

Social Movement to Address Climate Change

LOCAL STEPS FOR GLOBAL ACTION

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P R E S S**

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CHAPTER 9

STEP IT UP AND IMAGE POLITICS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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We created a visual message in the form of a family friendly carbon-offsetting “Marching Forest.” It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. We hope our forest serves to stir people, no matter how old or what language they speak...We need all voices...When people see that others are putting themselves on the line about this issue, it helps give them courage to join in. The more people we can reach, the easier the rest of the work will be...We want the whole world to see that we citizens in the U.S. mean business about global warming...Let’s take to the streets! If we all stayed in our homes who would know?

—Linda Stein

“The Marching Forest of Shoreline Takes it to the Streets”

A picture is worth a thousand words. This popular cliché points to the widely held notion that images are more valuable and more powerful

communicators than words alone. The growth of predominately visual forms of mediated communication—television, YouTube, interactive Web sites—only serves to reinforce our collective preference for pictures over words.

The power of visuals is similarly demonstrated in the above quote from the Marching Forest of Shoreline's Step It Up 2007 (SIU) action report (Stein 2007), which described how the Marching Forest sought to create a visual message. The group's report suggested that public, visual actions can help build movements by telling others about concern for global warming and giving new people "the courage to join in." The action report indicated a clear attempt to use visual images as a movement-building strategy; the effectiveness of the Marching Forest, however, is unclear and its effect uncertain.

In this chapter, we examine how the power of images aids movement building by examining multiple SIU actions held in the Pacific Northwest as *image events*, spectacles designed to gain media attention and widely disseminate visual messages as a means of building a social movement (Johnson 2007; DeLuca 1999). We offer a detailed account of seven distinct events while also making an argument about the possibilities and challenges of staging image events as a movement-building strategy in the twenty-first century. This chapter provides readers insight into the dynamics of Pacific Northwest SIU actions, the concepts of image events and the public screen, and a method for evaluating the usefulness of image events for building future movements.

We begin by introducing the concept of the image event. Research helps us understand how and why staged image events function as effective strategies for movement building. With this background, we describe seven SIU actions in the Pacific Northwest, where we had researcher participants. Then we discuss how these actions do and do not function as image events. This spectrum of examples provides lessons on the challenges and possibilities of using image events in movement building. In the conclusion, we offer practical suggestions for movement organizers who may want to use image events to build future movements.

THE THEORY BEHIND IMAGE EVENTS

At a national level, one of SIU's core objectives was to invite individuals and local groups to gather at iconic places and take pictures of everyone gathered with a banner reading, "Step It Up, Congress: Cut Carbon 80% by 2050." This objective suggests the possibility that SIU actions could be usefully viewed as *image events*.

Creating image events has been an effective tactic for environmental and social-movement groups aiming to challenge conventional thought about social issues and practices. For example, environmental-justice group Allegany County Non-violent Action Group (ACNag) had six elderly people bundled up in lawn chairs and handcuffed to a chain traversing a bridge to protest building a nuclear reactor in their town (DeLuca 1999). Through photojournalistic press coverage, this tactic drew attention to its movement by highlighting the identities of the participants involved (elderly citizens) and the local scene of which they were a part (the bridge and river). The tactic was successful because the act of being handcuffed to the bridge itself had symbolic significance—the image of elderly citizens on a bridge was a persuasive, jarring reminder of what was at stake when building a nuclear facility. The same impulse helps explain why radical environmental groups elect to chain people to trees and bury themselves in roads to prohibit logging and drive boats between whales and whalers' harpoons to protest whale-hunting. These events create powerful images that help communicate a movement's message.

Part of the reason image events are an effective tactic in movement building is that we live in an era when much of public discussion is televised, appearing in the form of sound-bytes and pictures. Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peebles (2002) have referred to this recent change as the *public screen*. Traditionally, the bulk of political discussion occurred between individuals in public spaces like coffee shops or those provided by print journalism. Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1991) famously called these spaces the *public sphere*, referring to participation in the politics surrounding

important social concerns rather than the business sector. The public sphere thus highlights conversation as a site where rational participants meet to develop consensus on a particular issue. To achieve political change in an era of public-sphere discussion, a social movement would need to engage publics in conversation about a particular issue, particularly appealing to norms of rationality and consensus that characterize the public sphere.

In contrast, the contemporary public screen foregrounds the function of swift dissemination, dissent, multimedia, and publicity. Within such a system, social movements benefit from creating images that shock people and therefore attract media attention. During the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, for example, print and television news coverage significantly increased when anarchists used violent tactics (DeLuca and Peoples 2002). In this way, violence effectively propelled the protests (violent and nonviolent alike) onto the public screen.

