

Münster, im Februar 2023

Bei der **Versammlung der Wünsche**, dem Zukunftskongress von Soziokultur NRW, kamen am 26. Januar 2023 zweihundert soziokulturelle Akteur*innen, Mitglieder der freien Kulturszene und Vertreter*innen aus Politik und Verwaltung zusammen, um über die Zukunft der Soziokultur zu diskutieren.

Elf Künstler*innen haben Workshops zu den Themen Partizipation, Diversität, Care und Empowerment durchgeführt. Ihre Impulse und Projektanregungen haben sie in Workshop-Rezepten festgehalten, damit die Akteur*innen der Soziokultur sie weiterverwenden oder als Inspirationsquelle nutzen können. Dies ist eines davon.

Eine ausführliche Dokumentation der Versammlung der Wünsche, inkl. zehn weitere Workshop-Rezepte, ist zu finden unter <https://versammlung.soziokultur-nrw.de>.

Regenerative Activism – a taster workshop with the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination

„Caring for myself is not self-indulgent, it is self preservation and that is an act of political warfare.“ – Audrey Lorde

Can you imagine a world where all the activists, artists, citizens involved in the fight for social and ecological justice somehow renewed themselves rather than burnt out or gave up? How can we shift our mindsets and behaviours, so that we co-create a culture that puts care rather than exploitation at its heart? For the “Versammlung der Wünsche” / Assembly of Wishes we presented a few tools of Regenerative Activism, both analytical and embodied, some of them directly inspired by the Ulex project.

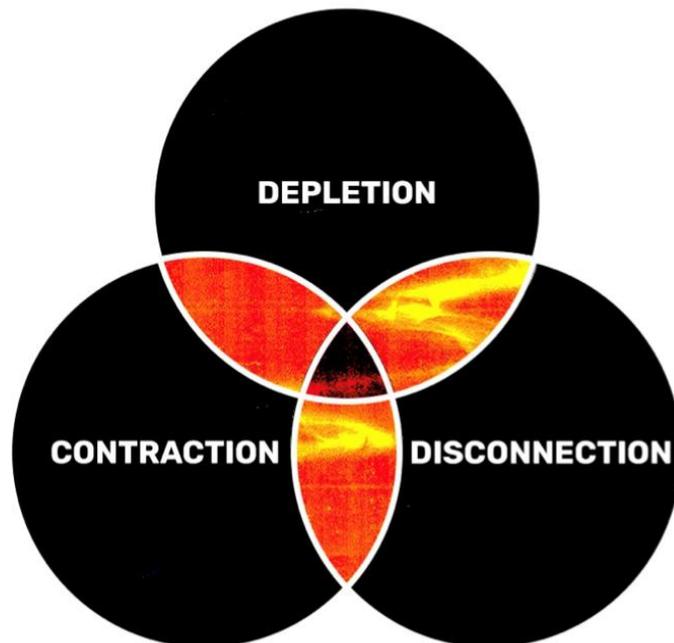
Regenerative Activism is an approach that tries to make our activism more effective and resilient to crises. It is more than just being able to “keep going”, but to revitalise and restore our personal and collective resources, thus keeping our movements responsive and creative. How can we thrive rather than just endure?

For us, burnout is not just a personal issue, it is political because it damages and weakens movements, groups break apart and intergenerational wisdom is lost. By sharing our experience of burnout together we also acknowledge that it is not our own fault, or weakness, but the result of our petro patriarchal racial capitalist culture, whose extractivist, productivist growth model depletes our lands, seas and bodyminds.

How to define burnout?

Everyone's experience of burnout is different. But a constellation of overlapping experience is common.

Depletion, Contraction, Disconnection



Depletion is when we feel empty, drained and it is hard to recharge. Motivation and inspiration dries up. Everything feels like it requires more and more effort from us. We have less to give and we feel like giving up.

Contraction is a healthy protective response to a loss of energy. The best way to imagine it is like a body curled up into a tight ball. We can feel blockages and density in our bodies. We contract emotionally, we pull away from others and lose capacity for empathy. We can contract our minds and imagination too, becoming cynical and rigid in our thinking.

