

# Reviews

## **Die Familie Schneider** Events

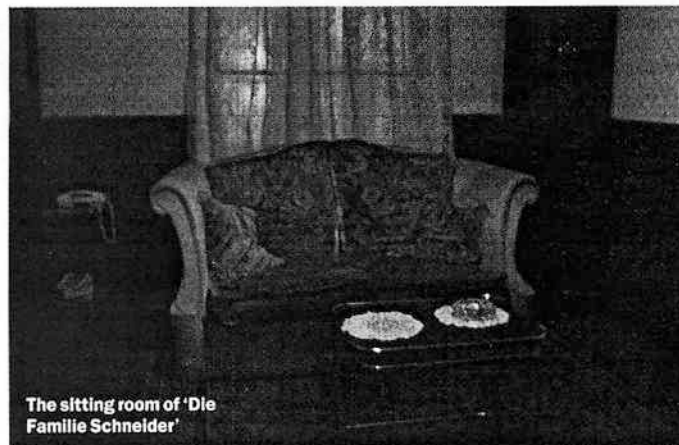
Since I'd written a feature about them, I had no intention of reviewing Gregor Schneider's twin installations; but I can't get them out of my mind even though, at the time, the experience didn't seem especially memorable. I visited the Whitechapel houses when work was in progress and knew roughly what to expect – two identically dreary domestic environments. Having picked up the keys, I let myself into a dingy hall where a 40-watt bulb dimly lights cream and chocolate-brown walls and a dull brown carpet. Everything is dirty, as though with long use: light switches are grubby with finger marks, walls bear signs of absent pictures. In the tiny kitchen, a woman stands with her back to you, washing up. She doesn't acknowledge your presence and you know she is an actress but, as you pass through the bead curtain to poke about the drab sitting room, you still still feel like an intruder. A Barbie doll lies behind the grotty sofa and on the phone table are some paperbacks: Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night', William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' and plays by George

Bernard Shaw that suggest educated inhabitants.

One basement room is empty save for some lollies and a packet of cupcakes; another houses rubbish and unwanted furniture. In the cellar, a cot mattress lies abandoned. Upstairs, the bathroom is hot and steamy. As you open the door you hear groaning; a man stands wanking in the shower. The decor of the bedroom is white and the cupboard doors are mirrored, but this doesn't alleviate the claustrophobia of the hot, windowless room. In one corner there's a changing mat and, in the other, a pair of child-sized feet protrude from a bin-liner; resisting probing fingers, the inhabitant remains determinedly hidden. Steep stairs lead to an attic; the door is closed and a child's gate prevents access. An infant must share this room with the child; why, then, are there so few signs of activity in this morgue-like domain?

Next door, the scenario is repeated, more or less, with identical twins playing the parts. This may be theatre and Schneider may have exaggerated the desolation and small scale of the interiors, yet you can't help imagining people leading similarly constricted lives all over London; the stifling emptiness and mediocrity which he conjures seep into your consciousness and refuse to quit.

*Sarah Kent*



The sitting room of 'Die Familie Schneider'