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Falling Heists, Rising Grift: Filming Capital in the Already Long Twenty-First Century

In a casual parenthetical clause amid his 1992 analysis of the communications technologies highlighted in the espionage classic *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), Fredric Jameson (1995: 14) likens the intelligence officer qua "informational mechanic" to "the ghostly proletarian content of other contemporary films such as *Alien* (1979), if not indeed of the heist genre itself—always in one way or another an inscription of collective non-alienated work." The fundamental correctness of this aside surely required hindsight: in the 1970s those "contemporary films" instancing the heist genre can only have been rarities like *The Sting* (1973), *Fun with Dick and Jane* (1977), and, dearest to Jameson, *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). But by the time of writing in 1992, additional influential heists like *Blue Collar* (1978), *Thief* (1981), *Die Hard* (1988), *Point Break* (1991), and *Sneakers* (1992) had established both the genre's popularity and its ideologico-critical concept of "collective non-alienated work." Moreover, this essential meaning of the genre would become indisputable only in the intervening years since his remark, years that encompass the historical heyday of the heist genre, including its supplanting by a historical and ideological opposite, arguably the signature

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genre of the original streaming era: the grift docudrama (a lightly fictionalized chronicle of true crime events in the elite echelons of 2010s venture capitalism). It is the three-fold purpose of this essay to, first, argue for this historical heyday of the heist film and thus substantiate Jameson's aside; second, explain that heyday's conclusion and supplanting with reference to transformations in Hollywood capital; and third, underline that the question of filming capital must always connect *represented capital*, the way in which modes and relations of production, circulation, and accumulation are formalized in cultural aesthetics, to *expended capital*, the models and resources of production, circulation, and accumulation at work in the film industry. At their generic apogee and historical peak, heist films advance "an inscription of collective" action and effort whose critical politics have been underestimated; the transition from corporate finance to private equity eclipses this immanently critical mode as the grift docudrama ascends. Minimally legible in the 1970s, more legible in 1992, heist movies have become undeniably legible now, in 2025, against the backdrop of their terminus. A "ghostly proletarian" and indeed utopian-realist genre whose time has come and gone.

Building this three-fold argument will require some industry base background, narrating the historical trajectory of the heist genre, and reading a prime-example heist alongside a prime-example grift. We shall arrive at the excellence of *Ocean's 8* (2018) and the mediocrity of *Inventing Anna* (2022). But first some math.

The economic story of the period from the 1970s to the 2020s can be meaningfully told through the framework of "the long downturn," aka "secular stagnation": arrested rates of growth and profit in economic zones of industrial overcapacity and consumption saturation, including decreasing stock exchange transactions, expanding stock buybacks, and a seriously slackening rate of business investment and reinvestment.[1] In the G7 economies, this pattern has obtained for decades now, and the widely acknowledged production lag precipitates compensatory intensification of circulation: if you cannot make more things, simply exchange them faster.[2] Not enough housing or cars are produced, so instead formerly immobile "real estate" or formerly private consumer vehicles are put back into circulation through the innovative financial instruments and data platforms of unregulated "hotel" and "taxi" companies; there is not enough investment in new horizons of consumer goods, so instead circulatory services like private limousines for burritos proliferate. Hollywood fortunes are intimately tied to this downturn. As J. D. Connor (2015) has shown, the studio system that organized most of twentieth-century Hollywood aligns with Fordist production; after the onset of stagnation in the 1970s, that system eventually gives way to integrated corporate media conglomeration. These transitions among financial modes transformed the kinds of films that could be made. A more recent twist coming into perception in scholarship is the deregulatory environment (such as the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act) and attendant restructuring of conglomerate ownership by private equity; one can and should argue that twenty-first-century Hollywood output is decisively determined by this changeover from the logic of the corporation to the logic of the fund (DeWaard 2024). Private equity and other asset managerial formats have plundered Hollywood film and TV in the twenty-first century, resulting in less investment in production and greater aesthetic homogeneity (a surprising feature of the seemingly heterogeneous overflowing "stream"). A parallel shift is the ascension of distribution companies (Amazon, Netflix) as nouveau production companies, distinctly "post-studios" driven by circulation imperatives. The resultant difference in grammars for filming capital requires examination.

