Chapter 3. Understanding "Crip" Time and Labor

By the terms of disability I discuss in the last chapter, antiracist grading ecologies that are open and equitable for all should not need to have accommodations added to them for those who experience disability, neurodivergency, or illness. All students should be able to function without inherent problems in the system. That is, the grading system should already be built to allow everyone to labor exactly in the ways they can and in the time frames available to them, while also meeting the institution's requirements for work done or completed in the course.

However, in most universities, as in mine now and in the past, we often work in systems that use definitions of disability that are medical, individual, and "fix-it" based. And this affects everyone who works and learns in those institutions. Such definitions of disability not only assume but determine our grading ecologies' assumptions about our students' capacities to labor. They surely affect mine. So, how do we move to a conception of labor that draws on Kafer's definition of disability and accounts for Bailey and Mobley's Black feminist framework? How can one crip labor in their own grading ecology, regardless of whether it is labor-based or something else? To answer this question, we have to ask what "cripping" means, and I'll do this in the context of my own LBG ecologies.

Crip Time

Most discussions of cripping focus on experiences of time and temporality. Quoting Margaret Price, Tara Wood explains "crip time" as "a concept in disability culture that 'refers to a flexible approach to normative time frames' . . . 'Students are expected to arrive on time, absorb information at a particular speed, and perform spontaneously in restricted time frames' [63]" (264). But to crip time, it means "recognizing that people will arrive at various intervals' and that people 'are processing language at various rates and adjusting the pace of conversation' [63]" (264).

Yet, cripping time means more than just offering more time on tasks in classrooms, being generous about when students begin and end activities, or even extending due dates for assignments. Kafer explains:

> Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of "how long things take" are based on very particular minds and bodies. We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need "more" time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing

> expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled
> bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock
> to meet disabled bodies and minds. (27)

Thus, for Kafer, Price's definition of crip time is "a reorientation to time," a bending of the clock. Crip time centers on "flexibility" (Price 62; Kafer 27), something that Wood's study of students who experience disability in writing classrooms also reveals as important to them (Wood 268). When discussing the timed writing experiences of her study's participants, Wood concludes that "[t]he belief that student writers, given a set amount of time, have an equitable opportunity to perform in a way that suits their cognitive style and pace relies on an assumption of normativity" (269). For Wood, then, cripping time in the writing classroom alleviates student anxiety and affords more students learning by "increasing flexibility, avoiding rigidity, and lowering the stakes of writing (particularly in the beginning stages of a course" (270).

What Wood finds in her study matches what Kafer explains about the ways our notions of time are connected to illness and disability. Kafer explains that "[f]amiliar categories of illness and disability . . . are temporal," that is, they change over time, however we mark that time, be it personal or historical (26). This means for Kafer, that such categories "are orientations in and to time, even though we rarely recognize or discuss them as such, and could be collected under the rubric of 'crip time'" (26). Thus, our orientations to time can change over time or when in different situations, depending on our conditions or our current bodily and emotional states.

In "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," Ellen Samuels offers six different ways she has experienced an evolving crip time during her lifetime, often because of her changing bodily states or the various conditions and people around her. Through her narrative, she describes crip time as a series of phenomenological experiences that engender liberation, loss, anger, and separation from others. In brief, she articulates crip time as "time travel," "grief time," "broken time," "sick time," "writing time," and "vampire time" (n.p.). Perhaps most germane to this discussion may be crip time as "time travel" and "writing time."

For Samuels, crip time as time travel means an experience of time that is nonlinear and filled with starts and stops, and abrupt changes in pace. In her case, this occurs because of Samuels' disability and illness, which has "the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings." The time traveling doesn't stop there. It moves her body forward in time to "the impairments of old age while still young" or to moments where "some of us are treated like children no matter how old we get" (n.p.).

On the other hand, crip time as writing time, according to Samuels, is not as euphoric or productive as it may sound. It doesn't mean there is more time to write or more productive writing time. It often can mean writing time is stretched out over longer periods of time. Samuels says, "I have been writing an essay about

crip time, *in crip time*, for so many years now, I wonder if I will ever get it done" (n.p.). Thus, crip time has deep implications to crip labor and the flexibility that can define it for LBG.

