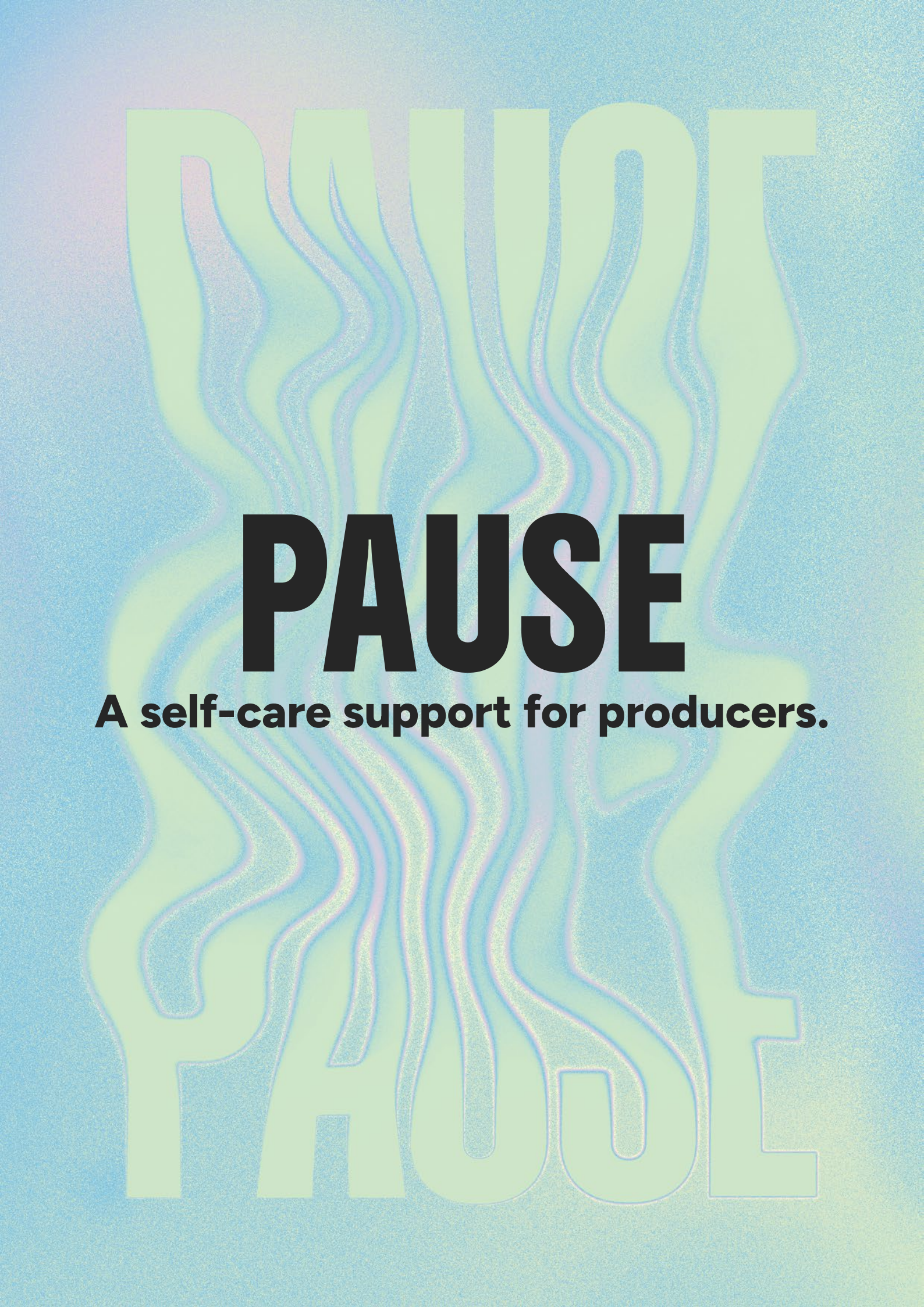


The background features a light blue gradient with a series of vertical, wavy lines in shades of green and yellow. The word "PAUSE" is written in large, bold, black capital letters, centered horizontally and partially obscured by the wavy lines.

PAUSE

A self-care support for producers.

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Burnout and the Arts: A Systemic Crisis

Nassy Konan,
Producer Gathering

Burnout is not just personal – it is systemic. It is the result of a world that demands constant productivity, relentless resilience, and unquestioning compliance. It is not just about working too hard but about working within often unsustainable industries that thrive on overwork, financial instability, and a scarcity mindset.

For those of us working in the arts – producers, cultural workers, facilitators, and organisers – burnout is not just about workload. It is about the activism embedded in our work, the emotional labour of advocating for artists and communities that have been pushed to the margins, and navigating hostile or indifferent funding systems. Many of us fight for change while struggling to meet our own basic needs.

Conversations with mentors and coaches – guided by the principle of “patterns, not particulars” – brought me back to four key themes: power, trust, risk, and capacity. These are not abstract ideas – they shape every part of how we work. As producers, we must ask ourselves:

- What power do I need in a project?
- How do I pay attention to and trust my sensing abilities?
- How do I assess the seriousness and accountability of a project team before I say yes?
- What permissions do I need to protect my wellbeing?

We work in a field that celebrates radical ideas but fails to create radical working conditions that support the people behind them. The system itself fuels exhaustion – funding structures that demand constant justification, contracts that exploit emotional investment, and an economy that rewards overwork but punishes rest. Yet we continue, because we believe in the work, in the artists we support, and in the communities that rely on cultural spaces for connection, reflection, and resistance.

The current funding landscape in the UK is only making this worse, with funding bodies reconsidering their models due to cuts, creating further instability for freelancers and small organisations. The ability for producers to effectively support artists through securing funding, managing budgets and handling logistics, when resources are so tightly stretched, threatens the cultural sector’s sustainability. Producers are rarely prioritised in funding models, leaving them overstretched and underpaid.

Moreover, **censorship** is becoming an increasing concern, with many funders applying pressure to organisations and their workers to remain politically **neutral** in the face of global conflicts that directly impact the communities they serve. Last year, I had to step down from a Board role after sharing anti-genocide content on my personal social media platform, deemed inappropriate by people I trusted as allies. I also had to turn down a job because I was told that including a resource link on the ongoing global conflict in my personal email could affect relationships with people in the organisation.

This increasing expectation for self-censorship and pressure to remain ‘neutral’ is deeply concerning, especially as many of us work directly with marginalised communities affected by political violence and displacement. *How can we advocate for artists and cultural workers if we are constantly being silenced, policed, or excluded for speaking out?* The impact of these things on our mental health and wellbeing as human beings trying to conduct our work with our ethics still maintained, cannot be overstated.

I've come to better understand how structurally embedded the power imbalances are between institutions, organisations, and freelance workers. We are expected to hold risk, deliver impact, and remain accountable, often while navigating unclear structures, complex processes, and a lack of meaningful support or accountability. This imbalance reinforces structural inequalities and creates unsafe conditions for those of us working independently and ethically within systems that were never built with us in mind.

So where do we go from here? We believe in building systems of freelancer-led care, solidarity, and resistance. We draw on models like Laloux's sensing organisations, and freelance rest policies developed by Watershed, to guide our thinking.

As this world continues to polarise, as the demands on creative workers continue to increase, we cannot afford to normalise or ignore burnout as the price of doing meaningful work. We must create alternatives, together. Because if we do not redefine what sustainable creative work could look like, the system will continue to define it for us – and we already know where that road leads. We need to fight for better pay, better working conditions, and better structural support for producers and cultural workers. This means advocating for policy change, pushing back against censorship, and ensuring that funders prioritise the long-term sustainability of the freelance arts sector.

Burnout is not just a personal struggle; it is a collective crisis. The solution cannot be left to individuals – it must be systemic, political, and community-driven. Only then can we build a future where cultural workers are not just surviving, but thriving. While we work together towards these aims, we recognise there is an immediate gap. Producer Gathering exists to meet you where you are. Not just as a future vision – but as a **present support system**, a network of peers and advocates who understand the weight of this work.

You can also read a brilliant reflective piece by Ema Boswood on the Producer Gathering website, exploring the lived experience of burnout from a producer's perspective – alongside other resources, case studies, and our Producer Directory.

Nassy Konan is a Birmingham-based independent Creative Producer working across live art, dance, theatre, and outdoor arts. Her work focuses on artist development, international exchange, and mid-scale touring for diverse audiences. She has collaborated with leading UK and international organisations, with past roles including Associate Producer for the University of Oxford Cultural Programme on Leys Festival 2025, Greenwich & Docklands Festivals, Birmingham Festival 2023, and China Plate Theatre. A Jerwood Arts awardee and Stage One bursary recipient, Nassy also leads Producer Gathering and supports a range of independent creative projects.

Producer Gathering is a UK-based initiative supporting independent producers in the arts sector. Established in 2016 by Xavier de Sousa and Sally Rose, it offers a wealth of free resources, including budget templates, funding bids, and access to information, to foster best practices. The platform also provides bursaries, case studies, and commissioned writings to nurture producers at all career stages. Managed by Nassy Konan, it is supported by Marlborough Productions and funded by Arts Council England.

Is everyone ok??

Ash Bowmott &
Laura Sweeney,
The Uncultured

Asking people who make things happen and get things done – or “produce”– to reflect on their potential physical and emotional exhaustion, tends to quickly push away from the reflective and towards something tangible and practical.

Personally we've attempted a spreadsheet of rest scheduling (that can be quickly undertaken and then closed off), and a flow-chart to improve the efficiency of recognising when self-care needs to be completed.

✓ *Health achieved, exhaustion overcome, stress-reduction unlocked forever and ever. Quickly move on to next point on to-do list.*

Producers also tend to be the ones who like supporting others to achieve their objectives. Finding a solution for someone's issue – whether it be getting money to make their art, or ensuring they don't deplete themselves through stressors – is baked into the job. Being a fixer and an advocate feels as much a part of an identity descriptor to many as their hair colour or age. The job description, plus societal, cultural and systemic factors can often affect our ability to apply self-care to...well...ourselves.

The plate-spinning, efficiency-seeking and no-matter-whatness that makes us good at our jobs, is also the reason increasing numbers of producers are knackered, fuzzy-brained and having a quick cry between meetings. The drive to give it our all and make the alchemy of art producing happen can leave us having *given our all so there is nothing more to give*. These mental burdens, like most burdens, are not equally carried. Those marginalised by society are disproportionately impacted by burnout, often experiencing prolonged stresses in other areas of life.

