Scottish Identity Revisited: Hybridity in the Work of Ross Sinclair

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CHAPTER FOUR

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MARION AMBLARD

In January 2014, a few months before the Scottish independence referendum was held, Ipsos MORI Scotland published the results of one of their opinion polls on national identity in Scotland. Respondents had to answer to what is now known as the "Moreno question." The Spanish scholar Luis Moreno, who has been investigating issues related to national identity and nationalism in Scotland and in Spain, carried out a survey in 1986 to know more about the manner in which the Scots identified themselves and he asked about 1,000 people living in Scotland to answer the following statement: "In which of these five categories do you include yourself?" The choices were as follows: "1. Scottish not British, 2. More Scottish than British, 3. Equally Scottish and British, 4. More British than Scottish, 5. British not Scottish." Since 1986, the "Moreno question" has been accepted by social scientists as one of the best guides to changes in Scottish national identity and has been used in many studies.[1] The results of the 2014 Ipsos MORI opinion poll revealed that 24% of respondents felt Scottish only, while 63% described themselves as both Scottish and British.[2] This indicates the complexity of the national identity issue in Scotland which for about two hundred years has had a hybrid or dual identity, being both Scottish and British.[3] As Professor Tom Devine has claimed, in the context of the 2014 referendum, this poll along with other surveys on Scottish national identity "confirm that the preferred option for the majority of the electorate remains enhanced devolution with the United Kingdom. This indicates not the end of the hybrid identity but its elasticity, even at a time of a much deeper sense of Scottishness than before" (Devine, *Carving*).

Vanessa Guignery stated that "the word 'hybridity' has its origin in biology and botany where it designates a crossing between two species by cross-pollination that gives birth to a third 'hybrid' species. […] The term is often used metaphorically to designate creativity, the creation of new specimens" (Guignery 2011, 2). As will be noted in the first part of this study, the concept of hybridity is particularly appropriate when referring to the Scottish national identity which was constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century being both a syncretism of Highland and Lowland traditions and a combination of nationalist/Scottish and unionist/British feelings. The outcome of the 2014 independence referendum has shown that the compound Scottish identity is still predominant, albeit contested. Indeed, since the 1970s it has been highly criticised by Scottish writers and scholars but also by many art historians, critics, and artists who consider it as conveying a deformed image of contemporary Scotland. Ron O' Donnell, Calum Colvin, Rachel Maclean and Ross Sinclair are some of the artists who have called into question the prevailing hybrid national identity.[4] In his series entitled the Real Life Project, Sinclair has

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[1] For more on the "Moreno question" in France see Élisabeth Dupoirier. 2007. « De l'usage de la Question Moreno en France ». *Revue internationale de politique comparée* 4 (14) : 531-43.

[2] For a detailed analysis of the results of the Ipsos MORI polls on the "Moreno question" see <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/questions/moreno-national-identity-5#table>. 6 April 2018.

[3] According to Moreno "the concept of dual identity or compound nationality concerns the way in which citizens identify themselves in sub-state minority nations or regions. It incorporates in variable proportions the ethnoterritorial (regional) identity and the state (national) identity. As a result of this, citizens share their institutional loyalties at both levels of political legitimacy without any apparent fracture between them. As regards multinational democracies and compound states, citizens have striven […] to make compatible both ethnoterritorial/regional and state/national identities" (2). For more on Scotland's dual Scottish/British identity in Scottish art see John Morrison. 2003. *Painting the Nation: Identity and Nationalism in Scottish Painting, 1800-1920*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; John Morrison, "Nationalism and Nationhood: Late Nineteenth-Century Painting in Scotland". In M. Facos and S. L. Hirsh. *2003. Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siecle Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 186-206. See also* **Lauren** Brancaz-McCartan. 2018. "J. M. W. Turner and the Construction of Scotland's Dual Scottish/British Identity." *Études Écossaises* 20, <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesecossaises/1376>. 7 June 2019. **Amélie** Dochy. 2013. "A Scottish Art and Heart: The Transparent Influence of the Scottish School of Art on Erskine Nicol's Depictions of Ireland." *Études Écossaises* 16, http://journals.openedition.org/etudesecossaises/837. 7 June 2019.

