Walter Crane and Hermann Obrist: craft, sculpture and transnationality at the fin de siècle

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> That is the great point to bear in mind in all design – the sense of relation; nothing stands alone in art. Lines and forms must harmonise with other forms and lines; the elements of any design must meet in friendly co-operation; it is not a blind struggle for existence, a fierce competition, or a strife for ascendency between one motive and another, one form and another, or a war of conflicting efforts. There may be a struggle *outside* the design, in the mind of the designer...we should feel that, however various its elements, they are not without their purpose and relation to one another, that all is ordered and organized in harmonious lines, that everything has its place, that, in short, it illustrates that excellent motto, whether for art or life: "Each for all, and all for each."[2]
>
> (Walter Crane, *Line and Form,* 1900)

The concept of interrelation, of co-operation, of lines which connect, affected all of Walter Crane's (1845-1915) output; from his art and political theory, to wallpaper, ceramic and textile designs, architectural sculpture**,** as well as his illustrative work. Crane was one the most versatile and prolific artists and designers working in Britain in the second-half of the nineteenth-century and the impact of his ideas was felt not only in his native Britain, but across Europe, the United States and even further afield, disseminated through the networks of education and publishing which connected countries across the globe. It was very much, to use contemporary vocabulary, a 'networked' nineteenth century.

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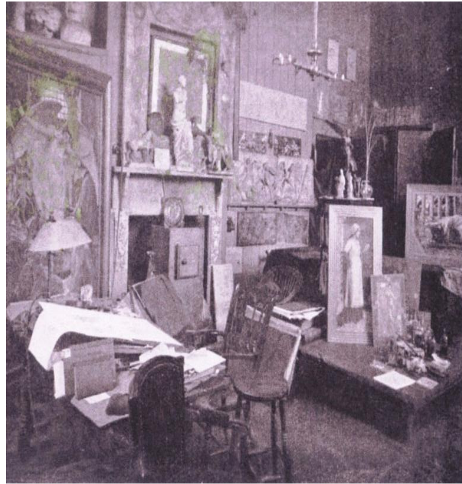
[1] My thanks to Jon Wood for inviting me to give this talk and encouraging all my work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculpture. Also, thanks to Kirstie Gregory for helping me prepare for the talk and for her editorial assistance, and also to Morna O'Neill whose invitation to speak at the 'Envisioning Utopia: British Art and Socialist Politics, 1870-1900' (Manchester, 2008) encouraged me to deepen my understanding of Crane's work.

[2] Walter Crane, *Line and Form* (London: G, Bell & Sons, 1914 [1900]), p. 137.



Walter Crane's Studio, 1885, reprinted in Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York: Macmillan, 1907)

Two photographs of Crane's studio space confirm Crane's ability to work across and between different media. His studio is a physical and material manifestation of Crane's core belief in the 'friendly co-operation' of all the arts: the angel in his large oil painting of 1885, entitled *Freedom,* appears to be hovering over Crane's desk, peering at the materials laid out for drawing or illustration.[3] Around the fireplace, sculpture, gesso panels, carved and moulded fire screens, plaster casts and more framed paintings occupy close quarters. The physical and conceptual proximity of the arts were one and the same thing for Crane — an idea which was made manifest in his own studio space. The second photograph shows Crane in a much more workaday corner of his studio with his young son, working on what I presume is a canvas, but the over-exposure of the image allows for a certain ambiguity. A palette and brush in Crane's hands cannot easily be identified. Crane could even be working on one of his gesso panels here. In 1874, after Crane was commissioned to produce some decorative panels for a dining room, he started to build up the surface of a panel using a paste made of plaster and glue applied to canvas. Plaster was an important material for Crane, which he attested to in an article entitled 'Notes on Gesso'

