

LIVE

# ALDO TAMBELLINI

*RETRACING BLACK*



Aldo Tambellini *Moondial* Electromedia Performance at The Dome, St Mark's Place, 1965. Courtesy Aldo Tambellini

## PERFORMANCE

*BLACK ZERO* 1965 AND *MOONDIAL* 1966  
SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER 21.00

£10 CONCESSIONS AVAILABLE

AS PART OF THE TANKS AT TATE MODERN  
FIFTEEN WEEKS OF ART IN ACTION  
18 JULY – 28 OCTOBER 2012



**THE  
TANKS**  
AT TATE MODERN

Aldo Tambellini (b.1930) is a pivotal figure at the heart of the shift to expanded media during the 1960s and one of the earliest artists to use video and television as a medium. *Retracing Black*, a new 'Electromedia' installation conceived for the Tanks, brings together his early innovations in painting, slide and film projections, video and sound to create an immersive media environment. Two key Tambellini performances from the 1960s will be restaged in conjunction with the installation.

Originally a collaboration with dancer Beverly Schmidt, *Moondial* 1966 presents a mixture of electronic imagery, slides, films and sounds, while a single female dancer improvises movements in front of a live audience. Large abstract, hand-painted slides and hand-painted films will be projected onto the dancer as she moves through the unique space of the Tank.

*Black Zero* 1965, considered a major early example of multimedia performance during the 1960s, is to be re-staged in its original form during this special one-off event in the Tanks at Tate Modern. An audio-visual, electro dance incorporating live amplified cello music, hand-painted slides and hand-painted films turns the South Tank into a hypnotic and mystical environment.

*'A pioneer in intermedia techniques, Aldo Tambellini has worked with multiple projections in theatrical contexts since 1963, always striving to cast off conventional forms, using space, light, and sound environmentally. In the spring of 1967 he founded The Black Gate, New York's first theatre devoted exclusively to what Tambellini calls 'electromedia' environments. His archetype, fully realized in Black Zero (1965), is a maelstrom of audio-visual events from which slowly evolves a centering or zeroing in on a primal image, represented in Black Zero by a giant black balloon that appears from nothing, expands, and finally explodes with a simultaneous crescendo of light and sound. Literally hundreds of hand-painted films and slides are used, each one a variation on the Black Zero theme. In addition to electronic-tape compositions, the piece often is performed in conjunction with a live recital of amplified cello music. In Moondial (1966) he collaborated with dancer Beverly Schmidt in a mixture of the human form with electronic imagery in slides, films, and sounds. With Otto Piene, he presented Black Gate Cologne at WDR-TV in Germany in 1968, which combined a closed-circuit teledynamic environment with multi-channel sound and multiple-projection films and slides as the participating audience interacted with Piene's polyethylene tubing. Another version of this piece was conducted along the banks of the Rhine in Dusseldorf, with projections on a mile-long section of tubing.'*  
—Gene Youngblood, Expanded Cinema

## MOONDIAL

*'I was invited by Rudy Stern and Jackie Cassen to perform Moondial. I had admired the dancer, Beverly Schmidt, and later becoming her friend, I asked her if she wanted to collaborate on an 'Electromedia' performance. Beverly had been a principal dancer in the Alwin Nikolais Dance Company at the Henry Street Settlement House in Manhattan. I had seen her performing several times and also seen her in some films by Ed Emshwiller which were screened at The Gate Theatre. The program was going to include improvisational dance, sound and projected hand painted films and slide (lumagrams). Beverly would use a hoop to create an image of a circle within a circle. I created Beverly's costume from clear plastic with silver round discs. I made a mobile head piece.*

*For the performance, I created an original set of 160 hand made slides (lumagrams) which were projected from two carousel projectors. These slides all had a black circle split down the middle leaving a band of light in the center. The dancer used the black space and the light area to improvise movement in and out of the light. She also used a big loop to create the image of a circle within a circle. Elsa and I worked the hand-held projectors with the slides in a circular motion seen on the screen and the dancer. At one point a 16mm film, from the Black Film Series, added a faster kinetic movement. Drummer, Lawrence Cook, improvised the sound. Later, Calo Scott with his amplified cello replaced Lawrence Cook. It was all an intense improvisation. It was performed in 1966 at The Dom, in St. Mark's Place, NYC by invitation from Rudi Stern and Jackie Cassen as part of their 'TRIPS' Program. Later there were several performances at the Bridge Theatre, NYC and later at the University of Western Ontario, Canada where Mary McKay, who was trained by Beverly Schmidt, danced and Calo Scott replaced Lawrence Cook. She powerfully interacted with my projection of film and lumagrams specifically made for her dance and the percussive drumming of Lawrence Cook.'*  
—Aldo Tambellini

*'The piece fell in that category which is known (by now) as Intermedia- in this case dance plus slides, plus movies, plus sound, plus costumes. It was one of these few cases where everything seemed to work perfectly. The Schmidt-Tambellini piece had a classic perfection and beauty about it. It was often a breathtakingly beautiful performance. In the middle of the performance, during one of its most culminating passages, I turned, for a moment around and looked where the slides and projectors were set behind the audience's backs. And I saw this amazing, almost phantastic thing happening: I saw both Tambellinis immersed in a deep dance trance of their own, moving, with hand-held projectors and slides, shaking, and trembling, no more conscious of themselves. And I looked at their faces. They were going through similarly phantastic changes and it seemed that the things on stage were directly connected with their fingertips, their face movements, their very flesh...every light change, every light trembling, every motion that took place onstage was produced directly by their bodies, by this phantastic action-reaction.'*  
—Jonas Mekas, Village Voice, 23 June 1966

## MOONDIAL

Electromedia performance for one 16mm projector, two carousels projectors, one dancer, one musician. Originally performed in 1966 by Aldo Tambellini (projectors) and Beverly Schmidt (dancer).

