

# Canal Festival

Santiago Brignardelli <sup>[AR]</sup>

The river Leie is a commercial waterway that flows from *Pas-de-Calais* to *Gent*. Between the cities of *Armentieres* and *Mennen*, it defines the Belgium-French border. Seven islands along this 20 km-long section are the product of canalization, introduced in 1670 to combat the flooding of adjacent fields and villages. Over the following years, this waterway developed into an infrastructural artery, and a ground-height difference of 4.50mts in this particular stretch was overcome by the construction of two locks, completed in 1780. In the 1930s the size of the lock chambers were improved in order to accommodate more modern cargo barges. By the 1960s, however, the canal went into decline, prompted by the slow demise of the industrial activities in the region. More recently, this wider area has been redefined not through industry but political bureaucracy, notably the *Schengen* area agreements in 1995, which dissolved permanent border controls. Ironically, despite this erasure of boundaries, the line of the waterway and its canal infrastructure has remained rigid – a register of a former industry, but one without any form of public, or indeed human presence.

The idea of the public festival is as old as the public itself. Every period in history has seen large gatherings of people, coming together in an open space for a brief, highly concentrated moment of celebration, before the crowds dissipate and the host space returns to its ordinary condition. In the context of the Eurometropolis, Belgium has a long-existing festival culture, from the historic Flemish *kermis* to its more than thirty annual festivals. Similarly, France has historically delivered policies of access to culture for the masses, from the ideals of *droit a la culture* to *Fete de la Musique*, where culture is brought to the citizens in the public space. However, over the last 20 years, the seasonal musical festival, sited in large and typically rural areas, has emerged as an increasingly prevalent type, pulling the festival away from public, urban space. This move out of the city is largely because of the size of the audiences – a mass and density of people that would collapse existing

urban structures. Based in International Standards<sup>1</sup>, this audience is housed in temporal structures, which are all set up in a brief period of time and then after the festival are packed up to disappear again. But the effect of lacking permanent infrastructure is a forfeiting of its public function and responsibility outside the bounds of the festival.

The project is the design of a festival ground as an extension of a particular canal lock, but it can also be seen to represent one example of as a larger systematic strategy for the re-use of a waterway infrastructure. The lock's only occasional use mirrors the essentially cyclical nature of the festival. At the same time, its permanent infrastructure offer the opportunity to improve the logistics of the festival, such as the transport and storage facilities. The waterway is not only a scenario that actively attracts and hosts spectators in search of experience, but is also an infrastructural framework for public inhabitation. The multi-cultural and de-industrialized river Leie offers a scenario to re-think the preconceived rigidity of the waterway infrastructure.

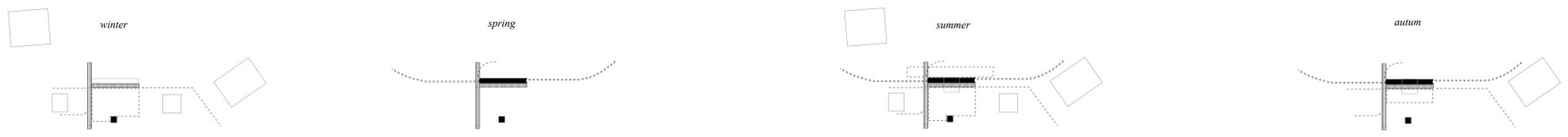
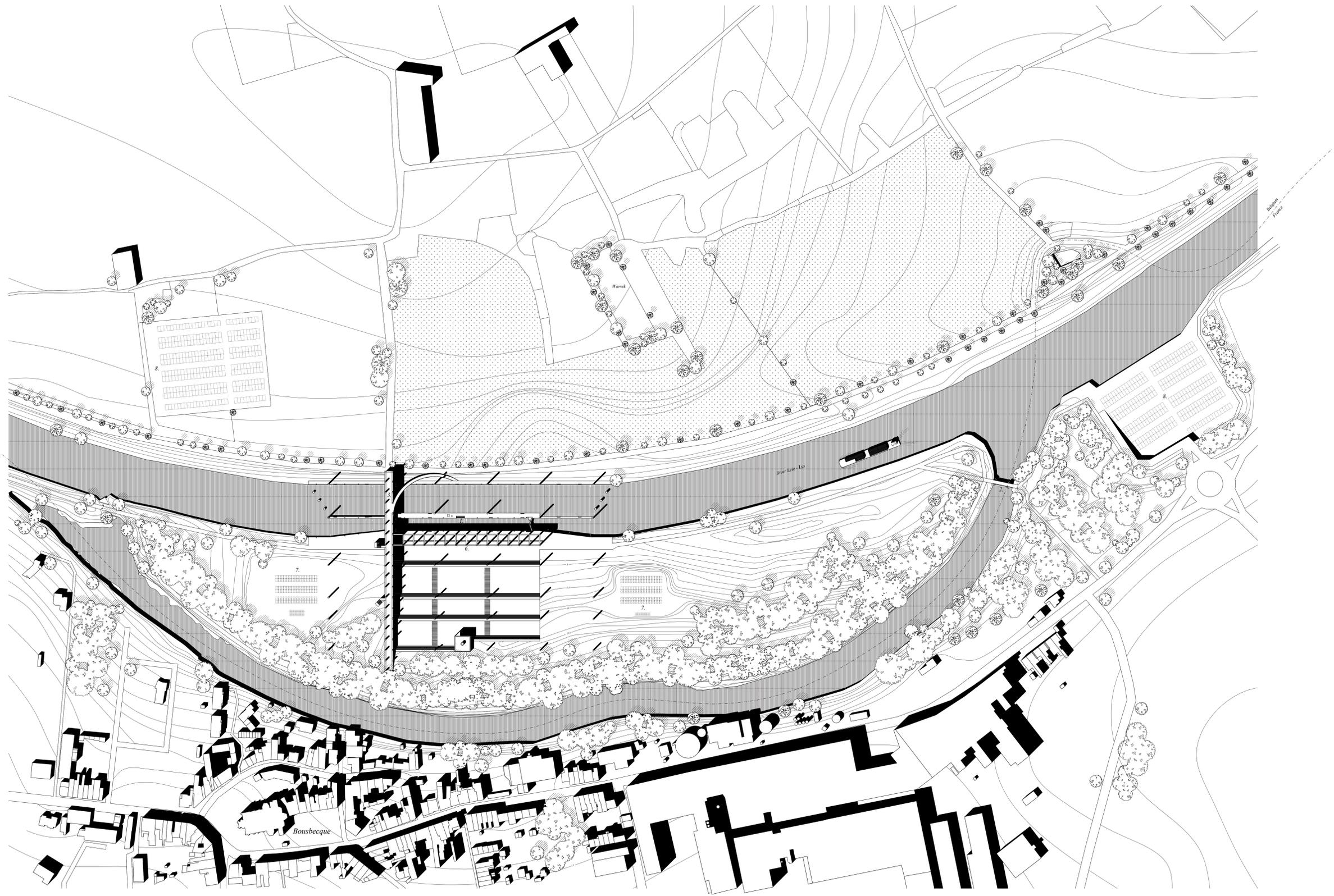
## 5 Propositions

