

## Notebook - Naomi Klein - Doppelganger\_ A Trip into the Mirror World-Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2023)

kindle

Naomi Klein

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### Page 8 | Highlight

Read or listen to yet another of her warnings that basic health measures were actually a covert plot orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party, Bill Gates, Anthony Fauci, and the World Economic Forum to sow mass death on such a scale it could only be the work of the devil himself?

Note:

*what happens when your doppelganger is your evil counterpart? How do you navigate that?*

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Other Naomi, as one of the most effective creators and disseminators of misinformation and disinformation about many of our most urgent crises, and as someone who has seemingly helped inspire large numbers to take to the streets in rebellion against an almost wholly hallucinated “tyranny,” is at the nexus of several forces that, while ridiculous in the extreme, are nonetheless important, since the confusion they sow and the oxygen they absorb increasingly stand in the way of pretty much anything helpful or healthful that humans might, at some point, decide to accomplish together.

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“Doppelganger” comes from German, combining Doppel (double) with Gänger (goer).

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Uncanny, a feeling Sigmund Freud described as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”—but is suddenly alien. The uncanniness provoked by doppelgangers is particularly acute because the thing that becomes unfamiliar is you.

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And here’s an extra twist: My doppelganger is a person who has undergone such a dramatic political and personal transformation that many have commented that she seems like a doppelganger of her former self. Which, in a way, makes me a double of a double, an uncanny state of affairs even Freud did not anticipate.

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It began to feel as if the forces that have destabilized my world are part of an expansive web of forces that are destabilizing our larger world—and that understanding these forces could hold a key to getting to firmer ground.

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**Page 11 | Highlight**

I have been preoccupied with the ways that large-scale shocks scramble our collective synapses, lead to mass regression, and make humans easy prey for demagogues.

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A state of shock is what happens to us—individually or as a society—when we experience a sudden and unprecedented event for which we do not yet have an adequate explanation. At its essence, a shock is the gap that opens up between event and existing narratives to explain that event.

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Metabolize the shock together, I would tell people, create meaning together. Resist the tin-pot tyrants who will tell you that the world is now a blank sheet for them to write their violent stories upon.

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The figure of the double began to fascinate me—its meaning in ancient mythology and in the birth of psychoanalysis. The way the twinned self stands in for our highest aspiration—the eternal soul, that ephemeral being that supposedly outlives the body. And the way the double also represents the most repressed, depraved, and rejected parts of ourselves that we cannot bear to see—the evil twin, the shadow self, the anti-self, the Hyde to our Jekyll.

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Doppelgangers, however, are not only forms of torment. For centuries, doubles have been understood as warnings or harbingers. When reality starts doubling, refracting off itself, it often means that something important is being ignored or denied—a part of ourselves and our world we do not want to see—and that further danger awaits if the warning is not heeded.

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That applies to the individual but also to entire societies that are divided, doubled, polarized, or partitioned into various warring, seemingly unknowable camps. Societies like ours.

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A Spanish word for existential anxiety and deep gloom, *zozobra* also evokes generalized wobbliness: “a mode of being that incessantly oscillates between two possibilities, between two affects, without knowing which one of those to depend on” —

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If doppelganger literature and mythology is any guide, when confronted with the appearance of one's double, a person is duty bound to go on a journey—a quest to understand what messages, secrets, and forebodings are being offered.

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The deeper I went, the more I noticed this phenomenon all around me: individuals not guided by legible principles or beliefs, but acting as members of groups playing yin to the other's yang—well versus weak; awake versus sheep; righteous versus depraved. Binaries where thinking once lived.

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But the pandemic, layered on top of so many other long-repressed emergencies, has taken humanity somewhere we have not been before, somewhere close but different. That difference is what accounts for the strangeness so many of us have been trying to name—everything so familiar, and yet more than a little off.

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It's because our world has changed, but, like a collective case of jet lag, most of us are still attuned to the rhythms and habits of the place left behind. It's past time to find our bearings in this new place.

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**Page 22 | Highlight**

We both write big-idea books (my No Logo, her Beauty Myth; my Shock Doctrine, her End of America; my This Changes Everything, her Vagina).

**Note:**

*I've read the beauty myth!*

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There is a certain inherent humiliation in getting repeatedly confused with someone else, confirming, as it does, one's own interchangeability and/or forgettability.

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In this way, confrontations with our doppelgangers inevitably raise existentially destabilizing questions. Am I who I think I am, or am I who others perceive me to be? And if enough others start seeing someone else as me, who am I, then?

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This is the perennial appeal of doppelgangers in novels and films: the idea that two strangers can be indistinguishable from each other taps into the precariousness at the core of identity—the painful truth that, no matter how deliberately we tend to our personal lives and public personas, the person we think we are is fundamentally vulnerable to forces outside of our control.

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It's a vertiginous thing to be harangued on social media about your alleged misunderstanding of your own ideas—while being told that another Naomi is a better version of you than you are.

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while these distinctions matter to me, and no doubt to her, most people couldn't care less. And why should they?

Note:

*This is true - that your values, beliefs,  
experiences define the self, but not  
other's perceptions*

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the confusion was now so frequent that Twitter's algorithm was prompting it, helpfully filling in the mistake for its users, to save them precious time.

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Zadie Smith saw all this coming more than a decade ago. Writing about the rise of Facebook, and by extension all the other social media platforms, she observed, "When a human being becomes a set of data on a website like Facebook, he or she is reduced. Everything shrinks. Individual character. Friendships. Language. Sensibility. In a way it's a transcendent experience: we lose our bodies, our messy feelings, our desires, our fears." But we aren't transcending to something higher, just less ourselves. And a flattened, reduced version of ourselves is easier to confuse with a flattened, reduced version of someone else.

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In the books and films about doppelgangers that had come to fill my evenings, I was struck by how reliably this phenomenon occurred: eventually, the double replaces the original, through sheer energy and tenacity, while the original fades away or worse. Dostoyevsky's novel *The Double* ends with Golyadkin, the tormented protagonist, being taken away to an asylum, driven mad by his

imposter's duplicity.

