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# ‘Intellectual Acid’: Cultural Resistance, Cultural Citizenship, and Emotional (Counter) Community in the *Freewoman*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the *Freewoman*'s relation to culture, as well as its role as a countercultural periodical — one that resisted hegemonic ideas and styles — and in the creation of an emotional (counter)community. It follows Raymond Williams's understanding of culture as having two senses: one is 'a whole way of life' — everyday practices — the other arts and other creative endeavours. The *Freewoman* was cultivating a view of feminism as a way of life that encompassed both these meanings, as its editor, Dora Marsden, encouraged the expression of both traditional and novel perspectives, working to connect everyday life to a vision of a feminist, perhaps utopian, future. My focus here is on three main ideas of culture and community under Williams's general framework of 'culture': cultural resistance and counterculture, cultural citizenship, and emotional countercommunity. These aspects of the *Freewoman* were central to its feminist politics, and I offer that attention to emotions and emotional communities can enrich our understanding of periodicals and their political workings.

## KEYWORDS

*Freewoman*, Dora Marsden, emotions, feminism, emotional community, counterculture, cultural citizenship, cultural resistance

An announcement appearing in the *Daily Herald* on 6 December 1913 promised that the current issue of the *New Freewoman* ‘contains a powerful interpretation of the insurrectionist movement’, labelling the journal ‘an intellectual acid’, meant to consume such concepts as ‘Rights, Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and the rest’.<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of intellectual acid, suggesting an active, even violent, attack on liberal values, also captures something fundamental about the *Freewoman*, the *New Freewoman*’s predecessor. The two periodicals, both edited by Dora Marsden (1882–1960), were in many ways similar in approach, and are sometimes treated as two phases of the same periodical. Looking at the *Freewoman*, this essay examines the countercultural role of the periodical, what it set itself against, and what alternatives — if any — it proposed. Focusing on the *Freewoman* as feminist counterculture, it draws connections between the periodical and ideas about cultural resistance, cultural citizenship, and emotional (counter)communities. Specifically, the essay looks at the *Freewoman* as a counterpublic characterized by an emphasis on emotion and passion. In other words, part of the periodical’s ‘counter’ identity is based on the centrality of emotions and emotional community to its vision.

One of the features that distinguished the *Freewoman* from many contemporary women’s and feminist periodicals was its focus on culture, used here in two senses: one is the emphasis on the role of art and artists, especially through the image of the quintessential liberated woman, the *freewoman*, marked by her potential of becoming an artist. The second is culture in a broader sense, as Raymond Williams puts it, culture ‘as a whole way of life — the common meanings’.<sup>2</sup> Feminism in the *Freewoman* was connected to various art forms, but also to spiritual matters, marriage, sexuality, and quotidian issues like women’s employment and housework, seeing them all as pertinent to an emerging culture and consciousness. It also served as a venue for the expression of both traditional, common views, and more radical ones, highlighting not only both aspects of culture, but as Williams also notes, the importance of their conjunction.<sup>3</sup>

The *Freewoman* was countercultural in that it positioned itself against many of the mainstream and hegemonic values of its time, both within and outside the women’s movement. The journal labelled itself from its inception in 1911 a feminist, rather than suffrage or women’s, journal, and was critical of the suffrage campaign, mainly of what was arguably its most prominent voice — the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). In their attempts to secure for women a say in parliamentary politics, suffrage organizations generally accepted the principles that Jürgen Habermas identifies as key to the bourgeois public sphere: rational discussion of common interests among private individuals, who were assumed to eventually reach consensus.<sup>4</sup> The *Freewoman* called these principles into question, particularly the emphasis on unity and consensus for the sake of political expediency. One of the paper’s stated purposes was to bring to light the multiplicity of voices that constituted feminism, an intention that did not align with the principles of suffrage organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Marsden fully intended to raise objections and envisioned the periodical as an arena in which ideas can be contested and oppositional opinions

1 *New Freewoman* (Announcement), *Daily Herald* (6 December 1913), 6. I am grateful to the editors and anonymous readers for their helpful feedback, and to the colleagues who read and commented on earlier versions of this article.

2 Raymond Williams, ‘Culture Is Ordinary’, in *The Raymond Williams Reader*, ed. by Jim McGuigan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 10–24 (p. 3).

3 Williams, ‘Culture Is Ordinary’, p. 3.

4 Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990), 56–80 (pp. 57–59).

