

Stella Bloch and the Politics of Dance

By

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B.F.A., University of Alberta, 2001

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

This thesis examines the early career and art criticism of Stella Bloch, an artist, dancer and writer who was active in New York City during the World War One era. I focus on Bloch's most important essays from this period: "Intuitions" (1919) and *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* (1922). In "Intuitions" Bloch developed a theory of aesthetics based on her study of Nietzsche and Buddhism. *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* incorporated this theory into the concept of an "ideal drama," which I have analysed as "orientalist." Linking Bloch's anti-colonial "orientalism" to that of her mentor, Ananda Coomaraswamy, I demonstrate that though Bloch's "ideal drama" was an ambitious critique of the social and artistic values of Western culture, it was still caught up in the "orientalist" discourses of the period.

Supervisor: Dr. Allan Antliff, (History in Art)

Contents

Supervisory Committee	i
Supervisory Committee	iii
Abstract.....	iii
Contents	iv
List of Figures	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Stella Bloch's Biography	4
Chapter Two: Intuitions, A Manifesto on Art, Life and Dance	16
Chapter Three: The Ideal Drama.....	29
Conclusion	40
Endnotes	44
Bibliography	50

List of Figures

Figure 1: Stella Bloch, Photo c. 1919.....	53
Figure 2: Stella Bloch & Ananda Coomaraswamy, Photo, n.d.	53
Figure 3: Stella Bloch, 3 Duncan Dancers, Pastel on Colored Paper, c.1918	54
Figure 4: Abraham Walkowitz, Isadora Duncan, Pastel on Colored Paper, 1917.....	55
Figure 5: Edward Calvert, The Bride, Copper Engraving, 1893	56
Figure 6: Stella Bloch, Intuitions, Drawing, 1919	56
Figure 7: Stella Bloch, Java, <i>Dancing and the Drama, East & West</i> , 1922.....	57
Figure 8: Ananda Coomaraswamy, Photo, Javanese Dancer, 1921.....	57
Figure 9: Ruth St. Denis as Radha, 1911.....	58
Figure 10: Stella Bloch, Isadora Duncan, <i>Dancing and the Drama, East & West</i> , 1922..	58
Figure 11: Stella Bloch, Bali, Frontispiece <i>Dancing and the Drama, East & West</i> , 1922	59
Figure 12: Arnold Genthe, Stella Bloch, 1921	60

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Introduction

Stella Bloch was an artist, dancer and writer whose emergence on the New York art scene unfolded during tumultuous and exciting times. (Figure 1) This thesis focuses on Bloch's early career, between 1917 and 1922. I will demonstrate the relationship between Bloch's aesthetic theory and dance performances, and provide an analysis of her radical perspective on the relationship between dance, art and society.

While Bloch was initially developing her dance repertoire, inspired by the modern dancer Isadora Duncan, she drew studies of dancers from observation and memory. Through the act of drawing, Stella Bloch attempted to provide a visual narration of the dances she studied. As a dancer herself, Bloch drew in response to her own knowledge of dance. As such, the drawings are as much a "trace" of Bloch's performances as they are works of art in their own right.² In chapter one, I outline Bloch's biography and provide information on significant influences on her career as an artist and dancer. I also analyse the evolution of Bloch's artistic development into the early 1920s, when her attention turned from Isadora Duncan's methodology to Southeast Asian performance traditions.

Bloch's ambition to join the New York artistic avant-garde during the first decades of the 20th Century is most evident in her self-conscious emulation and adoption of the modernist desire to merge art with everyday life. American modernists regarded the fusion of art and life as vital for creating a just society. This ideal was embraced by many radically-oriented artists at this time, particularly Robert Henri, John Sloan and Abraham Walkowitz.¹ With this fusion of art and life in mind, my thesis analyses Bloch's early career and her most important essays from that period – "Intuitions," published in

1919, and *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, published in 1922. "Intuitions" is the subject of chapter two, and it represents a significant turning point in Bloch's intellectual development. "Intuitions" may be considered Bloch's manifesto, where she expressed her ideas with great conviction. It also served as the foundation for her mature writing on art and dance. I will analyse "Intuitions" in conjunction with Bloch's study of Buddhism and aesthetics. *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, on the other hand, provides the reader with a more theoretical statement on art and society. It attempted to represent the "truth" of Eastern drama to the Western reader. Bloch argues in favour of traditional Southeast Asian dance performances and polemicises against the Westernised "oriental" dances then common on the American stage. Here she first outlines her concept of the "ideal drama," in which she argues art and dance have an important spiritual function in society. Bloch's "ideal drama" is drawn from her study of Southeast Asian dance traditions, and is an example of "orientalism in reverse." This concept was first theorised by Sadiq Jalal al-Azm in his critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said's theory asserted the knowledge constructed by "orientalists" supported the legacy of colonialism, both ideologically and materially. In chapter three, I will discuss the implications of Said's theory for Bloch's "ideal drama" and demonstrate that her references to East and West were a form of "orientalism" that opposed Western imperialism.

Stella Bloch is a hitherto a neglected figure in the history of American art and dance, and it seems her amateur status played a key role in her marginalisation. It was the price she paid as a "self-taught" artist, dancer and theorist.² As we shall see, this stance was calculated to ensure her artistic independence. But this position kept her out of the mainstream discourse, and consequently she was forgotten. A second factor in her

marginalisation was her relationship with the famous scholar of Asian art, Ananda Coomaraswamy. During her formative years, Bloch's writings and activity were overshadowed by the achievements of her well known husband. Since then, Bloch has been subsumed within Coomaraswamy's biography with little mention made of her writings and art. In his seminal biography of Coomaraswamy, Roger Lipsey, for example, refers to Bloch as an "untrained but gifted dancer" while dismissing her as a "candidate for the avant-garde:" her professional career is neglected.³ The only other reference to Bloch is found in Allan Antliff's study, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde*, where he mentions "Intuitions" in the course of discussing Coomaraswamy's contributions to the anarchist journal *The Modern School*. Apart from these two sources, nothing has been published about Stella Bloch. This thesis, therefore, is an original contribution to art history.

Chapter One: Stella Bloch's Biography

The only child of a single mother, Stella Bloch was born on December 18, 1897, in Tarnow, Poland (then occupied by Russia). Life in Poland must have offered very little for Charlotte Bloch and her daughter. There, Charlotte faced the daunting task of raising her child as a single mother in poverty. There are no specific indications of the circumstances behind their departure, but we may surmise that Stella Bloch's absentee father left a significant gap in her life. To ensure her daughter's well-being, when Stella was only a year old, Charlotte Bloch moved to New York City and turned to her extended family for help.

As recent immigrants of Polish-Jewish heritage, Charlotte Bloch's family provided both mother and child with the support they needed. She and young Stella joined her sister, Pauline Ehrlich, and brother, Bernard Offner, in the family's dressmaking business. The business occupied a brownstone on East 54th St, while Stella and her mother lived in a third floor room above the studio.⁴ Pauline Ehrlich owned the building and worked with Charlotte and a crew of seamstresses while Bernard Offner, who had trained as a tailor in Poland, drafted patterns and fitted garments. Many prestigious New Yorkers, including the Guggenheims, patronised their studio. When the company changed its name to Heller & Offner, after Charlotte and Bernard formally became business partners, New York's elite remained loyal customers. The workshop of Heller & Offner offered the most cutting-edge European styles, modelled after samples obtained from the top Parisian designers.

Despite the busy atmosphere of the clothing studio, Charlotte brought Stella to work with her and kept her occupied by encouraging her to draw on the walls with dressmaker's chalk.⁵ While Bloch attributes her supportive childhood environment and self-guided practice as the primary source of her artistic talent, she also acknowledges the influence of her eldest cousin, Richard Offner. Richard was 10 years older than Stella, and he took her under his wing when she was 8 or 9.⁶ Richard Offner's history also provides an interesting insight regarding Bloch's early biography. In high school, Richard joined a street gang. One evening, he was hospitalised with a stab wound he received in a gang fight, and, to ensure his safety, his family assigned him to study with his Uncle Ehrlich, Pauline's husband.⁷ Ehrlich was a renowned Hebrew and biblical scholar, familiar with multiple ancient languages. He was a respected tutor of many young men from the wealthy German-Jewish section of New York.⁸ Although Ehrlich himself was agnostic and a committed socialist, respect for his scholarship placed him in great demand amongst young men studying to enter the rabbinate. The family felt Richard would benefit from Ehrlich's strict schooling, and Richard's life took a more constructive turn.⁹ He became interested in art and shared his discoveries with Stella Bloch. She often showed him her drawings and he encouraged her to collect photographs of Greek sculpture.¹⁰

In high school, Stella's priorities shifted towards art at the expense of her studies and after she confided this problem to Richard, he suggested art school as an alternative option. With his encouragement, Charlotte Bloch reluctantly allowed Stella to transfer into art school.¹¹ Stella Bloch recalls enrolling "with a great sense of liberation," but accounts of her formal training are minimal.¹² From her description the art classes were

structured according to the traditional academic model of art education. Bloch recalls producing charcoal drawings of segmented casts taken from Greek statuary, and attending classes in oil painting.¹³ In her untitled autobiographical sketch, she emphasises that her training provided her with only technical expertise. While Bloch had the skill and desire to become an artist, inspiring subject matter eluded her.¹⁴ In spring, 1915, however, she attended a performance of the dancer Isadora Duncan and discovered a purpose for both her art and her life. This event was the touchstone that inspired Bloch's life-long love affair with dance.¹⁵ Bloch sketched compositions of Duncan's performance from memory and resolved to embark on her own dance career. The combination of Duncan's stage presence and her writings on dance and society deeply influenced Bloch's artistic concerns. In fact, by 1918, Bloch formed a professional association with Duncan's dance troupe, *The Isadora Duncan Dancers*, and Isadora's sister Elizabeth Duncan. However, before this occurred, another significant figure entered her life.

Sometime in the spring of 1917, in New York City, a few of Bloch's drawings of Isadora Duncan "fell into the hands of A.K. Coomaraswamy."¹⁶ Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was born in Sri Lanka in 1877. His father was a Tamil lawyer, and his mother was English. He was raised in England and received a Bachelor's degree in Geology and Botany from the University of London in 1900. Between 1905 and 1917, when he settled in the United States, Coomaraswamy divided his time between India and England. During this period, he was active in the English Arts and Crafts movement, and the Indian Independence movement. In his art criticism, Coomaraswamy merged these two concerns and this constitutes one of his most distinctive contributions to the history of the Arts and Crafts movement.¹⁷

Today, Coomaraswamy is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential pioneers of South Asian art history, and when he met Bloch, she was already known as a “gifted dancer.”¹⁸ He sought her out and became her mentor, friend and lover as they forged a relationship that was both personal and professional. (Figure 2) Coomaraswamy is remembered for synthesising a theory of art and culture that spans the division between East and West, in which his account of traditional arts is inseparable from his critique of modern art.¹⁹ Bloch would, in turn, develop this theme in her own research.

