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SHARP

SHARP

KINSHASA. AS THIN AS A THREAD

Parlementaires-débout at Eucalyptus Park, Kinshasa, RDCongo, 2006.

© Marie-Françoise Plissart.

Published in de Boeck, F., Plissart, M.
Kinshasa Tales from the Invisible City.
Ludion, Antwerp (NE), September, 2006.

cataloging

.03

Construction of trading and leisure infrastructures

.01

Environmental modification

catalyst

PAPERS, BARBER'S SHOPS, SCRIBES

example

Minimal infrastructure
Eucalyptuses Park in Kinshasa.

date

Nowadays.

author

Kinshasa's citizens.

address

Ngafula's Mount.
Lumumba, Comuna de N'djili.
Kinshasa, RDCongo.

descriptio

Spontaneous discussion, called "Parlementaires-débout", appear in Kinshasa's parks during Mobutu's dictatorship. They started around newspapers hanging on threads. This public space constitutes the quarry where the democracy's politics emerged. Besides, the Congolese urban parks work as outdoors malls, arranged by the trees plot.

POLITICS
SPONTANEOUS
AUSTERITY
ASTUTE
EFFICIENT

KINSHASA

bibliography

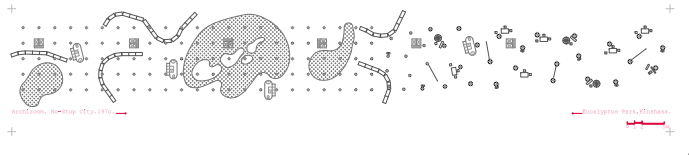
"Kinsahsa tales from the invisible City".
Filip de Boeck, Marie-Franquise Plissart.
Ed Ludion, Antwerp (setembre 2006).



The mechanism is simple: each of them occupies a tree and its surroundings, as if the shade that this one generates determined the plot of land.

Many of these merchants reserve their positions in a more 'official' way, tying tapes around the trunks of trees with the name of the supposed establishment or owner. This kind of park - market has the peculiarity of containing all types of products of the most diverse manufacture (from food up to car tires), we can also find services like barber's shops, writers, and kiosks... and all of this happens outdoors.

In our country we can find similarities with the traditional markets. However, in Catalonia, the markets are put on the squares or public spaces in which the commercial offer is already completed by other infrastructures, such as covered markets, shops, or others. There is not enough confidence on trade as a unique activator of the public space, as it happens in Kinshasa.



City and forest

The Eucalyptuses Park in Kinshasa is one of the catalysts to which we paid particular attention in this Thesis. During the past years, the new African metropolis have turned into one of the new areas of interest for the contemporary culture. They are the final destination of the European and American cities, according to some theorists. Current urbanism has understood these cities as laboratories of art and essay of the contemporaneusness (Koolhaas, R. Et al., Lagos. How It Works, Lars-Müller Publishers, New York, 2006).

Eucalyptus Park

Placed in Lumumba's district, crossed by the road that leads from the airport to the center, the Eucalyptuses Park is one of the examples of how trade is one of the fundamental assets at the moment of articulating the public contemporary space.

It is placed over the preexisting clearings of jungle caught inside the city. The irregular grid of eucalyptuses of the Congolese jungle forms a kind of invisible infrastructure that the merchants (who until then had been ambulant) started occupying.

AS THIN AS A THREAD

The trade is produced in a transitory, spontaneous way, without needing big previous infrastructures... And it is precisely this formless and changeable character what awards the park with this public dimension.

It is not only a question of selling, the place acquires a function of a contemporary "agora" of instantaneous character, in a place where no type of urban planning exists: the citizens of Kinshasa debate the political solutions to the economical situation of the country in a place close to the kiosks, the barber's shops turn into small spaces of conversation, the trees where the shops have not opened yet are occupied by citizens who read... Before the lack of resources, the public space is formed with the spontaneity, the improvisation and the activity that this not planned and transitory way of understanding the trade supposes.

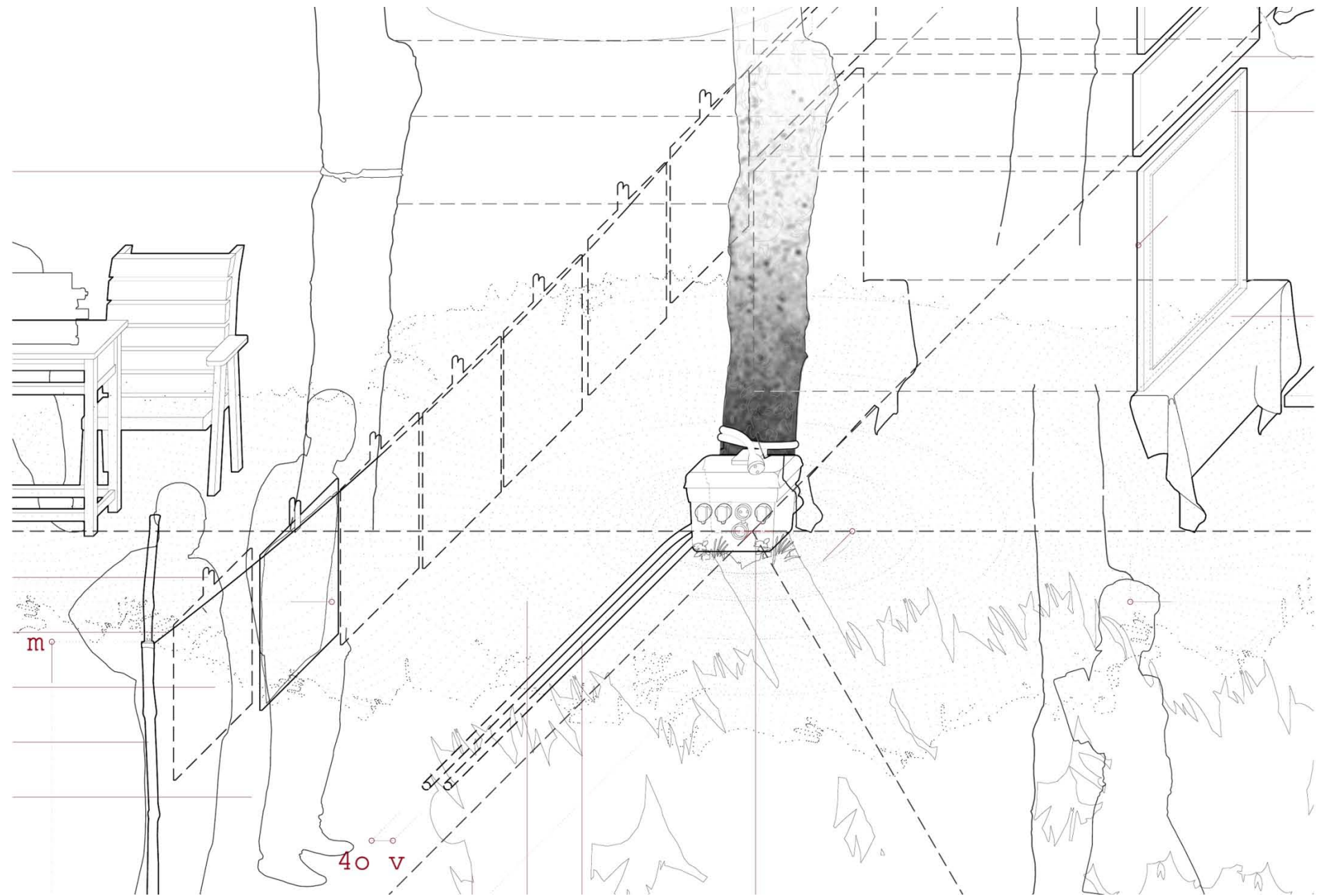
Eucalyptus Park

Trade is added over an existing structure; it is not an element that is counted on from the beginning of the design.

In this Thesis, we have tried to translate to drawings the same way in which this interaction between green places-public spaces – trade is produced.



emplacement / Ngafula's Mount. Kinshasa.



+ ESCRIVA

- .o1 cinta Indica que aquesta és la posició de l'escriba al parc. Pot ser una placa.
- .o2 escrives Es tracta d'operaris públics.

+ PARLAMENTAIRES

- .o3 pinça
- .o4 fil
- .o5 cartró Rigiditza les fulles de diari.
- .o6 màstil Pal que sosté el fil sobre el qual es penjen els diaris.
- .o7 debat

+ VIDA NOCTURNA

- .o8 prostituta Fenòmen conegut i indissociablement urbà a Occident, el què de dia és un espai públic vibrant de nit es converteix en un focus de prostitució.

