

Refusals as Access-Otherwise Crippled Embodiments of Destitution and Prefiguration

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WHAT IF REFUSAL—so often understood as defiance, dysfunction, or disengagement—were a legitimate form of presence, a more diffusive and livable form of access for students with disabilities? Moreover, what if refusals were engaged on a level of creativity that grappled with more ways and means of thinking, being, and becoming in educational spaces (ways in which challenge our own normative demands)? In schools, the word *refusal* is typically a diagnostic of lacking: both in terms of the pedagogical intervention and at the level of livability for the student (Kearney, 2008; Elliot & Place, 2019). As Melanie Yergeau (2018) argues, even naming a child’s bodily comportment a refusal “resorts to deficit-laden and negativistic terminology” (p. 4). I approach these questions from within crip theory and from within the everyday life of classrooms, where refusal is routinely interpreted as a problem to be corrected rather than a mode of access to be enlivened/supported. Even more so, I write as a crip theorist and former secondary history teacher, and as someone who has moved through schools and clinics under a long trail of neuro/psych diagnoses (autism, manic depressive disorder/bipolar disorder, general anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, etc.), often experiencing how support quietly becomes surveillance, coercion, and manipulation. Methodologically, I braid theoretical analysis with anonymized vignette analyses drawn from my U.S. and World History classrooms with juniors and sophomores. I use these contemplations as generative sites of challenging and crippling normative understandings of the educative, of access, of livable classrooms, and of teacher-student relationships.

For instance, during one of my own lectures on the French Revolution, I was discussing the political writings that drove and responded to popular fronts, when I looked down at one of my student’s lecture notes. All of my students are given certain critical thinking questions that they are assigned to grapple with during the lecture. However, a particular student wasn’t answering the questions on the piece of paper provided; rather, they were drawing a comic of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI on a gallows trying to explain why they shouldn’t be beheaded. Under a normative frame of teaching practices, this is off-task behavior that needs to be corrected (Parsonson, 2012). Even more so, as one of my students with an Individualized Education Program

(IEP), even more institutional and structural efforts were disciplining my own behavior in the moment to address this distracted moment (Mckenna, et al., 2024). Reframed, however, the moment is a mode of analytic uptake that refuses a narrow notion of literacy and proposes another means of being present. In disability community praxis, such refusals can be profoundly generative: both ontically and epistemically (Garland-Thomson, 2011). Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) calls it “the gift we give each other of seeing what the able-bodied imagination refuses to see: that sick, disabled, Mad, Deaf, and neurodivergent lives... are normal” (p. 70). Refusal, in other words, can mark a demand to be encountered differently (a crippled plea to be understood on their own terms), and it can be an act of care: “[a refusal] to abandon each other” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 51). Moreover, I also want to center that refusal is not only the student’s act; it also stages a decision for the teacher. The student’s off-script presence becomes an invitation, explicit or not, for me to either reassert the norm (correction, redirection, compliance) or to join the refusal by widening what counts as participation and thought: to play alongside the student in a rapid deconstruction of the learning context, objectives, and coercive tendencies.

In this article, I want to reframe/unframe how teachers are asked to react to refusals in their classrooms. Moreover, I want to reimagine what access looks like for othered and aberrant folks on the level of such refusals. This reframing runs hard against the grain of normative educational practices that depend on redirection, forced engagement, and various scripts of coercion (Ahmed, 2006). Modern institutions, Foucault (1995) reminds us, treat hesitation itself as an offense: the disciplined subject must obey “prompt and blind; an appearance of indocility, the least delay would be a crime” (p. 166). “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). Within this regime, a student’s refusal cannot signify critique of task or environment; it cannot be understood as a means of thinking otherwise, where students grapple with their own, crippled onto-epistemes; such refusal reads only as disorder in the student. Rehabilitation logics of disabilities in schools, moreover, intensify this: “Rehab demands compliance or—more properly—makes noncompliance unthinkable” (McRuer, 2006, p. 113). Once students are deemed capable of inclusion in normative classrooms, any divergence is cast as willful excess and must be corrected in diagnostic and scientifically appropriate ways (Billingsley, 2016; Yergeau, 2018). As Fiona Kumari Campbell (2009, pp. 105, 132) demonstrates, disabled people must adopt ableist postures or be rendered illegible. The effect is to preclude any crippled refusal or rebellion from meaning-making, to foreclose its potential as onto-epistemically generative.

Crip theory helps challenge this normative and normativizing gaze. A central provocation is Robert McRuer’s (2006) account of compulsory able-bodiedness¹, a system that “repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, ‘Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’” (p. 9). A crippled refusal interrupts that demand; a crippled refusal maintains aberrant ways of being, thinking, and learning. Campbell (2009) argues that “refusing able(ness) necessitates a letting go of... sameness for equality arguments... [instead of] wasting time on the violence of normalisation” (pp. 14). This is not withdrawal from epistemic labor; rather, it is an epistemic creativity beyond the confines of reproductive curricula (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Moreover, disability justice praxis offers a method: move from “‘access as service begrudgingly offered...’ to ‘access as a collective joy and offering we can give to each other’” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 16-17; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). In my original vignette, my student’s refusal of the “correct” note-taking processes is not an absence of participation but an access-making act that presses the classroom to widen its channels

of expression. The point is not to append accommodations to a norm, but to accept that access may require other literacies, tempos, and forms of visibility—what crip communities already know as livable ontically and epistemically.

Anarchic theory, meanwhile, similarly plays with refusals as a multi-directional means of resistance, as a way to deactivate and challenge obedience-machines. For instance, Agamben (2014) asks us to imagine “completely other strategies” to destituent power (p. 70): not seizing authority, but rendering its apparatus inoperative. Agamben calls this becoming ungovernable—not a descent into chaos-without-impulse but a positive ungovernability in which people no longer orient their lives around being governed. In other words, anarchists attempt to understand that refusals do not end at negation; they *prefigure* other relations outside or in confrontation with the socio-political logics of governability. As David Graeber (2004) defines it, revolutionary action is “any collective action which rejects, and therefore confronts, some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations” otherwise (p. 45). In schools, that looks like crippled refusals of normative access points, crip temporal markers that do not conform to the clock of the classroom, opt-in visibility and collaboration, and temporary autonomous zones where students play with the possibilities of ontic and epistemic productivity (Bierdz, 2024; Price, 2011; Samuels, 2017).

