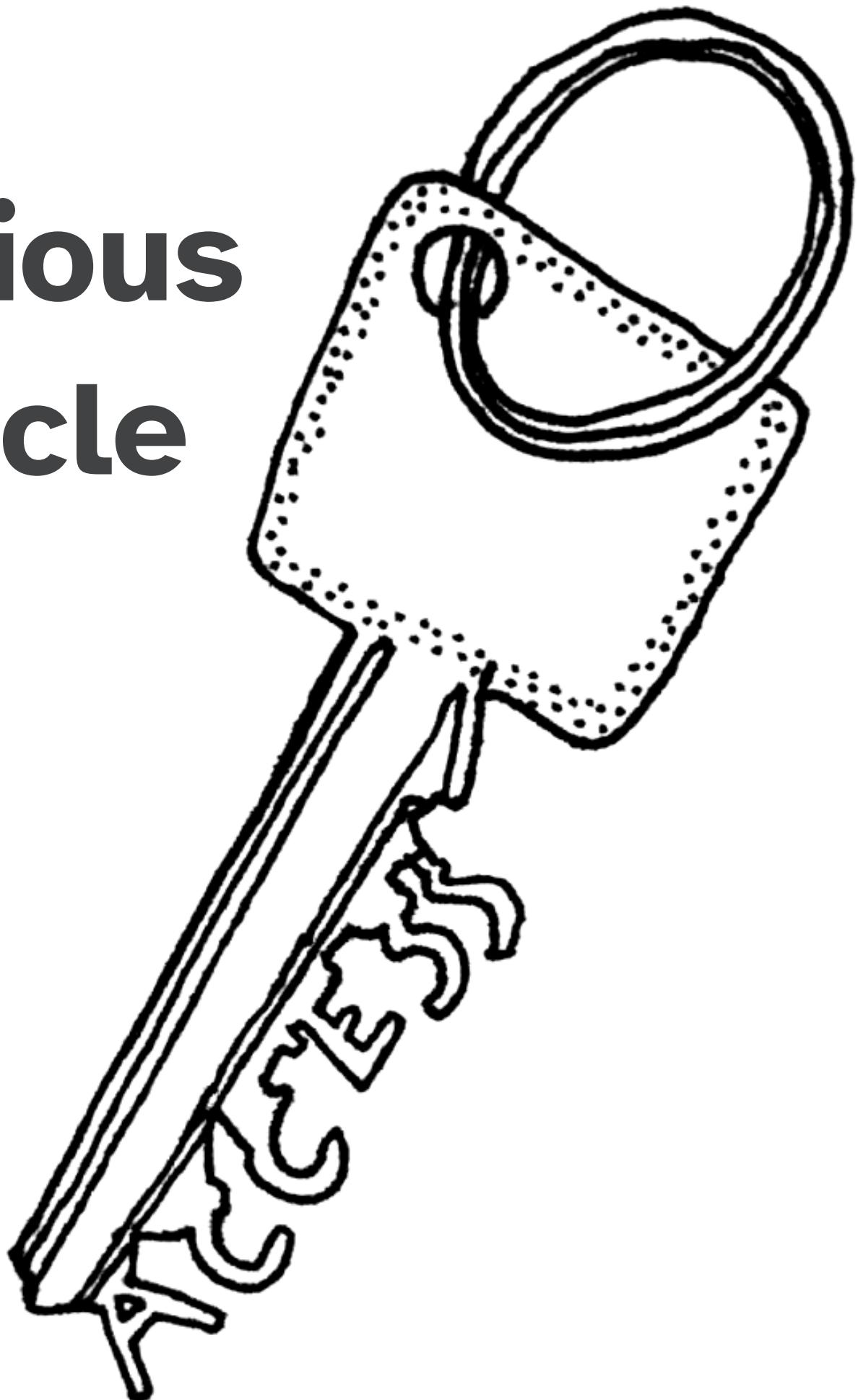


# The Tender, yet Furious Oracle



**The Tender, yet Furious Oracle is a collaborate project by members of Sickness Affinity Group.**

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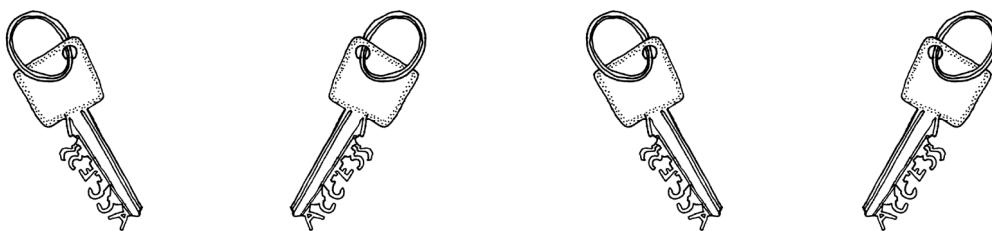
**Realised through voluntary labour**

**[www.sicknessaffinity.org](http://www.sicknessaffinity.org)**

**To get an accessible PDF please visit**

**[www.oracle.sicknessaffinity.org](http://www.oracle.sicknessaffinity.org)**

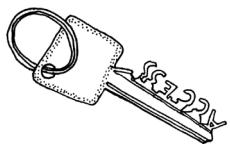
**The \_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_ Oracle is a collective voice aiming to support sick, disabled, care-giving artists, and cultural workers in navigating accessibility and working conditions. At the heart of this project is the desire to create space for collectively answering questions, doubts, desires, and calls for advice around topics of accessibility, institutional struggles, and intersectional exclusion.**



**As well as offering advice, The \_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_ Oracle shares resources, personal stories, and tools for enacting change. This booklet is part of a series of Oracle sessions and booklets that we started working on in 2019. The working method of the oracle is inspired by advice columns in newspapers, most prominently by Emotional Labour Queen. In Sickness Affinity Group, it was initiated by Romily, Clay, Fran, Laura and Inga. This particular booklet focuses on discrimination in a university context.**

**The Tender yet Furious Oracle came together to find answers to the discrimination that one of our Sickness Affinity Group members experienced at Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main. What had happened to them seemed exemplary of how harshly institutions deal with disability and dismiss access needs while showcasing anti-discrimination guidelines, advisory centers, and diversity conferences. We consider this case to be exemplary of the structural failure of anti-discriminatory laws and its system of help and advice centers. Democratic behaviour is publicly asserted, but its practise is impeded.**

**We want to encourage a systemic change of racist, ableist and sexist structures within institutions. We see institutions as the foundation for the structure that perpetuates those discriminatory power dynamics in the greater context. Therefore we believe institutions have a responsibility, due to privileged access to funding and resources to use their power to overcome those structures, instead of reinscribing or even reinforcing them.**



# This publication was produced by members of Sickness Affinity Group:

**njeszka** (Agnieszka Habraschka): njeszka is an invisibly disabled artist/cultural worker, who was born in Poland, grew up in poverty and came to Germany at the age of six. njeszka works around the topics of access, trauma, collective care and empathy.



**Inga:** Inga Zimprich is a white, temporarily able-bodied artist, mother and care worker.

**Isabel:** Isabel Paehr is a neurodivergent designer working on crip technoscience research and experimental game projects.

**Nirmala:** Nirmala Salom is a queer white latina of mixed ethnicity who lives with an invisible disability and who came back to making art and music after a long period of processing severe trauma, conflicts of identity, and grief.

**Saverio:** Saverio Cantoni is a white masculine-presenting non-binary cyborg and a disabled artist.

**Lisa:** Lisa Ness (she/her) is a white, chronically ill cultural worker and researcher who was born and is still based in Germany. Currently she works on the intersections of access, decolonial concepts of solidarity and connectedness.

**Christina:** Christina Zück is a white disabled artist and researcher working on illness, cancer and reparative practices.

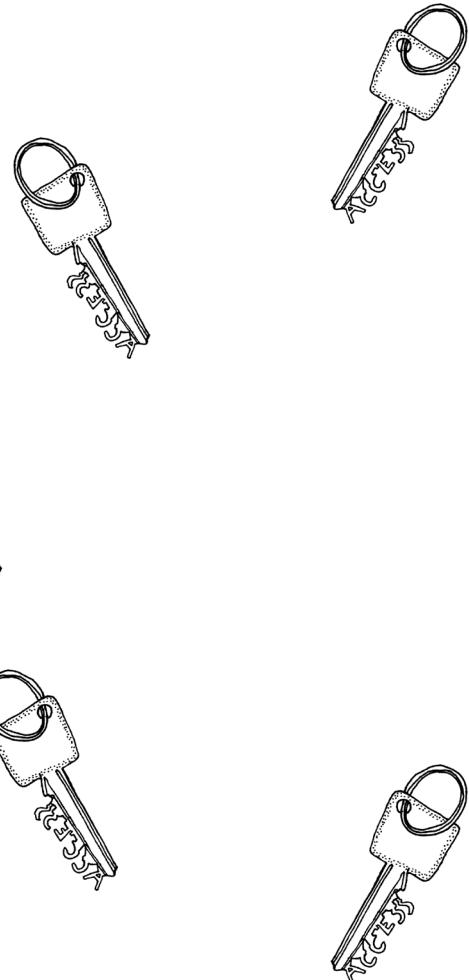


**Kris:** Kristina Eichel is a queer white, temporarily able-bodied researcher and systemic therapist, critically exploring pain, trauma, empathy and mindfulness.

**Maria:** Maria Morata (she/her) is a white south european cultural agent, working as a free curator and researcher. Recently she has started a long-life process of learning to live with chronic pain, which allows her to work again with reduced capacity.

