Twitter Thread by Cory Doctorow #BLM

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In 2003's Pattern Recognition, @greatdismal discusses the role of "apophenia" - finding patterns where none exist - in paranoid thinking. We are a pattern-matching animal, prone to seeing faces in clouds and hearing speech in static.

https://t.co/lKHfKbvzLN

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Apophenia is omnipresent and weird. It's why 5G conspiracy theorists started circulating a guitar-pedal circuit diagram as a leaked 5G cancer-microchip design (the diagram has a segment labeled "5G frequency").

https://t.co/ss6XwqrysZ

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But this kind of hilarious idiocy doesn't occur in a vacuum. It's got a business model. Companies like Devon's @Energydots1 prey on people who've been sucked in by their own apophenic misfirings to sell them "Smartdots" - stickers to protect them from "radiation."

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It will not surprise you to learn that Smartdots don't work. Indeed, they don't do anything, except, perhaps, produce a hard-to-remove gummy residue.

https://t.co/Pr8Y6UtEZD

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Energydots claims that their stickers are programmed with "scalar energy" - a study by the University of Surrey's 6th Generation Innovation Centre, commissioned by the @BBC, was unable to detect "scalar energy".

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Energydots is a good case-study in how predators exploit apophenia. Its victims' brains have misfired, and it seizes on the opportunity to part them with their money, first, by making outlandish claims, and then by lying about outside validation for those claims.

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In Nov 2020, Energydots announced a partnership with the NHS to install "brand new engagement units" in two London hospitals. They quickly walked the claim back, saying it was just one hospital. Then they deleted the press release. They say it was a "misunderstanding."

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We are literally beset by unhinged people who believe fantastical things that cause them to engage in irrational, dangerous and sometimes murderous behavior. They bear some responsibility for that conduct.

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But as we rush to blame the spread of that conduct on the "user engagement" business-model of Big Tech, which is said to blindly encourage these beliefs as click-generating activity, we pay short shrift to the fraudsters who set out to exploit these beliefs.

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If we're concerned that the tech platforms' business model incidentally encourages conspiracies as an emergent property of algorithmic amplification, let us also spare a thought for people who manufacture and sell fraudulent goods at fantastic markups.

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People whose sales rely on repeating and amplifying conspiratorial nonsense and falsifying confirmation of their lies from respected public health authorities.

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