MASTER WEAVER

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MODERN OVERSHOT

There are several reasons why the Colonial Overshot, not long ago the most popular weave in North America, is getting neglected. These reasons are of both: technical and aesthetical order.

Colonial overshot does not suit us any more, because first of all the traditional patterns do not fit into our modern way of life. They do not match our furniture, our dresses, rugs, and other textiles. The patterns lack simplicity and freedom - two important factors in modern designing.

Then from technical point of view the weave really is not very good. It has low resistance to wear, because it has too long floats, and its texture is not uniform, because the length of floats varies with the pattern on the same piece of weaving. Thus the fabric is firm and strong where the floats are short, and soft and weak where they are long.

With all these faults the weave has several advantages which make it worth rescuing from the oblivion.. For instance with limited equipment (only 4-frame loom) it gives very large possibilities in composition of patterns. Because it has a balanced tie-up it can be woven fast and without difficulties on any kind of loom. It can be adapted to any weaving yarn, and since it has the warp, pattern weft, and binder always mixed in the same proportion - three completely different yarns can be used in the same piece of weaving with good results, as for instance: cotton for warp, rayon for pattern, and linen for binder.

What can we do then about the colonial overshot to make it "modern"?

1. Use only very simple patterns, and rather subdued colours.

2. Avoid "compulsion" in designing, such as symmetry in all directions, diagonals crossing the fabric from one corner to another, certain rigid ways of treadling ("tromp as writ", rose-fashion", and so on.

3. Eliminate long floats, let's say longer than 7.

4. Make all floats of the same length, or if we have two sets of floats - distribute them uniformly all over the woven piece.

1. This is the easiest part. Even among the colonial patterns we can find quite a selection of simple geometrical designs (2 and 3 block patch patterns, cross and diamond, etc). Now if

instead of contrasting the pattern and the ground, we shall use the same colour for the pattern and the binder - we shall get a completely different and much more pleasant (to our modern eyes) effect. The colour selected for the weft should not be too different from the warp. Two different shades or rather grades of the same colour will give the best results.

Since we use the same colour for both: pattern and binder, we may as well use the same count of yarn, and consequently only one shuttle. This makes weaving much more rhythmical and incidentally much faster. The problem here is how to remember the next tabby treadle to be used. With two shuttles the position of the shuttle used for binder indicates the proper tabby shed: if the shuttle is on the right hand side, then the next treadle is the one also on the right hand side, and vice versa. But here the shuttle is always on the same side for the shot of binder.

Probably the best solution of the problem is to have a tie-up with both tabby treadles on one side, so that one foot operates the pattern and the other - the binder. Now after making one shot of binder, we keep the foot on the same treadle until the next shot of tabby, and shift it only in the last moment. After a while this becomes quite automatic.

Any overshot draft can be "modernized" for weaving borders, on the condition that it does not contain too long floats. Instead of weaving all four blocks, we select only two opposite ones (1,2 and 3,4, or 2,3 and 1,4), and weave them in two different colours.

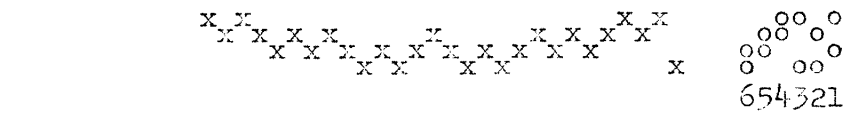


Fig.1

For instance in fig. 1, we shall use blocks: 1,2 and 3,4. The other pair is not very interesting, because there is hardly anything on the block 1,4. Let's call our colours B and R (black and red), then the treadling may be as follows:

1B,2R, 4B - 4 times, 1R, 4B - 4 times, 2R,1B, 6R - 6 times, 2B, and reverse. Use binder where necessary.

2. Let's forget about the "squaring" of each block, and about weaving them in any definite order. We do as we please. We shall see later that we can even weave two blocks at the same time.

3. It is very easy to eliminate long floats. We can either select drafts with short floats only, or "condense" any draft by shortening long floats and leaving other parts of the draft intact. This will solve only the technical requirements however, and won't give us much control over the pattern.

