Internal Memo: Monetising Scottish Culture in an Independent Scotland

By Ewan Morrison

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INTERNAL MEMO MONETISING SCOTTISH CULTURE IN AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND
An abridged sample of the findings and proposals of the Scottish Working Group on Culturo-Economic Futures (SWCEF).

'As Ithers See us'

The SWCEF was set up in 2012 — comprising thirty specialists from the fields of culture, heritage, (venture) finance and tourism we conducted twenty-two 'focus groups' and 'brainstorming sessions', oversaw four hundred interviews with members of the public and created and categorised the results of the **'As Ithers See Us'** questionnaire which was completed by over three thousand Scots and four thousand foreign nationals. The question at the centre of our investigations was **'how does Scottish Culture appear to the rest of the world, and how can we economically capitalise on our image and learn from our mistakes?'** This necessarily entailed investigating the negatives around how our nation and its people are perceived and we did not shrink from that task, believing, as we do, that 'every problem is a really an opportunity' and that 'every enemy is just a friend we haven't made yet.' We have attempted to embrace the challenge of our most radical and at times unexpected findings and to formulate creative solutions accordingly. Our reasons for this bold strategy concern the internal resistance that we have come across among the Scottish people to change and to challenges. This is clearly an impediment to venture capital investment, and to an evolving sense of what Scotland and the Scots might 'become'. Our proposals are intended to 'break the mould' and to do this we have

attempted, in every case, to **‘turn our problems into assets’**.

We have been guided in our methodology by thinkers and experts as diverse as Milton Freidman, Billy Connolly, Viktor E Frankl (author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*), Jackie Stewart, David Hume, George Lucas, Govan Young Team and Anthony Robbins (author of *Awake the Giant Within*).

Scotland — the remake

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In an era in which the global feature film industry produces largely films concerned with the past and with remakes (85% of all films made Globally in 2012 were sequels and prequels, remakes and re-inventions of existing franchises) we see a great opportunity for Scotland as a film location for the re-making of classics such as *Braveheart, Brigadoon, Local Hero, Highlander* and *Rob Roy* (urban classics such as *Trainspotting* and *Gregory’s Girl* are also ripe for remaking and should be re-produced by Scottish based filmmakers before US corporations ‘get there first’). As cultural amnesia is now built into the global consumer mindset and as little as six years are required before a blockbuster is remade with a new cast (see *Spiderman*), we see a great economic opportunity for regularly remaking our Scottish cinema classics for a world audience.

We note with alarm that remakes of *Kidnapped* (2005, starring Iain Glen) and *The Wicker Man* (2006, starring Nicholas Cage) were not shot, even in part, in Scotland. In the case of *Kidnapped*, the entire film was shot in New Zealand with NZ hillsides and mountains ‘standing in’ for Scottish ones, (with the careful placement standing stones and other signifiers of Scottishness). This was a great loss of opportunity which should not be repeated — however the reasons given by the BBC, and leaked by the cast, shed some light on this problem, which if unchallenged could impede feature film production in Scotland in future. It was said and has been repeated a dangerous number of times (and we paraphrase) that there were too many telegraph poles, roads and wind farms within Scotland to effectively serve as a natural 18th century setting. In this instance, the development of Scotland industrially and ecologically is an impediment to film

production, and this should not be taken lightly as a criticism.

The industries of film production and green power are directly at loggerheads, and we ask that government reconsider its existing short-sighted pro-green energy policy and plans for a facilitating a further forty-nine wind farms within Scotland as this will effectively put a stop to the use of Scotland as a film location for historic epics. Film production and its knock-on effects for tourism raise a far greater amount of capital than that raised by tax on what are in most cases wind farms owned by foreign corporations. Film production also has many spinoff industries, including merchandising, tours, costumes and prop manufacture, toy manufacture, post production and dubbing (in particular for the dubbing of Scottish accents into 'English'), catering and accommodation, and not least of all the employment of vast umbers of indigenous Scots as 'extras'. We recommend that areas of Scotland be kept undeveloped, precisely for the purposes of feature film production and that already developed areas be returned to a state of nature towards that end.

