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A DIALOGUE BETWEEN FASHION DESIGNER AND CLIENT: DRAWING FOR LAW

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This paper describes the first of a series of case studies exploring the use of drawing as part of the dialogue between fashion designer and client, with this initial study focused on the creation of a bespoke garment for a client in the music industry. A significant aspect of this commission was that the designer and client were geographically separated and much of their communication for the design process was facilitated by scanned drawings sent via email. The use of drawing was recorded and analyzed through the various stages of communication between designer and client in the design process and both achieved a mutual confidence in their own use and understanding of drawing to an extent that collaboration almost entirely reliant on drawing could be envisaged for future work.

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Background and introduction

In their investigations into the use of drawing in the design process, the Drawing Research Group (DRG) in the School of Textiles and Design, Heriot Watt University, has defined three main areas or categories for consideration, namely drawing for seeking *inspiration*; drawing for *communication*; and drawing to support creative thinking or *ideation*; and a series of initial studies has been conducted by members of the DRG to explore new potential for research in each of these areas. One of the case studies chosen for this research program focused primarily on the role of drawing in *communication* during the dialogue between a fashion designer and a client, with the use of drawing for inspiration and ideation as part of the design process also being subject to analysis.

The case study consisted of a fashion designer, Theresa Coburn, reviewing and analyzing the drawn record of one of her recent design commissions for a bespoke garment for a client in the music industry. An important element of the commission was that the garment was to form part of an image-making collaboration with the musician LAW for use in a promotional video, tour and press campaign. Various cultural influences had to be considered in the design of the garment intended for what is known in the industry as 'stagewear', including the influences of various subcultures of mainstream contemporary fashion design.

The designer and client were geographically separate for much of the progress of the commission so drawings formed a very important part of their mutual communication in both the process of designing and of persuading (Cikis and Ipek Ek 2010: 333). The use of drawing was recorded and analyzed through each of the stages of the dialogue with the client in the design process, including initial discussions, describing concepts and design developments, receiving feedback, adapting designs, estimating garment proportions, presentation of design solutions and fitting, during which time the type of drawing employed gradually evolved from initial sketches into the final presentation drawings of a professional fashion designer, an essential transition recognized by Rosenberg (2008:109), albeit in a different context. Drawings were employed as a source of reference between designer and client to explain scale, silhouette, proportion and balance, and the various types of interaction between the designer and client when drawing was employed in some form in the development of the garment included Skype, phone calls, email and a limited number of face-to-face meetings. Again, collage and drawing were also used to contextualize visual and historical sources and to aid the creative thinking of the designer. The comments of both the designer and the client are quoted as part of the account of this example of the design process.

The design of bespoke stagewear

Coburn describes herself as a fashion designer whose area of specialization is bespoke stagewear for musicians, an area she has been working in for many years. In her experience, many pop stars and musicians would agree that their 'image' is almost as important as their music, a phenomenon much evident in the legacy of an artist like David Bowie. Stagewear is about the image that the particular performer wants to achieve to represent themselves to their audience. Her design has been popular with avant-garde performers in the music industry since the 1980s, and has played a significant part in counter cultural and underground movements. Some of her work from the 1980s featured in the V&A exhibition 'Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s' (2013)

She describes her approach as follows:

'As a fashion designer in this area I see the stage as a catwalk and in some cases the performer as a muse. Within my work I like to explore notions of gender and conformity. It is important to understand that I am not 'styling' the client but working with them in a symbiotic relationship which enables them to explore their own psyche and their own relationship with their body and clothes. The garment design underpins the image that they wish to project to the world and it is important that this is authentic – that the clothes are not wearing them'.

Her clients, she explains, want the creation of a stage presence, an image wrought by design with exaggerated features, but they still need to understand the function of a garment and how it will support and not detract from their performance. When working with a client the garment is technically 'couture', so collaboration is inevitable. This is the difference between a bespoke design and selecting something from a shop, or employing a personal shopper or stylist. 'There has to be a dialogue with the client – that is the reason that they employ a designer in the first place'.

