**Social Science Centre**

**14 April 2012, at the Collection**

**Meeting Notes**

**Present**

Sarah A., John A., Mike N. (+ A.N., F.N. and L.D. on the art table)

**Apologies**

Ed B., Richard K., David M., Sandie S., Joss W.

**Issues for discussion**

* Open Day planning
* Paper-writing for Toronto conference
* Interview with *Lincolnshire Echo*

**Paper for conference**

[***The university is ours: a conference on struggles within and beyond the neoliberal university***](A%20Conference%20on%20Struggles%20Within%20and%20Beyond%20the%20Neoliberal%20University%20April%2027-29,%202012%20Toronto)

**April 27-29, 2012, Toronto**

We will be having a **writing workshop** to work on this paper on Monday, 16 April beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Sarah A.’s house in Lincoln. Please get in touch with Sarah for directions ([simonewright73@gmail.com](mailto:simonewright73@gmail.com)). If you can’t make it and would like to contribute either by sending something in advance or Skyping in, please also get in touch!

Mike N. will be attending this conference. It is organised by the [Edu-Factory](http://www.edu-factory.org/wp/), which is a transnational organisation of radical educators, students and academics who are studying the problems of contemporary higher education and working to develop alternative kinds of institutions (or in their words, a ‘transnational collective engaged in the transformations of the global university and conflicts in knowledge production’).

Mike is paying for the costs himself (i.e. not paid for by an institution). He would like to speak about the SSC, but there has been some discussion in meetings and on the discussion list about what it means to do this, whether this is a kind of representation of the centre/project, and who the author of a paper might be. He has suggested that it be written collectively, at least by those who would like to be involved. We agreed this should be a point for continuing discussion.

Mike has sent some early notes – an outline of key themes for discussion – to the list serve, also proposing a working title: ‘Institution of the commons’ (from a book by Gigi Roggero, *Living Knowledge*). Some people have replied. *The outline and the comments, taken from the discussion list, are attached at the end of these notes.*

Key issues arising include:

* A critique of the term/concept of *ownership*. What are the problems with this concept itself? Do we need to think of the university (or anything in these terms)? What are the alternatives? Further questions were raised during today’s meeting. If we do not make a claim for ‘ownership’, does this leave a vacuum in which other people (power) stake claims and occupy spaces/activities/possibilities? Are there other ways of thinking about ‘ownership’ that are connected to collectivity and belonging rather than exclusion?

The starting point now is to perhaps use the paper as a space to problematise the concept of ownership and the framing of the conference in this way – perhaps through a critical thinking-through of the notion of the commons, but this can be developed as well.

Please see comment from Pete S. at the end of these notes for a useful point about the distinction between co-operatives, commons and communities.

* A critique of the term/concept of *institution*. This feels a very established and establishment term, indeed, something that many who are involved in the SSC are directly kicking against. Should we not try to put some distance between educational institutions and what we are doing? Counter-argument that the SSC is something of an institution in so far as it has an organisational form and shape that others can see. However, the important point is that we want to keep this form open, to challenge it, to radicalise it at all times (or at least see this as a possibility). How to communicate this. The Edu-Factory talks about ‘monster institutions’ (see [here](http://eipcp.net/transversal/0508/carmonaetal/en) and [here](http://eipcp.net/transversal/0508/universidadnomada/en)). What does this mean? Is the concept useful for our thinking at all?

Basically, to be discussed further. Please send thoughts if you have them, or come to the writing workshop on Monday!

***Discussion on the politics of language***

We had a brief discussion about language, especially whether and how to use terms that already exist and are used in dominant ways of talking about the university, education, learning, knowledge, society and etc.

* Can we use commonly used words to mean other things; can we ‘infiltrate’ the language to appropriate it for our own meanings – this is, after all, a tactic that has been used for hundreds of years! There have also been concerns about the limits of this approach. Again, for ongoing discussion.

We suggest that it is in any case always very important to pause on words we use, to think critically about what they mean, what we mean by them, why we use them, how others might interpret them differently, and whether they are adequate/appropriate for our purposes.

**Interview/relations with media**

A local newspaper has asked to speak to SSC members about the centre and the wider project. A call went out for volunteers to meet with the reporter; several people would like to but are unable to do so, and others do not wish to be involved in speaking to media.

