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STOCKTAKING

THE
TENT

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31. 12. 2015

Introduction

This is not really a finished product. It is a collection of parts, which will hopefully appear as if they belonged to an imaginary book. This book would be about architecture with a slightly canonical ambition and a naive, personal standpoint. In fewer words, a theory for my (or our) architecture.

As a whole, it is the start of an effort to link pieces together, in order to simply explain what I like and consider ''good'' from all the thoughts and examples and references and material and mumblings and succesful projects and failed projects and experiences I have happened to have in my years of architectural training. For most of these years, I was involved in some world-saving, although I want to think it was of the intelligent kind. Whatever it is, this will still be apparent here, but the process of linking a maximum amount of things together in an honest account has already helped, from my point of view, to tone down the silly apocalyptic rhetoric.

It is extremely difficult to write long texts consistently, without making them too difficult to follow or without employing some form of artifice or subterfuge to link pieces together. Especially in this case, where texts where brought together literally from pieces, I did my best to negotiate between connections that would seem too gratuitous and articulation that would require unreasonable amounts of effort to correctly pull off. In this process, I sincerely hope there is something pleasant left to read, although I suspect that a second, full-time semester is necessary to enhance and improve the readability of the whole. Wether or not I should proceed directly to test my tent agenda in one or more actual projects, remains an open question. However, the work done thus far opens up a fair amount of possibilities, which I consider as good news.

Athens, 07.01.2016.

Contents

A (highly personal) Visual essay

This work, mysteriously entitled ''the Tent'', is a little bit similar to the story of space shuttle Columbia. It spans the transformation of matters of fact to matters of concern and speculates upon what needs to be done when we face an evenly covered field of debris. NASA's reaction to the disintegration of Columbia was to place the debris on a grid, inside a big box at the Kennedy space centre and literally see what used to be an object as an assembly.

With the present series of images we can widen and put in context the disintegration of the center and the rise of the assembly, the precise event that was exemplified by Columbia. We can therefore ask; The launch pads in cape Canaveral, are they very different than the trading stations of the New York stock exchange? The highly technological installations there, do they differ so much from the refrigerated stands of the Athens meat market? Woodstock will have an aftermath, as will Pruitt Igoe.

The starting point for everything that is going to be discussed is my concern for this aftermath. I have come to terms with not knowing what will this aftermath look like; having thought that for a while, I was tempted to hope for the apocalypse, which is quite scary and especially absolutely useless. Besides, you can't hope for something that already is. And an apocalypse where everything goes on, just not precisely as planned, is hardly an apocalypse. This does not remove the concern but it makes it relative. It also turns the attention to what there already is, what is the rubble made of and what do we already know about how to work with it?

Before moving on to more precise, but still unscientific observations, some personal stocktacking to put the tempo.