Performance and persona – creating garments for an emerging stage artist

During the last year, Coburn started working with an up-and-coming artist Lauren Holt, stage name LAW. She had not met Holt before starting working with her and, from the beginning, it was imperative that they could 'connect' in terms of a shared vision as Holt soon moved to London and Coburn remained based in Scotland. From the outset, it was evident that they were going to have to communicate electronically and that achieving clear, visual communication of ideas would be the key to successful collaboration.

Holt had very clear ideas as to how she wanted to develop the LAW persona.

'I like to exude a powerful image - a clear image on stage sticks with people. Your image should be a recognizable statement, almost like the flag of a country. I like

androgynous clothes. I like different genders wearing the same clothes, people being able express themselves, blurring boundaries and combating stereotypes. Its empowering to challenge peoples' perception.'

Holt knew that on stage she wanted to feel like a performer, 'stepping up and being dressed up for performance'. She also wanted the audience to look at her clothes and wonder where she got them. 'The clothes are special and make you feel more confident. Your own unique statement; your songs, your voice, your image.'

In Coburn's work drawing, used as a form of expression to create the 'image' or stage personality of the client, can be very effective. For example, a drawing featuring a garment can also include the type of footwear to be worn. Thus, in LAW's case, Dr Martens confirm a hard edged, androgynous aesthetic, whereas, in contrast, drawing evening sandals would imply a more glamorous, feminine aesthetic. However, her drawings, including presentation drawings, are essentially customized 'working drawings', very different from conventional fashion illustrations. As she says:

'Fashion illustrators' work is about conveying a mood and is invariably conducted after the event, drawing and recording what has already been created by a designer and is intended to persuade, rather than inform the client.'

Fashion illustrators frequently employ 'creative license' to enhance the appearance of a garment. In many cases, a garment will not actually 'flow' in the way illustrated. 'Skirts will not 'billow', scarves will not float in the air'. Coburn believes that it would probably be impossible for a fashion designer to create a garment that performs in the way often drawn by a fashion illustrator. Fashion Illustration is intended as a means of 'showcasing clothes while making an editorial statement...emphasiz[ing] only the most important elements of the outfit' (Kiper 2011:42).

Drawing in the design process

The role of drawing in the design process has been extensively characterized by Schenk in the recent book, *Drawing in the Design Process: Characterizing Industrial and Educational Practice* (2016), specifically in the chapter describing a *Taxonomy of Drawing in Design* (171–191). It is evident that, by looking in greater depth at specific design jobs, this process of characterization can be further informed adding to the extensive findings of the long-term study on which that publication was based. The long-term study was conducted in a period of transition in the design industry when the role of drawing in the design process was changing due to the introduction of digital technology. Several in-depth investigations of designer behavior with designers' use of drawing being subject to particular scrutiny, were conducted in that period, including those by Goldschmidt (1991), Schenk (1991), Garner (1992), Goel (1995), and Oxman (2002). During that time, the early theoretical models of

the design process emphasizing formal phases of ‘analysis’, ‘synthesis’ and ‘evaluation’ (Lawson 1983 17) were replaced by operational models with their identification of sequential steps or procedures (Newman and Landay, 2000:264, Staples 2001:8, Noble and Bestley 2005:33, Aspelund 2006:xiv, Amy:2011). Here, the work of the fashion designer constitutes an example of such an operational model and the drawings generated during the design process are considered in terms of such sequential steps and procedures. Several of the procedures identified by Schenk (2016) where drawing is used in the design process have, where appropriate, been adopted for the analysis conducted below, namely Inspiration, Ideation, Development, Presentation and Specification. The procedure of Adaptation, identified through the case study, has been added.

Inspiration and Ideation

According to Coburn, dialogue with a client starts in the first instance with a conversation to facilitate the setting of the initial brief. As they describe the way they see the function of the bespoke garment in creating the image they are trying to portray, she makes herself fully aware of the work of the artist.

‘Initial conversations with clients will centre around what they will and absolutely will not wear. These restrictions can be for many reasons, from body-image to politics to fabrics and color. There will always be practical restraints, movement, heat, instruments etc. I will then try to ascertain what the client likes, what their inspirations and influences are to establish a common cultural reference point from which to start to develop ideas.’