5 Lucy Delap, ‘“Philosophical Vacuity and Political Ineptitude”: The *Freewoman*’s Critique of the Suffrage Movement’, *Women’s History Review*, 11.4 (2002), 613–30 (pp. 620–21).

were welcome, with no necessary attempt at resolution. This challenged the notion of consensus as desirable. In the second issue of the *Freewoman* she answered some of the objections raised by readers, summing up her commentary thus: 'Probably these [i.e. the editor's] replies will raise more objections than those they were put forward to meet, but if such is the case it will be not merely what was expected, but what is *hoped*.'<sup>6</sup> The *Freewoman* also resisted the dominant style of public engagement, which historians have identified as austere, rational, virtuous, and 'manly'.<sup>7</sup> In both style and content, it gave centre-stage to emotions and passions, understanding the goals of feminism in terms of spiritual development, consciousness shift, and transcendence.<sup>8</sup>

## Cultural Resistance

In placing itself in opposition to mainstream ideas of the public sphere, the *Freewoman* can be thought of as what Nancy Fraser has termed a counterpublic; a public existing contemporaneously with the hegemonic public of Habermas's notion of a public sphere, and challenging it. A counterpublic proffers an alternative style of behaviour and highlights the multiplicity of publics actually in operation despite the effort to constitute the bourgeois public sphere as the only one.<sup>9</sup> By doing so, counterpublics also stand as a reminder of the processes of marginalizing and silencing through which one public sphere becomes hegemonic, highlighting a dynamic process rather than a static stance. In the *Freewoman's* case this was in line with a view of feminism as a constant political, social, and cultural process, developing through debate and dialogue, having no predefined end goal, or possibly no end goal at all.<sup>10</sup>

The *Freewoman's* capacity to form a counterpublic and sustain its dynamism is also connected to periodicals as a genre, specifically to its status as an independent review.<sup>11</sup> Habermas links the birth and decline of the bourgeois public sphere to the rise and subsequent commercialization of the press in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The growth of the periodical press and the reading public may have led to more heterogeneity, and in that sense threatened the hegemony of the bourgeois public sphere. However, intellectual and modernist publications had a complex relationship with the mass press, resisting some of its features and adopting others.<sup>12</sup> As Mark Morrisson notes, some believed 'that inexpensive mass distribution magazines and new promotional techniques could foster counter public spheres'.<sup>13</sup> Morrisson sees suffrage and feminist periodicals, which he groups together, as a counterpublic sphere, arguing that the *Freewoman* had difficulty surviving in it.<sup>14</sup> However, Marsden and other contributors saw the *Freewoman* as oppositional to the suffrage papers, whether or not they were seen as counterpublics themselves, positioning it as one public in dialogue and/or resistance to others.

6 'Commentary on Bondwomen', *Freewoman* (30 November 1911), 22.

7 Fraser, pp. 59–60.

8 Lucy Delap, 'Individualism and Introspection: The Framing of Feminism in the *Freewoman*', in *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals, and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap, and Leila Ryan (New York: Macmillan, 2011), pp. 159–93.

9 Fraser, p. 61.

10 Marva Milo, 'The *Freewoman*: Feminism, Dialogism, and Women's Education', *Feral Feminisms*, 1.1 (2013), 13–24.

11 Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre', in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 19–32.

12 Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 5–8.

13 Morrisson, p. 16.

14 Morrisson, p. 92.

The *Freewoman* was an evolving counterpublic, one that had the potential of developing in different directions and into different publics, through the interactivity of the periodical, especially its extensive correspondence section. Indeed, after several months readers had difficulty determining in which direction the journal was going:

It has been pointed out to us by friendly critics that THE FREEWOMAN contains each week matter so highly debatable, and of such serious human import, that it is difficult to digest all that it contains, and to find one’s bearings, in view of the many articles which express opposing points of view.<sup>15</sup>

The solution suggested was to establish ‘informal gatherings of men and women’, eventually named Freewoman Discussion Circles, that would use the weekly issue as a basis for discussion.<sup>16</sup> That these circles were open to both men and women was reflective of Marsden’s view of feminism; she stressed from the start that the periodical sought both men and women as readers and contributors. The space created, then, was a feminist, rather than a women-only space, one defined by ideology or theory rather than by gender, recognizing men as feminists (not only supporters of women’s struggles for rights), as well as the connection between gender-based oppression and other forms of oppression.

In creating a counterpublic, the *Freewoman* also became a form of cultural resistance; simultaneously a cultural product and a space in which passions could be explored and expressed through essays, fiction, and the critique of art and culture, and in which politics could be created outside of formal mechanisms. In this sense, the journal embodies what Stephen Duncombe sees as the radical potential of cultural resistance to ‘provide a sort of “free space” for developing ideas and practices’, where, freed from the restrictions of dominant culture, one can ‘experiment with new ways of seeing and being and develop tools and resources for resistance’. Duncombe sees cultural resistance as fostering community building and notes that it can serve as a path into political activism or function as political resistance in itself.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Freewoman*, this building of a counterpublic or countercommunity happened through the theorization of feminism, criticism of suffrage, and the construction of freewoman as an identity, as well as thorough emphasis on the role of art in feminist consciousness and politics more broadly. Contributors to the journal used art to speak about mainstream discourses, but they also sought in artistic work models and visions for societal change. Henrik Ibsen’s and George Bernard Shaw’s plays, for example, were discussed as significant to feminism in their representation of the plight of women in a patriarchal society, as well as presenting alternatives, highlighted especially in an article on Shaw’s play ‘Getting Married’.<sup>18</sup> A review of an Old Masters exhibition in the Grafton Galleries in London, though it did not directly connect the works to politics, still had a feminist bent. Mary Wollstonecraft was referred to as the ‘pioneer freewoman’, connecting freewoman as an identity to a figure that was highly controversial at the time, criticized by many feminists for her personal and sexual life.<sup>19</sup>

The inseparability of culture from politics was also manifest in experiments with ‘ways of being’, to use Duncombe’s phrase. Individuals associated in different ways

15 ‘Freewoman Clubs’, *Freewoman* (15 February 1912), 244.

