EVERYDAY HORROR AND REPRESSIVE NORMALITY

An archaeological sensibility

I regularly post about the horror that lies just beneath the surface of things, everyday normality rooted in the uncanny secret lives of things – have a look at Horror and disclosure – a scene of crime clings to its past

Joe (Adler) has just sent me word of Die Familie Schneider – An Art House Of Fear In Whitechapel. I do I wish I could see this!

The work is by Gregor Schneider and commissioned by Artangel.

Two apparently normal houses side by side.

Here is Camelia Gupta’s superb review on 24hourmuseum.org

I let myself in, wondering who I am to be letting myself into someone else’s house.

Shutting the door, I’m thus already a little nervous. The narrow corridors are claustrophobic. I hesitate in the doorway but my awareness that I only have 20 minutes to see both houses (one of several conditions of viewing) forces me on.

In the second house, I feel slightly braver. I wondered in the first house whether I was allowed to interact with the inhabitants of the houses but felt too oppressed. In an embarrassingly quavery and hesitant voice, I hail the woman in the kitchen. She ignores me.

I’m not sure whether I want her to respond, as that would indicate that I belong in this world.

A world where violence seems to lurk at every edge. There’s the terrifying sexual graffiti in the attic, visible only through the keyhole of locked door with, most worryingly, a locked child-gate placed in front of it. Was a child kept here? Does this connect to the secret passage and its grim destination? On the other hand, being ignored has the effect of making me feel like a ghost, condemned to witness and absorb the horror but with no scope for action. Neither option appeals.

And in another related review –

There’s a woman in kitchen washing dishes endlessly, in a way that is reminiscent both of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and of Lady Macbeth’s “out damned spot”.

The 70s aesthetic of the bedroom is deeply unpleasant. The heat is suffocating, the carpet muffles my footsteps. I realise suddenly that there’s a body in a bag in the far corner. I feel faint for a second. It appears to be wearing a uniform and is small: child-sized.

Bathroom. A man masturbates in the shower, back turned and partially visible through curtains. I don’t know how to behave – and hover, while his pants and groans fill the small room. Needing distraction, I rummage through cupboards.

I’m glad that I have to write, I’m using it to anchor and ground myself, to remind myself that there’s a world beyond this one. I badly need the reminder right now. It’s hard to battle the sense that this awful space is all there is.

Deep breath, and onto the second house. Scared of what I’ll find. Another condition is that once you’ve left one house, you may not return to it.

On my god. It’s the same. But I’m different looking at it. I feel the need to look closely at the woman in the kitchen. As I say, I feel moved/able to speak to her. She’s exactly like the first one. (They’re twins.) In the bathroom, I’m moved to examine the wanking man to get closer. He seems louder than the first, but I cannot compare. Perhaps my mounting panic is heightening my senses?

I can’t know whether it’s the same, as I’m not allowed to go back and check.

Downstairs is also the same, and now I?m finding this sameness terrifying. What the hell is happening here? The repetition has varying effects; the carpeted room feels even more like a cell. I can hear nothing but my own, heavy, breathing. I’m scared – in the cellar, I’m reluctant to shut the door.

An archaeological sensibility holds that we only ever have fragments to work upon, that every locale is a potential scene of crime where anything could be evidence, that there remains to much to be discovered beneath the surface of things, and much that we will not like, because the stories we have been told are meant to console and quieten us …