

# “An Art of Individuals”: Dora Marsden’s literary anarchism and Pound’s aesthetic reflection in *The New Freewoman*

by Marina Lops\*

## Abstract

The founder and editor of “Freewoman”/“The New Freewoman”/“The Egoist”, Dora Marsden was one of the leading figures on the London cultural scene in the years before WWI. Mirroring the evolution of her thought, the shift in the title of her magazines reflects her move from anarchist feminism to the adoption of an individualist philosophy that much owed to Stirner, Nietzsche and Bergson. Marsden’s radical subjectivism, her espousal of nominalism – with its rejection of universals, classes and abstractions that distort rather than reveal reality – connect her theoretical positions with the experience of movements such as imagism and vorticism.

Starting from this premise, this essay focuses on a specific moment in Marsden’s aesthetic reflection, namely the debate on the function of art and literature that she developed with Ezra Pound in a series of articles published in “The New Freewoman”. The exchange sheds light on their complex network of mutual influences and shows how Marsden’s nominalistic polemic against all universals and abstractions and her rigorous philosophical egoism echo through imagist and vorticist critical language and propaganda.

*Keywords:* Dora Marsden, Ezra Pound, Individualism, Aesthetic reflection, Imagism, Vorticism, Literary anarchism.

## I

### **Dora Marsden: from feminist anarchism to philosophical egoism**

Inevitably one argues with Dora Marsden. That is her value. She provokes thought. And she welcomes it. She wants everybody to think – not to think her thoughts necessarily, not the right thoughts always, but that which they can and must. She is a propagandist, it is true. But she does not create a silence, and call it a conversation.

This is how the American journalist Floyd Dell introduced his portrait of Dora Marsden, at the time editor of “The New Freewoman”, in his 1913 volume *Women as World Builders* (1913, p. 103).

Dell conveys the main features of Marsden’s character in a few deft strokes: her taste for intellectual provocation, her radical questioning of preconceived ideas and concepts, her outspokenness and directness in dealing with even the most controversial topics and themes and, above all, her willingness to embrace dissent. All these traits are mirrored in the pages of the journals she founded and edited between 1911 and

\* Università di Salerno.

1914: "The Freewoman", "The New Freewoman" and "The Egoist"<sup>1</sup>. These three little magazines provided the arenas for radical political and economic theories, Marsden's own reflections and the work of major modernist writers and poets<sup>2</sup>. Along with many other equally short-lived though influential publications such as Wyndham Lewis's "BLAST", John Middleton Murry's "Rhythm" and "The Blue Review", or Alfred Richard Orage's more fortunate "The New Age", they were part of what Mark Morrison has referred to as "counterpublic spheres" (2001, p. 11) and their role in the thriving and exciting atmosphere of pre-war London cannot be underestimated.

Given these premises, Marsden's almost complete absence in traditional accounts of modernism until the 1990s is rather surprising even considering the implicitly male bias underpinning the construction of the modernist canon. It was only in the late nineties, thanks largely to Bruce Clarke seminal study *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism* (1996), that she was finally rescued from oblivion and restored to her rightful place as an important literary figure of the Modernist avant-garde<sup>3</sup>. Since then the growing critical interest in Marsden has shifted its focus from investigating her theoretically informed feminist critique of suffragism to the reappraisal of her aesthetic reflection, based on a philosophical individualism which she consistently developed throughout her intellectual career, blending elements from Stirner, Nietzsche and Bergson into an original synthesis.

Viewed from this perspective, Dora Marsden's ideas can be set within the context of the transition towards radical, philosophical egoism, combining those various influences, which Michael Levenson, in his *Genealogy of Modernism* (1984), has identified as a distinct train of thought underlying imagist and vorticist aesthetics and linking the literary stances of early Hulme, Ford and Pound. Although he provides the indispensable framework within which to situate Marsden's experience, Levenson paradoxically gives Dora Marsden a marginal role in the formation of this tradition which, in response to the crisis of liberal ideology and the pressures of mass and technical culture, posits the wilful individual as the only and exclusive source of meaning and value.

