

The background of the entire page is a monochromatic blue. Overlaid on this background is a faint, artistic illustration of several hands reaching out from different directions, some open and some with fingers slightly curled, creating a sense of reaching towards the center. The hands are rendered in a light, almost white color, making them stand out against the blue background.

Negotiate.

Artwork by

Emilie Conway, Róisín Power Hackett
& Sighle Hennessy

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Introduction

by Róisín Power Hackett

There are several definitions for the word Negotiate. It can be understood as ‘having formal discussions with someone, in order to reach an agreement’, ‘to travel along a difficult route’ or ‘to deal with something difficult’.

‘Negotiate’ responds to a policy developed by Project Arts Centre in 2021 - Towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (TEDI). This work includes responses from three artists with disabilities including Emilie Conway, Róisín Power Hackett and Sighile Hennessy, who work across a variety of different media and contexts.

All three artists know what it is like to negotiate inequality, exclusion, and ableism on a daily basis.

Ableism is insidious, it is ingrained in public laws and policies, in all government departments, in our health care, public transport, and education. Every system is made ableist. The general-public and sometimes even our doctors, teachers, parents, family, and friends are ableist or benevolently ableist without even knowing it.

As a result of systems that ask the question ‘what is wrong with you?’ instead of ‘what is wrong with the system?’, people with disabilities live in the space between two realities.

On one hand we are praised for just existing and on the other we are consistently forced into isolation.

Ableism excludes us and forces us to limit our potential. Limit our education and career prospects. Limit our ability to socialise and explore culture. Limit our friendships, and sexual and romantic relationships. With limitations everywhere, negotiation is often our only means of living in the world.

The Towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (TEDI) Policy is a great first step towards reducing systemic ableism and we feel that other arts organisations across Ireland should be encouraged to examine and adopt the broader aspects of this policy. However, to prove its worth it must first be rigorously enforced by Project and exist beyond the pages.

Artists' Biographies

Sighile Hennessy

is a performer, mover, theatre-artist and founder-member of KCAT Arts Centre's Equinox Theatre Company. Recent works include POWER: We All Come From Somewhere (premiered Prague Jan 2020 - due for international tour 2021/22); The Big Chapel X (Asylum, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Abbey Theatre) 2019; The M House (Dublin theatre Festival, and Bounce! Festival, Belfast) 2018; Memory Box (National Tour) 2015; The Bridge Street Project; (Equinox, Asylum, Callan Workhouse Union) 2015; (The Making of) The Frogs after Aristophanes (Project Arts Centre, Dublin Fringe Festival) 2012.

Emilie Conway

is a vocal jazz artist, composer, and lyricist. Emilie's arts practice is multi-disciplinary as Emilie creates work through a process of singing, dancing, writing, and painting. An accredited art psychotherapist, she also believes in the healing power of art and multi-disciplinary creative expression. Her work centres around three areas of focus: jazz and visual art/literature, jazz and disability, and jazz and children. She is recipient of a New Work Award from Arts Disability Ireland Connect Scheme, 2020 and most recently a practice-based Agility Award from the Arts Council

of Ireland in 2021. Emilie is also a passionate activist for equal and equitable participation of disabled people in arts and culture. She is the founder of DADA, Disabled Artists and Disabled Academics.
<https://www.emilieconway.ie/>

Róisín Power Hackett

is a visual artist, writer, and curator. In 2021 Róisín graduated from the ARC LAB Curatorial Scholarship where she researched inclusion in and access to the arts for disabled people. Recent work includes A Consideration of All Bodies (2021) at the LAB Gallery in Dublin, The Finest Specimens of Fossilised Duration (2020) an online exhibition commissioned by Arts and Disability Ireland and the podcast ALL BODIES (2020) for Culture Night at the LAB. Róisín's recent awards include Arts and Disability Ireland Connect Research and Development Award (2021), the Waterford County Council Tyrone Guthrie Bursary (2019) and the Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary Award (2018).
<https://roisinphackett.wordpress.com/>

