Contestatory Performative Acts in Transnational Political Meetings

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Abstract
Young people are often more eager to use creative and artistic potential when acting politically. The article focuses on moments where contestatory performative acts take place in three different transnational political meetings. With these three examples it is shown how these moments of disruption and disorder – when something unexpected captures the core of the political gathering – are crucial elements for deep democracy. In such moments where the political speeches and the practices of the meeting do not match, young political actors are in a crucial role to initiate contestatory performative, and often carnivalesque, acts to execute the issue. The article highlights an aspect of political action that is often neglected and provides valuable evidence of the use of performative politics.

Keywords
youth, political participation, contestatory performative act, World Social Forum, European Social Forum, EU youth policy

Ancient and Renaissance Starting Points of the Study
The European model of democracy was born in ancient Greece. An agora functioned as a marketplace and a forum for the citizens of the polis, i.e. ancient Greek city-state. It was a place of political assembly. Many things have changed in more than two millenniums, but political agoras still exist, even if their shape is different nowadays. We have moved from the times of ancient Greece and Aristotle’s polis towards a global society where the free men, i.e. those who have the opportunity to participate in the agoras, gather to a common space which is most probably a conference room.

instead of a market place. In the agoras various actors aim at calling the public attention to their personal interests and the interests of their group. They are places for discussion and argumentation, speech and action. In this study I look at the World Social Forum Nairobi 2007, the European Social Forum in Malmö 2008 and Young Active Citizenships EU Meeting in Hyvinkää 2006 as examples of today's agoras where men and women from different countries and different age groups participate in different forms, and where transnational political debate as well as other political acts take place.

In this study transnational is defined as border crossing. First it has to do with the people who travel to an international meeting (and most of them need to cross borders on their way) and secondly it refers to the topics in the meetings which also reach over the borders of the nation-states. Thirdly I will show in this study how contestatory performative acts cross (symbolic and/or concrete) borders of the political sphere ( agora).

This article focuses on the moments where performative acts spontaneously disturb the transnational political meeting. These moments contest the hegemonic political structure of the meeting by prominently promoting more democratic alternatives, and are therefore crucial for deeper democracy. As William Connolly argues while defining the concept:

[…] none gives sufficient attention to the positive role played by a democratic politics of disturbance in projecting new challenges to old relations of identity and difference, disrupting the dogmatism of settled understandings, and exposing violences and exclusions in fixed arrangements of democratic rule.

More recently Tuija Lattunen has studied the politics of disturbance and found it important in the fight against superficial politics, where the politics of disturbance stands in an opposition for deeper aesthetics/ethics, contesting the ruling order and making its limits visible to the participants. Teivo Teivainen⁵ and Heikki Patomäki⁶ have both seen the concept useful in transnational settings – when building the global democracy – as

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it will ‘help us to undermine the there-is-no-alternative discourse.’ The politics of disturbance exceeds the boundaries of the political sphere (agora), and therefore it is linked both to the territoriality and to the freedom of political participation (free men).

In this article the democratic politics of disturbance is analysed from the perspective of contestatory performative acts, which can be seen as one type of it. According to Jane Monica Drexler’s research, during these moments of contestatory performative actions something unexpected captures the core of the political gathering. For Hannah Arendt these acts many times enable political inclusion and recognition of something new. But what makes these acts crucial for democracy is that within their boundlessness, spontaneity and resistibility lie the very possibilities of political freedom. To be free and to act are the same. Therefore I ask, what kind of freedom is demanded in the contestatory performative acts? Who are the free men and who are those contesting their freedom? What kind of acts the participants are free to execute in the events? And what kind of acts contest the existing code of conduct? What do the contestatory performative acts do to the inertia of the meeting?

As in the agora of ancient Greece, communication and argumentation are still the two most important elements in democratic decision-making. Communication among differing perspectives maintains plurality which Hannah Arendt understood as a condition of publicity: The plural standpoints in the public sphere enable each participant to understand more clearly what society means and what the possible consequences of a policy will be. Contestatory performative acts can be seen as one type of standpoint where the accomplishment lies in the performance. The impor-
tance of participation stems from its function of political discussion (rather than deliberation, i.e. a process of opinion formation rather than a procedure for decision-making)\textsuperscript{16} but participation also serves an important function for the participant’s self-development.\textsuperscript{17} Here these kinds of acts are seen as a form of communication.

As the study focuses on ‘the other’ (i.e. not the typical actors and acts of ordinary politics of sessions), I have found many useful theoretical and methodological tools from the feminist research of international relations:\textsuperscript{18} traditionally the different roles and/or hierarchies in transnational political meetings have not been a topic in the world politics nor the contestatory performative acts where the hierarchies are challenged or revealed.

During the centuries, the ancient Greek agora lost its political functions to markets and turned into a market place. In the time of renaissance the marketplace still had its own special social and political functions, especially the carnival, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin.\textsuperscript{19} Here, in the town square (or a market place), on a specific carnival day, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of hierarchies (caste, property, profession and age), privileges and norms. At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space caused people forget their individuality and to feel they were part of the collectivity. In a carnivalesque moment, through costume and mask\textsuperscript{20} an individual can be empowered and renewed.

One of my aims in this study is to show how contestatory performative acts include elements of carnival. Therefore I see it important to discuss the functions that carnivalesque moments may have, especially in relation to challenging hierarchies and radically widening the scope of political action. The selected situations have also to do with memory. These moments moved me as a participatory observer, media was interested in these situations, other researchers have also mentioned some of these situations, and participants spontaneously spoke and/or wrote their memories related to these moments afterwards. For Arendt\textsuperscript{21} freedom exists “in events which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Teorell 2006, p. 791.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Laine and Gretschel 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Kantola and Valenius 2007, pp. 9–34.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Bakhtin 1995.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Bakhtin 1995, p. 74.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Arendt 1961, p. 153.
\end{itemize}
are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories before they are finally incorporated into the great storybook of human history.”

