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Happy International “Crip” Day, 2017

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International Day of Disabled Persons is today. December 3, 2017. Happy Day of the Crips. I celebrate this day, every day, not just on the 3rd of December. For those of you unfamiliar with this coinage, “crip,” the noun, as I am using it, here (also true of “[crip](#),” the verb), is reclaimed.

Thanks, in particular, to my friends, [Catherine Lewis](#), [Quinn Lewis](#), and [Andrew Clark](#), for telling me about a groovy music initiative, and for our life giving conversation about it, very recently.

According to the creators of [Symphony for a Broken Orchestra](#) (and I quote, here, from the [website](#)):

There are over 1,000 musical instruments owned by The School District of Philadelphia that cannot be played because they are broken and there is no available budget to fix them.

Symphony for a Broken Orchestra is a city-wide effort initiated by Temple Contemporary in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Orchestra, The Boyer College of Music & Dance, the Curtis Institute and numerous professional/amateur musicians throughout the city. Together, these hundreds of musicians will perform a composition in December 2017 that is written specifically for the sounds these instruments can only make in their broken state. This once in a lifetime arrangement is being written by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Lang to unite generations of Philadelphia musicians and audiences in support of music education for our public schools.

Following the performance, Temple Contemporary, in collaboration with instrument repair professionals throughout the region, will repair all of the fixable instruments and return them back to the public schools they came from in the fall of 2018. Instrument repair kits will also be installed in every public school offering instrumental music classes, allowing any minor repairs to be fixed in the future.

Instruments are not people, but this music initiative and its related projects are replete with disability discourses. Do these instruments need to be “healed”? Yes, they do, if they are to be “wholly” played in most “typical” ways...and, yes, these Philly kids deserve to have the same *access* to instruments and musical orchestration as might anyone in a far more

socioeconomically privileged school district. Class, race, and disability intersect in deep ways in this story.

When the symphony described is orchestrated, and performed, taking “damage” into account, so that the “crip” instruments and their “unique voices” are underscored (!), a fine music will occur that would not otherwise have been possible: with “sounds these instruments can only make in their broken state,” as noted above. Maybe people will later deliberately create instruments to imitate and otherwise somehow to resemble these broken ones, since they will already have been repaired, and the orchestrations (and ones that are perhaps yet to be imagined and written) won’t work the same, if at all, with fixed or otherwise already typical, “normal” instruments.

This effort, to replicate these instruments (and to create other, newly deviant ones), could really happen, with keen intention and attention, as long as they’re not moldy or health harming, as Quinn (a brilliant while humble inventor, musician, and instrument maker) highlights wisely, since that is indeed some of what is behind the hurt instruments’ unique tones and rhythms.

As we four discussed, immediately before a delicious meal, the piano piece featured in the 1997 film, *Gattaca*, can only be played if you have twelve fingers.

[CRISPR](#) (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats), the now underway genetic modification trajectory that might make the more insidious aspects of *Gattaca*’s eugenics narrative come to fruition, *could* make it possible — instead of stopping disabled fetuses from existing in the first place — to hasten the births of disabled children, on purpose, children who will potentially advance our world, with their own creativity and uniqueness. I say this without diminishing or denying the structural violence of ableist crap encountered daily, or in any way romanticizing the ingenuity borne out of our disabled lives, helpful if not necessary, not only in an often unwelcoming (and largely ignorant and fearful) world, but just to live and thrive in private and in public.

Disability rights activist, [Ed Roberts](#) (progenitor of the independent living movement), quipped famously (as [Nick Holzthum](#) schooled me) that if he had to be perceived as a “vegetable,” he would have liked to have been thought of as an artichoke. Countering CRISPR, in honor and celebration of sardonic and inventive Ed, I suggest the beginning of The Artichoke Project, a radical refutation of CRISPR and the direction in which it is headed, currently, and likely in perpetuity.

Let’s keep making not-broken, Crip music, art, film, videos, poetry, dance, etc., on purpose, instead of conceiving of wilted, abject vegetables, metaphorical, maintained, even hardy, in the neoliberal refrigerator crisper. And, if not instead, because that is becoming nearly

impossible, as other oppressive paths continue to unfold, then also. [#TheArtichokeProject](#). Also. Coming to an accessible theater, near you. With accessible transportation. And your friends. Friends: “people who need people,” because, after all, some of us already know that we are all (differently, variously) interdependent, not just the crips.

That’s how orchestras work.

Notes:

“People who need people” references the chorus of the award-winning song, “People,” by Jule Styne, with lyrics by Bob Merrill, written for the 1964 Broadway musical, *Funny Girl*. Thanks to Styne and Merrill, and, of course, thanks to Barbra Streisand, who still sings this song that she made famous.

Gattaca (1997) was written and directed by Andrew Niccol. Thanks to Andrew Niccol, too. If we knew each other, I would ask him what he thinks of CRISPR, twenty years after *Gattaca*. Many people have drawn this apt and eery comparison about the film’s premise and the truths of today.