At the height of the conglomerate era, when the Federal Communications Commission's deregulation permitted unprecedented mergers in the mid-1990s like Viacom-Blockbuster-Paramount, Disney-ABC, and Time Warner–Turner, many newish genres rose to prominence. The top twenty-five highest-grossing films of the twenty-first century include whole-family children's cinema such as *The Lion King* (2019) and *Frozen* (2013), adult animated action hybrids like *Avatar* (2009) and *Avengers* (2012), and blockbuster ensemble action movies like the *Furious* franchise (beginning 2001). The Academy Awards for Best Picture in that time round out this generic spread with neo-epics like *Lord of the Rings* (2001), *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and *The Shape of Water* (2017). Although the heist genre does not feature on either of these lists, its success over the opening of the twenty-first century is undeniable. Heists feature in the top twenty-five if not top ten highest-grossing films worldwide in virtually every year during 2001–18. *Ocean's 11* was the fifth highest-grossing movie worldwide of 2001; *Ocean's 12* was tenth in 2004. Perhaps the last example of a mass blockbuster genre in the era of the mass blockbuster franchise à la Disney, heists were made by a wide variety of directors in a wide variety of styles and milieus in the early twenty-first century. Along with commercial success, the heist's generic refinement in this period delineates its longer history, with the ghostly proletarian collective dimension coming ever more to the fore.

To briefly consider that longer history: divergent from both the logistical interests of war films and the atmospheric moralism of noir, heist emerges as a distinct genre in the 1950s. Although there are steady instances in ensuing decades from the 1950s onward, a pronounced uptick in production characterizes the 1990s, with indies like *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *The Usual Suspects* (1995), auteur films like Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995), Wes Anderson's *Bottle Rocket* 1996), and Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* (1998), alongside British efforts like *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and sleeper blockbusters like *Set It Off* (1996). A wave of remakes of classics then propels a surge at the turn of the century: *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968 and 1999), *Ocean's 11* (1960 and 2001), *The Italian Job* (1969 and 2003). In its historical peak in the aughts and the early to mid-2010s, there are many dozens, marqueed by the five *Oceans* films (*11*, *12*, *13*, *8*, and the film that calls itself "Ocean's 7/11," *Logan Lucky*). By the later 2010s, a downshift is evident, borne out by a meager trickle in the 2020s.

The Heist Collective

All this counting is based in part on a definition of the heist genre, so what are its parameters? Film criticism has often disagreed on how to answer, even disagreeing that the heist is a genre. Let us posit that, on account of its being "always in one way or another an inscription of collective non-alienated work," the genre stands as formally specifiable, while also noting that the historical arc of its eminence allows some further specification financially. Foremost is the thematic element of collective process, centering the planning of a collective act. The plan, the project itself, and its payoffs (and consequences) are three distinct plot phases that may be accorded relative proportion; some heists will feature the project in greater detail than the aftermath, whereas others might feature the plan and the payoff with relatively little time spent in the execution of the act, and so on. At the genre's emergence, the Hays Code often weighted toward the aftermath of the act and a punitive tone; in its historical heyday there is a decided weight toward the plan and the project and a more comedic aftermath. Not only do they get away with it, but the audience is glad they do.

