

# Ungrounding the Rural: Four Grids for the Great Plains

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Beset by intense forms of flux and indeterminacy—from climate change to dramatic population shifts, from rapid technological change to intense economic restructuring—the contemporary challenges of global hinterlands profoundly challenge inherited conceptions of control and order in architecture and urbanism. Ever-more subject to urban processes yet too often left out of theorization on the urban, the rural today can act as a potent site of architectural and urbanistic speculation—taking its intense forms of environmental and demographic change as new grounds on which to expand disciplinary understandings of order, indeterminacy, and systems.

Thus, the question becomes: what are the new grids—new diagrams of control, new structures for reconciling intention and indeterminacy? How might we conceive urban and spatial orders that go beyond merely tolerating to actively harnessing changing conditions, opening themselves to an ongoing becoming and self-redefinition? How might architecture open itself to the multitude of other agencies at play in any system, beyond those of the architect-as-author?

This project is a speculation on four such New Grids, each of which directly cues architectural and territorial order to intense forms of change—on one hand, environmental conditions in dramatic flux due to climate change; on the other, the spatial practices of emergent

social collectives—stitching them together to speculate on new modes of inhabitation and alternative urbanisms in the Great Plains.

## **I. SATURATED ARCHIPELAGO**

The first Grid cues itself to the shifts in precipitation caused by a warming climate: increasing drought, violent storms, and intensified flooding. The project reorients settlement around a massively-decentralized network of water-retention landscapes, distributed along the many tributaries of the region. These aggregate to form a thick, saturated territory that captures and stores floodwater prior to flow formation—in the process providing an infrastructure for new patterns of inhabitation and alternative economies.

## **II. 'BELT-TIGHTENING**

The second Grid reimagines the Great Plains Shelterbelt of the 1930s—just as rising temperatures and declining soil moisture threaten the viability of the region's farms and the first round of trees begins to fail. This project reorients and intensifies the Shelterbelt concept: rather than aligned to the abstract order of the Jefferson Grid, cued directly to its bioclimatic effects; rather than as a singular intervention, a self-sustaining process of planting, harvesting, and reorientation; rather than merely trees, an open-ended platform for a host of timber-oriented uses.

## **III. THE ANNUAL SIESTA**

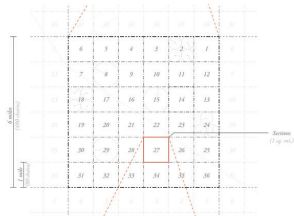
The third Grid operates in the temporal territory of the 'growing-season gap': an emerging mid-summer offseason in which high temperatures are higher than cash crops can withstand. In an inverted miniature of winter offseason migrations, the project takes advantage of abandoned quarries to create a distributed network of passively-cooled spaces, serving as ritualized refugia of collective gathering during this time.

## **IV. DUNE RANCH**

The fourth Grid inhabits the Nebraska Sandhills—a territory soon in flux again, as the warming climate stresses to failure the fragile mat of grasses holding the dunes in place. Dune Ranch is a triple-entendre: one part the ranching and herding of dunes themselves by a network of architectural devices, one part sustaining and transforming the region's existing cattle-ranching practices in the context of newly-mobile dunes, and one part a play on the idea of a 'dude ranch' as a place where urbanites in search of 'authentic' proto-rural life can indulge in the rugged pleasures of agro- and eco-tourism.

# UNGROUNDING THE RURAL

FOUR GRIDS FOR THE GREAT PLAINS

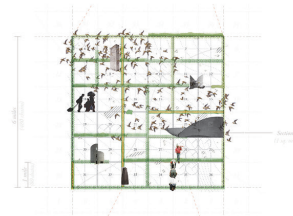


static orders: the Jefferson Grid & the "yoman farmer"

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In turn, the question becomes: what are the *new grids*—new diagrams of control, new structures for reconciling intention and indeterminacy? How might we conceive urban and spatial orders that go beyond merely *tolerating* to actively *harnessing* changing conditions, opening themselves to an ongoing, becoming and self-redefinition? How might architecture open itself to the multitude of *other* agencies at play in any system, beyond those of the architect-as-author?

