Slow(ed) Scholarship: On Crip Time and Refusal from the Intersections of Privilege and Precarity

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Abstract

This roundtable tells a story of three early career feminist critical geographers, facing disabling conditions and the pressures of neoliberal time in academia. Our introductory essay reviews the rich literature on slow scholarship, crip time, disabilities, and neurodivergence that resonated with us. We connect these themes with our personal journeys navigating crip time and refusal in North American academic institutions through a recorded roundtable discussion, transcribed below. In rethinking what slowing down and refusal mean from the perspective of an already slowed bodymind, we hope that this article stimulates more conversations among critical scholars at all stages of their careers. Aspects of the roundtable will be relatable to those facing varying levels of precarity, neurodivergence, and disabling conditions. With compassion for embodied barriers and time pressures we also encourage tenured and variously more secure and well-established scholars to read this piece and consider ways to alter the material conditions of inequity, stress, and mental and physical pain

experienced by scholars at the intersections we describe. A commitment to slow scholarship in feminist and critical geographies, we contend, demands a commitment to those who wrestle with time and disability in academia, and to those who inhabit the paradox between slowing down and keeping up.

Keywords

care, slow scholarship, neurodivergence, neoliberal academy, disability justice, crip time

Introduction

As three early career scholars in feminist geography, we came together beginning in August 2022 to unpack the importance of time and care in the academy through overlapping lenses of slow scholarship and disability justice. As an experiment with knowledge co-production, we embarked on a roundtable series to critically reimagine academic time, health, and refusal.

Inhabiting the intersections of privilege and precarity ourselves, we asked a series of questions: how can we both *care for* and *care about* (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) in ways that unsettle the demands of academic neoliberal expectations and standards? What do care*ful* refusals mean in the context of an already slowed body? As Ashley Taylor (2019) might ask, what is the difference between *being slowed* (by our bodies, brains, families, disabling conditions and ways the university responds to them) and *doing slow*, i.e. intentionally slowing down?

The above questions were originally inspired by the work of feminist, decolonial, and activist scholars who have challenged how North American academic institutions commodify knowledges and colonize bodies, mind, and time (e.g. Shahjahan 2014; Mountz, et al. 2015; Harland, et al. 2015; Carr and Gibson 2017; Caretta and Faria 2019; Hamraie 2019; Hawkins 2019), in conversation with our own experiences. These questions on speed and disability have also been addressed by disability rights and crip scholars. In the somewhat backwards process, rather than disability and crip scholarship inspiring our conversation, it was our discussions—with new diagnoses and medication changes, growing vulnerability with each other, and increasing disclosures—that eventually led us to theories of crip time. The term was first used in disability communities, a fact recognized in scholarship by critical disabilities scholars Irv Zola and Carol Gill (Kafer 2013). These 'in-group' and early scholarly uses were about not only "a slower speed of movement but also about ableist barriers over which one has little to no control; in either case, crip time involves an awareness that disabled people might need more time to accomplish something or to arrive somewhere" (Kafer 2013: 26). Increasingly, as Alison Kafer (2021: 428) writes, crip time highlights ways that disease and disability "are conceptualized in terms of time, affect one's experiences of time, and render adherence to normative expectations of time impossible." Crip time *also* theorizes "how people are refusing and resisting those very expectations, thereby creating new affective relations and orientations to time, temporality, and pasts/presents/futures" (ibid). Our publication explores these refusals and reorientations. Lastly, drawing from one of Ellen Samuels' understandings of crip time, we listen to (and in our case record) "the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words" (2017 n.p.).

The roundtable conversations dove into our lived experiences as invisibly disabled and neurodiverse scholars in U.S. academic institutions, and how the rich literature on slow scholarship, time, disabilities, and neurodivergence resonated with us. By weaving these literatures organically into our three perspectives, influenced by variations in expertise and experience, we each came away from our conversations conceptualizing our jobs and labor in new ways. We want this roundtable to speak to scholars who have taken different career paths and are at different stages. In this piece, we hope to provide a bridge across which this scholarship can reach and relate to you, too.

Bridges and Gaps

Critiquing the commodification of time in higher education as a form of human capital is not new. For decades scholars have argued against the neoliberalization of higher education and marketization of faculty time, scholarship and academic work (e.g. Casalini 2019; Smyth et al. 2019; Osbaldiston et al. 2019; Mountz 2016; Mountz et al. 2015; Shahjahan 2014; Radice 2013; Meyerhoff et al. 2011; Federici 2009). In the neoliberal institution, our moral character, merit, competence or productivity is measured by the 'proper' use of time for reaching excellence in teaching various classes (including teaching preparation and student assessment), producing a body of research (including applying for grants, presenting at conferences, writing and publishing books and articles), mentoring (including advising graduate and undergraduate students and mentoring colleagues), and participating in disciplinary and campus administrative services (Caretta et al. 2018; Pitt and Mewburn 2016; Vostal 2015).

Above all, the physical and emotional toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on faculty members has exacerbated feelings of stress and fatigue, with disproportionate effects on women, primary caregivers, disabled, BIPOC, and LGBTQIAP+ scholars (Neely and Lopez 2022; Price 2021). "Like many workers who struggle with low pay, lack of advancement opportunities and feeling disrespected," argue McCandless et al. (2023: n.p.), "higher education faculty members struggle to keep it together because of exhaustion and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic." They found that 33% of faculty members report being often or always physically exhausted, with mental exhaustion persistently affecting 38% (ibid). The American Psychological Association 2024 "Trends Report" wrote: "The majority of faculty report feeling burned out because of work."[1] Faculty are also part of the larger context of "so much mental health crisis" that Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2022: n.p.) writes about in *The Future is Disabled*:

> There are so many people taking care of their elders and sick friends while they're also sick, with long-covid or anything because as the care crisis continues… the entire-ass safety net we had during the pandemic has been taken away. There is so much complete exhaustion and so much dissociation

that of course is "not equally distributed."

