ROSS SINCLAIR

20 YEARS OF REAL LIFE

CRITICAL OVERVIEW

+ INTRODUCTION TO SUBMITTED

PUBLICATIONS: I-7, & APPENDICES A - B - C

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY BY PUBLISHED WORK

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART, 2016

Ross Sinclair 20 Years of Real Life

Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work at The Glasgow School of Art, 2016



Critical Overview
Ross Sinclair

Critical Overview, Introduction to Publications, Introduction to Appendices, Bibliography

Ross Sinclair CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Doctor of Philosophy by Published work

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

Published Work at The Glasgow School of Art.

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

Through a series of monograph publications, and other outputs, this submission

examines the practice-led project: Real Life which I have developed through a

series of interrelated artworks since 1994, beginning when I had the words REAL

LIFE tattooed on my back.

Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution

of others, that this submission is the result of my own work and has not been

submitted for any other degree at The Glasgow School of Art, University of

Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Ross A. Sinclair

Printed Name

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Abstract

The submission, Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life consists of seven publications discussed in a critical overview, with three supporting Appendices. Together they document and analyse the diverse outputs of my practice-led research project, Real Life, initiated in 1994. The critical overview argues for the innovative nature of the Real Life Project through its engagement with audiences and demonstrates its contribution to the field of contemporary art practice, across the disciplines of sculpture, painting, performance, installation, critical writing and music.

Drawing on multi-disciplinary methodologies, I reflect on the forms, materials and processes explored over 20 years of the *Real Life Project*, where everyday materials are utilised in unorthodox ways developing a series of installations and performances that seek to challenge conventional modes of exhibition practice. This has built a 20-year durational performance project that connects with the public at a dynamic intersection of ideas, context, performance and art-practice.

This project was initiated when the words *REAL LIFE* were tattooed in black ink across my back, at Terry's Tattoo parlour in Glasgow in 1994. The *Real Life Project* created at this moment has been disseminated across a range of exhibition and publication contexts, positioned against a critical framework of contested models of *Everyday Life* and *The Real* and acknowledges the influence of key critical thinkers such as Barthes, Baudrillard and de Certeau, and more recently of Bourriaud, Bishop and Kester.

The works discussed in this critical overview explore individual and collective relationships with *Real Life*, particularly when viewed through evolving paradigms of society such as: Democracy, Utopia, Justice, Commerce, Geography and History, the Church, the Bank and the State. These pillars of the architecture of contemporary *Real Life* are examined through the repeated interrogation of context, materials and audience engagement: testing the utility and agency of this tattooed artist and the contemporary art exhibition itself.

The submitted publications are central to an understanding of the evolution of the *Real Life Project* and its wider contextual focus and I claim ownership of them as I have conceived, developed and directed the monographic examples (1,2,3,5,6), supported by the relevant institutions. Gathered together here for the first time in Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of *Real Life*, the breadth and depth of the *Real Life Project* becomes manifest: a synthesis of the aims, objectives and methodologies of the peripatetic life of the project. Viewed as a single evolving project (including the published writing, music and exhibition chronology in Appendices A, B and C) this submission evidences a unique (ongoing) contribution to contemporary art practice.

The submission argues the *Real Life Project* as a distinctive model of practice: informed and developed through repeated testing in diverse contextual scenarios, the results of which can be observed through the submitted publications and appendices. The critical overview explores the question of how the contextually responsive, artist-initiated project, *Real Life*, has contributed an original model of artistic practice using distinctive methods of public engagement developed through heterogeneous public outputs over a 20-year period.

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List of Abbreviations

The Real Life Project is referred throughout as the RLP.

The citations for the seven publications central to Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life are noted below. Within the text they are referred to as PI, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7 respectively. Introductions and full citations for all seven publications appear on pages **064 – 093.**

Publications

- PI Ross Sinclair, Real Life, (Glasgow: CCA, Tramway, The Pier Arts Centre, 1997)
- P2 Ross Sinclair, Real Life and How To Live It, (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket, Aspex Gallery, 2000)
- P3 Ross Sinclair, If North was South and East was West, (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstvrein, 2004)
- P4 Ross Sinclair, 'Real Life Painting Show'/'Painting as a new medium Symposium,'

 Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods. Vol.1 No.1 (2006)

 http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/vlnl/vlnleditorial.html [accessed 1/10/15]
- P5 Ross Sinclair, We Love Real Life Scotland, Art, History and Place: a Reader exploring the heritage of Huntly's Gordons and Other Scottish Incidences (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2012)
- P6 Ross Sinclair, 20 Years of Real Life, (Edinburgh: Collective Gallery, 2015)
- P7 Ross Sinclair, 'A Body of Work in Character: On the Road with Ross and the Realifers', *Philosophy of Photography Journal*, Intellect Ltd, Volume 6, Issue I & 2 (2016)

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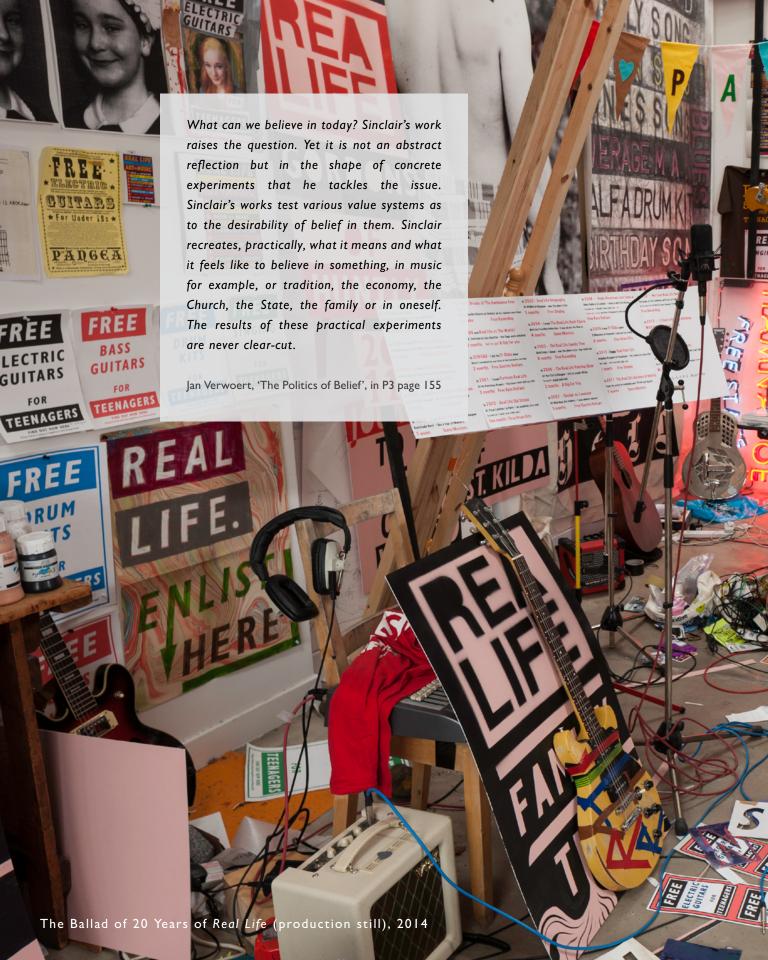


Critical Overview



Why, to tell long stories, showing how I have spoiled my life through morally rotting in my corner, through lack of fitting environment, through divorce from real life, and rankling spite in my underground world, would certainly not be interesting; a novel needs a hero, and all the traits for an anti-hero are EXPRESSLY gathered together here, and what matters most, it all produces an unpleasant impression, for we are all divorced from life, we are all cripples, every one of us, more or less. We are so divorced from it that we feel at once a sort of loathing for real life, and so cannot bear to be reminded of it. Why, we have come almost to looking upon real life as an effort, almost as hard work, and we are all privately agreed that it is better in books.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, trans. by Kyril Zinovieff and Jenny Hughes (UK: Alma Classics Ltd, 2015), page 114.





Introduction

This critical overview will set out the cultural, critical and artistic context in which the *Real Life Project* (*RLP*) has developed, viewed through the relevant *Real Life* books, articles and outputs that reflect the *RLP* in its published form, including three Appendices I have assembled that illuminate the hinterland of writing, music and exhibition practice that together provide a comprehensive critical overview of the *RLP*.

I will discuss why the publications are important to an understanding of the aims and ambitions of the *RLP* and how they are conceived and constructed. Each individual publication offers a distinct overview and analysis of a particular body of work and this doctoral submission brings them together, set within the chronology of the *RLP* for the first time.

I will relate the key ideas of the *RLP* to relevant critical literature and will address how the *RLP* has approached the engagement and development of *audience* utilising combinations of unfamiliar materials, process and context to produce an original and evolving longitudinal artwork. The timbre of the *RLP* is often informal in both exhibited and written form, sometimes appearing makeshift, even amateur in character, conveying the carefully contrived feel of *the provisional* in order to encourage public engagement, discussion and empathetic connection. However I will demonstrate that the *RLP* is informed by a careful critical reflection described in this overview and evidenced in the published written work and exhibited outputs.²

This can be seen in more detail in the introduction and afterword in Appendix A. The brief length of this critical overview as defined in the GSA/GU regulations allows for only a brief tour of the main component parts of the RLP, I have therefore included appendices to reflect the diverse outputs of the RLP.

² E.g. Kurt Cobain vs. Clement Greenberg: A Conversation, in P1, page 18 and P2, page 12 and 'Nietzsche, The Beastie Boys and Masturbating as an Artform', Appendix A, pages 82-89.

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The Establishment of the Real. The media transform the great silence of things into its opposite. Formerly constituting a secret, the real now talks constantly. News reports, information, statistics and surveys are everywhere. No story has ever spoken so much or shown so much. Not even the ministers of the gods ever made them talk in such a continuous, detailed and imperative way as the producers of revelations and rules do these days in the name of current reality...Narrated reality constantly tells us what must be believed and what must be done. What can you oppose to the facts? You can only give in and obey what they 'signify', like an oracle, like the oracle of Delphi. The fabrication of simulacra thus provides the means of producing believers and hence people practicing their faiths. The establishment of the real is the most visible form of our contemporary dogmas. It is thus also the one most disputed among the parties. The institution of the real no longer has its own proper place, neither seat nor ex cathedra authority.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press 1988), page 185.

1. The Real Life Character is born, Glasgow 1994

How did the tattooing of the words REAL LIFE on my back initiate and inform the project?

In summer 1994 at Terry's Tattoo Parlour in Glasgow, I paid senior tattooist Stuart Wrigley £125 to permanently inscribe the words *REAL LIFE* across my back in black ink, 50mm high and 360mm wide in a hand drawn font loosely based, before the ubiquity of computers, on *Times New Roman Bold*. A few hours later, I was back on the street, changed forever, with a sore back. Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan, editors of *Real Life Magazine* (1979-1994) covered the bill in exchange for using the image of my newly minted *Real Life Character*, a photographed on the streets of Glasgow, on the front cover of the final issue of their magazine.

Thus the *Real Life Character* was defined from the start: set in public, his tattooed back turned against the audience, quoting in equal measure from the historical precedents of the high cultural *Rückenfigur*, associated with Caspar David Freidrich and the jazz inflected, lo-fi, anti-spectacle of *The Velvet Underground*.

Underlining the diverse modes of critical engagement that run through my *RLP*, in addition to creating the cover image, I contributed an essay to *Real Life Magazine #23* on the contemporary Glaswegian art scene; a particular scene which at that point could be described as *nascent* but which soon would be routinely described as *miraculous*. This text explored tangential relationships with Los Angeles, the U.S.A. and metropolitan high art culture. It was called: 'Faster Than a Pool of Piss on a Hot Summer Sidewalk'.⁵

The project had begun.⁶

³ PI: page 46, Real Life contact sheet

⁴ Real Life Magazine #23, ed. Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan, (California 1994), in Appendix A, pages 366-371

⁵ Appendix A: page 366, and Afterword page 418 for a fuller account of relationship with Real Life Magazine.

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

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"Glasgow is a magnificent city", said McAlpin. "Why do we hardly ever notice that?" "Because nobody imagines living here", said Thaw. McAlpin lit a cigarette and said, "If you want to explain that I'll certainly listen." "Then think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively. What is Glasgow to most of us? A house, the place we work, a football park or golf course, some pubs and connecting streets. That's all. No, I'm wrong, there's also the cinema and the library. And when our imagination needs exercise we use these to visit London, Paris, Rome under the Caesars, the American West at the turn of the century, anywhere but here and now. Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music-hall song and a few bad novels. That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves."

