Modernist Group Dynamics
Modernist Group Dynamics: The Politics and Poetics of Friendship

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

FABIO A. DURÃO AND DOMINIC WILLIAMS

For decades, the study of literary and philosophical modernism concerned solitary figures like the flâneur, the exile, and the lonely genius, but recently the group formations that fostered modernist movements have emerged into view. Scholars now recognize how much of modernism took shape in letters and personal encounters, and how collaborative ventures like the salon and the “little magazine” contributed, not incidentally but centrally, to the cultural innovations of the early twentieth century. The essays in Modernist Group Dynamics: The Poetics and Politics of Friendship pursue this new direction in modernist scholarship, exploring the ways artists and intellectuals worked in concert and in conflict. Groups of friends encouraged each other in daring, sometimes scandalous ventures which, in turn, bore the marks of more than a single creative design, as modernists imagined and theorized group life in a period of growing alienation and atomization. Placing group formations, with all their promises and problems, at the centre of our study allows the contributors—scholars from around the world—to reconsider some of the best-known figures of European modernism, to analyze collaborations across national boundaries, and to recover modernist groups in unexpected contexts like the so-called Third World.

Milton Cohen opens the book with an account of the richest period for modernist groups, the decade preceding World War I. Building on his well-known earlier work, Cohen considers why modernist writers and artists were so peculiarly drawn to groups in this period, the roles of leaders, the promotional value of collective movements, and the instabilities that threatened them. Thus Cohen’s essay broadens out to provide a historical and theoretical overview of the specific studies of groups in London, Europe, and beyond. After this overview, five sections follow, each with two essays. The “Great London Vortex” starts with Caleb Smith’s essay on the new kind of subjectivity both presupposed and fostered by the Men of ’14, one which is predicated on an openness to connection, interaction and modification. Dominic Williams provides a new, demystifying interpretation of the best-known Anglo-American
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The Men of 1914, with the collaboration of certain key Jewish intellectuals, consolidated and disseminated a modernist anti-Semitism.

The second part of the book is devoted to the Bloomsbury group. Silke Greskamp uses Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of “habitus” and “field” to reconsider the singularity of the Bloomsbury group as a British “think tank,” to arrive at an alternative understanding of the avant-garde as a space of opposition against both cultural and social establishments, troubling at once conventional accounts of the art object and of race, class, and especially gender. Rochelle Rives picks up where Greskamp leaves off, with the questions of gender and sexuality in Bloomsbury. She pursues the ways in which the aesthetics and politics of the group destabilized its own elitism and received forms of social life, suggesting at the end that the stability of the community itself paradoxically rested on certain sexual destabilizations.

The surrealists are the object of the third part. Rad Borislavov connects the contradictions of Breton’s movement to the contemporary theorization of the friend/enemy distinction by Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin. Breton’s efforts to create an avant-garde group, destabilized by his own purges of non-conforming members, are explored as symptoms of the political instability of friendship as the organizing force of a radical collective practice. Following this, John Westbrook shows how a slightly later group, the Study Group for Human Phenomenology, attempted to revive the intellectual energies of surrealism to develop a new foundation for the human sciences in a moment of academic and social crisis. The recovery of the Study Group and its journal, Inquisitions, in turn, allows Westbrook to revise conventional accounts of twentieth-century French intellectual history. He shows how the enormously influential journal Tel Quel, whose contributors included Derrida and Foucault, Barthes and Lacan, may have evolved from Surrealist origins.

In the section devoted to the salon, Barbara Will reconsiders Stein, the center of perhaps the most famous modernist salon, in terms of her relationship with Bernard Fay, the Vichy official who protected her from Nazi persecution. While many Stein critics have celebrated dialogue, open exchange without hierarchy, as a liberating feature of Stein’s texts, Will shows how Stein’s lived friendships were often complex negotiations of power. Thus history allows Will to revisit the versions of friendship presented in Stein’s work, as when she writes that, “[i]n friendship, power always has a downward curve.” Rachel Freudenburg examines George’s
circle as a hybrid of two important group formations. She shows how George’s poetry expressed his homosexuality and his complex relations to an ever-shifting group of collaborators. Contextualizing the George Circle within discourses of erotics and friendship from the turn of the twentieth century, Freudenburg concludes that the contemporary politics of friendship allowed the Circle to pass for a Männerbund, a type of masculinist and often homophobic club, while it carried on a secret life as a gay men’s group in the fashion of a Jewish women’s literary salon like that of Rachel Varnhagen.

The penultimate part of *Modernist Group Dynamics* leaves Europe to discuss literary articulations in China and Brazil. Hua Jiang reads the friendship between Virginia Woolf and Ling Shuhua, as the development of a transnational feminist writing practice, one that according to Jiang provides an imagined sub-text of Chinese women in war that informed Woolf’s writing of *Three Guineas*. This transnational feminist bonding through the practice of writing, Jiang argues, resisted the nationalist ideologies of their respective countries and allowed them to re-imagine their identities through an aesthetic and cultural “interdependency” across nations. Fabio Acelrud Durão proposes two concepts to try to characterize the specificity of Brazilian modernist group formation. With the notion of “cordiality,” taken from sociologist Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, he tries to account for the preponderance of private and personal relationships in the articulation of the *grupo modernista* and its Modern Art’s Week of 1922. After this, Durão investigates how peripheral nationalism worked to define and oppose modernist groups among themselves. The book ends with Marianna Torgovnick’s memoir of her own writing group framed by some cameos of other 20th century writing collaboratives (Pound/Eliot, the Bloomsburys, DHL and friends/almost-enemies like Luhan and Middleton Murray). Following this, she casts an eye on the state of the writing group today, theorizing its relative fall but calling attention to the fact that it is so strongly a women’s phenomenon. Finally, Torgovnick discusses important do’s and don’ts of group writing, suggesting along the way pedagogical experiments she is currently developing in her teaching practice.
Anyone who studies modernism, especially before World War I, cannot fail to be struck by the prominence and proliferation of groups and movements that captured the allegiance of major artists, composers, and writers in this era. The Italian Futurists, The Blue Rider in Munich, the London Imagists and Vorticists, Die Brücke in Berlin, the Cubo-Futurists in Moscow, the Second Vienna School – the list could go on and on. These groups sprouted almost simultaneously in several modernist centres: Paris, of course, but also Berlin, Munich, Moscow, Leningrad, Vienna, Prague, Milan, London, and New York. Some of these groups, e.g., the Futurists, were full-fledged movements with a devoted membership and a doctrine proclaimed in numerous manifestos and journal articles; other groups were scarcely more than two-person collaborations, such as Picasso and Braque during the pre-war Cubist years; still others, like the Blue Rider, comprised a small core of organizers and several loosely adhering members. Groups emerged to plan large-scale art exhibitions, like the Jack of Diamonds in Moscow, or were centred on a gallery, like Stieglitz’s 231 circle in New York, or formed around a modernist newspaper, such as Herwarth Walden’s Der Sturm and Franz Pfemfert’s Die Aktion in Berlin. Groups were situated at cafés (more than one such was called “Café Megalomania”), or met regularly at an artist’s studio, like the Sunday afternoon meetings of painters and critics at the Duchamp brothers’ studio in Puteaux, or grew out of a weekly salon, such as Mabel Dodge’s in New York. But the common denominators for all these varied arrangements were shared interests and common goals compelling enough to bring independent artists out of their studios to meet together.
I. Appeals of the Group

