HART CRANE'S BRIDGE IN THE INFORMATION AGE:
DIGITAL AESTHETICS, CYBERNETICS, AND INTEGRAL EVOLUTION

by

DANIELLE BARRIOS

(Under the direction of Hubert McAlexander)

ABSTRACT

This essay uses Hart Crane's long poem *The Bridge* as a model for comparing the poetic conflicts of the machine age to those of the information age, and for illustrating the striking degree to which Crane's poetics anticipate not only the theoretical concerns, but also the technical and formal concerns, of information-age poetry. I discuss *The Bridge* as an early indicator of hypertextual poetic modes, and I explore Crane's employment of proto-virtual reality and cybernetic theory. *The Bridge* stands as evidence of Crane's prescience of what would become the proliferating paradoxical relationships among humans and their technologies in the twenty-first century, as well as of the ways in which technological advancement would come to bear on the evolution of narrative, history and identity construction.

INDEX WORDS: Hart Crane, The Bridge, Modernism, Digital media, Media theory, Cybernetics, Virtual reality, Technology, Information-age literature, Modernist poetry, Hypertext, Cape Hatteras, Posthuman, Integral evolution.

HART CRANE'S BRIDGE IN THE INFORMATION AGE:

DIGITAL AESTHETICS, CYBERNETICS, AND INTEGRAL EVOLUTION

by

J. DANIELLE BARRIOS

B.A., The University of Georgia, 2005

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

HART CRANE'S BRIDGE IN THE INFORMATION AGE:
DIGITAL AESTHETICS, CYBERNETICS, AND INTEGRAL EVOLUTION

by

J. DANIELLE BARRIOS

Major Professor:	Hubert McAlexander
Committee:	Adam Parkes
	Richard Menke

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

PROPHESYING THE AMERICAN MYTH

While the study of American poetic traditions has long required attention to the

influences of scientific and technological advancements in surrounding culture, relations

between the arts and sciences have often been troubled. In the period following World War I,

creative movements were largely characterized by a social backlash of humanism against the

mechanized vagaries of war, and many in the artistic community were compelled to conclude

that, in agreement with Ezra Pound, art has no place in a mechanized culture.[1] However,

antipathy toward the machine in the 1920s and '30's was answered and challenged by avant-

garde movements celebrating the promise of an arriving technological golden age. Unable to

avoid treating the commanding subject of contemporary technology, most typically art and

literature integrated varying degrees of mechanistic technique while exploring the tensions of the

machine age, marking intersections and divergences in the artistically, as well as socially and

politically, conflicting projects of technological progress and humanist conservativism.[2] In the

literary arts, movements whose philosophies embraced a "culture of the machine" formed in

partial alliance with the Futurists and Constructivists of the visual arts, and in opposition to the

high modernist, institutional aesthetic communities led by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, poets

whose interest in technology was keen, but skeptical and cautionary at best.[3]

Hart Crane was among the American writers who—though he was not without

reservations concerning new technology—developed man-machine symbiosis in his poetry in

---

[1] Daniel Aaron. *Writers on the Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961): 114.
[2] For more on the social response to technology from the turn of the century through the 1950s, see David Porush, "Cybernetic Fiction and Postmodern Science" *New Literary History* 20.2 (1989): 380.
[3] Marjorie Perloff. *21ˢᵗ Century Modernism: The New Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001): 196.

form as well as subject matter. Considered by some to have made "the most extreme and successful attempt at Futurist poetry in America," Crane was at the fore of innovative modernist poetics, the self-proclaimed "*Pindar* for the dawn of the machine age."[4] However, Crane's work—particularly his most ambitious project, *The Bridge*—received limited praise in its time. In comparison with the dominant component of high modernism (spearheaded by Eliot and Pound), Crane was often seen as too idealistic, his work saturated with the lyrical vices of earlier periods, tonally and structurally undisciplined, and thematically centerless; the great effort of *The Bridge*, his last, was deemed a failure by prevailing criticism. However, in the past several decades Crane has been somewhat redeemed; in the postmodern age of literature and literary criticism, Crane has come into his own as being among the first postmodern poets.[5]

In agreement with William Carlos Williams that the modern poet needed "another chant" to replace worn-out poetic modes, Crane aimed at estalishing harmonious relationships between science, technology and art, and between man and his universe, through the use of poetic devices inspired by modern technological advancements—certainly, a new chant. With his intended "myth of America" Crane hoped to define this chant; *The Bridge* was to be a unifying national vision, a simultaneous grounding and glorifying of American identity with the gears and throng of its own discordant machine age.[6] The poem begins in reverent admiration of the Brooklyn Bridge—"Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced / … Implicitly thy freedom staying thee"— whose "inviolate curve," tangible symbol of the expanse of man's progress and conduit thrust into the sky, may "lend a myth to God" ("To Brooklyn Bridge," 46). The poem is, progressively,

---

[4] Albert Gelpi. *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910 – 1950.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 86. Hart Crane. "A Letter to Gorham Munson" in *Selected Letters and Prose* (New York: Liveright, 1966): 225.
[5] James Longenbach. "Modern Poetry" in *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 124. Langdon Hammer. *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993): xv. Brian Reed. "Hart Crane's Victrola." *Modernism/Modernity* 7.1 (2000): 110.
[6] Hart Crane. "A Letter to Otto Kahn" in *Selected Letters and Prose* (New York: Liveright, 1966): 249.

a conduit through a landscape and timescape that integrate the origins of American consciousness with the complications of a "new realm of fact," and blend in cycloramic views an imaginative history of the American spiritual quest ("Cape Hatteras," 89).

Crane's assembly of an unwieldy and incalculable amount of information by associational means and his attempt to locate profound truth in the materials of artificial production are not in themselves highly extraordinary; other artists were doing similar things. But Crane's poetry is distinctive in that he engages the self-consciously modern, the exquisitely clean and sharp modernist aesthetic, with a vast, chaotic history of human feeling. In *The Bridge*, the mechanical avant-garde is highly developed, but is collaged with what many considered antiquated lyrical methods; the fractured and jaded intensity of modern awareness ("rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us / Wounds that we wrap with theorems sharp as hail") is paired tensely with the fervent ache of an enduring emotional youth ("Sustained in tears the cities are endowed / And justified conclamant with ripe fields / Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment") (Crane, *Complete Poems,* 91, 116).

Dissenting and misfitting, Crane's work lacked close cousinship with most of his contemporaries. Reassessment of his poetry today reveals that he stood apart even more significantly than critics have typically estimated. In the shift from machine age to information age, there has surfaced a network of methods and theories that reflect the same concerns that shaped the language, thematic content, and structure of Crane's later works; these are largely responses to new technologies and their role in shaping human consciousness. *The Bridge*, in particular, stands as evidence of Crane's prescience of what would become the proliferating paradoxical relationships among humans and their technologies, as well as of the ways in which

technological advancement would come to bear on the evolution of narrative, history and identity constructions.

In this essay, I will use *The Bridge* as a model for comparing the poetic conflicts of the machine age to those of the information age, and particularly for illustrating the striking degree to which Crane's poetics anticipate not only the theoretical concerns, but also the technical and formal concerns, of information-age poetry. I'll discuss *The Bridge* as an early indicator of hypertextual poetic modes, as well as exploring Crane's employment of what we would now call virtual reality and cybernetic theory, and I'll consider his poetry in light of the newly acknowledged relationship between homosexual poetics and cybertextual poetics. The cultural and social overtones of Crane's poetics in *The Bridge* were enabling to the philosophies motivating new media theory and development; Crane set a tone in his tributary of modernist writing that was counter in many ways to dominant modernism, a tone that eventually became part of a larger stream of creative ideology that has now found full expression in digital media environments. The construction of cultural identity is central to both Crane's project and the contemporary artistic one, with synthesis and integration operating as crucial tools; ultimately I will argue that, while Crane prioritized the need for a national historical identity, his inheritors must address the project of assimilating a global one.

Absorbing the Machine

In September of 1927, after a year of production on *The Bridge*, Crane wrote in a letter to Otto Kahn that he was "writing an epic," comparing his project "in historical and cultural scope" to Virgil's *Aeneid*.[7] R.W.B. Lewis rightly points out, in an influential 1967 study of *The Bridge,* that one aspect of the relationship Crane perceived between his own work and Virgil's was the

---

[7] Crane, "Letter to Otto Kahn," 249-54.

shared intention of marking the dawn of a new age, each poet attempting to commemorate a shift from "an age of iron discord into an age of golden harmony."[8] While the atmosphere of the late 1920s was one of dramatic metamorphosis, in which the disintegration of a cohesive governing culture created an open arena that welcomed high modernist experimentation, many features of *The Bridge* suggest that Crane envisioned a more extreme shift—a shift with greater "historical and cultural scope"—than even the most innovative of his contemporaries.[9]

A yearning for pre-verbal, pre-social unity is a common and overarching impulse among modernist works, and this impulse—often disciplined by a "mythical method," and certainly so in Crane's *Bridge*—is most famously performed in the benchmark work of the period, Eliot's *Waste Land*.[10] Eliot's influence on Crane was profound, and Crane, like many other poets writing in the wake of *The Waste Land*, inherited Eliot's project. Like Eliot, Crane railed against the shortcomings of available forms, and sought to access pre-verbal modes of understanding through the deconstruction of language, forever yearning toward "a mythic synthesis remaining out of reach."[11] Eliot would certainly have agreed with Crane's assertion of the modern artist's need for "gigantic assimilative capacities"—the complex methods of associational layering and linking in "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* aspire to, among other things, efficiently assimilate vast quantities of poetic data, something which Crane attempted in related ways.[12] C.S. Lewis aptly described the poetry that developed in response to this common need—the need for better *space* for expression—as "new in a new way … almost in a new dimension." And indeed poetry was taking a new shape, as multifarious logical and emotional—as well as visual and aural—

---

[8] R.W.B. Lewis. *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967): 223.
[9] Gelpi, 422.
[10] Longenbach, 122.
[11] Cary Nelson. "Modern American Poetry" in *Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 77.
[12] Crane, "Letter to Gorham Munson," 225.

methods of assocation merged to create, from the flatness of the page, something multidimensional.[13]

But what is always finally evident in *The Waste Land* is Eliot's lack of faith in his ability to execute his will with the materials at hand, a lack intensified to resemble crippling fact by the overwhelming aesthetic force of the work. As James Longenbach notes, "No matter how convinced we become that Tiresias does come to embody the unification of the world," ultimately "Tiresias sees only the failure of individuals to achieve any sense of unity."[14] Paradoxically, though conceived in amazingly, radically new-dimensional form, Eliot's poem renders a flat and lifeless, wrecked landscape: the inevitable revelation, it seems, of a poem committed to expressing the truths of the postwar American psyche. In the vogue and leaden shadow of pessimism given voice powerfully in *The Waste Land*, which now loomed over the poetry of the period, Crane 's poetry was an intentional, thematically opposed, answer. As Hammer notes in *Janus-Faced Modernism*, Crane saw in Eliot's work "a potentially liberating politics, a way of writing that could be placed in the service of his utopian vision of human community"—but thematically, Crane deliberately diverged from Eliot's aims.[15] First in *Voyages,* but more effectively in *The Bridge*, Crane used the tools of a highly developed, multidimensional modernist poetics to attempt a renewal of cultural myth and unified consciousness as both natural and necessary response to Eliot. "After this perfection of death—," he said, "nothing is possible in motion but a resurrection of some kind."[16]

Reconciliation of the nature-technology dichotomy was a necessary component of healing the ruptures in the modernist psyche, a view that was hardly exclusive to Crane. The

---

[13] Peter Kreeft. *C.S. Lewis for the Third Millennium* (Ft. Collins: Ignatius Press, 1994).
[14] Longenbach, 120-1.
[15] Hammer, 9.
[16] Hammer, 120. Longenbach, 114.

necessity of "absorbing the machine," adapting to the demands of a governing culture increasingly shaped by mass-market machinery, was begrudgingly accepted by the pragmatic component of high modernism.[17] Crane had no grudge. His goals in writing *The Bridge* were maximalist; he intended to synthesize antithetical disciplines, and antithetical ideas, through graceful organization.[18] The avenue by which synthesis might become possible, stated in "Modern Poetry," is submission: poetry must "absorb the machine," he held, "*acclimatize* it as naturally as … all other human association of the past," a process that demanded, "along with the traditional qualifications of the poet, an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life."[19] He was highly faithful to this philosophy in *The Bridge*, his assimilation of the machine into the aesthetic sphere remarkably unpolluted by the skepticism pervasive in modernist culture. Though Crane was in some form of agreement with Pound in seeing science and art as antithetical, his poetry is able to consummate a creative relationship between man and machine, or machine and nature, that is (particularly in its self-conscious idealism) something like a modernist *Frankenstein* attempt. At once comforting and threatening, hubristically violent and intensely beautiful, poems such as "Cape Hatteras" and "Atlantis" (segments of *The Bridge*) infuse life electrically into a modernist cyborg consciousness.[20]

