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DANCE REVIEW

Striving for Equity in Things Like Mountain Climbing

By JENNIFER DUNNING

It was "if only" time on Thursday night at the Duke on 42nd Street when Ellis Wood and Lisa Race presented new and recent works that came frustratingly close to their apparent goals.

Ms. Wood's ambitious new "Funktionslust Slut," a dance for five women set to propulsively atmospheric

music by Daniel Bernard Roumain, was inspired by the inequities faced today by female choreographers and performers in modern dance and ballet. Ms. Wood and her feisty dancers (Leslie Johnson, Michelle LaRue, Jennifer Phillips and Kristine Willis), dressed in sturdy, sexy practice clothes designed by Naoko Nagata, surged through the dance and text with unflagging energy. But they were surprisingly unconvincing

most of the time.

Two segments stood out, suggesting how powerful and individual "Funktionslust Slut" could have been. One was a touching solo performed by Ms. Wood, entirely believable as a woman becoming almost giddy as she realizes that she really does "want it, now" and can say that at last. The other was a stunning sudden shift from exhilarating power to cringing fear, as a woman ex-

claims "I'm free!," then crumples. "You don't have to pay me," she says.

Ms. Race's "Social Climb," a dance for four bounding young friends, juxtaposed the heroic communal physicality of mountain climbing with the petty everyday life and its demands. The movement and Michael Wall's music were mostly luscious and billowy. Anna Sofia Kalinikidou's story about an interrupted honeymoon was funny and chilling.

But Ms. Race never quite integrated the two worlds, and "Social Climb" petered out before its end. The juicy performing of the cast, which also included Paul Matteson, Jennifer Nugent and Mark Stuver, was a continuing delight.

The program also included the goofy, rubber-bodied "Three Wishes," choreographed and performed by Ms. Race to an equally nutty song by Amy Denio.