

OTTU

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ABSTRACT

In OTTU, a filmmaker searches for the eight winds of the Mediterranean on the island of Corsica. Using found footage and employing 16mm hand-processing experiments that attempt to expose its ethereal subject, the film brings audiences to abandoned churches, cemeteries, and ravaged beaches in its quest to find meaning in that which is invisible and has neither source nor end. OTTU, the Corsican word for eight, is a film made by and with the wind and with deference to all that we can never fully nor linearly comprehend—from cultures to places to natural phenomena or even our own perceptions, experiences, or personal narratives. The eight chapters of the film—each named for a distinct directional wind—offer a portrait of not only the wind, but ultimately of the landscapes it crosses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful to the powerhouse duo that is Manfred Becker and Kuowei Lee, who work behind the scenes to ensure that students have all the resources they need to advance their craft. The pandemic must have been incredibly difficult from an administrative standpoint and yet these two seemed to have endless energy available to help students navigate this uncertain period. In the loneliest moments of the pandemic, my emails with Manfred and phone calls with Kuowei made dark days brighter.

I could not have imagined a more good-natured and collaborative group of peers with whom to share this journey.

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THE MAKING OF OTTU

Introduction

OTTU is a film made by and with wind. Contemporary philosopher Madalina Diaconu has suggested that the wind poses challenges for documentation because “it has neither sides, parts, nor dimensions, no form and almost no matter” (2013). My thesis film explores the challenges of sensory filmmaking using Mediterranean winds as its focus. Setting out to document phenomena that is “invisible yet tangible, existing nowhere yet everywhere” (Watson, 1984), has been the essence of this project. I have privileged experiential forms of knowing, as opposed to scientific information, to create a framework to explore the mysterious power of the wind. At the same time, one of the central themes of the film involves questioning the very practice of *knowing* and to work towards acceptance of all that we can never know—particularly if the circumstances we find ourselves in had been different.

For the past eight years I have worked as a documentary filmmaker. I have experienced great luck by simply being in the right place at the right time. With all my past projects, I have had a clear objective pivoting on a desire to encourage cross-cultural understanding and peace. For example, RANGER documents one of the last journeys of the MV Northern Ranger, a boat that travels the Labrador coastline, and examines the vessel as a cultural container and lifeline for the region it serves. HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN documents cultural and religious diversity as well as the tensions and contradictions of multiculturalism along a short stretch of No. 5 Road in Richmond, BC. While I was an “outsider” in the making of both films, my methods and approach were guided nevertheless by relationship-building with the project’s participants and a collaborative approach to storyboarding in early stages of the project. In both cases, I worked

with participants—in some cases for years prior to production—to understand with accuracy and precision the unfolding of daily life in a particular place.ⁱ

By contrast, OTTU is a film that has as its starting point a great misfortune—being in the wrong place at the wrong time. OTTU was conceived in 2020—a year characterized by precarity, instability, uncertainty, and death. In February of that year, I travelled from my then home in Los Angeles, USA, to my hometown of Toronto, Canada, to attend my father’s funeral. I spent one month in Toronto. On my return to Los Angeles, I was stopped at the border, interrogated, and after some hours, stripped of my work visa—an *ink stamp* in my passport that had made it possible for me to live in a place I adored and work for organization whose mission I cared deeply about. I was given 14 days to enter the USA, pack my belongings, and leave the country for a period of at least one year. I still do not understand why this happened. I speculate that somehow maybe I was flagged on account of my employer. The non-profit organization I was working for at the time—The International Documentary Association (IDA)—had recently sued the Department of Homeland Security for requiring that filmmakers disclose their social media to border officials. The IDA was also deeply invested in funding documentary journalism that was helping independent filmmakers speak truth to power (an important element of democracy) in an election year. There is a part of me that believes the arbitrary border decision was politically motivated, even though I question whether American bureaucracies can achieve such levels of coordination. I did as I was instructed. I gave away most of what I had accumulated in my three years in Los Angeles and returned to Toronto—a city I had not lived in for at least a decade and while technically *home*, certainly did not feel like it.

Shortly thereafter, the Covid-19 pandemic took hold. In 2020, I wrote treatments for four different documentaries, as well as three short screenplays, and at year’s end it was clear that not

one of these projects could be made safely. I wondered how I might be able to make anything (let alone a film) in the context of the global pandemic.

The wind offered an opportunity. The winds that traverse the earth's surface have a vast and global history. Humans have habitually regarded the wind as an element to be observed, measured, analyzed, and harnessed to our own ends. Yet life scientist and environmental writer Lyall Watson has suggested that the intrinsic invisibility and enigmatic character of the wind should more aptly place it in a category like love, hate or politics—things “we find difficult to explain, but impossible to ignore” (1984). In my view, the wind represented the perfect guide at the close of 2020—a year characterized by death on both a personal level and global or societal level. Because the wind has no beginning, no middle, and no end—it moves freely and continuously—it seemed to offer some catharsis or a release from all the surprise endings I had experienced. Moreover, the wind does not know borders, and this too offered some respite from the trauma at the US border. Being in the outdoors—in nature—offered reprieve from the lockdowns and feelings of being enclosed for months on end. Most importantly, in a world beset by Covid-19, climate change and social unrest, I wondered whether the wind—which cannot really be predicted with precision despite the discipline of meteorology which aims to do so—could guide us to a place of strength in facing the unknown in such turbulent times.