The Bridge in the Twenty-First Century

My principal interests within postmodern digital media form and theory as they relate to Hart Crane can be divided into the earlier concerns of computing media—the need for vast assimilative capacities; architecture and coding; interactivity and resonance—and more recent

---

[17] Tapper, 150-1.
[18] Crane, "Letter to Gorham Munson," 224-9.
[19] Crane, "Modern Poetry," 261-2.
[20] Donna Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto" in *The New Media Reader* ed. Noah Waldrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003): 516.

areas of concern (which more distinctly engage issues of cultural identity): possibilities for pre-verbal synthesis; uses of association and linkage; virtual reality; cyborg politics and postgenderism—all of which are present in some form in Crane's poetry.[21]

The contemporary poet Alice Fulton describes literary postmodernism as form's ability to express "varying degrees of … pattern and repetition" that don't conform to classical binaries of order and entropy. This shift allows a "non-binary *in-between*," wherein authors can "explore the field between gibberish and traditional forms"; she mentions the antecedent poetry of Eliot and Pound. "Fractal poetics," Fulton's name for the late-twentieth-century intersecting phenomena in science and poetry toward this exploration of chaos, are most interested in the point of metamorphosis—they are "all threshold."[22] Fulton's analysis aptly describes digital literature, which is intensely interested in the non-binary in-between, in threshold, in disorientation, boundlessness, chaos. The "choose your own adventure" style of hypertext linking allows a potentially infinite proliferation of literary experience and the possibility of creating fictions which never read the same way twice, and in which even classifications of "author" and "reader" break down. Web communication technologies allow a literal and potentially limitless multivocality of narrative. Authors can integrate various media—music, images, text—in a single digital space, a significant theoretical move toward a unified sensorium. "Disorientation" and "lostness" become positive terms describing experience in an unordered creative space; there is no center, no climax, but rather a pattern of path-making, a microcosm of the experience of postmodernism. The ideological bent of such literature, developing as a corollary of internet

---

[21] James Beniger. *The Control Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986): 25-6: "Digitalization promises to transform currently diverse forms of information into a generalized medium for processing and exchange by the social system, much as, centuries ago, the institution of common currencies and exchange rates began to transform local markets into a single world economy. We might therefore expect the implications of digitalization to be as profound for macrosociology as the institution of money was for macroeconomics."

[22] Alice Fulton. "Fractal Amplifications: Writing in Three Dimensions" in *The Measured Word: On Poetry and Science,* ed. Kurt Brown (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001): 110-12.

culture, is highly democratic, extremely egalitarian. Thus ideal digital subjectivity is fluid, inclusive, collective, amorphous, and inextricably connected with mass media and commercialism.

The similiarities between modernist literary innovation and the media revolution of the late twentieth century have been noted by several critics in the recent past. In his 1999 article "Avant-garde as Software," Lev Manovich makes some important connections between the new media revolution of the last few decades and 1920s modernism, with the intriguing hypothesis that avant-garde techniques became, over time, "embedded in the commands and interface metaphors of computer software."[23] In *The Modern Poet,* Robert Crawford discusses in depth the work of Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid in the 1920s and '30s, exploring his use of postmodern encyclopaedism, proliferation, and cybernetic textures.[24] And in his essay on Hart Crane and John Dos Passos in *American Literature and Science*, Joseph Slade cites these writers as seminal in the development of information age literature, giving particular attention to symbol as communications medium, and the manipulation of metaphor and meter to encode data.[25] The tendency of American (and world) literature to "become bigger and more authoritative by [assimilating] its own limits, and so [to continue] its work of overcoming, overreaching, and overdoing," is a process with significant origins in the modernist avant-garde.[26] And as theories and forms of new media are gradually integrated into critical conceptions of literary history, the significance of earlier works can be better understood as intermediaries in the shift toward the

---

[23] Lev Manovich. "Avant-garde as Software" (UOC Publications, 2002).
[24] Robert Crawford. *The Modern Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 208-22.
[25] Joseph W. Slade. "Hart Crane and John Dos Passos" in *American Literature and Science* ed. Robert Scholnick (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992). Slade's argument will become relevant to my own as I discuss the expansion of modernist metaphor into virtual space, as well as the bridge and human-technological evolution.
[26] Steven Connor. "Foreword" in *Becoming Human: New Perspectives on the Inhuman Condition* ed. Paul Sheehan (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003): xiv.

current aesthetic and cultural moment: outliers in the 1930s become prophets in the 2000s. Hart Crane is one of these.

CHAPTER TWO

HART CRANE'S INFORMATION-AGE POETICS

Resurrecting a New Form

During the years he was composing *The Bridge*, Crane's letters to friends and patrons became increasingly occupied with finding ways to describe and affirm a redemptive "new consciousness" toward which he felt the world was moving. His letters are punctuated with, sometimes overwhelmed by, doubts of the possibility of realizing the redemptive theme and project of his poem.[27] On November 15, 1926 he wrote to Yvor Winters, "I'm engrossed in a thousand problems of form and material all at once these days"; to Waldo Frank, "The symbols of reality necessary to articulate the span [of the bridge] …. —these forms, materials, dynamics are simply non-existent in the world.[28] The source of much of Crane's doubt was an ongoing struggle with formal constraints, the continued lack of the assimilative capacities that he felt were necessary to express modern consciousness.[29] One component of Crane's approach to the formal problem was an effort to adapt old forms to supplement new ones, an approach of which Winters and Tate, among others, disapproved. For Winters, Langdon Hammer notes, *The Bridge* demonstrated "the impossibility of getting anywhere with the Whitmanian inspiration"; for Tate, it marked the end of the romantic movement as a whole.[30] Crane faced private and public frustrations in his attempts to shift from historical models, by an "apocalypse of the imagination," to the formation of new relations between consciousness and reality.[31] However,

[27] Crane, "Letter to Gorham Munson," 228.
[28] Crane, "Letter to Waldo Frank" in *Selected Letters and Prose*, 230. Warner Berthoff. *Hart Crane, a Re-Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989): 84.
[29] Berthoff, 60.
[30] Hammer, 175.
[31] Berthoff, 62. Lewis, 229.

his belief in a superior past America—Whitman's America—combined with a belief in the

responsibility of major art to "re-create and counterpose conflicting energies" in society, kept

him committed to projects of historical amalgamation, and the desire to amplify redemptive

relationships between two discrete Americas—the past and the contemporary—pervades his

writing during the period from 1926 to 1930.[32]

By the time Crane published "General Aims and Theories" in 1937, his intentions were

cleare, his defenses stronger. "I know that I run the risk of much criticism," his essay states,

> by defending such theories as I have, but … it is part of a poet's business to risk not only
> criticism—but folly—in the conquest of consciousness …. New conditions of life
> germinate new forms of spiritual articulation and … I am utilizing the gifts of the past as
> instruments principally.[33]

Crane's answer to accusations of nostalgically employing outmoded forms and themes, typical

criticism of his work during the 1930s and several decades following, was to, through historical

assimilation, deny the denial of dominant high modernism, and substitute integration for an

exclusive poetics of discipline. *The Bridge* is almost cinematic, teeming with life and material,

juxtaposing the high, insistent notes of urban commotion and deep, low notes of mythic longing

and epochal change; it includes all. It also broke with Eliot's institutional traditionalism, and in

all these ways Crane was moving beyond the wounded tendency of modernism to perpetuate its

own punishment.[34] Alice Fulton describes "modernist maximalism," as practiced by Pound and

Eliot, as

> a structure of depletion: the [high modernist] poem spent itself in a gesture of
> mourning—for lost civilizations and mythologies. Its exhaustion was nihilistic in spirit,
> much ado about nothing …. To risk a generalization, their modernism beautifully
> encountered what-is-not and gave ample voice to absence. The postmodern poem, on the
> other hand, is an architecture of excess; it spends itself by reveling in the plethora of

---

[32] Berthoff, 16. See *Selected Letters and Prose*, 224-259. "Letter to Waldo Frank," 232.
[33] Crane, "General Aims and Theories" in *Selected Letters and* Prose, 222-3.
[34] Crawford, 170.

what-is …. Built from presence, it has a life-wish. Taken together, the two modernisms resemble a twentieth-century lost and found.[35]

Much of Crane's practical difficulty in expressing a prepostmodern, or a postmodern, consciousness was in conceiving an adequate structural framework, a model that could effectively assimilate and support the "plethora of what-is," toward the goal of achieving the redemptive "found" that would become the focus of progressive poetry up to the present. His principal concern was with conscious "vision" and its treatment became a matter of creating, with language, a radically artificial system of support for visionary processes.[36] The system of support that Crane set out to design was prescient of the representational functions of the computer; it was characterized by encyclopaedia (a function in common with other high modernists), participation, and virtual space.

It was the world's transition toward "a reorganization of human values" (in Crane's words) that drastically reduced the fund of common expressive terms in art and literature, thus demanding a new system of expression. Industrial society was increasingly fragmented, a Babel of creation and consumption among interdependent but alienated disciplines and vocabularies; mass-market commercialism resulted in a data explosion that wreaked havoc on the human sensorium, producing effects insupportable to existing methods of constructing meaning. In 1964, John Dos Passos gave voice to a deficiency felt by writers as early as the 1920s: "It has become so hard to understand and to see [life] as a whole that most people won't even try." The influx of new information beginning at the turn of the century was the cause, and, as it eroded the effectiveness of traditional modes of communication and expression, it also gave rise to expanded literary forms that aimed at management by assimilation. [37]

---

[35] Fulton, 114.
[36] Crane, "Letter to Gorham Munson," 225.
[37] Slade, 173.

Methods for designing virtual space capable of accommodating infinity originated in the linguistic turn of the early twentieth century, when Western understanding of the function of language shifted from its descriptive capacities to its role in constructing reality. Ferdinand de Saussure argued that meaning is created relationally within systems of language, and writers like James Joyce went on to demonstrate that personal styles of language-use are on some level subsystems, or codes, which can be reproduced.[38] Joyce anticipated the role that coding would eventually have in relation to art and culture in the latter part of the century; his early experiments with deliberate literary coding (*Ulysses* the prime example) were highly complex and notoriously difficult to unravel. *The Bridge* is similar in that sense. A major inclination that Joyce and Crane shared was the conviction not to attempt to pack a breadth of modernist thought and feeling into an imagist capsule, the "cure-all" that it seemed dominant high modernism was after. Truer things, Crane wrote in a letter to Allen Tate, "have a way of coming out all the better without the strain to sum up the universe in one impressive little pellet."[39] Crane was prophetic without being anachronistic; the real representation of an infinite proliferation of relationships within a tight space would not become possible without later inventions of computing technologies. But Crane approached the possibilities of these with metaphoric symbol, linking, and metanarrative, erecting a "logos, or system of contact between the insulated departments of highly specialized knowledge … which characterize the times"; it was a new way of managing, through coding, the pullulating consciousness of postindustrialism.[40]

---

[38] Michael Bell. "The Metaphysics of Modernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 16-17.

[39] Hart Crane, "Letter to Alan Tate" in *Selected Letters and Prose*, 258.

[40] Slade, 173. The term "Pullulating consciousness" is originally from Jorge Luis Borges's "Garden of Forking Paths" (1941). From Janet Murray, "Inventing the Medium" in *The New Media Reader* ed. Noah Waldrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 3:

> Borges confronts us woth the "pullulating"moment, when we become aware of all the possible choices we might make …. His imagined Garden of Forking Paths is both a book and a landscape, a book that has the

"Logic of Metaphor": A Poetics of Linking

Perhaps the primary and best-known feature of Crane's assimilative logos is his commitment to a customized "logic of metaphor." In "General Aims and Theories" he explains that this mode of associative linking

> antedates our so-called pure logic [and] is the genetic basis of all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension. These dynamics often result, I'm told, in certain difficulties in understanding my poems. But on the other hand I find them at times the only means possible for expressing certain concepts … when, in "Voyages" (II), I speak of "adagios of islands," the reference is to the motion of a boat through islands clustered thickly, the rhythm of the motion, etc. And it seems a much more direct and creative statement than any more logical employment of words such as "coasting slowly through the islands," besides ushering in a whole world of music …. Although the statement is pseudo in relation to formal logic—it *is* completely logical in relation to the truth of the imagination."[41]

Despite Lee Edelman's analysis showing the logic of Crane's metaphor to be somewhat inconsistent, it was yet a means of undermining the the institution of Eliot's "tradition" with something primitive and timeless, a modernism "based not on the Evolution of the idea of progress, but on the articulation of the contemporary human consciousness *sub specie aeternitatis*."[42] The "extra-logical" truth of the poet, Crane claimed, is "capable of apprehending some absolute … concept of the imagination"—a spiritually practical, but not a scientific, logic.[43] The practical purpose of the logic of metaphor was, for Crane, the mission of poetry itself: to, as his ideological predecessor Whitman sought to do, fuse the seemingly intractable

---

shape of a labyrinth that folds back upon itself in infinite regression. It is a dizzying vision, one which will be described again by humanist writers for the rest of the century.

