

CS LAB

CARING IN TIMES OF CRISIS



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.

This publication
was edited
by Circostrada

CIRCO
STRADA
European Network
Circus and Street ArtS

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

FOREWORD

For the past year, the world and environment we were living in has been severely shaken by the global pandemic. We have been deprived of our reference points, of fundamental liberties, challenged in our capacity to endure, stand, accept and cope with an unprecedented situation impacting both the professional and personal realms. In the end, we had no choice but to adapt, reinvent ourselves, our ways of life and our working practices in order to move forward.

More than ever in the course of the 21st century we have been drawn to adapt to new circumstances, realities and, ultimately, to venture into unknown grounds and face uncertainty, along with the anxiety and doubts it brought about. But concretely, how did we navigate through this upheaval? What does it say about our resilience?

Drawing from the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), designed by the Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist Hans Selye, we have tried, in the framework of the CS LAB#6, to reproduce its three stages: Alarm-reaction, Resistance and Exhaustion, as a mean to conduct experiences and better understand the way our minds and body adapt to the stress labyrinth we've been crossing, as a deeply impacted sector and as individuals.

This publication does not seek nor claim to provide the right answers or ready-made solutions but rather aims to explore further the issues discussed during the CS LAB, offering us the opportunity to take a step back, question and reflect on these fundamental issues through various insights, testimonies, analysis and visions of experts from the field. It will most likely resonate with each and every one of us based on our own experiences, questions, feelings, ways of being and ways of responding to stressful times but ultimately, what we will make of it and how we may choose to apply this knowledge to our specific situation is up to us.

Circostrada & Imaginarius teams

ABOUT US

Circostrada

Circostrada is the European Network for Circus and Street Arts.

Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.

Circostrada is coordinated by ARTCENA – French National Centre for Circus Arts, Street Arts and Theatre – and is based in Paris (France). In a few words, Circostrada is:

- A community of circus and street arts professionals linked together by common values and aspirations, who advocate for greater recognition and more structured cultural policies.
- The voice and reference network of circus and street arts in Europe.
- A group of passionate and committed individuals who meet several times a year at the network's events.
- A network dedicated to its members, engaged in facilitating the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices at European and international levels.
- A digital resource platform that provides thematic publications, observation tools and news on circus and street arts, available to all free of charge in English and French.

🌐 www.circostrada.org

IMAGINARIUS

Imaginarium is the International Street Theatre Festival of Santa Maria da Feira.

It is a landmark, a living system of production and cultural circulation, focused on street arts and contemporary circus. With a consolidated trajectory of 20 years, it is the biggest street arts festival in Portugal.

In terms of program, the festival has invested in large international productions and in the development of original creations for presentation in its programming debut, giving space to the experimentation and imagination of local creators. The official program also includes the Mais Imaginarium section, contextualized as a competition of projects by emerging artists, and Imaginarium Infantil, with innovative workshops and experiences for an audience between 3 and 12 years old.

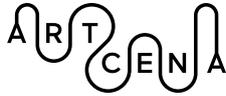
Since 2017, Imaginarium transitioned from a festival to a content-producing centre. The old municipal slaughterhouse was converted into an artistic residency center, specialized in street arts and contemporary circus. The center has an organized network of professionals to offer mentoring support to creative process and the dissemination of projects.

Promoting cultural exchange, new creation and audience development remain strategic goals as well as the incessant desire to create, develop and transform.

🌐 www.imaginarium.pt/en/

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A big thanks to

All those who contributed to this publication: Vida Skreb, Miguel Bica, Teresa Espassandim, Eva-Luna García-Mauriño, Elisabete Sousa and Diogo Martins.

Additional note



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Graphic design

Frédéric Schaffar

August 2021

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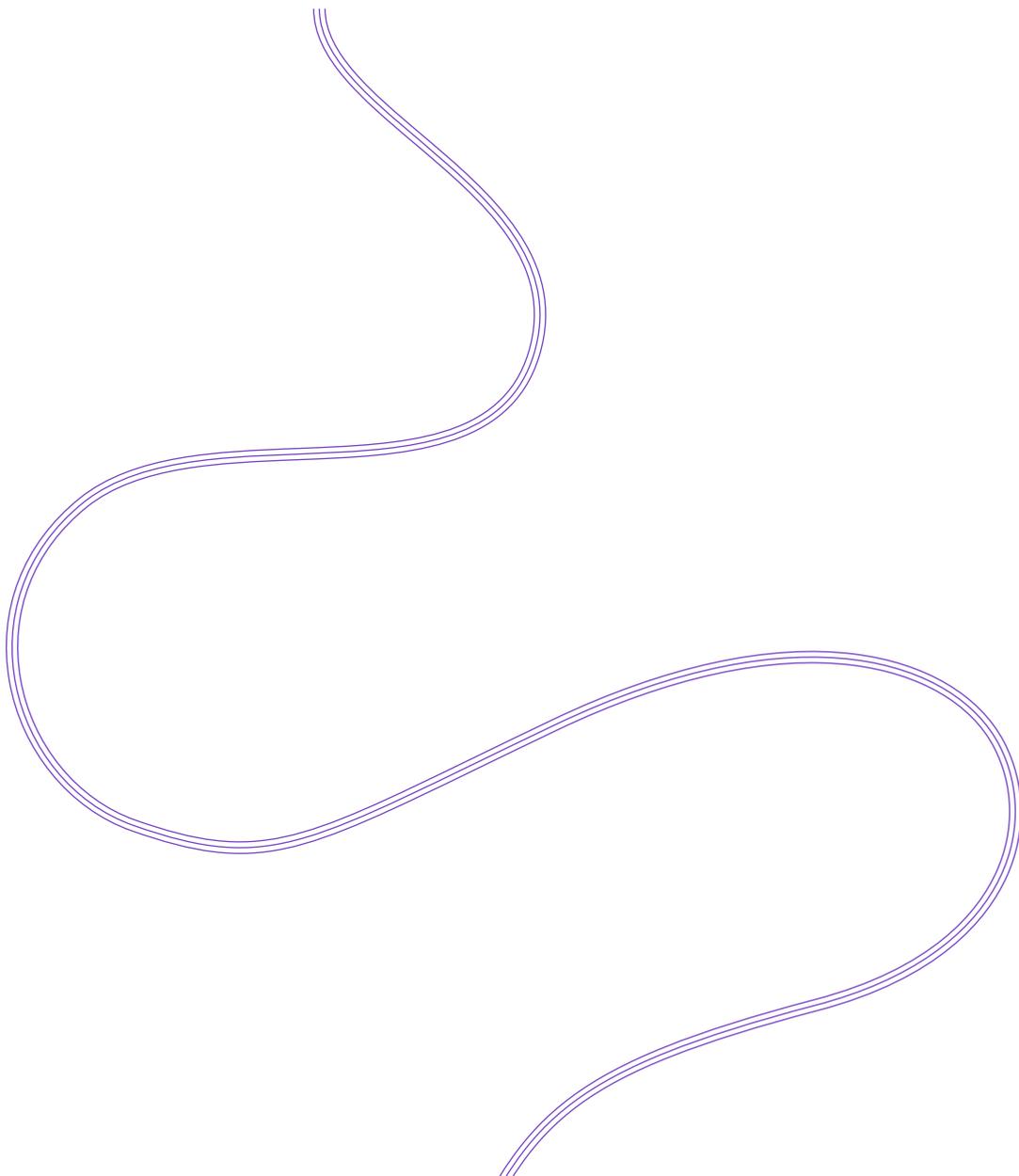
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HOW NEUROSCIENCE CAN HELP DEAL WITH STRESS

By **Vida Skreb**



Vida Skreb (UK) has an MSc in Chemistry and a Ph.D. in neuroscience. Her thesis from the University of Zurich was on the topic of learning and neuroplasticity. She is a facilitator, speaker, and certified coach, with over 700h of executive coaching, helping people connect to their purpose through psychological and neuroscience-based methods. As a leadership consultant in London, she helps companies and leaders create the conditions for the potential to flourish. She is fluent in Portuguese, French, Italian, German, and Spanish.

Vida Skreb has been invited to give a keynote session on the theme “Are we designed to adapt?” during the CS LAB. With this article, the author dives deep in explaining how our nervous system works by applying her expertise in neuroscience to stress-management techniques. In the section LABSTORIES, interviews with circus and street arts professionals will provide concrete testimonies from the field and different perspectives on how to cope with stress.

What happens to us under stress?