What were these shared interests? What motivated artists to form or join these groups? Their reasons were both practical and philosophical, artistic (sharing an aesthetic philosophy) and self-interested, defensive and assertive. The character of modernism itself determined much of this interest. As avant-garde artists challenged accepted styles, as well as the aesthetic and social norms undergirding them, they were relentlessly attacked, ridiculed, and scorned by the general public, the press, the conservative critics. Marginalized professionally, they had to find their own means of support, arrange their own presentations. And since modernists, in turn, scorned the philistine bourgeoisie that reviled their art, they essentially had only each other—along with a few sympathetic patrons, gallery owners, and journalists—for company, intellectual stimulation, and moral support. The veteran American painter Robert Henri put it very well to the twenty-four-year-old Morgan Russell, who was then struggling alone in Paris to find his style: “Most people like to be in a movement. Its [sic] always warm inside and […] its quite cool to be out by your self. . . . [M]ost all human beings, be it the commonplace or the minority-advance guard, want company enough to keep warmth and courage up.” Although Henri’s main point in this letter was that true innovation was and always would be reserved for the few individuals “who bear the Idea,” Russell came to agree with Henri’s concession to the psychological comfort of groups and soon formed his own, the Synchromists, with Stanton MacDonald-Wright.

Defensively, this banding together amounted to pulling the wagons in a circle. Often having just arrived in modernist centres, artists found comfort in meeting and socializing with like-minded peers in the friendly environment of the café or studio, especially when the larger societal milieu was distinctly hostile. The group thus became a surrogate family. As the American poet Alfred Kreymborg observed about his own artists colony at Grantwood, New Jersey: “The desire of congregating in sympathetic groups was a natural development […] in protection against the prevailing opinion held by American society that […] [the modernist] was a wastrel, a pariah, a superfluous blot on an otherwise united democracy” (Troubadour 207).

Joining was not merely a defensive act, however; and, far more than being a protective association, the modernist group was a nexus of intellectual stimulation, a synergistic goad to artistic growth. As Ezra Pound wrote in 1912: “You must not only subsidize the man with work still in him, but you must gather such dynamic particles together, you must
set them where they will interact, and stimulate each other.” For young artists still uncertain of their artistic identity, the opportunity to discuss technical problems with talented colleagues, share aesthetic and philosophical ideas with well-read contemporaries, and, not least, receive the encouragement and energy of the group’s leader was exhilarating. Even for the more self-sufficient, the group’s meeting place, typically a comfortable café or tavern, offered socializing and companionship to relieve the lonely rigours of the studio or writing desk. Little wonder that these cafés became so closely identified with the groups that habituated them: the Guerbois for the Paris Impressionists, the Closerie des Lilas for the Symbolists, the Chat Noir for the Montmartre Cubists, the Café des Westens and Josty for the Berlin Expressionist groups, the Stephanie for the Munich modernists, to name only a few. At Berlin’s famous Café des Westens, Wolfgang Goetz recalls: “We learned to see here, to perceive and to think. We learned, almost in a more penetrating way than at the university, that we were not the only fish in the sea and that one should not look at only one side of a thing but at least at four” (qtd. in Allen 24).

The group milieu gave fledgling artists the encouragement they needed to get started. Ernst Blass recalls that he did not start to write seriously until he began associating with poets of Berlin’s neue Club, who, in addition to meeting regularly at the Fledermauszimmer restaurant, gathered often at the Café des Westens: “although I felt very young and insecure […] I was encouraged, made to write poems and reviews. Things began to snowball. People asked: Have you written anything new this week? Blass poems appeared, at first playful and imitative, then with more feeling, more self-consciousness […] I did it timidly, just to see how it would turn out.” The milieu of the Café des Westens, where so many other modernist groups gathered, also sharpened Blass’s sense of purpose, of participating in an “us against them” conflict: “[W]hat I was engaged in […] was a literary movement, a war on the gigantic philistine of those days” (“The Old Café des Westens,” rpt. in Raabe 28-29).

Collectively, artists were far better equipped to deal with ridicule and critical abuse of the “gigantic philistine,” not just by defensively seeking sympathetic support, but by carrying modernist battle directly to the enemy. As Anton Webern wrote to his teacher-colleague, Arnold Schoenberg, after the latter’s String Quartet No. 2 was hissed at its première: “Nothing is more important than showing these pigs that we do not allow ourselves to be intimidated” (qtd. in Moldenhauer 105). This mutual support emboldened the group members to confront — even provoke — a hostile public in collective demonstrations far more eagerly, and with better chances of success, than they could ever have done as
individuals. Their motto was not “safety in numbers,” but “strength in numbers.”

