

# Chicago Tribune

DANCE REVIEW ★★★

## Troika's 'loopdiver' resists the technology it's wrapped with

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Troika Ranch's 'loopdiver' is a thematically complex, conflicted piece that replicates the jerky, eerie repetitions of computer imagery via live dancers.

Artists railed against mechanization throughout the 20th century, from Frank Norris' "The Octopus" all the way to and beyond Hal, the martinet computer of "2001: A Space Odyssey."

All seem to take their cue from a 19th-century sonnet by William Wordsworth that includes the line, "We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon." The Jeremiahs of 20th-century automation were removed idealists, unsullied, judging mechanical horror from afar.

But "**loopdiver**" by **Troika Ranch**, an arts group run by Mark Coniglio and Dawn Stoppiello, acknowledges a complicity in technological vices and virtues on the part of the artists themselves and, by implication, the rest of us. Since 1994, **Troika Ranch** has been exploring live performance and digital technology, embracing our age while dissecting it. Judging from "**loopdiver**," on view through Saturday at the Dance Center of Columbia College, they do so with engaging sophistication.

"**Loopdiver**" is thematically complex, a conflicted piece that replicates the jerky, eerie, instant repetitions of computer imagery via live dancers, who also rebel and fight it some of the time. It's both intriguing and numbing to watch, as innovative and off-putting as early responses to musical minimalism seemed in their day. This is not about pretty, reassuring design.

The six dancers, who include Stoppiello, perform around a series of hanging screens that turn about and unfold, just as they televise imagery involving Coniglio's unique Isadora software, a media manipulation tool he created.

Essentially, the movement consists of the forward, stop and partial reverse imagery of digital media, the quick, short-lived phrasing and stop-action that makes a dancer resemble a robot.

Throughout, the dancers mimic these pre-recorded pictures of themselves, imperfectly, unable to totally convert to machines. At times, there seems a battle between mechanistic predetermination and living human will. At others, there's a beautiful coincidence of live dance and digital effects. The concentration and precision demanded of the dancers is hellish.

Gradually, their short-lived encounters evoke the conflicts, longings and thwarted efforts to communicate that are fundamental struggles — humanism rearing its agonized head.

"**Loopdiver**" isn't easy, but it's current and relevant, both in media and statement — thoughts of a dry, techno-brain in a dry, techno-season.

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