The Harrisons' practice in the context of global environmental policy and politics from the 1960s to 2019: a timeline.

FREMANTLE, C., DOUGLAS, A. and PRITCHARD, D.

2020

The following is a draft version of a chapter that can be found in:
Cartiere, C. and Tan, L., 2020. *The Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm*. Abingdon: Routledge.

A version of the Timeline suitable for workshops can be downloaded here: [link to OpenAIR page]

The Harrisons' practice in the context of Global Environmental Policy: A Timeline[1]

These notes are provided as background to this *Timeline*. The *Timeline* complements the essay 'In the Time of Art with Policy' in the preceding chapter. It is offered as a working document that can be annotated by others and in this way further evolved. A pdf of the Timeline is available to download in a format that can be printed on A3 paper or on a continuous roll if available.

The three authors, Fremantle, Douglas and Pritchard, offer different disciplinary perspectives to this analysis of global environmental policy and the work of Helen Mayer Harrison (1927-2018) and Newton Harrison (b.1932), known as 'the Harrisons'. Fremantle is a cultural historian, public art producer and researcher, Douglas an artist researcher and Pritchard a conservationist working with environmental and cultural policy.

Douglas and Fremantle have written on the Harrisons' work together (2016a, 2016b) and separately (Fremantle 2008, Coessens et al 2009, Douglas 2018). Fremantle worked with Douglas on 'The Artist as Leader' research (2006-9). Fremantle has worked with Pritchard, chairing the Art Focus Group within the global Ramsar Culture Network coordinated by Pritchard (2016 onwards).

Approach

We first created a timeline by pooling our different disciplinary resources principally drawing on United Nations and other documentation associated with various Conventions, cultural histories of climate (e.g. Behringer 2010, Bristow & Ford 2016), histories of science (e.g. Gorman & Conway 2005) and histories of environmental activism (e.g. Woodhouse 2018) as well as works and essays of the artists (Harrison & Harrison 2016).

We mapped selected key milestones of development in global environmental policy from the early 1970s, alongside developments in science that have directly informed global environmental policy, and key projects in the Harrisons' work. We then met together to work with the timeline, suspending disbelief as to what this might reveal.[2]

Context

Timelines provide a useful way of opening up patterns of complexity with multiple points of interaction. Douglas and Fremantle included a timeline in *The Artist as Leader Research Report* (2009).[3] This mapped key cultural policy milestones from the foundation of the Arts Council in the UK post-war period until the date of publication, alongside the emergence of leading artistic practices that worked directly in public life in the UK and US. Cartiere included a timeline in *The Everyday Practice of Public Art* (2015) that mapped socially engaged artworks in the period 1950 to 2015 (i.e. up to the date of the publication), identified by five different contributors offering different interests and perspectives (Cartiere herself, Sophie Hope, Anthony Schrag, Elisa Yon and Martin Zebracki who is also the co-editor of the 2015 publication). Sue Spaid included multiple timelines in *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies* (Spaid 2002), in particular a timeline of ecoventions from

1955 to 2002 (i.e. up to the date of publication), and a second one of eco-art exhibitions (1951-2002).[4]

Artists have produced timelines such as George F Macunias' *Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus and Other 4 Dimentional* [sic]*, Aural, Optic, Olfactory, Epithelial, and Tactile Art Forms*[5] and Rachel Sussman's *(Selected) History of the Space Time Continuum.*[6]

Global environmental policy organisations also use timelines on their websites as ways of accessing their iterative processes. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides access to documents through a timeline of meetings starting in 1997.[7] The Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the United Nations presented the exhibition *70 Years, 70 Documents* through a timeline tracing the development of UN policy over that period.[8] The American Institute of Physics has a comprehensive timeline entitled *The Discovery of Global Warming* starting in 1800 to the present.[9] The Worldwatch Institute has a timeline of 'environmental milestones' specifically juxtaposing 'pollution' (specific instances) alongside 'governance' (Conventions) and aspects of biodiversity starting in 1960 through to 2004.[10] Finally, xkcd's quirky *A Timeline of Earth's Average Temperature* reveals the exponential and recent rise in global temperatures by tracing a pattern from the Ice Age to the present.[11] This is not a comprehensive sample.

