Events are actions or performances by people within certain contexts shaped by their environment. Research concerning cityscape and landscape has demonstrated the role of the physical environment in shaping the ways in which people act or perform in public (e.g., Mitchell 2000). For instance, Greg Dickinson (1997; 2006) analyzes the ways in which architecture in places such as Pasadena, California, effectively lead peoples’ gazes, or sights, within the physical environment. This process impacts the peoples’ knowledge about that site and, in turn, shapes their perceptions about right and wrong actions. In the case of Dickinson's research, cities that had experienced drastic changes in their economic situation due to globalization or economic downturns shaped their
physical environment in order to alter the ways in which people moved through those spaces. Pasadena, for instance, had been a waypoint along Route 66 to Los Angeles, where people stopped for the night and ate dinner. With the advent of Interstate 10, the city’s finances were drastically reduced. The city government initiated a refurbishing of the downtown area so as to draw the “shoppers gaze” and change movement through the city (Dickinson 1997). The point here is that events, whether they are protests or shopping sprees, do not happen in a vacuum. People exist within expansive environments that shape their knowledge and perceptions, which, in turn, influences their actions and performances.

WHAT ARE ACTIVIST EVENTS?

Over the years, I have found that activist events are not a simple matter. Whenever the topic of activist events comes up, most people typically think about protests and demonstrations. Because of the emphasis on phenomena such as protests and public demonstrations in many investigations regarding social movements, many people often associate events with public displays of resistance. Events typically portrayed in the news and entertainment media have been actions that were designed by activists to draw public attention, causing people to become familiar with such displays; they readily associate such events with social movements and activism. Specifically, people associate the concept of activist events with actions designed to draw the attention of mass media and the public at large; this makes sense as such actions are supposed to raise awareness about social issues or problems. The march on Washington led by Martin Luther King Jr., protests at abortion clinics staged by Operation Rescue, and Glen Beck’s Restoring Honor Rally are the kinds of imagery often associated with activist events. However, activist events can be so much more than protests or actions to draw public attention. In many cases, activist events are not aimed at external audiences, but rather at the activists themselves; these events build a sense of community and reinforce commitment to a cause. Some of these events are activities set up by activist organizations so that members have opportunities to interact and build a sense of cohesiveness. Some events are activities set up between different organizations within a network so that people can learn about other activists and the broad reach of the network. Other events allow for activists from different networks to come together and learn from one another. In each of these cases, public and media attention is not the rationale behind the event; community building, outreach to other activists, and building knowledge are the reasons. For instance, activist “tours” of marginalized communities, such as the tours of
“Cancer Alley” described by Pezzullo, play an important role in community building and shaping activists’ knowledge; such events allow for activists to educate one another.

Another good example of events that build community and cohesiveness comes from my own research concerning an anarchist gathering. In 2002 I explored the North American Anarchist Gathering, which was a weekend-long event that did not entail advocacy or conflict, but fostered connections and a sense of community (see Atkinson 2006). The event was organized to be a weekend of interactions, networking, and education for anarchists. The site of the event was made up of several campsites where people slept and lived, while larger canopy shelters were erected to serve as “classrooms.” During the weekend, anarchists could attend workshops in these shelters, which covered a wide variety of topics such as organizing at your place of work, constructive sewing, female self-examinations, Tolstoy and revolution, and bicycle maintenance. The workshops typically entailed instruction and printed materials, with ample time for discussion. The event was not intended to draw the attention of the public; there was no attempt to persuade people to particular visions about war, corporations or capitalism. Instead, the event was about building community. Such community building is what Bowers and Ochs first called solidification, which is necessary for the production of cohesiveness between members. As such, the North American Anarchist Gathering was an important event that helped anarchists to understand that they were part of a larger community that held particular values and beliefs; they were not alone. In the larger context of anarchist activism, such a meeting did in fact play an enormous role in their advocacy against corporate capitalism and peace. The activists that I encountered at the Gathering were busy circulating fliers and contact information, all of which would be integral to future activist endeavors.

Besides this long-term vision of advocacy, however, the Gathering enabled the activists to see anarchist principles in action. Decision-making for the weekend, dealing with problems among the activists, and celebrating was all conducted within a framework of anarchism that had developed over two centuries. On one night, a group of anarchists became intoxicated and engaged in belligerent behavior toward other people attending the event. The rest of the anarchists met in the morning to discuss how to deal with the unruly interlopers. Potential solutions were constrained by the tenets of anarchism that had been utilized to establish Gathering rules at the beginning of the event: consensus, nonviolence, and solidarity. Different anarchists offered various options, but the one that finally attained the consensus of the group was the notion of direct confrontation. Specifically, it was agreed upon by the collective that the group would hold hands while standing in a circle around the offending anarchists’ tents chanting slogans about nonviolence and soli-
So what is an activist event? In the most straightforward of terms, an activist event is an occasion for activists to come together and engage in some coordinated activity. Such events are usually shaped by the strategic function that they serve for the activists. Bowers and Ochs (1971), Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz (2010), DeLuca (1999; 2005), and Windt (1972), among other scholars, have outlined different strategies that can be called activist events; these strategies entail a variety of tactics. Most of these strategies were mentioned in chapter 1 and will be discussed in more detail here. One strategy of agitation is solidification, which is a reference to the community building and cohesiveness that has been noted here. Tactics that fit within the strategy of solidification would be a group coming together to sing protest songs, watch political debates, read poetry, or activist tours to “Cancer Alley” described by Pezzullo (2003; 2007), the Truth Excursions to Zapatista autonomous communities (Atkinson 2009b) and North American Anarchist Gathering (Atkinson 2006) from my own research.