In line with the definitive critical reassessment of Marsden's role in the context of early modernist literary debate (see in particular Clarke, 1996; Camboni, 2002; Antliff A., 2001; Antliff M., 2010), this article focuses on several of the editorials she published in "The New Freewoman" which testify to what can be considered an "aesthetic turn" in her thought, a transition from feminist polemic and strictly political concerns to philosophical egoism centred on artistic experience as crucial to the definition of the individual self. Such a shift was mirrored in the very nature and scope of her journal, with the opening of a literary section under the responsibility of Ezra Pound, who began contributing to "The New Freewoman" in the issue of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1913. Marsden engaged in an open discussion on aesthetic issues with Pound, who published *The Serious Artist* as a response to an explicit request by Marsden, who replied with the editorial *The Art of the Future*. Pound's role in shaping the editorial policy of the journal has been frequently overestimated, as the growing space devoted to literature and the arts has been

interpreted as a sign of his rising influence which culminated in the decision to change the journal's title to "The Egoist" in 1914. Indeed, these developments reflected the change in Dora Marsden's own interests and theoretical stance and had been implicit from the very outset of the adventure of "The New Freewoman". If the subtitle "an individualist review" left no doubts about the journal's commitment to philosophical egoism, the *Views and Comments* section of the first issue (15<sup>th</sup> June 1913) sheds light on Marsden's new approach. Her nominalistic critique of abstract concepts turns into a dismissal of the suffragist cause as the woman's movement, like any other collective political body, is denied any real existence and labeled as an empty abstraction when compared to the specific, concrete reality of each single woman. By extending such a notion of womanhood to any individual, Marsden moves to the final statement of her Stirnerian credo, a general definition of *egoism* and *egoists* (emphasis mine) that ignores gender differences:

The few individual women before mentioned maintain that their only fitting description is that of Individual: Ends-in-themselves. They are Egoists. [...] The intensive satisfaction of Self is for the individual the one goal in life (1913a, p. 5)<sup>4</sup>.

The individual self, individual needs and desires would be at the core of her later reflection on art and its function which would develop throughout the summer and autumn of 1913 and reach its culminating moment in the confrontation with Pound. In relation to Pound's pronouncements from the summer 1913 onwards and Lewis's vorticist manifestoes published in the first issue of "BLAST" a year later, her writings would reveal their connection with imagist and vorticist aesthetics, as her nominalistic polemic against all universals and abstractions and her rigorous philosophical egoism resonate with imagist and vorticist critical idiom and propaganda.

## 2

### "Concerning the Beautiful": Dora Marsden and the aesthetic experience

The leading article *Intellect and Culture* in the issue published on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1913 marked the beginning of Marsden's discussion of art. As was typical of her intellectual outlook and the dialogism that was an intrinsic part of her editorial method, it was conceived as a response to the article *The Golden Age* published by the psychologist Huntly Carter in the previous issue. Both contributions shared a common Bergsonian perspective and conceptual framework that was to lay the theoretical foundations of her discourse. The celebration of individuality as a life force led her to assert the insufficiency of the intellect. Intellect belongs to "the static *outward*" (Marsden, 1913b, p. 21), "[t]o recognise, know and trace the outline of things in space is its reason for existing"; however, it is "unable to grasp the fact that the thing which it served – life – was of a totally different order from the things which it knew and dominated – objects in space" (Marsden, 1913b, p. 22). The intellect therefore classifies and labels the outer world, but it mistakes its function when it turns to individual life itself, to the life of the Soul:

Intellect [...] is a good servant but a bad master, and its successes have given rise to the notion that intellectualisation is a master-rôle in life. In place of being directed it becomes director: in place of its performances being judged by Soul – the individual basic life – it begins to judge the Soul [...] and establishes itself in its place (Marsden, 1913b, p. 22).

Starting out with this premise, Marsden sets out her critique of Western culture and art based on the distinction between phony art, tainted by one-sided intellectualism, and genuine art which coordinates the intellect with the primary motions of the soul. However, she does not adopt a simplistic anti-intellectualist stance since, in her view, art – “the attempted tale of the Soul” (Marsden, 1913b, p. 22), as she defines it – requires the clarifying function of the intellect in order to come into being:

The Soul, self-conscious life, calls to Intellect for illumination [...]. When Intellect responds we shall have Art, the record of the Soul moving consciously in Light. The creation of Art is the supreme effort of Soul and Intellect (Marsden, 1913b, p. 23).

