



**Folding the Landscape:
Interventions of Nomad Space in *The Work of Wind: Land***
Article, Kitt Peacock



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Abstract

This article considers four pieces from *The Work of Wind: Land* (a book-as-exhibition produced by the Blackwood Gallery) which resists sedentary, colonial limitations of space through land-based ritual and geologic intervention. Using the dichotomy of nomad versus sedentary space proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, this analysis seeks out moments of transgression where nomad space appears among the sedentary, and questions where nomad space can be found in wholeness. Works considered include *Make Breeze*, a two-channel video by artist collective Pejvak (Felix Kalmenson and Rouzbeh Akhbari); *The Rock Cycle*, a sculptural work by Ilana Halperin; *Trapped in the Dream of the Other*, a short film by Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen; and “Colonialism at the Sea Edge of Extinction,” an essay by Macarena Gómez-Barris.

In placing these deterritorializing moments of “epistemic disobedience” beside each other, a strategy of resistance begins to emerge that chips away at the grip of sedentary space, leaving nomad space in its wake. Beyond the realm of spatial theory, these interventions have echoing implications for nomadic communities’ rights to roam and broader imaginings of a future free from colonial control. This paper considers these actions of disobedience a guiding light for a practice of unbordering, untying, and dislocating the world.

Keywords: spatial theory, deterritorialization, nomad space, Pejvak

The Work of Wind: Land opens with a call for epistemic disobedience in the face of its colonial centrepiece, the Beaufort Scale of Wind Force. Embossed on the cover and organizing the chapters of this book-as-exhibition from Blackwood Gallery, the Beaufort Scale categorizes the breeze through a neat matrix of wind speeds and numeric ratings. The Beaufort Scale appears objective and scientific, but it's also a decidedly colonial metric, originally invented to universalize experiences of the weather in the British Navy¹ and later leveraged by human traffickers to secure insurance payouts on enslaved Africans.² Although the tension between the wind and colonial subjugation is at the heart of this project, I find myself instead noticing the land, similarly confined by colonial grids. In particular, I am drawn to moments of epistemic disobedience, moments where the land begins to break free from the systems that bind it, intrusions of nomad space upon the colonial sedentary landscape. Examining the work of four artists featured in this book-as-exhibition, I read these challenges to sedentary space as a handbook for decolonial reclamation of nomadic space.

First of all, here is what I am referring to by talking about nomad and sedentary space. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer that nomad (in their words, smooth) space is free of limits and partitions, where subjects “move from one point to another, perpetually, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival.”³ This is in contrast to sedentary (striated) space, which they define as a homogeneous space,⁴ home to grids and limitations,⁵ parcelled out by the State.⁶ The stakes of this nomadic-sedentary dichotomy become clear when we consider the function of sedentary space in a disciplinary society. Because every location in sedentary space is

¹ Etienne Turpin, “The Beaufort Scale of Wind Force: This Land of Forces,” in *The Work of Wind: Land*, eds. Christine Shaw and Etienne Turpin (Berlin: K. Verlag, 2018), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 352.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 385.

described and constant, the State can reliably locate and discipline subjects who challenge its control.⁷

Let's begin by talking about sedentary space, which is familiar to those of us living in colonial nations. Sedentary space abounds in the stills of artist collective Pejvak's film *Make Breeze*. Although the Orientalist imagination paints barren landscapes, like that of the pictured Meghri region, as the land of nomadic wanderers, Meghri is not nomad space. Tied down by the post-Soviet Armenian/Iranian border, a nonfunctional rail line, and a "strict mobility regime for citizens,"⁸ the Meghri-Agarak region is a parceled and delineated sedentary space. In one still, two boys sing within a derelict engine car, their backs to the Iranian border—"I've stopped, I can't come / I can't come, I can't come."⁹ In another, a childrens' choir recites a list of abandoned railway stations, a definitive list of locations that they are unable to reach. The landscape is characterized by the invisible lines of borders and decommissioned railways, holding its people still.

This sedentary space is challenged by a pair of horse riders, who carry mirrored masks and windsocks as they seek out an absent breeze. The masks reflect a fractured landscape back as they remove the rider's body from the space. The horsemen are dislocated in the horizon, becoming an interjection of the distant space of hills and mountains into the immediate landscape. I understand their search for the breeze by the locations where they search: sites of border crossing and free travel. As their masks grant them a small reprieve from the sedentary space they inhabit, perhaps the breeze could give them a more expansive escape?

Make Breeze is not the only challenge to sedentary space in *The Work of Wind*. Geologic interventions appear in Ilana Halperin's sculptural piece *The Rock Cycle* and Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen's film *Trapped in the Dream of the Other*. In the former, Halperin ships brick fragments from Kilchattan Bay in Scotland to the Fontaines Pétrifiantes in France, where they are slowly encrusted in limestone deposits. Cohen and Van Balen perform a similar process in

⁷Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 34.

