

9

A Little Larceny

Labor, Leisure, and Loyalty in the '50s Noir Heist Film

MARK OSTEEN

“None of these men are criminals in the usual sense; they’ve all got jobs, they all live seemingly normal, decent lives. But they got their problems, and they’ve all got a little larceny in ’em.” With these words, Johnny Clay (Sterling Hayden) describes the crew he has assembled to pull off a racetrack robbery in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Killing* (1956). A milquetoast cashier with a wayward wife, a cop in debt to a gangster, a lonely bookkeeper, a farmer, a chess-club manager, and a bartender married to an invalid: such ordinary men with “problems” populate the gangs in many 1950s heist noirs. These films’ representation of criminals as regular, if quietly desperate, Joe Lunchboxes encourages viewers to root for them. Yet that same humanity—displayed in foibles such as boastfulness, an obsession with young girls, and racial prejudice—also dooms them. As *The Asphalt Jungle*’s (1950) mastermind Doc Riedenschneider (Sam Jaffe) puts it, he and the others “work for our vice.”

But they do work. Heist films emphasize the craftsmanship of the participants, many of whom disguise themselves as blue-collar workers—sewer men, flower deliverers, truck drivers, hat-factory employees—as they execute their crimes. These are the same trades that these men might follow if they weren’t criminals. Their alternative to work is . . . work—albeit for higher wages. It’s not an accident that these elaborate robberies are referred to as “jobs.” This fact also helps to explain a recurrent pattern in heist movies: the robberies go smoothly while the men are on the job, but rapidly unravel as soon they leave the work site.

The gangs even imitate specific aspects of the twentieth-century work world. For instance, many participants are selected for their specialized skills. Such a division of labor translates Fordist factory models to the underworld, and with the same goal: dividing tasks to minimize risk and to make the best use of resources.¹ Further, heist gangs' obsessive attention to timing exemplifies Taylorist principles of scientific management, which had by midcentury "come to dominate managerial theory and practice."² These tenets include separating execution from planning, replacing rule-of-thumb estimates with precise measurements, and using time and motion studies to produce optimum performance.³ The gangs successfully use these principles, but the films also show how the same principles tend to erase workers' individuality and engender the types of alienation that Karl Marx so pungently described.⁴ As critics of Taylorism observed, its specialization creates a class system that divides labor from management, brawn from brains.⁵ The films thus not only mirror the noncinematic working world (which was filled with labor agitation, caused in part by rigidly applied Taylorist principles); they also reveal how organizations that aim to undermine lawful society end up imitating it.

Because each specialist uses his skills to advance the larger goal, a heist requires teamwork.⁶ In that regard, the job is also a game. It is no surprise, then, that tropes of sport or gambling appear in every 1950s heist film: the title crime in *Armored Car Robbery* (1950) takes place outside Wrigley Field; *The Killing* is set at a racetrack; the heisters in *Kansas City Confidential* (1952) are identified by four torn playing cards; the college boys in *5 against the House* (1955) try to rob Harold's Casino, and so on. The heist itself—in this light, not a "job" but a "caper"—becomes a risky bet, a race against time. Crime is depicted as merely a higher-stakes version of everyone else's activities, a shortcut to the American dream of upward mobility through enterprise—albeit one that relies on deception. What does one wear when playing games or tricks? A uniform or costume. Hence the genre's recurrent masks and disguises, from the gas masks in *Criss Cross* (1949) to the students' Wild West outfits in *5 against the House*, suggest that the criminals are not working but playing. The fact that the robbers never get their loot thus derives both from the requirements of the Production Code (according to which crime must be punished) and from the suspicion that these robbers, though disguised as workers, are (according to the ethos of the heavily unionized 1950s) really no better than scabs. I propose that the representation of heist gangs as at once workers and players registers uncertainties about the range and limitations of labor and leisure in the 1950s, a time when Americans possessed more leisure time than ever before. In addition, because these criminal capers are usually exclusively male enterprises in which women are at best spectators or helpers, and more often interlopers or distractions, the films also dramatize evolving ideas about masculinity and

its relation to work and play—themes also reflected in important 1950s novels and films such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (novel: 1955; film: 1956) and *Patterns* (1956).

Nor is it an accident that the first true heist movies appeared in 1950, between the first and second round of House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings. The films' secret schemes and multiple betrayals reflect the paranoia that pervaded Hollywood in these years, and their many informers and compromised cops embody the ubiquitous feeling (not only in Hollywood) that no one could be trusted, that anyone might turn out to be a Communist, or that a former associate might rat you out. As J. P. Telotte has observed, multiple double crosses are the "ultimate law" of these films.⁷ In this way, 1950s heist films address the erosion of community both inside and outside of Hollywood. Collective action, they suggest, is possible only in the underworld, and even there it is fleeting and unreliable. The genre, in short, opens a window onto contemporary attitudes about labor, leisure, and loyalty through stories about elaborate criminal projects.

Precursors

The true heist picture, which places a meticulously planned, collectively executed robbery at its center, emerged as a significant film-noir subgenre after 1950. But two earlier films, both directed by Robert Siodmak, introduce its themes and tropes. The first noir heist is the Prentiss Hat Factory job engineered by Big Jim Colfax (Albert Dekker) in *The Killers* (1946). In one of this innovative film's eleven flashbacks—this one narrated by Charleston (Vince Barnett), the ex-cellmate of protagonist Ole "Swede" Anderson (Burt Lancaster)—we witness the initial meeting, where we learn of Swede's continuing infatuation with Colfax's girlfriend, Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner), see the mistrust among the gang members, and note the demurral of Charleston, who finds the plan too risky and advises Ole against participating.

Swede threatens Colfax after the boss treats Kitty roughly; Colfax stops him with, "The job comes first. . . . But afterwards we'll have business together." The sense that the heist is serious business is bolstered during the robbery sequence, which is enacted in the only flashback not narrated by a character. It is instead read from an old newspaper story by insurance investigator Jim Reardon's boss, Kenyon (Donald MacBride). His neutral narration functions as an aural equivalent of the gang members' stoic facelessness during the job: dressed as employees and carrying lunchboxes, the bandits are indistinguishable from the workers. Siodmak and cinematographer Woody Bredell present the heist in an ingeniously executed sequence shot. After a crane shot swoops down over the men entering the factory,



Which ones are the robbers? Gang leader Big Jim Colfax (Albert Dekker, far left) looks over his shoulder at Dum Dum (Jack Lambert, far right), as they enter the Prentiss Hat Factory in *The Killers* (1946).

the camera moves left as they enter and rob the payroll office, tracking them (without a cut) as they follow a truck through the gates (the camera moves to the truck before the robbers do) and escape after a gun battle. Both sequence and robbery are “performed . . . with detailed precision,” as Kenyon’s voiceover intones: the filmmakers mirror the criminals. As long as the men are inside the plant, the job goes beautifully. But afterward, led to believe by Kitty that he is being double-crossed, Swede steals the money from Colfax and company. Later, Swede is double-crossed by Kitty, who robs him and returns the money to Colfax—a double betrayal that ultimately leads to Swede’s death.

