

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART  
NEW AMERICAN FILMMAKERS SERIES

Tuesday, November 27 and Tuesday, December 4, 1979  
6:00-8:00 pm

STEAM SCREENS

STEAM SCREENS (1979) Installation/performance in the Whitney Museum's Sculpture Garden. By Stan VanDerBeek in collaboration with Joan Brigham. Computer animation for EUCLIDEAN ILLUSIONS by Richard Weinberg.

I use steam as a form of energy--not contained within machines to replace human work--but to be set free within a specific environment for a specific duration of time. By expansion into the non-art spaces containing the audience, the work becomes inseparable from them. It acts to reduce the differences and heighten the similarities. Surfaces, distances, textures and volumes--the factors by which we orient ourselves in time and space--hover like apparitions in mid-air. Painted clouds reflect an older wish to grasp the intangible. Now artists are committed to presenting the thing itself: unpainted, unframed, unsigned and off its pedestal and into the street. Seen there clouds enhance vision, not obscure it. Steam enters the working day and dreaming night like a dancer onstage, energizing the spaces with continuous movement. And although the energy appears to dissipate by evaporation, it merely changes form according to the laws of energy conservation, and becomes an activating and melding agent for the audience. 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. A reciprocity is set up in which there is freedom to respond at any level of cognition and perception--from active participation to reflective contemplation. Steam works are events in which response is undictated, in which a single view of reality is unintended. Aesthetic experience is available to everyone; it is the work of the artist to create possibilities for more integrative experiences within contexts which are familiar; streets and plazas. The old meanings are retained and reintegrated into higher levels of awareness. Steam is, for me, a manifestation of the collective dream.

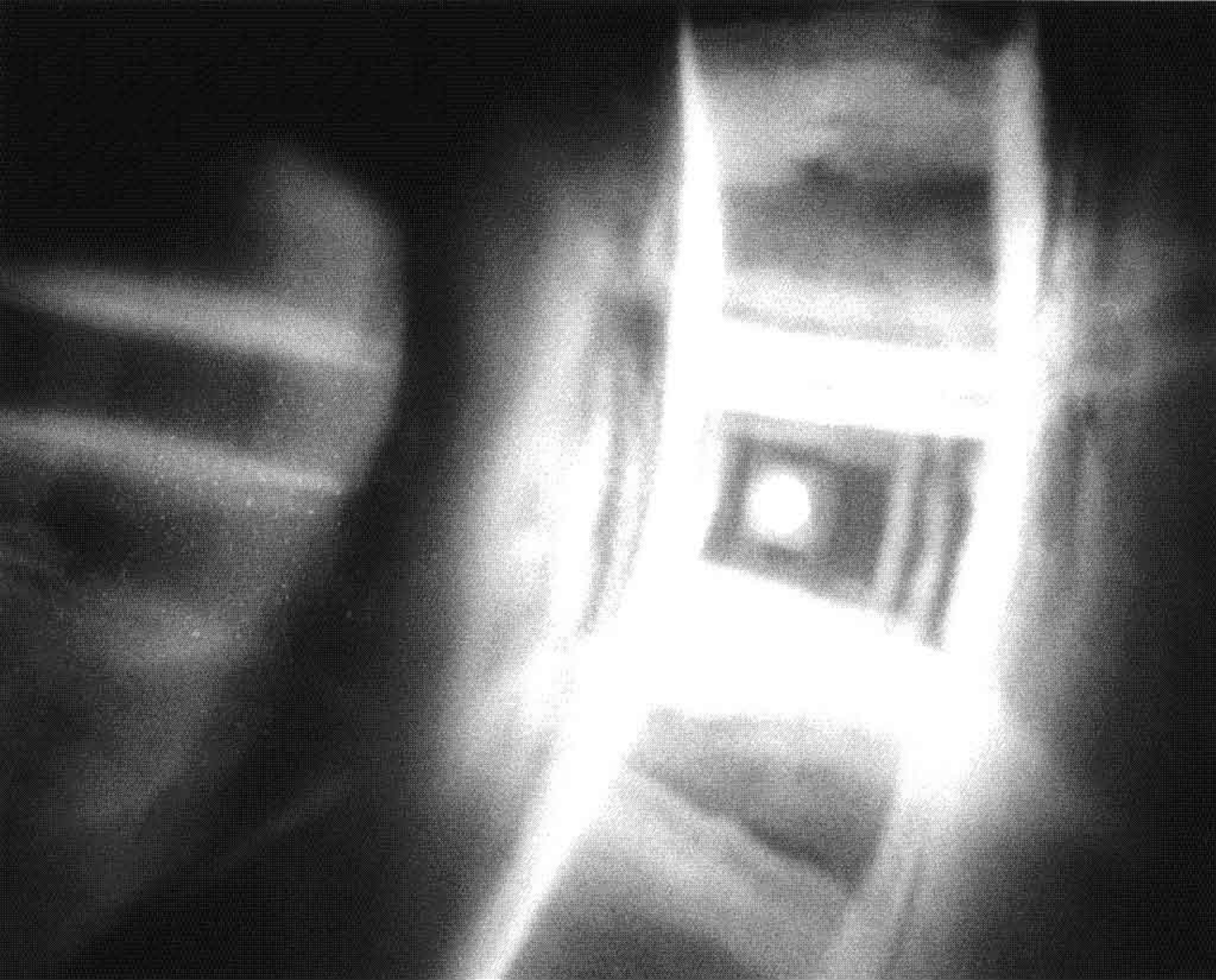
The work at the Whitney Museum is the fourth in a series of collaborations between Stan VanDerBeek and Joan Brigham using live steam as a screen for film images. In steam the film reaches the ultimate point of dematerialization. The audience is able physically to enter the image and the cloud and become 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.

