

Strategies for Survival (1986)

00: Introduction (2023)

Strategies for Survival (1986) is an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness in 2023, funded by the BC History Digitization Program at the University of British Columbia.

Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists was organized by the Vancouver Artists' League, as a component part of *Vancouver: The Place, Vancouver: The People*, a City of Vancouver centennial project for 1986.

Find the rest of the project linked at unitpitt.ca



TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUOTE

INTRODUCTION (2023)

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

DOCUMENTS AND ACCESS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CLOSING REMARKS (2023)



[The TABLE OF CONTENTS is linked at the end of each section.]

TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS

00:00:00

00:00:21

00:03:54

00:05:32

00:07:40

00:12:44



[The TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS is linked at the end of each section.]

00: Introduction (2023)

QUOTE

The premise of the conference was that “the support systems for art in Canada [were] in crisis,” and the three-day conference, with artist speakers from ten different countries, “[would] provide the opportunity for artists to talk about what kind of alternative systems could be developed to ensure that artists and art in Canada [would] not only survive, but—

[Tone.]



[\[Return to the TABLE OF CONTENTS.\]](#)

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[\[Return to the TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS.\]](#)

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Welcome to *Strategies for Survival (1986)*, an archives project re-presenting the partial proceedings of *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, June 9, 10, and 11, 1986.

A component part of Vancouver: The Place, Vancouver: The People, a City of Vancouver Centennial Project organized by the Vancouver Artists' League and supported by ANNPAC/RACA—the Association of National Non-Profit Artists Centres/Regroupement d'artistes des centres alternatifs—the three-day conference brought together artists and cultural workers from across the city, the country, and the world, concurrent with Expo 86 in Vancouver.

From the original conference papers, the conference description:

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It is a conference where ten countries will be represented and artists will have the opportunity to discuss their viable survival in the world today.

The premise of this conference is that the systems of art in Canada are in crisis and that this crisis provides the opportunity for artists to talk about what kind of alternative system could be developed to ensure that artists and art in Canada not only survive but flourish.

Artists' Presentations, Performance and Film will examine definitions and conditions of art and art production. They will present and compare different forms of cultural and government support and policies as they exist in various economic and political systems.

By examining models of arts policy and organizations in different countries this conference will serve to develop the basis for a

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critical evaluation of the structure and system of art in Canada. From this evaluation we will draw guidelines for a responsive and culturally relevant system of support for Canadian artists at the federal, provincial and local levels, as well as present appropriate and workable models of organization for artists.

All speakers/artists were asked to address the following questions:

How are artists perceived in their particular culture and how is the artist defined?

What is in these definitions [that] artists value and want to defend and what is problematic?

Is art production work? Why or why not?

What are the regional and cross-cultural factors that influence the making and the perception of art?

Do women artists have equal and viable access to the support mechanisms of art production?

What are the aesthetic contexts of art making?

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edited transcript
textural transcript
Introduction (2023)



What social limitations are placed on artistic expression? How do artists organize?



How is art production supported in various countries?



What implications does the nature of this support have for organization?



”

[Tone.]



[\[Return to the TABLE OF CONTENTS.\]](#)



edited transcript



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[\[Return to the TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS.\]](#)



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It's 2023 now, and this project is being produced by UNIT/PITT, an artist-run centre that has been without a centre for several years now, and the Vancouver Artists' League is long gone, their archive neither consolidated nor complete. When UNIT/PITT volunteers found a box of conference materials, including 11 cassette tapes, in their archives—and in a recent surprise discovery, three more!—the digitization and transcription of the audio cassettes was proposed, to make

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Because for all the generative conversation that you'll hear over the next fifteen hours and counting, a three-day conference can only be an opportunity to talk about the problems often called "intractable." Like most archive projects, this is both in progress and of its time—it was put together in 2023 on a budget numerically smaller than the conference almost 40 years ago—it's no wonder that survival is still on our minds.

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[Return to the [TABLE OF CONTENTS.](#)]

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[Return to the [TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS.](#)]

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As an archives project, you may experience some of my transcriber's frustration at the words rendered difficult or even impossible by the recording on cassette tape—I marked these in red brackets throughout the transcripts.



And you'll see that there are two transcripts for each audio recording—the textural transcript with all the *ums*, *ahs*, pauses, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of the spoken word, is an attempt to match the archival audio as close as possible—the difficulties, discontinuities, dismissals, and distortions of language turned out to be one of the underlying discussions throughout the conference.

Simultaneous English/French and French/English translation was continuously available over the three days of the conference, but—je m'excuse auprès de mes amis francophones, mais cette conférence s'est déroulée presque complètement en anglais, et ce projet aussi, ne tenait pas

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Although simultaneous translation was not assured for this project in 2023, a lightly edited transcript is presented alongside the textural one, to enable broader access in the present—any introduction of new difficulties, discontinuities, dismissals, and distortions is, of course, inevitable, but these errors are my own.

Closing remarks will be shared later in the summer, but if you have any recollections or information that you'd like to share about the 1986 conference, or new thoughts in 2023, send us a message at info@unitpitt.ca anytime. If you follow along or consult even one of the transcripts for your own research, we'd love to hear from you.

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 [\[Return to the TABLE OF CONTENTS.\]](#)



edited transcript



textural transcript



[linked here.](#)

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[\[Return to the TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS.\]](#)



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In 2023, this project is produced by [UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness](#), a charitable non-profit artist-run organization located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish First Nations, in Vancouver BC.

I'd like to acknowledge Brit Bachmann, former Director, and the present Director, Catherine de Montreuil, as well as Sara Ellis, a board member and head of the Archives Committee, designer Ricky Castanedo Laredo for our early conversations, and the many volunteers, funders, and others who make UNIT/PITT's programs possible. Further support for this project comes from [ReIssue.pub](#), an online art writing magazine, edited by Casey Wei, and published by UNIT/PITT.

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I’d also like to thank Dan Pon, Archives Manager at [grunt gallery](#); Karen Knights, Manager, and Emma Metcalfe-Hurst, Archivist, at the Christa Dahl Media Library & Archive at [VIVO Media Arts Centre](#), for their generous sharing and correspondence.

As this is an archives project, I’d also like to thank all those who have cared for the UNIT/PITT archives in the past and the present, and regionally, for the archives of our artist-run centres and other repositories honouring arts practices.

Thanks also to artist Hank Bull, who—as a Western Front original, a former member of the Vancouver Artists’ League, and participant in the 1986 proceedings—has supported this project from the beginning.

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I'd also like to thank, for technical assistance and further support, the artist Khan Lee, while acknowledging all errors as my own. For their readings from the archival papers, I'd like to thank the following artists in, from, or via Vancouver: Emily Hermant, Fabiola Carranza, Jinhan Ko, Katrina Niebergal , Maegan Hill-Carroll, Mike Bourscheid, Sydney Hermant, Sydney Koke, and Vanessa Brown.

An artist-run centre established in 1975, UNIT/PITT was the site of many meetings of the Vancouver Artists' League in the 1980s—long since disbanded, the Vancouver Artists' League left traces in the UNIT/PITT archives, now boxed, and some digitized! Of course, this project—and these thanks—would be impossible without their

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And for the Pitt, I'm Francesca Bennett, an uninvited guest on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, where I have supported art and artists since 2003, primarily in collections and archives, but also as an artist, curator, writer, and administrator. As project coordinator in 2023, I'd like to say a special thanks to Marion Barling, conference coordinator in 1986.



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[Return to the [TABLE OF CONTENTS.](#)]



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[Return to the [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#).]

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[Return to the [TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS](#).]