**Sickness Affinity Group consists of chronically ill, disabled and care- giving artists / cultural workers, as well as people working on topics of accessibility and care.**

**Sickness Affinity Group functions as a support group that challenges the competitive and ableist mode of working in the arts.**



**We share experiences and information while we aim to prioritize the well-being and access needs of our group members. Sickness Affinity Group holds open bi-monthly meetings in Berlin and maintains an open email list - [sicknessaffinity.org](http://sicknessaffinity.org)**

**If you are a sick / disabled / care-giving or otherwise marginalised person reading this document, we hope it may bring you solace, a feeling of connection and a hope for change.**

**If you are a curator, cultural worker, or institutional representative reading this document, we hope that you may feel called to enact some of what you learn here in your work moving forward.**



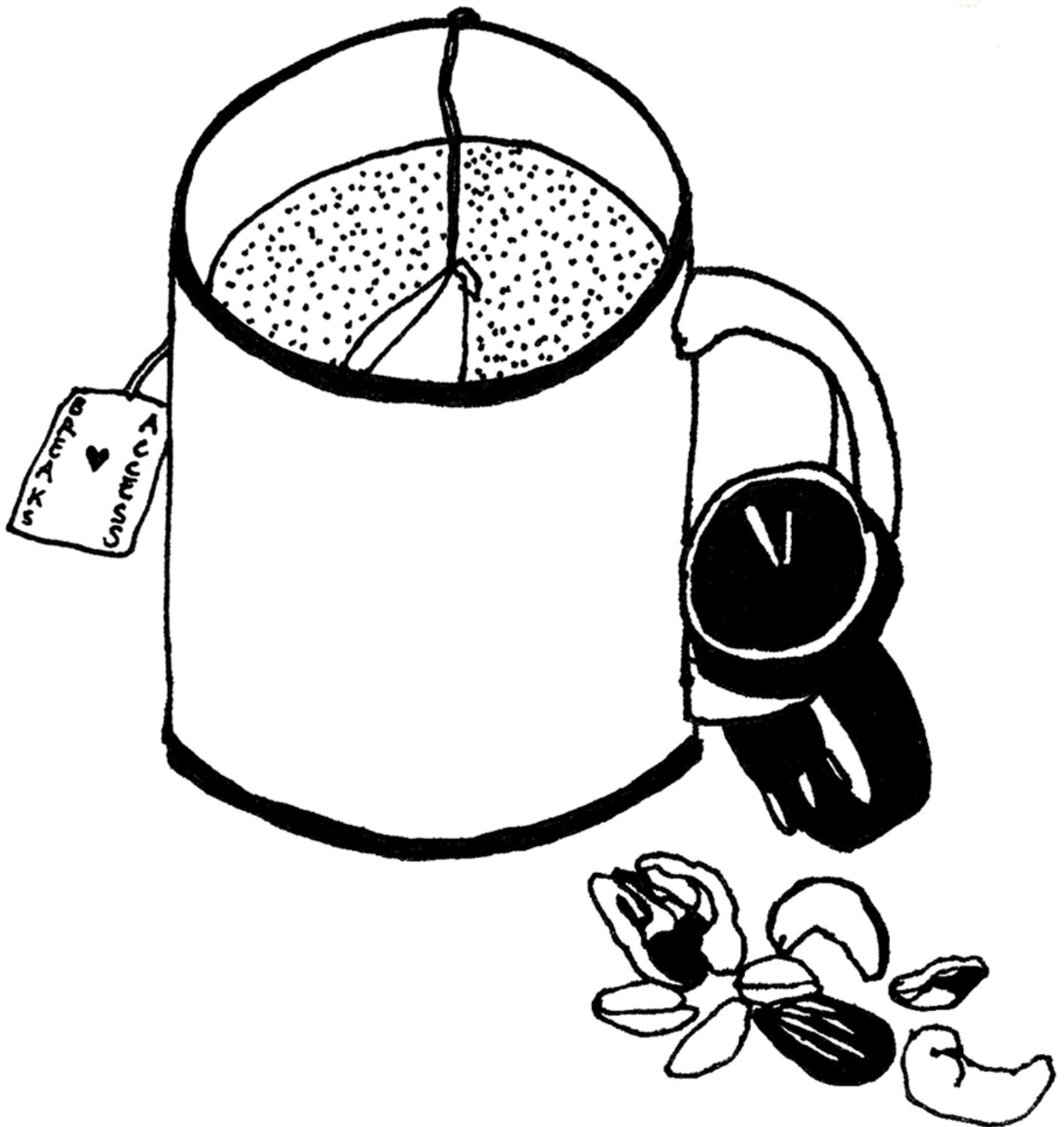
**This project has been partly funded by fees of the SAG members while most of the work has been done on a volunteer basis.**

**The person discriminated against has carried the largest part of unpaid work, next to the emotional weight of being discriminated against and having lost their job. SAG is aware that ideally the person being harmed is not additionally burdened with the required labour to receive justice.**

**A complaint can be shattering. Like a broken jug we can be left in pieces. I'll be picking up some of those pieces today not in order to create the illusion of some unbroken thing but so that we can learn from the sharpness of each piece how they fit together.**

(Sara Ahmed: On Complaint Lecture at Wheeler Center,  
24.10.2018 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j\\_BwPJoPTE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_BwPJoPTE))

# Questions



**Dear tender yet furious Oracle,**

**what would you advise me to do in this situation? I worked as a research assistant at an institute of Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt on a temporary work contract. Due to my disability, going to my workplace by car from a different city, was the most accessible and least exhausting way for me to get to the institute.**

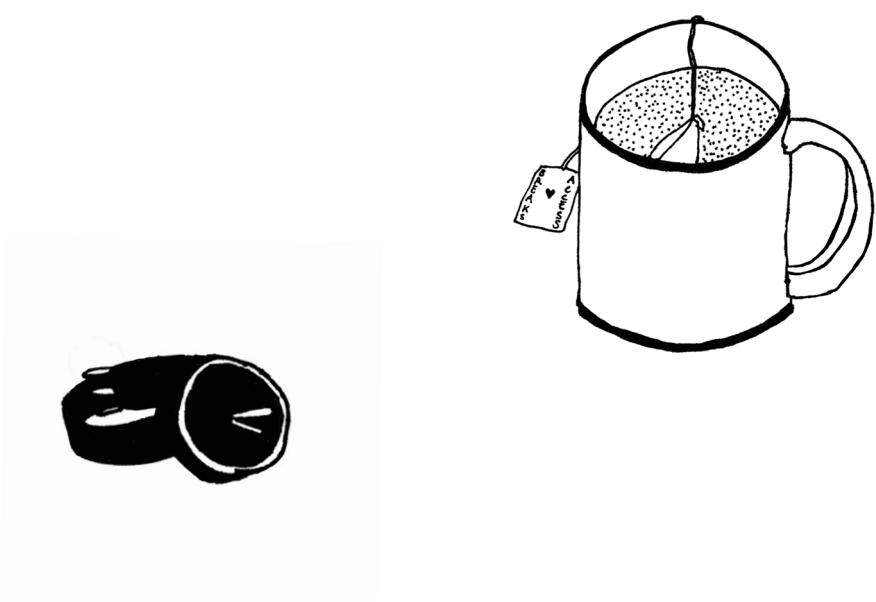
**I needed to drive through a gate to park my car on the institute's compound, and because the gate used to be locked, I had one of the main keys to open it. After I had already kept it for one year, suddenly the main key had to be taken away from me, which made my workplace very inaccessible. To still ensure my access to the institute, a cascade of bureaucratic measures were initiated.**



**In the end, after a time consuming request procedure, the Landeswohlfahrtsverband Hessen agreed to pay some money so that I could employ two very busy and overworked students as my disability assistants. Their main task was to open the gate whenever I needed it, and they were not happy at all with being on call. This solution made the situation even more complicated and created more conflicts. Dear Oracle, asking for access made me feel singled out and totally isolated. I felt like I was always asking for too much. At the end of this permanent struggle, my boss told me she couldn't deal with it any longer and she refused to extend my temporary work contract. I lost my job. I cannot continue my dissertation. I'm feeling devastated. How could this problem have been solved in a non-ableist world?**



**How would a workplace be different if you could express your needs, for example a lunch break on a long working day, without being singled out, framed as problematic, and as a consequence, losing your employment? Without the others being annoyed? If you could get rid of your permanent fear of negative consequences? And the stress while deciding whether to face the social consequences or to let your body get more and more sick?**



**How would a world look like where laws, rules and agreements that assert that people can live and work peacefully and equally together, actually were practised by the institutions who created them?**

**Where abuse of power and discrimination were actually sanctioned within a company, university, or government system? Why do institutions enhance discrimination and abuse of power while showing off with big statements, anti-discrimination rules, symposia, scientific studies, complaints officers, etc. ?**



**What steps could an institution take, in which harmful behaviour and decisions like this occur, in order to take responsibility for the resulting situation and to act accountable with regard to its institutional responsibility?**

# The



# Oracle



# Answers



## **Dearest person who fought for their needs,**

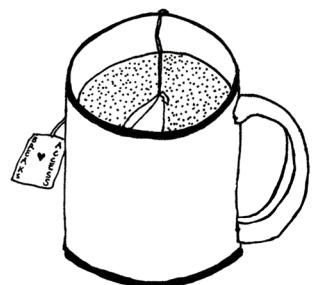
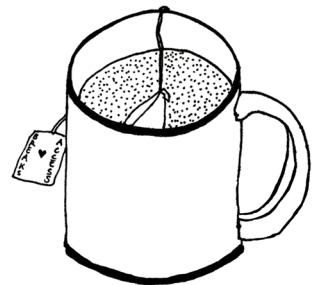
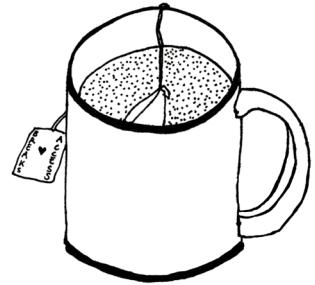
Please know that this question makes the furious and tired oracle sigh. If one could name a need without being framed as needy, or point out a problem without being made into the problem, this would make joyful and trusting collaborations and relations possible. This runs deep: How many times have we all told ourselves that pushing through is the only way? It's not the only way. It does not have to be.

~ The oracle also wishes to note: A work break is not only a need, it is also a right. If non-disabled people and institutions stopped treating our rights and needs as negotiable, we would not have to spend so much time negotiating.

## **Your furious, tired oracle that dreams of a better present**

## **Dear hurt and burdened human being with feelings and access needs,**

To deal with this problem in a non-ableist way, when employing someone with a disability in the first place, the responsible people should have sat down with you and asked you about your access needs. They should have listened carefully and documented all your access needs. There should have not been any restraints or any shame. Both sides should have come to agreements (e.g. agreeing on giving you a personal key for the compound). Those agreements should have been written down as access agreements to make the workplace accessible for you and signed by both sides, you and the employer. There should have been regular check ups about your access needs and if the signed paper still applied to your needs, as they are not static and can change according to your well being. All attempts should have been tried to be done in a way, where you were given agency.

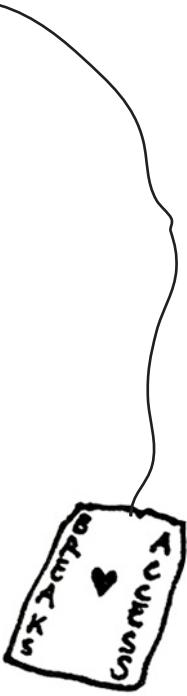


***All the people involved should have been made to understand how important an accessible workplace is for you, as for everyone else.***



Care, empathy and compassion should have been the foundations of that paid working agreement. This is how you create access, by giving the person with the access needs agency and not taking it away from them in a patronizing and harmful way. If the institution doesn't have enough knowledge in accessibility when employing someone with a disability, they can do training. One place that offers help with this is Diversity Arts and Culture or Berlinklusion. Those places also know about other freelance workers, the institution could get in touch with.