Bringing these two frameworks together, refusal is both destructive and generative: it destitutes imposed norms while prefiguring livable ones. Édouard Glissant’s (1997) right to opacity helps name what refusal enlivens and embodies: “subsistence within an irreducible singularity... the real foundation of Relation” (p. 190). A student’s refusal to be fully legible to managerial rubrics is not absence—it is not aggressive; it is a claim to exist otherwise, together. My own stance emerges from practice. As a teacher-researcher, I have watched refusals open learning rather than close it; as a crippled student, moreover, I was punished for refusing to simulate a normative bodymind. Those experiences orient me toward non-coercion and interruption: “I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination” (hooks, 1994, p. 18). Practically for the educator, this means refusing the reflex of punishment and/or discipline; it means refusing the impulse to correct or situate the student normatively; it means listening for what a refusal is saying about the classroom space, teaching practices, and the moment. It also means recognizing that refusal is an existential plea: “To refuse what has come to be is to fight to be” (Ahmed, 2021, p. 26).

The primary thrust of this article is that refusal is not a problem to be managed on pedagogical level but as an autonomous moment within which othered students can exist on their own terms. Crippled resistances and refusals are productive embodiments that make thinkable—and livable—being/becoming otherwise; the parallel task for the educator, then, is to refuse the normative practice of punishment/discipline when refusal signals a demand for different conditions of access (access beyond the purview of the lesson plan or the IEP). Moreover, I am not romanticizing violent refusals or abandoning responsibilities to one another as being/non-beings. The claim is narrower and more actionable: normative determinations of participation, responsibility, and intellectual work are definitionally restrictive given the standardization and coercion implicated in normal educational settings (Ahmed, 2006). Engaging refusal on its own terms can enliven other ways of responding, participating, and thinking. My arguments that follow first trace how schooling renders refusal legible only as deviance; then, I elaborate a crip-anarchic framework that reconceives refusal as access-otherwise² through crippledness, destitution, and prefiguration; following, I grapple with classroom vignettes through our crippled-anarchic

theoretical framework; and finally, I outline pedagogical moves that carve out space for refusals to function as livable access-otherwise.

Problematic and Theoretical Framework: Crip-Anarchic Convergences

Within normative school logics, refusal is coded as a deficit to be corrected: a fault to be cured. Behavior-analytic frames operationalize refusal as noncompliance and summarily design studies “to develop a function-based intervention to increase compliance,” with compliance timed by the second (Wilder et al., 2007, p. 173). This framing delineates refusals into an intervention economy—functional analyses, antecedent/consequence schedules, and treatment packages—whose end is legible responsiveness. At the same time, education’s audit culture and standardizations privileges “performance indicators chosen for ease of measurement and control rather than because they measure accurately what the quality of performance is” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 4-5). Together these rationalities strip refusals of epistemic and affective significance: they are indexed as problems that “need to be prevented and intervened” (Ulaş & Seçer, 2024, p. 7). In short, presence is equated with productivity under surveillance and opacity is pathologized; every refusal becomes data for correction and optimization, not an invitation to continuously re-understand the motive power of students or their onto-epistemic enlivenments (Manolev et al., 2019). Crucially, these regimes do not only diagnose students; they also recruit teachers as the apparatus’s frontline technicians. A student’s refusal becomes a demand placed on the teacher to restore legibility, and the scene turns into a call-and-response: will the teacher reassert compliance, or join the refusal by loosening what counts as access and participation?

I begin by unsettling the commonplace understanding of access-as-compliance in education (responsibilities of the teacher/student to govern and discipline): attendance, punctual speech, steady eye contact, bodies on task, outputs on time (Smith et al., 2022). In disability studies, this regimentation is legible as compulsory able-bodymindedness, attempting to produce and reproduce the unquestioned nature of the normative human bodymind as the standard and gatekeeping mechanism against any form of aberrance. McRuer (2006) names the nexus: “‘compulsory able-bodiedness’... [in which] ‘able-bodiedness... largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things’” (p. 1). Kafer (2013) extends the insight to the cognitive as well: “‘Compulsory able-mindedness’ is a way of capturing the normalizing practices, assumptions, and exclusions” that set the terms of intelligibility—of coherence and legibility (p. 184). Moreover, Campbell (2009) demonstrates how compulsory able-bodymindedness seduces any claim to justice-oriented work in education toward sameness—resisting the “ontologically tentative” and urging, instead, a vantage that looks “from the inside out,” finding “possibilities in ambiguity and resistance in marginality” (pp. 9, 128, 15).

Crip *dis*-readings of access refuse the conflation of access with mere presence or reproduction of norms. Hamraie (2017) cautions that design experts have long claimed authority to externally define the user and, by extension, access itself (p. 198), yielding policy that universalizes particular bodyminds, epistemes, and tempos. Against this, crip theory insists on access as a livable form that mutates along with the bodymind as crippled and crippling. Yergeau’s (2018) autistic politics articulates a “countersocial way of being, communing, and communicating,” asserting the validity of neuroqueer life and literacy (p. 108). In this breathing refusal of viscera and affectivity, accommodation that merely coerces legible participation misreads the demand of the crippled bodymind and the crippled gesture. Crippling access means

enlivening pauses, scripts, stims, asynchronous exchanges, and refusals as world-making practices rather than deficits (Bierdz, 2024; Price, 2011). It is a (de)generative stance of access as the very refusals of crippled bodyminds: destructive of norms and generative of practices that sustain bodyminds. Where audit culture and standardizing practices underwrite access conversations in the sphere of education (Wilder et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2022; Biesta, 2010), we naturalize what's countable, legible, and performative. On the other hand, *crip politics* and *cripistemologies*³ reorient toward what's livable—toward uses of time/space that exceed instrumentality and toward coalitions that protect opacity from being translated into needs for curative interventions. In this sense, access can itself be a refusal: a refusal to enter on normative terms and an instantiation of access-otherwise, of access as livable and breathable onto-epistemes of crippled bodyminds themselves. Read this way, refusal is rarely a solitary negation (or even a negation itself); it is a proposal made to the collective, to the teacher, and the normative regimes affecting classrooms more generally. Such crippled refusals ask, implicitly: can you handle multiplicity, contradiction, inoperative, and/or rebellion? Can you, too, refuse the terms that would translate my livability into a means of coercive correction?