Similar treacheries pervade the aptly titled *Criss Cross*, also starring Burt Lancaster, who, as Steve Thompson, is lured by the femme fatale Anna (Yvonne De Carlo) into participating in an armored-truck robbery. Much of the film unfolds in flashback as Steve, driving the truck to its rendezvous with the gang, traces the winding road of memory to the current moment. He recalls how the leader, Slim Dundee (Dan Duryea), recruited Finchley (Alan Napier), a chess player with a foreign accent and a drinking problem, to plan the robbery. It’s Finchley’s idea to have the robbers pose as sewer workers and to use an ice-cream truck as a decoy.

The phony sewer workers set off a bomb in a manhole; during the smoke-filled aftermath, the robbers don grotesque, troll-like gas masks. In the smoke it’s difficult to tell the good guys from the bad—precisely Steve’s problem. Torn between Anna and her shady cohorts and his old friend Pete, a police detective, he is the quintessential divided noir protagonist, and one of many noir characters who finds his legit job unsatisfying.⁸ As the “inside man” during the heist, he is simultaneously working for and against his company. Hoping to protect “Pop,” his aging fellow employee, Steve had insisted that there be no shooting, but that stipulation is quickly forgotten in the chaos. Once Pop is wounded, an angry Steve—who does not wear a mask—turns coat and begins to fight the robbers. Shot during the holdup, he awakens in the

hospital, his left arm (the sinister side) in a cast, to learn that he has been hailed in the newspapers as a hero. He is—and he is not: he has criss-crossed himself. Double crosses proliferate after Steve eludes his would-be assassin and tracks Anna to her hideout, where she betrays him again before Slim kills them both.

Although both movies adumbrate later heist films' blurring of the lines between labor and crime, these early pictures are concerned more with individual guilt than with social analysis. Later heist movies concentrate more on group dynamics and collective action to expose the period's evolving definitions of labor, leisure, and loyalty. In fact, we can pinpoint the birth date of the true heist film: June 8, 1950.⁹ That day marked the release of John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* and Richard Fleischer's *Armored Car Robbery*, two films that form the dexter and sinister arms of the genre.

Dexter and Sinister

In *The Asphalt Jungle*, corrupt lawyer Alonzo Emmerich (Louis Calhern) hears his wife confess her fears. "When I think about those awful people you come in contact with, downright criminals, I get scared," she tells him. "Oh, there's nothing so different about them," he suavely replies. "After all, crime is only a left-handed form of human endeavor." A dissolve superimposes his face over that of Dix Handley (Sterling Hayden), a "downright criminal" who, with Emmerich's backing, has helped to pull off a jewelry-store burglary. The wealthy lawyer and the hood are two of a kind, except that Dix is more honorable. If Emmerich's words strike us as a weak excuse for his involvement, they nevertheless explain the 1950s heist film's concentration on "seemingly normal, decent" men who turn to crime as an alternate commercial enterprise. Released in the wake of the initial HUAC hearings, Huston's film also dissects the ethics of secrecy and provides a template for the caper films that followed.

Like most noir heist gangs, Doc Riedenschneider's crew exemplifies the traits of a secret society, as brilliantly analyzed by the early twentieth-century sociologist Georg Simmel. Such groups, he writes, create a "second world alongside the manifest world"—a "city under the city," as the film has it.¹⁰ The secret endows each member with "inner property" (331)—an enormous boon for lower- or working-class citizens who own little else of value. Yet a secret inevitably contains a "tension that is dissolved in the moment of its revelation" (333): the phenomenon created to prevent betrayal also produces its likelihood. Simmel further suggests that "the secret society emerges everywhere as the counterpart of despotism and police restriction" (347). Thus, as HUAC cracked down on Hollywood and the red scare swept through America,

subversive groups and “un-American” ideas were pushed underground. Heist pictures emerged as a vehicle to dramatize alternative collective action and to question the status quo at a moment when direct challenges to capitalism and law and order had become taboo. Unfortunately, as Simmel observes, secret societies usually end up imitating the structures and values of the society they aim to repudiate (360). And so these gangs mirror the flaws of the legitimate work world: as they fall apart, their solidarity is supplanted by greed, loyalty by betrayal, teamwork by retribution.

Early in Huston’s film, when Dix complains to his friend Gus (James Whitmore) that owing money to the slimy bookie, Cobby (Marc Lawrence), damages his “self-respect,” Gus lends him a thousand dollars; a call to their friend Louie (Anthony Caruso) yields another thousand. Soon Dix is visited by Doll Conovan (Jean Hagen), who has lost her job and apartment; he agrees to put her up at his place, no strings attached. These “first-class men” (to use Taylor’s term for reliable workers) are clearly actuated by humane values such as loyalty and generosity.¹¹ Yet they are also trapped: Gus in his seedy diner, Louie in his cramped apartment, Dix by his gambling addiction. They are thus ripe for the promise of quick money.

A million dollars in jewelry is waiting to be taken from Belletiere’s; all Doc requires are the right men and some seed money. Because “men get greedy,” he explains to Emmerich, the “helpers”—a “boxman” (safecracker), driver, and “hooligan”—will each receive a flat fee rather than a cut of the take. Reynold Humphries comments that this scene resembles a corporate board meeting “from which the workers and their representatives have been excluded”: the proletariat are neither involved in the planning nor partake of the profits.¹² As mere “functional units” in what Fran Mason calls a “Fordist division of labor,”¹³ the boxman (Louie), driver (Gus), and hooligan (Dix)—their labels indicate their low status—are alienated workers. But Dix is not really a hooligan; what drives him is not greed but a nostalgic dream of returning to Hickory Wood, his ancestral Kentucky farm, which nurtured the love of



Doc (Sam Jaffe) explains the heist scheme to (from left) Dix (Sterling Hayden), Louie (Anthony Caruso), and Gus (James Whitmore) in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Single-source overhead lighting casts shadows on the men’s faces and doubts on their prospects.

horses that has been warped into a gambling problem. Though self-deluded, Dix is generous and loyal; that's why Doll, who "never had a proper home," loves him.