+ BARBERIA

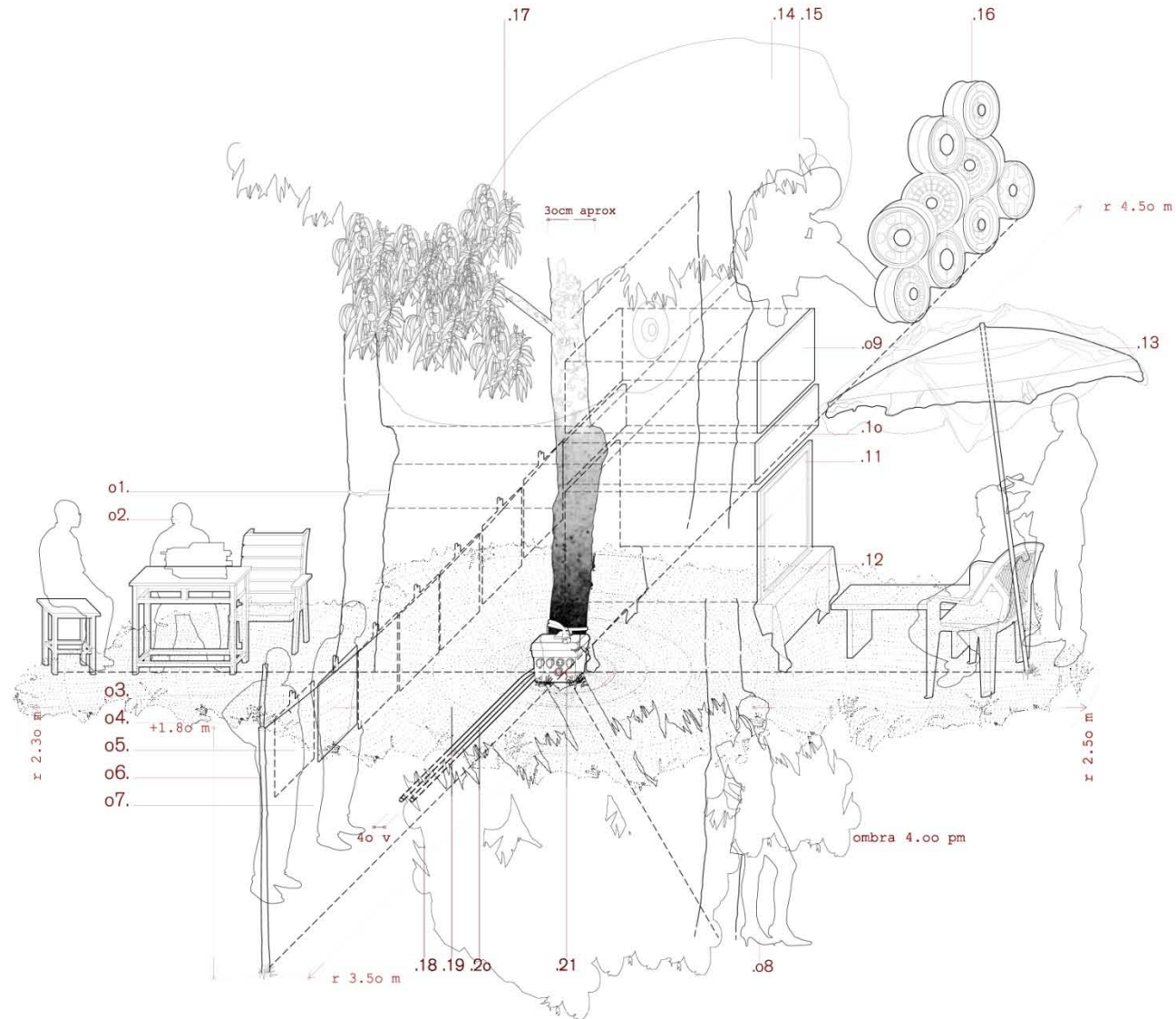
- .o9 cartells Retrat de J.B. Mpiana i rètol de la barberia.
- .10 pentinats
- .11 mirall
- .12 tocador
- .13 impermeable El parasol pot esdevenir paraigües.

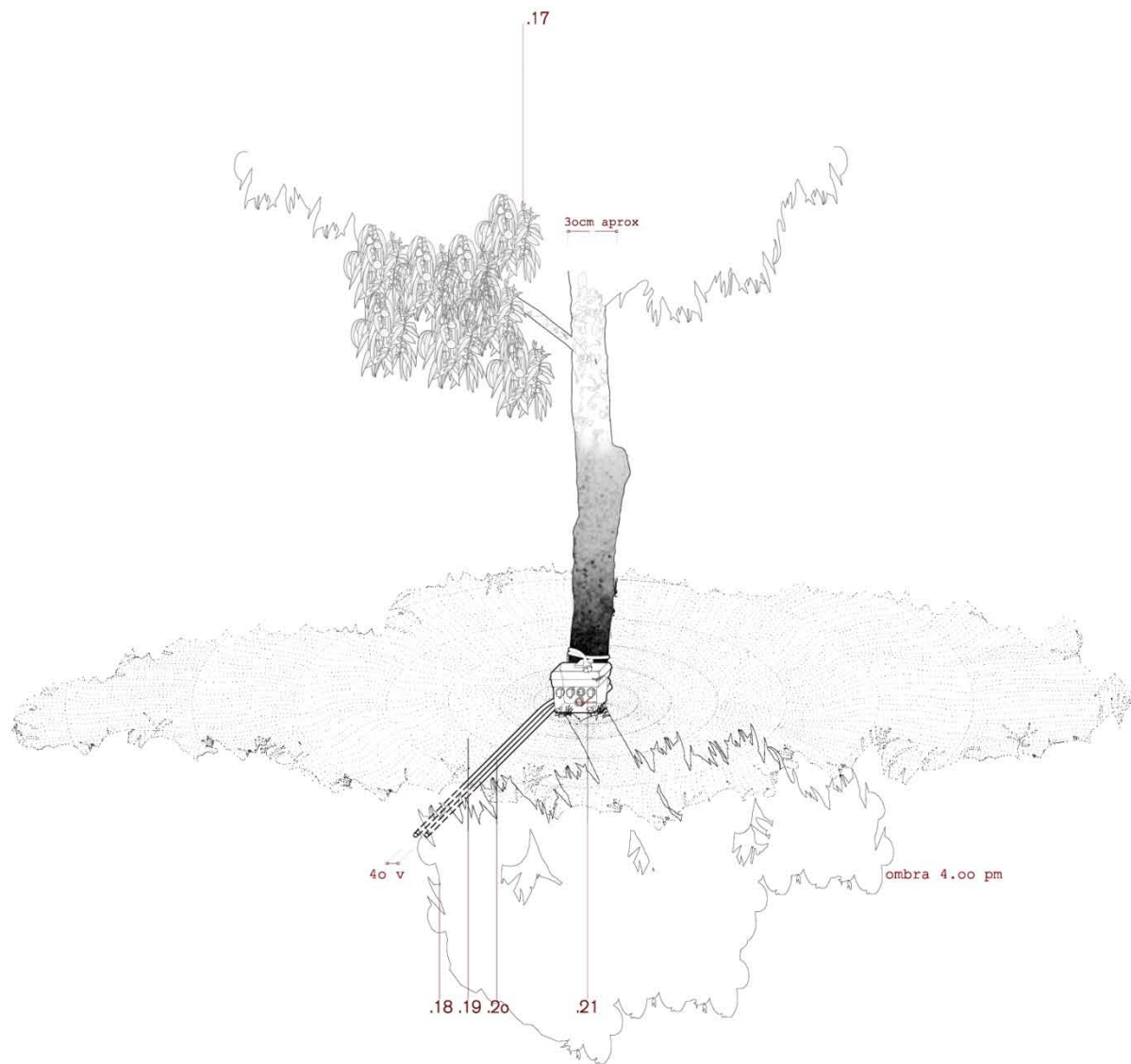
+ TALLERS MECÀNICS

- .14 cotxe
- .15 mecànic
- .16 llantes La majoria d'elements són reciclats.

+ MINUT 0.00

- .17 eucaliptus Plantats per l'Ajuntament per associar a la carretera de Lumumba una seqüència d'espais públics.
- .18 ombra Indispensable a l'aire lliure.
Clima Kinshasa Tropical
T°C mitja màx 18°C mín 35°C
- .19 clariana Coincident amb l'ombra.
- .20 allargador Connectat a les cases pròximes.
- .21 bateria

