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**Unreadability in question(s):  
the reception of “Work in Progress” ” in *transition* magazine (1927-38)**

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In the introduction to his translation of a fragment from *Finnegans Wake*, André du Bouchet reflects on his reading of James Joyce’s work as an experience of loss and missing revelation, which leads him to equate it to “the extreme disinterestedness of great works: those which grant us access rather than let us take hold of them.”<sup>1</sup> The international group of writers who oversaw the serialized publication of what was called, at the time, simply “Work in Progress” in the Paris-based transatlantic magazine *transition*, would no doubt have readily agreed with the French poet. In explaining and defending Joyce’s experimental work in their contributions to *transition* (in eighteen of the magazine’s twenty-seven issues, from 1927 to 1938), they all vehemently dismissed the notion that the book was “unreadable” and endeavored to prove just the opposite, though without ever attempting to impose a grid. Their common objective seemed instead to show contemporary readers that “Work in Progress” could be addressed otherwise than by searching for its meaning, as suggests this comment made by *transition*’s editors Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul in June 1927, in an editorial note entitled K.O.R.A.A., later to be echoed by other commentators, including William Carlos Williams, Samuel Beckett, Stuart Gilbert, Marcel Brion, and Victor Llonca:

[Joyce] makes the word elastic [...] He builds up a counterpoint of ideas, abstract enough to avoid confusion in long units, and plays upon all the slumbering rhythms, color values, odors, of his words and phrases. As in listening to music, one can enjoy the effect of Joyce’s prose upon the senses, without having the slightest conception of the organization and composition of the whole, this is to say, the meaning. (*tr.* 3)

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<sup>1</sup> André Du Bouchet. *Lire Finnegans Wake?* Paris: Fata Morgana, 2003.

This remark, which invites the magazine's reader not to focus on the notorious "unreadable" quality of Joyce's writing, but to concentrate instead on what makes it highly pleasurable to the senses (its oral/aural and visual quality), reflects the *transition* editors' and contributors' general appreciation of "Work in Progress."

However, these first comments on Joyce's work by some of its earlier readers have attracted little attention among most Joyce scholars, who have chosen to ignore or dismiss them as trivial glosses to any serious Joyce criticism, with the notable exception of Jean-Michel Rabaté who, in a 1998 article entitled "Joyce and Jolas: Late Modernism and Early Babelism," suggested considering the *transition* essays as "the best introduction to the *Wake* because they [are] systematically attentive to aspects of the text which have been rarely studied, if at all noticed, by Joyce specialists of the following generations."<sup>2</sup> Rabaté's appreciation reads like an invitation to once again return to *transition*'s case for the "readability" of "Work in Progress," more than eighty-years after Joyce and Jolas first met, through Sylvia Beach, to discuss publishing in installments a work which had so far met with almost unanimous skepticism and rejection. I would like to attempt this by reflecting on the choice of a little review as publishing venue for "Work in Progress" during a late phase of the avant-garde, so as to determine how it allowed Joyce to organize "the writing about the writing" of his work and make sure that his later readers read through the responses of those earlier ones<sup>3</sup>. By resituating "Work in Progress" within the cultural and material context of *transition*, this article aims to show the significance of the historicity of the reading of Joyce's work, and to discuss the competence of his contemporary audience in relation to any "ideal audience in the future."

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté. "Joyce and Jolas: Late Modernism and Early Babelism." *Journal of Modern Literature* XXII.2 (Winter 1998-99): 245-252.

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of Joyce's engagement with the specific conditions of reception, see John Nash's *James Joyce and the Act of Reception. Reading, Ireland, Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Nash focuses on local and contemporary Irish reception (from both non-professional readers and critics) in order to discuss critical accounts of Joyce's "unreadability." Nash's book also offers an interesting commentary on Derrida's reading of Joyce.

