

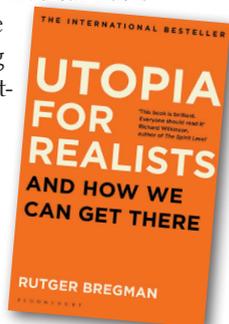
Books round-up

Food for idle thought

The best of the recent publications, as selected by Cathleen Mair

Rutger Bregman: *Utopia for Realists and How We Can Get There* (Bloomsbury, 2017)

Five hundred years after Thomas More wrote *Utopia*, Dutch historian Rutger Bregman calls for a radical return to utopian thinking. People might be richer, safer, and healthier than in More's time, but inequality is rife and we are working harder than ever. Surely we can imagine a better alternative? Following in the footsteps of John Maynard Keynes, Bregman explores how we might achieve a world without poverty. While some of the writing feels a little unrefined in translation from Dutch, his discussions of Universal Basic Income and the 15-hour working week are insightful and accessible, firmly grounded in historical knowledge and empirical

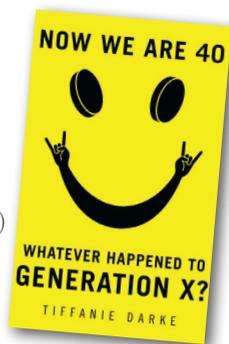


evidence. A welcome answer to some of the pessimism surrounding the automation of jobs, *Utopia for Realists* offers a fresh perspective on the problems of modern society and the search for the good life.

Tiffany Darke: *Now We Are 40: Whatever Happened to Generation X?*

(HarperCollins, 2017)

This is a fun and breezy portrait of the generation born in the late sixties and early seventies; the ravers, the Britpop kids, the Jarvis Cocker tribe. Tiffany Darke, a former editor of the *Sunday Times*' *Style* magazine, was there and did it all, and her book bounces along with great energy as she nostalgically recalls the halcyon days of Blur and Oasis and having fun for its own sake, that happy period of



culture, ay, before the dark forces of Silicon Valley megalomania and Trumpism took hold. Darke is also faintly anti-hipster, arguing that her generation invented craft ales, growing your own vegetables and coffee anyway, not the beardies. She ends the book with a defence of the Gen X values which she identifies as, essentially, being in the moment, enjoying life, bohemianism, wearing skinny jeans and a liberal outlook. She is also, rightly I think, aghast at the way movements like feminism and the wish for autonomy have appeared to regress rather than progress over the last few years. Our very own editor (*moi*) was hoop-o'-cock to find himself mentioned in these pages, not least because he was obsessively researching the effects of absinthe during that period and can't remember a single thing.

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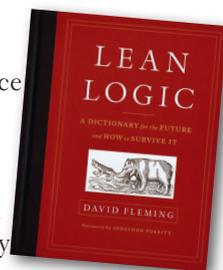
David Fleming: *Lean Logic; A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2016)

David Fleming, who died suddenly in 2010, was one of Britain's most visionary thinkers on environmental issues and played a key role in the birth of the UK Green Party. *Lean Logic* gathers together thirty years worth of his research in a dictionary, with over 400 essay entries on the environment,

economics and culture. In the face of a failing capitalist system, lean thinking seeks to rebuild a political economy grounded in ecology and local community; a path that offers both hope and practical solutions.

Stefan Geyer: *Zen in the Art of Permaculture Design* (Permanent Publications, 2016)

The *Idler* has long identified with the aims and spirit of Permaculture. Geyer's *Zen in the Art of Permaculture Design* fuses the practical elements of Permaculture with Eastern philosophy to offer readers a chance to think in "creatively caring and daringly experimental" new ways. Permaculture is much more than just organic gardening, it's an invitation to rethink the impact our way of life has on the world. This book is small enough to stick in your pocket, a little nudge encouraging you to slow down, observe and embrace your environment, before embarking on a journey to change it.