Images

1. Sketch of the interior of the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park (1851)
   © http://thecharnelhouse.org/
2. Varvakeios meat market in Athens
   © Athens Municipality.
3. The trading floor of the New York stock exchange.
   © NYSE
4. Aerial picture of cape Canaveral
   © NASA
5. Space Shuttle Columbia launch.
   Public domain, Wikimedia.
6. Space shuttle Endeavour landing in LAX (city of four ecologies) piggyback on a SCA747.
   © Stephen Confer
7. Tourists and locals, Athens © Eric Fisher
8. The World model, from *The limits to Growth*.
9. Disintegration. © Robert McCullough
10. Assembly grid at Kennedy space centre.
    © NASA/ Jim Grossman
11. Another Grid of Assembly. Omaha.
    © Library of congress.
12. Cyprien Gaillard: *Pruitt Igoe Falls*. Video of the demolition of a modernist building inGlasgow
    © C. Gaillard/ Bugada & Cargnel.
13. After Woodstock. © Henry Diltz
14. The Acropolis with tourists and machines
    © TWAN
15. Robert Smithson. Nonsite: Line of wreckage.
    ©Estate of Robert Smithson.
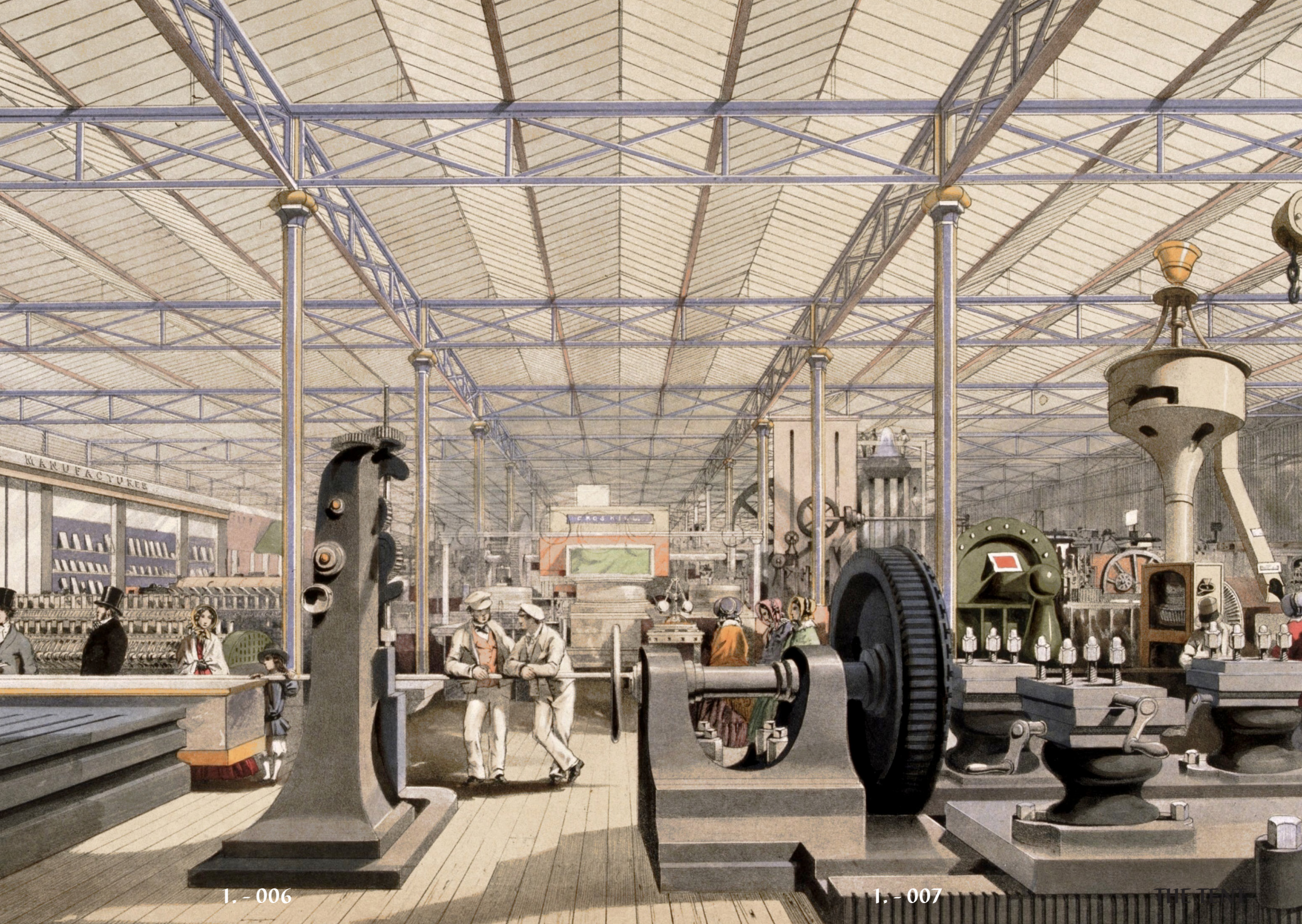
THE TENT

''The action happens in a context where all large-scale use of a capacity brings forth, despite the right intention of the agents, a series of effects, closely linked to the immediate and intentional ''benefits'', cumulating and culminating in negative consequences, much larger than the initial scope of action.''