[41] Crane, "General Aims and Theories" in *Selected Letters and Prose*, 221-2.

[42] See Edelman, Lee. *Transmemberment of Song: Hart Crane's Anatomies of Rhetoric and Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). Hammer, 10. Crane, "General Aims and Theories," 218.

[43] Crane, "Modern Poetry" in *Selected Letters and Prose,* 262. See also Steve McIntosh, *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2007), 167: Henri Bergson called this intuitive, trans-rational way of constructing truth "seizing from within," for which Bergson has also been linked to the Romantics.

forces of America into a universal vision.[44] Lewis quotes Whitman's "Passage to India" as

expressive of the spirit of Crane's assimilative poetics:

> All these *separations and gaps* shall be taken up, and *hook'd and link'd together*;
> The whole earth -- this cold, impassive, voiceless Earth, shall be completely justified;...
> Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,
> The true Son of God shall absolutely fuse them.[45] [my emphasis]

The importance of a mechanical "hooking and linking," of jumping gaps to consolidate man,

cannot be overstated; the poet becomes architect and welder of ideas, whose project is the

synthetic harmony of all creation, God's and man's combined. Crane follows in Whitman's

ideological wake, but with an emphatic mechanical overtone: typical diction employed in *The*

Bridge, Lewis notes, includes words like "'link,' 'fuse,' 'yoking,' 'bind,' 'stitch,' 'complighted,'

and 'conclamant'; … typical phrases are 'one arc synoptic' and 'leap and converge.'"[46] Crane's

logic of metaphor serves to close gaps in language-based thought via imaginative, pre-linguistic,

extra-logical leaps that make previously disparate elements agreeably contiguous: "And see! the

rainbow's arch—how shimmeringly stands / Above the Cape's ghoul-mound, O joyous seer!"[47]

       Crane's constant attention to the mechanics of integration anticipates the direction of

hypertextual modes to follow, and his work stands as one illustration of why many recent critics

have chosen to analyze modernism as a direct antecedent of digital poetics, or "non-

computerized hypertext."[48] Cary Nelson's comparison of *The Bridge* to Muriel Rukeyser's "The

Book of the Dead" (1938) confirms the point: Rukeyser's maverick Depression-era text on the

disastrous Gauley Tunnel tragedy is, like Crane's poem, a construction of history through

---

[44] Lewis, 244.

[45] Walt Whitman, "Passage to India" in *Leaves of Grass* ed. Jerome Loving (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 315-23.

[46] Lewis, 370.

[47] Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 95.

[48] John Tolva. "*Ut Pictura Hyperpoesis:* Spatial Form, Visuality, and the Digital Word" (Proceedings of the the Seventh ACM Conference on Hypertext, 1996): 5.

heterodox methods of linking, composed with a logic of hybridity.[49] "The Book of the Dead," in

a manner reminiscent of Crane's early reviews, was dismissed in as "part journalism, part

lyricism, part Marxian mysticism" (*Time,* March 28, 1938), but more recent criticism has hailed

it as pioneering. Rukeyser's achievement, Stephanie Strickland explains,

> was to create a poem as database, using materials never before seen in poetry—stock-market quotes, doctors' reports, and legal testimony, side by side with lyric and narrative. This database, this hypertextual organization, makes an implicit claim; namely, that the fullest range of textual type is required to understand and combat injustice.[50]

Like Crane, Rukeyser was creating essentially hypertextual works before hypertext existed in

form. Contrasting starkly with the strict acknowledgment of literary limits endorsed by Alan

Tate—"closing of all roads"—the common impulse in Rukeyser's and Crane's respective works

was to open all roads of relation and discourse in literature. Again, Crane outpaced his

contemporaries by rejecting limits for limitlessness, the modernist pellet for a postmodern giant

embodied in a "möbius surface of links."[51] Crane, along with Whitman before him and

Rukeyser afterward, identified the human condition with diversity and infinite possibility; he was

determined to create a new form for American literature that excluded no part of either, a poetics

that managed the multitude of existence while racing down infinite "endless terminals, Easters of

speeding light."[52]

---

[49] Cary Nelson. "Modern American Poetry" in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 88.
[50] Stephanie Strickland. "Seven-League Boots" in *The Measured Word: On Poetry and Science.* Kurt Brown ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001): 107.
[51] Hammer, 72. Tolva, 9. The Möbius strip is a mathematical figure, a two-dimensional surface with only one side. A möbius surface can be created by joining two ends of a strip of paper tape after a half-twist of one end. There is no "inside" or "outside"dimension to this surface, since inside becomes outside as you follow the loop; it is mathematically non-orientable.
[52] Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 88.

Architecture and Coding: Cyberspace Multidimensionality

Modernist poetics were important to the shift from pure imaginative space to the virtual space essential to contemporary media, and Crane's prepostmodern poetics clearly illustrate the impulse behind this shift. On the "multiply connected surface" of Crane's poetry, imaginative links defy conventional logical movement; thus movement from one phase of panoramic history to the next—from "rainbow's arch" to "ghoul-mound" or through "adagios of islands"— becomes extra-dimensional. In his article "*Ut Pictura Hyperpoesis*," Tolva describes the metaphor that mathematician Georg Riemann invented to represent extra-dimensional space:

> Riemann proposed thinking of two sheets of paper—each one representing a discrete two-dimensional universe—pasted together at exactly the site of a small slice made in the center of each page. (Edge-on the sheets would look like a hyperbola whose two curves meet in the middle.) He then imagined a two-dimensional creature ambling across the outer surface of one sheet and passing through the aperture created by the joined slits. Moving from the top to bottom sheet, the creature in effect makes an extra-dimensional leap … The landscape is changed utterly but through no fault of the linearly-moving bug … Theoretically the bug has traveled "through" a hitherto unknown space; its movement has created a third dimension (if only momentarily) in a 2-D world.[53]

Because Crane's logic of metaphor relies on extra-logical associational jumps—through space unmapped in our existing network of possible movements—we become like Riemann's bug passing through the aperture. We link across gaps which are often synaesthetic and frequently warp laws of physics and morph time and space; "Elevators drop us from our day" and a "forked crash of thunder parts / Our hearing momentwise."[54] This is Roman Ingarden's "imaginational space" that exists "only because of our perceptual refusal to admit any spatial discontinuity in a Euclidean universe: we think space, therefore it is."[55]

The "Cape Hatteras" section of *The Bridge* is perhaps the most disorientingly spacious, its world a multidimensional labyrinth of

---

[53] Tolva, 2.
[54] Crane, "To Brooklyn Bridge," 45. "Cape Hatteras," 90.
[55] Tolva, 2.

> continental folded aeons, surcharged
> With sweetness below derricks, chimneys, tunnels—
> Is veined by all that time has really pledged us …
> And from above, thin squeaks of radio static,
> The captured fume of space foams in our ears.[56]

With vast and diverse spatial networks, all flickering between potentiality and reality, Crane leads us down roads physical and metaphysical, biological and chemical, through space and time, through the human body, down electric pathways, into chimneys and tunnels—taking us from deep within cultural and geological "folded aeons," and launching us outward into the "fume of space." This is the building of a coded world in poetry, wherein the music of multidimensional travel—the "sound-unto-itself" of radically artificial poetry—becomes virtual space.[57] It is partially the synechdochal nature of the links and pathways that creates a world: if chimneys, tunnels, veins, and radio static are interchangeable routes of expression, then we have truly arrived in a new imaginative dimension.

In "Ave Maria" and "Powhatan's Daughter," segments I and II of *The Bridge* cycle, Crane expands dimensionality again, this time not by coding and linking but by creating through metanarrative a disembodied dialogue of information.[58] There is an untitled poem, printed in italics, which runs alongside, but is clearly separate from, the titled poems that compose an unambiguous order within the sections. (In the 1966 Liveright edition of *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, the five poems-in-order are printed on the left-side pages of these two sections, the metapoem alone on the right-side pages.) Although the metapoem carries its own weight—its progression and content can be read independently—at several points it responds to the ordered poem at its right, almost as a reader's notes in the

---

[56] Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 88.
[57] Fulton, 115.
[58] See also Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 1999): 21-23.

margin would do. For instance, against a passage in which the speaker awakes at sunrise, the

metapoem reads "—with whom?" Elsewhere, the metapoem communicates a differing aspect of

scene occurring in its ordered opposite, as in the first stanza of "The Harbor Dawn":

Insistently through sleep—a tide of voices—	*400 years and*
They meet you listening midway in your dream,	*more … or is*
The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:	*it from the*
Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,	*soundless shore*
Far strum of of fog horns … signals dispersed in veils.	*of sleep that …*

At every point, while the metapoem is in some shifting structural or thematic relation to the

poem at its left, it also has a trajectory of its own, toward a conclusion coterminous with that of

the section as a whole. Having no consistent rhyme or meter, and a voice but no obvious

narrative thrust, the metapoem does not interject: it instead floats out of order, in indistinct

relation to the rhythms of the ongoing section. The metapoem engages and perhaps crystallizes

the themes of the other poems in various ways, but its greatest effect is to produce a sense of new

space; its coexistent, disorienting, not quite interwoven or included position in relation to the text

creates a source of potential dialogue, a conceptual space between it and the five poems-in-order.

This follows Joseph Frank's definition of spatial form in literature, achieved by "deliberate

disconnectedness," the "art of a thing continually alluding to itself, continually breaking off

short."[59]

The imaginative space of the poem is further expanded by the shiftingly transparent

superimposition of a new scene, or a new view, onto the firmer scene of the poem-in-order. The

aural scene evoked in the poem above—"The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises: / Gongs

… beshrouded wails"—is complicated by its interface with the nebulous coming-into-meaning

of the metapoem at its right; the reader must determine ways to occupy both poems at once, an

occupancy hinging on relationships not having been clearly established. The "sound-unto-itself"

---

[59] Tolva, 4.

of "Ave Maria" and "Powhatan's Daughter" is thus a conversation between the five poems-in-order and the metapoem, a conversation whose terms include mood, sound, rhythm, and visuality, and whose progression—largely dependent on the reader's turn of mind—also creates virtual space within the poem. Shifting occupancy contributes to the sense of an in-between dimension that Fulton associates with postmodern, fractal poetry; that is, the oscillation from the nucleus of one perspective to that of another creates imaginative planes of varying densities, which

> move us into and out of the poem, as if it were a field of three dimensions. We gaze "through" thin lines and are deflected to the surface …. This modulating depth of field allows us to experience the poem as a construct of varying focal lengths. Such palpable architectonics also create an awareness of the poem as thing-in-itself rather than conduit for meaning.[60]

The postmodern poetic tendency to look "through" in this way was advocated prophetically by Blake, whom Crane quotes in "General Aims and Theories": "We are led to believe in a lie / When we see *with* not *through* the eye." Partially in response to Blake, it was Crane's professed hope "to go *through* the combined materials of the poem" toward absolute truth and beauty.[61] Jean Gebser connects the process of traveling through virtual space with a form of "aperspectival verition," or the apprehension of truth intuitively, outside of time and space; according to Gebser, this challenges the need for conceptualization and categorical boundaries, and allows for a fourth, integrated dimension of understanding, as we see in *The Bridge*.[62] The metacommentary of "Ave Maria" and "Powhatan's Daughter" can be read as an apparatus for moving through the sections, both chronologically and extra-dimensionally.[63]

---

[60] Fulton, 121.
[61] Crane, "General Aims and Theories," 220-1.
[62] McIntosh, 178.
[63] See also Langston Hughes's "The Black Clown" for an example of a similar technique.