16 ‘Freewoman Clubs’, 244.

17 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Introduction’, in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. by Stephen Duncombe (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 1–16 (pp. 5–6).

18 G. R. S. Taylor, ‘The Gospel According to Shaw’, *Freewoman* (30 November 1911), 27.

19 ‘B. A. S.’, ‘Notes on Art’, *Freewoman* (14 December 1911), 78; Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 248–51.

with the *Freewoman*, made choices that defied societal conventions, and connected them to earlier and contemporary bohemians, living their personal resistance in their everyday lives. Part of this resistance was displayed through a rejection of sexual mores: Marsden and the other women central to the periodical, for example, could be placed on the continuum of lesbian or queer existence;<sup>20</sup> Guy Aldred, a socialist and anarchist writer and editor, who contributed to and strongly supported the *Freewoman*, lived a bohemian life, in a free union with fellow anarchist Rose Witcop. As he put it when inviting Grace Jardine (who was part of the *Freewoman* editorial group, though never given official credit):

if you came down here I think you would enjoy things. For we are all friends & live in Bohemia. [...] my friend, Miss Witcop & myself, whilst believing in freedom & being chums rather than anything else, without being indifferent to each other live without restraint.<sup>21</sup>

Deborah Cohler notes that suffrage organizations, militant and moderate alike, promoted a conservative sexuality, and ‘worked hard to keep discussions of all but the most conservative and traditional sexuality out of their organizations’. She places the *Freewoman* as one of a number of renegade groups promoting alternative, queer sexual discourses and possibilities.<sup>22</sup> This is reflected both in the lives of the people related to the periodical and in the type of emotional community it created.

The decision to base a livelihood on writing, particularly writing on topics and from perspectives that were likely to be controversial, was itself a divergence from societal norms. Marsden left a well-paying and respectable position as a headmistress of a teacher training school to join the WSPU, then left to start an independent feminist periodical. Her later years saw her become increasingly isolated, until her eventual hospitalization in a mental institution, a trajectory of growing financial strains and declining health, that was, as Virginia Nicholson has noted, not uncommon in bohemian circles.<sup>23</sup>

However, Duncombe contends that cultural resistance and counterpublics, along with what they have to offer as alternative ways of engaging in dissenting politics, can also be an escape from politics. The creation of a community that lives outside of and in opposition to hegemonic culture may seem to its members sufficient and eliminate the impetus for more explicit political resistance.<sup>24</sup> Fraser points to Habermas’s distinction between two types of publics: ‘weak’ ones, engaging in the exchange and contestation of opinions, but not in decision-making; and ‘strong’ ones, that attempt to influence the hegemonic public sphere through political decisions. This distinction assumed separation between the state and civil society and focused on the capacity to influence decision-making in the context of the state. Fraser, however, sees the blurring of the line between civil society and the state as a democratic advance and offers a post-bourgeois conception of the public sphere, one that allows for hybrid forms of strong and weak publics, as well as a broad variety of relations between them.<sup>25</sup>

20 Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631–60.

21 Guy Aldred to Grace Jardine, 19 July 1912, Dora Marsden Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections Department, Princeton, box 2, folder 25.

22 Deborah Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 73–79.

23 Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden 1882–1960* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), especially pp. 155–88; Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900–1939* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 1–22.

24 Duncombe, p. 6.

25 Fraser, pp. 74–77.

The *Freewoman* had no intention of influencing parliamentary politics; it was highly critical of the state and the representative parliamentary system, and rather than attempting to influence government decisions, or even the demands made by suffrage and other women’s organizations, its editors and contributors often suggested alternatives that may best be described as utopian. Teresa Billington-Greig, founder of the Women’s Freedom League, though critical of some aspects of the *Freewoman*, still found it an appropriate venue for her critique of the democratic system. Seeing it as a system whereby a majority necessarily coerces the minority, she was explicit about not seeking an alternative governing machinery: ‘I am not prepared to substitute for the machinery I criticise destructively any personally devised alternative machine. I do not intend to make any concessions to those to whom the nakedness of a machineless land is an offence.’<sup>26</sup> Focusing on the connection between the democratic system and women’s rights, she concluded with an open question: ‘If government exists, women are of course entitled to share in it [...] It is granted. The question at issue is [...] whether some other movement outside politics, independent of the governing machine, would not provide a surer and a speedier way to full human liberty.’<sup>27</sup> The *Freewoman* was an appropriate periodical in which to publish this ‘destructive’ criticism, as it distanced itself from formal political aspirations, and espoused a broader view of the political often with an anarchist bent that emphasized associational relationships as the basis for society, even if Billington-Greig here refers to these kinds of associations as external to politics. In this sense, the periodical reflects the capacity that Fraser sees in the post-bourgeois public sphere, to ‘envision democratic possibilities beyond the limits of actually existing democracy’.<sup>28</sup>