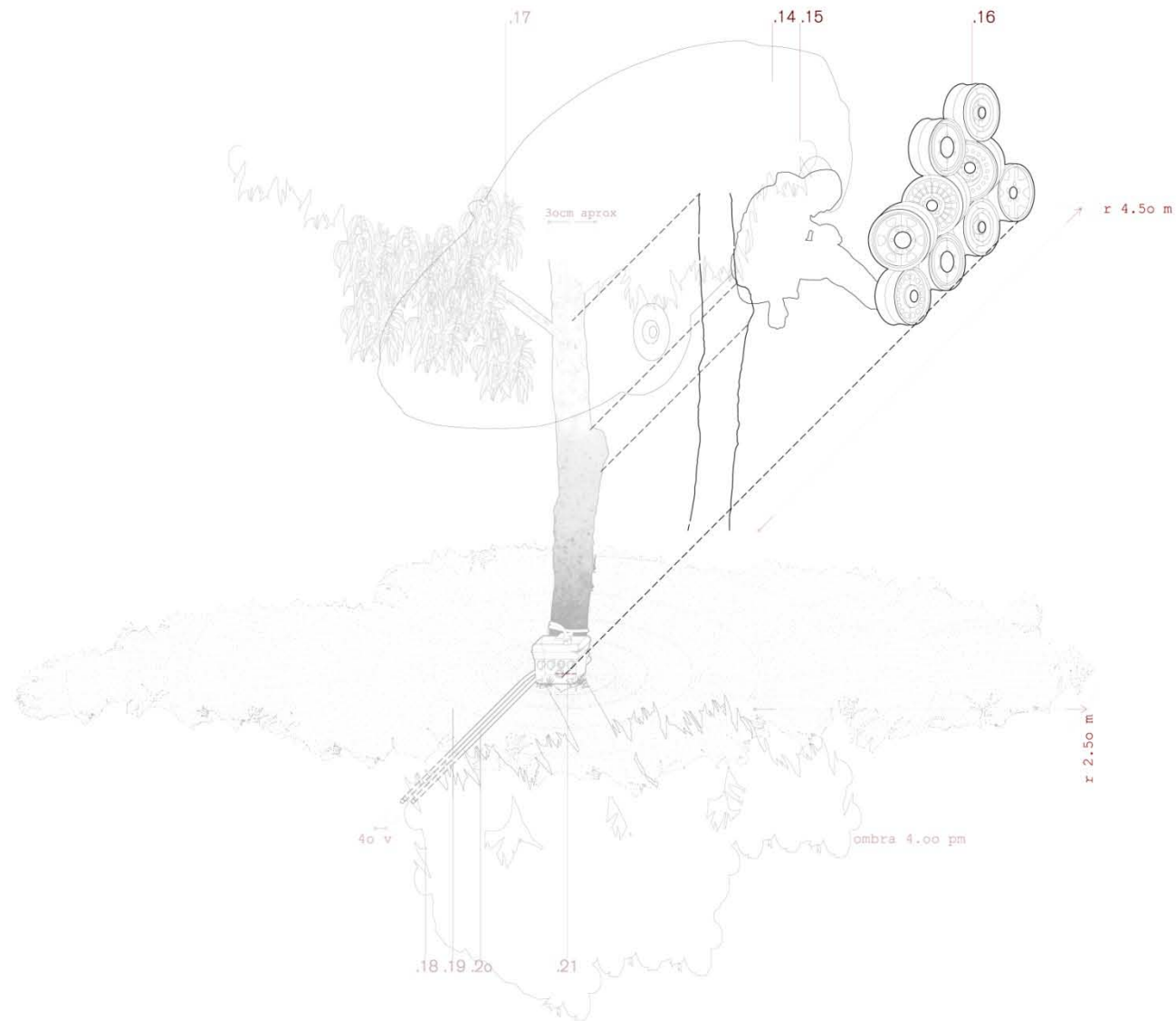




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T°C mitja màx 18°C mín 35°C



+ TALLERS MECÀNICS

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La majoria d'elements són reciclats.

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- .17 eucaliptus
- .18 ombra
- .19 clariana
- .20 allargador
- .21 bateria

Plantats per l'Ajuntament per associar a la carretera de Lumumba una seqüència d'espais públics. Indispensable a l'aire lliure.

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Coincident amb l'ombra.
 Connectat a les cases pròximes.

+ BARBERIA

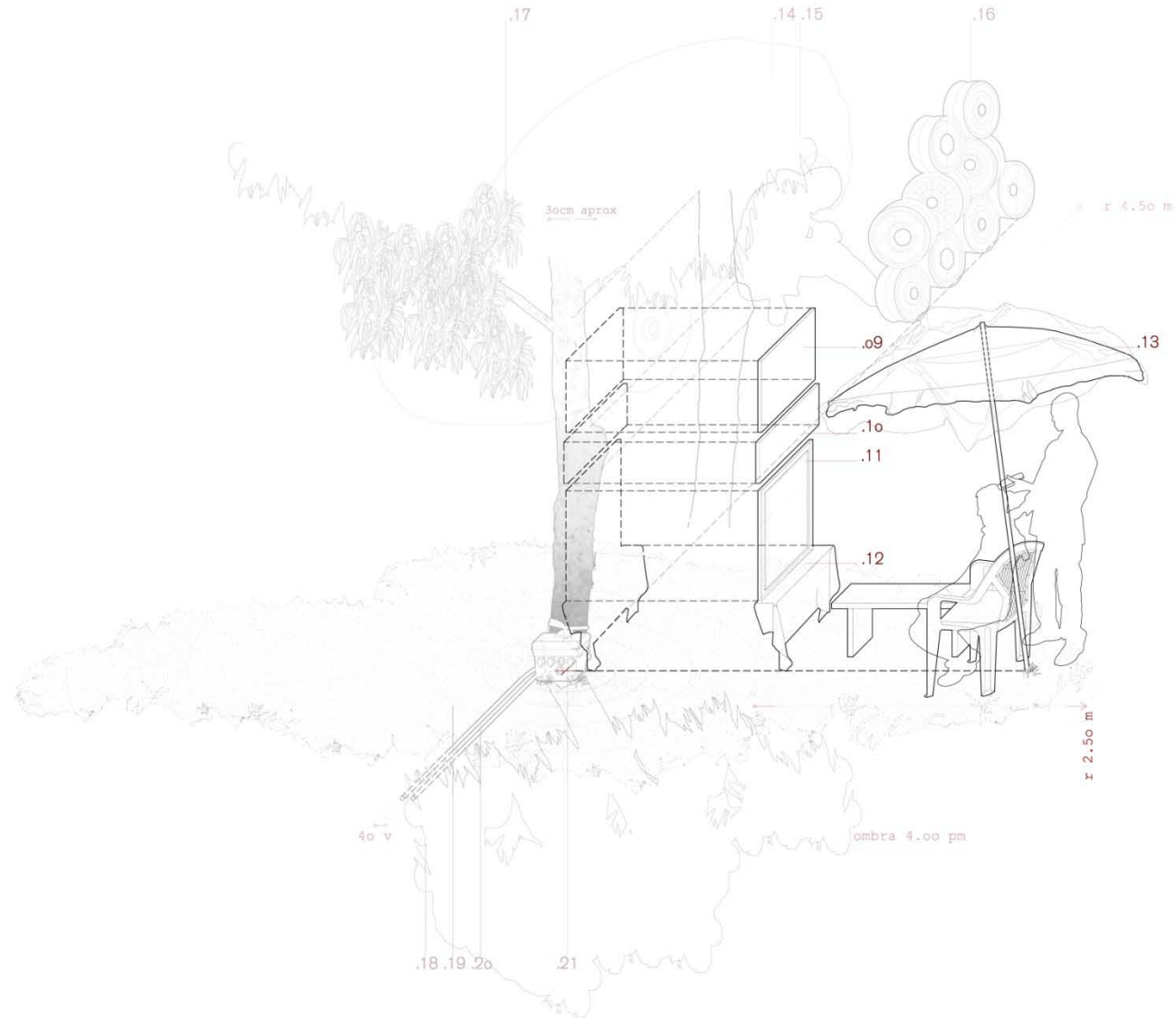
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- .19 clariana Coincident amb l'ombra.
- .20 allargador Connectat a les cases pròximes.
- .21 bateria



+ PARLAMENTAIRES

- .03 pinça
- .04 fil
- .05 cartró
- .06 màstil
- .07 debat

Rigiditza les fulles de diari.
Pal que sosté el fil sobre el qual es
pengen els diaris.

+ VIDA NOCTURNA

- .08 prostituta Fenòmen conegut i indissociable-
ment urbà a Occident, el què de dia
és un espai públic vibrant de nit es
converteix en un focus de prostitució.

