

A life of crime

Description

default watermark

Crime is immensely popular â?? in fiction if not in everyday life. No victim enjoys the consequences of crime. But many of us enjoy a good mystery, and the narrative aspects of crime meet some human need, as when solving a puzzle, or watching others solve it.

Burglary materialises metaphor, putting a thing in the wrong category: whatâ??s yours becomes mine. Were it not for the desperation and inconvenience we could see theft as a profound exercise in the imagination â?? or at least we can learn from it. After all, the trickster god Hermes, the father of communication and interpretation, was a deceiver and a thief.

Geoff Manaugh, in his book *A Burglarâ??s Guide to the City*, invokes the romantic myth of crime, that â??we should celebrate the burglar, this new archetype, this devil in the details of the built environment, a mythic figure who shows us what architecture, all along, could really be and, more important, how we should have been using itâ?• (262). He dismisses that conception, but it clearly resonates with certain city imaginaries.



Puzzles and paradoxes

To view the city through the lens of crime is also to see the city as a spatial puzzle. Burglary and theft provide good models here. The would-be detective has a puzzle to solve, but the burglar too has to defy spatial constraints and transport some content away to another place, invisibly. Criminal conjuring gives the illusion of spatial and temporal paradox.

Manaugh writes about â??hidden topological dimension tucked away inside the cityâ?• (76). Thinking of the clever bank heist that involves traversing rooftops and tunnels, and boring holes in walls, he suggests that â??point A might illicitly be connected to point Bâ?• (76); the burglar has to â??make this link realâ?• (76) by means of â??shortcuts, splices, and wormholesâ?• (76).

> â??Burglary reveals that every building, all along, has actually been a puzzle â?¦ a kind of intellectual game that surrounds us at all times and that any one of us can playâ?• (273).
>
> â??the world is riddled with shortcuts and secret passages â?? we just have to find them. Itâ??s a crime, but it also symbolizes that there are ways of navigating the world that we ourselves have yet to discoverâ?• (274).

Iâ??m content with that. I recall my four year old self convinced there was another world underneath the sandpit in our garden, and that my grandmother really kept a helicopter in the attic. Infants today are similarly convinced that every display screen they encounter provides access to the same ubiquitous underworld of games and endless entertainment, myths that are the start of architecture â?? or a life of crime.

Reference

- Manaugh, Geoff. 2016. *A Burglarâ??s Guide to the City*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (Macmillan).

Notes

- Image above is the overflow outlet at Ladybower Reservoir, a â??wormholeâ?• in the flat plane of the reservoir â?? perhaps a metaphor.
- The ideas of stealth and spatial wormholes reminds me of the video game Portal, in which the gamer blasts holes into walls that then result in topologically impossible room arrangements.
- Chris Speed provided a helpful link to the following article about a crime-related architecture project on FB: http://we-make-money-not-art.com/blasbichlers_twentyone/?fbclid=IwAR27QODw3jPfQ58WtTdg2-0cQT-Lt4GApbfK2iKaz_hvOCMsgA90upiwpNQ

default watermark

Category

1. Architecture

Tags

1. burglary
2. ciphercity
3. city
4. crime
5. metaphor
6. puzzle

Date Created
February 23, 2019
Author
rcoyne99