The VanDerBeek/Brigham collaboration began in 1975 with "Fog Mist and Dreams" presented at Art Transition, sponsored by the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, followed the next year by "Under Aquarius," an event held in the Alumni Pool at MIT. There, the darkened room was filled with steam on which multiple slide and film images were projected directly above the audience/swimmers while, underwater, strobe lights were installed, cyalume lights floated and were tossed among the swimmers. Underwater video and a sonar sound system completed the setting. The audience was entirely free to participate physically in any way, at any level of perception or cognition it wished, changing the conditions for its responses at will. The following year "Under Aquarius" was presented with some modifications at Hampshire College and included performances by the American Underwater Band of Miami.

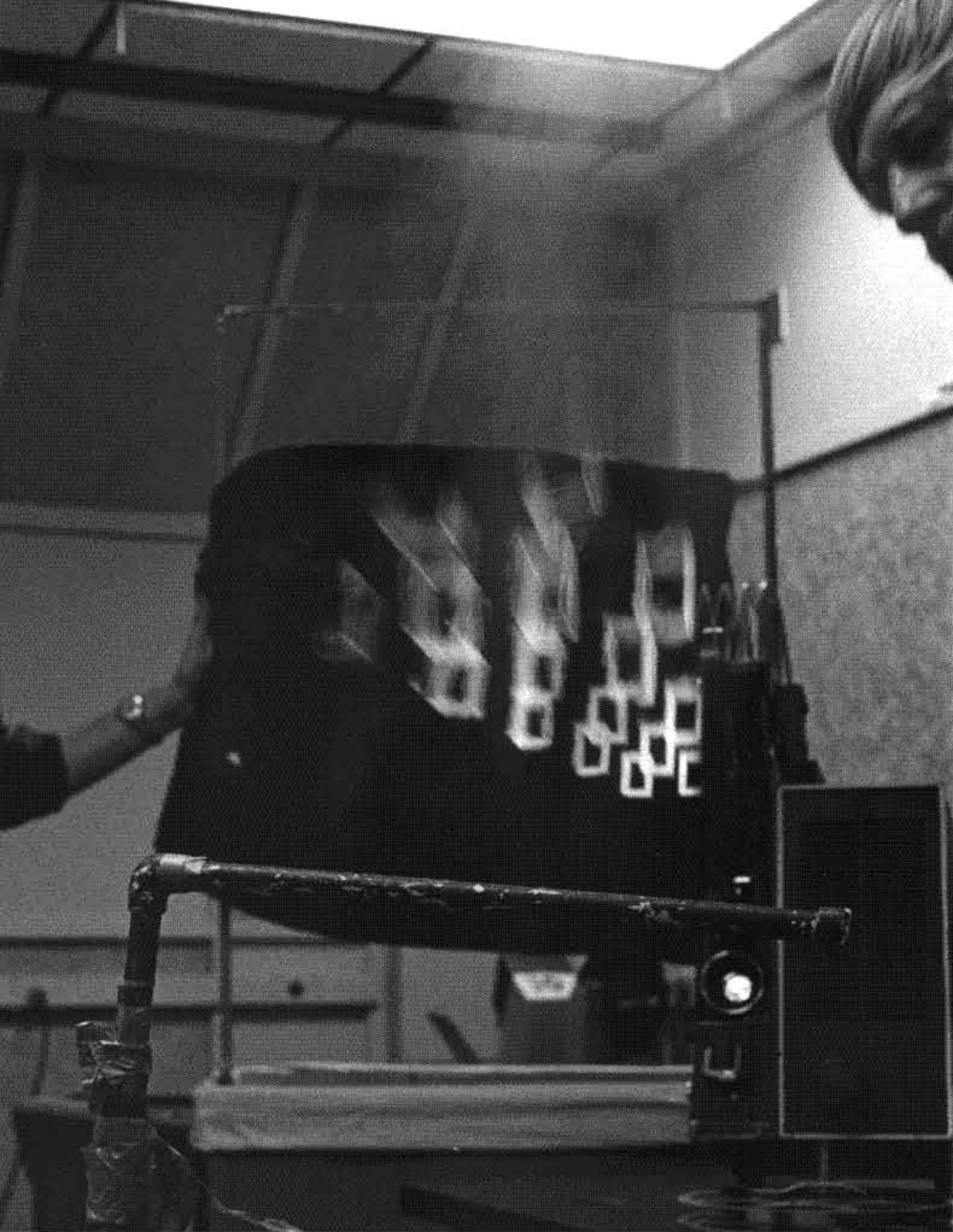
The present work at the Whitney Museum is a more developed version of the 1975 work. Here the steam issue is sequenced through a series of pipes to form moving steam waves which catch and refract the film images, forming and reforming them as the waves roll through the stream of projected light.