The *Freewoman* Discussion Circles were similarly envisioned as spaces where members could determine the directions and possibilities, evidenced by their minimal initial guidelines. While some members saw the venue provided for open debate as a goal in itself, others, as noted in a report on the Discussion Circles, ‘expressed a strong desire for discussions [...] leading to definite action. One member suggested the formation of a special “Actionist Group,” a suggestion received with marked approval’.<sup>29</sup> There is no indication, however, that such a group was ever established. The intention of the periodical and the Discussion Circles then can be thought of as influencing consciousness and fostering a culture of open discussion, both of which are intimately connected to politics, even if not directly to formal electoral politics. As Fraser acknowledges, individuals’ membership within different publics often overlaps, such that the opinions brought up and contested in the *Freewoman* and the Discussion Circles could thus have political influence through connections with other periodicals, organizations, and people.<sup>30</sup> And while it is certainly possible for cultural resistance to become an escape from politics, culture exists in a complex relationship with the political, and the political itself encompasses a wide range of relations and associations. This allows cultural resistance to be simultaneously more than just one of the options suggested by Duncombe; that is, a path into politics (presumably synonymous with formal/electoral politics), a political act, or a form of political escapism. For while formal political change was not one of the *Freewoman*’s goals, creating a shift in consciousness and culture around issues of gender, and centering emotions as political was. A broadened understanding of the relationship between cultural processes and the realm of the

26 Teresa Billington-Greig, ‘Women and Government’, *Freewoman* (21 December 1911), 85.

27 Billington-Greig, 86.

28 Fraser, p. 77.

29 Barbara Low, ‘“The Freewoman” Discussion Circle’, *Freewoman* (27 June 1912), p. 115.

30 Fraser, p. 70.

political shows the paper's power in providing a space for the envisioning of different political possibilities.

### Cultural Citizenship

One way of understanding the connection between politics and participation in cultural processes is through the concept of cultural citizenship. I employ Klaus and Lünenborg's notion of cultural citizenship as 'a set of strategies and practices to invoke processes of empowerment in order to subversively listen and speak up in the public sphere'.<sup>31</sup> When looking at feminist media, this concept can be useful in articulating the connection between media, identity formation, and participation in the political, broadly conceived. Attending to, as Gunnarsson Payne puts it, 'the ways in which gendered identities are transformed into *feminist* identities', and to the intimate connection between identity formation and cultural resources, can illuminate the constitutive — rather than solely representative — role of media.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that cultural citizenship is used primarily in contemporary political and media contexts (for instance, globalization and migration; zines and online media), and not all of its elements are applicable to early twentieth-century feminist periodicals. But, considering the saliency of the question of women's citizenship in the early twentieth century, the emphasis this formulation of cultural citizenship places on identity, media, and political participation makes it useful in this context.

Alternative media play a key role in cultural citizenship, particularly for marginalized groups, as they have the capacity to foster a participatory culture more accessible and supportive than the hegemonic one.<sup>33</sup> Definitions of alternative media put forth by theorists such as Duncombe, Downing, and Atton, recognize the blurry lines between the radical and non-radical, attending to the content but also the context in which radical media operate, and their modes of production and distribution.<sup>34</sup> Within the parameters of these theories, the *Freewoman* can be considered a radical alternative periodical, functioning much like Drüeke and Zobl describe contemporary feminist media, as a space to 'express opinions, experiences and political views — to actively construct meaning and make sense of the world — in which a critical and self-reflexive political education and a cultural citizenship could take place'.<sup>35</sup> This space was created through a combination of some of the features of the periodical as a publishing genre, especially its potential for openness and interactivity, also characteristic of some newer forms such as blogs and social media, which allow for the formation of communities based on disembodied communication.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the *Freewoman* this was augmented by the decidedly dialogical character of the paper, evident in the way discussion proceeded within it, and stated explicitly in its editorial policies.<sup>37</sup> Marsden was upfront about the role of the periodical in allowing open debate; responding to a reader who suggested the *Freewoman* should take a more 'constructive' and 'affirmative'

31 Elisabeth Klaus and Margareth Lünenborg, 'Cultural Citizenship: Participation by and through Media', in *Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks, and Cultural Citizenship*, ed. by Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drüeke (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 203–04.

32 Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, 'Feminist Media as Alternative Media? Theorising Feminist Media from the Perspective of Alternative Media Studies', in *Feminist Media*, ed. by Zobl and Drüeke, p. 66. Emphasis in the original.

