

Clothes for the Active, Playing Child in Sweden in the 1920s to 50s

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Abstract

The discourse of the active, playing dressed child was constructed in Sweden, at the time when the Swedish version of the welfare state Folkhemmet (The people's home) was built, during the 1920s-1950s. The view that children had to be able to move freely in their clothes while playing was materialized by both state experts and representatives of the market. They agreed that clothes should be suitable "for playing and romping in sun and rain". The article describes how the discourse of the active, playing dressed child was expressed in advertisements, in advisory booklets and in the magazine Husmodern (The Housewife). Further it discusses what material features clothes designed for play were supposed to have and it brings up how the discourse of the active, playing dressed child relates to two other constructions of the dressed child, namely the resource demanding and the fashionable dressed child.

Introduction

The forgotten woollen cap

In 1954 a booklet called "Kläder som barnen behöver" (*Clothes the children need*¹) appeared in Sweden. This booklet is interesting since it is one of the last publications meant to spread knowledge about children's clothes produced by a Swedish state bureau of advice called Aktiv hushållning (*Active housekeeping*). The bureau published *Clothes the children need* in collaboration with Hemmens forskningsinstitut (*The Research Institute for the Homes*) which had researched the amount and

¹ Citations and titles referring to Swedish brochures and books have been translated by the author.

types of children's clothes in Swedish homes some years earlier. In the booklet you find descriptions of children's clothes suitable for different activities mixed with photos of smiling children, posing in the clothes described. There is also advice on how to mend and remake children's clothes in rational ways and it is mediated what attitudes to children and their clothes mothers are supposed to have.

Especially two common problems regarding children's clothes are mentioned: the forgotten woollen cap and the torn jacket! The text states: "We cannot let the children bear the natural consequence and let them walk about without the lost garment, without cap, sweater or mittens" (Aktiv hushållning & Hemmens forskningsinstitut 1954/1: 126). Even if a mother thought that the child who lost things was to blame she could not let that influence her actions. Instead she inevitably had to care for the child's wellbeing and supply a new set of warming garments. A first suggestion was to let the children wear old clothes "...not paying attention to what the neighbours say" (ibid). But if a mother was not prepared to swallow her pride by dressing her child down she could instead follow another advice, namely take time off from her duties and go out together with her child to look for the lost items (ibid).

A solution proposed to solve the problem with torn clothes was that the child could handle the mother's ordinary duties, so her time could be freed for mending. The state experts made clear how they wanted mothers to think while mending and at the same time they put forward a picture of the ideal child: "It can give some comfort to think that a child coming home dirty and with torn clothes or having lost some garment, but who sparkles with playfulness and activity, is a healthy child, regarding both body and soul. If we could just help each other to establish that it's better to have a happy and active kid, than a neat one, then maybe a mother, sitting there tired and resigned when darning and patching, can feel encouraged by hearing the echo of a happy and eager child's voice inside her head" (ibid).

With Norman Fairclough's (1992, 2003) critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework for the study my interpretation is that in the part of *Clothes the children need* described here three different discourses of the dressed child are expressed: the resource-demanding, the active playing and the fashionable dressed child. The fashionable dressed child is a discursive construction just hinted at, and at the same time made irrelevant by the advice that you ought to find an old woollen cap to replace the forgotten one. If the child has ever been the fashionable dressed child, it does

not have the right to be so when the new woollen cap has been lost. Instead the resource demanding dressed child occurs in the text – the child whose clothes require material resources if they are to be made at home or economic resources to be bought ready-made.

The state experts, who wrote the booklet, seemed to understand that a careless child could make a housekeeping mother upset since doing the laundry, patching and mending children's clothes were very time-consuming tasks. But as we have seen they stated that the child had to be comprehended as an active playing dressed child instead of as a resource demanding child. The experts told mothers that children had to be able to enter play totally and explore the world freely without being careful with their clothes: "You can not be aware of your clothes and at the same time be interested in the puddle of water or in how funny it is to jump around precisely now. Furthermore children value things differently than we adults, who have experienced our culture with all its judgements and prejudices. Other things in the world are important to the children, to them activity, this to be able to try their muscles and possibilities, is more important than owning. (...) To them play is an all-absorbing activity" (Aktiv hushållning & Hemmens forskningsinstitut 1954/1).