[4] For instance, in 2013, just a few months before the referendum on Scottish independence, Rachel Maclean explored Scottish national identity and its founding mythologies in a series of works entitled I Heart Scotland. For more on Maclean's I Heart Scotland series see Rachel Maclean, David McAra and David McCrone. 2013. *I Heart Scotland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh

used a variety of materials and media to create hybrid artworks, in which he not only points out the inherent limitations of the Scottish identity but also invites the Scottish public to engage in a dialogue so that together they can re-evaluate and reconstruct a new identity representative of contemporary Scotland.

Hybridity and Scottish national identity

As George W. White has explained, national identity, just like any other form of identity, be it tribal, racial or ethnic, is not fixed or closed, it changes through time and with the economic, political, and social contexts (White 2004, 29). In the case of Scottish identity, since 1707 it has mainly evolved according to the relationship between Scotland and England and the place of Great Britain in the world. With the loss of independence in 1707 and the alliance with England, which for centuries had been Scotland's traditional rival, "Auld Enemy", it was necessary for the Scots to construct a new national identity. In his book *Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Stateless Nation*, David McCrone wrote: "it is indubitably clear that Scotland survived the Union of 1707 as a separate 'civil society' and as a nation, and that, if anything, its sense of difference and identity has grown rather than diminished" (McCrone 1998, 3). Indeed, if the Union of Parliaments abolished the political and commercial borders between England and Scotland, it has never been the case for cultural borders and Scotland has always preserved a distinct identity.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Union of Parliaments was far from being unanimous in Scotland, but progressively the population reconciled with the idea of being united with England.[5] Scotland, almost bankrupt when it signed the treaty of Union, became one of the most prosperous countries in Western Europe in about a century thanks to the development of trade with the British colonies and the agricultural and industrial revolutions. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, with the victory over the French troops confirming British supremacy, the Scots became staunch supporters of the Anglo-Scottish Union. After 1815, it was thus necessary to construct a new identity which was hybrid in more than one way. It was binational, being both Scottish and British, as it stressed both the Scots' allegiance to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and their contribution to British hegemony as well as the specificity of Scottish culture. This identity was largely defined by Sir Walter Scott during the ceremonies he organised for the official visit of King George IV at Edinburgh in 1822 and in his novels whose success contributed to its dissemination in Britain and on Continental Europe.[6] Scottish writers, historians and painters also greatly contributed to the construction of this new identity. Together, they revisited Scottish history and traditions which helped assert Scotland's cultural specificity and present Great Britain as an equal partnership between England and Scotland.

This study more particularly focuses on the Highland myths, as they are the most influential myths and traditions invented[7] specifically for the unionist national identity, and today the tartan, the kilt, and the misty mountain landscapes are still some of the most iconic symbols of Scotland. For centuries the Lowlanders had had little contact with the inhabitants living in the north-west regions of Scotland and in most cases, they had little or no respect for those people whose language and customs were so different from theirs.[8] However, from the 1760s, with the publication of the poems of Ossian by James Macpherson, the Lowlanders, the English and the Continental

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Printmakers.

Several books and articles have been devoted to the works of Maclean, O'Donnell, Sinclair and Colvin. For more on Calum Colvin's artworks see Tom Normand and Calum Colvin. 2002. *Ossian: Fragments of Ancient Poetry*. Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery; Rab Wilson and Calum Colvin. 2014. *Burnsiana: Artworks and Poems Inspired by the Life and Legacy of Robert Burns*. Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, and Calum Colvin, Fiona Stafford and Julie Lawson. 2015. *Jacobites by Name*. Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The works of Sinclair and Colvin inspired by Scottish history and literature have been studied and compared by Professor Camille Manfredi in her article "Figuring, disfiguring the literary past: the strange cases of Ross Sinclair and Calum Colvin". in I. Brown and J. Berton. 2014. *Roots and Fruits of Scottish Culture*. Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 17-26.