Together, the concepts of the image event and the public screen suggest why creating a spectacle might be a successful tactic for environmental movement building. As the examples above demonstrate, environmental groups have successfully used image events to attract media attention and present their message to a wide audience. Nonetheless, critics have questioned whether image events can be used to maintain a sustained, coherent movement. In the next section, we introduce seven SIU actions held in the Pacific Northwest, before considering the extent to which these actions function as image events.

Step It Up, Pacific Northwest

On the days following April 14, 2007, event organizers and participants posted photographs and reports from twenty-four events held in Washington, fifteen held in Oregon, and two held in Idaho on the SIU Web site. These images were posted as action reports and on the SIU home page. National organizers made prints of the photographs for the local organizers to give to their U.S. senators and representatives to demonstrate the local demand for political action on climate crisis.

In addition to reports by local organizers and participants, the research team had participant-observers at six actions in Washington and one in

Idaho. These events ranged in location from northwestern Washington to Northwestern Idaho.

Deception Pass State Park: A nature walk with seven participants highlighted the potential impact of climate change on the waterfront state park on Whidbey Island. Two park rangers sought to create a “dialogue” between participants rather than focus on the national SIU campaign.

Seattle’s Golden Gardens: A neighborhood group, Sustainable Ballard, staged a morning event at the beach at Golden Gardens Park. Participants stood in a line paralleling the shore about twenty-five feet from the water, holding nine-foot-tall bamboo poles with yellow caution tape tied to the tops, blue ribbon connecting the poles about three feet up, and pink plastic tape at the bottoms. Each ribbon represented ocean levels that have changed or are forecasted to change due to global warming.

Downtown Seattle: People gathered in local neighborhoods to travel together to join in a rally, march, and solutions fair. For example, the Marching Forest of Shoreline met at a northern Seattle grocery store dressed as forest creatures and rode a bus downtown. Simultaneously, students rallied at Antioch University and the University of Washington before traveling to the central rally to kick off the march. The march filled several blocks with an estimated two thousand participants shouting chants, waving posters, and walking in the rain. At the end of the march, people gathered at a waterfront park to listen to speeches from political, religious, youth, and labor leaders, and to learn about climate-change solutions from environmental organizations and businesses.

Cheney: Despite pouring rain, residents from Cheney and Spokane joined members of activist organizations from Eastern Washington University for a day of climate action. Though small by comparison to other sites in Washington, with approximately fifteen participants, the event received coverage from several local press outlets.

Spokane, Canada Island, in Riverfront State Park: Members of local environmental groups, specifically the Lands Council, which organized the event, gathered on Canada Island in Riverfront State Park. The event was dramatic, given the natural space within which it occurred, a small island near downtown surrounded by the Spokane River with its

dramatic waterfalls. Participants formed a human banner spanning one of the island's bridges, wearing shirts that collectively read, "Step It Up, Congress: Cut Carbon 80% by 2050." After taking several pictures for press releases, the event quickly changed as participants removed these shirts and gathered for a series of speeches.

Moscow, Idaho: About seventy people gathered at East City Park for the Step It Up Moscow bike parade. After riding around the edge of town, the parade made its way up Main Street, where an additional seventy or so people waited in the outdoor plaza under the "Step It Up, Congress!" banner. Participants gathered under the banner, holding signs, children, dogs, and each other to take photos for a press release. This event had a dual-city association. Moscow is the home of the University of Idaho and is located seven miles east of Pullman, Washington, the primary campus of Washington State University. Local residents refer to this entire area as the "inland Northwest," and it is common for people to live and work across the state line. Moscow is more activist-oriented than Pullman, which is likely why SIU happened in Moscow rather than Pullman.

We observed these actions, conducted interviews with participants, transcribed and analyzed speeches, and took pictures. We supplemented these field materials with an analysis of press coverage of events and action reports submitted by organizers.

Our central question is, what do these actions tell us about the use of image events in movement building? To answer this question, we begin by analyzing how the events we observed functioned (and did not function) as image events. Our analysis provides insight into what image events are, how they function within this national global-warming action, and how they relate to other types of movement discourse, such as speeches. In the section following our analysis, we draw upon this description to address the possibilities for and the challenges of using image events for movement building.

SIU Actions as Image Events

As participants in the downtown Seattle action marched to a waterfront park for the solutions fair, they passed a polar bear swimming in Puget

Sound, waving a sign that read, "Humans your habitat is in danger too!" (The other side read: "Step It Up, Congress! 80% reduction by 2050."). A local environmental think-tank president exclaimed, "Now, that's a great idea," while parents pointed out the polar bear to their kids.

