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**‘Mutations from Below’: The Land Raiders of Reef and *An Sùileachan* (2013) by Will Maclean and Marian Leven**

***Introduction***

The focus of this paper is the memorial structure, *An Sùileachan*, at Uig on the Island of Lewis which was designed by Will Maclean and Marian Leven and built by stonemasons Ian Smith and James Crawford in 2013 (see Figure 1). INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE. The memorial, dedicated to the Land Raiders of Reef, is the fourth in a series of memorial sculptures designed by Maclean to commemorate the struggles of the people against landlord control in different communities on the Island of Lewis. The earlier award-winning memorial sculptures at Gress, Aignish and Pairc were commissioned in the mid 1990s. Maclean’s words indicate the significance of these structures within his own life’s work:

It was a great privilege to be part of The Lewis Land struggle memorials project *Cuimhneachain nan Gaisgeach* . . . I was introduced to the Chairman and driving force of the project Angus MacLeod MBE, to the local historian and stonemason James Crawford, and to John Norgrove, civil engineer, who made sense of my initial drawings. Just as the history of the raids was researched by Angus and Joni Buchanan in her book *Na*

*Gaisgich*, so Jim's knowledge of archaeology and building techniques informed and gave substance to the sculptures. The communities of Ballallan, Gress/Coll and Aignish each came together for the opening days, three of the most memorable days of my life as an artist. The opening celebrations in the mid 1990s were an integral part of a project that gave continuity to the history of the island and its people.<sup>1</sup>

The title for this paper 'Mutations from Below' is used by Michel Foucault in his radical re-interpretation of classification systems, *The Order of Things*.<sup>2</sup> Much of Foucault's writing is concerned with power relations, the way that power is exercised over people's freedom: a relation of power is quite simply, in Foucault's words, 'a mode of action which ... acts upon [the people's] action'.<sup>3</sup> Foucault's writings are insistently combative, political and expansive but the specific context for his use of the phrase 'mutations from below' is related to language development. He writes of the way that it was only in the nineteenth century that the hierarchical attitude to languages was abandoned in which 'it was accepted that some languages were more important than others because they were able to analyse representations more precisely or more delicately'.<sup>4</sup> The democratic thrust of Foucault's writings is paralleled in the determination of the artists, Maclean and

Leven, to give a voice to the unrepresented voices of the people of Reef at the time of the Land Raid in 1913 and more generally to the voices of the people in their opposition to their treatment at the hands of landowners and their factors during the Clearances. Each element of the project demonstrates the artists' commitment to bringing the voice of the community to artistic form at *An Sùileachan*: firstly, in terms of their response to the topographical, the material, and the historic contexts of the commission and secondly, in their determination to involve the community in all aspects of the commemorative sculpture. Besides the requirements of the commission, aesthetic decisions are determined not only by intuition, but also by an awareness of a visual language. The artist's decisions should be able to withstand scrutiny from within informed debate in contemporary philosophical aesthetics. In successive stages of the essay, therefore, the insights of different cultural theorists – Martin Heidegger, Gianni Vattimo, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jacques Rancière – help to ground the argument in philosophical exegesis. Finally, the essay seeks to determine the nature and extent of the connection between the political and the aesthetic within the memorial sculptural form as exemplified at *An Sùileachan*.

***Background Context: A Community-led Commission.***

The commissioning brief was drawn up at the end of 2008, in a document dated 5 November 2008. It was minimal, but specific in its direction to the artists. The document stated:

#### BRIEF from Reef Committee

The structure should reflect

- 19thC Lewis Land Clearances
- The 20thC land raids by the Reef Raiders
- 21<sup>st</sup> C Scottish Land Reform and community ownership of the Bhaltos Peninsula.

The structure should be act as [sic]

- A view point
- A visitor attraction with interpretation
- A focus for local cultural and educational events

#### Construction

- Walls constructed of local stone
- Wooden elements from Stornoway trust
- Iron work from island blacksmith<sup>5</sup>

Will Maclean and Marian Leven were, as we know, the recipients of the commission but the reason for, and context around, the selection of the two artists needs further explanation.

For the highly respected, foremost contemporary historian of the Highlands, James Hunter, there were a number of very good reasons that Maclean was chosen for the commission:

Not only are Maclean's family origins in Scotland's crofting areas. Much of his art is a deeply felt and highly personal response to the social, cultural and spiritual traumas resulting from the clearances and evictions which the Highland Land League helped bring to an end.<sup>6</sup>

Hunter was writing here about the earlier 1994-6 memorial cairns on Lewis but the sentiment expressed is, nevertheless, pertinent to the 2013 memorial structure at Reef. Maclean is a deeply dedicated artist whose international perspective on the vertical culture of the Scottish Highlands has yet to be fully articulated. Maclean uses notebooks, his father's journals, his own sketchbooks, an archive of found objects, materials, a library of books (on fishing, explorers, history, poetry, architecture, ethnography and art), and his assemblages, drawings, collages and constructions to shape the play between reality and poetic interpretation.

Leven works alongside Maclean, in studios located in Tayport, Fife and Polbain, Coigach. The two dramatically different visions of the artists converge and coalesce in *An Sùileachan*. For both, the coast and sea has been a primary inspirational source. *Two Sights of the Sea*, is the title of an important drawing from Maclean's oeuvre of the 1980s, but it is interesting to reflect upon sight, the eye and the lens in both the broader, Highland context and in the personal drawing together, in the embryonic stages, of the Maclean and Leven approach. The title, *An Sùileachan*, refers to the eye; it can translate simply as "eye opener" but can also indicate something beyond, something more like perspicacity or prescience. *An Sùileachan* sits on the edge of the sea, and, indeed, the importance of the geo-physical or topographical location, the to-ing and fro-ing relationship between structure and the sea will be more fully discussed in a later section of the paper.

