

**Céline Mansanti**

*transition*, 1927-1938, Between Modernisms

## **Introduction**

Directed by American poet and journalist Eugene Jolas (1894-1952), and published between 1927 and 1938, mainly in Paris and in English, the literary and artistic magazine *transition* is the last important exile magazine of the interwar period and one of the most important magazines of its generation.<sup>1</sup> In eleven years – an unusually long run for a ‘little magazine’ –, *transition* produced 25 issues (among them two double issues) averaging 200 pages each. With five hundred contributors coming from all over the world, *transition* offered contributions ranging from literature to music, drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, ethnology, linguistics, cinema and photography.<sup>2</sup> Many literary and artistic avant-gardes found their way into its pages, the most represented being – in this order – Anglo-

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<sup>1</sup> *transition* was edited with the help of Eugene Jolas’s wife Maria, Elliot Paul, Robert Sage, Harry Crosby, Stuart Gilbert, Matthew Josephson, and, from 1936, by James Johnson Sweeney.

*transition* was spelled with a lower-case ‘t’ until issue no: 19-20 in June 1930. After an interruption of almost two years, the magazine was reissued in March 1932 and spelled from then on with an upper-case ‘T’. For coherence’s sake, I will only use the first spelling. In any case, *transition* should not be mixed up with *Transition*, founded and directed between 1948 and 1950 by Georges Duthuit in Paris. For more details, see Dougald McMillan, *Transition 1927-38, The History of a Literary Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1976), pp. 73-4.

<sup>2</sup> *transition*’s contributors came from the US, France, Germany, and Great Britain, and, to a lesser extent, from Central Europe, Spain, Latin America, Italy and Canada.

American Modernism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Dadaism, but also early 19<sup>th</sup>-century German Romanticism. The magazine quickly met with success: whereas ‘little magazines’ circulated 1,000 copies on average, *transition*’s circulation reached 4,000 copies, and the magazine was mainly distributed in the United States but also in France and Great-Britain. As a result, it is still available today in many libraries, even though its archives have disappeared.<sup>3</sup>

Among *transition*’s main achievements is its important participation in the communication of different cultural areas (and, in particular, the United States and Europe). Throughout its life, the magazine was faithful to its first editorial statement claiming that ‘contributions will be welcomed from all sources and the fact that an author’s name is unknown will assure his manuscript a more favorable examination.’<sup>4</sup> *transition* also reproduced the works of the major (and major-to-be) artists and writers of the time. James Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* was almost entirely published in *transition* under the title of *Work in Progress*, was presented as its main feature. The magazine also featured numerous pieces by Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams, the very first texts by Samuel Beckett and Jacques Prévert, as well as extracts from *The Bridge* by Hart Crane, and offered for the first time to an Anglophone audience works by, for example, Franz Kafka (with the first English translation of *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Betsy Jolas, the eldest daughter of *transition*’s director Eugene Jolas, explains that the magazine’s archives were stolen from her parents’ house in Neuilly during the German occupation. Access to documents related to *transition* is therefore limited, although some helpful information can be found in the Jolas’s archives at Yale and Harvard. See <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.jolas.con.html> [12/08/08], and <http://oasis.harvard.edu:10080/oasis/deliver/~hou00047> [12/08/08].

<sup>4</sup> *transition*, no: 1, April 1927, p. 137.

*Metamorphosis*), Saint-John Perse, Hugo Ball, Henri Michaux, Raymond Queneau, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Paul Éluard, Robert Desnos, Philippe Soupault, René Crevel, Rafael Alberti, Alfred Döblin, C. G. Jung, Kurt Schwitters, Gottfried Benn, and others. Among the contributors to the magazine the reader can find prestigious names such as Hans Arp, Antonin Artaud, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, Vassily Kandinsky, Alfred H. Barr, Alexander Calder, Man Ray, and Louis Zukofsky.

However, *transition*'s achievement goes beyond its ability to present the reader with a vast array of cultural movements and fascinating texts. While *transition* actively contributed to the transnational dialogue of the time, it also marked a chronological transition by helping redefine the particular kind of Anglo-American Modernism prevailing in the 1910s and 1920s, and usually known as 'early Modernism', 'first-stage Modernism', 'the avant-garde phase of Modernism', or 'historical Modernism'.<sup>5</sup> *transition* sheds light on the crisis of this 'historical Modernism' at the end of the 1920s and helps shape a new, minor form of 'late Modernism'.

This crisis took different forms, all indicating an institutionalization of the avant-garde movement. As the word 'Modernism' itself was increasingly publicized, an important anthological and critical enterprise emerged, suggesting that the time had come to cast a look backwards and assess the achievement of the contemporary literary generation. Various important anthologies were published, such as the retrospective *Imagist Anthology* (1930),

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<sup>5</sup> The first three phrases are used by Marjorie Perloff in *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 3. 'Historical modernism' is used by Jean-Michel Rabaté in 'La Tradition du neuf : introduction au modernisme anglo-saxon', in *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou), no: 19-20 (June 1987), p. 106.

Riding's and Graves's *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) and Jolas's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie américaine* (1927). In 1930, Pound sketched a history of the 'little magazine', from *Poetry* (1912) to *transition*; two years later, *Contact* engaged in a similar exercise, covering the period stretching from *Camera Work* (1902) to *transition*, and presenting in two consecutive issues a detailed bibliography of the American 'little magazine'.<sup>6</sup> Other symptoms revealed the extent of the crisis, such as the difficulty of creating literary groups<sup>7</sup>, or the dearth of new poetic forms, experienced by writers such as Kay Boyle, William Carlos Williams or Allen Tate.<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, the 'little magazines' of the time were heavily affected by this crisis. Pound's experience with the *Exile* in 1927 was mainly one of bitterness and frustration. Aside from editorial difficulties of all kinds and the competition of the much more widely circulated *transition*, the *Exile* evidenced Pound's frustration in forming a group.<sup>9</sup> Around 1928, the *Criterion* started its slow decline towards royalism, anglo-

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<sup>6</sup> See Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines', *The English Journal*, vol. XIX, no: 9, November 1930, pp. 689-704; and William Carlos Williams, 'The Advance Guard Magazine', *Contact*, vol. I, no: 1, February 1932, Kraus Reprint, 1967, pp. 86-90.