As a dynamic synthesis that conjugates the discriminating power of the intellect with the primary motions of the soul, art is an eminently individual manifestation, the product of strong personalities, because “[o]nly when personality is strong is Rationalism put into its proper human relationship and only then do we get the creator of true art, the Light-bringer” (Marsden, 1913b, p. 23). Using a language that is still resonant with romantic echoes, Marsden here posits the basis for an aesthetic doctrine which is consistent with her philosophy of egoism. In so doing she reveals a more general tendency that is a characteristic feature of early modernist critical thought and literary practice. If, as Levenson claims, “the egoistic leaning was as pronounced in Pound as it was in Hulme and Ford” (1984, p. 71), one cannot but agree with Clarke (1996, p. 110) when he questions Levenson’s view that Allan Upward was the main influence on Pound in this respect, denying Dora Marsden’s role which can be fully appreciated if we follow the debate between Marsden and Pound over the function of art and the artist in “The New Freewoman”, beginning with the publication of the first two parts of Pound’s *The Serious Artist* in the 15<sup>th</sup> October issue.

Prior to this, Marsden’s exploration of the field of aesthetics had continued in the editorial that opened the 1<sup>st</sup> September issue *Concerning the Beautiful*. In line with her radically nominalist perspective, she rejected any essentialist approach to the category of the beautiful to privilege the pragmatic nature of aesthetic experience. Emphasis was placed on the performative effects produced by single, specific objects in accordance with the variety of individual needs because “there is nothing intrinsically ‘beautiful’ just as there is nothing which is intrinsically a ‘food’” (Marsden, 1913c, p. 102). Hence, for example, “when life is monotonous, and of an unvarying ‘symmetry’, the ‘beautiful’ is found in the asymmetrical, for monotony too appears to ‘thin out’ the substance of the soul” (Marsden, 1913c, p. 102), while, on the contrary, the main effect of the beautiful can only be defined as its capacity “to rally the soul into complete self-possession after being scattered by experience” (Marsden, 1913c, p. 104).

## 3

**Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound**

Marsden had raised crucial questions, laying the foundations for an anarchist aesthetics that she was to develop in later articles, paving the way for a discussion that she intended to continue in the pages of her journal. In a typically provocative editorial approach that encapsulated her intellectual outlook, she then decided to give her new literary editor the task of defining his artistic credo. *The Serious Artist* replaced her own editorial in issue number 9, an unprecedented event that has long been mistakenly interpreted as a sign of Pound prevailing over Marsden in terms of prestige and authority. However, as their correspondence testifies and as the very beginning of the essay further demonstrates<sup>5</sup>, Pound reluctantly wrote it in response to Marsden's promptings.

There is a general critical consensus that the period from *The Serious Artist* to the *The New Sculpture* – from October 1913 to February 1914 – marked a fundamental transition in Pound's literary career which has been defined as a phase of "conversion" from a residual humanism to the militant antagonisms of vorticism" (Clarke, 1992, p. 104). An account of the debate between Marsden and Pound in the pages of "The New Freewoman" may help to reconstruct the complex nature of their mutual influences and ties as well as their differences and can show how Marsden's theory of anarchist nominalism reverberates in Pound's critical idiom.

The opening paragraphs of *The Serious Artist* set the theoretical framework for Pound's argument. A kind of dismissive skepticism tinged with irony seems to emanate from the opening sentence: "It is curious that one should be asked to rewrite Sidney's 'Defense of Poesy' in the year of grace 1913" (1913a, p. 161). However, the statement is significant as the reference to Sidney reveals Pound's explicit intention to situate his discussion within the humanist tradition. "I take no great pleasure in writing prose about aesthetic" he adds although he admits, "I have been questioned earnestly and by a person certainly of good will". It was the editor of the journal herself who had asked him "to define the relation of the arts to economics" and "what position the arts are to hold in the ideal republic" (1913a, p. 161). Pound's discussion then unfolds on the basis of the stated analogy between art and science:

The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual. The subject of chemistry is matter considered as to its composition. The arts give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man considered as a thinking and sentient creature (1913a, p. 161).