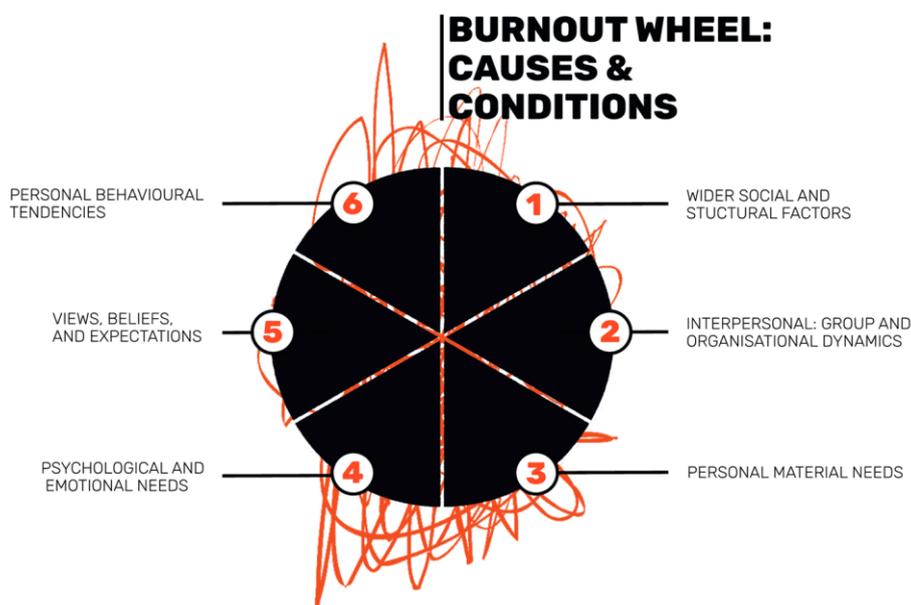
Disconnection is when we disengage from life and relationships. This can feel very confusing, or just more like numbness. We no longer recognise ourselves, feel cut off from our feelings, our bodies, from sources of support, from friends. We retreat from the world and can lose a sense of hope and agency.

Burnout is often hard to describe with words, and often in burnout we can lose our ability for clear thinking. This constellation can help us define our burnout and support us to acknowledge our own experience when we think that our burnout is not valid, because other people's pain is more valid than us!

Exploring the causes and conditions of burnout

So that we can make interventions and changes, it is important to be able to identify the key causes and conditions that lead to burnout. Often it is bad working culture and group dynamics that lie at the base of burnout. There is value in using this tool together with others in our communities to share our experience so that appropriate strategies can be collectively developed, and burn out is no longer seen as just as a 'personal issue'. Through sharing experience and building shared understanding we strengthen solidarity and enable the establishing of more caring cultures.

The wheel of burnout



Burnout arise from the overlap of personal, group/interpersonal and wider social political factors. This tool helps us to reflect on six categories that can undermine our wellbeing. Even if we haven't experienced burnout, this exercise can help us identify our friends and colleagues who might be going there. The exercise can be done alone and/or with a group. Ideally you do it as a group first, to get a sense of the categories, and then do it alone to focus down on specific cases. Don't forget to keep breathing whilst doing this, and trying to reflect on where in your body some of these experiences sit.

Draw out the circle, with six segments and then fill in each one for your experience.

1. Wider social and structural factors: To avoid and heal burnout its key to focus on factors that are at the scale of what we can most immediately change. But this can lead to the belief that its just a question of our own poor choices or bad habits. But some of the primary stresses and strains that can lead to burnout are often deeper structural factors, from social exclusion, racism, sexism and other forms of injustice. Even though these are things that long term struggle change, by paying attention to which factors are most relevant to us we can develop strategies

that can mitigate their impact. We can also, importantly, take account of the different ways these conditions impact us relative to our levels of privilege and take account of these differences in the ways we support each other in our movements.

2. Interpersonal dimension: Group and organisational dynamics: This is a broad area that includes the dynamics within our groups and ways we reproduce unhelpful tendencies in our organisational cultures. This can include cultures that pressure us to overwork, unresolved or entrenched interpersonal conflicts, and unhealthy power dynamics. While burnout is generally associated with our work-life, it is often factors related to our intimate relationships that can tip the balance, things like the break-up of a close relationship or the loss of loved ones can add significant strain - and we can't entirely compartmentalise the emotional impact of these things.