The swimming polar bear was actually Randolph Sill, a local artist decked out in a dry scuba suit underneath the fuzzy polar bear costume. According to his press release, he donned the costume to "bring attention to global warming and encourage Congress to 'Step it Up'" (Sill 2007). His action functioned as an image event on several levels. First, for the participants walking by, his presence was jolting and unexpected. The image of a bear in the water caught attention, leading people to then read the sign that shifted the typical human-nature relationship. Here an animal was using human terms (e.g., *habitat*) to provide advice. Moreover, participants and news media alike photographed the bear, making the performance a central image that represented the larger SIU events in Seattle in newspapers, blogs, television, and Flickr (a photo-sharing site). The bear was unexpected, cute, and quirky, and the message clearly stated the point in case people had missed it.

The polar bear was not the only image event in the downtown Seattle area. Following the nature theme, the Marching Forest of Shoreline comprised members of the Shoreline neighborhood in northern Seattle who dressed as trees, squirrels, the sun, and other forest-themed entities. The leader instructed the Marching Forest to stay together in order to be a "presence." As indicated in the introduction, the Marching Forest was designed to send a visual message about climate change. In particular, the organizer highlighted that the action "celebrated the benefits of urban trees" (Stein 2007). In interviews with researchers, several Seattle participants reported seeing people dressed as forest creatures, but none of the major news media focused on the Marching Forest as representative of the SIU action. Although the forest did not receive press attention during the rally, the local Shoreline newspaper ran photos of the group making the costumes at the organizer's home in preparation for the event.

The Marching Forest was an attempt to create an image event. It was an attempt at "voice," to quote Linda Stein, through the visual of a

marching forest (2007). Unfortunately, the message was less developed than the ornate costumes worn by marchers. Fellow marchers recounted observing people dressed in forest costumes, but did not attribute a broader message or specific meaning to this action other than attracting attention to the issue of global warming.

The Marching Forest participated in the larger Seattle march that filled several blocks: people waving signs, groups occasionally chanting, all the while plodding forward in the rain. A group of children led the march, holding a banner. The march itself created a visual display of people calling for change on climate-change policy, and both news media and participants photographed the march. The *Seattle Times*, which ran an aerial photograph of the march, characterized the march as "placid" in the headline for the accompanying story (Lacitis 2007). As an image, this group seemed approachable and accepting, a family group, not anything dangerous (especially compared to the 1999 WTO protests that shut down Seattle). One researcher's observations of the organizing meetings indicated that Seattle organizers desired positive messages—including climate solutions, involving children, and building for the future—and new people to engage the issues. But *placid* was probably not the intended message, given the overtly political nature of the event and the urgent demands for legislative and personal action to stem climate change.

Once the Seattle marchers passed the polar bear and arrived at the march's endpoint, an urban waterfront park, people were invited to collect promotional material from local organizations and businesses and listen to speeches from local politicians, community leaders, and a guest representing the Marshall Islands. The solutions fair offered more traditional forms of discourse, particularly the information booths and the eleven speeches given by the MC and presenters, which lasted almost an hour.

Notably, the MC started his first speech by referencing an image event:

We have read a lot of scary news in the newspapers lately about what is going on with global warming. But that's not really news, is it? We've been hearing the science for the better part of

twenty years. That's not the news. The news is not that the water is rising. The news is that this morning a tsunami, a tidal wave engulfed lower Manhattan. It was a sea of people wearing blue shirts. A sea of people who came out to a Step It Up event just like this one. And they formed a line in lower Manhattan to where the water would come to if the sea level rose ten feet, including very near the site of the World Trade Center. A sea of people is rising faster than the sea level is rising. And you are part of that sea.

This rhetorical use of an image event contrasted with the heavy reliance on spoken and, to a lesser extent, written discourse at the solutions fair. The remaining speeches made several allusions to the rising tide of support and tsunami of people, but much of their content was focused on envisioning Seattle as a leader in efforts to stem climate change, particularly by creating new technology and innovating legislative solutions.

Earlier that day, a rising-tide event took place at Golden Gardens, a waterfront park in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood. The action plan posted on the SIU Seattle Web site stated:

30 people 10' apart (spread out in a line 300' long at high tide mark along the beach just north of the bulkhead entrance to Shilshole marina boat moorage) will hold 30 poles 20' in height, with flagging indicating what a water level 5 or more feet higher would look like, just to help people visualize what global warming COULD mean.

A neighborhood group called Sustainable Ballard organized the event. While about forty people, primarily from Sustainable Ballard, turned out to participate in the event, the cool early morning at the beach park may have discouraged spectators. Only a handful of people walked by during the event and, of those, only two or three asked about it. Although event participants identified another photographer as working for *Real Change*, the city's homeless newspaper, images of the event did not appear in *Real Change* or any other media.

