I am fascinated by one of the current psychological theories which holds that dreams are a way for the body to get rid of body poisons (they get burned up in the dream-act). If this holds true, it seems likely that motion pictures might be a way for us to burn up international and national "toxic" attitudes. Perhaps this is an aspect of the moviegoing ritual, and an unexpected value of the Hollywood "dream factory." The major failure of commercial films made by the film "industry" is that they represent the range of public-accepted vision that cannot be made private...whereas the film poet is confronted with the dilemma that his private vision can in no way be made public.

Editing a film, often inter-editing from one separate film into another, continues conversations with the self. Cinema, like significant painting, must be made on the basis of self-expression and necessity.... There are no geniuses in film-making, only desperate men. In my opinion the audience should not be considered as the final "target" for a film, but they may be implicated.

I foresee motion pictures as the tool for a new form of world communication (via satellite) about to open the future of "ethos-cinema." I see that art and life, man and technology, unite and seek to renew and re-view. Clearly, movies help us to re-experience our experiences, which seems to be a basic human need. In particular I see that motion pictures will become "emotion-pictures" and will generate a new structure, a new context, becoming a nonverbal international picture language, in which we can "talk" to each other.

My own work leads me into multi-projection and the building of a prototype theater of the future—a "dream theater" exploring image transmission and storage, video graphics, electronic sound and music, drama and experimental cinema-theater, computer animation, lasers and holography.
The evolution of my concept of the "dream theater" began with the construction of my "movie-drome" in 1964 in Stony Point, New York. The "movie-drome" was a multi-media theater in which the audience lay down at the outer rim of the 32-foot dome and were presented with a 360° field of view above them. Taking five years to make, this theater was a converted farm silo top containing approximately 20 different kinds of projection systems all hooked up to a one-man control panel. Sounds could be moved around with a ring of speakers, images could be rotated or panned completely around the dome, and special wide-angle lenses could display one image over a major section of the dome screen.

My initial concept was to do research into audio-visual combinations—collages of concurrent simultaneous images, images with complex peripheral image traces that would make up a continuum of free associations of visual and musical ideas. I was interested in presenting filmic ideas within filmic ideas—the Chinese boxes of visual experience, not moving linearly forward like most movies but with simultaneity and density, as if cinema were a layered mosaic of flowing images and sounds. The audience was to edit the material by selective looking. Each member of the audience builds his own references from the image-flow...makes his own conclusions or realizations.

I discovered that after an hour the audience would often be asleep or very restful. At first their response puzzled me; I had expected them to be more participatory and active. This observation led me to realize that the dome space is automatically a soothing environment—a restful place which led me to the idea of a "sleep-theatre." I remembered my childhood experiences of long and often boring talks in planetariums, the sense of peace that I felt in the projected field of stars. Both the planetarium and the movie drome experiences probably retouched a human primal memory—i.e. lying on the curved earth looking up into space.
NEWSREEL OF DREAMS/1966-1972

This was a series of ongoing film/video works that go back to 1966. Several sections were done at WGBH in Boston while I was a video artist in residence (1970-1972). My concept of television watching is that it is essentially a national sleeping pill. The "Newsreel of Dreams" was a prototype for a national dream event, in which I projected that one night a year all major networks would synchronize the content of late night viewing to a deliberate "consciousness" of dream experience. This event would take the form of several hours of specially prepared images and music that would invite the viewer to ignore the narrative and enter the dream fantasy. Individual viewers could phone in their dreams. Psychiatrists and artists/poets could be guest narrators or participants in a discussion after the event. On the next night, they might review the effects of this national dream "net." I have long been curious what it would be like to compare the authentic dreams of the President of the USA or the Premier of the USSR—as one example of the international celebration of "Dream Catching."

CINE-DREAMS/1972

I began my "Cine-Dream" work with compilation films of my own and "found" films shown in longer and longer sessions, leading to the first 8-hour performance in 1972 at the Strassenburgh Planetarium in Rochester, New York. The audience entered the theater at 11 PM and stayed all night; breakfast was served and ideas and dream memories were discussed. In the 8-hour version the audience would mostly stay awake with periodic dozing.

The basic format was 8 hours of multiple images and sounds, orchestrated with some tensions and rests, with occasional synchronizations and free-form accidental combinations, with planetarium star fields and other visual effects. Integrated into my films were slides and graphics, laser etchings, modulated lights, live performers, and live video images of faces in the audience (being monitored by low light level surveillance TV cameras and making the audience part of the mosaic).

I am convinced that movies are the visual enactment of the dream state. I do not know how specific this function of previsualizing and making tangible the dream state is in our lives. But my own instincts move me further into experimenting with such illusory systems, such as computer animation which combines a kind of photographic reality with freedom of metamorphosis to create "meta" images that can approximate the geometry and forms of dreams. I am also moved to experiment with new environments that force films and light out of the darkened movie theater so that images can play a more external public role.
EUCLIDEAN ILLUSIONS

An animated film made entirely on a computer from the NASA Space Center in Houston, TX, by the media artist Stan VanDerBeek. This film is a study in "poetic geommetry" and was made under a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts, while VanDerBeek was an artist in residence at NASA. The film explores complicated geometric shapes and forms that are spinning in space. Richard Weinberg, computer scientist and programmer was a collaborator on this piece.
"Steam screen" is a system for suspending film images as light sculptures in open public spaces. The audience walks through or lingers inside the physical image, experiencing something close to a mirage or hallucination. This work using live steam as a screen for film images was done in collaboration with Joan Brigham at the Whitney Museum in 1979, and included computer animation by Richard Weinberg.
In steam the film reaches the ultimate point of dematerialization. The audience is able, physically, to enter the image and the cloud and become wrapped in a wholly new experience: the size of the droplets maintain the clarity of the image while at the same time extending it laterally into space. Infinite repeatability subject to the winds of chance.