To clear on horseback a hedge, fence, or other obstacle

by Róisín Power Hackett

To mount a horse, I always need help. Without the muscle strength or dexterity in both arms and hands I cannot grip onto the horse or swing my leg over its back the way I've seen others do. As I have mild cerebral palsy I need to be lifted onto its back. As soon as I'm on its back, I can feel and hear it breath, see the moisture steam from its nostrils. As the horse lowers its head to eat a tuft of grass or shakes its mane and snorts, which it invariably does the moment I mount it, I know I am on the back of a real live animal that could run or bolt and slide me off its back in an instant. Without good balance, muscles, or fine motor skills I am unable to stop myself from sliding off. And this is all before the horse starts walking. I have walked with a horse around a paddock before during beginner horse riding lessons. Then again in County Kerry on a beach and in sand dunes I walked and then trotted. I don't think I will ever do more than trot on a horse. I think I'd fall off if I did. Imagine me in a hunt, chasing after a fox. I canter through a muddy

field. I come to a hedge with a ditch, brambles, and mossy stones in front. I must clear it to catch the fox. Can you imagine me clearing it without sliding off into the moss and mud, soaking my clothes, bruising my body or worse?

What is it like to have poor muscle strength and no fine motor skills in one arm and hand? What is it like to have poor balance because one leg is fractionally shorter than the other and you have mild supination of the foot, which means you can only put pressure on the outside of your foot when you walk? I know what this is like, but I don't have the words to describe it. Those words don't exist yet. Or at least they are not in common parlance. I live precariously. I test my boundaries and creatively adapt. I perform tasks I technically shouldn't be able to and complete them by the skin of my teeth, my heart racing. All this to fit in and pass under the radar.

Perhaps people who've broken an arm, a wrist, a leg, or an ankle understand. Perhaps people who've developed arthritis understand. Now add to this list - my poor co-ordination, my poor sense of direction and my history of epilepsy.

I physically negotiate buildings and public spaces differently than non-disabled people. I navigate spaces by keeping the awareness of my body's movement at the forefront of my mind, vigilant to possible obstacles and ways things could go wrong. I learn the map of public spaces and streets in a deliberate manner, using visual markers and the names of streets as waypoints. Negotiating space in these ways requires more energy, time,

and planning than it does for other people. If I need to take a bus at a bus station or go for an interview, I will often go to the building far in advance of the time I need to, sometimes even visit the day before, so that I don't get lost and turn up late.

I study the Google Maps directions to a place as if I have an exam in them. No one told me how to negotiate, I learned to adapt by myself. I often walk on blisters that have developed over years from the supination and from wearing hard plastic foot splints (or orthotics). The pain is mostly dull or non-existent, but sometimes it is searing. Regardless, if I need to get somewhere, be on time or be sociable I must keep walking through the pain. To keep up the appearance of being "normal", no one knows I am in pain. No one knows I am dying to sit down or dying to tear off my boots and splint and set my right foot free. There are written and unwritten social codes where in certain jobs or social situations you are obliged to stand. I want these to disappear. People should be able to sit when they want, they should be able to take off their shoes, their splints, and their prosthetics in public. It should be normalised. Until it is normalised, negotiation of public spaces is not fully suited to me. Public space and public life are governed by social codes that do not consider me.

As a disability activist I try to negotiate changes for equality through discussions, curatorial projects, and essays like this one. I listen and learn from other disabled people, and I relay their experiences as well as my own. It often feels like we the disability community are only tokens brought in so that an organisation can say it's diverse. We're

also frequently the forgotten minority that isn't even acknowledged. Real change, which can only come from the government, does not come. The government and TDs know what is needed. We've told them and they've ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but they choose to ignore international law.

