

Your Body
queering
is a
the
Battleground
halifax citadel



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THE HALIFAX CITADEL: THE ULTIMATE QUEER LANDSCAPE ?

In this society, there are few established and visible spaces for people of oppressed and marginalized sexualities -- gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, anyone residing outside the hegemonic notions of “normalcy” henceforth labeled *queer* – to meet and congregate in peace. Forced underground and illegitimate by prejudice, queers have been largely unable to make “place” out of space; thus they have created invisible “places” through the usage or appropriation of heterosexual (normal/non-queer) spaces. This is a crucial paradox of queer identity: *invisibility in plain sight*. Everywhere, queers are and have been congregating in the public domain: parks, public squares, malls, libraries, beaches, cinemas, sidewalks, the internet, subway stations, and public washrooms. The queer city is an ever-changing assortment of spaces whose map is never drawn.

Queers have never *invented*, but have instead re-invented/ re-used/ re-structured what they needed from the ‘normal’ realm. Always resisting the institutions that perpetuate oppressive social constructions, they “re-create” rather than “create”, utilizing and subverting the constructs that already stand. From nail polish to biker gear, from public parks to cyberspace, nothing has ever been explicitly *designed* for queers. So Queer design, then – or queer “architecture” (yet another social construction) -- must begin with the appropriation and subversion of things already invented in the heterosexual world.

For a critical architectural engagement with normal/existing architecture, I searched for sites containing a high degree of ‘normal’ masculine behavior, where the repression of sexuality was an embedded code within the design. The search included places of banking and business, sports arenas, gyms, and religious meeting places, but focused primarily on military institutions, where “queer” sexuality is highly repressed and, as a by-product, becomes a major (albeit invisible) presence in the space.

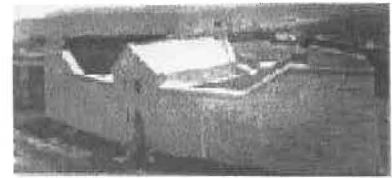


The Ramble, Central Park

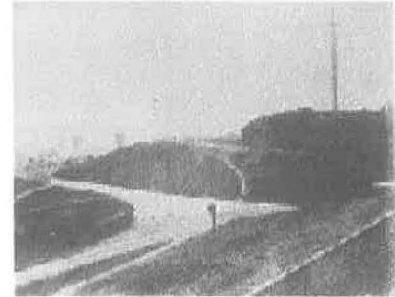
So I move to the Halifax Citadel, a heterosexual military space filled with repressed sexuality that becomes, upon certain inspection, a quintessential queer landscape already. In its present context as a national park and tourist destination, the citadel is paradoxically the most central, predominant location in the city as well as the most isolated, residing both *inside* the city as well as *outside*. A traditional icon of strength in the city, it is scarcely visible due to its immersion in the landscape, further reflecting the paradox of gay identity: invisibility in plain sight.

The citadel's star-like plan is based on triangular redans and ravelins designed for the optimum combination of views commanding the defended land, and deflection of enemy fire. The multi-angled plan and the immersion of the citadel into the land results in a series of projections and coves in and around which orientation is difficult, if not impossible. This creates an effective form of defense, while also establishing a complex framework that lends itself to individual reappropriation. In other words, while the casual observer might not be able to delineate (or even locate themselves within) the overall layout, someone who makes the effort to become acquainted with his/her own view of the structure can be quite comfortable in its uniqueness. This is a quality that places the citadel among the queerest of queer spaces. The citadel's isolation and confusing orientation as one walks, drives, or *cruises* around its upper perimeter are similar to a twisting, lonely rural road. This quality in combination with the citadel's proximity to Halifax's downtown bar scene and businesses creates the ultimate queer meeting conditions. Furthermore, like many other urban public spaces, it is not an accident that the citadel continues to be an excellent meeting place for those desiring queer contact in an environment of minimal (repressed) conspicuousness.

What I want to do to the citadel is create a design to augment its already-existing queerness, working within the institution of architecture while still upholding queer subversivity, with the intention of proposing a model for queer design.



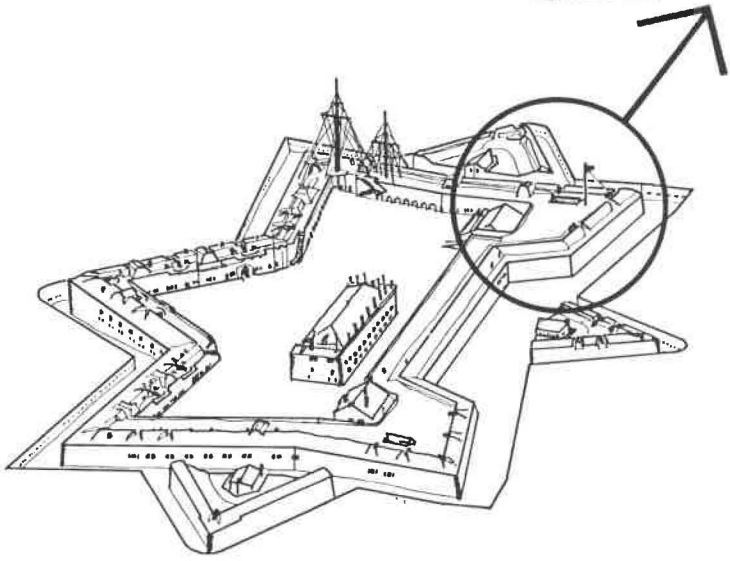
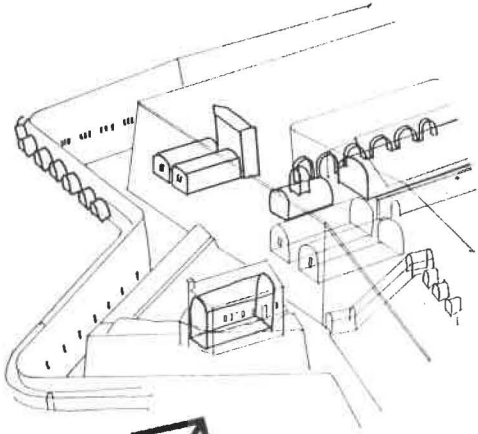
Guardhouse and Ravelin from Ramparts, Halifax Citadel.



