

**ARCH 6126.03: Architectural Translation**

MArch humanities elective

Instructor: Steve Parcell - parcell@dal.ca

Thursday, 9:30 am–12:30 pm, Room 1202

Brightspace: <https://dal.brightspace.com>**Calendar Description**

This course studies translation: the re-creation of meaning from one cultural domain to another. Through practical projects and theoretical sources, it considers translations between architectural modes (writing, drawing, building, etc.) and between disciplines (architecture, literature, etc.). Its emphasis on lateral thinking complements linear processes in architectural research and design.

**Additional Course Description**

A translator moves back and forth between two languages or cultural domains. We do this all the time, but rarely think about it unless something goes wrong.

In this course, the two cultural domains are literary (habitable words) and architectural (habitable places). In architecture, we rely on translation when reading, writing, diagramming, analyzing designs, and referring to projects elsewhere. Lateral thinking can be a substantial part of one's design process, as designing is much more than linear problem-solving. It can also broaden and deepen the intentions of a project.

Unlike most humanities courses, this course is project-based. It is centred on three interpretive projects with increasing scope and complexity:

- the first is an illustration of a text (words to images)
- the second is a creative misinterpretation of a local building (building to culture)
- the third is a translation of a literary work into an outline for an architectural project (words to "pre-design")

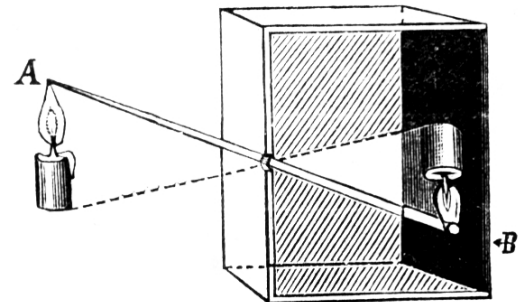
These projects emphasize lateral thinking across different modes or disciplines. The seminars will discuss theoretical and practical issues that arise from these projects.

Students with a sharp sense of humour and an aptitude for metaphors (such as the images on the right) will have a head start on understanding how lateral thinking operates in architecture. Students with a continuing interest in a cultural field other than architecture should gain lessons in lateral thinking that may be useful at thesis level. The primary aim of the course - especially in the final project - is to appreciate how cultural intentions outside architecture can provide authority and motivation for architectural work.

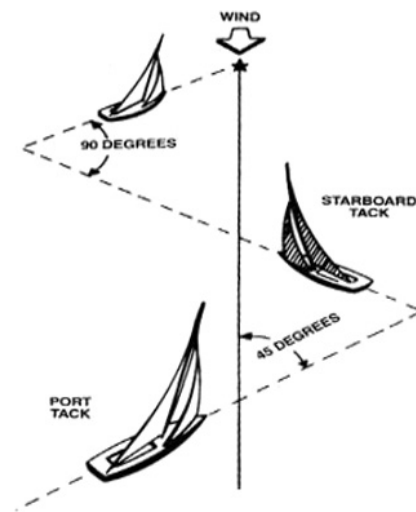
In philosophy, translation resides within the field of hermeneutics. This course will not delve into hermeneutic or literary theory, but be assured that its topic is part of a larger discipline, not idiosyncratic.

**Learning Objectives**

- interpret a building in different ways
- generate an architectural project from cultural intentions
- translate between literature (habitable words) and architecture (habitable places)



Camera obscura diagram (1910), from Wikimedia Commons



Sailboat tacking upwind

## Rationale for the Course

The course builds on knowledge and abilities gained during previous architectural terms. It is not co-requisite with any other course. The second half of the course anticipates (or parallels) the first half of the thesis year (M5), when each student defines a topic, conducts research, develops a critical position, and formulates a project for a building of some kind.

## Class Format, Time Expectation, Equipment, and Expenses

The course includes seminars and studio work. As a 3-credit-hour course, it expects an average of 9 hours per week for all activities, including classes. No special items are required and no major expenses are expected.

## Schedule and Due Dates

Week	Thursday	Event	Due
1	Sept. 14	Intro to the course; seminar	
2	Sept. 21	Seminar	
3	Sept. 28	Seminar	
4	Oct. 5	Review	9:30: Project 1
5	Oct. 12	Seminar	
6	Oct. 19	Seminar	
7	Oct. 26	Review	9:30: Project 2
8	Nov. 2	Seminar	
9	Nov. 9	Seminar	
10	<i>(fall break - no classes)</i>		
11	Nov. 23	Seminar	
12	Nov. 30	SLEQs; review and exhibition	9:30: Project 3
13			

## Assignments

All assignments will be done individually and discussed collectively. Please see the three project outlines for descriptions, requirements, formats, and submission instructions.