[3] I am indebted to the research of Morna O'Neill whose work on Crane is unparalleled. See in particular the excellent catalogue for the exhibition on Crane she curated in 2008 which published much material from the Crane papers recently acquired by the University of Manchester. Morna O'Neill, 'Art and Labour's Cause is one': Walter Crane and Manchester, 1880-1915 (Manchester: The Whitworth Art Gallery and The University of Manchester, 2008). O'Neill also discusses Crane's studio in her article, 'Pandora's Box: Walter Crane, *"Our* Sphinx-Riddle," and the Politics of Decoration', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* vol. 35 (2007), pp. 309-326. I

published in *The Studio* in May 1893. The decorative scheme Crane produced for the Greek Consul-General's house, No. 1 Holland Park shows extensive gesso relief work (inspired by the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam), and is further evidence that Crane worked between media, here between painting, sculpture and interior decoration.[4] In the background of the studio photograph of Crane at work, canvases, sheets of paper, lumps of stone, moulded reliefs all cohabit within the studio; the boundaries between them appearing indistinct at times. And, as to reinforce the point that art and politics, or art and life are one, he wears the *bonnet rouge*, a piece of clothing synonymous with the French Revolution, which had been revived by nineteenth-century political radicals.[5] His Socialism was at the core of his artistic practice, whether designing 'cartoons for the cause' or wallpaper.

To my knowledge, Walter Crane and the Swiss-born, part Scottish, German resident, sculptor and designer, Hermann Obrist, did not meet during their careers. Obrist was Crane's junior by seventeen years. However, I think that there is a good case for bringing the work of these two artists together. There are certainly numerous points of connection and overlap which can be traced in both their theoretical writings and material works of art and design. By looking at the work of Crane in light of Obrist's oeuvre, and vice versa, we can start to construct histories of art, sculpture and design which are more transnational in their approach, which see how cultural forms, as well as cultural figures, continuously moved across and between national and geographical boundaries. I am less concerned with Crane's direct influence on Obrist (or Obrist on Crane) than with the ways in which their attitudes and approaches were shaped in the interconnected, intercultural webs of art, craft, and making in the late nineteenth century. The predominant emphasis on the 'nation' in the art histories of the period have held back this kind

[4] For more information and images of Crane's gesso work, see Isobel Spencer, *Walter Crane* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 112-118.
[5] O'Neill, 'Art and Labour's Cause', p. 19.

of work, failing to take into account how ideas and art forms travelled and were circulated in this period.

The importance and impact of both Obrist and Crane's work for their contemporaries, and for generations of artists after their deaths, has yet to be fully assessed. Obrist and Crane both resist straightforward categorisation and this uncertainty about where to 'place' both artists has, I think, allowed them and their work to become somewhat culturally marginal within histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute ('Ornament and Line: Hermann Obrist as Art Nouveau Sculptor') makes a strong case for Obrist as sculptor, but the presence of fountains, plant stands, models for hilltop churches and milk jugs makes any one description open to contest. Crane actively resisted any kind of definition, railing against artistic taxonomies in his book *The Claims of Decorative Art*. 'All art has been rigidly divided into classes, like the society it reflects,' he complained. 'We have the arts all ticketed and pigeon-holed on the shelves behind us.'[6] Both men were involved in the Arts & Crafts movements in Germany and Britain, which celebrated the processes of making and campaigned against the established hierarchies which separated the 'fine' and 'decorative' (or 'applied') arts. Art and design was taken out of those pigeonholes, the 'tickets' were removed, and objects such as furniture for the home, free-standing sculptures and lampshades were put into cultural dialogue with easel painting, plasterwork and embroidery (much as in Crane's own home and studio). 'Craft' also came to be recognised as a thing in itself. 'It was now a noun as well as an adjective', Peter Greenhalgh has commented.[7] The artist, for Crane, was a manual worker, a craftsman – a point he visually and textually illustrated again and again. 'Art and Labour's Cause is one', ends his poem *The Craftsman's Dream*, c. 1889.

[6] Walter Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892), p. 109.
[7] Paul Greenhalgh, 'The History of Craft', in P. Dormer (ed.), *The Culture of Craft* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 1997), p. 36.

