

Selected comments by Mark McElhatten spoken aloud on Sunday May 5, 2019 during the special event:

In Memoriam -Phil Solomon
A Film Screening and Remembrance
Department of Cinema Studies and Moving Images Arts
University of Colorado, Boulder

Phil Solomon (January 3, 1954 – April 20, 2019)

“I will read from what I have written, inadequate but this as it came to me now mercifully condensed. Usually I speak extemporaneously, I go out on a limb with nothing prepared and I find the melody and the beat and the melody inspires the words.

But the melody was interrupted on April 20th and I haven't found it yet.

We have been asked to be brief at 5 minutes and talk about the films of Phil Solomon not our personal relationship to him.

We are here to celebrate his life. Not turn funereal .

Phil had immense hope. He was a celebrant of life. Enormously generous in spirit in friendship in his art. His films were deeply personal and people responded to them personally. His films are effulgent, vibrant but they are pitched towards mourning and memorialization. What the late Tom Rapp of *Pearls Before Swine* once acknowledged as "Constructive Melancholy"

It's amazing so many people, such a wide range of people were affected by Phil Solomon's films. Experimental filmmakers recognized these films as a zenith of advanced personal filmmaking. A large part of the lineage of the Avant Garde and a beacon within cinematic history. And first time viewers skeptical of films that depart from the beaten path of recognizable norms found them accessible and profound, they were really touched by them.

Phil's films *are* touching are tactile creating a spell immersive and stirring, we breathe them in like ether. We fall under their spell. And almost every film Phil made was an elegy honoring a recognition of something essential that disappears creating a piercing deprivation and a strengthening transformation.

We have to take care of ourselves.

"You have to be very careful" whispers Olga Chambers in *The Hart of London*.

These are Films of Loss

What's Out Tonight is Lost (1983) expresses that directly in its title.

I've always said that life is an accumulation.. of Loss

Wittgenstein said :

" If only you do not try to utter the unutterable Nothing gets Lost."

But Phil Solomon tried. And succeeded. Eloquently. So the loss is immeasurable.

As I wrote about his film in the 1980's:

" It's title from a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay,
What's Out Tonight Is Lost is an elegiac film sifting through the unrecoverable. The film is a reflecting pool where vision breaks up. The home we recognize is swallowed in the mist the light barely penetrates the fog and the yellow school bus steals us away, delivering us into new clouds, embracing fear. The film has a surface of cracked porcelain and intaglio, the allergic childhood skin of cracks and bruises. This is a film of transubstantiations, the discorporation of human forms into embers. Air itself looms and blossoms into solidity and nearness ... I hear it breathing ..."

Phil's work was concerned with breathing
Breathing as cadence ,measure the interruption of line in verse. Caesura.
Gasping. Respiration. Inhalation of ether that leads us into trance.
Oxygen levels that bring us back to The Second Breath and second sight.

Dream deep

Dreamers Awaken!

Solomon's films are made of surfaces, glazed and broken caressed assailed by chemistry. Scrims and veils, lyrical optical printing marvels, what exists on the other side or at dream level where all that we encounter in life swims towards us shedding persona shedding the superfluous and appearing to us the way our hearts recognize it.

The residue after evaporation. Our skin is an envelope a veil. As is the mortal flesh of Film where deterioration can manifest itself as optical splendor and poignant decay, artifact and metaphor. Phil was not religious but he evoked the Sublime. Through changing textures the molten the glacial the granular the epidermal he evoked the sublime. He called himself an "archeologist in reverse" so these are living images in

premature burial pushing their way back to the surface breaking through crust reaching to us, Searching for air.

How interesting to know that when Solomon's work afflicted of altered emulsions were shown at the Jerusalem International Film Festival in 2014 that this included an exhibition in a former leper hospital the Leprosarium of the Hansen Government Hospital patient rooms.