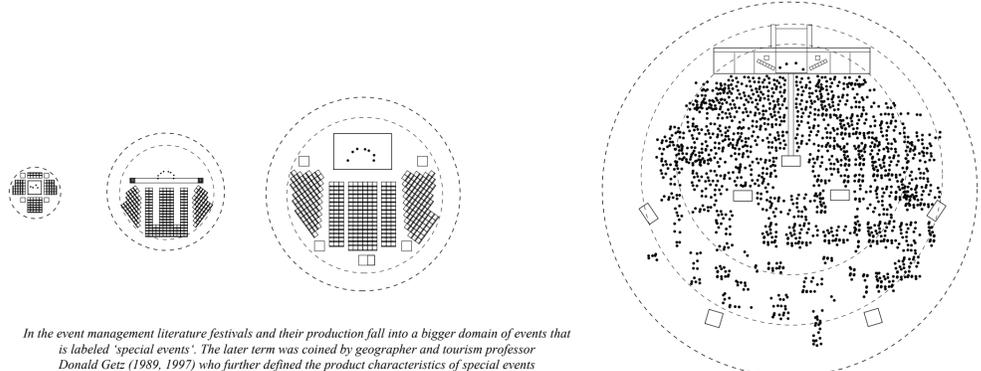
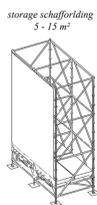
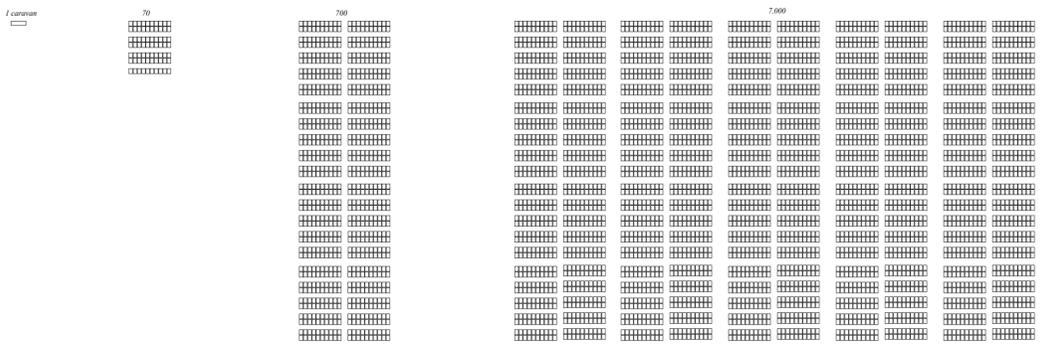
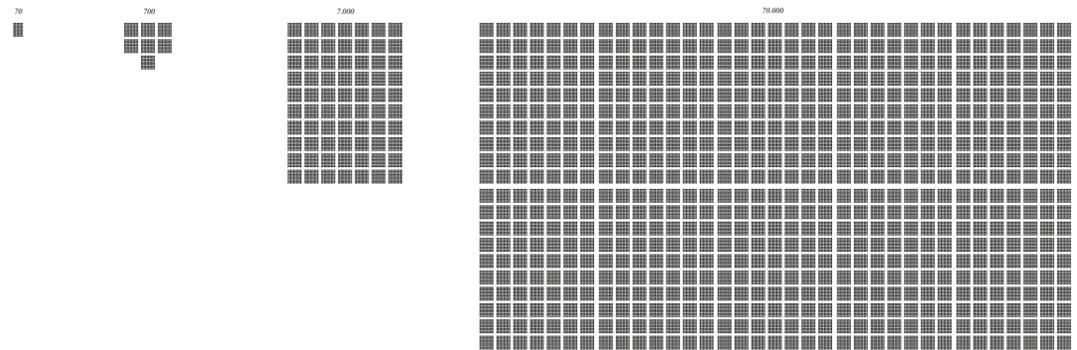
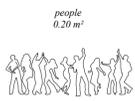
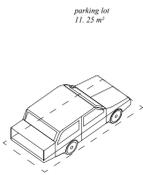
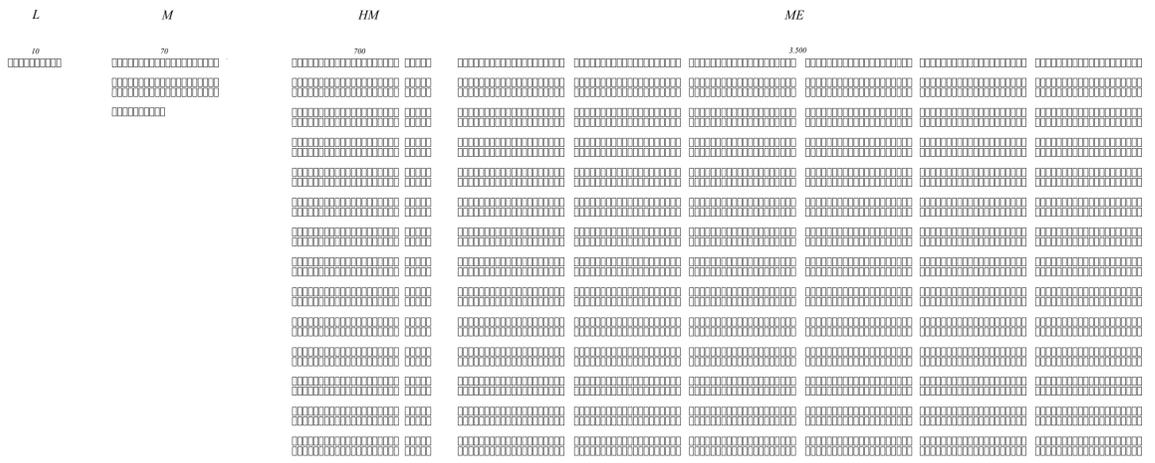
1. Infrastructure is permanent. After the demise of industrial activities, waterway infrastructure should be re-programmed to expand its spatial qualities in a post-industrial scenario.
2. The music festival has emerged as an increasingly prevalent type with massive logistics, but lacks an infrastructural framework, therefore festivals are deprived architectural quality.
3. Architects can not design the party, the market or the festival, the actual inhabitation can't be designed.
4. The bare necessity of permanent elements can define how inhabitation can take place. This is the architect's intervention.
5. Architecture is static but inhabitation is strictly cyclical, every season new activities take place and the architecture should allow this to happen.

<sup>1</sup> ISO. International Organisation for Standardization. Acoustics: Estimation of Noise-induced Hearing Loss (ISO 20121:2013) Geneva: ISO Technical Committee; 2013.