Coomaraswamy looked to the past traditions of both Europe and Asia to define an anti-industrial, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial critique of contemporary modernity. Most Asian nationalists were calling for an end to colonial rule through the transformation of colonised Asian nations into competitive modern states on a par with those in Europe. Coomaraswamy provided an alternative theory. Taking his cue from William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement, he defended the role of traditional Indian craftsmanship over industrialisation and condemned the factory system for suppressing the worker's role in beautifying and spiritually enriching society.²⁰ Like William Morris before him, Coomaraswamy argued against the division of labour imposed upon the worker in the industrial-capitalist system and denounced the modern division between the fine and applied arts. Considering the enduring relationship between labour and manufacture, Morris defined the craftsman's role as both personal and social. From his reading of Morris, Coomaraswamy emphasised the spiritual significance of art, theorising that Indian independence could not be supported by material change alone, but also required the force of the spirit that only a craft-based economy could provide.²¹

Coomaraswamy argued that the production of craft-goods was an essential link between religious beliefs and the social-economic well-being of society. On this basis, he condemned industrialism while elevating the role of the craftsman as the producer of India's cultural identity. Ultimately Coomaraswamy imagined Indian independence as a step beyond the industrial model of modernity: he coined the term "post-industrialism" to encapsulate the concept of an arts-and-crafts-based modernity in competition with the Eurocentric industrial-capitalist model.²² For Coomaraswamy, the Indian craftsman's devotion to his work was the antithesis of the individualist approach of the modern Western artist. Whereas the Western artist created art as a form of personal expression, often at odds with the values of his/her society, the Indian craftsperson reproduced the social and cultural values that were the bedrock of India's traditional culture.

Allan Antliff points out that Coomaraswamy's "post-industrialism" lends credence to critiques of Edward Said's concept of "orientalism."²³ Said's theory divides the world between East and West, or what has been traditionally known as the Orient and the Occident. This division is hierarchical: the colonial powers of Europe, or "the West," held cultural power over the colonised "oriental" East, which is therefore inferior, backward, etc. Criticisms of "orientalism" have charged Said with creating an essentialising dichotomy between East and West that conceives of the relationship between the two spheres as unilateral and unchanging –Western imperialism continuously subjugates a disempowered East. Antliff notes critiques of Said have fostered new approaches to "orientalism."²⁴ Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, for example, has formulated a theory of "orientalism in reverse" His critique of Said's thesis notes that many non-European nations accepted and affirmed the "orientalised otherness" conferred

on them by the West when making a claim for nationhood and a shared identity. The comparison between East and West is then taken up to argue in favour of the “orientalised” subject.²⁵ Coomaraswamy’s vision of Indian society follows this “orientalism in reverse” strategy. Founded upon an essentialised, “orientalist” perspective of Indian tradition, his theory of “post-industrialism” aimed to defeat colonialism by placing Europe and Asia side by side as equal civilisations. As I shall demonstrate in chapter three, Stella Bloch’s future research on the traditional dances of India, China and Indonesia, was deeply influenced by Coomaraswamy’s “post-industrial” critique and her writings about dance traditions in Southeast Asia echo Coomaraswamy’s anti-imperialist brand of “orientalism.”

Coomaraswamy was the most influential figure shaping Bloch’s early career as a writer and theorist. In his letters to Bloch, Coomaraswamy often discussed his intellectual interests and recommended books that provide clues to her theoretical development. On a personal level, Coomaraswamy’s tone is kind, yet patrimonial, and he is undeniably in love. The first letter sent to Bloch, dated March 31st, 1917, contains Coomaraswamy’s musings on the creation and appreciation of beauty in art.²⁶ In this letter, he defines art as a form of communication, and beauty as the vehicle of perfect expression. It is impossible for beauty to exist in a realm of its own; it cannot be separated from human perception, nor would it be possible for beauty to stand alone without considering the artist’s intentions behind the art work. Beauty is expressed in a work of art through its close correspondence to the artist’s initial vision, but one must also take the role of the viewer into consideration. Coomaraswamy defines the appreciation of art as equally vital to its production, referring to the “internal activity of the [viewer’s] creative imagination.”²⁷ His

inclusion of the role of the viewer in his aesthetic theory likely drew upon traditional notions of the relationship between audience and dancer in the classical dances of India. I will discuss Coomaraswamy's aesthetic theory in more depth in chapter two.

Coomaraswamy's second letter, written over a month later on May 17th, informs Bloch of an exhibition of Abraham Walkowitz's drawings of Isadora Duncan which were then on display at the Daniel Gallery.²⁸ The expressive quality captured by Walkowitz in his drawings of Duncan inspired Isadora to exclaim, in 1916, that he had "written her biography in lines without words."²⁹ Stella Bloch's discovery of Walkowitz's drawings constitutes the greatest stylistic influence on her artistic production during this period.

A comparison of a sketch by Walkowitz with a work by Bloch clearly demonstrates her debt to his example. (Figures 3 & 4) Walkowitz's drawing was exhibited at the Daniel gallery in 1917, while Bloch's was likely produced after she joined the *Isadora Duncan Dancers* in spring, 1918. Both pastels are executed on coloured paper, and both minimise facial details in favour of the dancers' movements. Bodily expression is emphasised through the elongated contour of the arms and legs, while movement is suggested through the play of line. Bloch first outlines her figures in pencil and then adds colour to create a sense of three-dimensionality. Walkowitz outlines Duncan in dark charcoal and also uses colour to create volumetric form. Walkowitz's influence on Bloch's earliest art works was purely stylistic. While she never met Walkowitz in person, she did observe his drawings of Isadora Duncan emphasised Duncan's movements. As first, Bloch also drew much like Walkowitz, but as she began drawing consistently from her observations of dancers, her art appeared less like his and she acquired an individualised style identifiably her own.

By the time Coomaraswamy moved to Boston from New York City to assume his post at the Boston Fine Arts Museum in September, 1918, he had already introduced Bloch to the community of intellectuals patronising New York's Sunwise Turn Bookshop, at 2 East 31st Street. The Sunwise Turn was a "gathering place" for radical intellectuals and artists, and featured regularly scheduled events such as lectures, discussions, literary and poetry readings, and performances.³⁰ Although Coomaraswamy's career kept him in Boston, he often visited friends in New York City and the Sunwise Turn became his regular meeting place. He often met Bloch there or left books at the shop for her to pick up. Through the Sunwise Turn, Bloch was exposed to contemporary discourses on modern art, radical politics and libertarian education. She befriended one of the co-owners of the shop, Mary Mowbray-Clarke, a woman whose friendship Coomaraswamy also valued (he once confided to Bloch that Mary and her husband were two of the few people he really trusted).³¹ Mary Mowbray-Clarke had been involved in the English Arts and Crafts movement, and when Bloch first met her, she and her husband John Mowbray were in the process of establishing a communal arts-and-crafts-colony at "the Brocken," their country home in upstate New York. "The Brocken" became an important getaway spot for Bloch and Coomaraswamy, where they could spend time together in privacy.

Stella Bloch's primary ambition between 1917 and 1919 was to establish independence from her mother, who was overprotective, and support herself as a dance teacher and performer. Bloch's relationship with Coomaraswamy also generated tensions for Bloch at home and due to these difficulties, she often stayed with family friends. In 1918, Bloch made her first attempt to move out of the apartment she shared with her

mother with the support of Coomaraswamy and Mary Mowbray-Clarke. With their help, she found a room to rent, but was soon forced to return home due to financial hardship. It is at this time, in the summer of 1918 that Coomaraswamy stopped sending his letters directly to Bloch, and instead sent them to her care of the Sunwise Turn Bookshop. He would later send them to her at the Kevorkian Art Gallery, which represented John Mowbray.³²

In April of 1918, Stella Bloch's professional association with *The Isadora Duncan Dancers* provided her with a second opportunity to escape her mother's home. Through *The Isadora Duncan Dancers*, who taught at *The Elizabeth Duncan School of Dance* in Tarrytown, New York, Bloch also made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Duncan, Isadora's elder sister. Bloch became particularly close to Erna Schultz, a student of Elizabeth's, and was also good friends with two of Isadora's protégés, Anna Denzler and Lisa Milker.

While Bloch pursued her interest in dance, she began developing her theoretical concerns under the influence of Coomaraswamy. She was particularly interested in the ideas expounded in Coomaraswamy's major publication, *The Dance of Siva* (1918). Here she again encountered Coomaraswamy's musings on beauty, first expressed in his letters to her, now in the guise of meditations on Hindu aesthetics. *The Dance of Siva* also includes a chapter on the aesthetics of love, or *Sajaha*, which Coomaraswamy wrote specifically with his feelings for Bloch in mind.³³ A second book, Coomaraswamy's translation of an ancient Sanskrit treatise on Indian dance entitled *The Mirror of Gesture*, was another core text for Bloch. First published in 1917, it describes various hand gestures (*mudras*) and poses and outlines the meaning they communicate to the spectator.

In his introduction, Coomaraswamy writes that the viewer's enjoyment of the drama is not dependant upon the skill of the actor, but on "the spectator's own (imaginative) capacities" which "share a common inspiration" with the performer.³⁴ As we shall see, this is a theme Bloch would echo in her own writings.

The most important influence on Bloch, however, was Coomaraswamy's 1916 publication, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. Coomaraswamy confided to her in a letter that it contained "many of my real feelings about life."³⁵ Although he had already recounted the story of the Buddha while completing the late Sister Nevedita's *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* in 1913, Coomaraswamy's *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* was his first full account of the religious doctrines of Buddhism. In *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* Coomaraswamy discusses Buddhist scriptures, Daoism, and Hinduism in conjunction with Christian mysticism and modern European philosophy. He supports his interpretation of Buddhism most strongly by drawing on the writings of the 19th -century German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche, and those of Chuang-Tzu, a 4th -century Daoist philosopher. The common thread running though Coomaraswamy's book is the resounding similarity between Nietzsche's philosophy and Asian ideals of enlightenment. I will discuss these issues further in chapter two.