The word negotiate can have two meanings. The first meaning is about how one physically passes through space. The second one is about communicating to come to an agreement. Negotiate comes from the Latin, 'negotiatum', the past participle of 'negotiari'. The word meant to carry on business, to do business or lack of leisure. Currently it can mean to tackle or manage successfully. According to Gower's Dictionary of 1965 this contemporary meaning derives from the hunting-field term negotiate, which was 'to clear on horseback a hedge, fence, or other obstacle'. This origin of the word negotiate suggests that negotiating is not an easy task. Every day I struggle to come to an agreement with the space and society I am immersed in. Negotiating the world as a disabled or chronically ill person is difficult and very much feels like I am navigating life on the back of a living breathing animal that is jumping over a hedge. And even then, I still need help to mount the horse so that I can even think about beginning.



An audio version of the introduction to the publication and the previous essay by Roisin Power Hackett is available here





▲ **VOICES** - why is it an arts centre? - what is the responsibility of established institutions? We need choice. There is also bias/fear from venues. As makers
 ▲ We can't just think of arts for the disability community as something that is therapeutic and not be prescriptive about what the artist can/can't provide. It's often difficult to trust to filter through and reach
 ▲ things should not be as rigorous. when that's not necessarily what our work is about. Still a luxury block
 ▲ less attention paid to what the artist can/can't provide. choice is. huge stumbling block
 ▲ when I'm disabled the token need much easier free flow connections between relationships with spaces
 ▲ create awareness of the space accessible. It's very 'application' within the building from the stage the backstage the gallery and the staff space
 ▲ brought in as a token amount of knowledge already and a certain set of values. what cultural environment are we
 ▲ make the language more accessible. Don't know are lacking in the Has to do with privilege or work position where you can't sit down
 ▲ assuming I have a certain amount of knowledge already and a certain set of values. what cultural environment are we
 ▲ **VOICES** It is like you feel like your being really difficult when you are in a social or work position where you can't sit down
 ▲ barriers start at birth. you build up resilience in dealing with it all undoing and unpacking the way things have always been done
 ▲ I feel you can feel contained limited a box
 ▲ we are capable

▲ systems in place -undoing and unpacking the way Things have always been done and rest A quiet space. for artists with disabilities
 ▲ rest in those spaces. more physically asking the way Things have always been done and rest A quiet space. for artists with disabilities
 ▲ comfortable having to ask asking Give access
 ▲ insist on a stage it can be quite difficult physically to negotiate. where I am

▲ Have an awareness that be aware of willing to negotiate. where I am
 ▲ People are smart and sensitive and they immediately ask and doors
 ▲ **VOICES** "A lot of cliques and relationships that exist before where I am
 ▲ "A diverse organisation should not have to have conversations
 ▲ "Be willing to willing to have conversations

A new type of process and working conditions need to be created to perform within mainstream theatre structures approach."
 ▲ "It's difficult to make to perform within mainstream theatre structures approach."

VOICES

- push against the established systems in place "undoing and unpacking the way Things have always been done"
- "There is a need for a space to lie down and rest A quiet space, for artists with disabilities
- "We need a literal safe space. chairs space for that feels uncomfortable asking more physically accessible to negotiate where I am."
- "You can't actually be an artist in those spaces" more physically accessible
- "Staff need training to sensitively assist on a stage it can be quite difficult physically to negotiate where I am."
- "There is a need for a space to lie down and rest A quiet space, for artists with disabilities
- "We need a literal safe space. chairs space for that feels uncomfortable asking more physically accessible to negotiate where I am."
- "You can't actually be an artist in those spaces" more physically accessible
- "Staff need training to sensitively assist on a stage it can be quite difficult physically to negotiate where I am."
- "what makes it an arts centre?"
- "who is the art work for and how is that translated?"
- "a gallery that there is stuff in the odd time"
- "are not approachable, adaptable and comfortable"

VOICES

- "what makes it an arts centre?"
- "who is the art work for and how is that translated?"
- "if the core staff are not approachable, adaptable and comfortable in dealing with something different"
- "Could we write an action plan write a 'guide to engaging with diverse artists' that could potentially be a benchmark in best practice Nationally"
- "Create a network and opportunities to get to know staff"
- "The arts has a role to play in creating a more accepting society revitalizing and reimagining"
- "By being 'exclusive' you become complicit facilitating exclusivity disposability"
- "people with disabilities have to be included in all arts activities and exhibitions Not segregated from 'mainstream' or 'normal' arts"
- "Nobody knows how you get in get in."