Both Crane and Obrist's work also reminds us that the nineteenth-century Arts & Crafts Movement was an international, as well as an interdisciplinary, one. The impact of design reform in Britain, led by figures such as A.W. Pugin, Henry Cole, and Owen Jones, which had been given a moral and social emphasis in the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris, was readily taken up by design reformers, artists and craftsmen in mainland Europe. Greenhalgh has also argued that Britain's contribution to international culture in this period was not particularly a set of objects or images (as important as these were), but a number of attitudes and ideas.[8] Walter Crane's work was widely translated and his reputation in Europe was held in high esteem as a result of these publications and the presence of his designs and objects in European exhibitions – one retrospective toured Austria, Hungary, Germany and Italy. The art critic Robert Ross, writing shortly after Crane's death in 1915, said that Crane was in fact 'much more esteemed, particularly in Hungary and in Italy, than in his own country'. 'From the continent,' Ross wrote, 'came the only official recognition he ever received.'[9] The wood engraving, *The Triumph of Labour,* designed by Crane and engraved by the Swiss engraver Henry Scheu, is just one example of Crane's international reach. This was sold across Europe with the mottos translated in German, French and Italian. This idea of translation — between languages but also between artists and media — is something I want to look at in more detail by bringing together British and German nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts culture.

The Crane-Obrist coalition of this paper also prompts us to think further not only about the art historical problems of categorisation with which these two artists present us, but also of the problematics of periodisation. Both Obrist and Crane, it seems to me, fall between periods; they were both explicitly connected to the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau movements of the nineteenth century, and yet their work also anticipates an abstraction and geometry which would

[8] Paul Greenhalgh, '*Le Style Anglais:* English Roots of the New Art', in P. Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* (London: V&A Publications, 2006), p. 145.
[9] Robert Ross, 'Walter Crane', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 27, No. 145 (April, 1915), p. 44.

become a hallmark of the 'modern' in the twentieth century. The work of both artists, however, is rarely included within the histories of modern art, falling perhaps in the fin-de-siècle gap between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (although it is worth remembering that both worked well into the twentieth century). Jessica Feldman's work on what she calls 'Victorian Modernism' is useful for thinking across periods and nations. She argues that we should see works of art as 'webs of relations and ideas with multiple centres and gaps, filigree-in-process.' In doing so, she argues, we 'will learn to pay attention to collections of things, arranged but subject to rearrangement.'[10] Perhaps we can look again at Obrist and Crane's work together, as a 'collection of things'. The histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, design and sculpture have been so firmly separated that the tangled webs of relations that connect across the chasm of the fin de siècle have been obscured or, at worst, severed. Both Obrist and Crane's concern for issues of materiality, craft, physicality and a cross-cultural attentiveness in their work shared roots which were firmly planted in the avant-garde experiments of the nineteenth century which had disturbed the hierarchical relationship between the fine and decorative arts. These roots took a firm hold and would provide the basis for the growth of new approaches to artistic practice, well into the twentieth century, which placed issues of materials and making at their core.

Roots & Shoots

Roots and shoots are appropriate terms for thinking about both Crane and Obrist's work. Not only is plant life and the natural world constantly referenced in their designs, but the whole concept of organic growth was at the core of both their artistic approaches. In order to achieve the successful and vigorous growth — be it of plants or artistic movements — one has to set down good, strong roots. For both Obrist and Crane, the sturdy roots of a robust culture of art and design was provided by education. Crane's proposal for a 'special course for designers' at the Royal College of Art in 1899 firmly places the study of nature as the roots of a student's

[10] Jessica R. Feldman, *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 109.

education. In fact, the whole course is designed like a complex root system for a magnificent tree, with each branch of art and design feeding and supporting each other. This system of educational growth with firm roots in craft and design was a radical departure from the formal academic training of the time which placed emphasis on the production of easel paintings made for private buyers and commercial galleries, as well as being an attack on the national course administered from the South Kensington Schools which heavily focussed on drawing. Crane's educational philosophy, which was firmly based in the technical and the manual, had been shaped by his experience as the Director of Design at the Manchester Municipal School of Art, a post he occupied from 1893-6. His lectures at the school were published as *The Bases of Design* (1898) and *Line and Form* (1900). Both were widely translated into numerous European languages.

