

## FIRST HOUSE

Canterbury Fringe Festival

Christchurch College

October 1986

A small house sits in the middle of a large empty space. It has no doors. The structure is dominated by two outside windows flanked by louvre shutters giving the effect of a minimalist Wendy House. The window panes are monitor screens transmitting the hazy image of a garden divided by a vertical window slat. You can just make out the shadow of an observer, and her camera. We would appear to be looking into a garden improbably located inside the house. A small boy runs up to the window and begins to tap playfully on the window pane. The glass screen of the monitor makes a literal connection with the window glass. Immediately the space reverses. The garden is no longer inside the house, it is outside merely a reflection in the window pane. The shadowy camerawoman now stands in for us, while the boy draws attention to himself and to the fact of our benign voyeurism. But he is also calling up a specific presence, that of his absent mother. She is not far away, she can be heard picking out a nursery rhyme on the piano. Like him, we are required to construct an image of her in our minds. This is not enough for the child and he summons her with his disruptive play. The piano stops. The mother enters his space, guides her child away from the window and returns to her unseen piano. Within seconds the boy is back again, delightedly hammering out his message on the window pane. His ploy is working. The mother returns again and again, but as insistently disappears after each 'round' of the game. As we move to the other side of the house, the second window comes into view. Here, sound and image of the mother are united. But it is only a fragment of her body that we see. One hand reaches out to the keyboard of the piano and unhurriedly plays the tune - over and over again. The image of the child at his window from the other side of the house is inset into the wall behind her. Now he would appear to be outside the house altogether with the garden behind him. When the mother appears in his (inset) space, her arm vanishes from the piano. When she leaves him, the arm abruptly reappears. This game of coming and going lasts over five minutes. It ends with the child entering the mother's space "Can I play the piano?" he asks innocently.

This installation allowed me to play with the spacial illusions of the video image. The 'natural' phenomenon of the window produced a tension between the (glass) reality of the screen surface and the illusion of depth it creates. I built a literal space behind the screens to reinforce the illusion, but simultaneously

