

Citadel Beacon Redux

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Abstract

‘Citadel Beacon Redux’ revisits an urban art installation by the author in Halifax, Canada. ‘Citadel Beacon’ was an urban optical device referencing the city of Halifax’s View Planes: corridors of air protected from development to preserve views of the city’s harbor. During research into the View Planes an article, “Making Meaning of Heritage Landscapes,” by Lachlan Barber brought to light the near-simultaneous preservation of views from Citadel Hill and destruction of Africville, a community of approximately 500 African Nova Scotians. This paper describes the shift of project scope in response to this ‘heritage dissonance’¹ and the author’s ongoing exploration of broader narratives of visibility and invisibility. Definitions of ‘device’ and ‘attention’ as argued by Jonathan Crary inform the notion of an ‘instrumentalized vision’ constructed by a modern subject and its impact on urban politics.

View Planes

On August 4th, 2016 I met with representatives of Nocturne at Night (an arts event held in Halifax, Canada) atop Citadel Hill: Halifax’s highest point and a national historic site administered by the national park agency, Parks Canada. “place Illustration 1 here”

Fig. 1: View from Citadel Hill looking north and east.

Joining us were artists and Parks Canada staff. An architect, academic, and newcomer to Atlantic Canada I was there to coordinate my installation of a competition winning eleven foot tall white foam sculpture, ‘Citadel Beacon,’ with other installations and Citadel regulations. The sculpture was a didactic optic instrument designed around the Halifax City View Planes. “place Illustration 2 here”

Fig. 2: Ten View Planes for the city of Halifax from four station points on Citadel Hill. ‘Citadel Beacon’ was designed around View Planes 1, 3, and 5 (highlighted in red).

The View Planes are corridors of protected air space originating from points on Citadel Hill which preserve views of Halifax Harbor against high-rise development. The installation was built around one station point anchoring three View Planes and articulated them through text, image, and light. “place Illustration 3 here”

Fig. 3: ‘Citadel Beacon’ installation photos. An illuminated, laser-etched acrylic plaque (left) mounted to the sculpture shows the View Planes overlaid on the city streets. View Planes 1, 3, and 5 (right, top to bottom) are captured through slots in the sculpture.

Apertures and spotlights in the sculpture were directed down the length of the View Planes to provide an empirical registration of their otherwise intangible form. “place Illustration 4 here”

Fig. 4: ‘Citadel Beacon’ installation photos. The audience interacts with the installation during the Nocturne at Night festivities: circling it, reading text and maps, and peering through the apertures (left); the installation photographed against the city skyline (top right); light from the installation is projected down the length of the View Plane corridor (bottom right).

Included in the competition proposal were a set of acrylic plaques etched with quotations representing members of different voices with vested interests in Halifax’s heritage landscape. “place Illustration 5 here”

Fig. 5: Excerpt from the competition proposal, reviewed by Parks Canada staff, showing proposed etched acrylic panels with quotations representing different positions on preservation strategies in the Halifax heritage landscape.

One was from Elizabeth Pacey, a Heritage Preservationist and member of a group of citizens that lobbied for the View Planes in the early 1970s.² The second was from a blogger on a chat room, Skyscraperpage.com, a forum for real estate developers in Halifax who often find the View Planes to be frustrating constraints on the financial goals of their projects.³ A third was from an academic, Lachlan Barber, whose critical essay, “Making Meaning of Heritage Landscapes,” challenged the commonly held assumption that the View Planes symbolized a democratic preservation of Halifax’s civic identity.⁴ Barber’s paper contended that the View Planes preserved a militaristic scenography by the enfranchised political and economic class and perpetuated a historic exclusion of marginalized ethnic, economic, social and political groups within Halifax’s heritage landscape.

After the meeting that morning on Citadel Hill a representative from Parks Canada asked how I would feel about removing Barber’s quotation from the piece. A two-month long conversation ensued resulting in the removal of all quotations from the sculpture. The explanation I was ultimately given for removal was that, “As federal agency, Parks Canada must be neutral at all times, and especially right now because we are in the middle of a federal election.”⁵

Africville

The charged word in that quotation was ‘Africville’ a small community of African Nova Scotians on the northern tip of the Halifax Peninsula demolished by the city in the late 1960s. In conversation a representative from Parks Canada confirmed that if the word ‘Africville’ appeared on the sculpture it would not be allowed on Citadel property. The destruction of Africville is a fraught moment in the story of Halifax whose aftershocks are felt to this day.⁶ It was a centuries old community stretching back to the late 1700s and under the power of eminent domain levelled for the purposes of industrial expansion, slum clearance, and racial integration.⁷ “place Illustration 6 here”

Fig. 6: Photos of the relocation of Africville residents. Possessions were moved using city garbage trucks. (image courtesy of Dr. Ted Grant, O.C.)

The concern of the Citadel, later explained by an associate was that any offense taken by the mention of Africville could make its way back to the conservative federal government and

impact the funding stream for the national heritage site.⁸ As the entire installation was highly site specific there was no option of moving it elsewhere. And it already had acquired a significant investment of resources. Rather than abandon the project, it was moved forward and initiated a process of intellectual and ethical exploration.

Attention, Exclusion, and the Modern Subject

In seeking to understand the evaluations of modern urban territories which lead to the preservation of one landscape and the destruction of another it is useful to consider the perceptions through which such assessments are made. These are the perceptions of a modern subject. Central to the construction of the modern subject, according to Jonathan Crary in Suspensions of Perception, is the notion of ‘attention.’ His concern with regards to attention is not just what it focuses on, but what it excludes:

“Western modernity since the nineteenth century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for ‘paying attention,’ that is, for a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli.”⁹

“Attention as a process of selection necessarily meant that perception was an activity of *exclusion*, of rendering parts of a perceptual field unperceived.”¹⁰

Crary cites instruments of attention such as the stereoscope, kaleidoscope, and panorama as serving to aid in the construction of the modern subject. “place Illustration 7 here”

Fig. 7: A Kaiserpanorama optical control device. Exterior view, section, and plan. (from Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*)

The discussion of these instruments, although they are largely for amusement, puts forth the idea of a modern experience which is constructed instrumentally; through codes, rules, and procedures at the exclusion of the larger field of stimuli. Thus, an urban planning concept such as ‘integration’ or a planning tool like the View Plane become instruments forcing a subject’s attention in one area at the exclusion of another. Records of events of the demolition and resettlement of Africville demonstrate how attention on the instrument of ‘integration’ led to only cursory visits to the neighborhood and the exclusion of assessments of kinship ties, ownership, and civic identity.¹¹ In short, the plight of the residents of Africville was denied the close observation and scrutiny that characterized the defense of the view from Citadel Hill. If one compares the hours of pain-staking construction of surveyed geometries and view mock-ups afforded the View Planes – the employment of rich professionalized instruments of vision “place Illustration 8 here”

Fig. 8: View mock-up (top left), View Plane mapping (right), and View Plane land area impact assessment (bottom left) are but some of the analysis techniques employed by city officials and civic advocates to justify and assess the View Planes. (from Elizabeth Pacey, *The Battle for Citadel Hill*)

– to the cursory analysis employed by city officials and civic representatives when evaluating the conditions of Africville the disparities are considerable.¹²

The Modern Subject and Political Agency

The common thread between the destruction of Africville and the preservation of the view from Citadel Hill was the social and economic class of their respective political agents. These agents were a certain class of modern subject with means and expertise to self-actualize their readings and conceptions of the urban environment.¹³ Crary refers to these realizations and conceptions, this narrowing of attention, as a ‘self-constituting freedom’: attention as an expression of the conscious will of an autonomous subject.¹⁴

Elizabeth Pacey’s The Battle for Citadel Hill recounts the events of 1968 to 1972 from the first objections to downtown high-rise development to the inscription of the fixed gaze of the urban subject into the zoning by-laws of the city. In the case of the view from Citadel Hill the notion of freedom was personalized, defended through its subjective significance.¹⁵ Recorded defenses of ‘the view’ included verbiage of ownership and identity such as “It is the Citadel plus the view that makes this the most attractive site in Halifax and it is a view that really belongs to all Nova Scotians – and Canadians.”¹⁶ Thus, preservation of the view was understood by this dominant class to be not only the will of their own autonomous individual subjectivity. But by extension it was understood as the will of the collective subject of an entire national citizenry. A citizenry ostensibly including residents of Africville who, although they could be guaranteed the scenic vista from Citadel Hill, were offered no such guarantee on their homes and property.