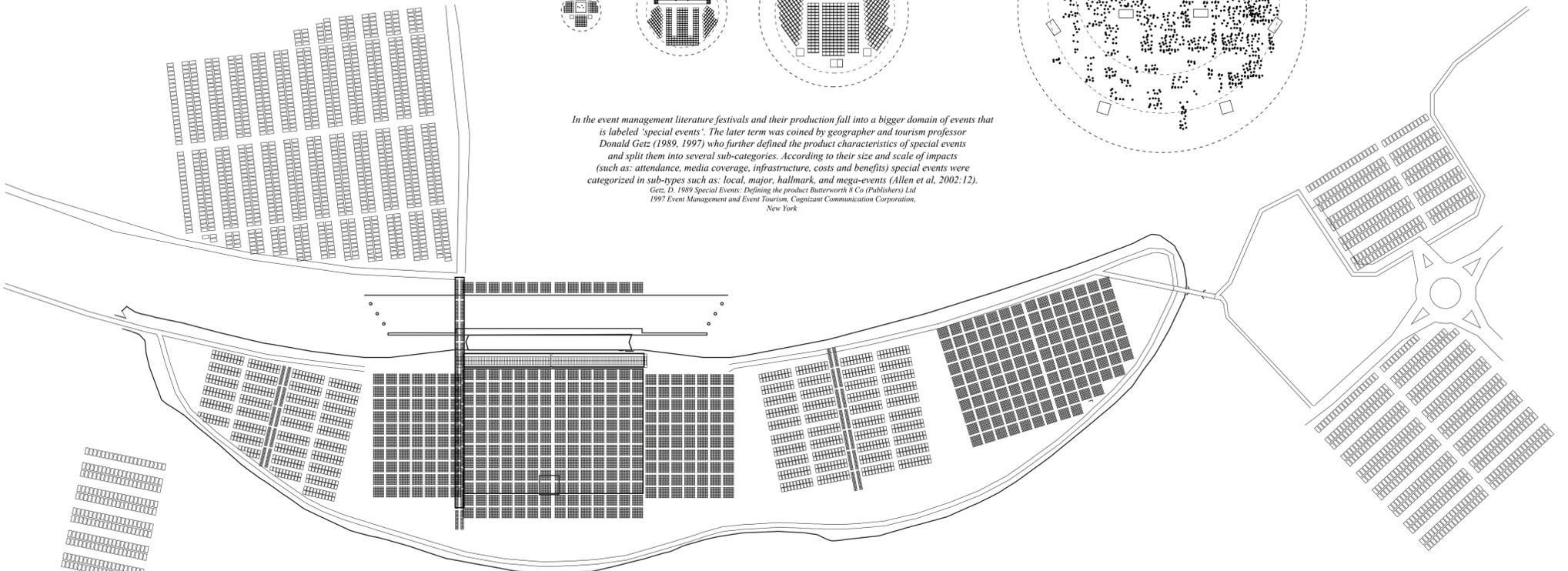
N  
scale 1:1.500

- 1. lock
- 2. access
- 3. bridge
- 4. tribune
- 5. power tower
- 6. stage
- 7. camping
- 8. parking

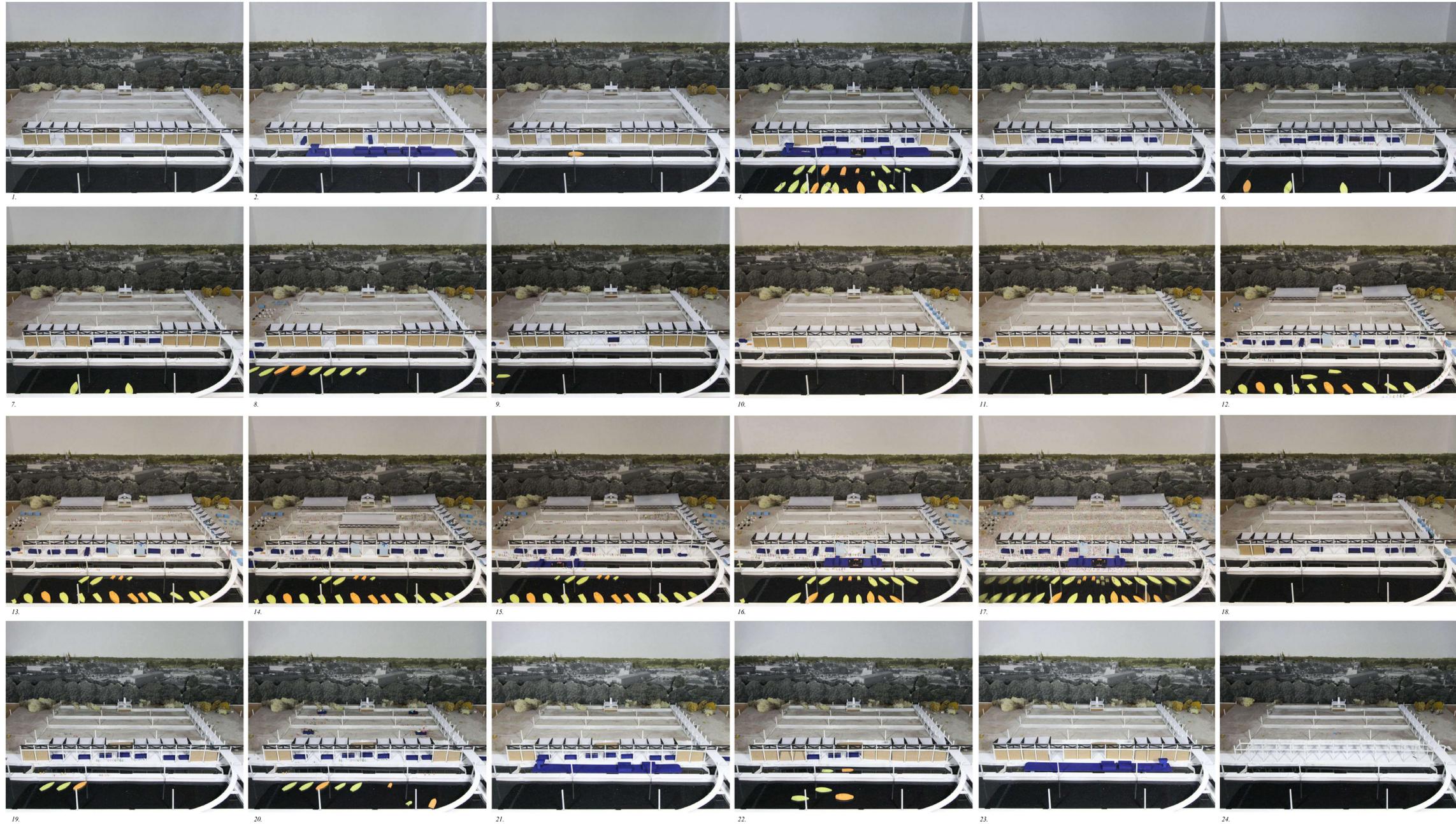
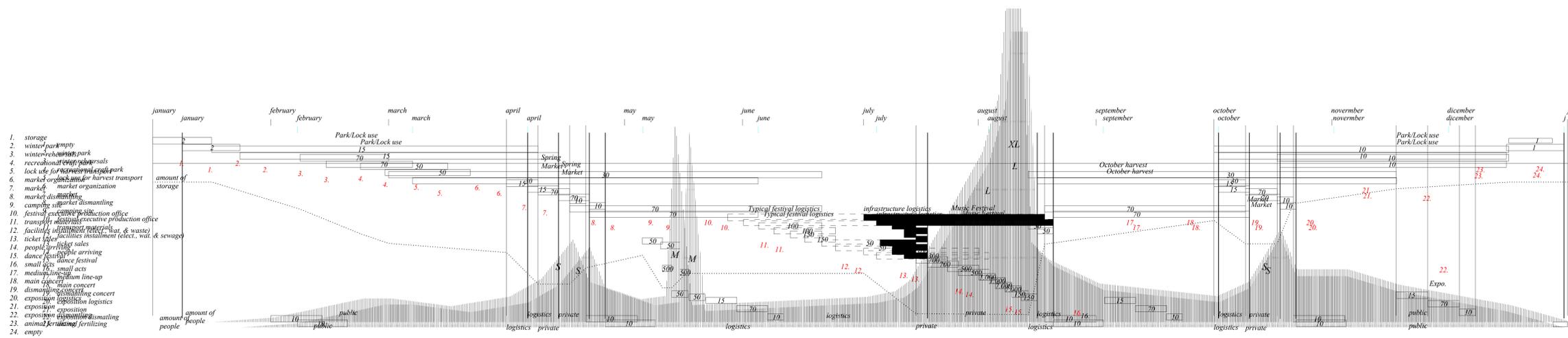




In the event management literature festivals and their production fall into a bigger domain of events that is labeled "special events". The later term was coined by geographer and tourism professor Donald Getz (1989, 1997) who further defined the product characteristics of special events and split them into several sub-categories. According to their size and scale of impacts (such as: attendance, media coverage, infrastructure, costs and benefits) special events were categorized in sub-types such as: local, major, hallmark, and mega-events (Allen et al, 2002:12).  
Getz, D. 1989 Special Events: Defining the product Butterworth & Co (Publishers) Ltd  
1997 Event Management and Event Tourism, Cognizant Communication Corporation, New York