Starting from this assumption, Pound develops his argument around the opposition between bad and good art. While the moral value of the latter lies in its capacity to bear "true witness" and "define for us the inner nature and conditions of man" (1913a, p. 162), the former is immoral in so far as it is "inaccurate" and "makes false reports" (1913a, p. 162). The imagist emphasis on accuracy and precision as the ultimate aesthetic values

prepares the ground for Pound's defense of the ethical function of art and informs his entire discourse. The serious artist, like the scientist, does not conform to any preconceived ideas or codes. As a relentless pursuer of truth, he proves his integrity by strictly adhering to the concrete, immediate reality of his individual perception and by recording it as faithfully as possible. However, wrapping the seriousness of art and of the artist in the mantle of scientific positivity, as Clarke rightly observes (1996, p. 112), discloses an inherent tension in Pound's position, as his appeal to the universalizing model of science serves the purpose of providing a rationale for the final consecration of the personal and the idiosyncratic. "The serious artist", he writes,

is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference. The more precise his record the more lasting and unassailable his work of art (1913a, p. 163).

As a definitive statement of Pound's early poetics, *The Serious Artist* combines the language of imagism with the epistemological subjectivism underlying Ford's doctrine of literary impressionism and has been interpreted as paradigmatic of Ford's influence on Pound's aesthetic thought in this phase<sup>6</sup>. Without objecting to such a critical view, I would argue that by advocating the primacy of the individual, Pound also shares Marsden's theoretical perspective since they both draw on a common critical idiom and employ similar metaphors and concepts.

*The Serious Artist* is followed by Marsden's implicit reply in the *Views and Comments* section published in the same issue, with which she began to outline her own aesthetic manifesto. Taking up Pound's analogy between art and science, she defines their relationship in terms of a difference of subject matter, not of method, and sets it within a more cogent and rigorous philosophical argument in accordance with her main concern with semantic and conceptual definition. In line with the ideas already expressed in the editorial *Intellect and Culture*, Marsden opens her article by proclaiming her nominalistic credo:

We shall have gone far towards rounding the Verbal Age to finality when we recognise that there exists nothing save things and the relations between things, and that all words which purport to express anything other – any "thought" – avail for nothing but gratuitous illusion and irrelevance (1913d, p. 165).

In her discussion, the imagist rejection of empty words and abstractions in favour of "the direct treatment of the thing" (Flint, 1913, p. 199) therefore seems to be reformulated at a philosophical and theoretical level. She then effectively adapts an electro-vitalist idiom to sketch out her materialistic definition of the soul. "The first thing of which we have any knowledge", she claims,

– the only thing of which we have first-hand knowledge – is the life within ourselves. We call it our soul, meaning thereby an individuated entity thrown out free by the stream of living energy.

The soul is not a thought, and has nothing to do with thought. It is a “thing” as electricity running along a wire is a thing (1913d, p. 165).

It is no coincidence that echoes of this are to be found in *Emotion and Poesy*, the third section of *The Serious Artist* published in the 1<sup>st</sup> November issue where Pound remarked that “the thing that matters in art is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radio-activity, a force transfusing, welding and unifying” (1913b, p. 194). Pound does not directly connect this energy to the individual self so that it is not immediately clear what is “unified” “welded” “transfused”. However, his statement occurs within the context of a discussion of the qualities of “major poets” and clearly appropriates Marsden’s language in the previous article, in which she had claimed that

the creative artist is one in whom life beats strongly; whose emotions, instead of being so feeble that he is capable of mistaking them for something else, are so strong and defined that they secure the right description. [...] The major artists are major *men*, and their “works” are a consequence. They are the expression of an energy which is either unknown or known only in rare flashes to ordinary men (Marsden, 1913d, p. 166).

The analogy between art and science is further pursued and developed by Marsden in her later editorial, *The Art of the Future*, published in the tenth issue of “The Freewoman” (1<sup>st</sup> November) in which she articulates “a vitalist schema for the interrelation of scientific and artistic effort” (Clarke, 1996, p. 116). While in the *View and Comments* she had argued that “Art is the scientific spirit applied to soul, observing, collating, noting” (1913d, p. 166), here she defines “the sphere of Art, as the complement of Science” and seems to participate in the idiom of imagism when she identifies their common ground in “the method of accurate description”, so that

[i]f science is the knowledge gained by applying to non-vital phenomena, the method of accurate description as opposed to that of imaginative interpretation, art is the product of the same method applied to vital (and mainly humanly vital) phenomena (1913e, p. 181).

