



WHEN DID THIS HOUSE BECOME A HOME?



A DISCUSSION, A DINNER, AN ESSAY

"I don't imagine the site of the kebab shop as a utopic melting pot"

Eda Gunaydin

The late academic **Sneja Gunew** over her career spoke relentlessly to the many aspects of multiculturalism and its categorising functions. Under her astute and historical eye, our nation's heralded policy is positioned as a kind of Hogwarts Sorting-Hat; managing and disseminating culture, ethnicity and race amidst the urban sprawl via a confluence between the state and those who could leverage such applications and assumptions. Gunew asks broadly of multiculturalism - *"who is included in the various narratives of Australia's cultural traditions or other collective histories?"*. It's a timeless and vital question.

Baba's Place - the restaurant - and our last blog (many moons ago - sorry) titled *'Slouching Towards A Suburban Cuisine'* was in many ways a response to this. The essay was part cuisine treatise, part business explainer and part fan-fiction of Mirjana Lozanovska's 'Migrant Housing: Architecture, Dwelling, Migration'. Within 'Slouching' we outlined an imagining of a "Suburban Cuisine" via the house, the backyard and the local. This was done via a successful graft onto the incredibly fruitful structure provided by Mirjana's idiosyncratic work which is committed to legitimising the undervalued contributions of migrants to an Australian architectural vernacular.

As a result of thoughts like these and in personal dialogue with Mirjana, "Suburban Cuisine" can only really be registered as one of exploration. NOT definition. The stories of backyard propagation, trans-national actors (e.g. seeds, dry goods) and ever changing "wog" mansion facades are only one, vital part of the picture. Outside the home, and beyond dwelling practices, exist a combination of more visible and significant narratives which both occlude and dovetail with the unrecognised and perhaps un-reconcilable assemblages of shifting cultures. Of people. Of a nation.

It's from this position of incomplete-ness we began asking ourselves about the nature of building or making a home. And what does that mean in the context of multicultural Australia with ever evolving diasporic narratives? Once again retreating within Lozanovska's work, she states point blank that *"the migrant house is never a complete object because the migrant can never attain a solid (stable) subjectivity"*.

Our new film predictably doesn't answer the title's question. For one, it's never posed. But how could it anyway? The metaphorical provocations are unwieldy.

The film, shot by the wonderful Darwin Schulze and directed by the inimitable Zac Perry, responds to this primarily via the atmospheric and the histories of space. Smuggled in between a somewhat standard round-table conversation structure, there's a love story about the power of gathering that restaurants like Baba's can offer up. Or, more cynically, have been made to 'market' as a result of the private erosion of third and public spaces.

If the migrant house is never a complete object, then our restaurant which fractures these dwelling practices and uses them as aesthetic has nooooo chance. Right?

With that in mind, there's a knowing self-awareness that humorously unravels. As any good later Seinfeld episode reveals to its audience, the ouroboros (snake eating its own tail) is the governing principle of reality. Performance turns into subjectivity as the distinctions of identity dissolve only to then collapse and begin all over again. In Seinfeld terms, Jerry & Co somehow have so much experience, wear so many faces and yet never learn and are never punished (forget that final episode). As it relates to Baba's Place and hospitality, the practice blends until all is edifice. Contained within 4 nights a week are performances that begin and end, again and again.

And yet there is something present which feels permanent; A vibrant striving. The aforementioned "somewhat standard" in relation to the central conversation is admittedly a sleight of hand. Our gracious, intelligent and vulnerable guests, 'Nakul, Hebah, Amy & Elizabeth' willingly refused to paint rosy, straight forward pictures of multiculturalism, the power of eating and the productive messiness of migratory patterns and habitation. There is little resolution to be found at the table. But my word there is joy and warmth. This is because "the work" of "social cohesion" can definitely start at the table. But as Nakul bravely mentions, it sure as hell isn't completed there.

Hopefully what is said is generative enough to prompt further thoughts, "yes-and's" and to turn our eyes away slightly from the hierarchy of those acceptable stories. If you don't find what you're looking for in the chat, the film works as a romantic portrayal of humans enjoying company in a picturesque restaurant filled with energy, civilians and workers. We could all use more of this kind of humanity. And more ways to make a "home".