90.000 m² islands  
35.000 attendants  
1.750 car parks  
3.500 tents  
3.500 toilettes  
3.500 m² stroage

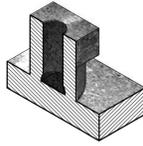




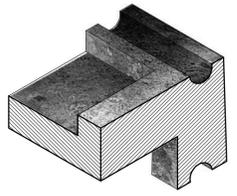
*a*



*b*



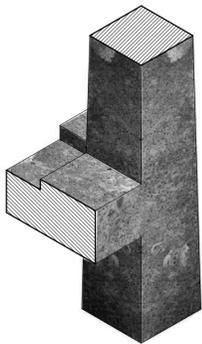
*c*



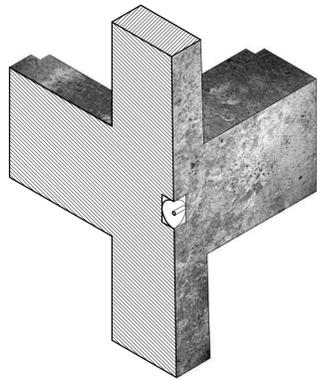
*d*



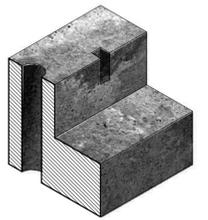
*e*



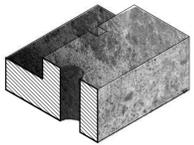
*f*



