

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

• by B. Sternberg •

Florian Hopf, film journalist and critic from Germany, had been invited to attend the Toronto Festival of Festivals '85. Not wanting to come just as a tourist, he decided to make a videotape related to the Festival. The result was three one-hour programmes on Canadian culture/identity/vision/filmmaking as expressed by the many "serious" filmmakers (as Florian put it, another alternative to "alternative" or "experimental") he interviewed, among them Joyce Wieland, Michael Snow, Bruce Elder, Peter Mettler, Jean-Marc Larivière, Amnon Buchbinder and Barbara Sternberg.

Of Canada's cultural situation, Florian had this to say: "I was very astonished. I met a lot of people here who are in arts, film, painting, theatre, who create an incredibly intelligent and lively climate, who do incredibly good things which are not acknowledged by the official policy. It seems to me that there is a gap between the cultural policy of this country and art where you really find it here. The art is not there where the government gives money.

"The multicultural system as a democratic idea, an abstract idea is good, but the result is that the government is financing a kind of museum of ethnic traditions which will never come to form art. Already, art tries beyond this level to form something which is really Canadian and could be a basis for developing more.

"Every artist in Canada doesn't represent only a Canadian but also another nation, a family tradition. So if you help a real artist who does not claim to be only German or to be only Ukrainian or Russian or Turkish or something like that, you help these people to create contemporary art.

"I believe that young artists in this country have to become more aggressive, more united and more aggressive against the government. In the confrontation with the government they must learn that they are not beggars, they are not in a situation to beg for something. The government, the state owes them something, owes them help in their efforts. This means they must give up competition between themselves. On a certain political level they should unite and be organized and demand, really demand.

"Artists need help; the only people who can help them are the people who address their work to the public: journalists and critics. Artists at first

should declare their point of view to critics and then try to get together with them and find out a way to make...it must be tactics. As soon as you have

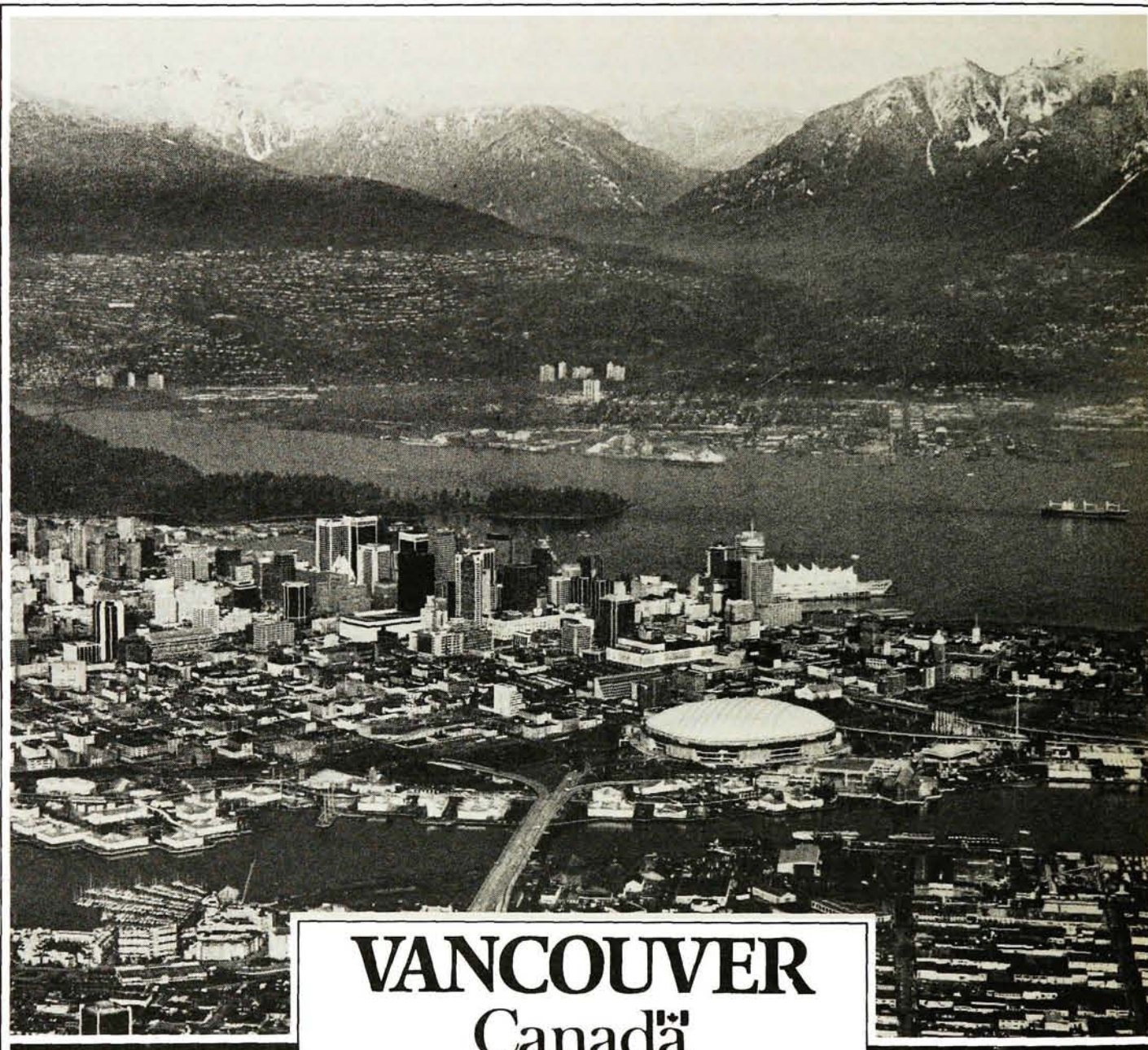
stirred up the interest of journalists, if you get an echo, you will be able to explain your ideas to the policy-makers and you won't go unheard.

