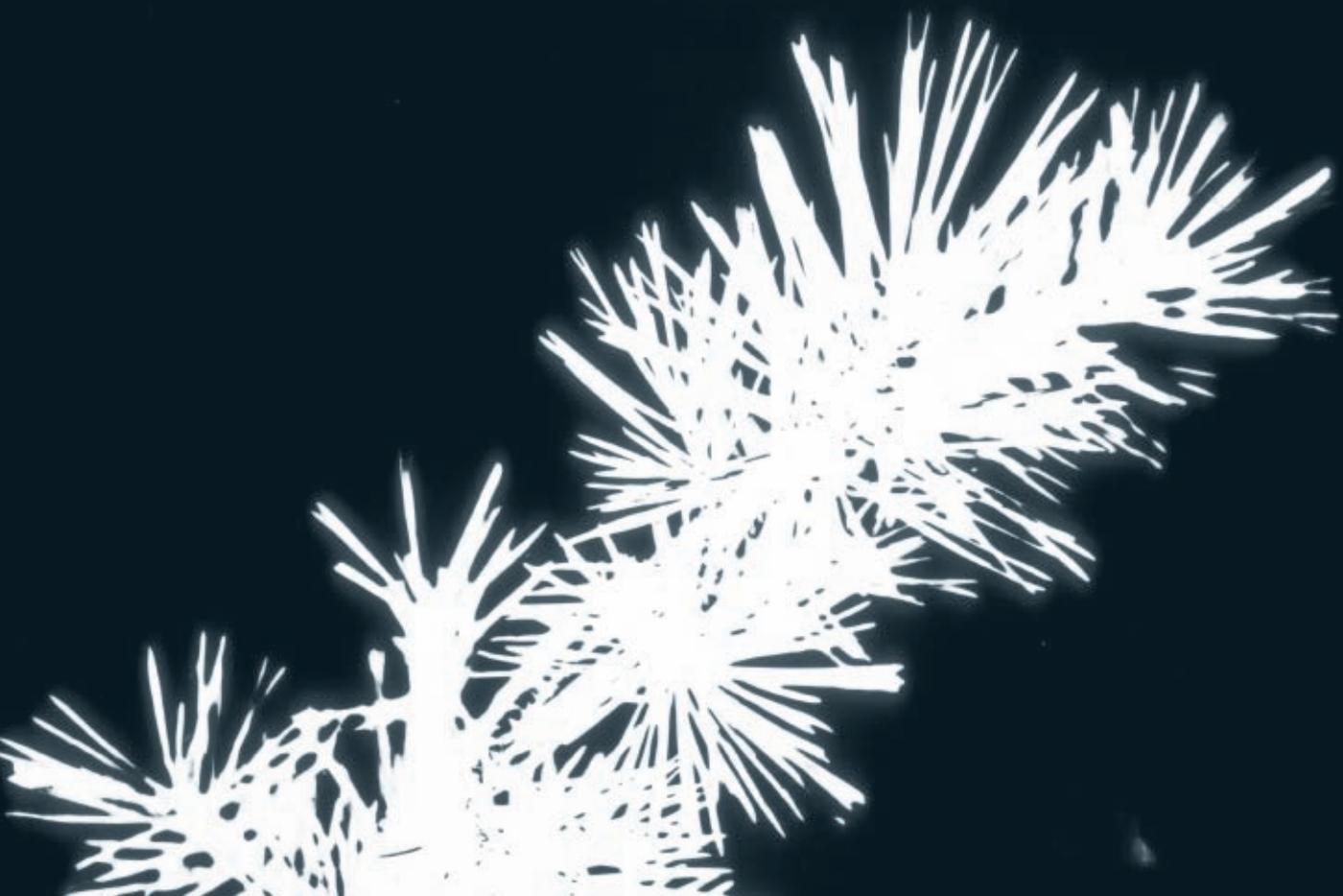


**Phill Niblock**



## Life All Over

*"Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, emerge; they were formed at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves."*

Sigmund Freud, in *Screen Memories*

Between 1985 and 1992 composer and filmmaker Phill Niblock, during his global journeys, asked a number of people (relatives, friends, accidental acquaintances) to spontaneously relate childhood memories in front of a video camera. The composition of the steady image remained the same for all 'portraits': only the head appears, slightly off center, with a backdrop varying from landscape to room to

wall. The subject was asked to look into the static camera and thus directly address the viewer.

We are witnessing layered time: the backdrop (whether static, a wall or room, or active, the sea, traffic or trees) is some sort of timeless present, unrelated to the narrator, not affecting him or her in any way; the narrator is a precise past, the time when the video was recorded; the narration is a vague, timeless past, when the subject of the recollection is supposed to have happened. The eyes of the narrator only appear to be looking at the camera, in reality they are looking inward, investigating a more or less distant past, and looking for details and fragments to piece together.