Bilda, Gero and Purcell (2006) emphasized the importance of experience in utilizing drawing as a means of providing useful cues for thinking and problem solving. For Coburn drawing ‘happens’ during the initial conversation. There needs to be both a verbal and visual dialogue with the client to achieve understanding of the purpose and form of the garment as they see it. This conversation underpins the brief and sets the parameters for the design. Initial ideas might converge around the theme and silhouette, playing with proportion and balance. Taking the particular case of the initial conversation between Coburn and Holt, whilst first speaking with the client Coburn soon began making rough notes and drawings in a sketchbook, what Pigrum (2010:4) defines as provisional modes of drawing. Mostly these were just notes to herself and the beginnings of ideas forming whilst talking. Figure 1 shows an example of a double page spread in a sketchbook.

‘[W]e referenced androgyny and male/female crossover. We spoke about youth culture and the endurance of classic garments such as trench coats, bike jackets, T-shirts and jeans.’

During this first conversation the decision was taken to focus on one garment based on a trench coat design, an emblematic garment with both utilitarian and high fashion connotations (Rodriguez McRobbie, 2015).



FIGURE 1 REFERENCING CLASSIC GARMENTS AS STARTING POINTS, THERESA COBURN 2016

Holt also spoke of her admiration for the style of the singers Nina Simone and Billie Holiday, and the activist Angela Davis. Later Coburn used this information to start compiling mood boards and collages to inspire fashion design ideas. The photographic material in Figure 2 was brought together to capture the visual aesthetic of these women in a type of adaptation and transformation identified by Petre, Sharp and Johnson (2006:189), who describe how designers ‘draw on a repertoire developed through experience and exposure to other sources’.

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the use of collage to bring visual references together. Coburn uses these types of boards for her own reference when designing, consulting them mainly for styling ideas for hair, make up, accessories, etc., to underpin the image-making process. She describes collage as the designer’s shorthand for ‘mashing up’ ideas and themes to inspire the creation of the client’s new image. Working in this way allows her to combine disparate visual sources to create a new fashion aesthetic, from which detailed



FIGURE 2 COLLATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS MADE TO SUPPORT INITIAL IDEAS AND INSPIRE NEW CONCEPTS

design drawing can start to emerge. The collage, as that for example in Figure 3, is purely concerned with visualizing the aesthetic and does not require the created representation to be proportionately correct or even to function as a garment.

According to Garner (1999:110), observational drawing heightens the designer's abilities for exploring, understanding, remembering and critically judging visual information and much of Coburn's work has its roots in 'classic' garments with the analysis of details conducted through drawing from observation. She refers to drawing parts of a classic Burberry raincoat from life, then starting to develop alternative ideas from the detailing, followed by deconstructing and analyzing through drawing, for example epaulettes, cuffs, fastenings, seams, topstitching, buttons etc. (Figure 4 shows examples of these drawings from observation.)

'Drawing from 'life' in this way enables the designer to further understand the construction of the garment and engenders ideas through the development of garment detailing, for example, exaggeration, juxtaposition and contradiction.'



