

What I've been reading

by Tyler Cowen February 2, 2025 at 12:17 am in **Books**

Owen Hatherley, [Militant Modernism](#). A very good short book, defending “left wing modernism,” a much maligned target on the right these days. Hatherley himself is a much underrated figure, a commie who came along at the wrong time but a very good writer and thinker about aesthetics.

Stuart A. Reid, [The Lumumba Plot: The Secret History of the CIA and a Cold War Assassination](#). For whatever reason, there are more good books about the Congo than most other parts of Africa. This is one of them. From 2023, but good enough to make a “best of non-fiction” list for a typical year. Very cleanly written as well.

Charles Callan Tansill, [The Purchase of the Danish West Indies](#). Who would have thought that this 1966 volume, and Tansill, would be making a comeback? The biggest lesson for me here was how much the purchase was a live issue as early as 1867. And as the final purchase approached in 1917, the other European powers were by no means happy.

Richard Overy, [Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima, and the Surrender of Japan](#) is a short but very good and substantive look at the non-nuclear and also nuclear bombing campaigns.

Michael Krielaars, [The Sound of Utopia: Musicians in the Time of Stalin](#). A surprisingly fresh and substantive book, which also does a good job integrating the first-person perspective of the author. I've read the standard biographies of Shostokovich, Prokofiev, and the like, and still learned a lot from this one.

There is Gregor Craigie, [Our Crumbling Foundation: How We Solve Canada's Housing Crisis](#).

Molly Worthen, [Spellbound: How Charisma Shaped American History From the Puritans to Donald Trump](#) is a very good book on an underexplored topic. In some ways tech has mattered less than you might think.

Stephen Witt, [The Thinking Machine: Jensen Huang, Nvidia, and the World's Most Coveted Microchip](#). A fun and well-informed look at its subject matter. There should be more books on one of the world's most valuable companies, and yes supply is elastic.

Marc Hijink, Focus: The ASML Way, Inside the Power Struggle Over the Most Complex Machine on Earth. You have to already want to read a book about ASML, but this is in fact the relevant book about ASML. To call it boring is to miss the point, because the company itself is somewhat boring.


Jeanette zu Furstenberg, Wie gut wir sind, zeigt sich in Krisenzeiten: Ein Weckruf. Exactly the wake-up call Germany needs.

Rainer Zitelmann, The Origins of Poverty and Wealth: My World Tour and Insights from the Global Libertarian Movement is a kind of travel memoir from a man who has become one of our most prolific writers on behalf of liberty.

And I was reading my own short commentary on Atlas Shrugged, from a few years ago.

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Skimming AI summaries of books is the new reading, Luddite.

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