

mother, jugs & speed.

s.marshall

"The cripple, the junkie, the wounded and the dying: society calls them all worthless. But they're not worthless, not to us. To us, each one is worth \$42.50 plus 50 cents a mile, and let's not forget it!"

1976. Venice, California. The neon lights of 7-Elevens, strip joints, fast food restaurants and gas stations flood the asphalt of Lincoln Boulevard as its snakes through West L.A. As the throbbing baseline of Paul Jabara's disco track 'Dance' moves up a key, an ambulance careers its way across the surface streets of Venice as its hot shot driver — a beer drinking, wise cracking Bill Cosby — races it to his next stop.

Mother, Jugs and Speed, a B-movie and black comedy that is as genuinely awful as it is perversely enjoyable, follows the escapades of an independent ambulance firm, the 'F&B Ambulance Service', and its unstable and incompetent members as they desperately try to earn a quick buck and stay afloat by exploiting the misfortunes and misadventures of a variety of helpless and hapless individuals. Dead or alive, an overdosed heroin addict, an inebriated student, a female wrestler and a country club lawyer with a weak heart — they're all worth \$42.50 plus mileage to Cosby and co. as they violently lurch their way through the chaos and debris of the wild and overburdened storyline. Slapstick shtick is side by side with homicide, belching and acts of random violence.

Yet it is the characters — a cast of stereotypes and caricatures — that see us through: Cosby's thoughtful but rebellious antihero 'Mother'; Raquel Welch's pneumatic blonde secretary with ambition 'Jugs'; and Harvey Keitel's 'Speed', a suspended cop awaiting justice for allegedly selling cocaine to kids. They are exactly what you expect.

Throw in Larry Hagman's 'Murdoch', a morally bankrupt paramedic who will stop at nothing — and I mean nothing — to satisfy his carnal desires and 'Whiplash' (a corrupt lawyer who literally chases ambulances), and we have the complete set.

Recognisable, all playing their part, inflated but dependable, these characters hold the whole mess of a film together.

Yet in L.A., the land of the bloated architectural stereotypes and caricatures, where the fabled Case Study Program and Californian Modernism reign supreme, it's the B-list of American architecture — the roadside banality of Ed Ruscha without the gloss — that provides the backdrop for the antics of the F&B and hold, not only the film, but the whole city together.

The Dive Bar, the 7-Eleven, the Strip Mall, the Used Car Lot and Drive-Thru comprise an alternative canon (an anti-architecture) of building types.

These are as resistant, consistent and unflinching as *Mother, Jugs and Speed*. These most satisfying of spaces speak of place, personality and familiarity rather than the satiated purity and abstraction of the precious floating white boxes in the hills, yet still form a series of categories — typologies — of a strange species of spaces and places, fuzzy but with a definite and recognisable genealogy that show a past, a present and a potential future. This is where the lounge bar and taco truck replace the hallowed sanctity of The Church and The Library as points of reference and stability.

Worthless? Where else can a drunk possibly have "her forth double and drop like a rock, dead" than the neighbourhood dive bar? Is there a better place to carry out the sacrilegious act of putting peanut butter and mayonnaise on a burger than at Barney's Diner Drive Up? They play the part perfectly, as grimy and gratifyingly offensive as they are visceral and comforting.

Ahhhhh comfort.

And what could be more comfortable and reliable than using a car crash of a 1970s cult movie to write about L.A... "I think you just blew that \$42.50 baby!"

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typological misfit.

a.kovacs

In the United States, the guard shack is a fairly common typology. Consisting of just a single room, these prefabricated, freestanding structures enclose a small space for security purposes (often commercial or institutional).

Within its functional and formal typological variations, this singular box nonetheless usually sits discretely at the edge of a site. Most commonly, it is isolated within a field of parking — creating a figure-ground relationship in which the ground of the parking engulfs the figure of the guard shack itself.

If type is the result of the identification of common features, it is nonetheless possible for a typological instance to subvert the category as a whole. This is the case with a single guard shack in downtown Los Angeles, on the corner of Grand and Olympic.

This particular guard shack is a single object accompanied by a host of other utilitarian objects. Composed and containing objects ranging in size from the actual shack to a teddy bear, from an umbrella to a street light, from a portable toilet (wrapped in a tarpaulin) to multiple forms of signage, several chairs, stools and a blue plastic garbage can. Integral to the composition is also a grey plastic garbage can, orange traffic cones, plastic bollards, a wooden storage crate as well as diverse and scattered materials — ostensibly waiting to be put to use.

Slightly elevated off the ground, the guard shack at Olympic and Grand is an anchoring device commanding and regulating the objects around it. Each of these functional objects is placed in close proximity to the shack, spiralling around and next to it.

The presence of all this dross around the shack, this gross accumulation of objects each with a specific purpose, reveals the obvious functional inadequacies of the guard shack as a type. This failure to accomplish its function adequately — the requirement of augmentation — means this guard shack can only be thought of as a typological misfit.

This typological misfit is much more nimble than the single (isolated) guard shack, and produces an alternate figure-ground reading. Instead of a static figure in a field of parking, the typological misfit becomes a dynamic, growing agglomeration of an ever increasing figure that continually encroaches on the ground of parking.

In its constantly growing state, the typological misfit can result in limitless compositional variations. Whereas the typical guard shack is bounded and hermetically and functionally contained, the typological misfit is prone to transformation. It is free to grow and expand with each utilitarian concern.

Such a slow motion mutation results in a micro-urban form of an incomplete quality that creates a break in the continuity of the urban fabric. The value of this conglomerate is not only in each individual object and their functional aspects but also in the direct relationship of each object to one another that produces a collage-like reading of an all-over composition.

As such, this typological misfit is a new whole where the conglomerate of objects is not based on a hierarchy of parts but rather each object has equivalent value due to their utilitarian needs.

Of course, this typological misfit is not designed by an architect. One may even argue that it is the product of everyday urbanism or makeshift innovation. However, the typological misfit bends the rules to fit its needs and offers a model for architecture to think alternatively about typology in general.

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Image on reverse by Andrew Kovacs.

The usage of "typology" today also needs explanation, exemplified by the disjunct in the current AA exhibitions. While PANEL depicts Soviet component assembly, the Rainforest Pavilion does not fulfil the primary requirement of its type; it cannot be entered... *Ed.*

