

Strategies for Survival (1986)

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

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 \(2023\)](#)

[DOCUMENTS AND ACCESS](#)

[DAY 2, SPEAKER 1](#)

[BIOGRAPHY \(1986\)](#)

[SURPRISE!](#)

[Q&A](#)

[CLOSING REMARKS \(1986\)](#)

[CLOSING REMARKS \(2023\)](#)



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

TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS

[00:00:00](#)

[00:00:21](#)

[00:00:49](#)

[00:02:00](#)

[00:02:50](#)

[00:03:59](#)

[00:04:19](#)

[00:11:17](#)

[00:11:56](#)



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

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

QUOTE

Translator (Mary):

Even though the NDP might come into power or something like this—and it is sort of leaning towards a socialist scale—you know, I hope the same thing doesn't happen here that has happened in Poland.

[Jerzy Onuch starts speaking in Polish.]



It's not a fair comparison.

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

00:00:00

Translator (Mary):

Even though the NDP might come into power or something like this—and it is a socialist, sort of leaning towards a socialist scale—we just, you know, I hope the same thing doesn't happen here that happened— that has happened in Poland.

[Jerzy interrupts, speaking in Polish, and they talk over each other for a moment:]



It's not a fair comparison.

[Tone.]

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

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

INTRODUCTION (2023)

Strategies for Survival (1986), is an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness, 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.



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

00:00:21

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

Welcome to *Strategies for Survival (1986)*, an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness, 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.

[Tone.]



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

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

DOCUMENTS AND ACCESS

For expanded access, this document presents textural and lightly edited transcripts of the presentation.

On the right is the timestamped textural transcript, with all the *ums*, *ahs*, pauses, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of the spoken word, meant to be read with the audio, linked [here](#).

This column on the left provides the lightly edited, easy-to-read transcript. This can be read with or without the audio, and subject headings from the original conference papers, or added for this project, are linked in the [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) above; matching the timestamps at right.



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

00:00:49

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

If you've already listened to the 2023 introduction (track 00, linked [here](#)), you may wish to skip ahead in this text [to] and then skip ahead in the audio to match the timestamp.

[All the timestamps are linked in the [TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS](#) above.]

If you haven't listened to the introduction, or any of the other recordings, you'll want to know that this is a multi-part project, presenting archival audio recordings alongside textural and lightly edited transcripts, for expanded access.

On the left of each transcript document is a lightly edited, easy-to-read transcript that, in some cases, directly excerpts the original conference papers; this can be read with or without the audio.

(By the way, if you're listening to the audio recording, and wondering, "where are the transcripts?" you can find links to those documents in the audio description!)

This column on the right presents the textural



edited transcript



textural transcript



transcript, with all the *ums*, *ahs*, pauses, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of the spoken word, to match the archival audio as close as possible—it may be difficult to read this side of the page without the relevant audio recording, [linked [here](#)].



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



07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

DAY 2, SPEAKER 1

Jerzy Onuch, an artist from Poland, and founder of Pracownia Dziekanka in Warsaw, was the first speaker on the second day of the conference. The recent surprise discovery of another cassette tape documenting his presentation means that we'll have more to share from the archives soon; this draft transcript presents only part of the Q&A, timestamps omitted; Jerzy's biography is inserted below, from the original conference papers.

To note, Jerzy Onuch's paper was published shortly after the conference, slightly edited for the exhibition catalogue of *Contemporary Art from Poland*, a group exhibition held at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, July 5–28, 1985.

|| 1986 / 📺 1986

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

00:02:00

Jerzy Onuch, an artist from Poland, and founder of Pracownia Dziekanka in Warsaw, was the first speaker on the second day of the conference. The recent surprise discovery of another cassette tape documenting his presentation means that we'll have more to share from the archives soon; this draft transcript presents only the introduction and part of the Q&A, timestamps omitted.