**Film** *Moonblack*

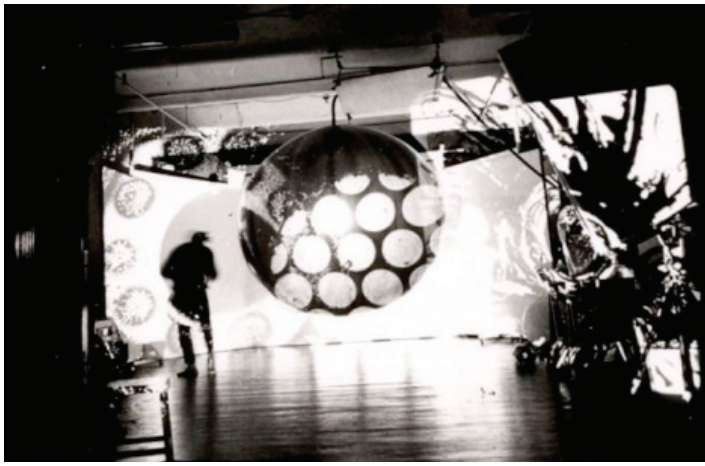
**Slides** *Moonblack Series*

**Dancer** Daliah Touré

**Cello player** Seth Woods

**Projections** David Leister

**Costume designers** Maddalena Giandonati and Vivi Ponti



Aldo Tambellini *Black Zero*  
Electromedia Performance at Intermedia 68, Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1968.  
Courtesy Aldo Tambellini

## BLACK ZERO

*'Black Zero began and grew in New York, but it will grow out there somewhere outside of New York for America rejects that which naturally grows. Black Zero is the cry from the oppressed creative man. There is an injustice done to man which is not forgivable.'*  
Dedication of performance by Aldo Tambellini.

*'At present, Black Zero keeps on changing and growing with each presentation as the black balloon which appears through the performance agonizingly grows, expands and disappears. In Black Zero you'll be inside of the black womb of the Space Era. And in that womb the Black poet, Calvin C. Hernton, will speak of the 'Monster Demon,' of 'Jitterbugging In The Street' under the beat of the bully sticks during the Harlem riot. The plastic gas masked figure floats like an astronaut under the expanding simultaneous motion of the stars. The television monitors pulsate in their insane cosmic dance. One day the light and the energy of sun will become ice cold and the enormous sun disc will become black.'* Statement by Aldo Tambellini, 'We are the Primitives of the Space Era'.

*'Mr. Tambellini's work got off to a slow start but turned out to be a stunner. Beginning with Negro voice on tape that intoned a poetic indictment of white injustices (written by Calvin C. Hernton), it gradually built up visual and aural imagery—sound, word, music, lights and slide projections to a shattering crescendo. Toward the end a huge balloon began to swell. As it reached the bursting point, something unplanned happened. It broke from its mooring and floated threateningly out over the audience, at whose hands it finally exploded. As a symbolic comment on the explosive racial situation in this country, Mr. Tambellini's work was a painfully literal experience. On a nother level, as well, it was a highly effective piece of abstract theatre.'* —Grace Gluck, New York Times, 9 March 1968

*'Sunday night, Intermedia '68 presented a superb example of existentialism through electronic art. Throbbing and pulsating vibrations of blinding images of black and white and shattering explosions flashed simultaneously from four television screens. Those who found what was happening unbearable walked out either senseless or super sensitized depending on whether they placed it as meaningless or meaningful. If you're capable of asserting existence through electromedia you'll be left in the mind-blowing midst of freaked out black tv viewers---compliments of Tambellini. Tune in, turn on, turn to black.'*

—Susan Asch, SUNY, Stony Brook, 18 February 1968

## BLACK ZERO

Electromedia performance for two 16mm projectors, three monitors, five slide carousels, one dancer, three musicians, four projectionists, one poet. Originally performed in Astor Playhouse, NYC, 16 November 1965 by Aldo Tambellini, Elsa Tambellini (projectors) Ben Morea (clamorous machines), Ron Hahne (spiral machine), Bill Dixon (horn), Alan Silva (Bass) and Calvin C. Hernton (poet).

**Films projected** *Blackout*

**Videos on monitor** *Black Video 1, Black Video II, Black Spiral, 6673*

**Slides projected** *Black on Black Series, Periscope Series, Internal Series, Simultaneous Series*

**Poems** *Monster Demon* and *Jitterbugging in the Streets*, written and performed by Calvin C. Hernton. Recorded by Aldo Tambellini in the Black Gate Theatre, 1968. *In the still of the stillness*, written and performed live by Aldo Tambellini

**Sound digitization from the original performance recording**

Erik Taros

**Sound restoration** Lorenzo Dalla Rovere (La Camera Ottica)

**Film prints** Harvard Film Archive

**Dancer** Daliah Touré

**Cello player** Seth Woods

**Projections** David Leister

**Poet** Aldo Tambellini

With special thanks to Anna Salamone and Harvard Film Archive

### Curators

Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi with Stuart Comer

### Assistant Curator

Capucine Perrot

### Curatorial Assistant

Laura Hensser

### Project Manager

Eleanor Pinfield

### Production Management

Adam Hooper and Steve Wald

### Production

Team Sam Barrett

Marty Langthorne

Nao Nagai

Rachel Shipp

Natalie Smith

### Volunteers

Piotr Krzymowski

Mona Sarresh

Tom Scutt

Tilly Shiner