The pandemic, far from an exceptional moment of crisis after which work would return to "normal" levels, laid bare a pattern of increasing time demands and stressors placed upon

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[1] https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/faculty-burnout-survey

such faculty that has been decades in the making (Peake and Mullings 2016; Price 2021; Martínez Alemán 2014; Medak-Saltzman et al. 2022). For instance, the "tenure clock" requires probationary faculty to undergo annual reviews with no attention paid to the ableist structure of time and our institutions "in which only the fittest survive" (Medak-Saltzman et al. 2022; see also Shahjahan 2014). To address Western institutions' ableist power structure and to denaturalize the "metric-oriented neoliberal university," movements such as slow scholarship challenge the speed and metric-focus of neoliberal academia and advocates for "collective action informed by feminist politics" (Mountz et al. 2015; 1236). While this literature is about more than speed, a strength of "For Slow Scholarship" (ibid) in particular is its recognition that the kind of substantive, engaged work the authors support *requires* literally slowing down. It is called '*slow* scholarship' for a reason. Discourses such as the slow university (Hartman and Darab 2012), an ethics of slow (Taylor 2019; Hytten 2017), and the slow professor (Berg and Seeber 2016) or inattentive professor (Molana 2022) have emerged advocating for *slowing down* and prioritizing the practices of care.

Yet, who is slow scholarship speaking to? The movement largely has not taken a critical disability lens into account. Critiquing mainstream self-care literature, Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk write that alongside race and sexuality, "disability seemed nowhere to be found—except, perhaps, in the unspoken shadow of what might happen should one not take care of one's health" (2021: 326). We feel similarly that an intersectional disability lens needs to be centered in the slow scholarship movement.

What happens when, in particular, various forms of chronic illness, disability, or neurodivergence[2] come into play, intersecting with the many facets of our diverse identities and embodied experiences? Crip, feminist, and critical disability scholars draw attention to the individualizing effects of neoliberal discourses that equate time with human capital (Casalini 2019). Trying to withstand such time pressures, Joshua S. Hanan (2018) suggests, may lead scholars to blame themselves for not meeting neoliberal markers of success or for their different mental and bodily workings in comparison to peers. Feelings of "less than" may manifest through actions, such as staying silent about one's condition or not requesting accommodations (Hanan 2018).

Accommodations themselves have been widely critiqued by disability-rights activists and crip theorists. Logan Smilges (2023: 71) calls the system "paramount to displacing the labor of creating access back onto those of us who don't yet have it." They are an institutional response that "individualizes hardships" (Simand-Gagnon 2016: 219) by focusing only on individual disabled bodies and not the "relations, systems, objects, and discourses" that harm disabled people (Price 2021: 258). In doing so, they channel faculty toward an expectation of resilience: a responsibility to independently endure the stresses of the job (Simand-Gagnon 2016). Moreover, the widespread institutional slowness of accommodation processes and inadequacies of it offered in the academy further discourage such requests and exacerbate time-based inequities (Price 2021). In this environment, scholars with 'invisible disabilities' or

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[2] We see disability and neurodivergence as fluid, open, and overlapping concepts. People within those communities use a wide variety of language, from being to having, person-first vs. identity-first. Even within our group we use different languages but have found a middle ground in places; at the same time, our differences in language lend an inconsistency we intentionally preserved.

lesser-known health issues also have been accused of malingering (Brown and Leigh 2018). 'Invisible disabilities' thus carry "lifelong psychic and social ramifications, affecting the very capacities for individual expression and identity formation (Hanan 2019: 106; see also Blum 2015; Wendell 1996).

To be clear, it is institutions' perception of time and productivity and *not necessarily* our conditions or selves, that *slow* us. As Margaret Price (2021: 258) puts it, "time is part of a material-discursive field through which body minds are sorted," suggesting that time itself—much like other markers of difference—is a socially constructed, power-laden mechanism used to divide humans into categories or degrees of worthiness. Some conditions even speed us up; for instance, studies show that autistic people are "up to 40% faster at problem solving than non-autistics" (University of Montreal 2009). Hanan (2019: 112) calls ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) a 'technology of the self' that "aims at inculcating the everyday folk sensibilities of neoliberalism." Such efficiencies do not always operate under normative time, such as within the 9–5 workday, nor can they be consistently harnessed. Like many encouraged to consume stimulant medications to meet academic standard efficiency, Hanan (2019) describes having a machine-like obsession with productivity. If for Hanieh Molana (2022: n.p.) unmedicated ADHD manifests as two extremes ('sprinting' versus slow and distracted), medication opens a third extreme, throwing her into "a complex, paradoxical space through which only a superhuman can navigate."

Those who take stimulants pay in other ways as well. It takes time for psychiatrist visits and urine tests often required for refills, and monthly pharmacy visits that may not sync with other prescription pick-ups. It takes time, money, and energy to establish the right medication plan: brand, release-type, dose, or combination, and other medications added to mitigate side-effects (e.g., stimulants can exacerbate anxiety or some of the challenges of autism). Both this process and the medications themselves can leave us "feeling physically and emotionally depleted," and take an "increasing toll on [one's] physical and mental health" (Hanan 2019: 112).

Medicating is but one example of the ways we alter or disguise aspects of ourselves to conform to societal and professional pressures. There is a wealth of writing on the impacts of this masking[3] in general, such as Devon Price's (2022) *Unmasking Autism.* A small portion focuses on academia (see for instance Price 2021; Kaufman 2021). Sara Judge's experience resonated with us: years of "painstakingly" masking came at "the detriment of good health—navigating my way through university with hidden neurological-difference for fear that it would damage my professional opportunities and hinder me from being taken seriously" (Judge 2018: 1104).

Granted, institutional pressures do not *always* result in insecurities, masking, or medicating to keep up. Scholars respond to institutional policies and practices that compromise their health, well-being, and identity in myriad ways. These include individually opting out (England 1996) or 'quiet quitting' (Vidra 2022); forming collectives from unions to covens (Smyth et al. 2019), or as our group put it, a 'fuck you' response.

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[3] In this paper, 'masking' refers to this form of performing. When speaking of wearing masks for public health, we use the term 'mask-wearing' or 'wearing a mask.'

In contrast to resilience or withstanding, such actions have been conceptualized as a more active pushing-back, variably labeled. While we seemed to avoid those labels in our conversation, we discussed many acts that we have since agreed are best encompassed by the term 'refusal.' Why refusal and not resistance? To the question of what counts as resistance, we considered Cindi Katz's requirement of oppositional consciousness to confront "conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales" (Katz 2004: 251). Of Katz's 'three R's', the actions we describe fit best, though imperfectly, within resilience: ways to get through each day that sustain oneself in the neoliberal university without significantly altering its harmful structures. Yet a "fourth 'R'" (Kaufman 2021), *refusal,* requires a consciousness of the conditions of both exploitation and the ways we challenge it. As Audra Simpson (2014), Robin D.G. Kelley (2016), and Sandy Grande (2018) have argued—highlighting disabled, abolitionist, indigenous, and BIPOC enactments—refusal means consciously pushing back against the neoliberal university. Drawing on Harney and Moten, Kelley (writing as a distinguished professor and endowed chair) urges students and faculty to refuse the illusion that the university can be reformed and insists on collective struggle (2016).