As it stands, in the absence of other volunteers Sarah A. and Mike N. will meet with the reporter on Monday 16 April. *If anyone else is interested, please get in touch as soon as possible!*

There has been some discussion of how we handle such requests as a group, with regard to:

* ‘representation’, or questions of how the group, centre and project are represented to different publics/audiences when it is not possible for everyone to contribute to this picture from their own experience and position; also questions of *who* speaks about or ‘for’ the centre, why, how we collectively decide who speaks, and etc.
  + earlier, it was suggested that as a first step we establish initially at least who is and who is not interested in responding to such requests, and then discuss; it was also suggested that we create a ‘public communications’ rota in the same way we have a chairing rota (again, with the terms up for discussion)
* individual roles – being mindful of the different roles that people may play in their different areas of work (especially those working in universities, colleges, other educational institutions, with community groups and organisations, etc.)
* whether we always need to be speaking in public or not; or, about what
* the relationship between ‘speaking’ and ‘doing’ – in particular, we need to develop ways of communicating the importance of *process* in our work; for example, explaining that while we might be able to point to ‘a curriculum’ as a starting point, the fact that it is to be negotiated means this is only a starting point and will be changing – which is difficult to do in a culture of ‘sound-bites’ and desires to ‘fix things’ into categories that are already familiar – agreed that this question of how to talk about what we’re doing that is different and/or a critique of the dominant practices whilst also being intelligible and able to engage in a wide range of debates is one of our major challenges

In brief, it was thought that it may be useful to discuss:

* some basic information about the SSC (that it is a co-op, works across the city, is organised around a collective membership) + be prepared to discuss our self-descriptions as on the website
* the SSC as a response to particular recent developments in Higher Education policy and practice (dramatic increase in fees, commodification and privatisation)
* explain some of the antecedents, inspirations and different traditions people see themselves working within (based on past discussions, writings, etc.)
* something about the ways we hope to work pedagogically
* an invitation to both student-scholars and teacher-scholars to find out more, come to the open day, join and participate

Sarah and Mike will be taping the interview for SSC purposes, and are thinking that it could be a useful object for collective reflection, analysis or criticism in the future (a learning tool)

***‘Being in public’ and care***

We are about to start working much more in public with hopefully a range of people; views on the centre and the project are of course diverse and divided. We discussed the importance of having open conversations within the centre about how to support each other when faced with challenges, different types of criticism, and etc. Not all member-scholars will have experience with this sort of work either in education or politically and it is likely to affect people in different ways. We have not come to any conclusions yet about how to go about this, but want to acknowledge it as an issue that might emerge and something we want to be attuned to and to discuss.

**Open day – plans for ‘Social Science and Everyday Life’ – 21 April**

Flyers have been distributed around the city, taken to schools and colleges; Mike M. will email to the head teachers of 70 secondary schools this week

We thought that in the informational leaflet we give to people, it would be useful to have:

* a statement about why this is a *social science* centre; i.e. why social science (defined as we will define it) is important to learn, do, teach, etc.

*Sarah A. will write something to get us going, circulate and others can contribute.*

* some statement drawing attention to the experimental dimension of the SSC; for example, that we do not ourselves know for certain how what we do in the centre will be perceived by others and that doing it requires a certain level of acceptance of that uncertainty – we cannot, for example, give assurances that those who study and work here will be able to exchange their recognitions/portfolios for employment – though we can say that this is not the ultimate aim of the centre, and also something about how *no one* can actually make such guarantees in this context (despite the fact that universities often do)

***To do for the open day***

**Everyone – please confirm if you will be coming to the Open Day on the 21st!**

*We have 40 members…it would be great to have everyone there!*

**Everyone facilitating or teaching a session** should send a title and brief description to Sarah A. asap!

* John A. – The quest for truth: a brief introduction to how the world really works
* Sandie S. and David M. – Socially engaged photography, socially engaged education
* Joyce C. and Sarah A. – TBC
* Richard K. and Mike N. – TBC

**Joss W.** to draft and circulate text for introductory sessions, perhaps creating slides as well.

**Joss W.** to draft and circulate text for the information leaflet, to include:

* theme is ‘Social Science and Everyday Life’
* who we are, what the SSC is
* the centre’s purposes/why we’re doing this
* a brief statement about the focus on social science (see below)
* a brief statement about our approach to education and why this matters (?)
* information about how to find us on the web/how to join the SSC
* timetable and a map of activities for the day

**Sarah A.** to type up timetable for the day

**Sarah A.** to create and print signs for :

1. seminar titles
2. ‘Curriculum corner’
3. ‘What do you want to teach/what do you want to learn?’