Technology and Pre-Verbal Synthesis

Janus-Faced Modernism, Langdon Hammer's comprehensive study of Hart Crane and Allan Tate, claims that subjective perspective is the central interpretive problem of Crane's oeuvre.[64] In *The Bridge*, certainly, the subject voice is diffuse and difficult to locate precisely at any moment. This was a source of some criticism of Crane by his contemporaries; Tate and Winters shared objections to Crane's attempts to merge private and public subjectivity with a sort of Whitmanian inclusion, a goal that, like Crane's expansive space-coding, clashed with compact, stark and institutionalized dominant modernism. While liberal humanist subjectivity is typically fragmented and often disembodied, it is consistently defined against an Other: the nature of Eliot's "tradition" ensured that, even as he was dividing modernist subjectivity into smaller and smaller fragments, it remained discrete for its boundaries against the undisciplined, the female, the unprofessional, and the personal.[65] Hammer argues that Eliot's modernism constructed a "new past" to legitimate new claims to culture that "reassert[ed] hierarchies of sexual and racial difference, and reconstruct[ed] traditional authority"; it seems that Eliot would not allow a subjectivity diffuse enough to sacrifice privileged social status for comprehensivity, and he went far to create boundaries within which the subject position could divide and multiply while maintaining exclusivity.[66] The pervasive solidarity and camaraderie of *The Bridge*—"a pact, a new bound / Of living brotherhood!"[67]—provides thematic material around which a formal democratic structure is arranged: the poem is "aggressively non-narrative," rejecting the hierarchical politics associated with conventional order, and Crane's form blurs the boundaries

---

[64] Hammer, 208.
[65] See also Hayles, 3-5.
[66] Hammer, 7-9.
[67] Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 93.

between reader and poet, inviting his audience to take part.[68] Yet an important element of the "Janus-faced" nature of Crane's modernism that Hammer suggests is that Crane's poetry, while ostensibly aiming for a subjectivity that is emphatically inclusive and democratic, also "systematically insists upon its own elite status"; Crane, like Eliot, complicates the deconstruction of authority by moving into and out of authoritative positions at will.[69]

For Crane, modernism had a promise of collectivity, what Hammer calls one of the early, "naïve" motives of modernism. However, though his poetry resisted the impetus of high modernist progress toward institutional authority, it retained something which would bring it closer to achieving what postmodern poets would pursue decades later. Crane's poetry aims for something cooperative and interactive—like Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, a "whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses"—not of one controlling another, nor one voice absorbing the rest, as we see in many of the definitive works of high modernism.[70] *The Bridge* is communicated as a historical narrative by many distinct and indistinct voices and perspectives: for instance, those of Columbus, Rip van Winkle, and Walt Whitman. This highly reflexive multivocality supports an identification of self with, in Crane's words, "*all of life*"—a refutation of the elitism common in political structures of the West, as well as among many tributaries of high modernism.[71]

Crane is noted for his ability to move easily into and out of states of mind and their accompanying idiom (in his poetry as well as his letters), a tendency linking him to artists of the

---

[68] Gordon Tapper, *The Machine that Sings: Modernism, Hart Crane, and the Culture of the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 166. Hammer, 205.
[69] Hammer, 9.
[70] George Landow, *Hypertext 3. 0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006): 36.
[71] Gelpi, 403.

period who used synthetic Cubism and collage as self-reflexive blurring of boundaries.[72] The

patchwork use of artifice was a way of formally integrating experience, characterized by an

"openness to to the onslaught of fresh sensation," particularly urban sensation, which had

become disjointed and—at least on the surface—sensually incoherent.[73] At many points in *The*

Bridge, Crane aims for deliberate confusion; Albert Gelpi compares him to Rimbaud, who also

created a formal "disordering of the senses."[74] I'll take a step further in suggesting that the

deliberate confusion of Crane's modernist text also approaches the patchwork nature of the

postmodern hypertext, wherein methods of combining elements are radically artificial,

engineered to draw attention to the "spaces in-between." Like the prophetic Blake before him,

whose work "demanded a new poetics of 'in-betweenness' in order to understand the relation of

text, image, graphic gesture, and pictorial convention," Crane created fractal juxtapositions

toward a goal of accessing—and/or encouraging his reader to notice—dimensions through the

apertures separating poetic components, and so making imaginative space of the link or gap.[75]

The Bridge is itself a textual patchwork, composed of ultimately analogous but episodally

incongruent sections; we travel from Columbus's psyche ("Ave Maria") to a vision of sexual

union with Pocahontas ("Powhatan's Daughter"), across the continent geographically and

through Crane's childhood ("Van Winkle"), through the tawdriness of the twentieth century and

the geological history of the continent ("The River"), etc.—all with little or no deliberate

transitioning between.[76] Critics have agreed that the sequence of *The Bridge* is dispensable, that

some components could be re-arranged, omitted, or added without affecting the impact of the

---

[72] Berthoff, 42. Glenn MacLeod."The Visual Arts" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* Levenson, Michael, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 200.
[73] Berthoff, 56.
[74] Gelpi, 395, 419.
[75] Strickland, 107.
[76] See Vogler, "A New View of Hart Crane's Bridge" in *Hart Crane: Modern Critical Views* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 69-90.

poem as a whole; its power originates in amplitude rather than acceleration or narrative thrust.[77] Structurally, *The Bridge* is not unlike hypertext fictions such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995); the latter is a narrative constructed in five analogous trajectories, with each trajectory divided into smaller text segments (lexia) through which the reader navigates at will. Thanks to new media capacities, Jackson's reader can shape the reading experience by selecting pathways through the text (the text itself is nonlinear in this sense), but the de-centered, arbitrarily-ordered, multiple approach to expressing a poetic reality is the same. This is largely what keeps the poem from being epic, as some early critics and even Crane himself called it at times; instead, it is ultra-inclusively historical, characterized not by narrative force but by variegated and manifold American experience. "An epic becomes a single statement," John Unterecker notes; Crane would not consent to being compressed into a singularity.[78]

The motives behind such organization are, as mentioned earlier, counter to traditional notions of a focused and centered, liberal humanist subjectivity. Crane makes strong social statements in his rebellion against the accepted rebellion of high modernism, which ironically included institutional conformity. Crane's formal experimentation also privileges a view of the fundamental unity of the disciplines, a theory that all disciplines—physics, biology, literature, music, painting—radiate from a common source, losing interchangeability as they branch out in space and time and particularly as they become assimilated by individual consciousnesses.[79] This is one representation of the modernist conception of the pre-text: archaic and uniform, "omnisensuous," an undivided sensorium, and also dependent upon collective consciousness since specialization and sensual unity are inversely proportional. The creation of essentially

---

[77] Berthoff, 87.
[78] Tom Chaffin. "Toward a Poetics of Technology: Hart Crane and the American Sublime" *The Southern Review* 20 (1994): 68.
[79] Albright, 4-9, I. Slade, 176.

hypertextual poetry—with linking, metanarrative, and other modes of patchwork incongruency that emphasize and then use the gaps in verbal logic—is, in a very large sense, an attempt to use the technologies of civilization to access the human possibilities buried beneath it.[80] It is an attempt to undo not only the increasing separation of the disciplines, but of separations and specializations within humanity itself, responsible for creating the impassable boundaries which caused W.B. Yeats, in a 1930 letter to Wyndham Lewis, to project a vision of human existence as that of "ghastly homunculi in bottles."[81] Here, the bottle imprisoning humanity represents interconnected systems of technology, commercialism, and industrialism that demand progressively specialized and alienated modes of existence. The bottle functions, Albright explains,

> as a man-distorter, a metamorphic device for atrophy and hypertrophy according to some scientific program. It creates human synecdoches: body parts that learn autonomy, turn into parodies of whole men. In its most frightening form the bottle is a machine for disembodying the mind, for filleting the brain and bathing it in a nutrient solution. (84)

The threat of the homunculus has at its source anxieties associated with more general threats of new technologies, to which Crane was certainly not immune. But Crane, unlike most of his contemporaries, put faith in the possibility that emerging technologies of writing had the potential to artificially access and re-create the pre-textual, to undo the damage of specialization. Indeed, beginning with high modernism and accelerating rapidly as digital technologies have developed, many writers have evolved ways of getting, as Crane hoped to do, "beyond self and outside of language," using virtuality to unify the human sensorium and the collective body.[82]

---

[80] Lewis, 226.
[81] Albright, 83.
[82] Gelpi, 403. Hammer, 198. See also *Language Machines*, 218. See also Beniger, 25: "Also blurred are the distinctions among information types: numbers, words, pictures, and sounds, and eventually tastes, odors, and possibly even sensations, all might one day be stored, processed, and communicated in the same digital form."

CHAPTER THREE

"CAPE HATTERAS": CYBERNETICS AND SYNTHESIS

The "Cape Hatteras" section of *The Bridge* vividly illustrates the ways in which Crane struggled to "locate his imagination in his America," to "resolve and blend" the incongruent factors of a modern American consciousness.[83] "Cape Hatteras" is the compositional center of *The Bridge*, and, interestingly, it is closer than any other section of the cycle to the traditional linear, progressive English epic style.[84] As Berthoff notes, it is also the most controversial major section: Thomas Yingling calls it the "most troubled," Sherman Paul, the "least successful"[85]; Albert Gelpi asserts its place as the "most extreme and successful attempt at Futurist poetry in America," and R.W.B. Lewis calls it a masterpiece.[86] My own reading of the section is informed by the disagreement of these varying evaluations, disagreement that helps to illustrate how, as I have suggested previously, Crane may become better understood as the corpus of literary criticism absorbs methods and models associated with information technologies and new media theory. Perhaps better than any other, this section illustrates Crane's postmodern reception and interpretation of new-technological themes, including the dissolution of the liberal humanist subject and its replacement with a virtual collective subjectivity that engages the issues of postmodern, integral consciousness.

---

[83] Gelpi, 419. Crane on "Cape Hatteras": "It presents very formidable problems …. indescribably complicated factors have to be resolved and blended." In "A Letter to Otto Kahn," 252.
[84] Lewis, 325.
[85] Berthoff, 105. Tapper, 159.
[86] Tapper, 159.

Cybernetics and Modernism

In 1948, theoretical mathematician Norbert Weiner's influential work *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* established the field of cybernetics as "the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal."[87] Weiner's cybernetics relied on the concept of the "feedback loop," a process by which a performed action elicits positive or negative feedback from another source, resulting in a continued performance of action. This is also known as a "causal loop," and is the simplest way of producing interaction among systems within, or between, animals and machines.[88] While Weiner intended advances in cybernetics to extend the domain liberal humanism subject, Katherine Hayles illustrates in *How We Became Posthuman* that the concept of manipulating feedback loops actually undermined established ideas of human subjectivity. "The idea of the feedback loop," Hayles explains, "implies that the boundaries of the autonomous subject are up for grabs, since feedback loops can flow not only *within* the subject but also *between* the subject and the environment. From Norbert Weiner on, the flow of information through feedback loops has been associated with the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject."[89]

But modernism was generating a rapidly proliferating set of relationships between history, identity and technology well before Weiner's *Cybernetics* popularized the term.[90] In *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, Tim Armstrong describes the relationship between modernism and prosthetic evolution that was made possible by machines:

> In America … literature before 1945 generally fails to explore the machine as anything other than a negative—attitudes perhaps reflecting an earlier experience of technology.

---

[87] Beniger, 8.
[88] Norbert Wiener. *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).
[89] Hayles, 2.
[90] Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 19. See also Crawford, 189.

> …. Early Modernism in Europe …. celebrated the mechanized body or the body attached to a machine: the fast cars and aeroplanes of the futurists or (more equivocally) the man-machine complex of Epstein's 'Rock-Drill.' …. However, a more reciprocal relationship between man and machine also emerges within Modernism … in which neither can be reduced to the other. Wyndham Lewis's campaign against a crude worship of the machine is a good example, coexisting with a keen sense of how technological developments have produced the revolutionary attitudes underlying Modernism.[91]

The intervention of mechanization and tech-prosthetics into modernist texts can be seen in the seminal works of H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and Aldous Huxley. Armstrong even holds that Theodore Dreiser's threshold "awareness of the body as circuitry" enabled Weiner's cybernetic models (39). In modernist poetry, mechanomorphism—Gerald Heard's term for the interface between body and machine—is clearly present in Whitman's "body electric," and in Pound's theories of the "Vortex" (19). And in *The Modern Poet,* Crawford reveals the "points of contact" between Weiner and T.S. Eliot, who, though their routes of philosophy diverged ultimately, shared the view that experience and knowledge are not only relative, but are relational components of a historical system; that they are, in essence, manageable data (187).

