

# *Isle of Islay*

## Nature Observatory

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### **Prelude: Voyage into the Substance**

SUN

*centre of the Solar System perfect spherical ball of hot plasma*

WATER

*one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms*

ROCK

*granite is a combination of the quartz feldspar and biotite minerals*

...

*with mere finger clicks*

*nature = substances = nouns<sup>1</sup>*

*It is a man-made world.*

*stimuli after stimuli*

*they try with colours and light up the night*

*they try with scale, SMLXL*

*I am immune*

*my eyes sore*

*ears shut*

*I abandon my senses*

*or else they do violence to me*

*but I want them back<sup>2</sup>*

*a city won't help –*

*itself the root of my disease*

...

*I go into exile*

*a nomad*

*like my ancestors<sup>3</sup>*

VOYAGE INTO THE SUBSTANCE

a true oceanic island it must be

ILA INSULA

## Remembrance of a Forgotten Treaty between Man and Nature

2067 AD, Ila Insula



Fig. 1. Isle of Islay - Nature Observatory:  
VOYAGE INTO THE SUBSTANCE

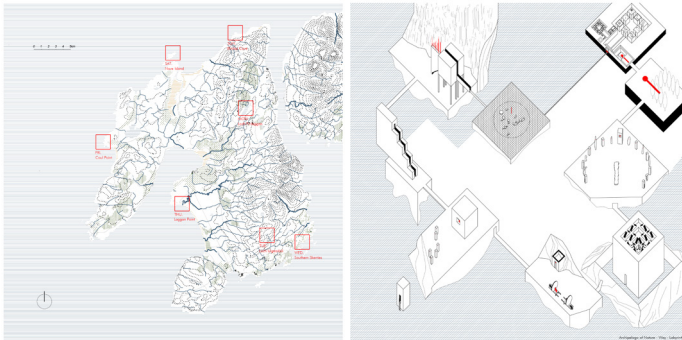


Fig. 2. 2067 AD, Ila Insula

## Introduction

The contemporary condition of the human race is the root, the origin and the subject of the project. Our society is highly industrialized, digitalized and automatized – what the earliest pioneers of the enlightenment movement could only have dreamt of. On the one hand, modern citizens are enjoying this progress: washing machines, ovens, laptops take our burdens away and are becoming an indispensable part of everyday life; on the other hand, modern life and culture are dominated by rationalization and technology, turning human life into a banal regular formula, which is increasingly becoming a burden in itself and incompatible with feelings and dreams.

The paradox of our age today is therefore the combating force between rationality and feelings and dreams. A retrograde wish would be merely escapist; to deny rationality would lead to barbarism. Enlightenment pioneers discovered reason for us; today we embrace reason but need to go beyond rationality and rediscover romance and nature. The *tabula rasa* created by modern movements needs to be filled with new inventions and understanding of a more mature, empathic and loving human-nature relationship: a rational romantic mind, or enlightened primitiveness?

The project is therefore a social critique against the overrule of rationality over humanity, a frustrated plea for more emotional capacity (for love and nature) within (or beyond) a rational world. To overcome the conditions and paradox described above, I have developed various fictive concepts or utopias. The project here is one of such concepts, and perhaps also a radical and pessimistic one – the protagonist takes his frustration with an escapist attitude, leaves his city behind and tries to find his joy and purpose of life in a natural and prescientific environment. He arrives at a faraway island in Scotland, where natural elements, not rational human beings, are the dominating force. I designed various instruments or observatories for the modern man to get in touch with what he yearns for – nature: through folklores and tales he regains a prescientific eye; through the instruments he experiences the varied elemental existence of nature – sun, moon, stars, water, fire, wind, waves . . .

During this project I got inspiration through reading, writing and collecting. Travel logs written by English scholars, who travelled to Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as folklores and tales of the Scottish islands were great inspirations; like a time machine, these words took me a few hundred years back to a prescientific state of mind. Viewing the myths with an enlightened eye enabled me to filter superstitions and adopt a primitive mind-set towards a coherent human-nature relationship. The narrative style of the travel logs sets an example for describing and experiencing space with an empirical method. Through my own writing, my own perception and impression of spatial quality and characteristics become known to myself. To write down my thoughts with poetic expressions means that I can express impressions, hypotheses, assumptions and associations in unconfined, not thought-through, not necessarily well-founded fragments that enable the freest documentation of impressions of moments. Through collecting archetypical references of various instruments and observatories from different cultures throughout history, I try to see through the formal and functional aspect of the structures, grasp the potential inherent in their form and function and transfer the intelligence in my own design.

