Film: Videotape Program at Whitney

9 Items to Be Shown Through Thursday

By ROGER GREPSUN

The second of the Whitney Museum's videotape programs is much like the first, but with the difference, for me, that the medium begins to seem more familiar and freer, less a collection of special effects and more a continuity of gestures and responses. Thus, I found the spati-colored facial mugging in this week's segment from Nam June Paik's "Video Commune" a considerably more relaxed and pleasant experience than last week's. And the new work by Woody and Steina Vasulka, a gorgeous flux of macrocosmic and microcosmic images called "Elements," suggested a compacted power that may have been missing; or that I may simply have missed in a previous tape of the Vasulkas.

Like "Elements," most of the Whitney tapes are purely abstract, their images in one way or another programmed into the tape rather than photographed or pasted up or even drawn. Some of these tapes, for example "Aleph-Nul" by Shridhar Bapat and Charles Phillips and "Point of Inflection" by Stephen Beck and Richard Feliciano, are visually stunning. But none of them escape the tendency toward trivia that characteristically haunts attempts to confer actual movement upon forms that, if still, would suggest nothing so much as the potential for movement. The result is not realization but limitation. And for all their vigorous ingenuity, the tapes seem to channel rather than to free ways of seeing. I am somewhat more interested by what happens to ways of seeing in Richard Lowenberg's "Feed Fields Back," a movie reminiscence, in which a W. C. Fields comment about a wonderful experience he once had with a rathskeller so upset the lady he is speaking to that her face begins to distort and then to dissolve along the airwaves (or closed-circuit cable waves, or whatever). It seems a moment of considerably more interesting risk-taking than the wildest of abstract patternings, however they may be made to butt against your brain.

Out of the brain comes "Descartes" by Joanne Kyger and Robert Zagone, not only because it is brainy but also because it means to visualize thoughts—Cartesian thoughts, naturally, such as "I think; hence I am. Get the picture?" or "To doubt is a drag." This is the kind of game-playing in the midst of the general gloom that closed circuit television could use more of, and I liked it even when I didn't know what was going on.

Entertainment Events

Film

TONIGHT


CONCERTS

TODAY

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC, Leonard Bernstein conducts, with Martin and 1. ARNO, soprano, Philharmonic Hall, 2. JOHN FRUCHTWALD, clarinet, Lincoln Center Library-Museum, 4:30. MASTERCIRCLE CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA, Paul Randolph, conductor, Cathedral Hall, 8:30. JULIARD STRING QUARTET, with William Marzec, piano, Hunter College. 8:30. ALEXIS WEISSENSBERG, piano, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 8. 1. W. POST COLLEGE MUSIC FESTIVAL CONCERT, Carnegie Recital Hall, 2. HIGH SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS CONCERT CONCERT, 10 West 46th Street. 8. LAWRENCE WATERS, organ, Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, 8.