<sup>7</sup> See Pound's and Zukofsky's correspondence between Feb 1928 and Oct 1930 in Ezra Pound Papers and Ezra Pound Miscellany, Beinecke, Yale, and in *Pound-Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Barry Ahearn (New York: New Directions, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> William Carlos Williams's 1932 letter to Kay Boyle, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirwall (New York: McDowell, 1957), p. 129. Allen Tate, 'John Peale Bishop' (1935), in *Essays of Four Decades* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1968]), p. 349.

<sup>9</sup> See for example his letter to Zukofsky, 31 August 1928, Ezra Pound Miscellany, YCAL MSS 182, Beinecke, Yale, Box 3, File 72: 'Unless there is life enough in US or NY to create such a group as mentioned in mine of Feb 25. I wouldn't care much about continuing Xile.'

catholicism and neo-classicism, and progressively shifted away from literature as Eliot lost interest in his own periodical. 1929 marked the disappearance of two landmarks: the provocative *Little Review*, one of the cornerstones of early American Modernism, and the *Dial*, which had established itself as one of the most important Modernist magazines by publishing pieces such as *The Waste Land* or selections from *The Cantos*. With the almost simultaneous disappearance of both magazines, a page was turned, as *Poetry*'s editor Morton Dauwen Zabel foreshadowed in a common tribute: 'In going, they open the way to our next literary period, and so leave with us some of the sensations of suspense we experienced when they first flashed upon the view.'<sup>10</sup> Maybe more than any other 'little magazine' of the time, *transition* stood out from this grim landscape and 'open[ed] the way to the next literary period'. Far from lapsing into disillusion and bitterness, the magazine responded positively to the disintegration of historical Modernism, choosing neither a clearly reactionary path (unlike Eliot's *Criterion* or Salemsen's *Tambour*) nor playing on with rules that no longer seemed to apply (unlike Pound who desperately tried to create a group of young writers, when, according to Williams, 'no group w[ould] form').<sup>11</sup>

### ***transition*'s editorial line**

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On Pound's editorial hardships, see Craig Monk, 'The Price of Publishing Modernism: Ezra Pound and the *Exile* in America', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, no: 31 (2001), pp. 429-46.

<sup>10</sup> Morton Dauwen Zabel, 'The Way of Periodicals', *Poetry*, vol. XXXIV, no: 6 (September 1929), p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> 'No group will form', letter to T. C. Wilson, 12 July 1933, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirwall, (New York: McDowell, 1957), pp. 141-2.

Writing in 1938 to James Laughlin who had just launched his magazine *New Directions*, William Carlos Williams regretted that ‘there was [in *New Directions*] too much *Transition* like random shooting – perhaps that’s the way that it should be, loose, unconfined.’<sup>12</sup> Williams certainly alluded to the fact that *transition* published many writers and artists of unequal quality. But ‘looseness’ and ‘unconfinement’ also described the magazine’s internal structure, relying, more often than not, on the mere juxtaposition of texts and documents within broadly encompassing sections such as ‘Fiction’, ‘Reproductions’, ‘Poetry’, ‘Essays’ (up to no: 12) or ‘America’ and ‘Other Countries’ (no: 14). Number 13, for example, presents successively an extract from *Work in Progress*, a scenario by William Closson Emory, a poem by Archibald MacLeish, a short story by Peter Neagoë, a text by Gertrude Stein, and so on. Similarly, the various art and literature sections do not so much engage in a dialogue as contribute to the eclecticism and visual beauty of the magazine. As if to add to the reader’s confusion, few critical articles shed light on the literary pieces presented in the magazine (*Work in Progress* being a notable exception). Far from taking on the collage tradition, which involves precise compositional designs, *transition* seems to develop according to an organic pattern of successive additions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Letter to James Laughlin, 23 January 1938, *William Carlos Williams and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, ed. Hugh Witemeyer (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> The idea that *transition* exemplified the collage tradition is developed by Dickran Tashjian in *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995, p. 26) and above all by David Bennett in an article strangely entitled ‘Collage, Individualism and Fascism: The Poetics and Politics of a Modernist Magazine’ (*Cahiers Charles V*, no: 34 (September 2003), p. 13.)

This 'looseness', however, is offset by numerous editorials (about 50 over 27 issues) explicitly shaping the ideological and aesthetic orientation of the magazine. Almost all of them were signed by director and editor in chief Eugene Jolas; *transition*'s editorial policy therefore strongly reflected Jolas's own ideas. While *transition* continued the publishing tradition of earlier Modernist magazines by defining itself as a laboratory open to experimental writers from all over the world, the magazine also set a new agenda by becoming the first Anglo-American magazine to engage actively in the exploration of the unconscious, in the wake of Joyce and the French Surrealists, as well as the German Romantics, Jung and the primitivist and occultist traditions. From the first editorial, Jolas and Elliot Paul defined art as a 'tangible link between the centuries (...) join[ing] distant continents into a mysterious unit.'<sup>14</sup> Over time, the editors asserted that 'only the dream is essential'<sup>15</sup>, and, in the wake of Schelling, defined art as 'a reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious'.<sup>16</sup> At about the same time, *transition* enthusiastically adopted Jung's notion of the 'collective unconscious' that Jolas discovered when translating 'Psychology and Poetry', first published in English in *transition* no: 19-20 (June 1930). The discovery of the 'collective unconscious' was essential to Jolas inasmuch as it allowed him to theorize the 'universality of [people's] impulses'.<sup>17</sup> The magazine also started developing an important work on the relationship between language and the unconscious, culminating in June 1929 with the publication of the 'Revolution of the Word' manifesto. As a result, the 'literature of the unconscious', in the broad sense of the term, covers the majority of the contributions published in *transition*, from *Work in Progress* to poems by Hölderlin and Novalis, about 50

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<sup>14</sup> *transition* no: 1, April 1927, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> *transition* no: 3, June 1927, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> *transition* no: 19-20, June 1930, p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> *transition* no: 1, April 1927, p. 135.

Surrealist contributions, experimental texts associated with the 'Revolution of the Word', and dream stories.