If you have the privilege of *pushing through*, there will be countless times that *digging deep* to get the job done has paid off for you. However, the accumulative residue of not paying attention to that low mood, that headache, that eye twitch – that's where we do a disservice to our future health and, as a byproduct, our future work. And thinking about burnout prevention before you have burnout is the efficient thing to do, after all.

Producer Gathering invited us to work with them on this, not only because we've made a bunch of resources and collections of sector-writing before, but also because we have experience of directly dealing with producer burnout, albeit as a two.

It snuck up on us. Laura thinks it may have been accumulating for years. Emotional and physiological symptoms were parked or dismissed until they were increasingly unable to complete what they would normally consider to be a simple task. Our working situation is unique because we sort of share a job, and work alongside each other in tandem, albeit on different tasks. Had Ash only seen Laura every now and then for some collegiate chats, she might have just chalked up the tears and the surprisingly shitty spreadsheet skills to a bad day.

Working together offered another privilege of Ash being able to say – you go, and I will literally still keep things going – in a way that working alone could never achieve. Of course, Ash couldn't do everything they can do as a two, but the arse didn't have to fall out of everything completely. Our co-dependency feels like it enabled a stepping away that prevented Laura entering into a full mental-health emergency. We had:

- someone else to check-in with regularly and say when enough was enough
- someone else to pick up the work
- someone else to share income with so there wasn't an urgent need to get back to it before being ready.

This is a really rare thing, and we can't flippantly suggest that it can be recreated. But it has helped us to try and position this resource as a self-care pal for those of you who are working alone. A PDF to start a conversation with. We hope it might ask you how you're doing, how you're supporting yourself and what choices you make for your own wellbeing. You do this for your artists and your teams, and we and the contributors herein now want to ask **you**.

This resource is an offering bringing together 8 contributions from producers, facilitators and wellbeing specialists. It partly invites you to listen to the experiences of others, and partly to focus on yourself. This might give you a way to reflect on your own realities and maybe get you into a more healthy head-and work-space. This should be one tool among many, but we hope it's one that speaks directly to your producer-shaped exhaustion.

**This isn't a medical aid, diagnostic tool or exhaustive descriptor of experiences. In their contribution, Lou Platt signposts to some organisations that might be able to offer further support if you think you need it.*

The Uncultured are arts independents Ash Bowmott and Laura Sweeney. They work together to produce, curate, facilitate and advocate. Their shared focus is on artist and arts worker development, believing career sustainability in our sector is in crisis, and this structural failure needs to be attended to by everyone working within it. Each area of their practice, from fundraising to creating free-to-access sector resources, is part of their work towards better, more equitable working conditions in the arts.

I believe in slowing down.

Toni-Dee Paul

**Please wait 5-10 seconds before
continuing to read.**

()

**Take 1 large inhale, hold for 3 beats,
and exhale until you've expelled the air.**

()

**I believe in doing, trying, attempting,
things differently.**

As a chronically ill person, who is often working on teams where we 'make things happen' I am often in a battle of wills. A standoff between as 'soon' as possible or as 'sustainable' as possible. The friction between doing it quickly, even though it is not rigorous enough, or getting things done swiftly, whilst we still have the momentum. This appetite for propulsion is, like most ways we live our lives, an inherited structure; one which prioritises speed, quickening big firsts and that demonizes choosing to slow down. Our need to be seen to be fixing, problem solving, solution seeking, it's all tied in urgency. But people who move slowly, can notice things that those moving quickly do not. Slowing down, and embodying care for one's self gifts us a more rooted view of our work and our landscape and it is with this knowledge – both practiced and preached – I want to offer an opportunity to think through pace, care, and how we build our survival strategies. These are not new, groundbreaking thoughts, but a checklist, a series, a guide or compass, to bake better and deeper care for yourself and others into your practice, so it cannot be removed easily. Care that is the priority, that stains the walls and doors of every project and budget and decision map. Inextinguishable care. Care that is not easily won, but is fought for, care that is elastic, fluid and disrupts the status quo. Care that is lots of small decisions and lots of systemic ones too. Care you don't only flirt with, but you commit to – care that hatches resilience and births resistance. Care that becomes the standard.

1. No martyrdom for the art – you are undoubtedly working incredibly hard, but none of us benefit from one person pushing themselves harder than any/everyone else. If you are moving faster than the rest of the team, you will only have to wait for them to catch up. It is unhealthy and unhelpful, and works in opposition to the collaboration needed to produce, make, and deliver art. Your health, and wellbeing are as important as everyone else's and being the person visibly suffering for your practice is more a warning sign than a trophy.

2. Schedule the rest – or your body will take it for you anyway. Resting is not optional and it doesn't make you weak. Take the break even when you don't feel inclined. Take the lunch break, take the weekend, cancel the meeting you can feel your head is not ready for. People are not machines – even with the best intentions, you cannot and should not work beyond your capacity. Your body will tell you things before your brain will – *trust it*.

3. Don't fetishise 'busy' – a full work calendar and opportunities to shout about success is impressive, but being overly busy can and often does lead to a toxic cycle where productivity becomes the measure of self-worth, and rest or downtime is perceived as laziness or a failure. It's not, and this mindset can cause burnout, as individuals push themselves to constantly stay occupied, believing that the more they do, the more valuable they are. Your worth is not tied to a to-do list. It also perpetuates a culture of overwork, where taking breaks or saying no is stigmatized. The pressure to appear busy, or worse, to recognise you actually are too busy, and don't know how to slow down can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, diminishing the quality of the work and more importantly diminishing you.

4. Sometimes the show *shouldn't* go on – on occasion you will have to stop, quit or exit something. That's okay. Practice saying no, it will be uncomfortable and vital. The 'no' is not always easy or welcomed but it is often the right call when you can feel that you are being stretched too thin. 'No' in the first instance may feel terrifying but in the creative industries that 'No' now, saves you time, energy and a lot of disappointed people later.

5. If it isn't no, at least a 'not now' – sometimes you really want to do the thing, the idea is lush, the money and the people are in place, but what you are desperately missing is the time. Don't rush to deliver something not well now that you can do better, with more time, later.

6. Trust is better than speed – adrienne maree brown's 'emergent strategy' teaches us to *Move at the speed of trust* – to remember that a deeper, more authentic relationship with our practice is one which is rooted in trustful relations. Prioritising relationships and open communication over rushing to meet deadlines or tick off tasks. Less focus on 'performance' and more on fostering genuine connections. Working at the speed of trust allows for those who work with you to intervene when you're pushing too hard.

7. Model what you want to see – be the example. Articulate to yourself where the line is drawn. Then articulate that to those working with you. Act in the ways that reflect your values and encourage people in your orbit to do the same. Write it on a sticky note and keep it on your laptop if you need to. Boundaries are not for others to keep, but for you to hold. If you say something is too much, remember, without outside influence why you made the decision you made and honour it.

8. Accident and Emergency *Artistic Edition* – visits to A&E to patch up small but significant problems are to be expected, but stitches and quick fixes should be for the odd and unpredictable event not continued recurring problems. You only get so many visits before a specialist referral is necessary. If something is a longstanding issue, we need longstanding solutions.

9. Doing it for the dollar – some jobs will not be for the love of the game, some jobs will be because you need the money, and that is okay.

10. The Long Tail of Misogyny – when we talk care, it can inevitably feel gendered, and if you are a woman, a queer person, experience racism, ableism, xenophobia or classism, it is likely your relationship to care is complex. We are only 60 years from someone pregnant expected to leave work with no return. The idea of keeping your 'life' out of work is a luxury those without access needs, whether that caring responsibilities, device assistance or a hostile political environment can speak to. There are so many pervasive and insidious manifestations of sexism that persist over time including removing your 'self' from your work. But the best of your work only happens with the best of you, and the challenge is to witness and stage intervention when we see those patterns recurring.

11. Signs and signals – Disability frameworks, which can be applied to everyone, disabled or not, are experiments on doing things differently. For that knowledge, insight and growth not to just be platitudes about how we got it right we need to document the entire process including dead ends and failures, instead of reporting just the successful final results. When you share your messy, pot-holed and 'unsuccessful', you're also sharing grit. You're letting people see the passion, the problem-solving and the humanness behind the process. Signal honesty, signal transparency, normalise mistakes, document failure, because perfection can feel distant and intimidating.

12. Care work is the work – producing is care, facilitation is care, mentoring is care, providing resource is care, accountability is care, connection is care, designing and managing the budget is care, being the helping hands is care and we part of an ecosystem that relies on micro and macro for all of this to work.

**Take 1 large inhale, hold for 3 beats,
and exhale until you've expelled the air.**
()

Try and try.

Attempt and reach.

Do things differently.

Toni-Dee Paul is a theatre-artist working in a wide variety of contexts as a workshop leader, director, performer, collaborator and 'thinker-in-the room'. Most recently their work, made with 'infectious warmth' (Exeunt) is a series of performances and installations made for cemeteries, refugee centres, kitchens, churches and theatres. Outside of her solo practice, Toni is Associate Director at Selina Thompson Ltd, Associate Artist with One Tenth Human and facilitates part-mutual-care-part-art making-part-activism project Balmy Army.

Understanding and Preventing Burnout:

**For Freelance Theatre Producers
from an Artist Wellbeing
Practitioner's Perspective**

Lou Platt

Working as a freelance theatre producer is both exhilarating and demanding. Juggling creative visions, tight budgets, unpredictable schedules, and the weight of responsibility for a production's success can feel like a full-time mental marathon. While passion fuels much of what we do in the arts, it can also mask the signs of burnout... until it's too late.

Here I aim to demystify what burnout is, how it manifests in freelance theatre work, and, most importantly, how to prevent it. It is written from my perspective and experience working as an Artist Wellbeing Practitioner in the creative industries. Since 2012 I have supported the mental health of those working in theatre, and have sat opposite many a burning-out, or burnt-out, freelance producer.

The current knowledge and insights I have on producer burnout is with thanks and honour to them – thank you for your bravery in stepping into reflective practice spaces with me, and for shedding light on what can often remain in the dark.

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or repeated stress. It isn't simply feeling tired or overworked after a busy production – it's a deeper, more persistent state of depletion that affects your ability to function, enjoy your work, or even care about things you once found meaningful.

The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition. It's characterised by three key dimensions:

1. Emotional exhaustion

– feeling drained, overextended, or unable to cope.

2. Depersonalisation

– feeling detached from your work, cynical, or emotionally numb.

3. Reduced sense of personal accomplishment

– feeling ineffective, unproductive, or like your work has little value.

Why Are Freelancers at Higher Risk?

Freelance producers often wear multiple hats: managing logistics, securing funding, supporting artists, and dealing with venues and audiences. Unlike salaried workers, freelancers typically lack structural support – there's no HR department, sick pay, or guaranteed holiday. This independence can be empowering but also isolating and relentless.