Furthermore, my anarchic framing turns on two primary moves. First, following Agamben (2014), I argue that refusal operates as *destituent power*: it does not seize or reform the apparatus; it renders it inoperative. The task, Agamben (2014) writes, is “Rendering inoperative the biological, economic, and social operations... opening it to a new possible use” (p. 70). In this register, “use becomes a form-of-life... not [that] destroys, but uses” (p. 68), shifting practice from the power of rule to the livability of use.

Destituent power is said to be the deactivation of the technique of sovereign power that splits forms-of-life into animal/human, bare life/power, household/city, and even constituent/constituted power. That is, for Agamben, *destituent power* is an attribute of the inoperative/in-active subject that is the Being of Humanity; a power or capacity that wrests back life's own most possibility for assuming any form whatsoever from the truncated existence that defines us as the subject of so many *dispositifs*. (Hostis, 2020, p. 4)

In this register, refusals such as leaving a classroom, avoiding school, refusing to participate, or arguing against the teacher, break the enforced link between legible participation and livable forms of knowing/being (Rancière, 1991; Scott, 1985). But even more so, destitution is not solely the responsibility of the student. The governmental machine persists through teachers' cooperation, through the teacherly reflex to intervene, document, redirect, and/or restore order, such that refusal also solicits constituent and collective *destitutive* impulses: the teacher's withdrawal from the compliance-work that keeps governing/disciplining apparatuses operational.

Second, refusal is *prefigurative*. Graeber's (2004) anarchism insists “means must be consonant with ends... One cannot create freedom through authoritarian means” such as manipulating and coercing performances of legibility (p. 7); the aim of refusals, therefore, is not to seize power but to abolish coercive forms and imagine more-egalitarian livabilities. In classroom terms, this means access-otherwise cannot be produced through forced participation or coerced relationality. Therefore, if refusal is *prefigurative*, then the teacher's response is part of the *prefiguration*: we either reproduce normative social relations (obedience/assessment, which are constantly shifting in concert) or embody/enact more livable timespaces (consent/use/opacity). Boggs (1977) names this *prefiguration*: “the embodiment, within ongoing political practice... of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that constitute the ultimate goal” (pp. 100-101). In queer terms, moreover, “The queer art of failure turns on...the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other

goals... We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88). Crippled embodiments that grate against the classroom’s normative tempo are generative—epistemically, ontically, politically, socially, and affectively—rearranging roles, relations, and realities, including the right to opacity (Glissant, 1997).

Ultimately, moreover, even as I read refusal as access in these onto-epistemically generative livabilities, I want to avoid drawing borders around those worlds. Heeding Tuck’s (2009) warning that ““The lives of city youth—already under the watchful eyes of police and school security officers, already tracked by video cameras in their schools, on the streets, and in subways—are pursued by (well-intentioned) researchers whose work functions as yet another layer of surveillance”” (p. 410), I gesture toward the particular possibilities of refusal while resisting any pre-definition or coordination of crippled possibility itself. Because the vignettes I grapple with in the following section necessarily involve a kind of looking, my aim is not to fix refusal into a cohesive, trackable type but to witness the livabilities it opens (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). In this light, crip and anarchic frames meet at refusal’s double edge: destituting imposed norms while prefiguring livable ones. Access, then, is not compliance within normativizing precepts but what refusal renders livable: a presence on different terms, organized around use, consent, and the protection of opacity from capture (Agamben, 2016; Harney & Moten, 2013; Tuck, 2009). Finally, these destitutive movements may also loosen the institution’s grip on productivity, making room for crip and othered bodyminds to linger in breathable spacetimes of crippled aberrance.

Refusals in Practice: Fleeting Examples

Within the managerial and coercive logics of schooling, refusal is scripted as risk and deficit rather than presence on othered terms. Handbooks and reviews insist that “effective interventions... must involve techniques that combat academic refusal,” casting it as a specific type of noncompliance aimed at evading work (Billingsley, 2016, p. 12). Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) then convert refusal into data that coordinate hypotheses about functions in order to engineer compliance through processes of normativization, disciplining such behaviors down to the second (Foucault, 1982; Wilder et al., 2007). Moreover, these regimes securitize conduct and manufacture urgency inside a culture grounded in coercive and normative frames (Biesta, 2010), where attendance and legibility are miscast as livable access. In such systems, even complaints are misrecognized “as the problem” (Ahmed, 2021, p. 86; Scott, 1999). Within this analysis, the vignettes that follow push against this framing. Rather than diagnosing, rather than preempting or intervening, I read the refusals as claims to access-otherwise and as the making of crippled timespaces—temporalities and modalities that interrupt coercive normativization (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Moreover, each vignette is not only a scene of student refusal, but it is also a scene of teacher destitency: a decision-point about whether to restore the classroom’s compliance apparatus or to let refusal rework what counts as access/learning in the first place. Each scene is read through crippled and anarchic lenses: crip readings that dis-interprets sense-making, tempo, and opacity as livable access-otherwise; and anarchic readings that show how refusal destitutes the classroom’s compliance apparatus while prefiguring more egalitarian forms of inquiry and existence.