As Doc outlines his painstakingly conceived plan to his crew, the single-source overhead lighting casts shadows on the men's faces and doubts on their success. Yet once they enter Belletiere's, Louie's skill and Doc's management put the jewels in their hands. Alas, a guard, alerted by nearby alarms, interrupts their departure. Dix punches him; the man's gun falls and shoots Louie in the gut. With this mishap, the scheme begins to crumble. In fact, as Simmel would predict, the gang's solidarity has started to unravel earlier, its loose thread being Emmerich, who plans to double-cross the others, grab the jewels, and disappear. His scheme fails when Doc and Dix fail to believe his cover story and kill his co-conspirator, the private eye Brannom, who wounds Dix in the struggle.¹⁴ Things go further downhill from there: Emmerich kills himself, Louie dies from his wounds, and Cobby—played by Marc Lawrence, who testified before HUAC not long after the film was released—turns stool pigeon, leading to Gus's arrest. So much for solidarity.

That leaves only Dix and Doc, who has the jewels but no way to turn them into money. Doc blames greed for the plan's failure, but greed isn't *his* chief vice; it's a different deadly sin—lust. He ends up being nabbed because he can't tear his eyes away from a dancing teenaged girl. He worked for his vice, but his vice didn't pay. As for Dix, Police Commissioner Hardy (John McIntire) describes him as "a man without human feeling or human mercy." Yet we have already witnessed Dix's humanity, and his final, poignant moments further undercut Hardy's pronouncement. Despite not having "enough blood left in him to keep a chicken alive," he makes it back to Hickory Wood, only to collapse and die in a pasture, nuzzled by a mare and her colt. Like Louie and Gus, Dix is the victim of an urban jungle where those lacking education or resources inevitably end up as prey. But despite being disenfranchised and desperate, the film's criminals are more honorable than the jaded Emmerich or the film's corrupt cop, Lieutenant Ditrich, who have besmirched Dix's vision of an unspoiled America.

Looming in the background are the HUAC hearings. After the first round, in October 1947, Huston, along with several other Hollywood liberals, formed the Committee for the First Amendment (CFA) to defend the subpoenaed radicals, some of whom were later jailed as belonging to the Hollywood Ten. But the CFA rapidly collapsed after a wave of negative publicity, and in November, studio heads signed the Waldorf Statement, which instigated the blacklist.¹⁵ *The Asphalt Jungle* thus records Huston's loss of faith in collective action. Like the Hollywood Left and the unions whose agitation precipitated the right-wing crackdown, the heist gang has power as a group, but mistrust and pressure

from fearmongers destroy them. Art also adumbrates life: soon after the film's release, Hayden and Lawrence gave the names of ex-Communist associates to HUAC rather than sacrifice their careers.¹⁶

Whereas Huston's film empathizes with the gang, *Armored Car Robbery* favors the police, led by Lieutenant Cordell (Charles McGraw). Like many pseudo-documentary noirs, it highlights the all-encompassing power of law-enforcement technologies. Aware of that power, criminal mastermind Dave Purvis (chillingly enacted by William Talman) copies the cops: at the film's opening, he sends a fake distress call to determine how long the police take to arrive at Wrigley Field (then the home of Los Angeles' minor-league baseball club), where he plans to rob an armored car of half a million dollars. As he holds his stopwatch, the radio announcer provides play-by-play. Purvis is smart, but he is also a cold-blooded psychopath, and his minions are an unimpressive lot: the hapless promoter Benny McBride (Douglas Fowley), whose burlesque dancer wife, Yvonne (Adele Jergens) is cuckolding him with Purvis; and Al Mapes (Steve Brodie) and Ace Foster (Gene Evans), career criminals. The odds for success don't look too swell, but Purvis, who boasts a clean record ("not even a parking ticket") and who pulled off a big heist in Chicago, improves them; fittingly, he'll get half of the loot.

Diagramming the plan on a window shade, Purvis explains that they must complete the job within three minutes—before the police have time to get there. During the heist, he and Benny dress in coveralls, and Purvis carries a lunchbox. In fact, Purvis plays many roles: if earlier he acted as a police dispatcher, now he serves as third-base coach, relaying wordless signs (a tug of the cap, a touch of the cheek) to the gang as Ace drives up in an old jalopy to divert the guards' attention. In the background the crowd roars, as if cheering on the robbery team. Taylorist principles seem to prevail as the men toss a smoke bomb, don gas masks, and Purvis clicks his stopwatch. But his management is flawed: the police arrive before they have finished; Cordell's partner is killed and Benny wounded.



Dave Purvis (William Talman) plays third-base coach, sending his team the sign to steal in *Armored Car Robbery* (1950).

Now Fleischer cuts back and forth between Purvis and Cordell to counterpoint the latter's humanity with the former's inhumanity. Whereas Cordell grieves for his partner, Purvis won't take Benny to a doctor—"we're wasting time," he snarls. He does promise to hand Benny's share to Yvonne—which only means that he'll get Benny's money as well as his wife. After the gang successfully eludes a roadblock by passing as oil-field workers, Ace is shot and captured. Purvis doesn't care: now there's more moolah for him, and more "time to spend it." But even he has a weak spot: Yvonne. After the police learn that the lipstick on Purvis's collar is "theatrical," Cordell and his new partner, Ryan, "kill time" at her burlesque theater and collar Mapes, who has shown up looking for his cut. Mapes quickly folds under interrogation—no solidarity here—but mostly seems dismayed that his labor will go unremunerated, protesting, "I earned that dough fair and square!"

The cops' next play is to catch Yvonne "off base." How? Bug her room, and "force her hand" by having Ryan masquerade as Mapes (this time, the cop is in disguise). The ruse doesn't fool Purvis, but he can't elude the police, who have his car bugged, so that when he forces Ryan to drive to the airport, the cops are on his heels. An attempt to charter a private plane fails when the pilot can't take off, after which the fleeing Purvis is run over by a plane, the coveted loot left to blow across the tarmac.

With his icy demeanor and obsession with time, Purvis (as his name indicates) represents a perversion of the police's technological efficiency. At once surly coach and soulless factory supervisor, Purvis stands for the sinister sides of labor and leisure, particularly the worst traits of Taylorism, which, critics claimed, fostered competition rather than cooperation.¹⁷ He is the evil counterpart of Cordell's righteous male authority. The only 1950s heist noir to evince no sympathy for its bandits, *Armored Car Robbery* suggests that, like ex-Communists, crooks will always betray each other when pressed. For many of today's viewers, however, the police's Taylorist omniscience may seem as chilling as Purvis's heartless automatism.