Common risk factors for burnout in freelance theatre include:

- Irregular hours and unpaid overtime
- Financial insecurity
- Working across multiple projects at once
- Difficulty switching off or saying no
- Lack of recognition or feedback
- Blurring of personal and professional boundaries
- Being expected to manage the emotional and psychological welfare of artists without adequate training.

Can you Smell the Smoke? – Recognising the Warning Signs of Burning Out

Burnout can creep in gradually. Being aware of early symptoms can help you take action before things escalate. It really is best to spot when you are burning out, before you are burnt out. Watch out for:

- Constant fatigue, even after resting
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling detached from your work or team
- Irritability or mood swings
- Avoiding communication or feeling overwhelmed by simple tasks
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, or digestive issues
- A persistent sense of dread about work.

If any of these feel familiar, you're not alone – and it's not a personal failing. Burnout is a systemic issue, particularly in sectors like the arts where high performance is often expected with minimal support. But we continue to work in this industry, so let's begin the process of changing how we relate to our work and each other, by becoming more aware of ourselves.

Strategies for Burnout Prevention

1. Set clear boundaries

Define your working hours and – even though there are voices inside saying you can't – stick to them. Turn off email notifications outside of work time and be transparent with collaborators about your availability.

2. Learn and practice saying “no”

Learning to say “no” is a vital skill – it protects your energy and ensures you can fully commit to the projects you do take on. Someone once said to me “a good no makes the yeses more powerful” – this helped me have greater trust in the word “no”.

3. Schedule breaks (and take them)

Plan breaks into your calendar, even during busy rehearsal or production weeks. Regular rest isn't a luxury – it's essential for sustainable creativity. Make space between projects if possible, and don't feel guilty about downtime.

4. Budget for your wellbeing

When planning a project budget, include funds for contingency days, mental health support, or hiring extra hands during peak times. Advocating for fair producer fees and workload sharing (e.g. co-producing models) can reduce stress and prevent overload.

5. Stay connected

Freelance work can be isolating. Build networks with other producers to share challenges, advice, and emotional support. Peer groups, producer meet-ups, or online forums can offer solidarity and practical help.

6. Invest in self-care

Self-care doesn't need to be expensive or time-consuming. It can be as simple as taking a walk, having a screen-free evening, or eating a proper lunch. Think of self-care as “producer maintenance” – your wellbeing is a crucial asset to your work.

7. Seek professional help if needed

If you're feeling persistently low or overwhelmed, speak to a GP or mental health professional. You may also consider coaching or therapy tailored to creative professionals – like an Artist Wellbeing Practitioner who are all qualified psychotherapists with lived experience of working in the creative industries. Several organisations can also offer subsidised services to those in the arts.

Intersectionality and Underlying or Pre-existing Conditions

Producers Own Foundations of Self

Imagine 1,000 freelance producers gathered in a dimly lit room, each with a lightbulb above their head and a switch to turn it on or off. All lights are on. The room feels safe, welcoming, relaxed.

Then, a few questions are asked. Each person turns off their light if their answer is “no”:

- Do you come from a marginalised background (race, gender, ability, sexuality, class)?
- Do you identify as neurodivergent (diagnosed or self-identified)?
- Have you experienced trauma, particularly in childhood?

How many lights would still be on?

In our experience, many would remain lit – soft, glowing, resilient. Some blinked off, then back on. Some stayed lit throughout. It’s a reminder: burnout often stems not just from work demands, but from the weight of marginalisation, neurodivergence, or trauma histories underneath.

One way to guard against burnout is to reflect on how these parts of your identity show up in your work. Marginalised experiences, neurodivergence and trauma can offer unique strengths – empathy, insight, adaptability – but may also contribute to burnout.

For example, many producers I’ve met learned early on to prioritise others’ needs, becoming exceptional caregivers in their roles – but sometimes at their own expense. These well-practised parts can struggle to set boundaries, still believing that saying “yes” is essential for survival.

If that resonates, try befriending that hard-working inner child. Reassure them they are loved. Let them meet the adult you – someone who can care deeply and say “no”, “not yet”, or “not me” when needed.

We recommend this brave inner work can be done deeper in therapy, counselling, or peer support groups with an Artist Wellbeing Practitioner.

Too many logs on the fire: The impacts of pastoral care of others – what are you really holding?

Many producers may find themselves burning out not just from the workload, but from being the steady hand others lean on when the effects of marginalisation, systemic oppression and/or trauma surface within a production. Especially productions that speak into these themes. Holding space for others' lived experiences – while managing timelines, expectations, and outcomes – can quietly drain emotional reserves. It can't be underestimated.

If this sounds familiar, it's important to recognise that you are not failing; you are holding too much. Coping begins with:

- naming this invisible labour
- creating clearer boundaries
- seeking spaces where your experiences are also seen and supported – for example, process supervision with an Artist Wellbeing Practitioner
- seeking training on how to do these growing demands on freelance producers – and if this training doesn't exist yet, let's see if we can make it happen.

Resources and Support

Here are some UK-based organisations and services that support wellbeing in the arts:

- **The Artist Wellbeing Company** – a collective of experienced psychotherapists with lived experience of working in creative industries, who can offer therapeutic process supervision for producers. If you're self-employed these can be claimed as a work expense in your tax return: www.artistwellbeing.co.uk
- **BAPAM (British Association for Performing Arts Medicine)** – free health support for performing artists: www.bapam.org.uk
- **Help Musicians UK / Music Minds Matter** – offers mental health support to anyone in the music industry (many producers cross over): www.helpmusicians.org.uk

Final Thoughts

Burnout isn't a badge of honour or a rite of passage – it's a sign that something needs to change. As freelance producers, your work shapes the artistic landscape, but you can't do that sustainably if you're running on empty.

By recognising the risks, setting boundaries, and nurturing both your professional and personal resilience, you can continue to create brilliant work without sacrificing your wellbeing.

You deserve to thrive – not just survive – in your creative career.

Lou Platt is a Dramatherapist, an Internal Family Systems Therapist, EMDR Practitioner, a Clinical Supervisor and has lived experience of being both a theatre maker and performer in the theatre industry. She is the founder and director of The Artist Wellbeing Company and began supporting the mental health of those working in creative industries in 2012 – providing individual on-call therapeutic support sessions, reflective practice and team wellbeing workshops in theatre, dance, opera, TV and film.

Holding space for yourself as a producer

Kim Simpson

Content note:
Illness, disability, mental health, suicide.

Producer

"Producer". So much in that word. So many expectations and assumptions. Many ways to do it. An artist makes work and the producer holds space for *everyone and everything else* (and sometimes the artist is also the producer). Fundraiser, project manager, accountant, administrator, manager of relationships and partners, marketer, confidante, spotter of risks and opportunities, researcher, evaluator, agent, reporter, fixer, fairy godmother.

Translator of everything between what the art is and everything it needs to exist. How much this art costs. Why this art is important to a funder or an audience. This art needs this person and this policy and this story and this image and needs to be understood in this context. This art doesn't know what it is yet but it still needs space, time, people and money for it to become what it is.

Why do we do it!? It sounds hard and thankless, right? It feels stressful and unsupported. And sometimes it feels like magic. We love the art and artists. We love the feeling of seeing something come to life. Something that wasn't that now is. Putting art that we love into terms that others need it to be expressed in can feel painful and vandalising when art isn't about funding applications or priorities or straplines. Being a producer is a deep act of service and love and it is a privilege to be the person that helps all the fragments and funds come together to make the art. But that work and love often comes at a cost.

Yourself

Your. Self.

Your self has a physical form. It needs nurturing. Like a plant or car.
Your self needs fuel. Your self needs hydration. Your self needs rest.
Your self needs to just be.

Your self has an inner world. Your self has drivers and motivations and purpose.
Your self thinks and feels and communes with the world around.
Your self *knows* things.

Your self has a story. And a history. These histories contain identities, experiences, tragedies, victories, joys and horrors. Loves, enemies, friends, allies, mentors, families, torturous and saviours. These stories can be limiting or freeing. Sometimes both. Sometimes others want to tell us what our stories are. The best person to know who your self is, and what your story is, is *you*.

Your self has desires. And needs that go beyond keeping the soil moist and the engine running. Your self yearns to be seen, to be heard in the way that feels right to you. That little teensy you from a long time ago that, like most of us, at some point learned not to follow your self's own instincts. The real you inside that needs to be touched, to create, to be loved and accepted and shown humanity when times are hard and your self isn't perfect.

Your self *only* gets to be you. And only gets to be *with you* 100% of the time. All of the bits of you that formed in response to conversations, shames, witnessings, learnings, playings and dependencies. Your self that has been sculpted by eons of these people and things before you and been shaped by the stream of news, media, trees, streets, families and communities your self has navigated your life by so far.

Your self needs space to be *you*. Whether “you” is a producer or an artist or a teacher or a parent or a child. Your self needs space to be you. Even if you’re fighting the good fight and have a seat at a table and feel the weight of expectation of all the others you care about. You still need space.

Space

Your self occupies space. Sometimes we forget that the space we physically take up is not the actual space we need. That kind of space is much bigger and space really also needs to mean time.

We need space (and time) to think, feel, know. We need space (and time) to, space from, space in. A layer of the universe between us and the world. We also need to be able to create enough space (and time) wherever we are. When we are the hub in the wheel, holding all of the spokes together and all of those spokes need something from us at the same time, when we are hurtling towards a deadline, when everything is too much all at once. Finding space for your self is the hardest and most necessary thing we can learn to do.

Space has a boundary too, just like you. This is my dance space, this is your dance space. Whatever the dance. But trying to keep those boundaries fluid is a subtle art and needs constant tending, because space and boundaries can become walls. You need to be able to see. Space (and time) is not about hiding.

Space allows for perspective, nurturing, growth, rest, recalibration, composting. All the things your self is taking in, deciding, planning, hearing, doing, these things need space to have their impact, make their incremental changes to your self and the work you find yourself doing.

Know we need space. A plant can’t grow from a crowded shelf if they can’t find enough light.

Holding

Holding is familiar to producers – we are often holding all the threads and the straws, short and long, and we are holding together a group of people working together in a temporary context to bring art to life. But holding space for yourself means also carrying your own stuff. Grasping your moments. Supporting yourself. Keeping your needs in sight. Sustaining good habits. Embracing those you love. Bearing your challenges, and sharing them. Maintaining the commitment to you. Continuing to consider your needs. Waiting sometimes to see what happens, before acting. Staying still. Containing the chaos. Protecting your space and time. Meeting yourself. Refraining from the urge to help. Deciding you matter. Occupying your body, yourself.

