Daniel Canogar

Media
Brainstorms

BY DARA MEYERS-KINGSLEY

Above and detail: *Midnight Plumber*, 2008. Scrap metal, fiber optic cables, zoom attachments, slides, and projector, dimensions variable.
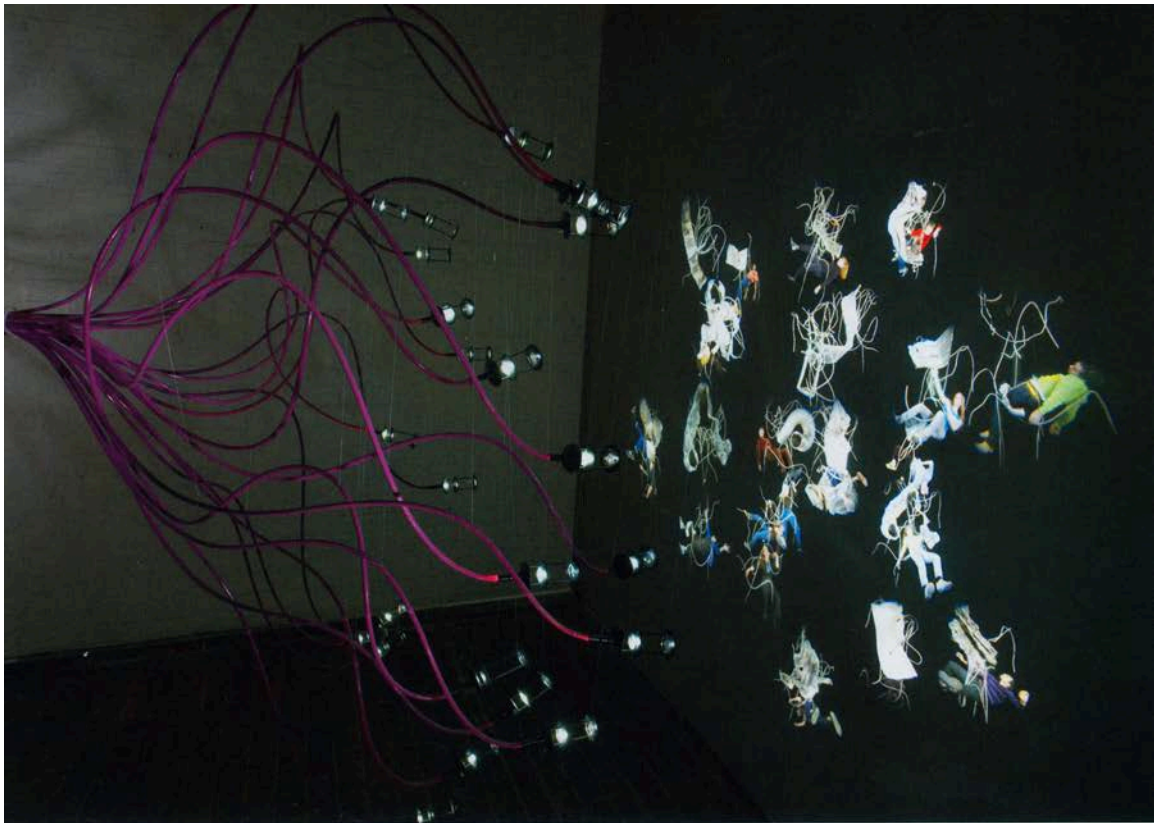
In the installations of Spanish artist Daniel Canogar, electronic media work in concert with sculpture to create hypnotic and mesmerizing environments from abandoned technologies. Throughout Canogar's work, there is an impulse to keep the "human" presence alive. He explores the short life expectancy of technologies and their relationship to organic mortality. Using the detritus of our disposable society, he scours recycling centers and dumps for discarded electronic waste. His re-networked web-like constructions of cables and wires, DVDs, slot machine screens, and videotapes become fascinating and awe-inspiring when combined with projected animations.

Confronted with these repurposed artifacts, we begin to imagine what was once inside them. What information, sounds, or images were once carried through these conduits or played on these devices? Through Canogar's re-animations using the newest cutting-edge technologies, dead media become a kind of resuscitated private and public memory.