When I started the project, I drew inspiration from the field of phenomenology (and eco-phenomenology) in an effort to privilege perception and awareness of wind phenomena over facts about its circulation. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty conceives of this approach as “a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing” the natural world—a practice achieved through “a direct description of our experience as it is” (1962). Astrida Neimanis has suggested that “this kind of phenomenological

attunement, amplification, and description” has the capacity to challenge “what we know and open to what we do not [know]” (2016). Such insights were a starting point for documenting the wind, but as my process evolved, the focus on perception was replaced by a desire to encourage *imagination* over perception—perhaps a natural outgrowth of working with a so-called “invisible” subject. Therefore, though I initially set out to make a documentary, I realized very soon into the project that the form might not accommodate the kinds of information and encounters one crosses in a film about wind.

Nevertheless, as with participants in my past projects, with this film I have attempted to approach my primary subject—the wind and the lands and people it traverses—as creative collaborators. The project has been informed by recent theorizing on documentary co-creation (Auguiste et al., 2020), a practice that prioritizes inquiry and dialogue over representation in nonfiction storytelling. The approach eschews top-down or vertical relationships between a film’s director, subject, and audience in favor of more horizontal, collaborative and improvisational spaces (Aston, Gaudenzi & Rose, 2017; Zimmerman and De Michiel, 2018). Indeed, *improvisation*, for better or worse, has been a cornerstone of the project. Early on in making this film I realized that the more I tried to *plan*, the greater the failure I would encounter. So much so that towards the end of the project, I stopped planning altogether. I let go of all expectations with the goal of surrender.

Destination France: The Wind Knows No Borders

For as long as I can remember, I have had a European passport. I am first-generation Canadian. My parents were displaced from war-torn central Italy as young adults. Canadian troops had liberated their town so it seems fitting that I should be a dual citizen. I had never used the

passport—I had never needed to—but for some reason, I always kept it valid. After my experience at the US border, I thought it might make me feel whole again to use this privileged “get out of jail card” to escape my confinement in Toronto and explore the possibility of a journey with the wind.

I had once experienced the fierce Meltemi winds on the Greek island of Crete and knew there were other winds circling southern Europe. Through my initial research it became clear that fact and fiction co-existed peacefully in discussions of the wind. What struck me as particularly interesting were the ways in which patterns and perceptions about the wind were often presented as fact. The east wind, Levante, brings rain and bad luck. Sirocco, a south wind that flows to Europe from North Africa is hot and dusty dry and blows fine sand from the Sahara throughout the Mediterranean. It occasionally comes to settle on the ski slopes of Switzerland, giving an unusual pink hue to the landscape’s snow cover. These were the sorts of “facts” that I encountered early in the project, and rather than separating fact from folklore, I decided to embrace both with equal measure.

France was the only EU country open without a quarantine on arrival. Only a negative Covid test was needed to board a plane departing Canada. The south of France seemed a fitting starting point. It is home to Mistral (a name derived from the Occitan word for “master” which struck me as a nice coincidence), which is a cold and dry powerful north wind. It travels through the south of France, down the Rhône valley, which opens to the Gulf of Lion on the Mediterranean. A smaller but related wind, the Tramontane, also frequents the same region. The Tramontane is colder than Mistral, but also less powerful. It moves in gusts. Although the Mistral is said to drive people mad, it has the paradoxical reputation of being *le vent sain*—a healthy wind—as its spells are generally followed by sun and milder temperatures.

The day I arrived in Nice was certainly one of the strangest in my lifetime. When I exited the plane at 1pm in the afternoon, the airport was entirely dark—a ghost town. Nobody checked my passport. Nobody asked me why I was entering France. There was no interrogation and it barely felt like I had entered a new country. Only now—two years later—can I laugh at the “fact” that I arrived at lunchtime and know now that the French enjoy a good lunch. On the day of my arrival, I walked quietly out of the airport with no more than a carry-on suitcase and boarded a tram for my rental apartment.ⁱⁱ

I spent the following weeks wandering around Nice thinking about the wind and where it might take me. Technically, I was only permitted to leave my apartment for one hour a day for the purposes of exercise and essential activities, so in those early days, the wind was clearly not going to take me very far. I was obligated to carry a paper attestation that stated my address and the time I left home. But after seeing hordes of people everywhere at all hours and having had conversations with locals, I realized that many people carried with them a stack of empty attestations and simply updated them every hour on the hour. In this way people could both observe and break rules. The idea resonated with me. Can you make a documentary without facts? Can you tell a story without—like the wind—a beginning, middle and end?



Image 1. Home movies found in a vintage market

On one of my daily walks, I found myself in a second-hand market. It was fun to look at old things, but I was also disheartened at the realization that I had not had a home for nearly one year. Among the oddities I noticed two reels of 16mm film. They did not appear to be commercial film.

Each reel had a handwritten label—one Spain/Portugal and the other Cote d’Azur. It was early January and since my classes were on zoom due to the spread of the new Delta variant, I was auditing a few sessions of Professor Phil Hoffman’s course on process cinema. I had recently acquired a Bolex H16 Reflex camera with the help of my friend and artist mentor Anna Kipervaser, and it was one of the few things I had brought to France with me. I had never used the camera but had wondered about its possibilities. This is because, one year earlier, before leaving LA, I had an advanced cataract removed from my right eye and was told that my left required an operation as well. The operation had restored some vision (previously kaleidoscopic due to a thickening of the cataract) but my right eye was now permanently focused at a distance of 200ft. I can see little that is in front of or behind that distance with any clarity or precision. Professor Hoffman had said that nobody can really see what’s in the viewfinder of a Bolex, so to me the camera represented a way to keep shooting my own films given my new ocular challenges. I had been following along with the course, not knowing where it might lead. The students were working on an assignment with found footage, so when I discovered the home movies in the market, I bought them. I paid five euros.

And then I placed a small bet with the universe. I wanted to know if there were traces of wind in the footage. If there were, I could take this as a validating sign to move forward with a film about wind. I mailed to film to Colorlab in Maryland.