*transition*'s exploration of the unconscious relied heavily on Romanticism and in particular on Novalis's conception of the unconscious as a source of wisdom waiting to be set free. *transition*'s neo-Romanticism thus constitutes the second main element of the magazine's editorial line. In his autobiography, Jolas wrote: 'I wanted to encourage the creation of a modern Romanticism, a pan-Romantic movement in literature and the arts.'<sup>18</sup> Most of the literary texts published in *transition* delineate 'a pan-Romantic movement', whose definition, however vague, as the prefix 'pan' suggests, implies a will to express the 'I' and set the imagination free. The magazine pays homage to Hölderlin, Novalis, Goethe, and Blake, and publicizes many avant-gardes related to Romanticism, such as Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism. *transition*'s 'pan-Romanticism' also helps define the quest for the absolute that characterizes the second series of the magazine as of March 1932 (with contributions by Harry Crosby, Camille Schuwer and Georges Pelorson, Joe Bousquet and Léon Bloy). Even more strikingly, *transition*'s neo-Romanticism pervades the editorials of the magazine, and finds its most successful expression in the recurring notion of 'synthesis', defined as the 'natural passion' of the 'true poet'<sup>19</sup> aiming at universal harmony through the reconciliation of all contraries (including capitalism and communism). *transition*'s neo-Romantic investigations of the unconscious represented a fruitful alternative to Eliot's and above all

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<sup>18</sup> Eugene Jolas, *Man from Babel*, ed. Andreas Kramer and Rainer Rumold (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> *transition* no: 16-17, June 1929, p. 29.

Pound's historical Modernism, away from 'the 'clean', 'hard', inorganic values of Imagism and Vorticism.'<sup>20</sup>

### **The Revolution of the Word**

The 'Revolution of the Word' manifesto, published in June 1929, expresses most succinctly the main goals of *transition*.<sup>21</sup> The manifesto was probably written by Jolas, and was signed by sixteen regular contributors of *transition* – the most famous being Hart Crane.<sup>22</sup> Although a manifesto of avant-garde pretensions, 'The Revolution of the Word' paradoxically reveals a propensity to continuity visible in its sober, classical form (**Fig 1**) as well as in its inscription within literary traditions from the past. The first statement is a case in point: 'The revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact.' The authors inscribe themselves within a tradition at the very moment when they proclaim a 'revolution'. The manifesto's continuity with Romanticism and Bergsonism is especially striking, as statements 3, 10 and 11 (and Blake's aphorisms) suggest: 'Pure poetry is a lyrical absolute that seeks an a priori reality within ourselves alone.' 'Time is a tyranny to be abolished.' 'The writer expresses. He does not communicate.' This paradox highlights *transition*'s original relationship to avant-gardism: the magazine uses avant-gardist forms (such as the manifesto) but rejects its fundamental idea, that of a break with the past. In fact, two separate logics collide in the pages of the magazine: that of the avant-garde moment of Modernism, and that of its institutionalization.

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 197. While *transition*'s neo-Romantic editorial line sometimes recalls Eliot's aesthetics, its investigation of the unconscious sets it apart from him.

<sup>21</sup> *transition* no: 16-17, June 1929, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> See McMillan, *Transition 1927-38*, p. 48.

This leads, at times, to an almost schizophrenic discourse. In the same paragraph, Jolas can call himself an ‘iconoclast’ and ‘defend the right to think in eternal terms’; he can claim ‘it is high time to make tabula rasa’ while pursuing a synthesis between the centuries and the continents<sup>23</sup>. The story of *transition*’s lowercase ‘t’ illustrates this collision. In January 1924, Ford Madox Ford chose to use lowercase letters for the title of his magazine and was astonished at the publicity it received as a consequence.<sup>24</sup> When Jolas borrowed Ford’s idea three years later, his intention was clear: ‘As an old newspaperman, I knew that the critics would give it a howling reception, and anyway it was the fashion among many continental ‘little magazines’ of the day.’<sup>25</sup> The use of a lowercase ‘t’ in *transition* becomes an advertising strategy, and points to a new historical stage of Modernism. In any case, the ambivalence of the ‘Revolution of the Word’ is not only generic; it also derives from the imprecision and at times the awkwardness of some statements: when the editors claim that ‘Narrative is not mere anecdote but the projection of a metamorphosis of reality’, it is not clear whether they distinguish between reality and realism; when they state that they are tired of the ‘hegemony of the banal word [and] monotonous syntax’, we might wonder if such hegemony is not fought by literature as a whole. At the same time, however, this manifesto imposes itself as a coherent text: the rejection of realism and the defense of imagination and subjectivity echo the editorial line of the magazine. What is more, the ‘Revolution of the Word’ points towards a new direction: that of a revolution of language, of a ‘liberation of

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<sup>23</sup> See *transition* no: 15, February 1929, p. 14; and *transition* no: 21, March 1932, p. 285.

<sup>24</sup> See Gasiorek in this volume.

<sup>25</sup> Jolas, *Man from Babel*, p. 88.

creative expression', allowing the poet to express his or her 'self' and create 'a fabulous world'.<sup>26</sup>

'The Revolution of the Word' is not only a manifesto; it also gathers an important variety of texts, most of them published in the 'Revolution of the Word' sections of issues no: 16-17 to 19-20 (June 1930), with others scattered throughout the magazine. *transition* mainly encourages its contributors to create a 'fabulous world': Douglas Rigby's primitivist 'Life of Mejjicana' (no: 14); dream stories by Harry Crosby, Kathleen Cannell, Peter Neagoë (no: 18), Marius Lyle, Daphne Carr, Norman Macleod and Dorothy Boillotat (no: 19-20); the fantastic worlds of Leigh Hoffman, Whit Burnett, Charles Duff, George Whitsett, Wayne Andrews or Charles Tracy illustrate this main tendency. In the wake of *Work in Progress*, 'The Revolution of the Word' also promotes playful linguistic innovations, with Michaux's 'Le Grand Combat' (no: 16-17), Vitrac's little known essay 'Le Language à part' (no: 18), Desnos's extracts from *Langage cuit*, or Prévert's first published text, 'Un peu de tenue ou l'histoire du lamentin' (no: 18). Eventually, a few texts published in the 'Revolution of the Word' section choose to focus on the materiality of the word, such as Tzara's sound poem 'Toto Vaca' (no: 19-20) or Bob Brown's 'Readies' (no: 19-20). 'The Revolution of the Word' thus gathers together very different aesthetics, associated with Jolas (who is gravely looking for a language able to express his interiority), Joyce (who is having fun creating a 'language of night'), and Tzara (who is primarily interested in the materiality of the word). The manifesto, stating 'the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words' while defining 'pure poetry [as] a lyrical absolute that seeks an a priori reality within ourselves alone', is flexible enough to support all these aesthetics. However, such eclecticism has led to confusions,