While we don't have years to complete one college course, there has to be more capacious ways to understand due dates, and more generous ways to articulate what we expect in labor-learning. If time is a part of labor expectations in a grading ecology, which I think it is, then beyond flexible due dates for assignments, crip labor could mean reorienting the ecology and those in it to account for multiple ways of experiencing temporality, pacing, and the passage of time. This includes accepting a wide array of learning products that come out of the laboring expected. It may also entail thinking with our students about the most meaningful processes by which to accomplish any given labor or assignment. We may not all experience time or our laboring in the same ways, but we can acknowledge that students will experience time and their laboring differently, need different processes to do work, and produce different outcomes. Doing these things together allow us to begin to crip LBG by incorporating these insights into the design of our grading ecologies.

Crip Failure

As I read the accounts of crip time, those with disabilities, and those who are neurodivergent, I hear stories of failure, which seem often to be an everyday thing, even expected. I appreciate this aspect of accounts like Samuels', Mingus', and Kafer's. They each illustrate an acceptance, but not a resignation, of the ordinariness of failing to do things in normative ways or time frames, of not being "on time." Perhaps the most common is a failure to move through environments and situations that have been designed to fail some of those who attempt to move through them. These are environments and systems that create an inability for some to make their way. Thus, failure is really an observation about the problems and weaknesses of systems, not so much individuals, even though failure is attached to individuals, and some individuals accumulate more failure attachments than others.

These accounts of failure make me wonder: How have I designed my past grading ecologies in impassable ways, in ways that force some of my students to fail at moving through them successfully? I appreciate this aspect of the literature because like struggle, pain, and joy, failure is not only diverse in its texture and nature but it is ordinary for everyone. It is not something anyone can avoid. We all fail in small and big ways, but for some students, their failures can be more present, more obvious in the grading ecology. In fact, their ways of laboring may be defined as failure if we aren't mindful of the ways our definitions of disability and failure collide.

As I've argued elsewhere, failure in writing courses is "a complex systemic phenomenon with structural, social, affective, cognitive, and noncognitive

dimensions" ("Theorizing Failure" 337). The nature and frequency of failure are designed in all systems, which means we control these aspects of it more than we typically think. And so, one way to crip labor is to redesign failure in the ecology in ways that do not harm those who fail, but instead add value to their learning experiences. The nature of failure, therefore, would not be negative or punitive. It would encourage or urge a student on. It might even be lauded or welcomed since failure can be ordinary, frequent, and expected. We can greet it with a smile. Thus, the nature of failure might be designed as "productive failure," a failure that makes things, is expected and useful, offering learning and quiet moments that afford students a chance to pay attention to how they labor ("Theorizing failure" 346). This would be a failure that is met with joy, I think.

I must admit that today I resist this language a bit, "productive failure," even as it matches the ecological language I use to describe grading ecologies—that is, failure can be an organic learning *product*, an important outcome of the ecology. Perhaps this same kind of failure might also be called "meaningful failure" in order to resist the association that "productive" has with Capitalist narratives that over-value production as some process that makes a predefined product that has predefined value (typically monetary) in the system. That is, our failures can be meaningful to us in social, affective, cognitive, or noncognitive ways without having any exchange value in the system that creates that failure. The meaning of any failures only needs to reside in the person who considers their own failure at laboring, for instance. This means meaningful failure is very much an important aspect of crip labor. And the best articulation of failure I've found comes from Jack Halberstam.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam (published as Judith Halberstam) deconstructs the concept of failure in society and media, linking particular aspects of it to Capitalism. Drawing on Scott Sandage's cultural and historical account of failure in U.S. society, Halberstam explains that failure "goes hand in hand with capitalism" (88). Capitalism, he explains, "requires that everyone live in a system that equates success with profit and links failure to the inability to accumulate wealth even as profit for some means certain losses for others" (88). And while the story of failure is "a hidden history of pessimism in a culture of optimism" (Sandage 9), Halberstam argues in his book for "a queer art of failure" that is "anticaptialist, queer struggle," one that is "a narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming" (88). He explains:

> This is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being. (88)

What I hear in Halberstam's discussion is this: Failure helps us imagine other goals for our reading, writing, and learning in courses. Accepting this idea of

failure gives those grading ecologies license to lean into "the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable."

Ultimately throughout his discussion, Halberstam reveals the way failure critiques the hegemonic Capitalist systems of patriarchy, White supremacy, heteronormativity, ableism, and neurotypical norms that make up success, winning, and progress in society. To his critique, I add that a queer art of failure also crips labor expectations, what students are expected to produce, and their attachments to time in classrooms. This critique reveals the counter hegemonic in the hegemonic, the hidden but always present ideas about, say, what it means and looks like to succeed or fail in a writing course's grading ecology, what it means and looks like to succeed or fail at laboring in an assignment.