Stress is a word we hear all the time, but what does it really mean? One way of describing it is being triggered into survival mode by a real or imagined threat. It’s when we perceive we don’t have sufficient resources to cope with the emotional or mental pressures and start to feel overwhelmed. We can have demanding lives, but if there is capacity to cope with it, we don’t actually feel stressed.

The underlying emotion is typically **fear**; we get anxious that things will go wrong. We keep expecting something unpleasant or painful to happen in the future, whether it’s physical, material, relational, and we stop feeling secure. When our brain gets the message that our safety has been threatened on some level, it wants to protect us. The brain is designed to help us survive and not to make us happy.



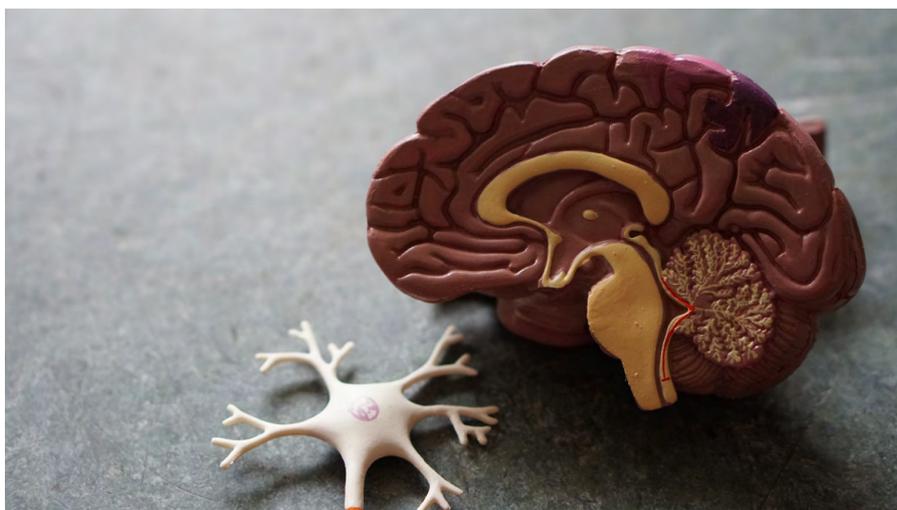
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Amygdala is in charge of the incredibly quick response that gets us out of danger. It's a small area deep within our brains that receives signals from our senses. Once it registers a potential threat it rapidly instructs the body to run away, or attack. This is the fight or flight mechanism we share with animals. There is also the immobilization or "freeze" response. It's when animals play dead until the predator leaves. For us it's getting paralysed and stuck, like a "deer in the headlights".

Without the amygdala's responsiveness to potential dangers, we would have never made it as a species. Imagine hearing a suspicious sound - if your amygdala is doing its job you run away, survive, and get a chance to procreate. If you stop to explore the sound however... you could end up being somebody's lunch. There is no time to check in with the prefrontal cortex, the more rational, wiser part of our brain. The amygdala prefers to err on the side of caution to keep us alive. Throughout history, humanity has been facing physical threats constantly, and being exquisitely sensitive to danger helped us survive.

This is the reason the brain has a negativity bias. We focus on criticism automatically and ignore praise. The news is filled with what is going poorly, not what is going well. For the brain, positivity is like Teflon, and negativity like velcro. Experiencing negative emotions simply means we are human. Focusing on successes and enjoyable experiences takes effort, while remembering failures and embarrassments happens automatically. It's been shown it takes three positive experiences to compensate for a negative one.

When the amygdala interprets images or sensations as distress, it activates a cascade of responses. It instantaneously calls the hypothalamus, the brain's command centre in charge of bodily functions. The hypothalamus in turn activates the involuntary sympathetic nervous system, which oversees our response to threat, orchestrating our bodily responses. It's like pressing a gas pedal that gets adrenaline going, heart pumping, senses sharpening, getting us prepared to start fighting, or flee. Once



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the threat is gone, the parasympathetic nervous system will activate to allow the body to recover and relax. It's often described as the "rest and digest" or "feed and breed" system. The sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system counterbalance and complement each other.

Humans have evolved to handle short bursts of stress followed by longer periods of recovery.

The problem occurs when pressure becomes chronic and the stress system goes into overdrive.

Today, we typically don't fear being eaten or slain on the way to the grocery store. However, our loyal amygdala is still there, a faithful guardian alerting us of potential threats. We are not made for long-term sympathetic system activation, because that prevents necessary recovery. **Accumulating tension over time can lead to a whole host of stress-related disorders** - anxiety, depression, insomnia, muscle tension, addiction, cardiovascular and digestive issues. Chronic stress reduces the capacity for higher cognitive functions. Attention, long-term memory, emotional regulation, and flexible behavior, seated in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), all suffer. Uncontrollable stress affects the PFC by reducing its neuronal firing. Simultaneously, the more primitive, impulsive response in the amygdala gets stronger.

The Personality Systems Interaction (PSI) theory is a framework discovered in 2000 by Prof. Dr. Kuhl based on over 20 years of

research in neuroscience and experimental psychology. PSI posits humans have four cognitive functions corresponding to activation of certain brain regions. Activation of a cognitive function underpins a particular way of thought, emotion and behavior.

We can imagine the functions as rooms in the palace of our brains that we can go in and out of. Each room has a particular atmosphere, lighting, and decoration, with windows showing us different parts of the world, and representing distinct parts of our inner landscape. We can move quickly between the rooms, sometimes even in a matter of milliseconds - this is a dynamic, fluid process. Here we will explore two of the four functions that are linked to stress response, surviving, and thriving, Object Recognition System and Extension Memory.

When a threat appears, the amygdala activates a function Prof. Dr. Kuhl named "Object recognition system", that perceives individual objects in our surroundings as opposed to the whole. For ease of reference we will call it **the blue room** from now on. Here the senses are sharp and alert, we are curious to understand what is happening around us, actively perceiving the outside world. When the blue room is active we zoom in to notice details and scan the environment for discrepancies and errors. We get tunnel vision, and only perceive parts of the whole picture. Quickly, we spot what doesn't fit into our perception of the world, what is new, different,

or a potential threat. We are attuned to noticing problems. At the same time, we can't step back to see the forest from the trees meaning we can spiral into negative thoughts. **The blue room is a novelty and error detector.** When in it, our mood ranges from curiosity and alertness to melancholy, fear, worry, and anxiety. The

underlying assumption of residing in the blue room is that we are not safe.

However, the blue room is needed for a multitude of reasons. It helps us to be cautious, precise, curious, to improve, spot problems, be sensitive to nuances, and the environment around us. It can reduce the complexity of the

world by distilling it into simpler objects. The brain operates in cognitive shortcuts - it's faster and more effective. The problem is when we jump to the conclusion about something being a threat too soon. Chronically overstaying in the blue room can result in states of depression.

How to recover from stress?

How do we get out of the blue room, once it stops being useful? By going into the complimentary **yellow room**. Prof. Dr Kuhl calls it Extension Memory, as this is a vast, extended network of neuronal connections. Its activation improves intuitive decision making, cognitive flexibility, creativity, engagement, and resilience; all great resources to combat stress. The yellow room is thought to be anchored in the hippocampus, and mainly the right side of the prefrontal cortex (PFC).

The hippocampus is a complex brain structure involved in learning, memory, and imagining the future. It plays a significant part in regulating our emotions, which is a cornerstone of mental health and well-being. PFC is the seat of executive functions. These include decision-making, working memory and social behavior, and expressing our personalities. It orchestrates thoughts, emotions and actions top-down, aligning them with our internal goals and plays a big role in changing how we feel by downregulating blue rooms' negative emotions.

Information is processed in parallel in the yellow room. This means we connect diverse ideas into a meaningful whole, which underpins holistic and creative thinking. We evaluate complex situations by integrating diverging points of view, to help flexibly navigate the challenges of life.

The yellow room is like a rich internal library of our experiences, creating the fabric of the Self. To access it we need to tune into ourselves, and get into contact with what is meaningful



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to us. Personal identification is the key that opens the door of the yellow room. It allows us to act in alignment with our core values in an intuitive way with little conscious effort. Spontaneously, we get absorbed and engaged in activities that matter to us. When people say "just be yourself," this is what they mean.

Given our experiences are stored in the yellow room, if we have too many painful memories we often resist going in. When it feels overwhelming to go into the self, please stop and seek professional support. The psyche has good reason to avoid accessing the self, so be gentle with yourself. Go slowly, and compassionately.

