

# ATCH (Architecture, Theory, Culture, History) Roundtable

The uses and Abuses of History, Then and Now

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The Uses and Abuses of History, Then and Now

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The historiography of architecture has for several decades been partly structured by a critique of instrumental history. Writers as different in their aims as Manfredo Tafuri and David Watkin (and many others) faulted the first generation of historians of modernism, particularly Sigfried Giedion and Nikolaus Pevsner, for narrativising the past as a process that would necessarily end in the triumph of modernism. Much meta-history since, going beyond this critique, has shown when and how historical writing has been symbiotic in the wider development of the profession. But now a different kind of instrumentalism is becoming common, if not dominant, in architectural history. We have politically progressive work with the explicit aim of de-colonising and de-masculinising the university curriculum as a path to a more ethical profession. In parallel, the emphasis of governments and the university sector on the utility of research means that increasingly, history is becoming an aspect of heritage where academics meet the other-than-scholarly needs of an industry and a social good. Neither of these uses completely converge with the traditional use of history in architecture schools in providing a body of precedents and concepts to trainee practitioners. As the profession itself undergoes transformation, how should we reflect on the uses of history in the past, today, and into the future?