FIGURE 3 COLLAGE TO DEVELOP THE INSPIRATION AND CREATE ORIGINALITY IN THE DESIGN STATEMENT

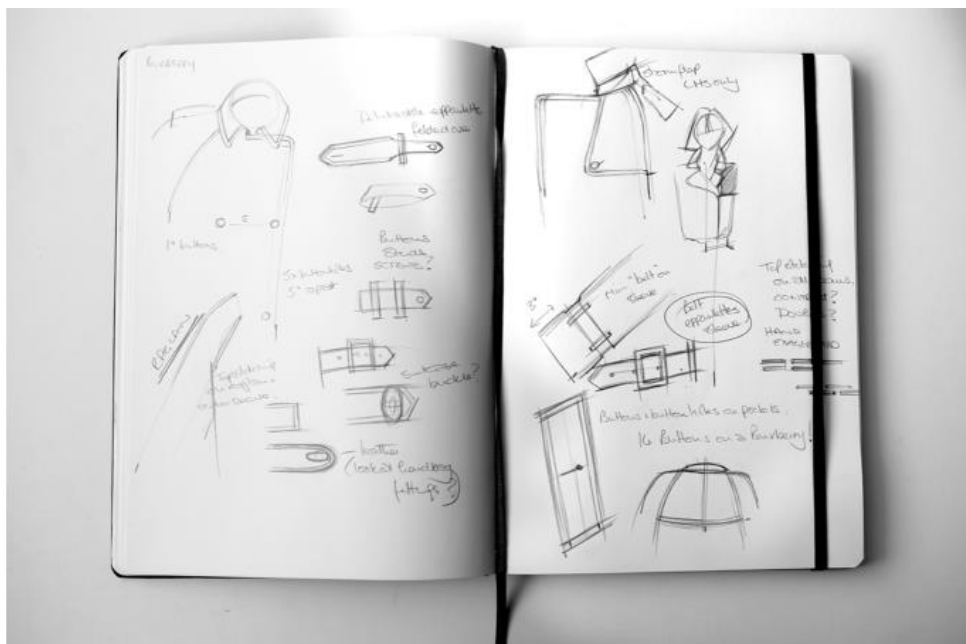


FIGURE 4 ANALYSIS OF DETAILS FROM OBSERVATION

In describing the procedure of ideation, she explained that ‘when developing initial ideas my drawing is very quick and spontaneous and for my own reference’, demonstrating the capacity of drawings for accurate communication when a designer may be exploring ideas with apparently simple sketches that are actually capable of expressing ‘form, detail, scale, or other information quite readily’ (Garner 1992:99). In Coburn’s words:

‘Even at this early stage I totally understand my own design direction and can visualize finished products for myself through my drawings. However, I could not show these drawings to a client if I were not present to verbally support them. There is not enough information in the drawings to give the client anything more than a sense of proportion and mood. Most clients are not used to ‘reading’ drawings.

Figure 5 shows this kind of concept drawing with annotations to record ideas.



FIGURE 5 DESIGNER'S EARLY CONCEPT DRAWING

In these early concept drawings Coburn worked loosely, first in pencil, and then pen, to try to establish the silhouette, proportion and balance of the main features within the garment and, at this stage, the act of drawing was very much concerned with establishing the overall 'look' of the garment. Furthermore, the 'unfinished' nature of the drawing facilitates further interpretation. As Coburn says, 'This kind of drawing is a 'suggestion' of a garment.'

As the design process shifted from seeking inspiration for design ideas, and the early formulation of these ideas, to the more detailed development and presentation of chosen concepts, two other important changes also took place. On many of the early drawings brief annotations were made to jot down further ideas for the designer, or as a prompt for communication (through Skype, phone calls or emails) to explain initial ideas to the client. This kind of annotation is particularly pertinent when numerous initial ideas are being explored. As the design process progressed, annotations were added by the designer to copies of drawings already sent to the client, thereby noting her comments in a form of 'aide-memoire' for agreed changes.

Another change was in the use of media. Initially either 'biro' or pencil was used to rough-out evolving ideas as shown in Figures 1 and 5. Pencil was also used for observational drawings as in Figure 4. In the later development and presentation stages pencil was only used for under drawing from which to produce carefully crafted ink drawings, or to make adaptations to drawings.

Development and Presentation

Pipes (1990:6) describes drawing as not only a means of externalizing thoughts, but also as a medium of persuasion. He emphasizes both its effectiveness and efficiency, and describes how it is crucial for a designer 'to explain in a few economically placed lines, perhaps at a meeting with a client, exactly how the as-yet-non-existent product will look, feel and fit together'. Van der Lugt (2005:2) describes the distinction between the role of designers drawing for their individual thinking process and in group activity, while Cikis and Ipek Ek (2010:333) explore this distinction between conceptualizing, on the one hand, and visual or verbal representation on the other, making the important observation that drawing can be both a 'private process of designing in an ideational sense and a public image to be shared in an interpersonal sense'. As Coburn began to develop early concepts it became necessary to send visualizations of her ideas to LAW in order to involve her in this development process.

