

Ballet Review

Among modern-dance choreographers, Neil Greenberg opens his *MacGuffin: or How Meanings Get Lost* with a solo that maximizes his strengths as a performer. Greenberg is a commanding allegro technician, as will be remembered from his dancing with the Cunningham company. Those of us who have followed Greenberg's own choreography admire his honest attack, his range of reference in dance styles, while admitting also his tendency as a performer to blitz the audience with his dynamic. As a choreographer, Greenberg exercises all the prerogatives of a young master. Dancing his own material, he sometimes uses his performance strength to blast his way through obstacles of his own devising.

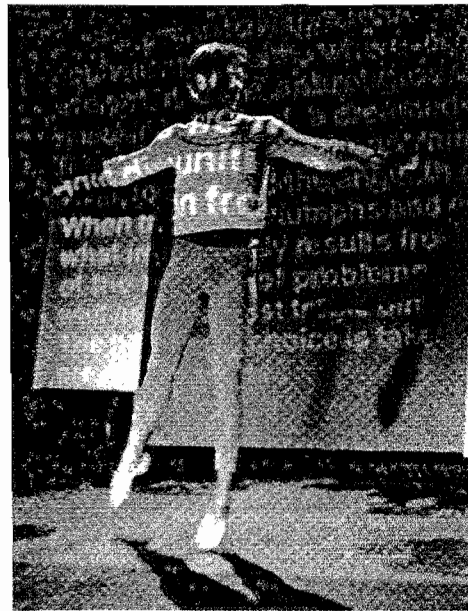
That never happens in *MacGuffin*. (The dance was presented at the Club at La Ma Ma and later at the Jeffrey Neale Gallery.) Greenberg has made a comic work about spectacle, about just how trustworthy observed experience can be, about dance spectacle itself as a belief system. There are witty Delsartean passages in the solo first half of the piece which are accompanied by verbal texts handsomely projected behind Greenberg or displayed by him as signs (that is, placards). The dance is in silence. The proffered languages comment on the epistemology of spy and detective narratives (the title "MacGuffin" is drawn from Alfred Hitchcock's term for a narrative red herring), and the dance has some of the patterned playfulness of Borges and Nabokov in their inspection of such materials. Greenberg as the clue master has never been so discriminating as a dancer.

Then Greenberg is joined by Christopher Batenhorst and Sondra Loring. Plot turns conspiratorial. Costumes are exchanged (belle, bullfighter, boxer); disguises proliferate. The replacement of soloist by group is part of the work's optical sleight-of-hand, but the dance is not overwhelmed by theatrical machinery.

Three New Choreographers Alone Together

Don Daniels

Indeed, it steadies itself and acquires greater rhythmic elasticity. The fragmentary details of Greenberg's solo are now synthesized and promulgated by an ensemble in full mockery of evidential motivation or methodology. The audience, grown skeptical toward the individual gesture, becomes convinced that the one true "clue" — yet another "MacGuffin"? — now resides in the group morale.



Neil Greenberg in his *MacGuffin: or How Meanings Get Lost*.

With her big jump and directness of statement, Sondra Loring has always been a striking performer. Here she is brilliantly insidious. Batenhorst is young but has grown perceptibly from his work with Greenberg. When all three dance together, it's "le trio infernal," stylistic siblings inhabiting a fantasy of Brontëan exclusivity. Like a good mystery film, Greenberg's elegant dance takes us in. "Whodun-it?" acquires a new meaning: not "What-is-it?" but "What-is-who?" We join a secret society and feel no guilt.