The collective element is constitutive for the genre: there are plenty of con, gangster, and caper films that do not meet the genre bar Jameson sets for the heist. Because, politically speaking, collectives are rarely given in advance, heists often illustrate that they must be convoked and assembled as part of the process, in ways that engage ensemble casts and initiate a structural parallel between the heist genre and the production of film as a medium. Steven Soderbergh, whom we will come to recognize as the director most magisterial in the genre's heyday, articulates this fundamental parallel: "Heists are so much like making a film. You're getting a gang together, there are external forces beyond your control. This may work, this may not. You could end up in movie jail. And it's important to remember that panic has never solved anything in the history of the world" (Shone 2017). With its calm planning and anticipation of contingencies, heist teamwork, like film teamwork, makes art out of organization. The stylistic flair with which the perfect crime is executed, Daryl Lee (2014) notes, exceeds the blunt force that may have achieved the same ends. Heists emphasize means: not just getting money but also orchestrating and implementing a counter-social logic and doing so with art; it is not for nothing that so many heist films target fine art and precious beauties. It takes art to get art.

Heists conceive the convoking of the collective as confederated specialization: from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. Generally, this confederation acknowledges some hierarchy; there is a leader or leaders, whose contribution is the intellectual labor of the plan and the social work of rallying the collective to its shared purpose. The leader(s) manifestly derive pleasure from planning, and the transmission of that pleasure to the spectators is a crucial feature of genre. In addition to the ideological elaboration of collectivity as a balance of unity and differentiation, and of equality and hierarchy, whose careful engineering is necessary for transformative action, heist films generally involve the ideological project to change the existing social allocation of resources and power. The exploration of resource accumulation by extralegal means inclines heists to relativize and problematize legal means; heists very often stage the drama of capitalism's intrinsic criminality. Their political unconscious expresses wishes for alternative societies and for economic autonomy. Whether a heist is tragic or comic colors the treatment of such wishes, but whatever the mode, the formalization of a collective remains the essential matter.

As this sketch of the genre hints, there is more than a little something constitutively utopian in the heist genre, from its depiction of competent work to its championing of collective action to its redistributive rather than retributive propensities. Above all, heists boost central planning and coordinated logistics, as majoritarian and collectivist strategies for the omnicrisis. It is this utopianism that gets evicted by the 2010s transition from corporate Hollywood to private equity Hollywood, an eviction legible in the difference between the heist film and the signature genre of private equity, the grift docudrama. Private equity firms are unique vehicles for capital with a very recent history, as detailed effectively by the financial journalist Gretchen Morgenson and consultant Joshua Rosner (2023). Bain Capital, Blackstone, or the Carlyle Group are not necessarily household names, but they rose to great prominence after 2008 and now center transactions in the twenty-first century. Generally not publicly traded, private equity firms purchase companies, load them with debt under the guise of repackaging, and then resell them. As Daniel Bessner (2024) has documented for *Harper's Magazine*, as of very recently, private equity firms own MGM and Miramax outright; the largest stakes in Disney, Netflix, Comcast, Apple, and Warner Brothers; and portions of Hulu and DreamWorks. Under this regime, Hollywood, like hospitals, insurance, and consumer retail before it, has seen a substantial contraction, as resources are diverted from business investment to fund wealth through stock buybacks and dividends.