Aside from these activities of solidification, scholars have also noted a variety of strategies of agitation that are typically performed in public spaces to draw attention: petition, promulgation, polarization, nonviolent resistance, escalation and confrontation, diatribe, image events, and more. For the purposes of this chapter, I have collapsed these strategies into three groups: persuasive strategies, provocative strategies, and hacktivism. Such groupings of strategies of agitation emerge from significant overlap and similarity between different strategies. The first grouping of strategies entails the presentation of ideas about a particular issue to the public, with the sole intention of persuasion; this category of strategies includes petition, promulgation, polarization, and image events. Petition is the activist endeavor to draw attention to an issue using established means of persuasion; the activists circulate petitions or approach authority figures and make direct requests of them. Promulgation is a strategy employed by activists to win over widespread social support. According to Bowers, Ochs, Jensen and Schulz (2010, 23): “Among the tactics employed in this strategy are exploitation of mass media, use of technology, use of the Internet, informational picketing, erection of posters, use of bumper stickers, painting messages in prominent locations, distribution of handbills and leaflets, and mass protest meetings.”
The strategy of promulgation is closer to typical conceptualizations of activist events, as tactics entail protests, demonstrations, picket lines, and other such means of drawing support. The strategy of polarization focuses on forcing people to make a choice between the activists who seek to create some kind of change, or supporting the maintenance of the status quo. Essentially, the activists use tactics that will illuminate an issue in ways that will not allow any audience or viewers among the public to stay neutral or ambivalent. For instance, pro-life activists often used language and imagery that equated abortion with murder; this enabled witnesses to pro-life protests or messages were hard-pressed to take a neutral stance. Who could support murder? Such individuals were forced to either align themselves with the activists or brand them as radicals or miscreants. The specific tactics associated with polarization are the same as tactics of promulgation. The difference between the two is the use of language; promulgation seeks to draw attention and acknowledgment from the public, whereas polarization seeks to force a choice. The strategies outlined by Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz are not the only strategies available to activists in their efforts to draw public attention and make persuasive arguments. DeLuca’s (1999; 2005) research addresses the notion that contemporary modes of communication typically distort or change the messages of activists presented through traditional persuasive strategies of protest; his exploration of strategic image events focuses on the ways in which activists could effectively use media exposure to their advantage. DeLuca notes that image events are staged actions that draw media attention. The image events, however, use particular ideographs that are widely accepted across society while simultaneously challenging other ideographs. By exploiting a dominant ideograph, the activists can build identification with audiences; this opens the possibility for considering new visions of the ideograph being challenged. According to DeLuca (2005, 16), an image event “shifts the focus of attention from how such unorthodox rhetoric constitutes the identities of protest groups to how it reconstitutes the identity of the dominant culture by challenging and transforming mainstream society’s key discourses and ideographs.” He goes on to state that these image events “operate in the territory of the system but outside the sense-making rules or the lines on the grid of intelligibility of the system” (20). The use of the dominant ideograph places the message within the “system,” while the challenge places it outside. For instance, DeLuca mentions the images produced by Green Peace that depict antiwhaling activists in the 1980s standing defiantly in rafts with Soviet whaling ships approaching them. Green Peace distributed photographs of the event to various mainstream media outlets and print publications. On the one hand, the picture depicted American individualism and coldhearted Soviets—assumptions that have emerged from a
myriad of American media narratives, such as advertisements (e.g., Marlboro ads) and movies (e.g., Rambo). On the other hand, it depicted the natural environment and industrial progress in altogether different fashions. Dominant assumptions held in American society at that time were that the environment was nothing more than the fuel for industry. Essentially, the image crafted by Green Peace made for dramatic news coverage that tapped into the American myth of rugged individualism, while forcing many people to view the environment outside of the dominant assumptions about industrial progress held at that time.