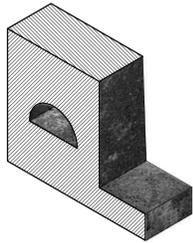
*g*



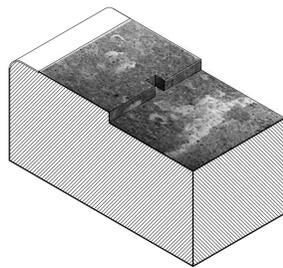
*h*



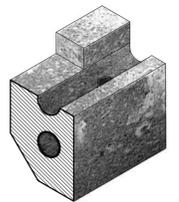
*i*



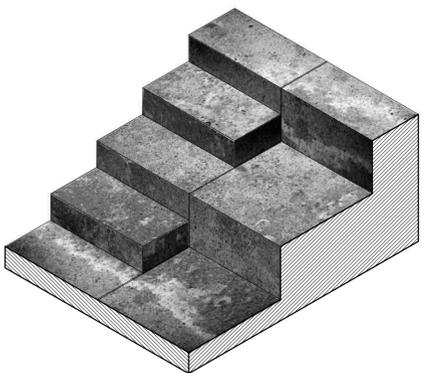
*j*



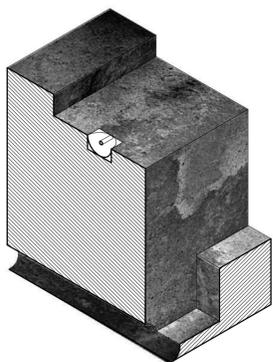
*k*



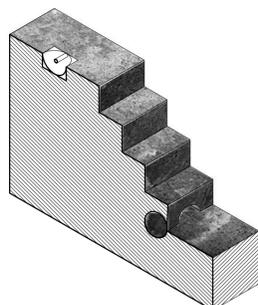
*l*



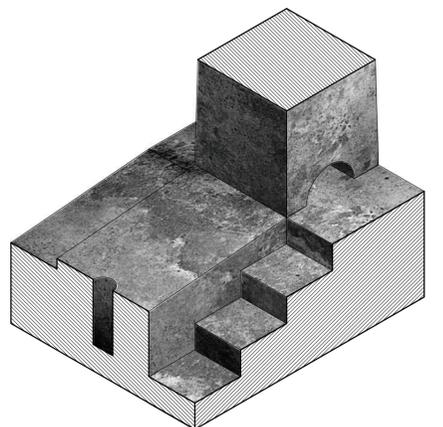
*m*



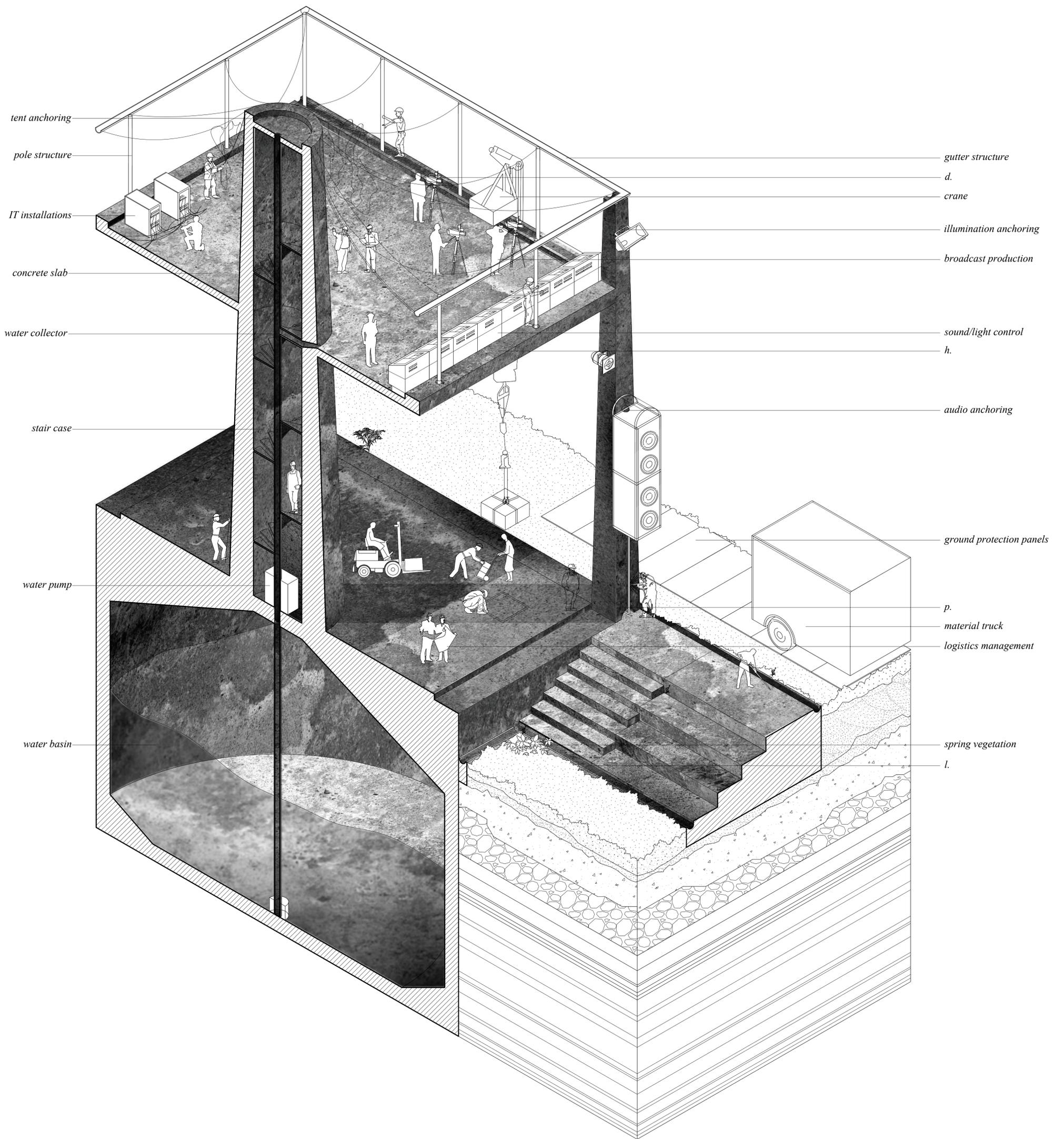
*n*



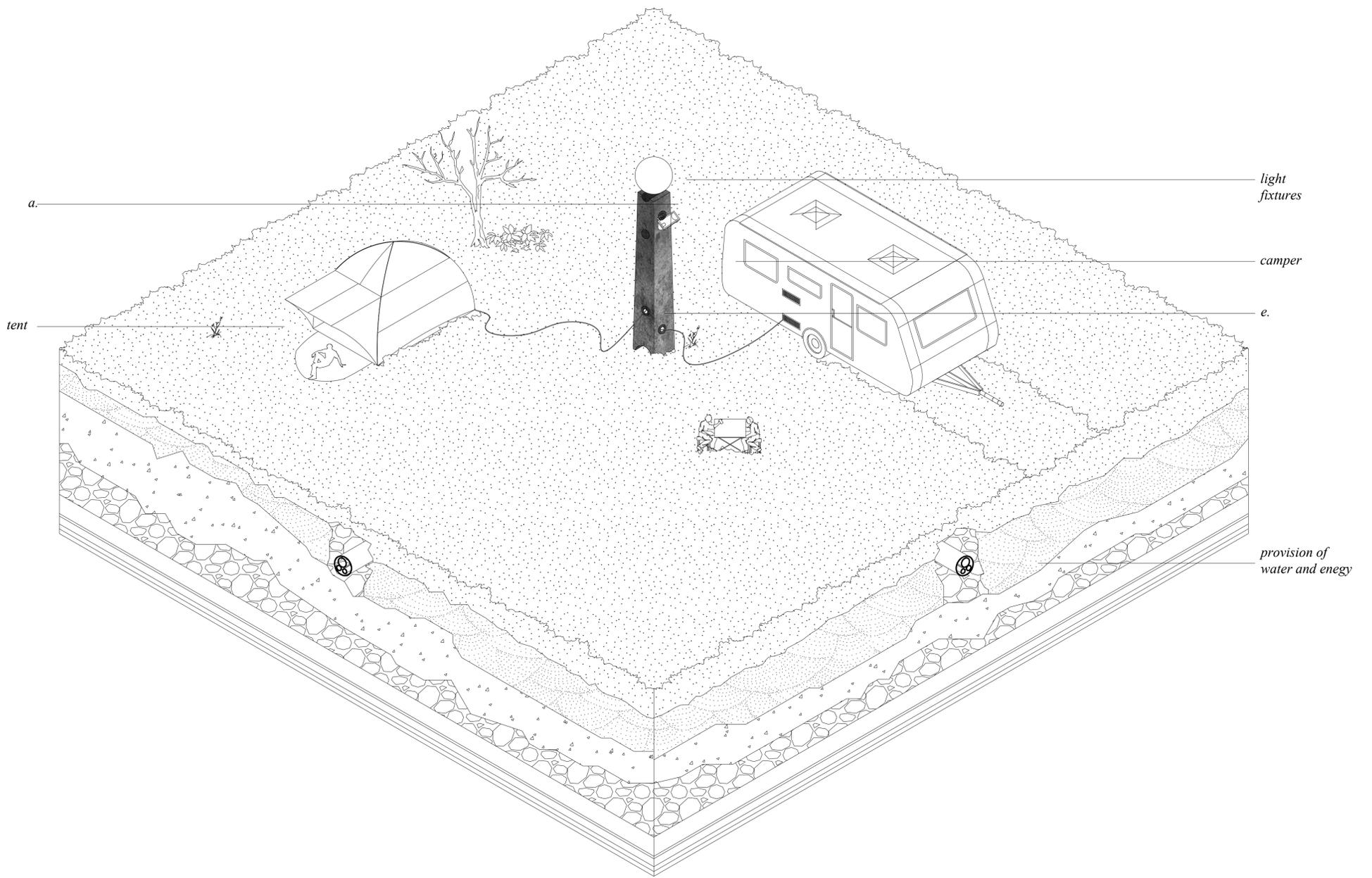
*o*