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When he first met Eugene Jolas in 1927, Joyce was very disturbed by Harriet Weaver's and Ezra Pound's criticism of the work he had begun four years before and of which he had managed to publish only a few fragments in small journals<sup>4</sup>. In a letter dated around Christmas 1926, Weaver complained of the obscurity of the fragments she had been sent by Joyce: "Without comprehensive key or glossary the poor hapless reader loses a great deal of your intention; flounders helplessly, is in imminent danger, in fact, of being as totally lost to view as that ill-fated vegetation you present."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Pound declared less mildly that he was simply not interested in Joyce's new work: "Up to present, I make nothing of it whatever" (Ellmann, 584). By contrast, the *transition* editors offered Joyce immediate support and invaluable help. According to Jolas, with every fragment of "Work in Progress" published, the number of collaborators increased: Stuart Gilbert, Robert Sage, Padraic Colum, Eliot Paul, Helen and Giorgio Joyce, and others helped with the preparations of the fragments destined to *transition* by searching "though numberless notebooks with mysterious reference points to be inserted in the text," so that "it seemed almost a collective composition in the end."<sup>6</sup> The transatlantic review also provided Joyce with an ideal experimental ground for his quest for a renewed *Logos* to create a new *Mythos*. As they declared in "Suggestions for a New Magic," a short declaration published in the June 1927 issue of *transition* which reads like the magazine's first manifesto, Jolas and co-editor Paul were fiercely against the use of the "widewake language, cutandry grammar and goahead plot"<sup>7</sup> Joyce had complained to Weaver about: "We

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<sup>4</sup> The first piece to be published in Ford's *Transatlantic Review*, in January 1924, was "Work in Progress," a title Joyce decided to keep for subsequent periodical publication. In January 1925, a fragment entitled "Here Comes Everybody" (I.2.1) was published in *Contact* (Robert Mc Almon, ed.). Then, three other fragments appeared in *Criterion* (I.5, February 1925), *Le navire d'argent* (I.8, October 1925) and *This Quarter* (I.7, November 1925).

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Harriet Weaver to James Joyce, 20 November 1926, quoted by Richard Ellmann. *James Joyce* (1959). Rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, 583.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Jolas, "My Friend, James Joyce" quoted from Dirk Van Hulle. *Textual Awareness. A Genetic Study of Late Manuscripts by Joyce, Proust and Mann*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Harriet Weaver, 24 November 1926 in *Letters of James Joyce*. Ed. Richard Ellman. London: Faber and Faber, 1957, 1966, 3:146

need new words, new abstractions, new hieroglyphics, new symbols, new myths [...] By re-establishing the simplicity of the word, we may find again its old magnificence” (tr. 3, 178-79). This quest was soon to be called the “Revolution of the Word,” the magazine’s editorial agenda and also the name of their famous 1929 twelve-point manifesto, which called for the disintegration of grammar, the abolition of the “tyranny” of narrative logic and temporal succession, the prevalence of expression over communication, and the systematic hallucination of the word in order to create a “language of night” bearing strong kinship with Joyce’s own “nightworld.” However, for the *transition* contributors, to reinvigorate the word was not an end in itself but, more essentially, the instrument of a renewal of the practice of reading.

One of the most influential theories behind *transition*’s “Revolution of the Word” was the one devised by the German thinker and art critic Carl Einstein, as early as 1906. Einstein’s reflection on the revolutionary potential of Cubism led him to think that “by seeing, we change people and the world.”<sup>8</sup> By relying on the legibility of the written language, he urged for the dismantling of received grammar and narrative rules in order to restore the subjective, dynamic nature of perception. His intriguing plotless, characterless, and storyless novel *Bebuquin* (1912), which was translated into English for the first time by Jolas (tr. 16/17, 298), offers an example of Einstein’s free play with syntax and word composition, as well as of his innovative associations of words, sounds, and images. Notoriously “unreadable” by conventional narrative standards, *Bebuquin* grounds its originality in the use of auratic and visual techniques which emphasize the “perceptibility” of the text more than its “intelligibility.”

Another influential theory in the shaping of *transition*’s editorial content was developed from the early 1920s by two linguists, Ogden and Richards, who wanted to devise a new science of meaning and to understand “how words work.” Their 1923 book entitled *The Meaning of Meaning*, which was discussed by Stuart Gilbert in an article entitled “Function of Words” in

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<sup>8</sup> Letter to Kahnweiler (1923) in *Carl Einstein Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler Correspondance 1921-1939* (translation, introduction and notes by L. Meffre), Marseille: A. Dimanche, 1993, letter n° 19.

