

Back-page Listings



Events / Shout-outs

This is where we list local cool stuff & when/where it is happening. If you've got an event, meeting or demo coming up, let us know!



Colchester Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs Colchester is looking to re-launch this Summer. Food Not Bombs is a world-wide campaign group that reclaims food that would otherwise be wasted and

shares it for free with anyone who needs it while promoting a message of anti-militarism and peace. Anyone interested in collecting food/cooking/getting involved with Food Not Bombs in Colchester should contact: colchestercoop@gmail.com



Colchester Against The Cuts

Thursday June 9th 7:30pm Colchester Friends Meeting House: Save our NHS!

Joint public meeting by CATC and Colch NHS... SOS. Discuss what action to take over 600 local NHS jobs being axed. All welcome.

Colchester Against The Cuts Info Stall Every Saturday 12:00 – 2:00pm Eld Lane

Come get the latest news from your local anti-cuts campaign. Drop by to sign the petition and learn what's happening to our vital services.



Transition Town Wivenhoe Every Sunday 3:00pm @ The Station Master's House

Just turn up and join in! Using a bit of permaculture thinking we will be growing herbs, veggies and flowers; bring gloves if you want them and hand tools if you have them. Donations of seeds/plants/seed trays and pots welcome. Enjoy a cuppa thanks to Kelly Kettle - bring a cup! email hello-food@transitionwivenhoe.org.uk or call Jo on (Wiv) 827649 for more info.

National Day of Action/Strike! June 30th

NUT, ATL, NAHT and PCS unions are balloting to strike! See <http://www.solfed.org.uk/> for more info.

Culture Zone

An occasional space for creative writing/poetry. Because art is resistance!

Ancarva

Standing, without shoes, on a rug
Tangle-patterned with ivy blossoms,
Before screen doors
Looking onto an eel-green marble balcony,

Ancarva and I watch the Camel Trail,
Sunsoaked gravel paths
Sinking into the armcrooks of half-waterless inlets,
Bicycle wheelspokes

Spitting, in light peppering shots, the same gravel
I flew onto shoulderblades first
At some forgotten time.

Coarse thatches of
Thistles, violets,
Snake over the uneven cobbled wall,
And run in curlicued paths down to the town,
The town with its clamour of emigrated
London haircuts, pearl necklaces and voices,

Rolled like dice from the hands of a doorway
Under the sign of a scudding swan,

And we scratch our sign on the contract,
And slide this town, this past,
Into our pockets.

The Spectre will return next month!
All submissions/correspondence should be sent to:
thespectre@hush.com



Issue 1 June 2011

Free/Donation

Introduction | Civil Religion

Letter from the editors,

Welcome to this, the first issue of The Spectre. If you've just had this paper shoved into your hands by some scruffy politico type, you might be wondering what it's all about. Allow us to explain...

The Spectre is an alternative, independent newspaper – made and controlled entirely by its contributors – based in Colchester and the University of Essex. It aims to promote awareness of both global and local politics and humanitarian issues as well as social and cultural events whilst providing a radical and critical voice. The paper aims to bridge the gap between local activists and campaigners and to provide a space for them to be heard and get their message out. Submissions (and donations!) from readers are always appreciated and should be sent to: thespectre@hush.com

With this first issue we would like to bring you the latest issues and reports on the social mechanisms and instrumentality behind the innocent royal wedding, the doubled-edge sword of the social media, the intrusion of the riot police at Mayfair and the brutal Chinese censorship on Human Rights activists for a free Tibet and within China as well as the successful 15-M movement in Spain. Furthermore, in the back page-listings you will find a culture and events section as well as a creative writing section to keep you engaged and active.

Due to time and space limit we have included articles that we found most relevant to the current world and local events. We would like to thank all the contributors that have made this issue possible and hope that our readers find it thought provoking and enjoyable.

Inside:

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p. 3: Chinese Censorship, Outrage! The 15-M movement in Spain

Back-page listings

Events and Creative Writing

Civil Religion

Back in April we had an extra Bank Holiday, always appreciated, this one was to celebrate the Royal Wedding. The people around me seemed to fall into two camps, those who enjoyed the spectacle and those who couldn't understand why they should be interested in two people they had never met getting married!

But there was more than just two people getting married going on that day, the 29th April was a prime example of something that sociologists call 'Civil Religion'. National civil religions are concerned primarily with creating a sense of national identity and unity, of reaffirming national mythologies, of reinforcing the elite's story and version of the nation, it uses rites, commemorations, ceremonies, symbols (1) and weddings to reaffirm as 'right' the existing hierarchy and oppressive class structure and gives the elite the opportunity to tell their story of who we are and how we should be. It is one of the ways a nation is told what to think about itself by the elite, part of 'the spectacle' referred to by the Situationists. Civil religion has been facilitated by almost universal access to television (in the UK) and now events experienced in the immediate location by a few thousand can be participated in by the entire population (2).