Instruments

‘Citadel Beacon’ was likewise conceived by a modern subject, the author, hailing from a similar professionalized, enfranchised class as the View Plane advocates and sharing the same appreciation for preserved vistas and their inscription on urban form. As an architect and member of the professionalized class of architects and planners who demarcated the views¹⁷ my initial response to the View Planes was to reinforce the instruments of practice which established them, such as surveyed geometries, measured drawings, models, etc.. “place Illustration 9 here”

Fig. 9: ‘Citadel Beacon’ competition proposal drawing demonstrating the construction of the installation around View Planes 1, 3, and 5 as well as the graphic illustration of the View Planes on a map.

In reckoning with these instruments of attention and exclusion it has become important to understand their methodology and mechanism. The sculpture employed an instrumentalized methodology of construction, part and parcel of the surveying and visual simulation of the View Plane design, in developing an object which was experienced in the round. Like the viewing devices of the nineteenth century the architecture of the sculpture was constructed around the mechanics of vision. Surveyor located points, digital modeling, CNC milling fabrication and on-site surveying produced a technically precise optical device whose mechanics of operation ultimately determined the sculpture’s massing and geometry. “place Illustration 10 here”

Fig. 10: ‘Citadel Beacon’ process photos (from left to right): an early on site mock-up of the installation; a slab of EPS foam mounted to a CNC mill for shaping; milled foam slabs and cinder block base during pre-installation mock-up; in-progress installation.

Stripped of textual content linking the instrument of the View Planes to narratives of the city, ‘Citadel Beacon’ served mainly a didactic function: enriching observers’ understanding of an urban massing tool, but neglecting the political and social implications implicit in such a tool. “place Illustration 11 here”

Fig. 11: ‘Citadel Beacon’ installation photo.

Political Instruments

If we consider questions of memorial, questions of memory, which haunt sites of commemoration we are confronted not only with remembrance. We are also confronted with amnesia. Like the pairing of Crary’s attention and exclusion, the act of remembering entails a corollary of forgetting.

Today Africville’s memory is characterized by a small museum – a rebuilt community church - established through a legal settlement with the city.¹⁸ The museum acquires funding independently and is neglected by provincial tourist advertisements. It often has to turn away interested visitors and student groups because of poor pedestrian access and lack of public transportation infrastructure.¹⁹ “place Illustration 12 here”

Fig. 12: A reconstruction of the original community church houses the Africville Museum (left). Access to the museum is limited by poor pedestrian infrastructure and no public transit services.

The plight of the Museum reflects a tokenized visibility alongside an ongoing practice of civic forgetting and neglect.

Jennifer Nelson, writing on Africville, looks to other stories of urban trauma, uncovering both remembering and forgetting claiming that “... the recent cultural incitement to remember history is simply the other side of the coin on which historical amnesia is imprinted.”²⁰

An example she cites is Lisa Yoneyama’s study of urban renewal in modern-day Hiroshima. Yoneyama claims that efforts of renewal in Hiroshima are mixed with the city’s desire to present its history and national narrative in a particular light.

“Through attempts to decentre memory of the war and to downplay the nearly axiomatic cognitive conflation of the city with atom bomb ... Hiroshima has engaged in a project of reforming the cityscape to carve out ‘new knowledge and consciousness, as well as amnesia, about history and society.’ While occupying very different contexts from each other and from Halifax, the [example of Hiroshima asserts] that the regulation and reconstruction of space are inextricably linked to how memory and forgetting can occur.”²¹

In the project of ‘reforming the cityscape’ the View Plane is a powerful instrument. It preserves a view – a past – and restricts what you can build – projecting a particular future. Thus certain things are remembered, and privileged, and certain things forgotten, or neglected. It has written into it mechanisms for remembering and forgetting as it simultaneously regulates and reconstructs space.

Counter View-Planes and Productive Exclusion

Considering the total mechanism of the View Plane – both the excluded and included – creates a complex remembrance. Typically, the View Plane is explicitly concerned with what is preserved. What is cropped out is largely an afterthought. But what if the View Plane was focused just as intently on what was forgotten as what was remembered? “place Illustration 13 here”

Fig. 13: Looking out of Dan Dixon’s back door, 1965 (left) (image courtesy of Dr. Ted Grant, O.C.). The same view, present day. Note the highway in the foreground (right).

The images presented here are mock-ups of what such an experience or artifact could be, a Counter View Plane. “place Illustration 14 here”

Fig. 14: Counter View Plane Mock-up. Africville experienced from the same vantage point from two different eras, with conflicting context excluded.

They seek to conjure the potential outcomes of a process of productive exclusion. By editing out the contemporary contexts – evidence of destruction - and capturing the fragments of lingering vistas it is expected that a triggering of memory can occur and a transportation in time. “place Illustration 15 here”

Fig. 15: A collection of Counter View Plane experiences. (Top and bottom right images courtesy of Dr. Ted Grant, O.C. Middle right reprinted with permission from The Chronicle Herald.)

Someone who experienced such a view fifty years ago may be – through the glimpse of a fragment – temporarily transported back to a place devoid of highways and vanished homes, and filled with the experience of community. Likewise, a visitor, without history or attachment to Africville may understand in the round, in three-dimensional space and time, through a fragment, what the specialness or experience of Africville once was. Whether the view from a favorite window, a stand of flowers, a patch of grass, a favored tree, once formalized it would enter the playing field of heritage politics presently dominated by the British colonial militaristic story of the view from Citadel Hill.

These Counter View Planes would not be initiated as objects, but rather as a process. For such a process to be successful the methodology for identifying the counter View Planes necessitates openness and integration: a non-standard kind of professionalized practice. They need to originate through encounters – in groups and individually – collective wanderings and mappings through which a hierarchy of vistas will evolve. In the case of Africville they require the solicitation of precise and specific memories and sites from members of the Africville

community. In this kind of practice architects and planners behave more intimately as agents of the social imagination. Memories and sites are then given the care and expertise afforded the Citadel View Planes with the specialized instruments and activities of professional practices. However, these tools and instruments of the professional class must be handled transparently, in exchange with community expertise. A redirection and regeneration of these instruments can then be achieved through dialogue and an exchange of expertise, experience, and resources. This inevitably will lead to the generation of new devices, new instruments of attention and, perhaps, a new kind of modern subject.

