

Psychopomp : A Vision Quest

Christopher Collier

Video, 3.13min, Jan 2009.

Played at the National Library of Wales as part of 'Film House': a revue of highlights from the National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales along with the best experimental works from emerging artists and film makers working in Wales. The event, curated by artist in residence Blue MacAskill, was supported by Safle and the Arts Council of Wales. The film was subsequently retained by the archive.

The intent behind this event, and the record of it on video, derived from the desire to draw parallels between artistic practice and elements of shamanism. It is to explore the concept that artists can fulfil the roles traditionally ascribed to shamans in other cultures and at other stages in our human history. The work took the form of a walk out on to the moors in the Peak District National Park on a winter's night. It was something of a familiar journey for the artist as he spent sometime in the area as a teenager and frequently suffering from insomnia would walk out onto the moonlit moors to occupy my long nights. Adopting the shamanic technique of walking alone into the wilderness, the use of totemic costume, of amulet objects, a musical instrument and ritual in order to reach some psychological level in which he could, shaman-like, charm down a host of shooting stars.

The soundtrack heard on the video is not the original music that was playing on the journey: that was far too intimate and disconnected to make any sense outside of the context in which it was played. Instead the music is a piece composed in order to express the atmosphere felt at the time and comprising many samples of rocket recordings to suggest the shooting stars he was attempting to coax out of hiding.

The title *Psychopomp: A Vision Quest* derives from the Greek term Psychopomp (literal meaning, "guide of souls") - a term given to some form of entity tasked with escorting spirits into the afterlife. It is also something of a self-deprecating play with the ideas that works such as this may be perceived as over-blown or something of a pompous playing out of internal psychodrama. *A Vision Quest* refers to the Native American tradition of the Vision Quest as a turning point in life taken to find oneself and the intended spiritual and life direction. When a participant is ready, he or she will go on a personal, spiritual quest alone in the wilderness. This draws parallels with artists who often feel they must remove themselves from normal society in order to return to it with insights, illuminating potential new directions.