

## *Editorial*

# The Future of Medical History

ROGER COOTER\*

This special issue of *Medical History* presents a selection of the papers delivered to the conference on ‘The Future of Medical History’, held in London in June 2010, sponsored by The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL. Although, sadly, this was an occasion to mark the closing of the Centre (in existence in various guises since the 1960s), it was also a moment for colleagues from around the world – junior and senior alike – to demonstrate the vibrancy of the field. Overwhelmingly, they proved that thinking historically about one of the most important domains of modern culture and politics was in robust health.

In order to include as many papers as possible, we asked our contributors to limit themselves to four or five pages. Their contributions were not meant to be fully elaborated and defended, so much as tastes and foretastes of work in progress. We also invited them to be as open, worrying, and speculative as they wished. The result is a cornucopia of commitments and concerns, ranging from political analysis of the current state of the sub-discipline, to trenchant challenges to its various modes of practice. Through case studies that span the globe geographically emerges a multitude of different kinds of engagements on everything from biopower to *BioShock*, leeches to lobotomy, and self-mutilation to model medical environments and museums. A wealth of different types of historiographical and methodological approaches are also apparent, drawing on epistemology, philosophy, and aesthetics, no less than sociology, anthropology, ethics and epidemiology. In theory at least, this richness and abundance bodes well for the future of *Medical History*.