Moat Roadway, Halifax Citadel



Musketry Gallery #54, Halifax Citadel



IN ^{SEARCH} OF A QUEER DESIGN M E T H O D

The citadel has an extremely clear and powerful architectural language. Highly orchestrated views, un-tame materials, labyrinthine spatial connections, sizes, and lighting conditions make the spaces of the citadel extremely sexual in their own right. In keeping with the qualities of queer space and in order to avoid the disintegration of the latent sexuality of the citadel, I proposed the following rules for a queer design method:

Queer space is never invented

“There is no queer space; there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use.”¹

Michel de Certeau argues that space is always invested with meaning by its users as well as its creators, and even when its creators have the power to define its official and dominant meaning, its users are usually able to develop tactics that allow them to use the space in alternative, even oppositional ways that confound the designs of its creators.²

Conceptual design attempts in which I proposed breaking away parts or adding new and foreign parts to the citadel, were unsuccessful because the latent queerness of the site was disrupted. Whether feminizing its masculine war machine language, dressing the citadel in drag or deconstructing its masculine body, significant new additions or subtractions were too intentional to be sexy or sexual. Queerness has taught us to resist the urge to force bodies to be something they are not.

¹ George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets” *STUD: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press: 1996) p,224.

² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)pp.xviii-xx, pp 29-42 taken from George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets” *STUD: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press: 1996) p,224.

Queer space is a place of realized erotics & desire

It must always be remembered that the purpose of queer delineation is to uphold an erotic self and support the open flow of sexual energy (unhindered or contained by heterosexual/oppressive constructs). An element of desire, then, can never be stifled.

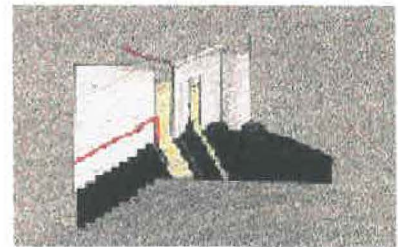
At the heart of eroticism is a focus on the self. At the heart of desire is the mysterious visual interplay of self and other. The arena of desire is the image (imagination, presentation, etc.); most importantly, the image that is both defined and undefined, both discernable and mysterious, both accessible and impossible to reach.



Planned assaults

Lars Lerup calls the changes average inhabitants make to their built environment – to make more habitable -- planned assaults. These everyday appropriations of the creations of ‘normal’ builders provides an excellent basis for a queer method. Planned assaults on the citadel are small changes to an already existing order.

Ironically, the simple guideline for this method reflects similar guidelines used by heritage committees or historical boards charged with the responsibility of regulating changes or updates to historical landmarks. The question of how to change or add while maintaining the queerness of the citadel is the same question of how to make an historical site like the Citadel accessible to tourists - who need additions to facilitate understanding and interpretation, access, and comfort: (signs, washrooms, ramps, café's). Every commission that has had to deal with modernizing a historical landmark for public visit would understand this method of planned assaults.



Love House, Lars Lerup

Satire as re-appropriation

Because it mocks a subject by re-inventing or altering it (juxtaposition, exaggeration) for comical and critical purposes, satire is highly queer.³ The design method and architectural language for the queering of the citadel is one that draws on a series of architectural discourses or precedents to re-invent and/or draw critical attention to them. Throughout the project, some of the precedents on which the design draws or quotes for the purpose of satirical criticism or homage are: Public washrooms, art galleries, renaissance palaces, Gothic cathedrals and religious architecture in general, stagecraft, activist art, dance clubs, peep shows, the Hellenistic gymnasia, cinemas, the Yale Rare Book Library, The Thirsty Duck (a Halifax Bar), Villa Savoye, the closet, fitness gyms, locker rooms, vernacular architecture of the maritimes, the architecture of the citadel itself, works by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Perkins and Will, S.I.T.E., Lars Lerup, Hans Hollein, Frank Lloyd Wright, Bruce Goff, Rem Koolhaas, Phillip Johnson, John Soane, Frederick Law Olmstead, Mies Van Der Rohe, Charles Moore, Mark Robbins, IOOA, Kennedy and Violich, Machado and Silvetti, Pierre Charreau, Brian Mackay-Lyons, Steve Parcel and a few of my classmates.

Gesture

A word with negative connotations in a setting of architectural criticism, *gesture* is the queer 'other' of architectural language.

"In our society we have conventionalized and institutionalized gesture in acting, whether formally (onstage) or in the street. Queers are masters of the hidden gesture, the theatrical walk, the creation of those close physical connections through the most fleeting motions of the body. Gesture finds its most physical points in buildings that refuse to sit still, obey orders, or tell a simple story of order."⁴

The making of queer spaces in the citadel involves gestures - ideas and methods of communication that do not necessarily mesh with the visible norm.