+ BARBERIA

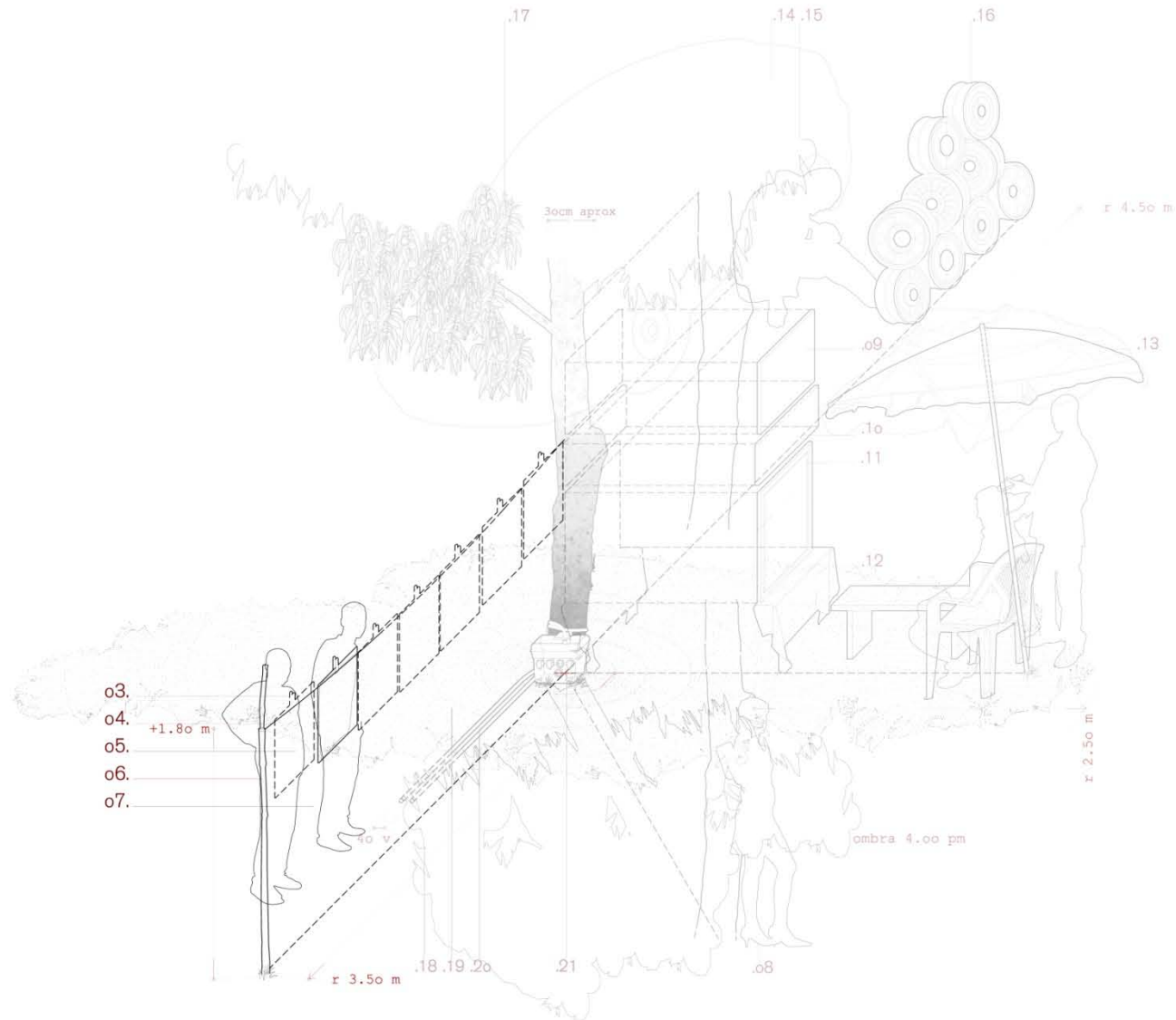
- .09 cartells Retrat de J.B. Mpiana i rètol de la
barberia.
- .10 pentinats
- .11 mirall
- .12 tocador
- .13 impermeable El parasol pot esdevenir paraigües.

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+ BARBERIA

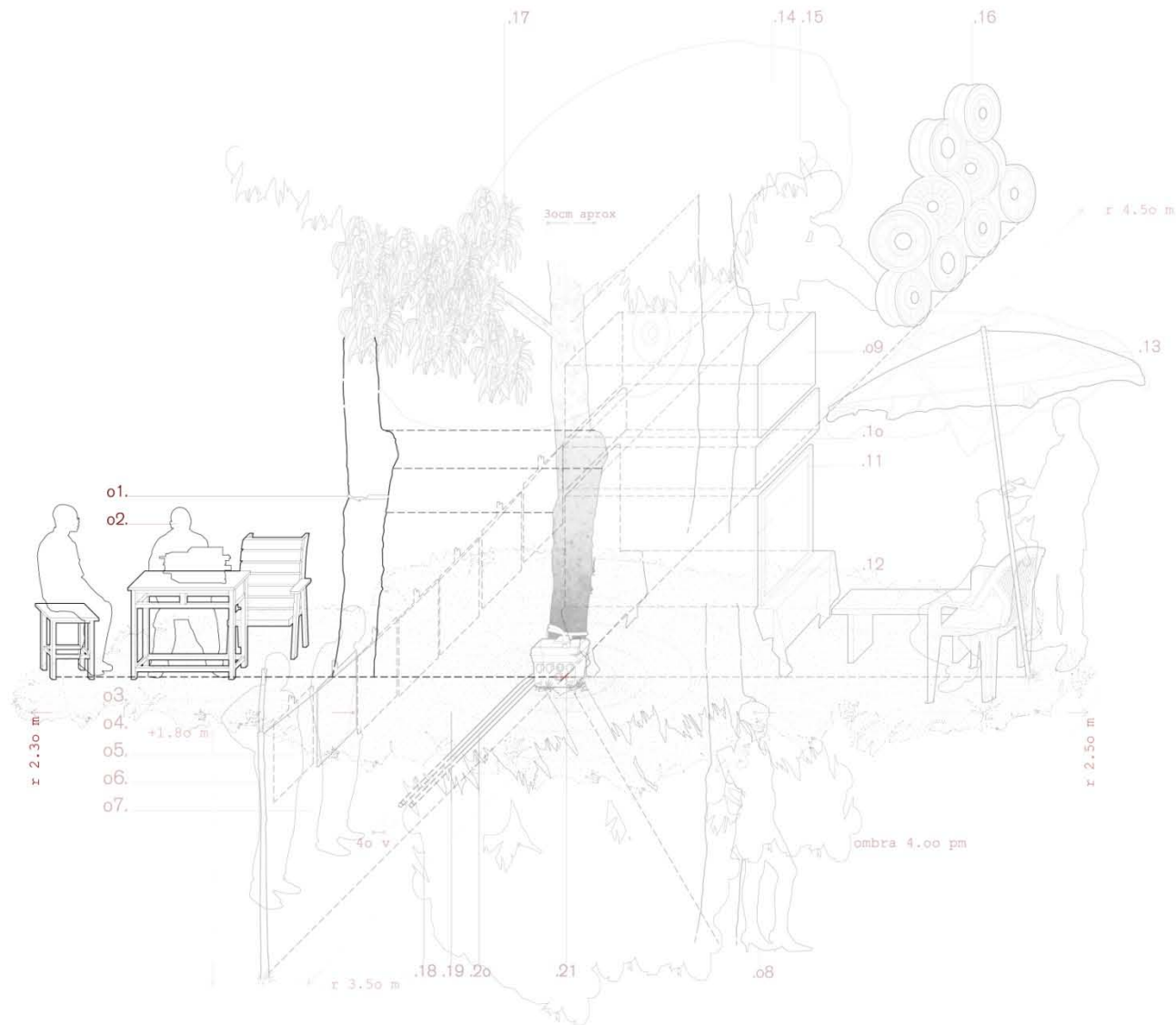
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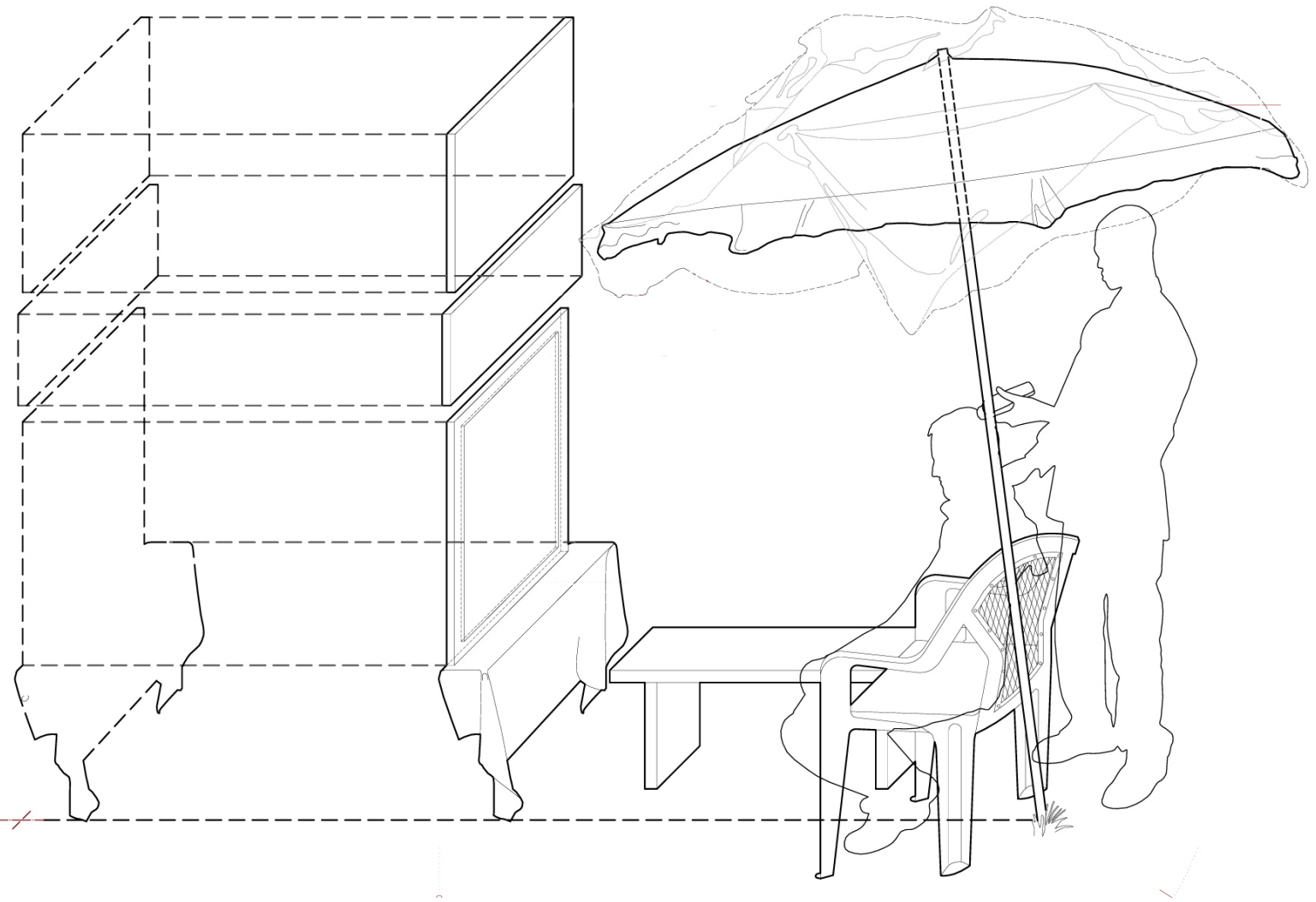
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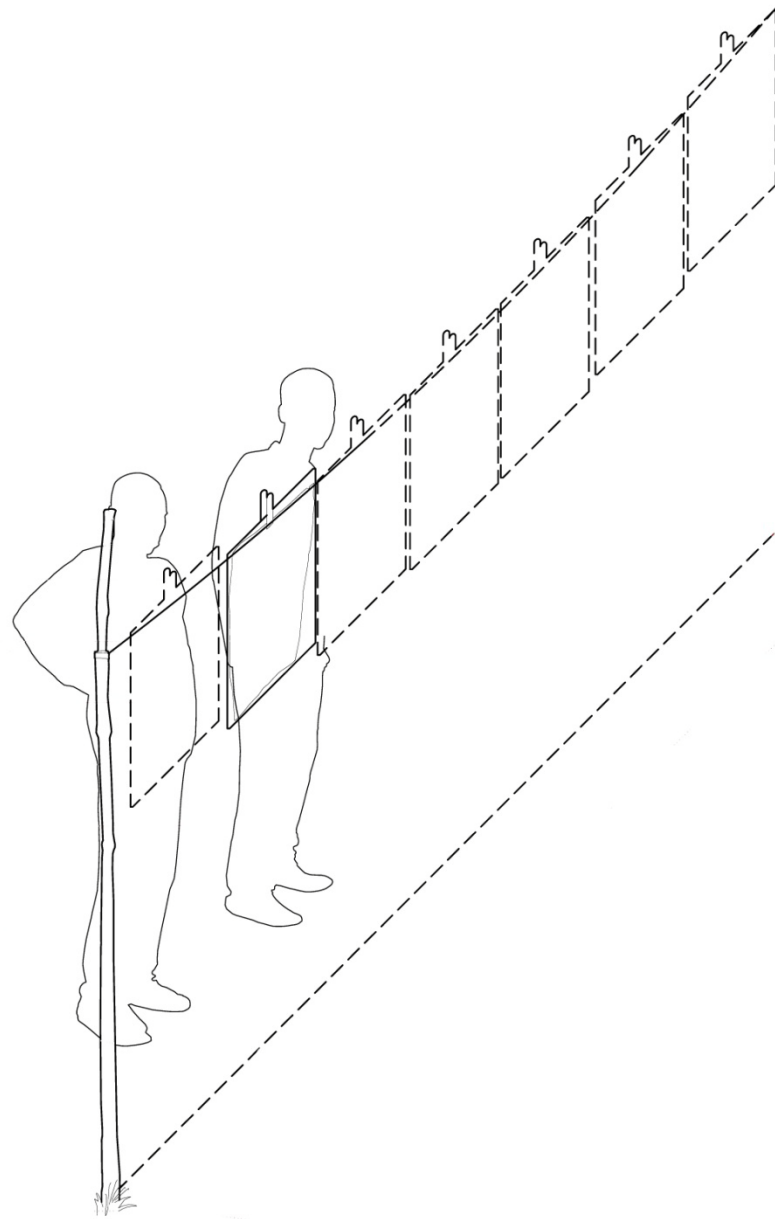
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- .19 clariana Coincident amb l'ombra.
- .2o allargador Connectat a les cases pròximes.
- .21 bateria