Steam enters the working day and dreaming night like a dancer onstage, energizing the spaces with continuous movement.... It places the viewer in a new perceptual mode; a place where there exists a precarious balance between the known and the unknown. The realities of each moment’s perception are in flux; contradictory, insistent and elegant. As the steam changes the audience, the audience changes the steam.... Steam works are events in which response is unddictated, in which a single view of reality is unintended.... The old meanings are retained and reintegrated into higher levels of awareness. Steam is, for me, a manifestation of the collective dream.

Joan Brigham, 1979
The "Membrain Theater," my present work at the University of Maryland in Baltimore County, features live performers acting inside of a projected film. The actors move in a large open dark space; their actions match or fit into movie images projected onto transparent screens that can be raised and lowered, confusing the eye between "real" and projected "real" images. This matching is not unlike the scenes in Buster Keaton's great inspirational film *Sherlock Junior*. This transference of real world actors and their superimposed selves interests me as a borderline between the shadow and substance of dream theater.

As holography comes more into play, the performance will be more intriguing, raising contradictions about the real and apparent. In my early work with Hart Perry and the Cabin Creek Foundation in New York, I used their system called "Intergrams"—in which they took 16mm film clips to be turned into 3-D holographic illusions. The use of this and other forms of 3-D systems will create systems for more complex "dream theaters" in the future. I don't know why I am driven to explore this complex relationship between the real world and its projected image, but I intuitively feel the need to externalize the dream process and to test the edges of "the real world image."

"Mem-Brain Theater" is a multi-media portable theater space conceived and designed by Rob Fisher during the 1960s. He donated the theater to VanDerBeek to continue his research in multi-media.
SKY-PAINTING?

You'll sit in your backyard and look up at beautiful paintings I and other artists will do for you on a 10,000 square-mile screen of clouds. The strokes and colors will be images projected by laser beams. I call it “painting with light” or optical painting. Art and technology and vision come from use. You have to train people on these new tools. Anyone knows you have to work for years and use paint before you can become a great painter. Our society's vision of what can be done with these new tools and technologies hasn't yet matured. Society's aesthetic imaginations are not equal to our advanced technologies.

“Vision” by S. VanDerBeek.

WANTED: YOUR DREAMS

Readers of Dreamworks can contribute to my research at the University of Maryland. Send me brief written descriptions of your dreams. I am seeking this material for developing my “dream theater” and for other futuristic dream-related media projects. Your name will be kept confidential. Send your descriptions directly to me, c/o Dream Media Research, Art Department, UMBC, 5401 Wilkens Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21228.
AFTER WRITING THIS ARTICLE, I HAD THE FOLLOWING DREAM

December 30, 1980

The dream was about a performance space—a kind of amusement park theater. I made some silent joke to myself later that the dream was about an “amazement park.” The theater was set on three levels. I was not aware of the large, open, space (loft like) about the size of a football field till near the end of the dream. I entered the building. I was not aware of anyone else. It was a large, open, dark space. As you enter (no conscious sense of the outside of the building), you are alone. In the dark you become aware of the largeness of the space. It does have columns and supports, but the floors seem to be transparent. Walking through the space, you see projected images, movies and stills everywhere. You can stop and control and change the images by will. The projection systems are of a kind of “cubistic” sculptural aspect. They are everywhere on the floors, invisible screens in space in front and beside you. You walk through, growing slowly aware of the multi-levels above you. You enter a kind of wire device that suspends you, and you are flown through a symmetrical tunnel of images at great speed. The images like snow flakes and other symmetrical images fly past you. You are aware that it is a circular track you are flying in. A slow and dawning interpretation of the images is coming through the multiple levels and flow of images; repetitions of real world and abstract images make a pattern of recognition possible. All of the images and apparent events are a metaphor of experience that are saying the same thing over and over. I realized it was telling a non-narrative story about “sharing.” The whole purpose of this huge experience machine/theater is to isolate you as an individual and reinforce by way of visual metaphors that the whole life experience is about sharing. The multi-levels of the space describe the relationships of the universe and how it takes so long to interpret the inter-relationships of all the details of life in the universe.

Upon awakening, I was very refreshed and excited. Very vividly, I had seen a wonderful way to help make a model of the universe—with exquisite details and also with the sweep of scale of the universe. Visual metaphors were the key to understanding. I wanted to build the “amazement park.” I realized that my “movie-dome” and “membrain theater” were steps along the way.

Rough sketch of “Amazen-ment-Park”, size of football field in length and 3 stories high, with circular track for ride through symmetrical images. Projected images everywhere.