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We'd all like to think that, wouldn't we? The trouble is, there are just so damn many of us out there trying to be unique at the same time, using the same preprogrammed tools, writing in the same fonts, answering the same prompts.

Note:

*Individualism is dampened by  
engagement with social media*

*we don't create our thoughts for ourselves  
but to feed the machine*

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I found that my bitterness was steadily fading, giving way to more complex, and unexpected, emotions. Being chronically confused with another person may be humiliating, but that's not all it is. It is also an oddly intimate experience. The boundaries between you and alter-you begin to wear down, becoming thin, even diaphanous. Their problems are your problems, their shame your shame. A doppelganger is your trail, your shadow, a bit like in the biblical story from which we derive our name, in which Ruth proclaims to Naomi: "Where you go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Perhaps this is why I became, increasingly, not bitter or angry about the confusion, but intensely interested.

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My doppelganger trouble was definitive proof that I had flunked at one of the most valued activities of contemporary capitalism: developing, maintaining, and defending my personal brand.

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**Page 60 | Highlight**

I wanted it both ways: to be the No Logo girl (the face of an emerging anti-capitalist movement) and to deny that I cared a bit about building a brand. To be the only clean one in a dirty business. And isn't that what so many of us want as we try to win the game of personal branding—or at least not to get slain by it? We carefully cultivate online personas—doubles of our “real” selves—that have just the right balance of sincerity and world-weariness. We hone ironic, detached voices that aren't too promotional but do the work of promoting nonetheless. We go on social media to juice our numbers, while complaining about how much we hate the “hell sites.”

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Good brands are immune to fundamental transformation. Conceding to having become one at age thirty would have meant foreclosing on what I saw as my prerogative to change, evolve, and hopefully improve. It would have locked me into performing this particular version of me, indefinitely.

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Without fail, students describe the crafting of their college admission essays as the decisive moment when their private sense of self was subsumed by the imperative to create a consumable, public-facing identity.

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**Page 65 | Highlight**

they learned to tell stories about their young lives that had less to do with truths as they knew them than with meeting the imagined needs and requirements of an audience of strangers for certain kinds of identities.

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**Page 66 | Highlight**

What is an all-seeing God, capable of knowing our thoughts and intentions, if not the most effective surveillance tool ever invented?

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**Page 66 | Highlight**

The Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank, who collaborated closely and later broke with Freud, saw the soul—the self believed to live beyond the body after death—as the original doppelganger, the most intimate of doubles.

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These doubles are the unwanted selves that we made some kind of deal with the devil to be free of, now seeking their revenge.

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And what happens to their abject selves while they are busily performing their perfected selves?

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But they have nonetheless grown up with an acute consciousness of having an externalized double—a digital double, an idealized identity that is partitioned from their “real” selves and that serves as a role they must perform for the benefit of others if they are to succeed. At the same time, they must project the unwanted and dangerous parts of themselves onto others (the unenlightened, the problematic, the deplorable, the “not me” that sharpens the borders of the “me”). This triad—of partitioning, performing, and projecting—is fast becoming a universal form of doppelganging, generating a figure who is not exactly us, but whom others nonetheless perceive as us. At best, a digital doppelganger can deliver everything our culture trains us to want: fame, adulation, riches. But it’s a precarious kind of wish fulfillment, one that can be blown up with a single bad take or post.

**Page 68 | Note**

*She is quite judgemental, though.*

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Notably, Bannon appears to have no desire to make Dave’s life better, to help him lead a life from which he would not need to escape. Rather, his goal seems to be to turn reality into a game played with live ammunition.

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the commodification of the self, particularly of Black selves, cannot and should not be separated from the brutality of its past, despite the enormous changes in context, agency, and profit flows. Branding is a process that requires what the author and psychotherapist Nancy Colier describes as an imperative to “relate to our self in the third person.” A commodified self may be rich, but commodification still requires a partitioning, an internal doubling that is inherently alienating. There is you, and then there is Brand You.

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Dr. Richard Schwartz, who developed the therapy mode of Internal Family Systems, suggests there are actually more than two parts in our selves: every self is made up of a multiplicity, or mosaic, of often contradictory voices, hopes, and urges.

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**Page 79 | Highlight**

we should not fear having voices in our heads—we should fear their absence.

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hooks’s ideas, and she understood that there is an unavoidable tension between the baggage a name can come to carry—its relative bigness in the world—and the ability of one’s words to reach people and be adopted as their own.

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it concerns me when Wolf’s exaggerations, speculations, and baseless claims get conflated with the shock doctrine—not because it’s a brand in need of protection, but because it’s a framework that has given people some language to guard against profiteering and attacks on democracy during confusing periods of emergency.

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what she was describing on Fox was actually not a vaccine passport at all. Rather, she was describing what it increasingly feels like to be at the mercy of omnipresent technologies that are governed according to opaque algorithms and whose often-arbitrary, hugely consequential decisions are outside the reach of existing laws. Seen in that context, it shouldn’t be a surprise that her state of alarm resonated with people who came across her videos.

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Wolf was nonetheless providing people with something they clearly wanted and needed: a focal point for their fear and outrage over digital surveillance.

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Like so much else in our culture, from abusive labor practices to climate breakdown, the burden of pandemic response was shifted from the collective to the individual, all in the name of getting back to business as usual: “Did you get your jab?” “Show us the proof.”

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**Page 94 | Highlight**

There were also social costs inside wealthy countries to placing so much of the virus-control strategy on vaccinations and verification apps. Whenever access to spaces and services requires a smartphone and QR codes, it further marginalizes those who are unhoused and otherwise vulnerable and are less likely to have access to those tools—“

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Among the most notorious was the Tuskegee experiment of the 1930s, in which hundreds of Black men in Alabama were given placebos instead of the best treatments for syphilis, with many dying as a result.