But the film did not arrive at Colorlab as expected and in fact was never inputted into the La Poste (French postal service) tracking system so its whereabouts were unknown for some time. I returned to the post office where I literally begged for more information. I even convinced the postal workers to let me search their back room to see if somehow the package had fallen off a trolley and not been mailed. A clerk assured me the film had left France. She made the sign of

the cross and told me that I should pray it might be returned to sender. For the next few weeks, I monitored my mailbox but the only thing I received was an ad for a medium.

And then the film arrived in Maryland. It was scanned and the digital files shared with me by email. The two reels were indeed home movies.

The filmmaker appeared to be a gifted amateur. Many of the frames were well composed and most featured the same woman in several major tourist destinations in the southern Europe. The footage included four countries – Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France. On neither of the reels or within the films themselves was there any identifying information about the filmmaker or its subjects.

I watched the two films and tracked all movement related to wind including subtle details such as waves, flowers, birds, trees, and flags. To my surprise—at the end of one of the reels—and *completely disconnected* to anything that had come before—was the footage of a storm. The location was the Promenade des Anglais in

Nice—approximately 200m from my apartment. The clip showed waves crashing on shore, overturned cars and people in the streets. Not only was this a remarkable historical record of a wind event but it also provided the push I needed to begin the film.

Initially I set out to build a mosaic of the wind, structured as a short film comprised of a series of eight short segments. Each segment was to represent one point on the *Mediterranean*



Image 2. Ad for medium found in mailbox



Image 3. Mediterranean wind rose

wind rose, a 14th century nautical navigation tool. The wind rose includes eight principal winds and I developed a list of shooting locations across the Mediterranean where each wind was known to be prevalent. However, during the spring of 2021, the Covid-variant Delta once again closed borders and it was unclear whether I would be able to visit Spain, Portugal, Malta, Greece, or other places on my list.

I studied a map of Europe and found Corsica – a small Mediterranean island where the eight winds blow. I initially did not know much about Corsica, but from a strategic production-planning perspective, it was a part of the country (France) that I was currently living in, and therefore theoretically open for travel, irrespective of variants and international border closures.

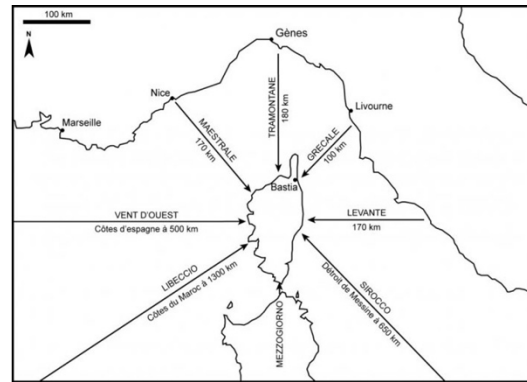


Image 4. Named winds and their directions on Corsica

It was also in this early stage of the project that I made the decision to shoot solely on 16mm film—to hand process the film where possible—and to experiment with phytography.

Grounding the film in the methods of process cinema (MacKenzie and Marchessault, 2019; Zinman, 2020) would allow me to work with Corsican maquis (dense shrubs, flowers, herbs, vegetation) as partners in the chemical production process, dry film in different winds, and imprint the land itself on the film strip. I had also run camera tests in Mistral wind outside of Marseille and found my digital camera unstable in the wind, whereas the



Image 5. Corsican maquis used for hand-processing

weight of the Bolex seemed better able to handle strong gales. I also felt that the digital image—a so-called “true” representation of an object provided to the maker at the very moment it is recorded—did not align well with the overall themes of the film. Surrendering to nature comes with uncertainties and risks, and these to me seemed a more authentic approach to capturing image. With respect to sound recording, I initially sought to obtain a pair of the highest possible quality omni microphones. I pestered Sennheiser for months but was ultimately unsuccessful in securing a pair for the production. I settled on a pair of handmade LOM omni microphones and used an Audio Technica stereo microphone. I also worked with the technical staff at Rycote to make custom windscreens capable of resisting strong winds.

The Winds of the Mediterranean on the Island of Corsica

By the time I had selected Corsica as my primary filming location, I had already studied the winds, their characteristics, and their patterns, extensively. I had put call-outs to local listservs in my area and consulted websites for weather enthusiasts. I interviewed a gardener, a choreographer, a sailor, a puppeteer, a paraglider, a commercial airline pilot, and surfers. Using sailing and kitesurfing forums, as well as historical meteorological reports, I had mapped the locations where I might be able to find each wind. But I did not know where exactly to begin.

Having received the advert the medium during the period in which my film was lost, I decided to put the words “Corsican shaman” into Google. I had also been reading books by British ex-pat Dorothy Carrington, and one of them *The Dream-Hunters of Corsica* (1995) had outlined in detail the folk beliefs in *mazzeri* (people who can foretell death) so I was particularly open to speaking to any spiritual person who might have more information on such matters. If meteorology could barely predict wind with any precision, what might a medium say? My top

understood. He replied in his best English. I understood him say—I have many regrets. I did not know how to respond, so I said in English: I have more mistakes than regrets.

I met Bernardu three more times on that visit. We made phytograms with foraged flowers on the terrace of his family home. He said the process was “incroyable.” We had a nice afternoon together, until I hit my head on a low doorframe and cut my tongue open with my teeth. There was blood everywhere.

Another evening he invited me to record the rehearsal of his polyphonic men’s chorus. This recording is used in the film. At the end of my time in Belgodère, he drove me through the mountains to Porto. That day was an interesting day.

