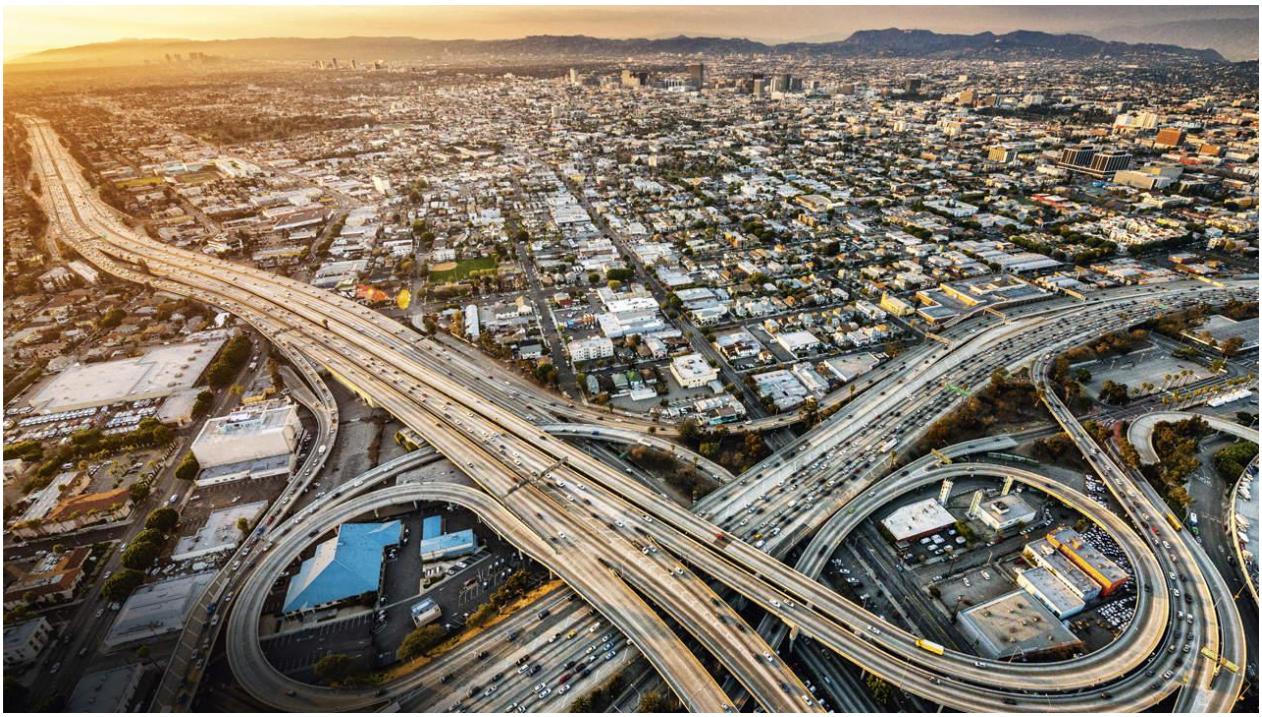
Interview: The Perfect Heist [C1]

Nell'era di Internet e della sorveglianza, si potrebbe pensare le rapine in banca abbiano i giorni contati. Tuttavia, lo scrittore e blogger Geoff Manaugh rivela nel suo libro "The Thief's Guide to the City" che la stessa tecnologia progettata per proteggere lo spazio urbano può essere un vantaggio per i criminali.



One would think that in the age of the internet and surveillance, the days of the massive bank heist were **numbered**. Yet as LA-based writer and design blogger Geoff Manaugh reveals in his book A Burglar's Guide to the City, the very technology designed to protect the urban space can be a **godsend** for criminals. In New York, **petty crime** has declined by nearly 87 per cent as law enforcement uses big data to **apprehend** minor **offenders**. However, websites such as Google Earth and Facebook provide means for thieves to check buildings for vulnerabilities or track the movement of staff or residents. In fact, says Manaugh, in our interconnected times you can potentially steal an entire smart city by **breaking into** one safety deposit box. Speak Up met with Manaugh. We began by asking him why burglars interested him so much. **Geoff Manaugh (American accent): **When you study architecture in school, you're not taught about how criminals might

use the building you're designing or how burglars broke into a particular building. It seemed that people who are interested in architecture would also be interested in this notion of **breaking into** buildings because it reveals something about architecture.