## Required Reading and Optional References

Please refer to the three project outlines for required reading.

For anyone interested in hermeneutic theory and its application to architecture, here are four optional references: essays by the instructor that include references to other sources in the field. All are posted on Brightspace.

Parcell, Stephen. 1993. "The World in Front of the Work." *Journal of Architectural Education* 46, no. 4: 349–59.

Parcell, Stephen. 2003. "Interdisciplinary Translation." *Contribution and Confusion: Architecture and the Influence of Other Fields of Inquiry*. Proceedings, 2003 ACSA International Conference, 676–82. Washington, DC: ACSA Press.

Parcell, Stephen. 2010. "Interpretation Rather than History." *Re-Building*. Proceedings, 2010 ACSA Annual Conference, 734–41. Washington, DC: ACSA Press.

Parcell, Stephen. 2015. "An Architectural Creation Myth Borrowed from the Phenomenology of Music." In *Architecture's Appeal: How Theory Informs Architectural Praxis*, ed. Marc J. Neveu and Negin Djavaaherian, 205–17. London: Routledge.

## Guidelines for Citing Sources

Please use Chicago Manual of Style: Author-Date Style for any citations. For details, see:

- Chicago quick guide: <https://tinyurl.com/chicago-author-date>

## Evaluation

### *Components, Weights, and Criteria*

#### **Seminars (10%)**

Contribution: attendance, collegial participation, insights, constructive criticism

#### **Project 1: Invisible Cities (25%):**

Breadth (10%): range of exploration and observations

Depth (10%): resonance between each short story and its related image

Clarity (5%): vividness of presentation; thoughtfulness of comments in critical summary

#### **Project 2: Hypothetical Culture for a Local Building (30%)**

Breadth (10%): range of exploration and observations; consideration of dwelling, building, and situating issues

Depth (15%): resonance between the building and the culture; integration of clues into a convincing hypothesis

Clarity (5%): organization and vividness of presentation; thoughtfulness of comments in critical summary

#### **Project 3: From Literature to Architecture (35%)**

Breadth (10%): range of literary and architectural components

Depth (20%): resonance between the text and the architectural components

Clarity (5%): organization and vividness of presentation; thoughtfulness of comments in critical summary

### ***University Standards for Individual Assignments***

- A+ (90–100%), A (85–89%), A– (80–84%): Considerable evidence of original thinking; outstanding capacity to analyze and synthesize; outstanding grasp of subject matter; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
- B+ (77–79%), B (73–76%), B– (70–72%): Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytical ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.
- C+ (65–69%), C (60–64%), C– (55–59%): Evidence of some understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems.
- D (50–54%): Evidence of minimal familiarity with the subject matter; minimal analytical and critical skill.
- F (0–49%): Little evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in analytical and critical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Assignments will be evaluated by the instructor, using letter grades. Letter grades for individual assignments will be converted to their mid-point percentage, multiplied by their weight, added, then converted to a final letter grade. For the whole course, a final grade below B– will be recorded as an F. Projects will be discussed in class. The instructor will provide additional oral or written comments after each project.

## Course-specific Policies

### ***Lecture Notes***

The slides from each lecture will be posted as a PDF on Brightspace.

## Due Dates and Late Submissions

Deductions for late submissions encourage time management and maintain fairness among students.

Project	Due date	Is a late assignment accepted?	If so, what is the penalty per weekday? *	Is there a final deadline for a late submission?	What happens after that?
Project 1	Oct. 5, 9:30 am	yes	3%	Dec. 7	receives 0%
Project 2	Oct. 26, 9:30 am	yes	3%	Dec. 7	receives 0%
Project 3	Nov. 30, 9:30 am	yes	3%	Dec. 7	receives 0%

\* For example, if an assignment is evaluated at 75% before applying a 3%-per-weekday deduction, it would receive 72% for being 1–24 hours late; 69% for 25–48 hours late; etc.