Material and method

Besides state booklets with advice I have analysed advertisements, photos, research reports, sewing instructions and articles on children's clothes in magazines, collections of newspaper clippings from ready-to-wear clothing companies, preserved garments in museums, and interviews where persons who grew up in the mid 20th century told about their clothes as children. The three discourses – the resource-demanding, the active playing and the fashionable dressed child – could be interpreted from all those different materials, which led me to the conclusion that they together made up the order of discourse of the issue of children's clothing, at the time when the Swedish version of the welfare state *Folkhemmet* (*The people's home*) was established, from the mid 1920s to the 1950s. Researching this order of discourse partly means to study how different discursive elements forming the issue of children's clothing are ordered – how features from different discourses, genres and styles (and other elements) are put together through discursive practices, to establish an order consisting of accepted ways of understanding, talking about and handling children's clothes. Partly it is also about observing that the established order is al-

ways instable and can be contested through discursive “struggle” (compare Fairclough 1992: 69–70 and 124, 2003: 24).

Building the People’s home was a political project dominated by social democratic reform politics. But to understand the transformation of the Swedish society it is important not just to know what political decisions were made. According to the professor in ethnology Jonas Frykman (1994: 67) it is most important to study how politics was implemented in everyday life by advice from intellectuals, directed broadly at the whole Swedish population – for instance advice about how to develop your body through nourishing food and gymnastics or how to do housekeeping in rational, modern ways. When *Active housekeeping* spread advice about children’s clothes it was part of this implementation of politics. Studying the state experts’ statements, and their actions, as attempts to influence the order of discourse of the issue of children’s clothing, makes it obvious that they acted to spread knowledge about a subject which also was a concern of the market, movements and everyday life (compare Hannerz 1992). Actors from these different societal contexts occasionally shared meanings, but also debated or argued over how children’s clothes ought to be designed, how they should be used, handled and so on.

Content of the article

In this article focus will now be on the discourse of the active, playing dressed child – obviously the most important discourse for Active housekeeping to inform about in 1954. One aim is to show how statements of this discourse were made not just in words and pictures but also in material forms: What garments were especially brought forward as clothes for the active, playing dressed child? What textile material forms contributed to constructing outdoor play, freedom of body movement and independence as important features of childhood? How were girls and boys respectively portrayed when clothes for playing children were discussed?

The text will also give some more examples as to how the three discourses of the dressed child related to each other in the mid 20th century. Also, the history of how the discourses became dominant one after another is simultaneously a story about relations between market and state. The text especially aims at demonstrating that the discourse of the active, playing dressed child had been spread by the market for a long time before it became the dominant discourse also forwarded by the state. The ideal of the active, playing child was connected to psychological and pedagogical ideas about an individualized and less authoritarian upbringing that came

from USA and England to Sweden, and were spread here from the 1930s (Pehrsson 1983: 84, 98). But even earlier such ideas had been picked up by American producers of goods for children who for instance started production of special garments for play. Thus when the Swedish People's home was built both child rearing practices and children's clothes were influenced by American ways to do things, even if "Swedishness" often was exaggerated in words, both in advertisements from the market and in booklets from the state.

Free to play – in practical rompers from America

Playsuit for the simplification of homes and for children's freedom of movement

Already in 1919 playsuit, consisting of dress and pants in the same material, is mentioned in a letter to the editor in the Swedish paper *Husmodern* (The Housewife) (Husmodern 1919: 529). Described as "forming a little part of the simplification of homes" it is said that playsuits, sewn in the right cut and in practical material, can spare both laundry and ironing. A cut later presented as suitable for a playsuit is the kimono arm cut. Instead of separate bodice and sleeve pieces joined together by a seam around the armhole the kimono cut means that the bodice and the sleeve are cut from the same continuous piece of fabric; front part of the bodice and the front of the sleeve are cut in one piece, just like the back part of the bodice and the back part of the sleeve. There is a seam on the shoulder which continues alongside the arm, and one seam under the arm, which continues as the side seam (see for instance Husmodern 1921: 375). A garment with such an arm can be put double plane on the ironing board to be ironed all in one. No sleeve board is required. This could certainly be seen as a kind of simplification. The same must have been the case with play trousers sewn after "the absolutely straight, English pattern" which is also described as "a great relief" when sewing the garment. Probably these are trousers with straight seams at the crotch and legs slanting outwards. Light green or light blue are occasionally proposed as colours for playsuits but mostly sewing instructions from the 1920s tell that it is practical to use durable material, which is not too light (see for instance Husmodern 1921: 375, Husmodern 1927/27: 43, Husmodern 1927/29: 40).