Interruptus: J's Refusal of Epistemic Refusal

During a silent drill on crafting thesis statements from history essays, J pushes the packet aside and continues a short story they began the night before. I catch it out of the corner of my eye; as I help another student, J keeps writing, aware that I am watching them refuse the task-at-hand. Thus, the scene becomes a quiet invitation—and my seeing becomes my own decision-point: whether to translate their divergence into correction (and restart the compliance loop), or to refuse that reflex and let their refusal stand as a different kind of work. At the end of class, J does not turn in a thesis; when asked to rotate papers, they continue drafting their story. Read through crip theory, this is not absence but presence on different terms: an epistemic refusal. And I want to be careful here not to over-interpret motive or “solve” J: perhaps they are simply immersed in their story, perhaps disinterested in the prompt, perhaps seeking a different tempo of thought. But that is precisely the point; refusal is not only a sign to be decoded. It can also be access as self-authored livability/learning, the enlivening of attention through one's own interest rather than coerced presentation of learning.

As J keeps writing, they are not simply off task; they are composing a winding notion of interaction and affect: pieces of creative writing that they later let me read with consent. In refusing the thesis drill and its one-sentence condensations of historical reason-making, moreover, J refuses the classroom's epistemic productivity and the argumentative-bent of normative historical epistemologies: the demand for linear causality, determinate conclusions, and neatly ordered directionality. Against normative classrooms built on compulsory able-body-mindedness as the natural order (McRuer, 2006; Kafer, 2013), J enacts a cripistemic impulse and a crippled time, which “is flex time not just expanded but exploded... bending the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds,” explicitly challenging normative expectations of historical epistemic productivity and normativity (Kafer, 2013, p. 27). Their stories' drifts resist the seduction of argumentative narrative and reductive historical logics, inhabiting the “ontologically... perverse [where] possibilities become imaginable” (Campbell, 2009, p. 170) as an epistemic method rather than a deficit. Put differently, J's refusal that enlivens their writing-otherwise does not abandon thinking; it relocates the normative notions of thinking outside the constitutive scripts of the history classroom and its assignments, opening more diffusive, non-determinative ways of noticing, relating, and making worlds. And while this may not be an intentional redesign, it still matters: by refusing the “objective, functional” version of accessibility that “experts, ergonomists, social scientists, architects, product designers, and policymakers claimed expertise about” (Hamraie, 2017, p. 5), J's self-authored work unsettles who gets to define access and what counts as legitimate engagement.

At the same time, J's gesture destitutes the micro-apparatuses that equate learning with quick, legible assertions that are normatively productive—and it places a similar demand on me. Agamben (2014) names this the “inoperativity of man,” the task of “making human works and productions inoperative, opening them to a new possible use” (p. 69). By not supplying the thesis on cue, J shifts from rule to use: “use becomes a form-of-life... not [that] destroys, but uses” (Agamben, 2014, p. 68). For the span of the drill, J vacates the classroom's compliance circuit epistemically and politically, composing a fleeting micro-TAZ: “liberat[ing] an area (of time... of imagination) and then dissolv[ing]” that space when no longer needed (Bey, 1991, pp. 99). Crucially, this is not mere negation or a refusal of accessible terrains; J's embodiment and intellectual work is prefigurative, and my response either cooperates with that prefiguration or collapses it back into compliance. If “means must be consonant with ends... one cannot create

freedom through authoritarian means” (Graeber, 2004, p. 4). In my classroom, then, J desists the thesis-writing activity not as a refusal of learning but as a livable terrain of aberrant possibilities epistemically and politically. By destituting the power operations of the classroom, normatively understood through efficiency and authority-ridden claims (Smith et al., 2022; Wilder et al., 2007), J embodies a consent-based, imaginative, non-determinative, non-argumentative, and livable access-otherwise for historical interrogation and academic spaces (Boggs, 1977). Rather than route them through an FBA to restore authority or compliance (or redirect their work via an IEP), a crippled and anarchic stance would treat their writing as access-otherwise: an enflashed point of “accessible public cultures we might yet inhabit” (McRuer, 2006, p. 35; Tuck, 2009). In this light, the thesis refusal is both an unworking of the legibility machine and a rehearsal of crippled timespaces where epistemic and political possibilities overflow the coherent boundaries of the classroom.

Near-ness: M’s Participatory Refusal

Moving from J’s thesis refusal and epistemic break, where pace and form were unhooked from institutional and normative legibility (Scott, 1999), the next scene pivots from what counts as acceptable work epistemically to the enforced modes and relations that it produces/maintains. Put differently, this vignette grapples with how a student refuses assigned tasks altogether: edging themselves out of the shared learning space and turning instead to unrelated work that more fully holds their interest.

Group work begins in one of my classes. I ask each group to build a timeline of the French Revolution without technology or my help; I want to see what they remember and what they judge as politically important to the development of social movements. As the room settles into collaborative work, M slides their desk to the edge, opens their computer, and begins doing something else. When I pass by, I see them “min-maxing” a tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) character, shifting stats and traits to optimize their build. Halfway through, M looks up and tells the group across from them that their timeline should probably include the Seven Years’ War as a precursor to civil unrest, then returns to their character sheet.

Read through *crip analytics*, M’s stance is not simply disengagement; it is presence without capture. Their participation is consent-based and intermittent: relational when they choose to speak, and equally consent-based in non-relation when they remain adjacent to the group task yet divorced from it intentionally. Moreover, I want to resist turning M into an object of interpretation, because whatever is animating their refusal is not saturable; their reasons are partial, shifting, and not mine to name or condone. However, this precisely enlivens the analytic wager that I am trying to sustain; refusal need not be intentional resistance (or even productive) to function as access. In classrooms where engagement is too often indexed by visible compliance (proximity, eye contact, talk, shared materials, on-task posture), M’s choice to enliven attention through their own interest unsettles the assumption that learning must appear through the prescribed social form or that valuable learning happens under prescriptive lenses. Their min-maxing is not a substitute for knowing; it is a way of holding cognition and affect on livable terms while keeping the door open when/if they decide to enter it (as their Seven Years’ War interjection makes plain). In other words, M’s refusal of the group script does not suspend analysis; it relocates analysis onto consent-based terms—relation by consent when they speak and non-relation by consent when they do not or when they refuse work entirely.