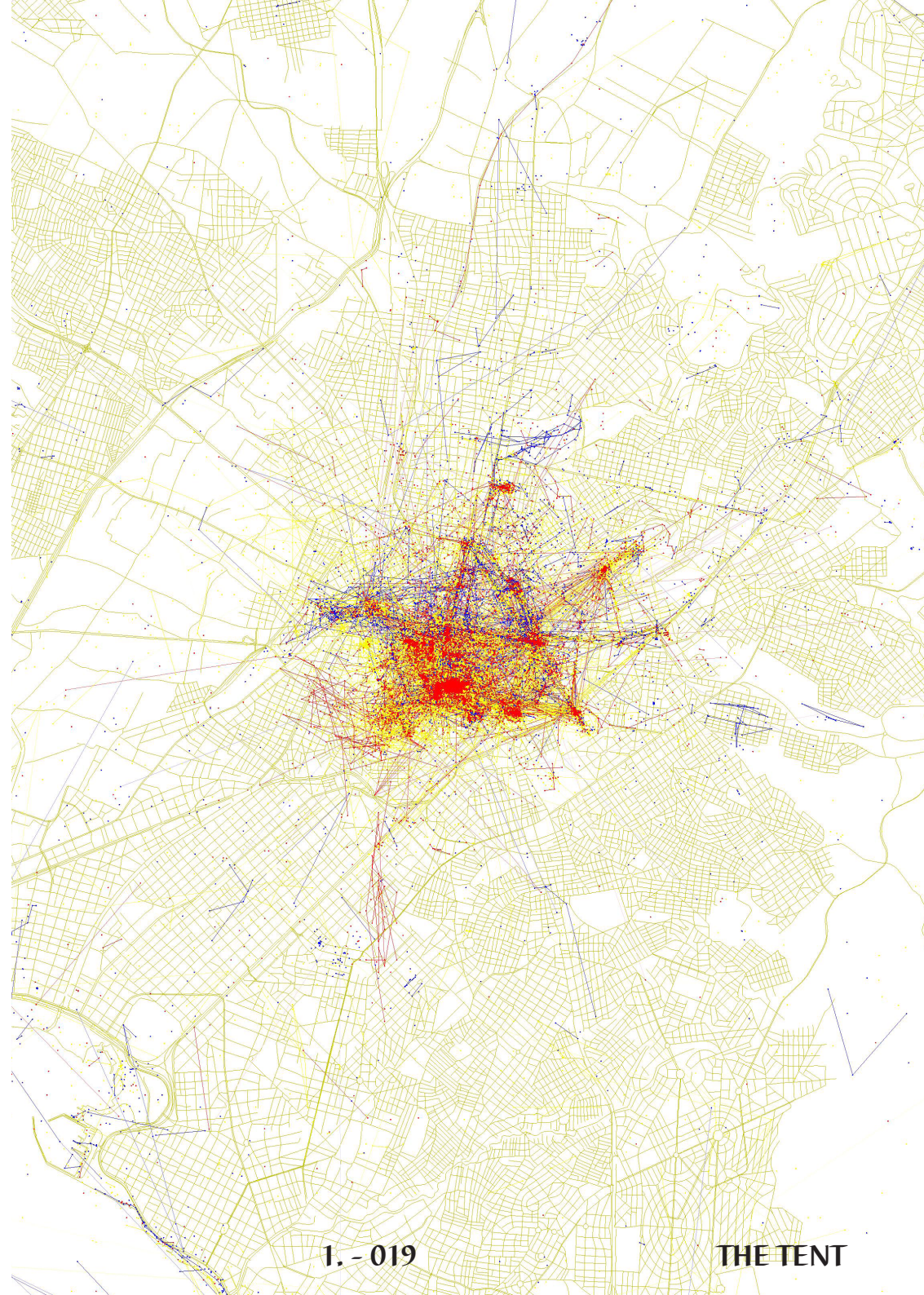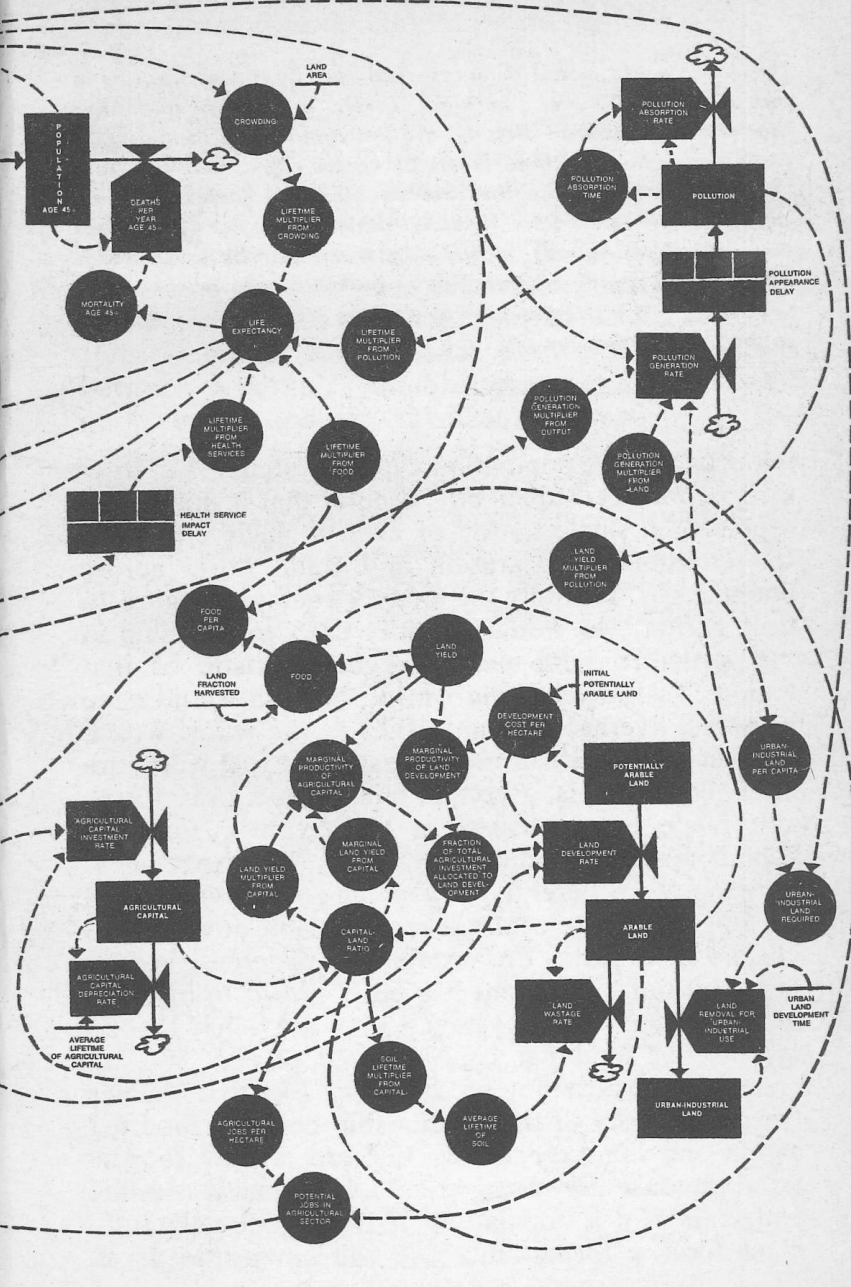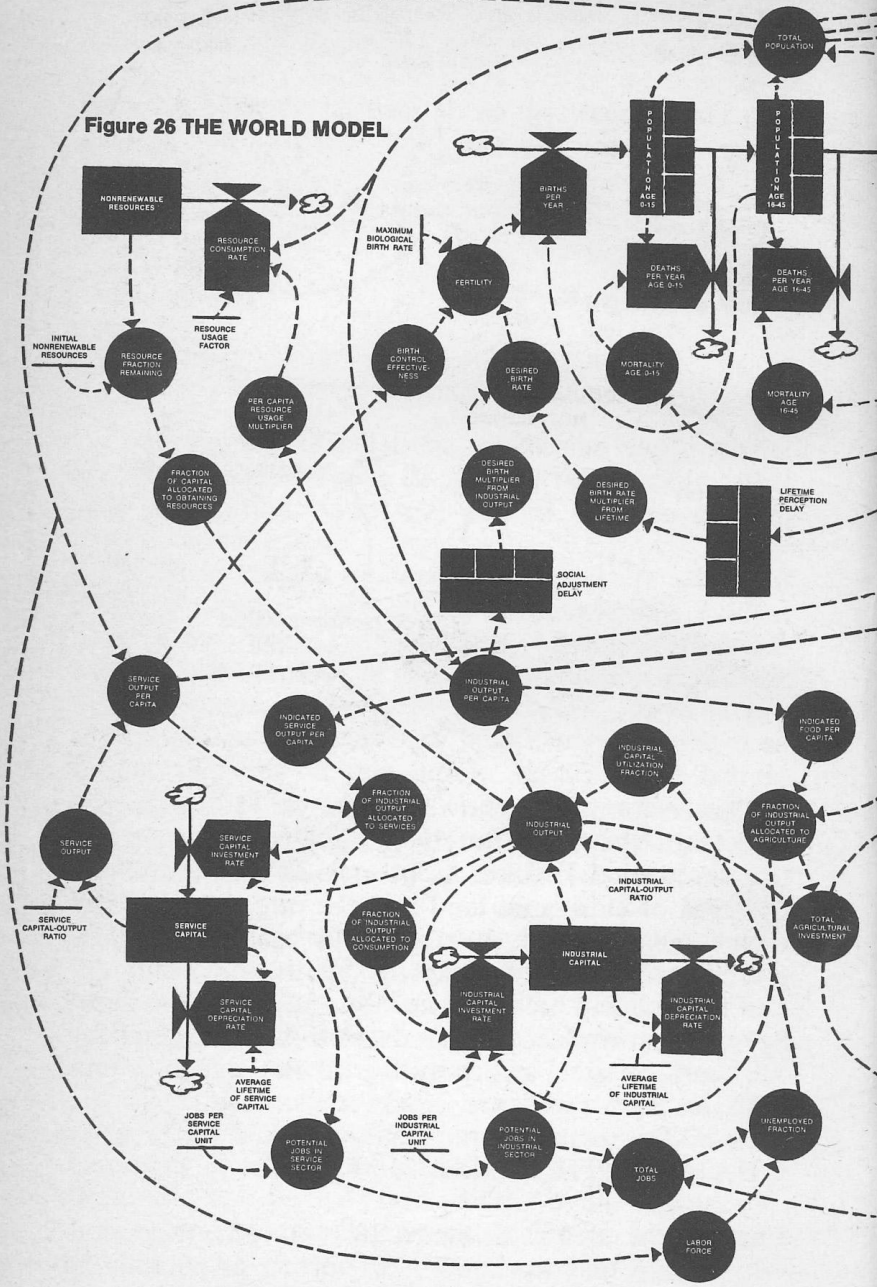Jonas, Hans. "Technology as a Subject for Ethics." Social Research 49 (1982).

Figure 26 THE WORLD MODEL

''Rightly astounded by the size of the effects, the moderns believe that they require prodigious causes. And as the only causes recognized by the (i.e. modern) *Constitution appear miraculous because they are reversed, the moderns clearly have to imagine themselves as different from ordinary humanity. In their hands, the uprooted, acculturated, Americanized, scientified, technologized Westerner becomes a Spock-like mutant. Haven't we shed enough tears over the disenchantment of the world ? Haven't we frightened ourselves enough with the poor European who is thrust into a cold soulless cosmos, wandering on an inert planet in a world devoid of meaning ? Haven't we shivered enough before the spectacle of the mechanized proletarian who is subject to the absolute domination of a mechanized capitalism and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, abandoned smack in the middle of language games, lost in cement and formica ? Haven't we felt sorry enough for the consumer who leaves the driver's seat of his car only to move to the sofa in the TV room where he is manipulated by the powers of the media and the postindustrialized society ? ! How we do love to wear the hair shirt of the absurd, and what even greater pleasure we take in postmodern nonsense !*

However, we have never abandoned the old anthropological matrix. We have never stopped building our collectives with raw materials made of poor humans and humble nonhumans.''

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern.* Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. pp. 115

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