### MONDAY BEFORE DAWN – ORIGIN – OUT OF DARKNESS

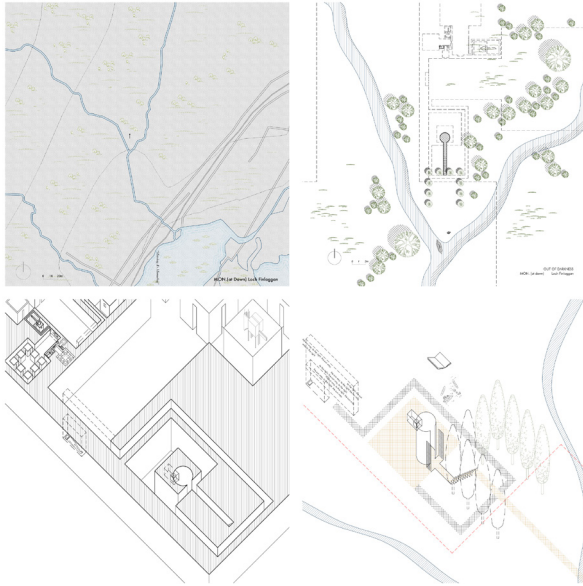


Fig. 3. Monday Before Dawn – Origin – Out of Darkness

In darkness he wakes up in a stone bed. Bumping into a wall, he feels his hands against it . . . It is uneven, carved with: *'the sun way, to the right.'*<sup>4</sup> Finally he arrives at a room where sun rays cast in. A red box is in a niche, with a guidebook of an island, INSULA ILA. His voyage officially starts. Up the stairs, morning sun rays shine in his face. Surrounded by conifers, in front of him two rivers join. Following the hints of the guidebook, he jumps in a boat: *follow the 'south flowing rivers' to meet the sun.*<sup>4</sup>

## MONDAY - ODE TO THE SUN - LOCH FINLAGGAN

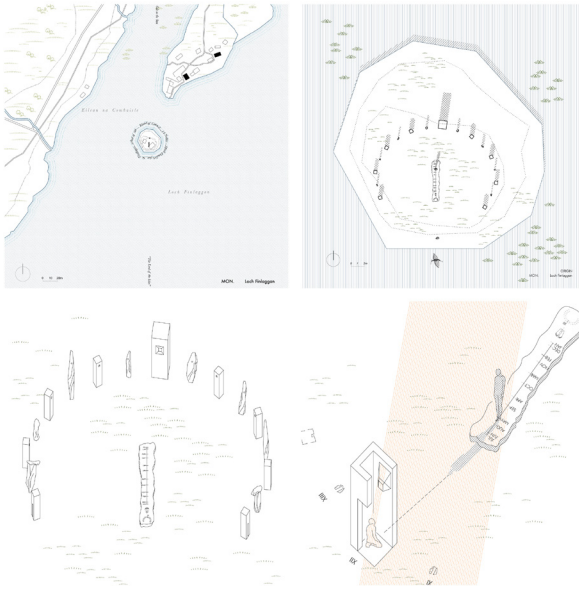


Fig. 4. Monday – Ode to The Sun – Loch Finlaggan

Almost circular, utopian, is the little island *Eilean na Comhairle* – island of council where 14 judges of the Lord of Isles used to meet.<sup>5</sup> Along a stone carved with names of months he walks towards the mark of the month 'May', *the sun behind him casts a shadow*, pointing to 'hour XII'. Around him are standing stones, smaller and bigger, like Stonehenge. They are holed stones, some of which have inner spaces.<sup>15</sup> Through the hole – mind's eye of the stone – he sees the sun. *At this very moment, the sun is in his eye, in this hole, and in this house and stone.*