Our roundtable is informed by Kelley's call. For every academic who has been told by the university, explicitly or by omission, that their experiences are anomalous, individual, or self-inflicted, we offer experiences that might suggest otherwise. On one hand, we reflect on our varied relationships to privilege, and on the limits to our understanding of other struggles and to what this conversation can express. On the other hand, the neoliberal university is designed to make us feel disconnected. In an institutional climate that divides us, we seek to offer connections. While we do ask readers to reflect on their power and security when considering professional risks, we also recognize that disabilities do not dissipate with rank, nor does tenure afford everyone the same security. For this reason, we choose not to quantify acts of refusal into more or less radical. The word 'refusal' spans an array of understandings (ours is inflected with those described above), for there are many ways, and conditions, to refuse.

Situating ourselves

As tenure track assistant professors working and living in North America, we know that our position comes with power and privilege unevenly distributed among academics. We are white and Middle Eastern, U.S. and Iranian citizens, with English as our first and second language. We are various flavors of neurodivergent[4], Autistic and Allistic[5], with ADHD medicated and not, women, cisgender and nonbinary, queer and hetero-passing, partnered, and (sometimes-solo) parenting. We all face disabling conditions and have varying levels of

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[4] While there are different understandings of neurodivergence, we are drawing on the concepts coined by Kassiane Asasumasu in 2000, as referenced by Nick Walker (2021), drawing Asasumasu, neurodivergence is "… a value-neutral term that encompasses *any* significant divergence from dominant cultural norms of neurocognitive functioning—anything from autism to dyslexia to aphantasia to synesthesia to epilepsy to schizophrenia to PTSD." Like Walker and Assasumasu, we intend "to be as broadly inclusive as possible" (Walker 2021: 34-35).

[5] Allistic refers to non-autistic people. There are many helpful guides to allistic neurotypes, behaviors, and social conventions, such as this one: https://autisticscienceperson.com/2022/07/28/understanding-non-autistic-social-skills/

(dis)comfort claiming the term 'disabled' in academic and non-academic spaces. We felt similarly about our mental health (anxiety, depression, PTSD, treated and not), which hardly sets us apart from many of our colleagues, but does impact our work and everyday lives. We have, and were raised with, varying levels of financial (in)security, family (in)stability, safety, and societal acceptance, which also influence our feelings of precarity and the way our bodies respond to stress.

We hope that this degree of difference makes our conversation relatable to a wider audience. Despite our different life paths, the expectations we encounter now as early-career tenure-track scholars formed a theme across our talks. As Marcia England (2016: 228) writes, not only is the tenure process stressful for many, but "the additional pressure of mental illness" (and neurodivergence and disability) make it "particularly daunting." However, the anxieties and inequities that came up in our roundtables are amplified for scholars with contingent appointments, as well as independent and unemployed scholars.

We all agreed that publishing our conversations carries some professional and personal risk. There remains a dearth of 'neurodiverse academic disclosure' (Judge 2018: 1104), due in part to Judge's fears mentioned above. While research is inconclusive about the benefits or harms of professional self-disclosure, Price (2022) notes that sometimes even when (autistic) self-disclosure does not harm, it can make those who disclosed feel even more vulnerable. Worse, the stigma of neurodivergence "deters much professional disclosure, continuing to enforce a silencing of voices that have long been spoken for, and about" (Judge 2018: 1102). In other words, "the stigma that surrounds mental illness is still prevalent in academia and society as a whole" (England 2016: 227), leading to the pressure to "cope quietly, afraid that revealing our discrepant status as psychiatrically' disordered' will discredit us" (Elliot 2024: np). For a growing contingent of neurodiverse and disabled academics, these risks and challenges are precisely why disclosure is so important—what both Judge and England call a political choice. Other than politics, is there a kinship to disclosure? Sara Judge (2018: 1104) felt that Marcia England's (2016) disclosure "*as a fellow geographer* provided a sense of solidarity." Reading both their works, we felt it too.

Still, we had reservations. First there were the professional ramifications that England and Judge warned of, despite having published their own auto-ethnographic disclosures after tenure. Yet was taking this risk a *result* of our intersectional privileges? Experiencing the pressures of meeting shifting tenure requirements variously as neurodivergent, disabled, parenting, and women *relies* on the privilege of having tenure-track jobs. Were our roundtable conversations merely an attempt to withstand conditions that wear us down? Worse, were we playing into the pressure to publish by co-opting our openness with each other into a product and a CV line? The risk of the last point was diminished by our realization that this format and topic does not in fact 'count' towards our tenure tallies and will likely slow our progress more than securing it. What a relief!

Roundtable

We began this roundtable on what was a hot afternoon in each of our three U.S. time zones. We had just re-read "For Slow Scholarship" (Mountz et al. 2015) and played with ideas for our collaboration to involve readers more intimately in our project. Our intervention is not a critique or even necessarily a response to this article specifically. Rather, it is a further dive into the slowing effects of the original article's calls and how that slowness is experienced

differently across bodies and across hierarchy, with a particular focus on disability and neurodivergence. From our first conversation, we developed a companion exercise to share with you that forms one possible 'way in' towards understanding and re-envisioning health and time through acts of refusal (see appendix). We encourage you to start there and revisit your responses after reading this piece (and whenever time seems to need re-envisioning).

Below, the roundtable begins where our talk about the exercises ends: with hope that the exercises and our transcribed recording might offer some of the connections with you that we shared with each other and that they spark solidarity, recognition, and more conversation among feminist, crip, and critical geographers who wrestle with time and health in academia.

HM: I hope this exercise was able to bring forth the ways our imagination and valuing knowledge and acts of resistance are bounded/restricted/defined by the ableist time in academia. This conversation is familiar among academics; what we are doing is not enough, or we are always 'behind' and chasing after time. Our academic accomplishments and merits tend to be defined by the number of publications, grants, awards, etc. But how about what happens behind the scenes? It is not very common to hear conversations and interventions about behind the scenes of our academic work (Hanrahan and Billo 2022). I believe many junior faculty, like myself, find themselves constantly running until they're tenured and promoted (if lucky enough to land a tenure-track job). This is why I think exercises like this [in the appendix] are so important. It gives us an opportunity to pause and detach ourselves from the pre-coded academic routines/time and just imagine; imagination is an extremely powerful tool to practice freedom/autonomy and ideally would lead us to alternative ways of inhibiting ableist time.