This matters in a classroom organized around compulsory able-bodymindedness, where able-bodymindedness “masquerades as a nonidentity” (McRuer, 2006, p. 1) and coerced social productivity is treated as natural evidence of learning. M’s orbit asserts a right to opacity: “not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (Glissant, 1997, p. 190) and resonates with Yergeau’s (2018) account of autistic life as authoring itself. As they put it, “Autistic stories are interrelational, even if that interrelationality does not extend toward allistics, or even humans more generally” (p. 24), clarifying that participation can be relational on one’s own terms and that choosing non-relation can be an authorial mode of presence/becoming rather than a lack (that refusal of learning itself may also be a valid onto-episteme to avoid epistemic limitation or homogenization). Here, M’s near-ness is the fertile insistence: they remain in the room, adjacent to the collective task, and they enter relation at the moment and in the manner they choose.

An anarchic vantage clarifies how this refusal is also a call placed on the teacher. M’s quiet non-relationality calls toward my own response: I can restart the participation economy (redirect, discipline, document), or I can refuse the reflex to restore legibility and instead treat adjacency, opacity, and intermittent contribution as viable participation. In other words, using Agamben’s (2014) terms and by sustaining such refusal, we work to render inoperative the micro-machine that couples enforced participation to productivity and cognition to eye contact, speech, and proximity; it is a “withdraw[al]... disappear[ance]” from coerced affiliation without abandoning more diffuse cognitive life (Bey, 1991, p. 100). Crucially, this is not retreat from the classroom so much as a prefiguration of othered classrooms: ends (livable, disabled access) held consonant with means (noncoercion, opacity, nonrelation), sketching access-otherwise that authorizes both consensual relationality and consensual non-relationality (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2004).

Against Legibility: S Remonstrates Learning

Following M’s access-otherwise, the next vignette returns to an example I briefly named in the introduction. Here, the question is not only whether a student participates, but through what medium participation and intelligibility are permitted to count: how thought must be structured to remain normatively legible in educational spaces (Scott, 1999). During a lecture, S refuses to complete my assigned sheet of critical-thinking notes and instead draws a comic-strip rendition of the historical narrative as I speak. In educational spaces built of “steep steps,” where objectivity and legibility have long been used “to count or diagnose or prescribe modes or literacies” (Dolmage, 2017, pp. 1, 100), textual coherence is installed as the default evidence of thinking. S’s comic interrupts that default. By representing sense-making outside of text, outside of normative language, S places pressure upon the classroom’s determinable access points and exposes how viable participation is often secured through a narrow channel of legible production. The comic-based response S enlivens, moreover, is criptemic: a semiotic access-otherwise that opens “a curb cut... a necessary openness to . . . accessible public cultures we might yet inhabit” (McRuer, 2006, p. 35).

Read through cript frames, then, S is not simply being creative; they are also refusing inclusion-as-normalization: “inclusive normalisation... a somewhat spurious claim” that aims to make the autistic less freakish/aberrant (Yergeau, 2018, p. 109). The refusal, moreover, is specific: they decline the managerial demand that thinking must look like orderly text in my template, under my pacing, in my sanctioned genre of legibility. What appears, instead, is a crippled semiotic claim; this is how understanding registers otherwise—without asking permission from the classroom’s

dominant forms of literacy/legibility. But the refusal is not S's alone. The scene also drafts me, as the teacher, into a choice: whether I am going to enforce note-taking economies or engage as a co-conspirator to loosen the classroom's terms of intelligibility by letting the comic stand as the work (to be negotiated as epistemically valuable). As the teacher, moreover, the refusal calls toward the community/the collective as well; I can tighten the room around legible participation, making/maintaining the template the measure of attention, or I can widen the channel, treating this medium-shift as a valid way of thinking that does not need to be converted into legible text to count.

An anarchic read sharpens what is happening to the apparatus itself. S's sketch destitutes the note-taking machine that equates attention with obedient inscription (Agamben, 2014): it shifts from rule to use: "the fundamental concepts of politics are no longer production and praxis, but inoperativity and use" (Agamben, 2014, p. 67; Agamben, 2016), a move that "render[s] inoperative the biological, economic, and social operations... opening them to a new possible use" (Agamben, 2014, p. 70). In this register, S's page becomes a small liberated timespace, resonant with Bey's (1991) sense of a temporary autonomous zone: "a guerilla operation which liberates" without directly confronting the State (p. 99). Where access is too often pre-scriptive, where note-taking normalizes semiotic expression and epistemic coherence in modes of normative legibility (Hamraie, 2017), S's drawing dis-authors access-otherwise by altering the analytic medium itself while retaining rigorous sense-making.

At the same time, it matters that S is still, in a way, "with" my lecture: they do not abandon the historical narrative so much as rework it. That co-presence is one livable pathway, but it is not the only refusal available. Other crippled livabilities might refuse note-taking altogether, refuse the lecture's tempo, refuse the demand to track the same narrative at the same time, or refuse visibility itself; each opening presents different and possible positionalities of access-otherwise that a crippled classroom might be able to hold. Taken together with the earlier scenes, these vignettes function as radical distensions of normative classroom behavior and work: dis-engagements rather than coerced participation (Yergeau, 2018); image-based semiotic expression rather than compulsory text (Campbell, 2009); tempos and formats that refuse capture while still sustaining critical thought (Kafer, 2013). Each refusal unworks obedience-machineries and prefigures classrooms where opacity, non-coercion, and multimodal analysis are livable and imaginative.