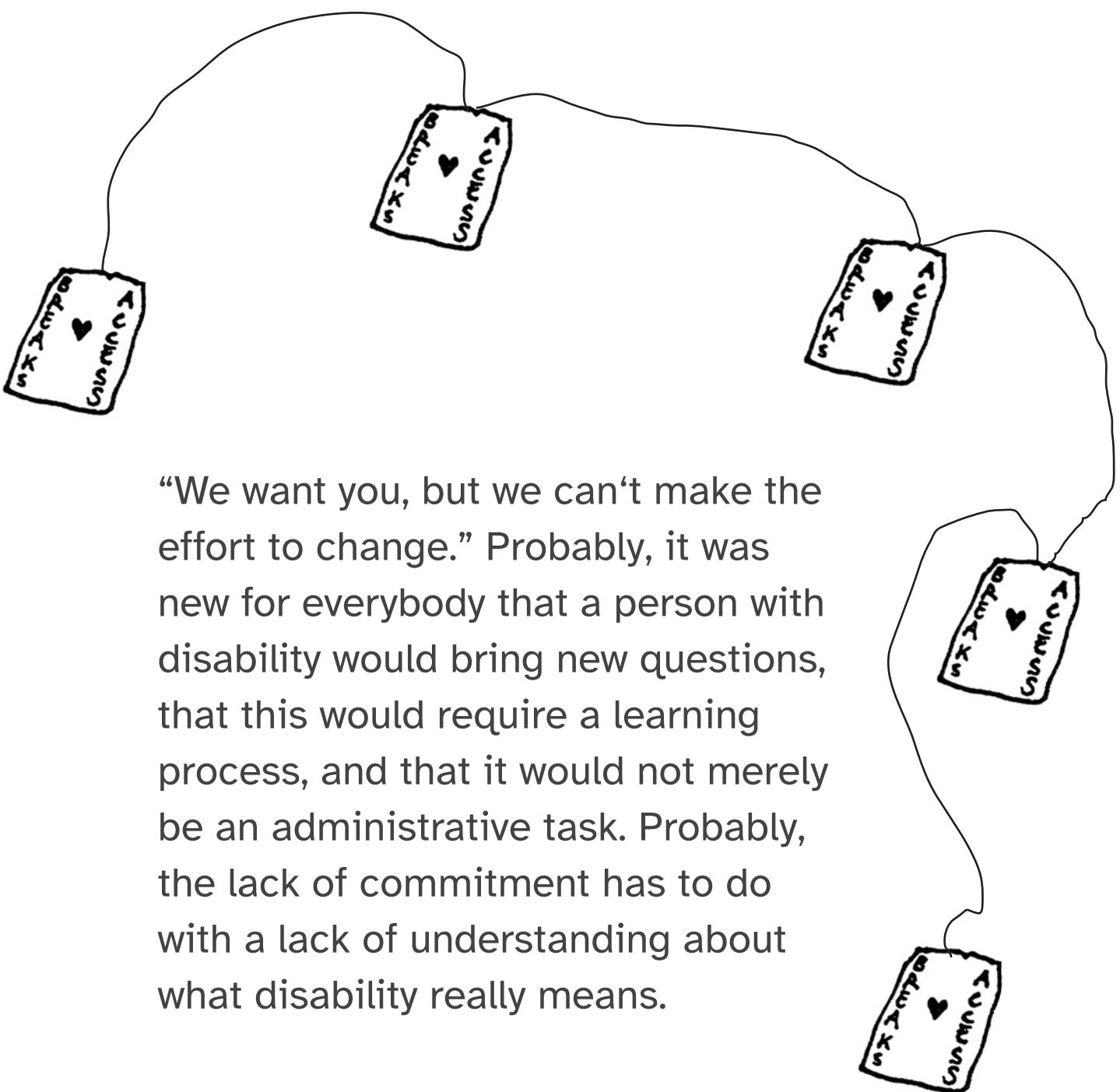
**The oracle that tries to be a handbook for advice on accessibility**



## Dear exhausted being,

I can feel your pain and disappointment, and your rage and discomfort. I am here with you and I will be with you all the way. This is not the first time I hear about systemic and structurally violent situations, and surely it will not be the last time, unfortunately.

Because of the precariousness of your life situation, reinforced by disability, you might have felt you had no choice but to embrace a job opportunity in the academic world. The university department probably needed more staff. And one possible way, to expand their team, was to apply for funding for a position with a disabled person. It seemed a win-win situation for all parties at first. But the balance works only from an ableist perspective: “We want you, but we want you, if you are like us.” “We want you, but we can’t make an effort to accommodate you.”



“We want you, but we can’t make the effort to change.” Probably, it was new for everybody that a person with disability would bring new questions, that this would require a learning process, and that it would not merely be an administrative task. Probably, the lack of commitment has to do with a lack of understanding about what disability really means.

I am sorry that you had to invest and sacrifice so much energy, thoughts and vitality, in order to make a claim on what already had been agreed upon. You were alone in this and you were very brave. I am writing to you to let you know: You are not alone; I am with you.

**Your caring, loving Oracle**

## **Dearest being, who is burdened but still fighting,**



While reading and listening to your words, I am getting frustrated and angry. Angry about a social system that labels itself anti-discriminating, but is not even willing to bring up resources for change. They are opening up a space for different needs, capacities and strengths, which every person has plenty of, but do so by upholding the key to bureaucratic, ableist power! They are protecting their measures, under the guise of institutional structuring, and as a university are reproducing segregation and highly neoliberalist and capitalist infrastructure development politics. And the responsibility for this violence can never be attributed to a single person. No one has to feel responsible for structural ableism. What a shame!

As your oracle, I definitely recommend institutions and individuals to ask others about their individual needs, and what might help to make spaces available for them, as an individual and for the collective body. You know best what might help you.



And supporting a person  
in finding agency, is the  
basis for enacting anti-  
discrimination. So spread  
and share the anti-ableist-  
knowledge and key-power!

Even though they are not  
interested in an exchange,  
I want to let you know:

I see you. I see your  
struggle. I see you fighting.  
I see your work. I see you  
working. I see, hear and  
feel your strength, your  
vulnerability, your creativity,  
your energy. You are not  
alone. I stand – if you want  
– beside you, and also  
behind and in front of you.  
Even though I still cannot  
understand everything,  
I will try to support you  
with deconstructing those  
gate-keeping-structures.



**Your enraged and  
empathic oracle**

**To make a complaint within an organisation can mean you become even more aware of just how little room you have. ... In making a complaint within an institution, you might not begin by thinking of yourself as a critic of the institution or a part of a wider effort to modify, let alone dismantle, its structures. But that is where many who make complaints end up.**

(Sara Ahmed: On Complaint Lecture at Wheeler Center, 24.10.2018 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j\\_BwPJoPTE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_BwPJoPTE))



## **Dear tireless educator on all our behalves,**

you are in the midst of a painful, slow and very necessary process that will eventually bring about change:

Practicing Accessibility requires solid educational, structural and political work to be done within any institutional setting i.e. personal engagement, changing recruitment policies, reworking political frameworks, and pursuing continuous structural change. Several people need to be committed to effect changes in an institution. They need to be financially equipped (e.g. to hire expertise, finance access needs, reduce barriers), and the institution needs to enact a policy (one that has been developed within and by the institution itself) that supports all necessary structural changes, both top down and bottom up. Working towards anti-racist and accessible institutions, means to actively move existing institutions away from their current status quo, one which is normally inaccessible and racist at its core. Enacting these changes causes resistance by people within those institutions, because they are still currently benefiting from the status quo. Examples for resistance can be: personal resentments, microaggressions, structural counter-proposals at meetings, continuous questioning of the policy, whataboutism, gaslighting, contradicting personnel decisions, etc.

All of those examples are very harmful for people affected by them. Transforming institutions from their current state is an enormous endeavor that requires strong commitment. Several organisations offer support, education, and awareness training for institutions that want to commit to making their institutions less racist and less ableist. These are: Diversity Arts Culture, Berlinklusion, Platz da!, Gladt e.V. and others.



When these processes are on their way, relationships, job interviews, work environment, expectations, etc. gradually become more safe and reliable for people affected by discrimination. Since most white educational institutions in Germany have a long standing tradition of ableist working modes, and foster repressiveness towards „othered“ knowledge and bodies, their buildings and working conditions are usually inaccessible for people with access needs, mobility aids, care obligations, and invisible disabilities. These concrete and structural exclusions have a long tradition of defending privileged access to resources. The majority of (educational) institutions in Germany have a long way to go and a true effort to make, in order to move towards becoming less harmful and less exclusive for people with access needs.

The concept of meeting access needs must be uncoupled from concepts like generosity or doing someone a favour (I'm referring to Piss On Pity, or the book „Dilemma Dankbarkeit“ by Udo Sierck). At the same time, we need to demystify Care as a voluntary labour of love and consider it a right to equal access granted for all people.

## **Your worn out Oracle with a slight fetish for structures**



**Dearest Questioner,**

A key? They did not give you access to the building because they could not make ONE KEY? Two additional people were paid to CARRY ONE KEY? The oracle is once again surprised about the troubles non-disabled people go through to make life more difficult for their disabled colleagues. In a non-ableist world, this oracle imagines all the energy that non-disabled people could save if they were less busy with upholding ableism.



**Your angry anti-gatekeeping  
(and anti-key-keeping!) Oracle**

**“A complaint about what is going on within the university can provide us with an alternative catalogue of the university. Complaints can teach us how a university is built. I want to think about complaint as diversity work. We’ll become diversity workers when we try to dismantle the structures that are not built to accommodate us.”**

(Sara Ahmed: Forum 34. Complaint: Diversity Work, Feminism, and Institutions  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jf4sgw5NeQ>)

**Dear troubled being who is seeking justice  
after being treated so unjustly,**



The world that you are asking for is built on empathy, interdependency, and collective care, and not on sanction. In this world, vulnerable people are centered and listened to carefully. The oracle understands that from being harmed, there arises a desire for the harming institution and the people associated with this institution to be sanctioned. But the oracle believes that accountability comes from building empathy and deep felt understanding, that discrimination and violence are wrong and hurtful for everyone, even for those who are causing the harm. There is still a long way to go to get there, and we need to build methods and capacity for transformation along the way. But the oracle wants to imagine institutions taking on the work of building compassion, by using their privilege to build the worlds we need and desperately want, making up for all the universalised, invisibilized, exploitative, colonial and eugenic violence that institutions were built on and that they reproduce on a daily basis. By taking on the responsibilities that come with this history, they should support systemic change in any possible way. I know... this is quite a wild dream. It's a dream about transformative justice.

**The transformative justice seeking  
Oracle, that believes transformative  
justice is also for institutions**



## **Dear struggling being, that is so worth of being loved and listened to,**

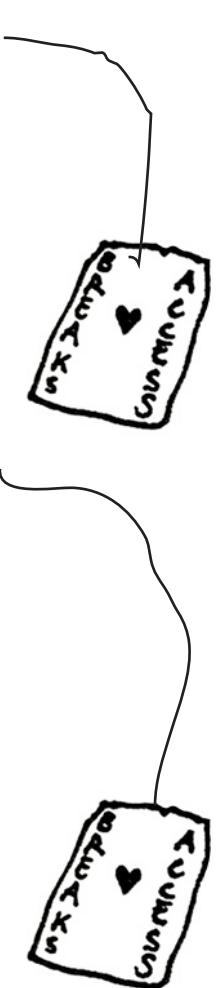
If there was the space given to you, to express your access needs and these would have been heard and picked up on, you would have felt safe and valued and cared for. There would have been a feeling in your body, that had felt wide and open, instead of tight and suffocating. You would have been able to flourish in your work and to experience yourself as a beautiful being, at any time able to bring up your access needs. Those needs would have been like flowers between other flowers, all of them being seen as aspects of your personality that need love and attention, for the garden, that is you, to grow in a healthy and sustainable way. People would have been able to recognise themselves through you, through your needs, through your flowers. They could have recognised that all of us are beautiful gardens and that all of us need everyone of us to water those flowers and to take care of the growth, that it's not just on each of us individually, but that we're interdependent and that through love and collective care all of us can be our true selves.

