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Jennifer Nightingale  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9342-9118>
(The Royal College of Art and Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom)

Knitting on Location: The *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* Film Series

Watch the audiovisual essay here:

<https://youtu.be/Ak7uQ-Xvoxs>

Abstract

This audiovisual essay and written statement unpack two films from the *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* series, which I created in 2023. The 16mm landscape films discussed here aim to translate Norfolk fisherman gansey knitting patterns. The films were shot and edited on location in two Norfolk fishing villages, Sheringham and Cromer, in the UK, where the patterns have been historically produced. The production of the films creates a structural relationship between a stitch of knitted textile fabric and a frame of film. In this methodology, gesture, landscape, and film are “knitted together” as a material object, re-embedding the knitting patterns into the location and landscape that inspired them. The essay and statement unpack the methods used for translating the knitting patterns. These have included the use of filming charts, a single-frame shooting technique that creates a self-instigated time-lapse, and a location-as-editing-system. The films build on the legacy of single-frame modes of filmmaking in the context of experimental cinema and produce new visual phenomena and motion effects.

The project asks what it would mean and look like to translate a knitting pattern into a filming chart, and what kind of audiovisual reflection would allow me to communicate the methods and process of my filmmaking. These questions are explored using photographs, notation, and interviews collected during the films’ production and the project’s research. In doing so, both the audiovisual essay and the statement highlight the project’s relationship to the rich history and culture of gansey knitting in Sheringham, and to the nature of my film project as handmade and craft-oriented.

Keywords

textile cinema, landscape film, location-as-editing-system, single-frame production, 16mm film



Creator's Statement

My audiovisual essay unpacks two films from the *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* series (2023), a practice-based research project that emerged from my PhD, completed in 2023, that also includes series made in Cornwall (2016), the Faroe Islands (2019), and Yorkshire (2024). The 16mm landscape films I discuss here use a single-frame production technique and a unique editing system to translate fisherman gansey knitting patterns. The films have been shot and edited on location in Norfolk fishing villages in the UK, where the patterns have been historically produced. The production of the films creates a structural relationship between a stitch of knitted textile fabric and a frame of film. In this methodology, gesture, landscape, and film are “knitted together” as a material object, re-embedding the knitting patterns into the location and landscape that inspired them. It is a common feature of gansey patterns that they represent the elements of the landscape or objects the knitters would have seen around them, such as fishing nets or cliff paths.

The processes of translation and production have included preproduction filming charts, a single frame shooting technique creating a self-instigated time-lapse mode, and a mode of systems-based editing wherein an external system (in this case, the knitting pattern) determines the editing sequence, which is conducted on location and privileges the act of filmmaking in the landscape. The films build on the legacy of single-frame modes of filmmaking in the context of experimental cinema, such as the films of Kurt Kren, whose systems-based editing was founded on numerical patterns, or the films of Rose Lowder, whose expressionistic, location-based practices in the French landscape intricately weave frames using a Bolex camera.¹⁾ My films also produce new visual phenomena and motion

1) Nicky Hamlyn, Simon Payne, and Al Rees, *Kurt Kren: Structural Films* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016); Rose Lowder, *Bouquets 11–20: Notebooks* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 2018).

effects, including flash frames, a non-mechanical time-lapse not triggered by the mechanism of the camera or a crystal motor, and camera positions that privilege natural markers in the landscape (for example, the horizon).

The audiovisual essay asks what it would mean and look like to translate a knitting pattern into a filming chart, and also what kind of audiovisual reflection would allow me to communicate the methods and process of my filmmaking. I have answered these questions using photographs, notation, and interviews collected during the films' production and throughout the project's research.

The audiovisual essay also explores the role of place, considering how it can both inspire and serve as a site of production. A key aspect of the films is my method of single-frame production on location, which involves positioning the Bolex camera in two different places within the site: one representing the knit stitches and the other representing the purl of the knitting pattern. In referring again to the filming charts, the film's production thus commences. Starting at frame "0" and following the filming chart, each knit frame is exposed in sequence, leaving the purl frames unexposed. The film is then rewound (in the camera), and the camera is repositioned. Then, starting again at frame "0," every purl frame is exposed, filling the unexposed gaps from the first round of shooting. When complete (apart from the chemical development of the film stock), I have completed the production of the film. This foregrounds my role as a filmmaker and employs an innovative self-instigated time-lapse device, wherein the Bolex camera's motor is disengaged and individual exposures are made by manually triggering the single-frame release. This operation is shown in the video.

Based on the historic connection between knitting patterns and place, a key aspect of the *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* films is how they frame the local landscape. When filming on a wide-open coast, the seascape is flattened to a horizon line even when you raise the camera. It is the promenades and markers — either running parallel, or in the case of groynes, set at angles — that add depth. In both Norfolk films, I aim to highlight the horizon by framing it unconventionally. This approach draws attention to the line by working counter to the traditions of landscape and seascape composition, in which the horizon is typically centred or raised to privilege the land, or lowered to emphasise the sky.

My new compositions use radical placement of the horizon line. For example, in *Cromer: Gilbert Rook's Seeds and Bars* (2023), the horizon is placed at the far top running just below the frame line; the second framing positions it the same distance above the bottom of the frame. In the animated sequences of alternating frames, the horizon becomes unstable, as does the relative position of other prominent markers in the landscape, such as the line of fishing boats on the beach running parallel to the horizon. Two key points of action are represented: the ship sailing across the horizon line left to right, and the walkers moving in both directions on the beach. In the film, the actions disrupt each other with a new thread of time. When they alternate more frequently, between knit and purl frames, the activities are woven together and visually intermingle.

