MATERIALITY RECONSIDERED

Windfarmhouse:
Inhabiting a Post-agricultural Landscape

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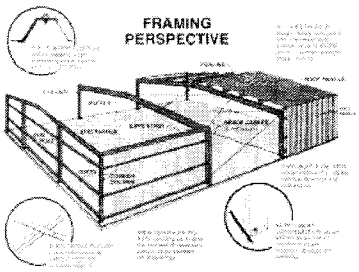
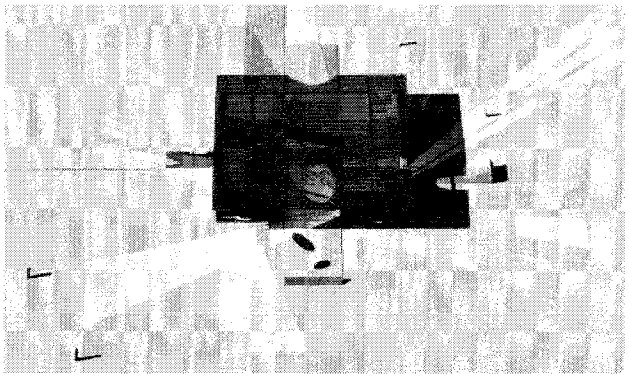
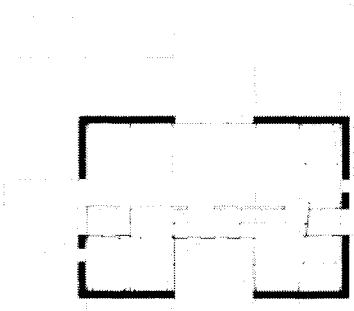
The barn is not a shelter any more, it is a machine closely involved in the productive process.[1]







Writing in 1966, J.B. Jackson recognized that the rural American landscape was one increasingly defined by the mechanical dictates of modern farm equipment. The land was altered not only to create a ground upon which the farmer could cultivate an artificially engineered product but also to accommodate the machinery that he relied upon to produce it. In addition to configuring the land and machinery that produced agricultural commodities, this economically mandated utilitarianism brought about a revolution in structures that house the farm and the farmer. Barns, farmhouses, and other infrastructures of the agricultural landscape were also changing to suit transformations in the farm economy. The kit-built house, the mobile home, and the pre-engineered metal building are common examples of the wholesale commodification of farm buildings. However, looking more closely at the general construction economy, one finds that most of the parts that make up the majority our buildings are not crafted artifacts but commercially available products. The notion that buildings are organizations of available components as oppose to skillfully ordered forms is undeniably the dominant paradigm for contemporary architectural production. Extrapolating from these conditions, this ongoing project explores the hypothetical future of a post-farming economy and proposes an architecture that exploits existing modes of production without violating their fundamental organizational nature. The structure featured here is a house for a wind farmer.

The site for this project is in Arthur County, in Western Nebraska, but it could easily be anywhere in the Great Plains where the wind factor is 3 or 4 (most of the region is). In a sense, the "site" is the "Jeffersonian" grid of section lines themselves rather than a specific topography. This is the *locus* of the rational deployment of the component parts that make up the landscape of the plains states.

The Windfarmhouse unites new and old vernaculars: a steel frame from the typical metal shed and a straw-bale envelope (the

only building technology invented in Nebraska). Proceeding from the reconciliation of these disparate systems, the house exploits the "free-plan" possibilities of the frame and envelope with a series of courtyards subtracted from the monolithic box to differentiate the interior spaces. A corrugated fiberglass wall bisects the house, separating the living and working zones and providing a chase for utilities. Holes cut in the grass roof control sunlight. Interior spaces are further organized with commercial mezzanines and sliding glass doors. Window bricks" provide additional fenestration by replacing individual bales without interrupting the normal coursing.

Project team: Jeffrey L. Day (MINDAY architecture), Jack Howard Hopkins, Jr. and Adele Phillips (project assistants with support from the UCARE Program at the University of Nebraska, funded by the Pepsi Endowment).

*John Brinkerhoff Jackson, "The New American Countryside: An Engineered Environment," *Landscape* (16:1, Autumn 1966): 19