Iain Sinclair: *My Favourite London Devils*

(Tangerine Press, 2016)

London-based Tangerine Press continues to produce curious and beautiful publications, and *My Favourite London Devils* is no exception. In this collection of writing, part memoir, part literary critique, Iain Sinclair has gathered together essays on writers who, like him, have dedicated their life to writing in, and about, London. Taking the reader on a tour through the city's history, Sinclair visits the famous and the forgotten, from Peter Ackroyd to JG Ballard to Angela Carter. Through anecdotes, interviews and biographical essays, interspersed with illustrations by Dave McKean, Sinclair succeeds in painting the city's literary past as vividly as we experience its present.

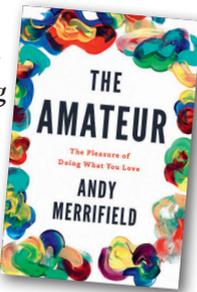


inordinate amount of power to those who assume the mantle of the expert. *The Amateur* invites readers to explore an alternative way of being. Rather than thinking of amateurs as dabblers, weekend gardeners, busying themselves with unimportant tasks, Merrifield defends the creative and political potential of doing things we love for pleasure. Amateurs take risks, seek independence, innovate by choosing a less obvious direction. By exploring the work of figures like Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, and Hannah Arendt, and their impact on his own professional life, Merrifield succeeds in highlighting the revolutionary spirit of the amateur; a reminder that it pays to be curious, not omniscient.

Andy Merrifield: *The Amateur: The Pleasures of Doing What You Love*

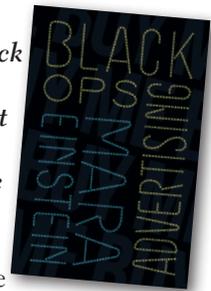
(Verso, 2017)

Professionals are everywhere, opines Merrifield. From the career politician to the growth hacking specialist, we seem to confer an

**Mara Einstein: *Black Ops Advertising; Native ads, Content Marketing and the Covert World of the Digital Sell***

(OR Books, 2016)

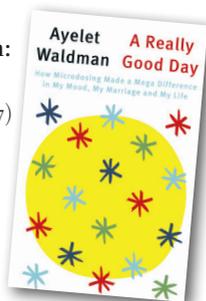
When did it become so difficult to tell the difference between an ad and a news story? On television, the boundaries were at least clearly defined, leaving time to make a cup of tea during ad breaks. Now advertisers have become publishers and the lines between editorial and marketing message are increasingly



blurred. Maria Einstein explores this shadow world of covert advertising, where ads no longer look like ads and sales pitches are hidden. Would we waste so much time watching funny videos, scrawling through pretty pictures or sharing BuzzFeed lists if we knew it was advertising? As more and more of our lives play out online, Einstein's book makes for an important but chilling read.

Ayelet Waldman:
A Really Good Day (Corsair, 2017)

The idea of microdosing on psychedelics to treat mood disorders is not new. Dr James Fadiman, author of *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide* and the world's leading expert in the field, began his research back in the 1960s. Yet it only recently entered mainstream discourse. Waldman's moving, entertaining and educational book contributes in valuable ways to this discussion. As her mood disorder becomes increasingly severe, Waldman turns to LSD, having exhausted nearly all other options of medication. Over the course of a month, with instructions from Dr Fadiman, Waldman chronicles her experiences with the drug and its impact on her mood and family



life. Enriched with extensive research into the drug's history, mythology and legal status, *A Really Good Day* opens a candid conversation on the treatment of mental health.

Stephen Fowler:
Rubber Stamping, Get Creative with Stamps, Rollers and Other Printmaking Techniques

(Laurence King Publishing, 2016)

For anyone interested in alternative printmaking or illustration, Stephen Fowler's guide to rubber stamping is a treasure trove of ideas and tips. From gathering equipment and making your own rubber stamps to creating type faces and putting together your own books, *Rubber Stamping* has it all. Fowler has included step-by-step guides, diagrams, and lots of great examples of rubber stamps in action. We are looking forward to doing a masterclass with Stephen at the *Idler Academy* later this year, but in the meantime, this book will allow any aspiring crafter to explore the colourful world of DIY stamping. 🌀