Weaving is also a method I use in the audiovisual essay, except this time with shots rather than frames. If the single-frame production technique allows for immediate dynamic visual relationships, in the video, I embrace the shot's potential to present associative and analogous relationships between elements. For example, the operation of the

Bolex camera parallels the procedure of using filming charts that translate the knitting patterns frame by frame — stitch by stitch. This is also demonstrated by combining the pictorial representation of the “Jimmy Chibbles Bishop herringbone” knitting pattern with the striations of bones and flesh of a fish. The herring, being an everyday object that the knitters would have seen in and around the harbour, inspired the gansey pattern.

The endeavour to film herring bones offered new perspectives on the project’s connection to the UK fishing industry: in my attempt to buy a fish to film, the fishmonger noted “you don’t get them nowadays” — a signal of changing tastes, and fish stock, that have contributed to the decline of certain types of fishing. These historic fishing and knitting activities are absent from my films, whose frames now capture walkers, visitors, and tourists. In buying my fish, I settled for sardines (small herring!).

My decisions in the production of the *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* films were inspired by the history and culture of gansey knitting and its patterns. While it was not necessary for these details to be communicated within the films themselves, they underpinned key production decisions: for example, the compositions used for each knit and purl framing discussed above. For me, this created conditions for practice-based reflection, such as regarding my role and position as a filmmaker in the landscape, and also how I am re-embedding the patterns of the historic women knitters who were there before me. This approach carries over into the audiovisual essay.

The knitting pattern’s new form as a film sets up a contemporary engagement with gansey knitting culture that mirrors, and is inspired by, the work of the communities of knitters who strive to understand and document the local knitting patterns as an activity that happens in-place, on location. In Sheringham, Norfolk, this is the gansey knitting group that meets weekly at Sheringham Museum. I filmed them knitting and also recorded a discussion with them. With their permission, I have included extracts in the audio-visual essay of their voice and knitting hands.

The images of hands highlight the nature of my film project as handmade and craft-oriented. “Craft” is a useful term for my films and relates to Lilly Husbands’s proposal in her essay “Craft’s Critique: Artisanal Animation in the Digital Age,” published in 2022.²⁾ The latter highlights the interrelation between process and product that lies at the heart of my film series and emphasises an intimate connection between the labour involved in the film’s production and the artefactual outcome in the form of a film. In addition, ideas of craft and labour can shed light on the production processes associated with making these films, which are physically labour-intensive and use analogue, material technologies of production, even though the hands making the knitting pattern films are not visible in them. Likewise, the knitted samples in the gansey groups — small fabric tests — and the historic garments in the museum share with my films a character of focused experiments and visualisations of the knitting patterns.

The idea of the handmade is valuable, as it highlights the importance of tacit knowledge embedded in my filming methods — working with materials and the Bolex camera technology — which in turn echoes the historic production of knitting patterns. This

2) Lilly Husbands, “Craft’s Critique: Artisanal Animation in the Digital Age,” *Animate Projects*, accessed October 8, 2025, https://animateprojectsarchive.org/writing/essays/l_husbands_2.

mirrors the practice-based research of the Sheringham group. The Sheringham patterns, like other regional gansey patterns, were not written down. The gansey group's research into the patterns — concerning how the historic garments were made and the practices used, for example — has involved re-making them.

Another key research method (also used by Mary Wright in her documentation of the Cornish Guernsey, a regional variation on gansey) has been to study early 20th-century photographs of fishermen.³⁾ In the case of Sheringham, the archive of the pioneering female photographer Olive Edis is held in the nearby Cromer Museum. To note the patterns accurately, the gansey group has studied details of the patterns from the photographs. This has been combined with the group's creative problem-solving — using old tools (such as wire needles and knitting sheafs) and working out the finer details of garment construction (e.g., gussets). These processes relate to the approaches employed by the historic knitters; for example, a gansey knitter's magpie-like approach in reproducing patterns they saw and liked, or the spirit of competitiveness that drove the knitters to create the best patterns, or the finest fabric. This fine-knitted fabric is one of the defining characteristics of the Sheringham ganseys. The voices in the video speak to this unique knowledge. The outcome of their research and noted patterns is documented in the book *Sheringham Ganseys: People, Pattern and Place*.⁴⁾

The group's research process is not linear, and my approach to the audiovisual essay chimes with this by presenting an interlinking set of subheadings under which core tools and processes that are used in my research project, and the films' production, highlighting the dialectic relationship between the camera, subject and filmmaker that underpins my practice-based research in the project. Unlike the 16mm site-based films, edited in-camera, the audiovisual essay enables me to create dialogue between audio, images, words, and preproduction documents, which speaks to the scope of my research into the Norfolk knitting patterns. As a knitter, I have followed some of these patterns myself. As a filmmaker, I have remade them cinematically.

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3) Mary Wright, *Cornish Guernseys and Knit-frocks* (Clifton-upon-Teme: Polperro Heritage Press, 2008). Photographs of the Polperro Cornish fisherman can be viewed in the Polperro museum, many of which have been reproduced in Wright's book.

4) Rita Taylor, Lesley Lougher, Jan Hillier, Ken Holloway, and Martin Warren, *Sheringham Ganseys: People, Places, Patterns*. Second Edition (Sheringham: Sheringham Museum Norfolk Trust Ltd, 2019).

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Filmography

Cromer: Gilbert Rook's Seeds and Bars (Jennifer Nightingale, 2023)

Biography

Jennifer Nightingale graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art. A Senior Lecturer in Film and Media at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, and Associate Lecturer in Visual Communication, Royal College of Art, London, her films have screened at international venues including Tate Modern, London; The National Portrait Gallery, London; The Serpentine Pavilion, London; The LUX, London; and The Film-Makers Cooperative, New York.

Email: jennifer.nightingale@rca.ac.uk; jennifer.nightingale@aru.ac.uk