Coomaraswamy's book inspired Bloch to embark on a strict Buddhist practice in 1918. She regularly meditated and assumed a doctrine of self-renunciation that Coomaraswamy described as "ascetic."³⁶ In her autobiographic sketch, Bloch wrote that an "immersion in Eastern thought leaves ideas of ambition, success and achievement in shambles," and adds that she has "lived [her] life in comfort without these drives."³⁷

In August of 1919, a year after Bloch joined the *Isadora Duncan Dancers*, she wrote "Intuitions." It was published, with Coomaraswamy's help, in the anarchist periodical *The Modern School Journal*. "Intuitions" and its corresponding frontispiece, drawn by Bloch, is the subject of chapter two.

After the publication of "Intuitions," Bloch's relationship with Coomaraswamy deepened. In 1920, Coomaraswamy, in his capacity as director of the South Asian section of the Boston Fine Arts Museum, embarked on a museum-sponsored collecting trip to India, China and Indonesia and invited Bloch to join him. The offer was too good to resist and she departed to study the traditional dances of the East, despite her mother's misgivings.³⁸ During her travels, Bloch was particularly drawn to the Indonesian dance traditions of Java and Bali. Upon her return, Bloch published her second major statement, a pamphlet entitled *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, with a small press, Orientalia. Coomaraswamy established this press with George M.L. Brown in 1920, and he conceived of Orientalia as an adjunct to a specialty bookshop, inspired by the example of the Sunwise Turn, dealing in Asian art, literature and culture.³⁹

After her return from Indonesia, Bloch presented a series of performances to select audiences designed to educate the attendees about the "truth" of Southeast Asian dance traditions, and copies of *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* were sold in conjunction with her appearances.⁴⁰ That same year, she and Coomaraswamy married, although they maintained separate living arrangements. Coomaraswamy returned to his post at the Boston Museum, while Bloch remained in New York. There, she regularly attended jazz performances in Harlem as well as New York's traditional Chinese theatre.

Indeed, she left behind a notable collection of drawings depicting Harlem jazz dancers and singers during the 1920s.⁴¹

The publication of *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* established Bloch as an authority in Asian dance theory and greatly enhanced her own dance practice. This text contains the most succinct exposition of Bloch's theory of the "ideal drama," which I will discuss in chapter three. But first, I will outline the theory of artistic expression expounded in "Intuitions." This theory sets the stage for Bloch's elaboration of the "ideal drama."

Chapter Two: Intuitions, A Manifesto on Art, Life and Dance

In August, 1919, Stella Bloch's first essay, "Intuitions," made its debut in *The Modern School*, an anarchist journal published by the Francisco Ferrer Modern School colony in Stelton, New Jersey. The essay's subject is the spiritual contribution of the artist/dancer to society and the ideal communication that exists between the artist and her audience. "Intuitions" attests to Bloch's engagement with contemporary issues in modern aesthetics, and includes a discussion of love, art, dance and life.

Bloch was inspired to write "Intuitions" by her study of Ananda Coomaraswamy's writings and her experiences dancing with the *Isadora Duncan Dancers*. In "Intuitions" Bloch framed her discussion to accord with Coomaraswamy's correlation between the philosophy of Nietzsche and Asian religious ideals. Coomaraswamy equated Nietzsche's concept of the "superman" to the Chinese ideal "superior man," the Arhat (a Buddhist Adept), the Bodhisattva (incarnation of the bestowing virtue), and Jivan Mukta (one who is freed in this life).⁴² In *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* Coomaraswamy wrote that Nietzsche's ideal human types—the artist, the lover and philosopher—"tend to final emancipation;" in other words, nirvana.⁴³ Emancipation was achieved through self-renunciation, which Coomaraswamy correlated with Nietzsche's "will to power." This "will to power" was not tyrannical but, rather, entailed the free will of individuals who renounced the desire to force their will on others.⁴⁴

From the *Isadora Duncan Dancers* Bloch had already learned the value of personal expression, which also related to Nietzsche. Isadora Duncan borrowed heavily

from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (a poetic ode to the concept of the "superman") in her 1905 manifesto, "The Dance of the Future." Stella Bloch likely purchased a copy of Duncan's essay at the performance she attended in 1915 (by then, "The Dance of the Future" had been circulating at Duncan's concerts for 6 years).⁴⁵ Drawing from her readings of Nietzsche, Isadora Duncan discussed the potential social and aesthetic power of her dances to express the individual, heroic struggle for freedom.⁴⁶ Citing "nature" as the origin of her dances, Duncan envisioned the transformation of dance from mere art into an avenue of social progression; her dancer of the future was a Nietzschean "superman." She concluded:

Oh she is coming, the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of new woman; more glorious than any woman that has yet been; more beautiful than the Egyptian, then the Greek, the early Italian, than all women of past centuries - the highest intelligence in the freest body!⁴⁷

Duncan vowed to found a school for girls to be "trained in my art, which they, in turn, will better."⁴⁸ Of the many hundreds of pupils trained according to the Duncan Dance methodology, however, only six young women would dance with Isadora and bear the title of authentic "Duncan Dancers."⁴⁹ In April of 1918, when Stella Bloch joined the "Duncan girls", as Coomaraswamy called them in his congratulations to her, they were living in Tarrytown in upstate New York.⁵⁰ There they were reluctant teachers at Elizabeth Duncan's American dance school (founded 1914). They also periodically performed in soldiers' conscription camps and select venues in New York. Stella Bloch's association with *The Isadora Duncan Dancers* provided her with an unparalleled opportunity to absorb the Duncan Dance methodology, including its Nietzschean aspects.

As I have noted in chapter one, publication of “Intuitions” in *The Modern School* came about largely thanks to Coomaraswamy. Sometime in the winter of 1917, he met the journal’s editor, Carl Zigrosser, while lecturing on India at the Sunwise Turn bookstore in New York City. Zigrosser, an influential American art critic, formed a working relationship with Coomaraswamy. Ananda contributed essays to the journal and forwarded Bloch’s work for Zigrosser’s consideration.⁵¹ Two years after their first meeting, in a letter to Zigrosser dated July 18th, 1919, Coomaraswamy introduced Bloch as the author of a manuscript he thought would interest him and enclosed “Intuitions” for his assessment.⁵² Zigrosser not only accepted Bloch’s article, but also one of her drawings to illustrate it. For his part, in the same issue where “Intuitions” appeared, Coomaraswamy contributed a poem, “New England Woods.” His poem was accompanied by a reproduction of *The Bride*, engraved by Edward Calvert. (Figure 5) The significance of “New England Woods” lies in the fact that it prefaced Bloch’s manifesto. Together, Coomaraswamy’s poem and Calvert’s print evoke an allegory of love as springtime in a forest, symbolising growth and renewal. In Coomaraswamy’s poem, a white fawn is the central character: “Unclad, unhidden, fearless, gay; She seems to say to me, “Be Still –He only finds who does not seek.”⁵³ Many of Coomaraswamy’s letters to Bloch address her as “My dear young fawn:” “New England Woods” is clearly a love poem written for her. Originally, Coomaraswamy suggested that *The Bride* illustrate Bloch’s essay; however, Bloch insisted on creating her own artwork for the piece. Shortly before the deadline for the August, 1919 issue, she sent Zigrosser the drawing that accompanies her article.⁵⁴ (Figure 6)

The main figure in Bloch's illustration is a woman seated on the ground, lifting her arms out from her body as she tilts her head towards the sunlight. She is clothed in the Grecian robes favoured by Isadora Duncan and her six protégés. The woman's lower body is anchored by gravity while the upper torso and arms are uplifted. Her tilted head emphasises the strain involved in her attempt to escape the confines of the earth. She appears to be serene and her face is bathed in the glow of the sun's rays. Her stance expresses a longing to transcend her limitations; a theme that, as we shall see, is also expressed in the text. The second winged figure is free and flies towards the symbol of pure love –the sun. This figure represents the liberated self. Together these two figures narrate individual yearning to achieve a Nietzschean state of self-overcoming, and thus, enlightenment.

Comparing Calvert's *Bride* with the "Intuitions" frontispiece reveals Bloch's intention to express a Nietzschean theme. Like "Intuitions," *The Bride* contains two figures in a rich landscape setting. The central figure is a woman, nude, as seen from behind next to a grape vine. The second figure, also nude, is carrying a fishing pole and a basket. This figure is walking into the distance while the central figure is about to lead a tethered lamb towards a cottage. The idyllic scene encapsulates a lifestyle in which humans are in perfect harmony socially and with nature. The difference between this image and Bloch's drawing is that her artwork represents the process of striving towards enlightenment while *The Bride* portrays a peace that has already been realised. It is no wonder she rejected Coomaraswamy's suggestion to introduce her text with Calvert's *Bride*.

The text in "Intuitions" provides the cues through which one discerns the focus of "Intuitions:" one of Nietzsche's three ideal types –the lover. Bloch begins "Intuitions" with the statement, "Love is the only power," and supports her thesis with a theoretical analysis of love's ideal nature.⁵⁵ Love, which resides in the heart, is the creative force that unifies the lover with life. Bloch asserts that there are two kinds of love. Impassioned love is instinctual and is "a great destroyer." It burns like fire, consuming the individual and warping his perception of reality (or truth) in favour of "fantasy."⁵⁶ Yet, there is hope in love. Bloch confirms it is possible to love without passion. The positive aspect of love is pure; its heat does not burn like fire, but warms the soul like sunlight.⁵⁷ This purity stems from an awareness of the unity of all things, which, in turn, provides the lover with access to wisdom and a clear understanding of truth.⁵⁸ Such "love like sunlight" is enlightened, and is experienced without attachment by individuals who grow "wise and serene, their eyes see clearly and their hearts are wells of steady radiance."⁵⁹ Love is the source of creativity that exists throughout the universe, as both a physical and a metaphysical phenomenon. Ultimately, this state of being will unify humanity, because in the state of love, individuals conceive of the unity of all things.⁶⁰

Here we have a debt to Coomaraswamy's *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. Bloch's concept of the lover is modelled on Coomaraswamy's discussion of Nietzsche's "superman."⁶¹ Her lover has a saintly nature, and is filled with an enlightened love. She is also a philosopher, because she can "comprehend" the universal forms she is close to. And she is an artist by virtue of her ability to "express" these same forms.⁶² The lover is a superior individual, because her sensitivity places her in close proximity to love, the source of creativity which is also the source of her artistic powers.⁶³

For Bloch, love nurtures human interaction and is the foundation of a truly cooperative society. To lose one's connection to love is to experience suffering, in the Buddhist sense. Without love, an individual remains ignorant of the truth of the "unity of all creation" and, as a result, "the world and life are chaos, all things contradictions, and every face [is] an inscrutable mask"⁶⁴ As such, Bloch's love precludes the imposition of personal will over others. In fact, she believes it is useless to impose one's will on another, even in the hope of guiding that individual to make better choices. She writes, "there can be no direction of another's life by our own experience" nor can there be any imposition of one's knowledge onto another.⁶⁵ Individuals must be free to develop their talents by choosing what they need to learn from others. In this way, each person will follow a unique path, while remaining connected to others who are also developing their inner nature.