The event, however, was organized specifically to be visual. One organizer told the group during an informal speech,

We're here because I get tired of marching and listening to speeches. I thought it would be interesting to do a visual. It's too bad we weren't able to be later in the day—but we were preempted by the events downtown—because I think more people would have seen it. I really am just delighted that all of you showed up. I'm particularly delighted that the little ones came, because we are doing this for you.

Several months after the event, one of the event organizers told a researcher, "My original goal was to get some good visuals for the media, but it turned out more to be just a moment of reflection for the people who did turn out." In interviews, some participants spoke about their reasons for taking part in the event in terms of the imagery it provided and the action that might unfold from being exposed to that imagery. One participant said she wanted

to help people *see* what is happening—and this particular project is very visual. I think it gets confusing for people because these things are happening but they're very abstract. This can help them get the idea. More and more awareness will lead to action. The idea is to get people to see it first and then to get policy changes.

In addition to the primary image of the rising ocean levels created by the bamboo poles and ribbons, some participants engaged in other forms of visual communication. For instance, one organizer taped a red-and-white plastic "For Sale" sign to herself, and at the top taped a sign she had handwritten that said, "Earth Not." She spent the event wearing the "Earth Not For Sale" sign on her body. Still another organizer, a woman in her seventies, wore a stuffed starfish that surrounded her face, from which she gave her two informal speeches.

While there was no media coverage of the Ballard event, the experience was visually striking. The sea levels represented by the tape and ribbons on the bamboo poles, some fluttering far above people's heads, were visually enacted and embodied on the sandy beach in front of the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean's Puget Sound. While seemingly not focused on mediated aspects of their image event, participants did seem

aware of its potential. For instance, during one informal speech, an organizer told the group, "There's a couple of photographers who want us to clump at each of the poles. Let's sort of step up into a clump to do some photography." After some talk and laughter, a few photographs were taken and the organizer asked, "So where are our photographers? You're good? You're good. Meeting your photo needs? All set? OK."

At the end of the event, organizers asked participants to go to the Seattle downtown march to "recreate this very scene." One organizer stated,

We're planning to bring the poles down and then, when we hold them in our hands, the wave will be at least above our heads. We'll have at least two waves, hopefully, going on. Then the fish will be swimming; the starfish will be there. We'll make lots more of our signs as we go downtown. Hopefully we'll have a big Sustainable Ballard presence at the march.

Researchers spoke to members of the group downtown but did not observe a reconstructed scene. Organizers later told a researcher that the group marched with their poles, "but their intent could not be seen in the mob."

Spokane provides an interesting case because the event both was and was not an image event. The rally in Spokane was divided into two separate sections. It began with an image event as organizers arranged participants—wearing white shirts over their daily clothes—to spell out the event's message: "Step It Up, Congress: Cut Carbon 80% by 2050." The participants spanned a bridge, and a man with a camera hurriedly snapped several pictures of the human banner.

This portion of SIU Spokane clearly constitutes an image event: there was no dialogue about the problem of global warming, SIU's stated demand to Congress, or what actions people might take to better manage the human and natural complexity of global warming. The objective of the picture was primarily directed to external entities—local and regional press releases, the SIU Web site, local and regional environmental Web sites.

After taking the photographs on the bridge, the entire crowd made its way to a small, open amphitheater. Marking a significant shift in tone,

the participants of the human banner removed their banner shirts as they entered the pavilion area. In contrast to the image event, the second portion of the schedule included a series of speeches and dialogue among members. No one appeared to take pictures or record the speeches. Beginning with speeches from the most prominent attendees (such as the then-Spokane mayor and the Lands Council president) and working toward a round of impromptu messages, the morning made a clear transition from image event to dialogue among like-minded individuals. The primary organizer for the day spoke briefly and then introduced the mayor. Members of local environmental groups followed with consistently briefer messages—one person, for example, said simply, “Think global, act local.” After a few seconds of silence, people politely clapped, the speaker sat, and another speaker rose. As these speeches ended, people transitioned into informal conversations in small groups to discuss global-warming issues: a researcher talked to a woman in her twenties who had just returned from a camp to be certified to deliver Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* speech to local audiences; two men in their forties complained about President George W. Bush’s energy policies; moments later, a researcher spoke at length with participants about green-building supplies.

