

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793

GRETCHEN BENDER

"TOTAL RECALL"

The Kitchen
New York City
May 7-9, 1987

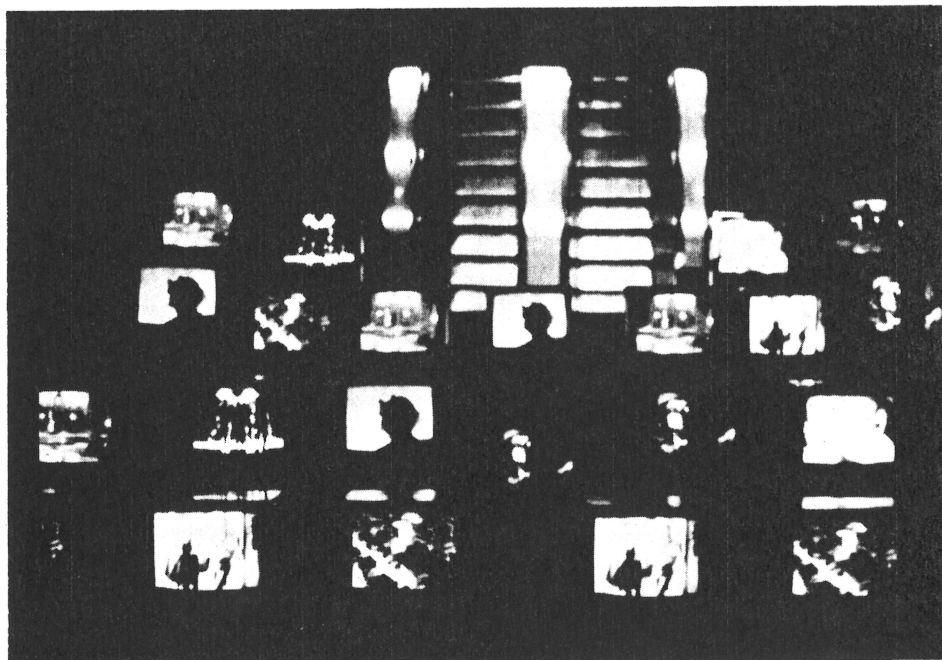
HIGH PERFORMANCE

In her latest electronic theater work, *Total Recall*, visual artist Gretchen Bender continued the examination of the ideology of technology that was the subject of her earlier work *Dumping Core*. By using some of the most recent images available through mass media Bender takes the emotional map of our consumer society as her starting place. Employing 24 monitors, eight channels of images and three film screens, Bender presented a visual analog to some of the finest scholarly literature concerning images, such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* or Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*.

As the spectators sat waiting for the performance to begin, the monitors, arranged in pyramid fashion, blinked on, one by one, in various pastel shades. A computer-generated, cool blue floating rock (created by Amber Denker) appeared on all the monitors. A voice told us he thinks he can live with what happened but there are moments when the pain comes back. For a split second there was a humanoid being handed a glowing ball. Then, without warning, there was a barrage of commercial images. Playing repeatedly in takes a few seconds were a series of shots that were clipped before the product message. People greeted one another in a manner that involved friendship, warmth, love and home. This was the personal side of the media's myth about American life. The series should have achieved narrative closure with a glowing "GE brings good things to life."

This is where Bender intervened. What the spectators actually saw were the sequences of the GE commercial run backwards. Thus the intended message of the images was totally negated. This was further complicated by the multiplication of images on the 24 monitors. Actions and people turned into an abstract visual landscape of shape, color and motion. The seduction of the singular image was conflated with a clear magnification of our ideology, critiquing the "immortality of consumption." When we consume the new and improved products that promise bigger, better and faster results we are staking a claim for an entropic cycle dependent upon deterioration and death. Bender's work is a deft document of how vernacular commercial images promise an emotional and sensory satiation while unwittingly underlining and evoking an absolute sense of loss.

There were other images: a rotating and stellated geodesic dome whose surface periodically projected outward into a globe of dagger points; a zonohedra—a 25-dimensional cube projected into 3-D; a series of upcoming movie titles including *Ishtar*, *Tough*



Total Recall

Guys Don't Dance and *King Lear*; fragments of an army commercial promising a high-tech war life, with imagery of men in the field and computers. All the images were accompanied by Stuart Arbright's masterful soundtrack.

What is most impressive about Bender's intelligent intervention is that in examining the information, ideology and seduction of high-tech media, she conjures from our unconscious the discourse we are having through and with media, easing us into an acceptance of "reality" while warning us about the inherent danger of our conversation with technology. The world according to Bender casts each of us as authors and brides of Frankenstein.

Carol Martin