Djemma El Fna.

Xai's party day.
Marrakech 2006.

Photography M.B.E

CASE STUDY #3

DJEMMA EL-FNA. CARTS, SNAKES AND STORYTELLERS

cataloging

.03 *Construction of trading and
leisure infrastructures*

.01 *Environmental modification*

.02 *Interpretation and manipulation
of pop culture elements*

catalyst

ORAL TRADE

example

Spaces of Oral and Intangible
Heritage of Humanity
Djemma El Fna Marrakech

date

1070 -Today

author

Traders and spectators

address

Jemma El Fna Square

description

*It is a place that has always wanted to preserve
the mixture and difference as urban conditions;
as its essential vocation. The strength of the
Jemma El Fna Square does not rely on its
shape or on its architectural project, but on the
oral and immaterial aspects of the place.*

DJEMMA EL-FNA

bibliography

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Art "Las mil i una noches de Xemáa el fna". Juan Goytisolo.

"Discours d'ouverture de la réunion du jury por la proclamation des chefs.d'oeuvre du Patrimoine Oral e Immatériel de l'Humanité".
Juan Goytisolo.



During the first visits, you get shocked by the frenetic movements of the people, the noise, the yelling, the intense smells, the smoke and heat; you discover a disordered and spontaneous public space, one that has been built freely and stimulating imagination. It is a place that has always wanted to preserve the mixture and difference as urban conditions; as its essential vocation. It is a fascinating public space, formed by the mixture of different cultures, ethnic groups, generations and social classes. A dissonant environment, confined by the chaos of images, rich and poor together, both country and cosmopolitan people, active and idle, old and young; all this mixture without minding about their origin, social condition, age, political color, either religion or social condition.

Once you are able to leave behind Jemma el Fna's atmospheric charm, you start to realize that there's a total absence of architecture in the space of the square.



In 1997, Goytisolo convinced the UNESCO to create a new program that would define the Spaces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The aim of this new category consisted of protecting some activities that were ancestral traditions, in continuous renovation, and very tied to the city. On the 18th of May of 2001, the UNESCO declared the Jemma el Fna Square the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

CARTS, SNAKES AND STORYTELLERS

The fortuitous visit to the square on the day of the Lamb let us recognize the value that Goytisolo was announcing and demanding.



The fortune of having met with Marrakech's city exactly on the day of the sacred holiday of the slaughter of the Lamb was crucial. It was a key moment, because it is the only day of the year that you are able to visit the square totally empty, without people or activity, and to discover the importance of the minor scale to construct the public space. The absence of cars, stalls, storytellers, snake charmers, etc; it was suddenly exhibiting a totally naked public space. A raw, ordinary and marginal place.

A rich and austere space

The Jemma el Fna Square has been a fundamental example for the development of this work on urban catalysts. Its singularity and difference with regard to the classic European squares has served us to find out which are the necessary conditions for a public space to be vivacious. To study an urban place constructed from austerity, without material or architectural resources, has all lead us to discover the essence of the public space.

The experience of visiting the Jemma el Fna Square has been essential to understand a public space that is characterized by its spatial informality.

Goytisolo proposes the oral patrimony

The writer Juan Goytisolo moved to Marrakech in the 70's seduced by the poetic charm of this peculiar square; and became the promoter of its new heritage category.

His long walks around the square helped him understand the oral and intangible value of the space, while he observed the jugglers, the snake charmers, the musicians, the singers and dancers, etc.

The strength of this public space does not rely on its shape or on its architectural project, but on the oral and immaterial aspects of the place.

Through the drawing of the transitory spaces of these catalysts, we have been able to distinguish between two types of activities. Some catalysts are of reduced mobility and are placed with precision on the paving that is traced following the "Zoco el Bahja" façade. And some others, more nomadic, circulate around the square without a precise or fixed position.