Crane's interest in the relationships between man and machines is well-documented; in "Modern Poetry" he announced his intentions to "*acclimatize*" and "absorb the machine" rather than to worship it (as the Futurists did) or deny its place in creative production (as many of his contemporaries tried to do).[92] Tapper explains that, rather than seeing nature and technology as antithetical, Crane "consciously strives to represent their interpenetration," particularly in "Cape Hatteras."[93] Some critics have read Crane's moments of anxiety concerning technological threat—moments which are often quite insistent—as indicators of a governing fear of technological progress; Lewis claims that Crane felt he was a victim, that he had been "squashed

---

[91] Armstrong, 85-6.
[92] Crane, "Modern Poetry," 260-3.
[93] Gordon Tapper affirms that "the reconciliation of the nature-technology dichotomy is one of the principal objectives of the poem." 150.

flat" by mechanized consciousness.[94] But acknowledging Crane's determined and highly successful efforts to assimilate interactive systems of information into his poetry is a challenge to that assumption, indicating that Crane's professed desire to adapt poetry and technology to states of compatibility was not only in earnest, but that he also predicted, a decade or more in advance, what relationships between poetry, science and information were to become: not utopian, not apocalyptic, but evolutionarily certain and necessarily ambivalent. Crane understood that the technological mechanics of language contained unexplored frontiers, the confronting of which would afford humans new ways of understanding humanity. *The Bridge* was not only "a demotic plane where art and science can meet," but also, as Scholnick describes it, a communications medium and a "symbol of human interchange."[95]

Destruction of the Liberal Humanist Subject

One of the defining elements of postmodern literature has been the conceptualizing of human existence along the same lines that we have come to understand information. In the twenty-first century, materiality has become interchangeable with, and sometimes replaceable by, the systems that govern interactions within and between our bodies and minds. Human being becomes the production of a complex interaction of organizing principles (those composing chemistry, physics, biology, cultural anthropology) and is built and expressed by the codes that underlie our identities (DNA and language). Not surprisingly, the field of cybernetics has evolved over the past fifty years from the study of feedback systems, to the study of human-machine interaction, and finally to the study of artificial intelligence, human-machines, and the coding of the human mind. Increasingly, the human body has become as "data made flesh";

---

[94] Lewis, 363.
[95] Slade, 187.

Hayles's highly influential concept of the posthuman is based largely on the principle of cognition over embodiment, with cognition located in disparate parts—cells, nerves, systems—that are only in tenuous relation and communication with one another.[96] This is the posthuman collectivity, a group of agents functioning as a body, the diffuse and diverse "we" replacing the unique "I" of liberal humanism. Individual consciousness, far from the defining characteristic of humanness, becomes rather "an epiphenomenon … an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow." (3)

In "Cape Hatteras" Crane experiments with technologies of information in constructing a modern consciousness, poetically coding virtual space to challenge the boundaries of physical and spiritual identity; he accomplishes this in large part by the creation of a dialectic between individuality and collectivity within the poem.[97] The oscillation between the speaker's "I" and "we" in the poem confuses the line between public and private expression, rather blends them into a single utterance; there is no way to tell where "I" ends and "we" begins, and they are used analogously in some cases. The shifts back and forth between "I" and "we" also underscore the Whitmanian comradery of the section which has been so much commented upon, the "bound of living brotherhood" that gathers individual expressions into collective consciousness, discrete and isolated perspectives into an expansive redeeming vision. Crane received criticism from Winters and Tate for this effort, both of whom connected Crane's merging of public and private discourse with a homosexual model of comradeship—an inclusion which was, in effect, exclusion from the larger, heterosexual community.[98] However, it seems Crane was after inclusive evolution rather than a method of disguising or sanctifying social withdrawal. As will become evident during a close reading of "Cape Hatteras," states of dispersal, diffusion,

---

[96] Hayles, 3-4.
[97] See Berthoff, 105 for more on the alternating "we" and "I."
[98] Hammer, 177.

disappearance, exile, and isolation are crucial to development, but they are only stages in Crane's larger project of constructing a state of human being which is controlled as well as unbounded, precisely defined as well as infinitely conductive.

Crane's subjective shifts reflect developmental shifts in humanity's history—personal as well as collective—that aim at creating a sense of progression through synthesis. The poem begins by emerging out of the native clay, the "depth of red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas," the mythic history of a shared past, into the high-tech age of aviation. Beginning in the cockpit with the Wright brothers, Crane offers a view through a periscope, wherein "Time clears / Our lenses … to glimpse what joys or pain our eyes can share or answer." This glimpse is a potential means of escaping the "labyrinth submersed" of disjointed vision, "Where each sees only his dim past reversed."[99] At this early moment in the poem, the "sharing or answering" made possible by an artificially-enhanced perspective (periscopic vision) allows a move beyond the submersed labyrinths of individual history, whose depths—like "the eternal flesh of Pocahontas"—suited earlier stages in man's consciousness, but now are simply mirrors of a repeating past. It is Time that "clears our lenses": evolution and progress offer, for Crane, possibilities for constructing more suitable human histories, by providing more inclusive and far-reaching vision.

The reader is merged almost immediately into the poem's subjective "we"; with the Wright brothers "in their twinship," and by the act of bravely and momentously "warping the gale" over Cape Hatteras, we become a part of "the soul," a shared state of human being "fledged into new reaches" (90). The sound of "we" becomes more insistent as the poem moves toward climax, sometimes couched in other words ("*Whee*led swiftly, *wi*ngs emerge from larval-silver hangars") where the gestative "I" is left behind and the nascent "we" emerges into flight, wings clipping, finally, "the last peripheries of light" (91). This is the unbounded expansion into

---

[99] Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 88.

the sublime history-future glimpsed through the periscope; it is Crane's striking out for a reality "beyond self" (collective) "and outside of language" (symbolic to the point of virtuality), a way of using the devices of modernity to access a vast expanse of life (88).

Crane's exploration of human possibility is highly imaginative without being imaginary. He rejected traditional systems of mythopoeia largely for their fantasy qualities, their too-simplistic binaries and exclusions; he "could not or would not live in an imagined land," and in early attempts to describe a myth that would suit modern consciousness, he struggled with the sense of becoming by his myth-making an "immorally conscious Don Quixote."[100] What Crane ultimately created (illustrated best by "Cape Hatteras") was the virtual expression of something conceptually real, something closely linked with science and mathematics, as well as with a sort of visualized art.[101] It is not the use of spatial metaphor, but rather the ways in which Crane adapted it to his themes that is remarkable: beyond typical poetic manipulation language, Crane used, simultaneously, language shape, sound, and conceptual shape, creating a multimediation of analogous and dispersing, then condensing and converging meanings—a hyperoperative text, and one modeled on the most basic unit of interactivity: the closed circuit, or circle.

Circularity is ubiquitous in the "Cape Hatteras" section: "lenses," "eyes," "bright circumferences," and "aureoles" compose much of its spatial geometry, and the action and force of the poem are likewise shaped by circular movements, by the contracting and releasing of circular forms and the traversing of circular trajectories. A magnificent din of circularity— "power whips a new universe"; "whirling armatures"; "giddily spiralled gauntlets"—surrounds and engulfs the quieter opening and shutting of eyes, the looping and unlooping of script, the rounding of capes and the harnessing of stars, until gradually the poem itself becomes an act of

---

[100] Gelpi, 419, 406.
[101] This also has much in common with later developments in computer-graphics design and modeling.

progressive closing and opening of circuitry. Loops of "prophetic script" engendering the Wright brothers' history become, as they take flight, "new latitudes, unknotting"—their "tournament of space" is "baited by marauding circles," circles which then expand lengthwise as "With razor sheen they zoom each rapid helix!" The closed-circular "O"'s that punctuate the poem frequently in the first stanzas ("O Saunterer," "O murmurless," "O sinewy silver biplane") as the poem progresses interact with images of circles opening: a conch, a typhoon, "gauntlets … unlooping." Approaching the climactic moment of the flight, rapid helices dash us "down gravitation's vortex" as down a drain, with revolutions of the helix constricting and accelerating until we crash, and all is dispersed "into mashed and shapeless debris."[102] The electric, mechanical imagery of opening and closing gradually allows a coexistent, organic, almost biological-seeming contraction and release, whose tension builds to the peak of excitement, climax, and catastrophic breakdown.

There is a relationship between the loops of circuitry in "Cape Hatteras," which surround themes of communication, inclusivity, and shared vision, and the feedback loops of Weiner's cybernetic theory. The redefinition of human experience by circuits—by loops of action, feedback, and reaction within the body, with other humans, with machines—reverberates in mechanomorphic interfaces between the pilots, their plane, the speaker, the reader, and the myriad fragments of voice and mechanical space in the section. A "repeated call to solidarity" challenges the reader to join with Crane's and the poem's process, and each individual agent involved with the poem has the potential to become a component of the system.[103] The program of the poem, automatic in its fixed state on the page, is also a window into the possibilities of human and mechanical interactivity that are not defined, as in the historical identity of the liberal

---

[102] "Cape Hatteras," 88-95.
[103] Hammer, 205.

humanist, by individuality, but instead by shared experience. There is beauty in the breakdown as well: the plane's crash is not a disruption of the system per se, but is the inevitable outcome of the exponentially constricting helix path, whose concentration must lead, by the laws of physics, to dispersal. The climax deconstructs the limits of the feedback loops—closed circles—necessary to intercourse, thus breaking the "closed circuit of the psyche" and causing a brief but crucial experience of synthetic collective individuality. For an instant, universes collide.[104]

Alice Fulton writes of the "fractal amplification" of "dense and lucid juxtaposed areas" in postmodern verse that create spatial depth. Crane's poetics are fractal in that sense: the language of "Cape Hatteras" oscillates between concentrated image and loose, amorphous suggestiveness; it alternates spaces compact and almost overflowing with passages relaxed and seemingly half-expressed, which dissipate into ellipses or are arrested by dashes that keep us aware of a "vast array of potentialities."[105] Again, the occupation of in-between space is a source of pleasure (reveling "in the plethora of what-is") as well as a conceptual tool. In "Cape Hatteras," concentration and dispersion serve to articulate—in image, feeling, and space—focus and breakdown as pervasive repeating conditions of human being. Crane's progression from the gestative "I" to the collective "we" gathers speed and power in the course of the section: the circuits of relationship grow tighter, the network of the poem (we, the speaker, the pilots, the machines) more condensed (and nearly conflated), the spiral helices of our trajectory smaller, the potentiality of being (the force and speed of the plane) extreme to the point of unmanageability, and certainly unsustainability—until finally we crash, disperse, to become "shapeless," a "beached heap of high bravery." The course of the first segment of "Cape Hatteras" is a distinct

---

[104] See McIntosh, 137-141: "Like electricity …. values are captured and harnessed by making a circuit through which they can pass. The circuit of values is thus engaged, and spiritual practice is made most real, when there is a connection established between the subjective and intersubjective domains …"
[105] Fulton, 110-113.

and progressive upgathering of force, followed by its dissolution; this becomes a cycle, as, after the plane has crashed, we experience the dawn of another upgathering, "a pact, new bound / Of living brotherhood!"[106] Integrated with the theatre of the Wright brothers' plane and its geometric acrobatics are quieter ongoing systems of collection and dispersal: we begin with "combustion at the astral core"; man is "an atom in a shroud" dissolving into "an engine in a cloud" (89). There is a continuous sense of core contraction and expansion, with the associated pleasures of constriction ("confined / In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee … oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy") and of release (as the orgasmic crash of the plane). Human subjectivity, far from distinct, becomes both nucleus and cloud; we are, as in the metapoem sections, continually fluctuating between occupation of the center and of the periphery.

Simultaneously, the poem has a definite outward thrust; pulsating, pullulating consciousness breaks through circuits of relational systems via the "pact of living brotherhood" as the last third of the poem, marked apart by a three-star break (rather like an elipsis), breaks free from old notions of order ("old persuasions / Of love and hatred, birth,—surcease of nations"), and forges comradery with humankind that is both resurrected from Whitman's vision and created new. Language flexes outward: cowslips bloom, "breakers cliffward leap," "mountain laurel broke through," and the individual subject reappears to "set trumpets breathing." (94) The speaker as individual, now separated from the collective in the fray, sees anew with "love's own diametric gaze"; informed by the experience of collectivity, his vision and voice may travel outward again, as "dayspring's spreading arc," to Whitman. "Our Meistersinger," the speaker praises, "thou set breath in steel … Stood up and flung the span on even wing / Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!" Song, like vision, propels outward

---

[106] "Cape Hatteras," 93.

to build a metaphorical bridge, a conduit for communication: "breath in steel," expelled in the

thrust of song, launches us

> in cupolas of space,
> Toward endless terminals, Easters of speeding light—
> Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace
> On clarion cylinders pass out of sight
> To course that span of consciousness thou'st named
> The Open Road—thy vision is reclaimed! (95)

This penultimate stanza of the section is infused with words, letters, and sounds that suggest

looping circularities again; the phrases "Vast engines veering outward" and "On clarion

cylinders" practically orbit their lines. To read the text aloud, the mouth shapes to "O" so

frequently as almost to remain there, and the symbols on and beyond the page reinforce the sense

of "*oooooo*" until the breath of Whitman, and the breath of the speaker, seem to be a part of our

own song, or ours a part of theirs. The "O" in space, multiplied and arranged in rapid sequence,

becomes a focused corridor: a cylinder, a cupola of breath and song, a channel of transmission

reviving the *Panis Angelicus,* outward impulse, and human connectivity. The corridor is a circle

at once infinite and defined, a closed circuit as well as the Open Road.