Conclusion

“Citadel Beacon,” while initially playing into the militarist, exclusionary history of the city of Halifax, evolved in an attempt to address this exclusion. The process of this installation’s censorship inspired an inquiry into the role of instrumentalized vision in the urban realm as a tool of remembering and a tool of forgetting. “Citadel Beacon Redux,” while studying the implications of instrumentalized vision and the political narratives of the city, tries to establish a preliminary methodology for rewriting this instrumentalization without discarding the instruments themselves. These instruments are not neutral. As shown by Crary, they condition and shape the consciousness of the modern subject. Therefore, the hands which form them and the resources and agency afforded those hands become opportunities for political visibility, political exposure and the orchestration of productive exclusions.

‘Citadel Beacon’ Project Team

Pearl Chang, M. Arch. Candidate, Dalhousie University

Jason Ejzenbart, M. Arch. Candidate, Dalhousie University

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Biography

James Forren's research addresses the aesthetics of technology: how building methods and materials impact the perception of our environment; and how an aesthetic inquiry into the means and methods of building technologies can re-inform their use. Digital technologies and their application to construction processes is one component of this work. Writings, exhibits, and built projects are the vehicles for inquiry carried out under the umbrella of Stilfragen Architecture, Art and Design often in partnership with industry and community groups. James currently teaches Design Studios, Building Systems Integration, and Technology Research Seminars as an Assistant Professor in Architecture at Dalhousie University. He holds a Master of Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Endnotes

¹ Lachlan B. Barber, "Making Meaning of Heritage Landscapes," *Canadian Geographer* 57.1 (2013): 95

² Elizabeth Pacey, *The Battle of Citadel Hill* (Hantsport, N.S. : Lancelot Press, 1979), p. 5

³ Fenwick16, "Skyscraperpage.com/Forum/ Halifax Viewplanes/Sightlines", May 22, 2010, 12:10 PM, <http://forum.skyscraperpage.com/showthread.php?t=162180>

⁴ "Making Meaning of Heritage Landscapes," p. 92

⁵ Anonymous, e-mail message to author, August 11, 2015

⁶ Brett Bundale. "Africville Land Settlements Possible," in *Herald News* (16 December 2014)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Anonymous in discussion with the author, August 2015

⁹ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1999), p. 1

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 24

¹¹ Jennifer Nelson, *Razing Africville* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 88

¹² *ibid.*, p. 87

¹³ Pacey, *Battle*, p. 10 and Nelson, *Razing Africville*, p. 87. Pacey's reference is to the emergence of a new "visual plan," "artistic city planning," and the preservation of historic neighborhoods as a corollary to opposition to high-rise development. While Nelson references the inputs to the razing of Africville arriving largely from the professional class. Although advocates for the View Planes may not have been exclusively from a professional planning background they emphasized an aesthetically-based urban discourse exclusive of income or social welfare concerns. And while the professional inputs around Africville addressed social

welfare concepts such as “integration” these concepts were exclusive of the desires of the Africville residents and the particularities of their community. In both cases the concepts of “artistic planning” and “integration” are concerns articulated by a particular professional class.

¹⁴ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 25

¹⁵ Pacey, *Citadel Hill*, p. 19

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 42

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 66 Prof. Besim Hakim of the School of Architecture, Nova Scotia Technical College, produced the initial View Plane drawings. NSTC is now Dalhousie University School of Architecture, where the author now teaches.

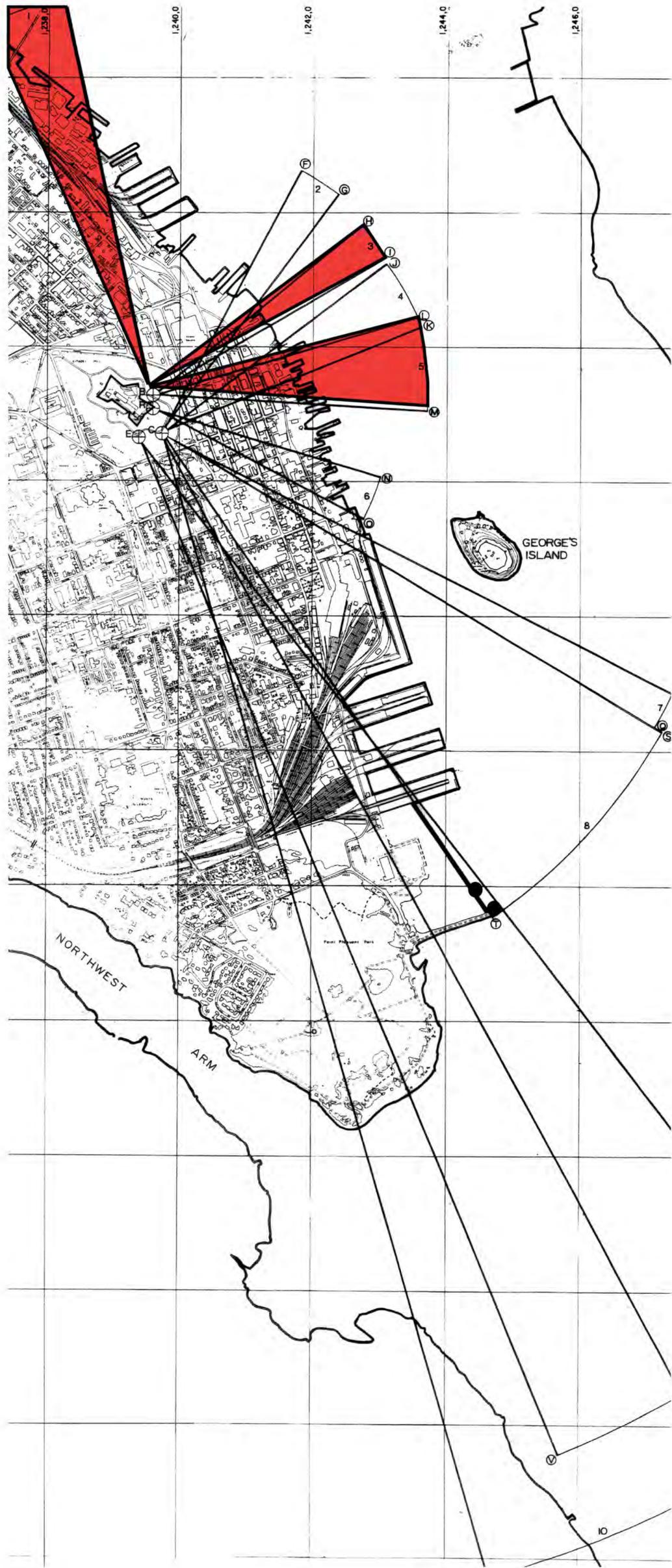
¹⁸ “About the Museum,” Africville Museum, accessed August 4, 2016, <http://africvillemuseum.org/the-story/>