Games of Chance

At 9:58 A.M., a man in coveralls and cap parks his florist's van between a bank and a flower shop. While he is inside, an armored truck parks in front of his van. The florist's man picks up his flowers and drives off. Seconds later, four masked men in coveralls and caps park in the vacated spot in an identical florist's van; within fifteen seconds they have knocked out the guards, grabbed several bags of money, and escaped with the take. By 10:02 it's all over: an efficient heist, superbly planned by embittered ex-cop Tim Foster (Preston Foster), who, like Dave Purvis, has spent days timing entrances and exits down to the second.

But why do the robbers leave their masks on after the job is finished? Because Foster has shrewdly determined that only he will know the others' identities. His control of knowledge gives him a "pat hand," a metaphor that is reinforced when he reveals how the members will recognize each other later: each receives a torn playing card—kings, all.¹⁸ However, because we have seen the masked Foster interview each man in the same chair, looming over each like a punitive (foster) father, we share his knowledge of these miscreants: nervous, chain-smoking Pete Harris (Jack Elam); cop killer Boyd Kane (Neville Brand); weaselly lothario Tony Romano (Lee Van Cleef).¹⁹

Such tropes of gambling and sports pervade Phil Karlson's *Kansas City Confidential*. But there is a wild card: Joe Rolfe (John Payne), the sap who drove the real florist's van and is fingered for the crime before being released. Out of work and embittered, he tracks the crooks to El Borados, Mexico, where they will meet to split up the money.²⁰ Along the way he finds Harris at a dice table and forces himself into the scheme, hoping to use Harris as a "bird-dog to point the way." But after Harris is killed at the airport (while holding the King of Spades), hunting gives way to fishing, with Rolfe, now impersonating Harris, as both bait and angler. He makes his way to El Borados, where Romano and Kane are "on the hook" as they await their leader, unaware that one of the fishermen they've met is the mastermind. Knowing that the money they stole is marked and can't be spent, Foster plans to set up the others to be arrested, then pocket the three-hundred-thousand-dollar reward for apprehending them.

Like Steve Thompson, Rolfe is a divided character, a veteran and ex-con with a grudge and a violent streak, but inside a "normal, decent" guy who might be tamed by the right woman. That woman is Foster's daughter, Helen (Coleen Gray), a charming law student who unearths the good side of "Pete." Although she asserts to Rolfe that "people rarely look like what they are," she fails to penetrate his disguise. But Helen is what she seems, and her authentic goodness represents the humanity and rule of law that her father and Rolfe—the cop who has become a criminal and the ex-con playing investigator—have forgotten. She resurrects the gentle dad buried in Foster and, with a fortuitous entrance, saves Rolfe, after Romano and Kane determine that he isn't Harris (Kane served time with the real Pete).

In the film's climax, Foster, still incognito, drives the other three to his fishing boat in a panel truck that resembles their florist's van. The others aren't really planning to fish, but Foster is, and these men are the bait. Once on board, Rolfe proposes to Romano that they cut Kane out; Romano kills Kane; Romano and Foster are shot in the ensuing struggle. With his dying words, Foster absolves Rolfe and gives his blessing to Joe and Helen's union. True to his name, he has acted as Rolfe's foster father, in the process redeeming his "son" and himself.

5 against the House

Gaming is prominent in Phil Karlson's second heist film, *5 against the House*, in which four college students (and one girlfriend) scheme to rob Harold's Casino in Reno. Early in the film, the students—Al, a Korean War veteran (Guy Madison); Brick (Brian Keith), his buddy, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder; Ronnie (Kerwin Mathews), a brilliant dilettante; and jokester Roy (Alvy Moore)—visit Harold's. Although Ronnie notes the mirrors and observation posts (and witnesses a would-be robber being arrested), the visit plants a seed in his mind: to plan the “perfect crime.”

These are students, not workers, so their motives are different from those of older heisters. Brick, who suffers from violent rages and feels the “edge-off-of-everything blues,” is aimless and bored. The spoiled Ronnie just wants “to be first at something” and longs to test his manly intelligence with this “field experiment in psychology” (it's “the best idea since the bikini bathing suit!”). Al, acting as a big brother to Brick (who saved his life in Korea), isn't even aware that a heist is planned. For some reason, he thinks a return trip to Reno will solidify his relationship with lounge singer Kay (Kim Novak). On the drive to Reno, Brick divulges the plan to Al and at gunpoint forces him to comply. Ronnie had conceived the heist as simply a “stunt” and planned to give the money back. Brick's interference transforms it from an intellectual exercise to a battle.

Because it's Jamboree time in Reno, the students don ludicrous Wild West costumes and beards to blend with the similarly dressed crowd (the disguises also suggest that the scheme copies the Western movies that have shaped their ideas of valor). Among the more ingenious (and implausible) elements in their plan is to place a tape recorder within a mock money cart; it plays threatening prerecorded phrases to convince casino employee Eric Berg (William Conrad) that a very small man is hidden inside. But Ronnie neglected to prepare for the possibility that Eric wouldn't cooperate, and when Berg slides the cart downstairs instead of out the door to the getaway vehicle, the plan collapses. Brick flees to a parking garage, where Al (his costume now suitable for his role as self-appointed sheriff) persuades his friend to give himself up. This anticlimactic ending (no one gets hurt, and no one mentions jail) reinforces the sense that the heist is just a game, after all. If in other heist films the robbery is a job, here it resembles nothing so much as a class project.

Foster's secret society, as Simmel predicts, founders because the precautions designed to ensure loyalty also erode it: the cards and masks create kernels of tension that erupt in betrayal. This theme implicitly evokes the HUAC hearings, but they are alluded to more directly when Helen asks Rolfe about his "friends." He responds, "If you were my attorney, how would you advise me to answer?" Reply: "I'd tell you not to answer at all . . . it might incriminate you." Several witnesses before HUAC (whose hearings were going on at this time) similarly invoked the Fifth Amendment, thereby avoiding jail but getting themselves blacklisted. Karlson's film raises the same questions the hearings summoned: can a person (whether he be a fake gangster or an ex-Communist) change? Is informing on disreputable associates a duty or a betrayal? The film provides no answers but suggests that trust is necessary for both romantic and business success.