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<sup>26</sup> See *transition* no: 18, November 1929, p. 175; and *transition* no: 16-17, June 1929, p. 13.

typically bearing on Jolas's supposed claim for the materiality of the word.<sup>27</sup> A few texts (such as Tzara's and Brown's), and the title of the manifesto itself seem to foreshadow the Language Poets' experiments; but this is not enough to balance against the 'Revolution of the Word's' powerful neo-Romanticism. As editor Stuart Gilbert wrote: 'The Revolution of the Word is a movement to explore this secondary, non-utilitarian function of language, to treat the *aura*, the 'light vapour which floats above the expression of the thought'.<sup>28</sup> Halfway between Jolas's personal concerns and a collective movement, the 'Revolution of the Word' is less the expression of a group than an international gathering of energies and texts, providing the readers with a general direction, that of the dream against reality, that of the word against the image, at a time when the creation of a literary group as such proves particularly difficult. As Josephine Herbst wrote, 'you might snatch at a new *transition* as a member of an underground might pore over a secret leaflet for a possible direction to action.'<sup>29</sup>

### **Three major contributors: Stein, Joyce, Crane**

Between 1927 and 1932, *transition* published a dozen texts by Stein, among them 'An Elucidation', written in 1923 but first published in *transition* four years later, 'Four Saints in

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<sup>27</sup> See Dylan Thomas's letter to Glyn Jones, c. 14 March 1934, in Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Letters*, ed. Paul Ferris (London: J. M. Dent, 2000 [1985]), p. 122; and Patricia Waugh, *Revolutions of the Word, Intellectual Contexts for the Study of Modern Literature* (London: Arnold, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *transition* no: 18, November 1929, p. 204.

<sup>29</sup> Josephine Herbst, *The Starched Blue Sky of Spain and Other Memoirs* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 82.

Three Acts', written in 1927, and first published in *transition* in 1929, and, in 1928, 'Tender Buttons', long out of print since its first publication fourteen years earlier. The magazine also provided helpful critical background, including two essays (one by Laura Riding, the other by Ralph Church) and a precious bibliography of Stein's writings between 1904 and 1929, later used as a basis for the Haas-Gallup catalogue (1940) and more recently reprinted by Kostelanetz in his *Gertrude Stein Reader* (2002). Stein's publication gave *transition* greater visibility because of her potential for controversy, even as this visibility benefited Stein, who only started to be better known after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933. However, the collaboration soon deteriorated when editor Elliot Paul, with whom she maintained good relationships, resigned in 1928. It was brought to an end when Stein criticized the Jolas in *The Autobiography* and Maria Jolas reacted by publishing a 'Testimony against Gertrude Stein' in *transition* no: 23 (July 1935). Part of the misunderstanding was due to personal feelings: Stein was growing jealous of Joyce's presence in the magazine, while Jolas resented her whims. Even more importantly, a wide aesthetic gap set the writer and the magazine apart: whereas Jolas was trying to express a new reality, by relying on the structure of language and respecting a traditional narrative framework, Stein was working on the structure itself, calling into question the very notion of narrativity. Hence Stein's comment about Joyce and Braque: 'they are the incomprehensibles whom anybody can understand. Les incompréhensibles que tout le monde peut comprendre.'<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Stein, then, both *transition* and Joyce pursued a 'language of night'<sup>31</sup> able to express 'a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry

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<sup>30</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (London and Toronto: William Heinemann Ltd, 1938), p. 260.

<sup>31</sup> From Jolas's pamphlet *The Language of Night* (The Hague: Servire Press, 1932).

grammar and goahead plot.’<sup>32</sup> Their goals, however, were not the same. Whereas Jolas insisted on the necessity for the poet to express the chaos of his inner self, Joyce aimed at producing an effect on his readers; in other words, Joyce defined himself as a fiction maker while Jolas tried to sustain the myth of a language that would faithfully convey the poet’s inner truth. Even though their projects differed, Joyce found in *transition* a staunch ally at a time when his new work was widely rejected. The magazine did not only provide a stable outlet for the publication of *Work in Progress* (from 1927 to 1938, 371 pages of Joyce’s work were published over 17 issues of *transition*); the editors also wrote and published about 20 essays aiming at explaining the new work (most of them reprinted in book form in 1929 under Joyce’s title *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*).

Although Stein and Joyce are usually perceived as *transition*’s leading personalities, Hart Crane is probably the contributor whose aesthetic is most in line with *transition*’s. Apart from signing the ‘Revolution of the Word’ manifesto, Crane contributed seven pieces to the magazine, among them 3 unpublished extracts from *The Bridge* (‘Cutty Sark’ and ‘The Harbor Dawn’ (no: 3), as well as ‘Van Winkle’ (no: 7)). The general project of *The Bridge* is very close to *transition*’s, whose planned title was, for a time, ‘Bridge’.<sup>33</sup> Like Jolas, Crane feels that the time is one of transition; this is what he writes Allen Tate in July 1930: ‘You will admit our age (at least our predicament) to be one of transition.’<sup>34</sup> In the same way that

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<sup>32</sup> James Joyce, *Letters III*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 146.

<sup>33</sup> See Jolas, *Man from Babel*, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> Hart Crane’s letter to Allen Tate, 13 July 1930, in Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems & Selected Letters & Prose*, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1966), p. 257.