Fugitive Presence: T Breathes

Finally, the last vignette challenges a normative assumption that often goes unnamed, that access depends on full spatial and corporeal presence: being wholly in the room, wholly on task, and continuously available for capture (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). During a lesson, T drags a chair into the hallway and sits in the doorframe, their body more outside the classroom than within it. From this threshold, they occupy two spaces at once: the classroom's sanctioned learning space and the corridor's passing traffic consisting of friends, fragments of other lessons, the custodial cart's slow roll. When I circulate, they raise their hand when they need help. Sometimes they ask about a drafted paragraph; other times they lean back into the hall to chat before writing again. The doorway becomes a negotiated border, diffuse, revocable, and consent-based, where T decides how and when they present themselves, how and when they take up space. Rather than remaining-in-place, T subtracts themselves from the obedience loop while staying close enough to re-enter on negotiated terms. In doing so, they challenge the precondition that participation must be

continuous, spatially determinate, and visibly/materially present at all times in order to count as learning.

Agamben (2014) gives language to this crippled livability: “In the moment that the form-of-life constitutes itself, it deactivates and renders inoperative not only all the individual forms of life, but first of all the dispositif that separates bare life from life” (pp. 73-74). In other words, this is not flight from learning/becoming, but a step aside from the circuitry that equates learning with obedient presence in a classroom space. As Hostis (2020) puts it, moreover, T’s destituent move “does not oppose the institution... it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire” (p. 11). Remaining in the doorjamb, T refuses the sovereign demand to be fully in and fully on (Harney & Moten, 2013), creating a fugitive space that both refuses and imagines otherwise. Borrowing Harney and Moten (2013), T remains in but not of the classroom (p. 101). That “not of” is not just a metaphor; it names a material re-routing of relation and time. The hall runs on a vernacular order, quick favors, whispered updates, and mutual aid, and this matters (Kropotkin, 1976). It offers a different sociality and tempo alongside the lesson’s normative, coercive rhythms. It offers a parallel lifeworld whose logics of presence and participation are not governed by the classroom’s demands for continuous legibility.

Scott’s (2012) account of “petty acts of refusal” clarifies what such thresholding does politically. Multiplied, these gestures do not announce themselves as revolution; they accumulate as friction, small evasions that quietly undo the fantasy of smooth governance (pp. 7-8). From an anarchic vantage, then, T is not trying to win power in the room so much as to interrupt, at least temporarily and partially, the coercive claim that educational productivity must be continuous, spatially determinative, coerced, and surveilled (Graeber, 2004). What emerges, flickering in and out, is a micro-zone of consent-based participation: T chooses when to lean in, when to lean out, when to hand a page across the doorjamb, when to ignore the room’s temporality. The doorway is not an escape hatch; it is an immanent practice of use/non-use that makes space livable without asking permission: a local destitution of the productivity mandate whose strength is precisely its partiality and opacity (Agamben, 2016; Glissant, 1997). And I am implicated too: I can drag them back into the room’s script, or I can shift the script toward the threshold and meet them where learning is already happening on different terms.

Placed alongside the earlier scenes, this threshold liminality clarifies how each refusal activates a different axis of access-otherwise. J’s refusal of thesis writing reframes epistemic/temporal access: consent-paced, non-determinative composition that resists thesis-on-cue and argumentative condensation (Campbell, 2009; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). M’s refusal of groupwork and coerced relationality reworks relational and non-relational access: presence without capture, the right to opacity, and relation by consent (Glissant, 1997; Yergeau, 2018). S’s refusal of textual note-taking embodies a semiotic/modal access: image as analysis that refuses compulsory text while sustaining rigorous sense-making (Agamben, 2014; Hamraie, 2017; McRuer, 2006; Yergeau, 2018). And T’s refusal of full participation and presence asserts a spatial access-otherwise: thresholded, intermittent visibility that destitutes presence-as-surveillance (Agamben, 2014; Bey, 1991; Harney & Moten, 2013; Scott, 2012). Taken together, these refusals are not only refusals of obedience machineries but also prefigurative practices where ends and means align (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2004), replacing attendance-as-legibility with livable, crippled timespaces in which thinking ripens, appears by consent, takes the form it *dis-sire*⁴, and occupies the spaces it can breathe; here, even non-participation is access-otherwise.

Across these four scenes, refusal is not the absence of learning but the design of conditions under which learning/becoming are made multiplicitous and livable: storied drafting, consent-

based relationality and nonrelation, multimodal sense-making, and thresholded presence. These practices puncture the classroom's demand for legibility and make room for access-otherwise. The vignettes refuse coerced visibility and instead stage opacity, adjacency, and othered meaning-making as legitimate ways of accessing an educative spacetime. They also move beyond reformatory impulses that preserve a coherent context of legible productivity toward abolitionist invocations (Moten, 2013; Ulaş & Seçer, 2024): these refusals are not fixes to the old order but exits from its obedience-machineries. Read together, they ask us to understand—and deliberately dis-understand—“access” as a normative demand for legible productivity, replacing it with access-otherwise that must be continually enlivened and enfolded by crippled mindbodies: lived tempos, bodies-in-flux, and sense-making practices that remake the very terms on which learning (re)becomes possible or imaginable.

The Response of the Teacher

My task (the teacher's pedagogical invocation), as the vignettes made plain, is not to restart the machinery of legibility when it stalls but to refuse the operability of its disciplinary machinations, to step out of the circuitry that would convert each moment into evidence of compliance (Smith et al., 2022). When S sketched a comic instead of completing my lecture-note template, I refused the impulse to correct them and asked what the drawing helped them notice. When T settled in the doorjamb of our classroom, I did not call them back into the room coercively but altered my circulation so the threshold became part of the lesson's livable geography. When J drafted their own fiction during a thesis drill, I read what they offered me with consent and responded in-medium, giving feedback on character depth and narrative cohesion. Each scene placed me under an obvious and visceral disciplinary pull: to become the teacher-judge, reassert access as normative behavior and thought, assign or deduct participation points, and generate the paperwork that proves instruction as uniform, efficient, and effective. Foucault (1998) describes such regimes as juridical: an instance that “judge[s] immediately, and without appeal,” possessing “its own instruments of punishment, and use[s] them as it [sees] fit” (p. 266). In other words, the teacher is normatively coerced to perform that ritual, translating living, aberrant work into examinable traces that feed ranking, tracking, diagnosis, discipline, and remediation. Refusing the ritual, moreover, is not an abdication of teaching; it is a crippling of curricula and pedagogy otherwise.