The private equity era in Hollywood is coterminous with the rise of original streaming content. This rise is often narrated in terms of flexible consumption ("cutting the cord," device integration, convenience) as well as content diversification (multiplying platforms and producers for algorithmic recommendation equals more heterogeneity, greater identity representation). But it must also be understood as a financial bubble. Subscriber TV was a profitable business, but streaming has proved unprofitable for every company but Netflix—and that just barely. Netflix, like Amazon, is a circulation company: a business built on innovative ways of distributing goods produced elsewhere. When those goods are not just durable consumer objects but also media forms governed by rights and residuals, distribution companies confront competition and conflicts with producers, and in recent years their solution has been to integrate production so they can distribute their proprietary media content. Studios controlled distribution in the past, but now they are controlled by the distributors, in a reversal that demotes studios. As the circulation companies have ventured into production, they have certainly made material investments like server farms and even new greenrooms, but their post-studio and divested mode of production is conspicuously circulation forward, propelled by subscriber acquisition, not content generation (as evidenced, for example, by the frequent cancellation of successful series after just three seasons, since actuaries have determined that new subscriber effects wane at that point; the goal is not to make and deliver a valued product but to churn sign-ups and user data) (Ryan 2020). By 2024 99 percent of US households paid for at least one streaming subscription; according to *Forbes*, Americans spend an average of over three hours per day streaming digital media, equivalent to a part-time job (Durrani 2024). Streaming was valued at nearly $555 billion in 2023, with revenue around $43 billion, even though the stock prices of most streaming companies have fallen by 50 percent or more in the 2020s. By 2022 Nielsen calculated more watching via streaming than cable or broadcast; this peak in the quest for subscribers has already translated into divestment from production, especially because major streamers from legacy producers like Disney, Paramount, and Warner Brothers sustained losses in the range of billions of dollars, undertaking debt to compete with Netflix as a "legacy" distributor. A rush to pursue ad support and tiered subscriptions has ensued, degrading one of the core selling points of the streaming model. A parallel rush toward "bundling"—one subscription for three streamers such as Disney, Hulu, and Max together—looks to be reinventing cable from scratch. Worse, on the spectator side, the promise of ongoing access to a streamer's catalog has been reneged, with countless products removed from holdings and rendered digitally obsolete. On the labor side, the older model of residuals on rebroadcast was replaced by flat fees for catalog inclusion; catalog contraction now completely cuts those off. Similarly, filmmakers sell to streamers for a premium upfront, but for no back-end share; thus there is an eternal short-term horizon for this regime. Aesthetically and generically, the imperative for outsize rather than merely effective profit and the actuarial analytics of past blockbusters mean that mid-list films, mid-blockbuster genres like rom-coms, low-budget, and independent films have all but disappeared. Whittling production and inflating circulation, the private equity era spells certain impoverishment of culture workers to enrich asset managers, and a deadly diminishment of cultural aesthetics to a slurry.

This capital transformation finds itself encoded at the level of form and medium in the fade-out of heist films and bubbling of grifter streamers. Filming capital at this point in history may be less a matter of an individual film's form than a mutation in genre, something that tends to require historical duration to come into relief. Turning now to a couple of illustrative examples from the past decade, we can track how the shift in expended capital is resulting in a shift in represented capital, with some manifestly shifting ideological valences.

For the heist film, take one of the last articles from its wending heyday: the 2018 *Ocean's 8*. The only of the *Oceans* not to be directed by Soderbergh, it was still produced by him, and it effectuates an important expansion of the *Oceans* franchise: to the femme. Perhaps for this reason, it tends to be underrated among heists in general and the *Oceans* in particular. But it rather perfectly exemplifies the genre: stylized collective work, edifying comedic ending, and downright utopian attitudes toward the redistribution not only of wealth but also of beauty.

A crew composed of eight women operates in the milieu of the feminine, that excess domain of consumption, fashion, jewelry, theatricality, and aesthetics as such. Unlike the recognizably parasitic and destructive capitalist targets of the other *Oceans* films (casinos, NASCAR), *8* sets its sights on a cultural institution, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, its annual gala, and a famed Cartier diamond necklace (an actual historic object, made in 1931 for the maharaja of Nawanagar). The feminine industries targeted by the operation in *Ocean's 8* are narrower than the casino capitalism at stake in the other films, but they are also more hegemonic: the pantheon of high culture. The gala is the annual elaborate fundraiser for the fashion wing of the Met, which is oddly the only collection at the museum charged with self-funding, and it has become a twenty-first-century must-see red-carpet, the Oscars of couture. The superstar quality of the *Ocean's 8* cast is notable compared to the male versions; it is as if the meta quality of the heist's targeting of the image industry is refracted in the cast's Hollywood clout. Though all eight members of the crew are beautiful and of young to middle age (a homogeneity departing from the uneven appearances and age range of the male *Oceans*), they hail from all five New York City boroughs. The specific skills of the heist crew are also interestingly feminized: jewelry making (Amita), fashion design (Rose), domestic fencing (Tammy), and acting (Daphne). The film amplifies the gendered dimension of the heist by pitting the crew of women against parole board officers, security guards, jewelers, insurance agents, police, and surveillance experts, all cast as men. Spotlighting this teamwork, there is no love story to dilute the plot (unlike in the other *Oceans*, and surprisingly for the femininized one). The counter-social of the heist genre as such gets consummated by this sororal solidarity.