In contrast to the image event just thirty minutes earlier, these speeches and conversations did not directly orient around the national SIU campaign—the specific demand to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent—and were focused entirely on local networks and regionally specific issues of climate change. This provided a notable contrast to the image event just moments before, when, as one participant put it, “we need to take a picture for the [SIU] Web site.” In contrast to that need, participants now mingled casually and talked about climate-change issues. The only explicit reference to SIU came within the context of people retrospectively talking about how slow people were to commit to the day’s events and how quickly the Lands Council brought things together working with pre-existing e-mail lists. Beyond these brief notes, researchers did not hear a single reference to SIU or its goal (“Step It Up, Congress: cut carbon 80 percent by 2050”) in over an hour of conversation.

In this way, Spokane demonstrated a clear split between the first and second portion of the day. The first section clearly focused on embodying the central SIU message by creating a human banner of that message. The second portion of the day served an internally affirming function for the organizers and participants.

The Moscow/Pullman event shared many characteristics with the Spokane event. In Moscow, participants gathered early in the morning to take part in a bike ride down the three-mile Main Street. The event was intended to embody or represent a solution, in that bike riding provided a specific example of the sorts of transformations necessary to avoid global-warming impacts. As riders made their way through the streets of Moscow, participating adults (some presumably parents) placed children at the front of the collective and also explicitly spoke about them as embodying a solution to global warming. One participant told a researcher, “Look, aren’t they cute? They are riding bikes and making a difference.” Another person foregrounded the role of children, saying, “Kids are the ones who are going to make a difference.”

The function of this image was to implicate both the impact on and solution-potential of children. The bike ride functioned largely as a relatively mild image event that was pleasant, contained no violence, and focused primarily on a solution orientation. The bike rally ended at the historic 1912 center, where they posed “for a group photograph which will be posted on the national Step It Up website” (Hilding 2007, 2). The group waved, shouted, and wielded banners with various SIU messages, including the movement’s primary mantra: “Step It Up, Congress! Reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050.” After the photos were taken, the event changed quickly as select public officials, such as University of Idaho’s president and an Idaho State representative, addressed the crowd concerning sustainability efforts, and youth members of local environmental clubs sold food. The image-driven aspects of the earlier parade and group picture shifted to a public address event and, later, to a small group space as people listened to the local band Plasma Soul while conversing with one another. In this way, the SIU event in Moscow illustrated the dual function similar to both Spokane and Seattle events,

where the early portion of the day was an externally focused image and the second half involved speeches and conversation among participants.

In contrast, the event at Deception Pass State Park was not an image event. People who followed details posted at the SIU Web site for a forest cleanup and protest on the elevated highway bridge would have found nothing; three researchers tried. Only after repeatedly asking an attendant at the ranger station about SIU were the researchers directed to a small sign advertising a "Disappearing Park" nature walk. The two park rangers who led the walk explicitly separated the activity from the national SIU campaign during their discussion with participants.¹ The rangers said they wanted to create a dialogue with participants rather than a protest event. They told participants that in the process of preparing for the walk they realized *for the first time* the extent of the impact global warming could have on this place they knew and loved. The list of impacts was long: the freshwater lake would become part of the ocean, Whidbey Island would be multiple islands, La Connor would be gone, freshwater-fish species in Cranberry Lake would be gone (or change dramatically), and the park would also lose beaches, shoreline, roads, and historic structures that are irreplaceable. During the nature walk, seven participants (two rangers, two local residents, and three researchers) discussed these impacts and learned about the park ecosystems. No one took photographs. No one contacted the media. No spectacle occurred.

The SIU actions we observed represent a range of approaches to action, from successful image events (the polar bear) to attempted image events with no dissemination (Golden Gardens) to mixed events (Spokane, Moscow, Seattle) to events designed to cultivate dialogue between participants that forwent images entirely (Deception Pass State Park). These examples suggest both potential challenges and possibilities of staging image events as a movement-building strategy.

THE CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF IMAGE EVENTS

The logic of the public screen suggests that image events are effective when they attract media attention and receive wide dissemination. That

social movements want to get mainstream media coverage is not a foregone conclusion. The Internet and alternative-media networks (such as Indymedia) provide alternative means of disseminating information (Best 2005). Nonetheless, many social movements do seek mainstream-media coverage. Press releases and media-relations guides written by and for advocates demonstrate that activists are often interested in receiving media amplification of their movement's message. As chapter 8 discusses, gaining media coverage was an explicit goal of the national organizers, who provided tips for attracting media attention in their "cookbook." Organizers recognize the inherent power of media dissemination. If a movement seeks to educate the public or raise awareness, national media coverage can almost instantly introduce the mass public to the movement's message and help construct a different way of thinking and talking about an issue. Mediated images, in particular, are powerful because they are representations of action and they invite readers and audiences to construct their own meaning of the message (Gamson et al. 1992).

