

Contextual Collapse

In an otherwise unpromisingly-titled article—“[Could the US really release more of its strategic oil reserves?](#)”—the *Financial Times* points out a surprising architectural vulnerability of the U.S. Strategic Oil Reserve.

“The U.S. Strategic Oil Reserve is a series of vast, subterranean salt caverns in four different sites in Louisiana and Texas,” the article explains. “Many are enormous—the average cavern holds about 10mn barrels, about as much as five [Very Large Crude Carrier tankers](#)—and one is big enough to fit Chicago’s Willis Tower. This clever network of tunnels, grottos, pumps and wells can in total hold about 715mn barrels of oil, or enough to supply the entire U.S. with all the oil it needs for over a month”—but those salt caverns were only designed to be drained and refilled five times.

The *Financial Times* calculates that we are already at the cavern’s ninth historic drawdown, suggesting that “catastrophic structural damage,” including dissolution of the salt caverns, is now a viable risk. This could mean, among other things, that the reserves can no longer be drained in their entirety, as “a minimum level of oil... must be kept in the salt caverns” to avoid this fate, with the result that the reserves’ effectiveness in a time of future national emergency will be reduced.

Of course, this could also mean that someday the caverns will simply collapse. Presumably, then, we’ll have to [design and build a replacement](#)—some helpful [videos](#) and [papers](#) can guide any ambitious architecture and engineering students in the right direction.

(Thanks to [Tormod Otter Johansen](#) for the link—check out his [Substack](#), as well as his new book, written with Mårten Björk, called [The End of Law: Political Theology and the Crisis of Sovereignty](#). Vaguely—i.e. not really at all—related: [Institute for Controlled Speleogenesis](#). See also [Sea Caverns of Singapore](#) and [Burying Bits of the City: Hong Kong Underground](#).)

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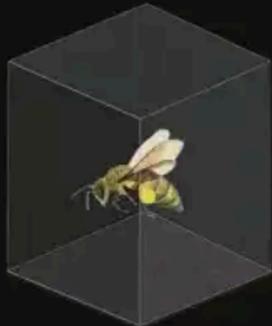
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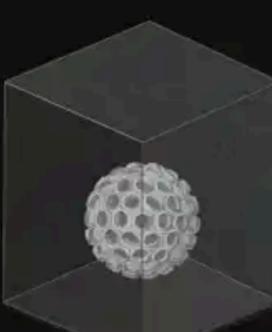
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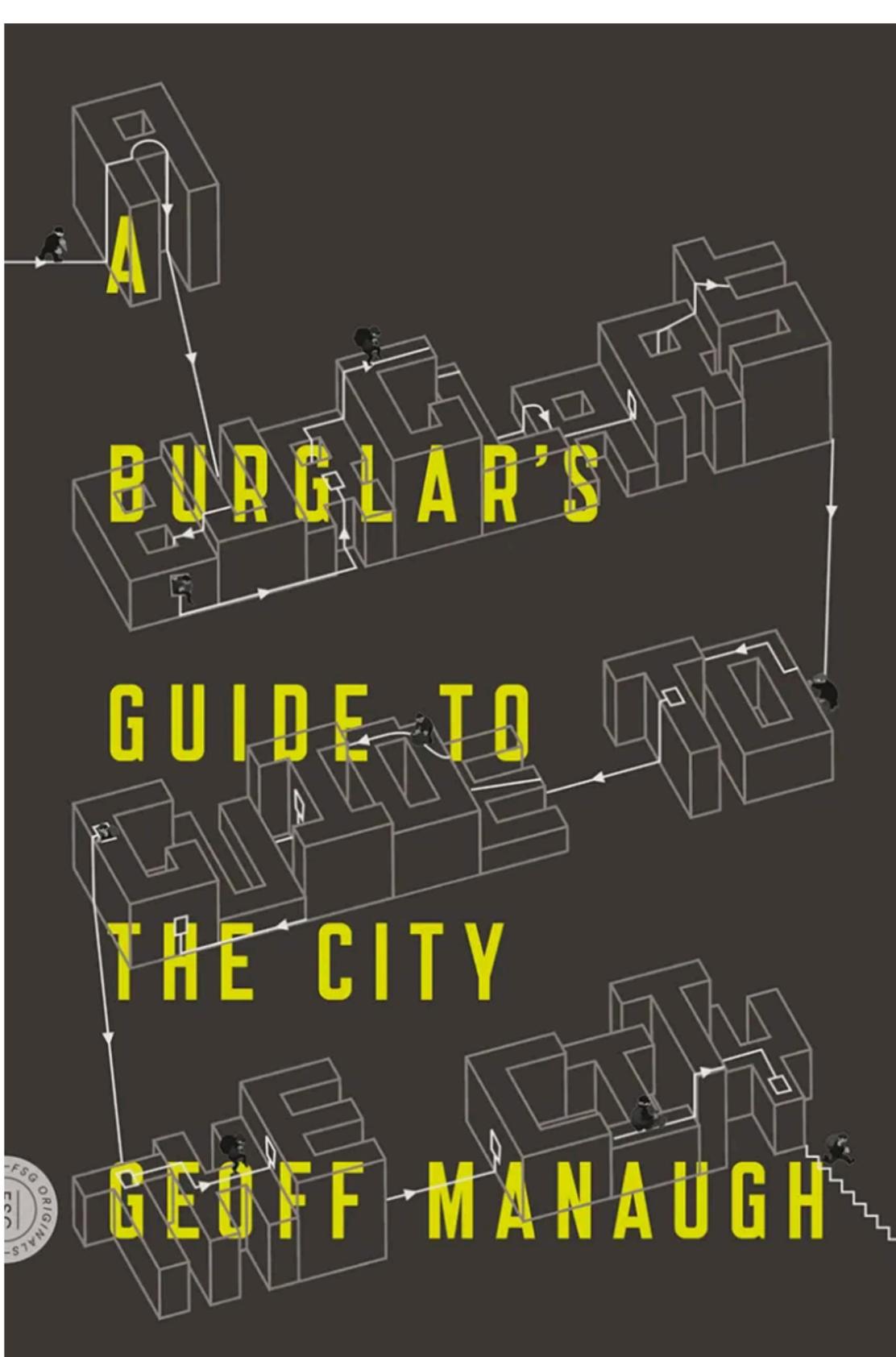


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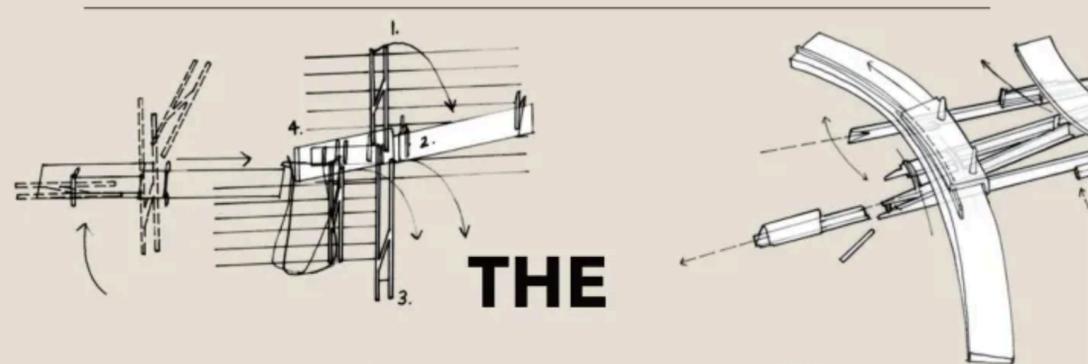


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