Housing Scheme Nature Reserves

Following from our premise to see the opportunity in every negative, we find in a recent story a vivid metaphor for the new Scotland. The Red Road Flats in Glasgow have long been seen as a blight upon Scotland, an example of just how bad social engineering can become, with these council-built, government-subsidised tower blocks being magnets for social problems. Within twenty years these utopian 'Homes as Machines for modern living' had become 'prisons in the sky'. Even in their demolition they proved disastrous, as they were constructed with large amounts of asbestos. However, only months before the demolition of the 27 storey block at Petershill, one of the now windowless blocks attracted a new kind of inhabitant — a family of Peregrine Falcons. By law it is illegal to disrupt breeding birds, so to assist the nesting pair, Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) working with the RSPCB and demolition contractor Safedem worked together and funded a purpose-built nesting box for the adult peregrines at another nearby block of flats at Red Road. While there is outcry among certain groups, that this one family of birds has been treated with more importance than the thousand inhabitants of substandard council flats in the area, this 'accident' poses an unexpected opportunity and demonstrates how private companies, charities and govt can work together.

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We find it not in the slightest bit ironic that negative connotations, stereotypes and puns can be cleverly inverted to be used as advertising slogans. So here, while there has been prejudice in the past that the underclasses who live in high rise council schemes are subhuman, we could play on this theme in a positive way: Red Road — Home to Real Animals.

Diaspora as a ready-made International Market

With respect to The Highland Clearances, not enough is made of this epic tragic event. Given that one hundred and seventy thousand were cleared from the land, moved abroad to settle in America and Australia (and more remote colonies), the descendants of these migrants now constitute a very large population and an immense tourist opportunity. We advocate that cultural events be re-enacted at

real locations in Scotland to commemorate the international and enduring emotional appeal of the Highland Clearances and to celebrate the positive spirit of survival. As has been shown by other countries diaspora can be turned around from its negative connotations and re-directed into a financial opportunity. To this end, we propose — in addition and as a compliment to the much loved statue to The Clearances at Helmsdale, Sutherland — that a vast 'wall of names' be erected at a suitable location. Not only would this reflect similar monuments (the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (VVMW), in Washington DC), it would reinforce the historic magnitude of The Clearances, and be an enticement for ex-patriots and direct descendants to visit Scotland to 'find their ancestral name'. Given the numbers of descendants involved we estimate a possible tourist draw from over seven countries, of an excess of two million people. To this end it also worth noting that the VVMW draws over six million tourists a year and that it is further backed up by travelling replicas (The Wall that Heals, the Travelling Wall, the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall and the Moving Wall). We further recommend that such replicas be created within Scotland, to raise public awareness and act as promotion for the iconic 'central wall'.

Further to this, as award winning Scottish Actor James McCoy recently proclaimed (and we paraphrase) "It is a great pity [and a lost opportunity] that no-one has yet made a feature film about the Highland Clearances." We find this a grievous omission and urge the relevant cultural bodies to initiate such a project immediately.

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Turning Gangs into Clans

One of the most radical proposals from the brainstorming sessions was around the aversive image of the long term unemployed (LTU) and the association with gang violence in central Scotland and the impediment to tourism that these represented. The following radical proposal was based upon the positive achievements of the Clanranald Trust for Scotland and other similar groups who are involved in 'Historic Battle Re-enactments' (The Battle of Prestonpans, of

Bannockburn, and the historic Battle of Stirling Bridge). The idea, radical in scope, is the creation of 'battle re-enactment units', utilising the labour and skills of LTU. As mandatory labour for the unemployed is going to be 'on the cards' in most developed countries undergoing austerity, we envisage that this strategy could 'kill two birds with one stone'. Through training in acting, swordsmanship, choreography, battle strategy and prop-weapon manufacture we would effectively be turning the LTU into high level performers to play the parts of Jacobites and Redcoats, Scottish Clans, Picts, Pagans and Vikings in vivid recreations of classic Scottish Battles. The numbers involved would be in tens of thousands and this could serve as a 'one stop shop' single-solution which would wipe-out the difficult negotiations involved with 'workfare' (mandatory work-for-benefits placements) arrangements with corporations such as Asda, Argos and Superdrug. This would be like the YTS of the 1980s, but without the negative 'chain-gang' associations. In short, you get your state benefits after you have taken part in a battle.

