



CRITIQUE **ANTOINE D'AGATA**

The heart of darkness

The Cambodian Room takes us into the uncompromising and claustrophobic world of D'Agata's search for the intrinsically human. TEXT **ALEXANDER CARNERA**

THE CAMBODIAN ROOM: SITUATIONS WITH ANTOINE D'AGATA

Directors Giuseppe Schillaci and Tommaso Lusena. 55min. France, Italy, 2009
Magnum photographer Antoine D'Agata has gotten a little too intimate with the subject of his photo series. In order to get to know the seamy side of Cambodia, he goes to "the end of the end." In Phnom Penh, he moves in with a drug-addicted prostitute named Lee, who does not only allow D'Agata to photograph her, but shares her crack pipe and her bed with him as well. When she asks him what he really wants from her, he admits that he hopes the pictures will earn him money. D'Agata has been throwing himself into projects like this for 20 years now. The claustrophobic atmosphere of this documentary is interspersed with gruesome street shots and uncompromising photos by D'Agata, who has increasing doubts about his profession as photographer. Journalist Philippe Azoury is concerned and visits D'Agata, forcing him to question his unorthodox working method.

See last issue of DOX for Carnera's text on *Aka Ana*.

THE MAGNUM-

PHOTOGRAPHER Antoine D'Agata needs to be in what he calls "a primal state of being" to be able to take his pictures. He needs to travel far from morality, Cambodia.

Somewhere between a portrait, an extended interview and travel documentary, *The Cambodian Room* presents a critical ethical study – that investigates the relationship between being an artist and simultaneously affirming a particular mode of existence. As D'Agata says: "it's not only to take pictures, but it's how I see the world and how I live it." *The Cambodian Room* is the name of a place where he can investigate his own limits, to see if he can bear it. The room is also the name of a small apartment in which he spends his time with a Cambodian prostitute. Both of them take refuge in smoking. This refuge is D'Agata's

attempt to avoid oblivion, his attempt not to forget about reality.

D'Agata wishes to discover a new method, a method to go further into the unknown. As he says: "to find more perverse ways to know the other. [...] This will go through sex, but only at the beginning, then we arrive to violence, pain, sorrow and indifference."

THIS DARING VOYAGE of a famous magnum-photographer bring to mind – not only his own film *Aka Ana* about a group of Cambodian prostitutes and an unknown man's voyage into his hell – but certainly also *The Heart of Darkness: a director's nightmare*, the portrait made of Francis Ford Coppola's journey while making *Apocalypse Now*.

He didn't care that this would end up being an intimate portrait of D'Agata himself and his intense struggle to continue his work >>