Men at Work

Johnny Clay believes that choosing "normal, decent" men for his audacious racetrack robbery will help them elude the police: who will suspect these ordinary Mikes and Georges?²¹ But while the major participants in *The Killing's* heist are amateurs at crime, pros perform key ancillary jobs: Nikki (Timothy Carey), a teeth-gritting hit man, is hired to shoot the favored horse and trigger a diversion; Maurice (Kola Kwariani), a tough chess-club manager, must start a fight to create a second distraction at the bar. As in *Asphalt*, these secondary players receive a flat fee rather than a cut of the take. The primary players must do something tougher: become like machines, for Clay has timed the plan down to the minute, so that each man must follow the template or ruin the scheme. *The Killing's* unique structure, which recounts the same events from several different angles, in overlapping flashbacks, mirrors the clockwork precision of the robbery, which James Naremore describes as "almost military."²² More to the point, Clay's orchestration (he carries his submachine gun in a guitar case) exemplifies several Taylorist principles: fragmenting jobs to minimize skill requirements; separating execution from planning; dividing direct labor (the amateurs) from indirect labor (the pros); conducting time and motion studies to ensure optimum performance; paying according to result.²³ Indeed, cashier George Peatty (Elisha Cook Jr.) and bartender Mike O'Reilly (Joe Sawyer) are performing their regular jobs at the racetrack as the heist proceeds, further eliding boundaries between labor and caper. However, their workplace is for most people a playground. Hence, more than other heist films, *The Killing* suggests that criminality is merely a "left-handed form" of leisure in which bettors hope to make a killing.

If each member is alike in having a "little larceny" in him, each one stoops to stealing for a different reason: the pathetic Peatty longs to placate his promis-

cuous wife, Sherry (Marie Windsor); Marvin Unger (Jay C. Flippen) wants to impress, and maybe possess, Johnny by furnishing seed money; O'Reilly hopes to help his ill spouse; cop Randy Kennan (Ted de Corsia) is under the gun for a gambling debt. Each man "works for [his] vice." Their human needs and flaws encourage us to root for these desperate characters and become complicit in their criminality, but they also make us feel superior to them and, perhaps, hope that they fail. As Maurice explains to Johnny (in an impenetrable accent), "The gangster and the artist are alike in the eyes of the masses. They're admired and hero-worshipped, but there is always present an underlying wish to see them destroyed at the height of their glory." Maurice's statement not only explains our ambivalence; it also underlines the sense that the film's characters court self-parody, that many of them (particularly Nikki and Val [Vince Edwards], Sherry's paramour, who plots to steal the take) have modeled themselves on movie gangsters—as implied by the row of "bad guy" shooting targets among which Clay outlines Nikki's job.

Johnny's part, however, is truly a performance, as indicated by his grotesque clown mask, a disguise that fits the heist genre's masquerade motif as well as the film's darkly comic tone and trope of clowning. Thus, for example, after the gang catches Sherry eavesdropping on their meeting, Kennan ("a funny kind of cop," according to Johnny) sarcastically advises George to "sing us a chorus from *Pagliacci*"—an opera about a clown. But the real joke is on the gang for, despite Johnny's punctilious planning (and the heist's incredible success), he makes stupid mistakes. One of them is trusting George even after they have caught Sherry snooping. Consequently, as the men wait for Johnny to arrive with the loot, Val and his associate intervene. Peatty starts a gunfight in which everyone but himself is killed. He then returns to his apartment to confront Sherry, and, as their parrot sardonically protests ("ain't fair, ain't fair!"), he shoots her. Dying, she describes the whole affair as "a bad joke without a punch line." But there is a punch line—and it's one of the most ironic moments in the entire noir canon (albeit borrowed from *Armored Car Robbery*). It follows from another of Johnny's foolish decisions: to buy a cheap suitcase with a broken lock to carry the loot. After airline employees refuse to let him carry the bag onboard (lesson: never let them check your luggage), he and his girlfriend, Fay (Coleen Gray), watch helplessly as an overladen baggage cart swerves to miss an errant poodle. The suitcase tumbles to the ground, scattering the ill-gotten gains across the runway. Ain't fair!²⁴

The Killing also introduces Kubrick's signature theme: that human creations, no matter how sophisticated, are as fallible as their creators and may overwhelm them.²⁵ He displays this theme via story, mise-en-scène, and set design. For example, although Clay moves from room to room while discussing his "normal, decent" men (the camera freely moving through walls), bars predominate elsewhere, suggesting the characters' entrapment and

adumbrating their fate.²⁶ His scientific management fails because, as critics of Taylorism had begun pointing out at this time, men are not machines and resent being treated as mere factors of production.²⁷ They are, rather, impelled (or pursued) by human drives, addictions, and emotions. One of these is sex, and it's what dooms the caper: George wants Sherry, but she wants Val. In providing the insecure George with enormous "inner property," the heist plan sows the seeds of betrayal. Yet if the story's sardonic tone seems apolitical and quintessentially Kubrickian, the Sherry-George subplot also alludes to HUAC and the blacklist (still in effect in 1956). Unable to keep his mouth shut, George, like many ex-Communists, betrays his friends. On the one hand, Peatty represents those (like Hayden) who named friends and associates; on the other hand, he exemplifies the pervasive feeling that nobody can be trusted, that even a humble cashier (or cop) might be a suspicious character—or even a Red.

There is also an informer in Jules Dassin's 1955 heist film, *Rififi*. Ironically, he is played by Dassin himself, who had fled the United States to *avoid* testifying before HUAC! Dassin's role as Cesar, the crafty Milanese safecracker who, under duress, discloses the location of stolen jewels to a rival gang, places the Hollywood blacklist in the film's immediate background. *Rififi* was Dassin's first post-exile film; though set in France and cast with French actors, its criminal characters, gritty black-and-white cinematography, and betrayal-packed story bear the noir stamp.²⁸

Rififi also follows the noir-heist template, while spending more time on the planning and robbery than do American heist pictures. We are introduced to the leader, Tony (Jean Servais), at a card game, but for the most part these robbers—Cesar, Jo (Carl Möhner, whose son, Tonio [Dominique Maurin], is Tony's godson), and Mario (Robert Manuel)—are definitely men at work. Their job: rob a safe full of jewels from Mappin and Webb, a heavily guarded store with an apartment on the floor above it. The crew carefully cases the place, timing its opening with a stopwatch and memorizing the location of every other building on the block. After Cesar checks out the store's alarm, the heisters buy an identical one to test its capabilities, learning how to muffle with fire-extinguisher foam the vibrations that set it off.