Furthermore, psychological studies show that one of the problems that face the LTU is depression caused by lack of physical activity, this in turn leads to outburst of violence (a natural response to being 'imprisoned by poverty'). The cycle can be broken by employment, and also by intense physical exercise. Historic re-enactments allow a cathartic acting out of aggression and also provide handsome financial remuneration for participants. They are fun, fitness, adventure and training all-in-one; they are 'play with pay'. Furthermore as studies show that the LTU put in up to nine hours a day playing virtual historic battles they are a demographic that comes already pre-trained in battle strategy (thanks to such games as *World of Warcraft* and *Assassins Creed*).

In brief the LTU within Scotland could be turned into a large and highly skilled moveable army. Such events could also become talent-spotting scenarios for feature films for a re-enlivened film industry (see above).

At present, England enjoys sixty-seven battle re-enactments (Scotland has only four) and has capitalised on this as a global tourist attraction. England has even gone so far as to re-enact contemporary Battles (see Jeremy Deller's artwork, *The Battle of Orgreave*, which reconstructed the incident from the 1984 miners strike.)

There is no reason why Scotland could not do the same, and do even better. Just because Scotland lost the majority of its battles doesn't mean they can't be

celebrated and capitalised upon. Re-enactments also add greatly to community finances with additional spinoffs for which can be monetized. These include: period music ceilidhs, light refreshments with period catering (thairm, brose, tripe, bannocks etc), children's classes in archery, tartan dying, supervised sword fighting, battle quizzes, model making, hide and seek, playing dead, and classes in calligraphy (the drawing up of surrender documents and treaties, etc). Period libations can also be made available to adults. Photo-op spots allow tourists to pose with historic figures while social media permits millions of others to feel they are taking part in these classic battles and to even vote for a change of outcome.

Key moments in Scottish history that have yet to be re-enacted for a tourist audience include the following: the Roman defeat of the Caledonians at the *Battle of Mons Graupius* (84 AD), The Northumbrians capture Edinburgh from Gododdin (638 AD), Pictish King Bruide's defeat of Ecgfrith at the Battle of Dun Nechtain (685 AD), the Viking sacking of Iona (802 AD), the Battle of Largs (1263), the Battle of Killicrankie (1689). Most of all, and perhaps the greatest missed opportunity for a re-enactment is the Battle of George Square, Red Clydeside Glasgow (1919), with over 90,000 involved in a Bolshevik-style insurrection, brutally put down by 'British' military force — a vast public spectacle and one of the largest 'battles' fought within Britain in the modern era. As such it could annually provide employment as actors for 90,000 Scots, with re-enactments performed weekly at the height of the tourist season. The opportunities here are not hard to see. We also recommend, as with the above, that this moment in history be dramatised as a feature film for the international market.

To date George Square has been most effectively utilised in the film War Zone Z (starring Brad Pitt, June 2013) — a film about a zombie pandemic in which George Square doubles as the city square in Philadelphia. To its merit the film employed over three hundred Glaswegians as zombie extras for a week's shooting, bringing hundreds of thousands of pounds to the city. We see no reason why this success cannot be repeated and why Scotland cannot have its own professional casting agencies for regular zombie work to serve the needs of global cinema.

Provisional Conclusion

'As Ithers See Us' leads to certain conclusions about the enduring nature of 'Scottish negativity' and we see this as threat to financial progress in an independent nation. We advocate that the only way to tackle Scotland's problems

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Further proposals include: Living Dioramas, new Monuments/Statues to Scottish Writers (Muir, Morgan, MacCaig, Welsh, Trocchi, Rankin, Banks and Rowling), The Clyde Regatta, CCTV Reality TV, Inner City Charity Zones and Back-To-Workhouses.

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