



Tuesday, Dec 10



Done

Well, that attempted news blackout from last night went belly up. I resumed reading *The Anxious Generation* shortly after work, trudging through the chapter about "the four foundational harms" (social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction). When I had a few pages left to go in the chapter, [REDACTED] called and I picked up. What resulted was an awkward, botched summary of the book on my end followed by some shaming from [REDACTED] when he heard about my attempted news blackout. The general vibe I gave off was "idiot who doesn't have what it takes to competently sift through large amounts of information" - be that information from a book or from a string of social media posts. When [REDACTED] then informed me that Brian Thompson's shooter had been caught, I entered into a free-fall - for the rest of the night, all the way up until 4:00 AM or so, I binged on social media reactions to this guy.

And then, from about 4:20 AM to 5:30 AM and in an effort to prepare for bed with a non-screen activity, I journaled a bit, writing a pretty wild two pages in which I noted similarities I had with the shooter.

Having only gotten four hours of sleep last night, I took the entire day off, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Nothing productive was done during the day.

Quite a fall from grace since I saw my mother on Sunday, I must say. Potential culprits include:

- Having eaten a bowl of sugary cereal for lunch yesterday instead of the usual sandwich
- Reduced serotonin levels due to low sun exposure
- An increase in psychologized modes of thinking owing to my reading the Haidt book
- Exposure to sensationalist views and abusive language on 4chan
- My attempting to empathize with a literal murderer

I should note that this saga bears quite a resemblance to how I handled the assassination attempt on Trump. In both cases, I went to Reddit for primary news and 4chan for NSFL photos/videos. In both cases, I got sucked into a vortex of absolute bullshit and confusion. And in both cases I was overstimulated and left with the impression that my brain was rotting.

Now for the Luigi Mangione stuff. Some stray observations that may or may not age well:

- Like me, the man is 26 years old, is of Italian heritage, graduated first in his high school class, studied STEM at an Ivy League school, and was influenced by Ted Kaczynski's manifesto. Unlike me, the man comes from a wealthy family, finished his degree in four years, was part of a fraternity, has travelled all over the world, and is extremely physically fit.
- It feels like we're in the early stages of my generation's version of the OJ Simpson trial. A major difference, however, is that Luigi may get off even if the jury believes (beyond reasonable doubt) that he did it.
- Of all the people born in 1998, one of them will end up becoming "the most famous" (however you decide to define that). Three particularly influential 1998 babies at this point are Jimmy Donaldson, Nick Fuentes, and, now, Luigi Mangione. But is there some even bigger behemoth lying in wait - some mega narcissist who is yet to make his first move?
- Probably not. Zuckerberg had already been a billionaire for three years by this point, and Paul McCartney was only a year away from seeing the Beatles break up...

- An aggressively Italian name, a cause célèbre, a politically charged national conversation... It's only a matter of time before some media outlet puts out a piece comparing Mangione's trial to the Sacco and Vanzetti trial.
- In all my time looking into this issue, I have yet to encounter anything that humanizes this Brian Thompson guy - no video of him talking, no write-up about his family life and overall character, nothing. I should note, however, that this may reflect a simple failure on my end to seek out such information. At the very least, I can say that nothing of this nature is ending up on the Reddit front page. They are *unanimously* Team Luigi over there.
- The last time I saw Reddit so organically united about something (I'm not counting Kamala/Walz astroturfing) was the initial GME short squeeze back in 2021. I should note that both cases involved a "folk hero" battling "evil corporate people." But if the GME squeeze was a farce - with "eat the rich" sentiment being taken advantage of so some rich people could take money from other rich people - the shooting of Brian Thompson is more genuinely socialist.

- Once material humanizing Thompson becomes widespread, it'll muddy the moral dimension of this case quite a bit. As Thompson's current reputation is that of an *impossibly evil corporate ghoul*, nearly any information about his personality will have the effect of reverting him to the mean.
- Mangione may be feeling some regret at this point. The "thirst trap" image of him that's been getting passed around is somewhat outdated, and reports seem to indicate that he entered a period of social withdrawal in the months preceding the assassination. Furthermore, the police reported that he was "shaking" when they approached him, and his shouted invocation today that his arrest was "an insult to the intelligence" of Americans struck me as somewhat odd.
- As the man is an avid reader with big books like *Infinite Jest* on his list, he may well set his sights on *Crime and Punishment* in the coming months. Like Raskolnikov, we see in Mangione a murderer with a utilitarian motivation, and like Raskolnikov, this could end with a good deal of regret. I should also note that Mangione, while by admission agnostic, evinced a degree of warmth to Christianity in one of his tweets.

- Also of note in his tweets is a general desire for fame. At one point in the feed he retweets an image of Google Trends data showing a chronology of "The Current Thing" over time. It wouldn't surprise me if Mangione looked at that image and thought "I want *my name* to be on one of those charts." We also find a tweet lamenting the difficulty of acquiring fame in mathematics: "I used to get bummed in math class when learning theorems: "All the low-hanging fruit has been solved before I was born! If I was alive at the time of Pythagoras I could've easily derived the Pythagorean Theorem and etched my place in history!""
- I've long suspected - but have been unable to back up, my own math background not being extensive enough to plausibly argue such a thing - that Ted Kaczynski had a similar relationship with mathematics. That is, he sought to become a household name on the order of Pythagoras but found it too difficult. It was at that point his ocean of an ego told him other methods were needed to obtain the attention he craved.

- It's been noted at this point that Mangione suffered sexual difficulties as a result of his radicalizing back surgery. Ted Kaczynski was likewise sexually troubled, having been something of an incel and having considered in grad school that he might be transgender. In both of these men (the latter's work having been read by the former), the prospect of leaving no genetic legacy prompted an insatiable urge for a cultural legacy.
- Harkening back to the "1998 babies" mentioned before, a similar complex seems to be at play with Nick Fuentes.
- The only other trend in Mangione's tweets I'd like to bring up is his affinity for Tim Urban. If Luigi is at all like me, and at all like most people who know about Tim Urban, he discovered the guy ten-ish years ago via his famous procrastination articles and associated Ted Talk. To connect so deeply with such a presentation is to (probably) have a problem with impulse control and an associated disdain with modern technology. Hence his affinity for Kaczynski and his retweeting things about *The Anxious Generation*.

- As Luigi and I appear to have a similar reading taste, I may take a recommendation of his to heart.
Describing Tim Urban's book *What's Our Problem?*, he said: "I believe this book will go down in history as the most important philosophical text of the early 21st century."

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