

《希望之夏：身心障礙革命》 *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*

Directed by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillen, 2017, 90 minutes, color. Distributed by mariboruprisings.org.

Wen Liu

Institute of Ethnology
Academia Sinica

Memories of summer camp often involve a sense of nostalgia about the endless youth and utopia of a time and space away from mundane and disappointing reality. *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* is a documentary about Camp Jened for disabled youth in the Catskills of New York. It describes a place that was much more than a temporary summer getaway, since it was part of the burgeoning disability rights movement in the 1970s. The directors Jim Lebrecht, a former camper, and Nicole Newnham used a collage of black-and-white video footage from the 1970s and present-day interviews with former campers to tell a story about not only the extraordinary time spent at Camp Jened and the radical actions that followed from it, but also the rare sense of freedom and solidarity that was made possible through camp life.

Crip Camp crafts a narrative about “crip time”: a critical take on ableist assumptions of time built upon capitalist logic and historical linearity, one that embraces loss and grief (Samuels, 2017). In ableist societies, being disabled is conceived as a disruption of the normative life stages of growth, adulthood, work, and family life. Camp Jened provided an alternative timescape for disabled youth, where many found a sense of freedom away from overprotective parents; pleasure in exploring music, baseball, dance, and sex; and, most importantly, a community that was not possible elsewhere. As disability scholar, Ellen Samuel, explains, “*crip time is time travel*” (2017; italics original). The differently capable bodies move quickly and slowly, jump forward and stop abruptly. Crip time provides a break from the binary of health and illness, since each one operates at a different pace yet they build a collective life at the camp. Lebrecht says that the biggest relief he felt at camp came from how campers no longer felt the need to hide their disabilities or the markers thereof, whether that might be a crutch, a diaper, or a wheelchair: “But at camp, everybody had something going on with their body. It just wasn’t a big deal.”

The solidarity is not about flattening differences but, as the film illustrates, about recognizing the possibility of existing and thriving through differences.

The co-director, Lebrecht, who was born with spina bifida, explains the disruptive potential of crip time: “They didn’t think I was going to live more than a couple of hours. Apparently, I had different plans.” The “different plans” for some campers were challenging the hegemony of the ableist pace of life and building a revolution led by disabled people. Their desire to extend the freedom of camp life beyond it is pointedly featured in the film’s introduction to a 1977 sit-in in San Francisco. Activists occupied federal buildings to demand the long-delayed enforcement of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, anti-discrimination regulations regarding people with disabilities. Judy Heumann, a former counsellor at the camp and a key leader in the movement, recounts her journey starting with cooking lasagna in the camp kitchen to mobilizing hundreds of disabled people in the “504 Sit-In.” Confronting the elitist government was a daunting challenge, but Heumann also details how the movement had to quickly adapt to everyone’s different needs so they could participate. For instance, a meeting could not happen without having interpreters in the room, and there were stairs to be overcome for activists to enter the inaccessible government buildings. At one point when activists decide to stay overnight and occupy the space, Heumann asked, “How many people in the room cannot sleep on the floor?” In this moment we see how the camp travels with the activists—in the prioritization of always being cognizant of the various needs of bodies.

Crip time is time travel. Although Camp Jened had to close due to financial difficulties, the sense of solidarity has extended well beyond its physical time and space. It sparked a mass movement that eventually led to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The documentary also highlights how the camp managed to build bridges with other communities. The historical possibilities of revolutionary crip time is not only about a single community in struggle, but multiple communities. The narrators situate the movement in the broader context of protests happening across the U.S. in the 1970s as it takes the viewers from the camp site to footage of the Black Panthers and LGBTQ people who joined the disabled activists’ rallies and occupation. It makes clear that marginalized people’s struggles are more linked than they had previously imagined. As Lionel Je’ Woodyard, an African American former camper observes, the treatment of Blacks in the South is similar to the abuse and exclusion of disabled people. In many ways, *Crip Camp* challenges us to reconceptualize the boundaries of disabled and nondisabled bodies and illuminates a future that is not necessarily “without disability” but where people can achieve their desire through the power of community.

The insistence on an intersectional approach and radical forms of community-building in disabled people's struggle points to the potential limits of rights-based movements. Regarding the passage of the 504 regulations, Heumann voices discontent and exhaustion about the state's response, which is always "too slow, too little." She says, "If I have to be thankful for an accessible bathroom, when am I ever gonna be equal in the community?" The persistent rhetoric of "separate but equal" haunts the disabled community, and also queer and people of color communities, whose rights do not fundamentally eliminate the precarity of their lives under neoliberal, individualist logic. As Robert McRuer (2018) argues, *crip time* illustrates the need for disability justice to move beyond the politics of representation; it shows the urgency of looking at the global material conditions of neoliberalism, for instance the flex economy, high-risk work environments, and the unaffordable health plans that have only aggravated precarity. By using anti-disability rhetoric, neoliberal logic makes sure that the subjects of austerity are held responsible for their own social reproduction, and their failure to match the pace of production justifies their exclusion. For many, *crip time* represents the necessity to continue to struggle as a collective under ever greater waves of austerity measures.

There are moments of grief, anger, and frustration in the film that refuse to reduce the narrative to one of progress in disability movements. In the end, as many campers admit, there are far more issues to be tackled, but the spirit of freedom they acquired at Camp Jened follows them wherever they go. In a heartwarming reunion scene, one former camper, Denise Sherer Jacobson, says to Lebrecht, "If somebody told you, you'd be living in Oakland with your wife, and going wherever the hell you wanted to go? You could not imagine." Despite the fact that disability justice is an unfinished fight, *Crip Camp* shows us the potential of daring to desire a life once thought impossible.

References

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