In the last lines of "Cape Hatteras," we are left with the circuit closed and opened yet.

"Yes, Walt," the speaker answers in ongoing dialogue with Whitman's historical and literary

being,

> yes, Walt,
> Afoot again, and onward without halt,—
> Not soon, nor suddenly,—no, never to let go
>   My hand
>   in yours,
>   Walt Whitman—
>   so—

Dashes, signifying the links and spaces between, gaps in the circuit, become intensely self-

reflexive here, establishing deliberate and emphatic connection (analogously with "never to let

go"), as well as all possibility of open circuitry: the final link is unattached. Again, Crane makes something of the nothingness of in-between space, shifting focus to the virtually-there, and letting the actually-there become increasingly as scaffolding, the elementary footholds and ultimately transcendable boundaries by which we (and Crane) attain absolute thought and experience. The mysterious virtually-there, the myth, exists not in the circles or circuits themselves, but in the space created by their multiplicity: human experience and history is recast, recoded as speed, breath and song in the infinitely open, infinitely closed cupola of the poem, which here Crane cannot, and doesn't try to, finish; later it will become "The Tunnel," and will transport us to Atlantis.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRANE'S POSTHUMAN POETICS

While it expresses a progressively changing consciousness, *The Bridge* strangely seems

to look backward as well; as R.W.B. Lewis noted, in Crane's work the innovative is composed of

two unequal halves, the mechanical (new) and the mythic (old), which are in constant interaction

with and reconstitution of one another.[107] As a feat of industrial design and everyday use, the

Brooklyn bridge works as Crane's myth does: it is simultaneously ultra-modern and timeless,

young and yet bleeding infinity.[108] The bridge becomes a mosaic of enduring human desires for

passage and rapidly evolving structures of cultural change, the vehicles of travel. A significant

number of critics, both among Crane's contemporaries and those writing after his death, have

understood *The Bridge* as at the end of a Romantic tradition (as Crane feared that it might be), a

"hangover echo." The idealism motivating the poem, as well as his resistance to adopting

influential new modes of poetic control, do make him appear behind the time.[109] And while it's

possible to consider *The Bridge* also as motivated by extremely progressive, even prophetic

philosophies, Crane did use traces of a moribund tradition (as well as modes linked to mass

culture) to deliver his prophecy.

Crane's romantic idealism and his use of industrial and mechanical metaphor were—on

the surface at least—antithetical to high modernism and its fashionable features of pessimism

and new traditionalism. Tate read Crane's romanticism as allied with commercialism and

standardized individuality. In contrast to the conflicted aims of the dominant school of

modernism, which oscillated between adherence to pseudotradition and commitment to

---

[107] Lewis, 379.
[108] Crane, "Atlantis" from *The Bridge* in *Complete* Poems, 116-17.
[109] Hammer, 175.

originality, Crane *was* openly allied with existing commercial forms, which were both real and accessible, thus practically useful.[110] He forged from the noise of the machine age a new kind of music, incorporating a sense of industrial mechanics and commercial energy exchange into poetic lyric and rhythm. Crane's attempts to dissolve boundaries separating art from consumer culture—an impulse he shared with, among others, the Futurists—suggests his prescient sense of the direction of literature in the information age, which would not follow the example of the cleanly avant-garde modernist capsule (protected by private modes of control from the perils of broad accessibility), but would be instead a collage of transhistorical elements on a non-hierarchical plane, a poetry constructed with and by the forces of public space and public consciousness.

Interactivity, Resonance and Autopoiesis

Tate made connections between romanticism and the "atomized world of mass culture," a society without a public center, which Hammer interprets as "organized around the private, peculiar, and plebian."[111] Indeed, for reasons already discussed, *The Bridge* is deliberately centerless: its final shape is, as Tapper aptly describes, "aggressively non-narrative"; the arbitrarily sequential arrangement of its parts, its privileging of analogy over continuity, its linked structure, all point to Crane's rejection of traditional narrative, history-making, and subjectivity.[112] This is patent in the intentional difficulty of fixing the poet's body and point of view, as continually we find ourselves peering through new perspectives contiguously and often simultaneously—so it seems—as well as through that of a shifting "I" and "we." Hammer notes that the difficulty in fixing the poet's point of view has been for many critics the central

---

[110] Hammer, 55.
[111] Hammer, 55.
[112] Tapper, 166.

interpretive problem of the poem. But Crane's continuous challenge to the reader to "share in the act of poetry" creates on another level the democratic creative community that he sought, an ideologically or politically centerless collective body. Reading his poetry involves sharing in the act of defining point of view ("Who am I/are we?" is one of the most important questions the poem poses) as well as sharing in the act of deconstructing limits, and letting variations of the private and peculiar personality merge and trade places with variations of fictional, historical, and public personalities.[113]

In his influential 1964 essay "The Medium is the Message," media theorist Marshall McLuhan discusses how Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) engages the technological and even media-based challenges to conventional order and reason facing the modernist psyche. "Rational," McLuhan explains,

> has for the West long meant "uniform and continuous and sequential." In other words, we have confused reason with literacy, and rationalism with a single technology. Thus in the electric age man seems to the conventional West to become irrational. In Forster's novel … Adela Quested's reasoning powers cannot cope with the total inclusive field of resonance that is India. … [This concept] is only incidentally related to Europe or the Orient. The ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organization of existence is upon us. Since understanding stops action, as Nietzsche observed, we can moderate the fierceness of this conflict by understanding the media that extend us and raise these wars within and without us.[114]

New media theory, as illustrated by McLuhan, runs counter to the tendency of Western society to confuse rationalism "with a single technology," or a single definition of order, leaving open spaces for new systems of logic. Like Forster's India, it is an inclusive, resonant field—as Marjorie Perloff states in *21st Century Modernism,* "there is no single poem"—made so by pervasive multivocality and the breakdown of boundaries in imaginative space and time.[115]

---

[113] Hammer, 205.
[114] Marshall McLuhan. "The Medium is the Message" in *The New Media Reade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003): 206.
[115] Perloff, 188.

Voices and narratives within the poem are diverse, interconnected; in the thematic context of mechanomorphic and cybernetic interfaces, the narrative—at the basic level, an exchange of information—is created via feedback loops between reader and poet, poet and diverse subject-identities, reader and subject-identities, and so on. The concept of reason changes as our ways of constructing logical pathways change: the single-line equation is replaceable by a network, and in fact the networked mapping of potential truths is more suitable to our contemporary ways of understanding ourselves as interconnected and interdependent subjects. David Porush calls cybernetics "the quintessential science of [postmodern] narrativity."[116] Crane conceived this network as poetic harmony; in a letter to Gorham Munson (1937), he posited a belief that intrinsic truth consists not in logical fact, even in the realm of hard science, but in the "harmonious relationships" within networks, in methods of organization engaging a sort of poetic grace.[117]

The Bridge is an experiment in using cybernetic systems to undermine traditional narrative constructs and replace them with the resonant, networked narrative. By inviting the reader into this network, *The Bridge* becomes reflexive in a way that is different from the reflexivity of Crane's contemporaries. One step beyond inviting the reader to understand the artificiality of language, Crane invites his reader to be both a part of the artificial text-space and involved in the process of creating it. The disorder of sequence in the poem, the emphatic in-between space that readers must fill with relationship and meaning, the highly networked and multiple approach—the access to options—around which the poem is structured, all converge with the model of collective identity/history construction that is communicated most clearly in "Cape Hatteras," to create a model of interactive poetry. *The Bridge* gives changed perspective

---

[116] David Porush. "Cybernetic Fiction and Postmodern Science" *New Literary History* 20.2 (1989): 379.

[117] Crane, "A Letter to Gorham Munson," 225. This also relates Crane to Precisionist emphasis on mathematical harmony and order—see Tapper, 168.

by allowing the reader informed entry into the authoring of systems of cultural theory, and a

virtual community for understanding cultural change. That is, rather than constructing a cultural

identity, cultural "tradition" or any definitive sense of identity for the reader, Crane allows her to

trade places with the poet-authority and create her own.

Crane's attempt to create an autopoietic text is postmodern in orientation, and he goes far

toward achieving his goal. "Autopoiesis," from the Greek meaning "self-creation," can now also

refer to processes by which computing systems maintain organization and regenerate their

components, much like biological systems. Crane repeatedly expressed theoretical desires for a

self-creative text that would "think on its feet" rather than fulfilling a predetermined scheme—an

autopoietic text, working organically and mechanically at once, a cybernetic program.[118] "It is

my hope," he wrote in "General Aims and Theories,"

> to go *through* the combined materials of the poem, using our "real" world somewhat as a
> spring-board, and to give the poem *as a whole* an orbit or predetermined direction of its
> own. I would like to establish it as free from my own personality …. Such a poem is at
> least a stab at truth, and to such an extent may be differentiated from other kinds of
> poetry and called "absolute." Its evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement,
> but rather toward a state of consciousness, and "innocence" (Blake) or absolute beauty. In
> this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations,
> shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly.[119]

The impulse toward autopoiesis in poetry, toward direct experience through interactive

construction, has radically progressive implications for history, narrative, and identity formation.

In Crane's project of defining national identity, it suggests an evolving Americanism which is

original by being purely democratic, a culture that rejects hierarchical tradition in creating and

evaluating its art. It also addresses the now common question of the value of virtuality, claiming

that poetry can exist as unmediated experience: not the semi-reflexive experience of

reconstructing an author's intended, controlled meaning, but the liberated, entirely reflexive

---

[118] Fulton, 113.
[119] Crane, 220-221.

experience of constructing meaning from within the system, to ends unknown. Whether *The Bridge* actually came close to achieving this is debatable, but Crane identified self-organization as the spring-board to emergence—his intent, as Hayles describes the intent of all self-organizing systems, was "to evolve the *capacity* to evolve."[120]

Crane anticipated the direction not only of postmodern poetry, but of postmodern theories of history and identity as well. In the first chapter of the highly influential *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Katherine Hayles expresses her goals as such:

> By turning the technological determinism of bodiless information, the cyborg, and the posthuman into narratives about the negotiations that took place between particular people at particular times and places, *I hope to replace a teleology of disembodiment with historically contingent stories* about contests between competing factions, contests whose outcomes were far from obvious …. I want to *entangle abstract form and material particularity* such that the reader will find it increasingly difficult to maintain the perception that they are separate and discrete entities. If, for cultural and historical reasons, I cannot start from a holistic perspective, *I hope to mix things up enough so that the emphasis falls not on the separation of matter and information but on their inextricably complex compoundings and entwinings.*[121] (my emphasis)

It is through the creative transformation of theory into history, concepts into narrative, that Hayles gives embodiment back to the ideas from which information society has taken it. She forges embodiment through relationship, patching together "contingent stories between competing factions" and entangling "abstract form and material particularity"; she actively and deliberately challenges the reader's sense of discrete identity, and focuses on the almost chemical, almost geometric, the broadly and intricately *relational* questions governing the construction of history and self. Like Crane, she treats pieces of history and art as separate but connected. He describes the mythic structure of *The Bridge*: "Each is a separate canvas, as it

---

[120] Hayles, 11.
[121] Hayles, 22.

were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others."[122] History

becomes a matter of, above all, relationship.

Hayles's "mixing things up" is brilliant, emitting (like Crane's *Bridge*, particularly like

"Cape Hatteras") a sense of amplified noise. "I want to demonstrate, on multiple levels and in

many ways," Hayles asserts, "that abstract pattern can never fully capture the embodied

actuality, unless it is as prolix and noisy as the body itself."[123] Hayles and Crane share a similarly

optimistic view of the capacity of coded language to do more than simply deliver information.

For Hayles, the possibility for re-embodiment in a virtual space resides in the dynamic of pattern

and chaos in "noise." This indicates the importance of uncertainty and uncontrollability, the

presence of planned, patchworked, authorized sections of narrative-history, as well as the

indispensability of unpredictable spaces between. Both Hayles and Crane subvert the circuit of

the mechanized, programmed feedback loop, which can be highly interactive but is always

ultimately closed; re-embodying history reflexively integrates the new, networked "body" into

the program of the text, and the previously in-between space of reader resonance (variable but

regulated by the poetic program) has the capacity to become focal and authoritative, to author its

own text, and to thus generate absolute experience for the reader within that text. Crane and

Hayles each place the absolute in the realm of the virtual—or of reality augmented by a

particular kind of information flow—and both attempt to access it by narrating history in a

particular way: noisily, garrulously, in contingent patches and also in the shape of networks

("inextricably complex compoundings and intertwinings") embedded with artifacts ("that great

Bridge") as well as ideas ("our Myth, whereof I sing!").[124] Each attempts to travel through coded

---

[122] Crane, "A Letter to Otto Kahn," 249.
[123] Hayles, 22.
[124] Hayles, 22: The textual body as embedded with ideas and artifacts. Crane, "Cape Hatteras," 94: "Stood up and flung the span … / Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!"

space to break closed circuits of the psyche—which have become inextricably intertwined with technological networks of information—thereby to locate the truth of the imagination.