In 1902, Obrist, along with Wilhelm von Debschitz, opened a private art school in Munich which became to be known as the Debschitz School. Crane's idea of 'the essential relation and necessary unity throughout all the branches of art' was mirrored at the Munich school which also refuted barriers and hierarchies between different branches of art and design. The school grew out of Munich's 'United Workshops for Art & Craft' which had been established in 1898 by several designers, Obrist among them. The school, Beate Ziegert has argued, had a profound impact on German artistic culture, cultivating 'a vision of interaction between art, design and manufacture that anticipated the German Bauhaus.'[11] Obrist declared that the core principle of the school was to provide an artistic education which taught 'the essential and varied elements of every category and not indiscriminately teaching a convention, even if it's a good one.'[12] Like Crane, Obrist did not just establish a reputation as artist, designer and teacher (he was responsible for teaching sculpture at the school), but also as a theoretician of a new and growing movement in design reform by giving lectures from 1896 and publishing

[11] Beate Ziegert, 'The Debschitz School, Munich: 1902-1914', *Design Issues,* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 28.
[12] Hermann Obrist, 'Ein künstlerischer Kunstunterricht', in *Neue Möglichkeiten der bildenden Kunst* (Leipzig: Diederichs, 1903), quoted by ibid., p. 29.

them in 1903. Educational reform for artists, designers and craft-workers was something of a meeting point for practitioners across Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.

The cultural connections between Britain and Germany were particularly strong in this period, and some have even spoken of the 'Anglo-mania' amongst German artists in the 1890s. Winifred Nerdinger has argued that the name 'United Workshops' came from William Morris's *News from Nowhere,* which was published in translation in 1892 in the social democratic journal *Die Neue Ziet.*[13] Crane's work was also widely disseminated throughout Germany, via exhibitions and the translation of his texts. For example, *The Claims of Decorative Art* appeared in German in 1896, four years after it had been first published in English. In 1894, a large exhibition of his work was held in Berlin which then toured extensively around Germany, and, in 1895, he exhibited *The Chariots of the Hours,* winning a gold medal for himself at the Glass Palace in Munich. In his book, *An Artist's Reminiscences,* Crane contemplated on the success of his work in Germany, especially the symbolic character of his painting, which he suggested were 'more in sympathy with the teutonic mind'.[14] There remains a material trace of this relationship between Crane and Munich today with his painting *Neptune's Horses* (1893) on display in Munich's art gallery. Munich was regarded as a particularly important node in this web of connections between Arts & Crafts protagonists. Writing in 1902, Thomas Mann commented of Munich that: 'Art flourished, art swayed the destinies of the town...There was a downright cult of line, decoration, form, significance, beauty. Munich was radian.'[15] In 1898, Crane also designed the cover of *Jugend* – the magazine that gave its name to *Jugendstil* – the German Art Nouveau movement. Although, I have argued against a simplistic compare and contrast exercise, the correspondences between the flow of lines in Crane's design and Obrist's 'whiplash' embroidery are nevertheless striking.

[13] Ziegert, 'The Debschitz School', p. 29.
[14] Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 431.
[15] Thomas Mann, *Gladius Dei* (1902), in Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), p. 85.

The lines of international cultural connection allowed art and ideas to travel in both directions. In 1896, Obrist's 'whiplash' embroideries, which have long been recognised as foundational pieces in Germany's Jugendstil movement, caused something of a sensation when they were exhibited for the first time in London at the Arts & Crafts Exhibiting Society at the New Gallery in October 1896 (of which Crane was the President). One reviewer for the *Saturday Review* noted the delicate handling of mass and colour, described the 'renitence' and 'chasteness' of these 'highly original pieces of work' which had not been influenced, in his opinion, by the 'Mr Morris School'. 'We have, perhaps, here in England,' the reviewer noted, 'carried the theory that all patterns for embroideries must be founded upon a geometrical basis a little far.'[16] The energy of the dark 'whiplash' lines against the austerity of the plain background do certainly contrast with the bustling thickets of intertwined undergrowth represented in Morris and Crane's textile work. But, again, I want to stress that the usefulness of bringing Obrist's work together with Crane only goes so far if we simply stick to visual compare and contrast exercises.