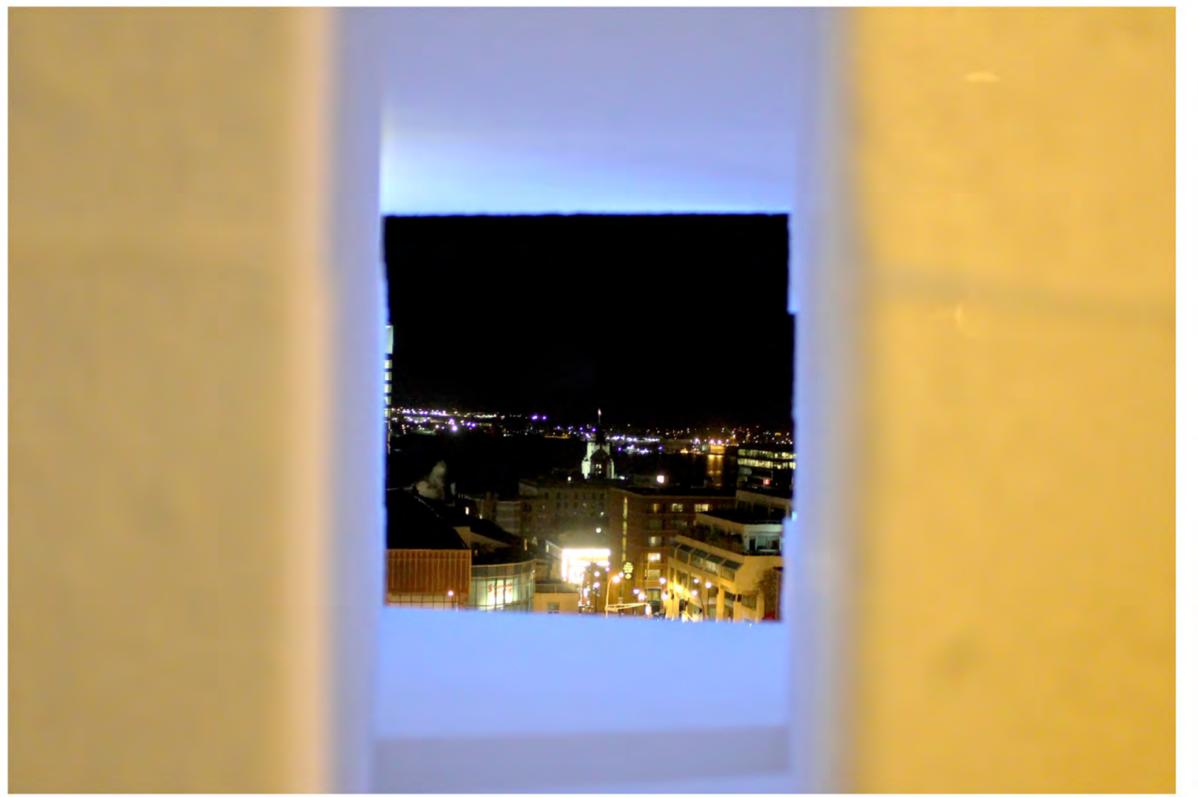
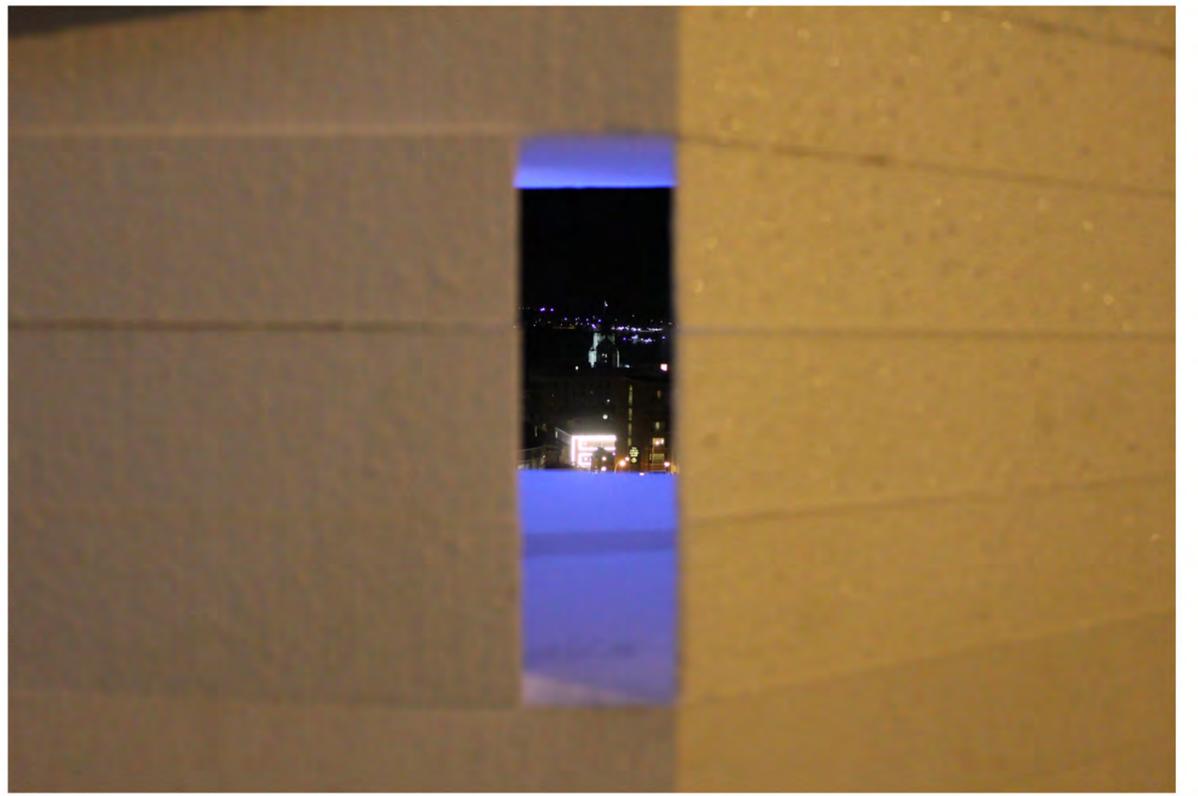
¹⁹ Tracey McCallum (Africville Museum) in discussion with the author, August 2015

