

Arguments to Debunk Modernist Myths

How do modernists argue?

- Modernist arguments are often filled with fallacies.
- They deflect criticism using clichés, mockery, projections, power tactics, and verbal scare tactics.
- This behavior reflects their insecurity and fear due to a lack of factual and evidence-based arguments.
- It serves as a warning to fellow modernists not to question or deviate from their path.

So, how do you break this behavior?

First, ask questions:

When your professors claim something that seems dogmatic, hostile, mocking, non-scientific or apparently goes against the public good, keep asking 'WHY?'

Just keep asking them about the reasons for their claims when they spew nonsense, until you get a satisfactory answer or until they let go.

But how do you counter 'arguments' if necessary?

The 10 Most Common Arguments of Modernists – and Why They Don't Hold Up:

1. "There's No Accounting for Taste"

- Modernists claim that perceptions of beauty are highly subjective and personal.
- This dogma is used to avoid discussions about aesthetic quality altogether.
- Research contradicts this, showing a general consensus on what is considered beautiful. ([Example](#))

2. "Architecture Must Reflect Our Time"

- Who decides what "our time" should reflect? Only architects?
- And next question: who says that Modernist architecture is the only type of architecture that is fitting for our time?
- Modernists have a linear view of history, believing each epoch has a singular true architectural expression.
 - This is the idea of the 'Zeitgeist'
- They argue that knowing the era of when a building was constructed adds value.
- The public, however, prioritizes a sense of place over historical discernment.
 - So, 'reflecting a place' instead of 'reflecting a certain time'
- Studies show people prefer areas that create a **cohesive sense of place** rather than a mix of architectural styles.
- Building what people today enjoy will naturally reflect the current era without intentional stylistic efforts.

- Architectural differences over time arise naturally from evolving knowledge, technology, and trends.

3. “People will Learn to Appreciate Today’s Architecture”

- Modernists claim the public will eventually appreciate new buildings, typically after 40-50 years.
- Despite a century of modernism, it remains unpopular with most people.

4. “You’re Reactionary. We’re Progressive”

- Modernists use this phrase as a verbal scare tactic to dismiss critics.
- Modernism is now over a hundred years old and ironically has become a tradition, and the very 'status quo' itself.
- The classical tradition offers endless variation and can produce new styles when architects apply its timeless principles, making it as progressive as it needs to be.
- Also, question what 'progressive' means. Progress towards what? Just changing things for change's sake? Or progress towards a more beautiful, livable, humane future? If we use the second definition, why can't traditional architecture be progressive?

5. “Do You Want Outhouses Too?”

- Modernists often paint opponents as backward with questions like “Should we go back to the time before electricity, women’s suffrage and with toilets outside?”
- This tactic ignores the possibility of combining historical strengths with modern advancements.
- New houses can be both beautiful and easily equipped with modern amenities.

6. The Use of Words Like “Pastiche” or “Disneyland”

- These terms are used to ridicule certain architectural styles.
- Modernist discourse often prohibits historical references and mocks those who violate it, while they reference the history of modernism all the time.
- You can point out that this argument is not constructive and/or serious, and ask if modern references to Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe are any less of a 'pastiche'.

7. “It’s Not the Architects’ Fault”

- It is not all up to the architects, but blaming others (developers, politicians, clients) for ugly buildings deflects responsibility from architects.
- Architects significantly influence building design and urban planning.
- Modernist ideology and styles were developed and promoted by architects.
- Architecture schools predominantly teach modernist methods.
- Architects often control municipal planning, approve building permits, and oversee architectural competitions favoring modernism.
- Most architectural magazines and awards focus exclusively on modernist designs.

8. “We Should Talk About Quality, Not Style / Beauty”

- This argument attempts to shift focus from aesthetics to something they feel more comfortable with.
- We believe beauty is an inherent quality worth discussing independently.

9. “Traditional Architecture Is Too Expensive to Build”

- Traditional architecture is rational, functional and does not need to be costly.
- Key elements like harmony, proportions, and color choices are simple and for free.
- A [Dutch study](#) and a [Swedish study](#) show that new traditional architecture does not cost more to build.
- People are willing to pay for traditional architecture as it is perceived as beautiful.
- Modernist emphasis on geometric shapes as the “facade” often results in expensive and impractical or even dysfunctional buildings (like Disney Concert Hall by Frank Gehry).
- Modernist architecture is often minimalist with flat facades without cornice. This can be more expensive in multiple ways:
 - Achieving truly flat, minimalist designs with good detailing can be very expensive.
 - Keeping the minimalist aesthetic truly minimalist, spotless and clean is a battle against the elements that can drive up maintenance costs. For example: the lack of a cornice will produce stains and rain stripes on vertical surfaces

10. “The Knowledge and Craftsmen Are No Longer Present”

- Modernism's focus on minimalism, petrol-driven machines and industrial methods reduced demand for skilled craftsmen, which means that modernism is responsible for this problem.
- Claiming all craftsmen and architectural knowledge have disappeared is an exaggeration, as they are still out there (albeit in smaller numbers)
- Craftsmanship traditions persist in restoration, reconstruction, new buildings designed to blend in, and custom private residences.
- With the current state of architecture, craftsmanship and traditional knowledge will diminish further. The solution is to support craft, not giving up altogether