What Obrist did share with Crane (and Morris) was a deep fascination with the natural world which went far beyond a straightforward mimesis of its outward appearances. Again, roots are important here. As Crane had made plant life the root of all education, Obrist similarly turned to nature and organic growth to provide the basis for his new artistic vocabulary of line and form. In numerous designs for textiles and objects, Obrist intimates the balanced growth structure of plants, with roots ascending downwards, providing anchorage and stability for the sometimes wild, untamed and fecund shoots, branches and above. There is a dynamic tension here between ascension and decension. Even in solidly sculptural designs, such as the possible model for an urn in the shape of a capital, there is sense of a spring, upwardly unfurling and uncurling which is balanced and supported by the solidly triangular foundations. Crane's designs, although much denser and busier in their interweaving of the forms of the natural world, also often stage this interplay between rootedness and ascension.

Organic life, ultimately, provided structuring principles for both Obrist and Crane. Obrist collected images of microscopic views of the natural world from contemporary scientific journals, providing a tremendous arsenal of 'inside' views of nature. They were both fascinated by what Crane

[16] 'The Arts and Crafts at the New Gallery', Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art, vol. 82, 3rd Oct. 1896, p.364.

describes as the 'systems of line in the organic structures of nature'[17]. But, again, it is worth stressing that these lines were not simply descriptive of the contours of shape and form, but the lines of nature a vehicle for a deeper contemplation of the forces and structures of life. It is worth comparing what Obrist and Crane had to say on this. Looking back at his work at some point in the early twentieth century, Obrist commented:

> Most of the works were free, musically rhythmical fantasies, full of vibrations, curves, verticals, horizontals and spirals...[And] the ideas did not originate in nature alone, but in everything that vibrates in all rhythm and all reverberations such as can be found everywhere – in waves, in clouds of feathers, in the circadian and annual cycles, in the sound of the wind in the trees, in every waterfall, every geyser, every lane, every marsh, every dance, every music.[18]

In 1900, Crane had called for artists to pay attention to the:

> Radiating ribs of the scallop shell, or the spiral of many other varieties; the set of feathers upon the expanded wing of a bird; the radiation of the sun's rays; the flowing line of the wave movement; the lines of structure in flowers and leaves; the scales of a fish; the scales of a pine-cone or an artichoke....They are organic lines, in short. They mean line and growth.

And, yet, for Crane, art also relied on vibrations and reverberations – this is what he called 'inner vision'. This inner vision was a store of impressions and memories:

> a mysterious tapestry of ...thoughts, a rich and fantastic imagery, a world where the elements are personified, where every tree has its dryad, and where the wings of the winds actually brush the cheek. The inner vision re-creates rather than represents, and its virtue consists in the vividness and beauty in which, in the language of line, form, and colour, these visions of the mind are recorded and presented to the outward eye.'[19]

Annika Waenerberg has unpacked the connections between Obrist and the art historian Bernard Berenson, who he knew whilst living in Florence from 1892-4 and their shared fascination with the 'life of line' in the creation of movement. Obrist and Crane's shared vocabulary of inward and outward, internal and external vital forces, of the natural and the spiritual, of the botanical structure and the mysteries of nature has, however, been overlooked. This was a vocabulary

[17] Crane, *Line and Form*, p. 139.

[18] Obrist, 'A Happy Life: A Biography of the Artist, Naturalist and Independent Spirit', in Eva Afuhs and Andreas Strobl, *Hermann Obrist: Sculptor, Space, Abstraction Around 1900* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010), p. 130.

[19] Crane, *Line and Form*, pp. 140-1, 222.

heavily inspired by fin-de-siècle spiritual movements, such as Theosophy, which at the time was a vibrant, international organisation which Crane certainly had contact with.

Both Obrist and Crane's work, although stylistically quite different, shared not only concepts about the role of organic structure within design, but also what I see as a fin-de-siècle ecological perspective. In their work, they focused on both large and small natural environments and strove to understand the connections between the part to the whole. Through their interactions with the natural world in their work, they both made comments about the interdependency of art and life, the roots in the soil to a much larger notion of the cosmos. This is work about rhythms, flows, repetitions, but also about the interdependent connections that make up the world.