November 1929 (*tr.* 18, 203-5), put forward a view of the symbolic and emotive nature of language which was central to *transition*'s preoccupations with the "Revolution of the Word." Along with this reflection on the potential of the English language, Ogden and Richards devised a linguistic project called Basic English,<sup>9</sup> a language of 850 words in which "everything may be said," according to its inventors. Joyce agreed to participate in Ogden's experiment in translating the last four pages of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" into Basic and the result was published in the March 1932 issue of *transition*. As he explained in the introduction to this "translation," Ogden wanted to prove that the detractors of "Work in Progress" were wrong in thinking that Joyce was disrupting the English grammar and to show them instead that what he was really after was to get "effects in rhythm" (*tr.* 21, 259). The keen interest and participation of *transition*'s editors in this and other experiments attached to transforming reading through writing<sup>10</sup> show that the search for "the new reader" animated the magazine from its inception. This editorial venture also made *transition* a particularly propitious terrain for Joyce's own purposes concerning the writing of the reception of "Work in Progress."

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As "a discontinuous, open-ended production of heterogeneous materials in provisional relations,"<sup>11</sup> *transition* may seem at odds with Joyce's monumental project of a book whose circular, infinite structure he already had in mind<sup>12</sup>. The choice of the little magazine thus signals that he saw the aesthetics of discontinuity that *transition* claimed as its editorial trademark as a strategic means to comment on the reading of his new work and to prepare a readership for the autonomous, organic unity of the *Wake*. On the one hand, the experience of

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<sup>9</sup> Basic stood for "British American Scientific International Commercial."

<sup>10</sup> One should also mention Robert Carlton Brown's project of a "reading machine" in 1930, which was meant to liberate reading from the book and gave way to a new poetic form called the "readie."

<sup>11</sup> David Bennett. "Periodical Fragments and Organic Culture: Modernism, the Avant-Garde, and the Little Magazine." *Contemporary Literature*, 30.4 (Winter 1999), 480-502 (p. 485).

<sup>12</sup> "The book really has no beginning or end. (Trade secret, registered at Stationers Hall). It ends in the middle of a sentence and begins in the middle of the same sentence." (Letter to Harriet Weaver, 8 November 1926).

discontinuity, which characterizes periodical reading, introduced a tension between the finished and the unfinished, indicating that a poetics of process was central to both the writing and the reading of the book. It also encouraged the reader to consider “Work in Progress” spatially instead of temporally, and allowed him to dip in or skip at leisure, which was a way for Joyce to answer those who criticized him for the time lost in the reading of his “difficult” works. On the other hand, discontinuity also characterized the content of each issue of the magazine which was designed as a collage or montage of disparate materials. Fragments of “Work in Progress” were thus interleaved with Dadaist sound poems, musical scores by George Antheil, stills from recent films by Man Ray, Eisenstein or Bruguère, photographs by Tina Modotti or Moholy-Nagy, reproductions of Cubist paintings, “primitive” artefacts or songs, surrealist manifestoes, expressionist narratives, and various theoretical essays. This very disparity testified to the great amount of energy circulating within the magazine which meant to be perceived as a collective entity and a “living growth” by its readers.

As publication of his work went by, Joyce chose to build upon the “permeable” aspect of the review by incorporating responses to “Work in Progress” originating from or transiting through *transition* in his writing. One famous example is Wyndham Lewis’s serious criticism of Jolas’s magazine and Joyce’s work in an essay entitled “The Revolutionary Simpleton,” in the first issue of Lewis’s review *The Enemy*, in February 1927. While Jolas and Paul contended with Lewis’s mistaken accusations that *transition* was the hotbed of both surrealism and bolshevism with a piece ironically entitled “First Aid to the Enemy” (*tr.* 9, 161-76), Joyce used Lewis’s response in the eleventh of the twelve questions of the chapter containing the fable of the “Mookse and the Gripes.”<sup>13</sup> By recording and transforming Lewis’s response in a chapter which plays with the reader’s difficulty with the text by constantly postponing clarity and

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<sup>13</sup> “I have allowed Shaun to speak with the voice of the Enemy.” (Letter to Harriet Shaw, 14 August 1927). This episode was inserted in *transition* 6 at the last moment, forcing the editors to hold up publication and compose a new proof.

resolution, Joyce restages the failure of reception and underlines the importance of the cultural circumstances his work was produced in and influenced by. As Dirk Van Hulle has noted, Joyce seems to have been interested as much in the content of Lewis's criticism as in his use of "special vocabulary, phrasings, or linguistic oddities" (Van Hulle, 98). The study of the unsystematic notes he took of the English critic's reviews of his work reveals that he enjoyed employing words or turns of phrases used by Lewis to criticize what he called Joyce's "craftsmanship" with words. One instance of this is the word "blepharospam" in Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), which reappears in a question asked by the old men to Yawn in chapter III.3: "Happily you were not quite so successful in the process verbal whereby you would sublimate your blepharospasmockical suppressions, it seems?" Joyce's cunning recuperation of Lewis's vocabulary turns his criticism on its head, while adding to the neologistic luxuriance of "Work in Progress."

