



Introduction

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The present issue is the outcome of a conference held at the Péter Pázmány Catholic University on October 21, 2015. The title of the conference was “Boundaries of Contemporary History.” It was organized by the Research Group for Social History of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Péter Pázmány Catholic University in Budapest with the aim of bringing together historians interested in questions of theory and method in the study of contemporary history. The complex problem of the present, considered as a specific perspective for historical writing, constitutes a considerable challenge for historians all over Europe. The dangers inherent in the public use of history require a resolute strategy on the part of academic history in defense of its roles. Has the maintenance of some control or at least influence over the excessive and uncritical use of different kinds of memory, which has been one of the consequences of the overwhelming rule of the present over contemporary societies, become one of academic history’s main functions, especially given the increasingly palpable need of contemporary societies for various and at times conflicting forms of nostalgia? Or has history itself, as has been claimed by several influential authors, become a form of memory? The inquiry into the boundaries of contemporary history concerns both the specific scientific conceptual framework of the writing of the history of the present and the limits of a period of time in human history formed by social and political factors which are constitutive elements of our present and which cannot be historicized yet as forces of a bygone era (in other words, a period of which we have living memories, not only historical accounts). The studies in this issue examine the peculiarities of this period and the institutional, conceptual framework of a professional history which is compelled to maintain a balance between social demands for memory (and identity) and its own methodological criteria. They also explore questions concerning the status of contemporary history among other branches of historiography and other present-centered social sciences. They seek to further a deeper understanding of the work and roles of historians as members of the community of professional scholars and as citizens who are attempting to orient themselves and their audiences in the maze of the present with the potential help of history.

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