With the allure of media dissemination in mind, this section discusses the challenges and possibilities of using image events as a social-movement strategy to gain public attention and build a movement. Sometimes these goals—attracting media attention and movement building—are synonymous. Other times, they can be at odds, such as when attracting media attention comes at the cost of appealing to movement participants. Understanding these lessons from SIU may enable movement organizers to make informed decisions as to what event strategies may be most appropriate for their goals.

Challenges

1. *Sometimes no media appear.* Organizers stage image events as a means of attracting media attention, hoping to get some airtime on the public screen. Unfortunately, not all image events successfully gain media attention. For example, the Golden Gardens event did not receive media coverage despite its visually striking quality, the visual orientation of its organizers and participants, and the promise it held to make the issue of

rising sea levels controversial. Sometimes the lack of media coverage can be attributed to characteristics of the event or a lack of publicity. In the case of SIU, having so many events in one day, which forced the Golden Gardens event to be early in the morning to avoid conflicting with the main Seattle downtown event, may have diluted the effect of possible SIU image events, as the media allotted to cover the event could only focus on so many visual events in one day. The Marching Forest of Shoreline, for instance, received local newspaper coverage prior to the rallies but no press attention during the downtown event itself. When image events do not attract media attention, their impact is reduced to those who directly observe or participate in them. From a movement-building perspective, image events with no press coverage rarely gain notoriety, realign conventional values, or bring widespread attention to the movement's goals.

2. *Attracting media attention may require extreme action.* The difficulty of attracting media attention poses the second challenge of staging image events as a movement-building strategy. Communication research demonstrates that extreme actions such as violence amplify the amount of media coverage an image event receives (DeLuca and Peeples 2004). Yet, extreme actions—in particular, the strategic use of violence—are not without costs. Event organizers must decide how these actions fit into the larger movement they are trying to build. An internal document on the messaging of the downtown Seattle organizers stated,

With the goal of cutting emissions by 80% by the year 2050, we will use this event to set us on a path to healthier communities, a healthier economy, a healthier environment, and a higher quality of life. Our goal is to both highlight success stories and encourage responsibility.

The risk of using violent images is that it may undermine the possibilities of creating “healthier communities.” Extreme, violent actions draw attention to problems, but they also may depict the movement as radical, thereby discouraging new people from joining or supporting the movement. For example, the Golden Gardens event participant who identified herself as “not really your out-there environmentalist” is not likely to

chain herself to a tree or set fire to a ski lodge; she wants to be mainstream *and* participate in SIU. Organizers often must choose different tactics to cater to mainstream and radical participants.

3. *Not all movement actions have a clear enemy to confront.* Image events often confront powerful people or industries and conventional ways of thinking about human-nature relations. Staging extreme actions is easier when there is a direct target (e.g., bulldozers to stop, delegates to blockade, corporate buildings to trash). But sometimes it is difficult to identify an enemy. The Golden Gardens event, for example, confronted no concrete person or industry, though President Bush was mentioned informally by some participants as a specific villain when it came to global warming. Organizers of the downtown Seattle event wanted to be positive, choosing to focus on climate-change solutions rather than blaming individuals or even government for inaction. The lack of an opposition target can make it more difficult to create an image event that highlights injustice, leaving organizers to visualize abstract systemic concepts like climate change that do not have a single cause.

4. *An image must tell the right story to be successful.* Some of the participants' tactics were more akin to protest-style visual communication, such as taping signs to one's body or wearing animal representations on one's head, and, therefore, were conventionally recognizable as resistant visual discourse. Other visual representations were less self-explanatory and perhaps a bit too esoteric to function effectively on the public screen. For instance, people holding poles with tape fluttering above their heads may be evocative but need some explanation. To be successful, image events need to tell the movement's story. To do so, they need to resonate with available cultural meanings or work hard over time to establish new frames of reference for their images (as accomplished by tree-sitter Julia “Butterfly” Hill, who lived in a redwood to protect it from logging). Organizers of Shoreline's Marching Forest intended to proclaim the importance of urban forests as carbon sinks and neighborhood habitat. As the forest marched down the street, the costumes were striking, but the intended political and environmental message was not immediately clear.

5. *Sometimes images only tell a portion of the story.* As requested by national organizers, the Spokane organizers took a photo of event participants and the central message of the event. A human banner reading "Step It Up, Congress! Reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050" drew attention to the dynamics between Congress and citizen groups. It captured people physically standing to demand political action on climate change. This image does not, however, say much about global warming. For people who do not already support political action on climate change, this image is not likely to sway opinion or compel people to rethink their carbon footprint. Instead, the image captures existing support for action; it does not make a case for why this action is necessary.