The weather report, which I consulted daily during the making of the film, said the southwest Libeccio wind would arrive with great force (45km/hr). But as I was leaving, with my recording gear, to find it, the woman who ran the auberge where I was staying told me I was crazy if I thought I could find wind. The auberge had for weeks tolerated my presence but I wondered if they were secretly worried about the fact that that a middle-aged woman with boom pole and windscreen had not been advertised in their brochure and was too much a spectacle for their other guests. Every night at dinner they seated me in a dark corner. I felt like a ghost amongst all the romantic couples enjoying their Corsican getaway. Maybe she was tired of my presence on that last morning of my stay when she said bluntly that Libeccio would not come that day. I showed her the weather report and she laughed at me. She said: “rain last night plus hazy sky means no wind today. No wind!” And then with condescension: “I know my own country!”

I left to document the wind anyways, but I ran out of water earlier than expected and it was 37C in the sun and I was worried I might collapse so I returned to town.

Later that night Bernadu and I were driving down the coast to Porto and near Galéria the wind was so strong he was having trouble handling the car on narrow mountain roads. We had found Libeccio. We pulled over so that I could record a few minutes, but the wind was strong and I could barely hang on to my gear. I stood on the edge of a cliff, clutching my microphone with all my strength, wondering whether this wind would reach the auberge in Belgodère.

Porto, Ota and Carghèse

One of the challenges of recording the wind was isolating its resonances in the landscape from all the other sounds one might hear on a small island overrun with tourists—so called “environmental challenges” that include people talking, children playing, air conditioners, and vehicles (Virostek, 2013). Day after day I would listen to my recordings and find it nearly impossible to find clean minutes without interruption.

In Ota, I decided to take sound recording walks in the mountains—in the opposite direction of the populated coastline—to see whether I could isolate the wind from the noise of tourism. On one occasion I hiked 27km to the summit of mountain, but on that day as I scrambled across rocks and shrubs, I found almost no wind. I could hear almost nothing but cicadas. The meteorological



report for the day had noted that midday the wind would change from southwest (Libeccio) to south (Ostro) and I wondered if when the winds changed direction they came to stillness. It seemed that way.

I spent the next day at the beach in Porto. I made phytograms in the sand by placing eucalyptus leaves directly on 16mm film and leaving them there until the west wind (Ponente) blew them off. From Porto I took boat tour to capture on film the red rocks of Piana that emerge from the ocean. I wanted to see the places where only the wind could touch. But only 30 minutes into the tour, a woman on the boat had a seizure and we returned to shore.

The southwest wind (Sirocco) visited every night around 4am and therefore every night I went into the streets to document its arrival, but all I could capture was the sound of air conditioners and transport trucks.

Cap Corse—Bastia and Ersa

Months passed before I returned to Corsica. This was for three reasons: first, I had to wait until I received the 4K scans from my initial trip to see what I had shot in order to correct any major errors; second, I became ill in early October and it took nearly a month to recover; and lastly, I needed to make sure that the season had fully transitioned into winter. I monitored the weather until I saw the northeast wind (Gregale) in the forecast and then hopped on a ferry to the island.

The challenge of Corsica in winter is that almost all hotels and restaurants are closed. I had wanted to stay in a place called Tomino but nobody would rent me a room. I had a hard time finding lodging but found a small apartment suitable for a long stay visit in Ersa, near the northern tip of Corsica. The apartment belonged to a local taxi driver so I agreed to pay one lump sum for the taxi rides to and from the ferry terminal and a long-stay in their apartment. Ersa was not in my plan.

I met my host Eve on arrival. She brought me homemade cookies. I told her about my project and she suggested I visit the ruins of an old cathedral in a nearby forest. She said I might

find it an interesting example of nature reclaiming its space on earth. She said the place is special to local people and there are only a handful of full-time inhabitants on the northern part of the island so it is not well known.

I followed her directions through a forest until I came to the old cathedral. The main entrance was cemented shut so I piled cinderblocks on top of each other and climbed in through a small window. The interior of the structure was remarkable. I shot one 100ft roll of 16mm B/W and recorded an approaching thunderstorm inside the cathedral. While recording, I had an eerie feeling because holding the boom pole and listening thunder reminded me that my godfather had been struck to death by lightning when I was very young. The thought scared me, so I stopped recording as the thunder grew closer. I had not considered the dangers of filming during a storm, so I spontaneously improvised and loosely buried a second roll of 16mm at the base of the tree, under earth and leaves, and left the cathedral to let nature do its work with the film overnight.

After the storm cleared I returned to the cathedral to check the film stock. This time, as I was crawling into through the window (a tight fit with my puffy winter clothes), I became stuck briefly. I freed myself and walked through the cathedral into the main body of the cathedral and saw a large man in front of me. I realized that I was potentially in a dangerous situation: in the cathedral with no door in the forest in



Image 8. Cathedral ruins in Ersa

the virtually uninhabited northern cape of Corsica. It was not clear what he was doing there, and I am sure he thought the same thing about me. I had not seen anyone for days. I had a very brief exchange—awkward due to the language barrier—and tried to convince myself that he was

probably more scared of me, than I of him. He had seen the film under the tree and I apologized. I begged the person in front of me for forgiveness. I packaged up the film and left the cathedral. He was already gone by the time I left.

That night I called my friend Lara Elliot in Los Angeles. She is a spiritual person, and someone I thought would not judge me or the situation. She asked what the man looked like and whether he looked friendly. I told her that the only things I could remember were that he was dressed head to toe in black, that the very first word that came to my mind to describe him was ‘hunter’ and that he didn’t look very friendly at all. He was tall and his eyes were blue and unfocused. The following day I received this email from her:

Given the sacredness of this place, I have a feeling that while ‘spooky’ you had an angel encounter to almost no doubt. I was thinking about yesterday and wondering that the story, how it happened and the surroundings all seemed very dream-like. Thus to me it feels that while technically dreams are at night and we consider day time and our “consciousness” the awake state... that this specific incident was still dream-like, hence it may have been a deep unconscious clearing of your deepest fears and this man in the chapel was a symbol for all of this. Perhaps this resonates with you?