Whereas Coburn admits she likes the speed and spontaneity in her early concept drawings, she acknowledges that clients require much clearer, tighter, self-explanatory drawings. It is important that they can imagine themselves in the outfit. 'The drawing should communicate fashion, fun, excitement. It cannot be diagrammatic as on the back of a dress-making pattern'. However, it must also present a realistic potential outcome. The client will expect the final product to look exactly like the drawing. It is important to stylize the drawing so that it has a strong fashion image but it should also resemble the client. As she says:

'In stylized fashion illustration, as opposed to drawing, it is common to exaggerate and elongate the features and although this is a very stylish aesthetic it can only help to portray mood, not the garment on the body shape of the client. You must sell the design in an attractive way but it needs to be as representative of how it will look as possible.'

Figures 6,7 and 8 show the first drawings that were sent to Holt. They are precise, detailed and diagrammatic and easy for the client to visualize. Coburn has transcribed Holt's reaction from a telephone call made on first receiving the scanned drawings.

'I loved that the drawings looked like me. It was like seeing myself in a comic book and added an extra layer to the dialogue. I could see that the outfits were going to suit me. The drawings helped me think about the styling and how it would work on me, and the drawings that I thought I would love to look like were the designs I chose. I realized I became persuaded by the drawings. I would have been more closed-minded about a verbal description of the clothes without seeing the drawings. The drawings made it easier to choose the garments to go with.'

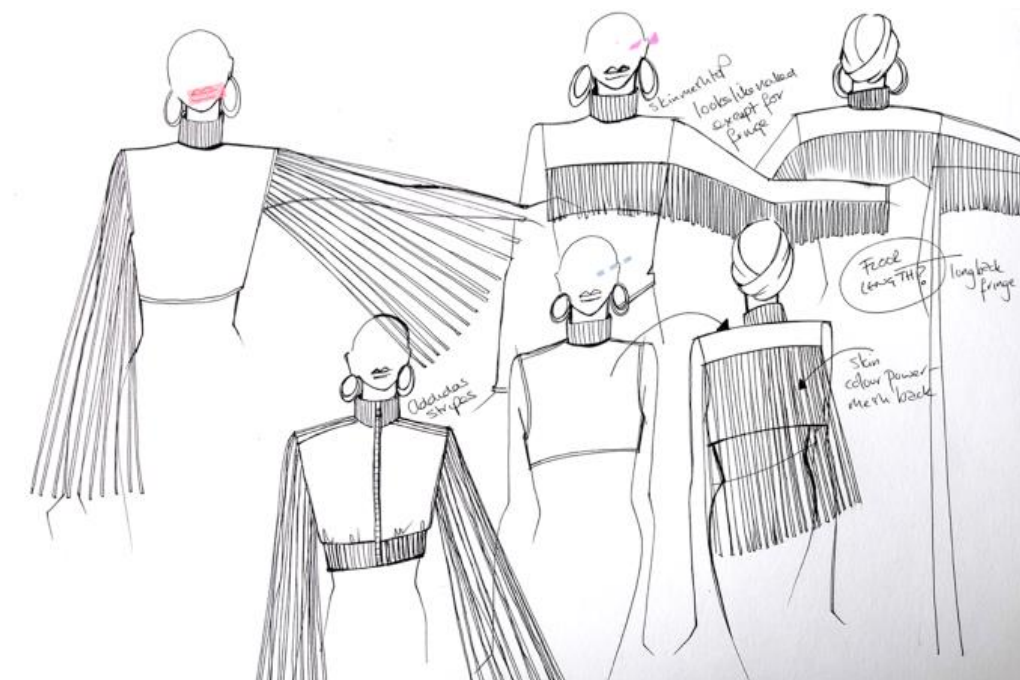


FIGURE 6 CLIENT-READABLE DRAWING WITH EXPLICIT DESIGN DETAILING

The drawings in Figure 6 are of individual garments drawn with more clarity and precision regarding proportion and silhouette as they demonstrate the development of a design

concept. They detail both front and back view and are drawn in a way that realistically depicts how the final garment will look. In fact, as Coburn explains, 'at this stage, an experienced pattern cutter could work from these drawings and interpret them accurately.'

The drawings in Figures 7 and 8 show a variety of ideas around a 'total look' which takes into consideration styling and accessorizing. As Coburn says, 'through drawing I aim to capture an image that the client can 'identify' with, through the styling, whilst promoting an idea of innovation through the garment design.'



