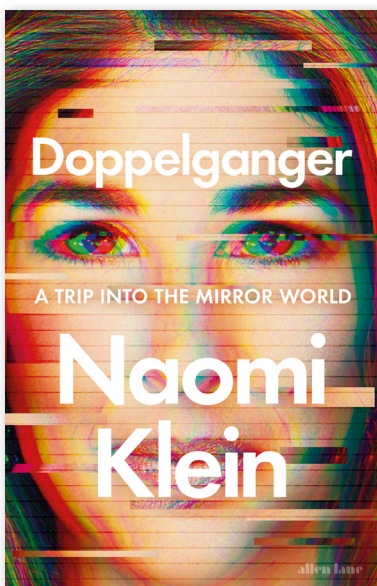


Doppelganger

A trip into the mirror world

by Naomi Klein



PLOT SUMMARY

What if you woke up one morning and found you'd acquired a double? Someone almost like you, and yet not you at all?

When Naomi Klein discovered that a woman who shared her first name, but had radically different, harmful views, was getting chronically mistaken for her, it seemed too ridiculous to take seriously. Then, suddenly, it wasn't. She started to find herself grappling with a distorted sense of reality, becoming obsessed with reading the threats on social media, the endlessly scrolling insults from the followers of her doppelganger. Why had her shadowy other gone down such an extreme path? Why was identity – all we have to meet the world – so unstable?

To find out, Klein decided to follow her double into a bizarre, uncanny mirror world: one of conspiracy theories, anti-vaxxers and demagogue hucksters, where soft-focus wellness influencers make common cause with fire-breathing far-right propagandists (all in the name of protecting 'the children'). In doing so, she lifts the lid on our own culture during this surreal moment in history, as we turn ourselves into polished virtual brands, publicly shame our enemies, watch as deep fakes proliferate and whole nations flip from democracy to something far more sinister.

This is a book for our age and for all of us: a deadly serious dark comedy which invites us to view our reflections in the looking glass. It's for anyone who has lost hours down an internet rabbit hole, who wonders why our politics has become so fatally warped, and who wants a way out of our collective vertigo and back to fighting for what really matters.



Shortlist
2024



“Such a clever book because [Klein] takes what, on the face of it, is a simple idea of having a double, someone who is frequently thought of as her, but then expands this to construct a dark comedy of a rather terrifying mirror image world.”

ANNE SEBBA, 2024 JUDGE



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WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In *Doppelganger*, Klein achieves a remarkable feat: distilling a complex cultural point in time and helping her reader understand what led to it, even though that journey is often unexpected, obtuse and involves negotiating illusion, doublethink and understanding how and why extreme political propaganda becomes popular.

Part of the enjoyment of reading *Doppelganger* comes from Klein's expert weaving together of her personal story with the history and politics of the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as considering novels and films that have dealt with the concept of the doppelganger, and drawing on cultural influencers and academic thinkers to help her – and her readers – understand the nuanced complexities of the Mirror World. It's a detailed, thoughtful book, but it's also an entertaining read – sometimes, with a dark humour that makes you laugh out loud – and the personal element means that we, as readers, relate to Klein much more immediately than if she had decided to write a book about diagonalist politics and left her personal experiences out of it.

Rather than a dry academic treatise, then, Klein invites readers into her close personal world, from her child's autism to her husband's political career, her family life and her feelings about her accidental conflation with her 'doppelganger', writer and conspiracy theorist Naomi Wolf. As Klein herself notes in her observations of American political strategist and media mogul Steve Bannon, part of Bannon's success in getting his message across to his viewers and listeners is his approachable, friendly, inclusive attitude. This is present in *Doppelganger*, where Klein shows a generosity of spirit even to her detractors, though, as she comes to understand, the adversarial binary of the doppelganger is an illusion in itself, and, to understand the other, you must first know yourself: a mirror's function is to reflect.

What we come to understand, reading *Doppelganger*, is that it's impossible to try and remove the personal from the political in this Brave New Mirror World, because, baring the details of our personal lives is, by now, so enmeshed in our ideas of currency, relevance, validity and worthiness. Thankfully, even though Klein knows this is the case, she presents the reader with alternative models of communication and the presentation of self within culture, from the inspiring work of bell hooks to a return to the values of more traditional left-of-centre community organising, rejecting the rampant individualism of capitalism and, instead, returning to caring for our fellow humans: 'when we are surrounded by need, we are called upon to become better care-takers' (p339).



