

## Country Europe

**A project by Marcelo Expósito and Verónica Iglesia for Chamber of Public Secrets / Manifesta 8 (Murcia, 2010) /**

**Document 1: proposal / Buenos Aires, December 2009**

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We approach the enclosure by car after travelling for almost an hour along a partially unpaved road. The area subject to control is surrounded by a series of physical barriers (metal fences, concrete walls crowned with barbed wire, etc.), surveillance systems (primarily closed circuit television cameras, but also guards concealed at several points along the its periphery), and roadblocks (at the main entrance, but also at secondary entrances controlled by guardhouses).

A few days earlier, we'd had to send a personal information pack that included: full name, professional credentials, national ID card number. Without this, there was no guarantee that we would be able to enter.



As the car nears the main entrance, cameras on either side automatically rotate to follow the progress of our vehicle. Two guards emerge from the guardhouse and gesture for us to pull up a few meters from the entrance. We are asked to identify ourselves. One guard keeps watch next to our car, while the other one unhurriedly heads back towards the guardhouse. In the distance, we see him check our details against a long list of names, as he watches us. He calmly makes his way back over the few meters that separate the guardhouse from our car. He nods, and we interpret this as permission to continue without alighting from the car. We edge the car up to the actual entrance. A gate prevents us from continuing. A third guard comes out of the guardhouse and gestures for us to open the boot so he can search it. One of us gets out of the car and allows him to check the material we are carrying: basic professional photography equipment. He rummages through the bags until he is satisfied. Wordlessly, he gestures for us to close the boot and get back in the car.

The barrier goes up and our car is free to move on, past a sign that indicates the speed limit. This time we've been allowed to enter through the main entrance to carry out our work. Other times, after identifying ourselves, we have had to detour around the perimeter of the protected area, locate one of the secondary or service entrances, repeat the whole identification and security ritual, park

outside of the area subject to control, go in on foot with a security guard, through an underground tunnel or secondary path, etc.

This description is a synthesis of several real experiences of entering an area surrounded by a control system that sets up a barrier between inside and outside for security reasons. It is not—as you would expect in a proposal for a project based on carrying out an artistic intervention at Murcia jail for Manifesta 8—a description of the security checks required to enter a prison. Rather, it describes the ritual of control we have been required to undergo in order to carry out our work as image professionals in one of the residential areas known as "countries" in Argentina. These private residential communities have proliferated in Argentina basically since the period of Menem's government, that is, since the period in which neoliberal policies led to a surge in the relative purchasing power (and therefore in the potential for accumulating debt) of the middle classes and also exacerbated the social imaginary of a privileged lifestyle and property to be protected.



Argentinean "countries" are certainly a *sui generis* local phenomenon, but they are also consistent with the phenomenon of gated, walled, private, protected residential communities that have cropped up in many other parts of the world. They are an important element in the consolidation of a social imaginary based on the logic of security through spatial segregation, which goes hand in hand with the renewed class-based fragmentation of society. (This aside, the proliferation of "countries" and gated communities in Argentina and other parts of the world should be interpreted in terms the surge in real estate capitalism).



While this preliminary document does not allow us to go into much detail, we would like to mention one of aspects of the Argentinean "countries" that were analysed by the sociologist Maristella Svampa in her book *Los que ganaron. La vida en los countries y barrios privados. (The Winners. Life in "Countries" and Gated Communities)*. The logic of control and security that underpins gated communities also encompasses a sinister experience of a lack of personal safety. Many

Argentinean "countries" are built right beside "villas", self-constructed housing made by unskilled migrant labour or the social strata who are heir to the urban industrial lumpenproletariat. This same workforce services the functioning of the gated communities: young "villeras" are their "mucamas" (they clean the houses and play the role of substitute mother for the children of middle or upper class professional women), while the young "villeros" work as security guards or as part of the "country's" maintenance and cleaning staff. Thus the security prophylaxis that imposes a barrier between the protected interior and an exterior that is perceived as threatening is unexpectedly altered by the interpenetration of inside an outside, as a result of the same state of things that caused the spatial segregation in the first place: class divisions, new and old, and new and old forms of labour organisation and exploitation.

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Colectivo CPS has invited us to submit a proposal for a project to be carried out within the framework of Manifesta 8 in Murcia, involving an intervention in an archetypal segregated and protected space: the prison. Our response to this invitation is a more general project that looks at different types of contemporary spatial segregation and border divisions based on a juxtaposition of different kinds of security logic. Our intervention in Murcia prison, which will be in the form of a photography workshop with the participation of a group of inmates (see details below), would be one element within a larger project. While it would retain an autonomous status as a group project, it would also be juxtaposed with other elements as part of a more general project.

To sum up the first two components of our project:

(1) the Argentinean "countries", gated residential areas in which the ruling classes or the middle classes fearful of being attacked by a vague "other", whose image is constructed either as a threatening figure matching the stereotypes imposed by the mass media that fans the politics of fear, or based on real experience of the violence that is habitual in metropolitan contexts devastated by neoliberal logic;

(2) the prison, an archetypal space in modern disciplinary politics, based on a historic figure that is the most extreme example of the model of institutional disciplinary spaces that also came to be expressed in the school, the factory and the psychiatric hospital.