Artistically, too, the group dynamic encouraged members to surpass themselves faster than they might have working alone. As Lothar-Günther Buchheim said of the closely knit Brücke painters: “They […] pushed each other to the heights of inspiration, helped each other with mutual, unvarnished criticism” (qtd. in Allen 27). This stimulus obtained even in the smallest two-person group, as Braque described in his metaphor about himself and Picasso as “two mountaineers roped together.”

Less heroically, groups offered young artists opportunities for getting their work before a public – of having their poems published in a magazine or at least read aloud at a soirée, their music and plays performed, their paintings exhibited – and for attracting critical attention to these presentations. A sizable number of groups emerged for just these reasons of professional advancement, organized around a newspaper or journal, or devoted to mounting a yearly exhibition. Such groups compensated for the predictable dearth of opportunities offered by established publishers and galleries. In Paris, for example, Blaise Cendrars complained that French periodicals of all kinds refused his verse between 1912 and 1914. In fact, established magazines granted so little space to poetry in these years that, as Kenneth Cornell notes, poets themselves founded numerous little magazines as a medium for their verse. Henri Martin Barzun’s Poème et Drame (started 1912), Nicholas Beauduin’s La Vie des lettres (begun 1913), Ricciotto Canudo’s Montjoie! (started 1913), and of course Guillaume Apollinaire’s Les Soirées des Paris (begun 1912) all arose to fill this void as well as to promulgate their editor’s particular aesthetic philosophy or movement: Barzun’s Simultanéisme and Dramatisme, Beauduin’s Paroxysme, Apollinaire’s exegeses of Cubism and Orphism (Cornell 123 ff.).

Groups provided artists greater visibility in another way. Having their work seen as part of a group’s style was often a necessary prelude to having it seen and evaluated on its own merits. The Cézanne-inspired artists who recognized their affinities at the Paris Autumn Salon of 1910 also realized that each gained from the synergy of their being displayed together. Thus, if they should fail to control the hanging committee of the spring Indépendants of 1911, Albert Gleizes explains, “in all probability we would be dispersed to the four corners of the salon and the effect produced on the public by a group movement would be lost. It was necessary that it be produced. We had to be grouped; that was the opinion of all” (qtd. in Robbins 16; my emphasis).

Finally, aggressive group leaders like Filippo Marinetti, Ezra Pound,
Herwarth Walden, and David Burliuk offered an astonishing array of publicity skills for keeping their group in the public eye—a point developed below. How could a young artist, unknown and often unassertive, gain comparable exposure working independently? Inevitably, the desire to advance oneself motivated many to join. Viewed cynically, professional expedience might even appear a group’s sole raison d’être. Thus, Glenn Hughes describes the Imagists’ motives in joining:

None of them was interested in a movement for its own sake; each of them was interested in being a poet. […] [B]eing faced in common with certain prejudices, they joined forces for a time and marched against the enemy, waving a single banner. That they won their fight is incontestable. And having won it they threw the banner away, broke ranks, and became frankly what they had been all the time: individual artists. (Introduction to Imagist Anthology: 1930 xvii)

Reviewers and critics of the time, already besieged with modernist styles, regarded this welter of “isms” and ideologies with deep scepticism. As Jeffrey Weiss summarizes in The Popular Culture of Modern Art, through its “excesses of réclame […] the group or ism was subject to allegations of sinister collectivity—the cénacle as a dynamic of leaders and disciples ganging-up to inflict their doctrine on a beleaguered art public” (74). Even modernist devotees of the group could suspect other groups of bad faith. By early 1913, Albert Gleizes, a chief organizer of the various subgroups of the Cubist School, worried in print that “the isms would soon multiply according to the will of artists working more to attract attention to themselves than to realize serious works.”55 Roger Allard was inclined to agree; this critic, who had himself attended the Sunday meetings at the Duchamp studio in Puteaux, concludes in 1914 that through its posturing and insupportable claims (most egregiously practised by the Italian Futurists), the modernist group has pushed the avant-garde “from good faith to mystification” (Weiss 102). Ultimately, however, this distrust only underscores the phenomenal success these groups achieved in establishing themselves as a common denominator in the culture of modernism.

Typically, these reasons for joining a group merged. In Berlin, for example, where groups proliferated beginning in 1910, artists grew bolder as they found others who shared their hostility to Wilhelmine society. They became still more assertive with the appearance of newspapers like Der Sturm and Die Aktion that provided a public medium for their criticism. Roy Allen summarizes:
[W]hat had been [for these new groups] at first a retreat from their society was at last reversed now and transformed into stridently critical opposition to it. The activities in the circles were simultaneously growing more intense and more organized, as the circles themselves became more tightly knit and more governed by a common spirit […]

The founding of their own journals […] [bolstered their] feeling of backing a movement or being united behind a common cause or mission.

(18-19)

A reflection of how group identity encouraged this strident opposition appears in the Russian Cubo-Futurists’ first manifesto, “Slap in the Face of Public Taste” (December 1912); among the four “rights” of the poet is: “To stand on the rock of the word ‘we’ amidst the sea of boos and outrage” (qtd. in Lawton 52).

II. The Duce

Without question, the group's leader was the single most important catalyst in creating the group and making it a force to be reckoned with. Such figures as Filippo Marinetti, Ezra Pound, Wassily Kandinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Alfred Stieglitz, David Burliuk, different as their personalities were, shared galvanizing qualities: energy, vision, dynamism, dedication. Marinetti himself was called “the caffeine of Europe.” A few leaders owned galleries (Stieglitz and Walden, for example) or edited newspapers (Walden and Pfemfert); devoted to promoting new talent, they, in turn, were natural magnets for that talent. Most leaders were practising artists with a theoretical turn of mind and a desire to promulgate their theories. Kandinsky (and Franz Marc), Marinetti, Pound, and Schoenberg all fall into this category. With the help of associates, Kandinsky and Marc, for example, mounted two Blue Rider exhibitions and published a large Almanac comprised of articles and art work. In both enterprises they recruited contributions from artists in harmony with their ideas. Such undertakings obviously stole countless hours from their own art, as Kandinsky makes clear in a letter to Arnold Schoenberg:

13 January 1912
Dear Mr. Schoenberg,
I am really very ashamed [to respond so tardily]. But it isn’t laziness! I will just briefly list for you what I am doing: 1) the Blaue Reiter [Almanac], that is write, read and correct articles, etc., 2) arrange Exhibition I of the B.R., 3) prepare Exhibition II of the B.R., 4) invite Germans, Frenchmen, and Swiss for the exhibition [the second Jack of Diamonds] in Moscow (I have unlimited authority, therefore also unlimited responsibility), 5) help
in the buying and selling of unfamiliar pictures, and as a result 6) read and write letters which are always hurried, and often complicated, often very unpleasant (there are days when I get letters with each of the five mail deliveries, there are days with twenty incoming letters, and there is never a day without letters). 7) I owed letters, 8) I don’t paint, 9) I neglect my own affairs. In two weeks I have written over eighty letters. My only hope is that it will change when the B. R. is finally printed and the exhibitions are arranged. I am already tormented by two pictures which I would like to paint – one is finished in my mind, the other I would like to attempt – So don’t be angry with me. (Rpt. in Hahl-Koch 41-42)

Balancing this selflessness was the power and attention these leaders enjoyed as prime movers. For some, indeed, this love of power expanded into full-blown megalomania, fed by their restless pursuit of public attention. Leaders like Pound, Lewis, Walden, Burliuk, and most of all Marinetti, who set the mould, were as much showmen as artists, masters of publicity in an age that was just awakening to its power in the mass media. These disciples of P.T. Barnum enjoyed causing a ruckus and being at the centre of controversy. Thus Wyndham Lewis: “I concluded that as a matter of course some romantic figure must always emerge, to captain the ‘group.’ Like myself! How otherwise could a ‘group’ get about, and above all talk. For it had to have a mouthpiece didn’t it?” Lewis, in particular, recognized that, for all their invective, the newspapers needed modernist hijinks as much as the artists needed newspaper coverage:

The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, and no Politics: so the painter could really become a “star.” […] Anybody could become one who did anything funny. And Vorticism was replete with humour, of course: it was acclaimed the best joke ever. Pictures, I mean oil-paintings, were “news.” Exhibitions were reviewed in column after column. And no illustrated paper worth its salt but carried a photograph of some picture of mine or of my “school” […] or one of myself smiling insinuatingly from its pages. To the photograph would be attached some scrap of usually misleading gossip; or there would be an article from my pen, explaining why life had to be changed, and how. “Kill John Bull with Art!” I shouted. And John and Mrs. Bull leapt for joy, in a cynical convulsion. For they felt as safe as houses. So did I. (Blasting and Bombardiering 35-36)

This symbiotic twining of seemingly hostile forces became one of modernism’s cultural legacies.

Group members had mixed feeling about being led by these showmen. On the one hand, notoriety certainly attracted larger audiences to exhibitions, readings, and evenings; and journalists, eager for a sensational story, covered these events, attracting still more visitors. But some artists
were put off by the tawdriness and vanity inextricably linked to this publicity seeking. The painter August Macke comments on Herwarth Walden’s actions: “The craze he has for advertising and pushing the [Blue Rider] association is something terrible. I’m getting disgusted with Der Sturm and its endless manifestoes” (letter to Franz Marc, 1912; qtd. in Dube, Expressionists 66). Marinetti, the most flamboyant of the publicist-leaders, also stirred doubts among his disciples. Gino Severini recalls in his memoir, Life of a Painter:

It was probably Futurism that gave rise to the demons of over-advertising and journalistic demagoguery, which came to plague artists. [...] [Marinetti] was [by 1911] beginning to look at things less from the point of view of art or interest in art than from that of the effect it produced. [...] I was sure that all the publicity, and the use Marinetti made of it, tended more and more to distract my friends from the main object of their aspirations. [...] Without realizing it, [Marinetti and Boccioni] were treating art as a “means,” a “pretext,” simply out of vain, materialistic exhibitionism. (80, 84, 93)

If these members were repelled by their leaders’ excessive publicizing, critics and reviewers were far more suspicious, believing that they – and the group’s members – were, in effect, being used. Albert Fleury wrote in Les Tablettes in 1912:

The group’s true goal […] [its] secret and unnamed objective [is] the “Will to Arrive,” the single-minded ambition of one man. […] The chef needs a group around him to spread propaganda, but the school functions only as his promotional machine. Even his disciples, the apparent insiders, are dupes to this enterprise. In the end, only the chef benefits; followers have been used without ever having achieved anything of their own by practicing the group style.7

In organizing and running the group, likewise, leaders often alienated the very members they recruited. When Ezra Pound, for example, expanded his core Imagist group of three to have enough members and material for a book of Imagist poems, he recruited several other poets whose Imagist credentials (or even knowledge of the movement’s aesthetics) were dubious. His core members protested. Worse, in their view, to maintain aesthetic consistency in this disparate group, Pound insisted on sole editorial control: he alone would select the poems for inclusion. The demand seemed high-handed to the participants. Frank Flint put it bluntly to Pound: “As to energy, etc. You deserve all credit for what you have done [in developing Imagism]. […] But where you have failed,
my dear Ezra, [...] is in your personal relationships; [...] you might have been generalissimo in a compact onslaught: and you spoiled everything by some native incapacity for walking square with your fellows. You have not been a good comrade, voilà!"8

Not surprisingly, the Imagists – even the core group – quickly gravitated to Amy Lowell’s offer of a more egalitarian standard: contributors would choose their own poems for inclusion in her Imagist anthologies. 9 Richard Aldington, one of the original members, noted approvingly, “There was to be no more of the Duce business, with arbitrary inclusions and exclusions and a capricious censorship. We were to publish quietly and modestly as a little group of friends with similar tendencies, rather than water-tight dogmatic principles” (Life 139). Muttering about “Amygism” turning an avant-garde movement into a “democratic beer garden,”10 Pound moved on to co-found with Wyndham Lewis a new movement of painters, sculptors, and poets, Vorticism – and as Lewis’s recollection (quoted above) suggests, these two leaders both enjoyed playing the duce.