Waves and Wings

I have spoken largely about roots and shoots in my discussions of Obrist and Crane's work. I now want to think about water and wings, as fluidity and flight were central to both artists' work. 'Flowing water', Crane wrote, 'is expressed by certain wave lines... In the streams that channel the sands of the sea-shore when the tide recedes we may see beautiful flowing lines, sometimes crossing like a network, and sometimes running into a series of shell-like waves.'[20] Flowing water became very important to Obrist in the late nineteenth century. However, he was less concerned with its representation than making it central to his sculptural practice. Fountains were a 'special passion', he wrote in his 'autobiography'. He shunned the use of allegorical or symbolic figures to render the forces of water, but, instead, would use water as a sculptural element in its own right, creating structures through which the water could tumble and cascade.

Again, this observation and fascination with natural elements goes beyond mere representation. The study of the flows and movements of liquids was the subject of much research in the nineteenth century. Experiments in fluid dynamics included landmark

[20] Crane, *Line and Form*, p. 17.

experiments by British physicists, Osborne Reynolds, on the viscous effects of fluids.[21] Another, connected area of Physics, which was receiving much attention from both scientists and artists, was the study of aerodynamics and the dynamic forces of gravity and lift. As we already know, Obrist was interested in the nineteenth-century scientific culture, yet he has been more readily associated with the study of botany and natural sciences. However, I want to suggest that many of his images and objects represent or intimate the 'will to flight', of upwards propulsion, and another connection between late nineteenth-century art and science. In an extraordinary passage from Obrist's unpublished notes, under the title 'Ecstatic Vortex', Obrist makes the following list:

Cigar glow, cook stove, Anromeda/ fog
Spiral funnel of the rudder in water /
Water vortex in the washbasin,
bat spiral, crater vortex
machineatonic, *sculpted*
cigarette smoke, Rococo chapel volute
torrent, Zermatt, *vortex around cliffs*
play of ectasy around vortex
seagulls' flight, butterfly vortex,
hummingbirds...[22]

So many of the words in this list link to contemporary scientific experiments to do with fluid and aerodynamics. Obrist did depict winged figures, but more commonly he suggested upwards motion, ascension, the desire to take flight and of the exhilaration of doing so. Flight, we might suggest, is not just fantasy here, but a reality — or perhaps both?

Crane's work is packed full of wings; figures and animals take flight, but so do objects Crane perhaps drew on a more traditional allegorical and symbolical image bank of winged figures: angels, sphinxes, putti and so on, but he also uses line to *suggest* (and not just represent) ascension. Using a drawing of *The Morning Stars* after William Blake for a lecture he gave, Crane describes how the arrangement of line with uplifted and intercrossing arms give a pattern of

[21] Shelley Wood Cordulack, 'Art Nouveau and the Will to Flight', *Journal of Design History,* vol. 5 (1992), pp. 257-272.
[22] P. Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 32.

'flame-like, triumphant, ascending verticals.'[23] Form and content fuse together here and, as Morna O'Neill has commented, Crane's discussion of line 'approaches abstraction'.[24] By 'focussing on the internal processes of creation', such as the structures of natural growth, and the geometry of design, rather than the faithful transcription of the external world, Obrist's approach is very similar to that of Crane, even if the resulting works are, in some cases, quite radically different. The use of abstraction and geometry in art has been a central part of the narrative of twentieth-century modernism, but I think the work of Crane and Obrist reminds us to push back beyond the barrier of '1900' when thinking about the notion of the abstract in art and design, and examine more carefully the groundwork that was carried out for these radical shifts in the approach to representing the world in the twentieth century.

