

*Sigurdson Erik*  
*Umea University, Sweden*

## **REFLECTION AS AN ATTEMPT TO ARGUE FOR A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON SLOYD RESEARCH IN SWEDEN**

*У статті розглядається відображення проблеми поняття естетики у випадку гендерних аспектів шкільного предмету технології та шляхи її вирішення та структурування його новій основі.*

*Ключові слова:* сloyd, стаття у сфері освіти, технологічна освіта, естетика предмету технології.

The **goal** of my article is to present an example of reflection as an attempt to argue for a gender perspective on sloyd research in Sweden. There is no empirical base for this reflection, thus it holds no empirical validity. This is a reflection produced on a office chair, and it is possible that you disagree on my description of aesthetics in sloyd. You are in your full right to do so. However, the reflection serve to problematize and deconstruct notions of aesthetics from a gender perspective in the sloyd subject.

Before I present the concrete example, let me describe the subject Sloyd briefly with focus on the political problems of gender equality in our subject in order to clarify and motivate my area of research.

Traditionally, the Swedish sloyd subject has been divided in two disciplines within the compulsory school. These disciplines are textile sloyd and wood– and metal sloyd. Prior to the school reform in the 1960:s, textile sloyd was exclusively for girls and wood– and metal sloyd was exclusively for boys. Due to the school reform, this gendered division was formally abandoned and from the 1970:s, both genders have been trained in both disciplines. However, in the later school years (school year 7-9) the sloyd pupils have had the possibility to choose sloyd discipline by interest. The problem is that choosing by interest seems to be the same thing as choosing by gender – girls choosing textiles, and boys choosing wood.

The choice by interest seems to be related to a gender pattern. This is in conflict with our school politics and curriculum which states that the Swedish school must work towards gender equality, this is also stated explicitly in the Sloyd syllabus.

My research is specifically aiming to describe and analyze the processes of *doing* gender in the sloyd classroom . By the word *doing* I stress that gender as a category is performed all the time, with or against a perceived gender structure, a structure that is commonly known as the gender order. The origin of this order can be explained through the frequently used theory of gendered division of labour. It states that the division of labour between men and women is socially constructed in purpose to create a dependency between women and men, a dependency that serve to guarantee heterosexuality and a continued reproduction of children. This theory implies that the two gender categories are the result of a socially constructed division between people on the basis of reproductive biological abilities. This is of course also visible in the sloyd subject, as I am about to show.

Sloyd is traditionally defined by the two words *practical* and *aesthetic*. In the following example, I aim to deconstruct the aspects of sloyd that connote to the word aesthetic – more specifically the aesthetical expression of the sloyd artefacts in regard to *form*. Research on Sloyd shows that pupils are much aware of aesthetic values in sloyd artefacts, compared with adults. Thus, the aesthetic expression of the sloyd artefact is important. In the two different sloyd disciplines, the possibilities to express aesthetics through the artefact differs. I am going to make a distinction of the concept of *form* as an aesthetic value or expression. Form is much dependent on the material available. Wood, metal and other hard materials, provide an opportunity to work

with three dimensional form, since the materials carry themselves, have a volume and the required strength do stand on its own. One of our most influential progressive sloyd reformists – Carl Malmsten – whos thinking about sloyd pedagogy still influences the subject, argue that knowledge about *form* as an aesthetic quality, comes from working practically, preferably with wood. Malmsten spoke as a representative of the whole sloyd subject, including textile sloyd. However, his ideas never had the same impact in the textile discipline, as you are about to see. The textile materials (fabrics, wool) do not have the essential qualities required to construct a form of its own. The material is soft and in most cases depending on a three dimensional form before hand. A commonly used form is the body, or parts of the body. The body is a familiar theme within the textile sloyd. The Swedish historian Eva Trotzig claims that the materials in the textile sloyd has been used to discipline the ways pupils use their bodies. The pupils have been taught to hold their materials close to their bodies, producing artefacts for the body and as they work on their tasks, being careful not to express their bodies too much. Could it be that the clothing of bodies as a way of manifesting three dimensional form is yet another bodily practice within the discipline – a way for two dimensional form to become three dimensional through the body? How can this statement be deconstructed? Let us use the lens of Nancy Hartsock and her feminist theory on “ abstract masculinity”. Hartsock claims that masculinity is abstract in opposition to the concrete and reproductive environment of the home. The home is represented by the mother, and as the young boy grows up, he is forced to define his masculinity in opposition to the concrete and “hands on” environment of femininity. Masculinity becomes abstract, distant and peripheral from “real” life. Psychologists and fenomenologists claim that the visual perception is abstract because it gives an illusion of objectivity and distans. Visual is male and thus ranked higher than for instance auditory or tactile perception. The visual is superior, and to visualize is to objectify. Objectification requires an object held at distance, an object that stands on its own.

The textile form is in most cases two dimensional, focusing on patterns of the fabric, the colour of the fabric and the *quality* of the fabric. I have the impression that when qualities are defined regarding textiles, the tactile perception is used. Through the touch you can sense the quality – you have to feel the quality. Quality as a concept is encountered differently when it comes to hard materials. You can not feel the quality of a table or a book shelf. Of course you can touch the surface and make qualitative judgements of the finish of a wooden artefact, but the *quality* of the artefact is still visually assessed. There seems to be a difference in *form* between the two sloyd disciplines. While the textile sloyd is concrete, tactile and two dimensional, the wood and metal sloyd is abstract, visual and three dimensional. The well known French feminist Luce Irigaray states “that the seeing, gazing, is primary in a masculine aesthetic. Sight is the most distancing of the senses, in which the subject stands separate and against the object, which is other, there.” [...]