The provocative strategies entail the presentation of ideas to the public, but messages are not the primary tool for persuasion. Instead, the activists seek to put themselves into situations in which they will be detained, arrested, or even attacked; strategies that fall within this grouping include nonviolent resistance, escalation and confrontation, and diatribe. Under the strategy of nonviolent resistance, activists typically engage in tactics that break laws. Some examples of nonviolent resistance would be civil rights protesters who performed sit-ins at segregated, all-white restaurants (see Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz 2010), or early suffragists in New York State who cast votes when they were prohibited from doing so because of their gender (see Kowal 2000). In each of these cases laws were broken and, just as importantly, many activists were arrested. Essentially, the laws that were broken were laws that the activists had deemed to be unjust, and punishment for breaking such laws demonstrated to the public their problematic or oppressive nature. The strategy of escalation and confrontation is similar, in that the activists engage in activities that violate the law. However, unlike nonviolent resistance, this particular strategy is meant to provoke a violent response from authority figures. Activists use this strategy so that the police, military, or other forms of authority will lash out at the activists, thus demonstrating to the public the repressive nature of those figures. Student protesters during the Vietnam War and anticapitalist anarchists both represent good examples of this strategy. During the Vietnam War, student protesters often engaged in tactics such as throwing urine and feces at police and soldiers, resulting in those authority figures striking back violently at the activists (see Gustainsis and Hahn 1988). At the turn of the twenty-first century, many anarchist protesters engaged in black bloc tactics of vandalism and general mayhem at major mass protests such as the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle of 1999 and the demonstrations against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001. In each case, anarchists initiated clashes with the police, resulting in severe beatings and repressive treatment at the hands of those law enforcement figures (see Klein 2002). The goal of such escalation and confrontation in these cases was to
expose the repressive nature of the state and other power structures in society. Windt (1972) added to these provocative strategies when he discussed the concept of diatribe, which is the use of vulgar or shocking rhetoric by activists who decided to reject conventional means of persuasion. Typically, activists who adopt such a strategy have deemed conventional or established means of communication to be corrupt because they are too closely aligned with power structures and dominant ideological assumptions in society. If those activists were to utilize those means of communication (e.g., mainstream media and news) to relay their message or engage in more traditional modes of protest to attract the attention of producers of such communication (e.g., mass protest, polarization), the message would be altered or co-opted in some way. Therefore, tactics such as nudity or vulgar language or imagery are used to break through all of the other communication, draw attention, and convey the message to the public.

As noted in chapter 2, activism can take place in person or online. Many of the strategies that form activist events noted earlier were conceptualized in terms of in-person activism. That is not to say that promulgation or polarization online is not viable. In fact, many activists have proven adept at finding ways to make those very strategies—including solidification—possible through websites and other forms of interactive media. Each of the examples of activism online noted in chapter 2, such as the concept of culture jamming discussed by Lievrouw (2011), can be classified as one of the strategies described here. In fact, culture jamming stands as a good example of promulgation, as activists use interactive media to draw widespread support for their cause. Take, for instance, the Nike Media Adventure example discussed in reference to culture jamming. In that instance, activists passed around the online conversation between one activist and Nike concerning Nike’s invitation to put messages onto shoes purchased from the company. Passing the online conversation around enabled activists to place it into various websites and news stories and gave audiences a chance to see Nike outside of the well-crafted corporate image. Even the “scene-setting” and “scripting” of activist events described by Gerbuado (2012) constitutes the use of interactive media to design and implement tactics of promulgation or nonviolent resistance.

However, research in recent years has shown strategic online activism that is altogether different from the persuasive and provocative strategies described earlier; such activism has been developed specifically for use in online and virtual environments. Such activist events can be categorized as a strategy called hacktivism. This term has been used by Meikle (2002), Gustavo Cardoso and Pedro Neto (2004) and Earl and Kimport (2011) to describe activist tactics carried out online; indeed, hacktivism is used in reference to those tactics that can only be carried out online: “[Hacktivism is] a computer-based form of
action which has evolved from its technological context to a new strategy of political resistance. The declared aim is the temporary occupation and exploitation of (mainstream) media, in order to draw the attention to existing power and domination relations” (Apprich 2010, 84). Hacktivism, as defined here, is different from those activist strategies that simply use interactive media as tools. In the cases concerning the research of Lievrouw and Gerbuado, the tactics either emerged from strategies that had first been developed and utilized in person by activists (as in the case of Lievrouw) or they were in-person tactics that relied on interactive media to mobilize action (as in the case of Gerbuado). In fact, these tactics could be referred to as e-tactics, a term used by Earl and Kimport to describe tactics that are “partially online.” Such e-tactics can have their roots in offline or in-person activism, or they can entail a blend of online and in-person action. Tactics online that fall within the strategy of hacktivism (i.e., purely conducted online) would be actions such as floodnet and alternative computing. Floodnet (also known as denial-of-service attack) is described by Meikle (2002) who explains how a group called Electronic Disturbance Theatre used activists and software to flood particular websites and forcing them to crash. Essentially, the group had numerous members and allies go to specific websites at specific times and use software that sent six hundred thousand hits per minute to those sites. The idea behind floodnet was that if the sites encountered enough hits at one time, the server for the site would not be able to handle all of the traffic and effectively shut down; people seeking to access the site would be denied service. Electronic Disturbance Theatre’s floodnet tactic was used to crash the websites for the president of Mexico, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the Pentagon in the United States. Similarly, Lievrouw (2011) describes alternative computing as a genre of activist media that was separate from the culture jamming described previously. The genre of alternative computing refers to a range of new media practices “that are united by a shared ethical and political commitment to information access, open systems, and control over one’s personal information and communications” (Lievrouw 2011, 99). Alternative computing fits within the context of hacktivism precisely because it is carried out through computers and interactive media tools, and because it has little or no connection to in-person activism. Essentially, media infrastructures are used to create action that can draw attention to problems in society, or liberate people from social or legal constraints. Sharing of open source software and production of software that “undermine the intellectual property–driven business models of mainstream software and media firms” (100–101) constitute forms of alternative computing. The production and sharing of such materials serve as an event in which activists take part. The nature of this particular genre actually places it outside of the bounds of alternative media (see chapter 7).
Overall, my examination of the research on activist events identifies two primary approaches to the topic: textual analysis and interviews in combination with other qualitative methods. Although it might seem odd to some, participant observation is not included in the list of qualitative methods used to study this research area. The reason for this is the enormous time requirements for ethnographic research discussed in chapter 3. Specifically, ethnographic practices such as participant observation typically take months or even years to collect adequate data (e.g., Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Chambers 2000; Denzin 1997; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Although there are some activist events that can span such lengths of time (e.g., Occupy Wall Street encampments), typical events and actions will only last a few days at most. For this reason, ethnographic narrative excavation and fieldwork is more feasible. In cases when ethnographic practices such as participant observation have been used in the study of actions and events, the researchers have typically been involved in the study of organizations or networks; the observations of actions were the result of their affiliation and work within particular organizations or networks. Take for instance the research conducted by Chavez (2011) described in chapter 4. Chavez was engaged in a focused examination of a coalition between two activist organizations. During the course of her participant observation, she witnessed marches and protests carried out by the different groups. In addition, Petray’s (2011) internal examination of the aboriginal rights network in Australia noted in chapter 5 included her observation of riots that erupted after a police officer killed an aboriginal man. Fenton and Barassi’s (2011) research concerning the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in the same chapter involved their observations of various events staged by the national organization. In each of these cases, the participant observation was grounded within organizations or networks; the researchers observed actions and events carried out by affiliated activists. For this reason, within the context of this book, par-

