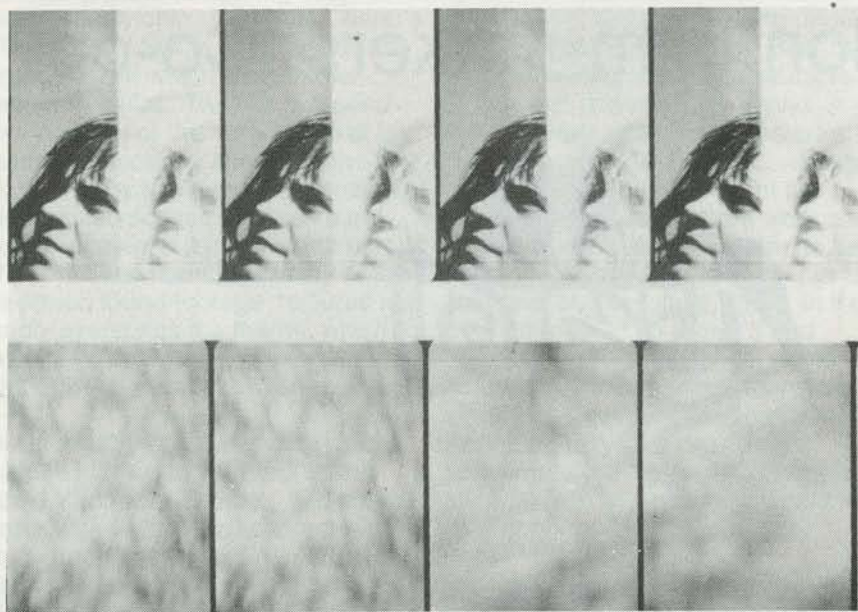


NIGHT ASSEMBLY



HOUSEWATCH in EDINBURGH (Dispatches from D. John Briscoe)

For two bitterly cold nights on the evenings of the 24th and 25th of November a crowd of 500 and 700 people gathered outside the Assembly Rooms in George Street, Edinburgh. The occasion; a visual feast specially designed for the Assembly Rooms in their bicentenary year. The show: **HOUSEWATCH**.

For those not familiar with the work of **HOUSEWATCH**, this basically consists of five London based artists who specialise in a form of "window theatre" by projecting images from the inside of buildings to create a visual display onto the windows, during which the audience stand (or sit if they bring their own chair) and watch this spectacle from the street. The concept is interesting in that it takes both film and spectator away from institutionalised spaces of cinemas and galleries.

The earlier work of **HOUSEWATCH** in the summer of last year, was a series of shows in London which utilised domestic dwellings for their audio/visual displays. The show in Edinburgh however, proved to be no easy task. It was for **HOUSEWATCH** the first show commissioned outside London and which utilised

the famous Assembly Rooms. The very scale and grandeur which the architecture of this 18th century building posed to the group was indeed a far cry from 'an ordinary terraced house in a quiet street'. A number of problems had to be surmounted in order for a successful show to take place. This certainly would not have been possible without the support and co-operation of the sponsors, namely, The Scottish Arts Council and the City of Edinburgh District Council, whose assistance was invaluable from the organisation of erecting scaffolding inside the building (for housing the projectors) to contact with the police in closing off George Street to traffic on both nights.

I travelled up to Edinburgh with the group to assist with the setting up and projection of the show. There was no time for rehearsal other than to set up and align projectors correctly. There were problems with street lighting opposite the venue, which could not be turned off as they were necessary for the public; however a compromise was reached and the lights were dimmed, though this still caused images to bleach when viewing from inside - from the

outside the images were bright and clear. With the aid of walkie-talkies we were able to communicate with the steward outside who informed us of any problems, e.g. whether images were in or out of focus or not aligned correctly and to adjust audio levels where necessary. The communication with the steward also proved invaluable in terms of listening-in-to-the-audience response.

So for two cold nights people gathered and stood for an hour watching and listening to works from five artists from **HOUSEWATCH**: Lulu Quinn's *Feast of Stone* began the evening, a timeless work, utilising images of stone, rocks and other natural forms superimposed on faces, both young and old. The second sequence by George Saxon, simply but cleverly used the full length of the windows. Entitled *'Jack's Dream-A Nursery Crime'*, it used a full length figure - a sleeping 'Wee Willy Winkie' who snores and farts in his sleep, twisting and turning in a dream, who like in a tragedy from Macbeth is brutally murdered by Jack, the character Saxon has used in his earlier Housewatch films. A short and evocative piece that could have been longer. The third in the sequence was *'Devotions'* by Ian Bourn, *'Harringay to Powderhall'*. A conversational work which brings the dog track and its atmosphere to George Street. Racing dogs move from window to window to the sound of James Brown.

In contrast, Alison Winckle's sequence *'Red Room'* with its lyrical and haunting soundtrack and images of clocks, candles and flames eating the windows entranced the audience without cries of 'fire', brought glowing warmth to the cold night air. Finally Tony Sinden's *'Pedestrian Colours-An Architectural Lament'* utilised rhythm and sound with colourful play of images, looking into each window at simple actions as if someone were decorating the house. The sound takes into account the nature of the location, in this case with the use of bag-pipes as a continuous lament.

Both evenings went well, despite problems which occurred technically. Housewatch, managed a difficult venue successfully. But what I would like to know is "*what will HOUSEWATCH do with an even bigger building?*" ●