During the brilliantly directed heist sequence, the men exchange no words. We hear only the creaking of shoes, stray street sounds, and the muted blows of the hammer with which they remove the floorboards above the store.²⁹ Jo, who does most of the physical labor, is clad in casual work clothes; the others wear suits—fitting garments for a mastermind (Tony), expert craftsman (Cesar), and impresario (Mario). But the entire sequence is, as Philip Watts has commented, "an ode to work."³⁰ Hence, even Tony must laboriously descend on a rope to deploy the fire extinguisher on the alarm. Then Cesar

drills holes in the safe to open it without explosives. These men may be as decent as Clay's crew (we witness Tony's fierce loyalty to Jo, for example), but they're not amateurs. As in *The Killing*, the filmmakers parallel their work with the criminals': not only does the director play a safecracker, but the film indicates that both jobs require professionals who plan carefully and marshal diverse skills and talents.

Everything goes beautifully while the men are on the job, but soon afterward their human weaknesses spoil things. Tony, who shockingly beats up his ex-girlfriend, Mado, early in the film, has a terrible temper and a penchant for revenge. Jo's family loyalties conflict with his criminal activities, and Cesar has an uncontrolled libido. Consequently, after the successful heist ("The biggest take since the Sabine women!" a newsboy shouts), Cesar can't resist giving an expensive ring to his girlfriend. The Grutters, rival gangsters who own L'Age d'Or nightclub, learn about the gift and torture Cesar until he divulges the jewels' location, which leads to the deaths of Mario and his girlfriend. When Tony learns what Cesar has done, he confronts the bound safecracker. "I really liked you, Macaroni," he admits, but "you know the rules." In this game, cheaters pay the ultimate penalty. Exiled because of the blacklist, Dassin plays the informer he refused to become in real life.³¹

Despite Cesar's disclosure, the Grutters don't find the jewels, so they kidnap Tonio, hoping to exchange him for the treasure. Tony tracks them to a construction site outside Paris, kills two Grutters, and rescues Tonio. But unaware that Tony has already found his son, Jo arrives at the site with a suitcase full of cash (a fence has paid them for the jewels) and is killed by Pierre. Returning to the site, Tony kills Pierre Grutter but is wounded himself and can barely remain conscious on the drive back to the city. Meanwhile, Tonio, wearing a cowboy outfit, stands on the car seat waving his toy gun around. From his point of view, the camera swirls and tilts until Tony passes out and wrecks the auto. Tony's thirst for revenge and Jo's family allegiances have finished what Cesar began. Moreover, the doubling of Tony and Tonio implies that, despite his dissipation and world-weary demeanor, the man is at heart a kid playing cowboys and Indians. The film's title, taken from a song performed at L'Age d'Or, implies as much. "Riffi" is "the lingo of the streetwise / the battle cry of real tough guys / . . . all it means is 'rough 'n' tumble.'" A word for rough sex or a rumble, "riffi" is what wayward lads do for fun. This film's robbers, then, are as much boys at play as men at work.

The Gold Rush

In a driving rain, a group of ponchoed men—the gray stockings over their faces making them appear ghostly—rob a train of three million dollars in gold

bullion. Like the *Rififi* crew, the bandits in *Plunder Road* (1957) say nothing during the job (although we hear voiceovers giving us their thoughts). The heist is swift and efficient: the men's costumes seem to have turned them into the robots so prized by Taylorism. Indeed, their spectral appearance invokes the anonymity of modern money. That is, twentieth-century money has no material foundation but is pure sign, its value deriving from interpersonal trust and faith in the political system that ratifies it. These faceless men (whom we barely come to know in the course of the film) also epitomize the social exchanges that dematerialized money promotes. As Simmel speculates, modern money, with its compressibility, abstractness and "effect-at-a-distance," encourages an alienation that fosters secret societies (335). In contrast, gold is a vestige of an obsolete economic regime in which value was thought to inhere in the weight of metal. As Jean-Joseph Goux reminds us, money incorporates three aspects: it serves as a measure of value (its "archetypal" or "imaginary" function); functions as medium of exchange and circulation (a symbolic or token function); and comprises a physical store and means of payment (a real function).³² This last function has waned as metallic money has been supplanted by paper, and now electronic, currency. These distinctions are more than theoretical; they play a major role in *Plunder Road*, for it is the very materiality (the "real" aspect) of the stolen gold that foils the men's carefully laid scheme.

The crew divides the gold into three trucks, aiming to drive it to Los Angeles. During the trips we are introduced to the bandits: in a tanker are mastermind Eddie Harris (Gene Raymond) and Frankie, a former race-car driver (Steven Ritch, who also wrote the screenplay); at the wheel of a moving van is Roly Adams (Stafford Repp); an ABC rental truck contains ex-stuntman Munson (Wayne Morris) and Skeets (Elisha Cook Jr.), a lifelong crook who plans to send his son to college and move to Rio with the dough. The men remain on the job for much of the film, but their work is also a game: a race against time for the robbers and an entertaining chase for the "normal, decent" folks who follow the story in the media. For example, when Skeets and Munson stop for gas, the attendant mentions the robbery and sadly notes that crooks today have no chance "with radio and all that science against them." Later, Eddie and Frankie pull into a diner, where a waitress and her customers discuss what they would do with that much money. It's clear that these law-abiding folks have "a little larceny" in them. As Maurice declared in *The Killing*, criminals are subject to both *schadenfreude* and admiration; part of that admiration derives from the belief that the police are too powerful—a perception that the film, with its constant radio reports and ubiquitous cops, dramatizes.

Roly is captured after he halts at a roadblock, where the troopers hear his radio tuned to police frequencies and assume he is a criminal. Munson and

Skeets stop at a weigh station, where their truck is determined to be 4,500 pounds overweight; the extra tonnage gives them away. The very materiality of the gold they have stolen—its “real” aspect—topples their scheme. Only Eddie and Frankie reach Los Angeles, where they carry out one of the most ingenious gambits in the heist genre. Given access to a foundry (Eddie’s girlfriend works for the company), the men smelt down the bullion and transform it into a car bumper. After attaching it to their fancy Cadillac (chrome plating disguising the gold), they change clothes and drive toward the pier, where they’ll board a ship to Europe. It’s as if the men have *become* gold: Frankie exults that he “feels like a million,” and their new attire—open shirts and casual jackets—suits their new identities as men of leisure, a different species from all those people who, Eddie sneers, “work for a living.” But while they may be special, their car is not; it’s just another auto on the freeway, all as identical as dollar bills, all caught in an L.A. traffic jam. The Caddy becomes special again only when it is rear-ended by a distracted driver, and the police discover the golden bumper. A panicked Frankie pulls a gun and gets killed; Eddie jumps from an overpass but falls beneath a car. He is now fully anchored to materiality. “Normal, decent” motorists stop and gawk, whether in celebration or lamentation we can’t be sure. The freeway that promised to emancipate them is really a grave, just as the gold that symbolized their liberation ultimately traps them. Eddie’s scientific management is no match for the police’s superior manpower and technology.