**Note:**

*Make an obsidian note on this*

Wolf, with her “Five Freedoms” campaign and her calls for anti-vax civil disobedience, is giving her followers something to do. She is telling them that it’s not too late to get their privacy, and their freedoms, back.

The more we accept the premise that we must be online for everything—liking, loathing, sharing—and the more we accept the tacit contract of trading privacy in exchange for app-enabled convenience, the more data points tech companies are able to Hoover up about us. And with that data, they create our real digital doppelgangers—not the aspirational avatars many of us consciously create with those carefully curated and filtered photos and those posts with the perfectly calibrated tone, but the doubles that countless machines create with the data trails we leave behind every time we click, or view, or fail to disable location tracking, or ask a “smart” device for anything at all. Every data point scraped from our online life makes our double more vivid, more complex, more able to nudge our behavior in the real world.

Nick Cave, when confronted with a ChatGPT-generated version of a Nick Cave song, described the phenomenon as “replication as travesty ... a grotesque mockery of what it is to be human.”

A shudder that turns into a quake when we realize that it is not just individuals who are being artificially copied, however poorly, but the entirety of human existence. Artificial intelligence is, after all, a mirroring and mimicry machine: we feed in the cumulative words, ideas, and images that our species has managed to amass (and digitize) over its history and these programs mirror back to us something that feels uncannily lifelike.

*not quite true of my generation - we had Myspace, and also did so many of those Q&A bulletins / notes on Facebook, imagining that this defines your identity (just because you said it was so)*

The Faustian bargain of the digital age—free or cheap digital conveniences in exchange for our data—was only ever explained to us after it was already a done deal. And it represents an enormous and radical shift not only in how we live but also, far more importantly, in what our lives are for. We are all mine sites now, data mine sites, and despite the intimacy and import of what is being mined, the mining process remains utterly obscure and the mine operators wholly unaccountable.

many happily cheered corporate deplatformings—until the same dynamics came for them.

*Further Reading*

Clout is the values-free currency of the always-online age—both a substitute for hard cash as well as a conduit to it. Clout is a calculus not of what you do, but of how much bulk you-ness there is in the world. You get clout by playing the victim. You get clout by victimizing others.

“We knew the branding was conspiratorial and shocking. Unfortunately, in this age, you kind of have to be that to get people’s attention.”

*what happens after? Is the charge permanent? what happened to the Nazis after WW II - was the movement still prevalent?*

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But I am also unsettled by the ease with which we can turn off other humans. I fear that there is something habit-forming about making other people disappear with a keystroke.

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The point is that on either side of the reflective glass, we are not having disagreements about differing interpretations of reality—we are having disagreements about who is in reality and who is in a simulation.

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**Page 131 | Highlight**

In my doppelganger studies, I have learned that there is a real medical syndrome called Capgras delusion. Those who suffer from it become convinced that people in their lives—spouses, children, friends—have been replaced by replicas or doppelgangers.

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What is Wolf getting out of her alliance with Bannon and from her new life in the Mirror World? Everything. She is getting everything she once had and lost—attention, respect, money, power. Just through a warped mirror.

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But I do realize, in retrospect, that I was too quick to take the official story—that it came from a wet market where wild animals were sold—at face value. If I'm honest, I accepted it because it served my own motivated reasoning and reinforced my worldview: the pandemic was a little less frightening to me if it was yet another example of humans overstressing nature and getting bitten on the ass for it. Then, as time went on, and the "lab leak theory" became a key talking point from people like Wolf and Bannon in the Mirror World, where it was mixed with baseless claims about bioweapons, along with plenty of anti-Asian racism, there seemed to be further reason not to take another look at the facts. Even though more and more facts and documents were piling up that supported a serious consideration of the lab leak hypothesis, most liberals and leftists didn't bother looking for months because we didn't want to be like them,

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without easy access to reliable, in-depth information about vaccine risks, rumors about friends of

friends falling ill or dropping dead after getting “the jab” coursed through the digital grapevine.

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When editors and journalists steer clear of important topics for fear that their audiences can’t cope with complex truths, it doesn’t throttle conspiracies—it fuels them.

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Stuck in the binary of lock down versus open up, we failed to consider so many options during the first years that we lived with the virus, and there were so many debates we didn’t have. Faced with the torrent of lies coming from the conspiratorial right, many liberals and progressives opted to simply defend status quo measures, despite the fact that we could, and should, have demanded far more.

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We defined ourselves against each other and yet were somehow becoming ever more alike, willing to declare each other non-people.

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After months of listening to Bannon, I can say this with great certainty: While most of us who oppose his political project choose not to see him, he is watching us closely. The issues we are abandoning, the debates we aren’t having, the people we are insulting and discarding. He is watching all of it, and he is stitching together a political agenda out of it, a warped mirror agenda that he is convinced is the ticket to the next wave of electoral victories—it’s an agenda too few on our side of the glass have tried to comprehend.

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Steve Bannon, regardless of whatever else he may be, is first and foremost a strategist. And he has a knack for identifying issues that are the natural territory of his opponents but that they have neglected or betrayed, leaving themselves vulnerable to having parts of their base wooed away. This is what he helped Trump do in 2016. He knew that a large sector of unionized blue-collar workers felt betrayed by corporate Democrats who had signed trade deals that accelerated factory closures in the 1990s, and that their anger deepened when the party bailed out banks instead of

workers and homeowners after the 2008 crash. He paid close attention to the ways Occupy Wall Street was dismissed and then crushed, and to how Bernie Sanders, whose left-populist 2016 presidential campaign grew out of that movement, faced all kinds of dirty tricks from the Democratic Party establishment as it closed ranks around Hillary Clinton. Bannon saw an opportunity to peel away a portion of the male unionized workforce that had always voted for Democrats—most of it white, but not all of it. Bannon crafted a campaign message out of the betrayals of his rivals: Trump would be a new kind of Republican, one who would stand up to Wall Street, shred corporate trade deals, close the border to supposedly job-stealing immigrants, and end foreign wars—moreover, unlike Republicans before, he pledged to protect social programs like Medicare and Social Security. This was the original MAGA promise.

