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| **About you** | **[Salutation]** | Jesse | S. | Cohn |
| The author of Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics (2006) and Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848-2011 (2015), Jesse Cohn is an Associate Professor of English living in Northwest Indiana. | | | |
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| **Your article** |
| Marsden, Dora |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Dora Marsden significantly influenced the aesthetics of Anglo-American modernism, largely through her creation of a series of journals. |
| Dora Marsden (March 5, 1882 – December 13, 1960) is one of the women who, when remembered at all, are remembered as ‘midwives’ to modernism; as the founding editor of a series of influential journals, beginning with *The Freewoman* in 1911 and ending with *The Egoist* in 1919, she did importantly play impresario to male figures such as Pound, Joyce, Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and Wyndham Lewis, albeit increasingly marginalised by the 1920s (West 577). Her connections to female modernists such as Rebecca West and H.D. have only begun to be explored, and her specific contributions to modernist aesthetics, often neglected even in feminist literary historiography, may have eluded later scholars for a number of reasons.  Trained as a teacher, Marsden began her public life as a militant in the Pankhursts’ Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) ca. 1909-1911, but chafed at the limitations of suffragism and clashed with its leadership, whom she later accused of ‘reduc[ing] it to a ‘cause’, a fixed idea, stationaryness and consequent stagnation […] The ‘Women's Movement’ is the ‘Women's Halt’’ (‘Views and Comments’ 203). Drawing inspiration from the radical scepticism and nominalism of Max Stirner’s Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum (1844), freshly translated into English in 1907, as well as Bergson, she redefined herself as a ‘freewoman’, then an ‘egoist’, and subsequently – trumping her anarchist interlocutor, Benjamin R. Tucker – an ‘Archist’: ‘What I want is my state: The world should be moulded to my desire if I could so mould it’ (‘The Illusion of Anarchism’ 343).  Her essays for *The New Freewoman* are especially striking, particularly when read in connection with the poetics developed by Pound and Williams. From Stirner’s assault on German idealism, Marsden distilled a powerful attack on abstract ‘ideas’ and ‘signs’: ‘They are made up of misty thought-waste […] bound together and made to look tidy by attaching an appellation-label, i.e., a sign. It is the tidiness of the sign which misleads. It is like a marmalade label carefully attached to an empty jar. Remove the label, and the confusion vanishes’ (‘Views and Comments’ 204). As Robert von Hallberg comments, ‘One can readily see that the poetics of this antiliberalism would encourage a numbering of the streaks of the tulip, details stripped of the discursive apparatus that facilitates generalization’ (65). David Kadlec also chronicles the influence of Marsden’s vitalist attacks on ‘The Chastity of Women’ (in *The Egoist*, 1914) on Joyce (Kadlec 97-101). |
| Further reading:  (Clarke)  (Kadlec)  (Marsden)  (Marsden, ‘The Illusion of Anarchism’)  (Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’)  (Stirner)  (von Hallberg) |