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participant observation does not play a significant role in the qualitative approaches to the study of this research site. Instead, the qualitative approaches discussed here are for researchers who are approaching activist events and actions with little or no connection to the organizations or networks that coordinate them.

The first approach to the study of activist events focuses on texts that constitute events (e.g., speeches), or texts that describe events; researchers have largely used rhetorical criticism. The use of rhetorical criticism typically explores speeches or activities that are initiated by an activist or a group and explains the role of that event within the framework of a social movement or social change. Essentially, the critic elucidates how to understand the event within a larger context. Another route to exploring activist events has been the use of interviews, typically alongside fieldwork such as observations and ethnographic narrative excavation. The interviews elicit from activists their experiences and narratives concerning the events. In particular, the interviews often allow for the activists to describe tactics, relationships, group dynamics, and performances associated with the event; interviews also give activists the opportunity to assess the impact of the events on their community, a social movement, or society. The accompanying fieldwork stands as supplemental material that bolsters the information gleaned from the interviews; researchers’ observations can effectively fill in any missing material that might have been overlooked (or omitted) by the activists. The following sections provide insight into textual analysis and interviews or fieldwork used in the exploration of activist events.

TEXTS AS A WINDOW INTO ACTIVIST EVENTS

Much of the research concerning activist events has used rhetorical criticism, as well as other forms of textual analysis such as qualitative content analysis. For the most part, rhetorical criticism has been more dominant in the study of activist events, so most of the discussion here focuses on that particular mode of textual analysis; qualitative content analysis, conversely, has been used more often in the study of alternative media. For these reasons, rhetorical criticism will be central in this section, while qualitative content analysis dominates the discussion about textual analysis of alternative media content in chapter 7.

Texts can essentially constitute a view, or window, into an activist event for one of three reasons: the text emerged from the activist event, the text was the activist event, or the text describes the activist event. Don Waisanen’s (2013) rhetorical criticism provides an example of examining a text that emerged from an activist event; it focuses on texts that were produced by the Otpor activist organization of the Balkans. His research explores the rhetorical strategies that emerged from student protests against repressive state actions instituted by Slobodan Milosević; essentially, the protests against the forces of Milosević
gave rise to specific recursive rhetorical strategies by Otpor activists. Regarding texts that represent the activist event, Josue Cisneros’s (2012) research concerning Reies Tijerina’s speech about the “land grant question” stands as the examination of an activist event. The speech was delivered to a national audience following a major militant action conducted by an activist organization with which he was affiliated. Jason Peterson’s (2009) qualitative content analysis provides an example of a text describing an activist event; it explores mainstream media descriptions of the protests by African American athletes at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, as they raised their fists in defiance during the medal ceremony. After winning medals in the Olympic games, Tommie Smith and John Carlos took to the ceremonial podiums in Mexico City and put their gloved fists into the air as an act of protest concerning the treatment of African Americans in the United States during that time. Major newspapers across the United States, as well as international newspapers around the globe, provided extensive coverage of the event. All three research projects are covered in this section; the point here is to simply establish that the texts can provide some insight into activist events.

Activist events can be examined through texts in one of two ways: rhetorical criticism and qualitative content analysis. Rhetorical criticism differs from qualitative content analysis; the former is used to explain how a text should be understood within a larger context, whereas the latter is used to identify latent meanings that are embedded in the text. Rhetorical criticism, unlike qualitative content analysis, is not nearly as orderly. Instead of engaging in a systematic identification of relevant texts, researchers rely on their own excitement and interest to identify texts of importance (Foss 2004); essentially, the researchers’ interests lead them to texts for analysis. The research interests concerning activism and social movements will often lead to texts associated with activist events. This is not to say that researchers’ interests alone dictate that the text is worthy of analysis; researchers must build the case that the text is truly important. Once researchers have identified the text that they will examine, they must set about proving that the text is tied to an event in some way and then demonstrate its importance within a larger context (e.g., social movement, society). Qualitative content analysis, conversely is much more systematic in its approach to the study of texts. The researchers’ interests may lead to a set of texts, but they must select representative texts for analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Schreier 2012); that is to say, researchers must find a systematic way to identify texts for analysis. For instance, researchers could randomly select ten listserv e-mails from each month during a period of study or interview activists about texts that they find to be most relevant and then focus on those texts. Such differences between the two methods are not confined to the selection of texts for analysis but are characteristic of both approaches overall.
In rhetorical criticism researchers engage in a close reading looking for the units of analysis and interpreting them for an audience so that they can understand the role of the text within larger contexts (Foss 2004; Brock, Scott, and Chesbero 1990). Conversely, in qualitative content analysis, researchers (or coders) search through the text looking for the units of analysis (whether inductive or deductive) in an effort to uncover latent meanings and patterns of meanings within the texts.