After explaining the selected method of analysis, three different sections will follow each handling one case. In the first case the ‘politics of shame’ disrupts the liberative “agoraparty” of World Social Forum Nairobi. The second section concentrates on today’s birth of new political clowns and how they acted in the European Social Forum Malmö, and the third section shows how the hierarchies can diminish for a carnivalesque moment even in an EU Presidency meeting. In all three cases I see the youth perspective as especially fruitful considering that the admiration of adolescence was built in the carnival where new birth, regeneration and “expectancy of a new youth” was expressed in multiple ways (e.g. in the drama rituals and novels).22

The justification for concentrating on youth and intergenerational relationships also stems from the fact that while young people are many times politically more radical than older people,23 the voice of young people is often marginalised even in the political debates concerning themselves.24 I also identify myself first and foremost as a youth researcher within the Finnish model of youth research as a good practice.25 Intergenerational relationships in political participation and active citizenship are central topics of discussion in Finnish youth research26 but many times the research projects lack the international perspective.

**Contestatory and Performative Analysis Methods**

Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because reading and writing are central to their everyday lives and occupational security: For many people throughout the world, however, particularly subaltern groups, texts are often inaccessible, or threatening, charged with the regulatory powers of the state. [. . .] The hegemony of textualism needs to be exposed and undermined.27

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By using the pictures in this article I firstly make ‘a demonstration’, 28 execute the scriptocentrism 29 of the social science as well as of the transnational politics. Secondly, not everything can be translated into text. Especially when concentrating on contestatory performative acts, I find it important to show the actions – at least in the still pictures – to the readers. In these moments where the politics is played, danced and acted the pictures are relevant sources of information, showing the power relations between the ‘ruling order’ and the contesters.

Thirdly, by using the pictures I give a voice – or a space – for the contesters once again. This way the use of the photographs can also be seen as a political action of the researcher. The contesters wanted to point out injustice, disturb the political process peacefully, 30 aiming to construct more open and democratic politics. By giving a space for their actions in this article I empower their actions once more. Fourthly, contestatory performative acts give a new perspective to transnational political meetings as it forms one type of argumentation in the political sphere. To capture these moments the microscopic nature of ethnography 31 is useful starting point. Interests in agency, i.e. citizenship in terms of how people act, have raised a new interest in ethnography in social science. My aim is to give a thick description of the specific microscopic fractions of the entire transnational political meetings. These fractions of action were the most relevant in terms of contestatory performative acts. In all of the three examples, I was there where the disturbance happened, and every time I was totally surprised by these contestatory performative acts – but at the same time I found them highly important.

Fifthly, performative politics makes invisible politics visible when disturbing settled conventions 32 emphasised, evidenced and demonstrated by the use of photographs in this article. I use the photographs as representations of the contestatory performative acts, or more precisely, how the acts occurred in the three different transnational political meetings: the World Social Forum Nairobi 2007 (henceforth WSF Nairobi), the European Social Forum Malmö (henceforth ESF Malmö) and the Young Active

28) See the full definition of the word ‘demonstration’ from the section analysing World Social Forum Nairobi.
Citizenships EU Meeting (henceforth Hyvinkää EU Meeting). I have done my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in these meetings, applying methods from visual anthropology (i.e. alongside other kinds of data I recorded video and shoot photos myself as well as collected these from the secondary sources).

What is more, at the same time when I analyse contestatory political acts, I will underline the fact that politics is much more than just speeches and papers. I also want to show how multiple the stages or dimensions in transnational political meetings are. I use the pictures to make my theoretical statements more concrete but also to challenge the concepts in front of new forms of transnational political meetings. Contestatory political acts as well as carnivalesque moments are often visual including body movements and sound. Therefore the video recordings can be even more beneficial sources of information depending on the perspective and research questions to be answered.

The pictures I use here are a special edition. The photographs I use are not taken by me but professional photographers who worked in these political meetings as photographers, and whose pictures were printed in newspapers (or published on the web-site of a newspaper), and therefore some of the pictures used can be seen as bits of information of a more collective memory. In addition to the photographical data I refer to my own observations, memories and to my video recordings of the meetings as well as to some documents related to the meetings (such as programme). I also bring some reflections from the interviews to show young participants’ reactions concerning contestatory performative acts taking place in these events. To show the visibility that contestatory performative acts got in the media I am also using some samples from newspapers. By using multiple kinds of data my aim is to produce evocative, versatile and thick description what the readers will need in order to understand my findings.


The World Social Forums (henceforth WSFs) are an attempt to create a global space for critical social movements. The first three WSFs were held

in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, 2002 and 2003. In the beginning it was clearly emphasised that the WSF was organised simultaneously with the World Economic Forum. Furthermore, the best-known slogan of the WSF ‘Another world is possible’ can be understood as a counter-hegemonic challenge to the equally famous slogan of Margaret Thatcher ‘There is no alternative’.  