- Personal correspondence, November 17, 2021

In her studies of mazzeri folklore, Dorothy Carrington explains that the dream hunters are akin to shamen. They hunt at night. Once a hunter has killed an animal, they turn the animal over on its back. The head of the animal will metamorphose into the face of a person belonging to the hunter’s social space. The recognized person will die within days. In this sense, Corsican dream hunters are said to foretell death and it crossed my mind that death was imminent in this small town. I consulted again both Google and Carrington’s book and read that mazzeri can be recognized by their gaze: they do not look at you, but look through you. I will never forget the eyes of the man I encountered in the cathedral—he was only a few feet in front of me and looking in my direction but somehow not at me.

The following day I asked Eve if she would be kind enough to drive me to the coast and stay with me while I did some recording. On the way there, we passed a small chapel with a few people outside. I asked her if someone had passed away and she said yes. I asked who. She said it was the doctor's mother. That night I hand processed the film using sage and a few foraged plants. As it was the middle of winter, there were almost no flowers to be found.

Days later, when I pulled my film from the buckets of sea salt fixer, I noticed that on one roll the emulsion had not fallen and the other roll had turn a pungent yellow. I sent a photo of the film to Anna Kipervaser and she said the developer appeared to be dead.

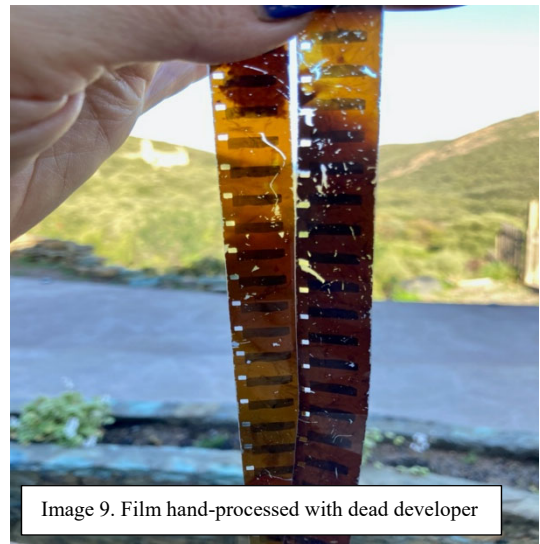


Image 9. Film hand-processed with dead developer

Ajaccio, Bonifacio and Porto Vecchio (and a Surprise Exit via Bastia)

One month later I returned to Corsica—by bicycle. It was the end November and cold and I no longer had the budget for expensive taxis and no longer felt it was safe to hitchhike as I had done all summer long. I needed mobility for the sake of the film. After the problems with my hand processing experiments on Cap Corse, I needed to be able to forage more easily.

My plan was to bike around the southern coast of Corsica. I would begin in Ajaccio and visit the towns of Propriano (a place Bernardu said had the essence of love), Bonifacio on the southern tip of the island, and Porto Vecchio. From Porto Vecchio I would take the ferry back to the French mainland.

My ferry arrived in Ajaccio five and a half hours late. I was supposed to arrive before 7am but instead it was after noon when the ferry docked. The delay was due to high winds. The distance from Ajaccio to Propriano was not great--perhaps only 85km, but there was quite a bit of elevation—1800m to cross the mountains—and I was carrying 25lbs of film equipment on the bike. I was prepared for rain but hoped my ride would be mostly dry. I did not have a GPS with me—only my cell phone with a pre-loaded map.

I had problems with my map almost immediately--I missed a road leaving town and had to circle back to my starting point. Then rain started. I rode in the rain for at least an hour and when I came to my starting point to ascend into the mountains the road I thought existed (that I had mapped) was not in fact a real road. I found giant boulders blocking a path. I re-routed quickly and started in a new direction. When the rain intensified, I had to put my phone in my pocket to protect it from water, and I rode without a map for hours. At one point I checked the map, but discovered I no longer had a cell signal. The rain was icy and the wind was strong. I wanted to document it but I feared for my safety and felt I needed to keep moving. I started to think about what might happen if I was unable to make it to Propriano by nightfall. I convinced myself that a night in the forest would not be fatal. In the worst case scenario, I might be wet and cold or meet a wild boar. I started to think about the conditions that might cause me to stop.

After some hours of cycling without seeing anyone, I came across a small restaurant, which truly appeared out of nowhere—it was not at the time and is still not listed as a location on Google maps, though it can be seen on the street view, which I have clipped and inserted into the film. The restaurant was open. I was soaking wet. I could barely see through my cycling glasses. I entered the building and found myself face to face with an older lady smoking a cigarette behind a bar. Two men drinking beer--the only patrons--turned to look at me.

The words exchange in the film are accurate. I have omitted only that I asked for a glass of water. I also asked the men for directions. Neither man could confirm the exact distance to Propriano. One said that it was 14km away and the other said 40km. I do not know whether the debate between them was about the actual distance or the correct English word for the actual distance. In the film I have highlighted instead the uncomfortable exchange I had with the three people in the restaurant—cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding.

When I eventually arrived in Propriano, my Super 8 camera no longer worked. This is the second Eumig Nautica Super 8 that broke during production. The first one I ordered arrived broken out of the box. Over the following days I used a GoPro to film wind. I reviewed this footage during post-production and deemed its wide fishbowl digital imagery unusable for the film.

Following Propriano, I cycled to Bonifacio and after some days proceeded onwards to Porto Vecchio. With no camera, I focused my efforts on wind recordings. I recorded in the maquis, at the port, and in caves.