Research by Cisneros (2012), Waisanen (2013), and Peterson (2009) all serve as good examples of research wherein activist events were studied via texts. Cisneros examines a speech given by the Chicano activist Reies Lopez Tijerina in November 1967, who was affiliated with Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants); the group sought to press the US government into returning land taken from Mexican people in the 1800s. The speech given by Tijerina followed a raid on a US federal courthouse in New Mexico by radical activists affiliated with Alianza. Cisneros demonstrates how the “Land Grant Question” speech helped to shape identity and agency of Chicano activists following the raid. Specifically, the use of metaphors within the speech aided in the construction of a migratory identity that allowed Chicano activists who attended to this message to effectively negotiate the binaries of “sameness” (that is, similarities with the dominant white majority) and “difference” that existed in late 1960s America. Waisanen examined the rhetorical strategies of the Otpor group following the repressive crackdown of President Milosević in Serbia during the late 1990s. Students from four universities across the Balkans established the organization as a response to oppressive practices by the state. Otpor set about producing a variety of different texts that aimed to undermine Milosević and topple him from power; activists produced radio broadcasts, commercials, posters, fliers, and many other forms of media to attack the president. Overall, Waisanen’s examination of different texts produced by Otpor reveals the use of “glocal recursions” as a rhetorical strategy, in which global strategies of resistance were used for local endeavors; in the case of Otpor, the group used global communication technologies to reach local audiences. Finally, Peterson studied news coverage of the protests by African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City; specifically, he looked at the ways in which US and international newspapers depicted the action taken by the two athletes, in which they stood on ceremonial podiums with black power fists in the air. The findings of the textual analysis demonstrates that the newspapers essentially supported the racist climate of the late 1960s by omitting serious coverage of the action or the rationale of the athletes.

A review of these rhetorical critiques demonstrates two important aspects of this type of inquiry: selection of texts and method of critique. Each of these
rhetorical critiques go about the selection of texts in different ways. The Cisneros study involves the examination of a single text: the “Land Grant Question” speech presented by Tijerina in 1967. But why did Cisneros select this particular speech? Tijerina was an exceptional orator and made several speeches to audiences during the time of the Alianza protests. One could argue that the critique should have covered all of the speeches made by this activist over the years, each constituting a different event. However, Cisneros noted that this speech was particularly important as it was given right after the courthouse raid: “Alianza was most (in)famous for their 1967 armed takeover of the federal courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, resulting in a shoot-out with police and the federal hunt and arrest of the Aliancistas. . . . It reached front pages and TV screens across the country, catapulting the Alianza’s regional land-grant movement onto the national stage” (Cisneros 2012, 562). This information is integral, as Cisneros essentially sets the “Land Grant Question” speech apart from all other speeches given by this particular activist during this time. Tijerina’s speech was perhaps the most important speech that he ever presented, as the audience was actually nationwide; the speech had the potential to truly transform identity and agency. This particular speech was an important event in Chicano activism that strategically functioned to call for change and advocate for particular issues. The text did not only serve as a window into a particular event, but was actually the event itself.

Waisanen, conversely, engaged in a thorough examination and critique of a wide-ranging body of materials that were produced by Otpor, or that reported on Otpor media events that took place between 2000 and 2011. The decision to pursue multiple texts was based primarily on the fact that there was not one solitary event that encapsulated the resistance to President Milosević; nor was there one event representative of all of the strategies used to combine global technologies and local concerns. Waisanen needed a broader body of texts to critique; this was accomplished through the use of LexisNexis: “A LexisNexis search of the term ‘Otpor’ was made with major world publications and broadcast transcripts between 2000 and 2011, and a textual snowball sample of artifacts were gathered from these 477 sources’ allusions and references. Focusing on newspapers, books, films, YouTube videos and other in-depth searches of Otpor’s texts, including posters, commercials, and training manuals, I constructed a picture of [their] communication arising from frequent and distinctive patterns in the data” (Waisanen 2013, 160). The search enabled Waisanen to collect an enormous number of texts that were either produced by Otpor across a variety of different media or news reports about Otpor-mediated actions. McGee (1990) has demonstrated that many modern societies and cultures exist in a diffused manner; the broken and fragmented texts that circulate throughout these societies are the context against which meaning and
ideologies develop. Overall, the texts collected by Waisanen were dispersed fragments that, when brought together, provide a cultural context of resistance within Serbia. These texts provided him with ample opportunity to examine numerous media events conducted by the organization; he was able to view Otpor-orchestrated events over the course of an entire decade.