Alasdair Gray, Lanark: A Life in Four Books (London: Panther Books, 1985), page 243.

2. Real Life Context - D.I.Y. tactics and making up methodologies

How has Context (local and particular) framed the critical voice of the RLP?

The timing of the gesture of tattooing could retrospectively be read as prescient, but as I sat in the chair at Terry's Tattoo parlour in 1994 waiting to kick-start my own project, I could not predict that it would be developing in parallel with an evolving dialogue around issues of socially engaged practice, relational aesthetics and everyday life, that would grow exponentially to form a critical crescendo, constituting one of the key art dialectics of the early 21st century.

In the Glasgow of 1994, where the *RLP* was formed, the civic re-ordering of the post-industrial city was in its infancy. The monetizing of culture and the *creative industries* was immature and uncertain. Any *real* identity the city projected was in a state of flux. That's how I felt too. The *RLP* was timely, insistent and necessary. I had contributed to early critical debates addressing this situation, published texts, pasted poster works in the streets of Glasgow, New York, Amsterdam and Dublin interrogating each city's questionable identity as a *Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital* while participating in critically defined exhibitions like Stewart Home's *Festival of Plagiarism* at Transmission Gallery. Self-determination appeared to be the only authentic tactic available.

Glaswegian visual culture of an informed and internationalist nature was thin on the ground. In stark contrast to the official visual culture being touted by the city fathers, writers such as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman had a more authentic influence on me and my peer group at that time, helping us re-imagine our city and how it might connect to the rest of the world. In Alasdair Gray's Lanark, the best book about art-school ever written, the main protagonist, Duncan Thaw explains.⁸

⁷ PI pages 68-71

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Artist Placement Group, now known as Organization and Imagination (O+I) (Manifesto, 1980)

O+I today operates on these following essential axioms:

- I. The context is half the work.
- 2. The function of medium in art is determined not so much by that factual object, as by the process and the levels of attention to which the work aims.
- 3. That the proper contribution of art to society is art.
- 4. That the status of artists within organisations must necessarily be in line with other professional persons, engaged within the organisation.
- 5. That the status of the artist within organisations is independent, bound by the invitation, rather than by any instruction from authority within the organisation, and to the long-term objectives of the whole of society.

 $\frac{\text{http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/}{\text{FINAL_Manifesto_APG.pdf}}$

2.1 No Artists, No Galleries, May as well go to London?

The circumstances and conditions under which this emergent milieu of artists worked in Glasgow in the 1980s and 1990s are well documented in Sarah Lowndes' influential book *Social Sculpture*. I was part of the group of artists who had been educated in the *Department of Environmental Art* at Glasgow School of Art under David Harding and Sam Ainsley's tutelage. We learned our trade in public around the city, exploring the complexities and possibilities of art and its audiences located outside of traditional gallery settings. We were taught to use the Artist Placement Group maxim that "The Context is Half the Work" as a compass to help explore and navigate this new (to us) territory. In the context is Half the Work is a compass to help explore and navigate this new (to us) territory.

This has remained a constant axiom in the evolution of the *RLP* and has proven an effective bulwark for this generation of artists who no longer felt the necessity to leave the city and the country to find opportunities and audience. Instead we looked horizontally to Amsterdam, Berlin, New York and Reykjavik; exploring an organically developing, reciprocal, symbiotic community of cultural workers rather than remaining tied to an outmoded vertical geopolitical hierarchy. In my essay, 'Bad Smells but No Sign of the Corpse', written for the catalogue accompanying *Windfall* '91, an artist-run exhibition organised by Glaswegian and European artists, I expand on the necessity of a self determined approach in relation to the politics of context and audience:

Sarah Lowndes, Social Sculpture (Glasgow: Stopstop, 2003). The background of 1990's Glasgow/Scotland is also discussed in Donnie O'Rourke's essay, He's The Mess We're In. P1, page 51.

Hans Ulrich Obrist coined his ambiguous Glasgow Miracle term, after his first trawl of the city in the early 1990's, though no one would notice the absurdity of the nomenclature for another decade. In 1993 he invited a group of us Glaswegians to make an exhibition in his Vienna apartment in a project called Left Luggage organised by Jonathan Monk. Even now, it is unclear whether Obrist thought the miracle he witnessed in Glasgow was the unusual mutually beneficial support system and kinship of artists in the city where there was no discernable private gallery structure or perhaps that a dynamic art scene was emerging from what might appear as a third world country, to a middle-class European.

Why wait for your work to be validated/approved/confirmed by some ex public school boy in a sharp suit/jeans n' sneakers (but maybe you knew him already from prep school?). You get out there, do some fucking hot shows and invite them over on your own terms. ¹²

Through Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life I will demonstrate how my RLP has made a sustained and original contribution to the development of these evolving issues of cultural and geographic identity and the role, remit and responsibilities of the artist engaging with them.¹³

3. A Publication of Blood, Bones and Ink.

How has the Real Life Character functioned as an ambassador and emissary for the Real Life Project?

The first physically published iteration of the *RLP* was the act of tattooing the words *REAL LIFE* onto my body. *REAL LIFE* was made permanent for as long as I live ¹⁴ located on my back one millimetre into the dermis, seen through the transparent epidermis layer of my skin, like the

¹² Ross Sinclair, 'Bad Smells but no sign of the Corpse', Windfall '91 in Appendix A, page 15

As a co-investigator on a recent AHRC funded project, The Glasgow Miracle, Materials for Alternative Histories, I attempted to interrogate this miraculous paradigm by conducting a series of long form interviews, some three or four hours with artists connected with this self-determined Glasgow scene, many of whom I have known and worked alongside since the 1980s. (Available here: "http://www.glasgowmiraclearchives.org/artist-to-artist-interviews/" Douglas Gordon, Martin Boyce, Nathan Coley, Toby Paterson, Claire Barclay et al). I wanted to discuss why these artists stayed embedded in Glasgow for the long haul, rather than disappearing to London like previous generations. These interviews can be interpreted as primary contextual research that helps articulate the early years of the RLP. I explore, with these artists, the methodologies and tactics employed as we imagined and developed our practice into being. In the interviews I try to capture, from the inside out an authentic voice of this generation of artists, and explore why such a dynamic and vibrant situation emerged. The archive was specifically conceived as counter to a number of representations of the Glasgow scene that are thought of as reductive, diminished and reliant on soundbites, which have created a narrative straightjacket of the city's art community, seen in such TV programmes as Glasgow: The Grit and the Glamour, U.K., BBC1, 2012, Dir. Alan Yentob and Scotland's Art Revolution: The Mayerick Generation, UK., BBC4, 2014.

¹⁴ The duration of RLP may, in fact, be longer than my lived life, in collaboration with the artist Christine Borland we are exploring the possible uses of the REAL LIFE tattoo after my death.

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

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...The whole thing's a reality show. All of this is rooted in a decision to turn back to art-like activity after a period of pop culture that allowed him (Sinclair) to absorb and play with the best of the communication devices that are so familiar from music and packaged sub-cultures. He (Sinclair) has proceeded to apply some of those strategies to the art world. He is not alone in this crossover mentality. Wolfgang Tillman's photographic images, Carsten Holler's scientific training, Philippe Parreno's combination of film sensibility with a desire to create events and Rikrit Tiravanija's creation of social space...

Liam Gillick, 'Leave Now Before It's Too Late, Ross Sinclair's Internationalism', PI, page 13.

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...Capitalising on the prospect of a forthcoming year's stay in Amsterdam to take stock, to assess what, in anything his art had achieved to date, an empty shop unit on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh became the Museum of Despair for 3 weeks in 1994 and was filled with, "all the shit that's left over from 5 years of making art". Situated in the cities busiest tourist stretch, the Museum of Despair was an intensely public work, from its site to the related series of postcards, which went out into the world as a kind of prepublicity. Exploring further the potential for disappointment and disillusionment, Sinclair described it as an amateur historification of one practice and an assessment of what one individual's contribution to society had been. Everything was ostensibly for sale, plastered with gaudy, day-glo price tickets; 'selling back to you, the public, all the stuff you paid for in the first place'. Part car-boot sale, part retrospective, part museum, this albeit arbitrary attachment of monetary value to his art clearly relates to that whole strain of his work concerned with commodification and exchange values. Siting this 'commercial endeavour' on the Royal Mile, which is all about the commemoration of history and selling it as a contemporary experience, a tourist attraction, recalls the way in which Felix Gonzalez-Torres talked about his stack works, offset prints on paper presented in neat, minimal stacks of unlimited copies. He made the first of those in 1989 after going through a copy of the New York Times; 'there was a huge ad for a Veteran's day Sale, and I thought, in our culture we no longer celebrate historical events at the public plaza, we go shopping.

Katrina M. Brown; 'From The Inside Out', PI, pages 30-31.

branding of a band logo 15 or the name of a local hero on the back of a football shirt.

The RLP was conceived and realised through the indelible alteration of my body, informed by contemporaneous public and critical dialogues revolving around the paradigm of Real Life. The project is critically positioned in this overview through the published evidence of its public dissemination via diverse heterogeneous outputs: starting with the tattoo, then the photograph, the cover of a magazine, the performances, the multiples, the exhibitions, the interventions, the t-shirt paintings, the installations, the dialogue, the hybrid sculptures, the physical structures, the songs, the paintings, the live music, the diverse contexts, the cd's, the neon signs, the galleries, the shops, the streets, the posters, the records, the billboards, the conversations, the arguments, the planning, the travelling, the meetings, the fund-raising, the talks, the teaching, the publications and finally this submission of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work. From its origination in the ink and blood of the tattooing, the RLP has questioned commonly held approaches to audience engagement (seen in P6) and the role of the artist in non-institutional settings (P5). From the first cover image and text published in Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan's Real Life Magazine, the RLP has interrogated the relative value structures of art and the art world addressing problematic assumptions and discourses on peripheries and centres. 16

The Real Life Character made its debut into a zeitgeist of pre-millennium tension. The decade was about money, galleries and gloss. I thought that the age of reality might be over. I was worried about late capitalism. I reflected on the folly of trying to understand the big picture. I hoped I wouldn't be assimilated. Certainties were over. If doubt was the new currency, I was loaded. I was also personally, however, on a day-to-day basis, completely economically impoverished. In an attempt to alleviate this, I devised Museum of Despair, 17 where I tried

I had previously explored diverse connections with audience while making music in the band, The Soup Dragons (1985-1990) designing record covers, merchandise, logos and videos. I continue to explore the role of the multiple and its fluidity in the RLP, in the form of postcard, poster, beermat, record, cd, badges, bag, t-shirt, pamphlets that are usually given free, as a gift, lubricating public interest but functioning as autonomous artworks, free floating, in and out of context. P1, p. 69 (The Soup Dragons), and Appendix B: Music Projects.

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Ideology is the system whereby society gives itself a 'meaning' other than what it really is...a turning of reality into apparent unreality, almost unbelievable while social dreams and myths seem so real. We wipe a great deal of our actual experience in life from our minds — our lives become the lives we don't lead: like the TV that isn't watched. Most of our lives become the 'unlived' lives of advertisements, the underside of their world picture. So this reality becomes almost literally unreal — sublimated, unconscious.

Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising (London: Marion Boyars Publishers Inc. 1988), page 170.

to sell all my old artworks that had been returned from shows, very cheap, in a shop in Edinburgh's Royal Mile, mining the pre-pop philosophies of Vance Packard, with help from McLuhan and Raymond Williams.¹⁸

I proposed a celebration and commiseration of this left-over art embedded in dialogue with mass media, advertising and commerce. I wanted to test what would happen if it was removed from the gallery and deposited on a busy city street. I re-contextualised this relationship for altruistic ends engaging the *detournemount* of the Situationists, activating slogans of reversal and reversal of slogans. I imagined I could physically convey the public to the shop via entreaties of psycho-geographic exploration, well, that and a mail-out of *Museum of Despair* postcards. What actually happened was that the *Museum* became an unregulated and free-flowing meeting place where I attended most days. It created an ambiguous space, not a gallery, nor a shop but nevertheless a place open for debate and discussion on the potential role of art and artists and audiences at the end of the 20th century.¹⁹

In a book, published in 2008, celebrating 20 years of Edinburgh's Collective Gallery (who I worked with again in 2014/15, producing P6) Neil Mulholland reflects on the *Museum of Despair*:

In this sense, certain members of Glasgow's Scotia Nostra were seen by Edinburgh artists as apolitical, neat, tasteful, and very prissy. Others were not, notably fellow prositu traveller Ross Sinclair. It was for Aerial that Sinclair produced the seminal mini-retrospective, *Museum of Despair* at 248 Cannongate, an oasis in the heart of the Royal Mile tourist trap selling self-aggrandising emotionally engaged pop memorabilia. Fittingly, *Museum of Despair* was where ECA's dadaist art historian Professor David Hopkins gave one of his infamous drunken recitals of Hugo Ball's Karawane.²⁰

It was while Museum of Despair was open in summer 1994 I took a day off, travelled to Terry's Tattoo Parlour in Glasgow and had the REAL LIFE tattoo made.