To note, Jerzy Onuch's paper was published shortly after the conference, slightly edited for the exhibition catalogue of *Contemporary Art from Poland*, a group exhibition held at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, July 5–28, 1985.

After the tone, I'll read Jerzy Onuch's biography from the original conference papers. After another tone, we'll join the conference in 1986.

|| 1986 / 📺 1986

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

edited transcript

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

BIOGRAPHY (1986)

JERZY ONUCH Poland

Jerzy Onuch's work goes through a full range of the visual arts. Drawing and painting, photography and film-making, performance and installation are all media he works comfortably in.

Onuch has studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and worked from 1976–81 with J. Baldyga and L. Szajna. His work has been shown extensively throughout Poland and he is co-founder and director of the Pracownia Dziekanka Academy of Fine Arts, the multi-disciplinary art centre in Warsaw. This centre remains an impressive showcase for work in performance and installation inside and outside Poland.

Important work done during the Solidarity period of the seventies included an international symposium on performance that brought artists such as Joseph Beuys to Warsaw.

Onuch's experience with this and other

00:02:50

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

Jerzy Onuch's work goes through a full range of the visual arts. Drawing and painting, photography and film-making, performance and installation are all media he works comfortably in.

Onuch has studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and worked from 1976–81 with J. Baldyga and L. Szajna. His work has been shown extensively throughout Poland and he is co-founder and director of the Pracownia Dziekanka Academy of Fine Arts, the multi-disciplinary art centre in Warsaw. This centre remains an impressive showcase for work in performance and installation inside and outside Poland.

Important work done during the Solidarity period of the seventies included an international symposium on performance that brought artists such as Joseph Beuys to Warsaw.

Onuch's experience with this and other centres in Poland will make him a valuable participant in this conference.



centres in Poland will make him a valuable participant in this conference.



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



edited transcript



[Tone.]



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

textural transcript



07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)



SURPRISE!

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

The recent surprise discovery of three more cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT archives turned up a missing tape from Jerzy Onuch's presentation—we'll keep you updated by newsletter and on social media.



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

00:03:59

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

The recent surprise discovery of three more cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT archives turned up a missing tape from Jerzy Onuch's presentation—we'll keep you updated by newsletter and on social media.

After another tone, we'll join the conference in 1986, for the Q&A in progress.

[Tone.]



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

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

Q&A

Translator (Mary):

It does certain things for you, regardless of whether you want them to be done for you or not.



Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]



Question [01], from the audience:

Okay, but there's sort of a secondary problem. The next Minister-to-be to replace Masse, at a recent reading—

[Speaker whistles at his own stumble.]

—a meeting recently—with performers, CBC people, and stuff like that—she asked around the room, you know, “Who here voted Tory?”—that’s the Conservative Party—and no one raised their hands. She said, “Well, you all voted NDP, eh?”

00:04:19

Translator (Mary):

It ah— does certain things for you, regardless of whether you want them to be done for you or not.



Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]



Question [01], from the audience:

Okay, but there's— sort of a secondary problem. The ah, next Minister-to-be to replace Masse, at a recent reading— meeting—

[Speaker whistles at his own stumble.]

—a meeting recently with ah— ah— performers, CBC people, and stuff like that, and she asked around the room, ah— you know, “Who here voted Tory?”—that’s the Conservative Party, and no one

edited transcript

↑

↓

↑

⌂

⌂

↓

↑

⌂

⌂

↓

↑

⌂

⌂

↓

↑

⌂

⌂

↓

↑

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

↓

⌂

↓

⌂

↓

⌂

↓

⌂

↓

⌂

↓

But the majority of artists in this country are—I think—Social Democrats. Someday we’ll have state power. So, the questions you raise or experience right now in Poland are ones that we’ll have to address.



I just wondered if you could give us some thoughts on that matter. When the working people do have state power, how best to address the art? Should we support artists’ unions? Or should we let artists sort of drift off on their own without support? Questions about that—

Translator (Mary):

[Speaks to Jerzy in Polish.]