Maclean stands in the same position as William McTaggart (1835-1910) where the vision is unmistakably Highland but the language is international: it begins with an insider's knowledge but transcends local articulation. The poet, Sorley MacLean, wrote that Maclean's art makes us aware that 'the local and contemporary and the present, the near and the distant past are in many ways continuous, and that the local and

parochial are often poignant and universal'.<sup>7</sup> We will see in the articulation of the details of structural elements of *An Sìileachan* Maclean's deep immersion in Highland culture and his intense interest in Modernism: in the language of Metaphysical artist Giorgio de Chirico and in the land works of Conceptual artist Robert Morris, amongst others. Again, if we return to Sorley MacLean's text, he speaks of Will Maclean as:

[A] man who is consciously and unconsciously aware of the philosophy, literature and visual art that Scotland has encountered and produced from Enlightenment and Scottish Renaissance to the present day; of a man passionately concerned with the whole history of his country, especially with its tragedy, which is part of the tragedy of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Leven, with all the expressive force and craft of the painter who works in watercolour and acrylic and, formerly, with weaving and printed textiles, turns her attention here to materials of a different kind. She applies her ability to convey, with the apparent effortless we have seen in her paintings, a scale and uncompromising engagement with the external world. In her lyrical, painted works she demonstrates the absolutely essential quality of the genuine watercolour painter where technical skill is kept firmly in check behind what



appears to be an ever-changing response to seascape. Her range of responses some of which are abstract in recent times, are contemplative, yet innovative (see **Figure 2: *Ocean-Scarred***, 2012). **INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE** What is suggested in her body of work is, oftentimes, an equivalence – the articulation of a series of correspondences within a very strictly controlled sense of form – not descriptive in any sense but moving us instead towards the idea of art as gesture. The seascape tradition is a rich and distinctive element in Scotland’s art history and Leven’s work in relating to varied aspects of this tradition is important in the context of this land artwork teetering on the edge of the Atlantic. Whilst there is an extensive Scottish narrative tradition of sea-shore and fishing scenes deriving mainly from the influence of the Dutch School in the nineteenth century as well as a strong decorative tradition deriving from the Scottish Colourists, there is another coastal tradition which derives from McTaggart. This third tradition looks beyond anecdotal incident or decoration to convey a sense of elemental forces through Expressionist marks or brush strokes and would include artists such as Joan Eardley, John Houston, Jon Schueler (his Scottish paintings) and Leven. Involved in mark-making, and with a background in weaving and textiles which necessarily engages the maker with borders and edges, we see her entering into a dialogue between freedom

and control which she explores, meaningfully, at the site at Reef.

### ***Aesthetic Response (1): Topographical Considerations***

The memorial sculpture construction *An Sùileachan*, a collaboration between Maclean and Leven, is a distinctive example of an aesthetic response to the issue of landlord oppression but before attending to the significant historical and political background to the piece, the discussion will focus on formal properties. The working drawings and the list of source materials is a study in itself, but it is the kind of mathematical precision as seen in all of Maclean's work that characterises the thrust of the enquiry. The visual statements of the artists testify to their determination to find a solution, a control of space by formal means that characterise this remarkable land sculpture piece. The sense of the geometric, constructed formal enclosure of form as an oppositional force in its equilibrium to the injustices of history is communicated, is felt, or, more accurately, is 'presenced'. Maclean and Leven's reaction to the physical location at Uig reveals the fact that the sense of the topographical is coterminous with the historical dimension. On receiving the commission, they commented:

The idea of the structure was first considered from the geography of the specific site identified by the community, the top of a rocky outcrop above the village of Reef. The small plateau has a natural stone path leading to two flat outcrops of rock and vegetation. The easterly area has a view towards the village of Reef and the westerly view is to Pabay Mòr. It was important to link these two identified areas within the plateau, both in terms of the landscape and as a symbolic pathway between the past and the future.<sup>9</sup>

In their statement, the artists make specific mention of the physical orientation of the site, and the existing material ('rocky outcrop above the village', 'small plateau', 'natural stone path', 'easterly area', 'westerly view to Pabay Mòr') as the source of their initial consideration. This is where they start from. The awareness of a sense of place that the artists manifest is echoed in the way that historian Neal Ascherson writes about the sites of the Bronze Age cup and ring markings in Argyll.<sup>10</sup> He says that he tries to see the markings in a particular way: 'It involves abandoning the anthropocentric perspective of the modern West, and returning to the vision of human beings who understood themselves and their imagination as components of the natural world'<sup>11</sup> and, later, on burial cairns he writes :

it has always been obvious to local people that many burial cairns are ‘tombs with a view’ carefully placed to command a vista of sea and hills, or that the positioning of henge monuments or circles of uprights can allude to the shape of a valley or the glimpse of a distant peak.<sup>12</sup>

This awareness of location is revealed not just in the gathering of materials relating to location by the artists but in the working drawings which, at each stage, relate the site to the surrounding environment (see **Figure 3: An Sùileachan, working drawing in watercolour**). **INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE.**

In Heidegger’s text, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, we read:

When a work is created, brought forth out of this or that work material – stone, wood, metal, colour, language, tone – we say also that it is made, set forth out of it. But just as the work requires a setting-up in the sense of a consecrating-praising, erection, because the work’s work-being consists in the setting up of a world, so a setting forth is needed . . . That into which the work sets itself back and which it causes to come forth in this setting back of itself we called the earth . . . Upon the

earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world.<sup>13</sup>

The words used by Heidegger – ‘work’ and ‘world’ and ‘earth’ – require some reflection as he intends that they carry very specific connotations so that their meanings be not confused by their everyday associations. It is clear, however, that the sensitivity shown towards the site by Maclean and Leven connects their endeavor with the poetic idealism of Heidegger. Heidegger’s terms are helpfully elucidated in Vattimo:

Heidegger emphasizes the notion of ‘exhibition’ in the same terms we use for ‘putting on’ an exhibition in a museum or gallery, for instance; for it implies that the work of art has the function of founding and constituting the outlines which define a historical world.<sup>14</sup>

Where Heidegger’s terms in his own text remain curiously enigmatic, Vattimo emphasises the historical, collective nature of the work of art and the way that the work functions through aesthetic means as a moral and political sensor of community values:

A society or social group – in short, an historical world – recognizes the constitutive traits of its own experience of the world (for instance, the implicit criteria for distinguishing between good and evil, truth and error, etc.) in a work of art.<sup>15</sup>

The ‘world’ that is created at Uig, however, although it is very precise in its principal signification, it is not a small world.

The idea for the two circular chambers came from the earlier research by Maclean and Leven on the Pictish double-disc markings in the East Wemyss caves in Fife.<sup>16</sup> Many aspects of Pictish society remain obscure but one significant point remains: ‘Although archaeology is adding more information about their houses, fortifications and burials than was known in the past, they are still best known for their carved stone monuments, which offer remarkable testimony to their artistic skills’.<sup>17</sup> A number of the carvings at East Wemyss have been dated to the early medieval period and were carved by local Picts in the sixth to ninth centuries AD.<sup>18</sup> Maclean and Leven used photographs and diagrams based on the markings as the basis for the overall shape of the structure.<sup>19</sup>

Amongst other source material gathered by Maclean and Leven is an illustration of Robert Morris’s *Observatory*

(1970) a land-art piece located in Flevoland, in the Netherlands revealing Morris's interest in the astronomic observatories of the Neolithic age.<sup>20</sup> Rosalind Krauss relates the *Observatory* to Stonehenge:

Morris had begun to think about the structures both made (like Stonehenge) and found (like caves) by prehistoric societies to convert the arc of the sun's revolutions into the straight line of the intelligible, arrowlike trajectory, and thus to 'read' the solstices.

*Observatory* (1971) is a massive project through which to think and to experience this culturally ancient notion of marking, which is to say, of entering into a text that one has not oneself written, and that will continue to be produced to the end of solar time.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth noting that the alignment of stone and sight lines are a key feature of Maclean's work and, in particular, in his Lewis work: *Alignment Receiver Calanais* (Figure 4: *Alignment Receiver Calanais* (1994)). The artist says of the artwork: 'That's a plan of Calanais – these metal studs – and these were notional holes for measuring sight lines. That was my flight of fantasy: a druid's computer!'<sup>22</sup> The play between reality and poetic interpretation alluded to at the beginning of the paper was a feature also of de Chirico's early Metaphysical paintings

which Maclean keenly admired describing de Chirico as ‘the master of the non-specific specific’.<sup>23</sup> INSERT FIGURE 4

The research for the structure at *An Sùileachan* had to reach into history but also to use a language which borrowed from contemporary Modernist art discourse. The diachronic aspects of the visual language, therefore, allude backwards in time to the Neolithic, to the Early Medieval Period in Scotland, and then synchronically outwards to echo Modernist developments in land and environmental sculpture.

### ***Aesthetic Response (2): Materiality***

The year before *An Sùileachan* was created, Maclean and Leven had made a journey to St Kilda, the Faroe Islands and Iceland.<sup>24</sup> This journey clearly had an effect on the artists. The distinctive doorway resembles the Inuit *tupqujaq* (see Figure 5: Working drawings of the archway), a large structure through which a shaman might enter the spirit world.<sup>25</sup> INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE The sites of such structures made them into venerated places for the Inuit peoples of Alaska, Greenland and Northern Canada – sites which reverberated in a metaphysical as a much as in a physical landscape. The spiritual aura of *An Sùileachan* undoubtedly owes part of its impact to the Inuit structures. The massive stones for the doorway were discovered by stonemason Jim Crawford near the low water mark on the



island of Vuia Beag close to the Bhaltos peninsula. The Scottish Salmon company provided a boat to transport them from the island to Crawford's workshop where the stones were cleaned and shaped.<sup>26</sup>

Maclean spoke at some length on the part that Crawford played:

On the surface I was the designer and Jim was the builder but when we got together so many of the aesthetic decisions and developments were made by Jim, so it became a collaboration. He knew, and he seemed to understand a) where the direction I wanted the piece to go in and b) where he could lay his hands on particular materials and how to put them together to make the thing work.<sup>27</sup>

The raw, unworked stone which comprises the structure is shaped into the passageway and chambers. They were lumps of stone, broken from the mountain originally, and then shaped into the houses and walls of Uig. The stonemason who built the walls, Ian Smith, gathered together the stones donated by the crofters and re-made them in the construction of *An Sìileachan*.<sup>28</sup> This was a demanding and labour-intensive element of the project as the stones from the old byres and

buildings were large and heavy and they had to be moved and split to fit the circular structures.<sup>29</sup>

Maclean and Leven's sense of the material-specific nature of the work is apparent in their written statement outlining their approach to the commission:

The land around Bhaltos is defined by stone walls skilfully built and of a distinctive design. Walls played an important part in the history of the early land raids and the tradition of wall construction has been continued to the present day. The walls of the proposed structure will follow the contours of the land and define two circles connected by a walled walkway or passage.<sup>30</sup>