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many leftists are concerned about the dehumanizing impacts of tech on workers treated as extensions of machines (I know I am), not to mention the dystopian possibilities of a future in which the rich can buy genetic upgrades for themselves and their kids. Many conservatives, meanwhile, oppose this kind of techno fetishism for different reasons; they see it as an affront to God's plan.

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there was weak resistance among progressives to the way vaccine manufacturers were profiteering from the pandemic, and so Bannon became the one taking on Big Pharma's greed—

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The structural critiques of capitalism are gone, and in their place are discombobulated conspiracies that somehow frame deregulated capitalism as communism in disguise.

**Note:**

*Perfectly written, feel like I've been trying to describe this for a while*



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Under trademark law, a brand that is not actively being used can be deemed dormant and thus fair game for another party to usurp. I started to feel that what had been happening to me, with Other Naomi, has happened to the left much more broadly—with Bannon and Vance and Meloni and others. Issues that we had once championed had gone dormant in a great many spaces. And now they were being usurped, taken over by their twisted doubles in the Mirror World.

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in contrast to Bannon's courting of disaffected Democrats, we also don't put enough thought into how to build alliances with people who aren't already in our movements.

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When we have differences, we tend to focus on them obsessively, finding as many opportunities as possible to break apart. Important disagreements need to be hashed out, and many conflicts that arise in progressive spaces are over behaviors that, when unchallenged, make those spaces unwelcoming or dangerous for the people they target. But it's not a great secret that plenty of people routinely go too far, turning minor language infractions into major crimes, while adopting a discourse that is so complex and jargon-laden that people outside university settings often find it off-putting—or straight-up absurd.

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Moreover, when entire categories of people are reduced to their race and gender, and labeled "privileged," there is little room to confront the myriad ways that working-class white men and women are abused under our predatory capitalist order,

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All of this is highly unstrategic, because whichever groups and individuals we kick to the curb, the Mirror World is there, waiting to catch them, praise their courage, and offer a sympathetic ear.

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This is Bannon's tone much of the time: warm, welcoming, protective of his "community," constantly praising listeners for their kindness, intelligence, and courage. All of it is designed as a rebuke to the harshness, snobbishness, sectarianism, and identity absolutism on parts of the highly

educated left.

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Bannon claims (and polling supports this claim) that growing numbers of Black and Latino people, particularly men, are open to voting Republican, in part over frustrations with how Covid measures affected their jobs and small businesses, and also over discomfort with their kids coming home with unfamiliar ideas about the mutability of gender.

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“Inclusive nationalism” just means that they have found some new blocs of voters who are also looking for scapegoats, and not all of them are white, or male.

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According to the results of a Public Religion Research Institute poll released in November 2021, among Republicans who say they believe that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, almost four in ten say that “true American patriots might have to resort to violence in order to save our country.”

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When leaders who seek what I call a “fascist shift” want to close down an open society, they send paramilitary groups of scary young men out to terrorize citizens. The Blackshirts roamed the Italian countryside beating up communists; the Brownshirts staged violent rallies throughout Germany. This paramilitary force is especially important in a democracy: you need citizens to fear thug violence and so you need thugs who are free from prosecution ... Say there are protests, or a threat, on the day of an election; history would not rule out the presence of a private security firm at a polling station “to restore public order.” The person who wrote that (back in 2007) is Naomi Wolf, now found regularly on the War Room, hosted by a man trying to make sure that, next election day, the thugs will be at every polling station.

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Just as he knew in 2016 that Trump could not win without pissed-off, mostly white union guys, he is sure now that pissed-off, mostly white suburban moms—nerves frayed from those years of yo-yo

remote schooling and closed gyms; still revved up about vaccine mandates and getting shadow banned on Instagram; genuinely worried about the well-being of their kids and their small businesses; done being dismissed and mocked as “Karens” by mean liberals—are the path to the next right-wing resurgence.

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It is no exaggeration to say that Bannon has cast Wolf as a kind of mom in chief for the voting bloc he is hoping to secure: a former high-profile Democrat, a onetime-famous feminist who now wants to speak to the manager on all of their behalf.

## Page 157 | Highlight

Chaplin and Hitler, “Each is a distorting mirror, the one for good, the other for untold evil.”

## Page 157 | Note

*Chaplin as Hitler's doppelgänger*

## Page 161 | Note

*"Writing is a form of therapy, sometimes, wonder how all those who do not write, ~~paint~~ compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation" - Graham Greene, Ways of escape*

## Page 166 | Highlight

Evidently, a great many of us want nothing more than to find another person who knows precisely

what it is like to live inside our bodies and minds—and that desire coexists with the drive to be unmistakably different.

## Page 169 | Highlight

For instance, when Bannon states that his armed and authoritarian posse is being “othered” by leftists and liberals, he is appropriating an important term that analysts of authoritarianism have used to describe how fascists cast their targets as less than human, making them easier to discard and even exterminate. But he is doing more than that, too. He is also making a mockery of the whole concept of othering, which in turn makes it harder to use the term to name what Bannon does as a matter of course—to migrants, to Black voters, to trans and nonbinary youth.

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Many of us even let ourselves dream that the emptiness of our highways, the rest the skies were receiving from planes, and all of the talk about missing nothing more than one another would actually lead to a meaningful change in how we decided to live when the pandemic finally eased.

## Page 177 | Note

For example - we just watched a youtube video on how we no longer name the decades, calling the last 30 years to feel homogenous. Naomi is saying that the right have taken words that are commonly used in leftist spaces and have applied a new, skewed meaning. As leftists, we can no longer include these words in our vernacular, as they are now associated with the right. As a result, we lack the vocabulary to describe the phenomenon occurring around us.