emplacement / Jemma El Fna Square

+ CATALITZADORS CONSTRUÏTS

- .o1 carros
- .o2 parades

+ CATALITZADORS MÒBILS

- .o3 encantador de serps
- .o4 home-font
- .o5 dentista

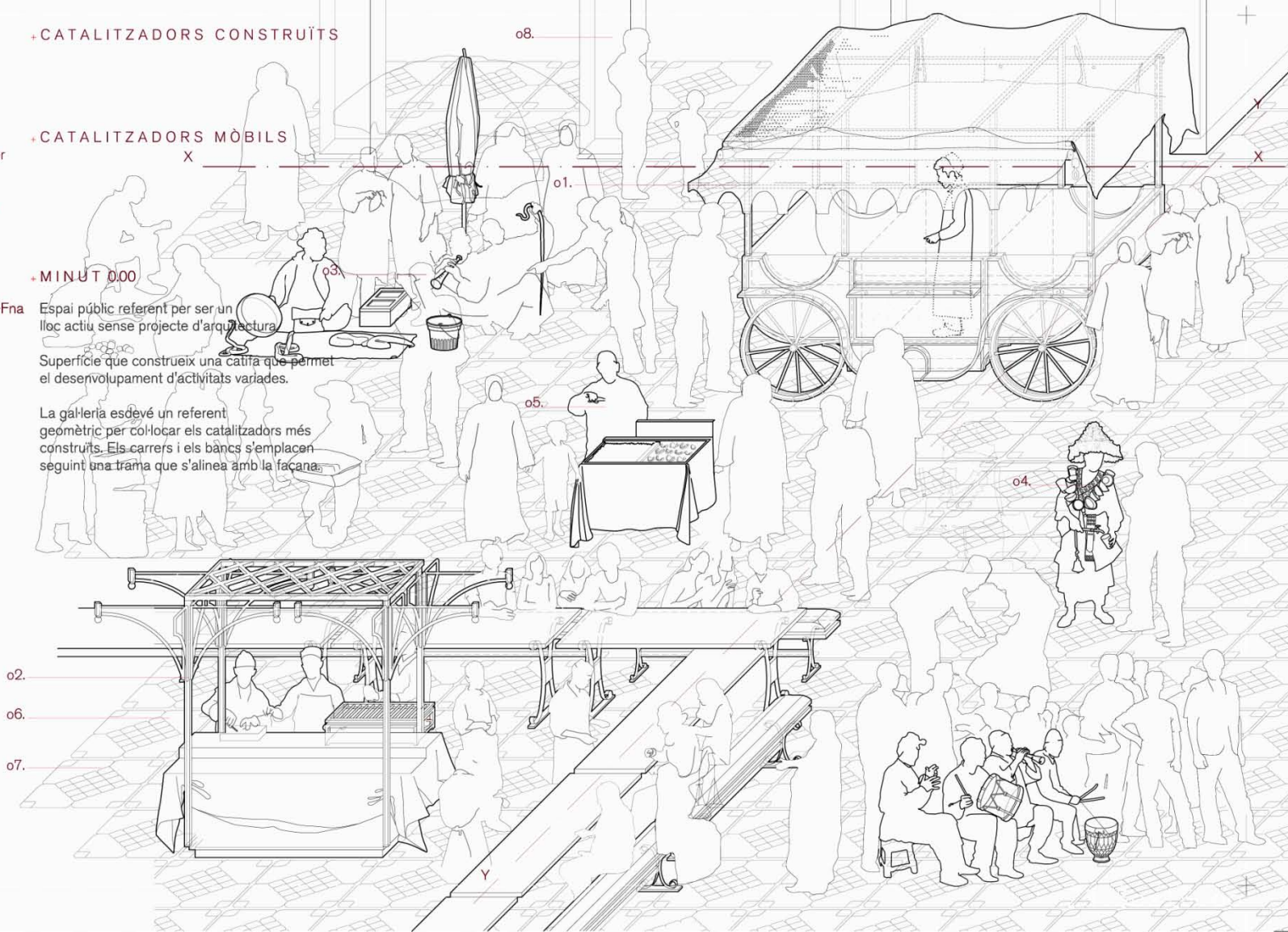
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- .o6 Djemaa El-Fna
- .o7 paviment
- .o8 façana

Espai públic referent per ser un lloc actiu sense projecte d'arquitectura

Superfície que construeix una catifa que permet el desenvolupament d'activitats variades.

La galeria esdevé un referent geomètric per col·locar els catalitzadors més construïts. Els carrers i els bancs s'emplanten seguint una trama que s'alinea amb la façana.

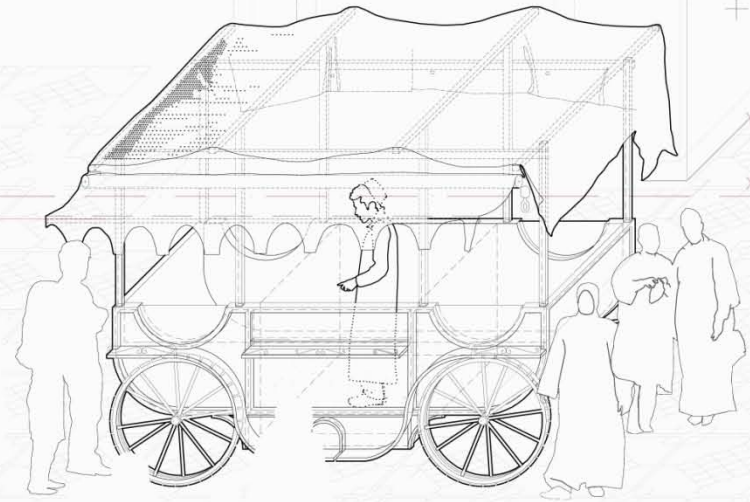


+ CATALITZADORS CONSTRUÏTS

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- o2 parades

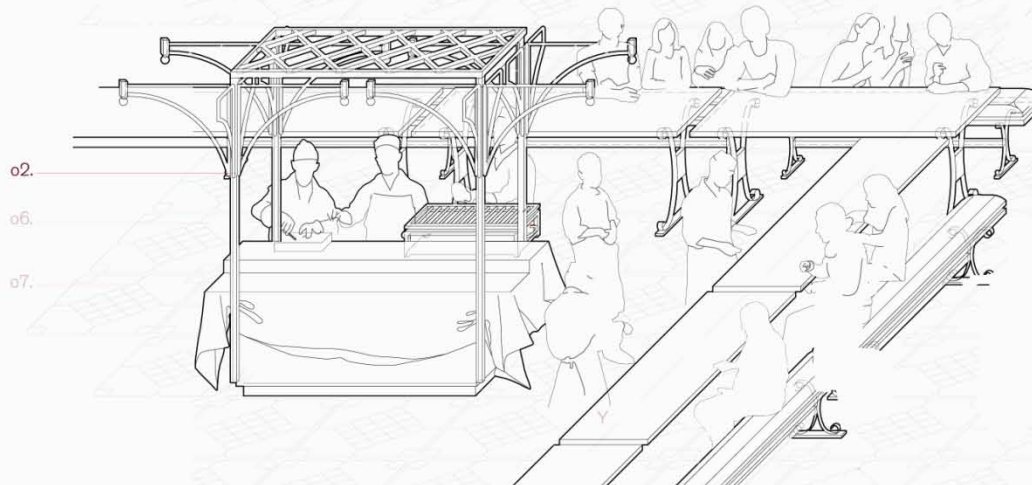
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- o6 Djemaa El-Fna Espai públic referent per ser un lloc actiu sense projecte d'arquitectura.
- o7 paviment Superfície que construeix una catifa que permet el desenvolupament d'activitats variades.
- o8 façana La galeria esdevé un referent geomètric per col·locar els catalitzadors més construïts. Els carrers i els bancs s'emplanten seguint una trama que s'alineja amb la façana.