The blue and yellow rooms are complementary brain functions forming the axis of self-development. In the blue

room we see parts, in yellow we perceive the whole. Blue discovers what is different from expected or needs improvement. Yellow uses these insights to fuel growth in a cohesive way and expand our perception. In short, blue detects the problem, and yellow solves it. If we stay in yellow only, we will not have incentive to grow, as we feel all is well and why bother. If we stay only in blue, we are anxious and cut off from our resources. Integrating the qualities of both cognitive functions allow for authentic and sustainable self-growth and our experience becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

How to thrive?

Stress has an adverse impact on our brain by weakening the resourceful, wise PFC and hippocampus (yellow room) and strengthening the reactive amygdala activation (blue room). However, studies have shown the effects of stress are reversible. This is due to the brain's ability to change, learn and adapt based on experience. Neuroplasticity is the mechanism that underpins this malleability. Whatever thought or action we repeat becomes more strongly represented in the brain, and what we don't use weakens.

When we apply ourselves to regulating how we feel and think, to calm down the amygdala and strengthen access to the yellow

room, and become more resilient and resourceful. This activity requires conscious effort, and practice. As a result we learn how to self-soothe and regulate emotions. Yellow already has the resources to break apart the effects of stress. These resources simply need to be activated. Otherwise, they stay dormant, and blue runs rampant in our brains, creating worries.

Whatever helps us get into a state of relaxed awareness unlocks this function's stress-combating abilities. Given the highly individual nature of the yellow room, it's dee-

ply personal how we get in. This can change over time as we grow - being an intuitive function, we cannot push ourselves to enter it. In the same way we can't command ourselves to fall asleep, or to be creative, or to relax, we must allow for conditions for it to happen in a spontaneous way.

We will explore four ways to get into our yellow, and also how to nudge others into theirs, offering support during stressful states.

1. Feeling safe enough

When feeling threatened, we immediately enter the blue room. Therefore we need to establish a sense of feeling safe enough to allow us to walk into the yellow. **Setting appropriate boundaries** to ensure we feel sufficiently secure is essential. This can mean taking time

out, saying no, or asking for support, removing ourselves from an overwhelming situation, or reassuring ourselves that things are indeed ok. If we tell ourselves all is well, we might not solve the problem, but we do create a sliver of calm. Then, we can find a solution.

When helping someone, start by asking what they need, and listen. It can be practical or emotional support. Asking someone to think of their needs helps them connect to their yellow room.

2. Naming and exploring emotions

Compassionately acknowledging how we feel is the first step of handling stress. Naming an emotion has been shown to decrease activity in the amygdala and the correlated emotional reactions. Approach the feeling with curiosity, a sense of wonder and exploration. Suspend your judgement. Our emotions always have a good reason to appear, even if it doesn't seem logical at first glance. If we look deeper, feelings are trying to communicate something to us. Repressing emotions is akin to trying to make hunger go away by ignoring it. Giving ourselves emotional nourishment relieves the discomfort, not avoidance. Similarly, if we respond to the underlying need that an emotion is signalling to us, the tension dissipates. Emotions want us to act, set bound-

daries, integrate, soothe, accept, reflect, grieve, connect, rest, support, or care in a different way. We all have very good reasons to feel the way we feel, depending on our histories, experiences, beliefs, and the characteristics of our nervous systems.

We will never be able to truly know what another person is going through. Genuinely validating another's perspective without judgement and offering our full presence and empathy can be highly transformative. People typically know what could help them. Often, they need comfort and support to regulate their emotions. Once they feel calmer, they reestablish access to their creative resourceful selves. This allows them to navigate and solve complex situations. Some-

times the other person might need a nudge to snap out of a passive or anxious state. Sharing a feel-good activity together or distracting the person creates a break from the "blue" spiral of thoughts. Meet the other person where they are, then nudge them in a way that respects their process.

3. Telling a different story

Research has shown that the detrimental effects of stress are in part due to the story we tell ourselves about our experiences. Changing our mind about stress will impact the body's response. **What we tell ourselves about what is happening to us changes the way we respond to it internally.** If we want to reframe the narrative, we can ask ourselves explorative questions to help us broaden our perspective; "What is the one benefit of this situation?", "Can I be absolutely sure what I'm seeing is true?", "If someone I cared for were in the same situation as me, what would I tell them?", "If I could control as little as 1% of

what's happening, what would I do differently?", and similar. The yellow room can integrate adverse experiences in a meaningful narrative that aligns with the big picture. We have choices over how we interpret situations. We are the only thinker in our minds.

We have never been taught that we can change our internal experience. Observing our states and changing how we feel takes some time to develop. A way to train can be a simple visualisation practice. Imagine a difficult situation happening, and then visualize yourself responding in a different way. Our brains can't tell the difference between a real

situation, and an imagined one, so the neural pathways of the better response will start strengthening and get easier over time.

Once you have a good connection with the other person, and there is relief from the grip of anxiety, explore with them what they see as being under their control. This will create a sense of empowerment. Another technique to trigger this is to ask how they would respond to a loved one if they were in the same situation, as this will connect them to the resourceful mature part of them.

4. Breathing, stretching, movement

The yellow room is closely connected to the body. Embodiment activities become a doorway to our real selves. When we feel threatened, our muscles contract, our breath quickens, and our shoulders hunch to protect the neck and chest. We can release stress by reverse engineering this process. Change the bodily response by purposefully breathing slowly, opening the chest and shoulders, and doing large stretches to signal safety to the brain. Physical activity in general is one of the few things that has

been shown to relieve stress, and it takes only half an hour of aerobic activity a few times a week.

When helping someone, go for a walk, ideally in nature. Have them move, stretch and breathe. Changing body positions helps change the perspective. You can't go wrong with movement.

There are many more ways to deal with stress, and learn from it. An inquisitive mind,

experimentation, reflection and willingness to explore will help build our unique toolkit that works for our yellow room. Ultimately, compassion is the key that unlocks our brain's resources to thrive.

TOOLBOX



To leave the blue room for the yellow room...

1. First, keep in mind that the blue and yellow rooms are complementary: while one detects the problem, the other solves it. It is natural to be anxious and not having everything sorted out: going from the blue room to the yellow room allows space for self-growth.
2. Now, build a secure environment around you which will help you to be safe enough to find a solution to stress.
3. Acknowledge how you feel without judgements and try to identify what could help you.
4. Imagine a difficult situation happening, and then visualize yourself responding in a different way, reframing will help you see the big picture.
5. Connect how you feel mentally to your body: breathing exercises, stretching and physical activities are ways to relieve stress.

HAVE WE BURNT OUT CULTURE?

By Miguel Bica



Miguel Bica (Portugal) is one of the founders and production director of Gerador, an independent platform of journalism, culture and education based in Lisbon, Portugal.

He found himself migrating to the cultural area, where he collaborated in the IndieLisboa and DocLisboa film festivals and was the manager of the Baixa-Chiado PT Bluestation project. In 2014 he founded Gerador, together with Pedro and Tiago and has seen it grow every day as production director. It is to Gerador that he dedicates himself body and soul, while at the same time working as a cultural events teacher at the World Academy creative school.

Where we stand

As of July 2021, at the time of this writing, the percentage of fully vaccinated people in the European Union is above 43%, in Europe as a whole just above 35% in contrast to the worldwide percentage which is just above 13%. Portugal, my country, is slightly above 46%. If we focus on the Western world and, in particular, on Europe, we can see the light

at the end of the tunnel for the long-awaited total reopening of society and, consequently, of the arts and culture.

Today, however, uncertainty remains. At a time when a more open summer was expected, the delta variant caused the numbers of infected to increase and, consequently,

the opening rules of cultural events have regressed. Once again, we face limited and controlled audiences, shows that are cancelled or postponed, and festivals that no longer exist. Now, mostly in France and Portugal, digital vaccination certificates are in place and that can give us some hope.

How we, creators and producers in the cultural area have been coping

Since the beginning of 2020, stakeholders in the cultural area have been forced to deal with three factors that are extremely difficult to manage.

1. Uncertainty in the various cycles of evolution/regression of the pandemic, with constant advances and retreats, changes in rules, creation of new rules, lockdowns, openings, postponements, reschedulings, cancellations. Fleeting improvements, which sometimes bring hope and cruel setbacks that rob it the next day. A whole cycle of uncertainty, which has certainly contributed to the wear and tear of an area that is already fragile due to its characteristics, with an evident mental wear of those who usually need the realization of an idea, a creation to close a cycle. We create, conceive, produce, present, close the cycle

and prepare to start a new one. This ideal order of artistic creation has been constantly broken over the past year and a half, with obvious consequences for the capacity and motivation of cultural agents for creation.