Take Your Pick

No one squeals in *Plunder Road*. As the blacklist faded, the figure of the informer became less salient. Yet the blacklist plays a part in an even later heist film (one often called the last noir of the classic period), Robert Wise’s 1959 *Odds against Tomorrow*. Although the crisp screenplay for this tale of three men trying to rob a bank is credited to the African American novelist John O. Killens, it was actually written by the blacklisted radical writer-director Abraham Polonsky.³³ Yet if betrayal is a principal theme in *Odds*, the film is less concerned with blacklisting than with blackness—and whiteness.

Again an embittered ex-cop (he “wouldn’t talk” and got a year for contempt, like an “unfriendly” HUAC witness), this time one Dave Burke (Ed Begley) organizes the scheme: to rob a bank in small-town Melton. He recruits Earle Slater (Robert Ryan), an ex-con and veteran hoping to restore his lost masculinity. Not only does his wife, Lorry (Shelley Winters), support him; he seethes with rage and simmers with suppressed sexual energy. To visualize Slater’s confinement, Wise frequently films him in doorways or at low angles so that his head seems to bump against the ceiling. One night

when Lorry is out, a neighbor, Helen (Gloria Grahame), seduces Slater by asking him how it felt to kill someone. He admits that he found it pleasurable, that it made him feel free. Helen too finds murder exciting: she belongs to those “masses” who worship the criminal. Burke—practicing the empathetic, Mayoist management style that succeeded Taylorism—also seduces Slater by assuring him that this is only a “one-time job,” just “one roll of the dice.”

The second recruit, African American jazz musician Johnny Ingram (Harry Belafonte), seems Slater’s opposite, as suggested in the opening sequences, in which Slater and Ingram encounter the same black children and elevator operator outside Burke’s apartment. Whereas Slater is grim and surly, the dapper Ingram is friendly and outgoing. Ingram eventually signs on to the plan. But why would this man—not just a “normal, decent” guy but a suave, handsome singer—be interested in a risky robbery? We soon get our answer: although he has a flashy car and an adorable daughter, Ingram is a gambling addict who owes alimony to his ex-wife and \$7,500 that he can’t pay back to a mobster named Bacco. On an outing to the park with his daughter, Ingram spends the day dodging gangsters and calling about his bets while the little girl rides merry-go-round horses. Ingram, we see, is trapped on his own horse-driven merry-go-round. He too is angry, cursing out his ex-wife after he interrupts her PTA meeting with some white parents and, after Bacco gives him an ultimatum, getting drunk at the club and ruining Mae Barnes’s performance of “All Men Are Evil.” The recruits are two of a kind—desperate and resentful—and Burke is an equal-opportunity employer.³⁴

Some of Ingram’s anger is the understandable frustration of a black man in a racist society. That society is embodied in Slater, who balks when he learns that the other member of the gang is a “nigger” (he utters this word while casing the Melton bank, his face scored with shadows). Indeed, their entire plan is based on the alleged inability of white people to tell apart two dissimilar black men. Burke has learned that an African American counter-man, Charlie, brings sandwiches and coffee to the bank employees after hours on Fridays. Ingram will don cap and white jacket to masquerade as Charlie; once the guard opens the door, the thieves will dash in and steal the cash.

Burke has planned meticulously: he knows almost two hundred thousand dollars in untraceable cash is available every Friday, knows what time Charlie arrives, and knows where the police will be. But Slater and Ingram never trust each other: at the beginning of the job, Slater refuses to give the getaway car’s keys to Ingram (who is supposed to drive) and instead hands them to Burke. So when the caper begins to go foul—they take too long in the bank, a cop stops to talk to a mailman and spots the masked men leaving—and Burke is shot, they can’t escape. The dream of a big score forgotten, Slater and Ingram face off in a gun battle at an oil refinery that ends in a conflagra-

tion. Finding their charred bodies, a rescue worker asks, “Which is which?” Answer: “Take your pick.” Slater’s boiling racism is to blame, but so is Ingram’s burning resentment. Though Ingram seems more normal and decent than the repellent Slater, the two are ultimately the same. Wise’s message couldn’t be more pointed: racism leads to what Langston Hughes predicted when he asked what happens to a dream deferred: “Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore—. . . or does it explode?”³⁵ Interracial collective action may be possible (we see it in Mrs. Ingram’s PTA meeting), but only when it is built on a foundation of trust. *Odds* suggests that racism and red-baiting spring from the same sources, ones that Polonsky knew all too well: hatred and fear.

Although Taylorism was succeeded by more humane management styles, and the blacklist eventually ended (Dalton Trumbo’s screenwriting credit for Kubrick’s 1960 *Spartacus* being one of the killing blows), the heist film’s insights endure: that secret societies engender bonds of loyalty that fray when a goal is accomplished; that collective endeavors—whether they be manufacturing, crime, athletics, or politics—require a suspension of the American ethos of individualism; that, given humans’ seemingly irrepressible desire to compete rather than collaborate, collectivity is nearly impossible to sustain.

In blurring the lines between labor and leisure, heist gangs reflect a shift in norms and a profound ambivalence. On the one hand, they suggest that activities like gambling corrode the hallowed American belief that only hard work brings success: that real men don’t play. Yet they also criticize management styles that dehumanize workers, and expose a powerful attraction to male-oriented collective leisure pastimes such as sports and gambling. The heist picture thus exposes seams in midcentury mores: why else do “normal, decent” people choose crime over work, root for criminals, or watch these movies? In an era that ostensibly prized law and order, the heist picture dramatizes a hidden desire to buck the system, to make a big score, to get something for nothing. In critiquing the mechanization of labor, the 1950s heist film reminds us that robbers, like workers, are human beings, and thereby pleads for a more humane balance between individuality and collectivity, work and play.

Notes

1. Fordism (named after its major proponent, Henry Ford) seeks to “achieve higher productivity by standardizing the output, using conveyor assembly lines, and breaking the work into small, deskilled tasks.” Fordism “emphasizes minimization of costs instead of maximization of profit.” “Fordism,” *BusinessDictionary.com*, accessed August 21, 2012, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Fordism.html>.