It is on this basis that she proceeds by perceptively pointing out the limits of contemporary art, part of which follows authority and conventions, while the other, which she praises in so far as it is an expression of free thought, is nevertheless sterile and merely ideological, since it is incapable of achieving the only and necessary objective of good art: the *accurate* (emphasis mine) recording of the motions of the soul. The case of the celebrated “drama of ideas” is paradigmatic in this respect: in her view, “[t]he conflict is one of words and not of living movements” (1913e, p. 182). Marsden was overtly critical of Pound’s skepticism about whether the artist should make explicit pronouncements about his task. In line with her speculative stance, she offers a kind of anatomy of passions and emotions and of the complex interplay that connects the senses to the emotions and the intellect to produce a detailed, “scientific” description of the processes involved in the creative act, presented as the result of a

contact between inner and outer experience. Her prophetic statement that "[t]he line of true delineation of the soul is the direction which all progress in Art must take" (1913e, p. 182) effectively sums up her aesthetic credo and anchors the imagist emphasis on precision to an articulated account of the ego and its motions.

In *Emotion and Poesy*, the final part of *The Serious Artist*, published in the same issue as Marsden's *The Art of the Future*, Pound's discussion of poetry displays several points of contact with Marsden's argument. This is no coincidence since, as I have sought to point out, their ideas developed in a dialectical confrontation, with Marsden playing devil's advocate and Pound responding to her provocations.

Several decades later, writing about *The Serious Artist* in *The ABC of Reading*, Pound would report quotations from various poets (Dante, Villon, Cavalcanti, Yeats) included in that essay and would present them as "examples of the ideogrammatic method used by E. P. in *The Serious Artist* before having access to the Fenollosa papers" (2010, p. 96). In *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry* Fenollosa, moving from the premise that nature consists of "things in motion, motion in things" (2008, p. 82), had claimed that the power of the Chinese written character is that it stays "close to things" (2008, p. 86) by depicting objects in process. Commenting on Fenollosa's influence on Pound's shift from imagist to vorticist poetics, Levenson has observed: "Pound, [...], had originally presented Imagism as the 'direct treatment of the *thing*'. But with the example of Lewis and the theory of Fenollosa, he moved from thing to process, noun to verb" (1984, p. 128). In fact, the quotations from *The Serious Artist* that Pound retrospectively interprets as examples of the "ideogrammatic method" date, by his own admission, to a period that precedes his discovery of Fenollosa. However, by identifying them with this method, Pound makes them correspond to a conception of language as activity or the transference of force which, significantly, bears a resemblance to Marsden's own view of language, and of poetic language in particular, as "the expression of the soul-motion" (1913e, p. 183).

The essay *The New Sculpture*, published a few months later in "The Egoist", marks a further step in Pound's shift from a humanist perspective to vorticism. An analysis of this essay goes far beyond the scope of this paper but in the context of this discussion I would like to draw attention to the connection, explored in detail by Mark Antliff (2010, pp. 47-57), between Pound's hostility to classical idealism and humanist aesthetics and Marsden's nominalistic polemic against abstractions and universals and her diatribe against standardized notions of culture. In *The New Sculpture*, Pound's rejection of the common ideal of classical form is accompanied by an alternative vision of the artist as an anarchist rebel, epitomised by Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska, and new emphasis is placed on art as the unmediated expression of "desire" and emotive "forces" (1914a, p. 68). At a political level, this outlook is mirrored in his antagonistic stance towards society as a whole and turns into an advocacy of the primacy of the individual self with regard to collective institutions. In June 1914 the opening pages of "BLAST" would represent the most vehement and provocative statement of this stance with their direct appeal "TO THE INDIVIDUAL" and the proclamation that "popular art does not



mean the art of the poor people [...]. It means the art of the individuals” (“Long Live the Vortex!”, 1914, p. 5). Pound would reformulate this concept later that year, when he wrote that: “The vorticist movement is a movement of individuals, for individuals, for the protection of individuality” (1914b, p. 306), a statement to which Dora Marsden would have certainly subscribed.