2. Lack of knowledge/experience of reality. The artistic community has always known its environment and its audience. A theatre, an auditorium, a stage, the street, all are places of artistic presentation and representation, and those who create and/or programme think about them organically, taking into account the way in which the environment contributes to what is presented and vice-versa. With the pandemic, the usual places where culture happens became conditioned or closed, with new rules and new perceived risks, which lead to the appearance of new places and different

logics. The digital environment was clearly the "new place" in the pandemic, despite it not being actually new. There were now new eyes looking at it, curious, often looking into the unknown but already creating a path towards the future.

We have also been forced to face a new reality when it comes to the audience. The people who are available to attend our initiatives have changed. Things like the way they look at the venue, the time of day they are obliged to go and, consequently, their day planning, generate a new schedule that can fit or not in what we have to offer (eg on July 21 in Lisbon, cultural initiatives are only allowed until 22:30 on weekdays and until 12:30 on weekends). The decades-old knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of its audience, very specific to each country, to each city, has determined the choices of



CSLAB#6 sensorial dinner © Imaginarius

those who create and programme, either because the programmer adapts to them or because the time and effort to train the public has transformed it. The pandemic changed these dynamics of audience attraction, changed the communication logic of the shows and brought new challenges, forcing in many cases a radical reformulation of the creation and programming strategy in order to attract the public.

3. The precariousness and financial weakening of institutions and actors in the cultural fabric. This issue, very evidently linked directly to the previous two, has had many more ramifications. In my view, the main one was the visibility that it brought to a group of cultural professionals, whose professions are voted to always be behind the scenes and, consequently, less visible. This lack of visibility is more drama-

tically marked by the state's inability, in the first phase of the pandemic, to effectively identify who were the people who worked in this field, who were the ones that the Ministry responsible for the Arts and Culture should represent and, of course, help in a time of crisis. The invisibles of culture became institutionally visible for the first time and it signaled the emergence of a group of associations and initiatives that aim not only to support them but also to represent them as a whole.

The idea of loss has been constant throughout this pandemic: loss of financial means, control, space, public, ability to implement a clear plan, knowledge of reality and the ecosystem, loss of energy in dealing and resisting constant aggression. But in the cultural area we also see resistance, the clear ability to perceive and anticipate the effect of art on others and to perceive our role as artistic and cultural creators, actors and producers, not only in our own recovery as individuals and as a class, which has rediscovered itself and united as never before, but also in the recovery of our audience and society in general.

But have we really burnt out culture? How can we adapt?

Culture is not suffering from burnout. Art is not burning out. People are. Art and artists have an historical capacity to rise in difficult times; it was amid a pandemic that Giovanni Bocaccio was inspired to write *The Decameron* in 1348, where a group of young aristocrats exchange stories while taking refuge from the plague, it was during the 1918 flu epidemic that Egon Schiele painted his mentor Gustav Klimt on his bed, where he would soon die, Schiele himself died shortly after, leaving a priceless artistic lifework. It was right after the first World War and the flu epidemic that surrealist and dadaist movements emerged, fueled by that same chaos and that same anguish, it was with the HIV/

AIDS epidemic that some of the most incredible works by authors like Keith Haring and David Wojnarowicz emerged, among many others. Artists and, consequently, art, artistic, creative and cultural manifestations have the capacity to add meaning to chaos, to give comfort to the public, to break prejudices and ideas and to force the entry to a new reality. Art and culture did not reach the point of burnout, they are, as they always were, the spearhead in the creation of new logics, new meanings and new perspectives on the world.

But art and culture are made by people and we cannot dissociate ourselves from that. In the article "*Burnout by now it's a*

given", Lucy McBride tells us that "Simply being human carries occupational risk. **Now is the time to redefine burnout as the mental and physical fallout from accumulated stress in any sphere of life**, whether that's work, parenting, caregiving, or managing chronic illness. To muster the energy for reentry into non-pandemic life, people need more than a vaccine and a vacation; they need validation of their experience, a broader reckoning with how they lived before March 2020, and tools to dig out from more than a year of trauma."

When we think from the perspective of "burnout", it is this relationship – art/artist/

individual that we have to consider in the present and in the near future. If, on the one hand, the role of creators and cultural and artistic agents is fundamental in creating a structure to help society overcome the

trauma and exhaustion of this pandemic period, on the other hand, we have to remember that not only they are subject to the same pressure as everyone else, but they are, themselves, in an urgent need for

a support structure. Cultural and artistic agents are at the same time the victims and the ones most capable of contributing to the resolution of a global issue.

How can we prepare?

At the expected end of the pandemic, we enter a new phase where everything will necessarily be different. This difference will not only be related to the pandemic period, of course, but also to the pre-pandemic. The world will necessarily be different from 2019. How can we anticipate the threats and opportunities, and how can we prepare for what's to come?

Creating support for creators and cultural agents

– who were highly affected financially and emotionally by the pandemic. A structured reinforcement, which reduces the loss of cultural agents (people who stopped working in the area and may not return) is essential, supporting a return to artistic creation and presentation and creating new contexts and support for these same presentations. We must create conditions so that there is time for the reorganisation and for the structuring of creative institutions, time is a much-needed resource for the creative process. It's important that this support comes from the state at different levels, both national and local, but also from the market, where we can take advantage of this new beginning to rethink a dated law on patronage. In May 2021, Gerador (the cultural platform that I represent) published "*Barómetro Gerador*"¹, its annual study on the perception of the Portuguese people in relation to culture, which, for the second year in a row, devoted a considerable part of the research to the current pandemic situation. The study was composed of 1200 interviews and is statistically representative of the Portuguese population. To the question: "Globally, do you consider that culture is important for a country's economy?" 93.4% of the inquiries said yes. To



Trampolim Gerador 2016 © Mathilde Cunha

the question: "Nowadays the Portuguese state spends 0.39% of its annual budget on culture. Next year, the Portuguese state should invest..." 84.5% answered "more" (*Barómetro Gerador*, 2021). Data shows that, at least in Portugal, the public not only understands the importance of supporting culture but is in favor of the state investing more in it.

Studying and predicting reality in the near future

– the main way for us to be able to adapt and make the right decisions is to try to take a look into the future. This ability is built on two main factors: knowledge of the present and the study of society's opinion and perception of the future, that hopefully gives us a view of the public's future decision making processes. It is essential that we find out as soon as possible how to assess society's availability regarding the reopening of the cultural

spaces and events. Bearing in mind that a gradual, as opposed to an immediate, resolution of the pandemic is expected, and as restrictions are lifted and the percentage of the vaccinated population increases, it is natural that the cultural community seeks to understand what the behavior of people will be in the near future. Again, in the "*Barómetro Gerador*" study, respondents were asked to imagine a scenario in which the majority of Portuguese would be vaccinated by the end of August. With this scenario in mind, respondents indicated, from 1 to 10 (1 represented not at all willing and 10 very willing) to what extent they would be willing to participate in certain activities. Going to a restaurant or a party with friends have interesting averages of 8.1 and 8.0, showing a readiness to get back to these activities. However, when asked about going to a concert, the theater or a music festival, the respondents still

¹ Gerador (2021): *Barómetro Gerador* www.gerador.eu, <https://gerador.eu/barometro/>

revealed a lot of apprehension, presenting averages between 6.7 and 6.3, which reveals a clear increase in willingness, given the timing of the question and the scenario presented, but still far behind from the expected levels of a post pandemic. The answers are quite revealing of the immense work that has to be done in order for the events to regain a place of safety and comfort in the eyes of the public. Art taking place in the streets and in the public space, due to its characteristics, is at the spearhead of this new era of cultural consumption.



Trampolim Gerador 2020 © Alvaro Ponte

What to aim for?

Indian novelist Arundhati Roy¹ wrote in early April 2020 that nothing could be worse than a desire to return to normalcy. Referring to the pandemic, she wrote that “It is a portal, the gateway between one world and the next”. Let us take advantage of the break not to aim for a return to 2019, but for a new beginning, fueled by the evident contributions made by culture and the cultural and creative industries in the joint creation of a better, fairer and more inclusive world. And we just need to look a little more closely to realize the extent of that same contribution at the following levels:

Economic: according to data from the *Rebuilding Europe study: the cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis* (GESAC, 2020)²: “At the end of 2019, the cultural and creative economy was a heavyweight European with a turnover of €643 billion and a total added value of €253 billion in 2019, the core activities of the cultural and crea-

tive industries (CCIs) represented 4.4% of EU GDP in terms of total turnover. Therefore, the economic contribution of CCIs is greater than that of telecommunications, high technology, pharmaceuticals or the automotive industry”. Culture and creativity not only strengthen the economy but mainly forces it to leave the capitalist logic of being an end in itself to a means of evolution and social transformation, in favor of society. It is also important to add that, when we talk about “CCIs”, we are talking indirectly about all cultural areas. Australian economist David Throsby, with the model “The concentric circles model of the cultural industries”³, explains very clearly the need for the existence of “Core Creative arts” such as literature, visual arts, music, performance and cinema as essential to feed the so-called creative industries, which in turn bring economic value and the ability to influence other areas of technology and innovation. The core creative arts are the spark to ignite the whole process.