· CATALITZADORS CONSTRUÏTS

- o1 carros
- o2 parades

· CATALITZADORS MÒBILS

- o3 encantador de serps
- o4 home-font
- o5 dentista

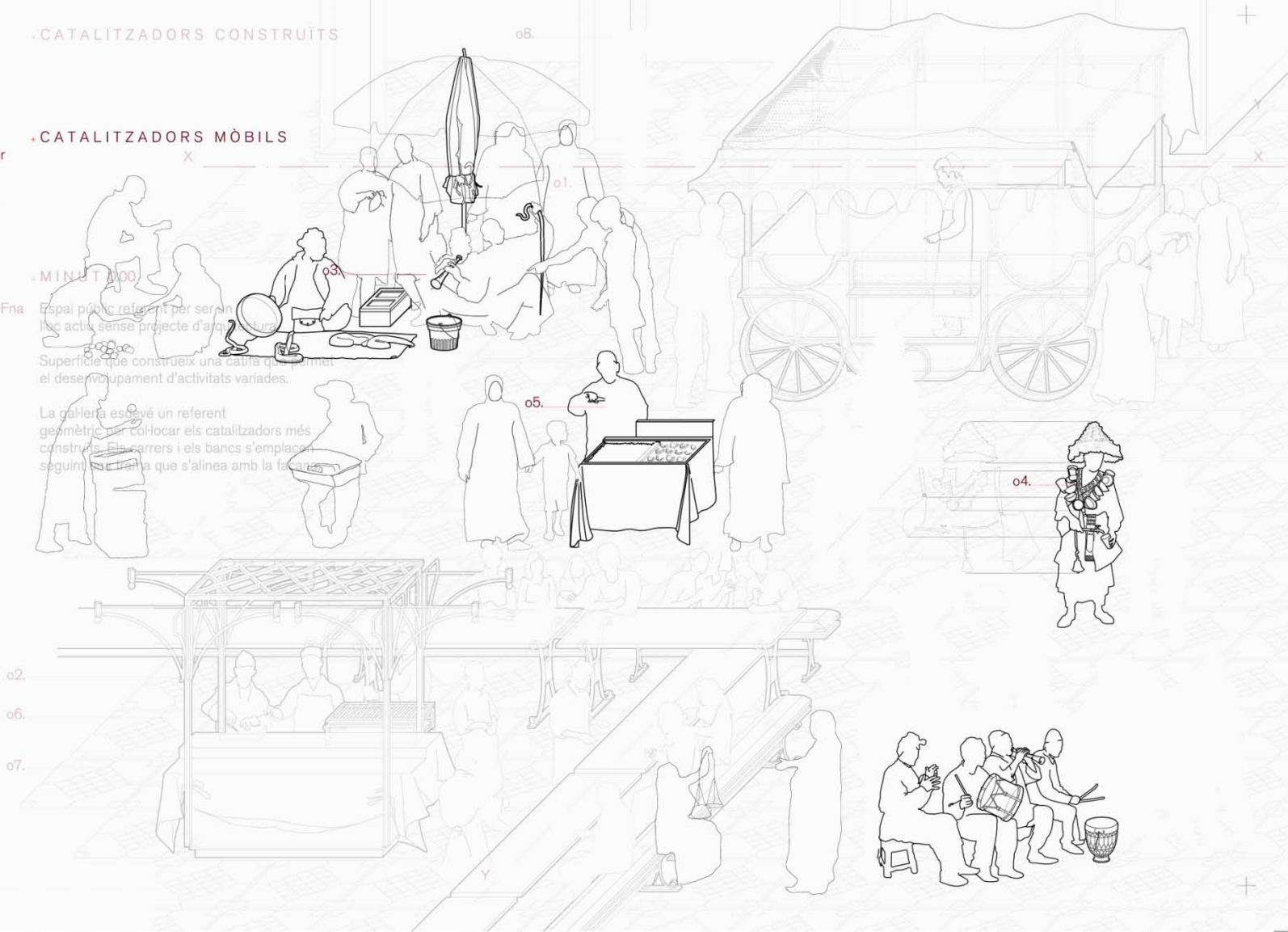
· MINUTMOO

- o6 Djemaa El-Fna
- o7 paviment
- o8 façana

Espai públic referent per ser un lloc actiu sense projecte d'arquitectura

Superfície que construeix una talita que permet el desenvolupament d'activitats variades.

La galeria esdevé un referent geomètric per col·locar els catalitzadors més construïts. Els carrers i els bancs s'emporten seguint la línia que s'alinea amb la façana





· CATALITZADORS CONSTRUÏTS

- o1 carros
- o2 parades

· CATALITZADORS MÒBILS

- o3 encantador de serps
- o4 home-font
- o5 dentista

· MINUT 0,00

- o6 Djemaa El-Fna
- o7 paviment
- o8 façana

Espai públic referent per ser un lloc actiu sense projecte d'arquitectura.

Superfície que construeix una catifa que permet el desenvolupament d'activitats diverses.

La galeria esdevé un referent geomètric per col·locar els catalitzadors més construïts. Els carrers i els bàncs s'emplacen seguint una trama que s'alinea amb la façana.

o8.

X

o1.

o5.

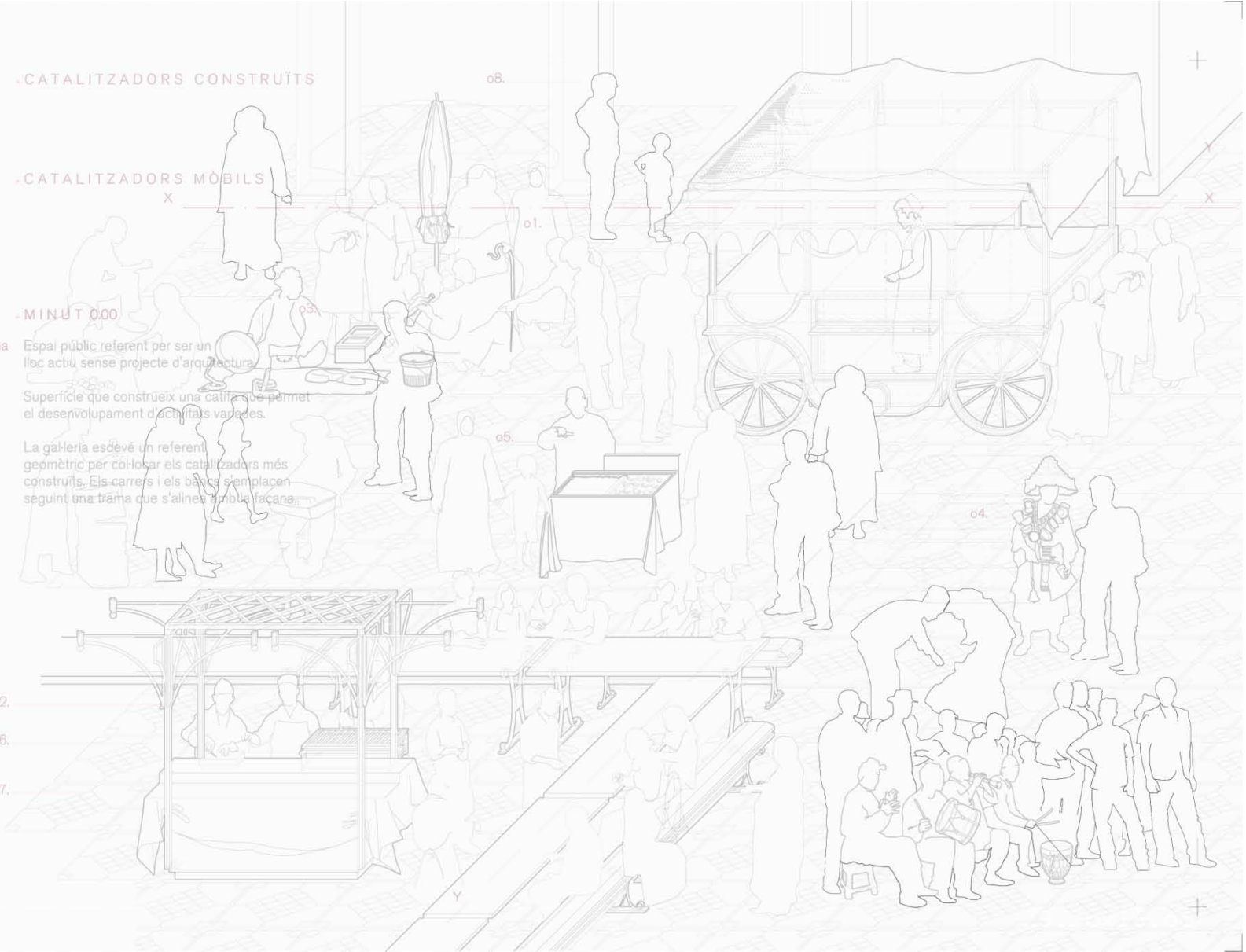
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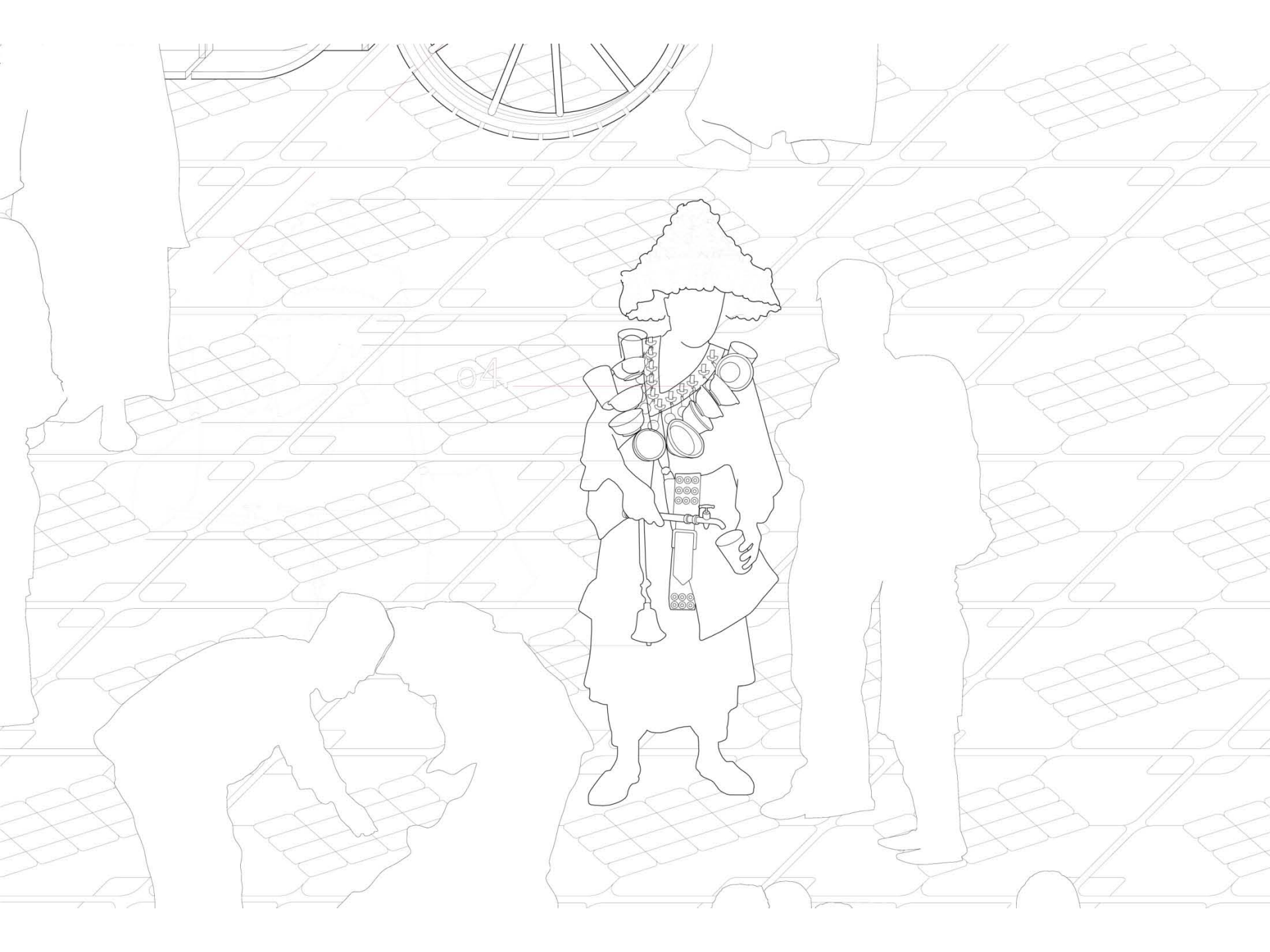
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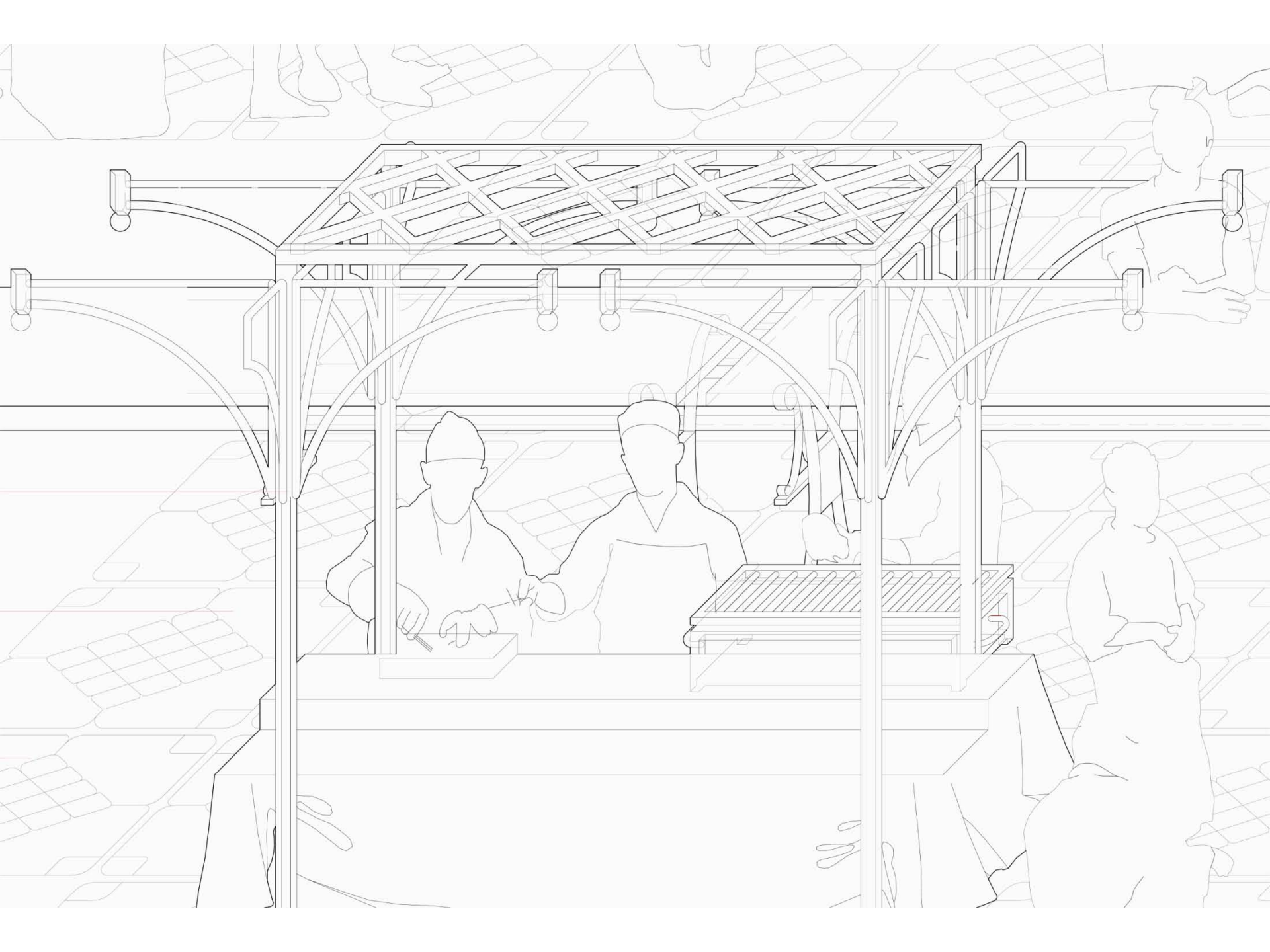
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04