Ocean's 8 devotes the bulk of its impressively fast diegetic time (it is the shortest of all the *Oceans*, even though arguably the most complicated of jobs) to the planning and research phase. It dramatizes the dynamics of large-group pedagogy, communication check-ins, and delegated specialization. The film's rapid opening sequence underlines the importance of group projects by establishing the relatively skill-less and unrewarding exploits of Debbie Ocean effortlessly stealing clothing from Bergdorf Goodman and conning her way into a suite from the luxury hotel 12 George. While impressive, such feats are far from the coalition building this film ultimately wants to showcase. Many montages relay assembling the team, and implementing the logistics, while split-screen sequences frequently highlight the parallel milieus of coordinated teamwork. Frequent ensemble shots in medium scope uplift the entire crew in situ, at bars, in the loft where they headquarter, and on the subway. The plotting sequence makes abundant use of gadgets that exceed those of earlier *Oceans* films: three-dimensional quartz printers for decoy jewels, super magnets, and wireless data-transmitting spyglasses—all so much general intellect mobilized for collective efforts at redistribution rather than capital profit.

In tackling the artisanal image industry of fashion, the plot also engages media and cultural institutions like *Vogue*, the Met, and Page Six, and the celebrity ego-plex through which Anne Hathaway is first a mark and soon an accomplice. The set design and styling boast several celebrity cameos, flashbulbs, and So. Much. Fashion. Auditing the femme tenor of this image milieu, Debbie vows that the crew must be all female: "A Him gets noticed, a Her gets ignored. And for once, we'd like to be ignored." Who would suspect some girls of a half-billion-dollar theft? Unlike the previous three *Oceans* movies, the heist is not motivated by revenge against a specific antagonist—which lets the act stand on its own, purely the thrill of the collective world to be won. Such utopian thought pits the coalition against the culture industry, but the film's relation to the heist genre that it at once capitalizes on and reworks (as the last *Oceans*, as the femme *Oceans*, as the most media biz meta *Oceans*) expresses the enabling function of traditional aesthetic forms, including the corporatist model that invests in them.

The Lone Grifter

Things look rather different—aesthetically and ideologically—from within the financial model that succeeds the corporation in Hollywood: the asset managerial program. The heist film is to corporate Hollywood in the beginning of the twenty-first century as the grifter streamer is to private equity Hollywood in its third decade. This phase in media history entails a marked preoccupation with true crime—a genuine boom across podcasts, documentary specials, and original streaming content. In the early 2020s, a tide of fraud shows boomeranged this boom into double whammies: nonfiction media about the true crimes followed closely by dramatic representations. Every single streaming platform had one of their own, often entwining the individual grifter's game with some of the most blazing companies on the twenty-first-century exchange. Hulu's *Dropout* remade HBO's documentary *The Inventor*; Hulu's *WeWork* documentary was followed by Apple's *We Crashed*; Showtime's *Superpumped* rendered Mike Isaac's best-selling book of the same title; and Netflix's *Inventing Anna* followed on Jessica Pressler's *New York Magazine*'s long-form reporting.

Inventing Anna chronicles Anna Delvey (Sorokin) as she styles herself a German heiress, evades hotel bills, scams banks, suckers art collectors, and preys on the near rich in a variety of ways, but most concretely in securing investments in a prospective high-society club. Those are indeed the crimes for which the "real" Anna Sorokin was tried and convicted and paroled after a notably short sentence. As the show disclaims at the opening of each episode, "This whole story is completely true. Except for all the parts that are totally made up." The true story pertains to what was made up. Notably, the miniseries was directed by Shonda Rhimes, a queen of televisual soap opera, as her first for streaming, and the constraint of working with a mostly true story seems to have suited her well. (There is less melodrama and less stretching in the rendering here, as the preposterous story itself bears more weight.) Expensive settings and costumes and a long run time did not translate into noteworthy cinematography, and while the show topped Netflix's offerings for months, it received decidedly tepid critical reviews.