Holding space for myself as a producer

I'm Kim. I still consider myself a producer even though I work for a funder now. Before that I produced independently and freelance for 15 years. I am an artist and musician but kept these things about myself hidden for too long because I felt I was not allowed to be an artist too. I am disabled with a heritable connective tissue disorder, AuDHD and I live with endometriosis and fluctuating mental and physical health and you would probably consider my background 'working class' or 'socio-economically disadvantaged'.

My work as a producer suited my deep need to be busy, solve problems and people please and at this point I can see it was a way to escape me and my mental and physical health issues. A way to feel capable and important.

NOT holding space for myself as a producer meant my *self* took over and made the decisions for me for a while (usually crying and sleep and pain and rest)... quite a few times. Trust me when I say, your body will tell you when you need space, but you won't always notice the signs until they are REALLY LOUD. Like when we realise we are thirsty, we have already been dehydrated for hours. Since I was 18 I have had tens of flare ups ranging from a few days to three years but it took the worst things happening for me to connect the way my body responds to what is going on in my life.

Life doesn't stop simply because the show must go on. I spent 10 of my producing years caring for my brother who was wonderful and funny and intelligent but also experiencing some of the worst of our world's hardships, exclusions and intolerances. In 2019 I had two really important professional opportunities: delivering a European festival in Brussels and doing a Clore Leadership Fellowship. It was during this time that my brother killed himself.

Dealing with this along with my existing challenges tested me to the limit and during Covid I had a psychotic break due to acute stress and was admitted to a secure psychiatric hospital. My husband and support worker were shocked at how much work I had going on that they hadn't known about or understood. The after-effects of this time are still impacting my life now and holding space for myself through all of this has been very, very tough, especially when shame and trauma are at play.

It is so easy as a producer (especially an independent one) to disappear into work, to take on all the problems of the sector, the project, the world. We are built to serve and support and this can lead us to real dangers.

Holding space for myself as a producer now means accepting that I have an inner world, physical and emotional needs, a history, a future, a background. I deserve to have time and space to process this as much as anyone else and my work is better when I do.

This also means holding myself in perspective, looking at things more objectively and seeing how I was getting in my own way and contributing to a situation that made me ill. I tried to gain a sense of identity, hope, accomplishment through my work and I now see that I have to generate these things from so many other places, no matter how much I love the work.

So going from the poetic to practical, I will finish this piece with the things that have helped me most in holding space for myself as a producer. I don't want to give the impression that I am doing everything all the time, I AM NOT. And I still have days of overwhelm and fear and anxiety. But these are my touchstones and anchors so when I am lost I can find myself again.

Getting the support you need

Really important is properly engaging with your needs. As a disabled person, I get Access to Work support and Adult Disability Payment. These are fundamental to my being able to work and exist in a complicated and inaccessible world. They pay for my car, ensure my Blue Badge, cover a support worker and pay for weekly meal boxes to help me manage cooking and eating. Some space needs to be paid for.

Meditation

I have used Calm for almost 15 years to support this practice but it's as simple as sitting and looking at the wall for 10 mins.

Morning pages

I did the Artist's Way (linked below) and learned about morning pages which is writing without editing, pause, or rereading for 3 pages upon waking. The stream of consciousness approach helped me gain insight into my mental chatter and has opened up my creative practices which are part of how I hold space for myself.

Mantras

I have been writing and collecting pithy statements that help me remember what is important to me and what I need to remember. My favourites are: "Wherever you go, there you are" and "movement plus variety equals health"

Values

I have identified my values which act as a compass when I need to consider how to handle something, including myself. They are LOVE, WELLBEING, UNDERSTANDING and I apply them to me as well as others.

Investing in health

I spend money on my health and decided many years ago that this was the most important thing I could spend money on. This includes membership to gym, pool, sauna and trying to go every day, even if I only sit in the jacuzzi! I get regular massage, talking therapies, somatic and wellbeing practices (sound baths, trauma release, retreats). I also invest in tools that help, such as my shakti mat or seat cushion.

Medicine

For me, holding space means buying time away from pain and managing my mood disorders. I take medication for both as well as vitamins and supplements. I think the simple act of taking my tablets in the morning activates the self-care neural pathway and gets me up and on my way to my morning swim.

Creativity

After years of ignoring my creative interests I am now doing music again and making art at home. I have created a dedicated space for this – something I am lucky to have access to but can exist anywhere, even if it's just a corner with a candle and a plant.

Time off

Sometimes we just need to take a step back. AND THAT IS OK.

Solidarity

Connecting with other disabled and marginalised people in the arts has helped me frame and conceptualise my experiences so much better.

Systems

I am all about systems to manage work – really rooted in the GTD Method of productivity and the idea of closing loops – the more open tasks in our minds the more bandwidth we use and the more we tire ourselves out. Using tools to close loops has been a game changer for me (closing a loop is just writing it down in a useful way that can be picked up again in the future) and I consider this an extension of my brain. I also use Eisenhower boxes as a prioritising tool.

Caring for your inner child

I do things that treat me, like going dancing, cinema, eating chocolate, wild swimming, making messy collages and hanging out with all the wonderful family, friends and children I have in my life. It can seem a lot to make these plans but I always feel restored after spending time with people.

Shoring up my non-Producer identity

Exploring other things that define me has definitely helped with space and perspective, such as family, travel, plants, writing, music, friendships, interests and study.

Coaching

Learning to be a coach and facilitator helped me understand so much more about self management and boundaries. Can't recommend enough.

Talking and owning your story

I am fairly open about my life and experiences, and for me this has helped. I have also struggled with isolating myself. I know that when I am in community with others I feel better. Thanks to incredible people like Halina Rifai for the opportunity to talk with her on A Sonic Hug, and all the others she has interviewed for sharing their stories.

Wonder

Remembering that we are all part of one amazing universe and taking time to ponder the wonder of what we are and that we are here is a huge perspective shifter.

Books and podcasts

I love learning and have spent a lot of time with books and podcasts to make sense of what I have lived through and witnessed. Here is a list of a few things I have found inspiring or useful in holding space for myself.

Books

When The Body Says No – Gabor Mate

The Body Keeps The Score – Bessel Van Der Kolk

Unmasking Autism – Devon Price

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice – Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha

Grief Works – Julie Samuel

Atomic Habits – James Clear

The Artist's Way – Julia Cameron

The Courage to Be Disliked – Ichiro Kishimi, Fumitake Koga

Set Boundaries, Find Peace – Nedra Glover Tawwab

Entangled Life – Merlin Sheldrake

Leadersmithing – Eve Poole

Emergent Strategy – adrienne maree brown

Podcasts

Translating ADHD – Asher Collins and Dusty Chipura

The Happiness Lab – Dr Laurie Santos

On Being – Krista Tippet

Kim Simpson joined Creative Scotland as Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in 2022 having worked as a producer, strategist and curator, facilitator and coach across the sector locally, nationally and internationally for 15 years. Her work is deeply informed by her lived experiences of disability and neurodivergence. She is a Clore Leadership Fellow and an ISPA Global Fellow.

A Letter to/from/about my Producing Practice

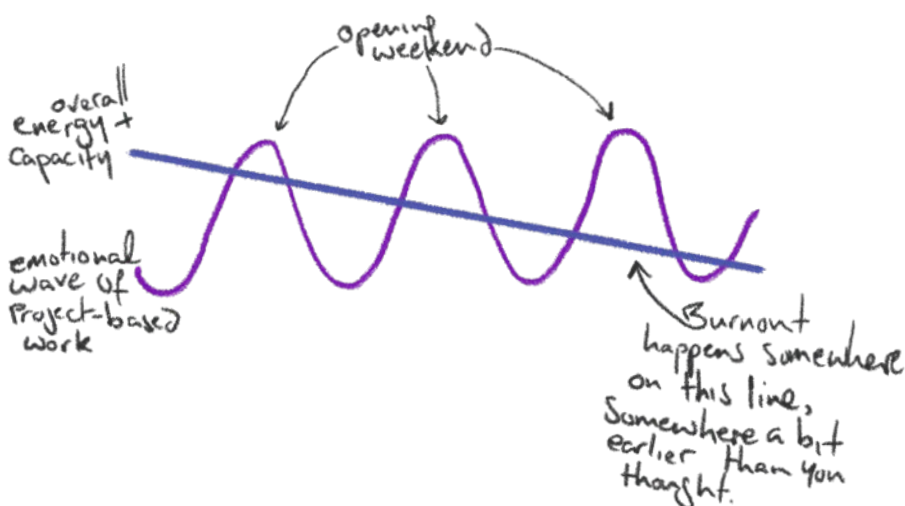
Nick Murray

I'm starting this letter at 8.30pm on the day I set out to write it. Something inside me bounced so hard off the idea of sitting with my own experience of burnout. So instead, for most of the day, I sewed a bag. I've found that a surefire counter for overwhelm (for me specifically) is to sew. I thought for a while that it was any physical creative practice, like collage or music-making. But, I would be intensely critical of myself with most mediums. Time goes into assembling something, pulling sounds together, choosing colours, and it can still turn out to be a bit disappointing. Somehow sewing is different. I'm not particularly good at sewing, but I find it incredibly tactile, and because of that, it's a really immediate activity. I bring two pieces of fabric together and sew them into one, and I have something new. Right there in front of my eyes. Repeat.

If you're interested, these are the two pieces of fabric I'm using. I have a bag of scraps and pulled out these lovely little bits. One is a light burgundy. I think it's a rib weave, but I'm not too sure. It's kind of loose which makes me think it might be something else, but I'm not so good at identifying these things. The other one is a thick wool tartan that came in a bag of offcuts from a friend who was giving a bunch of stuff away.



As a performance and exhibition producer, (generally stuff that audiences come to see at a particular time for a limited window) often I've found myself at the middle point between translating artists' intentions to be legible for audiences in the particular situation, and being the boots-on-the-ground person for an organisation, translating sometimes amorphous goals into practical applications. Looking back over the last few years, that second one has been the driver for burnout for me. Working on fairly large scale exhibitions means that there's a lot of moving parts, and the outcome doesn't necessarily become visible until it's all brought together. The finished object (the exhibition) doesn't appear until the very end, when there's already been months of back-and-forths, late nights, difficult decisions and last minute cuts. When it does come together, you get that blissful feeling of seeing audiences delight in the work, and it all feels worth it.



