

## **Living in Time**

For Phil Salmon

'I am sorry there is no one here to take your call'...  
The voice is poignant, unmistakable;  
This is no official announcement of regret  
but eloquent of other sadnesses  
she would not burden her callers with.

Those who did call on her  
as mentor, teacher, friend,  
know how little time she had  
for fake observances,  
scoring academic points.

She spoke her mind,  
writing a special kind of poetry  
not measured in metre  
but in careful cadences  
of hard won truth.

In an age of mechanical induction  
she drew on memory to teach  
the proper usages of grief,  
how not to make our grievances  
a method of instruction.

She taught us that education  
is not business, bureaucracy,  
or a football league ,  
it is where the generations meet  
on treacherous uneven ground

often at cross purposes, driven  
by fear of failure suddenly revealed  
in frantic games of leap frog  
over never leveled playing fields  
to reach the future first.

Standing there, observing life at school,  
she notes the awkward teenager she once was  
the one in the end -of -term photograph  
with the troubled smile, finding herself  
trapped in the lens's public glare

exposed to the gaze  
of people who would never know  
or care about her private agonies,  
the work she had to do,  
just being there, on show.

The endgame was no different.  
She held her camera lucida  
steady, unafraid to look  
Mistress Palsy full in the face  
and call her bluff ; when others  
would have given in  
to pity's subtle flattery,  
she was made of sterner stuff.

Her style was plain song  
not baroque; an elegiac  
counterpoint to death's  
slow march. Disowning  
pre-recorded messages  
of shock we hear her voice  
ring out again : 'please speak clearly  
when you hear the tone'.

No need for grace notes, then,  
or flowery tributes, or hired staff  
from rent-a-sob; no canned  
condolences or choirs,  
no churchiness without the spires.

Instead, let us renew her story  
as we mourn her loss:

be angry for her  
that the days drew in so fast;  
  
hope that endorphin angels  
took away the pain, but left her dreams  
intact;

be glad at being so apprenticed  
to her craft, of learning  
how to live in time.

Phil Cohen