In 2004 WSF was held in Mumbai, India, to really make it global, but also to make it return to Porto Alegre in 2005. During these years the number of participants grew from approximately 12,000 to 155,000. In the year 2006 the number of participants decreased as the WSF was held polycentric on three different continents: Asia (Karachi, Pakistan), Africa (Bamako, Mali) and South America (Caracas, Venezuela). The WSF Nairobi was the first time the WSF, as a whole, came to Africa – and brought 66,000 participants to Kenya’s capital. On the website of WSF Nairobi the conference was described as follows:

The 7th edition of the World Social Forum brings the world to Africa as activists, social movements, networks, coalitions and other progressive forces from Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, Europe and all corners of the African continent converge in Nairobi, Kenya for five days of cultural resistance and celebration: panels, workshops, symposia, processions, film nights and much much more; beginning on the 20th of January and wrapping up on the 25th of January 2007. From its modest origins in Porto Alegre in the year 2001, the World Social Forum has mushroomed into a global counter-force challenging the assumptions and diktats of imperialism and its associated neo-liberal policies that have over the decades, imposed colonialism and neo-colonialism; devastated Southern economies; bolstered the disastrous and repressive reigns of assorted tin pot dictatorships; marginalized women; disenchanted youth; intensified the destruction of the environment; unleashed bloody, inhuman and needless military conflicts in nation after nation, region after region and deepened the exploitation of poor peoples around the world. Rallying around the clarion call of Another World Is Possible, the World Social Forum has placed social justice, international solidarity, gender equality, peace and defence of the environment on the agenda of the world’s peoples. From Porto Alegre to Mumbai to Bamako to Caracas, Karachi and now Nairobi, the forces and the contingents of the World Social Forum have collectively expanded the democratic spaces of those seeking concrete, sustainable and progressive alternatives to imperialist globalization.

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36) I did my preliminary fieldwork in the WSF Bamako, i.e. it was my first time I participated in the WSF.
This description states it clearly that the World Social Forum tries to be an open space for different forms of political participation (‘other progressive forces’, ‘and much much more’ as well as ‘collectively expanded the democratic spaces’). The definition of open space stands clearly also in the World Social Forum’s charter of principles: “The WSF is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society [...]”

It is thus not a surprise that carnivalesque moments occurred in many forms in the WSF Nairobi considering that even its description included ‘cultural resistance and celebration’ as well as ‘other progressive forces’ which can also mean carnivalesque acts. Finally, the description shows clearly the plurality of political participation that was welcomed to Nairobi.

The first two of the pictures I use here are taken by photographer Raisa Kyllikki Karjalainen. In the interview Karjalainen told that she mostly stayed outside the seminar rooms as all the visual, i.e. activism that can be captured by camera happened outside. She gave me 160 pictures out of more than 1,000 she took during the WSF Nairobi. In addition she told me in an interview that it was especially easy to take photographs in the WSF Nairobi.

No-one refused to be photographed. On the contrary, many started to perform to camera. When the WSF is full of expressions and demonstrations, camera is an opportunity to a bigger audience. Actually, I felt I am on the same side as those I am taking pictures of. This happens very rarely. Many times people are quite sceptical of where the pictures will be used, but not in the WSF Nairobi. There people automatically thought I am on their side. (Karjalainen)

The main WSF Nairobi venue site was the Moi International Sport Complex. Most of the approximately 1,000 self-organised seminar sessions took place inside the main stadium building. The Sport Complex was fenced and the entrances were controlled by armed police forces. Everyone

39) A NGO or a group was able to propose and run a seminar, workshop etc. There was a specific web-site for the different activities many months before the WSF Nairobi took place for the NGOs and other groups to share their ideas and to join each other to organize seminars together in the WSF Nairobi. The organizers mainly took care of the space, that there were enough session rooms with needed facilities (loudspeakers, interpretation, etc.)
entering was required to wear the participant badge. Still on the third forum day, at the entrance of the sport complex, when I faced the crowd of demonstrators, I concretely understood that the open space is not as open as it states.40 On the front page of TerraViva,41 the independent newspaper of the WSF Nairobi, young activist Wangu Mbatia was explaining: “We have been congregating and waiting on the roadside for two days explaining to the officials that we cannot afford the fees. It is apparent that unless we use force, we will never participate in the Forum.”

Almost two years after the WSF Nairobi I interviewed Finnish young adults who had participated in the forum. When I asked a 29-year-old woman more generally about the most important issues she remembers from the meeting, she mentioned the demonstration:

There was one [...] demonstration by the local poor people who couldn’t afford the entrance fee. I think it is symbolically quite a relevant question. Obviously in a political sense, too. Can it really be so that those people, who really live in Nairobi, cannot enter the area if they can’t afford the fee? So who are those who speak there [in the forum] about the poverty and for the people of the slums? [...] this kind of processes and meetings that advocate good things have their own power structures and own basic problems that one also needs to actively edit out. Or at least we need more discussion on them, what are the problems the power structures cause and things like that.

People from the slums got support from the participants of the WSF Nairobi coming from all over the world. Most of the demonstrators were

**Pictures 1 and 2** Demonstration outside the WSF Nairobi venue site on 23rd of Jan 2007. Photos: Raisa Kyllikki Karjalainen

40) See also Nunes 2006.
middle-aged, but still the most cited, interviewed and written about was the young activist Mbatia, member of the People’s Parliament who was behind the action.\footnote{International viewpoint 2007.} The crowd of the demonstrators blocked the main boulevard heading to the entrances of the sport complex so that hundreds of the participants of the forum were jammed in the huge traffic jam. In picture 2 the demonstrators are negotiating with the police. As argued by Young,\footnote{Young 2001; Young 2000, p. 67.} demonstration and protest, the use of emotionally charged language and symbols, publicly ridiculing exclusive behaviour of others are sometimes appropriate and effective ways of getting the attention for issues of legitimate public concern.