↳ In "why I'm no longer talking to white people about race", Reni Edo-Lodge makes a similar point, that in progressive times, the general public doesn't get more progressive, they just hide their bigotry as it's not culturally valued in the present.

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The story beneath the story was the normalization of the disassociation between words from reality, which could only usher in the era of irony and flat detachment, because those seemed like the only self-respecting postures to adopt in a world in which everyone was lying all the time. And from there we were all primed to dive headlong into the sea of social media non sequiturs, the scroll that scrambles the narrative structures of argument and story in favor of a never-ending thought confetti of "this" and "this" and "this" and "look over there."

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I appreciated Greta's "Blah, blah, blah" speeches because they precisely captured the pervasive feeling of speechlessness, far better than my own impotent and sullen silences in this period. Greta had found a way not only of critiquing language but also of protecting language: she was mocking their words, and what happens to her words in their ears, but she was also saving her words for spaces where they still might matter, where they still can be married with principles and actions, where people are not merely performing for cameras.

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For Ehrenreich, this was all "part of a larger withdrawal into individual concerns after the briefly thrilling communal uplift some had experienced in the 1960s ... If you could not change the world or even chart your own career, you could still control your own body—what goes into it and how muscular energy is expended."

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But that raises some questions: If they can do it for Covid-19, why stop there? Why not launch

similarly ambitious public programs to tackle other human emergencies? Could the government tackle hunger, soaring housing costs, and the need for universal health care? A successful Covid response would have set a precedent for a modern, activist government—a precedent many on the right consider dangerous.

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once the slim, perfected body has been achieved, the less controlled body that once was can persist as an ever-present shadow self—and this discarded double is deeply loathed.

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And that is the trouble with this more private kind of doppelganger: when body mania sets in, the fit self may well not be satisfied with crushing its own unfit self; it may look for other targets, its self-hatred seeping out and projecting itself onto other people's less fit, less conventionally able bodies.

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Far from the unlikely bedfellows they first seemed to be, large parts of the modern wellness industry are proving to be all too compatible with far-right notions of natural hierarchies, genetic superiority, and disposable people.

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**Page 220 | Highlight**

The disability justice advocate and author Beatrice Adler-Bolton refers to the mindset that has animated so much Covid denialism as “deaths pulled from the future”—which she defines as the judgment-laden posture that frames “deaths from Covid-19 as somehow preordained” because the people doing most of the dying were probably going to die prematurely anyway.

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**Page 220 | Highlight**

The very idea that humans can and should be “optimized” lends itself to a fascistic worldview—because if your food is extra-clean, it can easily mean other people's food is extra-dirty. If you are safe because your immune system is strong, it can flip to mean others are unsafe because they are weak. If you are optimized, others are, by definition, suboptimal. Defective. Next door to disposable.

**Page 231 | Highlight**

Procreation has long been viewed, particularly by those who come from wealth, as a form of temporal doubling, with the child sometimes given the same name as the father or mother, extending the parent's legacy and fortune into the future (e.g., RFK Jr.). In our time of personal branding and optimized selves, you don't need inherited wealth or a title to do something similar. You can simply treat your child as a spin-off or brand extension—you and your little mini-me can dress up in matching outfits for Instagram or share adorable dances on TikTok.

**Page 233 | Highlight**

in today's language, if your kid is your brand extension, then having a child who challenges social standards of normalcy might mean that your whole personal brand is in crisis.

**Page 235 | Highlight**

For some parents, this experience of not fitting, of being extremely and glaringly distinguishable, and not in ways that bestow status, clearly triggers deep fears about falling behind in the perfectibility race in this world of so many little mirrors.

**Note:**

*Maybe this mirrors how I feel about  
Anthony's unmasking, why I can have  
difficulty coming to terms with it.*

**Page 236 | Highlight**

Multiple peer-reviewed studies show that children born to older parents are more likely to be

diagnosed with autism.

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**Page 239 | Highlight**

Wing knew that this definition was so narrow that it excluded many children who were neuroatypical and needed supports. So she developed the idea that autism was not a fixed set of symptoms, but a spectrum, presenting in a range of different ways depending on the individual, and could include people who are very verbal and physically capable. Her research eventually led to autism being diagnosed as a “spectrum disorder.”

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**Page 246 | Highlight**

The educators observed that many of the traits causing social difficulties had been present throughout history, expressing themselves through archetypes like the hyperfocused artist or the absent-minded professor, and so did not need to be treated as diseases. Instead, in keeping with Red Vienna’s ethos of child-centered policy, the educators simply saw these behaviors as different ways of being human and developed tailored supports for the children in their care. But it wouldn’t last.

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**Page 247 | Highlight**

Red Vienna’s programs designed to better understand and support children with social and developmental challenges were instead turned into diagnosis machines, places where doctors sorted out those who were considered useful to the Nazi project from those who were, in the party’s parlance, “unworthy of life.”

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**Page 249 | Highlight**

Asperger, in other words, was a key node in the system of sorting who would live and who would be murdered, an apparatus that would soon be expanded into a murder machinery capable of killing millions of people who did not fit the Aryan ideal in other ways.

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**Page 250 | Highlight**

Asperger’s jarring career trajectory demonstrates that, in just a handful of years, the same institutions and some of the very same people can shift from an ethos of care and curiosity toward a vulnerable group to one of callousness and genocidal cleansing. As if a switch has been flipped.



I have had several such experiences, usually while waiting in line, and they always go the same way: first comes the friendliness of the neuroatypical person, piercing through my little bubble of public isolation (usually involving headphones), then the shame and panic of the parent or grandparent, and finally the relief at having permission not to feel those painful emotions about someone they love, finding a little safe harbor in a never-ending storm.

The effect of conspiracy culture is the opposite of calm; it is to spread panic.

