



**AVALANCHE  
(OVERTURE)**

Badakshan Fieldworks  
Carlos Casas/Phill Niblock

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Avalanche (overture)  
Film part of Badakshan Fieldworks  
(Fieldworks#9)  
HDV  
59 min

**Introduction**

Avalanche (overture) is a 59 min introductory journey into this landscape, a sort of audiovisual meditation on disappearance, the film and its music are a research on the relation between music and landscape, a physical as well as mental experience, transporting the spectator into a state of flotation.

Avalanche is a film about one of the world's highest inhabited village, a Village bound to disappear, the film presents the last days of life of this village before it becomes a ghost village, before its stones and mud houses become part of the mountain again, one of the most unknown mountain ranges in the world and one of its highest, the Pamirs are as mysterious as fascinating, home of some of the most amazing and well kept traditions of Asia.







**Context:**

In 2009 before I was traveling to Pamir mountains to start my research for a future film. I visited Phill Niblock in his Soho loft in New York, I wanted to ask him to work together in this film I was to embark, I wanted him to be the guiding music for my film. His music and visual work had been a key influence on my work and I thought that would be the best way to render homage to his work.

That day Phill Niblock gave me some music and suggested that I listen to Stosspeng, a piece to be released on his last album for Touch. "Strings".

During my first shooting in the Pamir mountains Stosspeng became the soundtrack for my visual explorations, driving my mood and feelings towards the landscape, Stosspeng will become one with the landscape I was portraying. The first time music was defining the way I was shooting images and the first time I was working with Phill Niblock's incommensurable music, music that drives you to further understanding of your own interpretation of things, that levitates you in order to sedate your senses for an enhanced comprehension of yourself and where you are standing. Phill Niblock's music is so rooted in these images that it has become its own soundtrack, like the sound coming out of these mountains, I decided that it will become the overture of my film Avalanche. I wanted the overture to be a sort of introductory visual and sonic symphony, a way for understanding the landscape and also a sort of meditative introduction to the film.



**Technical specifications:**

**Images:**

**Carlos Casas**  
Avalanche (Overture) (59 minutes)

A visual overture sequences of landscapes from one of the highest inhabited region of the world.

Recorded in 2008 in the Pamir Mountain range, Tadjikistan.

HDV,  
Digital projection.

**Music:**

**Phill Niblock**  
Stosspeng (59 minutes)

An outstanding drone minimal composition, of overtones.

Susan Stenger and Robert Poss,  
guitars and bass guitars

The Stosspeng recording session to obtain the materials for the piece was on December 20 2006 at Robert Poss' Trace Elements studio on E 4th Street and Ave A, in New York. Robert was the engineer. The piece was completed using Protools in April 2007, in Vienna, Austria.





## Bio

Phill Niblock is a New York-based minimalist composer and multi-media musician and director of Experimental Inter-media, a foundation born in the flames of 1968's barricade-hopping. He has been a maverick presence on the fringes of the avant garde ever since. In the history books Niblock is the forgotten Minimalist. That's as maybe: no one ever said the history books were infallible anyway.

His influence has had more impact on younger composers such as Susan Stenger, Lois V Vierk, David First, and Glenn Branca. He's even worked with Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Lee Renaldo on "Guitar two, for four" which is actually for five guitarists. This is Minimalism in the classic sense of the word, if that makes sense. Niblock constructs big 24-track digitally-processed monolithic microtonal drones. The result is sound without melody or rhythm. Movement is slow, geologically slow. Changes are almost imperceptible, and his music has a tendency of creeping up on you. The vocal pieces are like some of Ligeti's choral works, but a little more phased. And this isn't choral work. "A Y U (as yet untitled)" is sampled from just one voice, the baritone Thomas Buckner. The results are pitch shifted and processed intense drones, one live and one studio edited. Unlike Ligeti, this isn't just for voice or hurdy gurdy. Like Stockhausen's electronic pieces, Musique Concrete, or even Fripp and Eno's No Pussyfooting, the role of the producer/composer in "Hurdy Hurry" and "A Y U" is just as important as the role of the performer. He says: "What I am doing with my music is to produce something without rhythm or melody, by using many microtones that cause movements very, very slowly." The stills in the booklet are from slides taken in China, while Niblock was making films which are painstaking studies of manual labour, giving a poetic dignity to sheer gruelling slog of fishermen at work, rice-planters, log-splitters, water-hole dredgers and other back-breaking toilers. Since 1968 Phill has also put on over 1000 concerts in his loft space, including Ryoji Ikeda, Zbigniew Karkowski, Jim O'Rourke.