Jerzy Onuch:

[Jerzy makes an impatient sound, like “beuf”, and the translator laughs. Jerzy speaks in Polish.]



edited transcript

raised their hands. She said, “Well, you all voted NDP, eh?”

But ah— the majority of artists in this country—I think—are Social Democrats, um— someday we’ll have state power. So, the questions you raise or experience right now in Poland are ones that we’ll have to address.



I— I just wondered if you could give us some thoughts on that matter. When the working people do have state power, how— how best to address the art? Should we have supported artists’ unions? Or should we let artists sort of drift off on their own without support? Questions about that—

Translator (Mary):

[Speaks to Jerzy in Polish.]



Jerzy Onuch:

[Jerzy makes an impatient sound, like “beuf”, and the translator laughs. Jerzy speaks in Polish.]

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

Translator (Mary):

[Laughing slightly.]

He thinks that that is somewhat farfetched, because although the artists in Canada, you know, do experience difficulties, these difficulties are very, very different from the difficulties that artists in Poland do experience.



Even though the NDP might come into power or something like this—and it is sort of leaning towards a socialist scale—you know, I hope the same thing doesn't happen here that has happened in Poland.

[Jerzy interrupts, speaking in Polish, and they talk over each other for a moment:]



It's not a fair comparison.

Jerzy Onuch:

edited transcript

Translator (Mary):

[Laughing slightly.]

He thinks that— that that_ ah— that is um, somewhat farfetched, because um, although the artists in Canada, you know, do experience difficulties, these difficulties are very, very different from the difficulties that artists in Poland do experience and um—



Even though the NDP might come into power or something like this—and it is a socialist, sort of leaning towards a socialist scale—we just, you know, I hope the same thing doesn't happen here that happened— that has happened in Poland.

[Jerzy interrupts, speaking in Polish, and they talk over each other for a moment:]



07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

[Speaks in Polish.]



Translator (Mary):

Okay. And if people here are interested in such things, in these kind of unions, it would give you certain benefits, like you know, a certain amount of financial funding, as has already been mentioned, physical well-being to some extent, I suppose, good living conditions.

But, it would make you have to write off any other, you know, things that you want to make statements on, your individual thoughts, and so on and so forth.

There's a trade off!



[Jerzy speaks briefly in Polish.]



Question 2, from the audience:

Is there any level of artwork in Poland that exists besides state- or church-supported? Either very, very underground and not very public, or so

edited transcript

It's not a fair comparison.

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]



Translator (Mary):

Okay. And ah- if— if people here are interested in such things well then, um, in— in these kind of unions, ah— that would require you to— well it would— it would give you certain benefits, like you know, um, ah— a certain amount of finan— financial funding as has already been mentioned, um, you know, physical well-being to some extent, I suppose, you know, good living conditions.

But, it would, ah— make you have to sort of write off your— your— any other, you know, things that you want to make statements on, your individual ah— thoughts, and um, so on and so forth.

There's a trade off!



[Jerzy speaks briefly in Polish.]



textural transcript

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

commercial [that it's] on the international market?
Is there any level of artwork that has a larger
degree of freedom?

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]

Translator (Mary):

In Poland as well, there is this sort of commercial
art production. If you want to buy it, it is there. It's
ah— I don't know, generic art.

I don't know what to call it!

I'm sorry, I hope I haven't offended anybody!

But, yes, it does exist, it does exist.

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish, Mary seems to make a
suggestion at the end.]

Question 2, from the audience:

Um, is there any level of artwork in Poland that
exists, uh, besides state- or church-supported? Ah,
either very, very underground and not very public,
or so commercial on the international market? Is
there any level of artwork that has maybe a— a
larger degree of freedom?

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]

Translator (Mary):

Um, in Poland as well, there is this ah— sort of
commercial art production. If you want to buy it, it
is there. Ah— it's ah— I don't know, generic art.

I don't know what to call it!