It is important to underline here the double meaning of the word demonstration. In most uses, the word stands for pointing out, to make known or to describe and explain.\footnote{Chaloupka 1993, p. 147.} In this case demonstrators wanted to point out how the entrance fee makes the poorest absent from the discussions. What is even more important, the demonstration is ‘a show.’\footnote{Chaloupka shows how this “is more evident in Frech, where démontrer, to demonstrate, immediately recalls montrer, to show”. Chaloupka 1993, p. 147.} ‘The demonstration perform (i.e. carry out, presents) something new, executes things that have been covered. Its mission is to point out the ruling order and contest the set borders.’\footnote{Lattunen 2003, 56.}

In another article\footnote{New Internationalist 2007.} it was clearly questioned: “Why host the WSF in Nairobi if the poor can’t join in the discussion because they can’t afford the entrance fee, or transport to get there, or food and water once they’re inside?” Also in this article Mbatia was quoted. After the demonstrators were let in the WSF venue site, after the gates had been opened to everyone interested to enter for free, the demonstrators rushed in the daily press conference on the Stadium. They climbed on the top of the media tables, and there Mbatia spoke again: “This [WSF Nairobi] is supposed to be a conversation between those who have and those who have not. We cannot change the world if we are having one-sided conversation. To ask us to pay seven dollars in order to discuss our poverty is criminal!”\footnote{New Internationalist 2007.} Young\footnote{Young 2000, pp. 175–176.}
identifies the capacity of strategies for arresting systems inertia as occurring through performative manifestation of a moral argument where otherwise powerless people effect a change of policy because the powerful agents have been successfully shamed. This strategy she calls ‘the politics of shame’. If the WSFs define itself as an open space and WSF Nairobi invites “disenfranchised youth” and other groups often excluded from the political processes to participate as written in the Forum’s description, it is shameful to be the target of demonstration of the people who can’t afford to get in.

Second Act: Disenfranchised against Inhumanity

The story of the politics of shame in the WSF Nairobi do not stop here. The protestors continued their way to a prohibitively expensive food stall, located on the best spot next to the stadium building and close to main entrance gate, owned by country’s Internal Security Minister John Michuki. He is one of the wealthiest individuals, part of Kenya’s economic and political elites, best known as a ruthless torturer of colonial terror against Mau Mau freedom fighters during the 1950’s. The food stall was run by his five star golf club.

As editor Jess Worth wrote in her blog, a group of Kenyan activists decided to ‘nationalise’ the stall: “They took it over en masse, and in the words of one demonstrator, ‘gave the children of Kenya a free lunch.’ A large group of slum children, and some adults, cleaned out the kitchens entirely.” This situation was photographed by Paulino Menezes and the picture was published in *TerraViva* the following day.

Both the free entrance and the free food concretely enabled the wider freedom of political participation. Both situations were carnivalesque: people celebrated the temporary victory over the ruling truth and ruling order (causing the marginalisation of the poorest and youngest, the economic and political domination of the elite). In the act of eating, the people faced the world joyfully. It was a people’s triumph of the world, showing in action how another kind of world really is possible.

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53) Bakhtin 1995, p. 11.
After cleaning out all the food the activists helped the staff to pack the stall. “It didn’t come back on the next day,” New Internationalist reports. In their words it was “a shame these activists had to focus so much of their energy simply on getting a fair deal from the WSF organisers.”

Activist Mbatia told in another interview that the group of demonstrators wanted to create awareness of the entrance and food prices as well as underline the fact that the WSF should be a place where even the institutions that are allowed to participate are carefully selected so that the forum don’t send out the wrong message.

I am not the first researcher writing about this episode. Marina Karides and Thomas Ponniah have also underlined these moments as concrete organising mistakes in the WSF Nairobi. They suggest, that “all this reflects political economic conditions of Kenya rather than Kenya’s organising committee willingness to sacrifice the principles of the WSF.” Unfortunately, now after the World Social Forum 2009 in Belém, Brazil, it can be said that it was not the political economic conductions in Kenya (only)
as similar demonstration took place in Belém: again local people who couldn’t afford the entrance fee were demonstrating in one of the forum entrances. This time no-one opened the gates for these activists to enter.

To conclude with the words of Janet Conway, People’s Parliament with their young spokesperson Wangui Mbatia, “politicalized the question of who the ‘open space’ of the WSF is for.” The contestatory performative acts hit the core of the WSF: described as an open space but still working by exclusion. I agree with the Rodrigo Nunes that one of the reasons why to organise WSFs is to let the unexpected processes, such as opening the entrance gates and invasion of the unethical food stall, reterritorialise and deterritorialise the forum venue, i.e. to redefine the free men who have the opportunity to participate in the political processes and to take the control and order away from a land or place (territory) that is already established. To undo entrance fee and Windsor restaurant as were the cases in the WSF Nairobi.

Here the activists made public noise outside when ‘non-deliberation’ was taking place on the inside. One of the primary reasons was to make the wider public aware of the institutional wrongs and to persuade public to join in pressuring for change in the institution. The contestatory performative acts, the demonstration and the invasion of the food stall, pointed directly how some of the practices of the forum support the people behind “inhuman and needless military conflicts in nation after nation, region after region and deepened the exploitation of poor people” as stands in the forum description as the forces that WSF says to resist. This contradiction of the statement and the practices created the politics of shame.

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63) Janet Conway (2008, 60) describes WSFs with “non-deliberative character [that] fees its participating groups to encounter one another, to listen and to learn”. Also in the Article 6 of the Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum the World Social Forum is defined as “a non-deliberative space” (World Social Forum 2004).
64) Young 2001, p. 676.
Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army in the European Social Forum Malmö 2008

On Saturday morning 20 September 2008 around 10,000 people demonstrated peacefully in Malmö City in Southern Sweden. Three days previously I had attended a seminar of ‘anti-capitalist art’ where a documentary film director Zuky Serper emphasised that in year 2001 the atmosphere of fear and danger came to stay in the European demonstrations because of the violent acts of the riot police in the Genoa and Gothenburg. The city of Malmö had come up with more dialogical setting: police officers, in many cases women, were wearing a ‘dialog polis’ corset and no helmet or a shield.