33 Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zobl, 'Introduction: Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks, and Cultural Citizenship', in *Feminist Media*, ed. by Zobl and Drüeke, p. 14.

34 Gunnarsson Payne, pp. 59–60; Duncombe, pp. 6–7.

35 Drüeke and Zobl, p. 15.

36 Margaret Beetham, 'Periodicals and the New Media: Women and Imagined Communities', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29.3 (2006), 231–40 (pp. 236–37).

37 Milo, pp. 16–22.



tone rather than ‘mud-throwing’, she stated her belief in the necessity of hearing all voices:

Light, and more light, we need, anyone’s light, even though it be merely a flicker, and, welcoming all, we believe the candle flame will not need to be extinguished to prove the brighter radiance of the electric arc [...] it is not fair to suggest that we should exclude the correspondence, ably put, of others. That, to us, is lamp-snuffing.<sup>38</sup>

If the general tone of the *Freewoman* seems to show little interest in joining or reforming existing formal political mechanisms, what was the community in which it offered citizenship? One answer to this is that those whom Marsden envisioned as having the capacity to be *freewomen* were the ones willing and able to live outside of societal norms and to pay the economic and social prices that such a life entailed. In this they were, in Nicholson’s formulation, ‘citizens’ of Bohemia.<sup>39</sup> As noted earlier, Guy Aldred saw himself and his partner as ‘living in Bohemia’, using it as both a place and an identificatory marker. Even without mentioning Bohemia, feminism and the individual and collective identity of the freewoman were invoked and debated, creating a cultural and political community of which women and men could be members or citizens of sorts. Another answer is that this community emphasized the primacy of emotions and the role of emotional discourse in politics. Cultural citizenship is characterized by boundary-crossing, participating in a circle of meaning-production that is situated in an intermediate space, among other things between public and private, rational and emotional.<sup>40</sup> It thus allows for a conception of emotional connections and discourses as fundamental to political consciousness and action. To understand the *Freewoman* as counterculture, therefore, it is important to account for its role in creating an emotional countercommunity.

### Emotional (Counter)Community

One of the important features of the *Freewoman* as a countercultural periodical and as a counterpublic is its centering of emotions and passion. This allowed for the construction of identity through style, which Fraser argues is one of the key functions of subaltern counterpublics.<sup>41</sup> The *Freewoman* thus created a countercommunity partly by insisting on the key role that emotions and passion — which could be sexual, artistic, political, or spiritual — play in feminism. Fionnuala Dillane has foregrounded the importance of attending to the affective aspects of periodicals, and I would like to add to this discussion the communal facet of the emotional experiences surrounding periodicals.<sup>42</sup> Readers’ emotional interactions with periodicals, much like the periodicals themselves, occupy an in-between position; intimately personal and private, but also public and communal, and the emotional intensity of encounters with periodicals is part of what gives them their political power and significance. Incorporating the history of emotions, as well as scholarship on social and communal ‘structures of feeling’, can therefore produce a richer analysis of periodicals as counterpublics. Elements of queer affect are also applicable in

38 ‘Topics of the Week: On Affirmations’, *Freewoman* (15 February 1912), 244.

39 Nicholson, pp. xv–xvi.

40 Drücke and Zobl, p. 16.

41 Fraser, pp. 67–69.

42 Fionnuala Dillane, ‘Forms of Affect, Relationality, and Periodical Encounters, or “Pine-Apple for the Million”’, *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.1 (2016), 5–24 (pp. 16–21).

the case of the *Freewoman*, specifically ideas of queer counterpublics and the ‘modes of feeling’ related to them (though I will not elaborate on this connection in this essay).<sup>43</sup>

As Ute Frevert notes, in modernity emotions have been regarded as strongly connected to one’s individuality, a view that was certainly shared by Dora Marsden.<sup>44</sup> This did not mean, however, that they were strictly private or apolitical. On the contrary, Marsden saw certain emotional states, mainly passion, as crucial to the development of consciousness in general, and feminist consciousness in particular, and to the freewoman’s subjectivity. Though some of the fine distinctions between the emotional states Marsden refers to in her writing, such as between passion, lust, and desire, may be lost on twenty-first-century readers, it is clear from her writing which of these states engender progressive resistance and are conducive to the development of feminist consciousness, and which leave women connected to mainstream views of ‘sentimentality’.<sup>45</sup> The emotional state that has the most radical potential for Marsden is passion, as she explains in a leader titled ‘A Plea for Psychology’, where she discusses the price women pay in mental and physical health for the repression of their non-normative passions. She then draws the connection between private passion and more public realms of life: ‘We have a belief that, given sufficient emotional data, we shall find that all passion is one, whether passion of man for woman, mother for child, friend for friend, devotee for faith, follower for cause — they are all one, in kind and essence.’<sup>46</sup> Passion, for Marsden, was similar to lust, though the latter was less enduring and connected more specifically to the physical aspects of sexuality. A Discussion Circles participant wrote to the *Freewoman* following one of the meetings, addressing the distinction between passion, which Marsden advocated, and sentimentality, which she rejected. The enduring nature of passion and its connection to consciousness were central to the distinction: ‘Is not spiritual passion simply continuous emotion, as contrasted with an ephemeral emotion, which may be termed sentimentality? ... continuous emotion, is evoked [...] by the mental pictures ... formed and retained in the mind ... the ephemeral emotion is roused directly by ... immediate experience.’<sup>47</sup> This resonates with Frevert’s account of an understanding of passion as more enduring and therefore more dangerous than affect, particularly in the context of women and emotions like rage.<sup>48</sup> Love and sexual passion, for Marsden, were central to feminist politics, since they were necessary for the development of a sense of self and subjectivity, a gateway to spiritual transformation, and a precondition for freedom.<sup>49</sup>