A first point of contrast of the form and ideology of *Ocean's 8* with *Inventing Anna* is the ensemble nature of the heist genre versus the prominent individual of the grifter docudrama. The project in process for the heist is a group targeting an institution. The con for the fraud is an individual scoring the confidence of successive individuals, such that their charade can be maintained. A heist has a specific point of achievement, a kind of spatial scale and discrete temporality, whereas a grift has a temporal duration that is ideally indefinite, and a spatial dispersal that helps keep the balls in the air. The grifter does not have time for process. Like the private equity firms that prioritize short-term cash-outs over long-term value building, the grift hurries to keep things in smash-and-grab motion. Grifters on- and off-screen are not invested in the fundamentals of a business, but in keeping a shell game appearance running long enough for cash-out opportunities. The heist worker is for the team, the grift worker is for herself.

The opening words of *Inventing Anna* are spoken by Anna: "This whole story, the one you are about to sit on your fat ass and watch like a big lump of nothing, is about me." The grifter show asks, why does the fraud lie? And why do we believe them? The heist film asks, what can't a team do? And why don't we collaborate more? One psychologizes and individuates, the other massages social muscles. Where it is easy to complain of *Ocean's 8* that the individual characters' depths are subordinated to the collective plot, *Inventing Anna* luxuriates in the psychological complexity of its morally dubious, pathologically convincing protagonist. This is true perhaps especially because Anna hungers for company but makes her friends her greatest victims, a jarring sociopathy as against the jovial solidarity of the heist crew.

In stark contrast to the high-gloss polish of *Ocean's 8*, *Inventing Anna* is formally uneven, in ways illustrative of the differences between corporate studio investment in production and asset managerial optimization of circulation. Although as a limited-term series by design *Inventing Anna* lasts only nine episodes, it nonetheless lumbers with a draggy, distended quality. The crime's success seems highly unlikely, since Julia Garner's Delvey runs a charm deficit, rendering it impossible to discern what marks saw in her. An actress of significant talent, Garner suffers here from limp writing and under-direction, as well as from an accent impression that is truly grating. Her performance is so affected as to incapacitate the grift in advance. Most especially, the reporter who popularizes Anna's story (and coproduces the Netflix show) is mystifyingly portrayed as obsessed with Anna to the point of violating journalistic ethics and jeopardizing her own pregnancy. At once a high point for the show and portal to its weaknesses, an inordinate number of underutilized characters played by Shondaland veterans appear in cameos and minor parts (Jeff Perry, Katie Lowes, Chris Lowell, Kate Burton, Joshua Malina, and others)—derivative media indeed. (To make matters worse, Anna's story overlaps with that of another grift protagonist, Fyre Fest's fraud Billy McFarland, hallowed in not one but two documentaries in 2019 made by Hulu and by Netflix—one streamer a commercial for the other.) While the milieu of *Ocean's 8* functions to analogize art and crime, *Inventing Anna* similarly situates Anna within the art world (with a particular penchant for Cindy Sherman's incognito self-portraits) merely to burnish its protagonists' pathology.

Crucially, far from a wrap on the schemes of Anna Sorokin, *Inventing Anna* functioned as a catapult for her charismatic pursuit of ever greater fortune. Sorokin sold the rights to her life story—so much as she could truthfully relay them—to Netflix for $320,000. Most of those funds then went to restitution and fines. She is now enjoying new deals for a docuseries on her life after parole, as well as participating in *Dancing with the Stars*, launching a line of non-fungible tokens, producing the new reality show *Dining with Delvey*, and hosting a podcast. Along with gallery shows of her drawings from her prison time, all these ventures serve, she states, to finally represent her truth: "You've heard so many voices already, but this is the beginning of me telling my story, my narrative from my perspective" (Maas 2022). She seems to have passed from society con to reality star unscathed, capitalizing on the self-as genre promoted by "immediacy style" (Kornbluh 2024: 9). Her output from *Inventing Anna* to the present formalizes the propulsive accumulation of private equity as capital strategy, and has no truck with the utopian quality of the heist film.