I had the opportunity to work with Canogar on his first American commission, for the exhibition "Inner and Outer Space" (2008) at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh. He created two room-size installations, visiting local recycling centers to find metallic scrap. He was drawn to the sculptural quality of the waste and to its particular significance to Pittsburgh—as a monument to a great industrial past.

To increase the local meaning of his work, Canogar engaged community members in making his installations. For *Midnight Plumber*, he invited Mattress Factory staff members, their families, friends, and a larger network of participants to serve as models in a photo shoot. Their images were projected onto the scrap constructions and walls using fiber optic cable and photographic slides so that both figures and industrial materials floated in a kind of weightless suspension. The resulting ensemble of images seemed pulled together by gravitational force. The cluster of bodies and junk suspended in the black void reminded us of our place in the larger universe and our responsibility to the planet.

In *Scanner* (2009, at El Tanque, Tenerife, 2010), a giant web of computer, telephone, and electric cables hung from the ceiling, serving as a three-dimensional screen for projected abstract video animations. The white lines moving over the twisted mass created a powerful effect, as if sparks of light were running through the cables. Viewers inevitably drew parallels between the human circulatory system
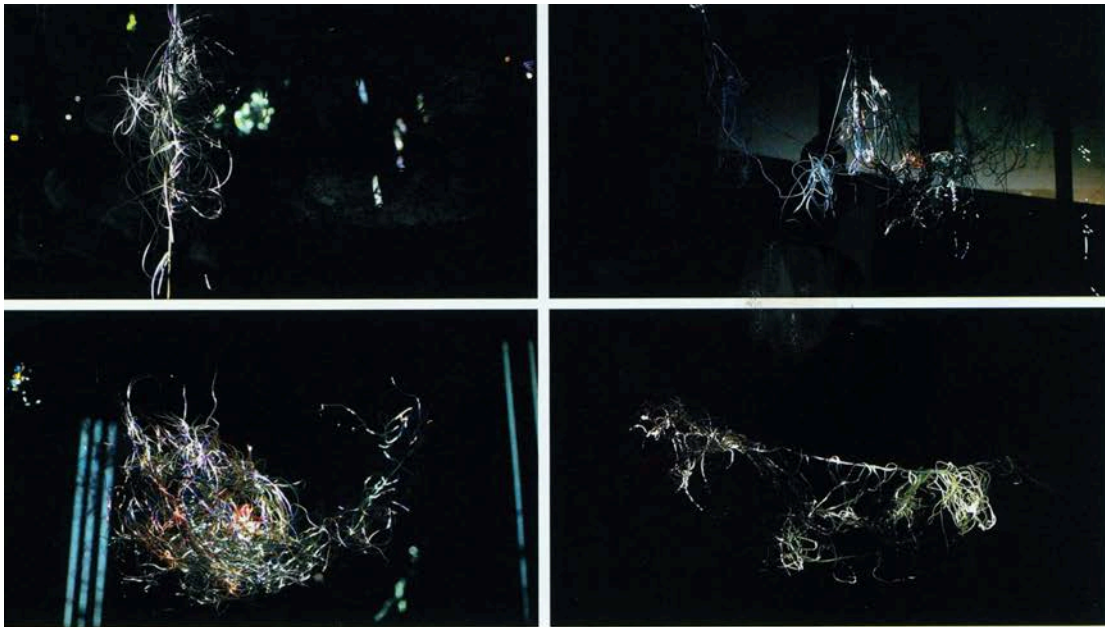
Above: *Scanner*, 2009. Computer, telephone, and electric cables, projectors, and media players, 4 views of installation. Left: *Synaptic Passage*, 2010. 6 video projectors, 20-minute animation loop, and 1,800 pounds of discarded cables, installation view.

and off as they multiply, their generation accelerating over a one-minute loop that attempts to replicate the average rate of fetal brain development (250,000 neurons created each minute).

For two recent installations at Bitforms Gallery in New York—*Dial M for Murder* and *Spin*—Canogar used magnetic VHS tape and DVDs as means to rethink and re-use content contained in discarded media. Video tapes and DVDs became screens onto which Canogar projected their original content; he also emulated how these media are normally "read" by machine: VHS by a video head and DVD by a laser bouncing off its mirror-like surface.