¹⁹ P1, pages 24-25: I participated in a show in Bordeaux with Ben Vautier and he inspired me with his stories of running an 'art/record shop', as he had done with in Le Magasin, in Nice, from 1958-1973. But how would this function transposed to the Scotland of the 1990s?

²⁰ New Gold Dreams (84-94-04) in 20 Years of Collective Gallery, (Edinburgh: Collective Gallery, 2008), pages 146-154.

3.1 Real Life Character in critical perspective.

Ten years before I initiated the *RLP*, Baudrillard's text 'The Precession of Simulacra' had utilised Borges influential 1946 one paragraph essay, 'On Exactitude in Science', telling the tale of the I:I scale map eventually completely covering the *territory* and in Edinburgh the metaphor had *come full circle*. I was now selling back to the public (as described on the postcard announcements) *all the shit they paid for in the first place*, in a high street shop filled with art criticising mass media paid for by the city. Baudrillard rehabilitated Borges' idea in his articulation of the simulacrum, announcing that reality is now no longer located or available in any one fixed context or ideology,

It is the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. ²¹

The tattoo affixed on my flesh is neither map nor its territory. It is now something else: a living mirror brandished at the viewer on whom its back is permanently turned. The tattoo on my body is located using an imprecise theoretical triangulation, operating in the vacuum created by the demise of the real traversed along the critical ley lines of Debord / de Certeau / Baudrillard / Barthes / Borges / Eco amongst many others: now welded to a physical context and engagement with audience, giving it agency in the world. This constructed a character with a unique hybrid identity, operating in a post-simulacrum society exploring particular geographies: Ross Sinclair, Real Life Character stripped to the waist, adorned with tourist style tartan shorts, visiting his own culture for the few weeks of an exhibition, trying to rationalise a dialectic from an objective position but being knowingly held in a paradoxical dislocation generated by the reality of the lived experience embedded in the context of history and belonging. The Real Life Character is self-identified from the start set in a discussion about cultural/national identity. I'm on a Rocky Mountain, set amongst fiberglass rocks and fake grass

Jean Baudrillard: 'The Precession of Simulacra', in Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary art, 1984), page 253.

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For a long time I supposed that an average intellectual like myself could and should join the struggle (even if it was only in regard to himself) against the tidal wave of collected images, the manipulation of effects. This was called 'demystifying'. I still struggle, now and then, but deep down I really do not believe it any more. Now that power is everywhere (a great and sinister discovery - even if a naïve one - of people of my own generation): in whose name are we to demystify? Denouncing manipulation itself becomes part of a manipulators system; 'recuperated', such would be the definition of the contemporary 'subject.' The only thing left to do would be to make a voice to one side; an oblique voice; a voice unrelated.

Roland Barthes, 'Day by day with Roland Barthes', On Signs, ed. By Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), page 114.

but seen on video too, singing my heart out in the *real* wilderness of the Highlands. My back is turned on the audience, tattoo between us. I am absorbed in whatever task I have given myself in each particular work, I don't even know if the audience is present, but I have to function as if they are. My character is an active performer, everyman, an individual, confused living human presence, e *Pluribus Unum*: but a member of the public too. I'm continually exploring this dynamic tension, searching for a new *transaction* in art and exhibition, all the while looking like a Duane Hanson international tourist sculpture, brought to life and defaced in central Scotland in the mid-1990s.

Barthes articulates a plea for this other place, this oblique voice:²²

3.2 It's Complicated: Brigadoon or Bust.

So the uncertainty, ambiguity and critical dialogues active at its inception were folded into the suitcase of the project, and taken on the road, and I kept going, and haven't stopped. This is important: the *RLP* is live, on tour, surviving off the meagre merchandise sales, and modest fees, constantly testing, responding to site and context, looking for a conversation. I couldn't see clearly where *Real Life* was located, in relation to what, and for whom, in theory or in practice. So I had to imagine what it might look like. So I construct it, make it visible, if only for a short period, then it's gone. Then I do it again, and again. I sensed it was going to take some time, but I was kept going by the gathering audiences who joined me on the journey. The *Temporary Autonomous Zone* articulated by Hakim Bey²³ suggested a range of different tactical approaches, which I viewed as an analogous relation to the quality of space I might attempt to create as the *RLP* evolved. With the careful development of each individual *Real Life* work, always temporary in nature and often open to conversation and participation, there is a parallel to be drawn with critical position Bey puts forward of the temporary non-hierarchical space creating new territories for public engagement outwith strategic institutional control.

²³ http://hermetic.com/bey/

But it's complicated: Umberto Eco discusses relations between art and mediated culture in Travels in Hyperreality

Once upon a time there were mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners to the mass media. Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on.²⁴

With the Real Life Character I have constructed a new identity, it's not me and it's not you: the public. The fourth wall that exists between the people and the work is a complex, shifting mirage. The Real Life Character exists somewhere in-between: the artist, the audience, the viewer – but who are all these people I have spent the last 20 years turning my back on? I want to know, I'm always interested, what have they gained? I want to explore a new culture of art dialogue. I needed a conversation that would last a lifetime; I'm a committee of one, one out of many. I wanted to hold an umbrella over the work that would protect it from being washed away in the cultural deluge. This is one function of the RLP. I project the presence and image of this Real Life Character who populates a series of artworks punctuating the practice. Initially employed in performance and live installation, this character is subsequently developed in photographic forms, film, text 28 and otherwise dispersed in a diversity of formal incarnations employed to initiate and facilitate other modes of dialogue. The purpose and utility of this character is discussed in detail throughout the publications (particularly in P7), testing a series of tactical approaches contributing to the evolution of the RLP. 29 30

²⁴ Umberto Eco, Travels in Hyperreality, trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg Ltd, Pan Books Ltd, 1987), page 150.

²⁵ PI, pages 7, 9, 32, 44, 56

²⁶ P3, pages 17, 19, 29, 44, 70-73, 124-125

²⁷ PI, page 50, 56, 64-65, P2, pages 33, 57 and 88

²⁸ P2, pages 56-70, P3, pages 86-98 and throughout the publications

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The decision to carry this message was, we understand on seeing it, not one that could have been taken lightly. In this sense, the marking of the flesh is evidence of an experience which must have given access to an awareness of the body, an awareness of the body's presence to itself, which was as real as one could hope to get. The effect of this on the way in which Sinclair has subsequently engaged with his audience, however, has been, paradoxically, to establish his body as an image of itself or, insofar as it is a banner carrying a text, as a messenger bearing news of some other, distant reality. Real life is an aspiration rather than a presently existing actuality. Because he has his back to us we share a point of view — he sees what we see - but for all that he may be singing a song for us to listen to, his position in relation to us makes the possibility of communication that much more remote. He does not speak 'to' us, he speaks with us.

Michael Archer, P2, 'The Other Place is here too' in P2, page 14.

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Can true life exist within the false? Yes or no? That is the starting point for Sinclair's experimental life-models. Yet they are not hypothetical models. They start, in fact, with an outlay, a declaration of belief, in the form of the words REAL LIFE tattooed onto Sinclair's back. The displaying of this tattoo is a stock gesture in Sinclair's artistic repertoire. Each fresh rear self-portrait with bared tattoo symbolically renews his declaration of belief in and commitment to Real Life. Real Life becomes an incantation: It must be possible to live a real life! But the tattoo is also a binding obligation. It commits Sinclair to proving to himself and to his audience that belief in real life is not an illusion, because it is indeed possible to live real-ly. Since his art deals in experimental models, however, the outcome of the experiment remains uncertain. Belief in real life may very well turn out to be illusory and the attempt to build one's own world / reality doomed to failure, since real life will always be the B picture (of)— "Spectacular Life" (the converse of Real Life for Sinclair) — that our (pop) culture proposes as a worthwhile life-option.

Jan Verwoert, 'The Politics of Belief', in P3, page 156.

In Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, I sensed a shape of the complex and dedicated space this *Real Life Character* would have to usefully inhabit if it were to effectively consolidate my aspirational aesthetic crusade, reflecting total commitment to each incarnation, where the *Real Life Character* must *mean it sincerely*, demonstrating to the public that we're in it together, for the long haul while simultaneously questioning the route, destination and mode of travel.

In the great classical dramas, by virtue of a contradiction for which they offer a magnificent solution, characters are not characters. They are utterly sincere, even when they are pretending. They are not acting, and this is why actors are able to impersonate them completely. The audience can identify with well-defined 'beings' and 'natures'. Conversely, all around us, in real life, characters really are characters; plays which attempt to represent them, (in other words to present what is hidden in life in a clear way and at a reasonable distance) must go beyond the classical concept of character.³¹

This sense of the critical paradigm of *the real* being set loose from its moorings, malleable and *re-imagined*, free-floating and *up for grabs* liberated me to consider how an artist might explore relationships with audience in new ways, focussing on the exact moment of engagement with an artwork. Maybe just for a second, before you realise it's art: something changes, or maybe it grows later as a seed that has been planted begins to germinate in the back of the viewers mind, carried with them as they go about the rest of their everyday lives. The paradoxical sense of this *REAL LIFE* maxim being permanently tattooed on my skin alters the identity of this human being from something naturally *real* into something that can never be natural or *real* again. The very act of embracing *REAL LIFE* in ink and blood defines *me* as unreal. This act embodies the paradoxical tension in the *RLP*: *Real* and *Not-Real* simultaneously: a walking, talking artwork looking to transform each context into which I re-animate it.

³¹ Henri Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, The One Volume Edition, Vol. 1 Forward trans. John Moore and Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2014), pages 38-39.

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The Rückenfigur is my concern. We can better deal with the contradictions inherent within Sinclair's ubiquitous self-portrait by close examination of it in Friedrich's precursor. In a painting with a Rückenfigur, a viewpoint is pictured that includes another person seen from behind. Ostensibly it and you, the viewer, are viewing a scene, typically a landscape spread out before us. Just as in some of Sinclair's' photographic self-portraits Friedrich's Rückenfigur may be positioned just to one side or as in The Wanderer it disrupts the view by standing right in our line of sight. It now seems to be the subject of the painting. Friedrich's successful development of this within the genre of landscape painting meant subsequent use of the motif has become a shared imaginative property and it is difficult to resist reference back to Friedrich's metaphysical channel when a similar figure is depicted. As a meaningfully important motif it has become a developed method in Sinclair's performances and photographic self-portraits. When the Real Life figure performs the live-presentation of his back to us means it is never entirely clear whether the figure is aware of our actual existence so we become a theoretical possibility (which in a gallery setting means a statistical likelihood). However in Sinclair's photographic self-portraits, my major interest here, the impossibility of facial communication and the lack of photography's famous punctum, heightens our viewingawareness of the landscape or splendour scene ahead of it and us. It gives us, as it did in Friedrich, a heightened existential sense of the landscape. The Rückenfigur is more than a surrogate, in Sinclair's photographic works its presence also suggests we, the viewers, our hopes and our fears, are the subject of his pictures.

Craig Richardson, 'Sealand', in P5, page 132.