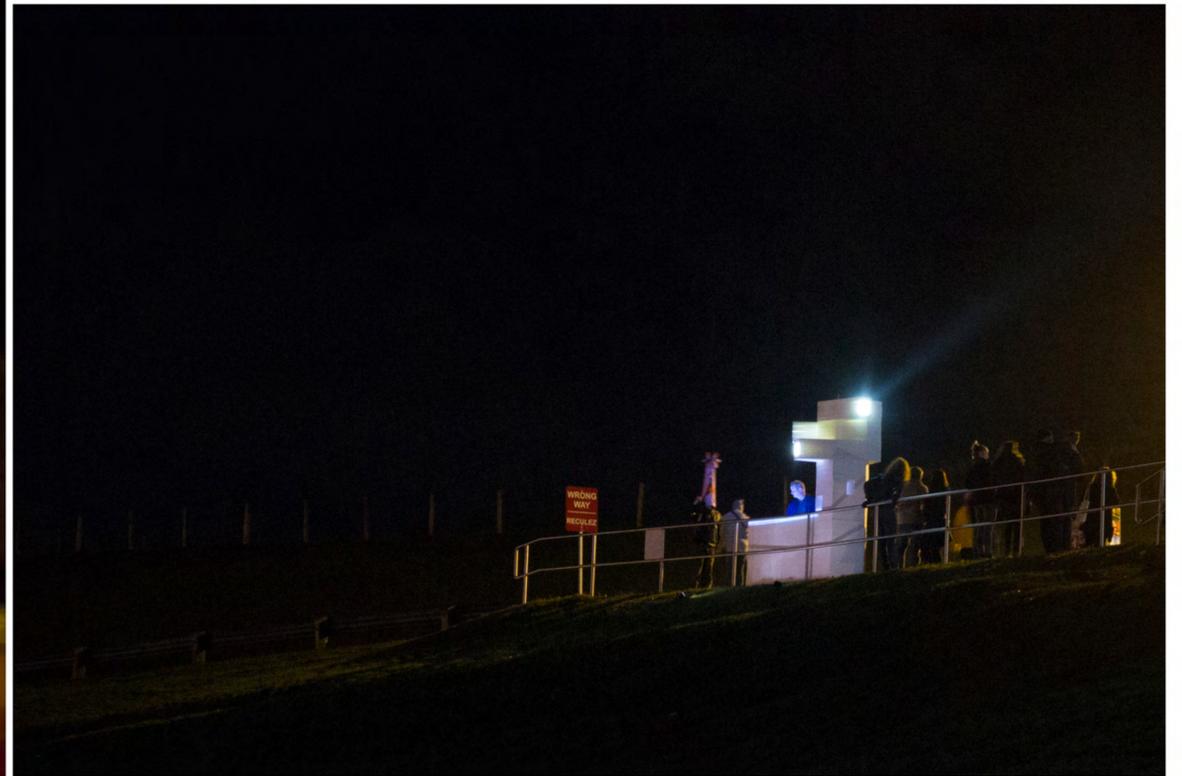
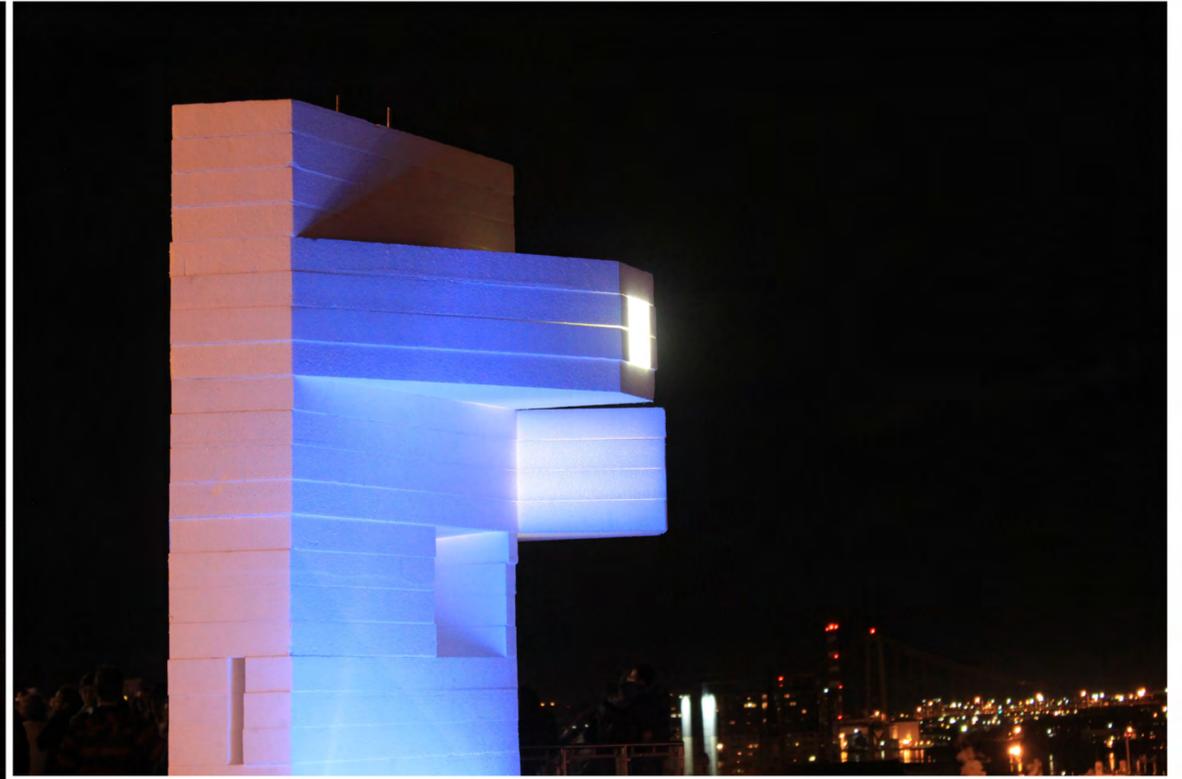
²⁰ Nelson, *Razing Africville*, p. 141

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117

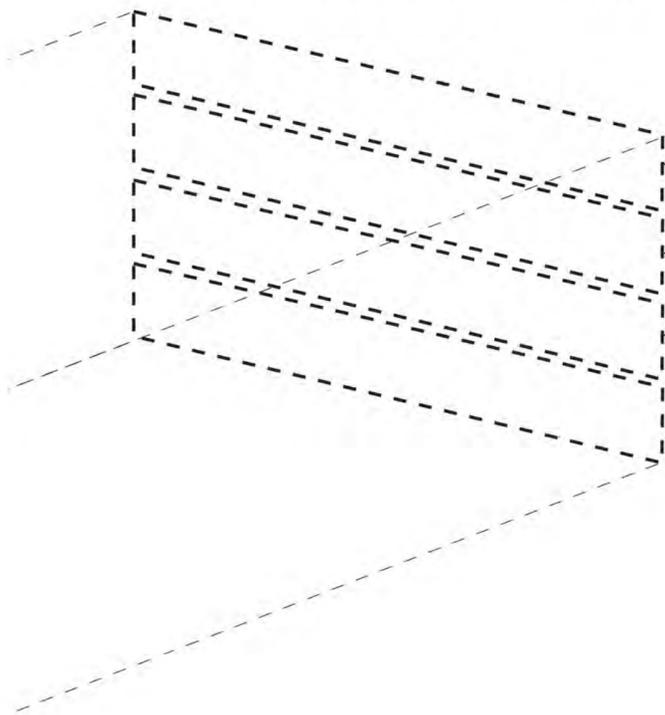








**Laser Etched Quotations
on Clear Acrylic
Illuminated from Behind**



Sample Quotations:

‘The defenders of the Hill were not the British soldiers that had garrisoned the fortress for a century and a half but citizens, young and old, who spoke out for the protection of the City’s vantage point and sweeping view of the harbour.’