If emotions were integral to the development of feminist consciousness, reading periodicals, much like novel reading in Frevert’s account, influenced the ways in which readers organized their emotional economy. The reclusive nature of reading novels is one of the main reasons for the paucity of accounts of their reception by readers, including their emotional impact. The ways in which periodicals operate on an emotional level, however, can be more visible. Jan Plamper emphasizes the importance of attending to the influence of the structural properties of media upon the production of meaning, which applies to the ways in which emotional meaning is generated as well.<sup>50</sup> Since people often read periodicals communally and wrote to the editors, we have a record of their emotional engagement with the material, which adds another layer to our

43 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, ‘Sex in Public’, *Critical Inquiry*, 24.2 (1998), 547–66 (p. 558).

44 Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), p. 16.

45 See, for example, ‘The New Morality: II’, *Freewoman* (28 December 1911), 101–02.

46 ‘A Plea for Psychology’, *Freewoman* (25 January 1912), 182.

47 H. M. Pulley, Letter to the editor, *Freewoman* (27 June 1912), 118.

48 Frevert, p. 89.

49 ‘The New Morality: II’, p. 101.

50 Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 285.

understanding of the impact of the social and political ideas discussed in them. A letter from a friend to Grace Jardine, for example, tells of one such communal reading experience, including its emotional aspects. The unknown author describes walking into a suffrage society office, where she

Heard a terrible buzz before I opened the door, & on doing so there was the room quite crowded, with one of the Russells sitting on the cupboard reading aloud to her people the editorial notes on Miss P. [i.e. Christabel Pankhurst]!! I’ve really never seen our crowd so excited & moved, a lot of them kept on its [*sic*] Mary Gawthorpe”. & other no ‘its [*sic*] that Miss Marsden’, oh how they did carry on I could not help laughing to myself [...] They couldn’t settle down to business at all that night.<sup>51</sup>

The shock generated by the first issue is evident from this description, as well as from the author’s statement at the beginning of the letter: ‘Oh my dear Grace & co-editors, What have you been doing? If you only knew how the bombshell you planted down in quiet deep exploded, you might be surprised, or perhaps you meant to do it.’ The content of the first issue was shocking not only for the criticism of the WSPU; the author of the letter expressed concern that ‘after you’ve discussed marriage & the birth rate, what in the world else will you write about? I am afraid that will exhaust the modern topics’.<sup>52</sup> The surprise and response to it were intensified by the communal setting and the debate, likely based on style and rhetoric, over who wrote the piece, causing a frenzy that interfered with work for the rest of the night.

The editorial, it turned out later, was Marsden’s work, and as evidenced by the response reported in the letter, it was effective in shocking and angering some of the readers, and generating emotionally charged discussions. Bruce Clarke sees the ‘shock tactics’ of the *Freewoman* as part of a process whereby the provocative introduction of an opinion or topic was followed by dialectical development.<sup>53</sup> What this depiction of a logical process misses, though, is the emotional basis and impact of Marsden’s style, for as Barbara Rosenwein reminds us, ‘one cannot separate feelings from rhetoric’.<sup>54</sup> In this case, the feelings of the author and the readers alike were inseparable from the meaning-making process. Assuming that Marsden’s rhetoric was calculated, we could ask what type of emotional economy it sought to create. She was often sarcastic and sometimes employed the discourse of anti-feminists when writing about women in their current state, though her goal was to shed light on the societal structures that kept women in this state. Her writing was unapologetically angry, sometimes contemptuous, seeking to generate strong responses, in which she succeeded; the antagonistic ones, especially, were emotional, even visceral: Suffragist Agnes Maude Royden, for example, found the *Freewoman* a ‘nauseous publication’; another reader thought it was disgusting, immoral, indecent and filthy, while psychoanalyst David Eder, after reading the editors’ response to his piece, referred to them as ‘monstrous and horribly cantankerous young cats’.<sup>55</sup>

51 N. A. to Grace Jardine, 27 November 1911, Dora Marsden Collection, box 2, folder 25.

52 N. A. to Jardine.

53 Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 56–57.

54 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feelings: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 8–9.