EK: Can we talk about that for a minute? The power of imagination, the limitations…

Have either of you done those "blue sky exercises"? The term might be Corporate Speak but I've been in union meetings where you'd answer questions like, 'if you could have any change'… and stick your post-it answer on one common board. I led one of these on parental leave, asking, 'if you could design it your way, what would it look like?' I would get answers like, "oh, well, maybe 4 weeks instead of 2." Including from pregnant and parenting union members! But—if you could have whatever you wanted with parental leave, I don't think it would be 4 weeks of paid time off. It's fascinating how hard it is for people to even let themselves imagine better conditions. Smilges (2023) talks about that—"if we demand more than the bare minimum, we usher ourselves onto a new horizon of crip possibility that invites us to ask for more. Crip negativity wants us to want more, and it gives us the tools to understand just how much more it is possible for us to want." So, I agree that it's a difficult but important exercise for anyone to imagine these alternatives [referencing the opening exercise]. I also keep getting stuck on like, an Imaginary for the Meantime. Yes, we need to know where we're trying to end up but also, what are we going to do right now, even if it's not perfect?

HM: That's a good question, "what are we going to do right now?"

All the movements pursuing liberation start with imagination (see Opara 2021). While I enjoy what I do as an academic, there are moments of frustration. But the irony is that I find myself juggling so many tasks at the same time that I barely find any time to just freely wonder and imagine an alternative reality or what needs to be changed. By imagining, we are planting a seed of resistance (or dare to refuse) which, hopefully, leads into a productive change that

benefits all. But, this seed (or we can call it a power of imagination) very much depends on what we embody as an individual: nationality, immigration status, race, gender, cultural background, class, religion, ability, etc. I guess what I am trying to say is that being able to imagine is a luxury itself. For instance, I have been struggling with the speed of academia that everything has to be done in a very fast paced space. English is my second language and I need extra time to complete writing or reading tasks compared to a native speaker. On top of this, being neurodivergent, in my personal case since I was a child, I had difficulty with *time*. It's like being *time blind*. Finding 'spare' time to *imagine* is something that I don't run into very often.

EK: What *is* time!

CC: Everything you said resonates with me. I think here's the missing link—there's a notion in society that slow implies easier. And for some people—and I think understanding this perspective requires more of an equity framework—being slow, or maybe being slow*ed*, is actually sometimes a speed at which you're barely keeping up. So, slow is relative. These are the things we're missing: that slow is relative, that in the 'normal' world slow is considered somehow easier, somehow more relaxing, less productive.

So the three of us are coming at it from the opposite angle thinking, "Okay, we need to slow down to survive, to not crash, to be able to thrive as human beings, thrive as workers, to love our jobs." I'm sure that the authors of "For Slow Scholarship" thought about it the same way—but the experience of time is relative to the person, and somehow that's missing.

HM: Can you expand a little more on your point?

CC: I'm not saying that slower isn't easier than faster for each individual. But my slow, your slow might be just as hard as an abled person's fast. There's a misconception that we can all slow down and have an easier time, when for some of us, what appears "slow" is actually the most we can possibly be doing, and it's still hard. Sometimes, if we go any faster than slow, then our bodies will put on the brakes and grind us to a halt.

EK: I agree there's a problematic association of slow being easier, but as we talked about, the points that "For Slow Scholarship" makes—most of the strategies are things that they're acknowledging are *more work*, right? They're asking us to do more work. If you run a race slowly, and everyone's running the same distance, you're gonna be running for more time.

CC: That's just it. They are wanting to slow down to have more time to do these extra things. We're trying to slow down just to keep up. There's a difference. I'm not saying that we aren't trying to do more things too. I'm saying that when I hear the words 'slowing down' with my work, *it is material, it's embodied, it is about my health*. It is about my surviving, thriving, wanting *to just make it*. Slowing down is so that I can be good enough to get tenure, because if I go too fast, if I force myself to do too much compressed into time, I'm gonna run out of steam before I hit that tenure because I'm gonna destroy my body. *That's a very different article than what they wrote*, which is 'slowing down so you have time to do all of this care-work for others in the academy.' It's related. It's just I feel like there is a distinction there. But push back on me!

EK: So, is 'slowing down to keep up' kind of like slowing down to survive? To make it to tenure at all?

CC: Kind of, but not just survive… to also thrive.

EK: Wait, so it can mean thriving *or* surviving… but aren't thriving and 'just make it' contradictory?

CC: Yes, *and*, we can want and deserve both. There needs to be *some* thriving. Sometimes just getting by is the only goal. Other times, especially because those survival moments are so tough, we need moments of thriving—and don't want to feel guilty about *sometimes* needing to thrive!

EK: Sara Ahmed said something like that: "In time, we learn to take time out. Time out from being a killjoy is necessary for being a killjoy. Even when you claim her, she is not all you are or all you do" (2024: 75). It kind of encapsulates my… not *critique* but personal anxiety around "For Slow Scholarship." They make really important proposals for how to do more feminist killjoy work. Organizing, resisting, reading groups, line-by-line collective editing… which is what the three of us are doing, so clearly we're on board with all of it, but that's the problem, for me. I need someone to tell me to stop, that it's OK to stop, that our publication can't meet all the suggestions of all four reviewers and all of us, let alone all of our readers. That some of the organizing we're doing is a losing battle or that we should let someone with more energy or less precarity do some of that work.[6]

Of course, the feminist killjoy does the exhausting labor of critique because no one else will. Crip killjoys fight for our students, each other, ourselves, just to obtain the bare minimum. But we know how that fight can go—it doesn't usually end well for us. It's nothing that every killjoy doesn't know in their bones, really. But as Mountz et al. also note, that killjoy work is on top of other uneven conditions outside work, from child-care to self-care, and maybe it's that self-care bit that's especially uneven in the disability context (2015). Sometimes survival is work[7]. And sometimes survival requires not-work, like a life-strike or "tapping out until the conditions change." (Smilges 2023: 54) Which is why we need time off from killjoy-work, because—Smilges says it best—"Sometimes the cost to our emotional, physical, and spiritual health of explaining our bad crip feelings is too high, especially for those of us who routinely play the role of the critic" (Smilges 2023: 70). I like that the concept of 'crip negativity' lets us refuse

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[6] As noted in our conclusion as well, Mountz et al. (2015) *do* suggest 'reaching for the minimum' and reducing workload *in addition* to their more labor-intensive calls. We greatly appreciate these list items, but here are sharing our honest feelings about reading the piece. We also recognize we are hardly alone in the above feelings. For instance, Smilges (2023: 54) writes, "I'm working too much, but I don't know how to stop. Not really, truly stop. I'm not even sure I know what stopping would look like." Also discussed later, Alison Mountz (2016) includes many such stories too, if not from a disability-perspective.

