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The design process: dilemma and logic

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The Bauhaus weaver Annie Albers once remarked that the process of designing and making involves the challenge of a problem, development of understanding, and the skill to resolve it.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge of a dilemma sets up the need to research and arrive at a solution. It enables me to feel engaged with the making experience and although some of these dilemmas are created deliberately and others are serendipitous, they always present challenges in finding the balance I want between intuition and control. This is a familiar issue for all artistic expression. Gilles Deleuze's discussion of how the painter Francis Bacon sought to create order out of chaos in forming images was based upon a vital understanding between materials and the unconscious elements that capture the "logic of sensation."<sup>2</sup> What is logically right might not be creative enough; so it is vital to me that in the processes of weaving there is room for spontaneity and the unexpected to occur. In an interview with Lesley Millar, textile artist Diana Harrison remarks: "It's important to me, I don't plan and plot everything out, but things evolve through experimentation."<sup>3</sup> Experimentation is woven into the learning process of my textile practice.

Influences are not always explicit or easy to separate out, but my recent work has taken from architectural structures and the relationships I find in the textures of the Yorkshire landscape across which I make frequent journeys. And in my current work I have taken influence from the sedimentary layers in the earth's surface. On a recent trip to Madeira I was able to photograph the distinctive volcanic layers of the coast. These themes are transformed decisively and instinctively by my approach to research. Elements appear in the weave as implicit signifiers relating to my themes. For example, the floating weft layers of the 'Sky' project were representative of the different layers of cloud in the atmosphere. This is supported by the fact that: "...for some textiles artists, the narrative is carried through their interrogation of surface, material or structure. In the work of Shelly Goldsmith the story is told as much through the material and technique as through the imagery"<sup>4</sup>

One of the overriding qualities of the yarns used in the 'Sky' project is that they are incredibly smooth and slippery. These properties make them difficult to weave and they constantly change the surface of the fabric. Even though this caused problems in the making, I believe that the 'slippery' quality was representative of the elusive and ever-changing element of the sky. For this piece it was important to work with these qualities as they aptly symbolised the meaning I sought to convey.

I use photography as a way of gathering the appearances of surfaces and atmospheres. A photograph is always my own because it recollects the fact that I have experienced first-hand what is shown and felt. The haptic is recalled in the way Elizabeth Edwards describes in *Grasping the Image*: "In the many hours I have spent watching people look at photographs, the describing of content is accompanied by what would appear to be an almost insuperable desire to touch, even stroke, the image. Again the viewer is brought into bodily contact with the trace of the remembered."<sup>5</sup>

If photography pre-empted the weaving process, then drawing is often retrospective for me; it can help illustrate a process after experimentation and sampling have begun. Additionally, as I work on the loom, I make small sketches of how a fabric might look, jot down thoughts, or draw diagrams about how to progress. Both drawings and photographs help me visualise possible directions. I like to feel that through my approach and sensitivity to materials they become as much of a focus of the work as the structures they create.

Kerry Greville

#### References

- 1 Albers, A., 2000. *Anni Albers: Selected Writings on Design*. New England: Wesleyan University Press. p.34
- 2 Deleuze, G., 2004. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. London: Continuum. p.120.
- 3 Millar, L., ed. 2007. *Cloth and Culture Now*. Canterbury: University Collage for the Creative Arts. p.164.
- 4 Ibid p.8.
- 5 Classen, C., 2005. *The Book of Touch*. New York: Berg. p.422.