Glass House with "reclining" bench.

Philip Johnson

³ An example of how satire and irony become a necessary component of queer culture and space is the way queer public meeting places were named: "By the 1930's the men's washroom in the Times Square subway station and the comfort station at Times Square were used so frequently for sexual encounters that they became widely known among gay men as the "Sunken Gardens" (possibly an allusion to the song by Beatrice Lillie about the Fairies at the bottom of *her* garden). Gay men dubbed all the restrooms (often called "t-rooms," short for "toilet-rooms," in early twentieth-century slang) "tearooms," which allowed them to discuss their adventures surreptitiously in mixed company, and may also have been an arch comment on the rooms' significance as social centers." George Chauncey, "Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets" *STUD: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press: 1996) p,250.

⁴ Aaron Betsky *Queer Space* (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc. 1997)

Queer Architecture is Minor Architecture

Minor architecture is subtle, non competitive, subversive. It operates with small design moves that carry intense impact due to highly subtle organization juxtaposition, and re-invention.⁵

Rules are for those who can't think on their own

Queerness suggests that rules are not held in high regard, as rules often impose narrow limits and definitions. On many occasions, particularly in the final design stages, the rules became flexible as confidence in earlier moves increased.

⁵ For more on Minor Architecture, See Jennifer bloomer: *D'or* in "Sexuality and Space" (Beatriz Colomina , ed New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press. 1992) and John Paul Ricco: *Coming Together: Jack-Off Rooms as Minor Architecture* in "Architecture/Research/ Criticism" No. 5, 1995.

THE QUEERING OF THE C I T A D E L

Because of the citadel's complex nature, and also remembering that each individual "re-appropriation" is valid, it would be unnecessary to attempt a design (re-design) of the entire citadel. Instead I've chosen four spaces on which to test my methods: the musketry galleries, the guard-house, the prison casemates, and the ammunition magazine.

Queering the Musketry Galleries

The musketry galleries are a continuous strip of shooting galleries that wrap around the outside wall of the moat. They are arranged so that all areas within the moat are viewable from many of the galleries. A penetrating intruder, once having fallen into the moat, instantly becomes a target. Intended for a maximum of two to three soldiers, each dimly lit 9'x6'x9' gallery is connected by a 6' high opening to the next.

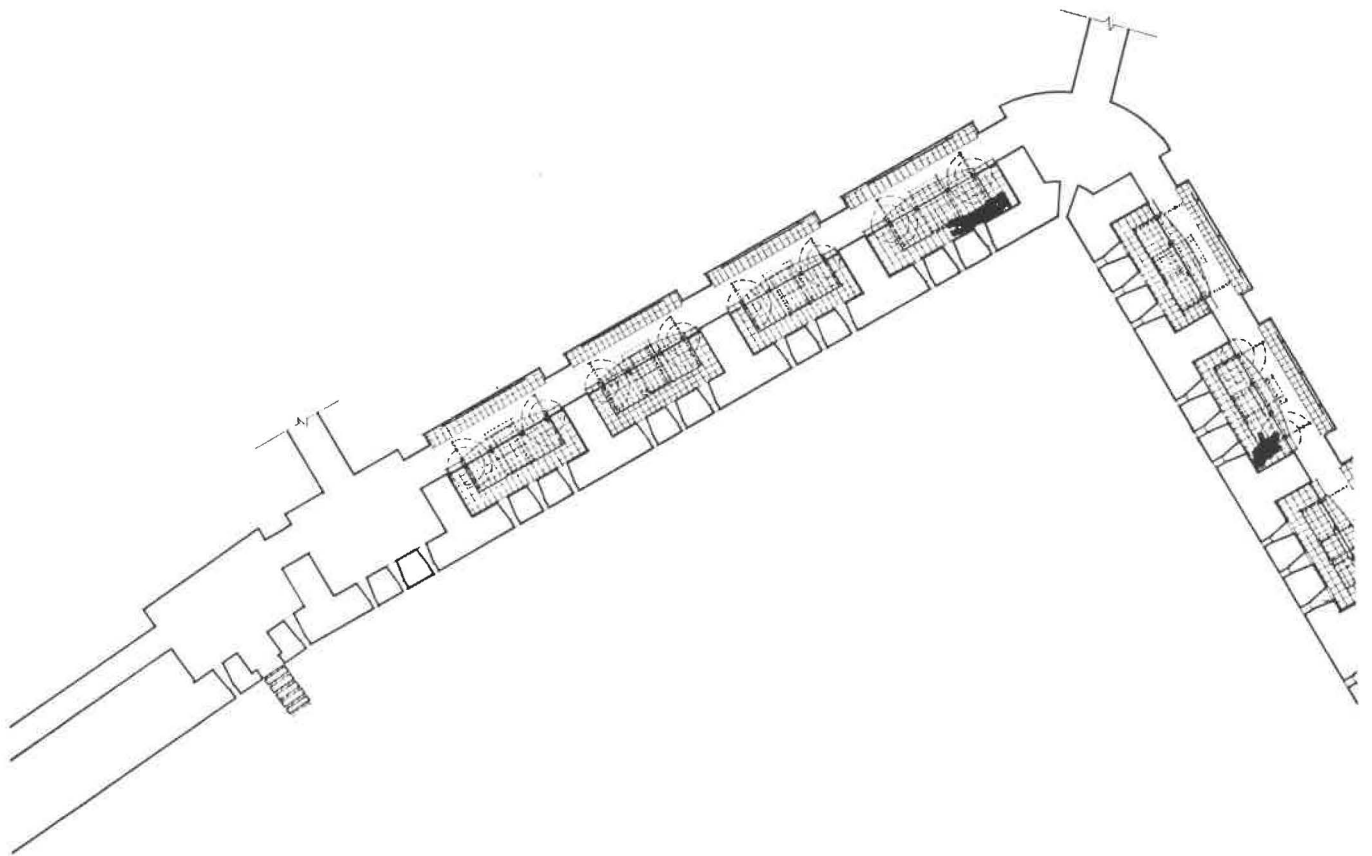
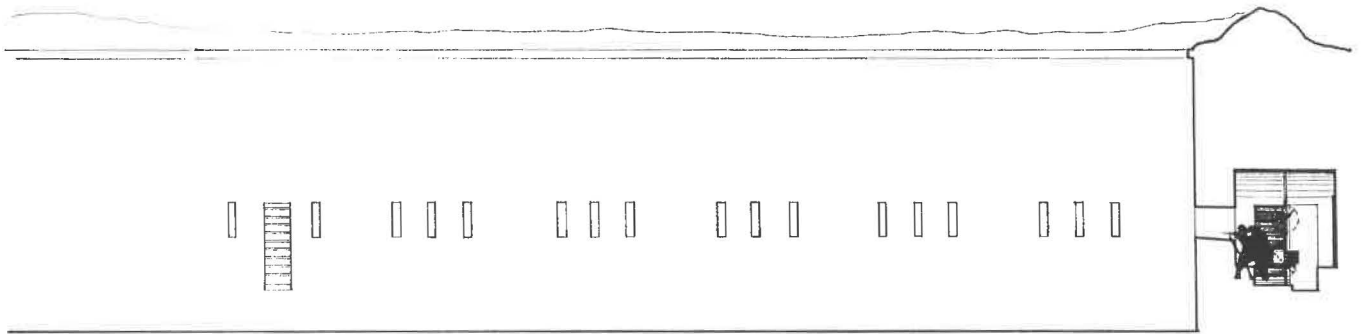
Like many art galleries and private spaces of renaissance palaces, rooms are connected to one another rather than individually accessed through another connecting space like a hallway or a courtyard so the visitor is presented with a new view or private spectacle upon entering each room with little in between.