Yes, our world is still confusing after we understand this—but it is not incomprehensible. There are always systemic forces at play, and a great many of them have to do with the core capitalist imperative to expand and grow by seeking out new frontiers to enclose.

Individualism, or the ones that capitalism places on your power as an individual (get your job, wear your mask) is here to stay, perhaps that's why young voters feel so disillusioned, knowing that capitalism has taught the world not to care about others, and that mindset is hard to undo, particularly when empathy is culturally unneeded.

That, I have always believed, is one of the core reasons for the left to exist: to provide a structural analysis of wealth and power that brings order and rigor to the prevailing (and correct) sense that society is rigged against the majority, and that important truths are being hidden behind pat political rhetoric. Because we cannot change what we do not understand. And because the system is rigged, and most people are indeed getting screwed—but without a firm understanding of

capitalism's drive to find new profit sources to enclose and extract, many will imagine there is a cabal of uniquely nefarious individuals pulling the strings.

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Page 269 | Highlight

I am a leftist focused on capital's ravaging of our bodies, our democratic structures, and the living systems that support our collective existence. Wolf is a liberal who never had a critique of capital; she simply wanted women like her to be free from bias and discrimination in the system so that they could rise as individuals.

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Page 270 | Highlight

This flip from hero to villain narratives goes some way toward explaining how so many seemingly apolitical people could have become obsessed with terrifying Covid conspiracy theories. Many, like Wolf, were people who had followed the rules of getting ahead in this broken system, and it had worked for them. They started their own business, saved some money, took out loans, maybe earned a little money on the side as a small-time landlord. They accepted the proposition that their job was to take care of themselves and their families and that nothing more would be asked of them (even as soaring housing, tuition, medical, and energy costs put the bare logistics of this kind of care increasingly out of reach). They had bought the story that their comforts and successes were the product of their ingenuity and hard work alone (not their workers, not their caregivers, not the trade policies that favor rich nations, and certainly not their race or class). And then, suddenly, we were all confronted with a crisis that required us to act as more than individuals, more than families, more than nations, because we are actually entangled with one another. And that was a shock bigger than Covid itself.

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Page 271 | Highlight

In the neoliberal era that began in the 1970s and has not yet ended, every hardship and every difficulty—from poverty to student debt to home eviction to drug addiction—has been pathologized as a personal failing. Every success, meanwhile, is lauded as proof of the relative superiority of the supposedly self-made. And, of course, these delusions of rugged individualism go far deeper than the half century of neoliberal unmaking. We who live in settler colonial states like the United States, Canada, and Australia have, for the most part, never truly reckoned with the fact that our nations exist only because of the twin thefts of stolen land and stolen people, that slavery and genocide were the bloody subsidies that allowed colonists, many of whom were themselves in debt peonage, to engage in their self-making adventures. And neither have the European nations that launched those colonial crusades in the first place.

**Page 272 | Highlight**

The illusion of our separateness fell away. We were not, and never were, self-made. We are made, and unmade, by one another.

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**Page 277 | Highlight**

the surface layers of markets that middle-class people in wealthy parts of the planet engage with directly—brightly lit grocery stores and gas stations, sleek websites and dull offices—are not the whole story of capitalism; they are its storefront. All of these operations require a level of extraction from their workers, shoppers, and users, but they also sit on top of more hidden parts of the supply chain, zones of hyper-exploitation, human containment, and ecosystem poisoning that are not glitches in the system but have always been integral parts of what makes our world run.

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**Page 279 | Highlight**

So, in attempting to understand the ludicrous theories swirling in the Mirror World, we should be very careful not to be so reactive that we end up saying that sadism and depravity do not happen, that only a loony conspiracy theorist would believe something so out-there. Because an economic order that contains inequalities as extreme as ours—in which the vanity rocket ships of billionaires sail over seas of human misery—is its own kind of depravity, and that level of injustice reproduces more depravity as a matter of course.

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**Page 281 | Highlight**

there is something profoundly unsatisfying about how open our global elites are about the power they believe they have a right to wield over the rest of us. The mechanics of oligarchy are not hidden; they are flaunted with a level of pride that actively humiliates their spectators.

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**Page 282 | Highlight**

In every case, they take up the mantle of solving the world's problems—climate breakdown, infectious diseases, hunger—with no mandate and no public involvement and, most notably, no shame about their own central roles in creating and sustaining these crises.

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**Page 282 | Highlight**

Knowing that this kind of unmasked plutocracy can take root in democratic societies without so

much as an effort to hide it is like being forced to watch your spouse cheat on you when that is not your kink. Maybe we should see conspiracy culture—with its theater of uncovering things that are not hidden—as some sort of twisted lunge for self-respect.

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Page 283 | Highlight

The extreme consolidation in the corporate world over the past three decades has produced a playing field so rigged against consumers that pursuing the basics of life can feel like navigating a never-ending series of scams.

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Page 283 | Highlight

The black box is not just the algorithms running our communication networks—almost everything is a black box, an opaque system hiding something else. The housing market isn't about homes; it's about hedge funds and speculators. Universities aren't about education; they're about turning young people into lifelong debtors. Long-term care facilities aren't about care; they're about draining our elders in the last years of life and real estate plays. Many news sites aren't about news; they're about tricking us into clicking on autoplaying ads and advertorials that eat up the bottom half of nearly every site. Nothing is as it seems.

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Page 284 | Highlight

Under the flashing lights of Las Vegas, hundreds or even thousands of people really do live in a sprawling network of storm tunnels.

Note:

*Look this up*

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Page 284 | Highlight

conspiracy theorists get the facts wrong but often get the feelings right—

**Page 284 | Highlight**

The word for the system driving those feelings starts with c, but if no one ever taught you how capitalism works, and instead told you it was all about freedom and sunshine and Big Macs and playing by the rules to get the life you deserve, then it's easy to see how you might confuse it with another c-word: conspiracy.