[5] As Jim Smyth remarks: "at the beginning of the eighteenth century the majority of Scots opposed an incorporating union with England. In addition to the religious, Jacobite-legitimist, and constitutional reasons for such opposition, Scottish antipathy to the union project drew on national sentiment. […] By the last decade of the century these positions were utterly reversed" (Jim Smyth. 2001. *The Making of the United Kingdom 1660-1800*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 135).

[6] On George IV's visit to Edinburgh and the construction of Scotland's dual identity see John Preeble. 1988. *The King's Jaunt: George IV in Scotland, August 1822*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000 and **Lauren** Brancaz-McCartan, "J. M. W. Turner and the Construction of Scotland's Dual Scottish/British Identity."

[7] The concept of the invention of traditions has been developed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.

[8] The prejudices towards the Highlanders already existed at the Renaissance as is suggested by the title of the anonymous poem "How the First Helandman of God was Maid of Ane Horse Turd in Argylle as is Said" and the poem "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie" by William Dunbar. As late as 1773, as he travelled in Scotland, Samuel Johnson was stricken by the differences between the Highlanders and the Lowlanders as he wrote: "to the Southern inhabitants of Scotland, the state of the mountains and islands is equally unknown with that of Borneo or Sumatra: of both they have only heard a little and guess the rest. They are strangers to the language and the manners" (Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. 1775. London: Penguin Classic, 1984, 96).

Europeans became highly interested in the Highlanders and the number of journeys undertaken to visit the Highlands of Scotland began to increase from the end of the eighteenth century.[9] The massive enlistment of the Highlanders in the British Army during the Seven Years' War (1756-63) and then during the Napoleonic wars also contributed to their rehabilitation. Indeed, during the Jacobite risings, the Highlanders had been considered as rebels threatening the country's stability but, in 1815, they were seen as heroes willing to risk their lives to protect Great Britain.[10] Walter Scott's novels, as well as the paintings by artists such as Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), executed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, confirmed the Highlanders' rehabilitation.[11] At that time, Scottish intellectuals, writers, and artists dreaded the complete integration of Scotland into Great Britain. Scotland had been progressively integrated politically and economically and the long-standing rivalry between the English and the Scots had softened as they had to rally to defend Britain against the French attacks. The linguistic differences which had permitted the Lowlanders to stand out from the English had considerably decreased. Therefore to maintain a specific cultural identity, writers and artists had no choice but to invent traditions identifying Scotland— its inhabitants, culture and landscapes—with the Highlands, at a time when this region was going through a major crisis now known as the Clearances.[12]

Eric Hobsbawm has demonstrated the importance of artefact and invention in the creation of nations as "imagined communities." The concept of the nation as an imagined community was first developed by Benedict Anderson who has defined the term nation as being

> An imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. [...] It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. [...] It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings (Anderson 1983, 6-7).

Hobsbawm has claimed that to be accepted by the population, the national identity has to rely on myths and traditions which may not always be genuine but help to assert the ancient origin of the nation and its cultural specificity (Hobsbawm 1983, 1-14). When the Scottish unionist identity was constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the tartan and the kilt became two emblems embodying the cultural specificity of Scotland even if, as has been shown by Hugh Trevor-Roper, they do not have an ancient origin, being both nineteenth-century inventions.[13] Presented as the dress worn for centuries by the Highlanders, the kilt became the national dress of Scotland during the ceremonies organised for the official visit of George IV at Edinburgh.[14] Following

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[9] For more on the development of tourism in the Highlands see Mathieu Mazé. 2017. *L'Invention de l'Écosse. Premiers touristes dans les Highlands*. Paris: Vendémiaire.

[10] Tom Devine writes that, after 1745, "over 50 battalions of Highland troops were raised, distinguishing themselves at Quebec, Seringapatam, Waterloo and several other engagements in many parts of the world. Having once been seen as lawless barbarians, the Highlanders were now perceived as vital assets" (Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 239).