24 hours before I was scheduled to board a ferry from Porto Vecchio to return to mainland France I received a message from Corsica Ferries informing me that the departure city of my ferry crossing had changed to Bastia—approximately 144km away. Bad weather caused the switch, and it was that same bad weather which meant that a ride up the coast would be nearly impossible for me. I begged a bus driver to allow me to put my bike in the luggage bin. It was the only way to get off the island.

On the bus ride and I used my cell phone to record the passing landscape. This footage is used in the film. My ferry to the mainland was further delayed and the journey, when it did begin, was so difficult that I vowed never to take the ferry again. I texted a friend the contact

information of my mother because I quite honestly did not expect to survive the voyage. I did not sleep and I looked through my porthole into the darkness all night long, waiting for land to appear.

Corte and Venaco (and an Unplanned Trip to Bonifacio)

I returned to Corsica the following spring. The plan was to head directly into the interior to begin work at the visual archives at the Pasquale Paoli University of Corsica, named for the revolutionary leader who gave Corsica a constitution in 1755. However, on departure I learned that a deadly tempest was making its way through France and was set to hit the port of Bonifacio in the coming days. I changed my plan and airline ticket to return to Bonifacio, a place I had not yet documented visually due to the broken camera.

I arrived in Bonifacio and found a ghost town and nearly nothing to document. Not only were all of the shops closed but I found volunteer crews moving through the town to remove or else duct tape securely anything that might blow away in the storm. Winds reached 125km/hr. This is very strong for Corsica, but not the strongest during the period in which I made this film (that record is in fact 224km/hr in August 2022—a storm that killed six people and left 45,000 without power). In Bonifacio I therefore found myself in the centre of a great storm, with almost nothing to point the camera at to show the powerful gales. Nevertheless, I worked my way along the coastline and through the town, documenting whatever I could. It was early spring and wild rosemary was in bloom. I clipped bundles of



Image 10. Rosemary used for hand-processing

rosemary flowers and branches—the flora that touched the storm during the tempest when I needed to be safely indoors—and used this to hand process the film that appears in chapter seven.

From Bonifacio I travelled north to Venaco, and later Corte. Corte is in the centre of the island is said to be the most nationalistic region of Corsica. It is isolated from the tourism along the coastline and therefore less affluent. Historically, when colonists fought over the island, the Corsicans would retreat into the mountains for safety. Over time, a separatist sentiment had taken root in the island's core.

Therefore, it is not surprising that I found myself in the centre of a political storm when I arrived in Corte. Civil unrest had erupted in Corsica the week prior over the strangulation of Yvan Colonna in a French prison. Yvan was a Corsican nationalist serving a life sentence for assassinating the French representative to Corsica in 1998. Yvan had been strangled by a fellow inmate for making anti-Muslim statements about the prophet Mohammad in a maximum-security prison near Marseille. Corsicans claimed that the French police could have intervened but did not and therefore were indirectly responsible for the incident. Moreover, Corsicans have been trying for decades to have their own prison rather than have their convicted felons serve their sentences on the mainland. Yvan's family had been trying in vain to get him home. Now he was on life support—neither dead nor alive.

In response to the killing, unions hijacked a Corsican ferry carrying French police and tourists. I saw that ferry in the Port of Ajaccio the day of the hijacking and thought initially—how odd for it to be resting idle in the sea, neither coming nor going. That boat stayed in the Port for seven hours having already travelled a half day through the night.

Major protests spread across the island—day and night. I attended a local protest out of curiosity but left at the sound of gunfire and homemade grenades. These protests barely made the news in France because the war with Ukraine had just started and the French elections were imminent; local media on the island is also very limited.

When I arrived at the university, I found it barricaded. I snuck in through a service door and wandered empty hallways until I found my host photocopying what appeared to be manifestos for the students.

We spoke about the collection, and he informed me that, in solidarity with Yvan, the university had effectively closed for 19 days—one



Image 11. Protests outside university

day for each year Yvan spent in prison. Then he asked, why are you making a film about Corisca? I told him the truth. His response was to ask how I did not know that Bonifacio has thirteen winds. Then he listed resources I could consult and made a plan to meet me the next morning with faculty who could help with the film. I expressed gratitude at this offer, but hours later he emailed me to cancel and said there was nothing more he or anyone else could do. That night, I wrote every single remaining contact I had to see if anyone could meet with me.

Only one graduate student replied. I met her for coffee the next morning. During the course of our conversation, it was revealed that she was the sister of a Corsican singer whose album had been sent to me by friend in Canada only ten days earlier. I had listened to it several times on the trip, and after learning of that coincidence, I could not listen to it again.

Prior to arriving in Corte, I was familiar with the history of colonialism in Corsica. It is well documented in Dorothy Carrington's *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica* (1971). It is also plainly evident in the languages spoken across the island and the etymology of its place names. But I was unaware of, or else surprised by, the intensity of protest and resistance I witnessed. And it was only in Corte that I made the clear connection to the wind's role in colonialism and slavery—not just in Corsica, but around the world. I wondered about my own positioning as a filmmaker collecting visual and aural artifacts for artistic production, for a degree, and presumably professional gain. I left Corsica with the intention to never to return.

Return to Cap Corse

In the months that followed—deep into post-production—I found myself haunted by the memory of the man in the cathedral. One of the kitesurfers I had met while travelling was planning a trip and I asked to tag along. I had remaining film stock and wondered if visiting the island as a tourist, seeing it one more time with fresh eyes, might break its spell on my psyche. I reasoned that the wind, when it passes over the same landscape, does not see exactly the same things. I wondered if the lightness of a road trip with company would help me understand Corsica in a new way.

I asked if we could visit the ruins before heading to the beach. My friend stood guard outside the cathedral as I worked. But with each roll of film I used, I encountered problems—either the reel would not advance or the counter would advance but not the reel itself. I had no choice but to open the hood of the camera several times and expose the film to light. In my



final attempt to film in Corsica, there was no synchronicity between time and image capture and in the end I left the ruins with fragments of film stock and a profound feeling of failure.