In 1928, however, Joyce started to organize reception in *transition* more systematically by focusing less on the writing of his new work than on "the writing about the writing," which is to say the explanation and vindication published at repeated intervals in the magazine, either directly alongside fragments from "Work in Progress" or in the gaps left by occasional discontinued installments. For example, while the "Revolution of the Word" of June 1929 does not contain a "Work in Progress" episode, it offers the reader three different pieces on it: one by Stuart Gilbert entitled "Joyce Thesaurus Minusculus," (15-23) one by Samuel Beckett, the famous "Dante...Bruno. Vico... Joyce" (242-53), and one by Ernst Robert Curtius entitled "Technique and Thematic Development of James Joyce" (310). Some of these commentaries were collected a year later, in a collection of twelve essays published by Shakespeare and Company, whose title had been chosen by Joyce himself, *Our Exagmination round his*



*factification for incamination in Work in Progress.*<sup>14</sup> The aim of this collection, which was to a certain extent orchestrated by Joyce, was to demonstrate the readability and intelligibility of the book, in answer to his chief critics, at the time Sean O’Faolain, Wyndham Lewis, and Rebecca West. Joyce made direct reference to it in the *Wake* by alluding to the active participation of the *transition* contributors whom he called the “twelve deaferend dumbbawls of the howl abovebeugled to the contonuation through regeneration of the urutteration of the word in pregress” (284. 19-23), in a self-mocking answer to those who derailed him and his so-called Parisian “clique.” Another allusion to his friends also makes clear the crucial role of these early readers in the process of writing: “His producers are not his consumers? Your exagmination round his factification for incamination of a warping progress. Declaim!” (497. 1-3). All these cross-references were of course obvious to the other contemporary readers of *transition* and no doubt added to the fun Joyce expected them to derive from the reading of his work. Along with the choice of other documents, they testify that Joyce’s involvement in the critical reception of “Work in Progress,” ten years before its final completion into a book, aimed to create a sustainable fictional construction.

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The essays and notes published in *transition* to explain, defend, and comment on “Work in Progress” were not the only means used by Joyce to constitute an audience for himself. As a sort of “clever ad-cavasser in his own right” (Ellmann), he also asked Jolas to publish a number of visual documents which progressively constituted a hagiographic montage. For instance, the reproduction of a page bearing hand-made corrections for the final proof of one of the fragments of “Work in Progress” highlighted the legibility and the materiality of the work. Other visual tools of self-promotion were Berenice Abbott’s portrait of the artist prostrated in his chair and

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Beckett et al. *Our Exagmination round his factification for incamination in “Work in Progress.”* Paris: Shakespeare and Co., 1929. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.

wearing a patch over his right eye, which looks like an illustration of the sufferings Joyce had to endure due to his poor health and bad eyesight (*tr.* 13, 4), and an intriguing caricature commissioned from César Abin, which represents Joyce in the form of a gigantic, cobwebbed quotation mark unhappily hovering above the world, which reads as an ironical allusion to his “unreadability” (*tr.* 21, 256). The incorporation of these documents in *transition* shows that Joyce conceived of the little magazine not only as a means to circulate texts and ideas, but also a production and marketing tool targeted at a certain type of audience.

In *Institutions of Modernism*, Lawrence Rainey has demonstrated this by explaining that the little review, because it was at the same time semi-retired from the publishing institution and firmly embedded within the market economy, was considered the most effective way of reaching into the future for the readers who would be likely to understand those modernist works of art that were shunned by their contemporaries, be those future readers students, scholars, or collectors of rare books.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, one recurrent feature of the texts produced in *transition* in defence of Joyce is their insistence on the fact that if “Work in Progress” was found to be “unreadable” by contemporary readers, it was only because of the latter’s own idiosyncratic limitations, a difficulty the future reader would be certain not to encounter. Among other examples, here is what Carola Gidion-Welcker wrote in 1930:

That we have become weak and entirely untrained for such abstractions [...] is not an argument against Joyce, but at the most against the period of our meeting him [...] Joyce seems to stand in universal connection with the vitality of present and future. For this reason, a good deal of the future will probably belong to him. (*tr.* 19/20, 174-83)

Two years earlier, in his appreciation of “Work in Progress” in light of Old Norse poetry, Franck Budgen had stated that “the difficulty in entering into Joyce’s imaginative world lies in no essential obscurity on Joyce’s part but in our atrophied word sense” (*tr.* 13, 209-13), while William Carlos Williams confidently announced “Forward is the new!” This collective will to

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence, Rainey. *Institutions of Modernism. Literary Elite and Public Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

entrust “Work in Progress” into the hands of benevolent, clairvoyant readers certainly accounted for the choice of the little review as its vehicle through time. Surprisingly, however, a closer examination of the arguments used by the *transition* contributors to vindicate Joyce’s “unreadability” reveals that this “will to the future” was in fact a “will to the present.”

Indeed, almost all of them insisted on the fact that Joyce’s text had to be read aloud if one wanted to reach the degree of consciousness which made it possible to step beyond one’s initial powerlessness into a new plane of communication. In the essay entitled “Word Structure of ‘Work in Progress’” published in the Fall 1928 issue, John Rodcker thus argued: “Beneath words lie affective contacts which might, it would seem, entirely dispense with words as signs but not as sounds” (*tr.* 14, 229-32). The reading aloud of “Work in Progress” had no doubt been prompted to the *transition* group by Joyce himself, as they often gathered to hear him read the latest fragments of his work. We also know that Joyce’s gramophone recording inspired Ogden’s translation of Anna Livia Plurabelle into Basic English, whose aim it was to bring the reader “the simple sense of it,” as Ogden put it. The number of contributions advising the reader to reinvest “Work in Progress” physically with his own breath, rhythm, and voice, and thus overcome its difficulties, points to Joyce’s notion of reading as both a productive performance and a social act. In a similar way, the *transition* critics repeatedly advised their readers to surrender to the “glittering humour” of Joyce’s “joyous creation.” Here too, “dissolving laughter” was seen as a way for the reader to restore a sense of immediacy and reality, while sharing in an archaic experience bringing back the sense of his collective self, as Armand Petitjean explained in a piece entitled “Joyce and Mythology. Mythology and Joyce”: “Joyce’s mythical laughter is the surest way of getting acquainted with the reader, of making his actors known to each other, the natural, radiant energy they develop in their contacts and contractions, the liberation from their own history” (*tr.* 23). The idea that Joyce’s work ought to be experienced first and foremost as an act of dissipative energy was further emphasized by

commentators who were keen on making clear that “Work in Progress” should not be understood as a closed structure, even when completed into a book, for it was essentially an ongoing, endless process. This warning did not seem to apply to the cyclical structure of *Finnegans Wake*, which the *transition* contributors could hardly have had a clue about at that early stage of the book’s production, but rather aimed at associating “Work in Progress” with the idea of a singular performance in the present (which brings us back to Ogden and Richards’s emotive and symbolic nature of language). As a constituent feature of Joyce’s reception in *transition*, the systematic emphasis on the importance of reading in the present allows us to better identify his ideal “new reader.”

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The “will to the present” formulated by the collective voice of *transition* is not, as one might have thought, opposed to the will to address “Work in Progress” to a better audience in the future. Indeed, as Alain Badiou has demonstrated, the rhetoric of the avant-garde was to simultaneously fabricate a present for their artistic innovations and wrap them as if in a protective envelope for the future<sup>16</sup>. In this respect, by making the “readability” of “Work in Progress” the formula of their avant-gardism, Joyce’s friends were intent on making it a sort of “metamanifesto” for *transition* and thus ensuring that both Joyce’s work and Jolas’s magazine would safely connect with future generations. However, in retrospect, this avant-gardist posturing raises questions: *transition* does not belong to the “happy” avant-garde, but to what Rabaté has defined as “late modernism,” a period characterized by a growing feeling of unrest and uncertainty. Thus, the use of the little review as an interstitial medium between the critical puzzlement of the present and the projected optimism for the future reflects an avant-gardist strategy which, despite its bravado, lets a palpable feeling of anxiety filter out.