[7] Piepzna-Samarasinha writes of the work of keeping oneself and each other alive, before and especially during the pandemic, as "a million examples of subtle, diverse forms of disabled survival work. Work that is mostly not seen as 'real work'" (2022: 52). Smilges too (2023: 55) writes of the "labor that keeps us alive" including "endless paperwork to secure benefits, unending calls to the insurance company, frequent trips to the disability services office, requests to move pharmacies, upping the number of appointments with our therapists, and stints in the hospital or rehab occasioned by the intensified stress on our bodyminds" and the "the time-sucks—that accompany being disabled in a world built for ableds, such as waiting on an accessible parking spot to open up, having to roll around to the back of the building to find a ramp, charging the batteries for a hearing aid or prosthetic, delaying a meeting until the interpreter arrives…"

not only ableist time demands of the neoliberal university, but also sometimes the labor encompassed by that refusal.[8]

HM: I agree with the points that you brought up. It makes me wonder what if someone really enjoys what they're doing and they are actually having a blast writing four, five, six or more articles a year above all the teaching responsibilities? What does slowness or slowing down mean to that individual? Wouldn't it be better if we replace slow scholarship with meaningful scholarship? Since slowness is subjective, I believe it should be about enjoying and making it a meaningful process, or just meaningful acts that are *meaningful to us.*

EK: If they're writing four articles a year there's so much else they aren't doing that they could be doing, which is where you get back to "For Slow Scholarship." "Slowing down" included a "collective feminist ethics of care that challenges the accelerated time and elitism of the neoliberal university" (Mountz et al. 2015: 3). I think they were *trying* to tell people to practice care—'slow' and 'care-work' being kind of synonymous (as Carrie said). I wasn't always sure *whom* this was directed at—*who* they think should "say 'no' to wildly outsized expectations of productivity" (Mountz et al. 2015: 1250), because not everyone can afford to say no (just as they acknowledge we can't all afford to say yes[9]).

But in my mind, it's directed at *this person*, Hanieh, who's writing four articles a year. *That* person should be taking that extra time to mentor students, to check the language in their work, to use the ethical research methods that "For Slow Scholarship" is advocating, because *they have time*. And security. Their career will be okay.

For those of us who are trying to keep up, especially as we navigate parenting and lack of childcare made worse by the pandemic, or neurodivergence and the time and physical impacts of obtaining medication (or not being able to), 'slow scholarship' means something very different.

Carrie, I think I agree with you—I just want to make sure I understand what you said. "Slowing down to keep up" is paradoxical right?

CC: Yes, it's paradoxical. But for me it's a lived reality. I think this also connects with this notion that if you're slowing down, you're not trying hard enough. Because I'm not able to produce at 'normal' speed, I have a heightened awareness and fear of being perceived as taking it easy, when really, I'm taking it quite hard on my body. Sometimes slowing down is the only way to make it through, and also the only way to meet my desire to thrive.

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[8] While it did not come up in our recorded conversation, Smilges (2023: 70) writes, "Crip negativity, by contrast, declines to work within this project of intra-human speciation. Instead, the affective spacetimes generated by bad crip feelings make room for refusal on multiple scales, including the refusal of humanist logics and the refusal of the labor of critique."

[9] Mountz et al. (2015) do highlight uneven terrains of power in enabling conditions of slow scholarship, which is similar if not identical to questions of who should *practice* it. In one of several appreciated mentions of differential obligations by rank, they write, "Those of us in more senior positions have the responsibility to share these strategies with and support the slowness of our students and earlier career colleagues." This call to 'share strategies' and 'support *others'* slowness' did not make it clear to us whether it was those in senior positions who were the main audience for the call to slow down?

EK: So, when you say "slowing down to keep up" is it like a tortoise and the hare situation? Not keep up in the moment, but the tortoise gets there; you want to get there in the end, and so it's necessary to slow down instead of crashing and burning.

CC: *Sort of,* except not everyone is in the situation where they're feeling these time compressions for various reasons—including disabilities. Therefore the hare always wins, even if I finish the race. That translates into lots of things: promotions, awards, grants, raises, recognition—which are so huge in academia in order to be seen as a mover and shaker in your field, right? You have to *be there*. You have to put in the *time* to develop networks and relationships, and I've thought about that a lot, too. All of those missed opportunities to develop meaningful relationships and network are essential for getting tenure. My point is that the way that advancement and academia is structured, it cascades into your career in *all* of these ways that have this negative feedback loop and make it so you have to work that much harder to get ahead. So if you work too hard, go too fast, especially with chronic illness, then your body can step into the driver's seat and refuse to work at all. You have to deliberately go slower to finish the race at all, and to be whole at the end. Slow then is not a matter of 'not trying hard enough' in fact, it's extremely effortful to walk that fine line. Again, 'slow' is relative and what is perceived as slow to others can feel/be exceedingly fast-paced.

EK: Yesss. What might look like 'quiet quitting' or like Smilges's idea of 'life strike' can—sorry for more animal analogies, but picture a duck with its little legs frantically kicking underwater, and above the surface it appears to be sitting still. That swimming, sometimes it's just "the labor of crip life, the work of living with disability" (Smilges 2023: 53). In Mountz's (2016: 206) "Women on the Edge" it's called "getting through the day" in horrendous ways, but respondents noted that their colleagues didn't notice—they only saw above the surface.