This wave of emotion becomes a pattern of working and it becomes normalised both internally (you just do it. Your body becomes used to the stress) and externally (the show was successful, wasn't it? Your requests for help and support to the directors of the organisation seem less urgent all of a sudden). This is what happened for me anyway, increasingly frantic calls for help that aren't addressed. All the while I wanted to make sure that the work was done to the best of my ability. Despite everything else, that was something that I could do. I knew the limits of my own body and how far I could push it to maintain the level of integrity I wanted to see in the project. Especially in wanting to ensure a good working environment for the people around me, my own capacity became the one that I could test.

I wasn't sure what I was making for a while, I just really wanted to do something with my hands and sewing is my go-to thing. Recently I've been getting a bunch of targeted ads for a big bag, and to be honest, it's a really nice bag. So I figured I'd give it a go. It looks sort of like this from the video I keep seeing.



Eventually I had to leave. It got to a point of feeling so doubtful of myself as a person ("If they're not helping, is it actually just me that's the problem? Am I just not strong enough?") and I haven't quite got over that yet. Burnout is both physical and emotional, and both can ruin you.

I haven't really produced anything big for a year or so. I decided I had to step away and work out *What Is It All For?* For myself, the artists I was supporting, and the audiences I was serving.

The Artists

I've had the privilege of working with a few artists recently, and this has generally been in very small collaborations. Limited production, limited scope and generous time. Despite it being uncomfortable at first, I've needed to work without the looming pressure of bigger projects. I've been reminded that the joy of working with artists is discussing their ideas and being part of the process that realises them in a way that might not have existed before.

What I learned here was that I don't have to doubt my abilities by default. The measure for productiveness or success isn't dependent on how much of myself I give away.

There's something in finding a rootedness as a producer, which is perhaps not the norm. Having multiple projects on the go, especially multiple short(ish) term projects, doesn't allow for a 'body of work' in the same way as other arts practices. I've found that smaller projects, with fewer people, on slower schedules, invite a level of collaboration that feels vital for a healthy creative and professional life. We can't make a career on just projects like that, but if this resonates at all, I'd say allow yourself to push for more. And, for me, that kind of work has led to professional relationships that feel more expansive and more cared for (longer-form as opposed to project-based).

The Audiences

Audiences will come if you ask them. In some of the larger projects I've been a part of, there was a drive to bring in all the audiences and give them everything. Something that felt very akin to the 'infinite growth' of capitalist models. This left very little for myself, in terms of energy and happiness. For now, for a while, I want to make small things and talk to a handful of people about them. That's enough.

It can be tricky to balance the tick boxes of funding targets and engagement areas and investment principles against the work itself, but these things are soft stats. They are important only in context, and making sure that context is apparent can make all the difference when talking about audiences. Not just for partner organisations, but for yourself too. The quality of connection is the thing.

You might have noticed I didn't list 'the organisation' in the *What Is It All For* list. Organisations are generally hierarchical entities. There's a director or something to that extent at the top, and layers of workers cascading down. (Of course this isn't the only case, there are collectives and community groups that operate differently, but I'm thinking about the general case where someone might come in to work as a producer on a project.) I wholeheartedly believe that in these organisations, care has to work its way downwards as a matter of duty and necessity. By this I mean, those higher up are in a position where that support becomes a significant part of their role. If those in leadership positions aren't prioritising the care of their workers before pretty much anything else, the whole thing is doomed to fail sooner or later.

As a producer, my duty of care was directed towards my staff – assistant producers, tech staff, get-in staff, etc – towards the artists we were working with, and towards audiences coming into the space. Something I found when support wasn't available from higher up, was that it then fell to us to support each other in a way that stretched our capacity. Me and my production team, also feeling the lack of institutional support, would take on additional duties of care for each other. This led to us getting stretched even further. Burnout can be contagious.

Basically, I think that the organisational needs have to be addressed, but in terms of burnout and individual care, the organisation comes last. If they cannot provide an environment that allows every working body to get over the finish line without burning out or falling out, then those working bodies should hit the bricks.

I had this strap left over from a theatre project funnily enough. It was part of a custom controller that operated a digital game. I'm glad it's getting a second life. It's about the thickness of a seatbelt, which feels nice and hefty!



In terms of advice to counter or recover from burnout, I think everyone who suffers from it will have had a specific series of instigators, so I can only speak from my own experience. Things that I may have benefited from hearing (from my future self in this letter to my producing practice) might go something like this:

Ask for help. If the people you're supposed to ask for help from aren't helping, ask someone else. Your friends, or peers in the same or similar fields.

So much of burnout comes from repeatedly taking on too much yourself. This stacked responsibility becomes too much to bear and then you crumble. But I think it's important to acknowledge that help isn't one big movement, it's gradual and it can come from different angles. Just knowing that you have the support of someone else can be an instigator for breaking the pattern. It's advice, it's emotional support, it's body-doubling in writing that difficult email to your boss, it's having someone bring over soup at the end of a long install day. As I write this (it's getting later and later) I realise these are just the things required for a good community. Which in turn makes me realise that part of burnout is that we put so much into our jobs, replacing the emotional drivers of our lives with those of our careers (especially in the arts where those get grossly intertwined).

I think asking someone who isn't directly related to your job can also be a lower consequence way of admitting that things aren't good, and getting a sense of the shape of why.

Outside of that, I think there's something in practicing how you channel your attention. Burnout thrives when the job causing it cannot stop being looked at. Now, I get that I'm living proof that this is easier said than done. It's another one of those things that is so much more difficult in creative industries where your job and your life are tied together. However, if you can look away from the glaring monster that is The Project for long enough, you can start to see that it's not that important. There are things closer to you that love you without extracting from you. Activities that can remind you that your hands can make beautiful things without bleeding. Finding just one of these, and giving yourself permission to do it can make all the difference. I'm not saying it'll cure burnout. Sewing certainly hasn't done that for me, but it's given me some little joy when my energy levels are unpredictable, and it's shown me a new perspective on what I thought was life-changing labour. And even without those things, I've got a nice new bag out of it.

Weirdly, something I learnt only after experiencing burnout, was practicing letting go of things I might have been holding tightly. I'd love to say that this is something I practice in my everyday life, but I'm not quite there yet! I was talking to a friend, who is an artist, about exhibition get-in periods, and all the little things that change as you get closer to the finish line. There is a moment when you just have to say that it's enough. Things might not get completed in the exact shape that you predicted or planned.

Laughing about experiencing that moment in shows we've worked on, when things just start getting cut left, right and centre, we ended up jokingly calling it the golden hour. Now, 'hour' is entirely relative. The golden hour in some productions might be days! But, what if it's even longer? I think there's a balance, but there's a calm in being able to say to yourself (and anyone you're working with) that you've done enough. And, somehow I want to make this a founding principle for everything. Being able to look at my work, and confidently believe that it's enough.

It took way longer than it should have, and I had to learn a few things along the way that I think will make talking on projects like this easier in the future. I think hindsight will always be a factor, and one you can't beat yourself up about. Going ahead, whenever I decide to go back to this kind of work, I'll know what to leave out and what to object to, and hopefully will have the confidence to actually do that! Anyway, here's the bag.



Nick Murray is a producer and artist making socially-engaged narrative work focusing on loss, memory and digital cultures. This often takes the form of games, interactive poetry and performance. Nick's recent solo show *Return to Dreamphone*, exploring local archives and the tributaries of the River Brent, was exhibited at Barham Park Studio (March 2025).

Formerly, Nick was lead producer for *Now Play This* at Somerset House, and was ACAVA artist-in-residence at Barham Park 2024-25.

Supporting your brain – working at your best

Emma Wee

Often in a reactive or fast-paced environment, we often forget that there are fundamentals that help our system function well. Generally speaking, if we have a foundation of self-care and there is consistency in the way that our system is set up to work, it allows us to be more adaptable and deal with variables around us that may be out of our control.

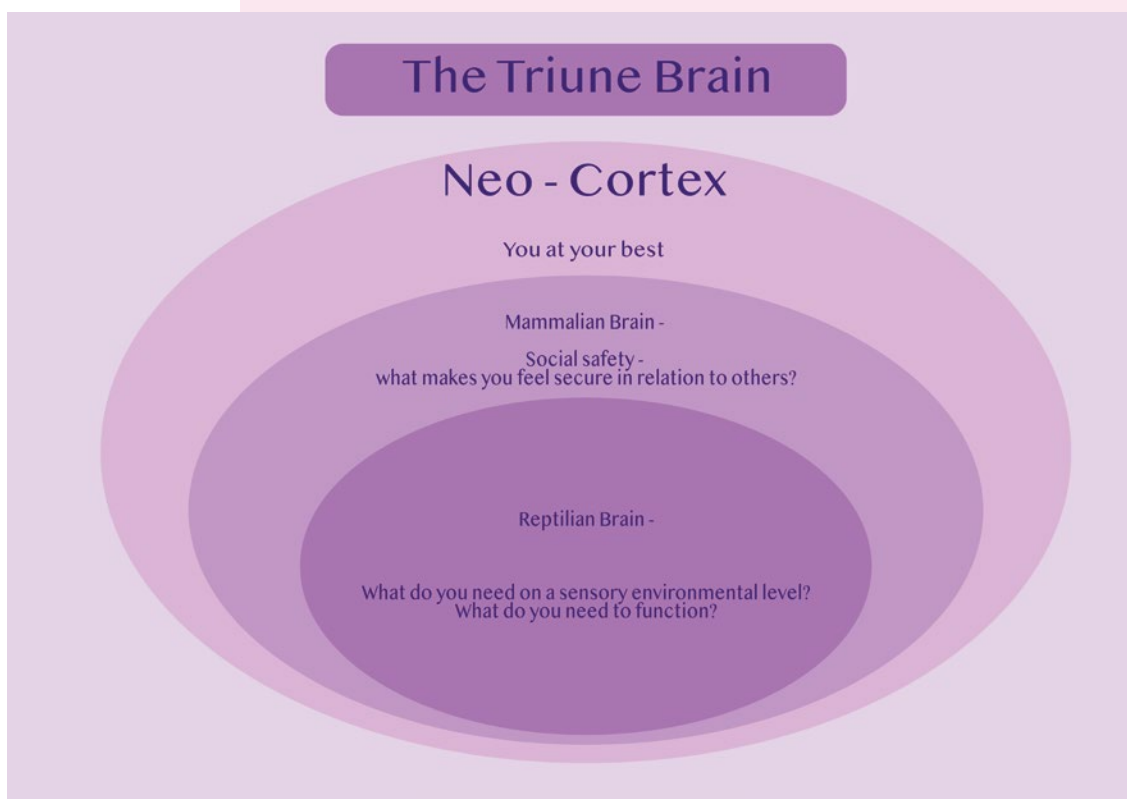
Being able to develop what I would call a “sensory rider” will give you more bandwidth to cope with these variables. This is a way of identifying different levels of need (similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs), but this is much more linked to a neurological perspective. If you are neurodiverse, having your sensory needs met and kept consistent can be critical for your brain to process effectively.