NY. HYDRANT, WATER ALWAYS WRITES IN PLURAL

Children in NY playing with the water from
a fire pump

F. Getty Images. Avax news

cataloging

.01

Environmental modifications

.03

*Construction of Infrastructures
of Trade and Leisure*

catalyst

WATER

example

Spontaneous alteration of the
urban normality.
Street in NY during the summer.

date

Until today.

author

New Yorkers.

address

NY

description

**ACCIDENT
MINIMAL
GAME**
*Some children from a big dense American city like
NY use the accidental water escape of a firemen
hose to convert the streets into a place for games.
It is an example of how a hazardous situation of
minimal resources can transform the city.*

HYDRANT, WATER ALWAYS WRITES IN PLURAL

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"Delirious New York". Rem Koolhaas.
Ed The Monacelli Press (December 1, 1997).



In the case of the Barcaza fountain in Rome, Bernini decided to place the water level slightly below the pavement of the street, resolving a technical problem of low water pressure, and at the same time using the different levels of the square to situate a bench around the fountain that gave it a new urban dimension that made the people approach the fountain to have a look at it and to chat around it.

The Fontana di Trevi is not only placed in a public square but it is also a place of public activity in which people toss coins in the water, imagining a better future.

Stairs and fountains

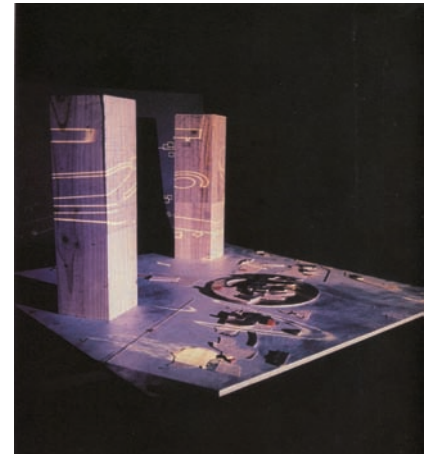
Nowadays, it is not very common to project an urban fountain.

Probably, Robert Venturi's projects in Philadelphia and Yago Conde's project in Barcelona must have been the last ones to think about this strange and complex condition that the fountains contain: they are distant objects that can feel close at the same time.

Stairs and fountains

Conde's fountain is an alternative to the monumental fountains that contained a single element and unique aesthetics.

It was proposed as a disperse fountain, capable of creating disseminated places. It is a fountain treated as a "geological score" coming from the "*marriage de contours of the shapes of Barcelona and the graphical score of John Cage's Fontana Mix. Therefore, this would provoke different situations, some monumental ones in the central part, and some others at the surface tied to little surprises and games for children*".





Monumental fountains

The monumental fountains are objects to be thoughtfully observed. They are urban elements that furnish the public space and that in many occasions symbolize the moments in which the city has suffered subsequent transformations or important events. Water spouts, sometimes of great height, turn into urban modals that splash and scare away the pedestrians who look at them from far away, avoiding to get wet.

Ornamental fountains

Bernini's fountains in Rome that remind us of the floods that the city suffered, or Salvi's Fontana di Trevi that represents the image of the celebration of the arrival of the water to the city, due to the torn down aqueduct of the Aqua Virgo; are both cases of fountains that are at the same time monumental and ornamental. **These are fountains that propose another scale of relation between water and the people.**

In the case of Venturi's project, it responded to a large scale, placing the dark gray aluminum fountain right on the visual axis of the Parkway Avenue that diagonally crosses the regular streets of the city. This emplacement helped the fountain act like a stretching element that could introduce the Fairmount Park until the Town Hall building. The fountain's shape is like the one of the Town Hall building in Philadelphia, with metallic finishing, similar to a car; and it was not only projected as an element to be observed from the big buildings surrounding it, but it was also thought in relation to its interior space, where you could hear the sound of the water.



WATER ALWAYS WRITES IN PLURAL

New York, it's summer, it's hot, the children don't go to school because they have holidays, and suddenly an unpredicted phenomenon is about to transform an ordinary street of the city. The spontaneous explosion of a firemen water hose coincidentally becomes the urban catalyst that is capable of changing this place that was ordinary until then. The children, without prejudices, got naked and knew how to take profit of such a surprising situation. The water escaped out of control and offered the possibility to identify the body with the city. The children played and got wet. Suddenly, the city had become a place for leisure and games.

A spontaneous water hose is not only a clear example of how the ephemeral strength of a catalyst is capable of modifying a city, but it also offers a modal that is able to easily prove the contextual value of the catalysts in the urbanity.

