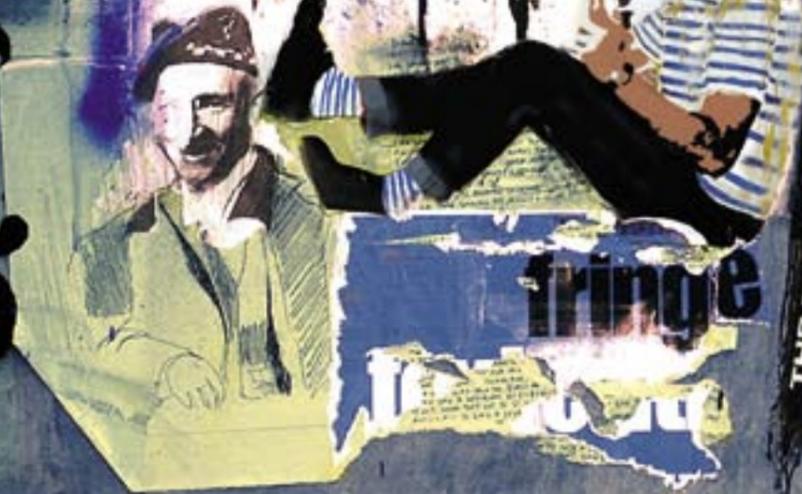


# Vanishing Scotland



WHAT IS THIS

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# VANISHING SCOTLAND

Pete Martin asks "Is our international identity and economic prosperity being undermined by lack of Scottish solidarity?"

Like Sinatra sang,  
**"It happened  
in Monterey."**

I was in the old Mexican city as Executive Creative Director of a New York ad agency for a 'power breakfast' with a global client.

Over burritos in the second-best hotel I've ever stayed in, we were chatting about our careers. I said that, before working on Madison Avenue, I'd founded an ad agency called SMARTS, and that I came from Scotland.

In turn, the client modestly revealed that he'd been the Deputy Finance Minister of Mexico and, before that, the Deputy Foreign Minister and... suddenly three distinct thoughts jumped into my mind.

1. Burritos for breakfast are a bad idea.
2. No wonder Scotland's tourist industry struggles when you can stay in a great hotel like this for so little.
3. This successful, educated, well-travelled man – the idea of Scotland had never crossed his mind before.

Since then – whether I've been working in Manhattan, directing ads in Paris, pitching in Dublin or just doing business in the English regions – I've had this nagging feeling about Scotland's international profile. Especially when you come home and the difference in the air, business-wise, is almost palpable. You can't put your finger on it.

Is the idea of modern Scotland simply hard to articulate? Or is it just that – like Scotch mist itself – the very idea of Scotland is evaporating?

Even an inkling comes as a shock. You're Scottish; the world and its mother knows Scotland: whisky, haggis, golf, tartan, tarmac, TV, the telephone and thermos flask – we invented the modern world, for chrissakes.

Sure, you've got an accent, but it's the distinctive, cultured, non-English version of the international language of commerce. You think.

However, except for one eccentric flute player in Central Park, I'd say no American stranger correctly identified my accent as Scottish.

Most people guess you're Irish: "You sound just like Colin Farrell," as one lady server laughably put it. Even allowing for the average American's lamentable sense of world geography, far too many simply have no idea.

In a city which already has two official languages (American and Spanish), a babel of other voices and a parade for every

ethnicity, the Scottish accent is rarely heard. Tartan Week comes and goes, and no-one mentions it to you. Even though you sound like Sean Connery. You think.

**Yet imagine  
the possibility  
that the  
average New  
Yorker hears**

**something more like  
Latka Gravas, (Andy  
Kaufman's role in 'Taxi'):  
a funny voice from some  
small, indeterminate and  
(therefore, obviously)  
insignificant country.**

Even if people are not our 'product', consider the issue of national visibility and identification.

There are about 500 Italian pizza parlours in New York, and maybe 300 Irish bars. How many Scottish pubs/restaurants do you think there are?

One.

Yeah, I know. We were too busy founding America to open a bar.

So, how many Irish bars are there in, for example, Barcelona? Plenty. But only one Scottish pub. And it doesn't sell any Scottish beer.

For me, that's the issue.

What makes us visible? Which distinctive economic activities – 'Scottish produce' if you like – round out our culture among competing international interests? Even if it's not a physical product, what recognisably distinct, differentiated

benefits do we offer, that the world cares about?

The aesthetes among us may shudder. Surely, culture is more than the sum of a nation's GDP? But equally, a living breathing culture can't just be our collected bric-a-brac, the stuck record of our broken history.

Yet even if 'Scottishness' could be the sum of our cultural output, you might still be worried.

Not long ago, I popped in to see Douglas Gordon's exhibition 'The Vanity of Allegory' in Berlin. I'm a bit of a fan, but I'm not sure how many people would recognise his work as Scottish.

Last year, I went to a revue by Scotland's leading music school. The theatre was half-empty, but the show was entirely filled with American standards.

I attended the opening of the new concert hall in my home town – the first major venue built in Scotland since 1990. Other than 15 minutes from the ever-excellent Craig Armstrong, this gala celebration of a major Scottish cultural event was played out with music from Austria, France and Czechoslovakia.

I went to a J&B party in Cannes and it was rare, except that, run by a London PR firm, you wouldn't have known the drink was Scotch. It was just contemporary generic hooch, diluted with fruit juice.

At least the Lyceum's 40th Anniversary featured Liz Lochhead's take on Molière. It's the kind of event you'd think would be buzzing with energy, and business

people making connections. Nonetheless, I hugely enjoyed an evening among Edinburgh's senior citizens.

Are these just random events, and we can point to any number of countervailing instances?

Or do you sense a common thread of unravelling culture? The fear of being seen to be parochial; art that downplays Scottishness; business cut off from 'country of origin'; a nation no longer interested in itself.

But isn't 'self-interest' – in every sense of the phrase – what defines a nation, and binds competitive economy to potent culture? Just ask the Irish.

**National self-belief is  
certainly an issue, as  
Carol Craig points out  
in her excellent book  
'The Scot's  
Crisis of  
Confidence'**

But you doubt if such insecurity springs from a deep-set national psyche. Our young people – shivering in sportswear, in pale imitation of gangsta-style – can't even have heard of Dad's Army and Corporal Fraser, never mind mugged up on John Knox and David Hume.

To me, failure looks more like learned behaviour: we simply see how Scottish society gives away its best opportunities with the generosity of a Bertie Vogts' back four, and assume we're not good enough.

In a wider historic and economic context, you could argue we have not defended each other that well, either.

Has lack of collective will helped erode the cultural 'line in the sand' that guarded Scottish interests, easing the drift of business decision-making (and spending) out of Scotland?

Or, more positively, are we so busy being 'international' that we forget to foster our own contribution to the global party?

So, what now? You can't legislate for Scottish solidarity: it's elective. But, if your own prosperity and quality of life depends on Scotland, it's an essential investment.

To create a self-supporting economy – with a vibrant culture that can be uniquely and credibly identified as 'the best wee country in the world' – we have to become self-supporters.

I woke up one morning and a voice on the radio said:

**"Hey, you're  
listening  
in the greatest  
city in the  
world."**

**And that was in Dublin.**

Now, wouldn't it be great to hear something like that on 'Good Morning Scotland'?

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