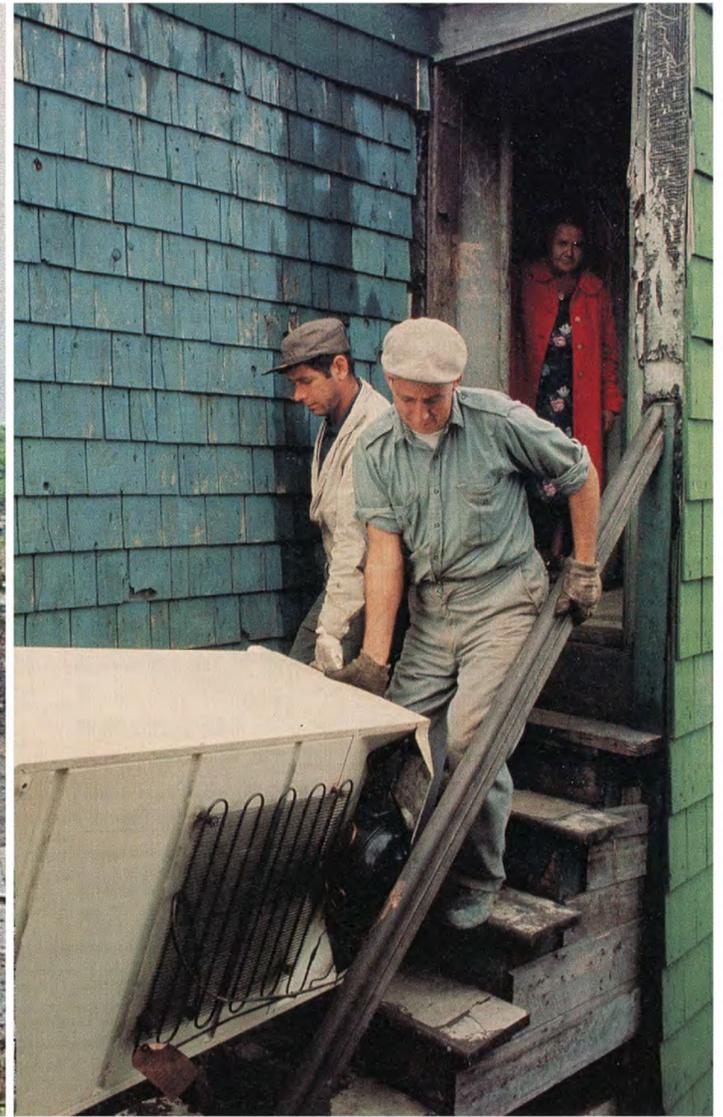
- Elizabeth Pacey, 1979

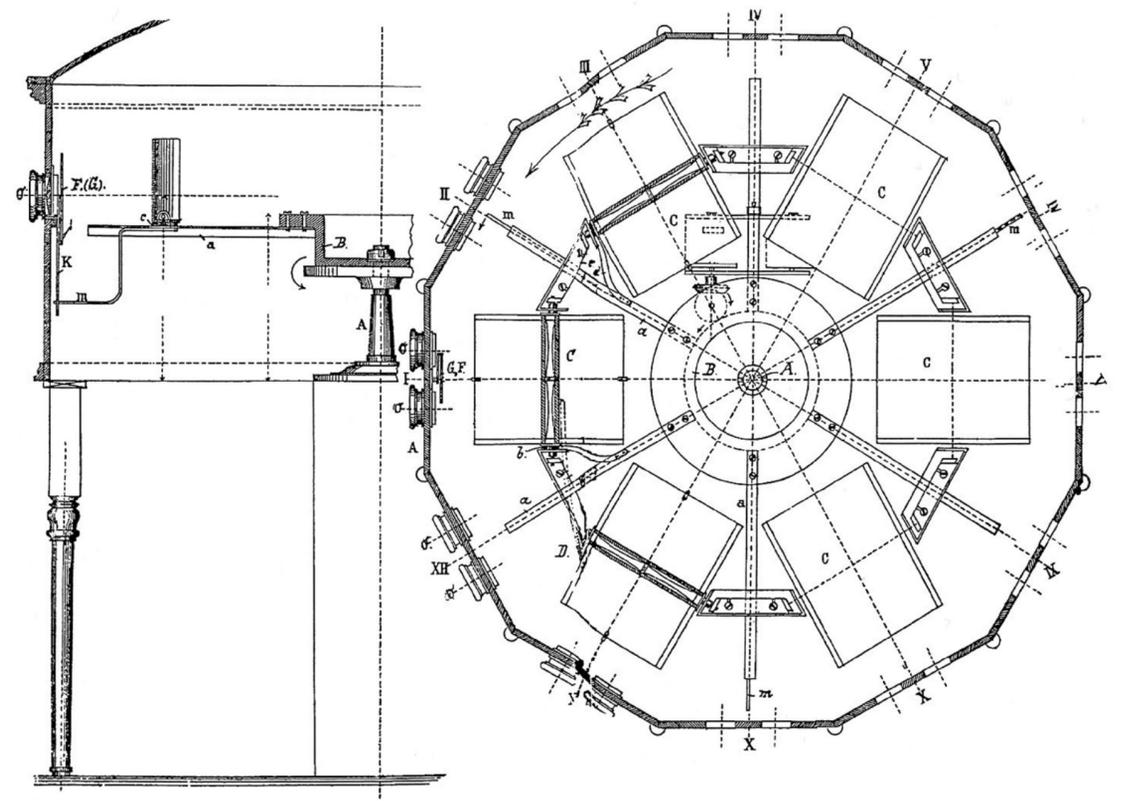
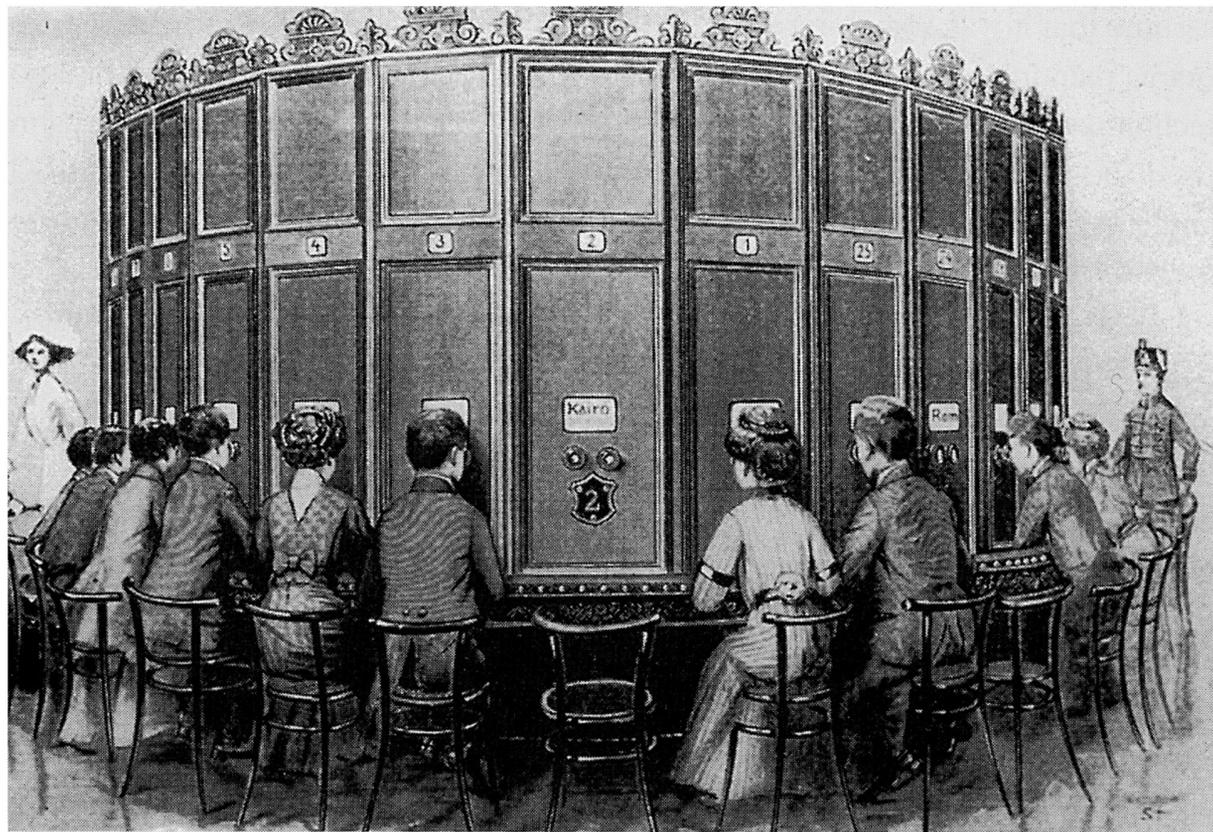
‘I have always disliked these viewplane bylaws and would like to see them scrapped as well as the overly restrictive height limits in the HRM by Design.’

