



## ***The Little and the Great: from a Knoll to a Village to the Tibetan Plateau***

**Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison**

Public Lecture hosted by Centre for Contemporary Art, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow

Wednesday 11th November 2009 6.30 - 8.00 pm

*“ A culture is a cooperative adventure a complex system  
of shared interrelated beliefs about the nature of reality  
and causation of values codes of conduct and ethics  
by which people define themselves collectively and niche  
themselves individually*

*It is a fragile form not having the duration of the oceans  
or lands with which it is in discourse and upon which it  
depends for its survival Its constancy is reproduction  
and change Its stability is always at risk*

*Its boundaries increase or decrease by virtue of the  
energies available the pressure of growth from within  
the pressures of change from without*

*Scarcity of food can reduce its population while  
increasing its vulnerability from without as can climate  
change as can disease as can an idea*

*Abundance can increase its population while increasing  
its vulnerability to stress as the resources available are  
consumed*

*Conquerors can debase a culture denigrating its belief  
structures and language while destroying its  
relationship to the ecology*

*But people are tough and resilient and improvise  
their existence as best they can very creatively with  
the materials at hand but the materials keep changing*

*Only the improvisation remains constant “*

First Lagoon p 37

*“ An estuarial lagoon is the place where fresh and salt  
waters meet and mix. It is a fragile meeting and  
mixing not having the constancy of the oceans  
or the rivers It is a collaborative adventure  
Its existence is always at risk*

Heavy rains increase its size and its boundaries  
increasing nutrients while decreasing salts

Forest fire then rain can set up the conditions  
for heavy silting and a lagoon can turn first into a  
mud flat then a swamp

If the day is warm the waters being shallow  
warm quickly If the night is cold the waters  
being shallow cool quickly

Life in the rivers the lakes and the oceans  
where properties of water are more constant  
is less stressful

But life in the lagoons is very special it has evolved  
high tolerance to the stresses that come about from  
sudden changes in salt and fresh water and  
temperature and available food for the life web

Life in the lagoons is tough and very rich  
it breeds quickly Like all of us it must improvise its  
existence very creatively with the materials at  
hand but the materials keep changing Only the  
improvisation remains constant

Third Lagoon p. 60

In

*The Lagoon Cycle* Helen Mayer Harrison /Newton Harrison Cornell  
University Ithaca New York 1985

## Introduction

"We developed the name "the Force Majeure" to explain the accelerating transaction between aspects of the Global Warming phenomenon and their interaction with the many ecosystems that are under stress or in actual turbulence from over-demand by human activity. Our work envisions a counter to the reduction of production and consumption due to market contraction and turbulence that mirrors the shrinking productivity and wellbeing of the world ocean and many, many other overstressed planetary sub-systems. The current work is designed to make clear, albeit in a very simple way, that subcontinents and countries that inhabit these systems are not equipped conceptually, legally, or structurally to meet a future shaped by such a force."

## Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison

[www.theharrisonstudio.net](http://www.theharrisonstudio.net)

Among the leading pioneers of the eco-art movement, the collaborative team of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison (often referred to simply as "the Harrisons") have worked for almost forty years with biologists, ecologists, architects, urban planners and other artists to initiate collaborative dialogues to uncover ideas and solutions which support biodiversity and community development.

Past projects have focused on watershed restoration, urban renewal, agriculture and forestry issues among others. The Harrisons' visionary projects have often led to changes in governmental policy and have expanded dialogue around previously unexplored issues leading to practical implementations throughout the United States and Europe.

"Our work begins when we perceive an anomaly in the environment that is the result of opposing beliefs or contradictory metaphors. Moments when reality no longer appears seamless and the cost of belief has become outrageous offer the opportunity to create new spaces - first in the mind and thereafter in everyday life."

By the early '90s, the Harrisons perceived that every work they were doing either needed or engendered a collaborative group. As a consequence, they formed the Harrison Studio and Associates. It's earliest manifestation was at the Bauhaus Dessau in 1993 in a team that centered around Bauhaus personnel with Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, Vera Westergaard and Gabriel Harrison, working collectively on the Mulde River watershed. Thereafter, the Harrison Studio has formed and reformed many times. There was the Harrison Studio in Borna, South Leipzig. In Bonn, with the Endangered Meadows. In Gouda, with Greenheart Vision. Most recently, the Harrison Studio Britain and, as an offshoot, the Harrison Studio Devon.

Their work process is singular. It begins with the question, "How Big is Here?" Here may be a street corner, as in California Wash or a sub-continent, such as Peninsula Europe. They only do work that is the outcome of an invitation to engage a particular place or situation. Typically, they agree to go to such a place to see, think, speak, research and engage a broad spectrum of people and groups. They will only take on a work if there is a general agreement that their actual client is the environment itself. The agenda is created by the artists in discourse with the larger community. Thus, the Harrisons see themselves simultaneously as guests and co-workers. They stay only as long as the invitation continues, or until they deem that they have done all that is possible for them to do.

## Participation

Attendance is free and open to all but please book a space by email: [participate@instituteadvancedstudies.org.uk](mailto:participate@instituteadvancedstudies.org.uk)

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