FIGURE 7 CLIENT-READABLE DRAWING CAPTURING CLIENT'S OVERALL 'IMAGE'

The drawings in Figures 7 and 8 clearly depict the overall silhouette being suggested to the client. Attention to design and construction detail also becomes clearer through inclusion of suggestions for topstitching lines around the collar, pockets, pleats and the depth of hem. Figure 8 also shows alternative ideas for the design of the back of the garment as requested by the client. These drawings were initially sketched roughly in pencil to map out proportions, then drawn over with fineliner pen to show clear detail, after which the pencil was erased. This signifies a change from mainly ideational to mainly presentational drawing usage.

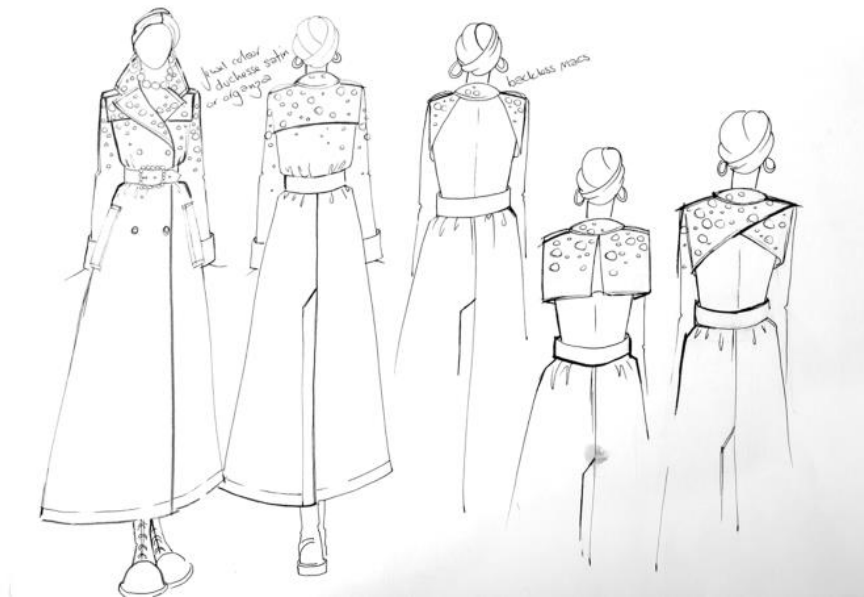


FIGURE 8 CLIENT-READABLE DRAWING RETAINING FASHION AESTHETIC

Coburn and Holt soon concluded that the limited opportunity to meet did not seem to have had a detrimental effect on either the progress or the success of the design process. Indeed, the distance may have helped as it had pushed Coburn to develop more ideas and to present them through more explicit types of drawing than she usually produced. In her own words:

'In industry designers work from working drawings or spec (specification) drawings. These are diagrammatic and very easy for the client to read. However, they lack personality. They are computer-generated and soulless. It is important in presentation drawings for stagewear to capture the visual style of the stage persona of the client rather than produce an exact likeness and the designer must achieve an innate understanding of the client's style.'

Adaptation and Specification

The designs were developed further as Coburn responded to the feedback she received from Holt. She described a process of 'taking details from one garment and adding them to another. This blending of ideas engenders further ideas development.' A notable use of drawing was to draw over her earlier drawings to incorporate requested changes as demonstrated in Figures 9 and 10.

These drawings depict responses to client verbal feedback, where discussions of personal preferences in relation to silhouette and proportion have taken place. In conversation with Holt, Coburn drew over the top of the original drawings in order to modify the design to take preferences relating to the garment's practicality and her own body-image into account.



FIGURE 9 OVERDRAWING TO INCORPORATE CHANGES (1)

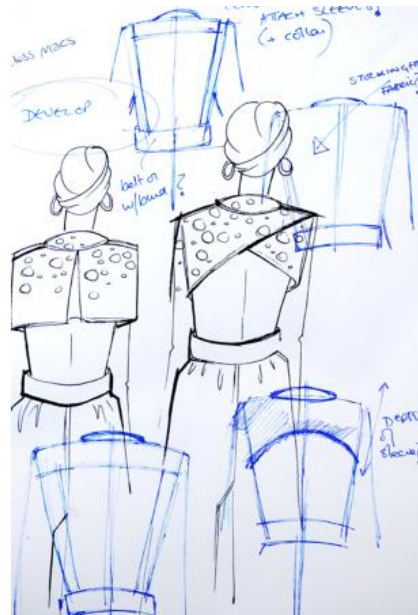


FIGURE 10 OVERDRAWING TO INCORPORATE CHANGES (2)

The drawings in Figure 10 depict a further expansion of ideas in relation to client feedback as Holt liked the concept of the backless coat but was keen to see further ideas around the theme.