**The Oracle, that wants to be your safe garden**

## **Dearest being of enduring hardship,**

There is a storm in my heart that crashes and breaks when I connect to your story. I see the complexity of the situation like the complexity of this storm, and how one story influences another story and another, until you have the monstrous storm of ableism and its destruction. And all that was needed was something so simple. But its simplicity makes it so powerfully symbolic. Because by being denied one key, which would have made it possible for you to do your work within the limits that were agreed upon, you were simply denied access to your work, to your health, and to your personal integrity, and this happened repeatedly. The ability to do your job was taken from you and then you were blamed for it. The word discrimination is not even adequate because it does not encompass all the subtle and complex ableist details that led to so much harm.





On an individual level, the discrimination was so destructive because it arrived collectively, in a hidden and pervasive way. The emails and statements you let the Oracle read, are not at all communicating that there had been „no discrimination“, even though those were the words used by the university. By claiming that there had been no discrimination, they are in fact making the discrimination very clear. ‘There is no discrimination,’ actually means, ‘I am a person who notices no discrimination. I am so ignorant of it, that I believe it must not exist. I am deciding to discriminate on the basis of my ignorance. I am basically unable or unwilling to connect to you and your needs.’

That is what is happening here. This is the point for me. None of this is your fault. How can the people working within such an institution understand an access need if they are working within such an ableist model? I want to know what is disabling them from connecting with you? Why did they decide that something that could have been as easy as making a copy of a key must be made so difficult and bureaucratic?



Even if there was a law in place that made it impossible for them to make a copy, then why did they not blame the law and try to change it instead of blaming you? And why were your access needs not prioritized from the start, if that is what they had allocated funds for?

I wish your boss could have gone through your access needs with you from the start. I wish there could have been an agreement between you and the institution to foster mutual trust and cooperation and to hold respect for your basic needs to access your place of work. It is not too much to ask. I wish the university's legal adviser had been informed about the Social Model of Disability<sup>1</sup> (see footnote below). They should have been informed about your inherent rights to be able to access your work place and to work in a respectful environment. I wish all the people involved could have stood with you and shown solidarity with what you were going through. I wish the institution had structures in place that would have prevented this from happening, for example a few extra keys for those who may need them due to their disability. How could something so crucial and so easy to solve have been so easily disregarded?

Dearest being of enduring hardship, I am the compassionate oracle of tenderness and fury and I will always hold space in my heart for the pain you have endured during this storm. There is sorrow and there are tears and a deep connection and love for you.

## Your stormy and broken oracle



<sup>1</sup> The Social Model of Disability is an approach to disability that identifies barriers as socially constructed problems that hinder a disabled person in their right to participate fully in society. In contrast to the Medical Model of Disability, which is a functional analysis of disability as the problem that needs to be fixed and cured, or the Charity Model, which sees disability as a tragedy that is dependent on pity and goodwill, the Social Model, instead highlights how variations of normative forms of able-bodiedness actually only lead to a disability when society fails to recognize and accommodate the access needs of a disabled person. (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_model\\_of\\_disability](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_model_of_disability))



**“Nach meinen Erkenntnissen im Rahmen des Beschwerdeverfahrens erfolgte die Entscheidung der Goethe-Universität Ihnen Arbeitsvertrag nicht zu verlängern diskriminierungsfrei nach Ihrer Eignung, Leistung und Befähigung.**

**(...)**

**Grundsätzlich steht es Ihnen natürlich frei, sich auf ausgeschriebene Stellen der Goethe-Universität zu bewerben. Die Auswahl zur Besetzung dieser öffentlichen Stellen hat im Wege der Bestenauslese zu erfolgen. Für Ihre weitere persönliche und berufliche Zukunft wünsche ich Ihnen alles Gute!”**



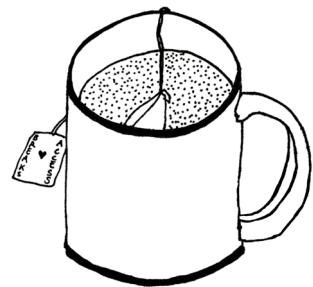
(Quotes from the letter rejecting the questioner's formal complaint written by the university's legal adviser)

# The Sarcastic and Cynical Oracle's Advice Column:

Do you also wonder sometimes how to protect your internal ableism and secure jobs for those people who already have them, due to privilege, segregation, discrimination or, ahem, as we say: merit? Let's have a look at Goethe University Frankfurt who really knows how to get away with it.

How to overachieve as an ableist institution:

- **Lesson 1:** Create an atmosphere where anyone who stands up for their needs is considered difficult and weak.
- **Lesson 2:** Send continuous and subtle reminders to disabled colleagues of how their employment in that very institution depends entirely on your goodwill. Mention how all the other colleagues can work long hours without breaks, or how much unpaid labour nondisabled, precarious academics are willing to sacrifice in fear of losing their jobs.
- **Lesson 3:** Create an atmosphere of mistrust. Always a hint: Sharing information about other people's illnesses and mental health you were entrusted with, just so everybody knows information is not safe with you.



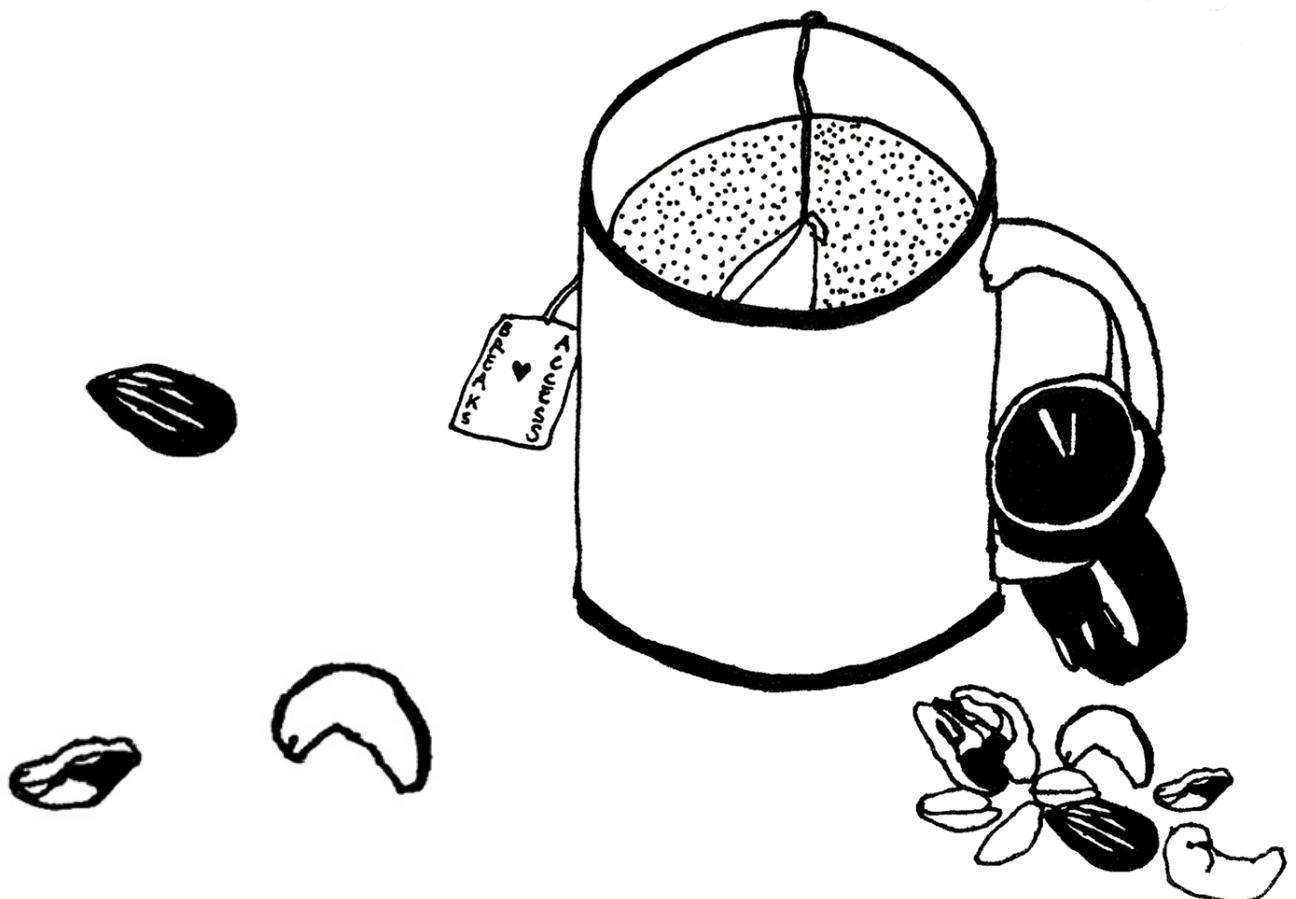
- **Lesson 4:** Blow off people who voice their access needs, with the full blast of ableist structures. Start out with subtle harassment and humiliation in team meetings. Continue with informal complaints behind their backs about how difficult disabled colleagues tend to make things. Eventually kick them out. Leave them without a job, let's say, in the middle of a pandemic. That surely gets the message across – you're not to be messed with.
- **Lesson 5:** Instead of inquiring about their needs from the start and being prepared to accommodate them, be very reluctant to meet access needs. Make meeting their needs extremely bureaucratic, complicated and burdensome, not only for the person in need but also for all people involved in providing the required care. Instead of making an extra copy of keys for people needing accessible parking, make those people apply for money to create a job for students, who are then paid by the hour, but have to be continuously available to organize the required key. This frames disabled people as too complicated, too lazy to take the elevator to the third floor, and walk through the building to get the keys themselves, which is roughly the picture you'd like to paint.

- **Lesson 6:** Install instances where cases of ableist discrimination can be reported. Don't worry, that's part of the trick. Unless you write down in your team meetings records that "SO-AND-SO'S DISABILITY IS SO ANNOYING" there is no proof that someone's contract is terminated because you find their disability annoying. Check.
- **Lesson 7:** Fundraise and create events that promote diversity and inclusion. Initiate an annual Diversity Day. Maybe hire someone in a wheelchair to speak at your panel? We all need to move with the times, right? It is easier to make diversity, let's say – a festival topic –, than to change your structures, right?
- **Lesson 8:** Ableist discrimination is an investment that pays off multiple times. Already one gross case of harassment keeps other people from applying. And beyond that people will find ways to suppress other needs too. Chronic illnesses, translation, transition, cancer, parenting, depression, PMS. Let's cheer for the multiple ways good German institutions have mastered the suppression of needs not just in the last decades.

- **Lesson 9:** Should you ever be accused of failing people's access needs, you should always rush to pity the poor individual who failed your institution's high standards, even though they were given a chance to try!
- **Lesson 10:** And if you doubt, rest assured: Essentially, this is how German universities operate. You are not alone.

It's all yours and you won't let anyone in!