**Page 297 | Highlight**

Yet witnessing how many of the loudest voices laying claim to this treacherous form of discrimination were, like me, well-off white women, I couldn't shake the feeling that part of the reason why they were making these choices was that they believed that being outside the Covid health consensus conferred on them a powerful kind of victim status—this at a time when the spotlight on racialized violence was causing plenty of white women to question ourselves and our roles. Did being a white woman count as a basis for discrimination at a time when everyone was railing against the archetypal Karen? Well, maybe, if a Karen can convince herself she is actually a Rosa in disguise, denied access to restaurants and transportation and shunned by friends and family. Surely, by laying claim to that abrupt loss of status, that would raise her status—which, let's face it, is not an entirely outlandish thing to believe at this stage of neoliberal capitalism, which has done a fine job of transforming identity-based oppression from a basis for solidarity and shared analysis (the original intention of identity politics) to its own form of currency.

**Page 297 | Highlight**

Only in spasms of reckonings like the one that followed George Floyd's murder does the dominant culture manage to look with anything more than furtive glances at these foundational crimes—or at the present-day realities of continued racial segregation in our neighborhoods, schools, health-care, and justice systems.

**Page 299 | Highlight**

It's as if by absorbing the language and postures of the oppressed, the diagonalists are attempting to outrun the long shadow of the past. Including the fact that our young countries are built on top of burned villages and graveyards, whose spirits have never been put to rest.

**Page 304 | Highlight**

"An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought," James Baldwin wrote. However, "to accept one's past—one's history—is not

the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it.”

Page 310 | Note

Naomi makes the point that diagonalist protesting, following civil rights action a protest, is a direct reaction. A grappling with reality, trying to force the world into having the same pro-colonial message as in the past. A return to the status quo at any cost.

Page 310 | Highlight

So, one way of seeing the convoy of eighteen-wheelers that made its way to Ottawa is as an angry reassertion of innocence, an attempt to stuff down these difficult truths ever deeper in the shadows, while trying to reanimate that comforting dream of righteousness and dominance—as individuals and as a nation.

Page 311 | Highlight

Did the truckers intend to upstage, blot out, and co-opt the Indigenous and Black racial justice

reckonings that have so deeply challenged our national stories and so many of our self-conceptions during these pandemic years? Surely not in any conscious way. There was no shadowy room where Steve Bannon and the Proud Boys met with my doppelganger and Pat King to cook up that devious scheme. Rather, I think what we are seeing may be more like a reflex, an instinct for what feels, to its participants, like self-preservation.

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**Page 311 | Highlight**

It's all tilting and rolling, and so much, like the assumed predictability of seasons, will never be stable again, at least not for several generations, and that is in a best-case scenario. All of this destabilization places demands on us: to change, to reassess, and to reimagine who we need to become.

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**Page 312 | Highlight**

Denial is so much easier than looking inward, or backward, or forward; so much easier than change. But denial needs narratives, cover stories, and that is what conspiracy culture is providing.

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**Page 319 | Highlight**

"Auschwitz was the modern industrial application of a policy of extermination on which European world domination had long since rested," Lindqvist writes. However, he continues, "when what had been done in the heart of darkness was repeated in the heart of Europe, no one recognized it. No one wished to admit what everyone knew."

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**Page 319 | Highlight**

W. E. B. Du Bois, in *The World and Africa*, published soon after the end of the Second World War, wrote, "There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world." What was new: it was now fellow Europeans who were being cast as the inferior race.

Note:

*we consider WWII to be the biggest atrocity to occur within Europe, but in doing so we erase the context of colonialism, we only emphasize the pain caused under the Nazi regime because it affected other Europeans, people who present white.*

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#### Page 320 | Highlight

What if that's the point: that Nazism is not an aberration from an otherwise uplifting story of enlightenment and modernity, but its not-so-distant double, its other face?

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#### Page 321 | Highlight

What Du Bois and Césaire tried to tell us is that culture, language, science, and economy are no protection against genocide—all it takes is sufficient military force wielded by a power willing to denounce your culture as savage and declare you brutes.

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#### Page 322 | Highlight

The countries that defeated Hitler did not have to confront the uncomfortable fact that Hitler had taken pointers and inspiration on race-making and on human containment from them, leaving their innocence not only undisturbed but also significantly strengthened by what was indeed a righteous victory.



Note:

*I've been reflecting on this. When I try to learn about WWII I feel bored, which - what a luxury. And feeling like we (Europe) will never allow that to happen again, when it already has happened again, is still happening: slave labour (fast fashion), mass incarceration & more slave labour, America's immigration camps...*

## Page 323 | Highlight

one of the hardest habits of thought to shake is the reflex to look away, to not see what is in front of us, and to not know what we know.

## Page 323 | Highlight

What if full-blown fascism is not the monster at the door, but the monster inside the house, the monster inside us—even we whose ancestors have been victims of genocide?

## Page 324 | Highlight

“There is a resistance to memory inside memory itself,” writes the historian of psychoanalysis Jacqueline Rose.

## Page 325 | Highlight

The fear that it will happen to them stems from an implicit admission that they did it to others. As though the Black, Brown and Indigenous downtrodden are just as hateful as they are and are going to turn around and do to them what they did to us.

**Page 328 | Highlight**

This is how prejudice works. The person holding it unconsciously creates a double of every person who is part of the despised group, and that twisted twin looms over all who meet the criteria, always threatening to swallow them up.

**Page 332 | Highlight**

But it was in the Christian world that it became inescapable. The New Testament is a powerful cosmology of doubles: God/Satan, Christ/Antichrist, angels/demons, heaven/hell. Since Jews are associated with Satan in the gospels, Jews and Christians were placed in a twinned relationship from the start, with Jews perennially cast as the demonic doppelgangers of the faithful followers of Christ. Not only did we fail to recognize the true messiah when we had the chance, but we are perennially blamed for Jesus's death.