Dial M for Murder (2009) began when Canogar found a VHS copy of the Hitchcock film in a dumpster. Taking the reel of magnetic tape out of its cassette, he built a lattice of intersecting lines in the gallery, creating a kind of triangular, three-dimensional patterning throughout the space. A precisely aimed video animation moved along the tape lines, much as the head in a VCR would have done. Canogar says that the animation was inspired by Saul Bass's

and the energy animating technology.[1] Last year, David Harvey of the American Museum of Natural History in New York invited Canogar to adapt *Scanner* to a neurological context for the exhibition "Brain: The Inside Story," which is on view through August 14. *Synaptic Passage* uses hundreds of pounds of cables (electric, telephone, and computer) salvaged from junkyards around the New York area to create a cave-like environment where viewers feel as though they are walking through a neural network. Six wide-angle video projectors cover the clusters of cables with digital animations replicating synaptic firing effects.

Canogar created a second installation for the exhibition's "Your Changing Brain" section. Using a mirror and a projector housed inside a drum-like structure on the floor, *The 250K Brain* streams silver and gold colors onto a large tangle of copper wire hanging from an overhead hoop. The animation contains stroboscopic white dots that flicker on

Above: *Dial M for Murder*, 2009. VHS tape, video projector, video animation, and media player, 4 views of installation. Below and detail: *Spin*, 2010. Salvaged DVDs, video projector, video animation, and media player, 2 views of installation.

graphics for the opening credits in several of Hitchcock's films. Cascading syncopated lines in strong primary colors suggesting traffic, buildings, and elevators animated the work. The viewers' eyes were drawn along the lines, following the movements of the animation.

Spin (2010), which involved one of Canogar's most complicated processes, consisted of 100 DVDs affixed to the wall. In this installation, he projected the video information originally found on each DVD onto the exact DVD in the space. By using what Canogar calls a "mapping" technique, a single video file containing all the content was projected directly onto all of the DVDs at once. The result was a kind of magical kaleidoscope effect, with the projections playing off the reflective surfaces of the DVDs and then bouncing across the gallery.

The choice of DVDs for *Spin* was truly media specific, if not self-reflexive. Canogar explained that "the DVD codes video information by reflection. Once the laser reading a DVD bounces off the surface like a mirror, it processes a 1; when it doesn't bounce off the surface it becomes a 0; and that is how the binary code is created. That was why it was so important for me to use the reflections as an important component of *Spin*: because DVDs are essentially mirrors."[2] By layering the diverse soundtracks as well, an acoustic cacophony periodically rose and subsided through the installation.

Canogar claims that *Spin* "explores the short life expectancy of the technologies we cast off, and how we are a society entranced by flickering images and the 'light-mirrors' we create."[3] He also says, "Through my work, I try to bring dead materials back to life, reveal their secrets, revive the collective memory they contain to construct an accurate portrait of a society and an age."[4]
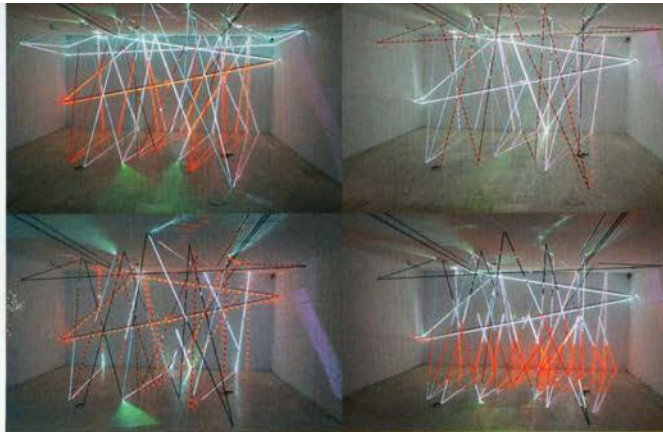
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1 <www.danielcanogar.com/TEMP/scannereltanque.mov>.

2 Interview with author, July 2010.

3 Ibid.

4 Daniel Canogar, March 2010, <www.danielcanogar.com>.

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