Inter-subjectivity and Creative Intercourse

Crane inherited the interactive, collective narrative from Whitman, who, Donald Pease explains, "invented a voice for America":

> He could not establish a fixed identity for himself in his poetry, for if he had he would have accepted the finality of separateness. In place of a fixed identity, he created what might be called an "inter-subject," a subjectivity reducible to neither self nor other and not even equivalent to intersubjectivity, but rather a consciousness of the never-ending collocution between self and other.[125]

Whitman's subjective consciousness (similar in some ways to Borges's pullulating consciousness) is itself a cybernetic narrative, reliant upon constantly shifting perspective and perpetual intercourse. Through it, the poetic text becomes a growing, changing body, unmanageable by the page; the poem "can never be written or con*firmed* into print," because, "like Blake's word of the imagination," in Pease's view, "it underwrites everything …. the word as voice displaces the privileged position of the exact, coherent meanings and replaces them with the copious flow of undifferentiated voices."[126] This is Hayles's prolix, noisy text. Its incoherency is its main source of strength: any point of interaction between pattern and chaos, program and noise, is synecdochal for the whole undifferentiated network. Again, existence—or embodiment—is defined by relations between self and other, body and voice; Donald Pease affirms, "When Whitman wrote 'I sing myself' he literally meant that his singing brought a self into being."[127] Whitman's sense of being "in profound relation with all creation" is largely

---

[125] Donald Pease. "Blake, Crane, Whitman, and Modernism: A Poetics of Pure Possibility" in *Hart Crane: Modern Critical Views.* Ed. Harold Bloom. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 210.
[126] Pease, 211.
[127] See Hammer, 184.

dependent on the idea of public or shared authorship of identity, a sense that shaped Crane's poetry also. And it's interesting to consider the meaning of "creation" in the context of the cybernetic text, whereby the coding of narrative becomes the prerogative of man and machine/text—by information transmission—rather than of a mythic God. The self becomes "wholly mediated—indeed, created—by the instruments and processes of its own expression." Just as Whitman "sings himself into being," Crane virtually codes himself into being.[128]

Autopoiesis again comes into play as the writer undermines the authority of godhead by self-creating the body-text, an act that subverts conventions of sex as well. Crane's and Whitman's efforts to create humanity with the technology of writing anticipate Hayles's posthumanism, the defining condition of whose existence is that, as subject, the posthuman has constructed or is constructing its own subjectivity. In this way, the posthuman subject is liberated from the domination by a disenfranchising, universally European, white male liberal subject, and from the locked-in, linear model of modernist heterosex (pro)creativity.[129] Crane thus saw in modernism "a literature capable of including homosexual authors and homosexual meanings," but he also gravitated toward the methods and principles that would liberate those meanings best, aligning him now with theorists who would follow, such as Norbert Weiner, Katherine Hayles, and Donna Haraway.[130]

Technologically-enhanced self-creativity is manifested in the mechanomorphic sexuality of "Cape Hatteras," a cybernetic love poem between Whitman, Crane, and the mechanized world; as Brian Reed writes, "[Crane] fantasizes a physical fusion of man and machine that

---

[128] Hammer, 184. See also Daniel Albright on the wave model of poetry in which "the human subject liquefies," 19-21.
[129] Hayles, 4.
[130] Hammer, xii.

releases a flood of creative energy … projects bestial, blind, raw Eros onto machinery."[131] The

channel of transmission, the circular "O" of breath and song that "binds us throbbing," is also an

ejaculation of creative energy launched into cupolas of space, in one sense, by the union of

Whitman and Crane, and in another, by ongoing and undifferentiated collisions of material and

information throughout vast networks of possibility. Rejecting conventional ways of creating,

Crane suggests a mode of sexual and textual creativity that does not belong particularly to the

situation in which it is performed, but is a synecdoche for every potentially creative plunge into

any cupola of space, belonging to all intercourse, all narrative transaction.[132]

Haraway's Cyborg and Postgender Poetry

The publication in 1985 of Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" has had broad

effects in cultural readings of mechanomorphic theory, as one of the first cultural and political

models founded directly in opposition to the idea of a liberal humanist subject. Haraway's

cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality

as well as a creature of fiction …. By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are

all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are

cyborgs."[133] Her cyborg is unique in that it skips the step of original unity, and thus is not

structured on polarities of wholes and parts, public and private, and so on. The cyborg

> is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal
> symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final
> appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has
> no origin story in the Western sense—a "final" irony since the cyborg is also the awful
> apocalyptic *telos* of the "West"'s escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an
> ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space …. The relationships for

---

[131] Reed, 107-108.
[132] See Gelpi, 204 for more on the relationships between mechanomorphism and eroticism in modernist art. See
Masten, 210-11 for a useful account of connections between technology, disembodiment, and deviant sexuality.
[133] Haraway, 516.

> forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world …. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.[134]

Haraway's construction of the cyborg speaks to the tensions and social themes underlying Crane's construction of cybernetic subjectivity in *The Bridge*. Crane, like Haraway, sought to debunk the Western myth of original unity as well as the revisionist histories resulting from it, to author a new and more appropriate myth for a "seething, confused cosmos … which has no formulated mythology yet."[135] He wrote in "Modern Poetry" that the need for this was intensified by a "shifting emphasis of the Western world away from religion toward science," and what he set forth in *The Bridge* as an answer was the unified consciousness of a Whitmanian inter-subject enhanced by technological apparatuses of control and interactivity.[136] Crane's representations of humanity in various states of disembodied expression and cognition suggest Haraway's "man in space," a subjectivity composed entirely of relations of information.

The rebelliousness of Haraway's cyborg politics is probably indirectly inherited from this brand of anti-institutional modernism. It is the same refusal to deny progress that fueled the impertinence of Futurism and made Crane want to correct Eliot, that rejected modernism's impulse to renounce the mass culture that it depended upon, and refused to weep over a vision of fallen humanity as though it were the end. The postmodern psyche has "been injured, profoundly," Haraway writes, —so "We require regeneration, not rebirth."[137] *The Bridge* is informed by the same idea. Its mythology does not pose rebirth, creation of man anew, as a solution, but rather the creation of history anew by a sort of narrative reshuffling, the creation of

---

[134] Hawaray, 517.
[135] Crane, "General Aims and Theories," 217.
[136] Crane, "Modern Poetry," 261.
[137] Haraway, 535.

poetry anew by innovations in writing technologies, and regeneration—or perhaps more accurately, the generation of prosthetic capacities—by giving men and machines translating codes for intercourse which they can use to function more collectively.

Crane's acceptance of creative reliance upon mass culture, including its technology, meant that his American mythology lacked the violent angst and self-loathing that characterized dominant dualistic modernist ways of managing national identity—as is evident in Pound's "To Whistler, American," for instance, whose speaker "bears the brunt of our [female] America" and tries "to wrench her impulse into art."[138] In postmodern America, the fear of having identity usurped by an Other would become progressively less important than the ways in which art and communication might integrate formal bodies into democratic collectives—shaped greatly by the evolution of new media politics—in an effort to create more inclusive national histories and identities.

The utopian cyborg model, because it re-conceptualizes the body in terms of information flows and resolves not to privilege heteronormative categories of sex that uphold the self/other dichotomy, leaves significant gaps for the development of a homosexual poetics. This is why, Haraway states,

> cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western" identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.[139]

The cyborg can thus inhabit "horizontal" orders of sexuality rather than those traditionally linear, progressive, or divisional; cyborg sexuality dissolves boundaries, again becoming as a single

---

[138] Ezra Pound. "To Whistler, American" in *Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of America, 2003).
[139] Haraway, 532.

creative act "distributed among diverse desiring machines."[140] Hammer's claim that Crane's minoritized "gay modernism" was "an important moment in the formation of literary modernism as a whole," and that his modernism and his homosexuality "overlapped," both ring true—it is significant, as Hammer notes, that Crane learned homosexuality and modernist poetics at the same time (124-7). While Crane adopted enough of the innovations associated with dominant modernism to be considered one of the major poets of the period, over a relatively short period of time he rejected the ones whose associations limited creativity by orientation, a gradual rejection corresponding to a shift in his poetics from modernist to postmodern. The "aberrant art of *The Bridge*" is so largely because dominant modernist drives to control, separate from, and dominate (their partners as well as machines) are replaced by postmodern desires to submit, merge, and assimilate.

Crane writes in "Modern Poetry" that the poetic process of assimilating technology, and thus adapting to the needs of the modern psyche, demands "an extraordinary capacity for surrender," a statement that speaks to Haraway's argument for "*pleasure* in … boundaries and *responsibility* for their construction."[141] The happily-cybernetic cyborg subject moves beyond modernist impulses to recreate by breaking free of categorical boundaries, and instead frees itself by recognizing the artificiality of such boundaries, and thereby making peace with limitation (assimilating boundaries to overcome them). The cyborg-esque subject of *The Bridge* submits to the ultimate lack of control that has been at the heart of artistic and political discourse over the past several centuries. Finally this becomes a matter of reinventing the sex act itself, to join elements in ways that, rather than attempting to create new life as replacement for old, commit zealously to the current act of living, on whatever terms. The subject has never been new and

---

[140] Hammer, 20.
[141] Crane, "Modern Poetry," 262. Haraway, 515.

thus cannot be old, is collective, thus cannot really die, so sex is freed from evolutionary

obligation—in a sense, technology has assumed responsibility for evolution—and becomes pure

interactive expression. The "great dream and promise" of information-scripted human

experience, according to Hayles, is that "if we can become the information we have constructed,

we can achieve effective immortality."[142] This was, to a large degree, Crane's intent: as the

conclusion of "Cape Hatteras" suggests, the poet's ultimate goals are to sublimate himself into

an idea, to exist as symbol, in space, in breath, in song. The poet wishes to become the code he

creates—to be, in short, transmission and information at once.

---

[142] Hayles, 5, 12-13.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTEGRAL EVOLUTION AND AMERICAN IDENTITY IN *THE BRIDGE*

At the beginning of his project, Crane wrote to Otto Kahn, "What I am really handling, you see, is the Myth of America. Thousands of strands have had to be searched for, sorted, and interwoven. In a sense I have had to do a great deal of pioneering myself."[143] The spatial language to which I've frequently returned in analyzing *The Bridge*, describing movements inward, outward, upward, around, together, apart, and through an architecture of ideas, developed in response to the logic of the poem, the interweaving and sorting of relational strands—elements and impulses—in the American psyche. The myth that Crane succeeded in weaving in for America is one of self-determining truth and vision; if Whitman invented "a voice for America," Crane was on his way to inventing a new language, perhaps a new system of logic that might afford a self-determining collective vision, and would give American voices the freedom to speak self-determining truth. To this end, he integrated intuitive, extra-logical ways of describing reality with the scientific and mechanical ways in which Americans were coming to understand the world and themselves. At the center of Crane's American myth is a sense of independence from tradition, as it looks ahead to constructions of identity that do not require mythopoeia—nor history, nor discrete individuality—in the same ways as before.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Lewis's identification of two defining elements in Crane's work, the new and the old, in constant interaction. When Crane wrote of his intentions to "resolve and blend" the incongruencies in American consciousness, these were largely defined, as we see in his work and in its early reception, by traditionalism versus progressivism, essentially the elements that Lewis indicated. Within modernist consciousness these categories

---

[143] Crane, "A Letter to Otto Kahn," 249.

were clearly defined (though also increasingly challenged), but in Crane's work, which sought to break down categorical boundaries, they become fluid. *The Bridge*, in particular, creates spaces for extra-, hyper-, and inter-categorical subjects and ideas—the "dark matter" of tradition.[144] This fluidity, expressed as a constant negotiation among various methods, an ever-shifting continuum of truth and beauty, ultimately becomes the defining feature of Crane's formation of a "new relation between consciousness and reality."