The wood came from the old trees in the grounds of Stornoway Castle; local woodworker John Angus MacLeod made the seating. The brazier in the Beacon Circle was forged by blacksmith John MacLeod of Stornoway: he made the brazier out of old graveyard railings which were over one hundred years old and when that was done the brazier was mounted on a granite disc. The design was based on an old illustration for the Kerrera North Spit Beacon opposite Dunollie Castle near Oban

and the Arnish Point Lighthouse (1852) designed by Alan Stevenson for Stornoway Harbour.<sup>31</sup>

These connections in the work to the ‘earth’ from which the work is set forth are crucial aspects to the ‘truth-bearing’ aspects of the piece. Returning to Vattimo, we read:

The work of art is the ‘setting-into-work of truth’ because in it the opening up of a world as a context of referrals – like a language – is permanently connected to the earth as the ‘other’ of the world . . . as the ‘other’ of the world, the earth is that which does not endure. . . The work of art is the one kind of artefact which registers ageing as a positive event that actively contributes to determine new possibilities of meaning.<sup>32</sup>

The sense that the structure of *An Sùileachan* itself – the stone, the seating, the brazier – will inevitably show the marks of time; its exposed location, its openness to the elements, its ageing and weathering will continue to demonstrate its connection to ‘earth’ and, as these aspects of the structure change, new interpretations will come into play, but the memorial will retain its all-important relationship to ‘earth’ in its ‘setting-into-work of truth’.<sup>33</sup> Ascherson’s meditative account of Scotland’s history, *Stone Voices*, is largely a search

for a way to explain the way that in Scotland the past seems somehow to be still here and it is clear that *An Sùileachan* will take its place in that landscape of the mind also:

There are many kinds of revelation. But the most powerful is the vision which transcends the mental boundary between life and non-life, and Scotland is a place where this sort of revelation often approaches. Staring into a Scottish landscape, I have often asked myself why – in spite of all appearances – bracken, rocks, man and sea are at some level one.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Aesthetic Response (3): Historical Issues***

*An Sùileachan* is dedicated to the Lewis people of the nineteenth century who were cleared from their land and to the twentieth century Land Raiders of Reef. When the Proprietor of Lewis, Major Duncan Matheson, continued to oppose the conversion of farmlands in Uig into individual holdings, the men who had applied the previous year for holdings on Reef Farm decided to take the law into their own hands and carried out the raid in December 1913.<sup>35</sup> The raiders were sentenced to six weeks imprisonment in Calton Jail, Edinburgh.

The Raiders' Wheel, the focus of the east circle, is made of granite with 14 names inscribed into the stone. The names of the Raiders are taken from the 'Breach of the Peace' document drawn up at Miavaig Police Station on 19 December 1913.<sup>36</sup> The names are, as follows: Malcolm Macritchie, Allan Morrison, John Morrison, Murdo Macdonald, John Morrison, Murdo Mackay, Alexander Mackay, Norman Mackay, Andrew Mackay, Angus Mackay, Murdo Morrison, Donald Maclellan, Donald Smith, and Kenneth Macleod. And, their occupations are described variously as: Crofter, Squatter, Shoemaker, and Fisherman. The Raiders' Wheel measures 2.40 metres in diameter; each raider's name fills one segment of the fourteen parts which radiate out from the centre.<sup>37</sup> The source for the design is the captain's wheel of the American clipper ship *Three Brothers* built in 1856 at Greenpoint, Long Island.<sup>38</sup> Another early inspirational association was with concentric stone circles – mazes and labyrinths – used by fishermen in the pursuit of predictions, knowledge of forthcoming gales.<sup>39</sup> This idea was not developed by the artists.<sup>40</sup> Standing at the hub of the Raiders' Wheel the spectator can engage with the land inhabited by the fourteen families involved, and the configuration is such that each raider is given equal importance.<sup>41</sup>

The Highland Clearances have been the subject of some considerable divergence of opinion amongst historians and the monument at *An Sùileachan* has to be read against the complex historiography surrounding the issue.<sup>42</sup> The basic outline of events is summarized in Laurence Gouriévidis' essay describing the will to restructure as the driving force behind the Clearances:

This economic restructuring was part and parcel of a movement which dominated national elite discourse and policies throughout Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Improvement. Improvement was a byword for economic development and included the rationalisation and modernisation of agriculture with a view to achieving higher productivity and industrial progress.<sup>43</sup>

The positions taken up by historians of the Highland Clearances gives some indication of the opposing perspectives: on the one hand are the views of the professional economic historians. They saw an absolute inevitability in the unfolding of events: 'In the last resort . . . it is possible that nothing could have been done that would have provided the Highlands with an alternative to congestion or clearance'.<sup>44</sup> In concise summation of the perspective of the professional economic

historians, Hunter writes: ‘The Highland Clearances . . . were nobody’s fault. Most decidedly, they were not the fault of the region’s landlords’.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst the authoritative historian Eric Richards has maintained his skeptical position in regard to any kind of history from below, his judgement upon the way that evictions were implemented, on the brutal application of the law and on the lack of government intervention makes absolutely clear the fact that there is blame to be apportioned in the case of the Highland Clearances and that the Highland Clearances are a special case. As he writes:

The clearing of the Highlands was more cataclysmic than in most places . . . The suddenness, and the almost total erasure of a highly distinctive society, distinguishes the Highland clearances from the customary movement of other rural peoples from the land.<sup>46</sup>

The view that has prevailed upon Highland history here is that ‘the Highland Clearances were no more and no less than a crime – by no means the worst or biggest such crime, but a crime all the same – against humanity’.<sup>47</sup> The issue is an ideological one: that is, that the discourse between historians

which pervades the subject of the Clearances is one which is itself characterized by conflict: this is partly due to the events' 'emotional and symbolic power' but also to 'a clash of ideological and cultural values'.<sup>48</sup>

