

## Overall Thoughts

Let's be honest—we are these people, they are us, in one way or another. We've all had our elevator moment, the long walk for gas, our version of speaking too loudly to foreign people in exotic places asking about worry dolls. And our reluctance to admit we don't know the difference between a fixed-rate mortgage and a fixed-wing airplane.

And when real life quietly collides with our own expectations, there's a kind of honesty to the humor of it all that makes us laugh. Maybe not right then, but eventually. That's the world we're observing here. These aren't characters, and we're not watching a comedy.

Instead, we're opening a window on reality for a thirty second observation, a look into a series of moments that are so familiar, so real that at first, we don't even realize we're slightly relieved its not actually us. And if we shoot these moments with that commitment to realism than we'll be able to laugh, even if it's at ourselves.

## Story – *You Ok?*

We all agree that casting and performance are key to making these spots resonate with credibility—so I'll dig into casting a bit deeper later on and for now just talk about each story and how we see it unfolding. Essentially, we're privy to a “found moment” each time we open. We never want to lead our viewer, or make the front end feel like a set up.

The way to do that is by creating a rich and real world, full of richness and detail so when we open on any give spot, the texture of what we see grabs us and immediately engages us in our hero's situation—like a couple dressed in their Sunday best, bedraggled and walking down a dirt road.

They look like they were en route to a wedding—until their tank hit empty and they had to spend the last ten hours in a forced march looking for gas. His once polished shoes are now worn, scuffed and dust-covered. His tie's undone and askew around his neck, more a noose than a fashion statement. He's sweat-stained, and his matted hair's plastered to his head while he lugs along a gas can.

She's the wedding cake that got left out in the sun. Her make-ups now a bad smear-job. Half her hair is styled and piled high, the other half's a ragged, fallen disaster. Maybe she snagged her dress ten miles back on something and it's a torn along the hemline.

This is more than a couple who've been inconvenienced. They're so far past caring or disappointment, there's an almost catatonic shuffle to their gait. Maybe their lips are dry and pasty, their skin's got that baked-out leathery kind of tan that mountain climbers get from endless exposure to the sun.

And we just hold them in frame as they move along slowly. We're not overlighting it to create false-drama, or trying to add grit by desaturating the colors—it's lit naturally and looks genuine, allowing performances to play with an even-keeled sobriety.

Just then an old, dusty dented truck pulls up alongside them. Our driver's probably a rancher from around these parts—a real fixture of the community, unshaven, salt of the earth guy who's got character, without being a character. His truck has as much personality as he does—an Indian blanket serves as the front seat's cover and a collection of round Skoal chewing tobacco cans dot the top of the dashboard.

There's a flat, lack of desperation to their exchange that unforcefully nudges the moment from one side of expectation to the other. He asks if they need help and basically, they say "yes", but what they need goes far beyond a gallon of unleaded.

We'll pull back as the husband talks to our driver, then the wife comes in to frame to chime in "*Not to mention if our investments are working hard enough for us*". So we never depart from our story, we just take it in a direction that's unanticipated.

And by simply bearing witness to this couple's situation, watching it play out from a safe distance, it takes on more nuance and humor than it would if we ever tried to make it funny. Now, the driver has a quiet reflective moment—and in that pause we wonder how he'll help them, until it's apparent he's in the same situation as them—he's searching for the same answers they are.

So we play these two realities off one another—there's what we see and expect a stranded couple to need and want, than there's something else. And that something else is our couple's real need, their real want.

And that need is bigger and more disconcerting and more difficult to bear really, then a forced ten-hour march for gas. They know it, as does our rancher. Which is why there's a mutual understanding between them—he can give them a ride, but he can't really help them. Our couple acknowledges this with a shoulder shrug. Our rancher acknowledges it by driving off.

This isn't a brush-off, our rancher's not uncaring. In a way, it's the extremely dry form of humor-compassion. They're all in agreement, like "Hey, what's a ten hour walk for gas when you're investments aren't doing their job?". There's an almost bittersweet sense of resolution—like the walk's bad, but not half as painful as being clueless to what your money isn't doing for you.

*What Do We Do Now?*

In each of these stories, there's an element of honest truth that drives it. So we have to make sure our comedy draws from the real life situation our people find themselves in. Like a couple stuck in an elevator.

I think it might be worth opening on them already well into their predicament. So at first look we get that this older couple has already been in this elevator for awhile. They're clammy and moist, her make-up and hair have fallen, his jacket is tied around his waist, or just discarded on the floor.

Maybe their stuff's sort of strewn around the elevator a bit—it has that look of people who've been living in a confined space for a few hours already. There's a note pad and pen on the floor, a few games of tic-tac-toe got them through the first hour or so. Some gum wrappers litter the area.

They could have their shoes off, maybe the husband's rolled up his pant legs so he's not so hot. Just some simple visual clues that tell us they've been there for awhile and man, are they over it.

And the elevators running on back-up power. So they're lit by that kind of lifeless, emergency lighting—we'll amp it up a bit so it's not too bleak or shadowy, but the lighting is low-value and adds to the visual claustrophobia we see.