The argument that special clothes for play will spare both laundry and ironing is put forward from the point of view of a housekeeping mother

and it is linked to the notion of the resource demanding dressed child. But in 1919 also a children's perspective on why it is good to be dressed especially for play is stated. It is pointed out that playsuits give "...the small ones the invaluable advantage of being allowed to romp around freely, without reminders that they have to be careful with their clothes". In the material I have studied that argument for particular playclothes frequently recur. This, the first time the statement that children must be allowed to play without thinking of their clothes is presented in the magazine, the contributor refers to a "foreign women's magazine". In that journal a pedagogue (not mentioned by name) has proposed that children have an interior "thirst for activity" already during their first years. A stage-divided scheme for children's play development, made by the pedagogue, is reproduced in *Husmodern*. Play is described as the natural activity for children, very important to their development. According to the article the mother must propose new activities when the child says it has no longer fun. For instance she can present a box of bricks which can be "great fun" to play with for the child (*Husmodern* 1919: 529).

New child rearing practices in the 1920s

Consumer researcher Daniel T. Cook states that the more child-centered upbringing with new moral values, formed selectively from academic psychology, was spread among middle-class parents in the USA in the 1920s, among other things by advice in parents' magazines (Cook 2004: 89, also see Ewing 1977: 140). The new moral values consisted in that the child's desires were upgraded. Parents had to take the child's impulses and feelings seriously, because they were supposed to show the right direction of development (Cook 2004: 67–68). A part of this new moral was ideas that children had the right to be happy. Quoting Martha Wolfenstein's concept "fun morality" – which is what she calls the attitude to children dominating in the 1940s – Cook brings up that it eventually became obligatory for children to have fun (Cook 2004: 89 refers to Wolfenstein 1955). I interpret the letter to the editor in *Husmodern* in 1919 as an example of similar advice on child rearing from the Swedish context.

Indeed Swedish parents had been urged to make their children happy and pleased in ads for different consumer products aimed at children already earlier in the 1910s (Brembeck 2001: 30). An outspoken, strong-willed child – who showed intense feelings, mostly positively smiling but sometimes glaring – could be found especially in advertisements for American toys during The First World War (*ibid*: 48–49). So when this

new American child begins to appear in the Swedish press it is a child of the market; an image of the child constructed to make shopping mothers aware that children have a will of their own, which must be allowed to influence the choices of products. But in *Husmodern* in 1919 the active, playing child is not constructed by marketing men. Instead it is a self-appointed woman expert, talking to other women, who gets the opportunity to communicate new views on children. She gives the ideas that children shall be allowed to be happy scientific connections both through the references to a pedagogue and by the developmental psychological perspective underlying her description of children's play development. Thus the letter to the editor can be seen as an example of how scientific views on children's and mothers' everyday occupations – including statements about children's clothing – began to be spread widely in society through advice in magazines.

Practical American children's clothes

Some years later the magazine's expert on sewing, in an article under the heading "Pattern for cutting out", presents an alternative to dress and pants as clothes for play. It is a playsuit with pants and blouse all in one (*Husmodern* 1921: 465). In a simple drawn picture a suit with short puffed pants and a short bodice with kimono arms is shown. Pants and bodice are sewn together at the front and the seam is concealed by a buttoned sash. In the back the pants are buttoned up to the bodice with a horizontal row of buttons. The text presents it as a novelty: "Earlier frocks and pants made of tricot or cotton fabric were used. Now we have received 'rompers' from America, which are both practical and nice". Another drawing demonstrates how a pattern for this playsuit is put out on 1.20 m of fabric 70 cm width. Thus the first presentation of rompers in the magazine *Husmodern* is not made in any flashy ad for ready-made clothes, neither by a professional fashion illustration or by a fashion photography from a studio. Instead rompers are presented by simple drawings, in a tangible way showing how a person familiar with sewing can sketch the pattern and put it out on fabric. So the new ideas of how the active, playing child ought to be dressed could easily be materialized in every home supplied with *Husmodern* and with the exact amount of fabric mentioned in the magazine.

In the 1910s and 1920s a two-sided fascination for America was expressed in Swedish magazines. On one hand America was pictured as the leading modern country where new rational solutions to people's everyday problems were presented. On the other hand it was also associated with

lack of taste, inferior quality of goods and fraud (Brembeck 2001: 82). According to the articles in *Husmodern* children's clothes at that time contributed to the positive views of the American. For instance one article states: "Honour is due to the practical American, for being the first to create especially for children suitable models of clothes, which lately have been brought up in other countries" (Husmodern 1921: 227).