[www.phillniblock.com](http://www.phillniblock.com)  
[www.touchmusic.org.uk](http://www.touchmusic.org.uk)



## Bio

Carlos Casas filmmaker and visual artist. his work is a cross between documentary film, cinema, and contemporary visual arts. His last two films have been awarded in festivals around the world from Torino, Madrid, to Buenos Aires, and some of his visual Fieldworks have been presented in collective and personal exhibitions around the world.

Carlos Casas, Studied Fine Arts, Cinema and Design. In 1998 he was awarded an Artist-in-residence in Fabrica, research and communication center of Benetton, In 2000 his short Film "Afterwords", produced by Marco Müller and Fabrica Cinema was selected for Venice Film Festival, Rotterdam Film Festival and Recontres du Cinema in Paris 2001. In 2001 he started a series of documentaries for Colors Magazine, he traveled to Patagonia to do a fieldwork that later in 2002 became a 24min documentary "Patagonia", in 2003 he developed a 52 min documentary, "Rocinha. Daylight of a favela" Shot on location in one of the biggest favelas in Rio de Janeiro. In 2004 he finished "Aral. Fishing in an invisible sea" about the life of the three remaining generation of Fishermen in the Aral sea, which won the best documentary award in Torino Film festival 2004, and was selected for the Rotterdam film festival 2005. Visions du reel Nyon 2005, One world Prague 2005, and Documenta Madrid 2005 where it received the special mention from the jury. In may 2005 he finished a 52 min version of the Patagonia research "Solitude at the end of the world" which received the special prize from the Jury in the Buenos Aires International Film festival 2006. The Siberia project is the last chapter of a trilogy of films dedicated to the most extreme environments in the world. (Patagonia, Aral, Siberia) was awarded Best Documentary award in Mexico International Film Festival 2008. In 2009 was awarded a residency in the Fondazione Claudio Buziol Venice, where he developed a research project on Parades in collaboration with Brazilian artist Arto Lindsay for the 53rd Venice Biennale. He is currently working on a film about a cemetery of elephants on the borders between India and Nepal.

[www.carloscasas.net](http://www.carloscasas.net)  
[www.vonarchives.com](http://www.vonarchives.com)



Notes about Phill Niblock by Bob Gilmore:

Phill Niblock's music is massive yet nuanced, with dense sonic clouds that envelop the listener in a high-volume, ever-changing environment rich in aural fascination. This is music without climax, broad swathes of sound composed of individual events that melt into larger textures suggesting a deep space. Niblock's materials are sustained pitches, sometimes reiterated, most often microtonally displaced by tiny amounts, creating a web of subtle pitch distinctions that appears static but which in fact undergoes constant change. The patterns created in air by the beating and phasing of near-unison tones are like wet paint with one colour streaking into another; tiny striations appear and disappear, like figures in mist. The extreme economy of material in Niblock's music ironically produces a quasi-infinity of sound; the pieces may begin somewhere, but there is never a necessary ending, the music inhabiting a world without boundaries. This music is expansive, metaphorically full of sun, wind and weather. Niblock is concerned as much with the weight and impact of one pitch against another as he is with their harmonic relationship. The tones fill the space, changing density as you listen, their hovering presence forming an endless recess of backdrops and headlands against which other tones wash and recede. Because of the complex acoustic properties of the source tones and his textures of stratified layers with blurred edges, Niblock's music has something equivalent to photographic depth. Things are not always as they seem: octaves are rarely octaves, almost always a few cycles too many or too few. The music plays with our perception of time, not because performances of individual pieces can vary in length (they can't) but because there are almost never any internal markers to orient the listener. This is music that drenches the ear in sound. There is glare and shadow, up-close-ness and farawayness, but rarely a sense of horizon line. Niblock's emotional range is wide, from severity to joyousness, from the monumental to the excitable, from stillness to luminosity. This piece featured in *\*Touch Strings\**, is as complex as the compositional processes used to realise them. *\*Stosspeng\** is vintage Niblock on a vast scale, in which recorded samples of the pulsating electric guitars and basses of Stenger and Poss were transformed, in ProTools, into an enormous sonic cathedral. These new works show Niblock, at age 75, still discovering fresh features of the landscape he has been cultivating with such consequence for the past forty years.

Notes about Carlos Casas by Andrea Lissoni:

The work of Carlos Casas stands in the crossover of documentary and visual arts, trying to extend the boundaries of contemporary visual experience, with the manners of an anthropologist and the goals of a visual artist, his works document with poetry and accuracy environments and people who are slowly disappearing, since 2001 works on what he calls an End Trilogy dedicated to the most extreme inhabited landscapes of the planet (Patagonia, Aral sea, Siberia).



**Avalanche (Overture)**

Carlos Casas/Phill Niblock  
2009-2010

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