Twitter Thread by Army of Shadows



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I'm going to post an essay I wrote, it's difficult on Twitler due to the character restrictions. It's about the formation of totalitarianism and group think.

Mass Formation, the Psychology of Crowds, and the Covidian Cult

Army of Shadows - 10 October 2021

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The American Psychological Association defines mass psychology as “the mental and emotional states and processes that occur in a large body of individuals who, although they may not have any common characteristics, are considered as a whole.”

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Crowd psychology & its formation delivers a fertile petri-dish for the emergence of totalitarianism & the implementation of ideological Utopian dreams. Mass formation is a hive mindset which responds to psychological needs, a form of hypnosis adopted by or imposed on a crowd.

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Mattias Desmet, Prof of Clinical Psychology at Ghent University, has formulated a theory of mass formation as it relates to the Covid crisis. According to Desmet, there are specific conditions which prime a population for mass formation & consequent totalitarian thinking.

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The four conditions necessary for mass formation in individuals & society are:

1/ Isolation & lack of social bonds
2/ Lack of meaning-making & sense-making
3/ Free-floating anxiety

4/ Consequent free-floating psychological discontent, frustration, & undirected aggression.

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If these pre-existing conditions are met then mass formation will occur given certain triggers. “Tunnelling” follows; a single category of information or narrative - however illogical and contradictory - takes precedence over other perhaps more rational or logical sources

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Tunneling supplies a focal point with concurrent psychological relief. Modernity, alienation, isolation, atomisation, anomie, dissatisfaction with work, mental stress and widespread use of anti-depressants, a lack of purpose and direction, loss of community.

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The ground was prepared for the emergence of a unifying narrative and Covid supplies that narrative. Focusing on this single threat provides a release from longstanding tensions and gives meaning to lives previously felt as directionless and discontented.

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Free-floating anxiety is given a focal point and a unity of purpose. Mass formation then becomes a form of mass hypnosis.

Joining the struggle against an enemy, especially an invisible pathogen, provides members of a society in free-fall with a certain mental apparatus.

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The mindset to appear caring and heroic, bolstering a sense of self-worth and virtue in the grand project of ‘saving lives’.

Western societies have bestowed a kind of freedom without clear guidelines and many people have been cast adrift, searching for leaders and models

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According to Desmet, the salient mechanism of mass formation, free-floating anxiety, is the most painful psychological phenomenon a human being can experience & its release by means of a simple narrative is a social glue which unfortunately leads to totalitarian solidarity

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When taken up, the Covid narrative is essentially a displacement and redirection of pre-existing anxieties and a flight from undirected affect.

Subsequently, in- and out-groups emerge.

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Those who have received relief and validation by mass formation will become intolerant of dissidents who threaten their new-found sense of meaning and direction because dissenting voices remind the new believers of their former anxieties and discontents.

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It explains why some people are comfortable with lockdowns and would not welcome a return to the “old normal” and why they focus on the victims of Corona to the exclusion of collateral damage - missed cancer diagnoses and mental health to give two examples.

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This is one of the characteristics of totalitarianism; the crude division between friend and enemy as delineated by NSDAP jurist Carl Schmitt.

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From the fight against the invisible Covid enemy to the identification of tangible human enemies - dissenters and resistors of the psychologically-helpful narrative - is but a short step.

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Mass formation can then be seen as a symptom of an underlying psychological and societal problem rather than the response to a biological threat. “We’re all in this together” issues balm to a previously directionless psyche.

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Free-floating anxiety has a target with a concrete problem to solve, supplies meaning to a secular mechanistic society & a solution to isolation and community breakdown, even if paradoxically the response is to stay indoors and order food and goods from one’s isolated pod.

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Furthermore, in a society in which organised religion has been replaced by materialism & science or the false god of “scientism” - there exists a potential void of the soul to be filled. According to the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, religion provides three elements:

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1/ Binding together of society or group to maintain solidarity. The etymology of “religion” is ‘obligation, bond, reverence’ & Latin religare meaning ‘to bind’. Durkheim explored how religion in its basic form is not only concerned with the numinous but with tribal bonding.

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2/ Shared rituals & a belief in the distinction between the sacred and non-sacred.
3/ Social alignment and control under certain norms and values which constitute a collective consciousness.

The first element is very interesting. A secular religion appears to be emerging

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A religion which brooks no dissent, which flies under the flag of impossible safetyism, which sees death as an aberration rather than a normal part of life. This new religion excoriates heretics and treats dissenters as witches beyond the pale of orthodox belief.

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“I saw Goody Proctor with the Devil!”. Covidian religion is related to Scientism & Technocratic rule of experts and is characteristic of mass formation. Covidianism is a precursor and facilitator of totalitarianism, the biosecurity state and biopower, a new form of fascism.

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Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life” posits a mechanistic reduction to the biological facts of life above the quality of that life, its potentialities and possibilities and richness beyond mere survival.

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As Ernest Becker wrote, “the basic motivation for human behaviour is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death.” The death denial is strong within the Covidian cult.

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