*transition* aims at creating a link between people, centuries and continents<sup>35</sup>, *The Bridge* is conceived as a link between America's mythic past and chaotic present, between the finite and the infinite, the universal and the particular, the archaic and the modern, the religious and the profane, and, like *transition*, between historical Modernism and a later form of Modernism. Both Jolas and Crane are looking for an enthusiastic expression of the cosmic, spiritual and even religious links that unite human beings in spite of the chaos characterizing their time of transition. At the heart of their aesthetic projects lies a deep aspiration for unity, for a 'synthesis' originally at work in German and English Romanticisms. *The Bridge*, to Crane, is 'a mystical synthesis of America'.<sup>36</sup>

*transition* thus welcomed two masterpieces widely rejected at the time, *The Bridge*, condemned for its neo-Romanticism by influential critics such as Yvor Winters, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, or William Carlos Williams, and *Work in Progress*, considered as a dead end by Harriet Shaw Weaver, Léon-Paul Fargue, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, H. G. Wells and Wyndham Lewis among others. Both works come close to *transition*'s main aesthetic projects: the exploration of the unconscious on the one hand, and neo-Romantic investigations on the other. Both works, each in its own way, also ensured a transition between an earlier and a later kind of Modernism. Both reflect historical Modernism in embracing and reorchestrating a set of myths and texts, yet both are characterized by elements of a later Modernism—metadiscourse and ironic laughter in Joyce, and neo-Romanticism in Crane.

### ***transition*'s cosmopolitanism and internationalism**

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<sup>35</sup> See *transition* no: 1, April 1927, p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Gorham B. Munson, 18 February 1923, in *The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932*, ed. Brom Weber, (New York: Hermitage House, 1952), p. 124.

Although Modernist magazines at large and exile magazines in particular tend to pay much attention to foreign literatures and cultures, *transition* deserves a special mention for presenting itself not only as a great cosmopolitan magazine open to international writers and avant-gardes, but also as an internationalist publication advocating a transnational union of humanity across state boundaries. Its ‘invitation’ to both ‘American writers’ and ‘writers of all other countries’ ‘to appear, side by side’<sup>37</sup>, in the pages of the magazine, resulted in its publication of 250 foreign contributors (i. e. half the total number of *transition*’s contributors) representing a vast array of countries and avant-gardes (mainly Surrealism, Expressionism and Dadaism).

Many now famous writers were first published in English in *transition*. Such seems to be the case of Robert Desnos, Philippe Soupault, Paul Éluard, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, André Breton, Hans Arp, Ivan Goll, Benjamin Péret, Pierre Unik, Jacques Baron, Roger Vitrac, René Crevel, Tristan Tzara, Antonin Artaud, Joe Bousquet, Henry Poulaille, Drieu la Rochelle, Hugo Ball, Saint-John Perse, André Gide, Alfred Döblin, Franz Kafka, Léon-Paul Fargue (not translated into English again before 1943), Alejo Carpentier (not translated into English again before 1947), or Gottfried Benn (not translated into English again before 1950). Among *transition*’s most important translations, or partial translations, one can cite extracts from Saint-John Perse’s *Éloges*, Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and Carl Einstein’s *Bebuquin* (not yet translated into English), Breton’s first chapter of *Nadja* (published the same month in French in *La Révolution surréaliste* and in English in *transition*), Desnos’s first chapters of *La Liberté ou l’amour !* (only fully translated into English in 1993), and Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and ‘Letter to the Father’. Interestingly, among the texts translated

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<sup>37</sup> *transition* no: 1, April 1927, p. 137.

into English by *transition*, three were apparently subsequently lost in their original language: Soupault's essay 'Whither French Literature?' (no: 16-17) and scenario 'The Mill' (no: 19-20), as well as Arp's 'Notes from a Diary' (no: 21). Without *transition*'s translations, those texts would probably have been lost for good.<sup>38</sup>

*transition*'s exceptional cosmopolitanism and internationalism owe much to Eugene Jolas's private life. An American born in 1894 to a modest Franco-German couple, Jolas lived the first years of his life both in the United States and in multilingual Lorraine. The 'man from Babel', to quote the title of his autobiography, was shaped by this distinctive linguistic, cultural and political situation:

I grew up, an American in exile, in the hybrid world of the Franco-German frontier, in a transitional region where people swayed to and fro in cultural and political oscillation, in the twilight zone of the German and French languages. (...) the bilingual conflict was a daily one (...) languages and dialects [were] ready to spring at each other's throats (...) emigration only brought further disorder, a sort of glotto-pathology for which there has seemed to be no permanent remedy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> These translations are translated into French in Céline Mansanti, 'Présence du surréalisme français dans la revue américaine *transition* (Paris, 1927-1938) : Eugène Jolas entre André Breton et Ivan Goll', *Mélusine*, no: 26, 'Métamorphoses', Paris: L'Âge d'Homme (February 2006), pp. 277-304.

<sup>39</sup> Jolas, *Man from Babel*, pp. 5 and 8.

From then on, Jolas dreamed of a frontierless world and ‘a new language, a super-tongue for intercontinental expression’.<sup>40</sup> *transition*, in many ways, is the result of this dream. After many trips between Forbach in Lorraine and the U. S., from 1911 to 1926, and many experiences including odd jobs as a grocery store delivery man, a newspaperman and an editor for the New Orleans-based *Double-Dealer* (see chapter 00), Jolas decided to settle in France with Maria Jolas, his newly-wed wife from a rich Kansas family. Thanks to Maria’s financial support, *transition*’s first issue came out in April 1927.

*transition*’s success was based on several factors. One is that its appearance was particularly well-timed. With the death of *This Quarter*’s editor Ernest Walsh in October 1926, a niche opened for a new exile magazine in Paris. Concomitantly, Joyce and Sylvia Beach were looking for a stable outlet to publish *Work in Progress*. Since March 1924, when the first instalment came out in the *transatlantic review*, *Work in Progress* had appeared in three more magazines (the *Criterion*, *Le Navire d’argent* and *This Quarter*) and both Joyce and Beach had lost a considerable amount of energy contacting the editors and dealing with practical details. Another reason for *transition*’s success was the number and quality of Jolas’s international literary connections. In 1921 in Strasbourg, Jolas participated in Solveen’s internationalist and trilingual (Alsatian, French, German) *Nouveaux Cahiers alsaciens* and later became acquainted with the internationalist, avant-gardist and neo-Romantic Arc group gathering the magazine’s editors and collaborators (Henri Solveen, René Schickelé and Kasimir Edschmid) as well as other personalities such as Hans Arp, Claire and Ivan Goll, and Marcel Noll. Through Marcel Noll, Jolas met Éluard in 1924 in Paris, and subsequently other Surrealists such as Péret and Desnos. From November 1924 and for about a year, Jolas was in charge of the column ‘Rambles through Literary Paris’ for the Paris edition of the *Chicago*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

