

48-241/48-641 “**Modern Architecture**” Course Description -- S’22 -- Prof. Kai Gutschow - 9 units

This history course surveys modern architecture and theory of the 20th-century from around the world. It is the second of a two-semester global survey that serves both as a historical foundation for disciplinary specialization, and as an intro. to architectural history.

We begin the course by defining terms such as history, theory, and criticism, as well as modern, modernity, and modernism in architecture. We look briefly at the bias embedded in most current textbooks and in terms like “evolution” and “Non-Western.” We problematize canon formation and ideas of progress, we’ll ask who gets left out of histories, and probe the legacy of colonialism, globalization, and social inequity in modern architecture.

After briefly identifying architecture’s role in some of the most important challenges facing the world today, this survey works backward in time towards the beginning of the 20th-century. Along the way we will explore major movements of the Euro-American avant-garde and the “heroes” of modernism, but also other responses to modernity, including vernacular, popular, tropical, and even anti-architecture, and their relation to contexts such as the Cold War, the Third World, Global Socialism, Postcolonialism, and Postmodernism. We will highlight the role of experimentation and provocation, but also of tradition and timeless ideals in different cultures, and how they each intersect with the demands of function and technology as well as social and political imperatives. Emphasis throughout the course will be placed on the relationship of buildings to the more general cultural, intellectual, and historical circumstances in which they were created, as well as changing interpretations of the past over time.

Work for the course falls into four categories: 1) active listening & note-taking in lectures (some pre-recorded); 2) reading, both original documents from the period, and more recent critical reflections on the work; 3) writing a series of 2pp. “reading reports” and participating actively in smaller discussions about these readings; 4) a semester-long, carefully curated research project on “Non-Canonical” buildings from the 20th-century.



Current books the course will be referencing