--Joan Brigham  
August 1979

























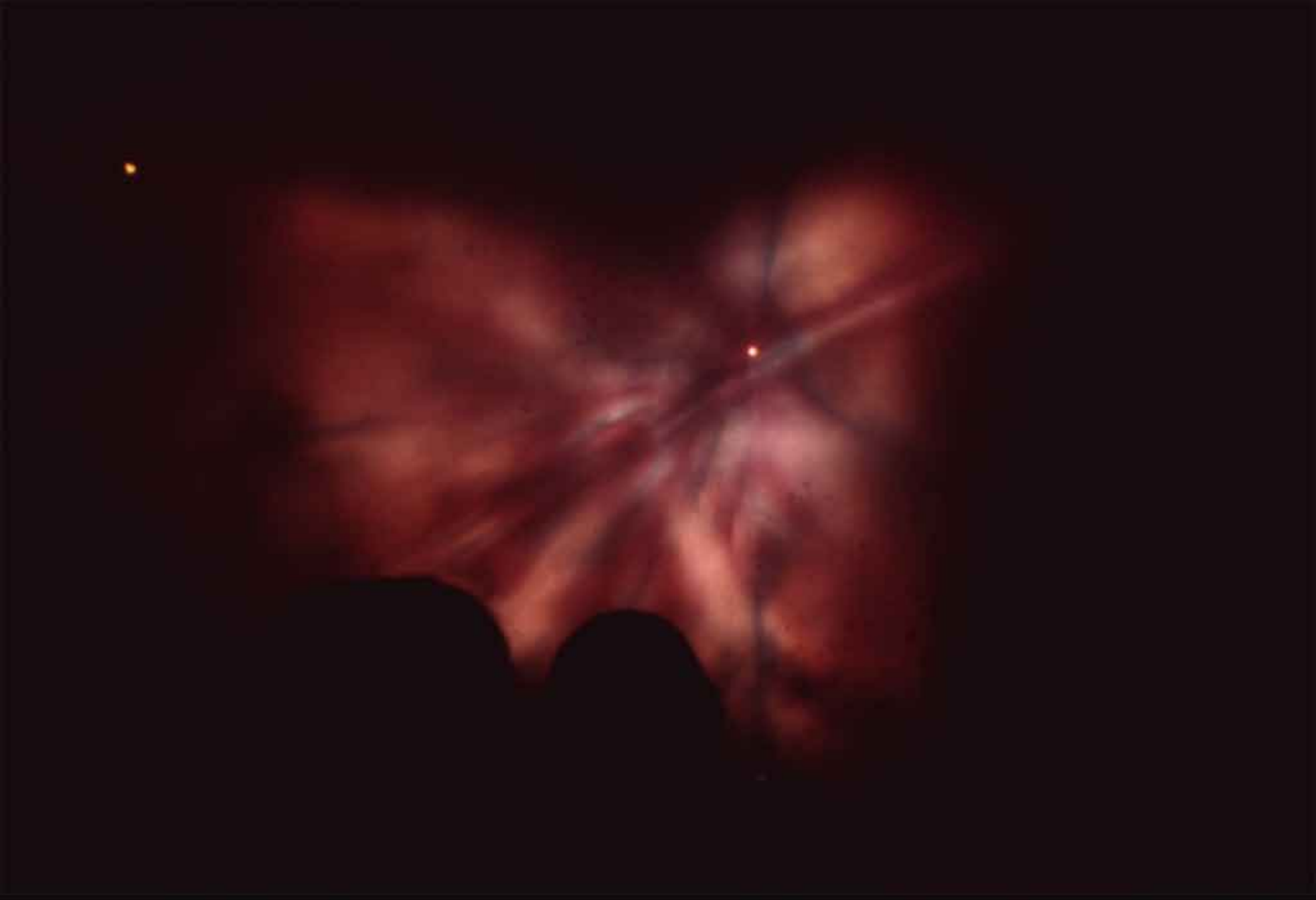








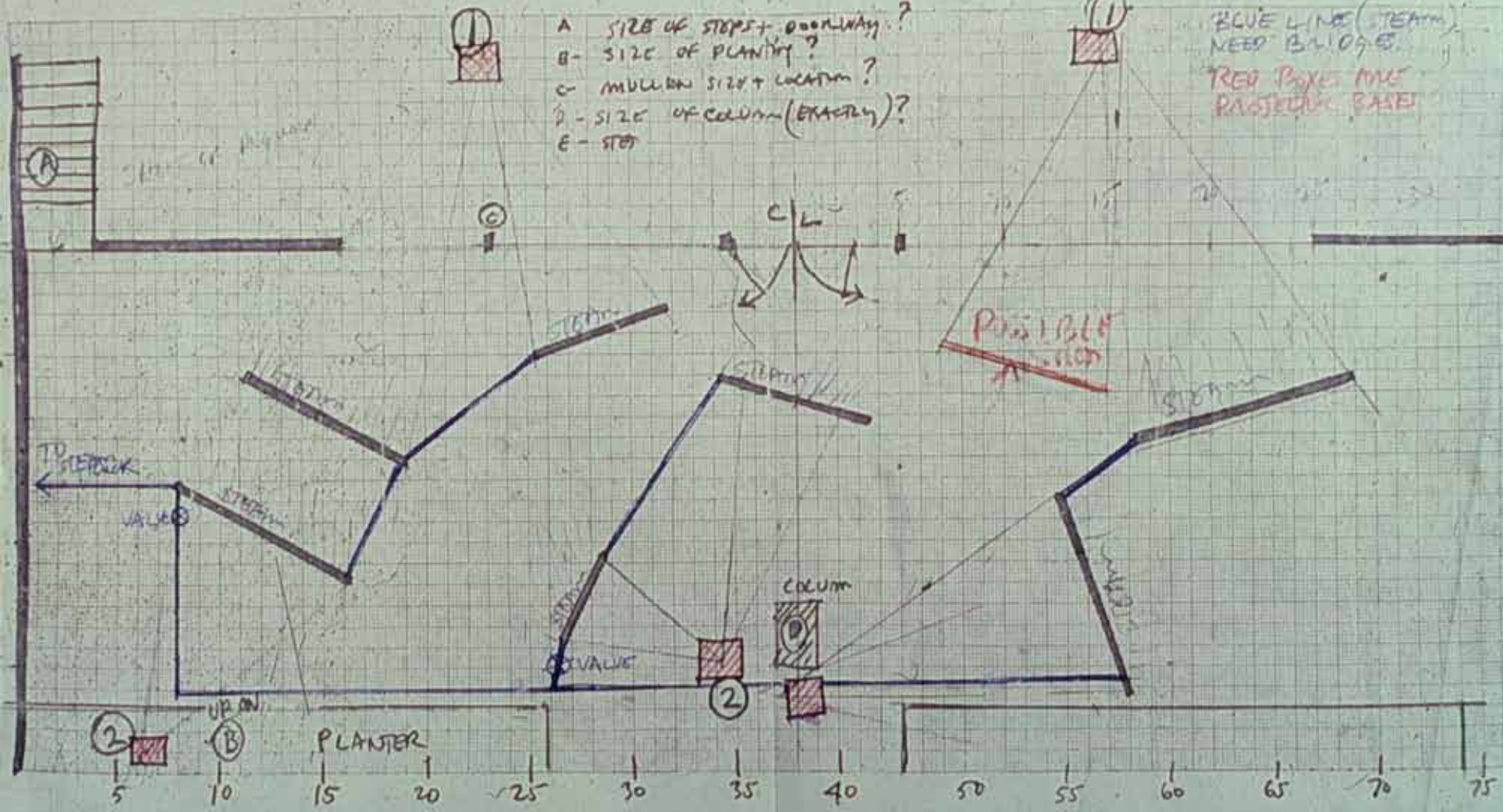