Daniel Cook declares that American producers of children's clothes recognized themselves as a special industry at least since 1917, when the publication of a particular trade journal for children's clothing started. He also tells that retailing of children's clothes in American department stores already in the 1910s was coordinated with advice campaigns directed at mothers, where the latest methods for caretaking and new scientific findings about children's health were mediated – for instance the influence of clothing on health. In that way it appeared that mothers, through the consumption of ready-to-wear clothes and other products, aimed at children, could live up to the moral responsibility of always protecting, taking good care of, and putting their children's well-being first (Cook 2004: 54–57). The manufacturing of children's clothes in Sweden at this time took place at companies producing children's clothes as an additional product to clothes for adults. A study made in 1914 by the Swedish Board of Commerce just accounted for one company solely making children's clothes (Berggren Torell 2003: 63). Thus both the American manufacturing and retailing of children's clothes can be seen as more developed than the Swedish when the discourse of the active, playing dressed child took form, and in *Husmodern* Swedish mothers even could find advertising for one garment manufactured in America. That was "Lee Union All", an overall with long legs and long sleeves. According to an ad from a well-known shop in Gothenburg, it was made of "extra strong, soft khaki material, that lasts long before being worn out" (Husmodern 1927/20). In 1927 it was stated as a garment particularly for children through the exclamation: "Mothers! Here's something for your little ones: Lee playsuits!". The association to America is made obvious by a picture of a little laughing boy, standing with his legs wide apart and his hands toughly stuck into his pockets, wearing Lee overall and a cowboy hat (Husmodern 1927/20).

Romping outdoors – in wash-proof Swedish cotton fabric

Ambivalence when the active, playing dressed girl is pictured

Some years later, in an ad for Camp-Ahla overalls fabricated in Sweden, a smiling girl can be found in an ad with the text: “For country life you can’t find anything better to put on your “kids” than a Camp-Ahla. Try some models while you’re still having the children in town” (NK ad, unknown daily paper 24/5 1931). The first part of the garment’s name connects to the new leisure activity camping, while the second part brings associations to the supplier of the material: Ahlafors weaving mill. The girl’s overall has no arms but long flared trousers. In an interview in a daily paper the producer tells that the design of Camp-Ahla is made “to add an extra female touch to it all”. “We have tried to use more beautiful and becoming designs than the old boilersuit models for boys. Brighter, more cheerful colours! Finer, pliable materials. We have also tried to make them easier to pull on and off. And they have bell-bottomed trousers to make the young ladies feet seem as small as possible” (St. 4/8 1929, unknown Swedish paper). But even though her Camp-Ahla overall obviously is designed to point out femininity, the girl stands in a pose similar to the one the boy had in the Lee ad; with her legs wide apart, elbows bent and hands at the waist. Thus her body posture tells that she is a frank, plucky child just like the boy in the Lee ad. Therefore she exemplifies that the active, playing dressed girl is ambivalently portrayed in ads and articles in the 1930s.

Ideas that certain details are needed to create a feminine expression when it comes to children’s clothes are common. In the article about rompers from 1921 it is for instance mentioned that the garment may well be used even for girls “...but it will be cuter to make a broad sash and tie a big bow at the back” (Husmodern 1921: 465). With a bow marking femininity the little playing girl should be distinguished and made more decorative than the boy! Other times, however, articles do not describe a decorative girl whose clothes emphasize that she is meant to be looked at, but instead a very active one, even though she does not wear the unisex garment the playsuit. When writing about what is sewn in Swedish homes, an expert on sewing for instance states: “We make little cotton dresses, which don’t get destroyed if their little wearer rolls down a grass slope or flops into the lake from the landing stage” (Husmodern 1921: 227). So, occasionally, when the active, playing dressed girl was pictured similar activi-

ties as those mentioned in articles about boys could be indicated for a girl. Even a girl in a dress could be portrayed as someone with great freedom of movement and with the full right to get her clothes dirty by being active. In that case it was important that the dress was made of cotton, since cotton fabric was considered easy to keep clean. It was durable if you had to rub it against a washboard and it could be washed at comparatively high temperature, while woollen garments had to be washed more carefully.

Swedish cotton fabric for playing children

Camp-Ahla was also made of cotton. Before the brand Camp-Ahla was introduced, models with short puffed pants, for children one to four years, similar to those the little child was wearing in the earlier depicted ad, had been advertised as “AHLA playsuits”. And it was not at all mentioned that the model was rompers from America. Instead “Swedish manufacturing” and “sun-and-wash proof material” was emphasized (Hyvéns children’s clothes department, in Svenska dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter 13/6 1926). Later in ads for Ahlafors fabric a guarantee certificate is reproduced. It is a paper label – said to accompany every AHLA garment – stating that if the colour is running or if it gets faded the garment will be substituted. The label says both “Swedish fabrication” and “Swedish raw material”. Maybe the cotton fabric woven in Sweden can be seen as the raw material for the production of clothes. But in that case the statement about Swedish raw material certainly exaggerates “Swedishness”. Nothing is said about the fact that the cotton fibres, which are the raw material furthest back in the chain of production, have certainly not grown in Sweden.