3. Personal material needs: These relatively obvious factors relate to how well we are able to meet our basic needs for food and nutrition, sleep, rest and recovery, shelter and housing, physical safety, economic security, and many similar factors such as our basic level of health or fitness. It is important to recognise and acknowledge our needs and the extent to which an inability to meet them creates stresses and strains on our lives. All too often we see activists deprioritising their own needs in self-sacrificial ways that are ultimately unproductive.

4. Personal behavioural tendencies: It can often seem that the easiest place to make changes relate to our behaviours, but these can be driven by deeper emotional needs or perpetuated by group culture and expectations. So, whilst it might not be as simple as just stopping doing things that are unhelpful, beginning to recognise the patterns can support us to explore the deeper causes and enable gradual shifts. Common tendencies include persistent overworking, struggling to sense and protect our boundaries, distracting ourselves from our experience in various ways, and placing ourselves in situations where our nervous system remains in a high stress or 'activated' state for long periods without coming down into resting states.

5. Psychological and emotional needs: Understanding how our psychological and emotional needs drive behaviour, will help us to see why we don't take rest when it's needed or why we regularly take on more than we can manage. This can help us to examine our work habits, our personal strategies for dealing with stress, and the balance we strike between work and other aspects of our lives. Factors can include our need for approval, to be seen, or to prove ourselves. We can find that we are acting out of guilt and shame or to avoid acknowledging other emotional pain that we are carrying. Sometimes we can find that we are ignoring or overriding emotional needs that eventually reassert themselves through symptoms of physical illness or mental strain.

6. Views, beliefs and expectations: While our behaviours might be underpinned by emotional or psychological needs, more often than not both behaviour and psychological needs are informed and shaped by our views and beliefs about ourselves and the world. Some of these are conscious and others less so. These views shape the way we see the world and the choices we make. Some of them are helpful while others less so. It is not only useful to uncover the views that shape our experience, but to also explore the ways we hold onto our views, how tightly we cling to them or how open mindedly we can be with their inevitably partial and provisional

nature! Core factors here are our views about how change happens, our human nature, and ways we construct meaning and our sense of who we are.

Once we have identified these causes we can begin to look at where we can change things together. What are obvious intervention points? Where can you intervene in things to make the most change? What resources do you already have? What do you need to find?

Reconnection as healing

Petro patriarchal capitalist culture encourages separation and atomization. We are encouraged to be less connected to our SELF, to OTHERS, to the LIVING WORLD ('nature').

Key to Regenerative activism is to heal these three areas of connection – to have healthy nourishing connections with our self, others (our collectives etc) and the living world ('nature').

Normally a Regenerative activism workshop will last for 10 days, with time to explore these three connections. We learn tools for awareness and emotional literacy, such as meditation and body work. We look at systems of oppression in groups, share good decision making tools, to make our group processes better. And by going into the living world, we do embodied work that opens us up to non-humans so as to feel part of something bigger and feel interconnected with beings who share life with us.

The taster workshop involved body exercises such as centering and tapping, which are techniques to bring us back into the body, as a way to counteract the tendencies to 'leave' our bodies in moments of stress and anxiety. These techniques can't be taught virtually.

For further information on the Ulex course philosophy see [here](#).

Who we are:

The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination brings artists and activists together to co-design and deploy tools of disobedience. Infamous for launching a rebel raft regatta to shut down a coal fired power station, turning bikes into machines of disobedience during a climate summit and refusing to be censored by the BP sponsored Tate gallery, the Labofii now inhabits the zad of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, 'a territory lost to the republic,' according to the French government, where an airport project was abandoned after 40 years of struggle.

The collective is facilitated by popular educator and deserter of the academy Isabelle Fremeaux (she/her) and art activist Jay Jordan (they/them) labelled a 'Domestic Extremist' by the UK police, and 'a magician of rebellion' by the French press. Together they authored the book and film *Pfade durch Utopia* (Nautilus, 2012) and *We are 'Nature' Defending Itself: Entangling Art, Activism and Autonomous Zones* (Vagabonds/Pluto/Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, 2021).

@labofii

www.labo.zone

Über die Versammlung der Wünsche:

Zur Dokumentation:

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