[11] On the evolution of the representation of the Highlanders by Scottish portraitists from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century see Marion Amblard. 2008. "Du rebelle au héros. Les Highlanders vus par les portraitistes des Lowlands entre 1680 et 1827." *Études Écossaises* 11 : 193-205.

[12] The Highland Clearances took place between the mid-eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century. For about one hundred years, thousands of Highlanders and Islanders were evicted from their homes mainly to allow for the introduction of sheep pastoralism. As a result, they were forced to migrate to the developing industrial cities in the Lowlands or to North America.
McCrone explains that this decision to assimilate Scotland to the Highlands may seem paradoxical: "as Scotland was becoming industrialised in the late eighteenth century, and its lowlands became much like other urbanised and industrialised regions, so the symbols, myths and tartans of the Highlands of Scotland were appropriated by lowland Scots in a bid to cling on to some distinct culture. The irony was that the part of Scotland which had been reviled as barbarian, backward and savage found itself extolled as the 'real' Scotland – land of tartan, kilts, heather" (17).

[13] Trevor-Roper wrote about the origins of the kilt: "its inventor was an English Quaker from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson" (Hobsbawm, *Invention*, 21). Concerning the family tartans he explained that: "the idea of differentiated clan tartans [...] seems to have originated with the resourceful manufacturers. [...] The greatest of these firms was that of William Wilson and Son of Bannockburn. [...] Messrs Wilson and Son saw the advantage of building up a repertoire of differentiated clan tartans, [...] and for this purpose they entered into alliance with the Highland Society of London, which threw, over their commercial project, a cloak, or plaid, of historical respectability. In 1819, when the royal visit was first suggested, the firm prepared a 'Key Pattern Book' and sent samples of the various tartans up to London, where the Society duly 'certified' them as belonging to this or that clan" (*Invention*, 30).

[14] According to John Prebble: "if a single occasion can be said to have determined the kilt as the national dress of all Scotsmen . . . [the ball held for the King's visit] may perhaps have been, that moment" (*The King's Jaunt*, 103). Professor

the example of George IV, who is wearing a kilt in the portrait by Sir David Wilkie (1785-1841) commemorating his visit to Scotland, many Scots, from the Lowlands and the Highlands, decided to wear a kilt with their own family tartan when they sat for their portrait. In fact, this type of portrait was so popular that the Victorian painter Kenneth Macleay (1802-78) specialised in this genre and thirty-one of his portraits were published in two books entitled *The Highlanders of Scotland*. Landscape painters also stressed the specificity of the Scottish national identity by using the Highland myths. The development of landscape painting in Scotland coincided with the definition of the hybrid national identity, and with their paintings they contributed to the identification of the Scottish territory to the Highland landscapes which partly insured the originality of the new national identity because, as White has explained, "place and territory are as much a part of national identity as language, religion, and shared history" (251), "the uniqueness of places and territories […] contributes to the uniqueness of national identities" (21). From the 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century, they specialised in the depiction of the wild misty mountain landscape of the Highlands, a region whose unique geography has been used as a distinguishing feature of national identity. For instance, the views by Horatio McCulloch (1805-67) and Arthur Perigal (1816-84), two major Victorian landscape painters, traditionally represent romantic rugged mountain scenery with a loch and a castle, populated by inhabitants wearing kilts and animals including sheep, cattle, and deer. Scotland is depicted as a rural and traditional country where industry does not seem to have developed. Their paintings convey a very different image from that of England in the works of the famous English landscape painter John Constable (1776-1837), for example.