Quality of life and mental health: the contribution of cultural and creative artistic areas in facing the most difficult moments of this pandemic was evident to everyone, as it has been at other more dramatic times in the history of humanity. Artistic and cultural manifestations provide us with escape, liberation and give us hope and strength to face the harsh realities of everyday life. An artistic expression that helps us escape reality, makes us return to it transformed, more attentive and more available to face it.

Building empathy – normalization and acceptance of difference: from multiple definitions of empathy, connecting with someone’s feelings to try and understand their perspective or putting yourself in someone’s shoes are the ones I identify the most with. And in an increasingly polarized world, empathy is one of the strongest and most effective weapons against hatred. Art and culture play a fundamental role in the process of creating alternative realities that

¹ Arundhati Roy (2020): ‘The pandemic is a portal’, Arundhati Roy, Financial Times <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

² Rebuilding Europe: The cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis (2020) EY consulting for GESAC <https://www.rebuilding-europe.eu/>

³ David Throsby (2008): The concentric circles model of the cultural industries, Cultural Trends, 17:3, 147-164

transport us to a world where it is easier for us to assimilate new perspectives, connect with others that are different or more distant and recognize that what brings us closer is stronger than what separates us.

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view

... until you climb inside his skin and walk around in it”.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), Harper Lee ¹

Education: cultural and educational policies need to intertwine more. Cultural institutions need to be more present in edu-

cational institutions and vice versa. Art and culture help to better understand complex issues and give us the ability to think more creatively in other subjects.

Conclusion

Circostrada Network's invitation to write this article came as a result of CS LAB#6, which took place last May in Santa Maria da Feira and in which I had the pleasure of participating. During these days, a series of conversations and reflections emerged around the concept “have we burnt out culture”, in which the various participants contributed with many different thoughts and insights that certainly influenced part of what I wrote here. The fact that Gerador has been very active throughout the pandemic period regarding

these issues, both in the journalism and the investigation areas also contributed to furthering my knowledge.

I would like to thank Circostrada, Imaginarius and the various guests and participants of the CS LAB#6 for those fruitful days of sharing of thoughts and ideas.

🌐 www.gerador.eu

¹ To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), Harper Lee



FROM RESISTANCE TO RESILIENCE: WHAT ABOUT CARING?

By Teresa Espassandim



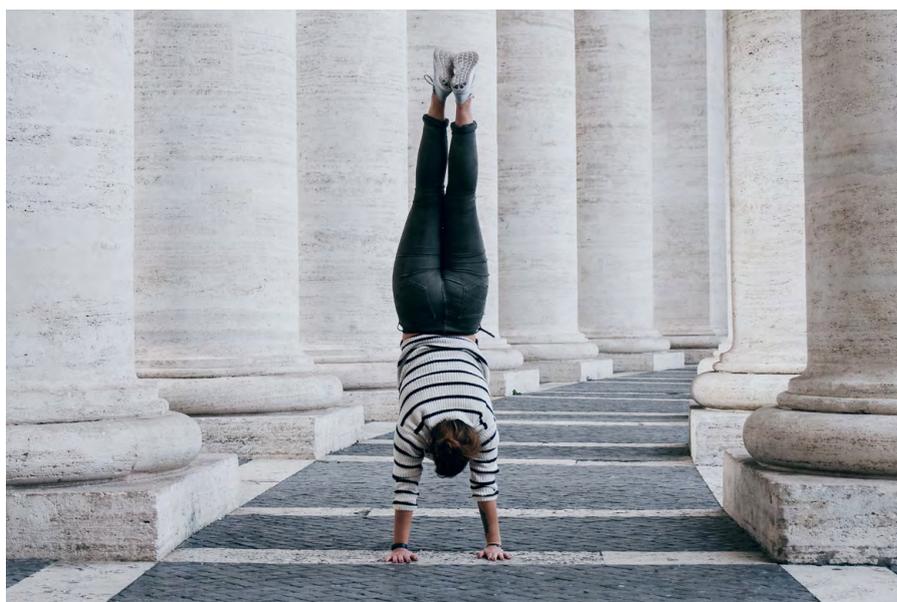
Born in Porto, Teresa Espassandim (Portugal) is a psychologist specialized in clinical and health psychology, educational psychology, psychotherapy and vocational psychology and career development. She has over 18 years of experience in psychological intervention, training and coaching for health promotion, performance and personal career management in public higher education and private contexts (individuals and organisations). She has assumed the leadership of teams and strategic coordination of projects in the fields of employability and building healthy workplaces at the Portuguese Psychologists' Association and develops consulting services in mental health literacy and occupational health psychology, combining a clinical profile with an organisational vision centred on people.

Living in the VUCA world

Starting with the present moment, it is not just COVID-19 that affects our daily lives. Even before pandemic times, we faced a postmodern world that we can better call the VUCA world. This is the acronym for:

- **Volatility:** the nature and dynamics of change, and the nature and speed of change forces and change catalysts.
- **Uncertainty:** the lack of predictability, the prospects for surprise, and the sense of awareness and understanding of issues and events.
- **Complexity:** the multiplicity of forces, the confounding of issues, no cause-and-effect chain and confusion that surrounds organizations.
- **Ambiguity:** the haziness of reality, the potential for misreads, and the mixed meanings of conditions; cause-and-effect confusion.

We live immersed in a society described by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman as liquid modernity, in which economic relations overlap with social and human relations that tend to be less frequent, more superficial and less lasting, leading institutions to weaken and lose ground to the individual who, thus, becomes completely responsible for his/her success to the extent that each one is seen as an entrepreneur of himself/herself and to whom the promise



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of happiness is renewed. In contrast, today people live increasingly anxious, sad and overburdened lives.

Being increasingly exhorted to realise our full potential and to fulfil certain popular success formulas and the paradox of being more alone than ever on these paths can lead to existences in which the stubborn valorisation of high performance and perfection ends up in shallow rivers of psychological wellbeing and mental health,

leveraged by processes of resistance that lack plasticity. It is not too much to remember that the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in the 1940s as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. And regarding the integration of the dimension of well-being in the definition of health, it is important to clarify what this means. Well-being is “the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having good men-

tal health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress". An overall sense of wellness will not be achieved without having a balance in the following key elements:

- **Emotional well-being** means the ability to practice stress-management and relaxation techniques, be resilient, boost self-love, and generate the emotions leading to good feelings.

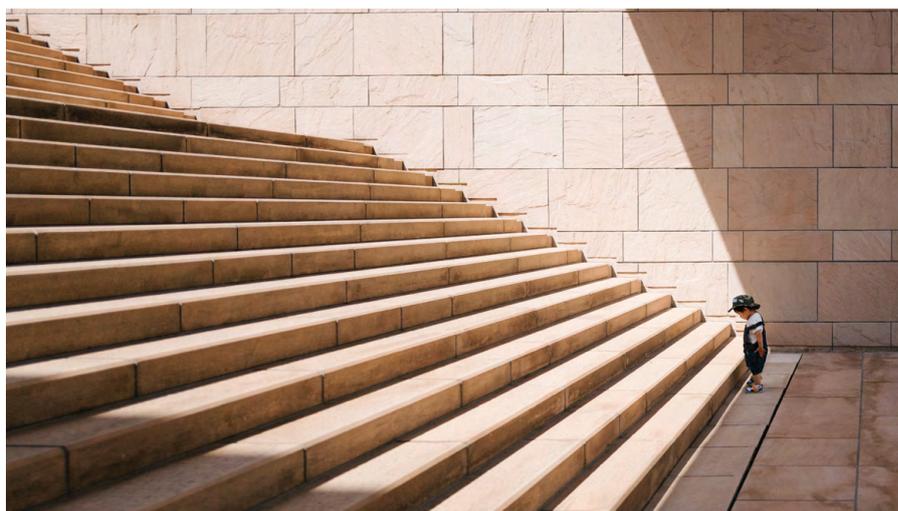
- **Physical well-being** as the ability to improve the functioning of our bodies through healthy living and good exercise habits.