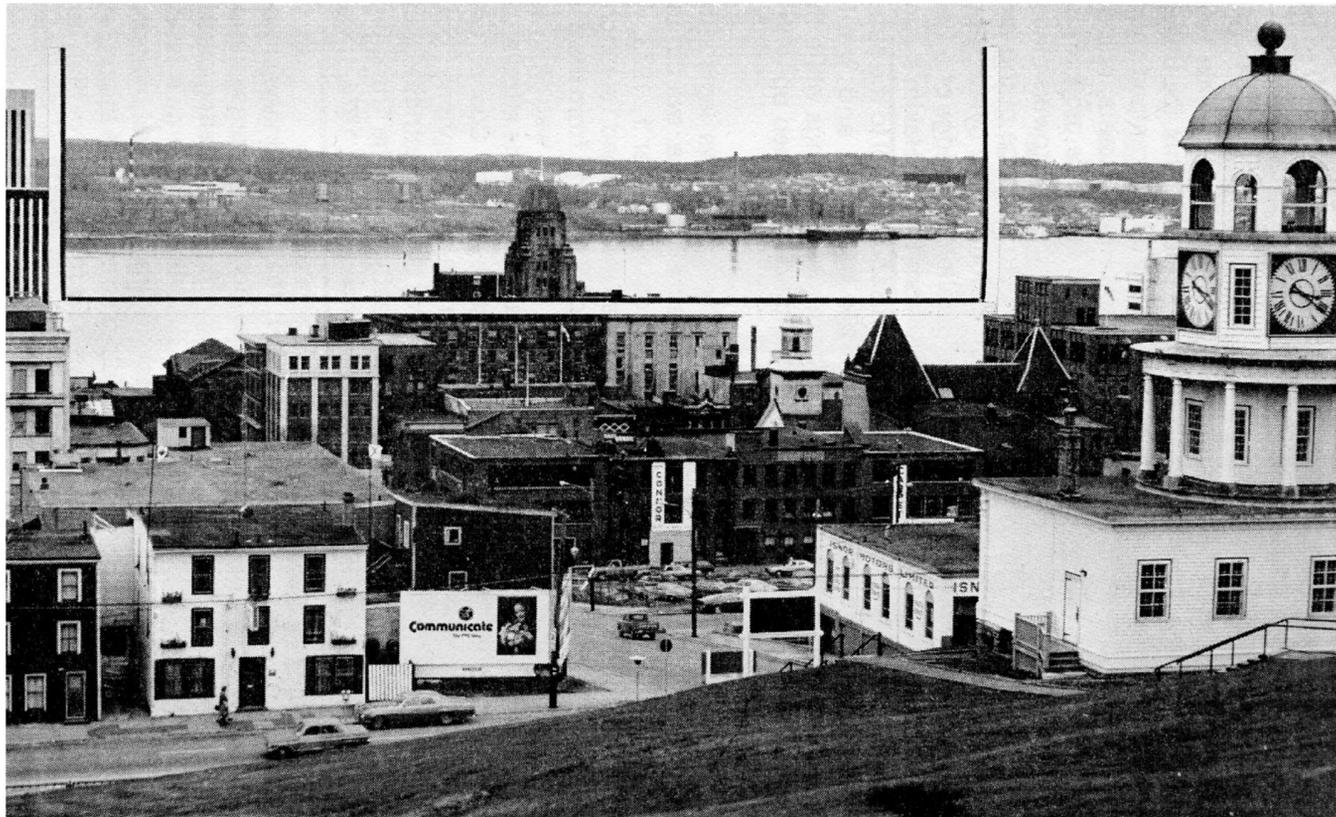
- fenwick16 (skyscraperpage.com), 2010

‘Africville’s absence from discussions concerning heritage in the central city is not due to the two issues being unrelated, but rather speaks to a long history of exclusion and marginalisation upon which the city, as a colonial, military space, depended.’