I'm sorry, I hope I haven't offended anybody!

edited transcript

textural transcript

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

✕ ✕

Translator (Mary):

Addressing the question of underground movement, or art or so on, this is exactly what Pracownia Dziekanka is! It is an alternative to the state, to commercial art, to the church domination.



It is a certain form. It is not what we could call extreme underground art—because there are people who don't want to align themselves with anybody—and largely, you know, they display in private galleries, which there aren't very many of—like, you could count them on your one hand in Poland.

I don't know, that's about it. There's the state, the church, the—

Jerzy Onuch:

[Interrupts, speaks in Polish.]

✕

But, um, yes, it does exist, it does exist.

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish, Mary seems to make a suggestion at the end.]



Translator (Mary):

Um— as addressing the question of underground movement, or art or so on, um— this is exactly what Pracownia Dziekanka is! It is an alternative to the state, to commercial art, to the church domination.



Um, and it— it is a certain form— it is— it is not what we could call extreme underground art, because ah, there are people who don't want to align themselves with anybody and— largely they are a part of, ah, you know, they display in private galleries, which there aren't very many of—like, you could count them on your hand, on your one hand, um, in Poland.

↑

Translator (Mary):

And then there is something like Pracownia Dziekanka, which is a radical statement in art, but it doesn't want to make any waves, you know, so that its existence won't be threatened.

↑

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]

↑

Translator (Mary):

It is a place for artists—church and politics can go elsewhere.

↑

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

↓

edited transcript

↑

And ah— I don't know, that's— that's about it. There— there's— there's the state, the church, the—

↑

Jerzy Onuch:

[Interrupts, speaks in Polish.]

↑

Translator (Mary):

↑

Ah— and then there— there is something like Pracownia Dziekanka, which is a radical statement in art, but it doesn't want to ah— make any waves, so that it— you know, so that its— its— its position would be threatened, its existence would be threatened.

↑

Jerzy Onuch:

[Speaks in Polish.]

↑

Translator (Mary):

↑

And, it is a place for artists—church and politics

↓

textural transcript

↑

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)



edited transcript



can go elsewhere.



textural transcript



07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

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



CLOSING REMARKS (1986)

Unidentified speaker:

Mary, at this time, we're going to have to break.
Thank you for the translation. And thank you Jerzy,
and thanks again, Hank.

*
**

Now we're just going to be having a coffee break,
Marion?

Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

We will have a 10-minute coffee break, for which
we will have to pay for today.

I just want to remind you that the paper sheets
are on the right-hand side. So, if you want any of
the speakers' sheets, please sign up now, and we
will do the run immediately after the coffee break.

Thank you.

[Applause from the crowd.]

00:11:17

Unidentified speaker:

Mary, at this time, we're going to have to break.
Thank you for the translation. And thank you Jerzy,
and thanks again, Hank.

*
**

And ah, now we're just going to be having a coffee
break, Marion?

Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

Yeah, we will have a ten-minute coffee break, for
which we will have to pay for today.

And um, I just want to remind you that um, the
paper sheets are on the right-hand side. So, if you
want any of the speakers' sheets, please sign up
now, and we will do the run immediately after the
coffee break.

Thank you.

[Applause from the crowd.]

edited transcript

textural transcript

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)



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

edited transcript



[Tone.]

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

textural transcript

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)

CLOSING REMARKS (2023)

Thanks for reading. This was just one part of a multi-part project documenting *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League in 1986—if you're following along, all of the transcripts and audio recordings are linked directly here, or can be found at unitpitt.ca

You may have noticed that, like most archives projects, this one is in progress. 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



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

00:11:56

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

Thanks for listening. This was just one part of a multi-part project documenting *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League in 1986—if you'd like to follow along, all of the transcripts and audio recordings are linked at unitpitt.ca, [directly [here.](#)]

And, you may have noticed that, like most archives projects, this one is in progress. 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



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

07: Jerzy Onuch (Poland)