This emphasize on Swedish fabrication can be seen as an example of how Swedish production more and more was brought forward in ads for different goods after the First World War (compare Brembeck 2001: 82–83). The possibility for Swedish textile- and ready-made industries to sell at the domestic market was favoured by such ads. Regarding Camp-Ahla the weaving mill Ahlafors and the ready-made clothing firm Erling Richard in Stockholm cooperated and boosted the Swedish together. Weaving mills had well known brands, established among the consumers since decades, since fabric had long been the product bought, rather than ready-made clothes. So the use of fabric from a known weaving mill could give goodwill to a producer within the growing industry of ready-made clothing. At the same time cooperation with a ready-to-wear industry, that produced great amounts of garments, must certainly have given a producer of fabrics safe sales (Berggren Torell 2003: 120). As we have seen, in the end

of the 1920s the discourse of the active, playing child was so strong that industrial cooperation at a national scale could be formed around playsuits and overalls for active children.

Following advice in *Husmodern* also when clothes were sewn at home the active, playing dressed child was materialized with products from Swedish weaving mills. For instance a sewing expert used sympathetic words when she described “a dress really made for playing and romping” as made of “honest checked Swedish cotton fabric” (*Husmodern* 1937/20: 31). During the 1930s and 1940s, Swedish weaving mills, like for instance Strömme, Kampenhof and Almedahls, advertised their checked cotton fabrics as particularly convenient for children’s clothes. They also gave their fabrics popular girls’ names like Stina, Lisa, Karin or Lena (eg *Husmodern* 1937/36, Åhlén & Åkerlunds Mönsterjournal 1944/3 and 1945/1). “The modern checked designs” are mentioned in some ads, but these modern machine woven textiles also seem to have historical connections. During the nineteenth century checked and striped textiles, like simple cotton fabrics and headscarves, were often woven in the countryside as handicraft for sale. So the “modern” patterns could be associated to the Swedish textile cultural heritage.

Dressed for outdoor play

Outdoor play was recommended for the active, playing Swedish child. Such recommendations originated from two sources. One of them was the notion that an inherent line of development in every child could be encouraged by activity and play. The other source was ideas regarding the positive effects of sun and air upon children’s health. The latter can be connected to the fact that in the 1930s and 40s information about health problems like never before became an important part of the reforming of the Swedish society (Palmlblad & Eriksson 1995: 97). Both opinions are expressed in *Husmodern*. There, for instance, an expert on child rearing discusses how the summer holiday in the countryside has made her children healthy and hardy. And in the same article she states her view on children: “Children are little savages, and they must to a certain degree be allowed to live as such. (...) The child thrives outdoors in fresh air, instinctively it feels that it gets on well out there, everything gets merrier, the play goes easier. (...) Anyway they play better under the big fir or down at the gate by the road than indoors” (*Husmodern* 1931/38: 16–17). The expert appeals to all mothers: “Let them at least during the summer be excused from thinking of their clothes, because fear of a stain or a rip can

suppress all their inventiveness and fantasy. (...) Put the least and the simplest possible on your 'kids' – it's not necessarily ugly because of that. Dress them comfortably, and if the weather is really warm don't dress them at all, or at least just in small pants!"

The connection with children's health is even more stressed when the radio doctor Urban Hjärne expresses his opinion in the magazine. He wishes that parents let their children play outdoors to make use of the sun's positive effect which will ward off spring tiredness and colds and he urges mothers: "Undress your children everything unnecessary when the sunny, warm spring days arrive!" (*Husmodern* 1935/18: 23). Advice that children should wear as little as possible was of course not convenient to the ready-made clothing industry though. The idea that you ought to have different clothes for various leisure activities fitted better to the more and more productive ready-made clothing industry, which needed to enlarge its sales. "The Camp-Ahla overalls", in some ads said to be "indispensable for camping" are examples of garments for such special purposes. Camp-Ahla overalls were said to be particularly healthy to wear in the summer since the fabric let the largest amount of sun and air through (Ad from an unknown daily paper dated 28/5 1931): "Sun and children belong together and the children have even more fun if their clothing is suited to its purpose... (...) Camp-Ahla, cretonne dresses and sun pants belong to little modern boys' and girls' equipment" (ad from an unknown daily paper, dated 17/5 1931). A preserved overall shows that materially the construction of a garment, which to some extent actually was letting sun and air through, was made by the use of fabric woven in so called panama, where two threads go together both in warp and weft. This gives a coarser but also more loosely woven structure than ordinary plain weave (garment at Mölndals museum).