The Reptilian Brain manages your physical and environmental needs, which also is the most reactive or stressed state.

The Mammalian Brain is tasked with processing experience and social triggers and insecurities. When these needs are not met, it can trigger the brain into being in the Reptilian brain.

Finally, the **Neo-Cortex** which is where the higher thinking or executive function takes place, and a person is working at their best.

For someone to be at their best both the physical and social aspects need to be kept balanced and happy.



Exercise Workbook

Reptilian.

Write down the physical and environmental factors that help you function well.

- Think about aspects such as whether you can work if you are hungry, thirsty, tired.
- Whether factors such as heat, light, noise, what you're wearing, the environment that you're working in are conducive to being focused/comfortable.
- What do you notice? Is there anything that you frequently find yourself doing/needing on a regular basis?
- What happens when some of these things aren't in place?

Neo-Cortex.

Let's skip to the outer ring.

When you're working at your best, you're like what?

- How do you feel? What tasks are you able to achieve?
- How are you working? How would you describe your working state?
- Whereabouts is this feeling – is it internal or external?
Whereabout in your body is this feeling of 'being at your best'?
- Can you name it? Does it have a size or a shape/colour?

Mammalian.

This is the part of the brain tasked with how safe you feel in relation to others.

In the workplace, these may be statements such as

"I need to be respected."

"I like to be part of a team."

"I need to be supported."

"My work needs to feel as though it's valued."

Sometimes it's easier to think about the things that don't work well for you and find the opposite statement ("I hate being micromanaged" – therefore "I like to have autonomy when I work.")

What statements are true for you?

Knowing each of these states, what can you do to facilitate each of these brains in order to function and work at your best?

The key understanding here is that in order to get into the Neo-Cortex (ie, working at your best) you need to keep the physical (Reptilian) AND the social (Mammalian) brains happy. If you notice that you're being reactive/feeling unsettled as opposed to being responsive (ie thinking logically in situations), then there's a good chance that something in one of those two areas has been triggered.

So – if you're not feeling at your best, what happened just before the moment you felt unsettled? What needs to be rebalanced? How can you get back to being at your best?

Emma Wee is a neurodiversity coach and trainer. She has a background in performance design, embracing a creative approach to coaching, tapping into new ways of working that are specific and flexible to the needs of each client. She is a champion of the resilience that understanding one's own neurodiversity can bring an individual, rather than being defined by a label. Being neurodiverse is not about being 'faulty' or 'broken' as a person; it's about working in a different way.

Digital Burnout Diagnosis?

Seyi Osi

When The Uncultured invited me to take a bunch of free burnout/self-care quizzes and write about the experience, I was strangely excited. I wanted to know what the internet thought about my work-life balance. Between getting the brief and actually sitting down to take the quizzes, I ended up falling unwell. It made me reckon with the reality that perhaps I was in fact burnt out and maybe if I'd taken these quizzes before my health took a hit, would they have flagged what was coming?

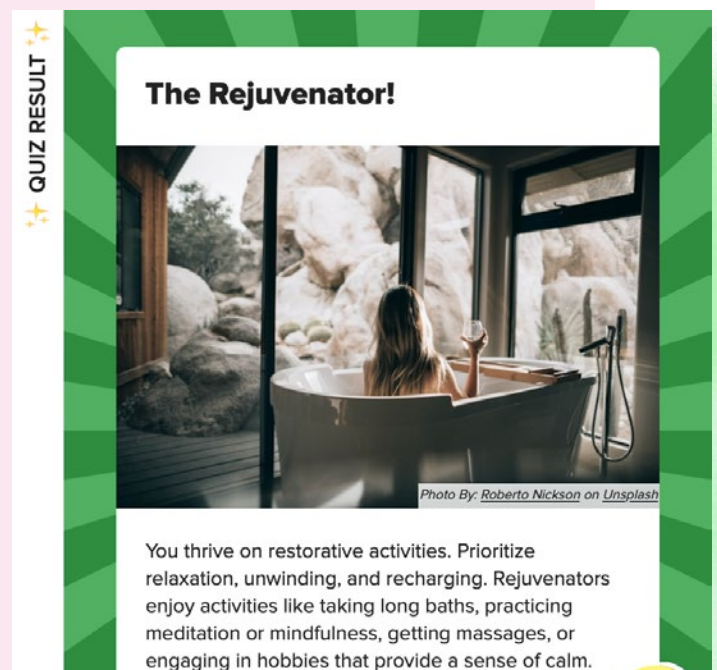
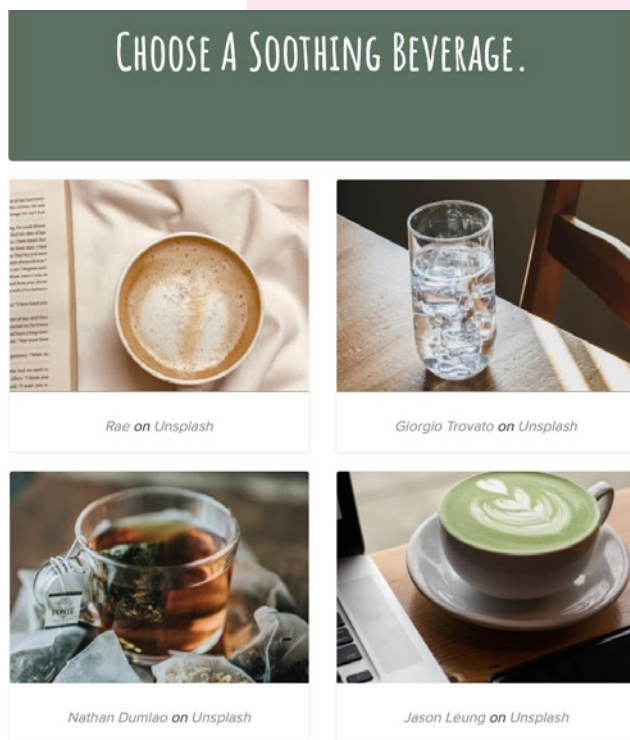
It also highlighted a broader societal tendency to only start to acknowledge burnout when it presents with physical symptoms, making it feel more 'legitimate' and harder for others to challenge than the often invisible weight of mental and emotional exhaustion.

The Quizzes: Headlines

(with links included if you want to have a go yourself!)

Buzzfeed Self-Care Personality Quiz

Silly, quick and nostalgic – very much a great warm-up quiz. I was so excited I didn't even read the instructions properly, I just dove in like it was 2014. The quiz asks things like 'choose your ideal breakfast' or 'your cozy places to do things'. My main takeaway: anywhere with a bed is my self-care sanctuary. There were no profound revelations or reflections here, but not sure if BuzzFeed quizzes have ever claimed to be that.



Example question and my result

Stylist's What's Your Work-Life Balance Quiz

More grounded and serious. This quiz talks a lot about a study done looking at the lifestyle of 2,000 Britons. The results showed that 70/30 adults feel work dominates life in work-life balance. When respondents were asked why they believed the ratio was so far in favour of work, the top answers were 'needing the money' (31%) and 'fear of being unemployed' (26%). The quiz is 6 years old, the current cost of living crisis and tough job market makes me feel like if it was to be redone the feeling of work taking over life would probably be closer to 80/20 now.

The quiz asks questions that make you reflect on your relationship with work when you're on holiday, how often do you take time for yourself to relax and questions around how you organise your life around work and social activities.

My result: 'The Compartmentaliser.' This quiz result didn't particularly make me feel seen. When (freelance) producing and juggling different projects, it feels very difficult to separate work and life, be it checking my phone and emails on holiday or even bringing my work laptop everywhere just in case there's something I need to action.

Although this quiz's result felt inaccurate to me, one of the multiple choice options when asking around work habits when on holiday was around 'leaving a work laptop at home when on holiday', sparking a new idea that this could be a practice that I could actually try and integrate into my work/life.



You have an important deadline due the next day and it's your friend's birthday drinks tonight do you:

Work until the deadline is done, your friend will understand

Work on the deadline until 6pm, make sure you are there for the start of the friends drinks. If need be you can leave the drinks early and make sure it is all finished

Work flat out on the deadline until 6pm, then off to the drinks

Work on the deadline as long as you can, then go to the drinks and enjoy yourself, it's OK if you're a bit late. You can finish it off in the morning if you have to



The Compartmentaliser

You are clear about keeping work and other activities separate. You are good at setting boundaries and rarely do personal things at work, and vice versa. This clear separation helps you to organise and prioritise easily.

Because you do work life balance in a structured way, you may find other peoples' ways of prioritising frustrating especially when their actions mess up your plans. There is a chance that you may also be perceived by others as too rigid or, in a work context, not committed enough.

Structured thinkers have many advantages, particularly when it comes to organising and prioritising but they tend to apply this thinking in all situations when sometimes it's useful to go with the flow, for example on group activities or on holiday.

It may help you to:

- Let it go when people let you down by changing their plans, they are not doing it deliberately to be difficult.
- Think about where you may be perceived as inflexible and consider how to address this. Think about how you can present yourself as flexible in some important circumstances, particularly if your boss values this.
- Go to the occasional work social event.
- Have some occasions where you are willing to go with the flow and with the decisions of others, particularly on holiday or at the weekends.

Example question and my result

Psychology Today's Burnout Test

This quiz was one of the more lengthier ones (20 questions rather than 7-10). Different to the others, you answer on a scaled multiple choice between strongly disagree to strongly agree. This already felt like it would take into account more nuance and made it feel more legit? There's less of an emphasis on work/life balance and more asking you to reflect on your feelings towards your career, your work load, and whether new projects excite you or not. It's one of the only burnout quizzes I did which interrogates how much control you have over your work which I think is important. Sometimes you can have all the right intentions to be boundaried and have a healthier work-life balance, but certain jobs or work environments don't equally help foster that culture.

The results section for this quiz is quite cutting. You get a score out of 100.

What do the scores mean?

0-16	Not burned out
17-36	Few signs of burnout
37-63	Some signs of burnout
64-83	Many signs of burnout
84-100	Highly burned out

The average score in my area was 57 (some signs of burnout); it really highlighted how being burnt out at work and in society is normalised. Although it felt strangely validating to know I'm not alone in suffering from burnout, it made me think about how we've created a society where it's a given to be fighting feelings of exhaustion and struggling to be engaged/productive.