UNDERGOUND

One of Manaugh's favourite examples is that of the Hole in the Ground Gang who, in the mid-1980s, confounded the FBI by tunnelling into two Los Angeles banks and stealing $270,000, as well as the contents of thirty-six safe-deposit boxes. The gang used the storm water network (a system of **pipes** that ensure water is directed to **waterways**)to access the banks from underground. Manaugh marvels at their knowledge and **daring**. **Geoff Manaugh:** They knew the storm water network **beneath** the city so well that they knew exactly where to go. They knew how **to dig** tunnels very, very well, so they didn't use any structure to support the walls or the **ceiling**. And then when they actually tunnelled into the bank, they did it by **tapping into** the electrical network at the bank itself. The bank basically **supplied** power to the burglars so that they could use the **coring machinery** to **drill** upward into the bank vault. Even the **getaway** route: they drove for miles and miles underground on Suzuki **four-wheelers**. They didn't get lost.

PROFESSIONAL WORK

They were never caught, but the FBI had various theories based on the gang's level of professionalism, as Manaugh explains: **Geoff Manaugh:** They might have been former employees with the Water and Power Department; they might have been mining engineers who decided to put their tunnelling skills to work to make more money. It implies that if you have a sufficiently-advanced knowledge of the city, that makes you a perfect burglar because you know how things operate. You know what streets are connected to others. You know how to get from one end of the city to the other without ever coming up above ground.

PUZZLE CITIES

By looking closely at its infrastructure, buildings, geology and routines, you can treat every city as a puzzle, says Manaugh. The perfect heist finds a way of solving it and **exploiting** a city's vulnerabilities to access a **prime target,** be that a federal money reserve in Sydney or a **diamond dealer** in Dubai. Pedestrian-friendly New York and freeway-connected LA require entirely different approaches and **getaway**s for thieves, and also different styles of policing, while similarities can appear between distant cities; take Berlin and LA, for example. **Geoff Manaugh:** Berlin is built on a lot of very **sandy** ground. So it's easier to do a tunnel job in Berlin than it would be in a similar, even a German, city that looks a lot like Berlin because it's not built on the same geology. Then other cities might have a river that goes right down through the heart of the city. And one city might go right past a **drainage outlet** that leads near the banking district or even to the diamond district in **Antwerp**.

PLAYFUL PLANNING

And, says Manaugh, this can be of interest to the future of architecture and city planning. **Geoff Manaugh:** Burglars reveal that people want a more playful relationship with architecture. They want to be able to go through different doors, maybe even through the wall, and maybe there's a way to design something like a different type of doorway that leads from one room to the next. Burglars are always **misusing** buildings. That shows that maybe there's a way to design for that, to make the built environment more playful and more responsive, and then that way people can interact with buildings — the way burglars would —without committing a crime.

Glossary

- **Antwerp** = Anversa
- **misusing** = fare un uso improprio
- **breaking into** = irrompere, forzare
- **waterways** = canali
- **to dig** = scavare
- **exploiting** = strumentalizzare, sfruttare
- **sandy** = sabbioso
- **ceiling** = soffitto
- **supplied** = fornire
- **coring machinery** = macchine perforatrici
- **godsend** = manna dal cielo
- **petty crime** = reati minori
- **apprehend** = catturare, prendere
- **daring** = audacia, coraggio
- **beneath** = sotto
- **drill** = trapanare
- **prime target,** = obiettivo principale
- **four-wheelers** = quad (lett. quattro ruote)
- **numbered** = essere contati
- **offenders** = colpevoli di reati minori
- **pipes** = tubature
- **tapping into** = sfruttare, approfittare di
- **getaway** = fuga
- **diamond dealer** = commerciante di diamanti
- **drainage outlet** = scarico di drenaggio