Crip labor, then, can include laboring that "imagines other goals" for laboring, other goals for reading and writing assignments in a writing course than the prescribed ones, or the ones imagined by the teacher or the class, or even the student as they began the work they now find themselves failing at. Perhaps crip labor can be a "story" of learning that disregards predefined outcomes at the last minute, letting go of grand narratives of "progress" in the final stages of laboring. Maybe crip labor allows for a story of now, of doing and being in the present moment not without boundaries—since those tell us when and how we fail, where we can go, and how we can move away—but without limitations, as those hold us back from finding fuller meaningfulness in our apparent failures. Boundaries, like measures of labor in a grading ecology, don't have to bind and constrict. They might simply mark and identify features of the ecology. But perhaps this too is a contradiction in a queer art of labor failure. Can you have a labor boundary that marks and identifies but doesn't bind and constrict?

Failure is also perhaps the most universal condition shared by all. Halberstam ends his book:

> To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures. (186-187)

I am drawn to this language, even as I am skeptical of the idea that death and disappointment are failures. Halberstam speaks clearly to laboring in paradoxical ways. How might LBG help our students "cleave to all of [their] . . . inevitable fantastic failures"? Cleave is a curious word here as it has two opposing meanings. It means to split or sever something, to crack it apart. It also means to stick fast to, to bond to something or someone. It appears one queer aspect of failure is its paradoxical nature in how we might treat it. It is something to sunder or split into two and simultaneously hold close and join. Crip labor, then, is a

paradoxical laboring. It is both hugging and pushing away our failures in laboring. It is learning and disregarding learning. It may even be noticing time guides in labor instructions and disregarding them. It's an aloof orientation to standards in a classroom that notices them while also letting them go at times. Or maybe, we might call this orientation an *interested disregard* for standards.

Through this cleaving process, crip labor can release us from thinking that any labor expectations (time on tasks, word counts, due dates, etc.) provided in a grading ecology define success, even as paradoxically they create a grand narrative about what success seems to look like that we need in order to resist it. Ironically, in order to have a queer art of failure in laboring, in order to imagine other goals for our laboring in a course, in order to disregard and walk away from prescribed learning outcomes, we first must have those normative goals, expectations, and outcomes to walk away from. These are the things that students can shirk when necessary, the labor goals and expectations we need in order to reorient ourselves and face other directions, or even notice that we already face in different directions and move at different rates.

Crip Labor

Thus, the notion of crip labor I'm suggesting in this chapter takes into account Kafer's idea of "imagined futures" by incorporating mindful and reflective practices that help students account for their labor in a course, not to do it better or differently next time, although that may be a desired outcome, but to account for it and perhaps cleave (to) their fantastic failures. Students, then, come to understand themselves and the ways they labor in their moments of laboring as well as afterwards, considering how their bodies and conditions affect that laboring. This kind of labor is not about making students into something else predetermined, or "fixing" them or their ways of laboring. Crip labor considers the ability to labor as universal but flexible, open-ended in terms of what it looks like, feels like, or is expected to be or produce. It cleaves to normative standards of labor, hugs them close and pushes them away.

Everyone labors, but not in the same ways, nor in the same conditions, nor do we produce the same outcomes. Such a conception of crip labor requires that students and teachers investigate labor as part of the ecology. Crip labor is meant to be wide, broad, open-ended, and dynamic, even evolving over a semester as we learn more about ourselves and each other, as we fail and cleave to the standards and measures of labor we have negotiated, as we hold close and push away our failing in order to both understand ourselves and reimagine other goals. But all this still assumes that everyone in a course is there to do work, often together, to labor in our ways and in our own conditions.

Crip labor is still three-dimensional in the way I describe it in Chapter 3 of *Labor-Based Grading*. It is also a direct product of a definition of disability for the classroom that must be explicit for students to know, even help articulate.

Such definitions must be resistant to the harmful ableist and neurotypical biases that spring from how our grading ecologies, schools, disciplines, and society have come to imagine our students in the future, that is, as somehow cured or better or transformed into something more than they are today.

Such grand narratives of learning and student progress might still be in the course, but they are there as foils, as villainous boundaries that show us the ways and depths of our fantastic failing, failing that makes us what we are in the moment. We use such labor expectations as we need them, but release them at the last minute when they have served their purposes, guided us to where we can go, and for some of us, helped us orient ourselves away from them as a grand narrative of progress or success. We know such labor measures and standards are fictions, and we, the people in the grading ecology, control them. In all these ways, crip labor is ultimately flexible.