

Interview with Aldo Tambellini
Cambridge, MA
December 18, 1991

(extracts)

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A: This was a show sponsored by the group called "experiment in art and technology" (1968)...and I think Rauschenberg also was involved... and Billie Kluver (?) That was like a collaboration between engineers and artists; and I think some of them ended up in the MOMA as well. Anyway, they made a catalogue which is very unusual because... And that's what Woody asked for... That's the explanation for the, not for the Black Spiral which was done afterwards.

K: So, what's that then?

A: Well, this was a - I show you the photograph. That was the very old machine, I think. There ran a tape like a loop and it went to the back of the machine, and it would be projected, and the tape was all electronically. Then there was a unit over there where you could through a microphone change the (?) or the movement of the lights. They could go positive or negative, the images.

K: How is this machine called?

A: I called it **Black Video II**, I think... And it was done by another engineer named *Ken Wise*... And that's what's been shown in this particular exhibition. I don't think I have it any more, don't know what happened, maybe...

K: So you don't think it exists any more?

A: Probably not.

K: Can you explain once more what you did exactly? (With the Black Video II)

A: I put in a video tape.

K: Which was recorded already?

A: Which I did there, electronically, the images were all electronic... the images were recorded separately on another place. And then the tape was put on in like a loop - there was no other way to play those, you know. **And this would modify like you're talking to it, the pattern would change on the tape.**

K: So it was **sound-modified**.

A: Right.

K: And this is some kind of video screener.

A: There are two video screeners.

K: This is in the book.

A: - And the engineer made the drawing for that. Yeah, I'm happy I found it. Cause I've everything in boxes and put them away. And I found this...

K: That's the schemata for the whole machine?

A: Yes. - And then the **Black Spiral** was done. I think it was - could be a year later, I don't know. But there was a show at the *Howard Wise Gallery*...

K: **TV as Creative Medium**...

A: - That's a TV set. And it was very difficult to make all the scan lines turn like this to a spiral form. So when we would broadcast, everything would be like this, like the spiral form. I don't know if it is still working correctly while it's in **Syracuse**. I'll have to find out, but Woody said it could be prepared probably.

K: Yes, I think so.

A: It's probably very simple because there is nothing to be done to the spiral part, only to the (?). It works like regular TV otherwise... It is a TV set. When it was broadcast, you could see whatever the news, the sport, like this. (in spirals)... My

engineer did this for me... I used to paint everything around, like in a spiral. So I wanted the TV done in a spiral... It was very difficult and we had a hard time. It is not the nature of the line to go that way...

K: So it was totally distorted.

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A: It's not a very good picture because it doesn't show much in the middle... but this is the one Woody asked about. - I think that's something he wanted for a long time ago.

K: This is 1969?

A: Ok, that's 1969. So that's 68 and 69, the two years. - Maybe because they're like historical.

K: They are, sure. I take them with me and you'll get them back, of course. - Tell me a bit about the show. Tell me how you came to it and to **Black Video** and **Black Spiral**.

A: I'm originally a painter and a sculptor, that's my background. And all my paintings used to be black and happened to be with circular forms. And then I began to work with movies, experimental movies. Those days they'd be called underground films. And the first film I made was all done by hands. Drawings on it with inks and different acid. And then I began to combine with (?) and working it over, the actual movie, the actual image changing then - working on top of them. And I used to make a lot of them... and that's how I began to film, - there was no video then. Then we opened up a theater in NYC in 2nd Avenue and 10th Street. It was called the **Gate Theater**. We had a space downstairs that was like a long hall for the movie. We used to show experimental movies then, it was different time than today, you couldn't do it today.

K: Yeah, but there are some weird theaters in NYC, still.

A: That was the beginning of the sixties. There was a huge crowd on the street around the aisle of the theater. All the young people from California, very very crowded... But it was no gallery.

K: What kind of program did you show there?

A: Well, we had... different filmmakers. So we used to make like one hour and a half program...

K: Was it just film or video, too?

A: No, there was still no video then. Then I opened a place upstairs which was like a dance rehearsal hall. It was about the size of this room. And it had a black platform. And I got *Otto Piene* involved in this program, so we opened it together. I had a program with the hand painted films and lots of slides, on the top of the films projected. And he had a program called *The Revolution of the Sun*, with slides, and people sat on the floor. And we had different programs from then on, but not all the time, that was like specials, like multimedia. And *Nam June Paik* had a program there, and... a Japanese woman named *Kusama*... She had different models, she painted them with dots and then she had all covered with these threedimensional dots. That's the sculpture she was doing. And *Joe Jones*, he did the music. The music was a big tank of water with frogs...

