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On the other hand, by now I can't imagine him otherwise. For his anti-classicism and his anti-lyricism, together with his more ingratiating qualities, notably the cleanness and intensity of his dances, he will always be recognized as the foremost representative of high modernism—the Joyce-Pound-Beckett kind—in the history of modern dance, and as a creator of beauty and meaning on their level. On opening night, there was a little ceremony after the show, and Cunningham came out onstage in a wheelchair, wearing a black velvet jacket, black sneakers, and an embarrassed smile. He told a story about how, as a young man in Centralia, Washington, he overheard his parents discussing his curious notion that he might have a career in dance. Could he ever make a living? his mother asked. His father said, "That fellow, if he didn't have the dance game, would be a crook." They let him go ahead.

In March, at the Kitchen, Karole Armitage put on a show, "Think Punk!," that consisted mainly of shortened versions of the dances that made her such a hot ticket in the nineteen-eighties: "Drastic-Classicism" (1981), "The Watteau Duets" (1985), and "Wild Thing" (an excerpt from the 1987 "Gogo Ballerina"). It was wonderful to get another look at them. Armitage danced in Cunningham's company for five years, from 1976 to 1981. Like Cunningham, she began as part of a general, cross-arts avant-garde, and she became a hit partly because of her collaboration with people such as David Salle, Rhys Chatham, Jeff Koons, David Linton. Like Cunningham, she favored high-level virtuosity and inscrutable emotions. She also favored ballet, and here the connection is more with Balanchine than with Cunningham. Together with her age-mates, she went in for "appropriation," and there are many frank borrowings from Balanchine in her work.

But Armitage (b. 1954) is much younger than Cunningham (b. 1919), not to speak of Balanchine (1904-83). Their period was modernism. Hers is postmodernism, or, when she started out, punk: the grating, the loud, and the repetitious. Her sexual politics are also of that time. Her women wear five-inch spikes. They do supported splits *en face*—that is, a man lifts the woman and she, facing us squarely, spreads her legs wide open. Balanchine, too, used that step (he may have been the first), but sparingly, and when his women did it they looked grave, as if they knew where love would take them. For Armitage's women, by contrast, the *en-face* split is almost a default position, and when they perform it they wiggle their legs with pleasure. Sex is not going to hurt them. They may not even do it; they may just think about it. (In a lot of Armitage's dances, the man seems to be presented as gay.) These splits were not just political; they opened up a new design territory. The woman could now use her whole body, all her geometry. And, of course, they were shocking, which was fun.

JULIETA CERVANTES

Bennyroyce Royon and Megumi Eda perform Armitage's "Watteau Duets."

What I wish for Armitage now is that she would put shock behind her. Already in the nineteen-eighties she knew how to modulate it. The tremendous "Watteau Duets," which she made for herself and another Cunningham veteran, the smoldering Joseph Lennon, had everything a postmodernist could ask for—kinky clothes, bad manners, irony—and yet the dance eventually stopped being naughty and became tense, thoughtful, intimate. She gave us something similar in her 2004 "Time Is the Echo of an Axe Within a Wood," but the piece she is working on now, "Mashup" (we got an excerpt in this concert), looks like a return to the joys of brashness. I hope not. ♦