Final designs were then very carefully drawn up for the concluding client presentation to incorporate agreed changes and refinements, and emailed to Holt for her agreement. Carefully and clearly drawn they both incorporated every aspect of the detailing while still retaining a recognizable appearance of the client and an attractive contemporary aesthetic.

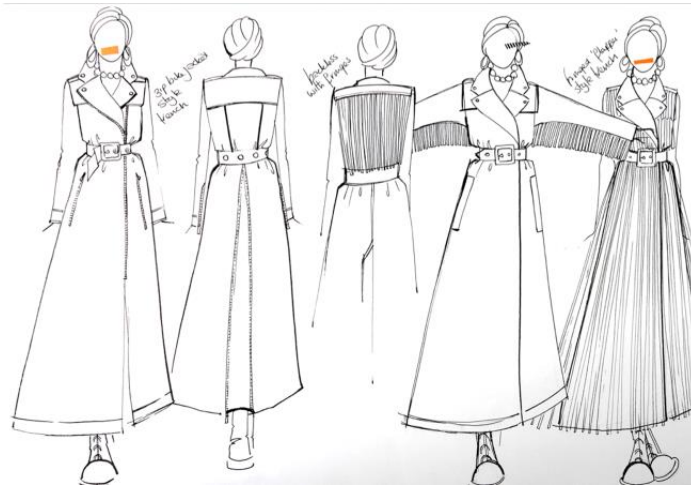


FIGURE 11 CLIENT PRESENTATION DRAWING FOR THE FINAL DESIGN

These drawings were presented to the client following final feedback, discussion and agreement about proportion, silhouette and attention to detail and indicate an accurate representation of the 'finished article'. (Figure 11 shows such a presentation drawing.) Coburn describes this part of the design process as follows:

'Based on the ongoing dialogue between myself and the client, the drawings have to be a clear representation of what the client can expect to receive. They must be able to envisage themselves wearing this garment on stage.' Coburn further explains that:

'It is important to avoid the use of color, as this can detract from the design of the garment and limit its appeal. The drawing at this stage is mainly about silhouette, balance and attention to detail, with another important aspect of the drawing being to communicate the weight and fluidity of the fabric as closely as possible so that the client can get a realistic idea of how it would hang.'

Coburn then worked on copies of the final presentation drawings, writing notes, measurements, and making specification drawings on them, as required. The final presentation drawings thus formed the basis for further over-drawing as shown in Figure 12 where they were employed as templates for measurements, embellishment and specifications, such drawings being produced as part of a dialogue the designer conducted with herself to help her to think-through the production process. 'When I am working out a production technique I will always draw it. It is interesting to note that this is the only way that I can problem-solve when making a garment'. Figure 12 demonstrates the thought process that the designer embarks upon in consideration of the production of the garment, using drawing as a shorthand to work out how details and features within the garment might be constructed. As stated above, these specification drawings are solely for the benefit of the designer to 'think through' her own production process before she begins to make the garment.