3.3 From the Rückenfigur to Real Life

But the words of Umberto Eco were ringing in my ears; art is not exempt from mediated pollution. What's going on? Let's find out. So I keep the Real Life Character on call and ready to work, sending him out into subsequent projects at a moments notice, literally fleshing out the bones of the project, a constant, live vehicle to walk it out into the world, a rush to the real, across the years, the continents and the decades. Studio Real Life, 32 Real Life Rocky Mountain, 33 Dead Church / Real Life, 34 Real Life Old School 35 and The Real Life Gordon of Huntly 36. This character is both Ross Sinclair, the artist, the author, and something else, something more than the component parts, in character. I have set The Real Life Character to work quoting the Rückenfigur of Caspar David Friedrich, with a gaze fixed on the Real Life installations instead of Friedrich's sublime landscapes (discussed at length in P5 by Craig Richardson, in his essay, 'Sealand'). This is a character who, in the context of the RLP, functions analogously to the way in which a writer might construct a protagonist to travel through a series of novels, woven through different stories, with different adversaries and problems that must be overcome while the character essentially stays the same, a fixed point, an identifiable individual among many, always recognisable in a changing world. The Real Life Character is conceived as a new archetype populating an evolving series of artworks set in a range of diverse contexts, public and private, local, national and international. It bears witness to the whole gamut of the RLP, holding the memory of every intervention in every museum, gallery, town square and billboard in the hard-drive of its blood and bones, imploring and reaching out to each new viewer, appealing to the universal components of human nature.

³² P3, pages 130-131

³³ P3, pages 136-139

³⁴ P3, pages 132-135

³⁵ P3, pages 10-29

³⁶ P5, pages 31-41

4. The Post Studio Sublime; Exhibition process and practice

How has the Real Life Project identified and defined a developing relationship with Audience?

The exhibition may have turned into a set, but who comes to act in it? How do the actors and extras make their way across it, and in the midst of what kind of scenery? One day, somebody ought to write the history of art using the peoples who pass through it, and the symbolic, practical structures which make it possible to accommodate them. What human flow, governed by what forms, thus passes into art forms?³⁸

The *RLP* has systematically explored and developed many relationships with audiences over the 20 years since it was brought to life. This has primarily taken place through the live exhibitions and installations and subsequently through the publications that document them. This relationship was forged for the first time in the works shown in PI that employ performative installation on a spectacular scale into which the viewer can be seduced: once engaged s(he) must employ critical thinking in order to work back towards an altered perception of the everyday (PI: Real Life Rocky Mountain, pages 32-41). In the works documented in P2 The Real Life Character begins to take a back seat from performance and invites the viewer to move centre stage, re-imagining the works, rebuilding them in their minds eye (P2: Journey to the Edge of the World, pages 22-35). From the outputs discussed in P3 onwards, the visitor is asked to become a more active participant in the RLP, physically responding to the forms and materials that constitute the works, becoming part of them, altering and adding to the totality of the work (P3: Real Life vs. The World, pages 74-79). In P5 the viewers must now be identified and seduced on home turf, away from the support of the institution (P5: The Real Life Gordons of Huntly, pages 31-41). This relationship develops further within P6, where the audience has

³⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and others (France: Les presses du reel, 2002), page 74.

become demonstrably collaborative in nature. As part the exhibition that initiates the project documented in P6 (20 years of Real Life: Free Instruments for Teenagers), the visitor is invited to make a painting and display it in the exhibition space, and over a period of time this is joined by many more and consequently a wall of paintings accumulates as more visitors pass through. This represents a simple but fundamental shift. A viewer coming to the exhibition when the show has been active for a while will see my initial display of works side by side with a new wall of paintings, made by the public. The image of the show eventually takes on a shared aspect, prefacing the collaborative identity of the final vinyl publication of this project (P6). The steady incremental development and robust testing inherent in the RLP has engaged many audiences over a long period and has been key to the articulation of this project as a robust model of practice, demonstrated in the publications and appendices that form this submission.

The Real Life relationship with its audience could be characterised by bringing into service the model of the tactical consumer and the concepts of strategy and tactics evoked by Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life.

I call a strategy a calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated...By contrast with a strategy...a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantages of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep...In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.³⁹

When the *RLP* is considered in relation to the model described by de Certeau, the *institution* (however formal or informal, private or public) where the artwork may reside could be articulated as a manifestation of the *strategic*. The viewer represents the *tactical* approach but

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1988), pages 35-37.

I also operate as an active *tactical consumer* and I have already begun a process of interrogation in my construction of the artwork (and de-construction of the institution).

Central to this process is my consideration of the role of the viewer, in relation to the *strategic institution*, with its hinterland of power, authority and centrality. I subsequently navigate the field of the encounter with the viewer by inviting them to explore this altered dialectic entering a critical *tactical* conversation that I already have up and running, in a *strategic* vs. *tactical* face off.

Like Law, culture articulates, conflicts and alternatively legitimizes, displaces or controls the superior force. It develops an atmosphere of tensions...for which it provides symbolic balances, contracts of compatibility and compromises, all more or less temporary. The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices.⁴⁰

I have pulled back the curtain just a little, to let some light in so that the viewer may enter to participate in this process on their own terms, utilising their own backstory to bring the work to life, proposing to each visitor the possibility of building a unique engagement. In this way over the course of the *RLP* I have been able to articulate and promote a series of accumulating critical dialogues between the artist, the institution, the artwork and the viewer.

4.1 Death of the Author as Producer

The works that characterise the *RLP* over two decades of its evolution have been conceived, developed and exhibited with the specific aim of engaging a viewer in dialogue with and through the works, in a specific location, at a specific moment in time. No works exist in the oeuvre conceived out of the mode of production designed specifically for public display and

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1988), page 17.

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Sinclair appears to have taken a number of sixties experiments to heart, and seeing a crack that appeared in the rather shaky foundations of autonomous art, he is still endeavouring to drive a truck through it. The result is a project that operates outside the familiar and increasingly hollow polarities of 'public' and 'institutional' spaces; they are all art space, all life spaces, all specific and all 'sites'. By refusing to stigmatise or prioritise one of the other Sinclair kills the need for the term 'Public Art' replacing it with the term 'Real Life'.

Barnaby Drabble, 'Public Art is Dead, Long Live Real Life', in P2, page 9.

exhibition. No objects or artworks are constructed in the studio for interior reflection or pursuit of the sublime, other than to test the material mechanics of each production.

Debord tells us in Society of the Spectacle:

The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society.

When analysing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves through the methodological terrain of the very society, which expresses itself in the spectacle.⁴¹

The works of the *RLP* are contextual and interventionist and often rely on *host* bodies to frame their critical interventions and with whom dialogue is established, and into which a viewer may enter, physically and in an intellectual and imaginative sense. The *RLP* has activated the shop, the church, the market place, the nation, rock n' roll, geography, the gallery, the museum, the public realm, extant bodies of knowledge and collective assumptions that become conversational partners activated by the body on which the tattoo resides. This is then developed by the presence of the viewer, whether or not, as is the case is some of the works (P6) the visitor is even necessarily aware they are engaging with an artwork.⁴²

5. Atheists are Preaching to the converted

How has contemporary critical discourse informed the Real Life Project, in relation to audience and relational or socially engaged practice?

In the introduction to her book, *Participation*, Claire Bishop proposes various examples of the development of historical models of audience engagement, pertinent to the enquiry in

⁴¹ Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Exeter: Rebel Press: Aim Publications, 1987), chapters 6, 11

this submission. I should add here that when I began the *RLP*, Bishop was still an art-history undergraduate and Bourriaud's influential, *Relational Aesthetics*, wouldn't be published for another four years, or translated from French into English for another eight years. The *RLP* has evolved alongside but largely independently of the bourgeoning *socially engaged* critical debate, ploughing its own furrow, constructing its own paradigm, idiosyncratic and contextually located. It would be wrong to ignore this current discourse but nevertheless this submission proposes that the practice-led *RLP* now represents a valuable, viable, alternative and autonomous model for study, in the context of these debates.

Using Walter Benjamin's 'The Author as Producer' from 1934 as evidence of one of the first texts reflecting the complex politics of participation, Bishop elaborates the political dimensions of socially engaged practice, imploring that the work of art should provide mechanisms to allow the viewer involvement in participation and production;

Benjamin maintained that the work of art should actively intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the processes of production: 'this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, the more readers or spectators into collaborators'.

Bishop continues to develop this argument through observations on this historical perspective by using Bertolt Brecht's dynamic theatrical innovations:

Brechtian theatre abandons long complex plots in favour of 'situations' that interrupt the narrative through a disruptive element, such as song. Through this technique of montage and juxtaposition, audiences were led to break their identification with the protagonists on stage and be incited to critical distance. Rather than presenting the illusion of action on stage and filling the audiences with sentiment, Brechtian theatre compels the spectator to take up a position towards this action.⁴⁴

⁴³ Participation, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: The Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), page 11.

⁴⁴ Bishop, page 11.

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What Brecht did for the theatre was to heighten the spectator's participation, but in an intellectual way, whereas Artaud had specifically rejected intellectual approaches in favour of theatre as a means of inducing trances ... Brecht and Artaud shared a desire to create a style of theatre which altered the way in which an audience participated with a performance. However, their methods of eliciting this participation and the type of involvement they hoped to arouse were very different ... Brecht intended to heighten the spectator's participation, not by testing the audience's knowledge of a subject, but instead by inviting the audience to develop their own thoughts and criticisms about the events on the stage, with clarity of mind ... without being overwhelmed by a sensory experience. In contrast, the 'trances' which Artaud advocated as the desired response from his spectators were, in his opinion, a way of giving the public the opportunity to be deeply moved.

Jones, Elizabeth: 'What Brecht did for the Theatre...' Innervate, Vol.2: (2009/10) ISSN: 2041-6776 University of Nottingham, School of English Studies. https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/documents/innervate/09-10/0910jonesebrecht.pdf [accessed 18/12/15]

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The second feature of this agonistic model involves art's relationship with the viewer. The appropriate response to the work is no longer veneration or obeisance, but discomfort, rupture or an uncanny derangement of the senses. I've written about this elsewhere in terms of an 'orthopaedic' model of the aesthetic in which art seeks to improve the cognitive or perceptual capacities of the viewer, who is constructed as always, already in need of correction. I would argue that these provocations often perform an affirmative function; verifying the pre-existing self-image of art world audiences. Or they are consumed rhetorically as the viewer identifies, in a self-congratulatory manner, with the subject position of the artist rather than the hapless implied viewer. In fact, one comes to the space of art prepared for precisely this sort of provocation; disruption is, in a way, expected and even savoured.

Tim Stott, 'An Interview with Grant Kester', *Circa*, 117, (Autumn 2006), pages 44-47 http://circaartmagazine.website/c117-article-an-interview-with-grant-kester/ [accessed 10/10/15]

Bishop is describing a compelling characteristic of practice in relation to audience and one I have explored repeatedly as the *RLP* has evolved but she later reverses the value of this 'awakening of critical consciousness' contrasting this unfavourably with the more confrontational and immersive *Theatre of Cruelty* of Antonin Artaud and its proposal to collapse the role of audience and 'author' into one.

By todays standards, many would argue that the Brechtian Model offers a relatively passive mode of spectatorship, since it relies on raising consciousness through the distance of critical thinking 45

Countering with a more objective analysis, academic, Elizabeth Jones gives further insight into the characteristics of this relationship:⁴⁶

Another key critic in the field of socially engaged practice is Grant Kester who, in an interview in Circa magazine, offers further critique on this *Brechtian* model in which he appears to accuse the artist of being implicit in the maintenance of the status-quo by failing to confront the viewer with appropriate critical integrity, where the impotent artist ends up simply preaching to the converted:⁴⁷

5.1 Who Guards the Guards? Who Polices the Police?

These arguments discussed above offer an insightful analysis of the state of play in the world of socially engaged art in relation to the RLP, and certainly emphasise the responsibility of artists engaged in this field to offer more than a rhetorical confirmation of an implicit, though too often absent, critique. The RLP has conducted practice-based empirical research over a long period tested through many events, exhibitions and outputs, and could certainly be characterised as engaging in what would be dismissed by Bishop as merely a post-Brechtian dialogue with its audience, where the production of critical thinking would be perhaps

⁴⁵ Bishop, page 11.

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

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And yet, to tell the story of oneself is already to act, since telling is a kind of action, performed with some addressee, generalized or specific, as an implied feature. It is an action in the direction of an other, as well as an action that requires an other, in which an other is presupposed. The other is thus within the action of my telling; it is not simply a question of imparting information to an other who is over there, beyond me, waiting to know. On the contrary, the telling performs an action that presupposes an Other, posits and elaborates the other, is given to the other, or by virtue of the other, prior to the giving of any information...

Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005) page 81.

assessed as an *unsatisfactory* outcome. I would argue, however, that from critical thinking comes engagement and synthesis between viewer and context, materials and ideas, offering a transformative conversation, combining art, people and *Real Life* and that this *Brechtian* critique should not be applied as a reductive and diminishing characteristic. It is simply one of many tactics I have employed over the two decades of the evolution of the *RLP*.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler suggests another model of the complex symbiotic relationships explored over the lifetime of the *RLP*:⁴⁸

The forms, materials and situations employed in the *RLP* have constructed multiple levels of invitation and entry points of engagement with each work, from an appreciation of a catchy tune roughly sung transforming into more sophisticated and sustained relationships. Sometimes the *Real Life* viewers have been pushed and prodded and shamelessly manipulated, to further the aims and ambitions of the works. In the *RLP*, the spectator may have been unknowingly *emancipated* in the complex arena of dialogue and relationships as discussed in Ranciere's *The Emancipated Spectator*, ⁴⁹ but the truth is I still have my hand firmly on the authorial tiller with an overview of the gathering momentum and possibilities of the *RLP*. The currently elevated role of the critic and curator as discussed above can blur the lines of responsibility inadvertently doing a disservice to the integrity and commitment of the responsible contemporary artist.

⁴⁹ Ranciere, Jacques, The Emancipated Spectator, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2009)

6. Real Life Body of Work: The Publication as Site

How has the role and function of the Real Life Publications contributed to the overall critical understanding of the Real Life Project?

An important research question running through the project concerns the development of critical relationships with audience and how they are constructed and maintained. I have discussed this in relation to the evolution of the individual works, but it is also important to consider how this has been has been further defined through the evolution of the submitted publications punctuating the first 20 years of the project. The publications mirror the scope and ambition of the project but for a potentially different audience, and are produced in a form that initially reflects the presence of the tattooed body itself then developing in relation to each phase of work. I have carefully conceived and produced the publications over this period as a way to evidence an overview of my work but it's also important to state that the *RLP* also exceeds the limits of those publications.⁵⁰

The primary monographic publications discussed in this submission are directed and *gathered* together by me in collaboration with the designers, supported by the relevant institutions. Where noted, they include essays and interviews generated and edited by me, including any un-credited descriptive or expositionary passages. I do not state this for hubristic effect, it simply reflects my need to accurately shape the books in the manner required to discuss and disseminate the project, to a reader who possibly did not see the particular body of work. I would argue that the site of the book is an extension of the work. The publications function as a site or context for the documentation of each project, space allowing and I have generally

For example P5 cannot completely re-animate my presence over a three month period as an artist in residence in Huntly, working in a shop front, open to the public, giving multiple formal and informal talks, having numerous art-encounters as I performed many works round the town, engaging daily with Deveron Arts, embarking on multiple discussions with visitors and audiences around what might constitute an art work, what the role of an artist might be, and how we could together realise these aims and objectives: notwithstanding the role of the artwork and multiple once they are liberated from the confines of exhibition. But the publication does a very important job, impossible to achieve in the space of the live work: it provides analysis, critical reflection and overview.

constructed them in the same manner in which I approach exhibition making, engaging with the context, audience and intellectual overview, though often shaped by budget and timing.

What may be lost when documenting large scale, tactile, live artworks in these publications is recouped by analysis and exposition over two decades, of a *Real Life* narrative. My aim has been to navigate the identity and dissemination of this artist's public evolution accumulating an innovative model of practice: one single *RLP* with an overarching critical identity.

6.1 Real Life Writing

Throughout the development of the project and the production of its publications I have continued to write, as documented in Appendix A. However in the context of my own monographic books submitted here I have worked closely with the other carefully selected writers in order to illuminate the passage of the *RLP*. In advance of commissioning a text I have often made specific presentations of relevant groups of works in order to inform the writer of the aims and objectives of the particular contribution required and the position in the particular publication into which it will fit. I have candidly discussed the successes *and* problems encountered with particular works which they may then bring into focus as the content of each publication demands. This has resulted in many insightful essays by writers who have brought dynamic new frames of reference to the *RLP*.

When viewed as a specific contextual space, each publication reflects my directorial vision to construct a representative document of each phase of the project providing focus and insight synthesised through reflection of the individual works brought together with commissioned texts in overview providing a more objective analysis of the *RLP*.

Through the developments of the individual works, I have developed a series of relationships with audience that have been marked by a series of subtle changes at a two-tier level where the first can be viewed as the specific evolving connection with the individual works, as viewed live, in their original context - and the second proposes a more objective understanding of

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A rhizome never ceases to connect semiotic chains, organisations of power, and events in the arts, sciences and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber gathering up very diverse acts — linguistic, but also perceptual, mimetic, gestural and cognitive. There is no language in itself, no universality of language, but an encounter of dialects, patois, argots and special languages. There is no more any speaker-auditor ideal than there is a homogeneous linguistic community...`there is no mother toungue, but a seizure of power by a dominant language within a political multiplicity.

Gilles Deluze and Felix Guattari, On The Line (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), page 12.

the project conveyed through the unfolding series of publications that articulate the *RLP* in overview.

The publications reflect the rhizomatic⁵¹ evolution of the *RLP* and articulate the contribution made to contemporary art-practice in Scotland, UK, and internationally over two decades via the medium of a single-authored practice-led project that could be characterised as organic, research-led, horizontal, non hierarchical and dialogic. When considered as one performative event, starting the moment the tattoo was made in 1994, the *RLP* has explored multiple models of artistic engagement; developing diverse and often unconventional audiences, travelling with them as they develop from the role of spectator, moving toward center stage activating the work using critical thinking to the position of participant and finally to that of collaborator, reflected in the development of the individual works viewed through the submitted publications.

Conclusion

The specific phenomenological existence of the works that constitute the *RLP* must themselves remain forever fixed in their live state, existing only in history and mythology, ingrained in the memory of the visitor, but fading slowly, in the same way the tattoo continues to fade on my back. The works of the *RLP* are suspended in context around their own moments of production, all bespoke, site-specific productions. Many of the institutionally hosted projects were only originally live for the standard length of an exhibition, one or two months and for many of them that specific moment in time, considered as a context, is important, and should be considered in an overall study of the project. However this is exactly why the role of the publications submitted is imperative to a wider understanding of the *RLP*, enabling critical reflection of its evolution and dissemination over two-decades.

The unique contribution to knowledge in the field of contemporary art practice is evidenced

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

Reality's a dream, a game in which I seem
To never find out just what I am
I don't know if I'm an actor or ham, a shamen or sham
But if you don't mind I don't mind,

Buzzocks, 'I Don't Mind' (lyric Pete Shelley) Single released 14 April 1978, United Artists.

I've got this bird's eye view, and it's in my brain Clarity has reared, its ugly head again So this is real life, you're telling me And everything, is where it ought to be

Magazine, 'Definitive Gaze' (lyric Howard Devoto) from 'Real Life', album released June 1978, Virgin.

in this critical overview through examination of the long-running, practice-led *RLP*, activated by the *Real Life Character* who has inhabited and defined it for more than 20 years.

The *RLP*, though contextualised and activated through a series of heterogeneous artworks, both institutional and informal, is positioned throughout the publications as one single project with an overarching critical identity, its main *character* repeatedly working, testing the possibilities of dialogic exhibition and documenting this process through publication, in relation to human beings.

Through this character driven methodology, the *RLP* has developed an on-going critical relationship with its audience that has grown over 20 years from that of *spectacular viewer*, into one of *critical thinker*, evolving into *active participant* and most recently to that of *collaborator*. This evolution can be viewed incrementally from project to project and as an overview through the parallel development of the publications and appendices that form this submission.

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

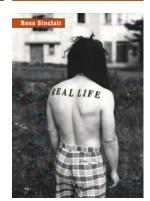
Specifically titled Real Life works and the countries in which they have been shown.

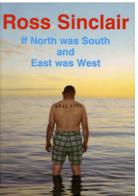
In most cases a completely revised version of a Real Life work is developed for any repeated showing, relating to local context, audience and scale. Many other works that do not feature Real Life specifically in the title are nevertheless all part of the project as they often feature filmic or photographic iterations of the Real Life Character (eg. three films in Sinclair vs. Landseer, P5 pages 135-139/157) and are informed by the same critical framework and brought together under the same rubric.

- **I. Real Life Tattoo** (Everywhere)
- 2. Studio Real Life (The Netherlands/London/Austria/Scotland/Hungary)
- 3. Studio Real Life TV (The Netherlands/London/Austria/Scotland/Hungary)
- 4. Real Life T-Shirt Paintings (USA/Scotland/Holland/Hungary/Australia/Germany)
- 5. Real Life Rocky Mountain (Scotland/London)
- 6. Real Life Moby Dick (England)
- 7. Real Life Death (Switzerland/England/Poland/The Netherlands/Belgium)
- 8. Journey to the Edge of the World: Real Life Republic (UK/Switzerland/Germany/Denmark)
- 9. I Love Real Life (Neon) (Germany/Scotland/Private Collections)
- 10. RLEIAFLE (neon) (Switzerland)
- II. Real Life vs. The World (Austria/Germany/London)
- 12. A Dream of the Hamnavoe Free State (Real Life vs. Spectacular Life) (England/Scotland)
- 13. Dead Church/Real Life (England/Scotland)
- 14. I Love Real Life (Market Stall) (Scotland/London/The Netherlands/Germany/Canada)
- 15. Real Life Geography (London)
- 16. Real Life Flag (3 versions, all stolen: England/Scotland)
- 17. The International Bank of Real Life Spiritual Gold (Norway)
- **18. Real Life Old School** (France/Germany)
- 19. Fortress Real Life (Austria/England)
- 20. Real Life Orcadian (Scotland)
- 21. Real Life and How to Live it (International series)
- 22. Real Life and How to Live it in Pangea (France/Scotland/Wales)
- 23. The Real Life Rock Opera (Scotland/Belgium/London)
- 23. Real Life Uisge Beatha (England/Scotland)
- 24. Real Life Painting Show (Scotland/Sweden)
- 25. We Love Real Life Scotland (Scotland)
- 26. Real Civic Life (Sweden)
- 27. The Real Life Gordons of Huntly
- 28. Real Life and How to Live it in Auld Reekie (Scotland)
- **29. Ross and the Realifers** I tried to Give Up Drinking With Guitars Instead of God (Scotland)
- 30. Real Life and How to Live it in Glasgow vs. Deroit (USA)
- 31. 20 Years of Real Life (Scotland)

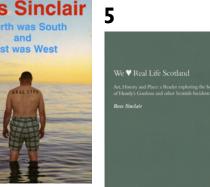
Introduction to Publications

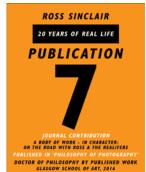
Ross Sinclair **REAL LIFE** And How To Live It



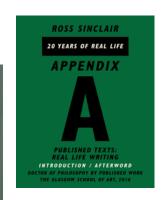


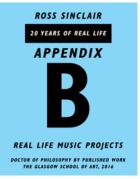


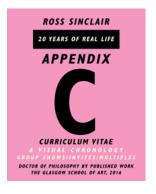


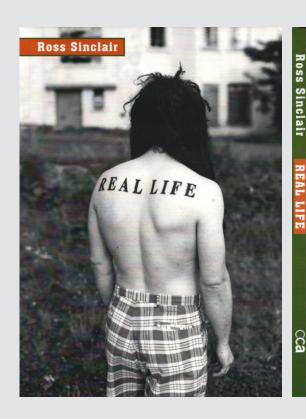


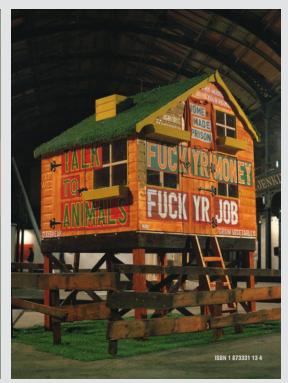












PI

Ross Sinclair: Real Life Ross Sinclair - Real Life Publication One (PI)

Publication One (PI)

Ross Sinclair: Real Life

96 pages, Glasgow, CCA, Tramway, Pier Arts Centre, 1997, ISBN 1873331-13-4

Gillick, Liam Leave Now Before It's Too Late: Ross

Sinclair's Internationalism pages 6-19

Brown, Katrina M. From the Inside Out pages 22-49

O'Rourke, Donnie He's the Mess We're In pages 50-63

Sinclair, R Bad Smells But No Sign of the Corpse

pp82-88

Sinclair, R This is Something for the Blunted

pages 89-91

Sinclair, R An Open Letter to whomsoever it may

Concern Regarding: Scotland – A
Brief and Fractured Introduction to the
History of the Period '1983/2083 pages

92-96

PI was my first monograph book, published in 1997. It developed from the Real Life Rocky Mountain exhibition commissioned by CCA Glasgow and was also supported by Tramway and Pier Arts Centre in Orkney. With this publication I introduce the first years of the project, documenting and analysing works that explore live, durational models of performance and installation (pages 7-9, 29, 32-3, 44, 53) while testing how film and video can be utilised in the RLP (pages 11-13, 36, 43, 56, 64-65). I engaged with techniques and the mechanics of the spectacular (pages 32-33, 60-63) exploring new relationships with the audience (pages 22-23, 25, 56). The chronology of early works explores the necessity for the project's inception (pages 68-80). Commissioned texts for this book explored the international (Liam Gillick, page 6) and the local (Donnie O'Rourke, page 51) interrogating these apparently paradoxical contextual imperatives reconciling them in relation to the development of the RLP. In this phase of the project the viewer is placed firmly in the role of the spectacular viewer, watching the Real Life show with the Real Life Character the centre of attention, awakening a critical consciousness.