**Sarah A.** to make copies of:

1. text for introductory session (x5)
2. timetable for the day (x20)
3. information handouts (x100)
4. directions around the site for the day (x20)

**David M.** to confirm arrangements with Collection, Usher and tea/coffee people

**SOMEONE** needs to get a few A3-sized posters printed from the Open Day flyer, so we can post them outside the Collection, Usher and Angel – **VOLUNTEERS?**

**SOMEONE** needs to create a sign-in sheet (names, contacts)

***Things we need***

Roll of art paper (for curriculum corner)

Large flip charts (x2)

Markers (x many –please confirm what you can bring)

SSC badges (David to bring?)

Laptops (please confirm if you can bring)

**If you need any materials copied for your session, please say so as soon as possible!**

**Issues arising**

Beyond the above, a few other things came up.

* Many of the discussions about key issues on the discussion list have been interesting, important and fruitful; we keep coming back to some of them and developing them, and it would be nice to have a better record, as well as for others outside the list to participate (other groups are often discussing similar issues around pedagogy, principles and values, collective care, politics of language, problems of representation, being in public, etc.).

Perhaps we could think about developing the blog further to make this possible?

* In the farther future, we could consider dealing more directly with questions of how people live, and make livings, as a problem of higher learning in the widest sense. A number of scholars have expressed an interest in alternative economies, and we could think about how courses (?) on this might include actual practices in self-sufficiency, things that allow people to take themselves further outside the dominant economic system (learning a new craft, etc.)

**Next meetings**

We will meet next at the Open Day, at the Collection in Lincoln, on Saturday, 21 April, 2:00 p.m.!

The subsequent meeting will be held on Wednesday, 25 April from 7:30-9:30 p.m. at the [Pathways Centre](http://www.nomadtrust.org.uk/page.asp?cID=31) on [Beaumont Fee](http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en-GB&q=Pathways%2C%20Beaumont%20Fee.).

For further meetings, events and announcements, please see the SSC website [calendar](http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/calendar/).

**Outline for paper for ‘The university is ours’ conference**

**From Mike N.**

Dear Scholars,

Please see below suggested outline for the paper to be presented at the Edu-factory conference in Toronto at the end of this month - http://torontoedufactory.wordpress.com/category/program/. I am providing this outline as the basis for our writing workshop next monday evening.

The title for the paper is 'Social Science Centre: An institution of the commons?' I get the notion of 'institution of the commons' from a recent book by Gigi Roggoro: 'The Production of Living Knowledge - The Crisis of the University and the Transformation of Labour in Europe and North America', published in 2011. As you see from the conference timetable the book forms something of a centre piece to the whole event.

SSC scholars have remarked that the title of the conference, 'The University is Ours', is problematic, as it assumes a type of ownership that many of us are working against, and is, indeed, implied in the notion of 'the commons'. I suggest, therefore, that the paper is written with that critical sensibility in mind. It would also provide a nice framing for my presentation: I am presenting the paper written together with members on behalf of the SSC. In other words, none of us own the SSC.

Suggested outline

What is the SSC? - co-op/pedagogy/ awards/subscription and funding/ types of memberships and broadness of perspectives/location

Context - HE policy in UK. This is an international conference so will need to explain brief history of HE policy in England and rest of UK

Part of network of radical alternatives to mainstream HE - Really Useful University, Free Liverpool University, Tent City U etc

A work in progress - How are we bringing this together, and what are the problematic issues

SSC and 'the commons': in what way is the SSC an 'institution of the commons", or might we want to define ourselves in another way?

**From Pete S.**

Sorry I can't be with you today but here are some comments for the paper.

Yes, none of us owns the SSC. But also we don't own it collectively either. This is where coops go wrong - coops are conceived as assets, which are owned by their members collectively. In contrast, a commons is open to all, and is not owned by anybody - it does not really have 'members'. The SSC is an organisation and has members, so is not strictly a commons. However, the contributions of its members are given freely, so that makes it look like a commons and very different from a coop. The SSC is more like a community association, which seeks a wider public benefit. It could even qualify for charitable status.

Hope this makes sense.

Pete