Some observations

We recognised the complex and contradictory nature of the material we had accumulated. Environmental policy at a global level develops in diverse and often non-obvious ways. The science of environmental monitoring is a significant shaper of policy. It has developed incrementally and in increasingly complex ways as new areas of research reveal themselves. Both policy at this scale and research dance to the tune of global and domestic politics. The current form of the timeline barely covers the complexity of juxtaposing the Harrisons' work with key global environmental events.

Nonetheless we started to develop what we felt to be some significant insights.

The timeline is therefore both a tool and a method – a tool in the sense of holding in one place a complex body of information, and a method of questioning the strengths and limitations of a 'bird's eye' perspective. That said, we might imagine all three strands of the timeline and their interrelationships as a means of facing the horror and absurdity of climate change by making the works of policy, science and art visible in relation to each other.

The timeline clearly reveals that the work of the Harrisons begins around the same time as a change in the pace of the work of global environmental policy and related scientific research. There are certainly influential historical moments in advance of this date, including the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). The development of a comprehensive model of the general circulation of the atmosphere (1955-1965)[12] formed an important step in grasping the complexity of the world's climate systems. The moon landings of 1969 opened an unforeseen perspective on the fragility of planet Earth. 1970 saw the first *Earth Day*, as well as President Nixon's establishment of the US Environmental Protection Agency. This brought together in one body federal research, monitoring, standard setting and enforcement of environmental policy. In the same year, the Harrisons began their artistic career together as a partnership through a series of works known as the *Survival Pieces* (1970-1985).

It is interesting to note that the US had a particular leadership role both in domestic and in global policy which continued until interrupted by President Bush's withdrawal in 2001 from the Kyoto Agreement and again in 2017 by President Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 Paris agreement and from UNESCO in 2019.

There is a clear rhythm of global Summits taking place roughly every ten years from 1972. This is interspersed with the setting up of new 'instruments' including the 1971 Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar); the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention covering cultural and natural heritage, the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the 1979 Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

In 1992 there was a significant round of new instruments (the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); UN Commission on Sustainable Development; Agenda 21 Action Plan; Convention on Biodiversity; Statement of Forest Principles; and Convention on Desertification) agreed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development ("Rio Summit").

Associated with each Convention is a programme of meetings of their respective Conferences of the Parties (the now familiar COPs). Each Convention's COP meets on a different cycle (Ramsar's COPs have settled into a 3 year cycle; the UNFCCC's are annual). Whilst the UNFCCC's COPs are annual, some are of greater significance and are known by the locations in which they occurred (e.g. Kyoto, Copenhagen and Paris). These COPs are concerned with setting globally agreed expectations, guidelines and targets. Each Convention also publishes Reports, again with differing frequencies.[13]

There are of course other geographical scales of environmental policy making in the public realm, at sub-global, national and local levels for example; but the universal applicability (in principle) of the global regimes is the reason for that focus in this Timeline.

We recognised that politics and science are intertwined and made manifest in global environmental policy. Our timeline is not intended to establish causality. We can see an initial broad focus on the environment, and then later bifurcations and increasingly specific instruments and processes for particular issues. We have highlighted the development of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development, but the bifurcations are more complex than this suggests.

Turning to the Harrisons' element of the timeline, we might ask "Why artists?" The Center for the Study of the Force Majeure, led by Newton Harrison, answers the question saying, "Why not artists? Art is the court of last resort – *and our best hope*. The evidence is overwhelming, and many people are, indeed, overwhelmed. But in case after case that we have looked at all over the world, these issues have been looked at locally - we saw a crying need to find ways to talk about the problem at the scale in which it is occurring. That can be terrifying and discouraging, but for us it opens the door to creative possibilities…"[14]

More specifically, we recognised that although the Harrisons' works exist along the same conventionally-conceived timeline as the policy, the way they evoke time within the works is very different from the way that time is manifest in the policy processes and documents as is described in the preceding chapter.

Just as we have not sought to identify causality in the relations between politics and science, the intention is not to suggest any causal connections between the Harrisons' work and environmental policy or strategy (in either direction), whether in terms of ideas,

motivation or content.[15] However, the point that we want to make is that their way of working is radically different from, but also potentially highly relevant to, policy making; and that considering this from the perspective of timeframes, durations, rhythms and periodicities can offer fresh insights into this.

