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Experimental Visions

AVANT GARDE VISIONS. A trio of experimental films: ** 'Piece Touchee' (1989), directed by Martin Arnold, 15 minutes; **½ 'Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol' (1990), directed by Janas Mekas, 35 minutes, and ***½ 'Sink or Swim,' directed by Su Friedrich, 48 minutes. Tomorrow at 7 p.m. at the New York Film Festival.

By Janice Berman

OF THE THREE FILMS that constitute the Film Festival's Avant Garde Visions program, one of them, Su Friedrich's "Sink or Swim" is wonderfully accessible.

Its story, about a girl's relationship with her father, is narrated by an adolescent female voice. In a series of connected anecdotes, funny and sad, it tells, sometimes through mythic parables, of a girl's struggle to understand her relationship to her brainy, insensitive but — possibly — still loving dad. The accompanying black and white footage ranges from closeups of zygotes and sperms to a preteen in her bathing suits — water is a frequent metaphor — shyly seeking approval. "Sink or Swim" is splendid.

"Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol," Jonas Mekas' series of home movies fully equipped with celebrities, has a certain keyhole-peeping charm. The soundtrack by the Velvet Underground includes plaintive lines about missing Andy. The movies, taken between 1960 and 1980 at Warhol's Montauk home, Union Square studio and assorted parties in

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between, are dotted with assorted Radziwills, Jaggers, Kennedys (young Caroline and John waterskiing but no Jackie) and John and Yoko, too. All it shows, really, is that the lives of the rich and famous (even the 15-minute famous) can be just as entertaining and just as aimless as yours or mine. Still, Mekas' affection for the departed artist comes across as genuine and touching. The film is dedicated to Lee Radziwill.

In "Piece Touchee," Martin Arnold doctors a few seconds of film depicting a typical domestic scene to achieve interesting, utterly peculiar results.

A husband enters his living room, stands behind his wife, who is sitting on a sofa reading, and touches her on the shoulder. The sequence runs backwards and forwards as he does it again and again and again, accompanied by a clanking, assembly line sound.

The couple, smiling, rise and move parallel with each other, opposite each other, and finally — it appeared — upside down with each other, over and over and over until we are unsure what the original looked like, so lost are they in some eternal, infernal, mechanical marital mambo. / ■