Bloch argues individual experiences are defined by one's destiny to "struggle and strive to laugh in spite of the mightiest revolt."⁶⁶ As a Buddhist, she accepted that all life is suffering, but she also felt the need to overcome it. Just as Nietzsche's "superman" constantly renews his old self in the act of overcoming, so too does Bloch's lover. For Bloch, love is the means of transcending suffering and creating a better, more just, world. In the course of struggling against injustice, love allows one to find release and freedom through laughter. The lover could "live in the moment, and recognise [the world's] infinite change and impermanence."⁶⁷ Bloch encouraged the development of such an attitude: one should live as though time were irrelevant, because the past and future are not reality. According to Bloch, the past is a trap of nostalgia and the future is tied to personal ambition, causing unease. In this regard, she evokes the Buddhist analogy of the

difference between the life of a flower and that of a tree. Ultimately there is no difference, because “all manifestation is mortal.”⁶⁸ Both a tree and a flower are unaware of their relatively short or long lifetimes: they only exist to be themselves.

By embracing love as the foundation of one’s life, Bloch also advocated spontaneity of living, which she then relates to dance. “Life, well understood, is a dance,” wrote Bloch, referring to love as the force of creation that “dances through every pattern of the Universe.”⁶⁹ As a metaphor for life, dance requires the performer to consider all of her movements, which are made in conscious awareness of herself. Just as Bloch situates love within the Buddhist ideal of renunciation, so too must dance be performed without attachment or passion.⁷⁰ If the dancer is enflamed by the passions, dance becomes a destructive force in opposition to creation.⁷¹ Such a dancer is not evil. She is simply ignorant of the truth. Bloch claims that one’s actions can never be fully considered if the mind is unclear and emotionally attached to its outcome, just as “no gesture of passion is as terrible as that which the impassioned dancer depicts.”⁷² Like the artist or the gifted dancer, one should move both through life and the dance with the goal of expressing passion, but not in the thrall of passion. In this way, Bloch bridges the gap between dance, the self, and one’s relation to society.

To reinforce the social import of her thesis about dance, Bloch likened the dancer’s movements to weaving. She wrote that the motions of the dance should be made in the same manner as a woven thread. If the thread is pulled, it will easily unravel and return to its original state, just as each movement of the dance, if carefully considered, will cancel previous movements.⁷³ In this way, one may perform one’s actions “without intention to achieve a purpose” –in other words, without being attached to one’s choices.

Bloch's model of non-attachment is a "disinterested" approach to living one's life, whether one is weaving, dancing or simply being. By living in such a "disinterested" manner, one exists idealistically, so as to "not to add to the sum of one's actions."⁷⁴ This statement, a fragment of a quote by the Taoist philosopher Chuang-Tzu, appeared in Coomaraswamy's preface for *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, and was an oft repeated phrase in his earliest letters to Stella Bloch.⁷⁵ It refers to a vow to act without passion in order to avoid accumulating karma, which would weigh down the spirit and force it into rebirth, instead of liberation.

In a letter dated December 3rd, 1917, Coomaraswamy recommended Bloch pay special attention to his chapter on the Buddhist heavens in *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. He characterised Bloch and himself as "evolved beings, [who] can understand, even if we can't always realise what is meant by the heavens above desire."⁷⁶ In this letter, Coomaraswamy explains how the contemplation of beauty can be a spiritually enlightening experience. Coomaraswamy theorised that the appreciation of the arts provides the individual with an opportunity to "visit" other spiritual planes while still existing in this world. In *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, he provided a table outlining the various levels of material and non-material existence, and described how the attainment of each higher plane requires more and more abstract contemplations on the part of the aspirant. Here Coomaraswamy merged his reading of Nietzsche with Buddhism. Nietzsche's "superman" is much more likely to be reborn in one of the Buddhist heavens. And this is the ideal Stella Bloch elucidates in "Intuitions," where she explains how the lover comes to understand the unity of life, and thus to realise enlightenment.

What then of art? Love is not only the greatest creative force for individuals, it is also a force that shapes society, including aesthetics. As Bloch proclaims, “The greatest art – national religious art – is the art of the many who have learned, through rigid discipline, self annihilation: the art of a force made up of infinite small forces, striving not individually, but for the whole – striving not for self assertion, but for self-renunciation.”⁷⁷ Taking her cue from Coomaraswamy’s position on art, Bloch’s text reinforces his claim that art is another means of realising enlightenment. “Art that is without character is the highest type,” Bloch writes.⁷⁸ In other words, the communal art of craftsmanship is greater than individualist-oriented self-expression. She clarifies this point in her discussion of the art critic and the connoisseur. In Bloch’s view, art critics and connoisseurs have a limited understanding of art. The critic cannot allow art to reveal its meanings to him: rather, he “must heighten his scent for imperfection in order that he preserve the high clear note of his fullest approval.”⁷⁹ The connoisseur is likewise limited in his appreciation of art because he assesses the art work with his “discriminating eye” and determines its value based upon a “dogma of personal ethics” instead of its inherent beauty.⁸⁰ The ideal appreciation of art lies in one’s willingness to perceive beauty as one perceives it in nature, “where all things are perfect” and “everything ... is a revelation.”⁸¹ The true appreciator “who loves beauty need not move or put forth any effort, for it comes to him as the sunlight through a window.”⁸²

But how does art appreciation enable the realisation of enlightenment? To understand this process, we must return to Coomaraswamy’s writings on the subject. In the first letter he wrote to Bloch, dated March 31st, 1917, Coomaraswamy claims he finally has “cleared up” his ideas about beauty.⁸³ He interprets beauty as a state of being

and claims it is impossible for beauty to exist apart from the artist's intentions or the viewer's appreciation.

According to Coomaraswamy, beauty is expressed in a work of art through a close correspondence between the final design and the artist's initial vision. Defined as the "theme and expression," the artist's concept and final execution of the art work is conceived as a "gap" the artist attempts to bridge.⁸⁴ The degree to which the artist either succeeds or fails in bridging this "gap" then determines the relative beauty of the art work. If the artist attempts to express a noble sentiment, but is merely sentimental, he creates "bad art" that is incapable of providing the viewer with a true aesthetic experience.⁸⁵ If, on the other hand, the artist's expression is "sincere" and he successfully realises the initial vision he held for his work, then the art work may be considered beautiful.⁸⁶ Ultimately, however, perception of beauty is a matter for the viewer, whom Coomaraswamy considers an equal participant in the completion of a work of art.⁸⁷ He maintains that if the viewer is astute and is able to identify the relationship between the theme and expression in the art work, he will then be moved by an aesthetic experience.⁸⁸

Why does Coomaraswamy place so much emphasis upon the aesthetic experience of beauty and how does he define it? An aesthetic experience is the element of beauty that is most directly related to life, not through any function the art object may have, but because of its experiential relationship with the viewer. It occurs when the viewer, by identifying with the art work's theme and expression, is made aware of the true nature of human existence.⁸⁹ Just as Coomaraswamy identifies a "gap" between intent and outcome in the creation of an art work, so he asserts that there is a profound "gap" in our life experience. This "gap" is one of the Buddhist truths that relates human suffering to the

temporal nature of existence experienced as “cause and effect.”⁹⁰ Aesthetic experience enables the viewer to transcend the cause-effect illusion and come into contact with absolute beauty.⁹¹ In this way, the viewer is able to identify perfection within the self, resulting in a profound experience of freedom –and enlightenment— through the contemplation of art.

The allusion to Buddhist doctrine in Coomaraswamy’s theory of beauty extends much deeper than a simple reference to the nature of human existence. The profound realisation of freedom through aesthetic experience is the Buddhist realisation of truth; the attainment of nirvana. In *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* Coomaraswamy refers to nirvana in both its Buddhist and Hindu interpretations, respectively as the “dying out of a soul” and as “perfect self-realisation.”⁹² Regarding the “dying out of the soul,” Coomaraswamy understands this as the death of the “passions” following the realisation that “all life is suffering.”⁹³ Such is the state of the Arhat, the Buddhist monk who is no longer attached to his passions, but still must work towards nirvana.⁹⁴ Once one has attained nirvana, all sense of causality ceases and one experiences a “release from individuality,” or freedom.⁹⁵

Buddhism does not refer to what may occur after reaching nirvana: it considers the very question taboo.⁹⁶ Coomaraswamy, therefore, turns to the Hindu usage of the word to speculate further. Nirvana is an older term that was borrowed by Buddhists from one of the earlier *Upanishads*, and it has a more esoteric meaning, namely the conquering of ignorance through “perfect knowledge.”⁹⁷ Coomaraswamy’s interpretation of nirvana refers to the great potential of human development, perhaps through the realisation of a universal awareness. This nirvana, based upon two religious systems, considers aesthetic

experience as an extremely powerful form of enlightenment. It allows the individual to identify with an absolute truth outside of the self while simultaneously realising one's perfection within the self. For Coomaraswamy, knowledge is the key to spiritual transformation: the goal to be attained is freedom, both personal and social.

It is noteworthy that Coomaraswamy emphasises the rarity of aesthetic experience. Most works of art contain a substantial "gap" separating the artist's intent from his expressive end result. Additionally, the generally apathetic state of viewers, many of whom do not demand sincerity in art, suggests there are few possibilities for realising absolute beauty in art.⁹⁸ As such, Coomaraswamy tends to view imaginative artists and sensitive viewers as superior individuals – they are Nietzschean "supermen."

Instead of perceiving beauty as a standard of taste, as Bloch's critic and connoisseur would have it, Coomaraswamy considers beauty as a state of mind, "an internal activity of the creative imagination."⁹⁹ A sensitive viewer should know if the artist has successfully bridged the "gap" even if he is looking at a work of art that is not beautiful in the conventional sense.¹⁰⁰ In the postscript of his letter to Bloch, Coomaraswamy clarifies his position in a discussion of two antithetical viewer types and the ability to appreciate "imperfect works of art."¹⁰¹ One type of viewer is insensitive and does not bother with questions of artistic intent; he favours easily appreciated subjects. This type corresponds with Bloch's critic, who distils his art appreciation according to preconceived notions of beauty. The connoisseur is likewise insensitive to the true value of art, because his primary concern is limited by his speculative interest in asserting his taste. For both Coomaraswamy and Bloch, the opposite of such insensitive viewers is the "creative viewer" who is so attuned to the artist's intent that he empathises with the artist.

