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**ANNABEL ELGAR**  
**Interludio**

by Daniele De Luigi

When we look at a photograph it is still our instinctive conviction that reality (or better, what we're used to calling reality) and the imagination occupy two conceptual fields separated by a clear demarcation line. It's a characteristic aspect of our relationship with images, so much so that where elements of the one and the other coexist and tend to get confused a tension is created which, together with the distinctions, also diminishes our certainties. But what is even farther from our way of thinking about photographs is that a tension with the real may innervate even fiction as a pure product of the imagination. In recent decades the photography of fiction has often been considered almost a genre in itself, but in giving it this label, evidently, there is the risk of defusing the capacity of these images to deeply grasp significant aspects of the complexity of the real.

The work of Annabel Elgar, for example, is ascribable to so called *staged photography* in which the photographer purposely constructs and directs a scene in function of the shot, as normally happens on a film set. The places we are shown are mostly closed rooms whose view outdoors is constantly denied us. Their appearance suggests a marginality or distance from urban civilisation. In the half light in which they're immersed, our eye manages to distinguish – thanks to the light that penetrates from behind curtains or through slits – the numerous details of what they conceal within. Outstanding among the many objects they contain are unusual, bizarre things, traceable to activities that are out of the ordinary at the least. But with a more in-depth analysis elements emerge which we can only interpret as disturbing clues. We are thus openly invited to proceed with identifications, to hazard guesses, make deductions, all the more so since some of them appear in several images, leading us to suppose that connections do exist.

There's no doubt that this British artist, exploiting to her advantage the communication codes of cinema and TV, skilfully builds up enigmas in which nothing is to be resolved and everything is to be interpreted. As we observe these seductive and complex images our judgements and suspicions go well beyond what we effectively see. We are offered the possibility of different narrative interweaves around the scene, of various explanations regarding what might have happened before and what might happen after this moment (and maybe what is happening in this interlude, *outside* the photograph). The inhabitants of these environments, the protagonists of these mysterious events, take shape in our imagination. We probably picture solitary people who find refuge there, enclosed in a world of their own, somehow linked to the past and memory – it's down to us to intuit to what extent nostalgic or rather obsessive. The repeated presence of souvenir photos and newspaper clippings could actually mean a shared desire to collect, like a memory exercise, just as much as it could mean the impulse of a disturbed mind. Other elements lead us to think instead of the presence of groups of people who centre around these places to implement collective actions whose nature is not made clear.

At this point, should we confine all these suppositions to the field of fantasy and leave them there, since they are *fiction*? We should do better to consider the relationship that these images maintain with an entire typology of real facts of news that periodically appear in the media: stories of secret religious sects, unthinkable collective rituals, strong personalities obsessed with superstitious beliefs. It is from these that this English photographer draws concrete inspiration to offer us her credible representation of inaccessible scenarios which we get to know about only through fragmentary and superficial news, packaged more to satisfy public curiosity than to keep us informed. From this liberation of the imagination to which we are induced there may then unexpectedly arise a psychological exploration of the everyday realities that surround us but are concealed in the invisible folds of the open society, interconnected and globalised. Apparently Annabel Elgar doesn't make any claim apart from involving us in the fantasy of stories of a dark flavour. But she does play subtly on several levels, legitimising the question of whether in that place between reality and fiction it is not sometimes possible to penetrate more deeply into things.