

L'ANGELOT:

HOW TO CARRY OUT A PROJECT WITHOUT DYING IN THE ATTEMPT

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In an article published in 1986, the theoretician and video artist Jean-Paul Fargier spoke of “l'ange du digital”, that something that is invisible, immaterial, that can be everywhere without possessing a physical or optical presence. The Association of Contemporary Culture L'Angelot, which was created in 1993 and specialises in Media Art, partly owes its name to Fargier’s evocative metaphor. The main reason, however, is that it occupies the premises of an unusual old cabaret of the same name that was well-known by a wide group of insiders in the seventies and eighties, featuring on its stage such popular figures today as Loquillo or Magic Andreu.

ACC L'Angelot was set up through private initiative, supported above all by the artist Thomas Nölle and by me, with the objective of creating a meeting point for research, publication and activities related to the field of art and new technologies: exhibitions, video art displays, digital and telematic art, contemporary music, performances, lectures, discussions, publications and other activities related to the interdisciplinary proposal of this space. It was at that time the first initiative with this approach in Barcelona and in Spain.

With respect to the organisation of the space, we decided to follow the model of the German “Kunstverein”—institutions for the support of contemporary art funded fundamentally by private initiative. L'Angelot was set up as a non-profit cultural association. It has a board of directors, subscribing members who pay a monthly fee to the association, and collaborating members who, like the board of directors, support and work for the institution on a voluntary basis. The contributions of the members are absolutely indispensable to our project, for

two obvious reasons: though the economic contribution is small, it has so far permitted us to operate even when all other support and subsidies failed; secondly L'Angelot is conceived as a collective space.

L'Angelot has now been operating for four years. During this period we have gone through two key stages and we are now going through the third. With hindsight these stages seem to be quite specific. The first stage of definition and development of the project at a conceptual, economic and legal level could be called the ADVENTURE STAGE, in the literal sense of the word: a risk or undertaking with an uncertain result. Our great optimism and enthusiasm at the beginning were put constantly to the test by great obstacles that sometimes seemed insuperable. The scepticism, mixed with a little curiosity, of a large part of the public and of the critics (however incredible it may seem, speaking of electronic art five years ago sounded, to say the least, exotic) forced us to demonstrate continually that it was not an ephemeral project but a clearly defined proposal aimed at meeting the need for a space devoted exclusively to Media Art.

We could define the second phase as an ACTIVIST STAGE, in which L'Angelot achieved a certain stability of programming and a special public who were more interested than incredulous. However, at this time we found that with few exceptions there was no individual awareness of the importance of individuals and the private sector in supporting culture. This meant that the idea of implanting the Kunstverein system met with a cool reception at a local level. Our disappointment at the lack of a local associative spirit was compensated, on the other hand, by the enormous enthusiasm and spirit of collaboration of the artists, who are the real protagonists and in practice the co-patrons of the L'Angelot project.

To maintain and carry out the activities, it was therefore necessary to adopt a different strategy of action, seeking the support of large companies to loan machinery, equipment, etc. (such as Sony, Medical Europa, Sèleco, Apple Computer, Loring Distribuciones, etc.); the collaboration and support of cultural entities (such as Cochlea, the Goethe-Institut of Barcelona, Connect-Art, the

Institut Français of Barcelona, VEGAP, etc.); and the economic contributions of public subsidies (the Generalitat of Catalunya, the Ministry of Culture).

This was translated into an increase in our activities and in a new policy of work, whose objective was the decentralisation of events from the space of L'Angelot, which had been the only venue, towards other venues in the city. Furthermore, in order to promote the dissemination of the theory of art and digital aesthetics, we began a series of publications devoted to these topics. The objective of these publications was to make known the principal writers and theoretical discourses in this field at an international level, since there are very few translations and books published in Spanish on these topics. In the book "Media Culture", published in 1995, essays by different authors introduce the fundamental topics of Media Art: virtual reality, telematics, performance multimedia, hypermedia, etc. The second publication, "Arte en la Era Electrónica - Perspectivas de una Nueva Estética", was published jointly with the Goethe-Institut of Barcelona on the occasion of the International Congress held in this city, in which L'Angelot collaborated actively, co-ordinating the whole parallel programme to the event. This book presents essays by all the speakers participating in the congress on the subject of aesthetic transformations and paradigms in the information age.

We have now entered the third phase, which I would call the RESISTANCE STAGE. We have carved a small "niche" in the panorama of culture in Catalonia and in Spain; we are a point of reference with respect to Media Art; we have obtained a faithful public; the press is now aware of our existence; the prospects for programming are especially promising; the exchanges are beginning to operate, and we are even beginning to arouse international interest. The 14th ACCA Prize, which the Catalan Association of Art Critics awarded in 1997 to L'Angelot for our activities of promotion and dissemination of multimedia and independent art, is without doubt an important recognition for the Association.

In these four years L'Angelot has served as a platform for work and research in new technologies applied to art, operating as a centre for disseminating and

supporting the theory and practice of electronic art and the proposals of young artists in this field. During this period more than fifty activities have been carried out, including a series of pioneering proposals in Catalunya and Spain, such as the first videographic retrospective of Carles Santos, the first international Art exhibition on CD-ROM, the virtual exhibition on the Internet produced jointly with Connect-Art, and the joint publication with Project ß of the interactive art CD-ROM "Opus 1", containing works by Spanish artists.

Though the Catalan and Spanish public are showing a growing interest in electronic art (and it is gratifying to see that L'Angelot has actually contributed actively to this), we are aware of the need to fight the current post-industrial mentality or, as Georg Simmel stated, the "pathology of culture", which is manifested in an "attitude of tedium": that is to say, using media language, the pathology of cultural zapping. It is not sufficient to follow fashions; it is not sufficient to blithely and opportunistically meet the expectations of the public with respect to these fashions (thus further encouraging cultural zapping). Above all, we must preserve the context and maintain a critical distance with respect to these cultural phenomena, offering parallel visions with a rigorous approach and a firm basis: we must promote communication, and not only information. This is how we understand our past and future work.

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