This viewer can appreciate a wide range of art, including children's art and "primitive" art.¹⁰² This viewer is an example of a genius who has trained his mind through a contemplative practice.¹⁰³ The artist and the sensitive viewer may or may not attain nirvana, but most certainly will be reborn in one of the Buddhist heavens, according to Coomaraswamy. There, they will have the opportunity to attain nirvana in the next life, because such individuals are naturally inclined to keep ascending the human stages of development.¹⁰⁴

Of paramount importance in Coomaraswamy's theory of beauty is the understanding that art is intimately related to life and beauty is an experience of true freedom akin to attaining nirvana. Stella Bloch's "Intuitions" is an exposition of this theory of beauty applied to dance. It is also the turning point in Bloch's early career as a theorist. The concerns she introduces in this text are further developed in her next publication, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, published in 1922.

Chapter Three: The Ideal Drama

In 1922 Bloch published her most comprehensive statement on the arts, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*. The essay was an outgrowth of an invitation extended to Bloch by Coomaraswamy in the fall of 1920 to accompany him on a trip to India, China, Cambodia, Java and Bali. During her travels, Bloch studied Asian dance traditions while Coomaraswamy, acting as head curator for the Boston Fine Arts Museum's South Asian collection, purchased artefacts.

Dancing and the Drama, East & West represents the culmination of Bloch's tutelage with Coomaraswamy. In his introduction to *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, Coomaraswamy makes a case for Bloch's authority as a scholar of dance in Southeast Asia based upon her "embodied" knowledge, a knowledge that was reflected in the profundity of her illustrations.¹⁰⁵ Coomaraswamy also commended Bloch on the scientific clarity and technical accuracy of her drawings and analysis. Finally he praised her lack of bias against Asian customs. In her essay Bloch combines text with an artistic record of the dances she analyses. During their travels Stella Bloch sketched many of the dances she witnessed, while Coomaraswamy took photographs. Although these photos were available for her use, Bloch chose to publish her drawings so as to reinterpret the experience of dancing in another artistic medium. Her choice also underlined her own subjective perspective. A comparison of Bloch's sketches with Coomaraswamy's photos demonstrates the precision with which she drew the dancers while also emphasising the aspects of each dance that caught her attention. For example, Bloch's drawing of a masked Javanese hero stresses his movement in space, while Coomaraswamy's photo of

the subject serves more as a record, indicating the dancer is participating in a temple performance. (Figures 7 & 8) Evidently, Coomaraswamy was also impressed with Bloch's drawings. His photos remained unpublished, while Bloch's sketches appeared in both *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* and an article by Coomaraswamy, "Notes on the Javanese Theatre." The latter article appeared in July, 1921, in *Rupam*, the journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta.

While *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* provides a broader comparison between modern dance in America and contemporary dance in Southeast Asia, "Notes on the Javanese Theatre" concentrates on Indonesian performance traditions. In his essay, Coomaraswamy emphasised the sociological dimension of Indonesian dance and, specifically, the role of aristocratic patronage in the arts. He discusses a play in which the Prince and his honoured guests were seated on the platform where the performance took place, while the courtyard filled with tradesmen and the people of the local community.¹⁰⁶ In his evaluation of the performance, Coomaraswamy emphasised the abstracted nature of the gestures and dance movements, which he described as "rhythmic" and "[suggesting] a kind of heroic pantomime."¹⁰⁷ And he critiqued Western dance in passing, writing that, unlike Western performances, "the Asian drama has no tendencies and has no problems to resolve: it is not an argument, but speaks with immediate authority."¹⁰⁸ It was left to Bloch to develop this critique further.

In *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* Bloch formulates a theory of the "ideal drama" which is founded on the traditional dances of Southeast Asia. Bloch observed that Southeast Asian dance was the foundation of a dramatic tradition that, together with music and theatre, fulfilled the socio-religious needs of the community. The source of

inspiration for the “ideal drama” was religious: it was a vehicle for “the great tale” –a term designating the stories of “gods and heroes” in Eastern religious epics.¹⁰⁹

In keeping with their socio-religious function, dances were performed in temples and courtyards where all members of society, from the aristocrat to the labourer, were free to attend. Because the subject matter of “the great tale” was not everyday reality, dances were performed with abstracted gestures. The “ideal drama” was hostile to the mimicry of realism; its forms of speech and gesture were meant to transcend the ordinary.¹¹⁰ The “ideal drama” drew on the authority of divinely prescribed dance conventions said to have been communicated to humans by the gods. Strict codes of expression governed the “ideal drama,” and actors were trained from childhood to “obey” these codes and master the traditional iconography of forms and gestures.¹¹¹ The actor in the Eastern traditions would not consider his or her role to be that of an interpreter, because personal subjectivity was not an appropriate element in drama. Nor was it an element in Bloch’s theory of the “ideal drama.”¹¹²

The dancers’ movements had to be performed with accuracy and devotion: the performer was required to demonstrate a mastery of the tradition. Therefore there was no need for personal expression as Westerners understood it. In fact, for an Eastern audience, to whom “the drama is familiar, as are the words of their prayers,” “disinterested” iconography was an essential attribute of the dance’s religious status.¹¹³ “Just as the writer does not invent words, so the dancer does not invent gestures,” Bloch wrote.¹¹⁴ Communicating the social-religious meanings behind the “ideal drama,” the dancer assumed a role analogous to that of a traditional craftsman. Like the craftsman, the

dancer sustained a cultural heritage with profoundly spiritual overtones, a heritage that renewed the vitality of socio-religious life.¹¹⁵

Bloch's use of the word "craftsman" signals that her theory of the "ideal drama" was politically linked to Coomaraswamy's "post-industrialist" critique of capitalism. "Post-industrialism" was an alternative economic model in competition with industrial-capitalism, which Coomaraswamy and others believed would eventually replace it.¹¹⁶ As I have already mentioned in chapter one, the "post-industrialist" critique was founded upon craftsmanship, in which the artisan's devotion to his or her work ensured the production of wares was intimately connected to the production of cultural identity. In devoting himself to his craft, the craftsman's individual quirks were subsumed into a larger artisan tradition, passed down through generations, which also serviced the religious needs of the community. The craftsman's work thus attained a grander meaning within society. Similarly, the craftsmanship model of Asian dance in Bloch's "ideal drama" also served a grander ideal. Bloch's performers are not merely dancers; they are mediators of spiritual truths.

Whereas Bloch praised the dances of Southeast Asia, she condemned the state of modern dance theatre in Europe and America, targeting the "oriental dances" then dominating the Western stage.¹¹⁷ She likely had in mind Ruth St. Denis, a dancer who had achieved great fame in the United States and Europe for her "oriental" themes. Since 1906, St. Denis had been "translating" traditional Eastern themes to suit Western taste.¹¹⁸ She had modeled her earliest "oriental dance" on the image of the Egyptian goddess Isis after an advertisement for Egyptian Deities Cigarettes caught her attention. This was typical of St. Denis, who appropriated her costumes and themes from popular

representations of the exotic orient. St. Denis' signature dances were highly theatrical and incorporated narratives of sexualised "otherness." Dances with titles such as *Radha*, *The Cobra*, *The Spirit of Incense*, *The Temple*, *The Nautch* and *The Yogi* were performed from 1906 on. In 1910 St. Denis expanded her repertoire with *Egypta*, and, in 1913, added a portrayal of a Japanese geisha, *O-Mika*, to her program. Ruth St. Denis' performances are remembered for their "chaste" demeanour in comparison with the "oriental dances" then common on the burlesque stage; however, the power of her sexuality is evident in both her themes and costumes.¹¹⁹ (Figure 9)

Reacting to the example of St. Denis and others, Stella Bloch denounced "orientalist" dancers for their "grotesque misconstruction" of Asian traditions, claiming they were motivated solely by "blind ambition for effect."¹²⁰ As Bloch explained, "To caricature and to idealise are both disparaging interpretations of reality, and produce the powerful evil –realism. They, in service of this master, seek to reproduce the surface of life –thinking effect to be the highest achievement of man and powerful as life itself."¹²¹ Bloch not only targeted showmanship. She also questioned the authenticity of these dancers' spiritual claims, asking, "But who can speak divine prayers to a god to whom he is not pledged by the strongest devotion?"¹²²

The only concession Bloch was willing to make regarding the worth of Western dance arises in her discussion of Isadora Duncan. "Perhaps the most serious effort put forth on the modern European stage," Bloch wrote, "is that of Isadora Duncan in the training of her six pupils."¹²³ The *Isadora Duncan Dancers* assumed the role of a modern Greek chorus and performed as a unit, moving in response to Duncan's gestures.¹² Duncan's dance practice was, arguably, "disinterested" in as much as her six pupils

subsumed their self-expression to Isadora's movements. However, it was a flawed attempt to formulate a modern dance tradition when assessed according to the values of the "ideal drama." Duncan's dance could never serve as a Western equivalent to Eastern dance because each pupil was an adjunct to Isadora's genius: the tradition remained tied to Duncan's expression of her individuality.

Bloch's *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* includes a drawing entitled "Isadora Duncan," which illustrates her analysis of Duncan's relationship with her six protégés. (Figure 10) Bloch creates an imagined dance lesson within the shallow space of a theatre, with Duncan in the spotlight on centre stage. Her six protégés stand in the shadows and are drawn on a more diminutive scale. They appear to be reluctant to join Isadora, but slowly overcome their shyness as Duncan beckons to them in a kindly, nurturing manner.