We drove as far as we could away from Cap Corse that night. We stayed in a small mountain town about 10km from the coast and the next morning discovered that our car was damaged. The vandals even left the tool—a red stone—they used to etch a zig-zag pattern into the hood of the car.

I sent the broken bits of film to Colorlab in Maryland for scanning. Weeks later I received an email stating that the film appeared to have a registration issue and strobing, which the lab said was due to the “shudder,” a notable misspelling.

In my second trip to the cathedral, I was able to capture only a handful of extra details to include in the film. Among these was the number eight (08) sketched on a wall. I noticed it while recording graffiti and it struck me as a bizarre coincidence to see the name of the film right before me. I am unsure whether it was there during my first visit—if it were, I likely would have remembered it.

Final Notes

In editing the film, I began by parsing my large collection of field recordings of the wind. I selected approximately two hours of recordings from my travels and worked to edit these to approximately 45 minutes. I then began to add images to the wind soundtrack. I had not intended to narrate the film but had amassed such a large volume of journal notes and emails, that at some point it became clear that my journey should form the foundation of the film. Bookending OTTU are selections of footage from the two reels of 16mm film that I found in Nice—the initial discovery that set the wheels in motion for the project—and to me there was no way to include this material without crediting it as found footage of unknown origin in the film itself.

I have used the themes outlined earlier—unpredictability, death, ghosts, discovery, and mystery—as a guiding compass for the flow of the story. I use the word story loosely. Like the residents of Nice who carried stacks of attestations to both obey and break rules, I have tried to abridge the full collection of my trips and experiences into eight chapters—one for each of the eight directional movements of the wind—without fully conforming to the conventions of either documentary or storytelling.

Each chapter is named using the Corsican language and I have paired each with a so-called ‘truth’ about wind that I encountered during the making of the film. Statements such as “the wind has a shadow” or “Bonifacio has thirteen winds” have no scientific validity and yet they are believed by the people who shared them and in my view worthy of headlining a chapter in the film.

Unu: Tramuntana – The wind has no beginning, no middle, and no end

Dui: Punenti – The wind is air in motion

Trè: Libecciu – The wind has many names

Quattru: Austru – The wind cannot be heard

Cinque: Gregali – The wind has a shadow

Sei: Levantu – The east wind brings bad luck

Sette: Scrioccu – The wind is invisible
Ottu : Maistrali – Bonifacio has thirteen winds

In making this film, I set out to document the wind. In the end, the portrait is not only of the wind, but ultimately of the people and landscapes it crosses. OTTU is a film made by and with Corisca.

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ⁱ I consider myself to be a place-based filmmaker and the filmmakers whose work resonates with me the most include JP Sniadecki, Verena Paravel, Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Gianfranco Rossi, and Frederick Wiseman. These filmmakers do not comprise any kind of unified group, but rather work in unique ways to explore the politics of place.

ⁱⁱ It is important to note the distinction between entering France by plane versus by train. The border between Italy and France along the Mediterranean coastline is heavily policed, but the policing is targeted. Every train entering France from Italy is searched for migrants, who are removed and transported back to Italy. Anyone riding the train who is a person of colour of either African or North African descent undergoes a passport check. Racial profiling occurs unapologetically—it is a matter of daily police routine. Vans and larger cars are also routinely searched at the border. However, cyclists riding nice road bicycles can pass freely with no problem. The land borders are often also closed at lunchtime.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Narration

I. TRAMUNTANA

THE WIND HAS NO BEGINNING NO MIDDLE AND NO END

Nice.

I find myself wandering through an antique market. I don't even know what I am looking for. Perhaps nothing in particular. I arrived in France with no more than a carry-on suitcase so maybe walking through this market is fulfilling a secret longing for stuff, for sentimental objects, or even simply clutter, of which I currently have none.

Among the oddities I notice two reels of 16mm film. Home movies.

I am lonely and there is a lockdown and I decide to play a game of chance.

I buy the film for five euros and walk to the post office. The shipping destination is a film lab in Maryland. I want to know if there are traces of wind in the footage.

For weeks I await news from the lab but I am told my package has not yet arrived. I return to the post office where I am informed that the box has disappeared without a trace. I insist that it must be found.

In the weeks that follow I monitor my mailbox—sometimes even three or four times a day—hoping that my package is returned to me. But only junk mail.

II. PUNENTI

THE WIND IS AIR IN MOTION

There are some things that cannot be known and it is often said that the wind is something we can experience only indirectly. I search the internet and find online a woman claiming to be a Corsican shaman. I write to her and explain that I am looking for the eight winds of the Mediterranean and wish to find them on the island of Corsica.

She tells me that she lives in California and introduces me to someone who can help. He is a scholar and a musician and to me his emails read like poetry.

III. LIBECCIU

THE WIND HAS A SHADOW

Belgodere.

I meet Bernardu in a cemetery. It is a quiet place.

Bernardu speaks Corsican, Italian and French. I speak English. But somehow we can communicate. I notice the word *regrette* inscribed on tombstones. He tells me that he has many regrets. I reply that I have more mistakes than regrets.

Bernardu plays traditional songs. He teaches me Corsican words to describe different kinds of wind. The words all begin with Z.

ziferettu: vent coulis
zilifrina: bise (nord-est)
zinzaletta: vent etesien
zirbulinu: vent d'automne
zifulime: hurlement du vent
zufulu: saute de vent plongean; devastateur

IV. AUSTRU THE WIND IS INAUDIBLE

Porto.

I hike directly into the mountains.
I want to meet the wind in its purest form.
I sit on a rock and rest.
And I wonder:
When the winds change direction do they come to stillness? Even for a moment?
I listen but don't hear anything.
I don't hear anything at all.