The demonstration was part of the ESF Malmö programme. Starting from a multiethnic suburb Rosengård the demonstrators paraded more than three hours across the city singing, dancing, shouting political messages and carrying banderols. The ambiance was friendly and helpful also from the side of the police, many of them women. The atmosphere changed in the city centre. ‘Dialog polis’ disappeared and riot police appeared. First they stood alone in the corners, but as the demonstration crowd proceeded closer to the centre (and nearer to the banks and commercial houses), the columns of police officers in a full riot costume got longer. I didn’t feel safe. I felt the police was there only to affirm the money and the markets. Not to protect people, but to harm us.

Right there, where the demonstration was getting short of laugh and the atmosphere was getting very serious and dark, the ‘Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army’ (CIRCA) appeared. Wearing clown costume mixed with army clothes (see Picture 4), the clowns started to imitate the police men: clowns stood in the lines between the police, marched in the end of the police queues and tried to look as serious as the police men as can be recognized from the picture 4 taken by Christian Leo and published on the South-Sweden newspaper Sydsvenskan’s internet page.

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What worked in the times of renaissance still works. Clowns brought about a carnivalesque moment by turning the controlling mechanisms upside-down: the lowest (clown) and the highest (police) changed their places. Clowns adapted sarcasm in the moment. In that moment the whole world seemed absurd. Clowns created a carnival laugh that rejoices and scoffers at the same time. This laugh points also to the laughers themselves.\(^70\)

The clowns use the word ‘clandestine’ in their name as they refuse the spectacle of celebrity:

Because without real names, faces or noses, we show that our words, dreams, and desires are more important than our biographies. Because we reject the society of surveillance that watches, controls, spies upon, records and checks our every move. Because by hiding our identity we recover the power of our acts. Because with greasepaint we give resistance a funny face and become visible once again.\(^71\)

To Bakhtin seriousness was related to violence, restrictions and prohibitions. This kind of seriousness is always scary. Power, violence and authority never speak the language of laughter. When people start to laugh and win the fear, the world opens to them in a new way. But this kind of victory is always temporary.\(^72\)

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\(^71\) I was surprised that international media didn’t notice this demonstration. Not even in Finland, even we know how rare such a big crowd of people demonstrate in the Scandinavia.

\(^72\) Bakhtin 1995, p. 83.
The clowns think that the key to insurgency is “brilliant improvisation, not perfect blueprints” and that “an insurrection of the imagination is irresistible”.73

We are rebels because we love life and happiness more than ‘revolution’. Because no revolution is ever complete and rebellions continues forever. […] Because we don’t want to change ‘the’ world, but ‘our’ world. […] We are clowns because what else can one be in such a stupid world. Because inside everyone is a lawless clown trying to escape. Because nothing undermines authority like holding it up to ridicule. […] Because fools are both fearsome and innocent, wise and stupid, entertainers and dissenters, healers and laughing stocks, scapegoats and subversives. Because buffoons always succeed in failing, always say yes, always hope and always feel things deeply. Because a clown can survive everything and get away with anything. […] We are an army because we live on a planet in permanent war – a war of money against life, of profit against dignity, of progress against the future. Because a war that gorges itself on death and blood and shits money and toxins, deserves an obscene body of deviant soldiers. Because only an army can declare absurd war on absurd war. Because combat requires solidarity, discipline and commitment. Because alone clowns are pathetic figures, but in groups and gagles, brigades and battalions, they are extremely dangerous. […] We are circa because we are approximate and ambivalent, neither here nor there, but in the most powerful of all places, the place in-between order and chaos.74

The underlining in the quotation show the clearest marks of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque moments: the emphasis on the bodily changes of eating and evacuation and the moment of ‘placelessness’ or liminality.75 Lattunen76 underlines the fact that in the Medieval carnival culture, the political impact of the carnival has been seen mostly symbolic, as the carnivalesque moments acted as a spare valve of the social order. Protests were leaded to take place at the carnival time. But as Stallybrass and White77 argue ‘given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle’.

For Nunes78 CIRCA is an alternative to the threat of escalation in the big demonstrations. Also here the powerful agents, this time the police

74) www.clownarmy.org, underlining by the author.
75) For Turner ‘liminality’ is related to a ritual that involves some change to the participants’ social status. Turner 1967.
76) Lattunen 2003, p. 59.
officers, are successfully shamed and the disruption of process or routine (of the use of riot police in demonstrations) is followed by the disruption of the reasonable and accepted. What is more, in the contestatory performative act, where the clowns imitated the police repeating them differently, lie the potentiality of the change and the breakage of institutionalised categories, identities and practices.

Beanies Disrupting the Routine in the Young Active Citizenships EU Meeting 2006

On the website of Young Active Citizenships EU Meeting the conference was described as follows:

A Young Active Citizenships EU Meeting was organised during the Finnish EU Presidency in Hyvinkää, 1–4 July 2006. The meeting served as a follow-up to the Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on the objectives of participation by and information of young people. The traditional Presidency youth event was integrated into this meeting. The aim of the meeting was to strengthen the tripartite cooperation between youth administration, youth research and young people in European decision-making. A second goal was to explore the different forms and contents, both old and new, of young active citizenships through discussions based on keynote and kick-start speeches and background documents. Various memberships offered to young people by societies and communities, including the global level, as well as obstacles to such memberships was analysed. The way to better organise dialogue between those who are active citizens and actors in the youth field was also discussed. There were two kinds of youth delegates invited to the meeting, those who represent youth organisations and those who represent new forms of active citizenship, a group, movement or network.