The Secret Garden (1988) is in effect an alchemical marriage a mash up of two different MGM films and a combination of influences. Stylistically it is as if two aspects inspired by Phil's mentors came together. The amatory detective in love film explorations as seen in Ken Jacobs' *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* mated with the shining refractions of Stan Brakhage's *Text of Light*.

The Secret Garden is in part about the blossoming and breakdown of enchantment, the hidden face of terror concealed in Magic moments of prismatic streaming in childhood, when powerful projections, tender mythical and strong, dissolve, let us down, reveal their own limitations breaking our dependence so that we may find our own way.

In Solomon's *The Secret Garden* the dual nature of every character in *The Wizard of Oz* is further compounded and meshed with excerpts from an already abbreviated and subtitled version of another MGM technicolor film a tale of an disruption infirmity and rejuvenation. A secret concealed rose garden. Paradise Exposed. A spectral Paradise. Expulsion. The human face beneath the psychological or societal facade the radiant disfigurements unmasked heroes and villains the polar entities the disillusionment that gives birth to new illusion is a part of the experience.
Liberation and gift.

"I'm set free to find a new illusion" Lou Reed sang.

Elegies yet the films are exhilarating

Exhilaration is breathing is breath

"I hear it breathing "

Breath the very thing Phil fought for

Breath and air

The suction of air that allows life inspiration air the medium we live in we move through...

Short of breath we walk on a cracking surface we walk on thin ice into thin air. As Phil said in an interview commenting on the communion with the audience

"But when the films have the entire room, it is a tender mercy, a holy thing, a rarified air..."

The Twilight Psalms

Solomon's work strives to bring together disparities and unlikely mergers. Mash ups and Alchemical marriages. *Twilight Psalms* fuses *The Twilight Zone* and The Book of Psalms. *The Twilight Zone's* televised eerie moral lessons with its frisson uncanny twists combined with the longing outcry and exhortation of Prayer.

The Book of Psalms

Tellihim in Hebrew, indicating praises but the word coming originally from the Greek means instrumental music.

Last Days in A Lonely Place is another title mash up combining the titles of Gus van Sant's *Last Days* (2005)and Nick Ray's *In A Lonely Place* (1950) films of wayward figures Kurt Cobain and Humphrey Bogart's Dix Steele, haunted figures treading the edge going over the edge going over the falls into nocturnal abyss.

Life consists of stolen moments. Death is The Grand Theft that steals us away.

Looking into the hidden arcades of Grand Theft Auto, in the series *In Memoriam : Mark LaPore* Solomon finds the poetry in the Game's malfunction, trespassing and safecracking into its secret code finding meditative anomalies spaces of ghostly wandering and oasis. Solomon grants us a space beyond the design of confrontation and demolition, the back alleys that lead to green pastures to ashen ruins and to the Bardo plain.

The Snowman and in part *The Exquisite Hour* derive from home movies works of family frolic, casual rituals of recreation bathed in melancholy and incantation.

The Snowman a film of tenderness showing the violence that befalls deep feeling, requiring a shift in disposition a change in temperature that leads to perception. A child of snow and flame. The little girl in the original story *The Secret Garden* loses her mother and father becomes an Orphan and has to be transplanted from India to England to undergo a climactic and radical change in order to be fully restored, transformed. First we are shattered...

I remember when Phil lost his mother and father. It was the first time an adult of his age had said to me "I'm an orphan now."

Wallace Stevens wrote his poem *The Snowman* in 1921 in the wake of tragedy, the death of his mother and his father the onset of mental illness in his wife.

" One must have a mind of snow..."

"And have been cold a long time ..."

We must take on the intrinsic qualities of what we behold what we seek to understand. Feel what we see be what is there in order to reach empathy and comprehension.

After I screened *The Snowman* for a class in Binghamton a student a young woman approached me fiercely upset.

" Why didn't you warn us about this film before you showed it"

I asked her what she meant she said :

" it made my heart explode!"

Phil Solomon died on April 20th 2019.
Beloved friend one of the great American Artists.

*" I don't know why you say goodbye
I say Hello"*

And now *Our hearts explode ...'*