And *sometimes* it's your brain spinning ideas faster than you can type them out, staying up all night in hyper-focus mode and then the next day reviewing 80 candidate applications for a job search (where you're the only non-man on a 5-person committee which is probably why you're on the committee), starting another futile DEI initiative, lecturing to 90 students and grading 50 papers and answering a dozen student emails, half of whom are mad you didn't answer the night before because they think teaching is your only job, unless they think you're their therapist because students are truly going through it right now, and you seem like a woman, therefore you must listen and nurture and care[10] (which you wish you didn't, but you do, goddamnit). And then you rush to pick up your prescription and your kindergartener and take her to dance class or a glow party because that's a thing now? They're both loud. And she needs to eat because *that's* a thing, and the hold music from the pulmonologists' office is a background to the percussion of silverware clanging on stoneware and by 9 PM you're at your sensory limit of whining and glowing and screaming and fluorescence and crowding and waistbands and masking. And you've ground to a halt, with nothing to show for 30 consecutive hours of what *felt* like work.

I mean, hypothetically.

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[10] Smyth, Linz, and Hudson (2019) note that "...while women may not benefit for doing extra labor, they bear a cost for not doing it." There is an expectation that women will automatically perform this care work. Those who intentionally resist this expectation "do so in order to undermine it." (ibid.)

Hanieh, does this relate at all to what you've written about time moving fast and slow and otherwise?

HM: It reminds me of the time when I decided to start taking ADHD meds. At first it seemed like a good idea; I was *functioning* and was able to meet the deadlines, kind of on time, or do a better job with my day-to-day tasks. Although that didn't last very long and after a few months I felt so trapped in *time*. The meds were too controlling, not to mention the side effects. On the paper I was checking boxes for getting work done, but in my head, I felt so robotic and depressed that in order to function as an early career scholar, I had to take meds. It got to the point that I was constantly blaming myself, I felt broken. I'm glad that didn't last very long (thanks to therapy sessions!). Eventually, I was more motivated to learn more about myself and focus on my bodymind, instead of molding myself into something that I'm not, or cannot be! I decided to embrace who I am and stop taking meds. I felt like I needed to say *no* more often, and it's not the end of the world if I ask for extensions or am late at grading. It's been a long journey and I'm still working on it…

EK: Crip time is all of this, I think. Ellen Samuels says that "it forces us to take breaks… even when we want to keep going, to move ahead." And that we listen to our bodyminds "in a culture that tells us to divide the two and push the body away from us while also pushing it beyond its limits. Crip time means listening to the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words." Ok, I don't know if I like "*broken* language"—artist and writer Mel Baggs (2007) beautifully conveys a different interpretation in their video "In Our Language" and problematizes the need for translation. But besides that, the idea of listening and *deciphering* and *heeding* our bodyminds is life changing.

CC: Beyond that, I think it's extremely courageous to desire a life of thriving, or at least moments of thriving in the midst of keeping up! In a way, and to my previous point, I do see such courage as resonating with "For Slow Scholarship" and their call for care-work, by modeling a different way to be an academic other than the hare, risky though it may be to our careers and our very livelihood. Within our current institutional culture and the negative feedback loops that happen when slowing down, I can't say this is a model for career success in conventional terms. I know that I risk failure. But it's the only model available to me, and I'm sure to many, many others with disabling conditions.

HM: I totally agree with what you said, Carrie, that "the hare always wins." Academia is designed for those who finish faster/sooner rather than just arriving at your own pace. I see scholars (I mean mostly scholars in humanities and social science) in the global south, or countries like where I am coming from in the Middle East region, being like that tortoise; suddenly slowing down (in the "For Slow Scholarship" sense) becomes a luxury, regardless of one's *ability*. Even if one is not slow, external forces like academic sanctions, lack of funding, language barriers put us behind "Western scholarship." It is mostly the game of catching up with Western academic knowledge production and trying to find a space to share our voice. Eventually everything comes down to how *fast* or *slow* one can catch up; wondering whether it would be even possible to be that hare…

EK: How does it manifest for you?

HM: For instance, during my first two years of living and studying in the US, I found myself stuttering a lot. I've never stuttered before back home, but now I was either selectively non-verbal in various academic spaces or the moment I would open my mouth to share my

thoughts, I struggled to speak. On the other hand, I would see my native English speaker colleagues or classmates beautifully elaborate and speak naturally. Besides ADHD, stuttering became another temporary extra layer that shifted my relationship with time and slowness. I think what Carrie is saying about "slowing down in order to keep up" resonates with my experiences, but maybe not exactly the same way she sees slowing down, rather how we choose to react in order to protect ourselves.

CC: Yeah, I agree that slow in both cases is a matter of protection, of finding ways to stay in the race as best as we can even though we know we won't be the hare. What's really sad is recognizing that for each of us on the protective slow track who has made it through to a certain point in academia (whether it's graduate school, postdoc, early career, even tenured faculty), countless others haven't made it.

EK: True. I mean, it's not necessarily 'really sad' for the people who leave. It can be, or it can be infuriating. Some leave with a 'good riddance' feeling, some find more fulfilling lives outside academia (and often higher pay). But it's definitely 'really sad' for academia. For knowledge production, teaching, mentorship, representation. Sad for their students and colleagues and everyone who could have benefited from their research.[11]

CC: And they leave not because of a lack of talent or dedication. But perhaps because a chronic illness got exacerbated when academia forced them to go at lightning speed or maybe because they worked at a doable pace, desiring a life (or moments) of thriving, but were judged for it. Or because colleagues or classmates didn't make a supportive space and time for non-native English speakers to add their thoughts to the conversation. Who's not here with us?

We continued the conversation by discussing the added layer of the pandemic on our experiences with time and time health in both our personal and academic spaces. For instance, the experiences of not flying throughout the pandemic for personal and public-health reasons, relating to caring for vulnerable family, disabilities, and disability justice. One had not seen family for four years, initially due to the Travel Ban (also known as the Muslim Ban) and now the pandemic. One had lacked daycare, babysitting, or family help with their then-unvaccinated child for over a year. Our discussion focused on professional consequences of this relative (to colleagues) immobility. These included less time to work and as a result of not networking in-person, no longer receiving invitations to give talks, which are necessary for tenure.