I also included three texts of my own which reflected the international arc of the RLP, one published in New York, one for catalogue for an artist run exhibition in Glasgow and an unpublished text written for an abandoned Transmission Gallery anniversary book. The approach of reproducing the texts in exactly the format in which they were originally published is something I have maintained and developed. (See Appendix A). From the start the publications articulated the significance of the performative text and contextual writing in the work and I acknowledge a long line of artists influential in the evolution of

this aspect of the project, including Lawrence Weiner, who famously discusses his exclusively language based work as sculpture with the descriptive text as his *materials*. I worked briefly with Weiner while he was installing an exhibition at Transmission Gallery in 1991.

In my work, it's simultaneously realities, instead of parallel. Simultaneous avoids the problem of alternate reality. In parallel reality, there's always a hierarchy, and there doesn't necessarily have to be a hierarchy. When you're in a palace like Blenheim (where Weiner was preparing a show), you're supposed to be in awe—why not be in awe of something different than the stuff they're showing you? It's about finding your own existential place.

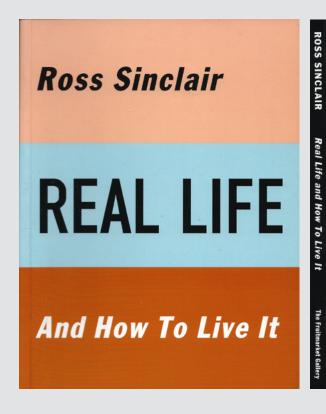
http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/artistsat-work-lawrence-weiner/print/ [accessed 5/12/2015]

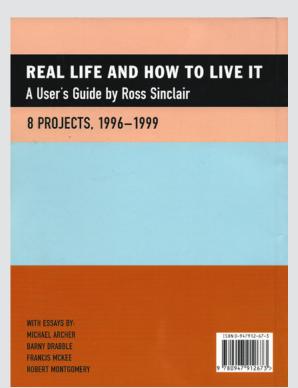
The works of the early RLP are documented and discussed animating relations with audience that explored collective and social imperatives: e.g. Justice (Real Life Death, pages 60-63), Creativity (Studio Real Life, pages 7-9), Protest Songs (I Never Felt More Like Singing the Blues, pages 56-57), Identity (Real Life Rocky Mountain, The Sound of Young Scotland, pages 32-36). Always live, in public, always in front of an audience. Multiple points of entry to the work were explored and encouraged. Unconventional materials in unexpected contexts are utilised, often engaging the fake, makeshift and provisional, open for discussion, proposing individual responses and interpretation. Songs are written, recorded, performed and explored in the key of Real Life attracting viewers in, imploring a human presence through which the viewer can empathetically focus on the work. Through Ross Sinclair - Real Life Publication One (PI)

the synthesis of these materials, context and action, the visitor may begin to assess the gap between everyday living and *Real Life*. They can stand in a gallery in the middle of a city and reflect on the critical distance from this newly opened window that indicates this other place of Geography, or History, or Justice, and how it may be experienced in relation to their own everyday life. Thus the imaginative space between ones everyday life and this other place, this simultaneous reality, can be identified and one can begin to imagine how it can be traversed. This would be developed further in later works.

Real Life Rocky Mountain (described fully in P2 page 85) was originally developed for CCA Glasgow in 1996 and subsequently had dynamic, portable incarnations in shows in London and Stoke. Significantly this work was re-commissioned by The National Galleries of Scotland in 2014 for Generation, 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland. It was one of the centrepieces of the exhibition and twice the size of its original 1996 incarnation. This provoked an interesting new analysis of the work and its engagement with the transformation of the real relative to a collective understanding of the history and geography of the Small Damp Northern European Nation of Scotland. The timeliness of the original incarnation in terms of focussing the question of national identity through the lens of popular music in a fake diorama was underlined as the remade work was on public display in Edinburgh during the period of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, both the time of intense anticipation and aftermath of the outcome. It provided the backdrop for a number of intense public interviews and discussions which took place over the seven months of the exhibition.







P2 Ross Sinclair: Real Life
And How to Live It

Publication Two (P2)

Ross Sinclair: Real Life and How To Live It

96 pages, Edinburgh, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Aspex, 2000, ISBN 0-947912-67-3

Drabble, Barnaby Public Art is Dead, Long Live Real Life

pages 5-11

Archer, Michael The Other Place is Here Too pages 12-17

McKee, Francis Revolutions Per Minute pages 18-21

Montgomery, R. The Most Modern and Least Boring Kind

of Poetry pages 90-93

This second book (2000) was made with The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh and was part of a series of commissioning exhibitions called *Visions for the Future* developed to 'commission and exhibit substantial new bodies of work from artists working in Scotland' (with accompanying books). I was partnered with Martin Boyce, who exhibited downstairs while my work *Journey To The Edge Of The World: The New Republic of St. Kilda* was encountered upstairs.

In this publication I overlaid a taxonomical rationale to the RLP addressing the works under specific key themes explored across the various works curating each project into a specific thematic headings (P2 page 1). I wrote thorough notes on each project (pages 23, 3, 44, 53, 71, 77 and 85) re-animating the specific contextual scenarios critical to the works development. I imagined it like a field guide. I was building a wider secondary reading of the project, to compliment the careful primary relationship with audience fostered through the multiple live exhibitions. I aspired to create a meta-image of the practice overall in the readers poetic imagination. I proposed an image of a broader Real Life Community by making this evolution legible in published form and invited the reader to join, however vicariously. I was beginning to visualise an overarching narrative weaving together art and life, through reflection, comment and analysis on eight major projects and many supporting exhibitions. In I Love Real Life (Bremen) I explore six of these contested public contextual scenarios, drawing them together in a new civic coalition (P2 pages 58-65).

The viewer engaging with the works described in P2 is now being drawn into the centre of the action, sometimes adopting the position previously held by the Real Life Character at the core of the dialogue, exploring the projects,

re-assembling them using the glue of critical thinking, not simply observing from the outside, as with some previous works in PI. The Real Life Character is sometimes now seen only in a textual or photographic form, for example in the St. Kilda project, in a short, looped black and white film, floating in the water (page 33). The projects gathered in this publication address a broad cross section of institutional life and how as individuals and collectively we might, at least theoretically at first, observe and engage with them in new and dynamic ways.

P2 reflected a shift visible in the works over these years where the focus and emphasis moves away from the Real Life Character functioning as a permanent physical performative presence in the work sometimes now withdrawing into a photographic, symbolic presence allowing space for the gradual elevation of the viewer becoming the central Rückenfigur discussed in P5 (Craig Richardson: 'Sealand', P5, pages 144-146) operating at the centre of the work's orbit, activating a bespoke understanding of the work, from the inside out. Many of these works test the differing modes of audience engagement possible in non-art public spaces acting as hosts such as I Love Real Life Market Stall (pages 66-69), The International Bank of Real Life Spiritual Gold (pages 70-75) and A Dream of the Hamnavoe Free State (pages 43-51).

The key work that launched this publication is Journey to the Edge of the World: The New Republic of St Kilda, (1999) a.k.a. Real Life Republic (P2, pages 22-35)

This expansive work explores a contemporary *Utopic* impulse through exploration of a *Real Life* historical scenario, ambiguously reconstructed through library research of *facts* and reportage. The viewer is invited to navigate the work in their own fashion, physically and intellectually

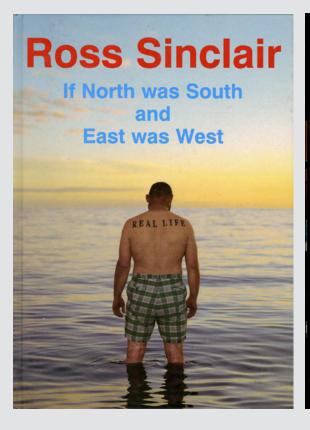
re-mapping the historical perspective as they wish, defining their own understanding of this apparently convincing history and geography, presented through the reversal of century old films of the story of the place, while the sound of songs sung in an apparently unintelligible language filled the air (traditional Scottish songs I recorded myself singing, played backwards). I invited the viewer to reconstruct the pieces for themselves, informed by their own experience, repopulating as they wander through the different rooms, weighing up a contemporary political situation in their unique reading of the work.

A scaled down, portable version of this work won the Baloise individual artist prize at the Statements section of the Basel Art Fair, 2001 and was subsequently acquired by Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, as part of the award. The subsequent process of defining the scale and layout and material identity of the project (slideshows, films, maps, chalk drawings on cardboard boxes) in the tyrannical perpetuity of conservation was a challenging and valuable process in a deepening understanding of the work.

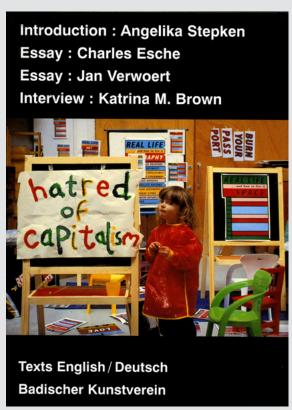
I was invited to re-present this work a decade later in two museums in Denmark in 2009-2010 as part of an exhibition called *I-Lands* (Appendix C, page 240). It is interesting to consider that an important constraint on my initial research and shaping of this project, when first shown in 1999, was the lack of information available about St Kilda (one book, a couple of 1930 newspaper articles, accessed on microfiche at the Mitchell Library, and film clips from early 20th century courtesy of Scottish Screen Archive). Consequently, I could credibly propose many different readings of the reality of the contemporaneous social history from the time of the islands evacuation in 1930

for consideration by the viewer. The story of St Kilda existed in a collective imagination at that time, but the details were very sketchy. However by 2011, literally hundreds of books, photographs, even operas had been published about these myth-soaked islands and the paradigm of the Utopian more generally. Thousands of photos of the place, blogs, stories etc. were now available on the smartphone of every visitor, accessible even as they stood in a museum in Denmark engaging with the work. In one sense this argues for the prescient nature of the original work but also proposes new paradoxical contradictions. When the work is re-presented, the viewer now has access to compelling images of the real St Kilda through web access while I am proposing they enjoy an intimate, unmediated, authentic relationship my Real Life version in the imaginative spaces I have built (with cardboard boxes).

The curator of this project physically visited St. Kilda after working with me on this project and was puzzled when she realised I had not visited nor did I not wish to accompany her on this journey. I told her that in my conception of the identity of the artwork, the key idea was that this other place, this flawed utopian paradigm represented by St Kilda should be actively reimagined and re-constructed by the viewer from the components I presented, in the physical space of the Museum not by visiting in the flesh. It can begin to enter one's everyday imagination only by attempting to comprehend the distance between this impossible illusion and the physicality of where one is standing at the precise moment of engagement with the work, and reflecting on the comparative Realities on offer. Though animated by the almost incredible story of this place and its people, the artwork isn't really about St. Kilda at all; it's about the viewer, the human being, in a room in a city, when they begin to imagine Real Life, not as it is, but as it could be.



Ross Sinclair If North was South & East was West



P3

Ross Sinclair: If North was South...