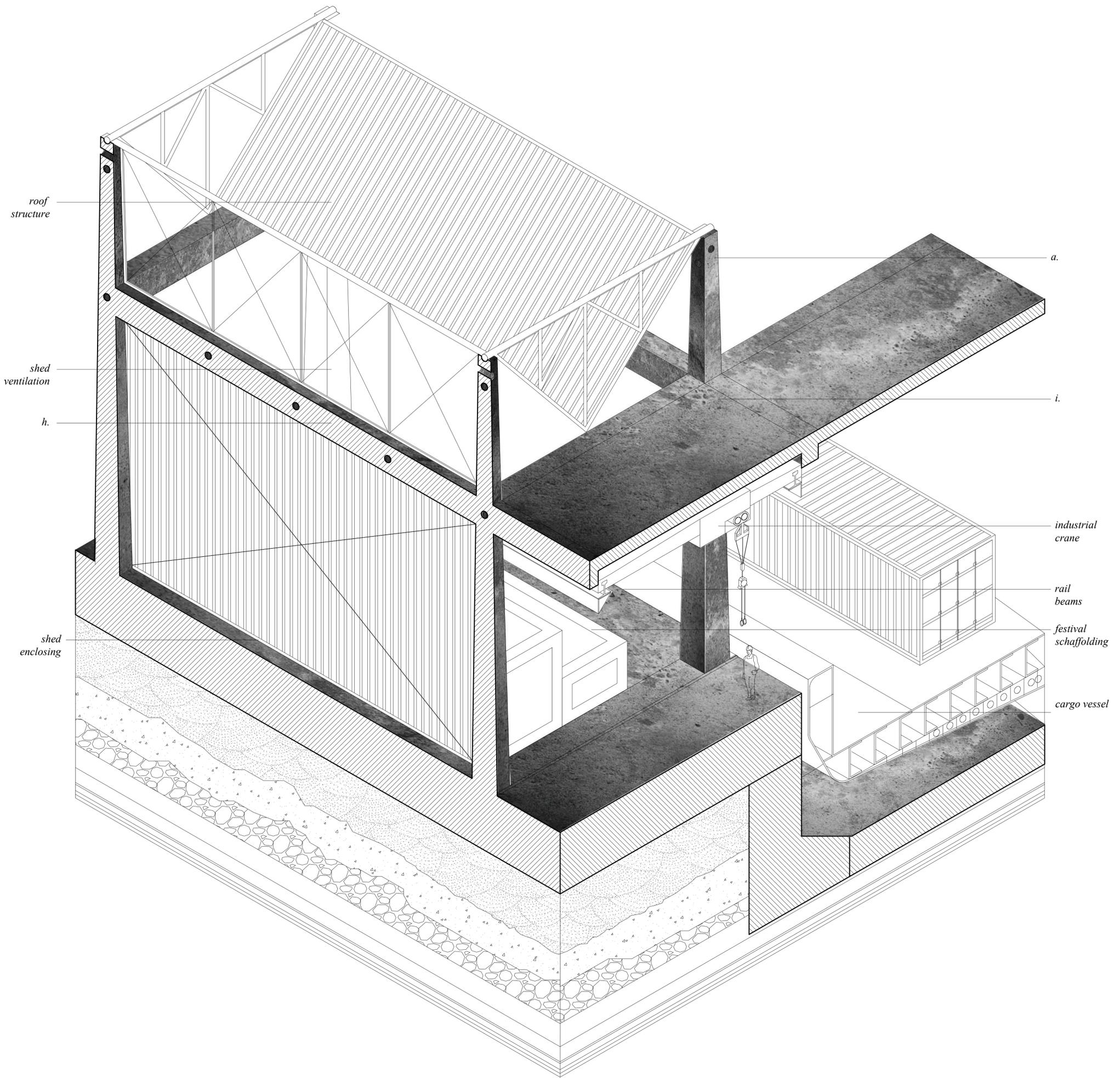


*p*

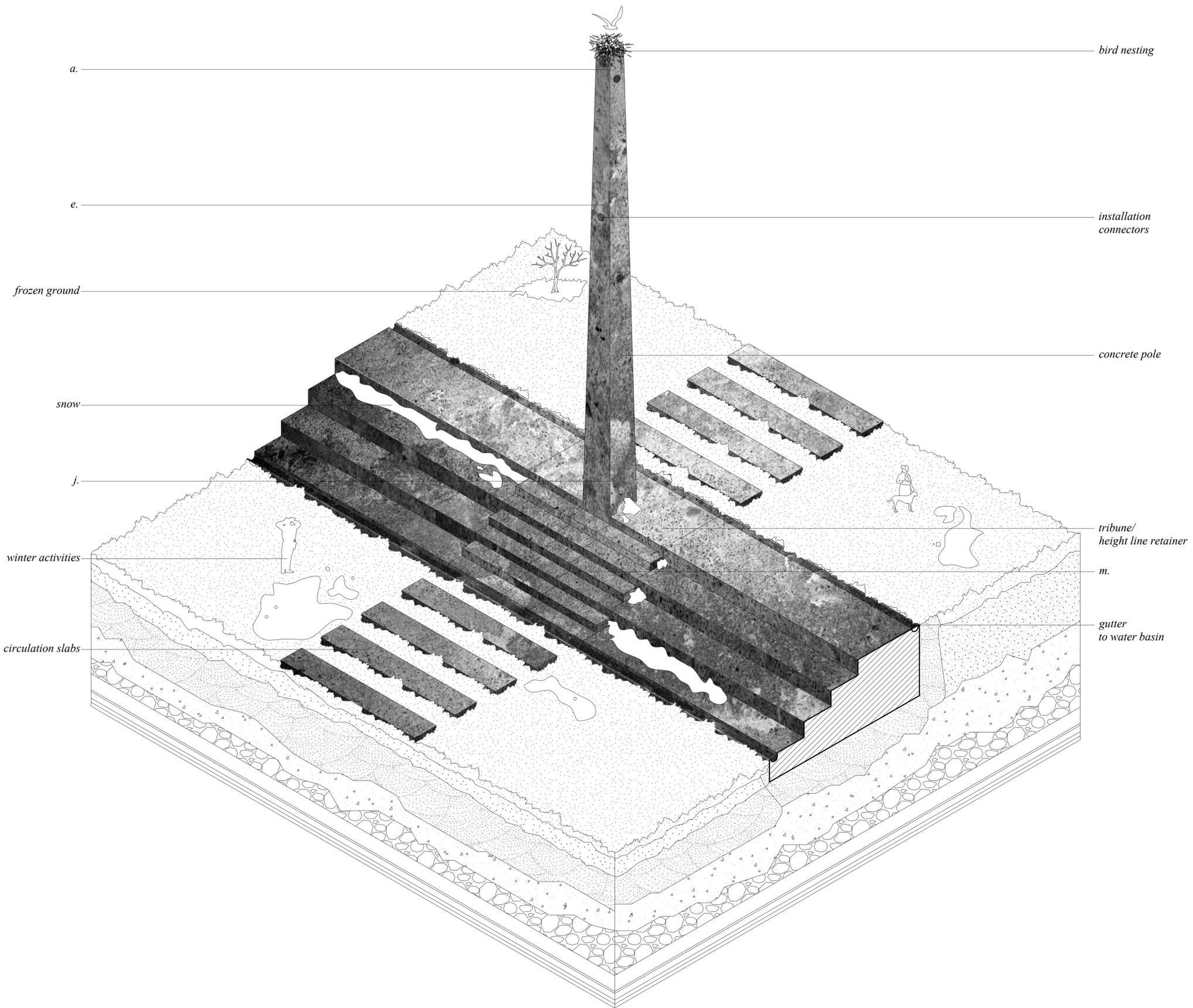


spring at the control tower  
1:75

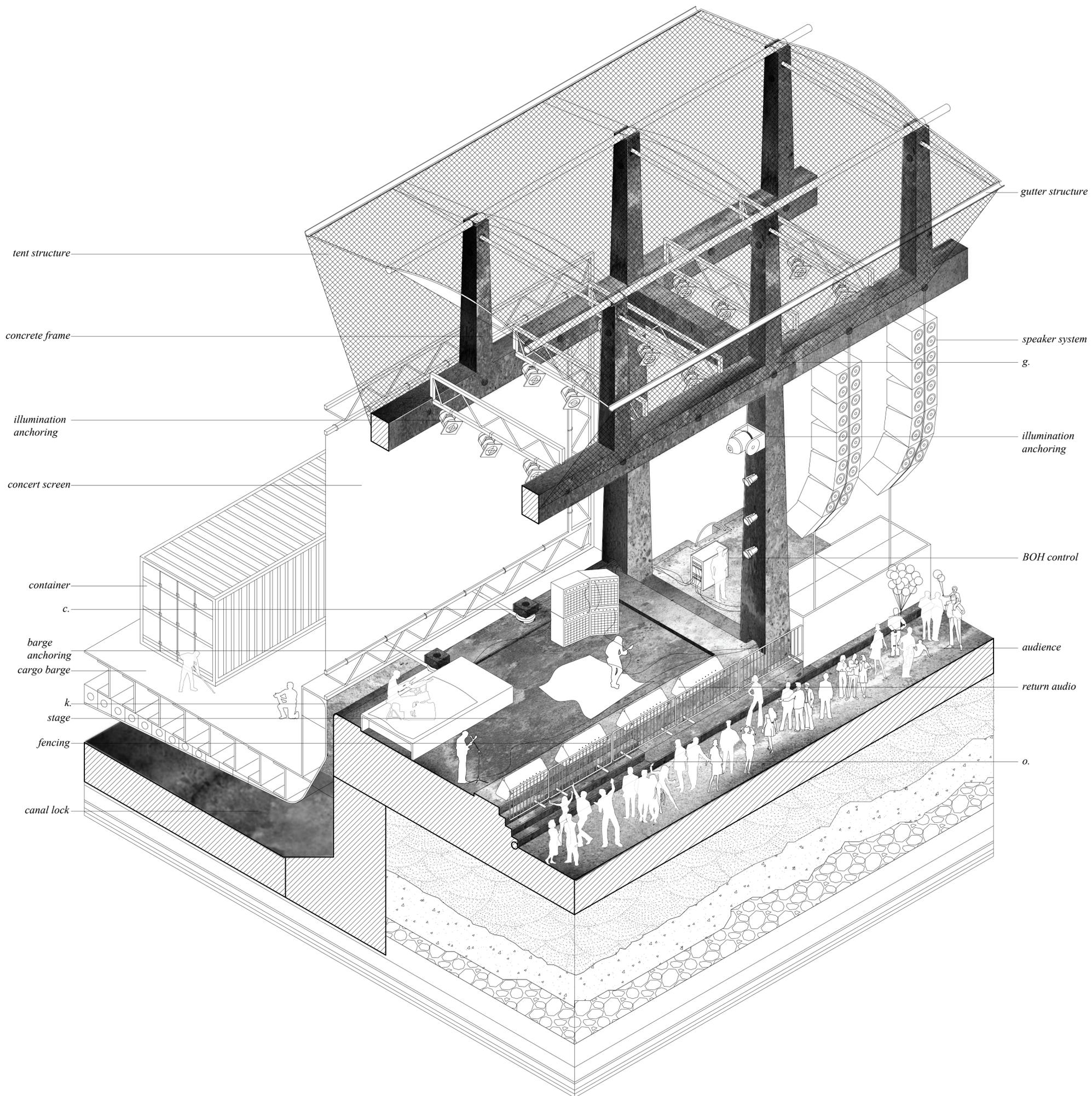




storage facility  
1:75



winter at the tribune  
1:75



tent structure

concrete frame

illumination anchoring

concert screen

container

c.

barge anchoring

cargo barge

k.

stage

fencing

canal lock

gutter structure

speaker system

g.