We discussed being the only mask-wearing person in the classroom or professional space, and potential impacts of mask-wearing on perceptions from students and colleagues[12]. One shared (evidence-based) discomfort with attending in-person indoor

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[11] Several studies cited in this paper discuss faculty burnout and mental health crises, including McCandless et al. (2023: n.p.), who argue that whether or not you sympathize with or believe the negative impacts faculty report "burnout among faculty is a concern because many are leaving for employment in other sectors." As Marta Elliot writes of (ongoing) pandemic pressures, "being treated as dispensable was demoralizing and contributed to rising resignation rates among academic faculty" (2024: np)

[12] From Piepzna-Samarasinha (2022: 57): "... disabled people with multiple chemical sensitivities/injury, asthma, and other immunocompromised conditions have been masking to stay safe—from chemicals and fragrances but

events where most would be unmasked since one-way masking is much less effective. As Samuels (2022) concludes in her poem, *Elegy for a Mask Mandate*,

> … We
> learned to speak a new
> vocabulary, to understand
>
> what it means to
> protect each other so we all survive. In
> my home now, in my lonely
>
> bed, I'm still speaking those
> words to the silent house: *my mask*
> *protects you, your mask protects me*.

In other words, we discussed how mask-wearing is not an individual decision as often portrayed, but a community and public health decision. Others' decisions to put their own comfort before community needs and public health made many academic spaces inaccessible to us. "The grief is real," reflects Piepzna-Samarasinha, "especially when some of us do go back to arena concerts [and conferences] and 'normal' and the rest of us… can't" (2022: 157, ellipses original). In sum, the pandemic still carries additional professional consequences for us as neurodivergent, neuroqueer, disabled, and parenting early-career academics whose decisions were also informed by concern for public health and disability justice.

Conclusion

We each had a dozen more things to say and ask in response. But we had forgotten time, or forgotten how it works, and ran over our scheduled meeting end. After hurried goodbyes, we each scrambled off to the next demand. Hanieh stayed seated behind her desk, already a few minutes late to her next Zoom meeting. Carrie rushed off to a meeting for another research collaboration. They both left with a burst of energy from the conversation and excitement to meet again. Carrie felt the all-too-familiar panic of rushing off to the next thing, literally running *not to be* late.

As they slid into a blazer and a mask (in more ways than one) while racing rushing down the hall to teach, EK felt it too: that perpetual state of catching up. E.C. mused that Carrie had said it poignantly… something about slowing down to keep up? At the podium about to start class, E.C. scribbled on several post-its:

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also viruses—for a long time." This kind of community care work has been undertaken long before (and long after) the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
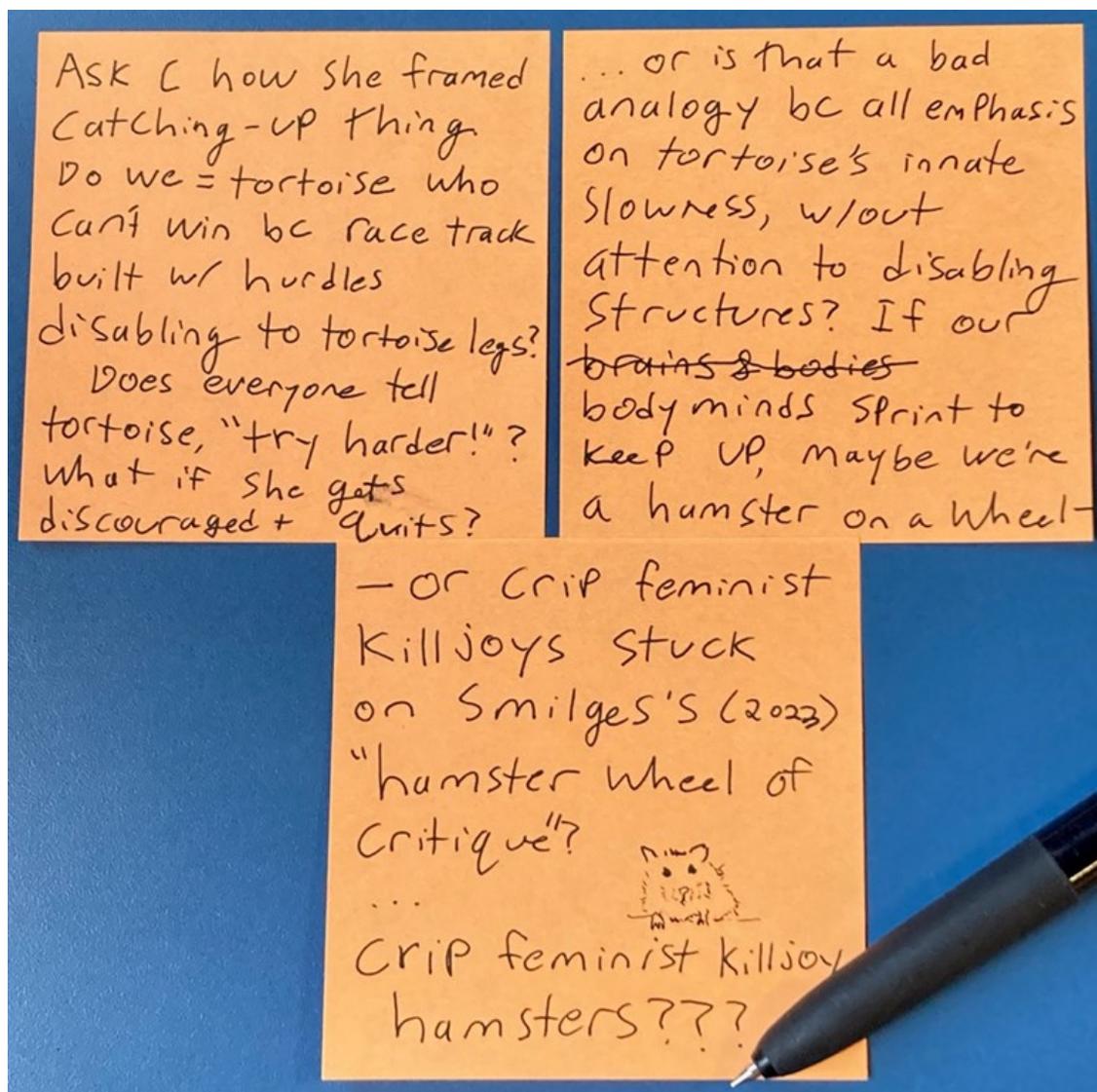
Figure 1: Three orange post-its on blue desk, with black pen resting on lower post-it. In black pen, in order, they read: 1) Ask C how she framed catching-up thing. Do we = tortoise who can't win bc race track built w/ hurdles disabling to tortoise legs? Does everyone tell tortoise, "try harder!"? What if she gets discouraged and quits? 2) ...or is that a bad analogy bc all emphasis on tortoise's innate slowness, w/out attention to disabling structures? If our [crossed out: brains & bodies] body minds sprint to keep up, maybe we're a hamster on a wheel— 3) —or crip feminist killjoys stuck on Smilges's (2023) "hamster wheel of critique"? [here there is a tiny pen sketch of a hamster looking out from the page] ...Crip feminist killjoy hamsters???

