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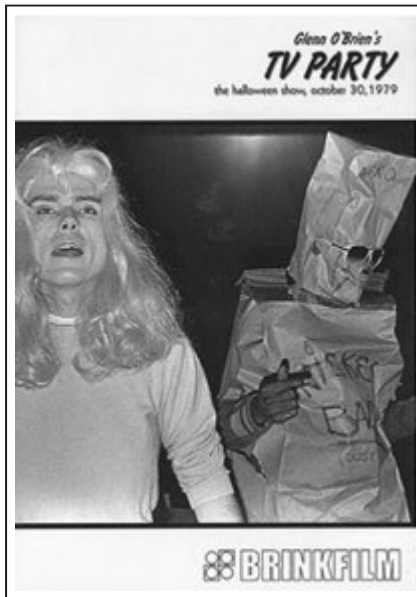
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## Glenn O' Brien's TV Party

*Glenn O'Brien's TV Party: The Halloween Show, October 30, 1979*

**A Public Access Walk on the Wild Side**

**(Brinkfilm)**



There are some people out there in this wide, wild world who don't believe in surrealism. They believe (or at least attempt to believe) that everything is logical, rational, and sensible. All events are related, and everything happens for a reason. Yet, there are two particular things which can always defy the notion of the logical world: a Halloween costume, and public access television.

The Halloween costume hypothesis is easy enough to follow: there is usually no ulterior motive to a Halloween costume. Nobody wears a Halloween costume for a "reason"; we put them on, if anything, to escape from the kind of oppressive rationality that comes with day-to-day life. And in the process, what one chooses

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to wear simply becomes a reflection of the wearer's subconscious personality or emotional state. In pure mathematical terms: desperate + college girl + frantic need for attention = slutty [insert animal, princess, or devil here].

The public access television theory is harder to explain, due to the odd mixture of both total self-consciousness and selflessness involved in the making of these programs. There is the need to share something interesting with the world, as well as the paralyzing fear of looking like an idiot in front of an entire city. Throw in the oddness of technical failures, not to mention the bizarre things which most people want to share with the world (anything from horror films made by 16-year-old paintball warriors to sexy music videos with muzak piped over them), and then, finally, the personalities that people adopt in front of the camera. And welcome to a free hour of surreality, without the famous egos.

The Halloween 1979 episode of *Glenn O'Brien's TV Party* fills both of these surreal requirements, as well as an added reality to the historically hip New York scene of 1979. There's a popular image with the youth of today that New York in 1979 was the epitome of cool. The images that float through young brains are of CGBG's, Talking Heads, Blondie, and of course the advent of NO WAVE, with freaks like James Chance and Lydia Lunch mutating, twirling, and distorting funk. Everything is flashy, hip and cool, with black sunglasses and a cherry on top. So, imagine what a surprise it is to find out that the hip cat New York scene, which included *TV Party* host Glenn O' Brien and guests Debbie Harry and Chris Stein, could be such likeable nerds. The tone of *TV Party's* Halloween party ranges from a strange, childlike glee, as the TV Party Orchestra plays a song which sounds eerily like the sound of a robot's soul toasting in the flames of hell, to a high school feel of funny-weird; when O' Brien interviews a man [NYC graffiti artist and future *Yo! MTV Raps* host Fab Five Freddy] dressed as a cheap-ass bag of angel dust; to the uncomfortably strange satire that is O'Brien's hosting, as he lists off several Encyclopedia Britannica-esque facts about Halloween. The ebb and flow of the *TV Party* is at the same time enthralling, hilarious, and a little standoffish.

The biggest distance between the modern viewer and the *TV Party* experience is, first and foremost, the quality of the film. Being a public access show at the end of the '70s does not lend itself to stunning filmmaking. Even to a present-day high school video production student, *TV Party* will look like a big, black-and-white piece of sludgy shit. For this reviewer, that's also a little bit of the old appeal, but there will be more than one person who won't be able to watch this footage purely

based on aesthetic reasons. The only other problem is simply the fact that most younger people alive might not even care who these people are; while Debbie Harry is still a fairly well-known celebrity, the other members of *TV Party* have faded into just weird, eccentric, funny guys dressed as women, drugs, and saucy models. Even a lot of the famous guests that appeared over the years are not that famous now. While the Gun Club is experiencing a resurgence in popularity (at least in Detroit, anyway), there are still few young, hip kids who can automatically tell you who Jeffrey Lee Pierce is. And even worse for the commercial fate of this edition of the *TV Party*, the Halloween episode doesn't boast any semi-famous celebrity guest stars such as the aforementioned Mr. Pierce.

Yet despite these potential flaws, this reviewer desperately wants *TV Party* to succeed. Yes, there is a glamour in obscurity for obscurity's sake, but does such an interesting cultural gem deserve such a fate? Hell, no. There has to be a niche audience of 1970s New York-o-philes/Factory refugees-o-philes who are longing to see this DVD and pile on the interest. And while I accept the fact that I'm not writing about some hidden jewel of lost cinema - more like some public access show with cool people in it - I also believe that *TV Party* is not just a *show*, but instead a relic of a much cooler past.

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