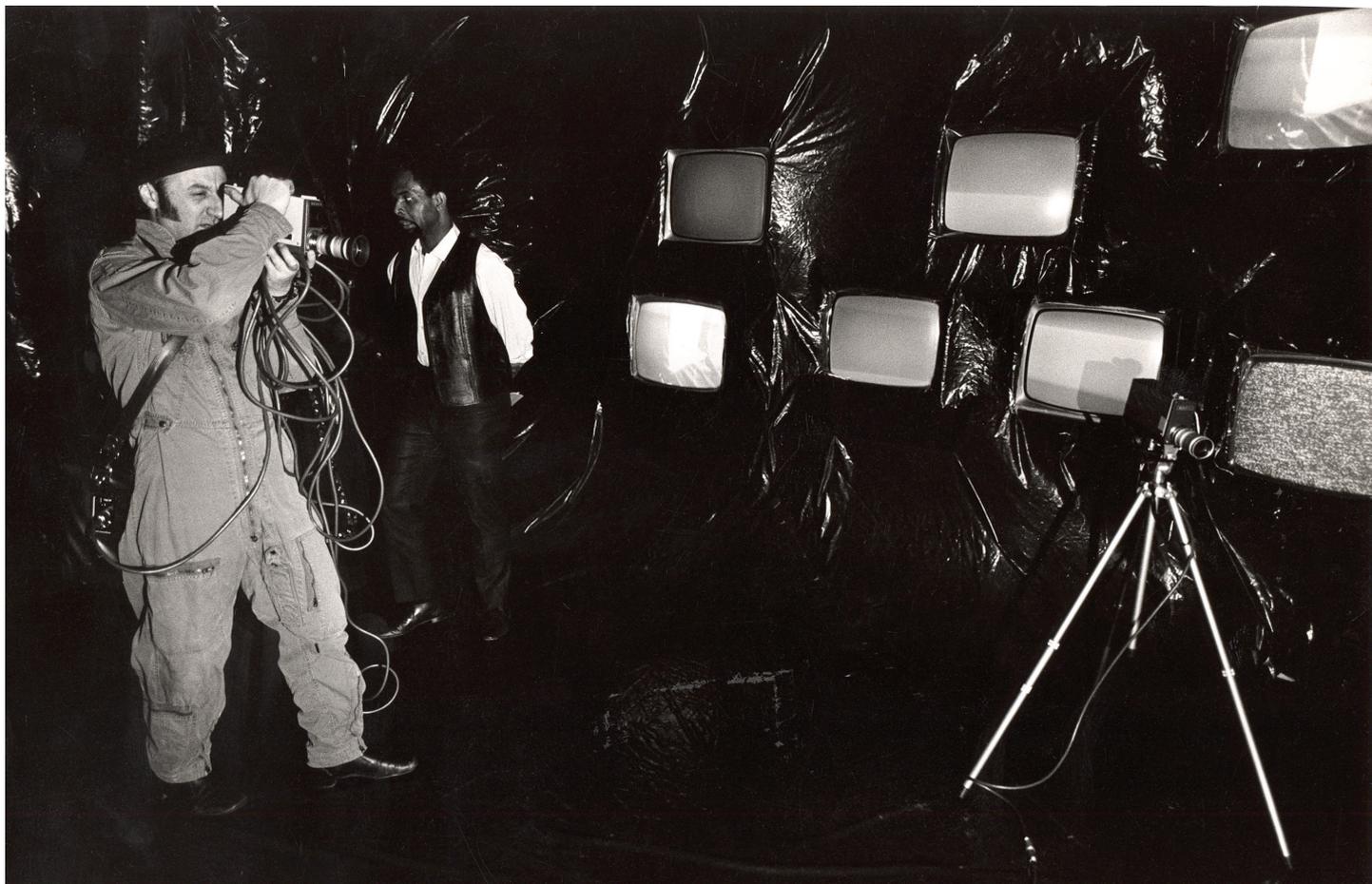


LIVE

# ALDO TAMBELLINI

*RETRACING BLACK*



Aldo Tambellini and Franklin Morris with Membrain Studio 0+0 1971, multimedia concert, International Institute, Automation House, New York

9–14 OCTOBER 2012

FREE

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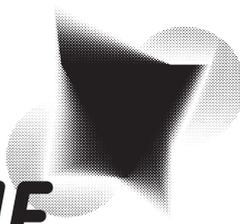
SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER 18.00, STARR  
AUDITORIUM

£5, CONCESSIONS AVAILABLE

*PERFORMANCE*

SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER 21.00, THE TANKS  
£10, CONCESSIONS AVAILABLE

AS PART OF THE TANKS AT TATE MODERN  
FIFTEEN WEEKS OF ART IN ACTION  
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**THE  
TANKS**  
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*Black to me is like a beginning. A beginning of what it wants to be rather than what it does not want to be. I am not discussing black as a tradition or non-tradition in painting or as having anything to do with pigment or as an opposition to colour. As I am working and exploring black in different kinds of dimensions, I'm definitely more and more convinced that black is actually the beginning of everything, which the art concept is not. Black gets rid of the historical definition. Black is a state of being blind and more aware. Black is a oneness with birth. Black is within totality, the oneness of all. Black is the expansion of consciousness in all directions. I strongly believe in the word 'black power' as a powerful message, for it destroys the old notion of western man, and by destroying that notion it also destroys the tradition of the art concept. —Aldo Tambellini, 1967*

