

Merce on the Page

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one
long sentence in
one long
column
makes visible his credo:
“dance is an
art in space and
time; the object
of the dancer is
to obliterate that,”
which explains his breaking
up of actions in
different ways,
different ways
done to allow each
viewer to see in his or
her own way.

next to the column are two
blocky paragraphs in which
he talks about the separation of
music and dance, for which he is
famous and which was so new in
the 50's when he and John Cage
did it, people, some people, had no
idea how to hear, how to see, it's
chaos, they said, pure chaos; they
had to learn to see and hear all over

again. rather like coming upon a page
of writing and noticing that you can read
either the column or the blocky
paragraphs, no one's telling you which is
right because either one will do just fine.

what you don't see: capital letters. a democracy of the alphabet; each letter carries the same weight. and you find as you read without capitals, you tend to lean less hard on those first words, put less of your weight on each beginning. which makes you carry more of your weight on to the next word, and the next, and next thing you know you've not plopped yourself down and heaved yourself into a sentence in the usual way, nor come to a crashing halt at the end. no. you have made of each sentence the kind of gesture launched by that lighter, more seamless, beginning. you have 'held' your weight even as you let it fly, and this, you will feel in your muscles, is like what a trained body feels when dancing.

there is punctuation, yes, of course, for punctuation is part of rhythm, of breath, essential elements of dance. and each sentence is separated by a larger-than-normal amount of white space, a rest. a rest to remind the reader that stillness is every bit motion's equal. another democracy. but do not be lulled by the seamlessness of rests, of no capitals. from seamlessness comes distinction. each sentence stands on its own, the particular in relation to the whole. he asks of his reader the double-vision to move back and forth between the gesture and the dance. which is the dance. which is to say that his reader becomes his audience and sees something of what it is like to watch one of his dances.

note how his words sit on their pages. i mean how they are grouped and how the groups are grouped. occasionally a line extends beyond the borders of its neighbors, like the leg extended in an arabesque. like a movement that takes the time it takes "rhythm is intrinsic to the movement," he says. patterns can be determined by chance, another form of order.

words sit on the page until you read the above in whatever order you want without compromising meaning which creates a sense of motion independent of meaning, another one of cunningham's tenets, and at the same time to you, his reader, these groups of paragraphs *seem* to move. like body groupings on a stage. yet what is more still

than a printed word on a page?