

dance

## Raw Meat

### Steel Traps and Soft Landings

by Deborah Jowitt

The world of Lisa Race keeps tilting. Maybe it's because in her pieces dancers are liable to wheel between being right side up and upside down. Yet nothing looks effortful; their joints are lined with plush. Race's new *Social Climb*, presented by Dance Theater Workshop last month at the Duke on a shared program with Ellis Wood, involves struggle, but no tension. "What could be better than hiking?" asks Paul Matteson. Immediately, his companions—Anna Sofia Kallinikidou, Jennifer Nugent, and Mark Stuver—turn themselves into a peak for him to scale, and the dance becomes a long, fluid process of sliding and vaulting over one another, of climbing, toppling, and being caught. Against Michael Wall's bright score, the performers speak of other obstacles and fears. I'm caught up in the beauty and imaginativeness of the evolving formations; the body you least expect to see surface spurts up from the group in a shape you never expected to see. I do sometimes feel that Race and the dancers get on a roll—unable to stop, or punctuate, or veer in a new direction—drunk on momentum, sating us with loveliness.

Wood is not about loveliness. The Germanic edge to her memorable premiere's title, *Funktionlust Slut*, answers the Kurt Weill echoes in Daniel Bernard Roumain's now sweet, now ominous music. This is one ferocious piece. Women lie flat on their faces on the floor, stick their rumps up in the air, and inch along. "It's no problem; I can do this," says one of them about the physical rigors that life (and Wood) demands of them. Leslie Johnson, Jennifer Phillips, Michelle LaRue, and Wood plunge, stumble, cry out, and laugh hysterically. Phillips futilely thrashes her arms around. She, Johnson, and LaRue slip out of their Naoka Nagata duds and leave the stage in their panties while Wood works herself into a lather of drastic, hurtling movement and stark pauses. "I want it!" she tells us. "I have a fire in my house. I'm hot." She makes the words sound like a hopeful boast. And as if to convince themselves of their sexiness, the others crawl back in and start curling their mouths around words, threatening to suck them dry.