6. *Image events may alienate participants when they cater to an outside audience.* At the Spokane event, organizers managed logistics for the photo, yet none communicated to other participants standing in the rain what was going to happen, when, and why. Those not involved in the picture stood around talking about whether they should get behind the banner or stay entirely clear of the picture. Only when a researcher read the human banner as it was being photographed did he realize what it stated. A few directions from the event organizers would have enabled all participants to feel like part of the event as opposed to separate from it, watching it from the sidelines. In this case, the importance of creating an image overshadowed the experience of participants and may have alienated existing members who did not feel included or appreciated. By focusing on external audiences, image events can miss the opportunity to build community among movement participants. Richard Gregg (1971) identified what he called the ego-function of protests as uniting participants by reinforcing their participation as important and worthwhile. This function can be important for building commitment from movement members. Some image events may forsake this crucial ego-function, leaving participants to feel their participation is unvalued and unimportant.

7. *Image events are difficult to stage.* Beyond the creative challenges of imagining the event, natural settings can pose logistical challenges. In the Spokane event, the photographer was perched atop rock outcroppings

upriver from the human banner. The Spokane River undoubtedly provided an iconic scene for this image event. But it was early spring in the Northwest United States, and the melting snowpack from Idaho and Montana created a raging river. As a researcher stood on the bridge watching the human banner collectively pose for shots, he watched the photographer yell directions at the hapless human banner. None of the participants could hear the directions over the roar of the river, however. Without the photographer, the image potential of this event—the possibility to embody the political message of the day—would have been lost. The frustration and time wasted trying to manage the photo shoot could have been minimized had someone planned for the environmental challenges the natural space provided. In the case of Spokane, a two-way radio or even cell phone would have simplified and streamlined the image event. Even the relatively effective swimming polar bear had to overcome logistical challenges, namely, how to stay warm in the chilly Puget Sound (a dry suit did the trick).

Possibilities

1. *Images are memorable.* Despite the challenges and potential problems of staging image events as a movement strategy, such events have the potential to be a vital tool for movement builders. Image events are effective, in part, because people remember the images even after an action or a newscast. As Seattle participants walked by the swimming polar bear, they pointed and exclaimed. But they continued to talk about it later, too. At a meeting with a U.S. Congressional representative to present the group photo from the action, one of the participants referenced the polar bear in describing the meaning of SIU. Though the politician did not know what the participant was talking about, the other SIU people all nodded their heads. This image stuck with them, representing SIU as a whole.

2. *Image events can translate reality through powerful metaphors and anecdotes for movement building.* When image events create a lasting picture that stays with audience members, that picture can continue to remind people about the message of the movement. Image events can

also function as rallying points for movement participants. During his opening speech, the Seattle MC started his speech by referencing a tsunami of SIU participants in Manhattan. By referencing another image event, the MC was able to conjure the visual impact of the other event in his own speech. He then told Seattle participants they were part of that sea, using the image event to unite disparate actions and highlight the force of SIU. Similarly, participating in extreme image events like chaining oneself to a tree or dressing as a polar bear and swimming in the sea can become mythic experiences that perform the ego-function of reminding participants how much they have sacrificed or risked to commit themselves to a cause.

3. *Images communicate efficiently.* SIU demonstrates that images capture the breadth of actions across the nation. Few people are likely to read more than one thousand individual action reports. But they will watch a digital slideshow on the SIU homepage. Together, a set of images can capture the scope and details of an event or a range of events more efficiently than written text. For a grassroots movement like SIU, images bring together the distinct grassroots groups while maintaining their individuality. The most dramatic photographs (e.g., scuba divers under the water) will be widely disseminated and duplicated by media and supporters alike. For Seattle participants, seeing the polar bear in Puget Sound instantly communicated the urgency for action on climate change. The message's meaning was memorable and easily understood.

4. *Images can communicate complex arguments through representation.* Much has been written about the complexity of climate change and the difficulty of communicating the science to citizens (e.g., Moser 2007; Moser and Dilling 2007; Revkin 2007). An image event like that at Golden Gardens has the possibility of transforming climate science into a tangible experience. Climate change becomes a beloved urban beach marked where it will be covered by water. This local, observable image embodies the impacts of climate change while also implying that action is necessary if people want to protect their local beach.

5. *Image events can transform human-nature relationships.* DeLuca (1999) discussed how some image events work to change the way we see

human-nature relations by putting the human body into more ecocentric forms (e.g., an Earth First! protestor perched in a tree). At the Golden Gardens event, participants not only donned fish and starfish on their heads, they stood together on the shore to enact the forecasted tide line above their heads. In this sense, the participants invited both themselves and possible spectators to identify with the natural world. The polar bear swimming with a sign addressed to humans shifted human-nature relations in a different way. By calling for humans to be concerned about their "habitat," a scientific term conventionally used to mark places animals live, the polar bear challenged humans' unique position of dominance, sending a message of warning that placed humans on the same level (in danger of losing habitat) as the bear. Together, these examples demonstrate how images do important ideological work of realigning values and transforming popular ideas of human-animal relationships—and images can often do so in a way that is not considered preachy.