The main advice from the results section is to 'seek therapy'. There weren't any tangible resources offered other than suggestions to 'take holiday' and 'prioritise your loved ones'. This quiz feels like a good starting place to see where you're at in terms of burnout and maybe can be that nudge for someone to seek further help from therapeutic services.

Burnout Test

✓ 20 QUESTIONS 3 MINUTES

Do you feel stuck at work?

Burnout, a state of severe mental and emotional exhaustion most often caused by work-related stress, can lead to depression or anxiety, strained relationships, and even physical health problems. This test can help you determine if you're showing signs of burnout.

Using the key below, answer the questions based on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

STRONGLY DISAGREE NEUTRAL STRONGLY AGREE

1. I dread going to work each day.

DISAGREE AGREE

Example question

Dr Saundra Dalton-Smith's 7 Types of Rest quiz

This quiz was my favourite, even if my results were a little grim. This quiz focuses on 7 different types of rest: mental, emotional, spiritual, creative, social, sensory and physical. It feels the most nuanced and thorough; questions are scaled multiple choice, there are about 40 and it can take up to 10 mins. This quiz definitely has a holistic approach to analysing where you're at in terms of rest. It looks at all areas of your life from your ability to sleep to your relationship with social media. I also like how this quiz doesn't centre burnout in the title, rather centering rest and what you need.

The results are then emailed to you with a breakdown of your scores in each area of rest, as well as diving into what these different types of rest actually mean and can look like which helps guide your interpretation of your own results. The results email contains actual resources: book recommendations: [Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity](#), a newsletter and even a free Work-Life Integration Action Guide.

Definitions of types of rest

Physical: The chance to use the body in restorative ways to decrease muscle tension, reduce headaches, and promote higher quality sleep.

Mental: The ability to quiet cerebral chatter and focus on things that matter.

Spiritual: The capacity to experience God in all things and recline in the knowledge of the Holy.

Emotional: The freedom to authentically express feelings and eliminate people-pleasing behaviors.

Social: The wisdom to recognize relationships that revive from ones that exhaust and how to limit exposure to toxic people.

Sensory: The opportunity to downgrade the endless onslaught of sensory input received from electronics, fragrances, and background noise.

Creative: The experience of allowing beauty to inspire awe and liberate wonder. Below are your personal rest deficit assessment results. Use these results to help you see which types of rest you already excel at and which ones you need to focus on improving.

Take this **quiz** and find out **what type of rest you need to live your best life...**



You have a feeling there's a reason why you feel tired all the time... you know something is missing in your life... but **what IS IT?**

[Take The Free Quiz](#)

This **FREE** Personal Rest Assessment is based on Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith's bestselling book *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity* and features her 7 Types of Rest Framework™.

Receive a complimentary rest deficit analysis to learn what type of rest you have been missing. Rediscover the fulfillment and satisfaction of a well-rested life!

Instructions: Read and answer each question below. Allow 5 -10 minutes to complete this comprehensive assessment. You are worth the personal time investment!

If I could spend an extra hour finishing my to-do list or sleep, I'd choose sleep.

- ☐ Does not describe me
- ☐ Rarely describes me
- ☐ Occasionally describes me
- ☐ Often describes me
- ☐ Almost always describes me

Example questions

I'm often battling upper respiratory infections and get sick more often than others.

- ☐ Does not describe me
- ☐ Rarely describes me
- ☐ Occasionally describes me
- ☐ Often describes me
- ☐ Almost always describes me

Your results are in!

Congratulations on taking the first step on your journey to finding the rest you need!

Your Category Scores:

Physical Rest Score: 31

Mental Rest Score: 33

Emotional Rest Score: 37

Spiritual Rest Score: 31

Social Rest Score: 31

Sensory Rest Score: 23

Creative Rest Score: 31

My slightly grim results^

How To Interpret Your Results

Based on your input, the type of rest with the highest score is the one you should focus on. It is the primary type of rest you are missing in your life.

If you score 0-15: You are getting adequate rest in this area

If you score 16-25: You are experiencing rest in this area but would thrive with more.

If you score 26-35: You are feeling the effects of your lack of rest and need a change.

If you score >35: Your life is negatively affected by your lack of rest in this area.

So... Do These Quizzes Help?

Sure, yes. Not in a life-changing way, but in a 'mirror held up to (my tired) face' kinda way. These quizzes didn't really tell me anything I didn't sort of know already. Some quizzes felt surface-level, and generalising, others went deeper. These online quizzes don't feel like a substitute for accessing real support or systemic change in ways we work but ticking boxes that said burnout was affecting my friendships, my ability to relax, and my body was confronting and a nudge to realise or admit where I'm actually at.

In general the quizzes felt not super relevant in language towards freelancers as often 'your job' doesn't fit into one role or one responsibility, so although some of your project tasks may be 'simple', for me it's the balancing act of multiple different gigs at the same time that leads to feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion rather than the work itself.

For producers, freelancers, and creatives, these kinds of quizzes can be a good starting place, an accessible low-stakes way to validate or affirm the feelings you're potentially experiencing. If you're overwhelmed or unsure whether what you're experiencing is 'serious enough', answering the questions can help you name it and get you to a place where you can reflect, seek support and boundary-set.

But being real: the hard work starts after the result. If the quiz tells you you're burnt out, the next step isn't always clear, solutions don't fit into a result summary especially when these quizzes have a lack of nuance, e.g. don't take into account intersectionality and lived experience.

Seyi Osi is a Creative Producer at Raze Collective and Programme Producer at Marlborough Productions who focuses on the inclusivity and celebration of often marginalised communities, such as the LGBTQIA+ community and those who are racially othered. Having grown up rarely seeing herself represented in mainstream arts and media, Seyi seeks to produce arts and culture that centers the queer and/or black experience. She also produces with The Cocoa Butter Club and Faggamuffin bringing their work to spaces such as the Southbank Centre, Somerset House, Here at Outernet, Soho House, Underbelly Festival and Village Underground.

Soft Strength: Practicing Self-Compassion as a Producer

The Black Wellbeing Collective

The Black Wellbeing Collective are a community and workplace wellbeing service dedicated to inclusive, intersectional support. We deliver culturally-responsive wellbeing solutions designed to foster compassion, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging. As a collective we create holistic and validating spaces for Black communities and prioritise the impact of social exclusion and healing of racial distress for staff members with lived experience across social change, creative and corporate sectors.

Self-compassion is a very important part of ensuring we have a fruitful routine and a balanced work/life experience.

Let's start with some daily check-ins.

Daily check-ins are key grounding exercises at the beginning of the day, supporting emotional regulation, clarity and focus, and burnout prevention. Being able to connect with your purpose and joy every day is important for self-alignment and a restoration of agency.

Use the below prompts before getting stuck into work, put pen to paper first thing as part of your work morning routine. Select questions that align with your needs, and answer between 4-5 of the below questions every morning.

Daily Check-In

AM:

Mood check-in

How are you feeling today, write down any moods that are rising. Or jot down your mood on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the best, 1 being the worst).

Gratitude reflections

What are you grateful for? How can you ground yourself to be in the present moment? What is one thing you've created – even if unfinished – that deserves appreciation? What's something simple around you right now that you can be grateful for?

What would make today great?

Reflect on what would be one thing that'll make today great for you, it could be- *simply getting through the day, speaking to a colleague, enjoying freshly brewed coffee.*

Intention Setting

What reminder or mantra can help me stay grounded if things feel chaotic? How can I protect my creative time – and my peace? What's one thing I want to focus my energy on today?

Self-compassion check in

What do I need to feel supported – emotionally, physically, spiritually? How will I know when I've done *enough* for today? In what small way can I offer myself grace today?

PM:

Top highlights

What were the top 3 highlights of my day (or week)? What do these highlights reveal about what I value right now?

Breathwork

Breathwork is great at self-soothing the nervous system to support co-regulation. Breathing can help us show up for ourselves and support self-compassion during challenging times. But it can also be used for everyday practice. Below are a few breathwork exercises to try that can help ease comfort and calm the mind.

Basic Belly Breathing

The basic technique is to breathe slowly and steadily through your nose down to your belly, filling it with air like you would a balloon.

Then breathe slowly and steadily out through your mouth like you're gently trying to steam up a window. Holding your breath at either end can help to calm your nervous system.

Hand Breathing

= 4 / 2 / 6 / 2

Sometimes a physical action can be helpful and soothing for many breathwork exercises.

Trace the index finger of one hand up and down the fingers of the other hand in time with the breathing count and holding the breath at the tip and dip of each finger.

Bringing Us Back To Our Senses

Another way to promote calm is to tune into any one of your five senses alongside your breathing. For example, feel your feet grounded on the floor, run your hands under warm water, give yourself a hand massage or listen to music that calms you.

You can build on this with a breathing technique you can use wherever you are.

Letter Writing

✨ Letter from Your Most Compassionate Supporter ✨

A Self-Reflection Exercise for Black Creatives

Think of someone – real or imagined – who sees your full humanity and values you beyond your output. This is someone who understands the weight you carry as a producer navigating a demanding, often exclusionary creative industry.

Now, write a letter to yourself from their perspective. Let them speak to you with care and clarity, especially around the area where you tend to judge yourself harshly.

Use these prompts to guide the letter:

- What would this person say to remind you that your struggles don't define your talent or worth? How might they help you reframe the pressure you put on yourself?
- How would they express deep understanding and kindness for the emotional toll of constantly having to prove yourself or protect your ideas?
- What would they say to remind you that you're not alone – that it's human to feel overwhelmed, to question yourself, to carry both brilliance and vulnerability?
- Let their words validate your experience. Maybe they'd say: "It makes sense that you're tired. You're doing a lot – and you're doing it in a space not built with you in mind. That's not weakness. That's reality."

Camille Lesforis is the founder of The Black Wellbeing Collective, director of Tailored Wellbeing EAP and Freelance Social Impact Consultant and Facilitator. Her career is dedicated towards improving the wellbeing of Black and racialised communities, she has a track record for creating platforms and tools for accessible wellbeing support both digitally and holistically. As seen on BBC Radio and Kings Cross Young & Gifted Campaigns, Samsung KX.

The Burrow

Evie Muir

Prelude

There are some comrades that when they invite you to be in shared practice, you drop sticks and follow their call. This is how I came to spend a weekend in training with Healing Justice London, practicing Politicised Somatics¹ as a revolutionary tool of racial justice organising. More bootcamp than retreat, this residential was as intense as it was nourishing and I found my body unfurling from its wintered posture of self-preservation, to one of openness.