Without making this an unbearable "Das Boot" shot, I do want to give the whole vibe some real emotional dimension. They've been in there for hours and are into the panic-management phase of their experience. Maybe the wife pulls out a box of mints, opens it to reveal there's only two left.

She gives a quick and unseen eye-glance to her husband, then pops them in her mouth. If we can build in these little details along the way, I think it'll engage us immediately instead of feeling like a throw-away set up for a punchline.

We pan over to the husband who stands in front of the control/button panel—we can see the panel's no longer locked securely; in a moment of panic the husband pried it open, maybe with the tic-tac-toe pen. But everything still works, because from the panel's speaker we hear the reassuring voice of elevator assistance.

Again, the dialogue is delivered with a minimal, matter-of-fact brevity and tone. They can have a hint of worry in their voice, but the misdirect comes from what they're truly upset about—what rate their mortgage should be, how they'll ever retire on their current savings and income.

I think we could cut away to elevator assistance—the voice belongs to security-guard type in a roomful of wall-monitors. On them we see empty hallways and office cubicles throughout the building and on one monitor, our couple in the elevator.

The security guy's eating a sub sandwich and merges right into the conversation, voicing his own concern—"You guys know anything about mutual funds?". In the monitor, we can see the couple standing there, just looking at the speaker wordlessly.

We'll cut back to them in the elevator and just keep them in frame. There's a real tension that slowly charges itself when you just leave the camera in place. You know you're waiting for something, but you don't know what. And we don't have to provide relief, comic or otherwise.

The couple just shrugs—to the panel, the security guy, to each other. And we get it—they'll probably make it out of the elevator eventually, but they may never figure out whether fixed or variable mortgage rate is better.

### *Worry Doll*

A great script and probably the biggest challenge. But as I said on the call, at the end of the day I think it's really doable. But everything is contingent on creating a really detailed, authentic Guatemalan marketplace—so let's dive into production design because if we can make it look real, the spot will feel real.

There's a spot on my reel—"Golden Egg" for Maryland Lottery. We basically built the set from tractors and machinery we found on this farm. We even pulled up tufts of long grass to give the effect of grass overgrowing up and though abandoned machinery.

That's the level of detail we need for our marketplace. And one idea I had is to find an old church—something that has that Neo-classical degree of ornate detail. If we can find something in an older, slightly "worn" neighborhood, we're halfway there. Then we cover the hardtop/streets with dirt.

And we build one of those precarious looking wooden shacks and lay out all these brightly colored Mayan/Guatemalan wares. Those woolen blankets with those big, brightly colored stripes of red, fuchsia, green and orange can be hanging everywhere. Maybe some woven baskets, more brightly glazed pottery and cooking utensils.

The wooden table and chairs are painted the same greens, reds and oranges but the paint's chipped and peeling. And behind the table is our proprietor, a five foot two inch Mayan woman, probably in her sixties, probably wearing the colorful garb of her country.

In the background we can see an old school bus, brightly painted and roof-loaded with more market goods—furniture and hemp-rope bound stacks of brightly colored blankets.

I won't ask for a live goat to walk through frame, but one extra "local", carrying their belongs (could be clothes, or balancing a water-container) atop their head and we're there. And just to add, a little blocking goes a long way—what we don't see in frame, translates into presumed Guatemalan countryside or local village landscape.

The production design's more about quality than quantity—if we make it look really third-world, far-away exotic then our tourists don't have to act, they just have to truly be who are—tourists in need of a larger worry doll for their big money problems.

True to form, they'll fall into the tourist-logic we all do when traveling. Instead of more clearly articulating their needs, they'll begin explaining like they're talking to their grandchildren, "*We have very big, grandé worries... mu-tu-al fu-nd-s....invest-ments ...*", and when that fails, the wife will half-shout at the confused woman, "*...mucho worry!*".

The dryly-ironic humor comes as much from the slight absurdity of their request as it does their earnest, almost desperate tone—and in that tone and delivery we all see ourselves, we've had our share of worry doll moments.

And the unaffected performances make the point without making a big deal of it—the odds of getting a worry doll to fix your investment problems make about as much sense as you being able to actually understand your investment strategies.

### *The Offer*

What's ultimately funny about these vignettes is how they strip back any false pretense to reveal just how human we are, and how flawed our humanity really is. Because what's almost tragically funny is how the real us becomes more obvious, the more we try to be who we aren't.

So when we open on our young couple in their mid price-point Toyota or VW sedan outside their starter home, there's a palpable charge of nervous, acceptable excitement in the air when the agent tells them they're a mere five grand from owing their first home.

I remember the first time I was on jury duty. I sat in a small room with people I would never in my life be this intimately associated, making life-changing decisions. It was revealing, and tense and charged with a kind of giddy disbelief all at once.

Which is just about the vibe we get when the back door opens and a lawyer gets in the car and reminds the couple about his fees they'll have to tack on.