In reference to the method for critique, both researchers drew heavily from the concepts of ideograph and ideology (e.g., McGee 1975; 1990), as well as the notion of constitutive rhetoric (Charland 1987; White 1985). These concepts deeply influenced the researchers’ close readings, as they served as a theoretical lens through which the different texts were examined and interpreted. In Cisneros’s research, the primary units of analysis were metaphors used throughout the “Land Grant Question” speech. The metaphors were the site in which Tijerina regularly evoked dichotomous ideologies about citizen and foreigner, insider and outsider; such metaphors, as well as the use of ideology, potentially shaped the identity and agency of activists nationwide. Waisanen, on the other hand, took note of four particular units of analysis as he engaged in a close reading of the multitude of Otpor texts:

This approach has precedent in communication studies, following McGee’s (1990) argument that critics can construct a text and context out of the diffuse elements appearing in fragmented contemporary cultures. . . . I analyze four aspects of the glocal recursion in Otpor’s activities, including the technological conditions under which movement activists built recursive actions, the use of structured spontaneity as a form of recursive organization and appeal, the indigenous, recursive adaptations inviting audiences to revolt, and the dialectical reappropriations recursively drawn between students and the regime. (Waisanen 2013, 160)

As Cisneros and Waisanen identified each of the units of analysis in the different texts, they were examined through a theoretical lens established through key concepts (e.g., ideology, constitutive rhetoric); these lenses aided both of the researchers in interpreting the different activist events. The close readings in which they engaged reveal the connections between identity and agency, as well as global technologies and local concerns. In their published essays, they lay out their interpretations of these texts for audiences; the researchers essentially guide the audience to a specific knowledge about how to read and understand these texts.

Peterson’s research concerning the black power protests of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics uses qualitative content analysis, rather than rhetorical criticism. Peterson examined different newspaper articles written during the time of the Olympic games in Mexico City. In order to conduct his research, he had to first identify texts that would provide a glimpse into the
event, as well as proper insight into the ways in which the event was covered by mainstream news media. Peterson drew his sample of texts in the following way: “A sample of news accounts, columns, and opinions was drawn from 15 US and world newspapers published between October 17, 1968, the first day the protest was reported, and October 29, 1968, when coverage of the last day of the Olympic Games ended. Because of the different political and racial contexts throughout the United States, a representative sample of newspapers in major markets throughout the country seemed appropriate” (Peterson 2009, 101). To ensure a representative sample, he selected three newspapers published in each of the major regions in the United States: East, West, South and Midwest. In addition, he also selected three international newspapers that covered the Olympics published in Australia, Canada, and England. This approach to identifying an event, as well as texts as windows into that event, holds similarities to the two previous examples. Peterson’s research overall is similar to that of Cisneros, as he selected a singular event that was important to activists and nonactivists across the United States within a particular moment in time; the protest by the two Olympians was an enormous moment in the black power movement of the 1960s. However, rather than simply looking at the event itself, recorded by television and photographs, he chose to look at wide-ranging portrayals of the event in news media across the United States and around the world. Similar to Waisanen, Peterson sought to bring texts as fragments together so as to gain insight into cultural reactions to the protests in Mexico City. With the representative texts selected, Peterson then searched through the texts looking for descriptions of the protest by sportswriters. Essentially, he was engaged in an inductive form of qualitative content analysis in which narrative components were recorded in each example; as discussions about the protests were identified in the text, Peterson took note of the ways in which the two characters and their actions were portrayed. This enabled him to demonstrate that there were significant biases across the twelve US papers that hid from the audiences the social background associated with Smith and Carlos’s protest.

Textual analysis has proven to be an important method for the examination of activist events. Researchers can interpret events by constructing conceptual lenses and using them to read through texts that are associated with an event; such a method gives rise to an interpretation of the event within a larger context. In addition, researchers can also engage in a qualitative content analysis to show the content and meanings that are embedded within particular texts that are tied to activist events. In either case, the texts provide a small window for viewing and understanding activist events. However, as the events have already taken place, this approach is somewhat limited. Perceptions and experiences of people who took part in the event are not really represented in this approach, and thus there is a danger that in many cases much may be left out.
INTERVIEWS TO STUDY ACTIVIST EVENTS

The other way in which activist events are typically explored is through the use of interviews along with additional supplemental qualitative methods. Specifically, researchers usually employ interviews so as to provide activists with ample opportunity to weave narratives about events and provide rich descriptions of experiences and perceptions concerning such events. Alongside the interviews, many researchers also rely on fieldwork that involves observations of activist events; the use of this additional method can provide additional data, corroborate activists’ information, or reveal additional elements of events of which activists are unaware or unwilling to discuss. In addition, researchers can also use textual analysis (typically qualitative content analysis) in order to supplement the interviews that they conduct with activists. Ultimately, these methods enable researchers to acquire knowledge about the actions, the setting, and the different characters involved; the more methods researchers use, the more information they can acquire.