In an article in *Husmodern* (1931: 16–17, 68–69) so called beach pyjamas, swimsuit and overall are said to be the most suitable garments for the beach, the garden and for woods and fields. The picture that illustrates the article also shows a linen tennis dress. I find this presentation of popular summer clothes remarkable because it is made at a time when many older persons in interviews have told that in their families they had very little clothes.² The magazine *Husmodern* thus seems to be meant for a

² In the project "Barnkläder som industriellt kulturarv" (Children's clothing as industrial cultural heritage) I worked with children as participant researchers. The children – 10 to 12 years old – interviewed old relatives about their clothes as children (Berggren Torell 2003).

growing middle class in the first place – for families that could afford to dress their children in many different garments for various activities.

More strains of functionalistic ideas about clothes with different functions for different occasions can be noticed. Advertising about sun- and wash-proof material can for instance be seen as pointing at the garments' purpose to be worn when playing outdoors. It was a prominent part of advertising from the biggest ready-to-wear clothing company in Sweden, Algot's, that saw children as a special target group for some of its products from 1928. This firm produced warm zip suits for winter and jackets, shorts, trousers, bib-and-brace-overalls and skirts of strong cotton twill in bright colours for summer play. Also trench coat was a popular garment that according to advertising was adjusted to healthy outdoor activity by its material: "Children are not afraid of bad and windy weather. However it can be too much for them – and then a cold comes sneaking. But if the children wear smart trench coats and anoraks from Vargens (The Wolf) they will be protected, since the material has been especially impregnated and is wind- and waterproof" (Husmodern 1935/15: 16).

Independent children – in the practical clothing models of "the people's home"

The important issue of children's clothing

During the second half of the 1920s the rhetoric that Sweden should be made into "a home for the people" started to develop in the political sphere. In 1928, Per Albin Hansson, the social democratic leader, spoke in the Swedish parliament about his vision of Sweden as a good home, a home that protected the small, weak man: "Folkhemmet, medborgarhemmet" (The People's home, the Home of the Citizen) (Karlsson 2001: 460–461). He and other leading social democratic politicians stated that social reforms were necessary to counter the insecurity that the class society until then had meant for many people. According to the rhetoric of "The People's home" all men's latent will to take responsibility for the society should be able to be expressed. The ideal citizen was an active, self-reliant, but social, human being – set on finding collective solutions to his or her problems (ibid: 460 ff).

Children were seen as a raw material for building the future society; a material possible to enhance with social reforms based on psychological

and pedagogical science (Lindgren 1999: 2). Healthy, strong, well-nourished children were needed so they would grow up to be vigorous citizens, capable to earn their living for instance by bodily demanding industrial work and to contribute to the development of modern society (Gullberg 2004: 102, 84). But Sweden had the lowest birthrate in Europe in 1933 and 1934. Based on this Gunnar and Alva Myrdal in their book *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (The Crisis in the Population Question) propagated for reforms directed at children, youth and mothers (Hatje 1974: 8). Thus children's clothing was a topic discussed in the political sphere when the rhetoric of "The People's home" began to be concretized as political propositions in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1945 children's food and clothing (among other things) were brought up as important questions to research by Befolkningskommissionen (The Commission on Population), which was supposed to suggest reforms beneficial to the society (ibid: 27–28). A proposal on children's clothing allowance for poor families came in the final proposition of the commission (ibid: 42). However the so-called reform pause in 1938 delayed this reform. The risk of war had begun to be felt in Europe and the reform pause was motivated by the need for consolidation of the country's finances in the face of war (ibid: 43). General child allowance was not decided until 1947.

It follows from the first part of this article that when the issue of children's clothing became a political subject connected to the building of the Swedish "People's home" in the 1930s the active, playing dressed child was still a construction made by the market – more specific expressed by textile- and ready-made clothing companies in their advertising and by experts in family magazines – while state politics at the same time, based on experiences of lack of children's clothes in many families, was occupied with the (economically) resource demanding child. But as we saw in the beginning of this paper about 20 years later, by the mid -50s, the active, playing dressed child had been established as an important discourse also within the state. This change is connected to the fact that active women, committed to work for change in the areas of consumption and household matters, took place in the Swedish state administration, in the earlier mentioned advisory bureau Aktiv hushållning (Active housekeeping), during the Second World War (compare Aléx 2003: 118–121). So even though economic allowance for better children's clothes was delayed "the issue of children's clothing" was focused in the societal debate during the war years.