## Your Cynical and Sarcastic Oracle



# **Dearest brave, fatigued and resilient disabled researcher,**



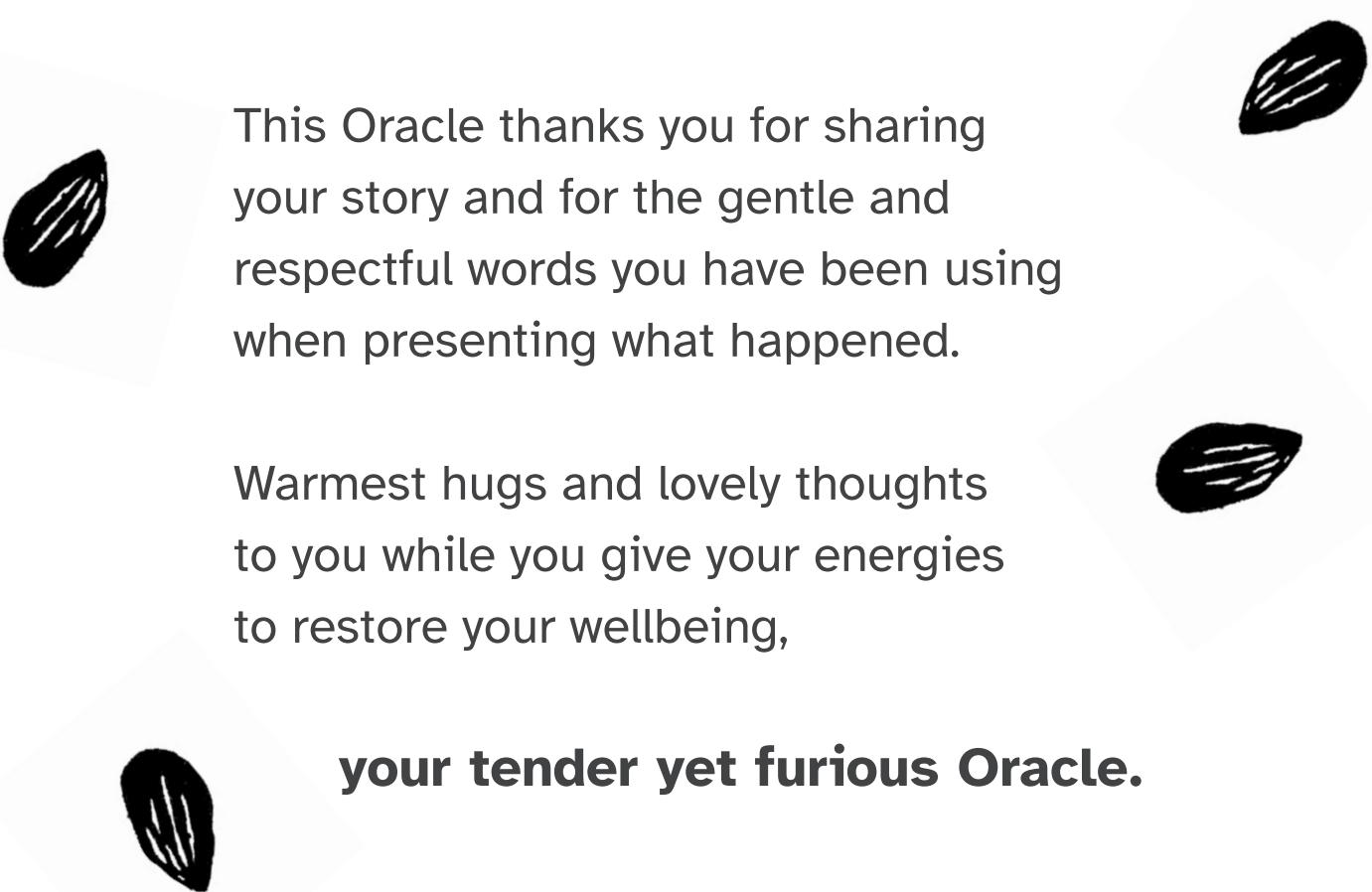
You are not alone, and this Oracle is ready to stand with you. To call out the injustice that is quietly accepted in a democratic, rich, privileged European public institution. This Oracle is appalled by those who practice their abusive power rooted in privilege, protected and institutionalised in this Western, white patriarchal regime. We live in violent times, and the furious oracle hopes that those holding power will come to fully understand the devastating effects of the power they exercise. This oracle is shocked that they had the impertinence to suggest you to re-apply to the job they had just taken from you. It is obvious that the tired institution stands but you were forced to fall. Is this fair? this Oracle asks the standing ones. Not at all: It is another case of discrimination.



We all know that the purpose of your research is not the exhaustion of your body and mind. How can places of education accommodate your needs instead of taking everything from you? How can we stop feeding a meritocratic system with our energies?

It seems we are not prepared to hold each other accountable. But accountability doesn't come without preparation. Understanding power positions and privilege is difficult and cannot be done alone. The university should hire its own external advisory structure that assists the process of deconstructing its barriers.

This Oracle suggests, that in order to build personalised accessibility, we should hold group sessions in which at least two advisors work together with you to find out and formulate your access needs. The advisors should have personal experience of getting their access needs met.



This Oracle thanks you for sharing your story and for the gentle and respectful words you have been using when presenting what happened.

Warmest hugs and lovely thoughts to you while you give your energies to restore your wellbeing,

**your tender yet furious Oracle.**

**“What I hope to convey is now. It is happening now all around us. There are explosions, acts of speaking out, and speaking back.**

**She decided to make a complaint. Because „she wanted it recorded“. And because „the culture was being reproduced for new PhD students“. A complaint becomes a recording device: you have to record what you do not want to reproduce. She gathered statements from around 20 people in her department. A complaint can be a feminist collective. A meeting was set up in response to her complaint. And at that meeting she was described ... as if she complained because she had a personal grudge.**

**(...)**



**One way a complaint is heard or not heard is to discredit the complainer as if the problem she identifies is a problem with her. Her complaint goes nowhere and the issues are, to use her term, „swept under the carpet“, covered over. When those who try to stop a culture from being reproduced are stopped, a culture is being reproduced.”**

(Sara Ahmed: Forum 34. Complaint: Diversity Work, Feminism, and Institutions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jf4sgw5NeQ>)



## **Dear exhausted explainer,**

Reading the long protocol of your odyssey, I needed to take a nap afterwards, exhausted by imagining your exhaustion. Where is space and time for your PhD? Falling asleep, I want to dream up non-ableist worlds.

Like this one:

In a non-ableist world, public transport would be freely available for everyone. There would be free cabs for those who have difficulties walking or being in sensory-wise stressful spaces such as trams. Trams would be built as less stressful spaces: more spacious, more seats, less noise... There is no traffic because public transport is well organized and people who don't need cars simply don't feel like using them. There would be an additional car-free path to the university for walking and biking only.

In a non-ableist world, all students get funded for studying. Learning is exhausting and studying needs to be worthwhile for everyone. No student needs to work. There are jobs for those who want to continue working in academia.

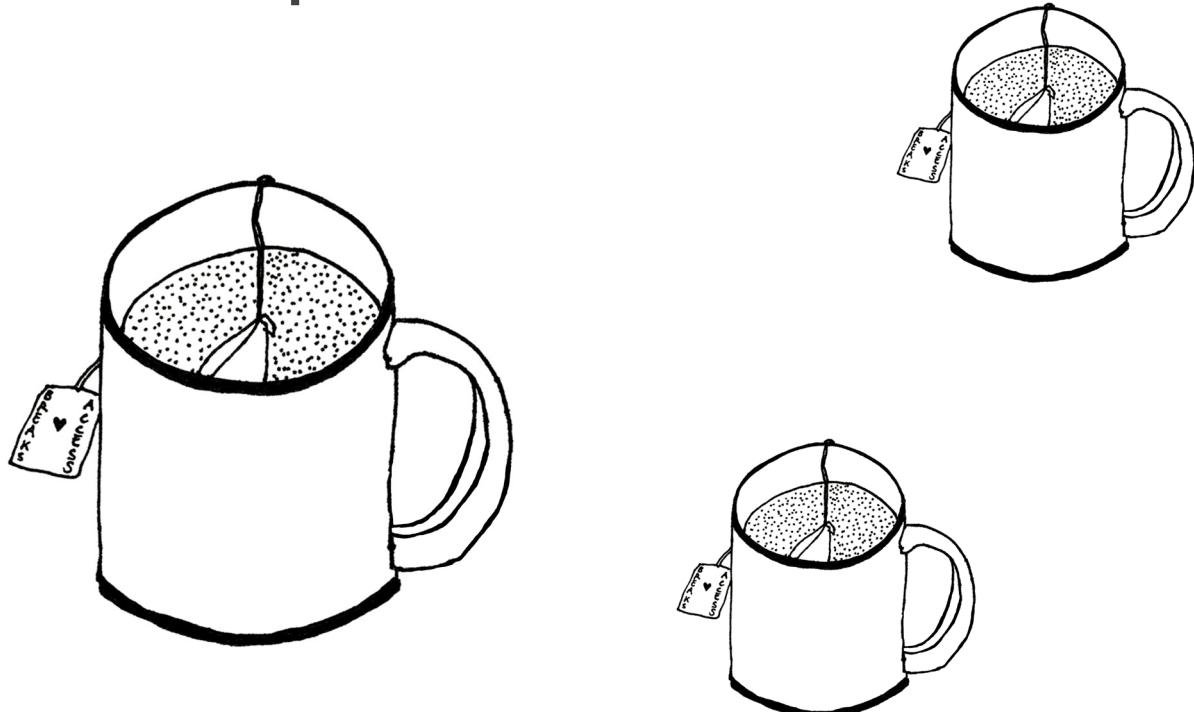
In a non-ableist world, lunch breaks are available for everyone. Food is part of our understanding of education. Food is prepared healthy and fresh and people can have their meals together.

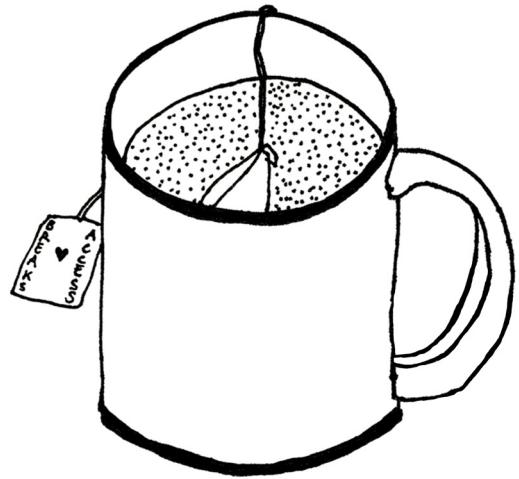


Breaks are loooong and these are times when nothing important ever happens so that those who rest don't fear to miss out on anything. For rest, the university would provide gardens and napping areas, quiet and calming.

In a non-ableist world, the university has a diverse ombuds team, working within a transformative justice framework. All members of any institution, students, staff, researchers, janitors, professors, etc, are part of accountability groups, which they perceive just as an integral part of their work.