Meanwhile, to coincide with the Berlin Film Festival, a group from the

Canadian film community was invited to West Germany by the German federal government. Toronto filmmaker Bruce Elder was among the group. I asked him about the trip.

"Well, the German government has a real concern with culture; Germans care about

their culture. I'm not sure what percentage of their budget is spent on culture, but I bet it's comparable to France which spends 1%. How much does Canada spend? .03%, I think. And the German government wants to make their art known abroad, so they have been inviting people from overseas —



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last year it was curators; this year, film people. The Goethe Institute invited me and asked me what I wished to do while there. I said: Meet Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Alexander Kluge, and see experimental films.

"I asked Syberberg about his views on technology. I began by saying that I found in his films a view of history as controlled by technology, an in-

exorable historical movement through technology in which our sense of good and evil is eroding and an attempt to take over through technology. Syberberg said to me: Why is it that only you Canadians can understand this? The last person I met who understood this was also from Toronto! I quipped back that I understood this from reading a German — Heidegger.

"German artists are taken seriously as intellectuals. When Alexander Kluge says something on film policy, he is listened to. Kluge is prominent amongst the intellectuals — he was trained in the Frankfurt School. But it still comes as a shock to a Canadian artist that a man in a shirt and tie who is an adjunct professor of law and who speaks like a philosopher, actually is one of the creators

of the New German Cinema. "There is a hard-core materialist cinema that is outside of the New German Cinema, but even some of these filmmakers have found support within the feature film industry; for example, Bastian Cleve. So experimental filmmakers can access funds that were set up for feature filmmaking. Moreover, there is a network of cinemas that sup-

port alternative cinema. About 1969, Ulrich Gregor established an alternative cinema in Berlin called Kino Arsenal, collected some wonderful people around him including Alf Bold, and began to screen historical films (Soviet classics, German classics) and experimental, alternative films — all together. Kino Arsenal became the model for a number of Kommunalis Kinos. There's one community cinema in every large town and most show experimental films amongst their programming. I asked a chap in Berlin how many screenings a hard-core, demanding experimental filmmaker like Klaus Wyborny or Christoph Janetzko might get — 25-50 was the answer. I was astonished. I spoke with Ernie Gehr recently (and he is one of the greatest experimental filmmakers ever) and he had three screenings of his newest film lined up! In Germany they have a system of exhibition that *regularly* programmes experimental film. Every town of any size has such a cinema.

"And the Berlin Film Festival devotes a large section of its programming — perhaps one-half the films shown — to independent and alternative cinema. This is the Film Forum and is run by Ulrich Gregor. A lot of people suggest that this is the really important part of the festival. In past years they've shown Snow, Gehr, Frampton. This year they had Werner Schroeter's *Der Rosenkoenig*, Wyborny's *Am Ronde des Finsternis*, Peter Greenaway's *Zed and Two Noughts*, a selection of films by Barbara Hammer, a selection of work, by the great American structuralist Morgan Fisher, the French experimental filmmaker Phillippe Garel's *Elle a passé tant d'heures sous les sunlights*. Also Ulrike Ottinger's new four-hour film, *China — Die Kuenste-Alltag*.

"The Germans, of course, were interested in Canadian film policy and I had to admit that I couldn't tell them much because things are changing now, so we have to wait for the government to decide. They made it quite clear that the German government would never consider changes in film funding without consulting all the major film groups in the country."

TORONTO — Alison Emilio, director of advertising and publicity for Norstar Releasing Inc. since the distributor's opening in September, 1984, will depart the company this spring to take up a post with Atlantic Releasing in New York. Emilio will become Atlantic's director of national advertising and expects to start May 1.

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he will conduct a ten-week workshop for professional actors on taking charge of their own career, via redoing resumes, setting up a Master Career File System, getting advance info on film and tv production, how to write letters that get auditions, on-camera commercial copy and 'office interviews', and much more!

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