In 2000 89% of prime time UK TV viewing was on only 4 channels therefore State television as a means of perpetuating and reinforcing civil religion and telling us what to think is still very effective (3). State sponsored or hijacked events, like weddings or World Cups are occasions when national unity is reaffirmed- and therefore transnational identity (e.g. working class identity) is undermined, this serves the interests of the national and international political/economic elite as it maintains artificial and false divisions between the exploited working class and militates against transnational working class solidarity, it also hinders the realisation that the interests of those in power and the interests of those ruled over are mutually hostile.

There are many civil religious events that are televised that perpetuate this sense of "imagined community" (4), in these events we are told to accept that the status quo is good, that we are all one big happy national family and that the average British working class person has more in common with Maggie Thatcher than with other working class people who may happen to live the other side of an artificial boundary known as a national border!

At civil religious events dissent or anti-nationalism is absent, marginalised or demonised. All these civil religious events, televised or not, involve the deliberate re-presentation of 'the nation' to itself by the State/elite reaffirming their values and interests as good and legitimizing existing social hierarchy, even presenting it as 'God ordained' when the institutionalised church plays a submissive, co-opted role. When these events are televised the immediate audience is recast in an affirming role for the television viewer. However we are not in '1984' yet so the transmitting of these events into households allows room for private interpretations of, or dissent against, these events, our responses to these events are not able to be controlled by the elite irrespective of their power to promote their propaganda(2).

Bibliography.

(4) Anderson, B. (1991) 'Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and spread of Nationalism', 2nd edn., London/New York, Verso quoted in Pittaway, M. (2003) 'Language, identity and nation' in Chimisso, C. (ed) Exploring European Identities, Milton Keynes: The Open University, pp.149-182.

(3) Burton, G. (2005) 'The media and new technology' The effects and implications of technologies for the media and their consumption' in Burton, G. Media and Society, Critical Perspectives, Maidenhead: The Open University, pp. 197-223

(2) Dayan, D. and Katz, E. (1988) 'Articulating consensus: the ritual and rhetoric of media events' in Alexander, J. C. (ed), Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 161-86.

(1) Parsons, G. (2002) 'Introduction: the concept of civil religion' in G. Parsons Perspectives on Civil Religion, Aldershot: Ashgate/Milton Keynes: The Open University, PP.1-10.

Get involved: network23.org/thespectre/
thespectre@hush.com

The Revolution will be Televised?

The Revolution will be televised! A term often used by social activists, whether you dream of a revolution to end all revolutions or want to change the face of the current socio-political and economic structure, the use of media technology as an outlet has been an important often pivotal tool employed not only by those who wish for change but also by those who wish to maintain the status quo. With the burst of the mass social and political movements that are sweeping the Middle East and North Africa as well as the rest of the world, in light of the economic climate, amongst other reasons, the role of media technology is more prevalent and more controversial than ever.

As an avid follower of global politics and current affairs, I have been alarmed by the ease at which governments not just in the Middle East and North Africa but also in the West have been able to censor vital media sources, including the use of the internet, such as Facebook and Twitter, mobile phone technology, televised news and broadcast media. Whilst many commentators focus extensively on the ban placed by the governments of North Africa and the Middle East, namely, Iran, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, amongst others, we often forget or are made to forget about the similar actions taken by the United States government in response to the Wikileaks saga. Not only have these governments been able to shut down 'dissident' bloggers and social networking sites but they have also targeted specific websites, which included Wikileaks itself.

Furthermore, to add to this unjust use of arbitrary power, such draconian actions have not been limited to state officials. There has been overt interference by international corporations including the termination of services by Mastercard and Paypal for the Wikileaks website but also implications of involvement by British based mobile phone network, Vodafone, in the government propaganda propagated by the then Mubarak regime of Egypt, which came in the form of a pro-regime SMS text messages sent to all mobile network users. Vodafone have denied responsibility, claiming government officials to be in control of activities there. However, this in itself serves as an insufficient claim, as it calls into question why a private corporation would allow the government of an undemocratic regime to exercise such control?

The role of media technology itself has been one that has changed the face of political and social mobilisation; particularly in countries where the majority of televised and broadcast media is state-run. People are no longer receiving news from a monopolised source of information but in fact have a number of outlets that they now have access to. This has led to the march in the millions in cities across North Africa and the Middle East, both peaceful and violent. However, its role does not cease there, whilst playing a key role in the mobilisation of people from all walks of life; media technology has also been at the forefront of reporting and as a result keeping to account the actions of state and non-state actors in their techniques of suppressing the huge crowds, whether they administer tear gas canisters into crowds of men, women and children, hose them with water in the middle of their prayers or dreadfully and sadistically take the lives of innocent protesters, shooting at and beating them to death.