**Your sleepy Oracle  
that will keep on napping to  
wake up to a better world**





**hey precious,**

If you are being ridiculed, blamed or sanctioned for voicing needs, please be assured that your needs are valid and valued. You are worthy of being cared for. If your needs are made invisible and ignored and if you are being pictured as being too difficult, too demanding and problematic, be assured that there are people who feel you, who share your pain, who relate to what you are going through. You are not alone in these white halls of power<sup>1</sup>. I am responding to you to let you know that I am standing with you. I see you. I am with you.

**Your compassionate witness:  
The ever growing oracle.**

<sup>1</sup> The oracle loves to relate to this phrase by Sara Ahmed.



**Dear colleague, dear artist, dear educator, dear researcher, dear wage and care worker, dear solidaric person, dear person with strengths and needs, dear past-, present- & future-you,**

to think about the possibility to express needs without getting discriminated and being positioned as the ,other'... sounds unfamiliar. In an ableist structure the constructed ,norm' - the healthy, productive, mobile, available, functioning... body - transfers the responsibility to disabled people to ALWAYS inform society about their so called ,special needs'. In this situation the disabled person, subject, body is at the same time marked as a deviation and reduced to the disability. But no: It must be more than okay to speak about needs, strengths and capacities we ALL have. And especially when or because they differ.

(Thanks Patty Berne for your inspiring thoughts at this point!)

If I really let the idea of an anti-ableist world come up and start creating that utopia, there might be the possibility of becoming more self-confident, fragile, (self-)esteeming, even scared... - all our amazing aspects and parts would be welcome. People would stop thinking about which facets of their identities are safe(r) in specific spaces (like the working field). There would be time to finally work on projects that people would be interested in, instead of being occupied with doing care work for ableist fragility. People with disabilities and chronic diseases would not be marked as the representative ,experts of disability' just because of their personal story with it.

And if they decide to work or speak about it, they would get paid adequately, because their practice is considered as an essential value - and most of the time an exhausting wage labour.

People who are sensitive about power structures, ableistic and intersectional discrimination would be asked for advice. Everybody would know or learn about the struggles and resistances of disabled people. It would be clear which option is no option, and what alternatives might exist or could be brought up. All of us would interact less in neoliberal and capitalist working structures. We would not believe any longer that we are just ,producing machines‘ legitimated by the performed working results, or by letters of recommendation and CVs. There would be less stress because of job cancellations. Less fear to disappoint anyone or ourselves for not ,being on time‘. Less pity when we ask for and get assistance. Less shaming when we communicate limits. We just stop running. Breathe. Take breaks - whenever we need them. Suddenly we would have more time and space for imagination. More capacities to think again about creating new forms of solidarity. More resources for growing individually and collectively - but resisting a system that systematically reproduces patriarchal, neocolonial structures.

Yes, in my furious and tender oracle sphere, this space sounds at least a bit safer...for a lot of people.

**Your idealist and yearning oracle**



**I attempt to think through the experience of complaint. To think about that experience. And to think with those who make complaints. I'll be drawing on interviews I conducted with staff and students, who have made complaints within universities that relate to unfair, unjust, or unequal working conditions or to abuses of power, such as harrassment and bullying. I want to give room to complaint. To listen to complaint. In order to counter a history that has become routine, in which those who complain are dismissed as rendered incredible, unable even, to bear witness to their own experiences.**

(Sara Ahmed: On Complaint Lecture at Wheeler Center, 24.10.2018 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j\\_BwPJoPTE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_BwPJoPTE))



## Dear harmed scholar,

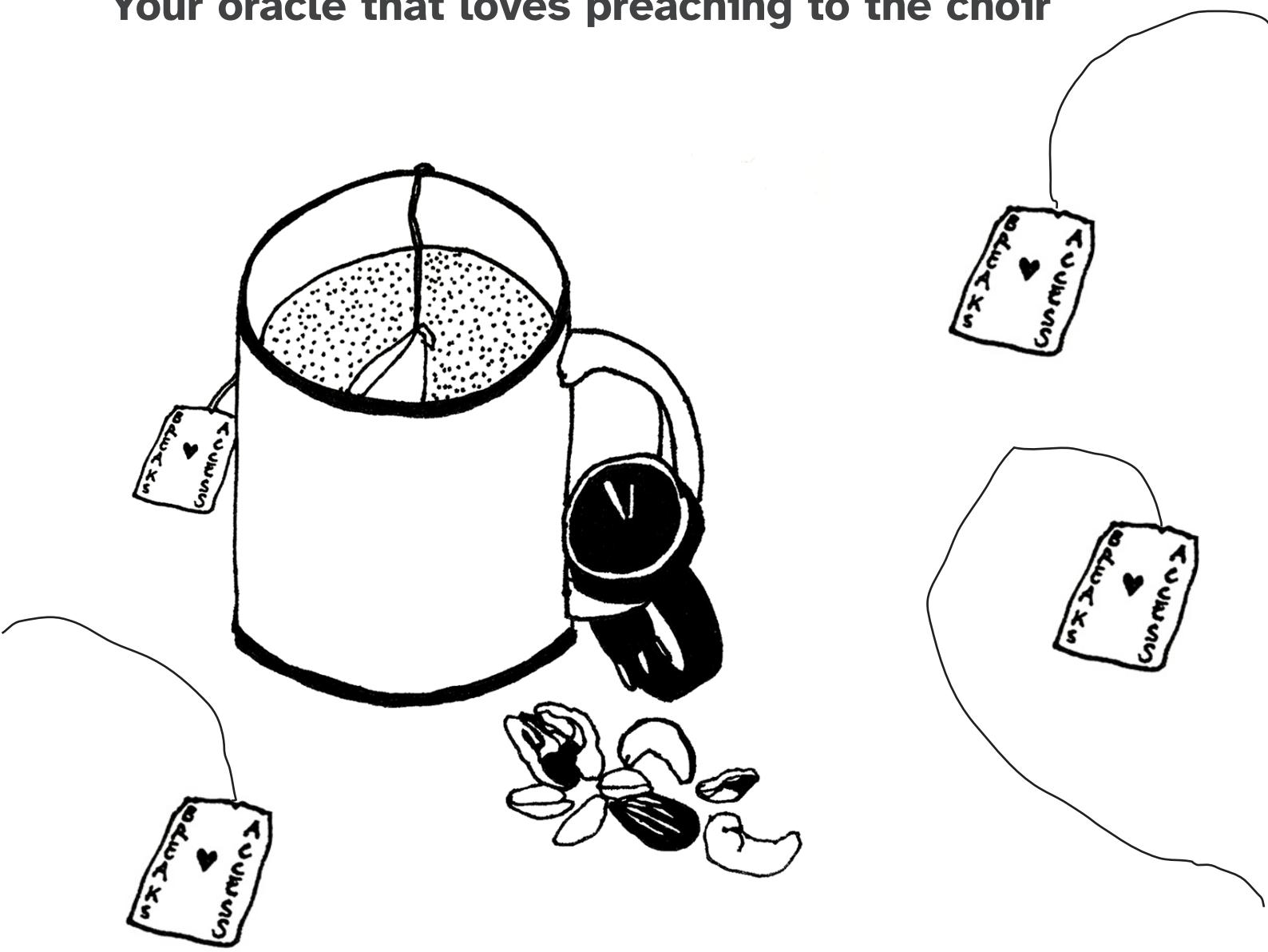
Naturally, also the Oracle racks its brain to come up with ways how this institution could leave its downward spiral, one that leads straight into ableist doom. However stunned and hopeless your account leaves me, I believe some basic guiding principles and practical measures could be enacted in any institution to reduce the harm it currently causes:

- The institution could set up processes to ensure that access does not have to be negotiated between professors and disabled employees alone. The idea is to limit the power of professors, who are often inexperienced, when it comes to access and disability.
- The institution could follow the recommendations of their disability and anti-discrimination advisors.
- It could offer anti-discrimination workshops to their employees to lessen discrimination towards People of Colour, Black people, disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people, LGBTQIA+, gender diverse people, as well as people from working class and non-academic backgrounds, with a focus on intersectionality (e. g. how disabled people of color face ableism and racism in German universities). It could invite them to present their experiences in talks, lectures, and seminars, without tokenizing them.



- Conferences about diversity and anti-discrimination should include the persons that are usually discriminated against, not only researchers, equal opportunity or anti-discrimination officers, and administrators.
- It could end the practice of work contract limitations.
- It should create a peaceful work climate where one can speak about weakness, differing experiences and sickness, without facing negative consequences. People in institutions should be able to collaborate without competition.

## Your oracle that loves preaching to the choir



# The Tender yet Furious Oracle demands:

- *Renew the work contract of the harmed person so that they can finish their dissertation*

- Apologize

- Compensate for the emotional labour, the stress and the worsening of the health situation of the harmed person.
- Based on the needs and wishes of the harmed person, offer a framework for repair.

- Set time and resources aside to unlearn ableist practices with the paid(!) help and knowledge of disabled and chronically ill persons.

- Finance the oracle and make sure to pay it well.

**- Build a sustainable structure for intersectional and anti-ableist work.**

- Create a Sara Ahmed Grant that complainers receive whose careers are being ruined. This grant is paid out in full monthly academic honorariums over the course of five years. The time acquired through the grant is first spent to recover and repair harm... and then to finance the actual work. I didn't write how many Sara Ahmed Complainers grants we demand? Because they are unlimited in number. They fade out as the reasons to complain will.