### Note:

- With a Student Declaration of Absence (maximum two per course), an assignment may be submitted up to three weekdays late without penalty. The SDA form is available from <https://tinyurl.com/dal-sda-form>. An SDA cannot be used for the final assignment.
- With a medical note submitted to the School office, a course assignment (including a final assignment) may be submitted more than three weekdays late without penalty. The number of weekdays depends on how long you were unable to work, as indicated in the medical note. If more than one course is affected, you should consult with the Undergraduate/Graduate Coordinator to set a new schedule of due dates.
- A student with an accessibility plan that allows for deadline extensions does not need to submit an SDA.

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Faculty of Architecture and Planning is committed to recognizing and addressing racism, sexism, xenophobia and other forms of oppression within academia and the professions of architecture and planning. We, the faculty, are working to address issues of historic normalization of oppressive politics, segregation, and community disempowerment, which continues within our disciplines today.

## University Policies and Resources

This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate. See the School's "Academic Regulations" page ([tinyurl.com/dal-arch-regulations](https://tinyurl.com/dal-arch-regulations)) for links to university policies and resources:

- Academic integrity
- Accessibility
- Code of student conduct
- Culture of respect
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Student declaration of absence
- Recognition of Mi'kmaq territory
- Work safety
- Services available to students, including writing support
- Fair dealing guidelines (copyright)
- Dalhousie University library

## Project 1: Invisible Cities

This project considers a basic form of interpretation: from text to image. As we read, we visualize images, especially when the text is a story in which we imagine ourselves as observers or participants. The challenge of this project is to get those images down on paper (or a digital equivalent).

### Method

#### Observation

To begin, please read this book. It is available from online bookstores.

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. (any edition)

The book consists of 55 short stories, each describing a different facet of Venice. It contains no images, just words. For this project, please choose two cities from the book.

#### Representation

First, describe your perceptions of each city in gestures and speech. Pay attention to what you are visualizing when reading: figures, objects, backgrounds, point of view, scale, colours, materials, movement, light, etc. Then interpret the story in brief annotations (written and drawn). This process material will provide starting points for an eventual illustration.

#### Translation

For each city, the eventual aim is to make one vivid illustration that would be appropriate in a children's book (rather than in a typical set of architectural drawings). It could involve drawing from scratch (manually or digitally), assembling photographic fragments into a montage, etc. There are many different kinds of illustrations in children's books, done in many different media.

#### Composition

For each invisible city, please prepare an InDesign document (24" x 36", landscape orientation) with the story (top left), your process work, and your illustration and name (bottom right), exported as a PDF. Everyone's work will be displayed on paper or a screen for class discussion, uploaded to Brightspace, and later exhibited for other students and faculty.

#### Reflection

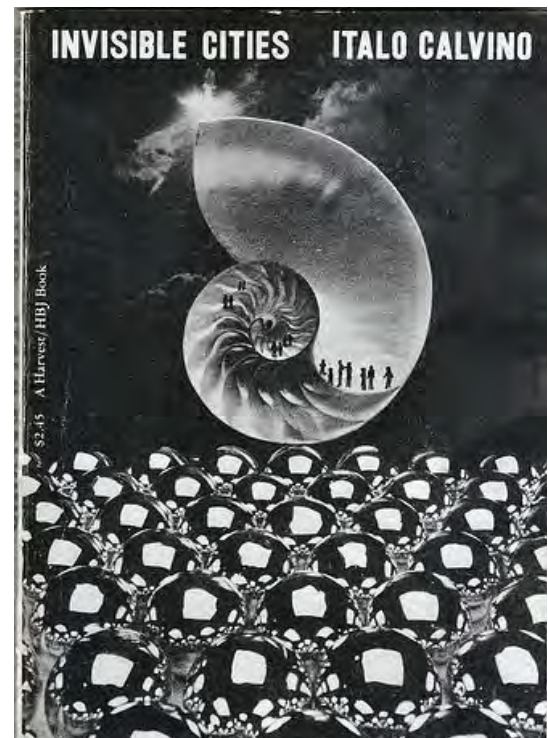
Please write a separate critical summary (200 words, PDF) that discusses your steps - observation, representation, and translation - including what you might do differently next time. Include citations for any external references you used. Please upload this summary to Brightspace.

### Tips

#### Perception

Start at the scale of the whole story. Avoid focusing directly on nouns that could provide instant subjects to draw. Instead, try to focus on perceptions.

- What intrigues you about the story?
- How would you describe the story with both words and your hands, then with just your hands?
- Do you imagine being positioned somewhere?
- Are looking up or down?
- Are you near or far from things?
- Which of your senses does it evoke?