- Lachlan B. Barber, 2013



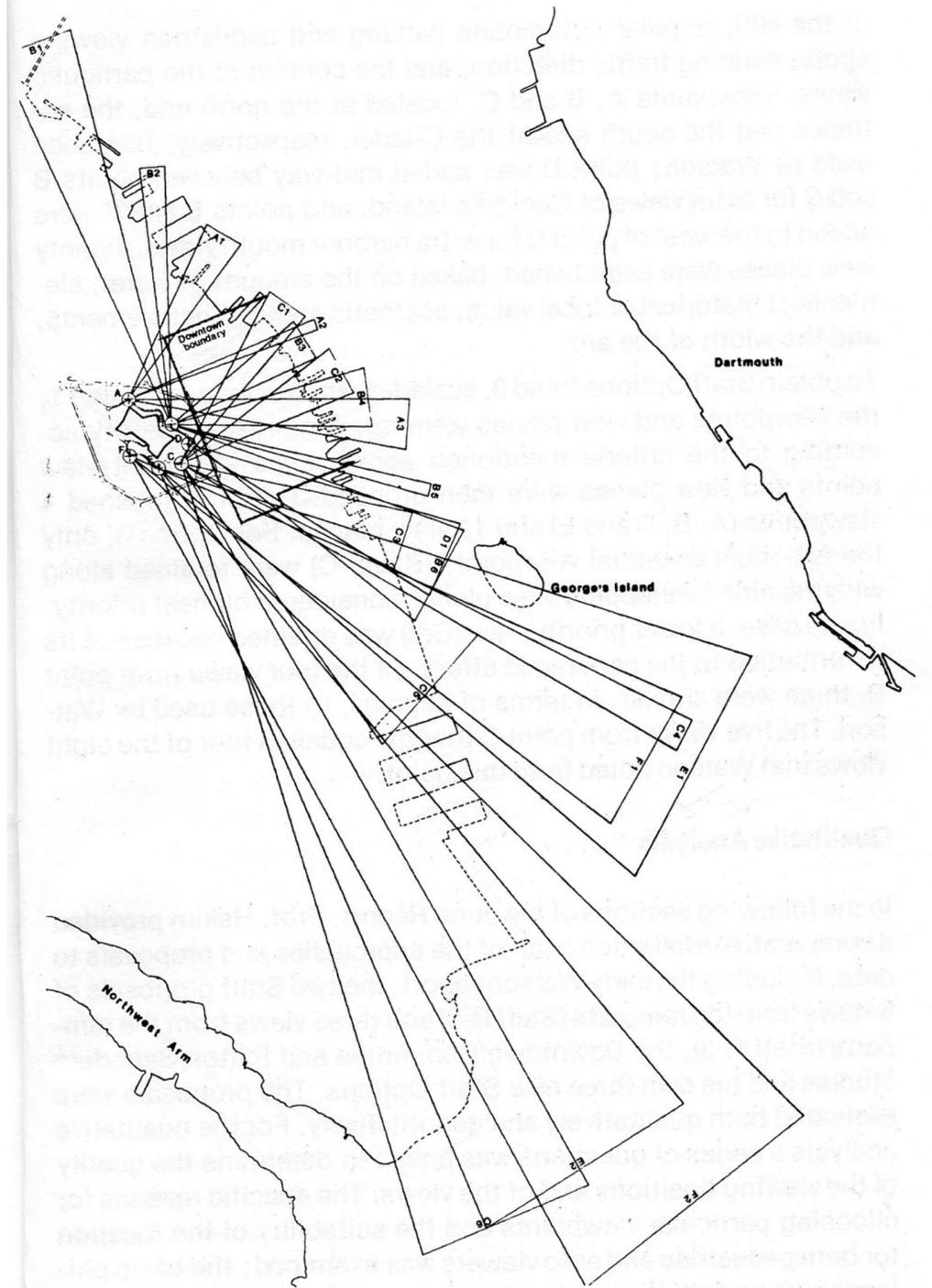




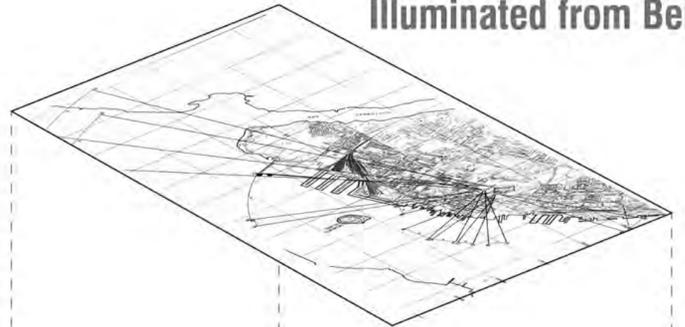
LAND AREAS AFFECTED BY VIEW RESTRICTIONS

	Gross Area		Net Area of Private Land Susceptible to Development	
	Overall Boundary	Downtown	Overall Boundary	Downtown
Watson	547.0	86.0	82.3	28.9
Staff R-6	575.4	42.0	64.8	11.4
Staff R-3	370.2	18.2	39.3	5.2
Downtown Committee	338.4	76.0	58.1	18.1
Staff Option 1	670.5	72.1	92.7	22.3
Staff Option 2	539.0	54.8	77.0	16.8
Staff Option 3	296.8	55.6	47.4	16.3

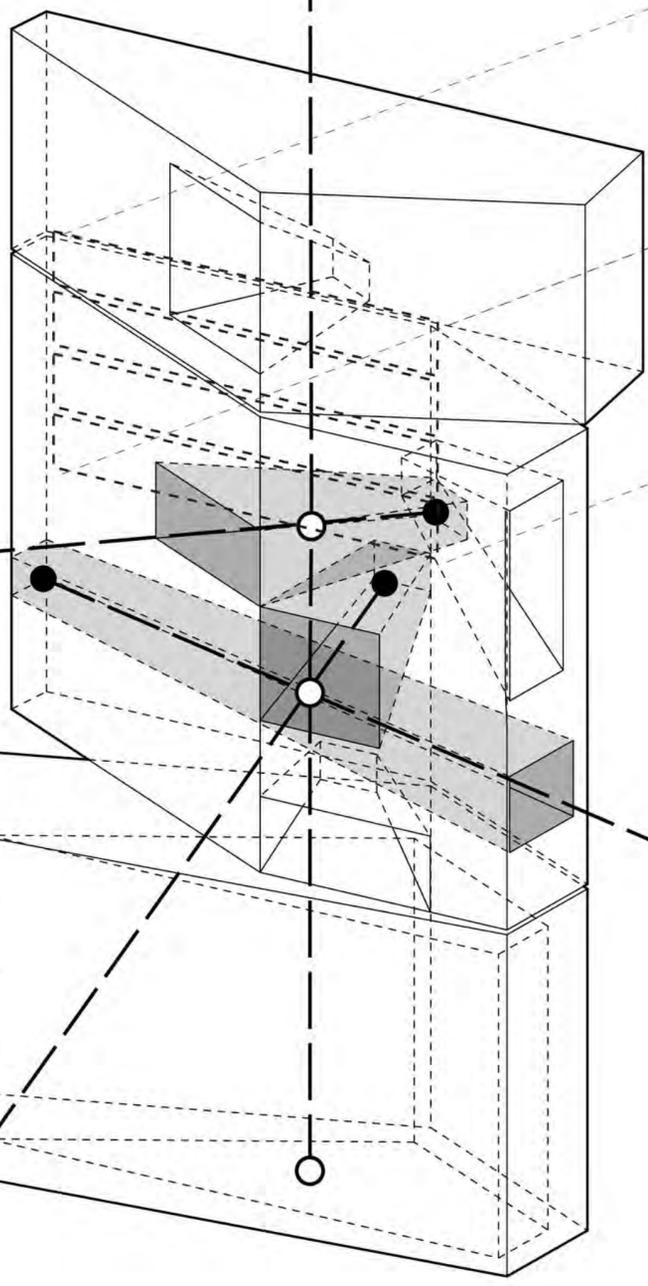
All areas are in acres. Net areas exclude areas of streets. Material on the Patton/Saunders proposal was not available for calculations. Source: Halifax City Planning Department, *Views from Citadel Hill: Halifax, N.S., Proposed Bylaw*, June, 1973.



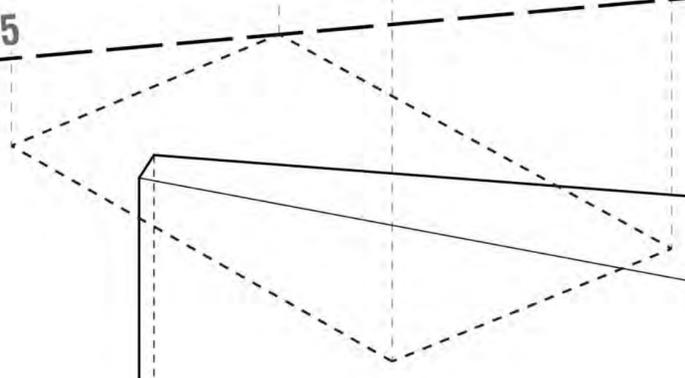
**Laser Etched Context
Map on Clear Acrylic
Illuminated from Behind**



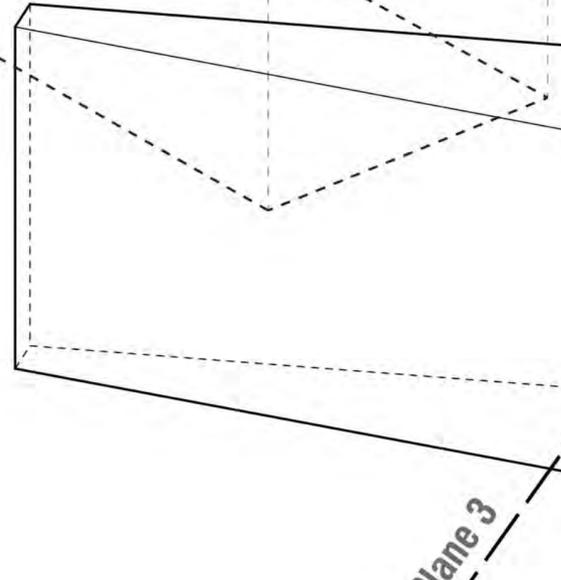
Viewing Position B



View Plane 5



View Plane 3



View Plane 1