2. Stephen P. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed: Scientific Management Theory since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 9. Taylor himself believed that his principles were “applicable to all kinds of human activities,” which seem to include

crime. See Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Row, 1911), 7.

3. Taylorism “breaks every action, job, or task into small and simple segments which can be easily analyzed and taught.” “Taylorism,” BusinessDictionary.com, accessed August 21, 2012, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Taylorism.html>. As Edward Dimendberg notes, “[T]emporal exactitude is to the caper film what scientific management is to the assembly line.” Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 200.

4. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Norton, 1978), 72–77. Critiques of Taylorism became widespread by the middle of the twentieth century, many of them focusing on such mechanization.

5. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*, 7.

6. Stuart Kaminsky points out that heist movies derive from stories of “communal quests requiring cooperation of men with special powers.” Stuart Kaminsky, *American Film Genres* (New York: Dell, 1974), 101. The “special group” structure also grew from the platoon film that became popular during World War II. Like the heist film, the platoon film involves a set of characters charged with a mission in which specialists and eccentrics come together for group action.

7. J. P. Telotte, “Fatal Capers: Strategy and Enigma in *Film Noir*,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 23 (1996): 165.

8. See Jack Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster Film*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 309. Shadoian also provides a capsule portrait of Finchley (312).

9. These dates are given in Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, eds., *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, 3d ed. (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1992), 13, 14.

10. Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), 330. Subsequent references are cited by page number parenthetically in the text.

11. See Daniel A. Wren, *The Evolution of Management Thought*, 4th ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 112.

12. Reynold Humphries, “The Politics of Crime and the Crime of Politics: Postwar Noir, the Liberal Consensus and the Hollywood Left,” in *Film Noir Reader 4*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (Pompton Plains, N.J.: Amadeus Press/Limelight Editions, 2004), 237.

13. Fran Mason, *American Gangster Cinema: From Little Caesar to Pulp Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 99.

14. Here the story dramatizes what midcentury critics of Taylorism were saying: that it creates “conflicts between workers and managers” (Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*, 7).

15. The most thorough account of the hearings and aftermath remains Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 254–98.

16. Tormented by guilt, Hayden spent his later years apologizing and condemning the blacklist. See Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 364, 391; and Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 129–30. In the latter, Hayden tersely summarizes the predicament of all the witnesses: “Cooperate and I’m a stool pigeon. Shut my mouth and I’m a pariah” (130). Lawrence told Lee Server that testifying was “like a

stab in the back. You're still breathing, but you . . . can't get the thing out of your back." See Lee Server, "Marc Lawrence: The Last Gangster," in *The Big Book of Noir*, ed. Lee Server, Ed Gorman, and Martin H. Greenberg (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1998), 53.

17. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*, 25. Taylor stressed that his principles require and promote "cooperation, not individualism," but they seldom worked that way in practice (*Principles of Scientific Management*, 140).

18. Simmel cites an historical precedent for this gambit. The Omladina, a Czech secret society, divided itself into cells called "thumbs" and "fingers"; each thumb would choose fingers, who would then choose another thumb, and so on. "The first thumb knew all the thumbs, but they did not know each other." Simmel, *Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 357.

19. This film has the distinction of bringing together, for the only time, these three terrific character actors, each famous for portraying heavies. Karlson and cinematographer George Diskant heighten these characters' ugliness with frequent Eisensteinian close-ups of their constantly sweating faces.

20. Rolfe fits Shadoian's description of Karlson's typical protagonists, who "stagger dully about as life's punching bags, until they can't take it anymore and go haywire" (Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, 196).

21. James Howard, in the *Stanley Kubrick Companion* (London: Batsford 1999), 46–47, speculates that Hayden was cast as Clay partly because of his performance in *The Asphalt Jungle*.

22. James Naremore, *On Kubrick* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 77. The source novel, Lionel White's 1954 *Clean Break*, employs a similar structure. See Lionel White, *The Killing [Clean Break]* (n.p.: Black Mask Books, 2008).

23. Clay's management style, however, is closer to that of George Elton Mayo's "corporatists," who sought to imitate "orchestra conductors, samurai masters, parents, teachers, and therapists," than to Taylor's scientist/dictators. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*, 193.

24. In the source novel, Peatty tracks Clay to the airport and shoots him there. White, *The Killing*, 173.

25. Viz: the madness of Hal, the supercomputer in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or the Ludovico treatment by which the government transforms Alex into a Pavlovian creature in *A Clockwork Orange*, or the Domsday Machine that destroys humanity in *Dr. Strangelove*. Now there's a punch line!

26. David Hughes, *The Complete Kubrick* (London: Virgin Publishing, 2000), 41–42.

27. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*, 12, 7.

28. Dassin had directed several significant noirs in the United States, including the prison melodrama *Brute Force* (1947), the quasi-neorealist procedural *The Naked City* (1948), and the leftist trucking tale *Thieves' Highway* (1949). For a discussion of these films in light of Dassin's politics, see my *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and the American Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 225–28.

29. Philip Watts observes that the silence during the heist sequence invokes Dassin's own personal history, which involved "silences produced when governments become intent upon compelling citizens . . . to speak, to reveal their secrets." See Philip Watts, "Riffifi and the Politics of Silence," *L'Esprit Créateur* 51.3 (2011): 47.

30. *Ibid.*, 49.

31. In an interview on the European DVD of *Riffifi*, Dassin states that during Cesar's death scene he was thinking of "friends who in a bad moment during the McCarthy era betrayed other friends" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 54).

32. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 47–48; Jean-Joseph Goux, “Ideality, Symbolicity, and Reality in Postmodern Capitalism,” in *Postmodernism, Economics, and Knowledge*, ed. Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio, and David F. Ruccio (London: Routledge, 2001), 166–67.

33. Polonsky had written the terrific boxing noir *Body and Soul* and directed the poetic gangland tale *Force of Evil* in the 1940s before HUAC swooped in.

34. Belafonte, who produced the film for his own company, HarBel, insisted that Ingram be depicted as a flawed character. In the source novel, Ingram is not a musician but a professional gambler. See William P. McGiven, *Odds against Tomorrow* (1957; reprint, London: Xanadu Press, 1991). Much of the novel’s action takes place after the robbery, as Slater and Ingram, holed up in a farmhouse, eventually achieve a rapprochement. For more on the musical aspects of the film, see Osteen, *Nightmare Alley*, 172–74.

35. Langston Hughes, “Harlem [2],” *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Vintage, 1994), 426.