III. Leaving the Group

A leader’s high-handedness was certainly one factor that alienated some members to the point of leaving the group. Others found the demands of participating in group demonstrations and exhibitions too onerous. Gino Severini and Carlo Carrá, who had been Futurists since 1910, finally left in 1914, Severini wishing “to work in peace” (Martin 185). For some artists, the very act of belonging, for all of its professional opportunities and social comforts, was too disturbing to their artistic self-concept. For one thing, reductive critics were all too eager to slap a corporate label on the style of each member, regardless of how individual and innovative it was. The Czech painter František Kupka experienced this dilemma when he agreed, with much trepidation, to show his paintings at the Section d’Or exhibition organized by the Puteaux group in 1912.11 True, he had attended several Sunday meetings of the group at the home of his neighbours, the Duchamp brothers, for he was interested in several of the topics discussed there: “fourth-dimensional theories, Cubism, Orphism, and the golden section” (Fauchereau 18). But his other interests – biology, astronomy, and theosophy – were probably more central to his painterly imagination. And his paintings were not really like the Cubist-oriented canvases of the exhibition’s organizers, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Jacques Villon. His Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colours, for example, while almost as abstract as Delaunay’s contemporaneous Windows series,
derived not from a Cézanne-Picasso lineage of planar analysis, but from Kupka’s highly eclectic and theosophically tinged interest in organic shapes and their relation to life forces.

The Section d’Or exhibition confirmed his worst fears. In his address at the opening, the poet and art critic, Guillaume Apollinaire, categorized artists into various types of Cubism while standing in front of Kupka’s paintings. Worse, Apollinaire lumped Kupka’s work stylistically with that of Picabia, Duchamp, and Delaunay (who had not exhibited) under the “ism” Apollinaire was just then reifying in his art criticism: Orphism.\textsuperscript{12}

What especially galled Kupka about being dubbed an Orphist was that that group’s putative leader, Robert Delaunay, was then working on a series of abstract \textit{Circular Forms} that showed unmistakable similarities to Kupka’s 1911-1912 \textit{Disks of Newton}.\textsuperscript{13} Kupka now faced not only public confusion about his artistic identity, but even worse, potential infringement on his claim to artistic innovation and originality: “Certain witnesses state that he even thought that Delaunay with his \textit{disques simultanés}, and Léger, with his \textit{disques dans la ville}, had stolen their ideas from him.” Separation from all these groups seemed the only recourse: according to Serge Fauchereau, Kupka removed his works from the exhibition and “was quick to deny any such links with a specific movement[, j]ealously defending his position as a precursor” (18).

\section*{IV. Group conflicts and Split-offs}

As members came and went, the groups themselves were inherently unstable and constantly changing their composition. Moreover, their combative nature, and in particular the radical vision of their leaders, kept them in continuous ferment. Marinetti identified the modernist group’s new aggressiveness in the Futurists’ Foundation Manifesto of 1909: “Literature having up to now glorified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy, and slumber, we wish to exalt the aggressive movement […] the cuff, and the blow” (rpt. in Chipp 286). This will to battle addressed two different opponents. The first enemy was familiar: the defenders and supporters of conventional art. The avant-garde’s opposition to the forces of reaction – a complacent public, conservative critics, journalists, the academies – was axiomatic, virtually a cliché by 1910. The second target, however, was new. As modernist groups proliferated before World War I, \textit{intergroup} rivalry intensified as groups vied for public attention. At the same time, tensions often arose within groups between radical and conservative members. The result was often pitched battles between groups and insurrections within the group itself.
Battles between avant-garde groups and a hostile, conservative public are too numerous to detail in this article. One recalls the most sensational of these: the riot at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées on the opening night of Le Sacre du Printemps; the uproar at such exhibitions as the second NKV-Munich exhibition (1910), where viewers spat on the canvases and had to be prevented from slashing them; and of course the Futurist evenings throughout Italy between 1910 and 1914 that would typically erupt in cat-calls and insults hurled back and forth, barrages of thrown fruit, and finally fistfights. What is less well known about these conflicts is that they were typically two-sided and rarely spontaneous. Groups pro and con attended these events expecting trouble and ready – eager – to participate in the free-for-all. Thus, the older stereotype of beleaguered artists suddenly and unexpectedly attacked by an irate, reactionary mob must be revised when, for example, pro-Stravinsky forces crowded the theatre balconies at the Ballets Russes that May night in 1913, ready to battle society swells to defend this much-rumoured masterwork of their hero (Eksteins 73; Fletcher 65). Their cat-calls against critics and fervent applauding during the music contributed to the general pandemonium. Similarly, the Cubist groups that had quietly organized over the winter of 1910-11 and arranged to be exhibited together at the spring and autumn Salons of 1911, came to the openings prepared for trouble. At the spring Salon des Indépendants,

[The cubist rooms […] had the character of a collective demonstration, but with a difference from similar occasions in the past. Neither the impressionist exhibitions nor the Fauve exhibition of 1905 had aimed – any more than Cézanne had aimed – at creating a public scandal. What the 1911 Indépendants showed was that the new generation of painters no longer shrank from the “scandalousness” which had hitherto weighed on the avant-garde, and that in fact they courted it and sought to turn it to account. (Daix 76)

And in “Room 8” of the 1911 Salon d’Automne, the Cubists concentrated their work to achieve maximum impact. Recalls Albert Gleizes: “In spite of the lack of homogeneity the thing as a whole has a fine irreverent swagger. From these pictures there rises a wind of battle” (“Souvenirs,” qtd. in Fry 174). Self-evidently, these conflicts fed off the existence of militant avant-garde groups.

