

Film: Videotape Show

10 Experimental Shorts in Whitney Program

By **ROGER GREENSPUN**

The film programs for the next two weeks at the Whitney Museum will consist not of films but of experimental videotapes broadcast by closed circuit to color TV monitors set in partitioned spaces arranged for intimate viewing. The audience will for the most part be asked to lounge on cushions on the floor.

There are 10 pieces in Program I. They range from 3 to 16 minutes in length and some are excerpts from longer works. A few were made on the standard commercial videotape two inches wide, but for this program they have been reduced to one-half inch tape with, I am told, an inevitable loss in color and image quality. Nevertheless, several of them managed to look pretty good.

What they do like varies considerably, with abstract images and movement patterns ranging from what you see when something is wrong with your TV set to more or less formal designs of great vigor and exuberance. Everything is always changing, and the magical mutation of forms, which seems so often to be the end product of experimental film, is virtually a first principle of experimental videotape. The Whitney program notes discuss "mandalic feedback patterns" and a tape "made in black and white and then colorized" (Richard Lowenberg's "See Mudra Gulp"), and you realize that in comparison with film you really are dealing with a new medium and the potentials of a radically new technology.

Having said that much I had better add that no one of the Whitney's abstract tapes struck me as terribly exciting, though some were pleasant and handsome, and two—Douglas Davis's black

The Program

A SPECIAL VIDEOTAPE SHOW, VIDEO PROGRAM I: VIDEO COMMUNE by Nam June Paik, 5 minutes; KEY SNOW by Woody and Steina Vasulka, 6 minutes; LET IT BE by Steina Vasulka, 3 minutes; SEQUENCES/NIGHT VIDEO by Douglas Davis (Excerpts); SEE MUDRA GULP by Richard Lowenberg, 6 minutes; COSMIC PORTAL 2 (short version) by Stephen C. Beck, 13 minutes; PLEASE SUPERIMPOSE, PLEASE? (excerpt) by John Randolph Carter, 16 minutes; SKIP SWEENEY FEEDBACK by Skip Sweeney, 5 minutes; BLACK VIDEO NO. 3 (excerpt) by Also Tambellini, 6 minutes; WEST POLE 1 by Robert N. Zagone (excerpt, 7 minutes). At the Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Avenue and 75th Street, through Dec 9. Film showings every day at 12 (except Thursday), 2 and 4. Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 6 and 8.

and white "Sequences/Night Video" and Stephen Beck's subtly colored "Cosmic Portal"—were witty and mysterious enough to make me want to see them again.

Four of the tapes feature the human face and/or form divine—but with a difference. In his "West Pole 1" Robert Zagone surrounds a pleasant West Coast female vocal group, the Ace of Cups, with a kind of light show of semidetached color. Nam June Paik parades the flexible contours of happy faces in "Video Commune." And in "Let It Be" Steina Vasulka isolates ears, eyes, forehead and especially tongue, teeth and lips mouthing the title song—ever so slightly out of synch.

But I especially liked "Please Superimpose, Please?" in which John Randolph Carter places a graceful young girl in one room and a graceful young man in another and then, by means of split screen and superimposition, monitors them as they become acquainted and begin to make ghostly love by television proxy. The sequence is funny and genuinely erotic and ultimately rather moving in its adjustments between the human couple and the freedoms and restrictions of the medium.