Although Stella Bloch respected Isadora Duncan's attempt to release Western dance from the confines of ballet, she remained critical, writing, "such things are not achieved by deliberation."¹²⁴ Duncan may have successfully integrated the traditional Greek chorus into her modern dance-theatre but, in the end, she "achieved something far different from the intent that began it."¹²⁵ Here a second flaw presents itself. Duncan expected her pupils to mimic her movements on stage while encouraging them to express their individuality as well. Bloch observed that "Isadora's six girls, instead of moving as one according to classic principle, are marvellously versed in the art of self-expression and each is self-conscious of her own special grace."¹²⁶ But, a contradiction arises in Duncan's dance methodology. Following Duncan's method, her students could never transcend their individuality to convey profound meanings such as those that permeated

Asian dance. Devoid of the social-religious function of traditional Eastern performances, Duncan's theatrical fusion of dance and drama fell short of the "ideal drama." Bringing her discussion of the Duncan school to a resounding close, Bloch exclaimed, "but how like a mirage is this romanticism beside the power where the immortal gods order the Arts!"¹²⁷

Finding no satisfaction in the Duncan Dance tradition, Bloch turned to the dances of Southeast Asia, where the observer was an equally important participant in the fulfillment of religious dramatic rites. The most significant factor in the "ideal drama," she argued, was the audience that attends the performance "out of a need to look upon life without prejudice or passion."¹²⁸ The viewers participated in the religious function of the drama, and understood their role as part of the artistic creation. Bloch adopts this observer-participant role herself and signifies it in her artistic practice. In her drawings of the dancers she encountered on her trip, Bloch strove to produce drawings that illustrate the ideal consciousness evoked by the dances. As a result, her drawings exhibit a controlled spontaneity more akin to calligraphy than painting. The drawings focus on rhythmic movements, gestures and costumes, all of which symbolically narrate the traditional story that is the subject of each dance. The frontispiece drawing from *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, for example, features a female Balinese dancer during a performance. (Figure 11) Accompanying the image is a single word—"Bali"—indicating that Bloch considered this drawing her most successful representation of that region's dance tradition. Bloch conveys the dancer's movements through the spontaneous use of line while simultaneously capturing her poise and serenity. The colours, which were added after the initial sketch was completed, communicate her impressions of the

dancer's elaborate costume. Bloch attempts to re-create the experience (not reproduce an image) in her response to the dance. This is why neither she nor Coomaraswamy made use of his photographs. Photography, a mechanical form of image making, fell short in re-creating 'life,' in their estimation.¹²⁹

According to Bloch, the grandeur of the Southeast Asian drama lay not only in the formal dimension of the performance, but also in the social structures of the East that supported the dance tradition. Bloch defines dance in Southeast Asia (and by extrapolation the "East" as a whole) as the greatest form of art because it developed as a tradition that renounced the self and was thus communal.¹³⁰ As such, Southeast Asian dance was an art form that prefigured the ideal society wherein individuals act in cooperation, rather than come into conflict. As participants in a religious rite, the actors of the drama must embody the myths they perform in order to assist with the "spiritual enlightenment of the community."¹³¹ Thus, symbolic movements are "fixed" expressions that are "read" by the audience: and their subjects are based on the myths that form the religious foundation of Southeast Asian civilisations.¹³² The performer is transformed from a mere artist, who only expresses subjectivity, into a craftsman, whose expression embodies the ideals of the whole community. The dance, therefore, represents the negation of ego through the expression of selflessness: the dancers, who perform as actors and singers, are considered the messengers of divine will.¹³³

Bloch's comparison of Southeast Asian and Western dance was an ambitious undertaking and her arguments contain both strengths and weaknesses. From her perspective as a visiting American in Southeast Asia, Bloch was very conscious of her status as an "outsider" in relation to the cultures she discussed. Acknowledging her

limited capacity to judge the dance forms, Bloch wrote, "In a system so highly evolved, it is impossible for a stranger to read the meaning behind the symbolism."¹³⁴ In this manner, Bloch recognised the evolving nature of the dance tradition in Southeast Asia and its influence on the performances she witnessed. On the other hand, while Bloch provided descriptions of dance according to differing regions, she did not hesitate to subsume the dances of India, China, and Southeast Asia into an overall category of Asian ("Eastern") dance. Her thesis rests on an "orientalist" essentialising of the East, a position that was reinforced by Coomaraswamy. In his introduction to *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, he claimed Bloch's pamphlet was more than a treatise on dance, "it is an introduction to the theory of Asiatic civilisation."¹³⁵

In his introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes the orient as a "special place in European Western experience."¹³⁶ He claims that within the categories of East and West lie fundamental differences, which the West used to construct the East as a lesser "other." This stereotype was then perpetuated through scholarship, which, in turn, influenced the ideological foundations of the European colonial subjugation of Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Attempting to espouse an authentic account of Southeast Asian dances, Bloch nonetheless recapitulates "orientalist" assumptions about "the East" in *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*. The most salient attributes of Bloch's "orientalism" were her insistence on a lack of personal expression in the "ideal drama" and her generalised assumption that dance had the same function within socio-religious spheres across Southeast Asian communities. These are grossly simplifying tropes, as befits the Western "orientalising" paradigm. That said, while Bloch's essay creates an "orientalist" division between Asia and Europe, her sympathies lie with the East, as she

clearly demonstrates in her scathing critique of popular Western “oriental dances.” As such, through her elevation of Eastern dance over the Western traditions, Bloch’s form of “orientalism” turns Edward Said’s model back upon itself. Plainly, there is more at work here than a Westerner “orientalising” a non-Western civilisation.

In his assessment of contemporary postcolonial theory Fred Dallmayr has developed a “porous model” of East-West exchange, drawn from Derrida’s concept of cultural identities open to “otherness.” This model recognises cultural differences and allows for the intermingling of identities.¹³⁷ It does so out of the need to acknowledge different colonial encounters in the history of world imperialism. Antliff notes that Dallmayr understands the relationship between the coloniser and colonised as “a multiplicity of coexisting, competing or intersecting cultural identities.”¹³⁸ As a result, Dallmayr’s “porous model” opens the “orientalist” debate to the possibility of multiple subject positions in which identities may coexist and intermingle. Coomaraswamy’s aesthetic theory, which fuses Nietzschean philosophy with Hinduism and Buddhism, is an instance of cross-cultural exchange. And so is Stella Bloch’s “ideal drama.” Bloch’s agenda in *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* was twofold. She wished to educate the Western public about Asian dance while paving the way for an as yet unrealised cultural fusion between East and West. *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* was more than an account of contemporary dance theatre in Southeast Asia: it was a call for an “ideal drama” paralleling the dances of the East which would unify Western art, dance and society. In her comparison of Eastern dance traditions with those of the West, Bloch concluded that Western performance was wanting because it lacked a meaningful role in society. Her indictment of the dances of the West provided the foil for her claim that

Eastern dance dramas were a comparatively more true art-form, not only because they transcended the status of mere entertainment, but because they upheld the standards of craftsmanship. They also had a ritual function in society, and a vital one.¹³⁹ As Bloch put it, Eastern dance was more than an “art”—it was “life.”¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have outlined the integrated relationship between Bloch's art, aesthetic theory and dance criticism. As I have shown, both "Intuitions" and *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* feature illustrations that contribute to Bloch's critical analyses. Whether the drawing is an imagined scene, as in the "Intuitions" frontispiece (Figure 6), or a sketch from observation, as with the frontispiece in *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* (Figure 11), Bloch's art work encapsulates a distinct aesthetic vision that reinforces the arguments she presents.

"Intuitions" is Bloch's first statement on the relationship of love with aesthetic appreciation. Here she presents the core of her aesthetic theory, founded upon Coomaraswamy's Nietzschean Buddhism, which understands the contemplation of beauty not as something to be discovered, but as a practice that allows beauty to reveal itself to the viewer. These ideas are developed further in *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*. In this essay, Bloch discusses her concept of aesthetics in the context of craftsmanship and the communal ideal in art. Drawing on Coomaraswamy's "post-industrialist" critique of industrial-capitalism, Bloch argues that in Southeast Asia craftsman reproduce, over generations, art that expresses the socio-religious ideals of the whole society. Dance serves a similar function, and this is why Southeast Asian dances are greater than mere art: they constitute an "ideal drama."

It is no wonder, then, that Bloch critiqued Isadora Duncan's attempts to establish a modern Western dance tradition. Acknowledging that Duncan had made an important contribution to dance, Bloch still saw little value in a dance movement that cast its pupils

as forever indebted to the genius of the teacher. Although Duncan's development of a modern Greek chorus appealed to communal ideals, Duncan's dances fell short of the "ideal drama." In the "ideal drama," modelled on Southeast Asian dance, the participatory role of the audience was the key to authentic communalism. The audience of an "ideal drama" was not passively entertained—it assumed the status of witness to the religious rituals being performed.¹⁴¹

Here we see the relationship between the "ideal drama" and Bloch's discussion of aesthetic appreciation in "Intuitions." Just as the sensitive viewer perceives the resolution of the "gap" between the artist's intent and the final resulting art work, so do viewers of the "ideal drama" perceive the dancers' movements from a position of aesthetic contemplation. Bloch asserted Southeast Asian dancers were craftspeople following traditional gestures, handed down through millennia. The viewers of these dramatic rites are conscious of the cultural traditions determining dance's "ideal" movements. Presumably, these viewers would perceive the bridging of the "gap" between the dancers' intentions and the final execution—the dancers' participation in the religious function of the dance left no room for imperfections.

As I have shown, from a contemporary postcolonial perspective, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* perpetuates an "orientalist" division between East and West. Bloch's essentialised the various dances she studied into a singular socio-religious function and subsumed the cultural nuances of each region into a monolithic "East." However, her elevation of Southeast Asian dance over Western performances was an atypical "orientalism" in as much as she asserted her "ideal drama" could serve as a model for the West. Once again, we find a correlation with Coomaraswamy's "post-

industrialism.” He predicted the end of colonialism could be facilitated through the establishment of a crafts-based economy in the West similar to traditions already existent in India and envisioned “post-industrialism” as a non-hierarchical transformation of East-West relations. Similarly, Bloch sought to nurture Western dance practices akin to those of the East. In both instances we have a model of renewal in which East and West would advance together without one dominating the other.

Stella Bloch’s thesis concerning the “ideal drama” suggests she would go on to found her own dance movement, but the fact remains she did not. I can only speculate why. Bloch’s account of the “ideal drama” in the East emphasised the important contribution of the audience to the performances, and accordingly, a Western “ideal drama” needed to incorporate an equally meaningful relationship between performer and audience. Presumably, upon her return to the United States, when Bloch began performing Southeast Asian dances for select audiences, she also attempted to convey the importance of audience participation to her viewers. (Figure 12) It must have been difficult for her to perform these dances without the original context they were created in. Perhaps this discouraged her.