4. How to combine the freedom of the pattern, and a uniform texture? There is in colonial weaving a technique of drafting which practically solves all our problems. There is one element of pattern which can have any size whatsoever and still the floats remain of reasonable length. This is the colonial Table (fig.2). The table is made of any number of small squares or rectangles. Thus we can have the floats quite short (5 in our example), but the table may be as large as wanted.

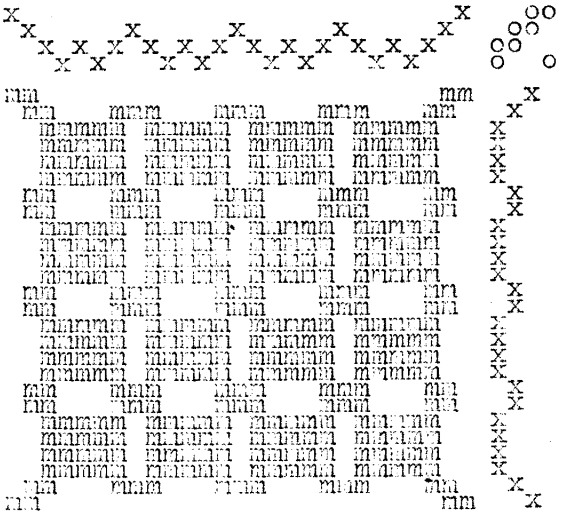


Fig.2

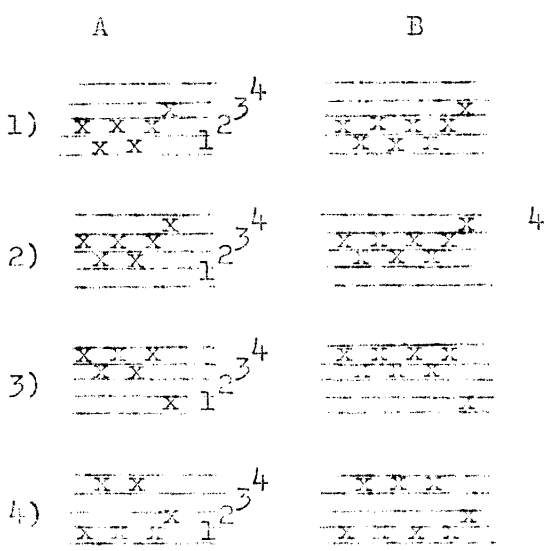


Fig.3

Now we can have four different tables, each made of units of 6 or 8 warp ends. The draft in fig.2 is made of four such units. Fig.3 shows in column A all four units with floats of 5, and in column B - units which give floats of 7. In draft 2 we have used four units No.1 in column A.

Any unit can be repeated any number of times, until the desired size of a table is reached. Then we can draw another table based on another unit, and so on. We shall have four tables or four blocks of pattern in all. In one piece of weaving only the units taken from the same column can be used.

When joining two blocks of pattern (or two tables), we must insert an incidental heddle, just as in Crackle weave, to preserve the tabby order in the draft. Thus between unit 1 and 2 the incidental heddle will be on 4. Between 2 and 3 - on 1. Between 3 and 4 - on 2, and between 4 and 1 - on 3. The units do not need to be used in the above order in a draft, but then the incidentals change. For instance between 4 and 3 - the incidental is on 1; between 3 and 2 - on 4, between 2 and 1 - on 3, and between 1 and 4 - on 2.

A complete draft of a very simple 4 block pattern is shown in fig.4.

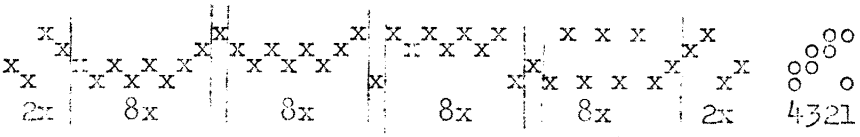


Fig.4

There are many ways in which this draft can be treadled. First of all it can be woven in the traditional way "woven-as-drawn-in" with a diagonal running across the whole woven piece. It will show four squares or colonial tables as in fig.5. But the tables may be woven in the "continental" way: each table made of 8 long,

vertical columns, instead of 64 squares. For instance table No.1 (based on unit No.1) will be woven using only treadle No.4 until the proper size is reached. In colonial weaving it would be: treadle No.4 - 6 times, alternately with treadle No.3 - twice.