- Do you imagine a certain time of day or year?
- Is anything moving?
- Is it a momentary perception or do changes happen over time?
- Is there a pivotal point in the story when something changes?
- Does anything seem impossible in the real world?

### **Analysis**

After considering perceptions at the scale of the whole story, consider the text at smaller scales:

- Paragraph scale: Look at the structure of the paragraphs: what comes first, what comes next.
- Sentence scale: Are any sentences notable?
- Word scale: Are any words notable? (Consider nouns, verbs, and adjectives.)

### **Suggested Process for Each Story**

1. Try describing it with arm/hand/finger gestures.
2. Make a process portfolio page that includes a photocopy of the story in a vertical column, with some written and graphic annotations alongside the story that begin to translate the text into image fragments.
3. Using 1 and 2 as raw material, compose a draft illustration on a separate sheet (either manual or digital). To fine-tune the illustration, consider each representational characteristic separately: drawing medium, line/tone/colour, projection, and composition.

**Note:** Please don't use artificial intelligence to generate images for this project, as that would short-circuit the process. A primary aim is to strengthen your interpretive and imaginative abilities, anticipating the next two projects.

### **References**

A chapter from each of these books is posted on Brightspace. The full books are also on reserve for three-day loan from the Sexton Library.

McCloud, Scott. 1994. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Salisbury, Martin. 2004. *Illustrating Children's Books: Creating Pictures for Publication*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's.

Shulevitz, Uri. 1985. *Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books*. New York: Watson-Guptill.

## Project 2: Hypothetical Culture for a Local Building

This project considers a more complex type of translation: from building to culture. Buildings are often visited quickly, observed superficially, and described simplistically according to their use or their formal style. To recognize the deeper and more subtle architectural characteristics of a building, a different approach is needed. This project approaches a local building in a metaphorical, perhaps irreverent way: by formulating a hypothetical culture in which this building would make perfect sense. Through creative misinterpretation, we can imagine that the building was built in another place and time by a different culture with its own values, beliefs, and practices. This exercise draws from our experience of living in and around buildings for twenty years or more, as well as visiting other places in the world and in fiction.



Illustration from: Max Ernst, *La femme 100 têtes* (Paris, 1929)

### Method

#### Observation

To begin this project, choose a local building that seems puzzling or quirky. Make arrangements to visit the entire building several times. On your first visit, don't photograph or draw anything; just walk, look, listen, smell, and touch.

Based on your observations, imagine a different culture in which this building would thrive: a fictional human culture that resonates fully with the design of the building. You will be playing the role of an architectural detective who looks for clues in the building design and gradually formulates a cultural hypothesis based on them. You may need to visit the building at different times (light, dark, sun, rain, busy, quiet) and to observe it in different ways (from far and near, outside and inside; with attention to a particular bodily sense or a particular topic). Clues may be found by looking closely at building, dwelling, and situating characteristics such as:

- the exterior form of the building
- how the walls meet the ground and the roof
- major formal elements and geometries of the building

- organization of interior spaces and routes
- window openings, interior views, and exterior views
- distribution of natural and artificial light
- selection and arrangement of materials, textures, and colours
- built-in fixtures and furnishings (the building's portable furnishings may be disregarded)

### **Representation**

As you proceed, gather your architectural clues in appropriate modes (gestures, words, drawings, photographs, etc.) and retain them as potential illustrations to support your developing hypothesis. You will find that clues are more evident when images are carefully composed, closely cropped, and/or graphically abstracted, rather than in wide-angle views that show too much.

### **Translation**

As you interpret the building, consider aspects of its hypothetical culture; for example,

- Who would be appropriate inhabitants in this building?
- How would the social or political order of this culture be organized?
- What are the primary activities that would occur here?
- What kinds of furnishings might be brought into the building?
- In what larger setting would this building be located?
- What would the climate be like there?
- What forms of speech would they use to communicate?
- What kind of food would they eat?
- What kind of music would they play?
- What would they do when someone dies?

This list is not exclusive or exhaustive, so use your judgment as an architectural/cultural detective to pose other questions. A few strong observations of the building may provide a solid basis for a convincing interpretation. When discussing particular cultural characteristics, feel free to cite existing examples that the rest of us would recognize (e.g., J.S. Bach, Lady Gaga) or simply to describe specific features and qualities. As you consider these individual questions, try to imagine this culture in an integrated, well-rounded way.