On the final morning, after days of rigorous recalibrating, I came on my period. My womb was screaming to go home and lay horizontal and despite having been engrossed all weekend, I wanted to be anywhere but in practice. I was hyperconscious of my sudden inability to make eye contact with anyone else in the room and this felt like I was letting everyone down after days of building intimacy and trust. Letting down. The conditioned tendency for withdrawal that arises within me once a month, snarling that if I'm not able to show up fully, no, that if I were to show up honestly, sensitive and sharp tongued, in the messy manifestation of my menstruation, that's what I'd be doing.

An ongoing work in progress, I stayed in the room and brought my practice to the floor, participating in the prompts on offer but adapting them to accommodate the hot water bottle laden, wriggling, writhing, pain riddled contribution I'd become. It was vulnerable. But, as one of the fellow participants reminded us often throughout the weekend after we'd done something brave; no one died.

Remaining in the space meant that I wasn't absent for the final practice of the weekend; a somatic exploration of Allyship². The facilitators (Brandon Sturdivant and Erika Lyla), instructed the room to get into three – we would each experience allying with and being allied with. Having experienced the possibilities of this practice before, one of my allies was noticeably overwhelmed by the invitation and was immediately moved to tears. After some gentle holding, they decided to join us, and I went first.

I spoke my Declaration³ to the group, and we explored affirmations for my allies to relay to me during the practice. We followed Brandon's instructions as he guided us to stand in a variety of formations; myself in the centre, allies on either side, allies in front, allies behind, allies facing in, allies turning away. Having gained a sense of how my body responded to each position, we were then given the space to experiment with new formations and I let my soma guide my allies accordingly.

I began to succumb to the instinctive draw of gravity. Sinking to the floor, comfyng myself. Within seconds I'd established that having my allies standing skyward around me felt uncomfortable, and so I beckoned them to join me earthbound. In a triangular formation, all in the foetal position, we burrowed.

¹ 'The work of politicised somatics is the process and movement of addressing, exploring, identifying, understanding and transforming ourselves and our sites of shaping – this refers to our intimate and family networks, communities, institutions, social norms/historical forces and the spirit/natural world – in service of collective liberation' (Healing Justice London).

² 'An embodied skill in which allying and being allied with needs to be based on what the soma needs, rebuilding the link between safety and belonging' (Staci Haines c/o the Movement Medicine's Politicised Somatics Programme).

³ 'Declarations are a commitment we make to a desired future. They are a core part of embodied transformation; an embodied skill and a vision or intention for the future that we transform toward.' (Staci Haines c/o the Movement Medicine's Politicised Somatics Programme).

I noticed my discomfort with centering my own needs, and receiving care while being conscious that there was a member of my team also processing big emotions. The urge to self-sacrifice pulsed in my neck, willing my jaw to clench. Telling myself to trust in the process, and trust in my team members ability to consent – or withdraw consent – to the practice at any time as we'd practiced throughout the week, I let my body soften to the sonic spell being invoked by my allies: *you deserve rest / everything else can wait / we're resting with you / your body needs this / this is also 'the work'...*

Together we created a temporality that elongated into an indefinite pause. In reality, the practice could have only lasted a few minutes and despite having our backs to the world with all its dangers and threats, cocooned here, my body felt safe enough to let go of its usual hypervigilance and my eyelids closed. Had the practice continued, I believe it wouldn't have been long before I was serenaded into sleep. All it took was permission.

When we repeated the process with the others in the team taking turns in receiving allyship, I noticed the panicked narrative rise within the crevices of my brain; that I am useless and unable to offer care in this state of bodily anguish. I pushed through regardless, and though the heaviness of my womb forbade me from standing in allyship, I was humbled at how my offer of allyship from a seated posture was received with enthusiastic gratitude. The lesson: when I'm on my period and feel empty, I still have much to give.

After the session, my allies and I also reflected on how in making a request for allyship that saw my comrades resting with me, instead of simply creating space for me to rest alone, we were able to experience allyship as mutual reciprocity. The person who showed up raw and vulnerable was able to receive rest, and that rest gave them the capacity to also make a request for allyship. My request for rest, allowed me to then be replenished enough to show up in allyship for others.

We give and receive together. We move as one, a symbiotic whole that contorts and adapts to each other's needs, knowing that elsewhere in the ecosystem, connected through underground networks of care, our comrades are moving through the many formations that allyship can embody. But for now, the invitation is to return to a deeper interrogation of this homely posture with me. A home of both place and practice. Welcome to *The Burrow*.

Burrow [noun]

bur·row /'bʌrəʊ/

Definitions :

1. A group of activists, artists, organisers, movement makers who choose each other as comrades in rest;

Synonyms :

community, ecosystem, family, kin, tribe

2. An undercommons⁴ of rest, pause and fugitivity⁵ for activists, artists et al to organise from;

Synonyms :

retreat, safe place, haven, time machine, interlude, circle of love⁶**Burrowing** [transitive verb⁷]

bur·row·ing /'bʌrəʊɪŋ/

Definitions :

1. To practice rest as allyship as community care as revolutionary love⁸ with co-conspirators and collaborators in movement spaces and community organising;
2. To pause and recalibrate in response to the emotional and embodied needs of the individual within the collective, or the collective as a whole;
3. To commit to the underground and out of sight work of tenderness in togetherness;

Synonyms :

rest, hibernation, care, tending, nurture, permission, return, retreat, rhythm

⁴ 'A wild place that continuously produces its own unregulated wildness' (The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten)

⁵ To be 'in community and in relation with other lives on this planet – both inside and outside of oneself – as part of an ecological system' (Fugitive Feminism by Akwugo Emejulu)

⁶ A meaningful, life-sustaining intervention that can embrace and hold us while we surrender to the grief and pain within us (Sisters of the Yam: Black women and Self-recovery by bell hooks)

⁷ *A transitive verb is an action that requires an object community to convey its meaning
In other words: Burrowing requires a burrow.

⁸ 'On our best and worst days and nights, an elusive Revolutionary Love might be the one tangible link that holds us together as communities despite the precarity and the predatory powers arrayed against freedom in balance with all life forms' (In pursuit of Revolutionary Love: Precarity, Power, Community by Joy James)

Practice

Incantation / Invitation

You deserve rest
 Everything else can wait
 We're resting with you
 Your body needs this
 This is also the work
 You deserve rest
 else can wait
 resting with you
 body needs this
 is also the work
 You deserve rest
 else can wait
 resting with you
 body needs this
 is also the work
 deserve rest
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 resting with you
 body needs this
 is also the work
 resting with you
 deserve rest
 body needs this
 else can wait
 is also the work
 body needs this
 Everything
 else can wait
 This
 We're
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 body needs this
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 is also the work
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 We're
 resting
 with
 you

When I invite others to meet me in a place of rest, incantations reverberate across the walls of our curated burrow. Cushioned and blanketed, we are bunnies curling into a collective foetal position. When I invite others to meet me in a place of rest, I am able to relinquish what keeps me alert and tense. Trusting that the more energised amongst us can hold the complexities of this work, allows me to surrender and my world to become small. When I invite others to meet me in a place of rest, I banish the shame and guilt, knowing that my request for care creates openings for my kin to tend to their own needs as they embody the container for mine. When I invite others to meet me in a place of rest we are able to practice allyship, showing up for each other despite our unwholeness.

Though burrowing can be practiced with any trusted party, building a burrow with those you already organise with is advised. If you are part of a bigger collective, you may want to experiment with size and scale, exploring what smaller and larger burrows can create space for. If you are working in projects or within external collaborations, establishing transparency may be necessary in relation to duration and depth. Where you burrow is also a point of adaptation. Whilst many of us work towards a home for our diasporic bodies to lay, our burrows may be meanwhile, as transient as those practicing. We call ourselves to burrow across space and time, entering the otherwise, the inbetween, the elsewhere and the not-quite-there-yet, whilst also being right on time. The practice, similarly, though it has bones which sturdily hold onto generations throughout history, can and should be fluid. The posture of the burrow, the affirmations whispered, the actions shapeshifted, will differ based on the burrow and the burrower's needs in any given moment. It could and should be seasonal, evolving, rotating, in flux. How one collective burrows may be completely different to how another practices. But know that when we all burrow, we intertwine to form an ecosystem, connected through mycelia of restful solidarity. Doing what needs to be done to maintain momentum.

Provocations

I'm interested in postures of resistance that deviate from the stereotypical. I'm interested in the shapes and contortions that create the capacity for us to be floppy and soft-bellied, that see interlaced fingers and snuggled embraces. I am interested in how these postures can influence different perspectives. ■ What do we see from down here, nestled in this mulchy earth? ■ What messages do we receive from the worm, the mycelium, the mole? ■ When we collapse the hierarchies of height and return to ground, how do we move differently from this position of softness? ■ What do we need in order to be protected in this posture? ■ How are we still useful to the movement? Not useful as in productive or laborious, but useful as in we all have something to offer even in our un-strengthened moments. ■ What dreams and desires make themselves known from this collapsed state and how do we follow them? ■ Who else is here-but-not-here with us in our burrow? Think wider ecosystems, global solidarities, ancestors, plantcestors, future generations. ■ And how do we redirect our actions in order to honour this new state of alignment?

Reading List

Akwugo Emejulu, *Fugitive Feminism*, Silver Press, 2022

bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*, Routledge, 2015

Camille Sapara Barton, *Tending Grief*, North Atlantic Books, 2024

Evie Muir, *Radical Rest: Notes on Burnout, Healing and Hopeful Futures*, Elliot and Thompson

Ewa Jasiewicz, Farzana Khan, Sarah Al-Sarraj, *An Introduction to Politicised Somatics*, Healing Justice London, 2023

Joy James, *In pursuit of Revolutionary Love: Precarity, Power, Community*, Divided Publisher, 2022

Maymana Arefin and Evie Muir, *What We Nourish Underground*, Skin Deep Anthology, 2025

Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, Central Recovery Press, 2017

Staci Haines, *The Politics of Trauma*, North Atlantic Books, 2019

Stefano Harney & Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Minor Compositions, 2013

Stephanie Foo, *What My Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma*, Allen & Unwin 2022

Tricia Hersey, *The Nap Ministry's Rest Deck: 50 Practices to Resist Grind Culture*, Chronicle Books, 2023

Evie Muir is a nature writer and the founder of Peaks of Colour – a Peak District based nature-for-healing community group, by and for people of colour. Advocating for the decolonisation of local and global environments, their work sits on the intersections of gendered, racial and land justice and is interested in the ways a Black Feminist, abolitionist and nature-allied praxis can forge a landscape for healed futures. Evie's debut book, 'Radical Rest: Notes on Burnout, Healing and Hopeful Futures' was published in 2024 by Elliot & Thompson.