K: When was that?

A: This was all in the sixties.

K: How was the theater called?

A: That was the **Black Gate**. Everything was called "black" those days... There was another Japanese musician - *Kusuki*. He took all the different radios like portable radios and he put them on strings and then he wind them all up like this and they would just be going back to this and back again.

K: So the sound was spiraling and moving around.

A: And they kept on going like this. Another artist did an environment with a fog machine. And it would look like fog and he projected the lights on it. So that's the kind of program we did.

K: How long did that last?

A: We lasted about almost four years... We used to just charge a Dollar and half and people just came from the street. That's what I said, today you couldn't do that. Just any ordinary people... **And there came another lady to the box office who said she had a friend who was almost blind who probably would appreciate my films.**

K: Because they just showed black and white contrasts?

A: And all the abstract forms I had made. - It was an unusual time, because everybody could just come in. It wasn't just like artistic people...

K: Do you know *Alfons Schilling*?

A: Yeah, I know him... I haven't seen him for 20 years.

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K: When did you move off NYC?

A: That was when I came here with the Center of Advanced Studies.

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A: From 81 on I did a lot of things with telecommunication. To send images from here to other countries, two-TV-ways... while I was here at M.I.T.

K: You were at M.I.T. from 79 to 84.

A: Yes, I think...

K: And from 84 until today?

A: I started painting again, Black Painting. I use graphites, I use black acrylic, I paint a lot of them direct in blue printing - like they use for engineers and architects... And I live in Cambridge.

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K: So you were in with the *Howard Wise Gallery*?

A: Yeah, they had two TV shows there. The first show that did a museum was in *Brandise (?) University, MA*. I can't find the catalogue. But there was the first museum show in America... I think it was called **Vision as Television**. And some of the people who were in this show (TV as Creative Medium) were also in that show. But it was before this particular show.

K: So this (TV) was the second one?

A: That (Brandise) was the very beginning. But Otto Piene did a show in **Cologne**... Since I had the Black Gate, Otto arranged to make a program over there at... *WDR*. So Otto arranged that and we called the show **Black Gate Cologne** which was a light program. And a lot of propositions of my things, a lot of tapes, a lot of slides, and films... Otto brought the "Inflatable" and our program was done there. Which was the first time that artists did a broadcast.

K: You did really "art for TV", or was it video on TV?

A: No, there were video tapes, too. But the program was on TV. So we were the first to do that.

K: When was that?

A: **It could be 69. Howard Wise was after that...**

K: And Otto Piene invited you to come to M.I.T.?

A: Right.

K: How was the department called you were in?

A: Center for Advanced Studies. It still exists, but it's almost at the end, I think... Otto'll be finished in a year or so...

K: Is there somebody else coming after him?

A: I don't know. Probably not.

K: So they'll just close the whole Center?

A: Yah, I think so.

...

(Catalogue)

K: Yah, here's the *WDR program*.

A: We used to do this with slow scan, you know. With slow scan you can have an image to a camera, a video camera, and then it will go to some kind of unit called slow scan... and through another wire you go to the attached telephone. So for one you talk to the people in the other country or whatever city. And then you gonna send some information, some images, and then they begin to receive that at the same time. It makes like a sound and it begins to scan it down.

K: Is it so slow because the telephone communication is so slow?

A: It makes like little beep sounds.

K: That reminds me of the very modern machines, the video telephones you have now, the very small ones. They're also very slow. (I saw one at Woody's!)

A: This was **February 1980**, it was called **Communication Sphere**. And we always made a stamp when we did an event. Always the same stamp... We sent a lot of images and photographs. And then we would send a whole series like this... I have some tapes and big boards with all the photographs and sequences... If you want them I have to look for them... **All the very early tapes (1/2 inch)... are copied to 3/4 inch and they are in NYC at the Film Archive (E 5th Street).**

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end

Katharina Gsöllpointner

additional:

Aldo was at Ars Electronica in 1982 at the Sky Conference already.

His **Black Video is Interactive**, maybe it's interesting for the show.

The big boards with photographs for slow scan might be interesting, too.

Part of his work has been published at dumont's (Cologne) in the book "Video Art".

He will send a new resume on his telecommunication projects.