Overshot with all floats of the same length presents a possibility which the traditional weave lacked: it can be woven without binder, and still give good texture. The technique is the same as in bound weaves, with the difference that here we do not try to cover the warp with the weft, and that the sett of warp remains conventional. When weaving without binder we may use several colours, and what is more, we can combine blocks, i.e. weave two blocks at the same time, a thing unheard of in colonial weaving.

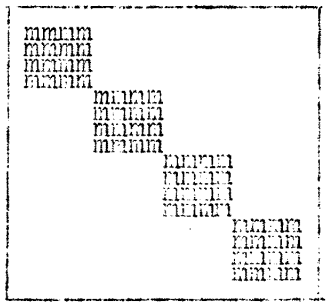


Fig.5

Let us start with 4 colours. In practice they will be probably rather four shades of the same colour, or one strong colour and 3 neutral ones, but for the sake of clarity we shall suppose that we have four different ones, for instance: black (B), red (R), grey (G), and white (W). The treadling here is always the same: 1, 2, 3, 4. It never changes. What changes is the order in which the colours are used. Each block of pattern has a different order of colours.

	treadle:	1	2	3	4
block:	1-st	B	R	G	W
	2-nd	W	B	R	G
	3-rd	G	W	B	R
	4-th	R	G	W	B

Fig.6

		1	2	3	4
	1-st	B	G	G	W
	2-nd	W	B	G	G
	3-rd	G	W	B	G
	4-th	G	G	W	B

Fig.7

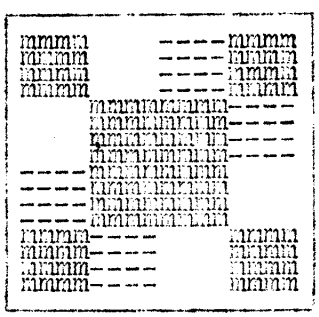
Fig.6 gives the directions for treadling. We can start with any block depending on the pattern. If it is block 1-st, we use all four shuttles in the order indicated: black on treadle 1, red on 2, grey on 3, and white on 4. We keep on weaving in this way until the block is finished. Then we change to the second (or any other) block.

To keep the order of colours without remembering them all the time, we place the four shuttles one above another on the woven piece, so that the shuttle which has been used last comes on top, and the next one is taken from the bottom.

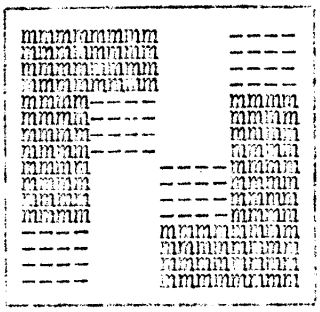
If we do not want all four colours, we still keep the same treadling, but use one of the colours twice as in fig.7.

We shall notice that in fig.7 there is one colour (black) which is the most important - it is the one which shows the pattern, the leading colour. Other colours form the ground, more or less. We can take advantage of this fact and weave <u>two</u> blocks in black, one in grey, and one in white. In this way we shall have combinations

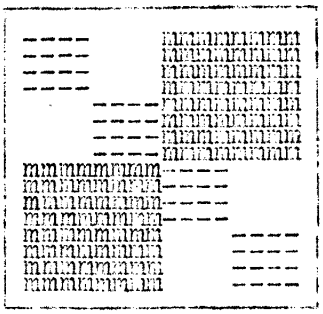
of blocks. Fig.8 shows examples of patterns woven on the draft No.4 and the corresponding treadlings:



A



B



C

		1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
treadle:															
block:	1-st	B	W	G	B		B	B	W	G		G	W	B	B
	2-nd	W	B	B	G		B	G	W	B		G	W	B	B
	3-rd	G	B	B	W		B	W	G	B		B	B	G	W
	4-th	B	G	W	B		G	W	B	B		B	B	W	G

Fig.8

From purely practical point of view the bound overshot is vowen exactly in the same way as any other bound weave. If we want to cover the warp nearly completely with weft, the sett of warp must be much lower than usual, and the weft rather heavy and soft. With usual setts of warp, the picks of the same colour of weft will be not quite close, but since the blocks of pattern are very large, this does not blurr the pattern.

Whatever is the count of weft used all four colours must be in the same yarn - the same material, number and twist. Otherwise the texture of the fabric will be uneven.

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