Gallery view from moat



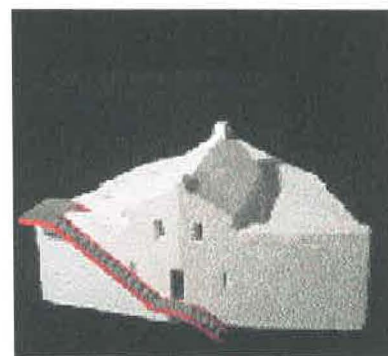
Gallery interior



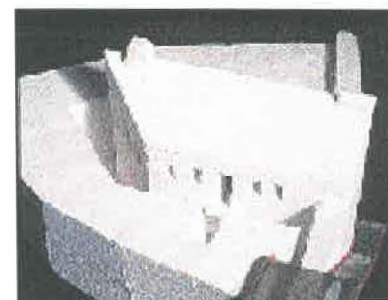
The queering of the musketry galleries becomes a celebration of museum galleries as places of display and renaissance palaces as places of private spectacle. A queer visitor moves from gallery to gallery until they find the spectacle in which they wish to participate. This establishes, almost accidentally, a rhythm of voyeurism, exhibitionism, posing, display. A partition of toilet stall divider dimensions segments the main thoroughfare and a stage-like assembly of glass block seating positions. The translucent glass block is lit from below with red lamps and heat lamps, making a warm, glamorous glowing back/bottom-lit surface that is easily sprayed down for cleaning. The partition itself has a series of doors and movable parts that can be positioned for complete viewing, partial and reflective views, or complete visual discontinuity at eye level height. Extra mirrors and openings are placed at crotch height. Opposite the stage/stall is a glass block bench so that lengthened viewing is made possible. For the casual voyeur passing through, a mirror behind the bench creates the effect of always being a part of the display. A new entrance door/stair is designed to resemble its original counterpart. It swings downward like a hidden attic stair in a wall. From the outside (in the moat) the galleries look the same as always, although to some a second look may reveal something a bit queer.