It is quite clear that the memorial cairns on Lewis of the 1990s and the memorial structure of *An Sùileachan* are major contributions to the historical narrative. The challenge for the practitioner who engages with the historical issues at stake here is considerable: 'what makes representation of the Clearances challenging for heritage practitioners is both their highly charged character and their atomised nature'.<sup>49</sup>

Writing of the several strands ('local', 'emigration', 'national') which distinguish the different focus for museums which deal with Clearances-related concerns, Gouriévidis characterizes the local museum presentations as celebratory of the crofter's agitation and resistance to Landlord oppression. She writes of the way that venues on Skye and in Sutherland do not just commemorate, they also acknowledge what is owed to the resilience and actions of crofters during the 1880s which eventually led to government legislation: 'Acting as memorial sites, those museums commemorate a debt owed to past social actors – along with the lessons for the present this may hold'.<sup>50</sup>



The view that this is something of an orthodoxy, especially through research into the role that cultural memory plays, is echoed in Siân Jones: ‘much research in historical archaeology, as in other disciplines, has focused on memory’s capacity to destabilize authoritative grand narratives associated with social elites and national institutions’.<sup>51</sup> It has not really been since the land reform debate of the late nineties and the eventual legislation passed by the devolved assembly that the crucial significance of the Clearances has effectively re-defined the national narrative.<sup>52</sup>

Of the way that the commemorative structures on the Island of Lewis address the question of the traumatic effect of the Clearances, Iain Robertson writes:

There can be no doubt that the Lewis memorial cairns represent a form of recovery from collective trauma . . . It is testimony to the strength of the world view represented by the crofting tenantry as opposed to that of the previously dominant landowning class. These cairns are an assertion and manifestation of a sense of heritage from below.<sup>53</sup>

The historical position, then, from a contemporary point of view is not at issue, but as we return to *An Sùileachan* we

should consider, above all, the question of representation.

Recent studies in cultural memory especially the work of Pierre Nora, suggest that the idea of collective memory is problematic: that memory is often localized and quite different to a collective or unified memory. This idea is crystallised in Charles Withers' essay of 1996:

Nora is concerned with those 'places of memory' which should be regarded, he argues, as 'mirrors in which people once tried to see themselves'. Memory - national or its variant forms, however held - becomes a means to identify both with a place, or places, but also with a particular sense of the past which may be made real in museum displays, in statuary, or in other material forms. In this sense, Nora's work parallels Foucault's emphasis on the 'reality' of the past residing in the artefacts of its representation.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, it is that the form of *An Sùileachan* becomes the focus because it is an 'artefact of representation' and that the 'reality of the past' will depend ultimately on its success as representation. The point is echoed by Roddy Murray (Director of *An Lanntair*) in the 1990s in relation to the three Maclean memorial structures at Balallan (Pairc Raids), Aignish and Coll/Gress: 'a vernacular pile of stones would emphatically not

achieve the overtly representational mode deemed necessary, as they would not speak to a constituency wider than the purely local'.<sup>55</sup>

The touring exhibition *As an Fhearann* (1986), initiated and organized by The Third Eye Centre (Glasgow) and An Lanntair (Stornoway), conveyed the compelling message that representation of the Highlands and Islands had to be generated from within.<sup>56</sup> Essays by Malcom MacLean, Finlay Macleod, Angus Peter Campbell, Alexander Moffat, Sorley MacLean, John Murray, and John McGrath revealed the extent of the stereotyping that had disfigured perceptions of the place and its people. The exhibition revealed through landscape painting, photography, and postcard images the way that representation from without was always bound to bring with it centre and periphery assumptions and attitudes. Significantly, of course, the exhibition was created to celebrate the passing of the Crofting Tenure Act of 1886.<sup>57</sup> The sculpture *An Sùileachan* can be seen as a significant step in a narrative which restores the representational role to the vision from within. The many features which connect the piece to 'earth' and 'world' are amply evidenced but the features of the structure which connect the piece to other Inuit cultures and to the world of contemporary land art ensure that this is not an insular vision. It reaches out beyond the past towards unknown futures with

something of a spiritual yearning, questioning the order of things and re-framing the narrative in dramatic and innovative form.

*‘Mutations from Below’ (revisited), the ‘Dialogical’ and the ‘Distribution of the Sensible’*

The essay began with quotations from Foucault and Foucault’s ideas are vital to an understanding of the argument. Foucault places great stress upon language as the agent of freedom and he returns to the beginning of the nineteenth century to find what he sees as signs of hope:

Like action, language expresses a profound will to do something. And this has two consequences . . . the first is . . . if language expresses, it does so not in so far as it is an imitation and duplication of things, but in so far as it manifests and translates the fundamental will of those who speak it. The second consequence is that language is no longer linked to civilizations by the level of learning to which they have attained (the delicacy of their representative grid, the multiplicity of the connections it is possible to establish between its elements), but by the mind of the peoples who have given rise to it, animate it, and are recognizable in it.<sup>58</sup>

The language we are referencing in this essay is, of course, a visual language but the link between the Gaelic speakers of Lewis and the English spoken by the great majority of their oppressors reverberates through the signifiers whether they be symbolic (linguistic) or iconic (visual). In relation to Foucault, and to Bakhtin's notion of the 'dialogical', it is not just the notion of the active voices of the people who animate the project that is significant, it is the fact that these voices are oppositional voices – for Bakhtin the 'dialogical' always represented the struggle for dominance which is the relation of social classes and the overturning of official values.<sup>59</sup>

The artwork reflects far more than the perceptions of two individuals – that is, the artists Maclean and Leven – *An Sùileachan* works, instead, to engage the people of Lewis in a 'dialogical' relationship with their histories. The Bhaltois Trust were absolutely clear about their objective from the beginning which was to celebrate the different facets of the community's evolution from the distant past through the land clearances, the land raids and on to the land reforms which finally gave the people the right to determine their own future through community land ownership.<sup>60</sup>