Additionally, just as Stella Bloch’s *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* was published, Ruth St. Denis’ dances were peaking in their popularity. It was at this time that the Denishawn dance school, an institution co-founded in 1915 by St. Denis and her partner Ted Shawn, came to dominate dance training in America. The Denishawn school was too large an institution for an independent dancer like Stella Bloch to compete with, especially given her antagonism towards “oriental dances.” On a positive note, while Bloch’s dance career lapsed, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West* was listed as an

important theoretical work in *The Dance Journal* as late as 1936. In the end, Bloch was writing about an ideal concept of art and dance. She never theorised the path toward a harmonious society that could sustain such art practices in the West. Presumably her readers would chart the way, for, as she wrote in "Intuitions," "to seek to convert is to reveal one's lack of faith."¹⁴²

Endnotes

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- ¹ Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), *Passim*.
- ² Stella Bloch, *untitled autobiography*, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Series C0822, Box 8, 1.
- ³ Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 145.
- ⁴ Bloch, *untitled autobiography*, 1.
- ⁵ *Ibid*.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁷ *Ibid*.
- ⁸ *Ibid*.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 3. It was through Ehrlich's contacts that the family's business grew.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*. Richard Offner was destined to gain renown in the United States for his groundbreaking research on pre-Renaissance Florintine painting.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹² *Ibid*.
- ¹³ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁷ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 128.
- ¹⁸ Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, 145.
- ¹⁹ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 127. See also Lipsey, preface, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, xiii, and "Tradition: An Introduction to the Late Writings," 265-280. While Lipsey asserts Coomaraswamy defined traditionalism as distinct from and in opposition to modernism, Antliff demonstrates Coomaraswamy's emphasis on tradition was not formed as an outright rejection of modern life, but from a radical theory of "post-industrialism" which viewed tradition as the foundation of a "new internationalism" that would end colonial exploitation and usher in a new era of co-operation between East and West.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 129. See also Lipsey, "Tradition: An Introduction to the Late Writings," in *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, 266 for an account of the spiritual foundation of tradition.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 132.
- ²³ *Ibid*.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ²⁵ Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East*, (London: Al Saqi Books, 1984), 368.
- ²⁶ Coomaraswamy to Bloch, March 31, 1917, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 1-2.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²⁸ Coomaraswamy to Bloch, May 3, 1917, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. A recent exhibition (2000) at the University Gallery in Delaware included some of Walkowitz' drawings

exhibited at the Daniel Gallery in 1917. The formal similarities between these drawings and Bloch's are immediately obvious.

- ²⁹ Ellen Avitts Menefee, "The Abraham Walkowitz Collection and Archives in the University Gallery Collection," in *Line Dance: Abraham Walkowitz' Drawings of Isadora Duncan* ed. Janet Gardner Broske. Exhibition Catalogue ed., 2-9. (University Gallery: University of Delaware, 2000), 3. See also Abraham Walkowitz, *Isadora Duncan in Her Dances* (Girard: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1941), where the quote is reprinted on the book cover.
- ³⁰ M. Sue Kendall, "Serendipity at the Sunwise Turn," in *The Paintings of Charles Burchfield: North by Midwest*, ed. Nannette V. Maciejunes and Michael D. Hall, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1997), 92.
- ³¹ Coomaraswamy to Stella Bloch, October 24, 1917, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 6.
- ³² Coomaraswamy sent his first letter to Bloch via the Sunwise Turn on July 8, 1918. By February 10, 1919, he was sending his letters to Bloch care of the Kevorkian art gallery. Bloch may have been employed by the Kevorkians for a short while, but the letters are unclear about the specific details.
- ³³ Coomaraswamy to Bloch, February 2, 1918, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy submitted the chapter on *Sahaja* to Mary Mowbray-Clarke, who encouraged him to include it in *The Dance of Siva*, and asks Bloch for her opinion on the matter. On February 9, 1918, he thanks her for her response and comments about how she "helped him" write *Sahaja*.
- ³⁴ Ananda Coomaraswamy, Introduction to *The Mirror of Gesture: Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara*, translated by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya (E. Wheyhe: New York, 1936) 21. This book was originally published in 1917 by Harvard University Press. In one of his more flirtatious letters to Bloch, Coomaraswamy asks Bloch "which of the 44 glances in *The Mirror of Gesture*" does she throw him "to see what he is thinking?" November 6, 1917, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
- ³⁵ Coomaraswamy to Stella Bloch, October 28, 1917, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
- ³⁶ Coomaraswamy to Stella Bloch, May 15, 1918, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
- ³⁷ Bloch, *untitled autobiography*, 7.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³⁹ Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, 154.
- ⁴⁰ Karla J. Vecchia, Finding Aid: Stella Bloch Papers Relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library 2002, 2003. Last Modified: July 01 2003. accessed September 2003 & February 2005.
- ⁴¹ Bloch's interest in African-American performance suggests she considered jazz as an example of a modern "ideal drama."
- ⁴² Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva: 14 Indian Essays* (New York: Sunwise Turn, 1924), 115-116.
- ⁴³ Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (London: Putnam & Sons, 1916), 115.
- ⁴⁴ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 135.
- ⁴⁵ The "Dance of the Future" was written in 1903 as a speech for the Berlin Press Club. In 1909, it was copywrited and published as a pamphlet for sale at Duncan's performances.
- ⁴⁶ Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 7. Daly describes Duncan's dance as "a narrative of force," involving the dancing body within the space of the stage.
- ⁴⁷ Isadora Duncan, "The Dance of the Future," *The Art of the Dance: Isadora Duncan* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1969), 63.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

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- ⁴⁹ Duncan Dancer is the title of Irma Duncan's autobiography and a common label for *The Isadora Duncan Dancers*. Although many girls and women trained in the Duncan Dance methodology, only Duncan's six protégés would be considered "authentic" Duncan Dancers.
- ⁵⁰ Coomaraswamy to Stella Bloch, April 8, 1918, 2, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
- ⁵¹ Coomaraswamy to Carl Zigrosser, Feb 5, 1918 & July 18, 1919, Carl Zigrosser Papers, Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; microfilmed by the Archives of American Art. Reel #4618.
- ⁵² Coomaraswamy to Carl Zigrosser, July 18, 1919, Carl Zigrosser Papers.
- ⁵³ Coomaraswamy, "New England Woods", *The Modern School Journal* 6 (August, 1919), 209.
- ⁵⁴ Coomaraswamy to Carl Zigrosser, Aug 20, 1919, Carl Zigrosser Papers.
- ⁵⁵ Stella Bloch, "Intuitions," *The Modern School Journal* 6 (August, 1919), 210.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* This perception of the passions is outlined in the Buddha's sermon on life as fire, which Coomaraswamy recounts in *Buddhism and the Gospel of Buddha*.
- ⁵⁷ Stella Bloch, "Intuitions," *The Modern School Journal* 6 (August, 1919), 210.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹ In *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* Leslie Paul Thiele discusses Nietzsche's saint as "he who loves," and emphasizes the spiritual nature of saintly love. 139.
- ⁶² Bloch, "Intuitions," 210.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 211
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 210-211.
- ⁷⁰ Nandikésvara, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala, *The Mirror of Gesture: Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikésvara*, (New York: E. Weyhe, 1936), 18.
- ⁷¹ Bloch, "Intuitions," 210. Bloch echoes Coomaraswamy's assertion of right-understanding to gain freedom through the dance.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 211.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ Coomaraswamy, One of the quotes noted in the introduction of *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*.
- ⁷⁵ Coomaraswamy to Stella Bloch, Dec 3, 1917, 3, Stella Bloch Papers relating to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁷⁷ Stella Bloch, "Intuitions," 213.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

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- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 214.
- ⁸³ Ananda Coomaraswamy, letter to Stella Bloch, March 31st, 1917, 1.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Coomaraswamy refers to the Buddhist truth of causality when he refers to the nature of human existence in this letter. See *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* for his explanation of the Dharma, and the truth of suffering, 90.
- ⁹⁰ Ananda Coomaraswamy, letter to Stella Bloch, March 31st, 1917, 1. See also *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, 93-94 on the concept of Anicca, one of the three Buddhist paths of Right Knowledge.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹² Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, 116-117.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 90 & 118.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115-118
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.
- ⁹⁶ This statement is drawn from Coomaraswamy's interpretation of Buddhism. There are many representations of Nirvana in the history of Buddhist art. However, Coomaraswamy is emphasizing the interpretation of Nirvana based upon his studies of the oldest branch of Buddhism, the Theravada or Hinayana school. In conjunction with the earliest Buddhist teachings, we find that Buddha himself is not directly represented; only his footprints indicate his presence. This is why Coomaraswamy claims representations of Nirvana are taboo.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117. Taken from the citation in which AKC critiques Buddhist doctrine for its limited interpretative capabilities.
- ⁹⁸ Coomaraswamy, letter to Stella Bloch, March 31st, 1917, postscript, 4. It is noteworthy that AKC defines sincerity in art as the expression of identity and freedom in an artwork.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, postscript, 4.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, 115.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁵ Coomaraswamy, Introduction to *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, i.
- ¹⁰⁶ Coomaraswamy, "Notes on the Javanese Theatre" *Rupram: An Illustrated Quarterly Journal of Oriental Art, Chiefly Indian* 7, (July, 1921), 9.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

- ¹⁰⁹ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, (New York: Orientalia), 1922, 2. The "Great Tale" is a term also used by Ananda Coomaraswamy in *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, (New York: Dover), 1956.
- ¹¹⁰ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 2.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹¹⁵ Unlike Isadora Duncan, who sought to negate the view of the body as an "instrument" used to perform the dance, Bloch casts the dramatist in the role of "craftsman," and emphasizes that the dancer in the "ideal drama" does not personally interpret the performance, but simply demonstrates her art.
- ¹¹⁶ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 132.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10. While Stella Bloch does not refer to Ruth St. Denis' performances, there is no doubt she was thinking of Denis. Ruth St. Denis' "Oriental dances" were too famous to ignore.
- ¹¹⁸ Ruth St. Denis, *An Unfinished Life*, (New York and London: Harper & Bros., 1939), 51-53. See also Don McDonagh, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Dance*, (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970), 19. Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 13. Troy and Margaret West Kinney, *The Dance: Its Place in Art and Life*, 2nd Edition, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1924), 222-233, and Arnold Genthe, *As I Remember*, (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936), 201 for references to St. Denis "translation" of non-Western dances.
- ¹¹⁹ Although historians of modern American dance have downplayed the eroticism of Ruth St. Denis' "oriental dances," her earliest performances of oriental themes coincided with the growing fad of the "Salomania," which heralded the popular rise of professional and amateur strip-tease performances. "Salomania" gained notoriety after Richard Strauss' 1905 adaptation of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*. Interest in this form of dance peaked in Europe and America between 1905 and 1909, and when St. Denis traveled to Europe in 1906, she adapted the role of Salome into her performances. Although her rendition of Salome was much less risqué than Maud Allen's a Canadian dancer who scandalized her audiences, Ruth St. Denis' appropriation of Salome was equally significant for its sexual connotations. I maintain sexual innuendo also informed many of St. Denis' other "oriental dances," including her rendition of the traditional Indian nautch. The role of Salome was part of St. Denis' repertoire for many years, and the American artist Robert Henri painted at least two portraits of her in Salome costume around 1909.
- ¹²⁰ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 10
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹²⁹ Coomaraswamy never did publish his photographs of Southeast Asian dancers, preferring instead to use Bloch's drawings to support his articles on the subject.
- ¹³⁰ Bloch, "Intuitions," 213.
- ¹³¹ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama East & West*, 8.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Coomaraswamy, Introduction to *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, iii.