Queering the Guardhouse

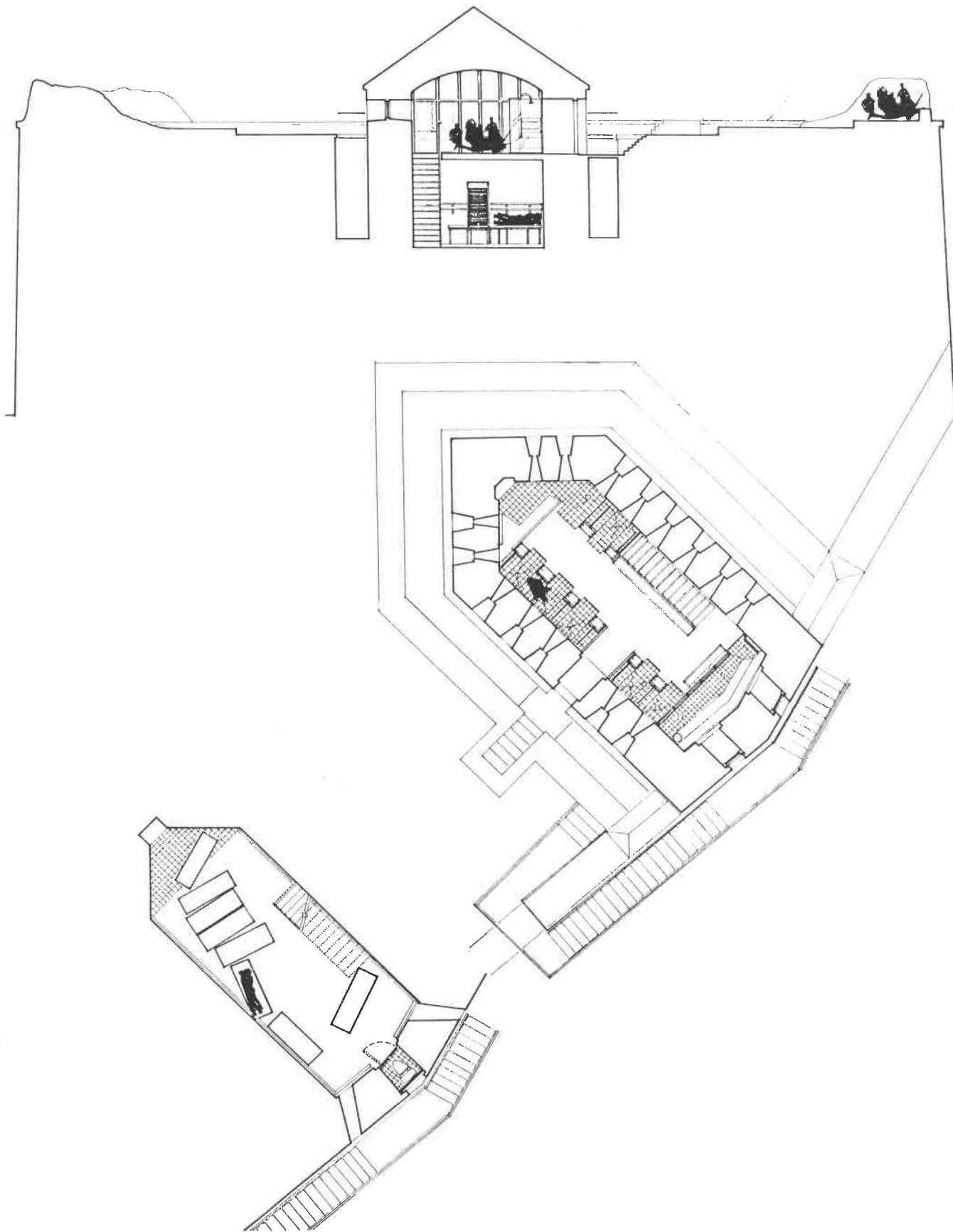
Wedged in each of the three ravelins there is a 2 story guardhouse. The guardhouse is both house and wall. The guardhouse was intended to hold several guard soldiers living and working in a fairly remote location relative to the rest of the fortress. The guardhouses were also intended as last chance shelters in times of attack. The ship's ladder to the first floor door is moved. The new stair which bypasses the entry takes visitors directly to the top of the ravelin. To those who know this to be a queer space, access is made via the bridge and doorway, where one enters a changing room. Here the term "changing room" is used to describe not only the place where changes are made to one's clothing, but also changes to one's identity. The changing room marks a signifi-



Guardhouse with red stair

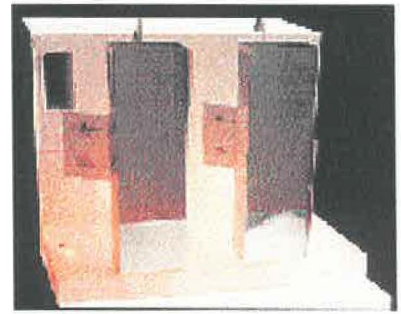


Guardhouse top floor (new) entry



cant passage from normal identity (public life, the moat, the citadel, the tourist, the straight acting queer) to queer identity (eroticism, otherness, desire, engagement, freewill and tolerance.) Lockers and storage spaces, lighting conditions, and viewing angles reflect this 'identity change' and pay tribute to the 'coming out process'. Boundaries between individual and group are blurred. Control of partitions and doors does not necessarily equal control over views or bodily engagement.

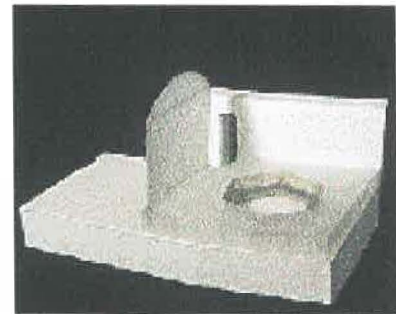
From the changing room, the queer visitor can come back outside or down to the dark room which is the ultimate in underground space. Six Foot long corporate modernist leatherette topped steel 'SOM' benches can be arranged individually for couples or placed together for group activity. The entrance that was once accessed by the ship's ladder from the moat becomes a toilet. Grab/handcuff bars are placed around the perimeter.



Guardhouse shower/locker.