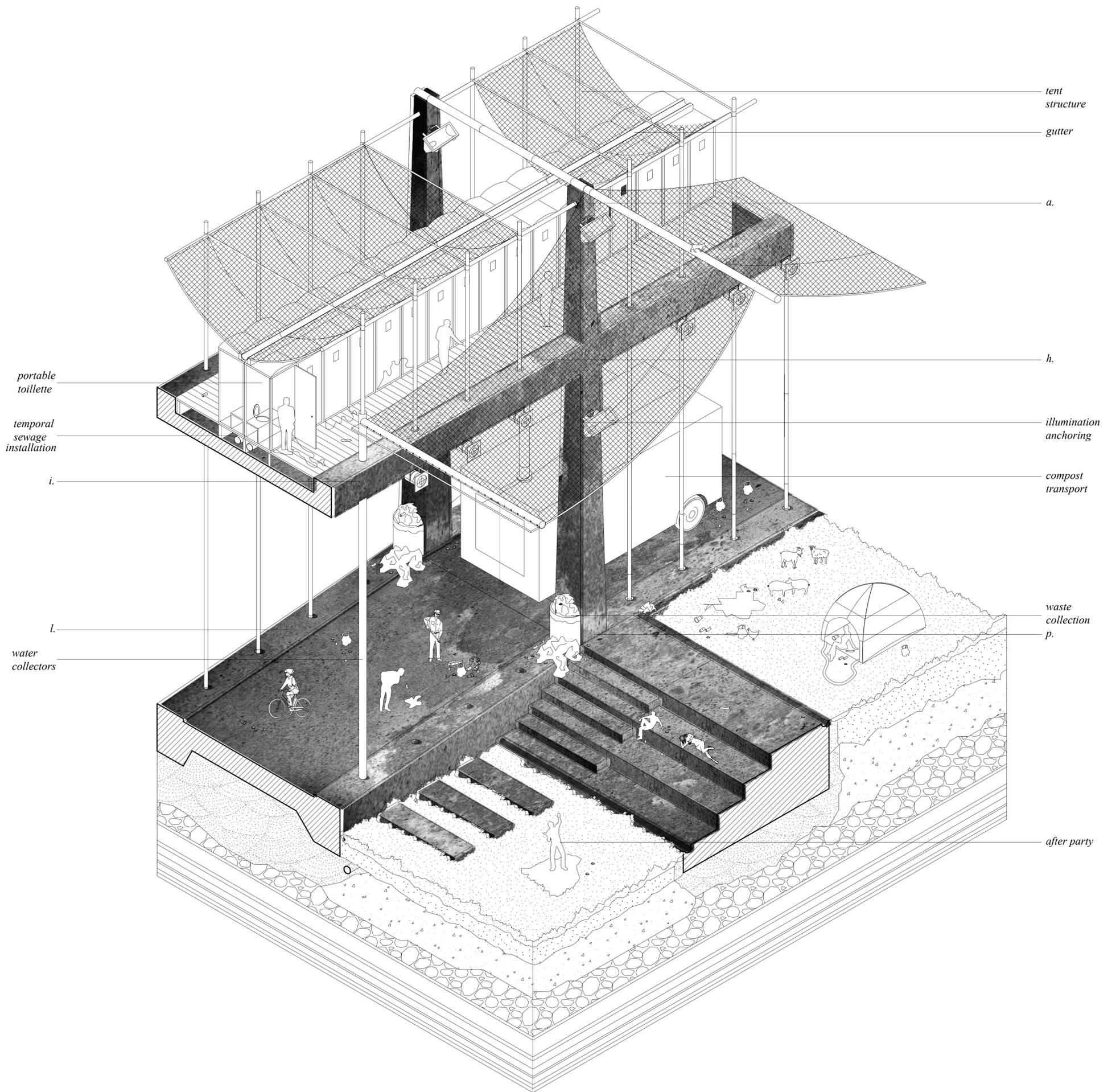
illumination anchoring

BOH control

audience

return audio

o.





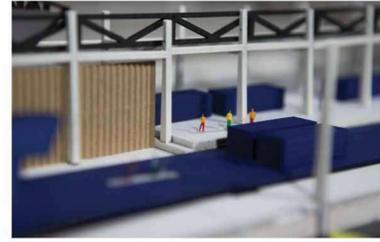
Bridge



Water Deck



Recreational Deck



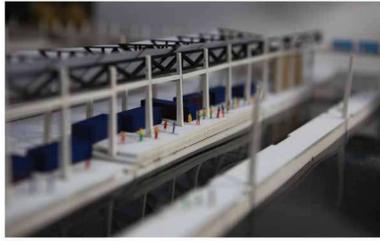
Water Pier



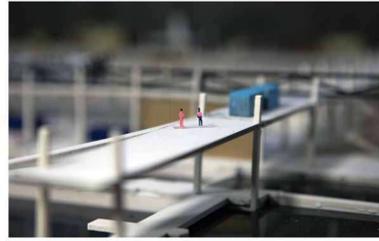
Water Deck



Water Deck



Water Deck



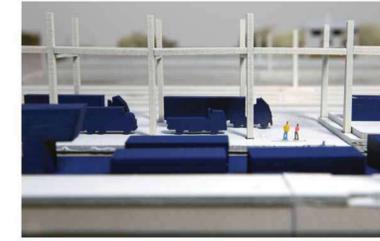
Water Deck



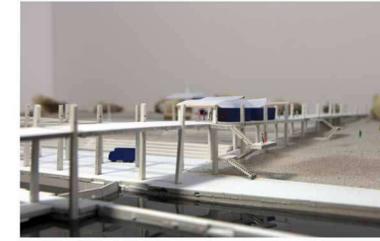
Camping Site



Recreational Deck



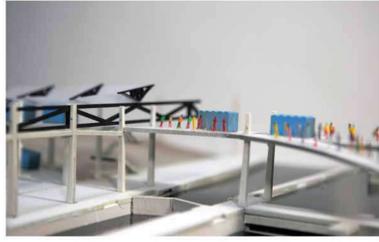
Water Pier



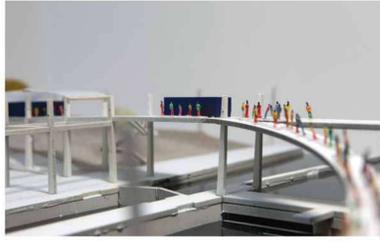
Water Pier



Water Pier



Water Pier



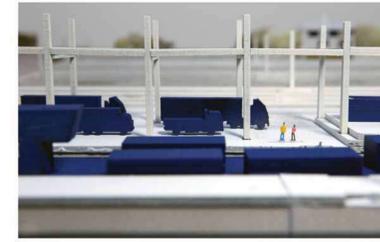
Water Pier



Water Pier



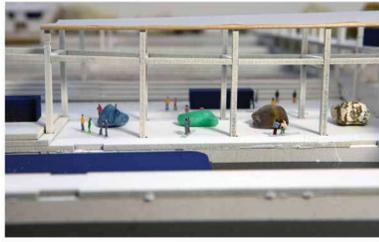
Camping Site



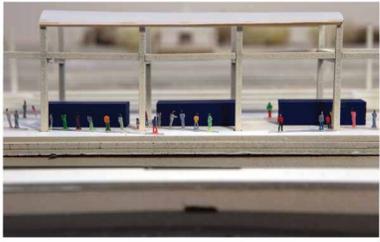
Water Pier



Water Pier



Water Pier



Water Pier



Water Pier



Camping Site



Recreational Deck

# Canal Festival

Santiago Brignardelli <sup>[AR]</sup>

Meandering from 200 km, from the Pas-de Calais department of northeast France to Ghent in Belgium, the Lys River has since the Middle Ages formed the principal artery of the flax industry and continues to shape the Eurometropolis. Its moniker-the Golden River-alludes to its partially-natural, partially-artificial iridescence, a consequence of the soaking of flax grown along its river banks so as to improve the firmness of its fibers. By the nineteenth century, the river's artifice increased even further with its canalization and straightening, laying permanent foundations for the hundreds of river-side textile factories.