Crane was formulating his own way of handling myth, a dialectic in which poetry and spirituality were partner elements against the encroaching catalysts of science and technology.[145] The movement from one cultural stage of consciousness to the next has been illustrated frequently with a figure of an upward-directed evolutionary spiral, a concept that Crane engages in "Cape Hatteras." The helix is the result of a dialectical process by which the individual mind and culture at large retain what has been differentiated as evolutionarily sound from the previous stage, and reincludes it at a higher level. The idea developed in philosophy and the social sciences as a direct result of increasing cultural understanding of evolution as existing in systems outside the hard sciences. Crane extended these processes to include art as well. "Science," Crane wrote to Gorham Munson in 1926, "is the perfect antithesis to poetry," and he went on in his poetry to metabolize high modernism, separating what he perceived to be the evolutionary upward movements of modernist poetry from its obstacles—for instance, separating the mechanical genius of *The Waste Land* from its self-defeat—and wove the former into a schema of existing ideas that, as evolutionary resources, were not yet exhausted, such as Romantic idealism. Crane wrote to Allan Tate in 1930, "you posit *The Bridge* at the end of a tradition of romanticism … but I don't yet feel that such a statement can be taken as a foregone conclusion**.**

---

[144] Fulton, 116.
[145] Crane, "A Letter to Gorham Munson," 225.

A great deal of romanticism may persist—of the sort to deserve consideration, I mean."[146] This turned out to be true. The Romantic "promise of collectivity" that is such a force in *The Bridge* persisted in the background of American culture, to be realized later in postmodern politics and art.

Although *The Bridge* explores social territory that will later produce Haraway's cyborg politics—self-generation and genuine democratic order become intensely important to the trajectory of the poem—Crane doesn't fully commit to this model of identity. The cyborg model precludes mythology, tradition, and hierarchy in absolute ways, and Crane's dialectical method cannot abandon these absolutely. The beauty and difficulty of *The Bridge* are owed in large part to the fact that it never commits absolutely to any model of history, identity, or reality; it evolves before our eyes, unfixed, practically living, in an upward spiral of progressive becoming. The poem does have, as Crane intended, an orbit and direction of its own.

The modernist stage of consciousness in the West has been characterized by commitment to logic, competition, and hierarchy; in answer, the shift to postmodern consciousness has been a discursive move toward inclusion, egalitarianism, and diversity.[147] Crane's postmodernism is patent, and I've suggested that his work was an indicator of theoretical modes to follow. However, it seems that *The Bridge* reaches even beyond the postmodern repertoire of ideologies and drives, having undertones of assimilative revolution which are progressive even now. In the project of creating meaning for the modern American psyche, *The Bridge* defines public and private values within networks that privilege neither science nor spiritualism; the poem is a model for assimilating limitless voices and worldviews into harmonized expression, in an inclusive "field of resonance." Significantly, Crane's conscious and practical search for cosmic

---

[146] Crane, "A Letter to Allen Tate," 257.
[147] McIntosh, 29-53.

integration reflects the fundamental impulses that many social philosophers and theorists over the past several decades have connected not with the postmodern stage of cultural evolution, but with the stage following it, designated the integral stage. A response to globalization and new media particularly, integralism transcends even stage divisions by integrating—panoramically, as does *The Bridge*—trans-historical, trans-rational, and trans-cultural constructions of reality.[148] Inclusivity and dialectically-synthetic understanding are central to new ways of making meaning, and macro- and microcosmic ways of conceptualizing identity come to the fore, as human identities become networked, interdependent, and amorphous.

Crane's attempts to find new forms of spiritual expression, and particularly his logic of metaphor, are clear antecedents—identical in intention and nearly identical in method—to contemporary integral philosophies that aim at developing a "common spiritual language" defined by relational circuits. Concepts of discourse-circuitry and identity happened to find expression alongside the hard and technical sciences in late modernism and have developed in close relation to new technologies ever since, so the relationships between spirituality, creativity, and technology in the twenty-first century are profound.[149] In the 1930s, when Crane was writing *The Bridge*, they were suggested rather, and Crane intuitively mapped out many relationships which would turn out to be precisely accurate. The resulting basis for understanding reality goes far in answering the human need to identify with the physical universe in ways that make rational, as well as spiritual, sense. This need is pervasive in *The Bridge*, and is the impetus behind the most insistently progressive sections—"Cape Hatteras" is a good illustration— wherein cosmic and inter-subjective relationships become the synecdochal, defining features of existence. What exists in the poem between Whitman and Crane is comparable to relationships

---

[148] See McIntosh for more detail and social-anthropological background.
[149] Crane, "General Aims and Theories," 222. McIntosh, 140-2. See also McIntosh, 159 for brief info on relationship between modernism and integralism.

between atoms, planets, words, and ideas. Crane anticipates the philosophy of Brian Swimme, who writes in *The Universe Story* (1992), "You take hydrogen gas, and you leave it alone, and it turns into rosebushes, giraffes, and humans. ... The point is that if humans are spiritual, then hydrogen's spiritual."[150] The integrated consciousness that Crane suggests in his writing is characterized by the ability to relate with "*all of life*"; its artistic language is thus essentially relational, and expresses, in myriad ways, the universal project of becoming.

But Crane was also developing ways to express a relationship to reality that would be essentially and uniquely American. As he anticipated some of the most revolutionary changes in the history of human identity, Crane understood his particular American moment as evolutionarily unique: "I feel persuaded," he wrote in "General Aims and Theories," "that here are destined to be discovered certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere."[151] Crane's America, at the start of his project, was sublime but incongruent, deeply conflicted; modernism was still at war with itself, attempting to manage the cultural effects of violence with an art that was also violent. *The Waste Land* is one obvious example of this. The brutal ways in which many American modernist writers chose to build identities manifested as exponentially increasing categorical division, which had social and political effects still quite active in American culture. But progress in the sciences—increasing dedication to reason and logic that pervaded all of culture, including the arts—led some philosophers and poets to begin to formulate theories that made connections between "antithetical" disciplines, a move suggesting potential for synthesizing other incongruencies as well. At the time Crane was beginning *The Bridge*, America was in a uniquely conflicted state, on national and individual levels both, and in a uniquely rapid state of industrial

---

[150] McIntosh, 144. See also writings of Alfred North Whitehead on prehension, proto-communication, and awareness—relationships between governing systems of humans and atoms.
[151] Crane, "General Aims and Theories," 219.

and political change; he was right to suggest that the conditions were ripe for creative revolution. And it seemed possible now that the highly conflicted American psyche might be able to resolve itself dialectically: future and past, individuality and collectivity, self and Other. The myth of *The Bridge* is structured with this in mind. While so much of modernist literature emphatically thrust irreconcilable opposition to the fore in order to make its points, Crane gathered mismatched and incongruent elements of Americanism, not to present them as disparate parts, but as a collectively and progressively relational network: "One arc synoptic of all tides below."[152] This new, networked way of conceiving identity—making it equally collective as individual—expresses the cultural needs that precipitated new media, the American founding of the World Wide Web, and globalization.

Particularly now, philosophy and social theory are engaged with issues of developing integrated global identities, and art continues to search for ways to communicate a sense of progressive networking over a still-conflicted din of traditional, modernist and postmodernist entities attempting to conduct mutually beneficial intercourse. Synthesis and integration continue to be the most useful tools toward this goal. It continues as an effort to help the internal universe identify itself with the external one; as Steve Connor explains in the Foreword to *Becoming Human*, "we must strive to assist the process of growing a world-mind that can be a match for the new world-body of global communications and economic power."[153] Crane intuited the kinds of growth that technology would engender, and *The Bridge* attempted to make that match even before the implications of the information age had really begun to materialize. In "Hart Crane's Victrola," Reed poses the question of how Crane's poetry might have been different if he'd had access to digital music technologies; likewise, I have to wonder what *The Bridge* would have

---

[152] Crane, "Atlantis," 114.
[153] Connor, xiv.

been if it were written in the 2000s instead of the late 1920s.[154] Reading through the poem, one feels this could have been the case—Crane's exploration of how technology would shape human development, his internalization of mechanistic ways of knowing and creating, allowed him to blaze a trail into human consciousness that we're only now, in an age slightly more receptive to assimilative histories and philosophies, rediscovering. What appeared to be radical failure to the literary giants of Crane's day turns out to be an impossibly brilliant mutation, a gigantic leap in the evolution of American literature.

And Crane takes a highly evolved approach to myth, the grandchild of a much older human impulse towards a definitive God, as the networked relation between various cycles of awareness, manifest in a prolix environment of secular streets and subways: a modern view of life in conversation with older ways of understanding relationship. The cities are "*justified conclamant* with ripe fields / Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment" (my emphasis).[155] Crane's work is integrative beyond what even most contemporary poets have been able to achieve; it has been possible to discuss the boundarilessness of pre-digital form in the same essay as the willful boundedness of cyborg posthumanism, and to praise the pervasiveness of traditional Romanticism in a work whose defining feature is innovation. This weaving of seeming incongruencies in *The Bridge* is highly significant, finally, when assessing the value of Crane's American myth.

The force of *The Bridge* is a tense creative discourse between the empowerment of self-authorship and submission to a universal principle of evolutionary progress. But the God of *The Bridge* is not an ironic absence, nor a usurped godhead associated with technological prosthesis or poetic imagination, as has been many times suggested. Crane's purpose was not to do away

---

[154] Reed, 120.
[155] Crane, "Atlantis," 116.

with or to replace God, but to suggest the possibility of a user-created God, a God-created God; God, too, follows the principles of an autopoietic and synecdochal universe, is the product of changing relational structures, not a source or end in itself, but also a process of perpetual self-regeneration. The upward-spiralling, dialectically self-creating bridge as a "myth to God" is infinitely variable yet infinitely bounded by the rules of its own creation, just like humanity, and as a symbol it is redemptive of every evolving system—of everything that exists. A generalized understanding of creation and beauty in universal systems has the potential to combat cultural conflict on the ground, and *The Bridge* was a bold move toward evolving this capacity. Crane's masterpiece bridges the gap between his present, ours, and the many pasts of which, the poem suggests, we can become worthy through intimate relationship. To this end, *The Bridge* finally rings incomplete, as it must: our whispers are "antiphonal in azure swing," and we, Crane's realistically-foretold modern subject, hang mid-arc, nascent among skyscrapers and atoms, resonant in exchange with universes within and about us.

WORKS CITED

Aaron, Daniel. *Writers on the Left*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

Albright, Daniel. *Quantum Poetics*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Armstrong, Tim. *Modernism, Technology, and the Body.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Begnal, Michael. *Joyce and the City: The Significance of Space.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Beniger, James. *The Control Revolution.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Berthoff, Warner. *Hart Crane, a Re-Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Hart Crane: Modern Critical Views.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Bolter, Jay and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Brown, Kurt, ed. *The Measured Word: On Poetry and Science.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001.

Chaffin, Tom. "Toward a Poetics of Technology: Hart Crane and the American Sublime." *The Southern Review* 20 (1994): 68 – 81.

Crane, Hart. *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose.* Ed. Brom Weber. New York: Liveright, 1966.

Crane, Mary Thomas. "Literary Studies and Cognitive Science: Toward a New Interdisciplinarity." *Mosaic* 32 (2) (1999): 123-140.

Crawford, Robert. *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science.* Oxford University Press, 2006.

Crawford, Robert. *The Modern Poet*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Gelpi, Albert. *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910 – 1950.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Hammer, Langdon. *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Kalaidjian, Walter, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Landow, George. *Hypertext 3. 0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Laughlin, Charles D. "The Evolution of Cyborg Consciousness." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 8.4 (1997): 144 – 159.

Levenson, Michael, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Lewis, R.W.B. *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Manovich, Lev. "Avant-garde as Software." UOC Publications, 2002.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Masten, Jeffrey, Peter Stallybrass, and Nancy Vickers. *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

McIntosh, Steve. *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution.* St. Paul: Paragon House, 2007.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: U Toronto Press, 1962.

Perloff, Marjorie. *21st Century Modernism: The New Poetics.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

Porush, David. "Cybernetic Fiction and Postmodern Science." *New Literary History* 20.2 (1989): 373 – 396.

Reed, Brian. *Hart Crane: After His Lights.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006.

Reed, Brian. "Hart Crane's Victrola." *Modernism/Modernity* 7.1 (2000): 99 – 125.

Rehder, Robert. *Stevens, Williams, Crane and the Motive for Metaphor.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Scholnick, Robert. *American Literature and Science.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992.

Sheehan, Paul, ed. *Becoming Human: New Perspectives on the Inhuman Condition*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Tapper, Gordon A. *The Machine that Sings: Modernism, Hart Crane, and the Culture of the Body.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

Tolva, John. "*Ut Pictura Hyperpoesis:* Spatial Form, Visuality, and the Digital Word." Proceedings of the the Seventh ACM Conference on Hypertext, 1996. 66-73.

Travis, Molly. "Cybernetic Esthetics, Hypertext, and the Future of Literature." *Mosaic* 29 (4): 115-129.

Waldrip-Fruin, Noah and Nick Montfort. *The New Media Reader.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

Weiner, Norbert. *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961.

Yarbrough, Stephen. *Deliberate Criticism: Toward a Postmodern Humanism.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992

Yingling, Thomas. *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.