Refusal, then, is not passivity or abeyance; it is not ignorance or idleness. It is a practice of making the apparatus of normative discipline/coercion inoperative. As Agamben (2014) writes, “Inoperativity... coincides completely and constitutively with... destitution, with living a life. And this destitution is the coming politics” (p. 74). What we, in the classroom, are allowing to breathe is a deactivation (a destitution) of the link between embodiment and coercion (Piepznar-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 24): recognizing a student's mode of presence without forcing it into a sanctioned, disciplined form. Agamben's (2014) grammar sharpens the point through the deponent verbs that cannot properly be called active or passive (p. 71), offering language for a pedagogical stance that refuses the binary of compliant activity or inert passivity i.e., presence as use rather than capture (Agamben, 2016). Teaching that refuses to enforce participation is deliberate non-cooperation with obedience machines. In practice, this looks like treating students' onto-epistemic mutations and tempos as livable and viable.

But refusal is not only something a student does. It is often relational: an address, a call, a pressure on the teacher to renegotiate the conditions under which learning is supposed to appear. A comic is not merely an alternative product; it is also a demand that I loosen the script that installs text as the privileged evidence of thought (Dolmage, 2017). A desk at the edge of the group is not only absence; it is a refusal of compelled relationality and/or a claim to opacity (Glissant, 1997; Yergeau, 2018). A doorjamb is not only spatial drift; it is a critique of presence-as-surveillance and a request, sometimes quiet, sometimes acute, for different proximities or to enliven othered spaces beyond the demonstrably educative. At the same time, however, refusal is not automatically virtuous or universally enabling. Some refusals are generative and prefigurative; some are protective withdrawals; some are anti-educational in the most literal sense: interruptions that break the bind of the educative as constitutive, refusing not merely this task but the demand to be formed in advance by the institution's terms. A student may choose to sleep, daydream, or go blank. That, too, can be an access-gesture: exhaustion, overwhelm, shame, boredom, hunger, dysregulation, or the felt impossibility of the task might make refusal the only breathable option. It may also be a sign that the student does not yet have the confidence, tools, or scaffolds to enter the work. In those cases, honoring refusal cannot mean abandoning the student to the consequences of institutional sorting; it means taking refusal seriously as information about livability and as a prompt for pedagogical redesign, altering the conditions of entry, the forms of support, the acceptable media of response, and the timelines of demonstration.

This is where the difference between reframing refusal and reproducing low expectations matters. The point is not to romanticize disengagement or to treat marginalization as determinate. It is to refuse particular normative solutions that have reliably intensified harm for those already most governed (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Even more so, there are also risks to such refusal: risks to the teacher and risks to students. For the teacher, standards, pacing guides, learning-management systems, and grading schemas interlock to position teachers as coordinators of visibility and output (Foucault, 1982; Taubman, 2009); the pressure is to keep the uninterrupted examination humming across a term, producing comparable data on schedule (Williamson, 2016). As Biesta (2010) argues, "The technical-managerial approach to accountability can in no way be reconciled with an approach in which responsibility is central" (p. 72). Responsibility here is risk-bearing judgment—ethical response-ability to students and to education's purposes - rather than compliance with preset indicators and audit trails (Biesta, 2013). But responsibility must still remain intelligible enough to survive institutional scrutiny: parents who read opacity as avoidance, administrators who request participation metrics, and colleagues who expect uniform deliverables (Williamson, 2016). The call I am making, therefore, to teachers more broadly is to prefigure different arrangements without leaving students to navigate risk alone.

On the other hand, for students, the risks are concrete and uneven. Refusal can be converted into discipline referrals, deficit narratives, special education paperwork, "behavior plans," lowered grades, exclusion from advanced tracks, and intensified surveillance; it can become a durable institutional story about who a student is allowed to be (Yergeau, 2018). Those consequences do not land evenly across race, disability, gender, and class; they often compound existing exposure to punishment and misrecognition (Annamma et al., 2013). A justice-minded pedagogy cannot treat refusal as costless freedom while quietly allowing institutions to extract its costs from the most vulnerable populations without intervention. This is why deliberation matters, not as a call for compliance, but as a practice of informed, collective risk-navigation. In practice, this means naming consequence structures plainly (without threat), building consent-gates, and developing protective forms of documentation and/or falsification that preserve students' work without

surrendering them to capture (Tuck, 2009). Sometimes it also means subversive action: crafting cover stories and portfolios that satisfy institutional demands without exposing students' livable practices as evidence against them (McRuer, 2006; Yergeau, 2018).

In this light, refusal is also a refusal to become a diagnostic instrument (Klug et al., 2013). In each vignette, I could have morphed into evaluator, clinician, and manager at once: naming the behavior, imputing a function, prescribing an intervention, and recording compliance (Daliri-Ngametua et al., 2022). Such an itinerary is thinkable because students have learned under subject regulation and governing machinations that have “silenced, ignored, berated, infantilized, corrected, scolded, behavior-planned, extinguished, institutionalized, electroshocked, restrained, hog-tied, faux-praised, tasered, secluded, shamed, raped, shaken, hit, teased, studied, molested, laughed at, or murdered” (Yergeau, 2018, p. 83). Cooperation with that itinerary is the maintenance of normalization technologies. Instead, I stay with refusals as coordinations and locutions concerning the environment and educative impossibility/possibility itself. In Arendt's (1958) terms, moreover, public life depends on a space of appearance where we begin anew together; the teacher's refusal is precisely such an initiative: an act that opens a different stage rather than tightening the old script.