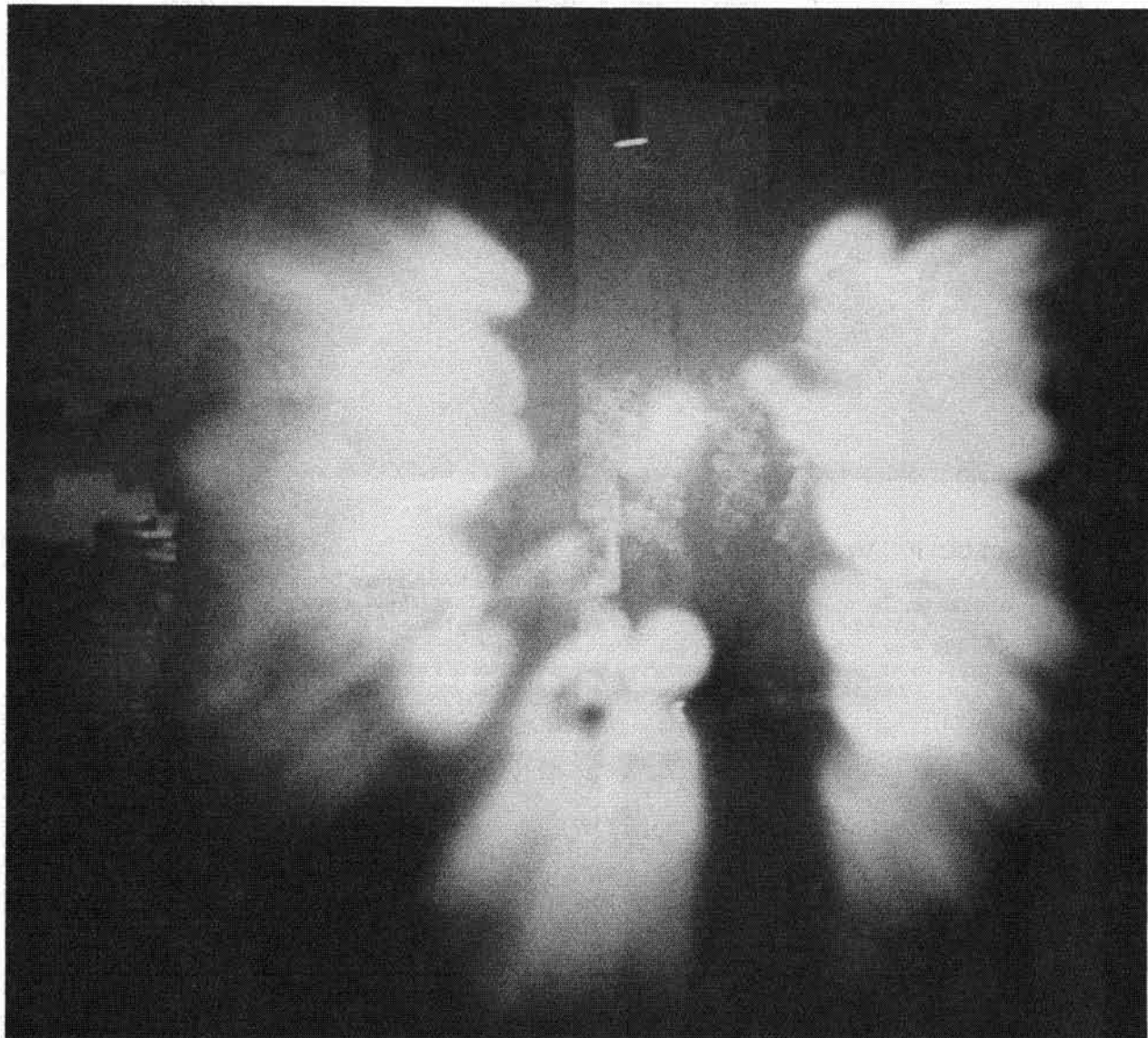
TO WHITEN.