Publication Three (P3)

Ross Sinclair: If North was South and East was West

200 pages, Karlsruhe, Badischer Kunstverein, 2004 ISBN 3-89309-106-8 (Deutsch/English)

Stepken, Angelika Forward (English/Deutsch) pages 2-3

Esche, Charles On the High Road with Ross Sinclair

and some fellow travelers pages 149-154

(English) pages 169-175 (Deutsch)

Verwoert, Jan The Politics of Belief pages 155-160

(English) pages 176-182 (Deutsch)

Katrina M. Brown Ross Sinclair interviewed pages 160-167

(English) pages 182-191(Deutsch)

P3 (2004) begins with an expansive survey show at Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, Germany where the characteristic works are now more often activated directly by the viewer. (Fortress Real Life, page 30 pages 74-79). P3 is considerably larger in size and length than previous books, reflecting the ambition and increasing scale of the work. I wanted this to be more of a picture book, easy, almost a coffee table style tome in terms of access and easy, casual entry. In this phase of RLP the role of the audience is moving centre stage and has developed from an invitation to critical thinking brought in relation to the works previously seen in P2 and is now evolving towards dynamic participation and activation of the works, in context. The visitor now must physically interact with the largescale installations to fully activate them. This implies another layer in the concentric circles of the reading of the works. This change of emphasis proposes the viewer as a part of the work and includes a new reading as new visitors enter they see the existing audience activating the work and in this way the audience become part of the work.

This book highlights the photographic series of the Real Life portraits, and how they weave through the diverse outputs (pages 16, 19, 23, 28, 44, 46, 47, 56, 70, 98, 105, 124-125 and 144, discussed at length in P7). I designed this book to have multiple levels of entry in this publication, mirroring the aspiration for multiple entry points into the works where different modes of engagement are possible, each aspect pulling the viewer further in to the other place of the project. However this other place is no longer always to be found in an exterior psychological space imagined from the gallery reverie but is now constructed in the physical space itself with the viewers participation, activated by

their presence and hand, whether by paintbrush or drum, live, whenever the public is present. I proposed new ways of re-imagining a recognised institutional art space that may be over familiar to the local visitor and argue that this can be transformed through total immersion Real Life participatory installation.

This can be seen clearly in key work Fortress Real Life, in Bregenz, Austria (P3, pages 30-43) that specifically addressed the contemporaneous political and cultural situation in Austria at that time. In P3 this work is discussed in some detail in an interview with Katrina Brown (pages 160-167)

RS - Of course it is significant that Fortress Real Life was realised in Austria in 2000 where a defacto cultural boycott had been proposed after the rise of the right and the Haider/Freedom Party in the coalition government debacle. I thought this was crazy — my friends in Austria implored that a dialogue should be maintained. I wanted the people of Austria to come to the Fortress and simply to have their say, Un-mediated, Un-censored and on display in Kunsthaus Bregenz.

I wanted to challenge the inhumanity and hard beauty of the building with young people and noise and music, to bring them into this cathedral of modernism, where they'd find this totally different type of place, like Noah's Ark. In one way the fort enabled a personal dialogue with the Kunsthaus Bregenz itself, one of the most dramatic and controversial new buildings in Europe. I wanted to just set this scenario and see what happened. I thought each day when the placards were displayed a top the ramparts there would be a passionate debate displayed about the politics of left and right. I wanted the space to be open for any discussion — and insisted they be publicly displayed.

KB - And what did happen?

RS - Well, there was far more of a predilection for painting than I thought. It was more shocking than any political posturing.

Thus the visitor became a critical participant in the RLP, whether painting placards and making a mess n European temples of high culture in Fortress Real or with paint bombs and Ping-Pong (Real Life vs. the World, Badischer Kunstverein, P3, pages 74-81). Many of the works now need a viewer to play, and activate, often engagement is proposed between the visitors themselves as part of the active life of the work (P3 pages 34-39). The first two publications move through a documentation of the Real Life Character operating from the centre of the live installations and reflecting the development of the viewer as active navigator of the installations. P3 further develops this momentum and reflects projects in which the viewer/audience is now actively participating in the construction of the meaning of the work itself, through their own free contributions, embellishments and enhancements based on structures provided in the concepts and materials of the projects.

In addition to changes of the role of the Real Life viewer in relation to the increased participatory nature of the practice, Fortress Real Life reflects an important consideration of the role of the publications in articulating the contemporaneous contextual scenario of each work. This could include the Geographic, Historical, Political, Religious, Commercial, Social, Fiscal or Creative. The pertinent, specific, defining context of each work is engaged and developed as an important element in each work, at least equal to other formal materials colour or scale of the work. This is hard to

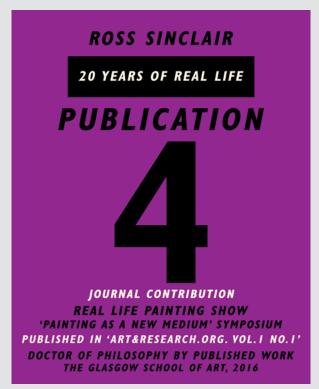
reflect in a retrospective sense, particularly the political context described in the work above. Around this time I participated in a number of exhibitions with the artist Thomas Hirschhorn (in Bordeaux and New York) and I experienced the confidence conveyed in his robust approach to informal materials, context in the activation of audience and this gave me confidence addressing the complex context of a work like Fortress Real Life, where the work was developed against a call to shut down international dialogue with Austria:—

Thomas Hirschhorn:

Doing art politically: What does this mean? Doing art politically means creating something

I can only create or fulfill something if I address reality positively, even the hard core of reality. It is a matter of never allowing the pleasure, the happiness, the enjoyment of work, the positive in creation, and the beauty of working, to be asphyxiated by criticism. This doesn't mean to react, but it means to always be active. Art is always action. Art never is reaction. Art is never merely a reaction or a critique. It doesn't mean being uncritical or not making a critique — it means being positive despite the sharpest critique, despite uncompromising rejection and despite unconditional resistance. It means not to deny oneself passion, hope and dream.

http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v3n1/ fullap01.html [accessed 2/12/15]



ROSS SINCLAIR

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY BY PUBLISHED WORK
THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART 2016

P4

Ross Sinclair: Real Life Painting Show

Publication Four (P4)

Ross Sinclair

'Real Life Painting Show' /

'Painting as a new medium: Symposium'

Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods. Vol.1 No.1 (2006) ISSN 1752-6388

Two of the *publications* submitted for this PhD are contributions to refereed journals (P4+P7) reflecting the multiple tactical forays of the *Real Life Project* disseminated through diverse publications and outputs.

This submission is a re-presentation of the material published in the on-line journal Art&Research.org reflecting various components of my 2006 solo exhibition at CCA Glasgow, Real Life Painting Show. The background and development of this project is introduced by an in-depth interview between myself and Ross Birrell. I initiated a symposium, Painting As A New Medium, also at CCA during the exhibition to discuss and debate the questions raised by the show. This exhibition explored the question of whether or not painting itself can remain a valid conceptual tool, in the first instance as part of the **Real Life Project**, but more broadly in contemporary art, outside of the cocoon of the commercial gallery world of the 21st century.

The publication features transcriptions of the contributions from the invited speakers, leading painting practitioners and critics: Thomas Lawson, David Batchelor and Barry Schwabsky. The event was chaired by John Calcutt. The symposium began with a walk round my show where I discussed the aims and objectives of the project in the context of my RLP with Francis McKee, Director of CCA and the speakers and attendees. The symposium then moved upstairs for more formal presentations in the room directly above the exhibition. A round table discussion after the presentations addressed many of the questions raised through my development of the exhibition in terms of the utility of contemporary painting in relation to the RLP, set amongst an expansive international perspective articulated by the speakers.

The publication is submitted in a style that re-formats the original journal sections as there are no hi-res outputs available from this online journal. I took this opportunity within this Doctoral submission to include more comprehensive documentation of the exhibition in order to make visible the artworks under discussion as part of the submission. However the text in the reformatted hard copy version is reproduced verbatim from the on-line journal.

The evolution of this project echoes through many works and all the publications of the RLP. It begins, unusually for me, by taking a few steps back from the specific thematic concerns of the large scale projects and instead looks inward, testing the reliability, authenticity and veracity of the intuitive decisions I had been indulging in while building the RLP, concerning colour/ scale and form (P3, Dead Church/Real Life, pages 132-135, Real Life Death, P3 pages 58-63). These questions were explored over a year of production (including for some weeks live in the gallery space) and through the development of the exhibition and the symposium debate. In this work I attempted to distil the RLP down to its simplest essential reductive forms of brushstroke, text, colour and scale (sizes: S.M.L.). This explored the basic component parts of RLP, trying to unravel the long threads that weave together to create RLP. The final form of the project brought together more than a hundred of these paintings together (2m x 2m, Imx Im, $0.3m \times 0.3m$ etc.) through the formal presentation of a large-scale exhibition spread around all the available spaces of the gallery.

http://mapmagazine.co.uk/8642/ross-sinclairreal-life-scena/









Publication Five (P5)

Ross Sinclair: We Love Real Life Scotland Art, History and Place

184 pages, UK, Deveron Arts, 2012, ISBN 978-1-907115-09-7

Zeiske, Claudia What does it mean to be Scottish? pages 10-11

Sinclair, R A Reflection on a Journey with the Real Life Gordons of Huntly pages 17-52

Forbes, Anne L. Trials and Triumphs pages 58-66

Scott, Patrick A Walk around Huntly pages 67-79

Sharp, D A Personal View pages 80-81

Gordon, Kim W. A Personal View pages 82-83

Scott, Pat A Personal View pages 86-87

McCrone, David Scotland the Brand pages 88-101

McKee, Francis Another Green World pages 103-111

C. of Neoflagellants Strathbogie Knights pages 112-117

Buchanan, Roderick From Castle Huntly to Huntly Castle pages 118-129

Richardson, Craig Sealand pages 132-163

Relyea, Lane Class Struggle pages 164-165

McCaughey, Peter Those who go with Real Life will be the Winners in History pages 166-175

Sinclair, R The Real Life Gordons of Huntly History Song pages 180-181

P5 (2012) was developed from an intensive period of practice and dialogue generated by a three-month artist residency I undertook in the Aberdeenshire town of Huntly, hosted by Deveron Arts. Over the months of this intervention the RLP was tested and documented operating outside the bounds of a formal institutional infrastructure. A project was created where the audience must be imagined, created, observed, understood and sometimes coerced in the construction of specific artworks developing a relationship with them that evolved over the residency. The role of the resulting publication expanded the remit of the RLP into uncharted territory. In the lead essay 'Where are We?' (P5, page 17) I discussed the complicated role of the artist in this situation. Deveron Arts and their voluble leader Claudia Zeiske are clear, they need participants, folk joining in, not audiences. I however, wanted art; art with people. So battle commenced. In the end though, it turned out we were perhaps looking for the same thing. The supportive critical relationship with Deveron Arts was central to the development of the audience and works created. This book developed a sustained investigation of how art and artists can relate to a particular local, national and international context addressing the history, politics and culture of a place, questioning to what extent the place has constructed its inhabitants, or vice-versa. These ideas are explored through the testing of multiple artworks, interventions and conversations (pages 26-28, 48, 80, 82, 97 and 104) in various locations in and around the town. The publication is described in its subtitle as a reader. It was composed slowly over many weeks and months of dynamic and intensive dialogue between Claudia and myself. At one point we considered including a chapter on the argumentative conversation about what we each wanted the book to represent, to reflect the mutually productive process at play. It contains 15 texts, each commissioned with a specific role to play, with perspectives spanning the microlocal to the international, reflecting the voices of

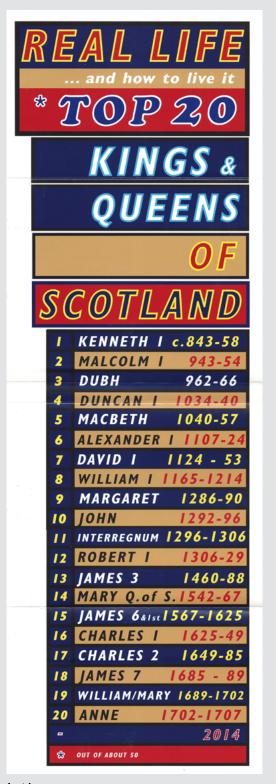
the contributors relationships to the context, the artist and the artworks. In the works documented in this publication the role of the audience has changed again. When I arrived they didn't exist, I had to invent them, with help from the hosts. They are conjured from the civic community, sometimes identified by name (Gordon), location or potential for engagement. My first job was to convince these people that the experience of engaging with art and an artist will be worthwhile.

I began this research by testing the efficacy of the Real Life Art project out of the urban cultural safety zone, offering it unvarnished to the populace of Huntly in a series of non-art spaces. Sometimes it was a hard sell.