The bureau was formed in 1940, as a department of the State Board of Information, to intensify information about how Swedish citizens could be economic with scarce resources, when import of goods and raw materials was difficult because of the conditions of war. Advice was gathered among a broad web of contacts and spread through pamphlets, courses, articles and radio transmissions, especially directed at housewives. Domestic advisers (Hemkonsulenter) and women active in the cooperation organizations for teachers in Home economics and for housewives were among the experts from whom the advice originated (Åkerman 1984: 79). Thus actors from movements and state worked together to transform people's everyday caretaking of clothes. Many of the active women can be interpreted as middle class intellectuals who seem to have been eager mediating their own norms regarding for instance children and consumption to other layers of the population (compare Frykman 1994: 69–71). They seem to have been convinced that with hard work from all housewives, in combination with the growing production of children's clothes in the industry especially after the war, a modern Swedish "People's home child" could be made true. This was a child who would not experience lack of clothing or even big differences in clothing between children from different classes in society. It was also a child whose clothing habits would help him or her to develop in the right way; both bodily, moving freely in functional clothes while playing, and mentally by taking responsibility for the clothes, for instance brushing woollen clothes or mending stockings.

Children's clothing was for instance a subject in pamphlets informing about patching, mending and remaking, published by Active housekeeping. Sewing for children was said to be particularly profitable because you could use material from partly outworn adult's clothes and since "nearly every patch in nice material" could be useful when altering children's clothes (Aktiv hushållning 1942/1: 14–15). Housewives got the advice that they could sew new arms, a yoke or new "loose hems" to make outgrown children's clothes longer (Aktiv hushållning 1940/4: 9). As a step in making children the responsible citizens of the future Active housekeeping suggested that children should be allowed to take part in parents' discussions about the clothing budget of the family (Aktiv hushållning 1940/4: 7). The bureau also supported schools when they made pupils work with the subject of how to take care of one's clothes. In one pamphlet Active housekeeping proposed rules for children's behaviour: "Be careful with all clothes when playing in the schoolyard. Don't tear and pull each other's clothes. Don't try to find every pool of water. Don't use the soles of your

shoes to polish up an ice slide. Beware that the amount of leather and rubber is restricted. Tie your shoestrings, they last longer if you don't step on them. (...) If you see a woollen cap or a coat on the floor, pick it up. The woollen cap is not a ball to kick about" (Aktiv hushållning 1942/1: 25). When discussing the discourse of the active, playing child these rules are interesting since they show that the state experts really understood the normal child – the one for whom their rules were meant – as the active, playing dressed child. This is also underlined in the same pamphlet by a photograph with happy, playing children, accompanied by the text: "The clothes don't restrain play." So even though most part of state advice from the time of war constructed the resource demanding dressed child it is clear that the discourse of the active, playing child began to gain influence also among state experts.

Clothes designed to make children independent

In his dissertation Daniel Cook brings up how a self-help campaign was pursued by child psychologists and pedagogues in the 1930s in the USA. Its aim was that two-to-six-year old children would be able to dress and undress with no, or minimal, help from adults. Big buttons and wide openings in children's clothes were ways to make this possible. Furthermore the arrangements for opening and closing ought to be placed at the front side of the garment and not at the back. The campaign tied the benefit of self-help clothes to children's development into independent human beings. In an American magazine, aimed at well-educated parents it was written that everything children wear can play a role teaching them independence, self-esteem and self-reliance (Cook 1998).

Similar attitudes towards children's clothes can be noticed among state Swedish experts in the 1940s and 50s. After the war – from the second half of the 1940s until the mid 1950s – when Active housekeeping continued working with the issue of children's clothing the restrictive tone was gone and the active, playing child was portrayed as a positive character that design of children's clothes had to take as its starting point. Then Active housekeeping had the basic demands on children's clothes that they should be cut to give freedom of movement and that their material had to be easily washed. But thoughts about how children's activities had to influence the design also went further. The view that dressing had to be a natural part of children's playful activities had to affect children's clothing according to the state experts: "Now children start to get acquainted with their clothes in a totally new way and learn to button and unbutton, pull

zips up and down, lace and unlace shoestrings and tie and untie ribbons. This is the first time the work of their little hands gives an obvious and useful result, and we have to see to it that they reach that result without too much trouble. Their clothes have to be constructed especially considering their own possibilities to master them” (Aktiv hushållning & Hemmens forskningsinstitut 1954/1: 38). The experts stated that activities directed at clothes could be seen as equal to adults’ work: “Properly designed clothing can actually bring an amount of pleasure in their work, while incorrectly constructed and complicated garments can bring forward feelings of uneasiness, which can even have a restraining influence on their development” (ibid).

