

Reorienting the Rural: The Great Plains Shelterbelt in an Expanded Subjective Field

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'Reorienting the Rural' is a research project that uses the climatic and economic disruptions sweeping the Great Plains as both site and pretext to re-examine how architecture conceives of order, form, and the agency of more-than-human subjects. The project appropriates and redeploys the spatial, territorial, and microclimatic logics of the original Great Plains Shelterbelt of the 1930s—reinvigorating it just as its current form reaches the limits of its ability to mediate soil moisture by lifting the wind off their fields. It centers on a speculative narrative of farmers "tightening their belts"—their Shelterbelts, that is—in response to the looming threat of a second Dust Bowl. Aggregating along an emerging Aridity Line beyond which crops lack the soil moisture to consistently grow, the new belts thicken the line into a newly-sheltered territory—while at the same time thickening the idea of what the Shelterbelt can be and do.

First, while the original Shelterbelt was aligned to the abstract order of the Jefferson Grid, the new belt is instead cued directly to the bioclimatic operations that it performs—tightening the 'Belts to better harness the wind shadow of the trees, buildings, devices, and objects that make it up. No longer confined to the edges of the grid, the belts realign to negotiate prevailing wind direction, slope, height of objects, and desired length of shadow—allowing for much more pronounced microclimatic mediation.

Second, where the original Shelterbelt was more or less entirely trees, the new belts host a variety of different uses within their open-ended spatial, legal, and microclimatic platform. These are grafted into the current monofunctional monoculture of the region—helping the farmers hedge their economic bets while also hedging their fields. Much like the wind-turbine land-leasing model that precedes them, the belts operate as a source of alternative income and sustenance—a new way to engage economies and ecologies often written out of the landscape of the Plains.

Third, where the original Shelterbelt was a singular intervention, the new belts take form as a self-sustaining process of planting, harvesting, and reorientation. Replanting is cued to measurement and realignment, allowing the belts to tighten and adjust in an ongoing way—a reflexive form of order.

In stepping into an expanded field—in the case of the Great Plains, not only figuratively but also quite literally—architecture confronts both an opportunity and the necessity to reconsider its notions of agency and subjectivity. Could architecture come to be seen less as an authorial act of will and more as a co-production between a host of forces—human and non-human, animate and inanimate alike? How might such an expanded perspective bring us closer to the everyday practices of a broader, often under-addressed set of subjects—in turn, opening new potentials and better addressing their needs? Ultimately, how might such an expanded understanding of agency in architecture allow us to operate within a broader ethical field—re-conceiving and re-deploying the tools of architecture to engage a wider array of subjects?

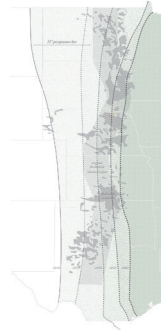
REORIENTING THE RURAL

THE GREAT PLAINS SHELTERBELT IN AN EXPANDED SUBJECTIVE FIELD

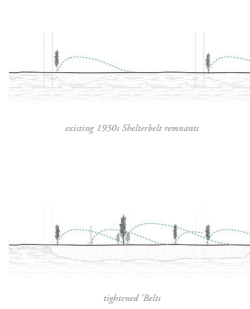
Reorienting the Rural is a research project that uses the climatic and economic disruptions sweeping the Great Plains as both site and pretext to re-examine how architecture conceives of order, form, and the agency of non-human subjects. The project appropriates and redeploys the spatial, territorial, and microclimatic logics of the original Great Plains Shelterbelt of the 1930s—reinvigorating it just as its current form reaches the limits of its ability to moderate soil moisture by lifting the wind off their fields. It centers on a speculative narrative of farmers “tightening their belts”—their *Shelterbelts*, that is—in response to the looming threat of a second Dust Bowl. Aggregating along an emerging Aridity Line beyond which crops lack the soil moisture to consistently grow, the new belts thicken the line into a newly-sheltered territory—while at the same time thickening the idea of what the Shelterbelt can be and do.

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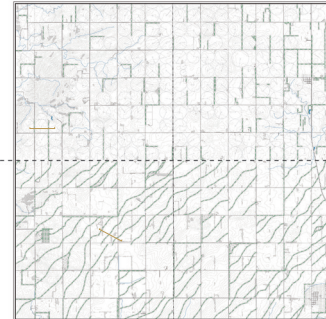
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The Great Plains, Ungrounded declining Shelterbelt, advancing Aridity Line



Tightening the Belts from the Jefferson Grid to an evolving bioclimatic grid



Reflexive Territoria incremental transition: ongoing transformation

An Ecology of Typologies

the minimum goal of the new Belts hosts an open, polyvalent ecology of interchangeable uses, which can be swapped in or out and reoriented over time

