Twitter Thread by Mark Brown



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Some of you will probably know I'm currently grieving. It's a month since my fantastic sister died. I've been thinking a lot about loss, progress and reckoning and coming to terms, both personally and as a society. And I've been wondering: how will we remember the pandemic dead?

The UK is filled with memorials to the dead of wars, of disasters, of lifeboat crews and atrocities. We are a landscape haunted by attempts to remember the brave and the innocent. Villages, towns, businesses, communities: all grouped together to pay for plaques, statues, gardens

I have a terror that in our desire to get 'back to normal' we will forget those lost and things lost during the current pandemic. There's not an enemy they were overcome by; not a single flashpoint of tragedy. Those lost to the pandemic are an uncomfortable reminder of failure

Rebecca Solnit talks about hope only coming from knowing history. People may be optimistic about the future post-covid-19, but that's just desire and dream. For us to build a hopeful future we need to acknowledge and feel what has been lost; to repair and grow, not just erase

The thing is, I don't know if our communities know how to remember what is lost, not in ways that are meaningful to all of that community. Religion is a great enabler of remembrance, but that's not something everyone has. I'm wondering how we fully inhabit our collective sorrow

I feel like the seeds of something better are there in the soil of that sorrow; but that our every instinct will be to turn away from them, to salt the ground so that uncomfortable weeds of what has been lost cannot grow up through the shining 'building back better'

You might argue that we shouldn't politicise sorrow and loss, that blame is not appropriate at a time where unprecedented circumstances led to decisions that are obviously wrong in retrospect. I think this is a trap to avoid the possibility of sorrow turning to hope of better

I feel like there should be a cadre of people helping communities to find a better world in midst of sorrow. Grief doulas if you like. People who for next couple of years come forward to work with expression of collective grief. Not to put it to bed, but to help it become fertile

Imagine every place in the UK set itself the task of finding someway of understanding and living within what has been lost, then creating a new something: a new vision, a new togetherness, a place or a thing that allows the anger, loss, isolation to find a place in the new world

Without a way of carrying the reality of those people lost and those things lost into the new landscape, our collective response will exclude, will devalue. The rush for a national narrative will just be rhetoric and avoidance and the change we need will not happen

WIthout a shared common space in which grief and loss and sorrow can exist, both for lives lost and ways of life lost, we'll just end up with a world that tries to be the same as it was before, and with nowhere but dreams and disaffection for those who have lived through but lost

I don't really know who these grief workers should be; but they need a space to exist and to draw people together. To know what a better world will be takes going to where and when the last one was at its worst. I fear instead we will create a taboo against pandemic loss

We need something that bridges individual and collective loss. We don't have it now. Covid-19 isn't to blame for the pandemic. How our world was organised and how we responded is. We need to remember how loss of people and things happened to avoid it happening again

But my sense is that we don't need a national 'story' of loss. What we need to do is take the licence and space to make our own smaller collective remembrances, to seize back the story in whatever shape that takes. And we don't know how to do that yet: to transmute loss to hope

I do know that the people who lost least and have the greatest resources will define the 'national story'. I also know that this is wrong. The pandemic year isn't just the story of those who made it out relatively unscathed. And loss isn't just a problem to be managed

We don't really know how to build a culture of remembrance and of living through sorrow for thousands of individuals who died because they were in wrong place at the wrong time. We don't know how to make that individual plural. If the risk is hollow theatre, the answer is meaning

I dunno, I picture a vast quilt of different responses, different reckonings, different communities and different conclusions. And to get that quilt started we need to begin the process of sowing and stitching and gather yarn. It;s not too early. It's exactly the right time

And what do we need to overcome? Those who feel the fear they will be tainted by touching the loss of others; people who fear what that loss may tell us about the world that was and the world to come. They'll want to avoid the inconvenience of the need to remember

Many people have lost their lives, and many more have lost the lives they thought they would have. And that isn't inconvenient to 'bouncing back'. It's what bouncing back is bouncing back from. It's not an alternate discussion about the future. It's what the discussion should be

I'm just a sad person missing their dead sister. I've not got any answers tonight. My story is important and so is everyone else's. But forgetting will be a violence against those already hurt.

Thanks for listening. I'm off to make the dinner. Hope you're all as OK as it's possible to be right now.