The significance of involvement and re-enaction in memorialisation has been highlighted by Withers in his account of events surrounding the opening of Maclean's Pairc Cairn at Balallan. The engagement with the community took the form of a march through the township, a ceilidh, the writing of a commemorative tune, the production of a tartan, and the acting out of a raid on the memorial cairn itself by local schoolchildren. Withers comments: 'The varied spectacle of remembrance undertaken in May 1994 should be seen as an expression of local identity through a process of social remembering. Memory of the raids is being drawn upon as a socially constitutive act'.<sup>61</sup>

Withers speaks of 'a process of social remembering' and Jones echoes this when she speaks of 'social memory' which is produced by acts of remembering and reminiscing in the encounter of people and places.<sup>62</sup> She continues to develop and amplify the position: 'social performance and narration of past events and experiences are actively "composed" in an attempt to constitute the self as a coherent subject in relation to narratives that link past, present, and ultimately future'.<sup>63</sup>

The activities organized to raise awareness of the construction of *An Sùileachan* and to celebrate the opening reveal the extent of the community's engagement with the

project and the many ways in which the community were encouraged to articulate their personal histories (see Figure 6: Community gathering, 2013). An exhibition was run throughout the summer season in the Community Centre tea-room to promote the initiative and to engage as many of the members of the Uig community as possible. This was designed to inform people of the background to the project and to give a historical perspective to the Land Clearances, the Land Raids and the Land Reforms which had affected the area. The exhibition included photographs and reminiscences from some of the oldest members of the island community as well as written work based on the Clearances by children in the local primary school. Visitors also came to see the exhibition and to research their roots from the museum files which were made available. The Directors of the Bhaltos Community Trust decided to commission a Bhaltos tweed to promote the project and to celebrate the area. This was completed by the weavers at Shawbost Mill in time for the Dedication Ceremony at *An Sùileachan* on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reef Raiders and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Bhaltos Community Trust on Friday, 24 May 2013. To coincide with the dedication, a ceilidh was organized for the evening and with the assistance of the local community a real, traditional *taigh cèilidh* atmosphere was created in the village hall. It was decided to collect old photographs of Uig and borrow the village archive

boxes for the ceilidh so that people could share their memories and put names to faces and places. The ceilidh featured Dougie Maclean who was living at Reef farmhouse – the place where the raids had taken place in 1913 – and a number of musicians with local connections including fiddle player Campbell Scanlan from Magersta, Uig who composed a tune for *An Sìileachan*'s dedication.<sup>64</sup> **INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE**

We have detailed the extent of the collaborations between the artists, Maclean and Leven, and the stonemasons, Smith and Crawford; the engineer, Norgrove; the joiner, J. A. Macleod; and the blacksmith, J. Macleod. These individuals might all justifiably be reckoned as participating in the creation of the artwork. The detail about the techniques of wall building in the surrounding area could likewise be seen as another aspect of 'heteroglossia' – the inclusion of a range of voices. Whilst wall-building is acknowledged within the community as a distinctive skill or technique its inclusion as an integral component within the artwork transforms the signifier (of the stone wall) into a completely unexpected signified (art form or sculpture).<sup>65</sup> This expands the notion of what can be valued within the established aesthetic. It would be an example of the democratization of art: the problematising of the active maker of art as privileged controller of 'the gaze' by the widening of



the aesthetic to allow for new elements to figure within the range of 'the sensible'.

Contemporary French philosopher Rancière explains what he means by the concept: 'the distribution of the sensible': 'I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective positions within it'.<sup>66</sup> Rancière sees the issue at stake as a political one. What needs to happen – and Rancière echoes the sentiments of German, Romantic philosopher and playwright, Friedrich Schiller, here – is a contesting of accepted divisions:

by suspending the opposition between active understanding and passive sensibility the aim would be to break down 'an idea of art – an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks'.<sup>67</sup>

Maclean has shown throughout his career his determination to widen the vision of the material appropriate to art by positioning the signifiers from a working class culture within an aesthetic environment: where their original signified might have been their use within a crofting/fishing/seafaring

community, they are transformed into sacred objects in Maclean's work. The functional signified gives way to aesthetic signification. As Rancière says, 'the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph, a mythological or phantasmagoric figure'.<sup>68</sup>

In this regard, we should remember the groundbreaking exhibition at The Third Eye Centre in Glasgow in 1978 based on the tradition and history of ring net fishing on the West Coast of Scotland. The exhibition was a stunning and original juxtaposition of the two worlds: industry and art. This was a collaboration between Will Maclean and Angus Martin both of whom had worked as ring net fishermen in their early lives.<sup>69</sup> The exhibition took a conceptual form which had few precedents but it remains as a conspicuous illustration of the breaking of the oppositional barrier which Rancière identifies above, between those who think and those who are doomed to material tasks. Much of the material for the exhibition was gleaned from interviews with fishermen and the compelling thrust of the exhibition came from these voices from below.<sup>70</sup> To return once more to Foucault and his emphasis upon the recognition of the oral as opposed to written aspect of language at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we read:

its mutations no longer come from above (from the learned elite, from the small group of merchants and travelers, from victorious armies, from an invading aristocracy) but take their being obscurely from below, for language is neither an instrument nor a product . . . but a ceaseless activity.<sup>71</sup>

### *Aesthetics and Politics, Re-Framing the Narrative*

Rancière is amongst the most radical of contemporary theorists and his pronouncements are consistently challenging:

The real as such does not exist. What does exist is a framing or fiction of reality. Art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional. Making fictions does not mean telling stories. It means undoing and rearticulating the connections between signs and images, images and times, or signs and space that frame the existing sense of reality.<sup>72</sup>

It is the idea of ‘framing’ which Rancière proposes as the proper domain of art, that most accurately reflects the vision behind the structure at Uig. The name of the structure, *An Sùileachan*, has to be revisited: that it is a looking beyond (not

just a looking back) and this looking beyond takes in the ‘distribution of the sensible’ and the re-framing that Rancière writes about. In the mighty archway, the land and sea beyond are literally framed but we have to consider the utopian elements which characterise the mythological and numinous aspects within Inuit cultures – the belief in another world beyond the material. This needs to be connected to the meaning of the term, *An Sùileachan*: the seeing eye as a sign of prescience – a foreknowledge of things – a seeing beyond what is there. The tradition of *dà shealladh* (second sight) is such a distinctive feature of Highland culture that its emphasis here should not be seen as a mere addition but rather as intrinsic to the sculpture; a part of the material structure, certainly, and providing a startling architectural feature but its reason for being there is because it is a metaphysical as well as a physical opening.

The sense of the metaphysical as an element of landscape is a notable feature of Leven’s later works. Especially in some of her Northern landscape oils where she restricts her palette to greys and whites and the most subtle of textural scratchings, she achieves a mesmerising, symphonic effect which goes far beyond any literal kind of description – much more like the abstraction of a musical response than anything pictorial or illustrative. The Northern-ness of these

images is conveyed not in isolated features but in an enveloping gleam which infuses the surfaces of these works as though from another world. This is another kind of ‘framing’ which is closer to the language of the Abstract Expressionists than to familiar picturesque or sublime responses to the Northern European landscape. Maclean’s work also resonates with something of the metaphysical but in a wholly different way. He endeavours throughout his work to reassert a sense of unheard voices. He speaks from his own culture – his oral Gaelic culture – whose voice has been inaudible to an English-speaking hegemony. The narrative that has preoccupied Maclean throughout his career has been that of a dispossessed people, but the (Gaelic) language of the dispossessed is re-configured as image in Maclean’s work. The image speaks in Maclean’s work as the voice of the repressed ‘other’ but embodied, framed, not in a minority language (or to use the terminology preferred by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in a ‘minoritarian language’) but as a dissenting voice in a majority visual language.<sup>73</sup> Maclean’s work resounds with voices; it is replete with murmurings, snatches of story, bardic utterance, memoirs, whisperings, memories to which he responds as interlocutor from another time. Forever alert to these voices, he has developed a subtle and supple visual language which has remained consistent in its themes and in its content but which

allows for a variation in form or ‘framing’ to ensure that it remains part of the international language of visual art.

Leven and Maclean have been engaged in visual re-interpretations of the Highlands throughout their careers which enables them to refract a range of perspectives in their works. It is this act of refraction or as Bakhtin would have it – ‘hybridity’ which best articulates their role at *An Sùileachan*: they are able to develop a visual form which refracts the voices of community with voices from other Inuit cultures and the combined vertical strengths of these cultures with the wider, more horizontal cultural conversation of contemporary sculpture and land art.<sup>74</sup>

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### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Will Maclean, ‘In conversation with Sandy Moffat’, in Selina Skipworth (ed.), *Will Maclean Collected Works 1970-2010* (London, 2011), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1986 [1970]).

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1983), 208-26.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 285.

<sup>5</sup> Source Material File, 'Reef Committee Brief', 5 November 2008, Maclean and Leven Private Collection of Papers [M/L PC].

<sup>6</sup> James Hunter, 'It Is Not Right That The Clearances Should Be Forgotten: Some Highland Aspects of The Art of Will Maclean', *Will Maclean: Selected Affinities* (Dundee, 1995), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Sorley MacLean, 'Foreword', Duncan MacMillan, *Symbols of Survival: The Art of Will Maclean* (Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> MacLean, 'Foreword', 7.

<sup>9</sup> 'Reef Project: Texts: Celebration and Commemoration', M/L PC.

<sup>10</sup> Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (London, 2003 [2002]).

<sup>11</sup> Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, 219.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in Clive Cazeaux (ed.), *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (London and New York, 2011 [1950]), 100-01.

<sup>14</sup> Gianni Vattimo, 'The Death or Decline of Art', in Clive Caseaux (ed.), *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (London and New York, 2011).

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<sup>15</sup> Vattimo, 'The Death or Decline of Art', 218.

<sup>16</sup> Source material file, '81 East Wemyss Caves continued: 81.2 Doo Cave; 81.3 Jonathan's Cave; 81.4 Sliding or Sloping Cave; 81.5 The Glass Cave', M/L PC.

<sup>17</sup> The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Pictish Symbol Stones: An Illustrated Gazetteer* (Edinburgh, 1999), 5.

<sup>18</sup> RCAHMS, *Pictish Symbol Stones*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Will Maclean, 'Interview with the artist' in the Maclean Studio, 2011, Blair Collection of Private Papers, Blair Archives [BA].

<sup>20</sup> 'Reef Project: Refs in books: overlay 1', M/L PC.

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind Krauss, 'The Mind/Body Problem: Robert Morris in Series', exhibition catalogue, *The Mind/Body Problem, Robert Morris* (New York, January-April 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Will Maclean, 'Interview with the artist', 2011, BA.

<sup>23</sup> Maclean, 'Interview with the artist', 2011, BA.

<sup>24</sup> Maclean and Marian Leven, 'Interview with the artists', 2011, BA.

<sup>25</sup> 'Reef Project: Archway: Archway Master', M/L PC.

