

Aldo Tambellini Videograms

BY LYNN MALISZEWSKI

"The editing process of our culture takes place continuously every night in front of the TV screen—and bits of information we call news...images and words we call information. In the regeneration of old icons, the making of new ones—in a digested format, the world is defined. We connect for a moment over the air in isolated spheres we called homes. Years from now we will remember that art was swallowed by media—that media was the language of communication—that interactive media brings the process to a live response."

Aldo Tambellini, June 13, 1981

Beyond astronomical units of measure and rumors of cackling aliens lies the most frightening component of outer space: abysmal darkness. The first satellite images of the Earth and the moon had been captured by 1960, amplifying the fantastical danger of solar systems beyond the amniotic fluid of Earth's atmosphere. The ulterior dimension, seemingly directionless and silent, suddenly had a maternal dexterity: she created, destroyed, and held an indeterminable amount of other secrets. Aldo Tambellini, an Italian artist transplanted to Manhattan in 1959, connected this depth to a volcanic deluge of technology that was rapidly becoming more accessible. Using a staggeringly experimental range of technological and traditional media, and grounding everything in a philosophy of the color black, Tambellini ceaselessly examined the intimacy between the universe and technology through his practice. Black became the basis of Tambellini's work upon his arrival to the Lower East Side. Drawings from the early 1960s integrated Duco, an industrial black cement that was as

abrasive as it was absorptive. Circles and spirals were fundamental forms. Tailspins toward infinity fluctuated in unrelenting expansion and compression. Black was a paradox, no longer the absence of color but a vehicle for enlightenment. It relayed fear and freedom, "a state of being blind and more aware."¹ The rubble and grime of downtown Manhattan was talismanic. Tambellini discovered discarded projector slides one day and continued his drawing practice onto their surface—they were sliced, melted, manipulated chemically with acid, paint, and ink. These slides, as well as 16mm film altered with similar improvisation and technique, became the basis of his *Electromedia* performances from the mid-1960s. Several projection surfaces hosted particular arrangements of slides in rapid succession, mixed with film, poetry, choreography, and recorded sound, all amounting to a cerebral onslaught. The electrified universe mirrored the violence Tambellini had experienced in Lucca, Italy, during World War II—emotionally distressing, yet an undeniable catalyst for growth as a human

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Videogram (1968)

being. The projected components of these performances, more aggressive than ambient, are referred to as the *Black Film Series*. They are somewhere between political rant, psychedelic introspection, and tantric inquiry blasted from the speakers of a planetarium. When it came to technology, excitement and suspicion existed in a symbiotic relationship for Tambellini. He utilized his films, still an unrestrained medium, to dissect its subtext and thus, physical capability. Tambellini's *Videograms* are a direct extension of the *Black Film Series*. Endowing a cathode-ray tube (CRT) television with agency, Tambellini placed photo paper directly in front of its glass screen and proceeded to quickly turn it on and off. Electrons whiz through a vacuum smashing into the phosphor coating on the interior of the screen, illuminating pixels to produce the *Videogram*. This series of images within an image is simultaneously random and graceful. Ominous black orbs or succulent curly-cues are suspended in milky ambiguity, fundamentally producing a negative from the action. Indecipherable

silhouettes resemble impressions captured at the onset of cataracts, ridden with anxiety as shapes mutate in natural light. The retina is a loony samurai, awaiting a clear picture of the enemy that may never congeal. Blurs inherent to the CRT mechanism produce a graduated grey scale that fictionalizes a foreground and background. Tambellini never discloses the content of the television broadcast.

The electrical charge is the singular source of black in this series. Its abstraction, a ghostly hiccup upon a neutral field, implies the birth of television's inestimable gluttony. It predicates "the silence of the universe"², a reverent nod to technology that mirrors the duality of outer space, its simultaneous terror and intrigue. As television became more accessible to the modern family, it was a generous teacher, a trusted source for information. Tambellini was suspicious of this momentous power, even in 1968. By reducing television's universe to sheer molecular force, presenting the medium *au naturel*, he reminds audiences of its enigmas, yet unquestioned.

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SAMPLE SIZE ALDO TAMBELLINI



Videogram (1968)



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