## TUESDAY – ODE TO THE LOCH – LOCH UIGEADAIL

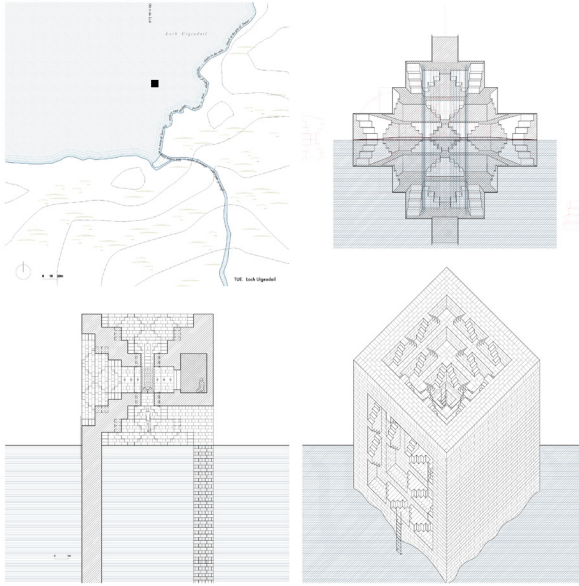


Fig. 5. Tuesday – Ode to The Loch – Loch Uigeadail

Amid white quartzite hills he arrives. White are the Stones, dark blue is the water, endless is the moorland and dramatic is the sky: *as if the loch has a reign*. In the midst of the loch is a cube with many stairs. He swims across and arrives at its centre surrounded by small niches. Opening an iron cover in the floor, he jumps into the water and sees a step well, like those in India.<sup>15</sup> At a touch, the mirrored reflection vanishes: *residence of the invisible soul of the loch*. On the top of the structure are little stones here and there. *He picks up one and puts it into a niche.*<sup>6</sup>

## WEDNESDAY – ODE TO ALL LIVES – SOUTHERN SKERRIES

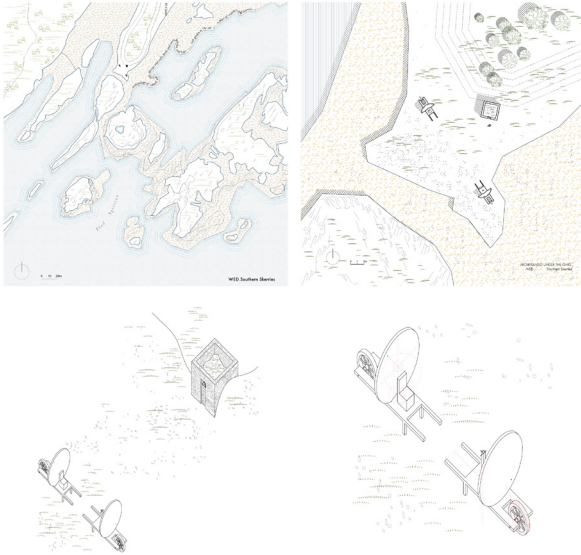


Fig. 6. Wednesday – Ode to All Lives – Southern Skerries

Archipelagos of islands and islets, skerries and rocks, atolls and coves, beaches and bays. Lush green with oak trees and deer grass – lives celebrate. Walking towards a cube he finds his nose against a triangle opening. Seeing nothing, out of curiosity he takes a breath. Earthy and fresh, familiar but intense: *It smells exactly like here!* He then sits on one peat cart and faces another, on top of which birds eat the seeds. How vivid their songs are! A perfect reflection of the birds' talk reaches his ears, *he feels like the magic hunter who can hear birds' talk.*<sup>15</sup>



## THURSDAY – DELAY & WAIT – LAGGAN POINT

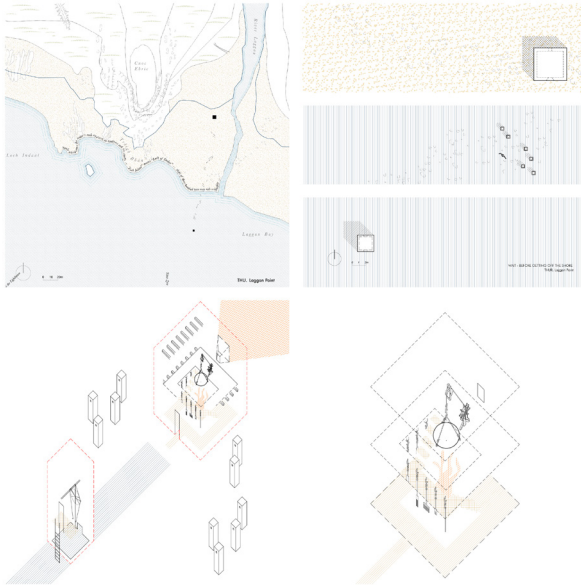


Fig. 7. Thursday – Delay & Wait – Laggan Point

Here the River Laggan flows into the sea. There were once many fish here, where a local decides to bury himself *with a spike ready to go fishing*.<sup>7</sup> Beside the river is a house. He walks in and pulled the pot up the central fire with a *spinning wheel*. He prepared some woods, took the hanging *spikes* and made himself a *Brochan Lom* - a traditional island dish. On the beach are standing stones quite like an Antony Gormley sculpture. With the help of these standing men he knows *the depth of the tide*.<sup>8</sup>