In-between the towns of Armentieres and Mennen, the Lys defines the Belgian-French border. Seven islands along this 20 km-long section are the product of the process of canalization, introduced to increase productivity as well as to combat the flooding of adjacent fields and villages. Over the following decades this waterway developed into an infrastructural artery, especially devoted to the transportation of flax. During this process the canal was further engineered, most notable the resolution of a 4.5 m ground-height difference along this particular stretch, by the construction of two locks. Completed in 1780, and upgraded in 1825, the canal was widened to 5.2 m and its draft was increased to 1.6m. Still very active in the early decades of the twentieth century, in the 1930s the size of the lock chambers was further enlarged to accommodate then-new 39 m-long cargo barges, requiring a minimum water depth of 2.2 m. Despite these generous dimensions, its decline began in the 1960s with the demise of the coal and textile activities in the region.

More recently, the border region in which the seven islands lie has been redefined not through industrial upgrades but by political bureaucracy, most importantly the Schengen Area agreements that dissolved permanent border controls in 1995. Ironically, despite this erasure of boundaries, the path of the waterway and its canal infrastructure

remained rigid-a register of a former industry, but one without any form of public, or indeed human presence. Where waterway infrastructure has consistently been seen as a rigid space attached only to industrial development, definitive processes of 'de-industrialization'<sup>1</sup> a new opportunity arises for it to be re-programmed in order to perpetuate its usefulness and expand its spatial qualities.

The idea of a public festival is as old as the public itself. Every period in history has seen large gatherings of people, coming together in an open space for a brief, highly concentrated moment of celebration, after which crowd dissipate and the host space returns to its more typical condition. Belgium, in particular, has a well-established festival culture, from the historic Flemish *kermis* to its more than thirty annual festival today.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, France has historically pursued and delivered policies of access to culture for the masses, from the ideals of *droit a la culture* to *Fete de la Musique*, where culture is brought to the citizens in public settings.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, however, and especially, the last twenty years, the seasonal musical festival, sited in large, open, typically rural areas, has emerged as an increasingly prevalent type, pulling the festival away from more concentrated, public, urban space.<sup>4</sup> This move out of the town is largely because of the size and type of audience-a mass and density of people that would overwhelm existing urban infrastructure. Current international standards only regulate logistical impact when an audience is housed within temporary structures in open space.<sup>5</sup> 70,000 people in 7,000 tents demand 7,000 parking lots; they are catered-to by a corresponding set of temporary services: 7,000 toilets, or 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> of storage for the scaffolding for food vendors and sanitation facilities. These are set up in a limited period of time and, after the festival ends, are packed up and disappear again.

A lack of infrastructural framework causes significant pressure on the environment-pressures exacerbated by a largely private network of transportation, and essentially disposable patterns

of consumption. As a result, the festival effectively forfeits its public function and responsibility outside the bounds of its event, therefore depriving it of any architectural quality. Architects cannot design the feast, the concert of the festival, and actual inhabitation cannot be designed; however, permanent elements can define how inhabitation might take place, and this does definitively fit within the remit of architects.

Since the ephemeral nature of the contemporary music festival deprives the festival of any architecture quality, laying foundations is the first, significant step towards an architectural scenario in this de-industrialized region. A festival ground forms the extension of a canal lock, and can simultaneously be seen as larger systematic strategy for the reuse of an underused waterway infrastructure. The design focuses on the lock since its occasional use reflects the intrinsically cyclical nature of a festival. Foundations set a framework to relate mass culture to a terrain by providing an architectural quality to the festival. At the same time, existing and permanent infrastructural elements improve the logistics of the festival. The waterway infrastructure is not just a setting that actively attracts and hosts spectators in search of a unique experience, but more importantly represents a structuring element for the festival's logistics, from waste management to power supply. The islands along the canal are vacant areas, varying in size between five and thirty hectares. Corresponding to requirements of an audience of between 7,000 and 70,000 attendants, the festival can occupy one island or the entire network. The strategy is applied to the island in-between the towns of Bousbecque and Mennen, where temporal components define the scale of events, corresponding to the number of car parks, toilets, tents, or scaffolding to be stored. Industrial cargo yards by the canal provide parking lots and the lock is used for loading and unloading materials to the site.

The waste is managed by the possibility of transporting vast quantities: if an audience of 7,000 spectators require 700 toilets by normative codes, then the waste can be directly shipped as fertilizing material around the rural areas that surround the canal. Permanent elements of the lock are reconfigured to define spaces for the festival,

embedded in the landscape in order to synchronize the concrete infrastructure and its temporal inhabitation.

The permanence of waterway infrastructure is disrupted by the temporality of a music festival, giving a new understanding to its performance, with either 7,000 vans at a summer festival, or a single loaded container barge in the winter. Earth and water retainers contain height lines that create tribunes, canvases are attached to concrete poles, the lock accommodates stages when not holding barges, and the water basin works as a power tower for light and sound control.

If the nineteenth-century process of canalization laid foundations for the subsequent industrial development of textile industries along the Lys River then the proposed festival infrastructure claims the necessity of laying architectural foundations for the intrinsically ephemeral type of the festival, further increasing the artifice of this waterway, thus allowing for a multiplicity of new planned-and unplanned-festive scenarios along the banks of the productive and scenic Lys River.

<sup>1</sup>The use of the term "de-industrialization" to describe this

<sup>1</sup>The use of the term "de-industrialization" to describe this territory is a reaction to the indiscreet use of the term "post-industrial". In the book *Manufacturing Matters*, Stephen Cohen and John Zysman argue that "The division of labour has become infinitely more elaborated and the production process far more indirect... But the key generator of wealth for this vastly expanded and differentiated division of labour remains mastery and control of production. We are shifting not out of industry into services, but from one-kind of industrial economy to another" See Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman, *Manufacturing Matters: The Myth of the Post-Industrial Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 26.

<sup>2</sup>See European Festival Association (EFA) <http://www.efa-aef.eu>

<sup>3</sup>The Modern post of Minister of Culture was created by *Charles de Gaulle* in 1959. The first minister was the writer André Malraux, who was responsible for realizing the goals of the *droit à la culture* ("right to culture"), an idea which had been incorporated in the *Constitution of France* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) by democratizing access to culture.

<sup>4</sup>Since the first Woodstock festival in 1969, music festivals have become a multibillion-dollar industry, dominated by two corporations: Live Nation and AEG Live. See Emma Webster and George McKay, *From Glastonbury to Glastonbury: The Impact of British Music Festivals* (Norwich: Arts and Humanities Research, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>See ISO, *International Organization for Standardization* (ISO 20121:2013) (Geneva: ISO Technical Committee 2013).

winter

spring

summer

fall