*Tribune*, where he interviewed Claire and Ivan Goll, Joseph Delteil, Philippe Soupault, Valery Larbaud and André Breton. During these years, Jolas was acquainted with many French writers and editors such as Jean Giraudoux, François Mauriac, Tristan Tzara, Jacques Rivière, André Gide, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Pierre Mac Orlan, Michel Leiris, Roger Vitrac and Antonin Artaud. Through Sylvia Beach, Jolas met Joyce (in 1924), Hemingway, and probably Archibald MacLeish. ‘Shakespeare and Co’'s owner also acted as *transition*'s main agent until June 1930 and she was probably the one who sent their copies to the Gotham Book Mart in New York. Across the street, Adrienne Monnier, the owner of ‘La Maison des livres’ and administrator of *Commerce*, was probably instrumental in *transition*'s publication of *Commerce*'s editors or contributors Léon-Paul Fargue, Valery Larbaud, Marcel Jouhandeau, Henri Michaux, André Gide, Saint-John Perse, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Alfonso Reyes, and André Breton. On the American front, many contributors of *transition* were already published in the *Double-Dealer* (such as Allen Tate, Hart Crane and H. D., as well as Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher, Hamilton Basso, Robert Graves, Malcolm Cowley, Pierre Loving, Kenneth Fearing, Bravig Imbs, and Samuel Putnam), or in *This Quarter* (such as Man Ray, Gertrude Stein, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, Bryher, Blanche Matthias, Kenneth Fearing, James Joyce, Robert McAlmon, Djuna Barnes, Morley Callaghan, John Herrmann and Yvor Winters). As for Elliot Paul, Robert Sage, Bravig Imbs, Virgil Geddes, and Henry Miller, all were associated with the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Not only did ‘Transocean’<sup>41</sup> gather in its pages many different writers and work as a bridge between continents and cultures, to the greatest happiness of its contributors; the magazine

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<sup>41</sup> This is how Joyce refers to *transition* in *Work in Progress* (*transition* no: 4, July 1927, p. 63).

also offered a tribune to the dissident Surrealists.<sup>42</sup> Almost all the authors of *A Corpse*, a pamphlet written in reaction to Breton's massive wave of excommunications in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1929, were contributors to *transition*.<sup>43</sup> Queneau and Michaux, influenced by Surrealism but put off by its clan-like organisation, also found an outlet in *transition*, where they particularly enjoyed the 'Revolution of the Word' movement and Joyce's experiments. Conversely, Breton and Aragon were seldom published, and Éluard, whom Jolas particularly liked, did not appear in *transition* between March 1928 and 1937. As for Breton and Jolas, their relationships were marked by distance and indifference, until a quarrel in 1941 resulted in Breton calling Jolas a heretic and Jolas reproached Breton with never paying attention to his magazine.<sup>44</sup> Although Surrealism was the avant-garde that most influenced *transition*, the magazine quickly tried to differentiate itself from Breton's movement. First, it declared itself apolitical (in spite of communist sympathies, as of 1927). Second, whereas 'Surrealists never aimed at stepping outside the laws of language'<sup>45</sup>, the 'Revolution of the Word' offered to express the new reality, that of the unconscious, with a

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<sup>42</sup> Many testimonies, by contributors such as John Glassco, Josephine Herbst, Henry Miller, Harry Crosby, Kay Boyle and others, show that *transition*'s cosmopolitanism and internationalism were considered as a vital source of inspiration.

<sup>43</sup> They include Jacques Prévert, Robert Desnos, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Michel Leiris, Roger Vitrac, Jacques Baron, Gérard Limbour, Raymond Queneau, Jacques-André Boiffard, Max Morise and Alejo Carpentier.

<sup>44</sup> See two unpublished letters by Jolas at the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet in Paris. The second one, dated September 21, 1941, quotes several extracts from Breton's letter, apparently lost.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot and Brookfield Vermont: Ashgate, 1999), p. 30.

new language involving a reform of syntax and vocabulary. Third, *transition*'s powerful aspiration for 'synthesis' set it apart from Breton's historical materialism and brought it close to *Le Grand Jeu*, a dissident Surrealist magazine founded in 1928 by Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, René Daumal and Roger Vailland which pursued a metaphysical and mystical quest.<sup>46</sup> But the most striking difference between Breton's Surrealism and *transition*'s editorial line is *transition*'s staunch advocacy of internationalism, in the wake of the internationalist brand of Surrealism that Ivan Goll tried unsuccessfully to oppose to Breton's more narrow conception of the movement in 1924. In his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' published in the one and only issue of his magazine *Surréalisme* in October 1924, Goll wrote: 'Surrealism does not content itself with being the means of expression of a group or a country: it will also be international, it will absorb all the isms dividing Europe, and will gather the vital elements of each.'<sup>47</sup> Although *transition* was not a repetition of Goll's manifesto and developed its own agenda, the magazine shared with the poet a conception of Surrealism, as well as a passion for pacifism and internationalism, that set them apart from Breton, who never paid attention to the American, British and Irish exiles in Paris. Only in 1953 did Breton acknowledge the talent of Anglophone writers such as Joyce and Cummings, and the existence of a broader movement interested in a reform of language, but he still could not hide his contempt for experiments other than his own: to him, the 'unleashing of a 'revolution of the word' (James Joyce, EE Cummings, Henri Michaux) [...] could do nothing but result in 'lettrism'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> As of 1930, Breton grew more and more interested in esoterism and occultism. 'In this regard Jolas anticipated Breton's interest in the occult during the 1930s.' (Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen*, p. 26).

<sup>47</sup> Ivan Goll, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', *Surréalisme* (October 1924), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> André Breton, 'Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives' (1953), *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 'folio essais', 1994, pp. 165-6.

### *transition*'s American literary Surrealisms

Unlike other Anglo-American Modernist magazines, *transition* published and translated many French Surrealist writers. But even more surprisingly, *transition* triggered collective literary Surrealist experiments in the United States, at a time when the few Surrealist experiments developing in the country were first and foremost visual ones.