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## FRIDAY – IN MEMORY OF A LOST KINGDOM – COUL POINT

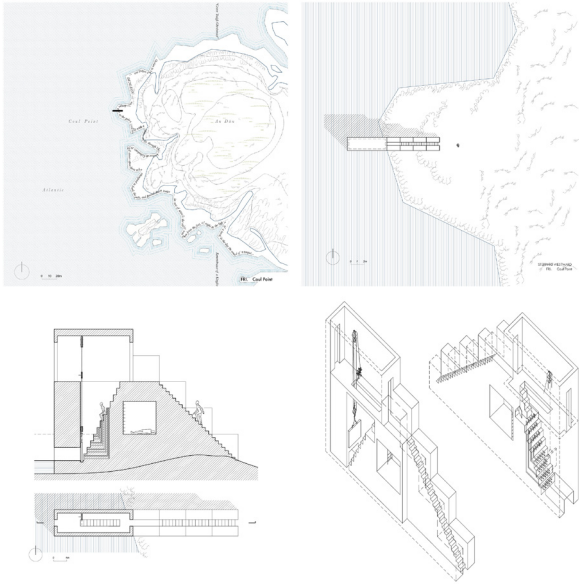


Fig. 8. Friday – In Memory of A Lost Kingdom – Coul Point

The islanders considered this to be the furthest western point and the back-side of the world. Step westwards, what a romantic notion.<sup>9</sup> Coul burg was a *defence place* nearby, steep at all sides with small passages easy to be blocked from within.<sup>10</sup> A typical Scottish *burg* has an atrium at the entrance, so that from the top, stones could be rolled down, or fire could be initiated against invaders. Here a tourist in the past might end up in a dungeon.<sup>11</sup> Friend or Foe? He walks up huge stairs, arrives at an atrium, lifts the door: huge waves rush in and the stairs become water organs,<sup>15</sup> as if foes are rushing in and horning loud.

## SATURDAY – THE GLEN: ODE TO THE WIND – NAVE ISLAND

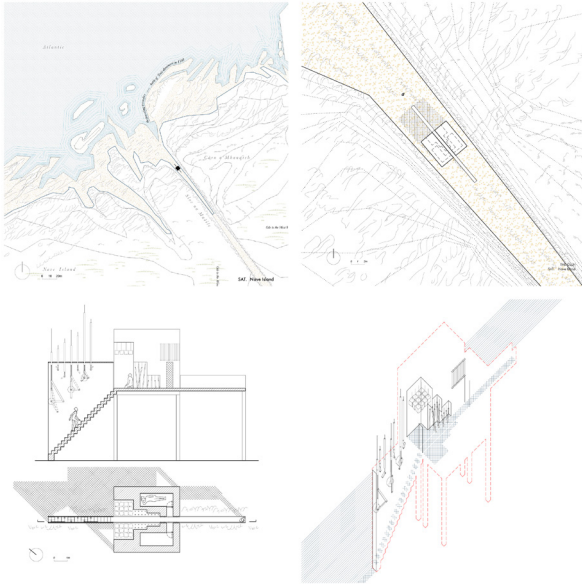


Fig. 9. Saturday – The Glen: Ode to The Wind – Nave Island

At the northern point on a little island, he finds himself facing an impressive glen. Opening the door of a stone house with pipes, he feels heavy wind against his back. Apparently it is not just him who felt the wind . . . *What a mixture of talks and singing and dancing.*<sup>12</sup> Something metallic rings, pleasant to the ear. On the wall strings of harp sing.<sup>15</sup> *All the works of wind.* What a theatre.