**Page 334 | Highlight**

Jews have been the subjects and targets of the most persistent conspiracy theory of the last two and half centuries. Despite shifting names and players, the script has stayed remarkably similar: an international Jewish conspiracy stands accused of colluding in the shadows to undermine Christian values, weaken Christian states, seize Christian property, and, in later versions, control the media.

**Page 335 | Note**

*We're all angry about the same issues,  
but there is a comfort in blaming groups  
rather than identifying the power structures  
at play that truly create these issues*

**Page 336 | Highlight**

These methods have recurred through the centuries for a simple reason: they work. They were a reliable means of blasting apart nascent alliances and coalitions of working people and safeguarding the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

**Page 338 | Highlight**

This is the playbook used by Trump and the other pseudo-populist strongmen the world over: throw some minor economic concessions to the base (or at least claim to do so), unleash the dogs of race and gender-based hatreds, and preside over a rapid upward transfer of wealth, alongside an authoritarian concentration of power.

**Page 338 | Highlight**

it's striking that the two most tenacious lines of attack that Jews have faced over the generations—the scheming Jewish bankers and the scheming Jewish Marxists—are perennially on a logical collision course with each other.

**Page 339 | Highlight**

That all the thousands of pages of theories and manifestos are, partly at least, a long procession of Jews banging their heads up against the brick wall of history and saying: No, your money problems are not the result of Jewish “shysters” ripping off hardworking “goyim”—they flow from a system that was designed to extract maximum wealth from working people. And that system is not called the “Illuminati” or the “Elders of Zion”—it's called capitalism.

**Page 371 | Highlight**

Haunt the dreams of your comrades, and the nightmares of your enemies; live in a future that never came—be a specter, a memory, and a herald. Remind them that the current state was not inevitable until it came to be. Do not occupy yourself with the question of why this very possible future failed, leave the victorious to grope for answers. Be the question, and do not heed your impotence. A ghost has no need for material presence or action, you just need to shimmer. — Alaa Abd el-Fattah, You Have Not Yet Been Defeated

**Page 375 | Highlight**

no longer saw how we could avoid the social and ecological outcomes that so many of us most fear. That was the deepest source of my vertigo. Who was I without that story of possible salvation to share?

**Page 375 | Highlight**

The self as perfected brand, the self as digital avatar, the self as data mine, the self as idealized

body, the self as racist and anti-Semitic projection, the child as mirror of the self, the self as eternal victim. These doubles share one thing in common: all are ways of not seeing.

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Page 376 | Highlight

It is all so unbearable. No wonder we work so hard to look away. No wonder we erect those walls, literal and psychological. No wonder we would rather gaze at our reflections, or get lost in our avatars, than confront our shadows.

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Page 378 | Highlight

Put a little differently, the climate crisis can be understood as a surplus of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere; it can also be understood as a surplus of self—a result of all the literal and figurative energy it takes to perform and perfect the selves fortunate enough to live outside the Shadow Lands.

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Page 379 | Highlight

our role here on earth is not simply to maximize the advantage in our lives (or to try to extend our selves beyond our life with “grief tech” avatars). It’s to maximize (protect, regenerate) all of life. We are here not just to make sure we as individuals survive, but to make sure that life survives; not to chase clout, but to chase life.

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Page 381 | Highlight

Self-involvement, however it manifests—my doppelganger’s megalomania, my various neuroses, your fill-in-the-blank—is a story in which the self takes up too much space, just as the story of Judeo-Christian Western civilization puts the human (read: white, male, powerful human) at the center of the story of life on this planet, with all of it created for our species. None of it is true. Whether we are loving ourselves too much or loathing ourselves too much—or, more likely, doing both—we’re still at the center of every story. We’re still blotting out the sun.

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Page 382 | Highlight

“We can be hard and critical on structures, but soft on people,” says the civil rights scholar john a. powell. That is the opposite of the discourse that dominates today, the one that is so very hard on people and far too soft on structures.

a central reason why so many of us cannot bear to look at the Shadow Lands is that we live in a culture that tells us to fix massive crises on our own, through self improvement. Support labor rights by ordering from a different store. End racism by battling your personal white fragility—or by representing your marginalized identity group in elite spaces. Solve climate change with an electric car. Transcend your ego with a meditation app. Some of it will help—a bit. But the truth is that nothing of much consequence in the face of our rigged systems can be accomplished on our own—whether by our own small selves or even by our own identity groups. Change requires collaboration and coalition, even (especially) uncomfortable coalition. Mariame Kaba, a longtime prison abolitionist who has done as much as anyone to imagine what it would take to live in a world that does not equate safety with police and cages, puts the lesson succinctly, one passed on to her by her father: “Everything worthwhile is done with other people.”

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**Page 386 | Highlight**

When individuals organize toward a goal, they discover not only that they share interests with people who might look (and vote) very differently from them but also that a new sense of power flows from this alliance. “The struggles we engage in create the potential and possibilities of uniting because it clarifies what’s at stake and how we might overcome it,” Taylor explained.

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**Page 389 | Highlight**

Shut in our homes by the first wave of strict lockdowns, severed from the movement that had held us together, so many of us who had been overcome by the power of “us” felt as if we had just been summarily dropped into a deep sea of “me.”

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**Page 396 | Highlight**

She was talking about living in a part of Ontario that has been a site of intense industrial pollution, and the draw of moving to more “pristine” wilderness. But, she said, “when I think of the land as my mother or if I think of it as a familial relationship, I don’t hate my mother because she’s sick, or because she’s been abused. I don’t stop visiting her because she’s been in an abusive relationship and she has scars and bruises. If anything, you need to intensify that relationship.” You visit her even more.

Maybe I should apply this to  
Croydon...

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Page 400 | Highlight

Vertigo invades when the world we thought we knew no longer holds. The known world is crumbling. That's okay. It was an edifice stitched together with denial and disavowal, with unseeing and unknowing, with mirrors and shadows. It needed to crash. Now, in the rubble, we can make something more reliable, more worthy of our trust, more able to survive the coming shocks.