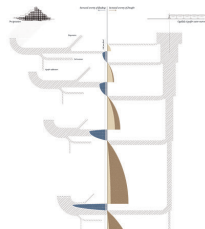
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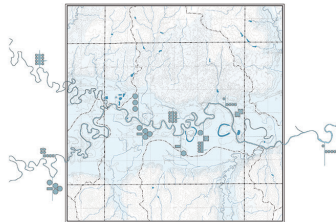
dynamic orders: new grids & more-than-human subjects

## I. SATURATED ARCHIPELAGO

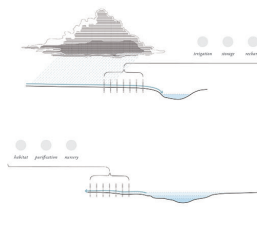
lowland urbanisms harnessing hydrological flux



intensification of flood-brought pulse, depletion of aquifer



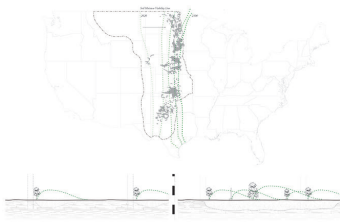
anominal, distributed hydrological infrastructures



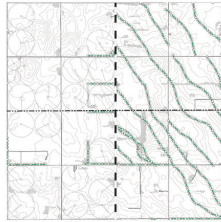
settlement infrastructure as capture, storage, and utilization of floodwater

## II. "BELT-TIGHTENING"

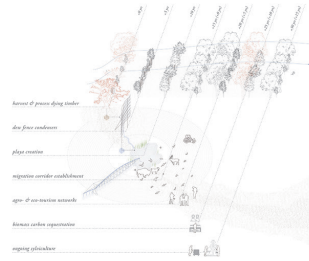
rethinking and reorienting the Great Plains Shelterbelts



loading off the new Dust Bowl: soil moisture decline, microclimatic modulation



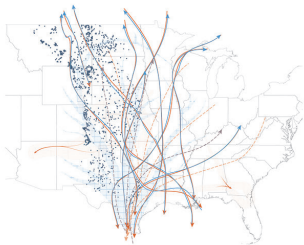
from Cartesian to bioclimatic order



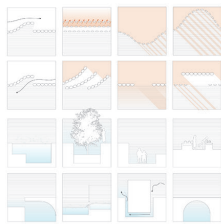
new material-operational ecologies of the Shelterbelts

## III. THE ANNUAL SIESTA

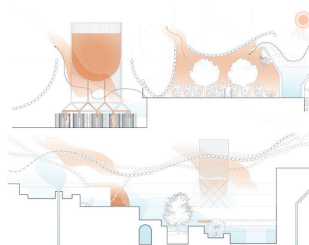
thermodynamic collectivity in an emerging mid-summer off-season



thermodynamic opportunism: human & non-human seasonal migration



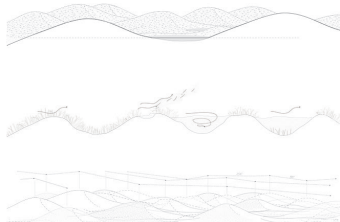
a responsive, ever-shifting matrix of thermal and aesthetic conditions



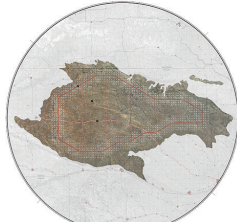
mobile subjects pursue thermal delight, tracking shifting conditions

## IV. DUNE RANCH

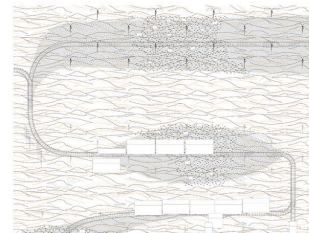
mobile urbanisms, "herding" newly-mobile dunes in the Nebraska Sandhills



loss of vegetative cover: mechanisms of dune movement



mobile forms of habitation and production "track" scarce resources



architectural instruments, temporarily conditioning land as they move