Queering the Garrison Prison Casemates

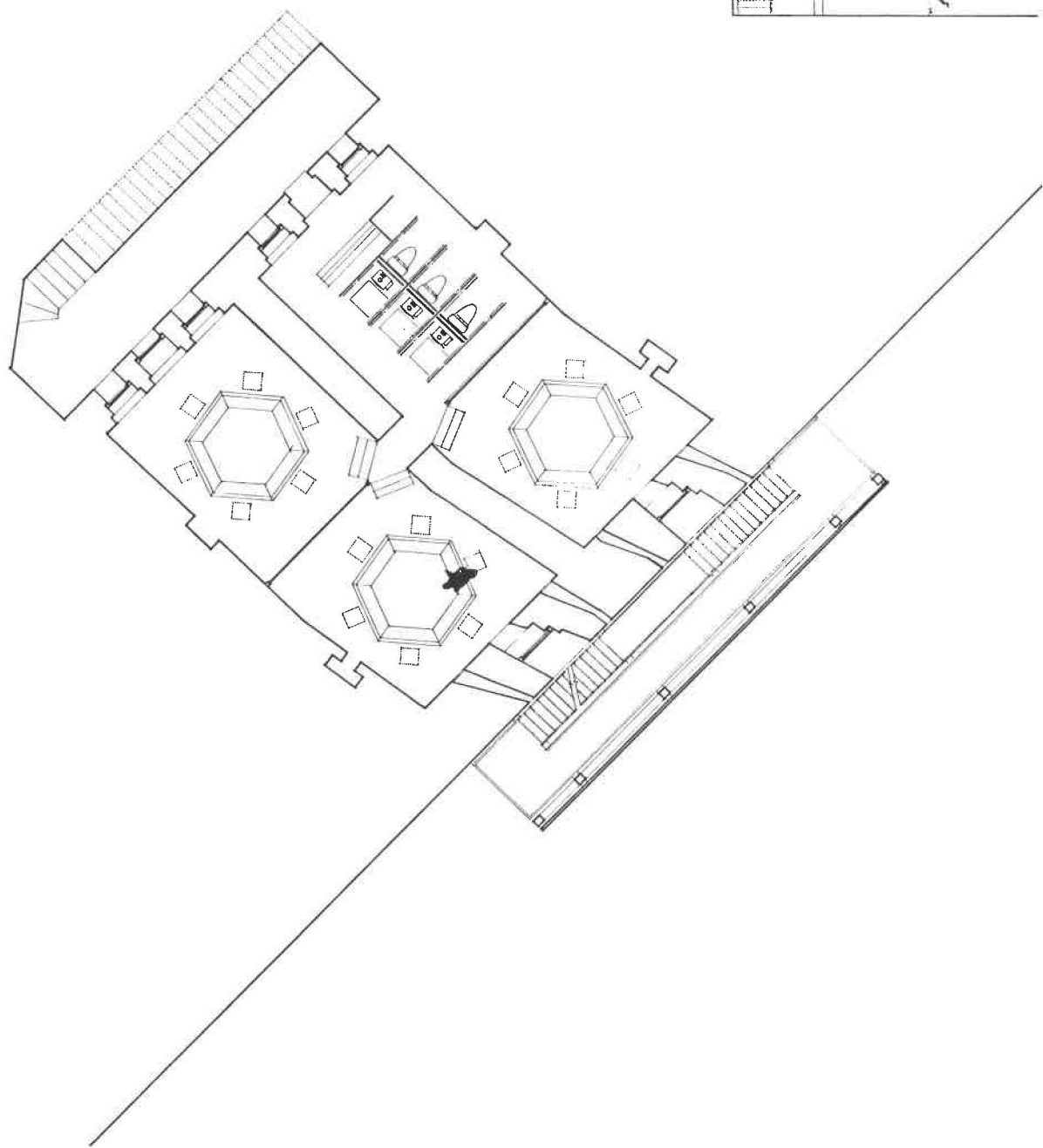
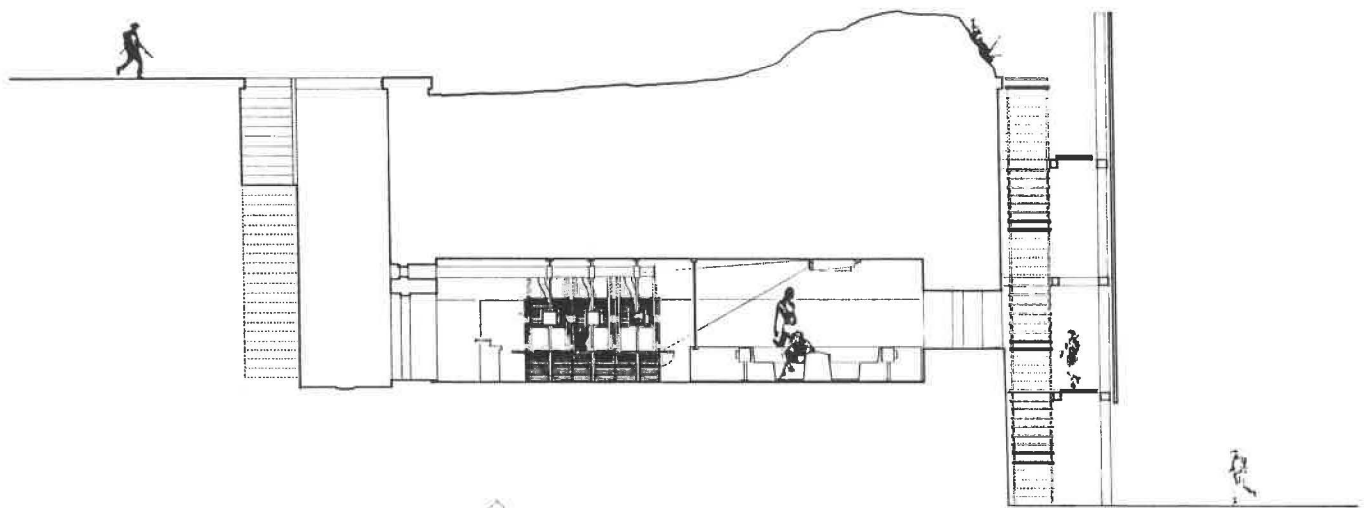
At each corner of the citadel below the ramparts there are two casemates intended as garrison prison cells for insubordinate soldiers or war prisoners. These spaces, accessible by a two story stairwell from the top of the ramparts serve the double purpose of housing prisoners and cannons strategically located to fire down the moat. The casemates indirectly share many qualities that are found in queer porn cinemas. Here the real truth about queer movie houses (*watching film* isn't the only activity) is architecturally revealed. Screens divide each casemate in two. Airline projectors are hung from the ceiling. Each spaces is essentially a sunken hexagonal seating area inspired by queer architect Bruce Goff. In the cinemas intimate (visual?) engagement takes precedent over normal screen viewing, which by default becomes the important backdrop.



