

PASSING PLACE

A film by Nicky Coutts

DV-PAL 21:47 mins, 2009

Passing Place (2009) is set at a remote crossroads in rural Northumberland. Scenes from six feature films, where significant moments occur at crossroads, are re-enacted by local people who live or work nearby and know the location well. Film excerpts from *Oedipus Rex*, (Paolo Pasolini, 1967); *Down By Law*, (Jim Jarmusch 1986); *Cool Hand Luke* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1967); *Castaway*, (Robert Zemeckis 2000); *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, (Maya Deren, 1985) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, (Luis Buñuel, 1972) show people coming and going, hiding from the law, getting shot, killing their father, performing voodoo rituals and moving forward, one of four ways, towards an uncertain future.

Crossroads are traditionally where life-changing decisions are made. Seen as unhallowed ground in most Western cultures, they represent a threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead. Vampires are believed to congregate there at midnight waiting for their next victim to pass by, while in Germany the pottery of the deceased is smashed at the crossroads to protect the souls of the recently departed and whips are cracked at remote crossroads on Walpurgis night to rid the area of demons and witches. In Voodoo, Ghedes, the God of the Crossroads waits in a long black coat (and now sunglasses) at this boundary between the material world and the world of spirit ready to lead new souls to the afterlife. Neither consistently malevolent nor benevolent, the crossroads is always a site of transformation where what was dependable and familiar is liable to take an unexpected turn.

Some of the participants in **Passing Place** knew the films they were re-enacting well and studied their parts thoroughly, deciding how they would represent the characters they were playing often of another age or gender. Others were happy to be guided through their parts without having seen the original film and performed spontaneously on the day. Similarly, it isn't necessarily important for the viewer to know the films that are being re-enacted well, or at all. The comparison between the re-enactment and the original is not what is being asked for here.

Instead **Passing Place** presents the known, familiar form of the crossroads transformed with every story told. Each local participant, a frequent passer-by in any case, is this time at the crossroads to stage something out of the ordinary passage of the day, re-visiting a fiction that nevertheless originally did take place elsewhere at another similar location. In Heather Phillipson's essay 'An Art of Surprise', written about all of Coutts' work made over the same year, she begins with "Here are some images that do not tell the truth. Neither do they tell an untruth. Instead they succeed in telling precisely neither of these things." **Passing Place** could be seen as a quiet magic trick, how many fictions can you pile one on top of another before a slither of fact is revealed. However, if fact emerges its temporary and if fictions are re-enacted they fast become an inseparable part of the location they are newly sited in. **Passing Place** is a new story of the crossroads that doesn't tell the truth...



DIRECTOR Nicky Coutts
 PRODUCER Nicky Monroe
 CAMERA Liz Murray
 SECOND CAMERA Richard Ward
 BOOM OPERATORS Shona MacCracken Nicky Monroe
 Mel Coutts

In OEDIPUS REX.....Ted Monroe...Bill Monroe...
 Nicky Monroe...Tom Hoggan

In DOWN BY LAW.....Sarah O'Connor...Colin Watson...
 Mark Hall...Patrick O'Connor

In CASTAWAY.....Judith Russell...Jameson Bell...Barley

In DIVINE HORSEMEN: LIVING GODS OF HAITI...Nicky Monroe

In COOL HAND LUKE.....Micky Macgregor...John Holland

In THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE...Micky Macgregor...Iona Macgregor...
 Jerome Stonborough...
 Mandala Macgregor...Trudi Macgregor..
 Baptiste Soulard