### **Composition**

Your interpretation may be presented in an analytical form (a travelogue or guide book) or a narrative form (a short story with characters). Your drawings, photos, etc. will present characteristics of the existing building, while your words will describe the culture. The strength of the interpretation will be evident in the parallels between the images and the text. It should include about 750 words plus images. The size and format are optional (booklet, panels, etc.), but try to place each image near the text to which it refers. Everyone's work will be displayed on paper or screen for class discussion, uploaded to Brightspace, and later exhibited for other students and faculty.

### **Reflection**

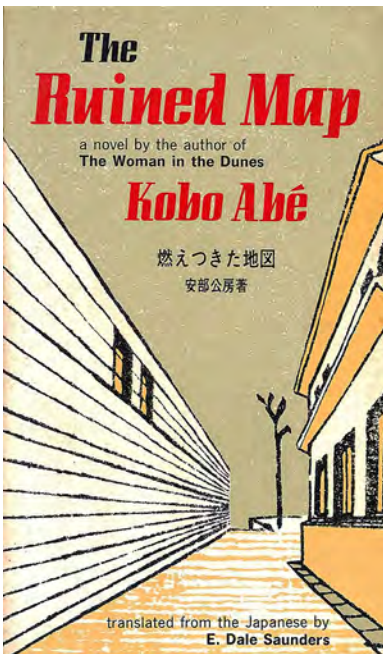
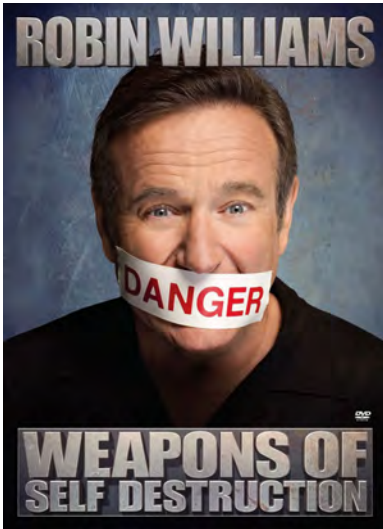
Please write a separate critical summary (200 words, PDF) that discusses the methods of observing, representing, and translating that were most or least effective. Also, mention what you might do differently next time. Include citations for any external references. Please upload this summary to Brightspace.

### **Optional References**

Examples of creative misinterpretation are available on Brightspace in excerpts from these books. The full books are also on reserve for three-day loan from the Sexton Library:

- Griffith, Richard M. (1966) 1970. "Anthropodology: Man A-Foot." In *The Philosophy of the Body: Rejections of Cartesian Dualism*, edited by Stuart F. Spicker, 273–92. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Kottak, Conrad P. 1978. "Rituals at McDonald's." *Journal of American Culture* 1, no. 2: 370–6.
- Macaulay, David. 1979. *Motel of the Mysteries*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Sexton: PN 6231 C46 M3 1979)
- Magritte, René, and Roger Torczyner. 1977. *Magritte: Ideas and Images*. New York: Abrams. (Sexton: ND 673 M35 A4 1977)





### Project 3: From Literature to Architecture

This project considers a more challenging type of interpretation: from a literary work to an architectural work. The aim is to understand how cultural intentions outside architecture can provide motivation and direction for architects. It opens channels to allies in related fields.

The aims of this project are to generate motivation from a literary work, to recognize parallels between “literary habitation” and “architectural habitation,” and to devise an outline for a project in Halifax. This project presumes that an architect’s role is not just *how* to design, but also *what, for whom, where, when, and why*. It anticipates or parallels the thesis year, when students are responsible for all of these factors.

#### Method

##### Recognition

To begin this project, please choose a concise literary work that inspires and motivates you. It may be a short story, a political speech, a book chapter, song lyrics, a comedy monologue, etc. Its words may be augmented by other modes: voice, gestures, images, music, etc. This source (and implicitly its author) will serve as your cultural mentor throughout the project. Conversely, you will serve as your mentor’s architectural associate.

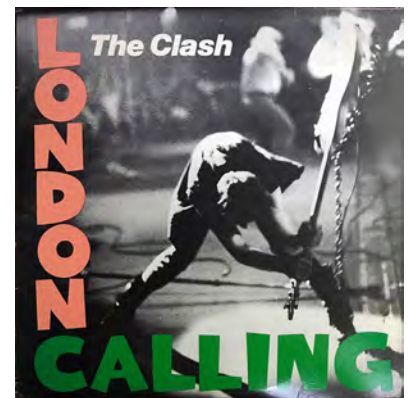
##### Translation

Moving forward will involve three basic steps:

The first step is to study the literary work to understand its “world view,” including its components, composition, context, audience, and cultural motivation.