Casemate seating and screen.



Joe Price Studio, Bruce Goff.

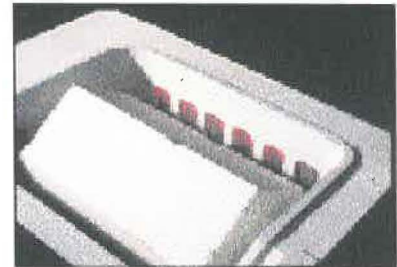


Queering the Magazine

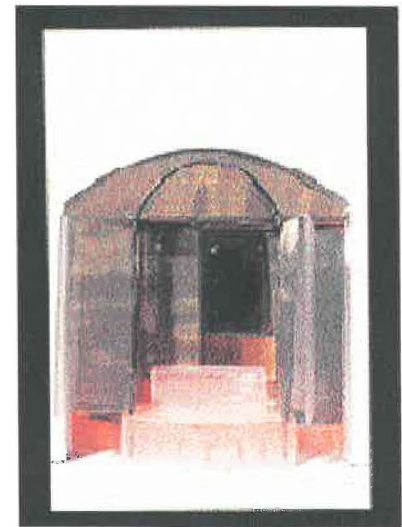
The magazine is the most heavily constructed building in the citadel. The magazine is where ammunition and gunpowder were stored. Its ten foot thick stone walls were made to resist the most extreme of forces given an explosion from within or from without.

In plan a possible queer reading of the magazine is one of large cathedrals. *Public* worship occurs where the nave of the church would be found - the magazine proper. Nave becomes rave. In the rave/nave, a space designated for an 'other' form of spirituality nothing exists but the latent memory of a massive stockpile of explosive energy (ammunition) in a room of wonderful acoustic separation.

Private worship occurs in the arched storage spaces surrounding the rave/nave which are located in plan where chapels are found in cathedrals. Here the saint is the queer and they are on display for body worship. Typical chapel plan is reversed and the saint is placed on the ambulatory side. Entrance is made from either side of the saint, like a confessional. Depending on whether one chooses to be the saint or the worshipper, the queer sits on an outward facing church pew or takes place upon the altar. Sliding and swinging doors of varying visual permeance move and transform the chapel space according to activity and desired levels of visual control.