And every time we add someone new to the mix, it should look and feel like we just pulled this person from their most natural working environment to climb into this car and remind the couple about the additional fees they represent.

A carpenter climbs in, his tool belt's loaded and rattling with gear—a hammer, tape measure, pliers—whatever. But he just climbs in like this is part of his job. Maybe he has to lean over, kind of move his hammer out from under the woman's leg. They exchange one of those mimed, forced smiles that says “Oh, that's fine you're hammer just clawed my leg...”, but means, “WTF is a carpenter doing in my car and what's that digging into my thigh...”.

We're watching person after person jam into this rapidly crowding sedan but there's never a hint of slapstick or “wink” to the situation. In fact, there's no comedy as such, just the very real observation of many people from many backgrounds doing what they must in a situation they could never imagine.

A plumber crawls in—big tools, big tool belt. His arrival forces people to shift weight and alter positions. Maybe the lawyer gives a little eye-roll, checks his watch. The plumber raises his hand, announces his fees. He wears a large rubber glove and we probably don't want to know where that gloves been.

We just keep adding players to the mix and the whole time, everyone's reaction is firmly rooted in a “just another house closing” vibe, it's just that this closing is happening in a car. And it's full of counter-types stuffed in there, a mix of jobs, incomes and cleanliness—or not.

Dirty day laborer is next to the thousand dollar a suit lawyer. Maybe the plumber's next to the young wife who keeps stealing nervous glances at his rubber-gloved hands. Maybe the final straw is our really hefty moving guy, who squeezes in, smiles and slams the door behind him.

We go to a wide shot of the sedan as he announces his fees. We hold on this shot for just a second, wondering why the sedan hasn't exploded at the doors. Just as the horn goes off, blaring it's own white flag surrender, the husband probably pushed too far forward by now and into the steering wheel.

### *First Time*

This is an extended, explored moment along the lines of “The Offer”, and just for the sake of brevity I don't think we need to cover each beat. Essentially, it takes its cue from “The Offer” in that it never feels like broad comedy or slapstick. With each additional person added to the car, the tone and temperament are never elevated above a “this is normal” reaction from any of the passengers.

And each new person presents themselves with a professionalism of tone and a matter of fact run down of their roles just as if they were in their respective office with the client—instead of their car. For our final shot here, we can pull back like

we do in “The Offer”, once the contractor gets in. We hold for a second, then watch the car sag under the weight.

Or we can stay in the vehicle and just hold on the contractor for a second—until we hear a creak and the car settles down in the frame, losing its position as it shifts under the weight.

#### Casting+Performance

I’d prefer to find people who are actually interesting, instead of talent who can play interesting. I’d like to find a really great range of looks and faces who can not only bring that real-person appeal to each story, but maybe give us something more.

Let’s give our talent the room they need to succeed, by letting them discover who their characters are. Maybe our wife in the elevator comes up with a great moment of her own—like her husband reaches for a mint and she snaps the tin shut before he gets it.

I’d rather cast really interesting people then give them the room to explore these moments, then completely shackle them down with expectation. They’ll know we have to cover our scripts, but beyond that let’s give them some room to stretch out their characters—we’ll cover it all and I’m sure we’ll get some on the spot genius.

Generally speaking, our performances are pulled-back and restrained. These are small moments, never over the top or obvious so we’ll need some talent who’s know their craft and can carry a moment with a subtle eye-roll, or nervous tic or an insincere “Oh, you’re hammer’s fine there...”, pained smile.

Our touchstone for the performances are real life. If a moment ever feels like a commercial, then we’ve crossed a line and need to pull it back. With this kind of comedic drama, you have to let it come to you—and come to you slowly and with pace. Otherwise, the performances won’t look or feel real, they’ll come off like they’re mocking the situation.

I think there’s a pretty broad range of casting possibilities in each spot, but just to touch on a few thoughts...in The Offer, we might be able to pull even more texture out of the spot if our couple is African-American. It could just introduce a really subtle level of layered awkwardness to see this really cool couple kind of sandwiched between all these blue and white-collar types.

And our workers--lawyer, contractor, plumber, let’s go broad here with ages and looks. I think the greater the diversity and visual appeal, the more textured the neurosis will feel when people’s personalities start encroaching on one another.

For Worry Doll, we'll have to do our best to find some Hispanic talent out there. Including the stall-owner, the basic look needs to be that shortish, stocky Guatemalan build.

### Shooting Style

To maintain a quiet believability, the lighting and camera work should feel natural, the framing is understated. The camera work is observed, we don't really want to notice it—it's all about the situation and observing the action.

The shot selection is always motivated by the unfolding action—our camera's always objectively relaying the action, so it has a little movement and life, instead of feeling locked off and simply freezing the action in frame. Overall, the look is tonally rich and cinematic, but never calls overt attention to itself at the expense of our story, or the performances.

I think the scripts are dead-on perfect. If we keep the performances dry and restrained, these captured moments in time will reveal just how human we all are, and how truly funny it is to be that human. These are just a few initial thoughts and I'm looking forward to discussing the spots further.