

## EDITORIAL

---

These days, there's a history of everything. There's Manning Clark's *A Short History of Australia ...* and now there's *A Short History of Manning Clark*. There's *A Brief History of Time* and, for busy readers, *A Briefer History of Time*. There's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* and, in case that sounds a little too sweeping, there's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*. There's *Per Cent: a history of interest* and *Non-Violence: the history of a dangerous idea* and *Propitious esculent: the potato in world history* and *A History of Sin: how evil changes, but never really goes away* and ... the list goes on and on. And now there's 'The History of ...'

Something about the word 'history' makes a book-title authoritative, even when it's used ironically, as with Peter Carey's fictional *True History of the Kelly Gang*, or even when it sounds ludicrous, as with Frederick Kaufman's foodie book, *A Short History of the American Stomach* (Chapter One: 'Debbie Does Salad'). The phrase 'the history of' (or even 'a history of') is commanding but also comforting—somehow rooted in the dirt.

But maybe too much history—all those facts and figures, all those engorged Wikipedia pages, all that interpretation of the past to understand the present and plan for the future—dulls the senses. Maybe that's precisely *why* there seems to be a history of everything: to distract us. Except that the past *does* speak to us and *does* tell us stories—if we let it. As novelist Antoni Jach says in these pages, during a luminous and layered interview, 'how can we live in the present if we have to remember the past, or do we need to forget the past to be able to live?' Or as the narrator in Lee Kofman's 'Sultry Nights in Sokhumi and Melbourne' reflects, 'Say vodka and people forgive the Cold War, gulags, famines and the Iron Curtain.'

The past collides with the present in many ways in 'The History of ...' There's Géraud Boursin and YennY's haunting photographs of the abandoned ballroom above Flinders Street Station in central Melbourne. Their images of a grand space slowly decaying contrast with Wayne Quilliam's stunning photographic manipulations of the human form and with Romy Sai Zunde's collages, constructed from material pulled from her own sketchbooks.

As well, there's plenty of fiction, essays and poetry, including Isabel D'Avila Winter's story about a poet and a kiss; J.J. Steinfeld's Adorno-quoting jogger; Lauren Pope on loving your own reflection; Kay Sexton's foray into the Beijing racist park; Kevin Brophy's reflection on a very long nap; clinical neuropsychologist Kylie Ladd's ruminations on memory loss; and two very different—but complementary—tales of Poland by Joanna Kujawa and Antoni Jach; and much more.

By some happy accident, 'The History of ...' has quite a European flavour. Some people believe that's what history is: a series of accidents—sometimes happy, sometimes horrific—piled one upon the other over the centuries. Other people think that sounds like a convenient avoidance of humanity's capacity to shape, and reflect upon, its own world ... which leads me back to where I began: these days, there's a history of everything.

PATRICK ALLINGTON  
Fiction Editor