Seen this way, the teacher's role in refusal is to refuse in concert with students, to withdraw cooperation from governing technologies such as disciplinary, coercive, compulsive, and corrective technologies, to decline the invitation to translate every aberrance into data in order to sustain normativization (Yergeau, 2018); to protect the right to opacity long enough for other literacies to take hold and to be engaged on their own terms (Glissant, 1997); and to grapple with onto-epistemic wandering without forcing it into a normative choreographies. It is, finally, to vacate the position of gatekeeper so that the spacetime of teaching becomes more porous—to “render inoperative” the hinges that make presence and productivity synonymous (Agamben, 2014, p. 71). What follows is not chaos but a different order of responsibility: a communal stewardship of the conditions under which otheredness can breathe, under which refusal can do its double work, destituting the old terms while prefiguring more livable ones (Boggs, 1977; Kafer, 2013).

Conclusive Impulses

Normative schooling is remarkably efficient at producing particular kinds of humans—temporally-mediated, compliant, legibly productive—and the machinery that does this work is both onto-epistemic and material. Classrooms are synchronized to dashboards and rubrics, to participation points and punctuality metrics; as Biesta (2010) notes, “This is the particular constellation under which accountability in education currently operates... [an] odd combination of marketized individualism and central control” (p. 56). Layered into this auditable logic is an onto-epistemological injunction that naturalizes compulsory able-bodymindedness. The normative school repeatedly demands that disabled people embody an affirmative answer to the unspoken question: “Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?” (McRuer, 2006, p. 9). Inside that machinated bind, refusal conventionally appears as dysfunction to be normalized and disciplined. But the vignettes in this article, J's thesis refusal, M's correlative doings, S's lecture-notes refusal, and T's refusal of presence, ask us to see something more radical and more livable: refusal as access-otherwise, the ways othered and aberrant students carve breathable timespaces in environments calibrated against them, insisting that thinking and appearing are non-singularizable, mutational, and aberrant.

Read through crip and anarchic lenses, refusals are not voids of disciplinary lacking but *dis-irous* spacetimes that operate with a double movement: destitution and prefiguration. They unsettle the obedience-machinery of the classroom while sketching more livable relations. As Graeber (2004) writes, “revolutionary action is any collective action which rejects... some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations... [It] does not necessarily have to aim to topple governments” (p. 45). In classrooms, governance is often mundane, and by refusing such machinations, we demand more livable educative/anti-educative possibilities. Moreover, Agamben (2014) gives the grammar: “destituent power outlines a force that, in its very constitution, deactivates the governmental machine” (p. 65). When a student/teacher refuses the governing epistemic logics of a thesis drill, refuses coerced relationalities, refuses prescribed media of legibility, or refuses compulsory presence, we deactivate the links between presence/productivity and access to educational possibilities long enough for othered literacies, tempos, and livabilities to take hold.

However, that commitment does not erase difficulty. Some refusals are fleeting; some persist. Some signal immersion and world-making; some signal exhaustion, uncertainty, skill gaps, or the felt impossibility of entry. Some refusals can become limiting or harmful and in those cases refusal still calls for response, not abandonment. In other words, the question is not whether refusal is always good/productive/efficient, but how educators respond without defaulting to coercion/compulsion/discipline as the only imaginable form of care. Even more so, compulsion and surveillance have never been reliable solutions to inequity gaps; they more often re-entrench the student in defensive refusals while expanding the institution’s punitive reach (Annamma et al., 2013; Zuboff, 2019). A more just pedagogy treats refusals as a continuous invitation to redesign/undesign the educative, learning supports, and tempo, while keeping expectations tethered to livability rather than obedience.

Finally, refusal is inseparable from risk, and risk is often uneven. Teachers face institutional scrutiny when they loosen legibility regimes; students face discipline, deficit narratives, and escalated surveillance when their refusals are captured and pathologized—risks that intensify across disability, race, gender, and class (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Tuck, 2009). A justice-minded response therefore includes protective work: consent-gates, obfuscation, clear discussions of institutional governing machines, and collective deliberations of possibilities and lines of flight. Disability justice already names the ethic that animates this: “Love in action is when we strategize to create cross-disability access spaces... When we refuse to abandon each other” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 78). In this key, refusal is not an exit from community but a demand that community be reconstituted on terms that can hold us in concert without diminishment or coercion. Acting on this analysis requires that educators reframe refusal from obstacle to opportunity and reorganize curricula and institutions around access-otherwise. Concretely, that means challenging coercive discipline machines, refusing to equate coercion with learning, recognizing generative work outside determinative scripts, and co-authoring agreements about use that make learning more livable and that can be revisited as bodies and needs mutate (Agamben, 2016). It also means preparing educators to make destituent moves and urging administrators to protect classroom opacity and flexible timelines rather than entrenching standardization, normalization, and surveilled coercion. What is at stake is that “which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence” (Glissant, 1997, p. 191). In other words, to enliven opacity is to accept refusal as a form of presence—both the unworking of terms that harm and the continuous drafting of more livable terrains.

Notes

1. I am mutating McRuer's compulsory-ablebodiedness to eschew any separation of the body-mind dichotomy that descends from rationalist thought qua Descartes.
2. Access-otherwise: imaginative and time/space-bending modes of access that recompose classroom "access" around othered ways of knowing/being. Not bolt-on accommodation but crip epistemology/ontology: story-first, image-response, adjacency, opacity, and clock-bending tempos that refuse compulsory able/able-mindedness and prefigure livable study on different terms.
3. Cripistemologies name ways of knowing rooted in disabled/crip embodiments that unsettle normate rationality - valuing opacity, interdependence, and crip time as epistemic resources, and reading refusal, misfit, and noncompliance as knowledge practices rather than deficits.
4. I use dis-sire to name crippled desire as deviation/aberrance, wanting/moving/attaching otherwise. In other words, dis-sire highlights what schooling excludes and how refusal can pull us toward more livable, even anti-educational, counter-productive spaces.

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