¹³⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-2.

¹³⁷ Fred Dallmayr, Introduction, *Nineteenth Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal, Special Issue: Colonialisms* 18, (no.1, 1994), 4.

¹³⁸ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 132.

¹³⁹ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama East & West*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Bloch, *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 4.

¹⁴² Bloch, "Intuitions", 212.

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Illustrations



Figure 1: Stella Bloch, Photo c. 1919



Figure 2: Stella Bloch & Ananda Coomaraswamy, Photo, n.d.

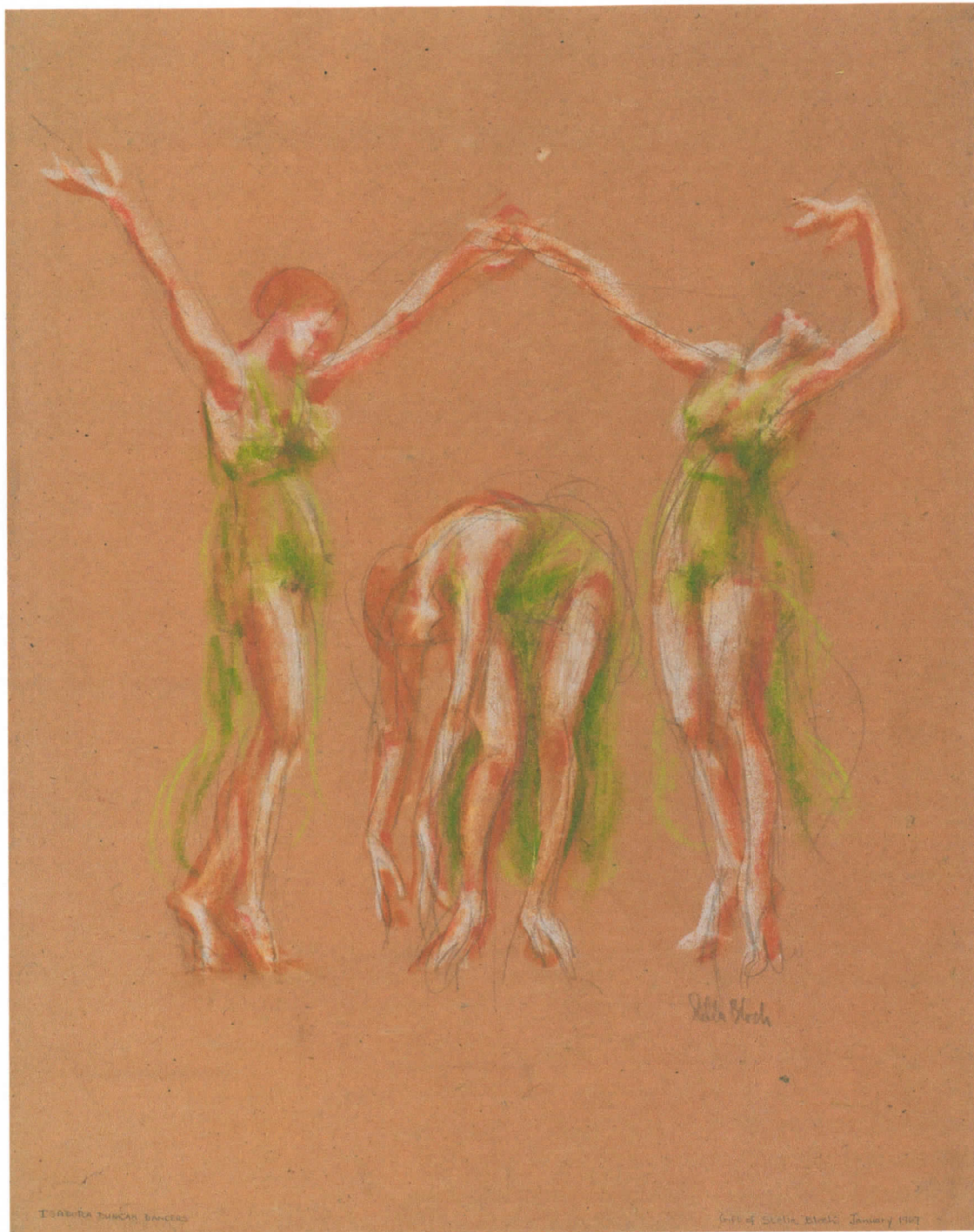


Figure 3: Stella Bloch, 3 Duncan Dancers, Pastel on Colored Paper, c.1918

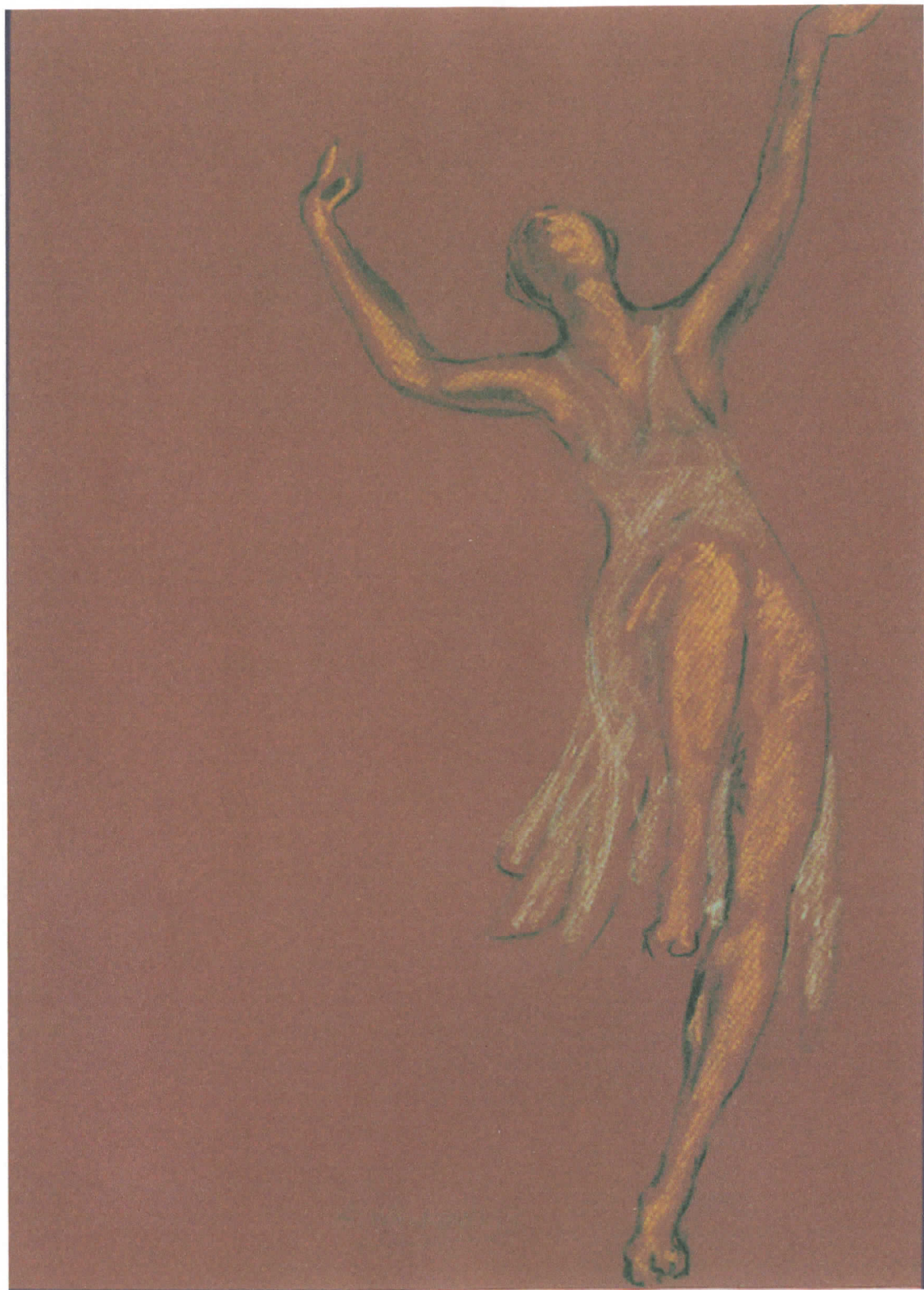


Figure 4: Abraham Walkowitz, Isadora Duncan, Pastel on Colored Paper, 1917



Figure 5: Edward Calvert, *The Bride*, Copper Engraving, 1893

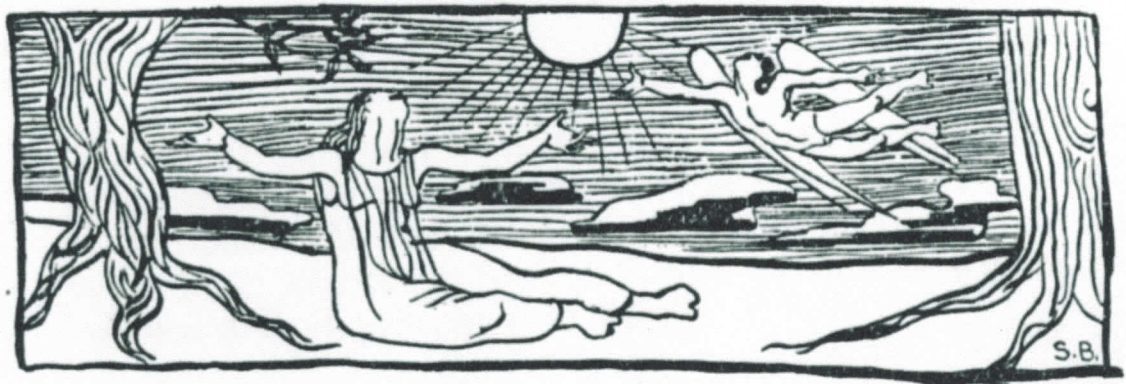


Figure 6: Stella Bloch, *Intuitions*, Drawing, 1919



Figure 7: Stella Bloch, Java, from *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 1922



Figure 8: Ananda Coomaraswamy, Photo, *Javanese Dancer*, 1921



Figure 9: Ruth St. Denis as Radha, 1911



Figure 10: Stella Bloch, Isadora Duncan, from *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 1922



Figure 11: Stella Bloch, Bali, Frontispiece from *Dancing and the Drama, East & West*, 1922



Figure 12: Arnold Genthe, Stella Bloch, 1921