## Notes

1. From a lower-middle-class background, Dora Marsden entered Manchester’s Victoria University in 1900, where she attended a three-year teacher training course. During this period, Marsden developed an interest in the feminist cause and strengthened her feminist awareness. In 1908, she joined the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), the suffragist organization that Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst had founded five years earlier, and soon achieved national notoriety as a fighting suffragette and one of the leading figures of the movement. Over time she became sharply critical of the organizational tactics and parliamentary goals of the WSPU and resigned in 1911. In the same year, along with Mary Gawthorpe and in frank opposition to the Pankhursts’ political agenda, she created “The Freewoman”, published for only eleven months. The initial subtitle of the journal, “a weekly feminist review”, later became “an individualist review” when its publication resumed in 1913 as “The New Freewoman”. This choice was in tune with Marsden’s new editorial policy and theoretical outlook, shifting from libertarian feminism to individualist anarchism and literary experimentation. A further change in title took place in 1914 when “The New Freewoman” became “The Egoist” (1914-1919). In June, Marsden left the role of chief editor to Harriet Shaw Weaver, but never stopped collaborating as contributing editor, further developing her theoretical interests in the direction of philosophical egoism and a new philosophy of language. “The Egoist” became the mouthpiece of the Anglo-American avant-garde, with Richard Aldington acting as co-editor until June 1917 when he was replaced by T. S. Eliot.

2. Among the contributors to Marsden’s journals were Edward Carpenter, Remy de Gourmont, Huntley Carter, Benjamin Tucker, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, May Sinclair, F. S. Flint, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, H. D..

3. Noticeable is Marsden’s absence from Kime Scott’s pioneering anthology *The Gender of Modernism* (1990), which paved the way for the radical revision of the modernist tradition in the field of women’s and gender studies. Prior to Clarke’s volume, Les Garner’s *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit. Dora Marsden 1882-1960* (1990), republished in a revised and expanded form in 2019, was the first biography of Dora Marsden and led to her rediscovery. Since the 1990s Marsden has never ceased to engage critical attention: as well as the numerous articles and essays published in academic journals, worth mentioning in this context is Cary Franklin’s study *Freewoman: Dora Marsden and the Politics of Feminist Modernism* (2002); an insightful discussion of Marsden’s heterodox feminism is provided by Lucy Delap in her *The Feminist Avant-Garde. Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (2007). Among the contributions by Italian scholars see Camboni (2002) and Lops (2003, 2012).

4. Published in 1844, Max Stirner’s *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* had been subjected to a harsh critique by Karl Marx in *The German Ideology* in 1847. After a long period of oblivion, Stirner was rediscovered at the turn of the century and in 1907 *Der Einzige* was translated into English by Steven Tracy Binyngton and published by Benjamin Tucker, the two American anarchists who also contributed to the pages of Marsden’s journals. *The Ego and its Own* soon became widely popular in the Anglo-American anarchist milieu and Dora Marsden, “England’s foremost advocate of Max Stirner’s philosophy of anarchist individualism” (Antliff A., 2001, p. 75), described it as “one of the profoundest of human documents” in her editorial *The Growing Ego* published in “The Freewoman” in August 1912 (p. 221). For a discussion of Stirner’s thought and influence on Marsden and on early modernism more generally see, among others, Antliff A. (2001), Antliff M. (2010), Clarke (1996).

5. For a careful reconstruction of their correspondence at the time see Clarke (1992), which provides a revisionary account of the Marsden-Pound relationship and questions the canonical misreading of Pound’s influence on Marsden.

6. In his *Genealogy of Modernism* Michael Levenson provides a detailed and well-documented account of the relationship between Ford and Pound. Discussing the doctrine of literary impressionism that Ford developed in a series of essays published mainly before WWI (“Impressionism – Some Speculations” [1913],

“On Impressionism” [1914], “The Poet’s Eye” [1913]), Levenson points to the apparent contradictions inherent in Ford’s pronouncements in which, he argues, Ford “alternately offers *realism* and *self-expression* as the basis for his literary programme” (1984, p. 115) and moves between the two without apparently offering any reconciliation. If considered more accurately, however, Ford’s impressionism, as Levenson acutely points out, “is a *subjectivity in which the subject has disappeared*” (1984, p. 119), since, in Ford’s view, the “faithful rendering of the received impression” (1964b, p. 151), in which the literary art consists, requires the absolute withdrawal of individual personality and can be achieved only “by presentation and by presentation and again by presentation” (1964a, p. 43). “The Impressionist author”, Ford claims, “is sedulous to avoid letting his personality appear in the course of his book. On the other hand, his whole book, his whole poem is merely an expression of his personality” (1964a, p. 43) as it is the *objective* registering of *subjective* perceptions. As Levenson rightly observes: “Objectivity, in this perspective, is merely a phase of the subjective – namely, that phase where the subject discreetly withdraws, leaving the immediate, uncorrected impression, the ‘impression as hard and definite as a thin-tack’” (1984, p. 119). In his essay Pound expounds a similar view when arguing that good art is art that “bears true witness” (1913a, p. 162), whereas bad art is “inaccurate art” (1913a, p. 162). For the serious artist, Levenson comments, “[t]he stipulated accuracy is accuracy to one’s own perceptions” and Pound’s statements “are perfectly congruent with Ford’s view of things”, so that “we may consider the period to the beginning of 1914 as the Impressionist phase of Imagism, or at least the Fordian phase” (1984, p. 120).