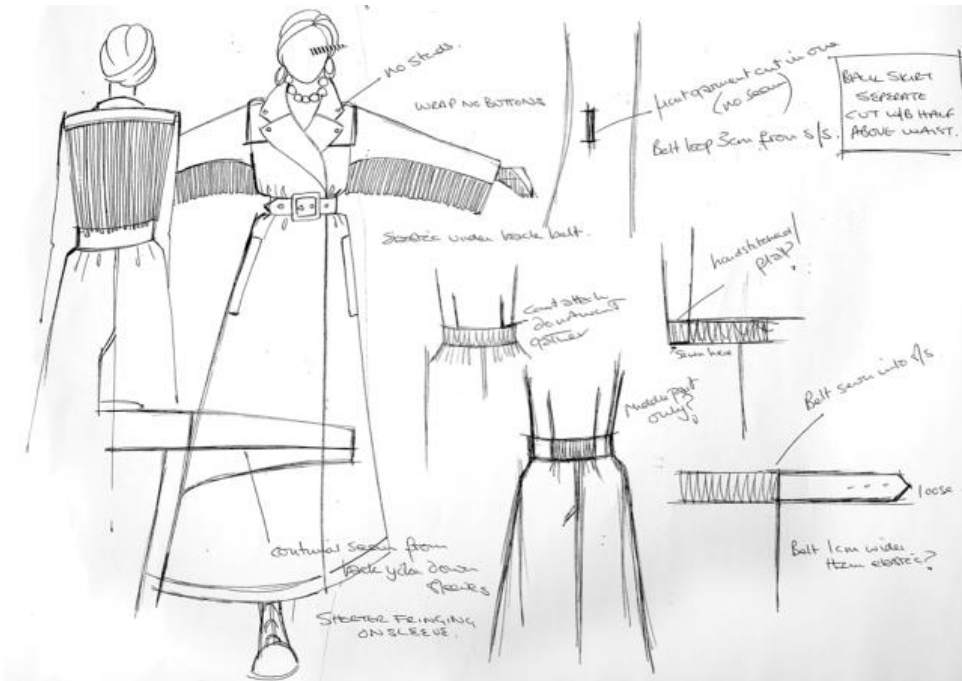


FIGURE 12 PRESENTATION DRAWING EMPLOYED AS A TEMPLATE TO WORK OUT A TECHNICAL PROCESS BY OVERDRAWING

Reflection, conclusions and future work

At the end of her analysis of her drawn record, Coburn concluded that '[t]his process has made me reflect on much that I have previously taken for granted in my design work'. Holt's reaction to her own increased capacity to 'read' drawings was also very revealing and she was enthusiastic to extend the interest and confidence she had developed during the dialogue with Coburn and to begin to share ideas through her own drawings.

'I found this a very personal and emotional process. The fact that [she] drew things opened my mind to possibilities. I wouldn't have liked the descriptions but I loved the drawings and each discussion around a drawing became a decision. Every time we spoke it felt like a whole next stage had happened. The distance did not allow us to waste time or resources. Through the language we have developed together I feel I can draw without embarrassment.'

While in many respects, Coburn's approach to the commission corresponded to that observed with other designers with well-established specialist, professional drawing skills (Pipes 1990:6, Ferguson 1992, Van der Lugt 2005:2, Schenk 2016:132), some specific characteristics could be identified. The intention to work closely with the client, albeit from a distance, made the designer produce more clearly defined and individualized presentation drawings than may be typical. However, the limited opportunity to meet up was not, of course, the only distinct feature in a commission that was not only concerned with the design of a garment but one that would also play a significant part in the projection of the stage

persona of LAW. Evidently, Holt's intense interest signified her own professional rationale in witnessing the melding of cultural influences in a fashion garment that would not only enhance but also help to define her stage presence.

Although the persuasive effects of drawings are invariably put to good effect by designers, Holt's own comments describe the distinct impact that the drawings had on her (the client) 'I loved that the drawings looked like me' and 'I realized I became persuaded by the drawings'. Not only was this a strong reaction, it also signified heightened awareness. Evidently, not only did the drawings, help to sell the design ideas to the client but they also engaged her in the design drawing process. The use of drawings made the client more open-minded than if the designer had simply described concepts to her, and created a bond of visual language between the designer and client thereby facilitating potential future collaboration. In effect the designer/client dialogue facilitated by drawing gave the client the confidence to experiment by responding through drawing, even though she had previously thought that she was not able to draw.

This case study was conducted to achieve a greater understanding of a designer's current practice and to identify potential opportunities for further exploration and research. The authors concluded that new knowledge on the role of drawing in design could be achieved by a joint identification and exploration of case studies aimed at investigating features of specific design projects. Furthermore, by seeking to make the hitherto tacit and implicit drawn aspects of a designer's practice more explicit, the shared knowledge of the DRG could be extended. A second case study analyzing a client/designer dialogue conducted entirely through drawing without any written or verbal dialogue is currently underway.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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