Whilst the courageous struggle of these peoples continues, it begs the question that I believe all people everywhere, particularly in Britain need to ask themselves; are we doing enough in our realisation of the recent events and to what extent are our governments and political leaders implicit not only in the facilitation and support

of suppressing vital media streams but most alarmingly in the supplying of ammunition and weapons that have claimed the lives of peoples fighting against tyranny, fighting for justice.

All good is from Allah, All Mighty, and any mistakes are my own.

Shoomi Chowdhury

Riot Police at Mayfair

It's not an uncommon sight at the Wivenhoe Mayfair to see people pretty wasted. But this year saw a new kind of waste added to the usual with the huge overreaction of the good ol' Essex police force.

After what the cops have themselves since described as 'minor scuffles and fights' broke out around the edges of event, the totally proportionate and not at all overly costly action of deploying a police helicopter (running costs estimated £1000 an hour), an attack dog unit and a squad of fully kitted out robo-cop riot officers was taken. Anyone who thinks this sound like over-kill should bear in mind that the highly organised operation was successful in arresting absolutely no one at the time of the disturbance. Money well spent, eh?

In fact, the only things the van load of baton wielding officers seemed to be good at were being rude (having been asked by your reporter several times 'could you tell me what's going on?', the only response given besides silence was along the lines of 'you're annoying me, that's what' followed by a rather unfriendly shove) and drawing a healthy dose of criticism. Having stood around refusing to answer questions or take any advice (mostly 'go away!') from members of the public they're surely meant to serve and protect for around 10 minutes, the officers got back in their vehicle, took off their helmets and stab vests and drove away having successfully instilled a handful of previously happy festival goers with a sense of paranoia and annoyance.

All this isn't to say that there was no trouble at all – at least one person did receive injuries from a glass bottle and was taken away by the on-site paramedics and there were a few scraps between drunken teenagers. Hardly appropriate to call in the cavalry though. As one eyewitness said “People are pretty good at looking after themselves. I saw a lady who got hurt... within seconds someone had got the ambulance and people were helping her out of the crowd. I don't know what good these riot cops think they're doing!” It's an open secret that local councils and police forces around the country have never been a fan of free festivals or their ilk – if it's not sponsored by a giant corporation and doesn't cost a fortune to get in then it's too much effort for not a lot of profit! In fact, the last time the Mayfair was associated with any trouble in 2006, the next year saw 'problems with the contract for hiring the playing fields' – lets hope this isn't used as an excuse to stop what's otherwise one of the local area's best annual events from going ahead next year. A big congratulation to the organisers of the festival (even if you did turn the music off at 6 sharp! Let the band finish next time!) but to who ever called the cops – you're a muppet.

p.s. A mention has to go out to the Daily Gazette for it's hugely exaggerated coverage of the trouble which nicely complimented the exaggerated handling of it by the fuzz. Making it sound like some kind of riot broke out might well have made for a more interesting headline than 'Surprisingly Little Trouble at Packed Free Fest' but its just another example of the kind of shameless hyperbole newspapers engage in to grab attention (not that we'd ever do anything like that here at the Spectre of course... *ahem*)



Monks protest the oppressive Chinese regime in Tibet. Meanwhile, bystanders perform the moves to YMCA.

List of facts about the new generation in Spain.

34.7% unemployed under the age of 30

45.4% short-term employment contracts

28.4% abandoned academic studies or school

19.4% no longer live at home

40% overqualified

53.9% receives money from parents or relatives

Chinese Censorship

Imagine if you could be arrested for owning an MP3 track. Tortured for talking to a friend on the phone. Jailed for life for sending an email. These things may seem impossible, but it's exactly what's happening to people in Tibet today.

Tibet was a country the size of Western Europe, located between India and China. It had treaties with Britain when the UK ruled the Indian Empire and its spiritual leader the Dalai Lama is known throughout the world as man of peace. But Tibet was invaded by China in 1949, and invasion which was cemented ten years later, when 86,000 Tibetan men, women and children were killed by the Chinese military, crippling Tibet's resistance.

But that resistance has never really faded. The Tibetan cause is a peaceful one, and a new generation of Tibetan students, artists and musicians are using the arts, and most importantly the internet, to break down Chinese state propaganda and assert their demand for human rights and freedom. That's why the Chinese state is cracking down on Tibetans who use the net to communicate, they know what we know; that forming social communities online is the future. It brings people together, and that's what the Chinese regime is afraid of.