## References

- Antliff A. (2001), *Anarchist Modernism. Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London.
- Antliff M. (2010), *Sculptural Nominalism/Anarchist Vortex: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound*, in M. Antliff, V. Green (eds.), *The Vorticists. Manifesto for a Modern World*, Tate, London, pp. 47-57.
- Camboni M. (2002), “*The Freewoman*” - “*The Egoist*”. *Trasformazioni di una rivista tra femminismo britannico e modernismo letterario angloamericano*, in M. Rizzante, C. Gubert (a cura di), *Le riviste dell’Europa Letteraria*, Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, pp. 129-58.
- Clarke B. (1992), *Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound: The New Freewoman and “The Serious Artist”*, in “Contemporary Literature”, 33, 1, pp. 91-112.
- Clarke B. (1996), *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism. Gender, Individualism, Science*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Delap L. (2007), *The Feminist Avant-Garde. Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dell F. (1913), *Women as World Builders. Studies in Modern Feminism*, Forbes and Company, Chicago.
- Fenollosa E., Pound E. (2008), *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry*, ed. by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling and Lucas Klein, Fordham University Press, New York.
- Flint F. S. (1913), *Imagisme*, in “Poetry”, 1, 6, pp. 198-200.
- Ford M. F. (1964a), *Impressionism*, in F. M. Ford, *Critical Writings*, ed. by Frank MacShane, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, pp. 33-55.
- Ford M. F. (1964b), *On Impressionism – Some Speculations*, in F. M. Ford, *Critical Writings*, ed. by Frank MacShane, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, pp. 139-52.
- Franklin C. (2002), *Freewoman: Dora Marsden and the Politics of Feminist Modernism*, Oxford University, Oxford.
- Garner L. (1990), *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit. Dora Marsden 1882-1960*, Avebury, Aldershot.
- Kime Scott B. (1990), *The Gender of Modernism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington-Indianapolis.

- Levenson M. (1984), *A Genealogy of Modernism. A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- "Long Live the Vortex!" (1914), in "BLAST", 1, pp. 5-6.
- Lops M. (2003), *Femminismo e avanguardia: le riviste di Dora Marsden nella stagione del modernismo prebellico*, in D. Marsden, *La Donnalibera/The Freewoman*, a cura di Marina Lops, Liguori, Napoli, pp. 3-60.
- Lops M. (2012), *Da "donne libere" a "egoiste": l'avventura editoriale di Dora Marsden*, in L. Di Michele (a cura di), *Modernismi femminili*, Giannini, Napoli, pp. 57-69.
- Marsden D. (1912), *The Growing Ego*, in "The Freewoman", 2, 38, pp. 221-2.
- Marsden D. (1913a), *Views and Comments*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 1, pp. 3-5.
- Marsden D. (1913b), *Intellect and Culture*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 2, pp. 21-3.
- Marsden D. (1913c), *Concerning the Beautiful*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 6, pp. 101-4.
- Marsden D. (1913d), *Views and Comments*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 9, pp. 163-6.
- Marsden D. (1913e), *The Art of the Future*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 10, pp. 181-3.
- Morrison M. S. (2001), *The Public Face of Modernism. Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- Pound E. (2010), *ABC of Reading*, introd. by Michael Dirda, New Directions, New York.
- Pound E. (1913a), *The Serious Artist I and II*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 9, pp. 161-3.
- Pound E. (1913b), *The Serious Artist III. Emotion and Poesy*, in "The New Freewoman", 1, 10, pp. 194-5.
- Pound E. (1914a), *The New Sculpture*, in "The Egoist", 1, 4, pp. 67-8.
- Pound E. (1914b), *Edward Wadsworth, Vorticist*, in "The Egoist", 1, 16, pp. 306-7.