- **Social well-being** as the ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others, and maintain a support network that helps us overcome loneliness).

- **Workplace well-being** implies the ability to pursue our interests, values, and life purpose in order to gain meaning, happiness, and enrichment in a professional environment and finally, societal well-being as the ability to actively participate in a thriving community, culture and environment).

Life contexts and professional territories particularly characterised by the ode to personal overcoming, challenges to physical and mental limits and indulgence in perfectionism are specific to the arts, sport and performance. Here and so often, the person that lives behind the professional artist is blurred and almost reduced to the dimension of a performer, whose value lies in the mastery of the gestures and movements produced, accompanied by indicators of box-office sales and the decibels of the audience's applause.

The frequent request for "one more effort" and remaining in an attitude of "extra mile" is a trigger for the deterioration of the physical and mental health and the motivation of these professionals through the exhaustion of their mental and physical resources, leading to the reduction of their energy and to states of exhaustion which, paradoxically, mobilise the activation of subjective effort with psychological costs. "One more effort" can also describe the climate in which many artists and other professionals currently live in their workplaces, with situations of stress, depression, anxiety or burnout being increa-



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singly referred to by a significant number of people in the face of excessive pressure to meet the demands of the contemporary work paradigm. Getting sick, due to work, seems to be a trend that has become viral and revealing of how inhuman certain organisational cultures, management practices and values are, and how unsafe and psychologically unhealthy certain work environments are. Contributing to these phenomena is a certain magical thinking around the idea that enduring and resisting is identical to being resilient and that this feature is only due to intrinsic factors of the professional and their personality, rather than their interaction with the context in which the work/artistic activity is carried out.

Life may not come with a map, but everyone will experience twists and turns, from everyday challenges to traumatic events with more lasting impacts. Each change affects people differently, bringing a unique flood of thoughts, strong emotions and uncertainty. Yet **people generally adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful situations—in part thanks to resilience.**

Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. Or a pandemic. As much as resilience involves "bouncing back" from difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth. These adverse events do not have to determine the out-

come of our lives. There are many aspects of our lives we can control, modify, and grow with. That's the role of resilience. Becoming more resilient not only helps us get through difficult circumstances, but it also empowers us to grow and even improve our lives along the way.

Being resilient doesn't mean that we are superheroes or we won't experience difficulty or distress. People who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives commonly experience emotional pain and stress. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress. While certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience isn't necessarily a personality trait that only some people possess. On the contrary, resilience involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. Research has shown that resilience can be learnt and precisely for that, this psychological feature is ordinary, not extraordinary.

Like building muscle, training for a performance or a show, learning a new language or a musical instrument, increasing our resilience takes time and intentionality. Focusing on four core components—connection, wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning—can empower us to withstand and learn from difficult and traumatic experiences. To increase our capacity for resilience—and grow from—the difficulties, we can use the following strategies.

Connecting with others

We can start by building our connections, for instance, prioritizing relationships. Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind us that we are not alone in the midst of difficulties. Focusing on finding trustworthy and compassionate individuals who validate our feelings, which will support the skill of resilience. The pain of traumatic events can lead

some people to isolate themselves but it's important to accept help and support from those who care about us. Whether going on a weekly date night with our companion or planning a lunch out with a friend or a colleague, we can try to prioritize genuinely connecting with people who care about us. Another possibility is joining a group. Along with one-on-one relationships, some people

find that being active in civic groups, faith-based communities, or other local organizations provides social support and can help us reclaim hope. Researching groups in our areas that could offer us support and a sense of purpose or joy when we need could be a way.

Fostering wellness

We can continue with fostering wellness, taking care of our body. Self-care may be a popular buzzword, but it's also a legitimate practice for mental health and building resilience. That's because stress is just as much physical as it is emotional. Promoting positive lifestyle factors like proper nutrition, ample sleep, hydration and regular exercise can strengthen our bodies to adapt to stress and reduce the toll of

emotions like anxiety or depression. Practicing mindfulness: mindful journaling, yoga, and other spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation can also help people build connections and restore hope. These practices help us ruminate on positive aspects of our life and recall the things we are grateful for, even during personal trials. Avoiding negative outlets is also part of selfcare: it may be tempting to mask our pain with alcohol,

drugs or other substances (amplified by the fact that such consumption behaviors are socially accepted in many contexts), but that's like putting a small bandage on a deep wound. Focusing instead on giving our body resources to manage stress, rather than seeking to eliminate the feeling of stress altogether is a much more effective strategy.

Finding purpose

We can also develop resilience through finding purpose in helping others. Whether we volunteer with a local homeless shelter or simply support a friend in their own time of need, giving our time to teach or develop him or her in something we master, we can garner a sense of purpose, foster self-worth, connect with other people and tangibly help others, all of which can empower us to grow in resilience. Another way is by being proactive. As much as it's helpful to acknowledge and accept our emotions during hard times, it's also important to help us foster self-discovery by asking ourselves, "What can we do about a problem in our lives?" If the problems seem too big to tackle, breaking them down into manageable pieces is a possibility. For example, if we got laid off at work, we may not be able to convince the person in charge

that it was a mistake to let us go. But we can invest two hours every day in developing our top skills or strengths. Taking initiative will remind us that we can muster motivation and purpose even during stressful periods of our lives, increasing the likelihood that we'll rise up during painful times again. Moving toward our goals: developing some realistic goals and doing something regularly—even if it seems like a small accomplishment—enables us to move toward the things we want to accomplish. Instead of focusing ourselves on tasks that seem unachievable, asking ourselves: "What's the one thing we know we can accomplish today that will help us move in the direction we want to go?" For example, if you're struggling with the loss of a loved one and you want to move forward, you could join a grief support group in your area, look for opportunities for self-discovery.

People often find that they have grown in some respect as a result of a struggle. After a tragedy or hardship, people have reported better relationships and a greater sense of strength, even while feeling vulnerable. That can increase their sense of self-worth and heighten their appreciation for life.

Embracing healthy thoughts



© Tim Mossholder

Resilience can also be fostered by embracing healthy thoughts. **Keeping things in perspective:** how we think can play a significant part in how we feel—and how resilient we are when faced with obstacles. Trying to identify areas of irrational

thinking, such as a tendency to catastrophize difficulties or assume the world is out to get us, and adopting a more balanced and realistic thinking pattern has scientific evidence. If we feel overwhelmed by a challenge, let's remind ourselves that

what happened to us isn't an indicator of how our future will go, and that we're not helpless. We may not be able to change a highly stressful event but we can change how we interpret and respond to it. Accept that change is a part of life. Certain goals or ideals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations in our life. Accepting it can help us focus on circumstances that we can alter. Maintaining a hopeful outlook is another way. An optimistic outlook empowers us to expect that good things will happen to us. Trying to visualize what we want, rather than worrying about what we fear. Along the way, we can note any subtle ways in which we start to feel better as we deal with difficult situations. Learning from our past by looking back at who or what was helpful in previous times of distress, we may discover how we can respond effectively to new difficult situations. Reminding ourselves of where we've been able to find strength and asking ourselves what we've learned from those experiences can be powerful.

Seeking help

We can also develop resilience by seeking help. Getting help when we need it is crucial. For many people, using their own resources and the kinds of strategies mentioned before may be enough but at times, an individual might get stuck or have difficulty making progress on the road to resilience. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist people

in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if we feel like we are unable to function as well as we would like or perform basic activities of daily living as a result of a traumatic or other stressful life experience. Keeping in mind that different people tend to be comfortable with different styles of interaction is important. To get the most out of

our therapeutic relationship, we should feel at ease with a mental health professional or in a support group. The important thing is to remember we're not alone on the journey. While we may not be able to control all of our circumstances, we can grow by focusing on the aspects of life which challenges us with the support of loved ones and trusted professionals.