Thus the national identity constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century has three levels of hybridity, being a cross between Scottish/nationalist and British/unionist feelings as well as an amalgamation of the Lowlands and the Highlands and of real and fictitious traditions. Even if it is still prevailing in 2018, this identity, and more particularly its British/unionist component, has been under attack since the 1970s at a time when a first referendum on Scottish devolution was held. According to McCrone, the Scottish unionist identity has been weakened as a result of "the demise of empire, the erosion of the monarchy, as well as the diminishing capacity of quintessential British institutions such as the BBC to reflect a unified and homogenised British culture" (McCrone 1998, 201-02). In the Scottish art galleries, a large part of the Victorian paintings promoting the binational identity has been lying in the storerooms, and very few exhibitions have been devoted to them. In 2005, when the National Galleries of Scotland showcased a retrospective celebrating Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-73), an English Victorian painter whose Highland scenes encapsulate some of the most potent Highland myths, reviewers were highly critical: for instance, Professor Duncan Macmillan did not hesitate to write that the exhibition was "the ghost of the redundant iconography of an imaginary Scotland". Ross Sinclair, who was invited in 2005 by the National Galleries to deliver a paper on Landseer and the Highlands, has shown consistent interest in Scottish stereotypes and myths. Indeed, over the last twenty years, Scottish identity has been a recurring subject in his works and he was even inspired by the Victorian artist to create his installation entitled *Sinclair vs. Landseer*.

Hybridity, Territory and Space in Ross Sinclair's *Real Life* Project

Ross Sinclair is a Glasgow-based artist who began his career in the 1980s as a musician in a band called *The Soup Dragons*. Trained at the Glasgow School of Art, he started to work on his *Real Life* Project in 1994 when he had the words REAL LIFE tattooed across his back. Through the numerous works constituting the Real Life Project, Sinclair tackles a great variety of issues and raises the following key question: what can we believe in today? The artist does not give a clear answer but invites the audience to reflect with him on what is real in their lives—or to use Sinclair's words, to consider "the distance between everyday life and [fiction,] this *other place* and how the two might be reconciled, at least in an imaginative sense" ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 9).

The concept of hybridity is particularly relevant when referring to Sinclair's art practice, as his *Real Life* series includes works across the disciplines of sculpture, painting, performance, installation, critical writing, and music. The project has resulted in heterogeneous outputs comprising t-shirt paintings, hybrid sculptures, live music, cds, posters and billboards to name a few. Sinclair has explained that many of his works "reflect on notions of history and politics and people of a small damp northern European nation" ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 219-21). *Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital, We ♥ Real Life Scotland, Real Life Rocky Mountain, A Dream of the Hamnavoe Free State, Journey to the Edge of the World—The New Republic of St Kilda, The Real Life Rock Opera, Sinclair vs. Landseer* and *The Real Life Gordons of Huntly* are just some examples of the works which have dealt with the notion of Scottish identity. Although all the works which are part of the *Real Life Project* are not exclusively Scotland-identified, they can still be connected to Scotland and the issue of national identity as Sinclair has written

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Devine shares Prebble's opinion but notes that this was not unanimously accepted as, for instance, Lord Macaulay "looking back from the 1850s, […] found it incredible that the monarch should show his respect for the historic Scottish nation 'by disguising himself in what, before the Union, was considered by nine Scotchmen out of ten as the dress of a thief'" (*The Scottish Nation*, 235).

that his entire project is

> about the identity of a small country which has been politically and economically overshadowed by a more powerful neighbour and has […] had long spells of thriving as an autonomous nation state, but subsequently from an international socio-economic point of view has been subsumed by this other nation state. ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 223)