It's not just Tibetans. The Chinese state oppresses its own people too. Recently, the renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has been in the news after being arrested; a vocal advocate of human rights, he's in jail now on unknown charges, even as his exhibitions take pride of place at the Tate Modern and other prominent galleries in the UK. Chinese rights activist Liu Xiaobo is serving an 11 year prison sentence in China, meanwhile he has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this very same work. In Tibet, just this April China has reportedly ploughed 55,000 troops into a tiny town in Eastern Tibet to quell peaceful protests at a monastery and has beaten two elderly citizens to death. Every aspect of life is monitored and websites carrying news from the outside world, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, are blocked by the 'Great Firewall of China'.

People often say things never change; that the powers that be are too powerful and non-violence never works. They said that about Gandhi in India, Mandela in South Africa. They said it about Tunisia and Egypt, yet these regimes fell only this year. In Tibet, students are at the forefront of the movement to demand freedom for their country, and it's young people both here and across the world who understand technology better than the powers that be- who can make it work in their favour, bring people together and circumvent strict censorship and state controls. So if you want to get involved and help the Tibetans, the Burmese, or any rights movement or environmental cause, now's the time to do it!

Gabriel Hartnell
Chairman, Students for a Free Tibet UK
www.sftuk.org

For your local chapter of Students for a Free Tibet contact Sonam Choden at shode@essex.ac.uk

Outrage! The 15-M movement in Spain.

In February 2011 Stéphane Hessel published a book titled “Time for Outrage!” which influenced thousands of people affected by the austerity measures in Europe. Above all, it was one of the books that managed to capture the anger of the citizens and foster a call for action. Fostering a call for action that was heard by thousands of citizens across Europe. Although the massive protests started well before the book was published, Hessel was the first person to capture the attitude of the people in this little book. Resistance to the austerity measures were resembled, firstly, by the response of the people of Iceland to the measures of the European Union and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in the two referendums held last year. The results of the two referendums were firm. The people of Iceland opposed the payment of the debt by its citizens, and hence resembled a sign of resistance to the financial crisis that does affect and would further affect the most poor. Secondly, and highly influenced by the Icelandic response to the imposition of austerity measures thousands of students, unemployed, workers took to the streets to demonstrate against the austerity measures in the UK, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain. Among the various national protests, one caught the eye of the media by the name of “Real Democracy Now!” and the following occupations of the main squares all around Spain.

The impact of the democratic wave in Spain began boiling in the social media four months before the actual demonstration. A well-organised group named “¡Democracia Real Ya!” (Real Democracy Now!) began using twitter, Facebook, bloqs, among other tools to foster a movement that culminated with its great success in the 15th of May. Over the past 3 months DRY had extended its participation horizontally, in a non-hierarchical way, involving an infinite amount of social groups that were angry and frustrated with the current political, economic and social system. DRY were formed by various groups (#nolesvotes, juventudsinfuturo) with different opinions but holding common values and ideas due to the scarcity of democracy, the discontentment with corrupt leaders, the growing economic crisis that were affecting harshly the public sector and a large part of the population. Above all, DRY managed to provide a platform for every citizen, social group, public or private to coordinate and bring the virtual discontent into the real world. It was in the 15th of May that the group managed to congregate 80.000 people across the country and provided the spark for the growing tide of demonstrations and occupations.

The demonstration rapidly turned into a national one and is now gaining wide international support with an international mobilisation scheduled for the 15th of October. A date that will surely bring together the outraged citizens to demonstrate and occupy their main squares in their respective cities or towns.

It was in the following days after the successful 15th of May demonstration that a surprising, spontaneous act of people committed themselves to occupy the main squares in Spain. The occupation of the main squares, firstly in Madrid in the “Puerta del Sol” and then in Barcelona in “Plaza Catalunya”, demonstrated the willingness and the commitment of the people to sacrifice and fight back against the banks, the bourgeois government and the economic system. At first, forced out by the police, the movement grew stronger in support, growing from 300 people to 6000 people in the next few days (Puerta del Sol). On the 16th and 17th of May, the recent movement (acampados), which joined Real Democracy Now! , spread fervently occupying the main squares in Sevilla, Valencia, Las Palmas, Bilbao, and many more.

Although the movement remains unorganised and chaotic, the occupations have gained massive support among the population. These have transformed into centres of communication involving points of reflection, workshops, classes and most importantly a stage where forums and assemblies are held. These are open to all and are held every day at the same time where debates, and agreements are formed, in order to exercise the “democratic muscle” that so far have lacked in the recent years. In other words, these new social development have managed to open new channels to voice concerns, propose ideas, innovations, and serve as a platform to organise an actual democracy.

This type of demonstration should encourage all of us, whom are tired of the status quo to fight for your rights and for a real democracy! It's time for Outrage!