Corporate Studio Heists Versus Private Equity Grifters

In light of these examples, we are now in a position to heighten the contrast between these two revealing twenty-first-century genres, as they film capital in their respective ways. The different underlying capital formations of these two moments and genres manifest in the competing emphases on collective assembly and individual propulsion, and the conflicting ideological orientations of redistributive reworking of social logics in solidarity versus singular acquisitive exploits. Who knew the studios would look like aestheticized collectives when compared to the strip miners? But that is the conclusion one might draw from the juxtaposition of these media forms, and from the material allocation of investment in the changing eras. Even if the realities of private equity hollowing out hospitals and nursing homes, insurance, and consumer retail are becoming more documented and recognized, it is less evident that our popular media forms have also been recently demolished by the forces of profit extraction. The bubble of grifter shows reflects the extractive hollowing of televisual cultural production. Grifters work for personal gain by overpromising business prowess and pirating investments without ever channeling them into production. The asset manager takeover of Hollywood has similarly worked by divesting from production while overextending debt to enrich private fundholders. There is no there there when it comes to private equity management of a streaming service, there is only the promise of future return. It is this logic that animates the grift story. Grifter shows exhibit that tendency to cannibalization and intellectual property metastasis common in the private equity era, by basing their arcs in true crime rather than independently generated fictions. They impart a map of capitalist accumulation as shady misdealing, which differs from the mapping occasioned by the heist genre. One is tempted to say that the thinning of production engineered by private equity results in the grift as a rather too literal allegoresis, whereas the heist, motivated by the art of collective planning and spurred by the utopian impulse, more thickly conceptualizes regimes of accumulation and systems of distribution.

It seems bonkers to retrospectively celebrate what the corporate financing model offered to filming capital, but the plundered aesthetics of the private equity era are utterly deranging. As histories of the corporate form like Henry Turner's (2016) suggest, and interpretations of corporate form like Jerome Christensen's (2012), Michael Szalay's (2024), and Dan Sinykin's (2023) suggest in turn, the "corporate" collating of efforts for a successful undertaking can be a more ideologically capacious endeavor than quick audits of corporate cultural production indicate. The metabolization of corporate practices and corporate identity by corporate-based representations like the work-life balance dramedy or the literary fiction–genre fiction hybrid can be more aesthetically dynamic than post-corporate slop. With this kind of scholarly insight, and in consistency with Marxist methods, the transition from corporate to private equity structure in cultural production must be understood to initiate different metabolizations. The shift from a heyday of heist films to a slew of streaming grift is one such metabolization. And again at the risk of a bonkers nostalgia, one must observe that the political ideas ferried by the central planning and collective action in the heist film are of comparatively more purchase in our present omnicrisis than those of the lone-wolf propulsive deception in the grift show. Financial changes become mappable in these ideological passages. *Filming capital* signifies the power of engaging so many sensory registers in the nearly impossible project of thinking totality. And it matters whether the capital at stake is corporately configured or private-equity configured. We can best assess the prospects for that impossible project when our analysis coordinates capital in its contextually variant granular modalities to filmic mediation in its ideologically conversant actualities. Be collective, do heists. Be individual, do fraud. One is a curriculum and calisthenics for effective political agency, and one is not; their respective micro-historical acmes reveal that filming capital is not just a question of documenting and indexing but also of interpreting the kinds of forms that historically variable kinds of capital make available, and elevating the kinds of forms that in turn make those kinds of capital available to thought.

Notes

1. For helpful versions of these histories, see Brenner 2006, Gordon 2016, and Summers 2020.
2. For more synthesis of stagnation and circulation and the aesthetic styles they beget, see Kornbluh 2024.

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