55 Agnes Maude Royden, *The Times* (22 June 1912); Edgar Ansell to Dora Marsden, 14 July 1912, Dora Marsden Collection, box 2, folder 25; M. D. Eder, Letter to the editors, *Freewoman* (21 December 1911), 91.

As the spotlight of the research turns to the ‘structures of feeling’<sup>56</sup> related to the *Freewoman* and the people involved in it, we can start to think of it as what Barbara Rosenwein has termed an ‘emotional community’. These communities are defined not by their membership or structure, but rather by the focus of the researcher studying them. Emotional communities are delineated by a focus on emotions they ‘define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore’.<sup>57</sup> Rosenwein contends that an emotional community can be an aspect of any social grouping, including textual communities, so that the emotional community in the case of periodicals could be an element within the imagined periodical community.<sup>58</sup> The *Freewoman* as a textual community positioned itself as an alternative to the dominant emotional culture surrounding it, doing so at least partly through emotional resistance.

The journal was not monolithic in its relation to emotions, but by and large Marsden’s and other contributors’ modes of expression and critique challenged the emotional culture of both the women’s movement and the public sphere more broadly. Participants in public political, intellectual, and social discourse were expected to be rational and keep their emotions under control, a capacity that was associated with civilization, and therefore also with men. Indeed, by the 1930s historians were writing explicitly about emotions as destructive, warning of a ‘revival of emotions’ which could lead to the decline of reason.<sup>59</sup> On the other side of the divide stood passions, emotions, spirituality, and the threat of anarchy, particularly spiritual anarchy which rejected scientific rationalism as a way to attain ‘truth’, turning instead to ‘human feelings, desires, mysticism and religious impulses’ as key to understanding the world.<sup>60</sup> These tendencies explain some of the criticism of anarchy as infantile, and the understanding of it as a phase in the process of political maturation, corresponding with Freudian ideas about civilization.<sup>61</sup> This rejection of the ‘masculine’ scientific rationalist discourse was connected by authors such as Robert Owen, Edward Carpenter, and others, to women’s liberation and sexual reform, and to the creation of a better society, founded on gender equality and embracing more open emotional and sexual expression.<sup>62</sup>

The concern with the destructive power of emotions was present in the *Freewoman* right from its inception. In fact, it surfaced even before it was entirely clear that it was to be a periodical, when Mary Gawthorpe, who co-founded the journal with Marsden and served as its nominal co-editor for a short while, was still referring to Marsden’s initiative as a ‘movement’. From her letters, it is clear that Gawthorpe perceived Marsden’s attitude towards women’s and suffrage organizations, and her plans for advancing discussions on feminism, as destructive: ‘If you wish to associate destructive tactics with a *movement* then I say you’re doomed to barrenness of result from the outset. No movement can destroy and build at the same time [...] a movement for the organisation of thought requires no irritating tactics. Another thing: in public affairs straightforward and destructive tactic alone cannot cope with “invested” personality.’<sup>63</sup> Gawthorpe uses

56 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128–35.

57 Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, *American Historical Review*, 107.3 (2002), 821–45 (p. 842).

58 See Plamper, pp. 68–70; Beetham, ‘Periodicals and the New Media’, p. 235.

59 Frevert, pp. 27–29.

60 Matthew Thomas, *Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures in Britain, 1880–1914: Revolutions in Everyday Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 25.

61 Thomas, pp. 57–59.

62 Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 65–91.

63 Mary Gawthorpe to Dora Marsden, 1 June 1911, Dora Marsden Collection, box 2, folder 1.

the language of the expected behaviour in ‘public affairs’, suggesting that to be accepted and to have an impact, Marsden will need to give up the destructive tactics and discourse, which Gawthorpe connected to directness of expression, and accommodate to the norms of the public sphere. Considering the ‘bombshell’ of Marsden’s first leader, and the tone of much of the writing that followed, accommodating to the style expected in public affairs was clearly not the intention.

As Rosenwein notes, one of the elements that make a group cohere into an emotional community is their approach to, and evaluation of, others’ emotions. In this respect, the analysis of the emotional economy of the WSPU in the *Freewoman* is particularly interesting. Marsden saw the Union as operating through the exertion of ‘affectional control’ on its members and saw this as an example of the authoritarianism of the Union.<sup>64</sup> This was apparent in its strict hierarchy and militaristic rhetoric and manifested emotionally through the loyalty and devotion that members were encouraged to express towards the leaders, especially Christabel Pankhurst. Marsden saw this emotional control as detrimental to women’s capacity for freedom, which required that they access and express their passions untrammelled by the conventions of society or an organization. Marsden also criticized the emotional tactics employed by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) for fundraising, and explicitly drew connections between this body and the WSPU.<sup>65</sup> In both cases organizations working for and led by women were presented as exploiting women’s perceived emotional susceptibility, and stifling their individual judgment and development.