⁸ Rouzbeh Akhbari and Felix Kalmenson, "Meghri/Agarak," in *The Work of Wind: Land*, eds. Christine Shaw and Etienne Turpin (Berlin: K. Verlag, 2018), 181.

⁹ Ibid, 165.

Trapped in the Dream of the Other, where they defy the border agency of the Democratic Republic of Congo by smuggling one hundred kilograms of fireworks into the country, each containing a small amount of soil from Liuyang in the People's Republic of China. As the fireworks are detonated in a cassiterite mine, the Hunan soil mixes with that of the DRC.

Although they perform distinct acts, both artworks transgress upon sedentary space. Halperin's limestone encrusted brick is land overlaid on land, simultaneously belonging to Scotland and France. Cohen and Van Balen defy a national border—a restriction of sedentary space—to explosively mix soil from China and the DRC, creating a site that is both places at once. The sedentary map is folded; points that do not merge in sedentary space overlap in this new, nomad space. Borders and delineations are no longer absolute as the artists uncover processes that perforate them.

Through the transgressions of Pejvak, Halperin, Cohen, and Van Balen, I have glimpsed nomad space, but only as a brief fracture in sedentary space. Considering Deleuze and Guattari's proposal that States are in the business of “territorializing” nomad space into sedentary space¹⁰ and the visible colonial parcelling of land on a global scale, nomad space is understandably scarce. Where do I find it in its wholeness?

In *Colonialism at the Sea Edge of Extinction*, scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris' contribution to *The Work of Wind*, I find nomad space in the borderland between ocean and land. It does not reveal itself easily: Gómez-Barris sets up the sea's edge as a function of sedentary space, offering that it “organize[s] our relationship to space, power, access, [and] territory.”¹¹ However, I would push back against this: I see the sea edge functioning as a line at the *edge* of sedentary space. Here is the grid of a port city, and here is the nomad space of the ocean. There is no sharp line between the two: the tide renders any attempt to map the exact end of the land obsolete. What of the land at the sea's edge? I think it is nomad space too. Gómez-Barris writes that the colonial imagination represents the sea edge as *terra nullius*,¹² a sentiment often applied

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 385.

¹¹ Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Colonialism at the Sea Edge of Extinction,” in *The Work of Wind: Land*, eds. Christine Shaw and Etienne Turpin (Berlin: K. Verlag, 2018), 233.

¹² *Ibid.*

against nomadic territory. Sir Charles Eliot invoked the concept in the Kenya Land Report of 1933, writing that he “[could not] admit that wandering tribes have a right to keep other and superior races out of large tracts of land merely because they have the habit of straggling over far more land than they can utilize.”¹³ *Terra nullius*, then, is not really empty space, but a colonial shorthand for nomad space that the State machine has not yet territorialized. The sea edge has survived as nomad space because it is land at the mercy of the ocean—it cannot be reliably mapped and therefore, reliably sedentarized. Gómez-Barris’s attentions to the sea edge are attentions to nomad space, and a moment of the charged epistemic disobedience that *The Work of Wind* sets out to create.

These moments of epistemic disobedience through spatial practice become critical because of the decolonial social implications of nomad space. Writing from a colonial state, it is easy to forget that nomad space is important because *nomadic people live in nomad space*, and their home in such a place is constantly threatened by the grid-systems of expanding colonial empires.¹⁴ I am reminded of this visiting an *atchin tan* on the Blue Lias mud flat, a Romanichal stopping site where the nomad space of the sea’s edge is contaminated by mineral waste from the surrounding industrial estate. It teeters on the edge of uninhabitable, but State subjugation has rendered nomad space scarce: in the UK, thousands of stopping sites have disappeared in the past decade.¹⁵

How can we deterritorialize more nomad space from the grip of sedentary space? In *Work of Wind*, land-based ritual and geologic intervention light our path as two strategies for reclaiming nomad space. Perhaps Pejvak’s riders will catch the deterritorializing phenomenon of the breeze, but I am inclined to say that it will take more of us to shift the balance away from the sedentary grid. I want to believe that if enough hands fold the colonial map, it will eventually

¹³ Charles Eliot, *Kenyan Land Commission Report* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), quoted in Jeremie Gilbert, “Nomadic Territories: A Human Rights Approach to Nomadic Peoples’ Land Rights,” *Human Rights Law Review* 7, no. 10 (2010): 681.

¹⁴ Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 103.

¹⁵ Martin P. Levinson and Andrew C. Sparkes, “Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33, no. 6 (2004): 716.

start to fray. What kind of joy will emerge from those creases? We are on the sea edge for now, but we can always look towards a practice of unbordering, untying, and dislocating the world.

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Featured image: Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari and Felix Kalmenson), film still from *Make Breeze*, 2018. Image courtesy of the artists.

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About the Author

Kitt Peacock is a transgender interdisciplinary artist and settler from O'odham Jewed, currently living and working on the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Their practice draws on spatial theory and folkcraft in order to heal breakages in the transmission of gendered cultural practices to queer and trans folks. They hold a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design (2019) and are currently an MFA candidate in Visual Arts at the University of British Columbia.