Magazine

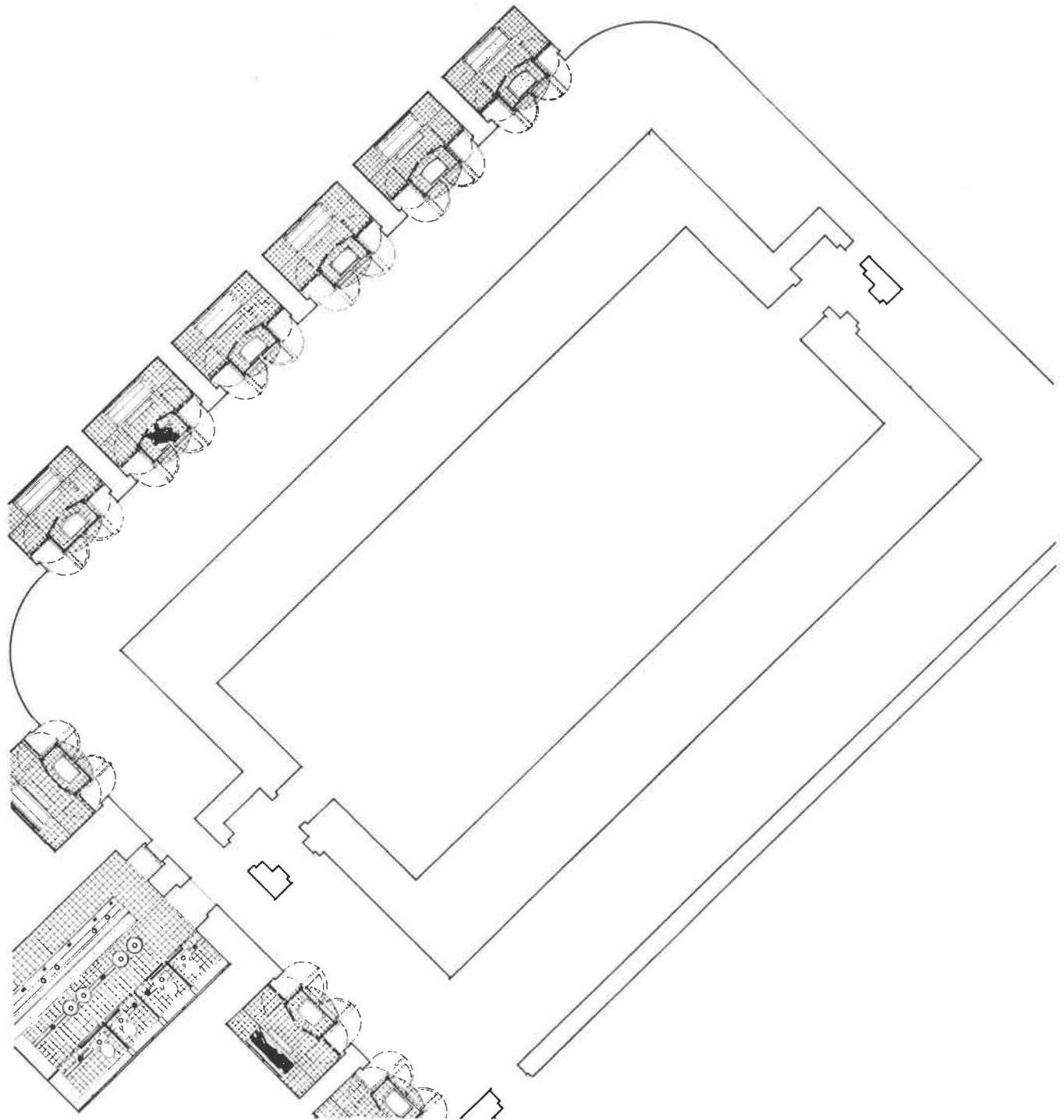
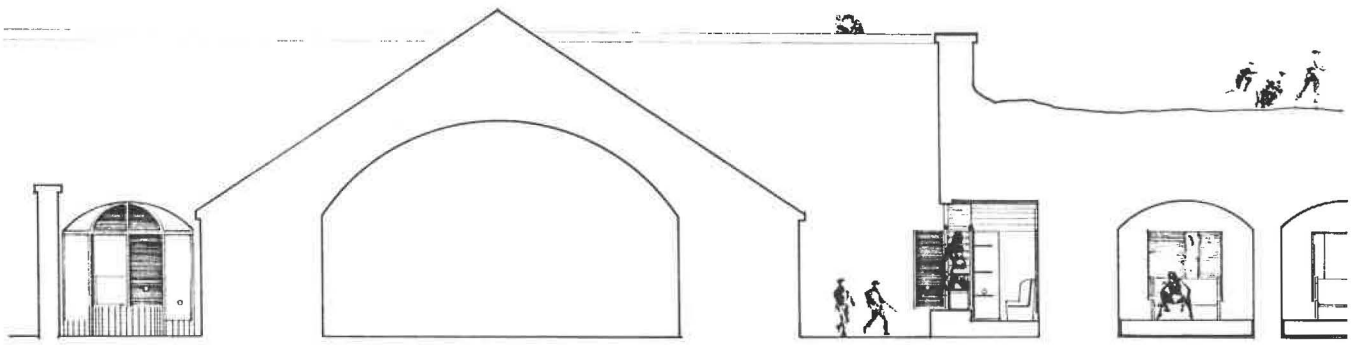


Chapel

The Moat

(because the citadel's moat weaves through each of the four segments, I felt it was impossible to ignore)

The very qualities that intensify views on the outside of the citadel moat exist within it. The moat was organized with a continuous band of musketry galleries around its outside edge so that an intruder, once having penetrated the space of the moat would be in full firing view from at least one if not many angles. These combine with several overhead firing angles from the rampart edges. Thus



in the context of a casual “stroll” through the moat, one has the ever present panoptic sensation of being viewed from multiple points.

The continual sensation of being in view (in other words objectified, scrutinized, evaluated), has the added sexual intensity of realization of one’s body and its movement (posing)- something that is in high effect in a ‘cruising’ environment, particularly one dominated by men. Echoing long corridors that lead into queer sex clubs and some queer dance clubs, The high walls and long narrow spaces of the moat create limited long and narrow views which make orientation very difficult, heightening intensity and the curiosity and desire to discover what lies around the next corner, a characteristic that is well in synch with cruising, flirting, and sexual conquest in general.



Moat

C O N C L U S I O N

There will always be margins, and oppression, and constructs that limit self-expression or freedom. Yet through this process of “queering” the Halifax Citadel, we can be reminded never to rest in the rules of the established world. Still working within the “institution” (architecture, citadel, hegemony) as a way of utilizing all erections, we can then re-invent/re-examine/and most importantly *initialize* our own work, or our own viewpoint, granting it a solid life of its own. It would be impossible to assume that such a viewpoint could live completely apart from the surrounding world, thus it must contain within it elements of past (and future?) assertions.

Sexuality is still largely a taboo in the world of architecture. Thus there are rules that still hinder self-expression. To be Queer is to recognize such rules and re-examine them, throwing them aside as the case may be. The Citadel is only one example of a queer space. There are infinite possibilities.



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Queer Resources Directory: vector.casti.com.QRD/html/QRD-home-page.html

Rainbow Query: www.glweb.com/RainbowQuery



come out