The insistence on individual emotional development was part of Marsden’s feminist politics, one that blurred the line between the personal and the political, and unsurprisingly garnered strong responses from readers. Some focused on the political effectiveness of unity and on support for suffrage as a step towards women’s freedom, both potentially jeopardized by strong, critical, emotional expressions. Anger and passionate criticism, these commentators implied, were counterproductive even if the WSPU was far from perfect, and in this they seem to agree with Gawthorpe’s understanding of Marsden’s approach as destructive. Others, however, centered their objections on what they saw as personal attacks on Christabel Pankhurst, and those objections were emotionally charged. Readers were disappointed in Marsden and even more so in Gawthorpe, who was well known and loved in the Union, for their perceived betrayal of the cause and the leaders. Hertha Ayrton, for example, wrote to Gawthorpe a few days after the first issue was published:

Your vile attack on Miss Pankhurst in *The Freewoman* fills me with amazement & disgust, too deep for expression. That you, *you*, who talk so glibly of seeking first & foremost TRUTH & LIGHT should follow a Mrs. Billington Greig in attacking a former colleague at the first opportunity – this is indeed a disillusionment [...] Oh I am deeply ashamed of you; yes, & sorry for you too, for you must be ashamed of yourself to your heart’s core.<sup>66</sup>

There was also criticism of the focus on passions and sexuality, which some *Freewoman* readers found excessive. The language and tone of these critiques point to a perception of the economy of emotions in the *Freewoman* as unbalanced; some emotional states are viewed as excessive, while others are lacking, a perceived imbalance that was understood as impeding political progress.

64 ‘Ed.’, response to reader’s letter, *Freewoman* (14 December 1911), 73.

65 ‘Notes of the Week’, *Freewoman* (25 January 1912), 183–84.

66 Hertha Ayrton to Mary Gawthorpe, 26 November 1911, Dora Marsden Collection, box 2, folder 25.

The modes of emotional expression promoted and criticized in the *Freewoman* also had a gendered aspect; while the journal criticized the rational rhetoric that can be seen as masculine, it also rejected the sentimentality and unquestioning loyalty of the WSPU, which were perceived as feminine. It strove perhaps for an emotional state that transcended the divides between public and private, masculine and feminine, constructive and destructive. In this sense, as well as in its discussions of sexuality, the *Freewoman* approximates Berlant and Warner's idea of a queer counterpublic.<sup>67</sup> The *Freewoman*, as mentioned earlier, did not have a uniform voice as an emotional community, a polyvocality that was in keeping with its general dialogical approach to feminism. It sought legitimacy in political discussion for 'counterproductive' or 'destructive' emotions and recognition of their necessity within a reformed culture of political debate. It attempted to create an emotional countercommunity or what Stephen Brooke has termed 'a kind of emotional citizenship', upon which a different understanding of feminism, indeed of politics more broadly, could be built.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

What does it mean for a periodical to be part of, or to be, a counterculture? Its content, style, or politics have to resist the mainstream, be it on a specific issue or as a way of being and understanding society more broadly. In the *Freewoman* it was the rejection of values and notions that were associated with the still dominant idea of the public sphere — those values that the periodical as a radical 'intellectual acid' was intended to destroy. To appreciate the power of the *Freewoman* — and periodicals in general — as counterculture, we need to think about their context, particularly about what would be considered normative or acceptable and what would have been radical and oppositional in their own time. This challenges us to conceptualize the impact of periodicals in ways that go beyond sales, subscriptions, or longevity, which often belie the resonance of these publications for their readers. One way to move past the numbers is to think about the social, emotional, and discursive networks of which these periodicals were part, the different publics that formed around and through them, and the connections among them and between them and other communities. For counterculture generally, and feminist periodicals especially, it seems appropriate to use methods and theories that correspond with their politics; in this case thinking about citizenship as a cultural and emotional category, not merely a formally-political, state-centred one.

Attending to the emotional economy of periodicals can give us a view into aspects of acts and mindsets in the past, which are often lost otherwise.<sup>69</sup> This becomes all the more significant when thinking about the voices of working-class feminists like the one who wrote to Jardine about the responses to the *Freewoman's* first issue, and of others who would not have had their writing published outside of the periodical community. Considering emotions seriously as part of the workings of periodicals allows us also to think about them as connecting reading practices to politics; it reminds us not to neglect the passion, lust, anger, disgust, and other affective states of the people and texts that we study, however elusive they may be.<sup>70</sup> Rather, we should find ways to think about emotions as constitutive to periodical communities, particularly to feminist and other political communities formed through print networks, which might require going back to the more nuanced language of emotions, before they were grouped

67 Berlant and Warner, pp. 558–64.

68 Brooke, p. 84.

69 Frevert, p. 10.

70 Dillane, pp. 20–21.

together in ways that make distinctions more difficult. We also need to be mindful of the relationship between media and emotions, and the unique forms of political participation and resistance these relationships can generate. Thinking of counterculture through periodicals directs our attention to questions of production and critique of culture, and engagement with it in the everyday, in quotidian interactions, lifestyle choices, and social circles.

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