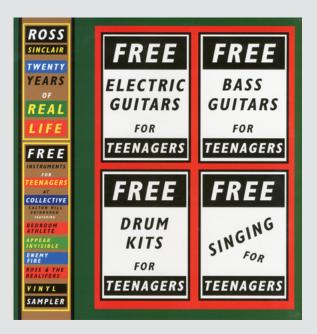
The concept of P5 was two-fold. The initial debate in this book orbits around the interrogation and repeated testing of the role of the artist, when removed from official cultural structures and institutions, reflected in Deveron Arts' motto, The Town is the Venue. Fundamental to this is the construction and coalition of a new iteration of the public, brought together under the umbrella of the RLP. This was a volunteer army, irregulars, a ghost image of The Gordon Highlanders, recently disbanded.

The second role of this book was a broader assessment and analysis of a significant number of works I have made over the 20 years of the project that implicitly or explicitly have addressed Scottish cultural identity, discussing the complexity of these influencing factors and how they can be understood and discussed in contemporaneous and dynamic ways, in public, with a diverse cross-section of audience. This aspect of the practice has been an integral part of the evolution of the RLP from the earliest works. Key works in P5 were The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318-2011 (pages 31-37, 40), Portable Museum Tour (pages 21, 29, 54, 68, 68) Real Life Artist in Residence, Huntly Livestock Mart (pages 22-4, 42-5).





Outside Inside





P6

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life

Publication Six (P6)

Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of Real Life Free Instruments for Teenagers

Collective, Edinburgh 2015, Vinyl Record, gatefold sleeve, risograph insert ISBN 978-1-873653-16-6

Ross Sinclair

Claire Biddles

James Bell

Also discussed in Appendix B P6 (2015) is literally the record of a two and a half year project working with Collective Gallery, Calton Hill, Edinburgh. Celebrating twenty years of the RLP I developed a collaborative project re-imagining the idea of the retrospective exhibition. For a year preceding the exhibition I developed and produced a site-specific exhibition at Collective's City Dome space that incorporates a series of placards naming 20 years of Real Life artworks with structures supporting multiple musical instruments, a public rehearsal space and an interactive painting area. The exhibition component of the project was active over the Summer 2014, during the time of the Edinburgh Festival and was visited by over 17,000 people, many of whom were interested tourists rather than art aficionados. At the end of the show we gave away most of the exhibition to any young person born since I had the REAL LIFE tattoo made in 1994, 20 sets of musical instruments, one for each year of the project. This was followed by 18-months of working with the teenagers who had received the free instruments that culminated in a recording session and the production of this publication/record. Articulating this publication I characterise the development of the project in a quote on the record sleeve:

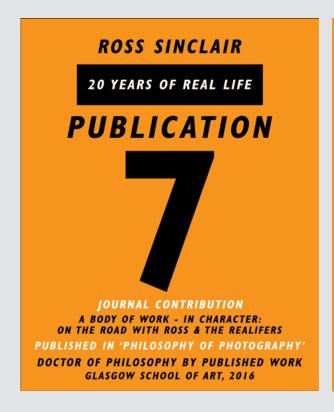
2014 was the 20th Anniversary of my Real Life Project. I wanted to look back and celebrate this journey, but at the same time look towards the next 20 years with a renewed sense of optimism. What had been promised? What had been achieved? Hundreds of exhibitions and artworks, local, national, international, books and essays to document them all, records, cd's, posters, postcards, beermats, billboards, and any other forms I could think of to use. But what really remained when the show was over and the people went home? I wanted to explore a way to translate the energy and ambition and hope of these works I had made (many of which had only been 'live' for a few weeks or months during an exhibition) into

other forms - planting new seeds that could take on a Real Life of their own. Collective asked me to make an exhibition in the City Dome on Calton Hill. This was the perfect opportunity to reach out to another audience.

I had constructed the Real Life Character in 1994 by making the tattoo and I placed him at the centre of the various works setting up unusual and dynamic encounters with the visitors proposing new ways to consider the veracity of their own spectacular experiences. Over the years I have developed the identity of the character being repositioned in photographic form, or simply by imagining Real Life through various textual iterations and as the project develops the visitor becomes slowly elevated to become the operator or driver of the work. Subsequently this shifts towards the viewer becoming more physically active in the projects, participating with the construction and refining of the work, having fun participating in painting or making music and the creation of meaning around it, where the audience themselves become part of the work.

P6 features music developed and recorded during a project where the locus for the creative energy has evolved further and the promise and celebration of the work is expressly handed over to the participants. Then I bring it back together in the final publication, as part of the RLP. Again it should be stressed that while the resultant artwork is something of a collaboration, I am in control of the framing and outputting of the publication, commissioning writers, designing most aspects and providing the content and defining the key modes of dissemination. It could be argued then when viewing the participating bands in a live concert in December 2015 at Collective to celebrate the launch of the record, the young people involved in this project have become extensions of the live installation I was exploring with my own tattooed body at the projects inception.







Publication Seven (P7)

Ross Sinclair
Journal Contribution
'A Body of Work – in Character...
On the Road with Ross and the Realifers'

Philosophy of Photography Journal, Intellect Ltd, Volume 6, Issue I & 2 (2016) ISSN: 20403690

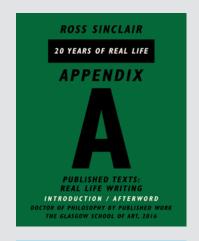
This visual and textual essay reflects on the development of the photographic representation and development of the image of the Real Life Character in portrait form, now migrated to an academic journal. This is an analysis of the evolution and meanings proposed through the photographic self portraits of the Real Life Character that have played a critical role across the span of the project, taking the form of an illustrated poetic reverie.

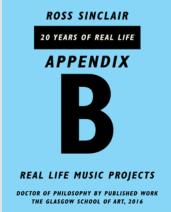
Ross Sinclair writes

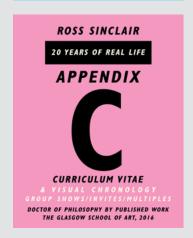
The Realifer immediately went out and posed for a series of black and white photographs round the streets of Garnethill, near the Art School in Glasgow. Sympathetic friends took the photographs. Some kids laughed, then ran away, pointing at this crazy character with long dreadlocks, stripped to the waist with some awful green checked tartan shorts on, looking like a Duane Hanson sculpture come to life in a post apocalyptic landscape of empty black and white buildings and smashed windows. And what were those words written on its back? What could they mean, here, there and everywhere. Hyper Realism - the Real Life Character - would come to populate many of the nascent works over the coming years, and then these years would become decades, one, then two, then the start of a third, literally fleshing out the bones of the projects as they grew and developed, as one. Studio Real Life, Real Life Moby Dick, Real Life Rocky Mountain, Real Life Death, Dead Church Real Life, Real Life Old School, Fortress Real Life, Real Life vs. The World, Real Life Orcadian, Real Life Painting Show, 20 Years of Real Life etc, on and on, over and over. This character is partly the author, and something else, something more than the sum of its parts in context and settings, in character.

Over the timeline of these publications the Real Life Character has travelled far and wide in its dialogue with a Real Life public. The Real Life audience have developed over this time from spectacular consumers (PI) through to critical thinkers (P2) bringing the works to life with their central presence, moving toward a position of active enablers of the work, painting, participating, getting their hands dirty (P3). This has evolved through the civic forays and self-identification as a Real Life Public in Huntly, where we conjure art together exploring unfamiliar methodologies in a familiar (to them) context, gathering new audience members as we go (P5). In the project described in (P6) the audience takes the form of a group of young people deeply committed to a long term particapatory project. These teenagers have now become active collaborators in the project, we work together for eighteen months, playing, writing and recording music eventually sharing the grooves of the vinyl with our songs blending and clashing in dynamic conversation. Finally, in the last publication submitted, I reconstruct the journey of the Real Life Character itself (P7) looking back to try to understand how it arrived at its current location, reflecting on the peripatetic route it has taken, to see if this will give any indication of the direction and terrain of the uncertain road ahead.









Real Life Writing: Music: Visual Chronology

The three appendices submitted reflect the multi-disciplinary nature of the *RLP* documenting numerous outputs utilising different forms in diverse contexts. Appendix A and Appendix B contain introductions to the respective bodies of work and Appendix C is designed to give a visual indication of the breadth and depth of the *Real Life* exhibition practice outputs. The materials in the three appendices are seen side by side in this submission for the first time reflecting the empirical, practice-led nature of the *RLP*.

Appendix A: Published Writing; introduces a body of written work I have published in the form of essays, texts and reviews woven throughout the projects history, that reinforce the importance to the momentum of the RLP of the twin approaches of public exhibition and published critical, textual practice. This work is here gathered together and reproduced in full for the first time. The two modes of Real Life research: exhibition/installation/live performance and the artists writing each articulate a distinctive contribution in their own right; the published written work adding a critical voice of the artist/writer often reflecting on working in a remote geographic outpost (Glasgow) contributing to the international debate on the centres and peripheries contemporary art practice. This appendix also contains an afterward contextualising the project in relation to Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan's Real Life Magazine and the Glaswegian context at the time of the projects beginnings.

Appendix B: Real Life Music Projects; shows the development of music projects that provide another vehicle for the engagement of audience and the dissemination of the RLP. Music has played an important part in the evolution of the RLP and this appendix helps to articulate some of the more formalized output. Not captured, however, are the hundreds of live performances and interventions, in exhibitions, talks and lectures.

Appendix C: Curriculum Vitae & Visual Chronology, Group Shows, Invites, posters, multiples etc; contains my Curriculum Vitae and other works documented and published in a diverse array of outputs. These materials are included to give additional form and context to the 20-year international arc of the project. The published material is drawn from an informal archive of my work as it has appeared published in catalogues and books from group shows and survey style exhibitions amongst many other forms of public engagement. Also included are invites, posters and multiples. This Appendix offers a broader understanding of the depth and span of the project, its international profile and the texture of its engagement with the world.

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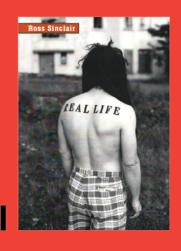
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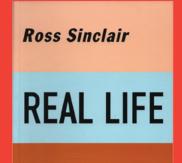
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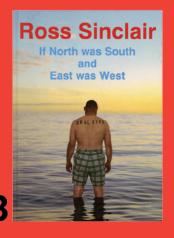
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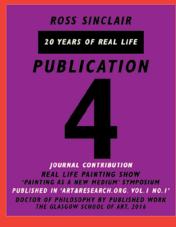


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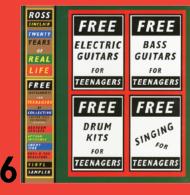


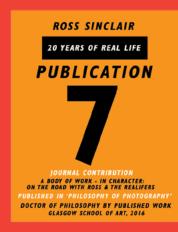
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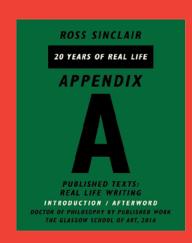
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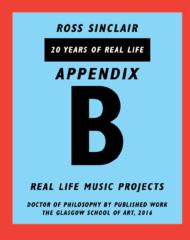


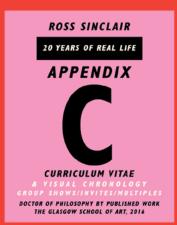






APPENDIX





PUBLICATION 1 Ross Sinclair: REAL LIFE, CCA, PIER ARTS CENTRE, TRAMWAY, Glasgow 1997

PUBLICATION 2 Ross Sinclair: REAL LIFE And How To Live It, FRUITMARKET, Edinburgh, 2000

PUBLICATION 3 Ross Sinclair: If North Was South And East Was West, BADISCHER KUNSTVEREIN, 2004

PUBLICATION 4 Ross Sinclair: REAL LIFE Painting Show/Symposium - ART&RESEARCH.ORG, 2006

PUBLICATION 5 Ross Sinclair: We REAL LIFE Scotland, DEVERON ARTS, Huntly, 2012

PUBLICATION 6 Ross Sinclair: 20 Years of REAL LIFE, COLLECTIVE, Edinburgh, 2015

PUBLICATION 7 Ross Sinclair: A Body of Work...PHILOSOPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHY, 2016

APPENDIX A Ross Sinclair: PUBLISHED TEXTS, REAL LIFE WRITING

APPENDIX B Ross Sinclair: R E A L LIFE M USIC PROJECTS

C Ross Sinclair: C.Y., GROUP SHOWS, VISUAL CHRONOLOGY