V. GRIGALI THE WIND HAS A SHADOW

Ersa.

I meet a woman named Eve. She suggests I visit the nearby ruins of a cathedral. She tells me the place is special and a good example of nature reclaiming its space on earth.

I follow her directions through a forest. I find the main entrance is cemented shut. I pile old cinderblocks on top of each other and enter through a small narrow window. I walk through abandoned rooms until I enter the main holy space. A dusty altar has weathered the test of time. The ceiling is no longer and in the middle of the church there is an enormous tree, whose branches reach up—through the open roof--into the heavens above.

I set up my camera begin to document the details—the crumbling ceiling, traces of frescos, wild flora encircling the altar, graffiti. I set up my recording equipment and wait for the wind. I hear thunder in my headphones and decide to leave. Before I do, I plant a roll film at the base of the tree to let nature do its work overnight.

After the storm clears I return to the ruins. I find the cinderblocks where I left them. I climb in through the window. It is tighter than how I remember and for a moment I am stuck.

I free myself and walk into the body of the cathedral where I come face to face with a man. He is tall. At least 6 feet tall. He is dressed in black and his eyes are blue and unfocused. He is silent. I apologize. I am so sorry. I am so sorry. Eve told me to come here.

I am alone in the church with no door in the forest in the virtually uninhabited northern part of Corsica. I don't know who he is or why he is there.

I watch him move through the cavernous space. He circles around the alter and I don't see him again.

The following day I process the film in total darkness—using sage. I can think of nothing else but the mysterious identity of the man in the church.

But when I pull my film from the pail of sea salt I see that the emulsion has not fallen. There is almost no record of the church. Only a faint trace of the number 8 inscribed on a fall.

VI. LIVANTU THE EAST WIND BRINGS BAD LUCK

Ajaccio.

My ferry arrives five and a half hours late. The delay is due to high winds. I have a bicycle and will ride to Propriano—a place Bernardu has said is the essence of love.

The rain starts just as I depart. Everything with me is waterproof—even my camera.

I arrive at a small road leading to a mountain pass. It is inaccessible. I have studied the route for weeks but now before me a row of massive boulders blocks the road. I continue down the coastline to the next pass and find it too barricaded. I choose another route but after some kilometres where my map shows a road—the landscape before me has no trace of even so much as the smallest footpath.

Then rain. Real rain.

I feel icy water touch every bit of exposed skin—through the slits in my helmet, the spaces behind my goggles, my socks, my shoes, my gloves, down the back of my neck. I start to cry.

And then, after several hours, I see a small restaurant. It looks open. I enter and see an older lady with heavy makeup smoking a cigarette behind the bar. The only patrons--two men sharing an afternoon beer—turn to look at me. I speak first: Je suis perdu. I am lost. One man asks in English: But from where have you come?

A million answers cross my mind—including “I don't know”—so I pick the safest one. Canada.

The lady looks past me at the men and says in French something that she thinks I cannot understand: “But what kind of person comes to Corsica by bicycle in November?”

One of the men snaps back at her: “She said she’s from Canada. This is summer for her.”

No one can tell me the route or distance to Propriano.

Hours later I see small villages emerge along the approaching coastline. The rain subsides. I stop to film. But my camera does not work.

Later that night the wind arrives at my auberge. It rattles my windows and I can hear heavy hail. I look at my wet shoes and my muddy bike and my broken camera.

VII. SCIROCCU THE WIND IS INVISIBLE

Bonifacio.

A deadly tempest is making its way through France. Its name is Franklin. A couple in their 70s drowns when their car is submerged in water. The winds reach 125km an hour and in the streets only stillness.

VIII. MAISTRALI BONIFACIO HAS THIRTEEN WINDS

Corte.

I arrive in a small interior mountain town. I am there to visit the visual archives at the Pasquale Paoli University—named for the revolutionary leader who gave Corsica its first constitution in 1755.

It is an odd time to visit. Days earlier I learned that a Corsican nationalist named Yvan Colonna – while serving a life sentence in a French prison for the crime of political assassination – had been strangled in jail by a fellow inmate. Neither dead nor alive – the act of violence was now reinvigorating the movement for Corsican separation.

In fact, earlier in the week, I noted a Corsican ferry resting idle in the port of Ajaccio. I thought it strange—that it was neither coming nor going--and later read that among the boat’s passengers were French national police. In an act of solidarity with Yvan, the unions prevented the ferry from docking. The boat stayed in the port for seven hours, having already travelled a half day through the night.

I arrive at the university and find it barricaded. My contact has not informed me of any changes to our meeting.

I circle the building and find a service door unlocked. I enter and wander empty hallways floor after floor until I see my host photocopying manifestos. He is surprised to see me and explains that the university is closed for 19 days--one for each year Yvan spent in a French prison. He tells me he cannot provide access to the archives.

Then he asks: why are you making a film about Corsica?

I tell him that I placed a bet in a vintage market in Nice and that my plan was to track the eight winds of the Mediterranean across several countries. But with quarantines and closures, the unpredictable became unmanageable. So, I studied a map and found this small island where the eight winds blow and decided to make it the object of my attention.

I regret that at the time I started the project, I did not know that the full history of colonialism in Corsica. I did not know that centuries of warring maritime states had also taken an interest in Corsica for its strategic location. Or that strategic colonialism is colonialism of the worst kind. That Corsica had been conquered and traded, pillaged, its people killed, or else taken for slavery elsewhere. And that it was the wind—trade/sailing winds—that had made it all possible.

He replies that he is surprised that in all of my travels no one has told me that Bonifacio has thirteen winds.

That night I attend a protest but decide to leave at the sound of gunfire and grenades.