To put their ideas into practice Active housekeeping started to publish their own patterns for handy children’s clothes models to be sewn in the homes. By analogy with seeing play as children’s work, adults’ working-garment, the bib-and-brace-overall, was seen as a particularly suitable garment for children. In Swedish it is called “snickarbyxor” which means carpenters trousers and thus refer to manual labour. Among the models from Active housekeeping were both bib-and-brace-overalls with long legs and braces especially designed to be easy for children to handle, and short-legged bib-and-brace-overalls for playing. Another garment which was designed considering the needs of the active, playing child was the playsuit “Lasse liten” (the name referring to a character in a well known nursery rhyme). It was an overall without sleeves and an adherent wide jacket, both in blue cotton twills and with zips right in front. Overall was considered a good playsuit because you could avoid any gap between trousers and shirt at the waist, and the zip at the front was meant to be easily handled by children. The wide jacket was supposed to be big enough for wearing a sweater underneath. Other important patterns were for zip suits with long sleeves in wool or poplin for playing outdoors, cap in helmet model, rain cape and different models of aprons to protect the clothes when performing various activities. In 1949 Active housekeeping presented their models in a 10 minute long film for housewives called “We sew for our children”. Both cutting and sewing of details were shown in the movie. So just like when rompers were introduced in Sweden in 1919, the active, playing dressed child could be materialized by mothers sewing garments suggested by experts, but in the end of the 1940s the experts did not represent the market, instead their status was representatives of the State.

Cowboy suits for active, playing but at the same time fashionable children

As we saw in the beginning of the paper the state experts continued their work for practical children's clothes unto the mid 1950s. But while state experts at that time still spoke positively about clothes for play, the ready-to-wear-companies were about to change their focus – from sewing practical garments for (outdoor) play in the 40s to producing children's fashion modelled on youthful, teenage clothing styles in the second half of the 50s. In ads from the 1950s children themselves were told to look for the latest colours or different fashionable clothing details and to check that they got clothes of the right original brands. Idols, more precisely singers and a sports star like the heavy-weight champion Ingemar Johansson, were used in Swedish children's clothing advertisement at that time. The discourse of the fashionable child was about to gain hegemony in the context of the market. But the discourse of the active, playing child was not thrown overboard immediately. Instead, popular children's culture from America contributed to bridge the gap between the discourses of the active, playing child and the fashionable child since both discourses were simultaneously materialised in the cowboy suit. This garment was marketed for both boys and girls (with trousers or skirt respectively) and it became very popular when more and more western films and western comics reached Sweden in the first years of the 1950s.

In a newspaper article reporting from a fashion show in 1952 the material qualities of cowboy suits are bespoken by a journalist as suitable for the active, playing child: "Latest fashion states that cowboy suits may well be used by both boys and girls. These garments were shown in a row of charming versions and the material – which often is jeans – is sturdy and durable. Additionally, these garments are relatively cheap to buy. The decorations on the garments are well adjusted to the demands that you could have, it is nice, and not placed in the way [of the child's movements]. Besides, it is obvious that the children like those suits which they can dress up in, but don't need to be careful with" (*Jämtlands läns tidning* 3/5 1952). So by manufacturing cowboy suits, and advertising them as the latest fashion – a "must have garment" for every child – the market saw too it that the discourse of the fashionable dressed child found its way into the creative childish world of play, in which adults, during the time of the building of the People's home, often placed children. Dressed in a fancy cowboy suit in bright colours, with great contrast between yoke and bodice, and with details like rivets and fringes, the child could simultaneously

inhabit the discourse of the active, playing child and that of the fashionable child.

Concluding remarks

In the article, I have exemplified how the active, playing dressed child was constructed in Sweden from the end of the 1920s to about the mid 1950s, by magazines and the ready-made-clothing industry as well as by state experts. When it occurred in the 1920s, the child in rompers materialized ideas about a less strict child rearing. According to new psychological findings of that time, children followed their own inner line of development and should be allowed to play freely without having to think of their clothes. We have seen that sometimes girls were portrayed as more decorative than boys. But other times girls dressed for play – even wearing dresses – were depicted as equally active as boys. Thus often, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, statements about the need for children to play freely are valid for both boys and girls.

From having been the child of the market, the active, playing dressed child as time went by also became a concern of the state. There was consensus between the market and the state regarding the importance of special clothes for play. During the 1930s and 1940s the child playing outdoors, dressed in Swedish ready-made clothing, or in homesewn garments made of Swedish cotton fabric, occurs as a discursive (linguistic, visual, material) figure through which the economic interests of the industry could be combined with state eagerness to shape sound and healthy citizens. We have seen examples of how the material design of garments suitable for active children was described in detail, in similar ways by representatives of both the market and the state: Dark nuances of easily washed cotton fabrics in clothes for romping children in the 1920s. Easily washed, sun- and wash-proof, long-lasting cotton fabrics in the 1930s and 1940s – for instance for checked dresses to point out the “Swedishness”. Overalls in loosely woven fabrics to let the sunlight through in summer and trench coats and zip suits made of impregnated poplin to protect against ugly weather during the rest of the year. The parts of every garment are cut to give good freedom of movement and many clothes have details like wide openings, zips and easily buttoned braces for independently active children, to feel joy dressing themselves!

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