Many American Surrealist texts developed a fantastic aesthetic involving the animation or personification of objects, plants, animals or concepts, and/or the creation of 'fabulous worlds', to quote the 'Revolution of the Word' manifesto. Such is the case of Wayne Andrews's 'Take a Number from One to Ten' (no: 24) and 'The Evocative Treason of 449 Golden Doorknobs' (no: 23), where a series of figures (no: 24), hair, walls and doorknobs (no: 23) are set in motion: 'The entry, rather 'solemn,' to be sure, of 449 golden doorknobs cautioned a dreamheavy evening'.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Wayne Andrews, who was only 22 when he first contributed to *transition*, explicitly inscribed his experiments within Surrealism. In his foreword to *The Surrealist Parade*, a book on French Surrealism written in 1987 and postfaced by his friend James Laughlin, Andrews wrote: 'I did not meet Breton until the summer of 1934 when he won my eternal loyalty by putting his stamp of approval on my prose poem 'The Evocative Treason of 449 Golden Doorknobs' (Published in *transition*, this was my first appearance in print).'<sup>50</sup> Other texts also suggest a reference to Surrealism through their claim to a mainly Surrealist genre: that of the scenario, a hybrid form between literature and cinema best exemplified by Artaud's 'The Shell and the Clergyman' and

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<sup>49</sup> *transition* no: 23, July 1935, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Wayne Andrews, *The Surrealist Parade* (New York: New Directions, 1990), pp. ix-x.

Buñuel's 'An Andalusian Dog'. Both William Closson Emory's 'Love in the West, A Scenario' and Whit Burnett's 'Home Edition, A Scenario' personify objects and animals. Emory's scenario truly verged on the burlesque ('A bologna sausage paces up and down in front of the night club yawning.'<sup>51</sup>), while Burnett's developed a more poetic tone: 'Accidents join hands, dancing along a radio wave.'<sup>52</sup> Similarly, in Leigh Hoffman's 'Catastrophe' (no: 13), the narrator chases his own head across the city. Many contributions belong to a genre closely associated with the fantastic, that of the fairy tale. Such is the case of 'Catastrophe', but also of Whit Burnett's 'An Essay in Compostography or the Life in the Day of the Squidge' (no: 19-20) and Charles Tracy's 'Seven Ages of Women' (no: 24) and 'Mother of Clown' (no: 25), both reprinted in 1939 in Tracy's only published work, *An American Surrealist*. Some of these texts also included Joycean experiments on language: Burnett stages a 'squidge', while George Whitsett's nursery rhyme 'Dancing Rope' starts: 'Lice night/ And the nice before./ Lambs and cuttlefish came to my door,/ The lambs wore plumes,/ The cuttlefish said,/ And a spray of almond over their head.'<sup>53</sup> The use of the fantastic in all these texts reveals an original interpretation of Surrealism, apparently mediated through 'The Revolution of the Word', and in any case separate from the aesthetics of French Surrealist texts. To Breton, the fantastic is mere fiction, unlike the marvellous, which springs from a poetic confrontation (an example of this could be Éluard's 'The Earth is blue like an orange.'<sup>54</sup>)<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the personification and animation of animals and objects noticeable in most of

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<sup>51</sup> *transition* no: 13, Summer 1928, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> *transition* no: 24, June 1936, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> See André Breton, Preface to Pierre Mabille, *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977 [1962]).

these texts did not originate in either French Surrealism or Joyce; they do recall, however, Lewis Carroll's universe, where animals are humanized and flowers brought to life.

Another American literary interpretation of Surrealism is the 'Superrealist' path cut by Nathanael West, William Carlos Williams and Murray Godwin, the last of whom was a steady contributor to *transition* who did not publish much outside the magazine.<sup>55</sup>

'Superrealism' was not a movement distinct from Surrealism; the word merely constituted an early translation of the French. However, this happenstance wording is also significant: as Jonathan Veitch has remarked, 'It is, as its name implies, an 'excessive realism'.<sup>56</sup> The phrase 'American Superrealism' is first used by West in a 1931 letter to Williams mentioning Godwin as a future contributor to the second series of *Contact*, edited by Williams and West as of February 1932.<sup>57</sup> West's *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (not published in *transition*) as well as three of Godwin's contributions to *transition* (two extracts from *Work on Sidetrack* published in *transition* no: 4 and 15 and a piece entitled 'In His Footsteps' in *transition* no: 9) better define this 'American Superrealism'. Interestingly, both Godwin and West rely on fantastic aesthetics: Godwin humanizes cars while West's narrator wanders through the entrails of the Trojan horse. But 'American Superrealism' is also a subversive reaction to the

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<sup>55</sup> Murray Godwin's life remains mysterious. A few biographical indications can be found in *transition* (*transition* no: 4, July 1927, p. 180).

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Veitch, *American Superrealism, Nathanael West and the Politics of Representation in the 1930s* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> 'Do you remember his dream factory stories in *transition* – what I meant by an American Superrealism (?)' Nathanael West's letter to William Carlos Williams, end 1931, in *Novels and Other Writings*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (New York: The Library of America, 1997), p. 770.

‘Frenchified symbolist stuff’<sup>58</sup> at work, for example, in Wayne Andrews’s and Paul Bowles’s Surrealist contributions to *transition*.<sup>59</sup> Against what West sees as an egocentric and morbid hypersensitivity<sup>60</sup>, both West and Godwin use a dynamic, American language (involving much American slang) relying on experience rather than abstractions (‘Life is like that – forever turning up a case uncovered by experience.’)<sup>61</sup>, and even, with the gratuitous murder of the idiot in *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, incorporating scenes of violence, closely associated by West with the United States.<sup>62</sup> Both writers advocate a concrete, ‘low’ type of writing, using the physiological, and even scatological body as a theme, and relying aesthetically on the grotesque (Godwin, West) and the pastiche (West).

Unlike West’s and Godwin’s, Williams’s main Surrealist contribution to *transition*, a long extract from *A Novelette* published in *transition* no: 19-20 (June 1930), does not tend towards social criticism or the grotesque, and does not create a fantastic aesthetic. But *A Novelette* contributes to defining ‘American Superrealism’ by theorizing an American counter-proposal to French Surrealism. Whereas his 1924 improvisations (some of which are

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 771.

<sup>59</sup> Both Andrews and Bowles (with ‘Entity’ in no: 13 and ‘Spire Song’ in no: 12) are fascinated with Europe and France which they associate to refinement, culture and decadence.