6. *Image events can also help people see themselves in movement actions.* In the challenges section, we discussed how image events could alienate potential movement supporters. The reverse is also possible. Just as the "mainstream" participant at the Golden Gardens event explained she was participating because it was important to "get people just to notice that there are a lot of normal people who are concerned about the climate," it might be possible that photographs of the "placid" Seattle march can show more conservative viewers that in not advocating for the environment they, in fact, are the ones who might be considered extreme. Likewise, the urban-natural locale of the Golden Gardens event, a city beach, provides a backdrop in a nature that is more familiar to a broader range of viewers than a remote, pristine natural space and may be more inclusive of urban viewers.

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites (2003) argued that daily photojournalistic images define the public through the shared act of viewing events as part of civic life. When images from events appear in the news, these images represent and define the mass public. Through images, people see themselves as part of the public. A similar phenomenon can occur with images from social-movement actions. In the case of SIU, the

participation of older people, women, families, and children in events creates a representation of this movement as including diverse groups. Kids rode their bikes in Moscow; older men and women waved signs as they marched in downtown Seattle. This representation enables audiences to see themselves in the representations of the climate-change movement, especially when the movement's images look similar to civic images.

7. *Image events can be experiential, too.* While a potential challenge of the creation of image events is the loss of local participants in favor of outside audiences, the Golden Gardens event offers a different model of an image event—one less focused on changing public discourse through media exposure and more focused on creating meaning and energy among an existing activist group. For instance, while organizers were aware of the photographers, they gave far more attention to participants via socializing and informal speeches in which they made sure participants understood the purpose and meaning of the event. While image events are designed to be widely disseminated, they are also intended to open up possibilities for ways of thinking about the environment and to help mark participants' identities and confirm beliefs. In the best image events, both local participants and broader audiences are struck by the images they have created and feel as though they are part of something bigger than themselves.

SYNTHESIS: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR MOVEMENT BUILDERS

The challenges and possibilities demonstrated by these SIU events suggest many reasons why movement organizers might want to use image events. To use them most effectively, organizers need to answer four basic questions.

What Is Our Primary Message?

As the above challenges and possibilities illustrate, some messages work better as images than others. By first identifying the intended message of a particular action or event, organizers can consider whether this message can be effectively conveyed through an image. Going through the

possibilities and problems laid out above can help guide an organizer to an answer. For example, images work well to realign traditional values. But images may not be able to articulate the movement's cause and solution in instances where there is no clear enemy.

Who Is Our Primary Audience?

Sometimes an image event targets external publics rather than focusing on event participants. In certain moments, this focus is the best way to build a movement. Other events aim to enrich the commitment of existing supporters. Organizers should decide on the primary audience for a particular action. If the action is geared toward local participants, an experiential image event like the Golden Gardens action may be the most appropriate.

How Far Are We Willing to Go?

The logic of image politics centers on the production of images that are fit for media distribution. As the SIU actions demonstrate, a striking visual image is not always enough to get press coverage. Instead, more extreme actions, including the strategic use of vandalism and violence, are sometimes necessary to attract media attention. Movement leaders must decide whether extreme image events are in line with the larger movement goals. In some cases, staging extreme events can propel movement images onto the public screen, where the mass public is exposed to the movement's message.

How Does This Event Fit Into the Bigger Picture?

Too many image events can compete with each other and minimize the individual impact, as the Seattle actions illustrate. Before committing to the effort of staging an image event, organizers must determine how it will relate to the broader campaign goals and other strategies. Organizers must determine their primary media goals and forgo additional events that may compete for or dilute media attention.

As the nature of society and media change, so do the venues for social movements. The onset of increasingly visual and decentralized media

outlets such as YouTube and Facebook clearly indicate that the public sphere of rational debate has turned into the public screen of snapshot images. To respond to this shift, we have highlighted in this chapter the roles, challenges, and possibilities of image events in social-movement processes. As our analysis indicates, image events provide both considerable promise and potential challenges. Action organizers' ability to capture and utilize these possibilities will greatly influence the success of the climate-change social movement in the future.

ENDNOTE

1. The Deception Pass rangers were assigned the task of leading this event by the park's education coordinator, the person who signed up the event on the SIU Web site but was unavailable to lead the action herself. Given their positions as state employees, it is reasonable to presume that promoting the action as a protest event could have endangered their jobs.

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