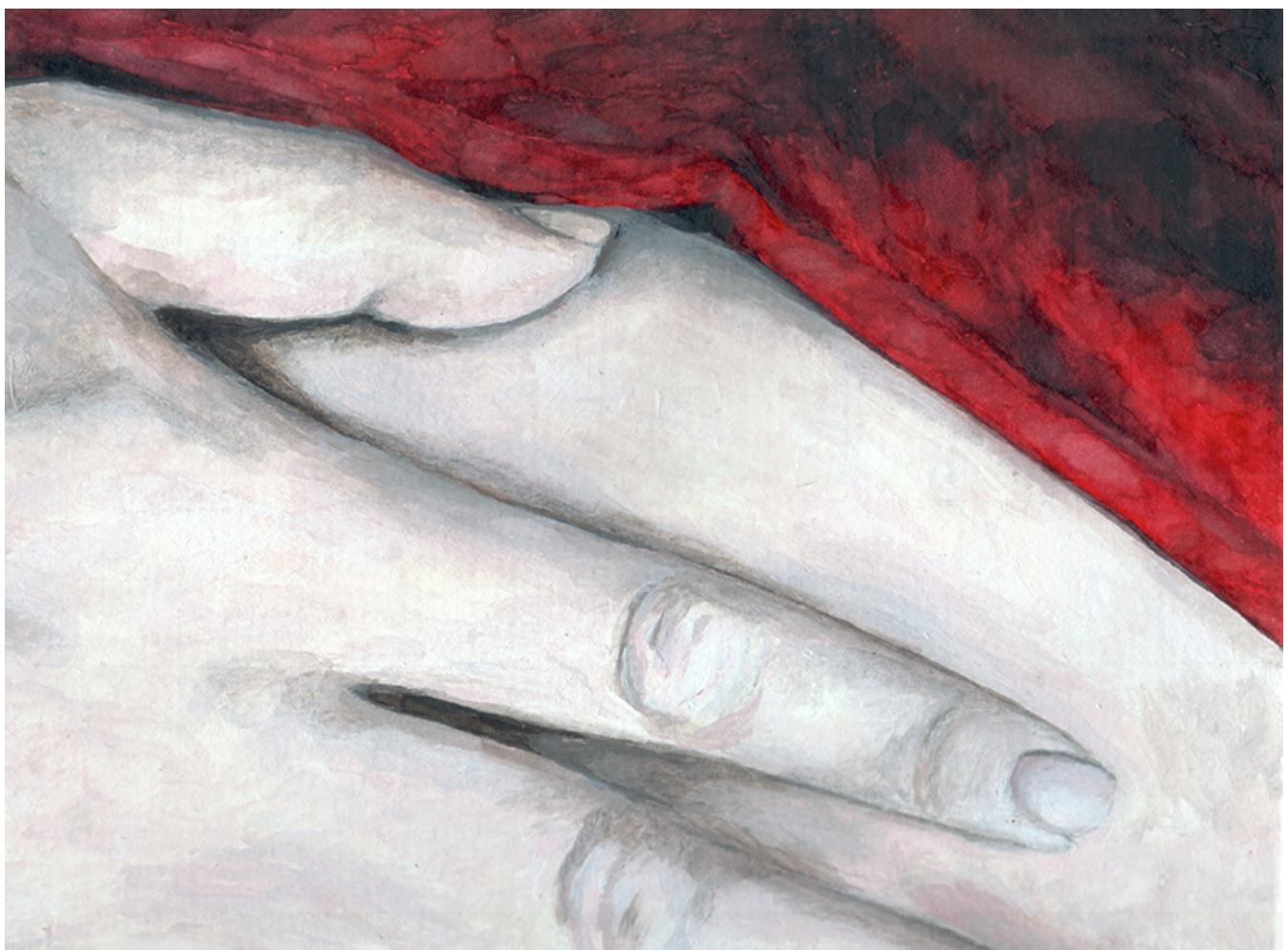
**- Implement anti-ableist resources across all university's departments. Resources might be: queer, antiracist, deaf, mad and crip theory; written or oral histories of a transdisciplinary cultural disability studies; and non academized disabled voices, et al**

- Increase the representation of disabled and chronically sick persons at every level of university ... as professor, cleaning person, lecturer, student, cook, administrative staff, security guard, director, librarian...

**This booklet contains quotations from different lectures on complaint that Sara Ahmed held. Ahmed's recent book “On Complaint” looks at the labour of those who challenge the structures they find themselves in by filing complaints when these structures fail them. Ahmed sees those complainers as diversity workers, who inform the institution that is supposed to accommodate them that it needs to change its culture, its processes and policies. Furthermore Ahmed analyses how institutions harness, neglect and intimidate those who complain in order to hold on to their privilege. We felt that the transformative power that lies in Sara Ahmed’s metaphors and analyses is a helpful tool of this tender, yet furious Oracle.**

**(The Oracle 2021)**

# Resources



## **Articles, Books & Lectures**

Ahmed, Sara: Complaint! Duke University Press, 2021.

Brown, Nicole, and Jennifer Leigh: Ableism in Academia. Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education. UCL Press, 2020.

Brown, Nicole: Trotz Fleiss kein Preis? - Ableismus in Academia. Lecture, Johannes Kepler Universität Linz, 18.01.2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7FGuX0XLwY> <https://www.nicole-brown.co.uk/ableismus/>

Hedva, Johanna: Hedva's Disability Access Rider & Sick Woman Theory <https://sickwomantheory.tumblr.com>

[https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG\\_1110\\_Hedva\\_SWT\\_e.pdf](https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf)

Jung, Karen Elizabeth: Chronic illness and educational equity. The politics of visibility. NWSA Journal, 2002, p. 178 - 200.

Katz, Jonathan: Abled Fragility Is Not An Access Need. medium.com, 27.07. 2018 [https://medium.com/@JonathanPKatz\\_43214/abled-fragility-is-not-an-access-need-5af767ecc1fe](https://medium.com/@JonathanPKatz_43214/abled-fragility-is-not-an-access-need-5af767ecc1fe)

Fazeli, Taraneh: Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time.  
Lecture, Coventry University, 19.06.2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckCkTszuXpk>

Fazeli, Taraneh: Notes for “Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying” in conversation with the Canaries. *Temporary Art Review*, 26.05.2016 <https://temporaryartreview.com/notes-for-sick-time-sleepy-time-crip-time-against-capitalisms-temporal-bullying-in-conversation-with-the-canaries/>

Lazard, Carolyn: Notes for the Waiting Room <http://www.carolynlazard.com/notes-for-the-waiting-room>

Manning, Erin: Me Lo Dijo Un Pajarito: Neurodiversity, Black Life and the University as We Know It. Lecture, Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia, 14.02.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYHSHRzj7eY>

Morsbach, Petra: Der Elefant im Zimmer. Über Machtmissbrauch und Widerstand. Penguin, 2020

Mingus, Mia: Forced Intimacy: An Ableist Norm. leavingevidence.com, 06.08.2017 <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/08/06/forced-intimacy-an-ableist-norm/>

The Nap Ministry <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>

## **Labour Struggles (in the arts):**

Precarious Workers Brigade Training for Exploitation?

Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education

<https://joaap.org/press/trainingforexploration.htm>

W.A.G.E. PROJECT: <https://wageforwork.com/home#top>

Art Workers Material Conditions and Labour Struggles  
in Contemporary Art Practice (edited by Minna  
Henriksson, Erik Krikortz and Airi Triisberg – not sure  
this info is needed) <http://www.art-workers.org/>

ART LEAKS <https://art-leaks.org/>

Scottish Artists Union: <https://www.artistsunion.scot/>  
Rates of Pay for Artists: [https://www.artistsunion.scot/scottish\\_artists\\_union\\_rates\\_of\\_pay\\_2018](https://www.artistsunion.scot/scottish_artists_union_rates_of_pay_2018)

Out of Action Group Emotional First Aid

<https://outofaction.blackblogs.org/>

Manual Labours: <https://www.manuallabours.co.uk/about/>

## **Accessibility (in the arts):**

Sickness Affinity Group Berlin-based support group for cultural workers with disability, sickness and/or care obligations who advocate for accessibility in the arts [sicknessaffinity.org](http://sicknessaffinity.org)

Access Docs for Artists information on how to write an access document for disabled artists [accessdocsforartists.com](http://accessdocsforartists.com)

A Primer on Working With Disabled Group Members for Feminist / Activist Organisations - Romily Alice Walden: <https://romilyalicewalden.com/Primer-> download

nothing / special ZINE is an art zine for mad/ sick/ crip art: <https://nothingspecialzine.cargo.site/>

Crip Magazine: self-published magazine on crip pop culture, the history and presence of radical crip movements, and subcultural, left and queer contexts of disability [cripmagazine.evaegermann.com](http://cripmagazine.evaegermann.com)

Skin, Tooth and Bone - Sins Invalid: disability justice primer <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/disability-justice-primer>

Platz da! Barrierefreie Kulturvermittlung <https://platzda2017.wordpress.com/>

Diversity Arts Culture Berlin consultation office for diversity development in the cultural sector [diversity-arts-culture.berlin](http://diversity-arts-culture.berlin)

Join the Künstlersozialkasse (KSK) guide how to join the KSK by Feminist Health Care Research Group [covenberlin.com/joining-the-ksk/](http://covenberlin.com/joining-the-ksk/)

Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice, Carolyn Lazard: <https://promiseandpractice.art>

Berlinklusion Berlins Netzwerk für Zugänglichkeit in Kunst und Kultur (network for accessibility in art and culture) [berlinklusion.de](http://berlinklusion.de)

You are welcome! Guide for international artists in Berlin [https://www.bbk-kulturwerk.de/con/kulturwerk/front\\_content](https://www.bbk-kulturwerk.de/con/kulturwerk/front_content).

## **Intersectionality:**

International Women\* Space <https://iwspace.de/>

POWER MAKES US SICK ZINES: <https://pms.hotglue.me/?resources>

Sisters Uncut <http://www.sistersuncut.org/>

TransInterQueer e.V. <http://www.transinterqueer.org/>

Les Migras <https://lesmigras.de/lesmigras-home.html>

GLADT ist eine Selbstorganisation von Schwarzen und  
of Color Lesben, Schwulen, Bisexuellen, Trans\*, Inter\*  
und Queere Menschen in Berlin <https://gladt.de/>

Reparative Archeology Bibliography:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1\\_iltqjKKSOo103tayuMyGPXhg3HvFob5Sxhtk-eHtuM/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_iltqjKKSOo103tayuMyGPXhg3HvFob5Sxhtk-eHtuM/edit#)

Abolitionist Futures <https://abolitionistfutures.com/>

## **Disability Justice:**

Disability Justice Resource List: Epiphanies of Equity / Chris Tiana, Obey Sumner <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bZv2kQwfnW1UJnX7NijSYD5dXm4xucKcTDxCt3wE8RU/edit>

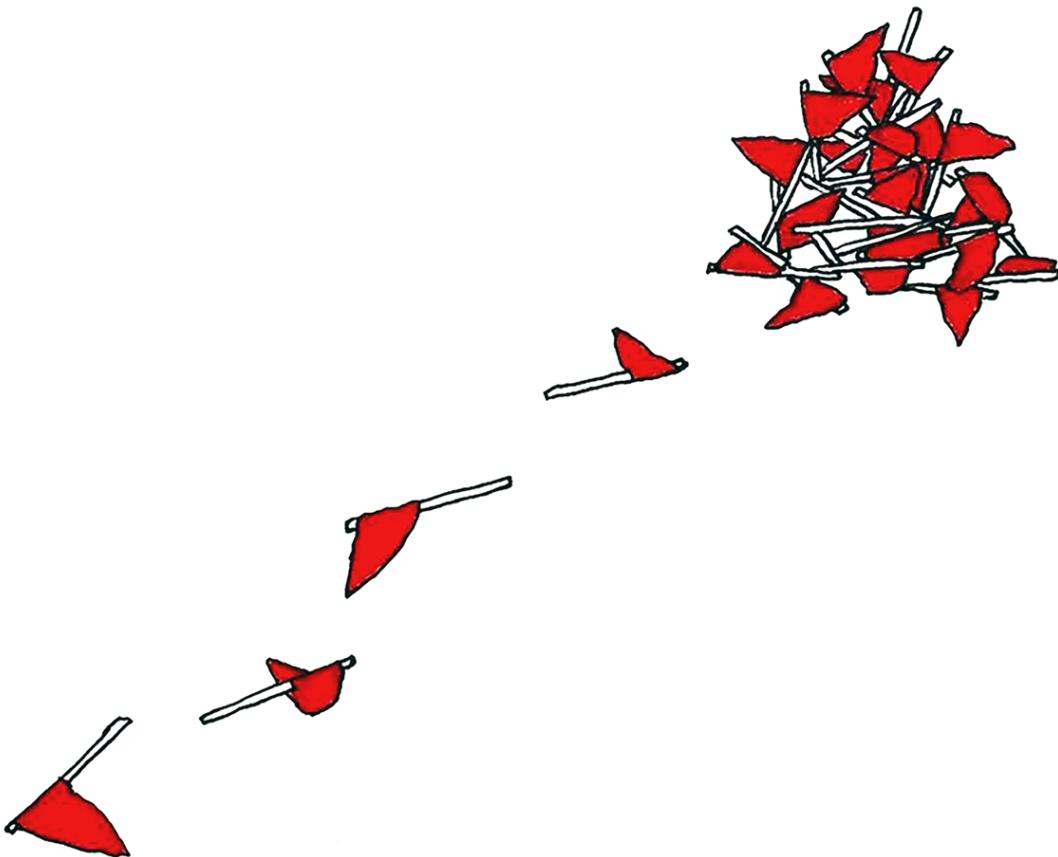
Access Intimacy, and Crip Solidarity, - Mia Mingus: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/>