## SUNDAY – IN MEMORY OF DARKNESS – BHOLSA CAVE

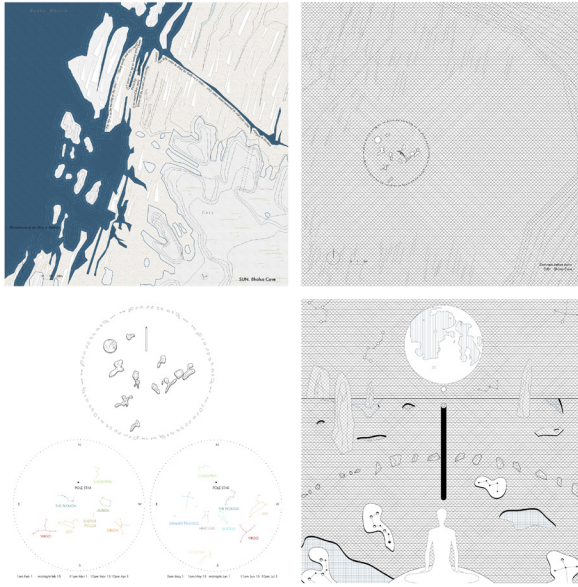


Fig. 10. Sunday – In Memory of Darkness – Bholsa Cave

. . . What a starry night! *He moves the stones carved with star patterns according to the overhead stars.* Bathing in moonlight with cold air, cold stones and colder feet, he thinks of saints who dwelled in stone chambers with stone beds and chairs.<sup>13</sup> With this thought he walks into the cave and arrives at a stone bed . . . Déjà vu.

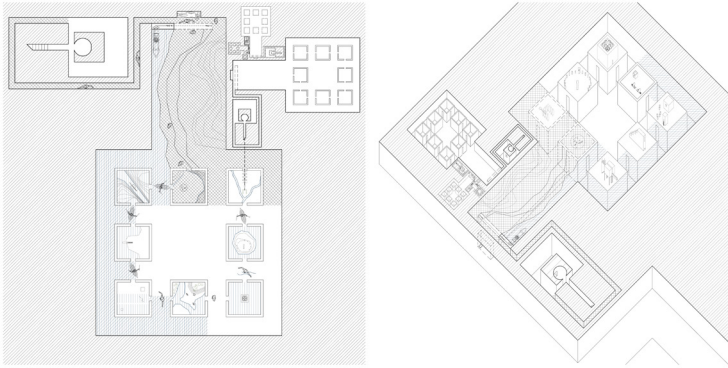


Fig. 11. Oceanic Island – Archipelago – Labyrinth

In his dream he is watching a play in the Book Theatre, and the eight places he visited are miniature rooms on the stage. What he does not yet know is – that when he wakes up, he would have forgotten everything and start the voyage all over again. An oceanic island of Deleuze it is, before Latour's immutable mobiles were invented. A true other worldly place called INSULA ILLA. And it is a labyrinth.<sup>14</sup>

- 1 World transformed into a mathematical formula, see George Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds.), *The Blackwell City Reader* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 14.
- 2 Precision, over-simulation and protective organism, see Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', op. cit. (note 1), 19.
- 3 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002), 48.
- 4 *Deas* (Gaelic): south and right. *Dessil*: an auspicious ritual – sunways from left to right.
- 5 Joan Blaeu, *Blaeu Atlas of Scotland* (1654).
- 6 Water worship in J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, Vol. IV (Edinburgh, 1860), 314-346. James M. Mackinlay, *Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs* (Glasgow: William Hodge & Co., 1893), 5-23.
- 7 Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703), 240.

- 8 *Loch Indaal* (Gaelic) means Loch of Delay: ships wait here until storms pass.
- 9 William Wordsworth, *Stepping Westward* (1807).
- 10 Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, op. cit. (note 7), 240.  
Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1772), 256.
- 11 Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), 252-255.
- 12 The battle of Traii-dhruinard took place north of Loch-Druinard.
- 13 Mackinlay, *Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs*, op. cit. (note 6), 5-23.
- 14 The Gaelic tale '*Murchag a's Mionachag*', describing a chain of cause-and-effect, indicates a labyrinth-like ancient mind-set. In J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, op. cit. (note 6), 157-163.
- 15 References to various instruments and structures for observation of natural phenomena. Sun: Stonehenge and holed stones. Water: step well. Sound: parabolic mirrors, whisper dishes. Water Organ: Greek hydraulic organ, sea organ by Nikola Bašić, Croatia. Stair: Jantar Manta, India. Wind: Aeolian Wind Harp by Kircher Athanasius, 1650.