- A - SIZE OF STOPS + DOORWAY?
- B - SIZE OF PLANTER?
- C - MULLION SIZE + LOCATION?
- D - SIZE OF COLUMN (EXACTLY)?
- E - STOP

BLUE LINE (TEAM)  
NEED BALOGE  
RED PAGES AND  
PROJECTOR BASE



## STEAM SCREEN/1979



“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.

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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 undictated, 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.

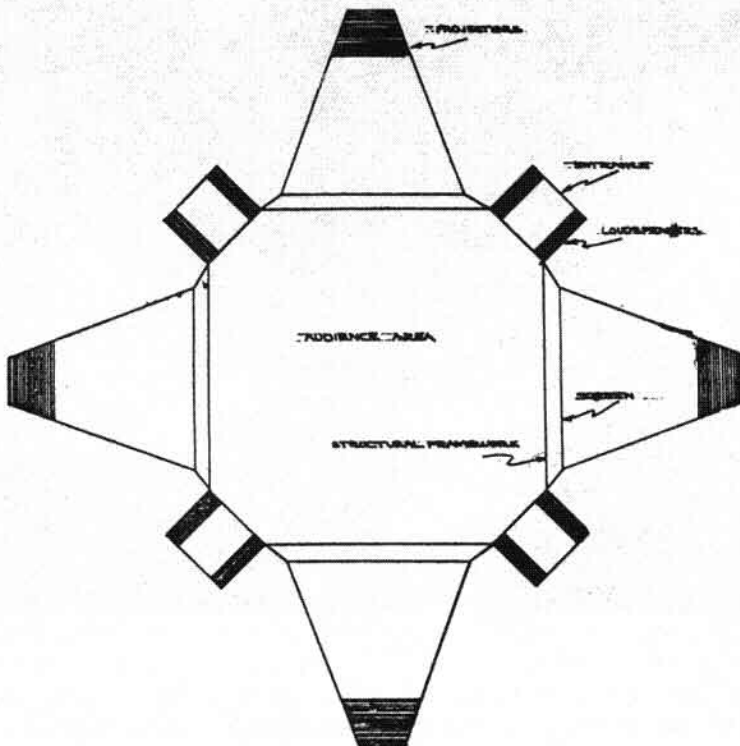
**Joan Brigham, 1979**



## MEMBRAIN THEATER/1980

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.

