



Selection of books

48-241/48-641: History of Modern Architecture  
Units: 6 or 9 Units  
Instructor: Kai Gutschow

This course investigates the global history of modern architecture and theory across the 20th century. We ask critical questions about the canon, the changing nature of history and theory, the biases embedded in terms like “modernism,” “progress,” and “Non-Western,” and the deep legacies of colonialism, globalization, extractivism, and capitalism in which modern architecture so actively participated.

After briefly identifying architecture’s role in some of the great challenges facing the world today -- climate change, high tech, and social justice -- this course loosely works backward in time following these themes. Along the way we explore major movements of the Euro-American avantgarde and so-called “heroes” of modernism, but also diverse responses to modernity, including vernacular, popular, tropical, and even anti-architecture around the world. We will highlight the role of experimentation and provocation, but also of timeless ideals, local and indigenous traditions, and how they each intersect with the demands of function and technology as well as social and political imperatives.

Work for the course falls into four categories: 1) attendance and participation in lectures and discussions; 2) reading, both original documents from the period, and more recent critical histories; 3) writing a series of two-page critical reflections on the readings; 4) a semester-long, carefully curated research project on “Non-Canonical” buildings from the Global South in the 20th century.