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<sup>16</sup> “Les avant-gardes ont simultanément activé au présent les ruptures formelles et produit, sous forme de manifestes et de déclarations, l’enveloppe théorique de cette activation. Elles ont produit l’enveloppement du présent réel dans un futur fictif. Et elles ont appelé ‘expérience artistique nouvelle’ cette double production.” Alain Badiou. *Le siècle*. Paris: Seuil, 2005, 196.

For this reason, it seems inaccurate to say that Joyce used *transition* to demand a better, later audience. Instead, he engaged contemporary readers to address their responses to future readers in the hope that the latter would read through the former. This may also explain why Joyce did not object to being associated with the synthetic, conservative trend he saw Jolas embarking on at the beginning of the 1930s. Indeed, by 1932, Jolas had clearly positioned *transition*'s "Revolution of the Word" in a romantic and Jungian vein Joyce was in total disagreement with. In that new phase, *transition* came to embrace what Jolas called the "Verticalist" or "Vertigralist" movement which gave way to new "mantic" experiments with the "language of night." While the new trend neither affected the two men's friendship nor the flow of essays on "Work in Progress" in *transition*, one may wonder why Joyce never bothered to distance his own experiment from Jolas's search for a universal logos inspired from Jung's "collective unconscious," especially since Jolas continued to allude to "Work in Progress" as an illustration of the quest for this "new Mythos." I would argue that Joyce chose not to say anything because *transition*'s editorial program offered a key to his own project to create a "new reader." In the same way as Jolas surrounded his "Verticalist" project with a hypertextual structure made of critical essays, footnotes, commentaries, experimental texts, and glossaries in order to help the reader keep believing in the meaning of the entire project composition, so Joyce wanted his reader to attribute meaning to the entire corpus born out of "Work in Progress," part of which was published in *transition*. In this respect, both Jolas and Joyce used the little magazine as a sort of genetic material whose aim it was to emphasize, facilitate, and preserve access to their experiments with language, albeit with a different view in mind concerning the ultimate result. In Joyce's eyes, the value of *transition*'s contributions in defending "Work in Progress" may have resided, first and foremost, in the fact that they demonstrated that the act of reading was more about learning a textual process than trying to

discover a secret code or cipher<sup>17</sup>. In this sense, there could have been no better readers of “Work in Progress” than the *transition* critics who were always keen on deriving pleasure from the text, confident that in so doing they added to the significance of the whole work.

On the whole, however, Joyce appears to have been ahead of his *transition* friends. Not only because he was able to see how his and Jolas’s projects were diverging, and to nevertheless envisage their potential shared ground in relation to the challenge of creating a new readership, but also because the significance of “Work in Progress” for him lay in its ability to be grasped as an organic whole by his readers, even before it was completed, something his friends were unable to take lightly. Indeed, their belief in the power as a process of “Work in Progress” was so strong, that they dreaded it coming to an end by turning into *Finnegans Wake*, as Stuart Gilbert wrote in the penultimate issue of the magazine: “It will be hard for us to accept the fact that ‘the motion is ended’ and this living growth has been arrested, at an arbitrary moment, under a specific title. For, in truth, ‘Work in Progress’ could never be ended.” Gilbert’s remark points out Joyce’s view of “Work in Progress” and *Finnegans Wake* as distinct, and yet contiguous,<sup>18</sup> and his strategic use of *transition* to offer guidance and access to a later text whose self-reflexivity defeats guidance by undermining all readings. This tension shows that Joyce’s writing did not posit any “unreadability,” but instead wanted to attract attention to reading as a demanding practice which is always grounded in social and historical circumstances. In trying to read through the responses of Joyce’s contemporary readers, as he saw to it that we would, we become, in our turn, the “new reader” he was searching for: not an “ideal” one, not a “better” one than the earlier ones, but one willing to learn (joyfully, that is *transition*’s message to us) that whatever meaning is produced is hypertextual and collective in its nature.

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<sup>17</sup> On this question, see also Jean-Michel Rabaté’s “Pound, Joyce and Eco: Modernism and the Ideal Genetic Reader.” *Romantic Review*, 86.3 (May 1995): 485-500 (p. 499).

<sup>18</sup> In the conclusion of his study, Dirk Van Hulle answers the conundrum: “where does the *avant-texte* end?” by deciding that “Joyce’s last work is both *Finnegans Wake* and “Work in Progress,” a combination of the text with its famous circular structure and the square siglum of the work he had in mind in 1924: □” (158)

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