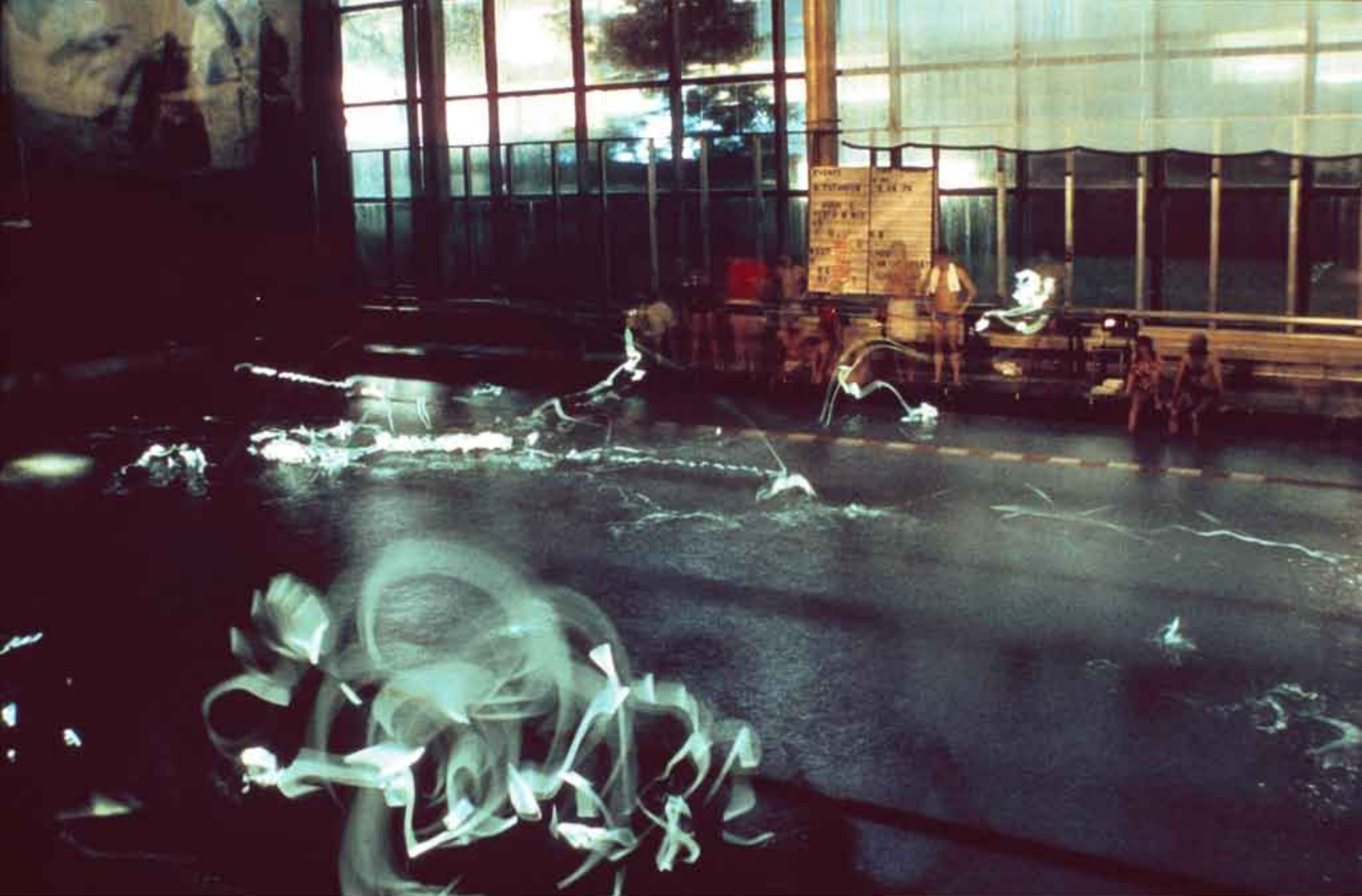
As holography comes more into play, the performance will be more intriguing, raising contradictions about the real and apparent. In my early work with Hart Perry and the Cabin Creek Foundation in New York, I used their system called "Intergrams"—in which they took 16mm film clips to be turned into 3-D 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.







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