We would meet again and discuss much more than animal analogies, becoming more open in self-disclosure each time. These meetings were initially recorded as a series of roundtables designed to be published sequentially, but whether or not that happens, we found—no, we made—a necessary space. A space to write, to talk, to pause and to validate pauses. A space to reimagine time, while recognizing that even that takes *time,* for "dreaming up and building new worlds is work of endurance, kept alive by the alchemy of slick slippage between the two ends of that process" (Smyth et al. 2019: 15). We could end by suggesting you do the same, but for one thing, others have said it better already, and then some: Mountz (2016: 216) advised "Forming and working in collectives proves key to survival and thriving in difficult environments." Mountz et al. (2015: 1251) tell us to form "intentional communities" working

towards "institutional and structural changes that nourish and support slow scholarship." Araby Smyth, Jess Linz, and Lauren Hudson (2019) call it forming a feminist coven (though encouragingly, "it may even be entered without notice" or conjured "out of thin air" by dire need). The call to form discussion groups extends Carrie Mott's lists instructing men to read feminist basics and do "the work of seeing oppression that does not affect you personally" (in Smyth et al. 2020). Of course, a crucial way to form collectives is unionizing, or joining one. As Mary Ellen Flannery (2024: n.p.) writes, "Investing in mental wellness also means ensuring reasonable workloads, respectful employers, and fair pay—and this is exactly what faculty and staff unions do."

Beyond collective-forming, action items applicable to the issues we have discussed include Kaufman's (2021) low-bar point that even without changing policy, it can help to codify or publicize existing ones like sick- and parental-leave. "For Slow Scholarship" ends with suggestions to those who can re-evaluate what counts. Yet most of their calls (from turning off email to reaching for the minimum to organizing for change) apply to any of us, because as Smyth et al. (2019: 874) point out, if we wait until our 'more pressing' work is done or "we've achieved a more secure status, we'll lose half of those on the road with us." Thus we recommend reading their inclusive academic survival list grounded in ferocity and fun.

If you have read this far and are still wondering, "well what do *these* authors want me to *do*"—*nothing*. At least, not at the moment, and—depending on where you sit at the intersections of privilege, precarity, neurodivergence, and disability—not more than you are already doing. You are doing enough—and you are enough. We clearly benefited from the suggestions above to form a collective, but one reason we are not directing *you* to do the same is that maybe you don't want more human connection, or you desperately do but are hanging by a thread and will come undone if we suggest making time for one more thing, even if that thing is a pause. Maybe, as Piepzna-Samarasinha (2022: n.p.) writes, "We are all in the process of being remade right now." In the face of crisis (public health, mental health, burnout, death, climate) their "new self was forming. In the bones, in the dark. Yours might be too" (ibid).[13]

What we want you to *feel* is less alone. This is for all of you who inhabit the paradoxes between being slow and being slowed; being and doing slow; and between *slowing down* and *keeping up*. We have all had the "sense that everyone else in a work environment can succeed in conforming to normative expectations of the ideal worker, but that oneself alone falls short" (Mountz 2016: 209). Neurodivergence and disability compound the feeling—and sometimes reality—that those around you *can* better conform to normative labor ideals, even at great personal cost. If you are variously more secure and well-established, then we hope you will *consider* how you might alter the material conditions of inequity, stress, and physical pain experienced by scholars at the various intersections we describe or inhabit. Simply *recognize* that neurodivergence and disability can be an added layer on top of already alienating expectations—and that caring for our bodyminds goes beyond abled expectations

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[13] We cannot include this 'we are all' quote without wider context that a crucial argument of Piepzna-Samarasinha's is that disabled people are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and now the removal of accommodations and protections. However, disabled BIPOC people have, and continue to lose more (in many ways, including loved ones, jobs, health, security, social lives) than white disabled people.

of 'self-care.' *Acknowledge* that our bodyminds (not to mention other caregiving responsibilities) do not always allow the working-through-the-weekend that Mountz's women 'on the edge' report. And if disabled and neurodivergent scholars sometimes simply *choose* not to because we need a moment to thrive, they–we, you–deserve that too.

Appendix:

In this reflective exercise, consider your upcoming career milestones, such as exams, graduation, promotions, renewals, tenure, etc.. Begin by calculating the number of years left to reach this milestone. Then, delve into the following inquiries:

Step 1: Time Through Numbers: Quantify–an admittedly subjective process

- How does the above number of years translate into expectations for the number of months?
- The number of working weeks?
- The number of working days?
- The number of working hours?
- How do you define 'working time'?

Step 2: Consider the pace at which you currently progress toward your milestone.

- How does the actual experience compare to your initial expectations? Are there discrepancies or surprising consistencies?

Step 3: Delve into the subjective realm.

- How do you experience each working hour dedicated to your milestone? What emotions, challenges, or victories characterize your journey?
- If time were a flavor, scent, or color for you, what would it be? How does this sensory perception influence your daily interactions with time?

Step 4: For those disabled and/or neurodivergent, ponder how your unique experience shapes your perception of time. OR: Ponder how your relationship to disability and neurodivergence shapes your perception of time. We invite those who identify as disabled and/or neurodivergent and those who identify as abled and/or neurotypical to explore these questions.

- How does dis/ability and/or neurotype influence your everyday decisions and activities? Not only obstacles, but for instance, what might being neurotypical or, say, having ADHD enable?
- What adaptations do your circumstances call for? How does this impact your approach to time management, or your relationship to time?

Step 5: Stretch your imagination by envisioning a day consisting of more than 24 hours (you decide how long!) Explore how you would navigate this expanded time.

- Reflect on the adjustments you might make in terms of work, leisure, and personal life. How would this altered temporal reality affect your routines, priorities, and overall well-being?

Step 6: Share your ideal timeline for reaching your milestone, incorporating both the qualitative feel of the alternative scenario and quantitative timeframes, which are also subjective.

- Consider the balance between efficiency and personal fulfillment. How does this ideal timeline align with your values and aspirations?
- If you could send a message back to your past self or receive one from your future self, what advice or insights about time would you share?

How might this communication influence your present perspective?

Acknowledgements

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