

to address any issue in depth.

Figures with respected reputations in alternative video either served up simplistic political pan or platitudinous aspirations. Peter Bradley, vice president of planning for Twin Cities Television, enthusiastically believed that "mass media can create an awareness of art." John Riley of Global Village encouraged groups of 5 to 15,000 people to start their own low-powered TV stations for as little as \$50,000 to \$75,000. Lisa Bear of Satellite Network and Vicki Gholson, producer of New York's Community Update, thought that "artists should work to change the tone and content of TV." On a less optimistic note, Les Brown, editor of *Channels* magazine, warned that the cable industry wasn't really interested in video art, that artists should "become their own entrepreneurs." Nicolas Johnson brought up the dangers of encroaching corporate control of the nascent cable business. All in all, an attitude of inexplicable self-congratulation combined with hopes and doubts for the future of art and TV. It was very irritating.

The sole voice of rational criticism amid the rhetoric came from critic Donald Kuspit, who wondered whether the relationship between art and TV wasn't self-neutralizing, and whether it would be possible for art as TV to keep the necessary cutting edge when it needs to compete with entertainment. These questions, while legitimate and provocative, were ignored by the rest of the participants in the rush to get on with the show, which consisted of live performances and recorded tapes.

The tapes, by artists such as Ilene Segalove, were fine, but why they were a component of this teleconference remains a mystery. Three hours of live satellite time is a rare event, as is live performance art on television, and they should have been used to full advantage. Not only could the tapes have been shown at almost any other time, but their technical quality was refined, providing a most unflattering contrast to the performances.

Most of the live performances were as uninspired as the talk, but there were exceptions. Mike Kelly in Los Angeles and Michael Smith in New York carried on an amusing pair of interactive monologues: Kelly, alone in a darkened room, intoned his poetic rambling on the notion of solitude; Smith, staring at the meager contents of his refrigerator, abstractly pondered the possibilities for a solitary supper. Their two images merged in the end.

The most perceptive and effective performance, however, was that of Chris Burden, an artist who never fails to surprise. Last on the agenda, Burden quietly kneeled with a primitive bow and stick apparatus, the sort used by Indians and Boy Scouts to make fires. He proceeded to pull the bow vigorously back and forth, turning the stick rapidly in a hole drilled into a plank of wood. He produced soot and smoke, but no fire. The strap on the bow broke, he fixed it and tried again, but no luck. For approximately four minutes, live, transmitted by satellite to hundreds of cities around the country, Burden demonstrated how little we actually understand. Just watching man at his most modern, trying to operate this primitive tool without success, finally leveled the tone of pompous omniscience that plagued the teleconference. It was Burden who accurately summarized the complex relationship, not just between the artist and television, but between man and technology. His simple gesture

targeted naivety, a naivety that was characterized by the smiling Davidovich as he closed the program.

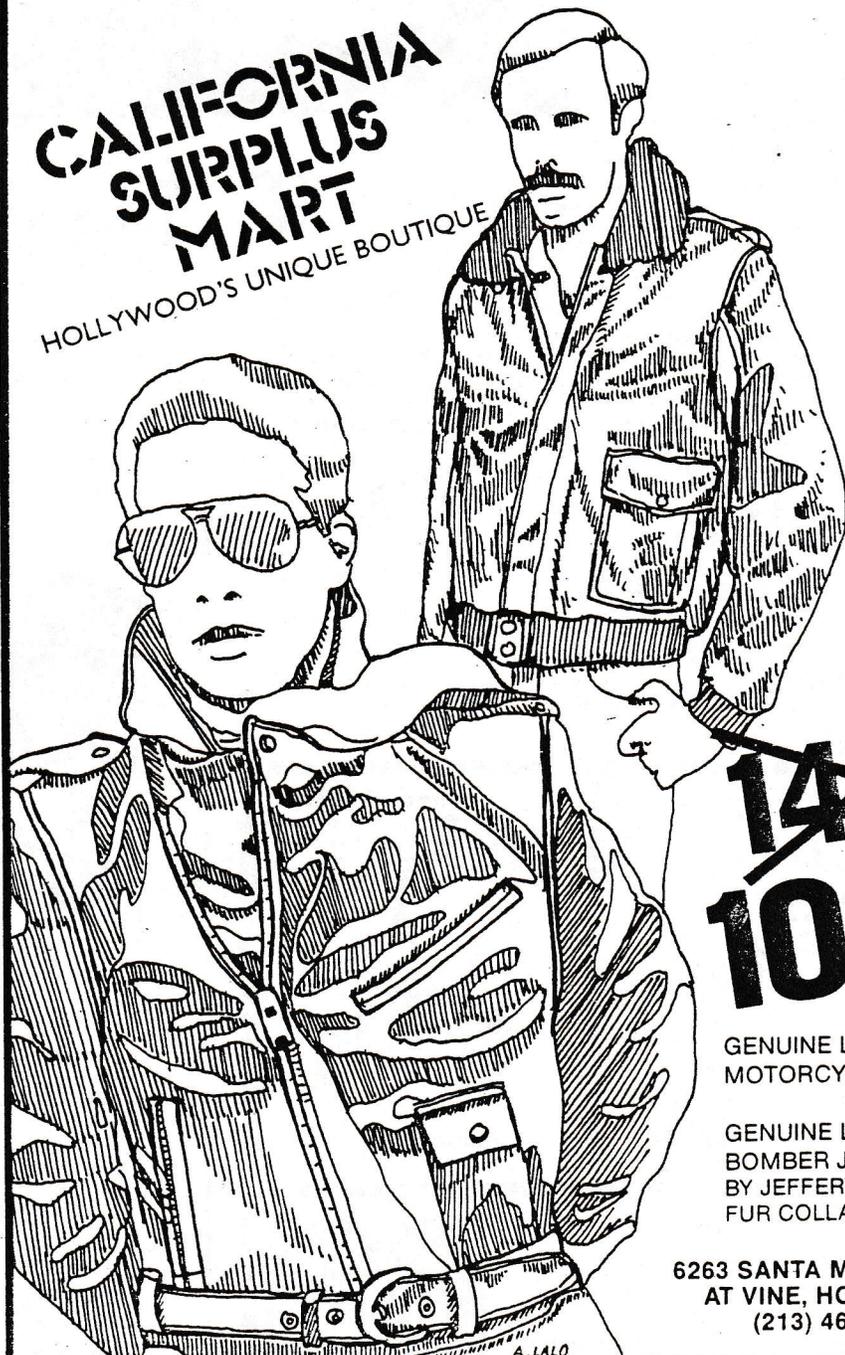
The most radical aspect of this interactive satellite event was its very existence. By no means was it a bad idea, and one hopes that sponsoring institutions such as UCLA and the University of Iowa will not be discouraged, and that future events will have fewer pedagogues and more of the genuinely curious and creative. I think the problem with this event rests in the questions posed by Kuspit. Although the tele-conference helped explore the issues of alternative TV and aesthetics in some depth, the event suffered the fate of most TV. Only the most cursory sort of examination took place, and the most shallow ideas came to light. There may be a way for TV to transcend its limitations as a popular medium, but this event provided no such evidence. ■



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