Allow space for custom stress-management practices

If we are living with high levels of stress, as many art professionals are, by aiming for and pursuing successively stratospheric performances, we're putting our entire well-

being at risk (threat to health, quality of life, functioning, goal achievement, self-esteem, confidence and personal development). Stress wreaks havoc on our emotional equi-

librium, as well as on our physical health. It narrows our ability to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life. It may seem like there's nothing we can do about stress. The

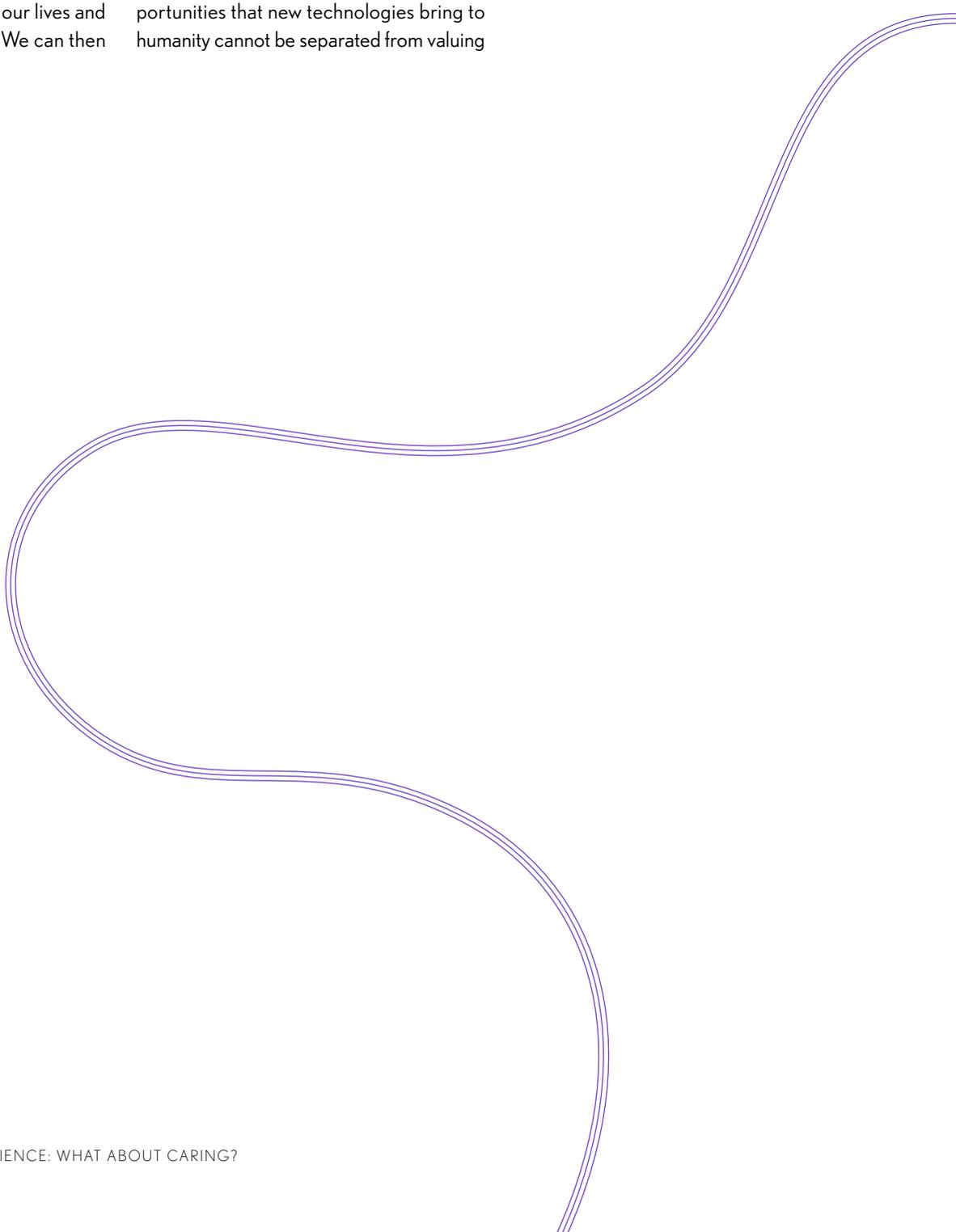
bills won't stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, and our work and family responsibilities will always be demanding. But we have a lot more control than we might think. **Effective stress management helps us break the hold stress has on our life, so we can be happier, healthier and more productive.** The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation and fun—and the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges heads on. But stress management is not one-size-fits-all. That's why it's important to experiment and find out what works best for each of us. This can take many different paths starting with identifying the sources of stress in our lives and avoiding unnecessary stress. We can then

alter the situation by expressing our feelings instead of bottling them up, being willing to compromise, creating a balanced schedule and adapting to the stressor, which means to reframe the problem, look at the big picture, adjust our standards and accept the things we can't change. Finally, other ways to manage stress are to get moving, connect with others, make time for fun and relaxation, manage our time better, maintain balance with a healthy lifestyle and learn to relieve stress in the moment.

The 4th industrial revolution or Industry 4.0 has triggered profound transformations in our society with its focus on process efficiency and productivity. However, the opportunities that new technologies bring to humanity cannot be separated from valuing

people and their skills, otherwise they will not bring development but only inequalities. Let's do each one for ourselves and for everyone else, protecting our health and well-being (it's not all clinic or disorder) by favouring self-care, gratitude and kindness, day after day, reminding ourselves that we are bio-psycho-social beings even when we feel on Olympus through artistic expressions and high performances.

🌐 <https://www.teresaepassandim.pt>





INTERVIEW WITH EVA-LUNA GARCÍA-MAURIÑO



Eva Luna García-Mauriño (Spain) is a former circus artist, researcher, cultural manager, philologist and artistic director. She is currently the general coordinator of MADPAC - Madrid Association of Circus Professionals, co-director of PDCirco and the MADN Circus Festival. She is a member of the internationalization commission of CircoRed and works actively for the recognition of circus in Spain.

You used to be a circus artist and you are now the Coordinator of MADPAC in Madrid - Asociación de Profesionales de circo de Madrid - two busy and demanding work experiences. Have you been exposed to stress in the past 12 months and if so, how did you deal with it?

Working in culture and the performing arts means assuming that stress is part of your profession, we face what the Spanish writer Remedios Zafra calls 'working lives' and I believe that everyone, whether you are an artist or a cultural manager, has a moment of crisis when we question our professional career and its demands.

Living with stress is very common nowadays, it is like our invisible companion wherever we go. We are so used to living with it that we do not realize how harmful it can be to our health. We plunge into a wheel of commitments, obligations, self-demands, tasks that we put before our own well-being, jobs that we accept for fear of dry periods, incessant phone calls, urgent emails that pile up in the inbox and an increasingly demanding digital world. We become a kind of one-man and one-woman band, capable of single-hand-



Ino Kollektiv © Gaby Merz

dly carrying out the work that 10 people would do under optimal conditions.

For me, the pandemic highlighted the need to breathe in all senses, to emphasize that sometimes you are not more productive the more hours you work. Today, knowing how to stop and breathe seems to me to be one of the most subversive acts possible, an act of rebellion.

My first step was to recognize the overload and to stop self-deception. Passion for our work induces us to justify the absence of rest and not to be able to identify it. On the other hand, many times the rhythm is set by our environment, but our collective task is to avoid the traps of hyperproductivity, which sometimes drag us and even make us drag those around us, it is a chain mechanism. One day I thought, what hap-



Artist Amaya Frias © Gaby Merz

pens if I stop, what happens if I face the initial emptiness? Learning to set limits and setting them for myself in the deconstruction of the superheroine I thought I was, has been the titanic effort I have faced in my personal struggle against stress in the last 12 months.

Once I overcame that abyss where the guilt of not being productive appeared, the next step was to realize that, in that rhythm, I had forgotten what it was to have free time. To deal with the stress I found a refuge in meditation and promised myself not to be my last priority of the day. Learning to do nothing and deciding what to do with my time is not easy for those of us who are used to not wasting a minute of the day, but in this search for tools to combat stress it has been a real discovery.

After the lockdown, avoiding overload has once again been a challenge. However, eve-

ry day I try to be aware of when I speed up again and carve out some time for myself that is a 'reward'. It's about finding moments of self-care that are part of the armor we put on to be able to dedicate ourselves to this profession without dying along the way.

Artist are often put under a lot of pressure - especially their bodies - to perform and tour in national and international festivals. Would you say it impacted your creativity? If so, how?

Absolutely yes. One day talking to a fellow artist she told me how office work and touring were taking over her creative work, how facing a new creation meant she was facing more and more blocks. It was a real relief to realize that this was not something I was going through alone. I started to research on this topic and I understood that there were different parts of the brain operating in what I have called 'executive mind' and creative

mind, each one requires different times and rhythms, creative work cannot be governed by pragmatism, it is more ethereal, it is expansion and breadth, it involves connecting with playing and risk in its broad sense; while the executive or management work requires different synapses in our brain and must be rooted in the ground to work, understanding this has been fundamental for me.