Organizing in a pandemic: Disability Justice Wisdom Podcast and Resource List <https://irresistible.org/podcast/61>

Irresistible A podcast from a Social Justice Lens Disability Justice Wisdom <https://irresistible.org>

How to Survive the End of the World A podcast by Autumn Brown and adrienne marie brown <https://www.endoftheworldshow.org/>

# The Case



# **The questioner's case documented**

(A summary of the Questioner's formal complaint regarding the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) within the Goethe University Frankfurt)

From March 2018 to February 2021, I worked as a research assistant at an art related Institute of Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt. It was a temporary work contract for three years - it is common at the university to extend these contracts for two more years, especially when the research assistant is preparing a doctorate thesis. I knew my boss from the Berlin art community. They became a professor at Goethe-Uni and were looking for a person with a disability in order to create an additional research assistant position through disability funds, because funding a regular position

was not possible. They promised me a three year contract that would be extendable to five years and included the chance to write a thesis. Later, in their own request to the faculty dean to remove the time limits of their approval as a professor, they pointed out their merit that they had created this extra position through acquiring third party funding.

In June last year, they told me that they didn't want to extend my contract and that it would end in February 2021. They said they didn't have the capacity any longer to deal with the problems that I created. It was too much for them. They were exhausted. I live with a visible disability and an invisible chronic illness. There had been conflicts about my access needs. The reasons for the refusal to extend my contract were obviously

connected to my disability and my access needs – I couldn't have avoided asking for access requirements at the workplace, otherwise my health would have been compromised.

My colleagues at the department were granted their contract extensions without any problems. One colleague even received a „corona-related extension“ allowed by the Ministry of Education during that period.

**I live with a visible  
disability and an invisible  
chronic illness. There had  
been conflicts about my  
access needs.**

Below I will describe how much difficulty I had to face just to be able to do my work.

Due to the fact that during that time the discussions about my access needs deepened and the situation became more complicated, I felt disadvantaged, discriminated against, and put under pressure. The events that I will describe here had a negative effect on my work performance and my health. My reputation within the team, the institute, and among the students was damaged. My disability was, on one side, disavowed as the cause of the conflicts. On the other side, it was always pointed out as problematic. I was turned into the person whose needs were always too much. My needs were ridiculed and my attempts to communicate were seen as annoying and complicated. My career was damaged. The remaining time, between the notice

and the eventual termination of my contract, was very stressful and difficult, and I am now unemployed. I can not continue my thesis, since I am without funding. Nor did I receive a reference letter from my employer.

**My needs were ridiculed  
and my attempts to  
communicate were  
seen as annoying and  
complicated.**

## **Summary of the conflicts**

I needed to use my car to commute to work, it was agreed with my boss that I

would teach two weekend seminars and participate for two weeks during the exams and exhibition preparations at the end of the semester. For several other special meetings or projects, I needed to be present once in a while throughout the year. The rest of my work time, I would be in home office. Especially for the weekend seminars, I needed the keys to the compound and the main building, because there was no custodian. After keeping those main keys for one year, I was asked to return them to the facility management because there were not enough keys for every employee. My disability wasn't considered a reason to let me keep them. The reason they gave me was that I was absent in Frankfurt most of the time. From then on, it was a very exhausting and time-consuming task to get access to the compound. I had to call a security employee who came over

from the neighbouring campus to open the gate. The installation of a parking lock, with an extra key and time regulations for when I was allowed to park there and when not, made the situation even more dire.

I became more and more exhausted. One colleague told me that they could see how badly I was feeling, and that I better not show it at the workplace. I was judged in a negative way. I complained about the key situation with the disability officer. They wrote some letters, but received no answer. Finally my boss decided that I should apply for work assistance at the ‚Landeswohlfahrtsamt‘. It took three months and many emails to get the application through, and the ‚Landeswohlfahrtsamt‘ would pay 265,-€ a month for a student assistant who would help me open the gate (3180,- € in a year for a key of a master-key system

that cannot be reproduced – on the other hand they created a student job). I asked my boss for a recommendation, and they suggested that I employ two of their assistants, who already worked for them. The two agreed, but as they now had two different student assistant jobs in addition to other jobs outside of the university, they were not really aware of the urgency that the closed gate posed for a disabled person. The cascade of problems went on. My boss had told one of the student assistants that it would be enough to communicate and set up appointments with me by email. The problem however, was that the traffic in Frankfurt and on the freeway was too unpredictable, which required me to call or text them on the phone. But they didn't want to give me their phone number. When I couldn't cancel one meeting because of acute illness, the other

assistant was very angry and wouldn't accept my excuses. Both complained about me to my boss, and my boss wanted to summon a meeting with all of us in order to rethink my "working structure" with my assistants. One day, when I asked the first assistant to open the gate for me the next morning, he went to see my boss, who then came over to me and asked: "He needs to sleep tomorrow morning, can't you get the key from the secretariat?" That day, I decided to take the train to be there on time and without problems. At the central station, a business man pushed me so hard that I fell down and broke my wrist, and I was taken to a hospital in an ambulance, where I spent the whole day. A driver from my car insurance company had to drive me back to Berlin, because the employer's work accident insurance wouldn't pay enough for my disabled

body's return transport. I had to undergo an operation, followed by 50 hours of physiotherapy and ergotherapy. Soon after writing this documentation, I have to undergo a second operation with 30 more hours of physiotherapy. On the day of the accident, I had also missed an important project meeting at work, and I asked my boss and the other participants to give me a summary. But nobody gave me the information and I was excluded from the teamwork.

## **I was framed as difficult and stressful.**

At the end of the winter semester 2020, I was the second examiner with a

colleague, an associate lecturer, who planned a long day examining students without a break. For health reasons, I require an adequate lunch break. But my request for a break led to long and exhausting email discussions, and I was framed as difficult and stressful. My access need was considered to be a problem. My boss told me later that these discussions were one of the reasons why she didn't want to extend my contract.

A friend in the art community recommended me to my boss for that particular position that required a disabled person. Before becoming a professor, my boss had been, like me, a freelance artist in Berlin. When I started working with them, they tried to collect detailed information about my illness and told me many intimate stories about themselves, explaining their interest in medical issues through their former work

in the medical field. They tried to establish some kind of intimate friendship, but I didn't feel at ease with it, because they could change their attitude in seconds and become implacable. It became clear to me that for them this kind of relationship was only meant to be beneficial for them. They spoke very poorly about certain colleagues, and they disclosed details about the chronic illnesses of many other institute members. When I had to look after a student, while installing her artwork for her exams, my boss told me that the student was suffering from a mental illness. When I had criticized another student's work during an exam, they used the situation in order to guilt-trip me for being too strict, because the student had just undergone a serious operation. I was very afraid that they'd tell details about my illness to others,

and frame me negatively, which would damage my reputation. Within the Berlin art community, I had heard from a friend that they had spoken negatively about me, and had told one of their friends how terribly I had behaved. It was clear that they definitely caused harm to my professional reputation. The fear and anxiety that they would use my illness to discriminate and frame me negatively kept growing.

Regarding my work time, I started to feel insecure about setting any boundaries regarding the amount of time I was working, which was often more than the weekly 20 hours agreed to in my contract. They emphasized several times that the research assistants of other professors worked full time 40 hours every week, although they also had a 50% contract. They, on the contrary, were generous

and would not pressure me to do that. They told me later that universities are underfunded and understaffed businesses, and one had to be able to cope with that. They told me that in some meetings, other professors (they didn't want to name them) had complained that I mostly worked at home, while their research assistants came to the office every day, which they found unjust.

Many times I had the impression that they didn't believe that I really suffered from a chronic illness. Once, when I described my current symptoms in detail, they said: „Now I do believe you that you have (... name of the illness...).“ Another time, when I told them that I had managed to do several things very efficiently, they said: „No wonder that you suffer from (... name of the illness..).“ My illness seemed to induce paradoxical

attitudes in them, serving different abusive strategies. They either pointed the illness out, or disavowed its existence. They doubted and ignored my illness, and used it as a special marker to frame me as different from others. This behaviour was highly irritating and discomforting for me.

**I experienced an extreme amount of stress, which also worsened my symptoms.**

At one moment, as a generous gesture, they suggested that I request a physical rehabilitation treatment from my health

insurance. I explained that I needed to stay productive during employment, to cope with all the emails and bureaucratic problems that come up every single day, and that physical training in a rehabilitation center would be too exhausting for me. They told me that they had been at a physical rehabilitation once and that they had been able to work there very efficiently. They became more and more emotionally agitated and repeated to me frantically: „You are able to work there!“

## **Navigating failing complaint structures**

Within the university, which is Germany's second largest university, I contacted the psychological advisor for employees' conflicts, who told me, completely

dismissing the disability aspect, that this was not a conflict, but my boss' right not to extend my contract, and that they couldn't help me at all. I called the ombudsman for research assistants. At one point, when I told them that I was driving a long distance in one day, they asked me if it was even possible for me to do that with my chronic illness. They talked to my boss, who refused to make a compromise regarding their decision, and the ombudsman advised me that if I wanted to get a proper job reference, I should quickly try to apply for a grant to continue my thesis.

I contacted the disability officer, the staff council, and the anti-discrimination officer. Sometimes I had to wait for weeks to get an appointment. Over a period of several months, they tried to persuade my boss to accept a mediation dialogue. The university had issued a

“Labour agreement for conflict resolution and a cooperative approach at the workplace”, but my boss refused to behave according to these guidelines, and refused any dialogue with me. We talked with the head of the department, and at the same time, my disability and staff counselors tried to convince my doctoral supervisor to take over my work contract and accept me as their extra research assistant, but they also refused: they wanted to avoid a conflict with my boss. In the end, I wrote a formal complaint within the university according to the “complaint procedure under the general equality law”. I had put together a 50 page long pdf of email correspondence that only dealt with getting the key. It took the judicial officer 3 months to reply - only after I had inquired several times - with a complete rejection of the complaint. Without any

attempt to understand the situation, with no excuses and no empathy.

While telling this story in a meeting with my research assistant colleagues, one of them asked me if I really wanted to go on with that formal complaint, because this would get around in other universities, too, and no university would ever employ me again. They briefly thought about writing a letter of solidarity for me, but when the discussion went on, they were in doubt, and in the end, they did nothing. After my contract ran out, no one said goodbye, as it is usually practised, with a little farewell party for colleagues who are leaving, and I never heard from any of my colleagues again.