The second step is to approach the text metaphorically by imagining architectural parallels for these same items.

The third step is to imagine how aspects of this “world view” can find fertile ground in a new setting: the Halifax peninsula in 2023. The eventual aim is to develop an outline for an architectural design project. It could include various architectural components, such as clients, inhabitants, builders, events, locations, surroundings, social organization, formal orders, building characteristics, building elements, and sensory features. These items should remain as “pre-design



From top left: Alice Walker, [seafoodnet.info](http://seafoodnet.info); Robin Williams, [www.discogs.com](http://www.discogs.com); Kobo Abé, [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com); Temple Grandin, [scitechspec.wordpress.com](http://scitechspec.wordpress.com); The Clash, [www.discogs.com](http://www.discogs.com)

fragments,” without being consolidated into a comprehensive design for a building. (This is an elective course, not a design studio.) One premise of the project is that Halifax has a rich urban fabric that would benefit from additional insights and “world views,” as well as additional “architectural threads” in its urban fabric. The translation could be framed as a public announcement, a competition brief, a request for proposals, an independent proposal to city hall or a prospective client, a university course outline, etc.

Although the three steps are listed above in sequential order, it’s likely that you will move back and forth among them. “Translate” is a verb, so the emphasis of this project is more on the process (the steps along the way) than the final product. The process will move slowly, so that insights can be savoured and options can be weighed - not only by the student doing the project, but by everyone in the course.



Left: Tiger; from [www.dreamstime.com/](http://www.dreamstime.com/). Right: Tourist map of Halifax (ca. 1938), reprinted by Maps & More, Halifax, [www.mapsandducks.com](http://www.mapsandducks.com).

### **Composition**

24” x 36” pages (physical or digital) may provide a suitable tableau for presenting the components of your process. Other sizes and formats are also possible. Imagine presenting interim work to your mentor for discussion. Everyone’s work will be displayed on paper or screen for class discussion, uploaded to Brightspace, and later exhibited for other students and faculty.

### **Reflection**

Please write a separate critical summary (300 words, PDF) that discusses the interpretive leaps that were most effective in the three steps of this project. Include citations for any external references. Please upload this summary to Brightspace.

### **References**

#### **Required Reading**

The only required book (or equivalent literary work) is the primary source for your project.

#### **Optional References**

To become more acquainted with the “world view” of the author, you may wish to browse a few earlier or later writings, but please focus on your own source. For the additional challenges of this project, the following items may be useful. Items marked \*\*\* are on reserve for three-day loan from the Sexton Library.

### **Literature and Architecture**

Yates, Frances A. (1966) 1984. *The Art of Memory*, 1–4. London: Ark Paperbacks. (Brightspace)

### **Urban Sites and Mapping**

Harvey, P.D.A. 1980. *History of Topographical Maps*. London: Thames & Hudson. (Sexton: GA 125 H37 \*\*\*)

Leatherbarrow, David. 1993. “Part 1: Limited Sites.” In *The Roots of Architectural Invention*, 7–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Sexton: NA 2540.5 L43 1993 \*\*\*)

Tufte, Edward. 1990. *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire: Graphics Press. (Sexton: P 93.5 T84 1990 \*\*\*)

## **Halifax**

Erickson, Paul, ed. 2005. *Underground Halifax: Stories of Archaeology in the City*. Halifax: Nimbus. (Sexton: FC 2346.39 U53 2005 \*\*\*)

Halifax ArcGIS geospatial data. <https://libraries.dal.ca/hours-locations/gis-centre.html>.

Halifax Regional Municipality. "Explore HRM." <https://data-hrm.hub.arcgis.com/pages/mapping-application>.

Raddall, Thomas, and Stephen Kimber. 2010. *Halifax: Warden of the North*. Halifax: Nimbus. (Sexton: FC 2346.4 R3 2010 \*\*\*)

Sandalack, Beverly. 1998. *Urban Structure - Halifax*. Halifax: Tuns Press. (Sexton: HT 178 C22 H272 1998 \*\*\*)

S. Parcell  
9 Aug. 2023