Consultation

by Emilie Conway

What is the nature of dignity?

What kind of cloth is dignity?

The kind you are encouraged to slip out of

into something a little more comfortable for us,

give us the personal story

(more relatable)

We're hard moved, hard won,

we won't give change in exchange for

for general,

logical or critical analysis.

We want to know,

we want to see,

how it hurts.

Over and over and over and over
again and again and again and again
the giving, the harvesting,
educating, communicating,
stripping, layer by layer,
privacy, dignity
concede, withhold, worry about
the personal story.

Tilt the lens a little this way or that
so that, this time, I might manage to remain whole.

Advocacy, activism,
“aren’t you great?”
“isn’t it awful?”

Driven to give -

Enough? more? a little more?

Too much - for hope.

Praise, blame, justice, discrimination,

blindness, deafness,

ignorance, denial and deferral.

15 There are worse things than not being able to see or hear.

Over and over and over and over

again and again and again and again,

in the end

I am left to re-dress

and, out of the mess,

to search for, and pick up from the floor,

my shreds of dignity among the shards of personal story,

while the audience shuffles out, clicks out,
"leaves meeting,"
obsequiously, with civil servant propriety
and the hushed tones of conspiratorial assurances:
"don't worry, your contribution will remain anonymous."

I stand still in the aftermath, silent, empty
tired.

But, why?

Why should I be ashamed of your behaviour?

It's Time, It's Our Time

by Emilie Conway

It seems you're really serious

About knowing and respecting us

Well it's about time.

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It's about time disabled people got to show and shine.

But you talk about inclusion,

When what we need is integration,

Oh it's time, it's time, it's our time.

Diversity, disability, marginalised communities

Isn't it time we living, breathing people shine?

We've got passion, love and soul and dreams,

Intelligence and endless creativity,

Isn't it time? It's time, it's our time!

When you want to hire somebody

Why not hire someone who lives different to you?

Someone with a disability?

Replace tokenism and disposability

With accessibility and sustainability.

Oh, isn't it time? It's high time.

We are:

Artists, directors, and policy makers,

Manage front of house, or backstage, porters, cleaners,

Hecklers and hackers, hangers on and hell raisers,

Dancers, designers, has beens and whiners

We're acrobats, actors, clowns and accountants,

Lighting crew, stunt fighters, audio describers,

Producers and ambitious administrators,

Sopranos and baritones sound engineers.

Applauded or heinous, derivative and genius,

Pathetic, aesthetic, celebrated, star-rated -

Isn't it time?

Listen to us, we're serious, we need you to join with us

Fight some systemic injustice:

When we work a day, our impairments stay

But the State takes disability supports away -

It can't work that way. It's not safe that way.

We can't live that way. We can't thrive that way.

We need change today.

Isn't it time? It's time, it's our time.

It's time disabled people shine.

TEDI

by Emilie Conway

This policy changes this space

Gives me a place

Legitimately

To be

As audience, artist, curious.

Whatever way I am

I don't have to hide or act differently

For someone else's benefit

I'm free to be

Look close, not see, even move uncertainly.





Response to Project Arts Centre's TEDI Policy

by Emilie Conway

Video, 2022, duration 5 minutes 57 seconds, captions available,
Scan QR code to access video







INFORMATION & BOX
OFFICE

Give me Space and Freedom

Images by Sighile Hennessy

These images are telling the story of being in claustrophobic situations where I wasn't listened to and also the flip side of it when I am listened to.

- 23** Doing this project, I really enjoyed expressing the different ways that I could tell a story. It was great having the other people get involved as well.













'Negotiate' (2022)

Negotiate is a response to Project Art Centre's
Towards Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Lead Artist: Róisín Power Hackett

Collaborating Artists: Emilie Conway and Sighile Hennessy.

Producer: Róisín Power Hackett

Designer & Cover Art: Dáire Hackett

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PDF of this publication
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