As modernist groups competed for the public’s attention, more battles broke out, this time between and within the groups themselves, as they struggled to define their aesthetics, assert their primacy, and fend off hostile takeovers. Oskar Kokoschka recalls: “New ‘isms’ were springing
up everywhere. [...] Each laid claim to consideration as a definitive creative statement and carried on a running battle with all the others (My Life 66). Typically, these conflicts assumed several forms: “split-offs” of small radical cells from their more conservative parent groups; rivalries based on conflicting aesthetics, personalities, or both; and survival struggles, as emerging groups fought off older groups (nearly always, the Italian Futurists) attempting to annex them. Not surprisingly, these forms overlap. When Mikhail Larionov stridently attacked the Burliuk brothers’ planning of the 1912 Jack of Diamonds exhibition, his motives were partly ideological (opposing their European emphasis) and partly political (calling attention to his separatist group, the Donkey’s Tail).

Split-offs were so numerous as to make the phenomenon almost an essential stage in the life cycle of modernist groups, as formerly rebellious groups now seemed too stodgy for their most radical members, who voted with their feet. To cite only a few instances:

- T. E. Hulme led more radical poets (including Pound) out of the London Poets’ Club in 1909 to form their own Poets’ Club.
- Kandinsky and Marc stormed out of the NKV-Munich in December 1911 to form the Blue Rider.
- Larionov and Goncharova publicly denounced the Jack of Diamonds exhibition group to organize their own exhibition, “The Donkey’s Tail” in 1912 and to display their new style, Rayism.
- Painters Emil Nolde and Max Pechstein exited the by now venerable Secession group in 1910 to form the Neue Secession in Berlin, which, in turn, witnessed the walkout of Die Brücke painters in 1911.
- In Prague, the Group of Plastic Artists (including painters, sculptors, architects, and writers) seceded from the older Mánes Union of Artists in 1911, only to experience its own secession the following year as several members formed an opposition group.

Conflicting philosophies often caused these rivalries, such as the one in Berlin between Herwarth Walden’s Der Sturm, which increasingly emphasized the arts, and Franz Pfemfert’s Die Aktion, which featured radical social criticism as well as the arts. But personality differences, especially between rival leaders, also played a role. Pound’s feud with Amy Lowell has already been mentioned, but many more could be noted: Wyndham Lewis and Roger Fry, Alfred Kerr and Paul Cassirer, Mikhail Larionov and David Burliuk, etc. – there was no shortage of blowups when inflated egos confronted each other.

Groups battled each other almost as much as they scrapped with the
public. When Marinetti and his acolyte, Charles Nevinson, tried to co-opt the English Vorticists into Futurism in 1914, the Vorticists responded by publishing a denunciation of the Futurists in the Observer and by breaking up a Futurist reading with heckling and catcalls. Marinetti experienced a similar response in Moscow that same year. After the war, the nascent Surrealists did precisely the same at a Dadaist public presentation in July 1923, shouting taunts and raising a ruckus. These internecine conflicts made the art world noisier, more tumultuous, as Wyndham Lewis describes: “The excitement [in London of 1914] was intense. Putsches took place every month or so” (35). Intergroup fights also force us to modify stereotypes of modernist camaraderie: of young artists fighting shoulder to shoulder against the “gigantic philistine.”

This turmoil among the modernists themselves – and even much of the conflict between the avant-garde and the conservative public – simply could not have occurred without groups. Enabling artists to organize public presentations – the flashpoints of conflict – and to keep up their morale, the group also emboldened them to take their war against the conservative status quo directly to the enemy. Their success in attracting attention, in turn, intensified competition between rival groups, producing more battles. As both cause and consequence of aggressive conflict, then, modernist groups greatly intensified the confrontational milieu of the prewar art world.

V. Demographics

Modernist groups appeared in every major art centre in Europe and America, but where were they most active? Which arts generated the most groups? A glance at the following list shows that the major modernist groups in the years just before World War I were unevenly distributed across Europe:

Table 1: Geographical Distribution of groups before World War I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paris</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cubist School groups</td>
<td>Unanimists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picasso and Braque</td>
<td>Simultaneists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphists</td>
<td>Paroxystes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ballets Russes</td>
<td>Dramatistes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montjoie! circle / Cérébristes</td>
<td>Fantaisistes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Milan
- Italian Futurists

### Berlin
- *Der Sturm*
- Der neue Club
- *Die Pathetiker*
- *Pan*
- Neue Secession
- Meyer circle

### Munich
- Neue Künstlervereinigung (NKV)

### Vienna
- 2nd Vienna School
- Akademischer Verband
- Neukunstgruppe

### London
- Imagists
- Vorticists

### Moscow and St. Petersburg
- Union of Youth
- Donkey’s Tail
- Hylaea / Cubo-Futurists
- Centrifuge
- Triangle

### Prague
- Osma or The Eight
- Skupina or Group of Plastic Artists

### New York City and environs
- Stieglitz’s “291” group
- Association of American Painters and Sculptors
- Mabel Dodge salon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Union of Youth</td>
<td>Jack of Diamonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey’s Tail</td>
<td>Rayists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hylaea / Cubo-Futurists</td>
<td>Ego-Futurists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrifuge</td>
<td>Mezzanine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osma or The Eight</td>
<td>Mānes Union of Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skupina or Group of Plastic Artists</td>
<td>Arconauts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stieglitz’s “291” group</td>
<td>Camera Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of American Painters and Sculptors</td>
<td>Synchromists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel Dodge salon</td>
<td><em>The Glebe</em> (Grantwood NJ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Russia and Germany generated the most groups. Italy produced the fewest, but only because the Italian Futurists were so dynamic and inclusive in their membership – with a group like the Futurists, Italy needed only one!

Paris appears a lively centre for groups, as one might have expected from
the capital of modernism; but the number declines considerably if we subtract several movements with only one or two members, typically the editor(s) of a journal.15 Not surprisingly, group formation was low in America, where modernism was only beginning to take root before World War I.