Research by Daniel Lieberfeld (2009), Jingfang Liu (2011), and Uta Papen (2012), as well as my own work (Atkinson 2009b), provides good examples of how to use interviews alongside additional methods in the study of activist events. In my research, I explored an activist “Truth Excursion” to Chiapas, Mexico, in which activists from the United States and Europe had the opportunity to meet Zapatista rebels in their autonomous communities. In particular, I traveled with activists and looked at the ways in which the US and European activists made sense of the resistance performed by the Zapatista rebels; the US and European activists were familiar with forms of resistance such as boycotts and petitions, whereas the Zapatistas regularly engaged in more militant forms of resistance. Ultimately, I found that the US and European activists relied heavily on their more peaceful forms of resistance to make sense of what they observed and learned in Chiapas; their own experiences with resistance in protests and actions in their homelands blocked out the

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**Recap 6-2. Textual Analysis as an Approach to the Study of Activist Events**

- Uses texts to provide insight into events because:
  - Texts emerged from event,
  - Texts were the event, or
  - Texts describe the event.
- Relies on either qualitative content analysis or rhetorical criticism:
  - Rhetorical criticism interprets units of analysis to explain how texts should be understood within particular contexts.
  - Qualitative content analysis allows for the identification of latent meanings and demonstrates patterns within texts.
more militant forms of resistance that they witnessed in the autonomous communities. Lieberfeld examined activities staged by an Israeli antiwar group called Four Mothers—Leaving Lebanon in Peace. The group opposed Israeli military action in Southern Lebanon in the 1990s and utilized a variety of media strategies to draw attention to their opposition to any military operations. The group was initially started by the mothers of active duty soldiers in the Israeli military, but quickly grew to become much more diverse (e.g., male, international, Palestinian). Lieberfeld focused on the media strategies used by the group, as well as the problems those events posed to their efforts. Specifically, his interviews with members of the group reveal that they regularly wrote letters to newspapers and met with members of the Israeli parliament; essentially, they engaged in the strategy petition. This petition on the part of Four Mothers emphasized a maternal identity of the activists that humanized them and made a stronger emotional appeal for their cause. One significant drawback, however, was that the activists often had to counter their own message with information and messages from male military experts, so that their petition could not be outright dismissed as overly emotional or sentimental. Liu explored Internet-based collective actions conducted by environmental groups in China. Essentially, interviews with a variety of activists affiliated with different environmental groups show eighteen instances of collective actions that used the Internet in some way; some actions were fully online, while others were only partially online. Online events included efforts to protect the Beijing Zoo (using online petitions and letter-writing campaigns) and a campaign to save the Tibetan antelope (using pop-up ads and an online benefit auction). Partially online efforts included environmental activities around Beijing (organized through the Internet) and a campaign to limit the use of air conditioners (using a website to circulate information to activists in various locations). Papen examined the efforts of activists to alter the cityscape of the Prenzlauer Berg district in Berlin, Germany, through the use of graffiti and street art; the city had been in a state of neglect since reunification of Germany in 1990. Through a combination of interviews and fieldwork, Papen noted that activists were able to effectively alter the “linguistic landscape” of the city by strategically placing graffiti and political street art throughout the physical environment. As such, the neglected exteriors took on a new façade that made the environment look more interesting and in effect drew in onlookers from outside of the city. By drawing in outsiders, the activists effectively altered the pathways and activities within the once-neglected site.

Papen’s research, like my research, uses a combination of interviews with fieldwork. In my research, the ethnographic narrative excavation involved interviews with six activists who were taking part in the Truth Excursion, as well as observations of contact between those activists and the leadership of
four Zapatista communities in Chiapas (see chapter 3 for details on the method of ethnographic narrative excavation, which can be used to explore nonroutine public events). The interview component of the excavation involved one-on-one postmodern interviews with each of the six activists at the beginning of the trip, as well as a focus group with all of the activists at the end prior to the group’s dispersal. The one-on-one interviews at the beginning of the excursion enabled activists to discuss their backgrounds, how they learned about the Truth Excursions, and what they hoped to discover by taking part in the excursion. The follow-up focus group at the end of the excursion was postmodern in design as well; the questions enabled the activists to weave conceptual narratives about what they learned from the overall trip, as well as their encounters with Zapatistas in the various communities in Chiapas. In addition to these interviews, I observed the Zapatista communities and studied the oral histories presented to the activist group by Zapatista authorities within those communities: “As our small group accessed the Zapatista communities we met the general assembly, the authoritative body of each community, and heard their testimonials about oppression and resistance within their communities. In each community, I asked the general assembly if I could tape record their narrative and take notes” (Atkinson 2009b, 143). My observations enabled me to construct a clear picture of the Zapatista communities and Zapatista resistance that was presented to the activists from Europe and the United States; I was able to compare the presentations of the Zapatistas to the activists’ recollections and descriptions of those presentations.

Papen also used multiple methods in her research. She interviewed twenty-five activists in Prenzlauer Berg. These interviews were often spontaneous and “carried out on the spot” (Papen 2012, 61); that is, she would meet with activists as she moved through the city examining the art painted upon buildings. These on-the-spot interviews enabled her to elicit information from activists about their graffiti and street art; she asked the activists about the meanings behind their work, as well as the use of “typescript, colour and other visual aspects of signs as well as their materiality” (ibid.). In addition to the interviews, Papen also engaged in fieldwork in which she traveled about the city in search of graffiti and street art; she selected streets that would “reflect the diversity of the area the study was located in” (ibid.). With that in mind, she noted: “sampling, thus, was theoretically driven but pragmatically constrained (i.e., limited to what was feasible to survey in the time given for this research)” (ibid.). As Papen moved through the city she photographed examples of the activists’ art and took detailed notes concerning the environment in which those examples were found; she would note nearby landmarks, modes of transportation through any spaces (e.g., roads, trains), signs and any other forms of writing
posted around any art, and the nature of spaces through which she traversed (e.g., commercial spaces, public spaces). In addition to these photographs, Papen also took photographs of the buildings she was studying. All of these photographs provided a visual record that could be connected to the responses provided by the activists and demonstrate the interconnected nature of language and images in Prenzlauer Berg. Overall, the fieldwork provided information concerning both the linguistic and image elements contributed to the cityscape by activists around the city, while the interviews enabled the activists to explain meanings and modes of production associated with the different forms of graffiti art observed throughout the city.