As easily recognised from this description, the Hyvinkää EU Meeting was carefully prepared in advance, step by step, minute by minute. I use nine pictures out of 104 that photographer Jorma Vainio gave me from the Hyvinkää EU Meeting, all taken on the same day (the only day he was present). In the official language it was because of security, as well as a budget question, why the participation was very restricted: there were four

79) Drexler 2007, pp. 11–12.
80) Young 2001, p. 687.
81) Lattunen 2003, p. 58.
82) www.citizenships.fi (15 December 2007), underlining by the author.
delegates from each country, and the meeting was only open to those who were invited and registered beforehand.\textsuperscript{83}

After intensive field work, research is always personal. The following story is even more personal since I worked as an EU meeting coordinator before the research post. In other words, the Hyvinkää EU Meeting was planned by the steering committee\textsuperscript{84} that was responsible for the Commission of European Communities (Youth, Sport and Relations with Citizens). I, as a young EU meeting coordinator – aged 29 on that time – brought proposals to the steering committee and put the resolutions of our steering meetings into the practice. Because the theme of the meeting was ‘young active citizenships’ I was all the time raising the question of diversity in the steering committee while planning the event. This was also the case with the conference gifts: in other EU Presidency events in Finland participants got silk ties and scarves. I refused this and consulted my friends by email what alternatives they could come up with that would fit the theme of the meeting. This way I came across with Outowear beanies. I proposed them to the steering committee of the meeting and the Ministry agreed. Then everything was concretely in the hands of 19-year-old Ville Lahtinen and his mom:

I am Ville Lahtinen, a Finnish snowboarder and young entrepreneur, and I run a small company called Outowear, which sells hand-made snowboarding and winter accessories. See http://www.outowear.com/.

On April 11th, Ms Sofia Laine, a EU meeting coordinator from Helsinki emailed me and ordered 260 unique beanies to be distributed as gifts to participants at the Young Active Citizenship EU meeting, which takes place on 3rd of July, 2006 in Hyvinkää. See http://citizenships.fi/.

Normally I make all beanies by myself but this time I had to ask some help from my mother, Raija Lahtinen. Since April, we have crocheted about 4 beanies per day [...].\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83} For more details, see Laine and Gretschel 2009.

\textsuperscript{84} The meeting was organised by the Finnish Ministry of Education, the Finnish Youth Research Network, the Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi (e.g. Finnish National Youth Council) and the City of Helsinki Youth Department. There were also two representatives of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) taking part in the steering committee meetings. The main coordination responsibility was in the Finnish Youth Research Network and the author of this paper worked as a meeting coordinator.

\textsuperscript{85} http://thinglink.org/thing:915ilq (29 August 2008).
The opening ceremony took place on Sunday evening, and the whole Monday morning was spent in the auditorium, mostly listening to the key-note speakers. In addition the plenary lasted longer than had been planned, so it seemed that nearly all the participants were exhausted and hungry in the lunch queue. When everyone had got their plates and seats in the dining hall, participants were surprised by hip hop music and break dance moves (see pictures 5 and 6). As pictures 5 and 6 show, the dance and the audience was set apart. It was very clear that the dancers perform and the audience watch the show (no-one got up and joined in the dance). In other words, it was not carnivalesque in Bakhtin’s way but a part of the ceremony set by the authorities.

The dance performance got a permissive response, but the atmosphere rose radically when the dancers, meeting assistants and Ville Lahtinen himself started to deliver the beanies to all the participants (see pictures 7 and 8). As picture 8 shows, after the Hyvinkää EU Meeting participants had put the beanie on, many of them started to imitate rap and hip hop poses. This moment broke into the carnivalesque atmosphere and what followed was not planned before and at the top of the planning hierarchy.

Beanies Occupying the Political Core

After the lunch break all the participants returned to auditorium and the key-note speeches continued. Quite a bunch was wearing the beanie while

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listening to the speakers which already made the atmosphere less tense – even though the key-note speakers were actually more politically VIP than those who had spoken before the lunch break.

The first speaker was Pierre Mairesse (Director for Youth, Sport and Relations with Citizen, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, see picture 9). As written on the local newspaper Aamuposti\textsuperscript{87} the following day: “As a pleasure for the audience Mairesse started his speech by trying his beanie on. Shortly after he however reminded that we need to be serious also in the youth issues, otherwise we won’t be taken seriously. [Translation by the author]”

\textsuperscript{87} Häyrinen 2006.
The next speaker was Tanja Saarela, Finland’s Minister of Culture. She started her speech with the following sentences:

Thank you Kari [the chair of the session who introduced Minister], it was a pleasure to come here. The only thing I was just a tiny disappointed about was that no one gave me a hat. [Audience starts to laugh] Where is my hat? [Laughing from the audience continues] But then Olli [the head of Youth Affairs unit in the Ministry of Education, who was waiting for her arrival at the main entrance of the meeting site] told me that you will get one, just be patient. But I am not good at it.

After her speech Minister Saarela got a beanie from Ville Lahtinen and she tried it on immediately after as shown in pictures 10 and 11. The audience rejoiced.

Next speaker, the chair of European Youth Forum, Renaldas Vaisbrodas, made some body movements (see picture 12) in the beginning of his speech that reflected the break dance show during the lunch break. After a coffee break Commissioner Figel’ participated in the meeting. After his speech a beanie was also given to him. After an encouraging from the audience, he tried the beanie on as shown in picture 13. The same picture was printed the following day in Aamuposti.