Both fenomenologist Iris Young and Luce Irigaray claims that the aesthetical pleasures of femininity by tradition is tactile and concrete – connected to others and less binary than the dichotomy of the object and the beholder. Irigaray states: ”Less concerned with identifying things, comparing them, measuring them in their relations to one another, touch immerses the subject in fluid continuity with the object, and for the touching subject the object touched reciprocates the touching, blurring the border between self and other.” [...]

Feminists argue that the division of people into women and men soon led to a Hierarchy of the two gender categories. This hierarchy has spilled over to other aspects of human existence, in respect to what we define as feminine or masculine. In this dichotomy, masculinity is considered rational, distanced, binary and abstract when femininity is considered emotional, subjective, non-binary and concrete. These dichotomous understandings of our gendered world is evident also in the expression of *form* in the two sloyd disciplines. Form as an aesthetical expression – as an

important and well trained aesthetic component of the sloyd subject– is gendered by practice and by materials used. A hard material gives a three dimensional form, a visual sensation and abstraction of quality. It is high ranked. It is male. A soft material gives a two dimensional form, a visual sensation depending on bodily forms, and a tactile concretisation of quality. It is low ranked. It is female. This is not politics on my part. I consider every three dimensional form to be partly two dimensional and vice versa. There is nothing essentially “better” with three dimensional form. It is form in either case. Nevertheless, it is important to display how a traditional gender order distorts the way we consider aesthetical expressions, such as *form*. Different environments with different materials have led to two sloyd disciplines with different understandings of aesthetics. This need to be addressed further, through feminist theories of division and hierarchisation of the two genders, through psychologist research on perception, through historical research on the sloyd subject, and finally through empirical studies of the sloyd aesthetics in school today.

Lets begin with an aspect of the word practical: the concrete worksite of the pupil during a sloyd lesson, interpreted through the fenomenologists Iris Young and Merlot Ponty. Based on my own experience of the two sloyd disciplines, historical descriptions of the subject as well as the descriptions provided by the national evaluation of the Sloyd subject, I will sketch a picture of two gendered categories of worksites. My theorizing of the two disciplines emphasizes a difference in how the worksites appear. This is radical, since the discourse within sloyd research thus far has had a focus on *similarities* between the disciplines. However, I believe that in this case, making difference benefits my argumentation.

Within the Swedish textile sloyd classroom, the pupils do not have individual tables, but are expected to share a few large tables between them. The individual space is not framed in the same way as in the wood– and metal sloyd classroom, where every pupil has a table of her own. It is a matter of sharing space or having space. It is a matter of lending space or owning space in the classroom. The different worksites are motivated through the materials used. In wood– and metal sloyd, the materials are hard to handle. Wood and metal needs processing, being sawn, welded, painted, in other locations than at the working table. The working table is rather a tool than a surface. In the textile sloyd the materials are easy to carry to the worksite for processing, exceptions being made when weaving, ironing, measuring clothes etcetera. Here it is a working surface, rather than a tool. Using the fenomenological concept of the “lived room” and the “lived body” through a feminist lens, I argue that the textile sloyd throughout history has consisted of a work pedagogy of *immanens*, meaning that the materials and the worksites in the textile sloyd has been used to restrict the ways pupils use their bodies. The pupils have been taught to hold their materials close to their bodies, producing artefacts for the body and as they work on their tasks, being careful not to express their bodies too much. This is also seen in the shared tables of the textile sloyd. Sharing worksites requires that the pupil is aware of her bodily limits. Merlot-Ponty calls this the room with double borders. As for wood– and metal sloyd, the historical aim has been to train boys to perform physically. At the first sloyd seminar for teachers of sloyd at Nääs, physical education was a part of the subject. Twice a day each teacher student performed gymnastics according to a strict schedule. The wood and metal sloyd fostered *transcendent* bodies, bodies that were to be claiming and conquering the “lived room” rather than hiding from it. The legacy of this fostered transcendence is evident in the materials and worksites in the wood– and metal sloyd. The materials and methods require that the pupils consider the whole space as their worksite. It is often required that the pupil use machines that cannot be taken to the worktable, that pupils use specially equipped areas and separate rooms of the classroom for different purposes in their work.

Drawing on structural theories like Rubins’ theory of division of labour, it becomes evident that the materials and worksites of the sloyd classroom – both practical aspects of sloyd – is

gendered by tradition. A division of bodily performances and practical structures is constructed through the physical environment and the materials used in each discipline. This theoretical example also shows that a phenomenological framework could be beneficial for studies on how gender is constantly *made* by the pupils in a bodily sense. Thus, part of my research will depend on perceptions of gendered bodily performances from a phenomenological perspective.

***Сигурдсон Ерик. Отражение как попытка аргументации содержания гендерной проблематики в исследованиях по предмету технологии.***

*В статье рассматривается отражение проблем гендерных аспектов школьного предмета технологии в контексте эстетики и пути их решения на новой, структурированной основе.*

***Ключевые слова:*** *слайд, пол в сфере образования, технологическое образование, эстетика предмету технологии.*

***Sigurdson Erik. Reflection as an attempt to argue for a gender perspective on sloyd research in Sweden.***

*The article deals with the problem of reflection the concept of aesthetics in the case of gender aspects of the school subject of technology and its solving and structuring its a new basis.*

***Keywords:*** *sloyd, gender in education, technology education, aesthetic.*