Liu’s and Lieberfeld’s research constitute good examples of interviews supplemented by textual analysis in order to fully explore activist events. In her research concerning Internet-based collective actions in China, Liu interviewed twenty-five activists from across nineteen different environmental groups; the activists were “key personnel . . . closely involved in the Internet-based environmental activities in which a particular [environmental non-government agency] was involved” (Liu 2011, 147). The questions focused on the daily web activities, as well as how the groups use the Internet in major collective actions. The information from these interviews provided insight about the groups, their actions on-and offline, and overall Internet use within and between the different groups. In addition to the interview data, however, Liu also collected textual data from websites and archives associated with the different environmental groups. The textual analysis was deductive in nature, as she developed a framework of different website types based on Bob’s (2005) notion of structural dimensions for nongovernment agencies (NGOs); this theoretical lens was the basis for three important categories applied to the different websites and archives for analysis: type of activity, intended audience, and frequency of involvement by activists. In order to conduct the analysis, Liu collected all of the web-based materials that were produced by the nineteen groups and then coded each according to those structural dimensions. This required her to note the type of activity that the text represented (e.g., web forum, newsletter, petition), the intended audience for each text (e.g., urban, rural, particular age group), and the frequency of involvement in the web-based text by activists. Liu coded the different web-based texts in a close reading; she poured over the different texts applying the categories based on Bob’s research. As elements of the texts were identified as type of activity or intended audience, that element was classified. Overall, the textual analysis provided a detailed description of the online collective actions performed by the different activist groups, while the interviews revealed the strategies used by activists in engaging in those actions. Lieberfeld’s research similarly used textual analysis. In his research concerning
the Four Mothers protests against the Israeli military actions in Lebanon, Lieberfeld interviewed a wide variety of different people to show and help to understand the actions undertaken by this particular group. In addition to interviewing activists affiliated with the organization, he also interviewed newspaper editors and reporters; activist interviews elicited information about protest strategies, while the interviews with people in the media allowed for insight into the processes of media coverage. The interviews with members of the media were particularly interesting as they revealed what drew those people to covering the Four Mothers protests, as well as the political and social environment surrounding the military actions and protests in the 1990s. In addition to the interviews, Lieberfeld also included inductive textual analysis of news stories from that period concerning both the military action and the Four Mothers protests. The inductive analysis was conducted through a close reading in which Lieberfeld examined mainstream news stories about the activist group and their actions. The reading process entailed noting the ways in which those actions were described and building an overarching picture of the media responses to the group; categories for media responses developed as the researcher conducted the reading. Ultimately, data from this content analysis helped to build on the information gleaned from the editors and reporters through the interviews.

Overall, this particular approach to the study of activist events entails interviews supplemented by different qualitative methods: fieldwork or textual analysis. This is considerably different from the “texts as windows into activist events” approach described previously. Rather than relying on a single method to explore the research site, many researchers talk directly to the activists involved and supplement any emergent information with an additional method that gives insight into the actual event. Essentially, the interviews elicit perceptions and experiences, while the additional methods allow for an unbiased view of the event. The use of additional methods is particularly important as memories and perceptions about events can be drastically skewed, given that those events can often be volatile. The data that emerges from the use of multiple qualitative methods provides a clear, distinct picture of the activist event and the role of the activists involved.

Recap 6-3. Interviews and Supplemental Methods to Explore Activist Events
- Interviews aid in eliciting activists’ insight and perceptions into events.
- Supplemental methods (e.g., qualitative content analysis, participant observation) provide unbiased information about events.
SUMMARY

This chapter defines the concept of activist events which is broader than simply protests or mobilizations of resources. Events can very well be those types of actions, as in the case of Waisanen's study of Otpor or Lieberfeld's examination of the Four Mothers. However, events can also be activities that bring activists together or shape their identities, as in the case of my research concerning the Truth Excursions or Cisneros's critique of the “Land Grant Question” speech. Whatever the shape or form, events constitute strategies that are used in order to fulfill particular activist goals.

The chapter also presents two approaches to the study of activist events demonstrated through communication and media literature. On the one hand, many researchers have used textual analysis in order to describe an event; rhetorical criticism has been the dominant form of textual analysis used in this approach, although qualitative content analysis is appropriate for such endeavors. In addition, many researchers interview activists about the events in which they have taken part; these interviews are often supplemented with textual analysis or fieldwork. Both of these approaches are valid and useful to researchers, although it can be argued that the latter provides more insight into activist events than the former. It is ultimately up to the researchers to make decisions regarding their approaches to the activist event, and it is their responsibility to carry out their research as thoroughly as possible.