The circle for Crane was a 'universal and important element in ornamental design of all times and kinds'.[25] The square and circle, he argued, were the basic shapes for world culture, from the 'Gothic ogee', the 'Chinese peony', the 'Arabic leaf' and the 'Persian palmette'. Both Crane and Obrist were, I think, genuine admirers of the art of other cultures, looking to both geographically and chronologically distant areas for inspiration. Obrist wrote that he believed that 'all Gothic, all Indian and all Arabian architecture was inspired by higher powers of cosmic creativity.'[26] Gothic architecture was the product of 'vital forces' according to Obrist. Crane was also a great admirer of the Middle Ages – as anyone with true Arts & Crafts pedigree had to be – but he was additionally an active and voracious supporter of the arts of South Asia. He was a founder member of the India Society, a group set up in 1910 by Bradford-born artist, William Rothenstein, to campaign for more sympathetic understandings of historic and contemporary Indian art. At an important meeting of the Indian section of the Royal Society of Arts, Crane objected to a statement made by Sir George Birdwood that India had 'no fine arts'. Crane made a comparison between the artistic and spiritual cultures of South Asia and the Middle Ages, suggesting that Hindu sculpture had the quality of the 'splendid vital sculpture' of the thirteenth century. The sculpture and architecture of Indian temples was animated, he noted, by a spirit of inner vision rather than the

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[23] Crane, *Line and Form,* pp.20-1.
[24] O'Neill, 'Art and Labour's Cause', p. 75.
[25] Walter Crane, *The Bases of Design* (London: George Bell, 1898), p. 219.
[26] Obrist, 'A Happy Life', p. 124.

'realisation of the outward appearance of things upon which European artists had spent nearly all of their force'.[27] Crane said that he had found a link between what certain artists in India and England were attempting to do, namely, to 'raise the banner of the handicrafts'.[28] The difference was, he noted, that in India handicrafts remained a 'living condition, firmly rooted in the life of the people', whereas in England, owing to the changes in industrial production and modern trade, many traditional methods had become extinct and had to be 'revived from the beginning'.[29] Crane, utilising his ammunition of theories developed in support of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, chastised Birdwood for his inability to see Indian art as 'a whole'.

Art, for Crane, was a visual language which had the potential to speak to people across the globe (it is also worth noting here that he was interested in the Esperanto movement to create a "world language"). [30] In a remarkable passage, Crane writes that

> line...is a language, a most sensitive and vigorous speech of many dialects; which can adapt itself to all purposes... Line may be regarded simply as a means of record, a method of registering the facts of nature, of graphically portraying the characteristics of plants and animals, or the features of humanity.... It is capable of this, and more also, since it can appeal to our emotions and evoke our passionate and poetic sympathies with both the life of humanity and wild nature, as in the hands of the great masters it lifts us to the heavens or bows us down to the earth: we may stand on the sea-shore and see the movement of the falling waves, the fierce energy of the storm and its rolling armament of clouds, glittering with the sudden zig-zag of the lightening; or we may sink into the profound calm of a summer day...[31]

Line, for Crane, was not simply two-dimensional or flat, but offered a conduit into our tactile and sensory world; a point made even stronger when we see that a lot of his 'flat' designs border on relief. This sensory approach to art, of returning the act of looking at natural forms and structures back to corporeal human experience is also something that, I think, both Crane and Obrist share. Both made an appeal to the dynamic act of experiencing art and a desire to merge touch and sight through the representation of space, whether in a wallpaper or embroidery

[27] Walter Crane, 'Discussion' reported in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,* vol. 58, no. 2985 (Feb. 1910), p.288.
[28] Ibid., pp.288-9.
[29] Ibid., p.288
[30] Walter Crane, 'Art and the Commonweal: An Address Delivered at Armstrong College to the Students of the School of Art', in *William Morris to Whistler: Papers and Addresses on Art & Craft & Commonweal* (London: George Bell, 1911), p.249.
[31] Crane, *Line and Form,* p. 22.

design or, in the case of Obrist, through the creation of physical spaces in his sculptures. Crane and Obrist's work was of different dialects, but ultimately, I think that they were speaking the same language. In turning to nature as the basis of design and by revealing design and making *as process* their work and theoretical approach has strong connections. Whereas Crane was the more actively political of the two men, they both had something to say about the public role of ornament. Their work reminds us of the complex chronological and cultural bleed between one century and the next, between the artistic practices of different nationalities and geographical regions and how we might go about thinking of artistic, cultural and material interconnections beyond face-to-face collaborations. I hope I have placed Crane and Obrist's work not neatly side-by-side but within the complex matrix of shifting boundaries at the fin de siècle, between the material and the spiritual, the inner and the outer, figuration and abstraction, the fine and applied art, in which their art was produced and received.