Why were groups so central to modernist activity in Russia and Germany, but less so in Paris? The artistic climate of a locale – specifically, its tolerance of modernist innovation – partly explain these disparities, but even here the issue is not clear-cut. Paris had long since established itself as the centre of artistic innovation, a city that accepted, if it did not actively encourage, the new. In fact, however, this image was rapidly tarnishing in the prewar years: the Cubist rooms of the spring and autumn salons of 1911-1912 and the Ballets Russes’ daring ballets of 1912-1913 were attacked by a hostile and increasingly xenophobic press and public and even became political issues.16 Nevertheless, those yearly salons were available to young painters and sculptors, as were an infrastructure of small galleries, like Bernheim-Jeune and the Kahnweiler Gallery, that were sympathetic to modern art – venues enabling an artist to show without having to resort to the expedient of a group. Parisian poets, however, had fewer established resources. Paul Fort’s Vers et Prose was there for Symbolist poets, and Le Figaro devoted considerable column space to the arts, but not specifically to poetry. Poets thus had to create their own little magazines to see their work into print. For that reason, many of Paris’s new movements in these years – Simultanéisme, Dramatism, Paroxysme – reflected the aesthetic doctrines of the poet-editors of these magazines.

By contrast, Germany and Russia offered a milieu most artists thought of as actively hostile to modernism, with newspapers given to scathing attacks, governments that could censor journals and close down exhibitions, and a public that seemed (in Germany’s case) complacent, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the arts.17 Such an environment, offering few resources and considerable intimidation to an artist starting out, made both the protective and assertive functions of groups attractive. The German painter, August Macke, summed up the differing worlds with envious exaggeration: “In France, success follows on the most daring experiments by the young, but for them taking risks derives from a tradition. With us, each risk is a desperate chaotic experiment” (qtd. in Vezin 104).

These cultural generalizations require qualifying, however. Why, for example, did groups flourish in (and young artists flock to) Berlin, but not Vienna, if both cities fall within the reactionary culture described above?
The cities were so different that they prompted no less prominent an artist than Arnold Schoenberg to leave Vienna in 1911 for what he hoped were better prospects in Berlin; and many artists would have concurred with Kupka’s comparison of Vienna and Paris in 1897: “Vienna was like the sickness of a man in poor physical health. […] I have become emotionally ill [living there]. The Viennese air is not good for a painter. […] It was pure decadence. Here [in Paris] once again I take pleasure in the warmth and light of life. I am cured of my ills and wish to return to my studies of nature.” And Berlin, as Kokoschka observed, was “incapable of enduring boredom. If something is the way it is, why can’t it be changed? In this attitude Berlin differs from Paris, London, Rome, and […] Vienna, where you hear a lot about tradition even though the tradition itself is now completely empty” (My Life 64).

In Berlin’s restless milieu, the arts, too, could change – or at least be left alone by an urban (if not urbane) public. Vienna, on the other hand, prided itself on its reactionary traditionalism and enforced it vigilantly. In Vienna, Kokoschka’s incendiary play, Murderer: Hope of Women, was closed by police after it provoked an uproar; Stravinsky’s Petrouchka was insulted by the Philharmonic’s musicians during rehearsal; and a concert of Schoenberg’s group was broken up by an infamous riot rivalling the one over Le Sacre du Printemps.

It would appear, then, that a locale’s artistic climate had to strike a balance for modernist groups to flourish: hostile enough to make groups attractive, but not so hostile as to repress their activity. Russian modernists, for example, experienced both encouragement and resistance in Moscow and St. Petersburg. A conservative and unsophisticated public forced these artists to warm themselves collectively – group activity was more intensive here than anywhere else. But even with censorship and the emigration of many artists to Paris, the milieu was not so repressive as to discourage their efforts – witness the remarkable productivity of the Cubo-Futurists alone – and their antics made good copy in the press.

Finally, differences in cultural temperament – specifically how much artists valued iconoclasm versus collaboration – may partly explain the uneven numbers and differing influences of groups across Europe. Parisian poets Georges Duhamel and Charles Vildrac, for example, refused to be grouped within Jules Romain’s Unanimism, even though both poets were part of the Abbaye de Créteil commune (with which the Unanimist credo was closely associated) and were sympathetic to the movement’s philosophy. Consequently, Duhamel and his friends “never made a concerted effort to dominate the Mercure [de France, where Duhamel wrote a column on poetry] […] [T]heir insistence on their individuality
precluded such intentions” (Cornell 120). Had they been Italian Futurists, they would have engineered a coup d’état to control the whole newspaper! This iconoclasm, also evident among the English modernists (despite Lewis’s and Pound’s best efforts to organize them), splintered French movements and made them far less effectual than their counterparts in Berlin, Moscow, and Milan.

When we consider which arts produced the most or fewest groups, the data are clear:

Table 2: Group Distribution by Art: 1910-1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Arts</th>
<th>Poetry/Drama</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Multidisciplinary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack of Diamonds-e</td>
<td>Ego-Futurists</td>
<td>2nd Vienna School</td>
<td>Cubo-Futurists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey’s Tail-e</td>
<td>Mezzanine</td>
<td>Akademischer Verband</td>
<td>Union of Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubist School groups</td>
<td>Centrifuge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orphists</td>
<td>Imagists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Die Pathetiker</td>
<td>Dramatistes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neue Seccesion-e</td>
<td>Simultaneistes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neukunstgruppe-e</td>
<td>Paroxyestes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mercereau salon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mânes Union of Artists-e</td>
<td>Revolution group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ballets Russes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of American Painters &amp; Sculptors-e</td>
<td>Der neue Club</td>
<td></td>
<td>Das Neue Pathos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synchromists</td>
<td>Neopathetisches Cabaret</td>
<td></td>
<td>Der Sturm group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picasso-Braque</td>
<td>Der literarische Club Gnu Meyer circle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Die Aktion group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NKV-Munich Group of Plastic Artists</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>291 group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mabel Dodge salon</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Glebe group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(e=exhibition group)

As Table 2 indicates, nearly all the groups fall into three broad categories: visual artists, poets, or artists from more than one discipline. Composers are weakly represented, and fiction writers are missing entirely. Self-interest vis-à-vis presentational possibilities of the art form seems the likeliest explanation of these disparities. A poet’s opportunities for public exposure were more flexible than a novelist’s. While novelists could (and did) have their fiction serialized, they ultimately required publishers to bring it out in
book form. For poets, however, publication in a literary magazine or arts newspaper was significant, hence the groups of poets surrounding – or creating – modernist journals like *Glebe* or *Die Aktion*. Poets also seemed more accessible (or perhaps more in demand) than novelists for public readings, thus their gravitation to such locale groups as Der neue Club in Berlin.