DISCUSSION POINTS

Klein makes a fascinating point about the modern-day radicalisation of mothers by the far right and the inclusion and integration of the 'warrior mom' as a powerful group in pursuing Mirror World agendas. Concerns over vaccination, gender identity and other hot topics, especially post-Covid, seem to be driving an army of concerned mothers – who are being fed misinformation by public figures such as Wolf and Bannon.

On p133, Klein reminds us that 'fascist and neofascist movements from Mussolini to Pinochet have recognised the powerful role played by women, particularly when cast in their "natural" role as mothers and protectors of nationalist traditions and healthy bloodlines'.

It's certainly true that the experience of motherhood or of caring for children often provokes strong protective emotions, and not just in women. In your opinion, are those instincts and emotions being manipulated for political ends in some areas of the media and the internet? Or, is it merely a difficult time to be a parent, whatever your views – and are any of the concerns of the 'warrior mom' valid? How does Klein's account of herself as parent present a counter-narrative to the 'warrior mom', or is Klein also a 'warrior mom' in her own way?

In the UK, do you think that this narrative of the 'warrior mom' exists in the same way as in the USA, and, if so, how are mothers possibly being manipulated by the media, influencers and politicians to respond to certain issues?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naomi Klein is the award-winning author of international bestsellers including *This Changes Everything*, *The Shock Doctrine*, *No Logo*, *No Is Not Enough*, and *On Fire*, which have been published in more than 35 languages. She is an associate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of British Columbia, the founding co-director of UBC's Centre of Climate Justice, and an honorary professor of Media and Climate at Rutgers University.



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QUESTIONS

How did you feel about Klein's analysis of ourselves as brands – having a personal 'brand' on social media, etc, and the idea that by becoming a brand, we lose an essential human sense of multiplicity? Do you have a 'brand' online? Does it define you? How gendered is your brand?

Has reading *Doppelgänger* made you think differently in any way, or realise something you didn't know before? How and what, if so?

Did Klein's definition of the problem of 'pipikism' strike a chord with you? Where have you noticed this loss of or re-adoption of language?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, did you notice a change in messaging from any of the social media accounts that you follow, particularly that of health and wellness influencers? Do you feel that it was positive or negative, and do you find 'wellness' influencer type accounts generally helpful, or not?

NEXT STEPS

Have you ever had any part of your life confused with that of somebody else? Have you been the victim of identity theft? Or, perhaps some events in your life have mirrored someone else's – a friend or family member, or even a celebrity? Write about this experience. How did it make you feel? Have there been any ongoing consequences? What were they? Does writing about it help? Is it cathartic?

Do you think that you feel under pressure from media or online sources to be thinner, fitter, healthier, prettier, more immune, clean eating, and so on? Write a list of messages that you feel are coming at you from social media and other sources regarding your health and wellbeing. What do you feel under pressure to do, say, eat and drink every day? Is there a cost involved with any of these requirements? What products or services are you paying for to stay well/young/desirable? Could you feel well, young and desirable without some of those products or services? Or are they all providing valuable help? ■

If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

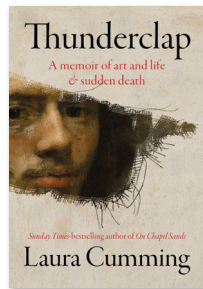
In *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Naomi Klein explores the way that powerful groups are profiting from major world disasters and conflicts.

In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Shoshana Zuboff explores the challenges to humanity posed by the digital future, a detailed examination of the unprecedented form of power called 'surveillance capitalism', and the quest by powerful corporations to predict and control our behaviour.

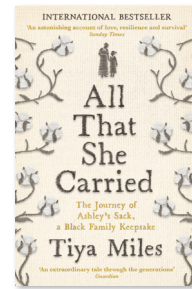
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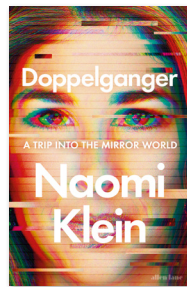
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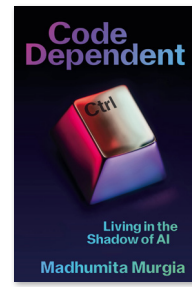
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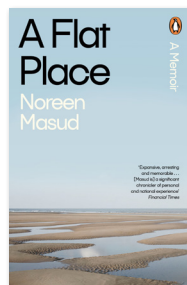
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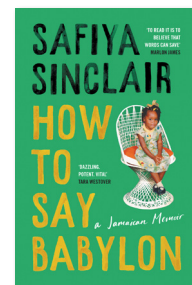
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