The Real Life Project began with a black and white photograph published in the last issue of the *Real Life Magazine* (1979-1994). In an urban landscape with, in the background, a white building with smashed windows, we can see the artist, stripped to the waist, wearing checked tartan shorts, his tattooed back turned against the audience. With this photograph Sinclair created the Realifer or the Real Life Character who has a unique hybrid identity being Ross Sinclair, the artist, a character, a viewer.[15] This character has been playing a central part in the *Real Life Project,* as he was constructed in order to engage in a dialogue with the audience. The Realifer, who always wears tartan shorts, a shorthand for his Scottish identity, and shows his Real Life tattoo, has been present in various forms throughout the project: he is sometimes an active performer in the installations playing live music or he can be seen and heard singing in a video. However, progressively his role has changed and has become less important as the function of the audience has evolved from being spectators, to critical thinkers by bringing the work to life with their presence, to finally become active participants by modifying the work by painting or singing, for instance. Since 1994, with the Realifer, Sinclair has embarked on a journey which began in Glasgow and then took him to other Scottish towns and cities; he then travelled to London, Continental Europe, the USA and China. Over the last twenty-four years, the Real Life Character has thus "travelled far and wide in its dialogue with a Real Life public" (vol. 1, 94); he has been encountered in an institutional context, in the numerous art galleries and museums where the project has been on display, but also in an informal context including places such as a town market, a shop and even a church. All along his journey, he has been engaging the audience in many different ways, pulling them physically and metaphorically into what he calls the "other place." Indeed, when he invites them to paint or play a musical instrument, the viewers not only enter the physical place/space of the Real Life Project but they also join the artist in this imaginary place which is between reality, their everyday life, and fiction. Together in this third space they try to figure out what is real and what is fictitious about their national identity. According to Sinclair, if the Scots want to become an independent state once again, it is first of all essential for them to reconsider and reconstruct their identity. In his essay entitled *Where are we? A Reflection on a Journey with the Real Life Gordons of Huntly* published in 2012, the artist wrote that,

> At its core, Scotland is endlessly interesting because the accumulated image of Scotland, which has slowly come into focus over the past 300 years, is essentially fictional. Of course it's made up of Walter Scott, from Queen Victoria coming back to Scotland [and] Ossian. […] All these things are related to historical facts, but this re-imagining of the culture, the mythology, the identity if you like—becomes reified after the last political force of the nation has faded, made impotent after Culloden […] then it's all over. So the tartans and Clans are proscribed, then in 1822 Walter Scott stage-manages George IV's trip to Edinburgh. […] And it all kicks off again. […] But it's all a fiction—isn't it? Is it? Then why do we love it so much? […] The biggest issue surrounding Scottish Independence—to advance towards this goal intellectually perhaps we have to find a way to knock our famously mythologised history out of focus—in order to ultimately make this country a *Real Life* proposition? ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 219)

Real Life Rocky Mountain is one the first works about Scottish identity. This installation was first created in 1996 then re-created on a larger scale in 2014 for the "Generation: 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland" exhibition. Sinclair has constructed a landscape inspired by the Highlands in which he has included some stereotypes associated with the region and also used as symbols of Scottish identity. We can see a mountainside covered with artificial grass, plastic rocks and a waterfall, a brook powered by a pump, as well as fibreglass trees and taxidermy animals including a red grouse and a deer, which are some of the animals traditionally represented in the Victorian landscape paintings depicting the Highlands. The Real Life Character is sitting in this diorama, playing the guitar and singing, his tattooed back to the viewer. Next to him, there are two TV sets showing a video of the Realifer, with his back to the camera, singing in real Highland locations. The songs in the video and those sung live are mainly popular Scottish songs dating from the early eighteenth century to the contemporary period including some written by Sinclair such as *Real Life Parledonia—Auld Reekie*. The adjective "real" in the title of the installation and in Sinclair's tattoo, the live music and the presence of the Realifer contrast with the artificial landscape where everything is fake. As is suggested by Sinclair's song, and more particularly by the use of the word "parledonia" which comes from the French verb *parler*, the artist wants to start a dialogue with the Scottish audience and make them think about the way they define their national identity. Sinclair wrote that with this installation he wanted to raise several questions:

> Are we dislocated from history, from nature?—is the history and geography of a small emasculated nation better

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[15] Sinclair has explained that the Real Life Character "is an active performer, everyman, an individual, confused human presence, e *Pluribus Unum*: but a member of the public too" (vol. 1, 35).

experienced as a sanitized theme park? […] I employ the songs to re-interpret this history, to find other, different histories, hidden histories, unofficial histories—real histories. I want to ask a simple question—who are we? How do we become "us" collectively and "me" individually? How does your home country affect that? And how can we begin to come to terms with this to better understand where we are now and where we are going? ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 133-34).