As a conclusion of this beanie episode I refer to Aamuposti newspaper article that started with the following sentences: “A Finnish hand-made colourful beanie rose to an important position on Monday during lunch

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88) The quotation is taken from a video clip.
89) Häyrinen 2006.
90) Häyrinen 2006.
break. 260 unique beanies symbolise well the theme and goals of the meeting: everyone needs to have an opportunity to participate in EU youth policy. It doesn’t matter what colour or size of the speaker is, the most important is the message, the common goal. [Translation by the author]”

After the Hyvinkää EU Meeting I started to interview the participants of the event. In the interview with Anna (codename), 24-year-old Finnish woman, the beanies emerged as an unintentional topic:

Anna: […] but I think that when we are young, we have the right to be what we are. My opinion is that the beanies were a very good idea in the meeting. I think it was great that now when I was in the European Youth Forum General Assembly on last week, there were a few dudes who had also been in Hyvinkää and all of them were wearing that beanie, because the weather was so cold there.

Sofi: Great.

Anna: It really was that kind of a thing that, hey, this is really what young people do. They really should wear beanies not suits. Because working in youth associations is not that we would wear suits in the office and in the meetings […] I remember when the beanies were delivered and the crew were like ‘hey, this is great’ and I heard that most enthusiastic squirrelled many of them. It was a nice beanie with a good quality; it was not any beanie from some discount store. It was very nice thing […] and it was also great when the dude was explaining to us how he can crochet.

There are plenty of alternatives of how to analyse this episode. First, I thought that some political dress codes were broken when political VIP wears the beanie. For Anna a beanie symbolises youthful dressing in practice. One message of the political symbolism of the politicians wearing the beanie is that they try to adopt a more youthful image. And to show they respect the young people (especially see the picture 13).
Secondly, if analysed by using Bakhtin\textsuperscript{91} the beanies stopped for a moment the dominant system of the meeting (hierarchies and restrictions). For this short moment the course of the meeting changed its track from the legal and ordinary to utopia of freedom. The Renaissance progressive leaders took part in the carnival and in the culture of laughter. Carnival was an exit from the official world view to alternatives. It enabled critical but positive dimensions for alternatives.\textsuperscript{92} Here, in the Hyvinkää EU meeting, by wearing the beanies the key-note speakers and the audience wanted to highlight for a short moment how it could be possible that even if all are different, all are equal. The beanies were a symbol of this.

Thirdly, when acting with the beanies, the political representatives were acting with no script to which they could refer to guide their action.\textsuperscript{93} Their acts were surprising and beyond the given system’s expectation.\textsuperscript{94} The beanies were not part of the political performance manuscript, and commissioner was unfamiliar how to put the beanie on properly as shown in the last picture (see Picture 13). The beanies enabled in practice a visible inclusion for the otherwise excluded fact (in the practices of the full sessions) of ‘all different all equal’, in the arena of the EU youth policy.\textsuperscript{95}

**Conclusion**

Many scholars have underlined the importance of plurality in politics. In this study it seems quite clear that the contestatory performative acts are many times combined with carnivalesque moments, and that this form of communication can appear only if the plural standpoints are available in the transnational political meetings. Political meetings are full of contradictions and they find new forms forever.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore WSF Nairobi, ESF Malmö and Hyvinkää EU meeting can also be seen as agoras of combinazione, described by Bruno Latour\textsuperscript{97} as reconciliation, combining, binding together, negotiation and making of compromises. The strength of any

\textsuperscript{91} Bakhtin 1995, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{92} Bakhtin 1995, pp. 244–245.
\textsuperscript{93} Drexler 2007, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{94} Drexler 2007, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{95} See also Drexler 2007, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{96} Bakhtin 1995, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{97} Latour 2006, p. 79.
society – or _polis_ – in handling of social disturbances lies in its capacity to reserve protected spaces (i.e. _agoras_) for the expression of difference in any human community. What is more, the study shows how important it is to give a space where also the issues of inclusion and exclusion can be negotiated. Important for sure, but what an effect does it make to the inertia of the agora? It is time to look critically on the downsides of the contestatory performative acts.

First, it might be difficult to analyse how effective form of an argumentation the contestatory performative act is. Somehow in all the three cases presented, the contesters succeeded – that time. But the victory was temporary: no permanent changes have occurred until these days. This leads to ask whether the contestatory performative acts only ventilate the political sphere, without permanently widening its democracy.

Secondly, from the youth research perspective it is important to notice that in all three cases youth were in an important role of the contestatory performative acts. It can even be said that in all the cases youth were the initiators. In the case of WSF Nairobi the young activist Mbatia was the most heard actor standing on the table of the media room explaining their contestatory mission. In the earlier studies the festive side of acts of mobilisation have been seen especially important for young activists who focus on the creative and artistic potential inherent in the movement. This is especially true in the case of CIRCA clowns in the Malmö.

What is more, “people are not young just because of their age, but because they assume culturally the youthful characteristics of changeability and transience”, as argued by Alberto Melucci. He sees that the question of boundaries becomes the fundamental problem of today’s adolescents:

[...] contemporary youth has to find new ways of having the fundamental experience of limits. The definition and recognition of personal and external boundaries is the key to movement in either direction: towards communication with the outside and compliance with the rules of social time, or towards an inner voice that speaks to each person in its secret language. Only in this way can a cycle of opening and closing be established, a permanent oscillation between the two levels of experience. Such passages mark the dynamic evolution, the metamorphoses of personal life.

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The questions here are: first, whether ‘more serious adults’ do listen – and try to understand – the communication of the contesters. Second, whether the contesters are not listened because their acts are interpreted as a form of radical political youth subculture that will flare up for a moment and disappear when the actors get older and learn to do ‘serious politics’? Or third, whether ‘the more serious adults’ are not ready to re-negotiate the rules of the political sphere as widening the democracy diminishes the power of the elite?

International politics has been criticised by the fact that it creates and maintains masculine identities. The analysis of contestatory performative acts in the transnational meetings decodes western ideal type of man by showing participants from different age groups and both sexes – and even without gender (clowns) – laughing, eating, southing, imitating, playing, making themselves a laughing stock and what is more important, at least in the case of institutionalised political representatives (e.g. Ministers), forgetting ‘the wrong kind of seriousness’ for a moment. In short, this way of looking gives plural faces for political actors.