We are witnessing quite different approaches to memory investigation; each probably a reflection of the personality of the narrator. The self-centered person, only I's and me's and mine's, telling what he or she did in



*Anecdotes (Stories from Childhood),*  
Chang Hsien-Chen (Taiwan),  
video detail



*Anecdotes (Stories from Childhood)*,  
Clarence Barlow (Kohn),  
video detail

relation to other, whether animate or inanimate, objects vs. the onlooker, and his or her mom, dad, friend, aunt, uncle or grandparents — *“my great great grandfather was a factory man and I don’t know whether he drank or not, and all the five boys that he had they liked their beer”* — and what they did in relation to him or her. The visual person — *“the amber light of a bedroom, pale rose flower pattern, a stucco home in a Spanish style, red tile roofs and patios cast in red colored cement”* — vs. the abstract one, not providing us with form or color, just interpretations. The chronological narrator vs. the unbound time traveler, going from age 7 to 4 and then forward, even out of the imposed childhood limits. The sensationalist — *“I had my first orgasm riding a bicycle; I slept with my father until I was twelve”* — often making efficient use of silence vs. the factual reminiscer and interpreter — *“I’ve come to believe that one’s perception is dominated by one’s original landscape.”* — The moralist —

*“life is a choice between good and evil; if you can understand yourself, you’re number one; it is not pleasant to deal with people who are evil”* — vs. the neutral observer. The crowd pleaser — *“a very interesting thing I like to tell you guys”* — vs. the unambitious narrator — *“I think my childhood was rather boring, it consisted of school and non-school.”*

*“But the truth is that we shall never reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it. Essentially virtual, it cannot be known as something past unless we follow and adopt the movement by which it expands into a present image, thus emerging from obscurity into the light of day. In vain do we seek its trace in anything actual and already realized: we might as well look for darkness beneath the light.”*  
Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory*

There’s death — *“ironically my very first memory of life started with death, the death of my grandmother”* — war

— *"I was told one of my classmates was killed by the Japanese bombs, I went to his house and I found there was no head; we played with the shells of the bullets; there were pieces of grenade in the pea soup" — domestic and other micro violence — "my dad he beat me, because I should not swim in dirty water; but one day, when we were playing the same trick the cook found us, you know the punishment for that is a really good beating" — confessions of minor misbehaviors and mischievousness — "one day my best friend found a very good loudspeaker in the auditorium, and he got a fancy idea of taking that speaker away from the auditorium, so we got the speaker and we sold it" — but still, everybody seems to look back onto these things without much trauma, as if happy to be able to remember, no longer to be confronted with it or held responsible for it. No 'good' old days, nor 'bad' old days, just old days. — "and stuff like that, it was real nice, that's life all over."*



The layering and multiplication of the materials, presenting the portraits three or more simultaneously, is a recurring form in the work of Phill Niblock, who made it one of his trademarks to show two or more simultaneous movies (12 in a recent London show) during

*Light Patterns*, slide detail,  
computer-controlled installation



*Anecdotes (Stories from Childhood)*,  
Rina Sherman (South Africa),  
video detail

his concerts. And in the case of *Anecdotes (Stories from Childhood)* it results in a strange deconstruction of time. When presenting the work in confrontation with or accompanied by *Light Patterns*, a series of high contrast black and white slides, also made during his travels, slowly dissolving into one another, this deconstruction is accentuated. The dissolving unintentionally seems to be mimicking the way the memories fade into one another, the way they interrelate, the way the various time layers are being superimposed. On the other hand, the steady rhythm of the slides contrasts with the irregularity of the rhythm of the recollections, while some narrators segue from one memory into the next one others spend a lot of time trying to get hold of the right picture. In turn, the appreciation of the slides strongly relies on the memory of the viewer; at the moment the slide is fully present, it starts fading into the next one. Time never stops.

*"No phase can be arrested and held. It can only be generated anew again and again."*

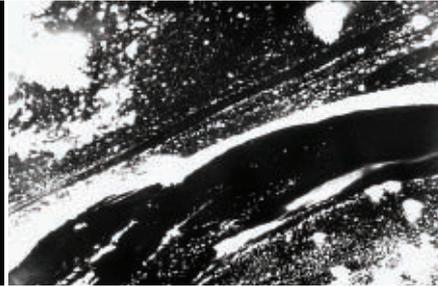
— Edmund Husserl in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*

**Guy De Bievre** is a self taught composer, arranger, musician, sound engineer and sound designer for various organizations and artists. He is also the curator of the audio art series *Earwitness At CCNOA (Center for Contemporary Non-Objective Art)* in Brussels, Belgium.

**Phill Niblock** is an intermedia artist using music, film, photography, video and computers. He makes thick, loud drones of music, filled with microtones of instrumental timbres, which generate many other tones in the performance space. Simultaneously, he presents films/videos which look at the movement of people working,



or computer driven black and white abstract images floating through time. He was born in Indiana in 1933. Since the mid-1960s he has been making music and intermedia performances which have been shown at numerous venues around the world, including The Museum of Modern Art, The Wadsworth Atheneum, the Kitchen, the Paris Autumn Festival, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; Akademie der Kunst, Berlin; ZKM, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard, World Music Institute Merkin Concert Hall, NYC. Since 1985 he has been the director of the Experimental Intermedia Foundation in New York



([www.experimentalintermedia.org](http://www.experimentalintermedia.org)) where he has been an artist/member since 1968. He is the producer of Music and Intermedia presentations at Experimental Intermedia (EI) since 1973 (about 1,000 performances) and the curator of EI's XI Records label. In 1993 he was part of the formation of an Experimental Intermedia organization in Gent, Belgium - I.v.z.w. Gent, which supports an artist-in-residence house and installation space there. Phill Niblock's music is available on the XI, Moikai, Mode and Touch labels. A DVD of films and music is available on the Extreme label.

Cover, inside cover, left:  
*Light Patterns*, slide details,  
computer-controlled installation

### **Phill Niblock**

Thursday, April 19 to  
Saturday, May 26, 2007

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### **Barbara Wiesen**

*Director and Curator*

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Gahlberg Gallery  
College of DuPage  
425 Fawell Blvd.  
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-6599  
(630) 942-2321

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