The Harrisons work grows and changes, becoming more complex and ambitious in the issues it addresses and more clear in the methodological approaches it adopts. *The Survival Pieces* (1970-1985) model the life cycle of particular species in context as a means of learning about ecosystems and complexity. Over time, self-directed work evolves into invitations, first in the US and then internationally (starting with the 1989 work *Atempause für den Save Flüss*). An early retirement 'package' in 1993/94 frees them from teaching responsibilities at University of California, San Diego, and they take on a new series of large-scale works in Europe. They articulate their growing realisation as they move from the Survival Pieces, through the Lagoon Cycle (1975-85) to the systemic scale work that they needed to shift from gallery based installations of living material at 1 to 1 scale to be able to address whole systems rather than fragments of systems. The consistent use of maps, complemented with photographs and video, opens the work up to multiple perspectives and scales. They engineer another step-change from the mid-2000s which in due course is manifest as The Center for the Study of the Force Majeure and the grouping of a number of works under the heading of *Counter Extinction Works* (2006 to the present). That shift is driven by the recognition that human systems are almost designed to produce entropy-rich rather than energy-rich systems.

It is worth noting that in the accompanying timeline we have focused, as the Harrisons do, on 'projects', and the resulting exhibitions. We have not highlighted where an exhibition might have been installed in multiple venues within a 'project' . Many of the works in the timeline have also been exhibited again subsequently, sometimes many years after the initial project.

We have not attempted to include the ways in which the Harrisons have worked with scientists throughout their career. This is a very important aspect of the way they work [in the *Time of the Force Majeure* (Harrison & Harrison 2016) they name more than thirty scientists with whom they have collaborated], but is a distinct (if related) subject from the ways in which their practice offers ways of thinking and working that may benefit the world of policy

Conclusion

We have selected some elements with which to compose this *Timeline*, but we do not claim any degree of completeness. Some of the items in the *Timeline* extend beyond the present, both in terms of policy and in terms of projects that the Harrisons have initiated. More importantly, however, there are many other strands that could be introduced, ranging from personal journeys of realisation to other dimensions of, and actors in, the discourse. We set out with different forms of expertise. We have negotiated across our different bodies of experience the limits of what to include, as well as what to conclude. As a result of this exercise and method we have generated a mutual understanding of what is important without needing to synthesise or conflate events or create false connections. In other words, the two broad categories of policy and everything bound up in it *and* the artists' trajectory have put each other in sharp relief.

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[1] 'Global' refers to those policies which involve a significant proportion of the countries of the world, where "International" includes regional (in the sense of supra-national regions) and bilateral, trilateral, and other transboundary levels too.
[2] 'Suspending disbelief' comes from theatre and refers to suspending one's assumptions about reality for the purposes of engaging in an artwork's construction of reality.
[3] Available from https://ontheedgeresearch.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/artistasleader.pdf
[4] An ecovention is defined in this context as an artistic tactic through which an artist seeks to create a concrete positive change in the natural environment (Spaid 2002, ii).
[5] Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus http://www.primaryinformation.org/product/diagram-of-historical-development-of-fluxus-and-other-4-dimentional-aural-optic-olfactory-epithelial-and-tactile-art-forms/ accessed 30 September 2019
[6] (Selected) History of the Space Time Continuum http://www.rachelsussman.com/timeline accessed 30 September 2019
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[9] American Institute of Physics Timeline of the Discovery of Global Warming. Available from https://history.aip.org/climate/timeline.htm
[10]Available from http://www.worldwatch.org/brain/features/timeline/timeline.htm
[11]Available from https://xkcd.com/1732/
[12]Available from https://history.aip.org/climate/GCM.htm accessed 3.10.2019
[13] The now familiar reports on Climate Change are actually produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a separate body from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
[14] Available from the Introduction http://www.centerforforcemajeure.org/
[15] There are examples where links of this kind could potentially be explored (Harrison and Harrison 2003, np), for example where images created by the Harrisons reappear in land use strategy documents, particularly in relation to *A Vision for the Green Heart of Holland* (1995).