Sinclair criticises Scott and nineteenth-century painters who constructed a Scottish identity based on a stereotypical and romanticised image of Scotland which, according to him, turned the nation into a gigantic theme park.[16] By including stereotypes which are part of the Scottish cultural paraphernalia and creating a contrast between the real and the fake, in *Real Life Rocky Mountain*, he is highlighting the artificiality of the prevailing Scottish identity and the urgency to construct a new, a real identity which would truly represent the contemporary Scottish nation. However, Sinclair does not offer the audience his own version of this identity: the Real Life Character is absorbed in contemplation and he seems to invite the audience to do the same and think about what it means for them to be Scottish.

In *Sinclair vs. Landseer* an installation created in 2007 for Aberdeen Art Gallery, Sinclair challenges the way Scottish identity has been conventionally portrayed by artists such as Landseer, McCulloch and Perigal. In a room dedicated to the nineteenth-century representation of Scotland, Sinclair has placed an old Land Rover, covered in neon Scottish maps, tartan, stag antlers and a stuffed stag head, evoking Landseer's iconic *Monarch of the Glen*. All these ornaments seem to be kitsch and morbid trophies of Scottish cultural heritage brought back from the age of Landseer. Parked on a dais made of old Scottish LP records, the vehicle is placed in front of Landseer's *Flood in the Highlands*. The scene depicted by Landseer cannot be compared to the idyllic views traditionally represented by Victorian painters but it includes several Scottish cultural icons including the tartan clad figures, the sheep, the Highland cow and the Border collie. The Real Life Character is visible on a monitor, his back to the audience, he is playing the guitar and singing a song written by Sinclair. The first line runs "Edwin Landseer died in 1873, I don't know what he means to you, but I'll tell you what he means to me." Then Sinclair makes a link between Landseer, Scott, the creation of the Highland myths and the construction of the Scottish identity as he goes on singing "together they invented Scotland for the world. Well, we know now that they didn't get it quite right." Below the front bumper, another TV screen plays a video showing a young girl—the artist's daughter—singing the same song, her face towards the audience. The Real Life Character who is facing the nineteenth-century painting seems to be turned to the past, looking at History, whereas the child looks towards the audience, the future, and seems to ask the public to think about the meaning of Scottish identity. Compared to *Real Life Rocky Mountain*, the viewer's role has evolved: he is no longer a contemplative spectator but has become a critical thinker, as he has entered into the room, he has become part of the work, he has physically taken the place of the Realifer and is invited to compare two works about Scottish identity which were produced one hundred and fifty years apart and to think about how he would define his national identity.

Since the 1970s the successive referendums held in Scotland have heightened the artists' need to revisit and revise the hybrid national identity constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, because it is no longer representative of the Scottish nation. As has been noted, the issue of national identity has been an important thread of Sinclair's Real Life Project. The "Real Life" in Sinclair's title underscores the paradox between reality and the sentimental images which were created by Victorian painters. In his work, Sinclair has not given a clear answer as to what it means for him to be a Scot. For the last twenty-four years, he has preferred to engage in a dialogue with the viewers so that they can re-evaluate what constitutes the core of their national identity. The audience enters the physical space of the Real Life Project and joins the artist in this imaginary in-betweenness or "third space" to reuse the term coined by Homi Bhabha, somewhere between fiction and their everyday life. Together they have embarked on a cross-fertilization process to create a new national identity allowing greater representativeness, not only of the people who were born and bred in Scotland but also of new migrant communities and Scottish expatriates.

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[16] Sinclair has used this comparison on several occasions. For instance, he compares Scotland to a theme park throughout his short fiction entitled *An Open Letter to Whomsoever It May Concern Regarding: Scotland – a Brief and Fractured Introduction to the History of the Period 1983-2083* ("Appendix A", vol. 2, 261-67).

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