*Before me - blackness: an inky-black sky studded with stars that glowed but did not twinkle; they seemed immobilized. Nor did the sun look the same as seen from Earth. It had no aureole or corona; it resembled a huge incandescent disc that seemed embedded in the velvet black of the sky of outer space. Space itself appeared as a bottomless pit. It will never be possible to see the cosmos the same way on Earth.—Aleksey Leonov, USSR Cosmonaut. First man to walk in Space, 1965*

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.

Born in upstate New York, Tambellini spent his childhood in Italy during World War Two before establishing himself as a central catalyst in the cultural and political upheavals of New York's Lower East Side. Beginning his career in painting and sculpture, his shift toward more participatory Electromedia work began in 1963 when he began to fuse slide and film projections with music, dance, video, spoken word, performance, poetry and politics. *Retracing Black* reflects on this transition from paint to film to video to experimental performance, and highlights Tambellini's ongoing fascination with circular shapes and blackness.

Tambellini first began to experiment with environmental projection with *Lumagrams*, hand-painted 35mm slides that he would alter through scratching and burning and then project from a tenement rooftop onto the building façades of Alphabet City in Lower Manhattan. The imagery in the projections included organic, cellular and cosmic forms. Tambellini subsequently incorporated large-scale *Lumagram* projections into collaborative performance events with dancers, musicians and the Umbra Poets, a group of black poets and activists with whom he met regularly.

He turned to filmmaking with the landmark *Black Film Series* (1965–69), a politically charged sequence of seven films created largely without a camera by a similarly direct and destructive process of painting, scorching, scratching, eroding and punching holes in the film strip. Energised by soundtracks including heartbeats and electronic feedback, stunning abstract segments of inky, primordial black forms are punctuated with found footage of the Vietnam War, Bobby Kennedy's assassination and black teenagers at Coney Island.

Tambellini continued to explore his formal, political and philosophical interest in black as both colour and concept through increasingly ambitious experiments with video and multimedia performance. After establishing The Black Gate Theatre in New York with Zero Group member Otto Piene in 1967, a venue that became a crucible for intermedia performances by artists including Yayoi Kusama, Nam June Paik and Jack Smith, Tambellini and Piene went on to produce the collaborative work *Black Gate Cologne* in 1968.

This ambitious Electromedia happening was recorded in a

Cologne television studio. The footage was edited and then broadcast in January 1969,

making it the first full-scale work of art for broadcast television.

For *Retracing Black*, a triptych of hand-painted 16mm films belonging to the *Black Film Series* is featured along with unreleased works filmed by the artist in 1960s New York, while a series of projected *Lumagrams* transforms cellular forms into a sculptural, kinetic installation. Electronic sound compositions are intertwined with the spoken words of Calvin C. Hernton, a poet, sociologist and member of the Black Art Movement, while the sound of oscilloscopes parallels Tambellini's seminal experimental videos, exhibited on monitors.

The futurist dynamism, embryonic forms and primal geometries of Tambellini's films are juxtaposed with television footage of 1960s political events and lost fragments filmed in working-class areas of Brooklyn and Manhattan, revealing the inner transformation of New York City and its increasingly shattered political and economic system. Tambellini focuses on the merging of the private dimension of everyday life and the public dimension of television.

Tambellini's video works seek to subvert the power of the television image, turning to the structure of the cathode emission itself. The study of light and real-time transmission are the key points of the *Black Video* series, resulting in an 'aerial painting' of throbbing and pulsating blinding flashes, caught in constant movement.

Returning to the traditional canons of expanded cinema and multimedia environments, *Retracing Black* reflects on the sensory mutation of cinematic and videographic elements, transforming found-footage and TV-collage practices into an immersive experience in which images, sounds and spectators are drawn into the liveliness of abstract form.

*With 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

**Production Management** Adam Hooper and Steve Wald

**Production Team** Sam Barrett, Marty Langthorne, Nao Nagai, Rachel Shipp and Natalie Smith

**RETRACING BLACK** Multimedia installation for three 16mm projectors, five monitors and three 35mm slide carousels, b/w, sound, 22 min

**Conceived by** Aldo Tambellini with Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi

**Editing** Gianandrea Sasso (La Camera Ottica/Crea)

**16mm 2k transfer** La Camera Ottica Film and Video Restoration

**16mm film recording** Marco Emiliani and Mirco Santi

**16mm print sources** Harvard Film Archive and Aldo Tambellini Archive

**Slides duplication** Claudio Domini (Errata Corrige)

**Sound digital transfer** Erik Taros (EatDesign)

**Sound restoration, editing and mastering** Lorenzo Della Rovere (La Camera Ottica)

**Produced by** Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi

**TATE**  
**MODERN**