In every century or decade there has been a market square, an agora, and a laughing group of people on it. Laughing choir has always accompanied the episodes of the world history. (Bakhtin 1995, 423.) Carnival can’t disappear. Even in our times when it is much weaker than in the times of the Renaissance it is fruitful in the different arenas of life and culture, as only laughter can reach some relevant dimensions of the world (ibid., 33). In a carnivalesque moment, people are free to state their soul and spirit (ibid., 64). Laughter has a creative significance (ibid., 65). Throughout time carnival has remained a weapon of the people (in opposition to leaders) (ibid., 86).

To summarise the findings, in the following figure 1 I have first listed the ‘free-men’ of the three transnational political meetings studied in this paper, secondly the people behind the contestatory performative acts. Thirdly I summarise what kind of freedom the contesters were demanding after, and finally, what was the code of conduct they wanted to disturb.

For Bakhtin carnival is the moment where life beats death. In the Figure 1 I have also looked the symbols of life and death of my three cases. What has been written in Figure 1 under the ‘Death’ column can be

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103 Bakhtin 1995.
generalised as the official world view of the ruling class (high politics): the monotony of thoughts and styles has almost always ruled the official spheres of ideology, art or politics. And what has been written under the ‘Life’ column can be seen as the multi-tone (in opposition to monotone) of the people who were fighting against the officials politics to stabilise monotonic styles in life. This fight goes on as shown in this article. The real life, including political meetings, is many times more ambiguous than the homogenous and clear picture that the leaders want to show.

‘Life’ column also symbolises the freedom of plural communication. By these acts both symbolic and concrete borders were crossed: in the WSF Nairobi the biggest border were the entrance gates (and entrance fee) that blocked poor people outside until the contestatory performative acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘Free-men’</th>
<th>People behind the contestatory performative acts</th>
<th>What kind of freedom is demanded? Bakhtin: Life</th>
<th>Existing code of conduct Bakhtin: Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WSF Nairobi</strong></td>
<td>WSF participants who had paid entrance fee</td>
<td>Poor people from the slums and their supporters. Young activist Mbatia as their spokesperson.</td>
<td>Inclusion: free everything so that the poor people have an opportunity to participate</td>
<td>Exclusion: high entrance fee, high prices for food and water served by unethical political and economic elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESF Malmö</strong></td>
<td>Those who do not harm ‘money’, i.e. the property of the banks and commercial centres</td>
<td>CIRCA clowns</td>
<td>CIRCA clowns supporting the demonstrator’s rights</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hyvinkää EU Meeting</strong></td>
<td>EU Meeting participants, selected 4-person delegations from each country</td>
<td>Everyone, after the preliminary work of young meeting coordinator Sofia Laine and Ville Lahtinen</td>
<td>Heterogeneity: a beanie that symbolises ‘all different all equal’</td>
<td>Homogeneity: a suite (uniform) and a clear hierarchy of the participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Summary of the acts and the actors of the three cases.

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105) Anderson 2006, p. 45 ref. Bateson 1993; see also Bateson’s blog.
enabled the opening of the gates for free entrance. In the ESF Malmö the clowns faded the border (or juxtaposition) of the demonstrators and the police, and in the Hyvinkää EU meeting the hierarchical borders broke when every participant wore a different beanie that all were as good.

It is common for all three cases analysed in this study that the topic under the ‘life’ column is present in the speeches and collective discussions. And that majority of the participants agree that it is an important issue, but in the practices of the meeting it has been marginalised. In these moments where the political speeches and the practices of the meeting do not match, contestatory performative acts are useful to raise the issue. These acts are carnivalesque in many ways, and what is characteristic of the carnivalesque moment it grasps the core of the meetings (media centre, city centre, the stage of the auditorium) as well as the whole system’s inertia for a moment. These moments are always memorable, reminding that another kind of politics is possible – at least for a moment. But can the contestatory performative acts change the track of the politics permanently? This question can only be answered in a longitudinal case study, where one (or more) political processes and their practical development are systematically followed.

To close with the resent episodes of the WSF, the question of the open space and how to integrate the local people more thoroughly to the forum was one of the topics also in the WSF Belém 2009. Unfortunately the practices didn’t support the networking of the grassroots activists and the cosmopolitan activists as there were two different university districts to either one: the UFRA included the youth camp and issues concerning indigenous people and nature conservation, and the UFPA included hundreds of sessions key-noted by the committed scholar-activists and the elite of the social movements. What made this division to ‘the contesters’ and to ‘the ruling order’ even more striking was the fact, made clear by one of my young informants, that the division was designed beforehand by the Brazilian Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT). Indeed, there is a need to open the discussion how to deepen the democracy inside and around the World Social Forum venue site in the future. WSF has a potential to develop itself to ‘a best practice’ of exchanging ideas, networking

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106 See similar earlier critical remarks from Pleyers 2008.
107 This time the demonstration took place here, on the entrance gates of the UFRA, for free access to the forum.
and generating new actions for global democracy, but not by isolating contestatory performative acts to another location – and not if some political party can hijack\textsuperscript{108} the forum.

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\textsuperscript{108} Tens or even a hundred of seminar sessions were cancelled because the facilitators and/or key-note speakers were invited to listen (without a dialogue) the presidents (Lula, Chavez, Correa, Lugo, Morales), and the helicopters were disturbing the work of the remained sessions. This disturbance caused by the security helicopters were something very different (i.e. non-democratic, exclusive and violent) from the democratic politics of disturbance analysed in this article.


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