I have noticed this even more since I combine cultural management with the artistic work of directing or external eye of companies. After several weeks without a break dealing with project management, logistics or production, I landed in an artistic residency with a company and the ease with which I previously approached the creative work sometimes suffered, it took my brain a few hours to abandon that bureaucratic and pragmatic self and enter the artist self.

If stress is inherent to the performing arts field, what could be done to improve the conditions/well being of artists and professionals at large?

Opening spaces where we can share, reflect and find common tools to help us address this current problem is a small step forward on the road to improving our conditions. I believe it is important to stop normalizing stress, to stop over-demanding ourselves and to find a better balance between our professional and personal lives. It is a collective task to respect moments of rest and explore the deceleration of work rhythms so that the quality of our projects and our health does not suffer.

On the other hand, I think it would be a good thing if public administrations were to develop strategic plans so that the sector can organize itself with wider time and coverage margins. It would help the sector to have enough time to be able to develop projects with less stress, if the calls for proposals were at least biennial.

We need a change of model and mentality that focuses on collective care over exploitation, hierarchies and productivity. Without pauses, deep reflection processes cannot take place.

Now that you are no longer working as an artist, how do you cope with the stress of your collaborators?

As an artist, more than once I found myself in situations of carelessness that affected the good execution of my work and subjected me to greater stress, such as the space not having what was agreed upon in the rider or bureaucratic demands that are not always easy to manage for artists. In the same way, artists sometimes don't realize the difficulties that exist beyond the stage. It is fortunate to have experienced both sides, with their particularities, to be able to understand, empathize and provide optimal working conditions. Now that I work in cultural management, I pay a lot of attention to details so that artists feel cared for and can work in good conditions. For me, closeness, planning, communication and horizontality are key to creating a positive environment. Listening to colleagues and empathizing with their needs is not far from the listening that takes place on stage to avoid an accident. It's about finding a balance between everyone and valuing the work done by all the people involved in a project.

In general, I tend to work horizontally, so that supporting each other and knowing how to handle moments of tension is not difficult, because for me, non-hierarchical structures generate less stress.

What are your main takeaways from the CS LAB experience?

I found it very interesting to be able to talk about our mental state without approaching it from the stigmatization perspective.

From Vida Skreb's talk, I highlighted the importance of incorporating some practical exercise into our daily lives so that we don't maintain stress for a prolonged period of time. Especially interesting was her statement that we can train our brain to take it to healthier places.

Also, I found Hugo Cruz's presentation and his approach to care at the center of his practices enlightening.

CS LAB #6 was a breath of air in the maelstrom of the last few months because it provided tools, pauses and reflections to face the current reality.

🌐 <https://madpac.es>

🌐 www.circoproducciones.es



INTERVIEW WITH ELISABETE SOUSA AND DIOGO MARTINS



Diogo Martins and Elisabete Sousa (Portugal) are a duo of multidisciplinary artists that have been developing their work through the connection between nature and technology, exploring other ways of collaborating with humans and non-humans, aiming for a more deriving and creating art. Performance, sculptural and audiovisual arts are some of the mediums that this collaboration invokes.

Your installation *the Cube* seeks to create a sense of cohesion/harmony between humans, digital and the livings and is very much related to the topic of "care". Can you tell us what inspired this creation and how the issue of care echoes in you?

We live in an Anthropocentric Era, in which the universe is evaluated in relation to the human being. With that being said, a paradigm shift is urgently needed. Given the catastrophes caused by humans, aware of their/our destructive behavior in the world, they/we become a geological force and pioneers in this aspect as a species. Within this limited view, reflection on other entities and beings is discarded. We believe it is necessary to rethink our existence in the world and in the relationship with non-humans and to seek a more conscious, interconnected union, since it has always been interdependent.

Because of this, the topic of "care" echoes within us as individuals and through this project from its research, production, materials, methodologies to the presentation to the public. All the materials used on the installation were organic, recycled, found or reused. Since we also have knowledge and information on non-harmful materials that can substitute really toxic ones, we were using them on the production of the piece. We were using, for example, bacteril cellulose - and bioplastics produced from renewable biomass sources, such as vegetable fats and oils, corn starch, straw, recycled food waste, etc.



© Imaginarius

Sharing this information and turning it into action is caring beyond our limited views as species.

We think it's important to question the different approaches in our personal and creative actions, by informing and motivating sustainable consideration and collaboration with the other - the other living being, the other object, the other technological entity.

We thought about *the Cube* as an interactive installation that merges from these ideas as a reflection on an archeology of the present and future. *The Cube* was thought to be an hybrid and performative being made of living organisms in constant mutation, as well as other organic and

reused materials, to which are added the capacity of reaction and sensitivity through technological and digital components activated by the public and the surrounding environment. It has various technological devices integrated in this structure, such as monitors, columns, engines and other reaction mechanisms in order to release responses to the interaction generated through sensors. It was planned to be a plastic representation of a site-territory and a body-territory that is always in a state of transformation and growth. The surface of the installation works as a reflection of the landscape so its appearance and ambience were thought to depend on where it is placed.



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The interactive aspect of *the Cube* also seems to be a key element of your creation process. Now that it's been showcased in the public space for a little while, can you tell us about the way people interact with your installation and what do you think they retain and learn from it?

This organic and technological being-territory allows a direct relationship between the public and its environment. By placing it on a human scale, curiosity, empathy and recognition of the other are increased.

People often think that they must do something when they are experiencing an interactive installation, when in fact the sensors we have chosen to this installation react to the environment - leaves, humans and other species - this is a key aspect: it is not focused entirely on humans. *The Cube* is thought to be a hybrid being made of living organisms in constant mutation and technological waste.

Usually, the focus of the people who meet *the Cube* is on the technology and nature dichotomy - people question themselves which one is taking over on the piece and that make them wonder how it is or how it's going to be in reality - as well as the awareness of the human being's print on the world. The surface of the installation, with moss and

technological devices, is used to be associated with a vision of buildings/cities/waste among nature. There is the recognition of the piece as a microsystem associated with the living beings - snails, insects and others - that started to live within the piece. There's also a surprise and visceral reaction, when the doors of the installation opening to show the bacterial cultures/cellulose that is a material very similar with human skin and organs.

Reflecting on this global pandemic and how you navigate through it as artists - with all the uncertainty the crisis has generated - is art, and creativity in general helping you become more resilient or do you feel you are more resisting at the moment?

We navigate through life in general as artists already in "resilient mode". Since there is a huge lack of fair funding and support for the arts in Portugal, we always have the need to be flexible and find some other solutions to be able to continue to work creatively, pay the bills and materialize our ideas.

This global pandemic made the world stop and we had the privilege of using this time in quarantine to focus on our future projects and idealizing them. Even so, everything was uncertain - and it still is.

There is an obvious need for the public in the arts, to share with others. We all know this was impossible for a long period of time, and it became unbearable for many cultural workers.

Art can be hopeful and/or cathartic, it is a way to express thoughts and emotions as well as being inspired so it helps us to keep us driven, aware and enthusiastic during this time - doing something we love everyday obviously helps.

This specific process and final result changed in many practical ways throughout this pandemic - it made us research and explore other ways of close interaction with the public, keeping the distance and discard sensorial interactions like touch.

These times made us question everything we had taken for granted, but we chose to take it as a challenge and evolve into other practices.

You are working as an artistic duo, how did you and do you take care of one another these past 12 months?

We have been friends for a long time but we just started to work as an artistic duo one year ago. As friends and coworkers we support each other by being generous with our energy, time and ideas to keep each other motivated while having fun working together. As individuals, we all have our struggles especially in these difficult times, so patience, tolerance and respect are very much needed. By working with another person, we also have the possibility to see things from a different perspective and learn from each other. Empathy is key.



You will find below a thematic list of resources and additional contents to dig further into the issues tackled in this publication.

CS LAB#6 Webinar

- [Keynote #1 "Are we designed to adapt?" - By Vida Skreb](#)
- [Keynote #2 "Have we burnt out culture?" - By Ana Pinto Coelho](#)

Stress Management

- [How to make stress your friend | Kelly McGonigal | TED talk \(video\)](#)
- [For the deep breathing \(music\)](#)
- [For the dreaming \(music\)](#)
- [Anger release \(music\)](#)

Mental Health

- [Rewriting the Stigma of Mental Illness | Paige Freeman | TEDxYouth \(video\)](#)
- [Panick Disorder video by Eileen O'Meara \(video\)](#)
- [Lucy Mcbride \(2021\): By Now, Burnout Is a Given, The Atlantic \(article\)](#)