<sup>60</sup> In *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, Balso Snell violently addresses Saint Puce: ‘Don’t be morbid. Take your eyes off your navel. Take your head from under your armpit. Stop sniffing mortality. Play games. Don’t read so many books. Take cold showers. Eat more meat.’ (in *Novels and Other Writings*, p. 15)

<sup>61</sup> *transition* no: 4, July 1927, p. 174.

<sup>62</sup> See Nathanael West, ‘Some Notes on Violence’, published in *Contact* and reprinted in *Novels and Other Writings*, pp. 399-400.

published in *transition*) clearly reveal the influence of both Joyce and the French Surrealists, *A Novelette* shows Williams's attempt at defining his own views of Surrealism, at a time when he was translating Soupault's *Les Dernières Nuits de Paris*. Williams was never interested in Surrealist themes (such as Paris, night-time, wandering, mystery, or chance); what he was interested in was automatic writing, or rather spontaneous writing, since Williams does not support the Freudian psychological assumptions of automatic writing. Spontaneous writing, in *A Novelette*, is not just seen as a modality of writing (as is the case with automatic writing); it is on the contrary presented as a way of conveying a feeling of urgency (grounded in real life in Williams's double professional life as a doctor and a poet). Drawing on Williams's readings in *transition* of Benn's 'The Structure of Personality' (locating the collective unconscious in man's physiological strata) and Jung's 'Poetry and Psychology', spontaneous writing is also closely associated with physiological relief: 'The main thing the Novellette [sic] says to us today is, just keep writing, don't quit, keep at it so your hand won't get stiff or your cock limp.'<sup>63</sup> Williams's concrete writing of Surrealism, against that of the French, is also suggested throughout *A Novelette*. A case in point is Williams's straightforward question: 'And what is a beautiful woman?'.<sup>64</sup> Where Breton abstractly reflects on the nature of 'feminine beauty'<sup>65</sup>, Williams bluntly declares: 'Look at her bare feet.' and goes on: 'Let us describe the thighs of a beautiful woman. Most literature is

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<sup>63</sup> Letter to Fred Miller, 15 May 1935, quoted by Dickran Tashjian, 'Williams and Automatic Writing: Against the Presence of Surrealism', *William Carlos Williams Review*, vol. XXII, no: 1 (Spring 1996), p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> *transition* no: 19-20, June 1930, p. 283.

<sup>65</sup> André Breton, *Les Vases communicants, III* (1932), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 206.

now silent.’<sup>66</sup> Through Godwin’s, West’s and Williams’s Surrealist experiments, ‘American Superrealism’ eventually appeared as a concrete, dynamic, American form of Surrealism, relying on the physiological body to express its specificity, away from more abstract and psychological conceptions at work in French Surrealism.

A third American interpretation of Surrealism in *transition* is represented by Henry Miller’s and Anaïs Nin’s contributions, respectively ‘The Cosmological Eye’ and an extract from *House of Incest*, both published in the last issue of the magazine (no: 27). A striking common point between *transition*’s editorial line and Nin’s and Miller’s Surrealist aesthetics was their deep interest in neo-Romantic themes such as mysticism, spiritualism, the apocalypse, or the quest for synthesis. While these characteristics drove them away from the American Surrealists evoked so far, others brought them closer. Like Godwin, West and Williams, Miller and Nin seem to have read Benn’s ‘The Structure of Personality’. In any case, both confer a seminal role to the physiological body, conceiving it as the origin of Surrealist creative activity.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, like many American Surrealists in *transition*, Miller particularly admired Lewis Carroll, whom he cites as an influence in ‘An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere’. As a matter of fact, one of his Surrealist writings, ‘Into the Night Life’, strongly reminds the reader of both Carroll and many American Surrealist experiments published in *transition*: ‘The whistle of the acorns loudly stirring, flurry of floozies bandaged in lysol, ammonia and camphor patches, little mica huts, peanut shells triangled and corrugated, all marching triumphantly with the morning breeze.’<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *transition* no: 19-20, June 1930, p. 283.

<sup>67</sup> See for example no: 27, pp. 323-4 and the very first sentences of *House of Incest*.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Miller, ‘Into the Night Life’, in *The Cosmological Eye* (New York: New Directions, 1973 [1939]), p. 266.

## Conclusion

For more than ten years, *transition* actively contributed to Anglo-American cultural life. However, at the end of the 1930s, the magazine's apolitical and neo-Romantic editorial line became harder and harder to defend. In the face of growing political tensions both in Europe and the United States, *transition* eventually died at the hands of a new political avant-garde whose main publications were *New Masses* (1926-1948) and *Partisan Review* (1934-2003).

While *transition* sheds light on the rich cultural bonds uniting Europe and the Americas, and more specifically France and the United States, the magazine also helps better understand the transition between earlier and later modernisms starting at the end of the 1920s and corresponding to the institutionalization of 'historical', or 'early' Modernism. Some characteristics of this new 'vortex' are mainly negative, such as the dilution of the avant-garde impulse (apparent in *transition*'s notion of 'synthesis' for example), difficulties in forming literary groups (experienced by personalities such as Pound, Zukofsky or Williams, and reflected by the looseness of the 'Revolution of the Word' movement), or the interferences of avant-garde and 'post-avant-garde' discourses (mostly at work in *transition*'s editorials). But *transition*'s emerging late Modernism is also characterized by the resurgence of a Romantic tradition (particularly in Crane's *Bridge*), the exploration of the unconscious (as well as related themes such as the night, or the 'soft', the organic, etc) and the radicalization of formal experimentation (in Joyce's *Work in Progress* or *transition*'s 'Revolution of the Word'). Among *transition*'s most interesting late Modernist achievements was the creation and publication of a coherent, yet wide-ranging American literary Surrealist avant-garde. Between

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the historical Modernism of its predecessors and the political avant-gardism of some of its successors, *transition* thus contributes to defining a lesser-known yet seminal Modernist current.<sup>69</sup>

**[Along with the “Revolution of the Word” manifesto (to be inserted within this article), I send more illustrations to pick from if necessary]**

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<sup>69</sup> For more information on *transition*, see Céline Mansanti, *La revue transition (1927-1938), le modernisme historique en devenir*, forthcoming February 2009, the Presses Universitaires de Rennes.