<sup>26</sup> Bhalto Community Trust, 'An Sùileachan Project Powerpoint Presentation', <https://bhaltostrust.co.uk/suileachan-project>. Accessed 20 April 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Will Maclean, 'Interview with Rebecca Gordon', 17 February 2010, M/L PC.



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- <sup>28</sup> Bhalto Community Trust, ‘*An Sìileachan Project*’.
- <sup>29</sup> Bhalto Community Trust, ‘*An Sìileachan Project*’.
- <sup>30</sup> ‘Celebration and Commemoration’, M/L PC.
- <sup>31</sup> ‘Reef Project; West Beacon Circle: Arnish Beacon Chart and Iron Beacon Ref 1’, M/L PC.
- <sup>32</sup> Vattimo, ‘The Death or Decline of Art’, 219.
- <sup>33</sup> Vattimo, ‘The Death or Decline of Art’, 219.
- <sup>34</sup> Ascherson, 26.
- <sup>35</sup> ‘The Reef Raiders’, Comann Eachdraidh Uig,  
<http://www.ceuig.co.uk/the-reef-raiders>. Accessed 20 April 2020.
- <sup>36</sup> ‘Reef Project, East Raiders Circle, Reef Raiders Names’, M/L PC.
- <sup>37</sup> ‘Reef Raiders Name Circle’, M/L PC.
- <sup>38</sup> ‘Ref Wheel for Raiders Circle’, M/L PC.
- <sup>39</sup> ‘Raiders Circle Ref’, M/L PC.
- <sup>40</sup> Will Maclean, ‘Thoughts’, Email with Maclean, 15 April 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> ‘Raiders Circle’, M/L PC.
- <sup>42</sup> There is a vast quantity of historical accounts of the Highland Clearances, including the following: Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2012); Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh 2007); T. M. Devine, *Clearance and improvement: land, power and people in Scotland, 1700-1900* (Edinburgh, 2006); Charles W. J.

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Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: the transformation of a culture region* (London, 2015); Michael Newton, *Warriors of the word: the world of the Scottish Highlanders* (Edinburgh, 2019); Iain MacKinnon, 'The Invention of the Crofting Community: Scottish History's Elision of Indigenous Identity, Ideology and Agency in Accounts of Land Struggle in the Modern Gàidhealtachd', *Scottish Historical Review* 98.1 (2019): 71-102; Sorley MacLean, 'The poetry of the Clearances', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 38 (1939): 1937- 41; Michael Fry, *Wild Scots: four hundred years of Highland history* (Edinburgh, 2005); T. M. Devine, *Clanship to crofters' war: the social transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 2018).

<sup>43</sup> Laurence Gouriévidis, 'The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 22 (2013), 59.

<sup>44</sup> T.C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (Glasgow: 1969), 337.

<sup>45</sup> Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh, 2005 [2002]), 310.

<sup>47</sup> Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Gouriévidis, 'The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances', 60.

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- <sup>49</sup> Gouriévidis, 'The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances', 61.
- <sup>50</sup> Gouriévidis, 'The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances', 63.
- <sup>51</sup> Siân Jones, '"Thrown Like Chaff in the Wind": Excavation, Memory and the Negotiation of Loss in the Scottish Highlands', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 16, Archaeology, Memory, and Oral Tradition (June 2012), 347.
- <sup>52</sup> Gouriévidis, 'The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances', 71-2.
- <sup>53</sup> Iain J. M. Robertson, 'Memory, Heritage and the Micropolitics of Memorialisation: Commemorating the Heroes of the Land Struggle', *Recovering from the Clearances: Land Struggle, Resettlement, and Community Ownership in the Hebrides* (Island of Lewis, 2013), 62.
- <sup>54</sup> Charles W. J. Withers, 'Place, memory, monument: memorializing the past in contemporary Highland Scotland', *Ecumene*, 3 (July 1996), 326.
- <sup>55</sup> Iain Robertson and Tim Hall, Interview with *Roddy Murray*, Lewis, 7 April 1998 in 'Memory, Identity and the Memorialization of Conflict in the Scottish Highlands', *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape* (Aldershot, 2007), 26.

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- <sup>56</sup> Malcolm MacLean and Christopher Carrell, *As An Fhearann: From the Land* (Edinburgh, 1986).
- <sup>57</sup> Maclean, 'As An Fhearann', 5.
- <sup>58</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 290.
- <sup>59</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Texas, 1981), 284.
- <sup>60</sup> Bhalto Community Trust, 'An Sùileachan Project'.
- <sup>61</sup> Withers, 'Place, memory, monument', 338.
- <sup>62</sup> Jones, "'Thrown Like Chaff in the Wind'", 349.
- <sup>63</sup> Jones, "'Thrown Like Chaff in the Wind'", 349.
- <sup>64</sup> Bhalto Community Trust, 'Sùileachan Project', *An Sùileachan Project Powerpoint Presentation*.  
<https://bhaltostrust.co.uk/suileachan-project>. Accessed 20 April 2020.
- <sup>65</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 324.
- <sup>66</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London, 2017), 7.
- <sup>67</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 41.
- <sup>68</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 30.
- <sup>69</sup> See Angus Martin (with drawings by Will Maclean), *The Ring Net Fishermen* (Edinburgh, 1981).
- <sup>70</sup> See Lindsay Blair, 'Reconfiguring the Historical Ontologies of Northern Communities in the Art of Will Maclean', *Relate North: Art and Design for Education and Sustainability* (Rovaniemi, 2018), 10-31; Patricia Allerston, *The Ring Net by*

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*Will Maclean*, unpublished MLitt dissertation (St Andrews, 1990); Angus Martin, *The Ring-Net Fishermen* (Edinburgh, 1981).

<sup>71</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 290.

<sup>72</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London, 2009), 49.

<sup>73</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minnesota, 1986).

<sup>74</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 324.