Visual artists, needing exhibitions, accordingly formed exhibition groups; the Akademischer Verband served the same purpose for composers. Perhaps the most surprising fact is how many groups intermingled two or more arts. Of course, this list would be much longer if it included one-time collaborations between painters and poets. As it is, the list demonstrates how extensively artists crossed disciplinary boundaries, not only to discuss ideas of mutual interest at a salon in New York or an artist’s studio in Puteaux, but also to work together on interdisciplinary projects (for example, the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*), or because the group’s aesthetic philosophy was just as appealing to poets and composers, say, as to painters and sculptors (which was certainly true of the Italian Futurists and the Russian Cubo-Futurists). Consider the alliance between painters and sympathetic poets (doubling as art critics) in the formative years of the Cubist School, 1910-1912. Albert Gleizes recalls their meetings to plan an exhibition or discuss Cubist ideas at the Closerie des Lilas and at artists’ studios: “From the painters who met one another, joined by poets, sympathies were created, an ambiance was formed that was soon going to determine an action. […]. Painters and writers went forward shoulder to shoulder, animated by a sense of sharing the same faith” (*Souvenirs*; qtd. in Robbins 16).

Finally, perhaps the most difficult question: why did the groups themselves proliferate so rapidly in the years just before the war? No single explanation obtains, but the most striking factor is the parallel between the rise of groups in the prewar years and the intensifying and accelerating pace of modernist productivity in all the arts. Many historians of the arts – not to mention artists themselves – have observed that avant-garde innovation was particularly intense in these years, and a list of landmark works and achievements from 1910-1914 confirms these assertions:

Table 3: Some Landmark Works and Achievements: 1910-1914

**Premières**

Scriabin, *Prometheus*, 1910
Stravinsky/Ballets Russes, *Petrouchka*, 1912
Debussy/Ballets Russes, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, 1912
Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*, 1912
Schoenberg, *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, 1912
Debussy/Ballets Russes, *Jeux*, 1913
Stravinsky/Ballets Russes, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913

**Publications**

- Italian Futurists, manifestos (over 50), 1910-1914
- Khlebnikov, first *zaum* (transrational poem), 1910
- Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1911
- Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, 1911
- Hoddis, “World’s End” (considered first Expressionist poem), 1911
- Sorge, *The Beggar* (considered first Expressionist play), 1912
- Kandinsky and Marc, *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1912
- Pound, *Ripostes*, 1912
- Pound, Imagist manifestos, 1913, and *Des Imagistes*, 1914
- Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations*, 1913
- Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose du Transsibérien...*, 1913
- Cubo-Futurists, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913
- Thomas Mann, “Death in Venice,” 1913
- Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 1913
- Marinetti, “Zang Tumb Tumb,” 1914
- Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, serialized 1914
- Vorticists, *BLAST*, 1914
- Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 1914

**Modernist Newspapers and Little Magazines (starting dates)**

- Walden, *Der Sturm* (Berlin), 1910
- Pfemfert, *Die Aktion* (Berlin), 1911
- Monroe, *Poetry* (Chicago), 1912
- Apollinaire, *Soirées de Paris* (Paris), 1912
- Caundo, *Montjoie!* (Paris), 1913
- Papini and Soffici, *Lacerba* (Florence), 1913
- Marsden and Weaver, *The Egoist* (London), 1914

**Achievements in the Visual Arts**

- Kandinsky, Kupka, and Delaunay all achieve total abstraction, 1910-1912
- Cubism achieves international influence, 1911
- Picasso and Braque create first collages and papier collés, 1912
Orphism achieves international influence, 1913

**Major Exhibitions**

- Stieglitz’s exhibition of young American modernists, New York, 1910
- First Post-Impressionist exhibition, London, 1910
- Cubist “salle 41” at the Salon des Indépendants and “salle 8” at the Salon d’Automne, Paris, 1911
- Blaue Reiter exhibitions, Munich, 1911-1912
- Italian Futurists’ travelling exhibition, 1912
- Donkey’s Tail, Moscow 1912, The Target, Moscow, 1913
- Sonderbund exhibition, Cologne, 1912
- La Section d’Or, Paris, 1912
- Armory Show, New York, 1913
- First German Autumn Salon, 1913

As Table 3 indicates, productivity in these astonishing five years approximates a bell-shaped curve, building to a peak in 1912-1913 and gradually falling off in 1914 before the outbreak of the war, which severely impaired activity in belligerent nations. Among themselves, artists and historians disagree slightly in locating the pinnacle of creativity in these years. Igor Stravinsky finds in 1912 the “summit” of “originality” and “explosive force” in modernist music — “the years of Pierrot Lunaire and Le Sacre du Printemps” (Memories and Comments 122). Virginia Spate also sees 1912 as “the decisive year in the development of Orphism — and, indeed, non-figurative art in general” (29). From the perspective of New York, however, Mabel Dodge opts for 1913, the year of the Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant: “in that year […] barriers went down and people reached each other who had never been in touch before. […] The new spirit was abroad and swept us all together” (Luhan, Movers and Shakers 39). But by 1914, Apollinaire noted “signs of lassitude” at the Salon des Indépendants, which he attributed to the Salon now attracting conservative painters (Spate 53).

It could be argued, of course, that these two indices of rising energy — group proliferation and modernist productivity and innovation — are merely parallel, not causally connected. But a sizable percentage of the achieving artists did belong to groups, and groups dominated the public, presentational realm of modernism: the exhibitions, concerts, poetry journals and arts newspapers, public readings, and evenings. Moreover, as leaders like Marinetti, Apollinaire, and Burluk criss-crossed Europe, and as large international exhibitions were mounted, groups contributed significantly to a flowering internationalism in prewar modernism, even as