What physical and symbolic form do these spaces of internment take? In what way do they function as a negative image of each other, in a reversal of paired concepts like interior/exterior, inside/outside, safe/dangerous, us/them? What are the many ways in which the security prophylaxis fails to prevent the constant interpenetration of the extremes of each of these pairs? What do current forms of these kinds of spatial segregation tell us about the transformations and overlaps between disciplinary logic (Foucault) and the logic of control (Deleuze/Guattari)?

To a great extent, this project will have to look at the production of stereotypes relating to normalisation through security and the representation of the dangerous individual, without falling into analysis that is distant and objectifying. Given that we are looking at how different kinds of spatial segregation end up producing new forms of social fragmentation and new forms of controlling the mobility of populations, how can we not foreground our own experience as individuals shaped and shot through by these dynamics? For the past three years, our lives have involved moving between Latin America and Europe, and in this movement back and forth we have repeatedly experienced the increase in forms of migration control and the precarious nature of our own safety as we travel between the two continents. In terms of this project, our experience in this regard is extremely paradoxical. We will dwell on this paradox for a moment.

The Colectivo CPS project for Manifesta 8 highlights what have been two of the most relevant aspects of the Manifesta 8 exhibition project since it began: (a) its transnational focus, which seeks to overcome the limits of nations and borders through artistic experience; (b) its contribution to expanding the social scope of arts practice, which is forced to exceed the formal limits of what has historically been its institutional nature, brimming over from the museum or gallery to multiple social and institutional spheres. These two characteristics are also central to the expansion of the arts institution itself, placing it at the centre of the growth and renewal of the most advanced modes of capitalism.

This phenomenon can only have contradictory effects: there is an increase in the possibilities of using arts practices for critical intervention, but, generally, the kind of critical intervention involved remains on the symbolic or discursive level, and also makes it necessary to put a multiplicity of spaces, institutions and individuals at the service of new forms of economic and symbolic valorisation. Roughly speaking: critical art expands all over the places, while at the same time it contributes to subjecting everything that it incorporates in its practice to symbolic and economic instrumentalization. In this order of things, this practice is completely in keeping with the way in which labour is generally carried out under post-Fordist logic: simultaneously or alternately autonomous and controlled, liberating and enslaving. The project we have been invited to submit for Manifesta 8 cannot escape being formulated under these contradictory characteristics.

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A few paragraphs back we mentioned our personal experience of travelling between Latin America and Europe. In order for one of the members of our team (who is Latin American) to be able to enter Europe to carry out this project, we must request a written permit from the Spanish police. The documents required when requesting this permit include: a certificate of registration in the city

of origin, a certified copy of current ID and passport; documents declaring where the person is to live during their stay and a document whereby the "inviting" person or persons accepts responsibility, written agreement that the person will not engage in any form of employment or remunerated activity or carry out actions detrimental to the destination country, proof that the person's purchasing power is higher than the average for the destination country, personal photographs that prove the relationship between the guest and the person or persons who have invited him or her, etc.

A permit to enter the European Union issued in this way, however, does not necessarily guarantee a citizen of a Latin American country entry into European space. The logic currently controlling the movement of persons at Europe's borders is in keeping with a "flexible" type of control that we could almost call post-Fordist: it is largely based on the randomness of the control criteria applied at each different place and time. In our case, the border police can ultimately grant or deny entry. This degree of "flexibility" obviously becomes more discretionary and more random as we move down the hierarchical ladder of the economic, racial and class importance of the individuals concerned.

There is an obvious contrast between the forms of transnationalisation that art allows and the reality of the controls that are increasingly being applied to the international circulation of persons. Just as there is an obvious contrast between the way in which this project contradictorily positions us as persons endowed with the power to intervene and move through social and institutional spaces—which at the same time segregate us as individuals in real life. Our intention is to include these personal experiences of travelling between Latin America and "country" Europe over the last few years as one of the components of the project.

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## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

### **(A) CONTENT**

In keeping with the above, we propose a project consisting of three main components:

(1) *A TRAINING AND PRODUCTION WORKSHOP USING PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AT THE MURCIA PENITENTIARY CENTRE.*

(2) *A COMPILATION OF DOCUMENTATION AND IMAGES ON PROTECTED SPACES: "COUNTRIES", GATED COMMUNITIES, ETC.*

(3) *DOCUMENTATION AND IMAGES OF CROSS-BORDER TRAVEL BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE.*

It is not our intention to set up comparisons between the different components of the projects, or to find similarities or direct correspondences between them. We would never want to "compare", for instance, life in a gated community to the restricted freedom that is imposed by confinement in a penitentiary centre. It is more about sketching out a series of narratives and juxtaposing or stringing them together around concepts like, for example, different forms of spatial segregation and border control, or different experiences of mobility or travel control.

### **(B) FORMALISATION**

The proposal requires CPS/Manifesta 8 to produce:

(1) *the WORKSHOP AT THE MURCIA PENITENTIARY CENTRE*

(2) *A PUBLICATION* consisting of a compilation of the materials produced in the course of the project/research process: texts, a variety of documents, photographs made during the workshop at the Penitentiary Centre and others, etc.

This publication will be our exhibition device: instead of producing a work for an exhibition space, we propose a circulating mobile artefact that can be passed from hand to hand. This artefact would be read at a different rate and allow a different use value to that of a work exhibited in a physical space.

## **TRAINING AND PRODUCTION WORKSHOP WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AT THE MURCIA PENITENTIARY CENTRE.**

The workshop will be carried out in three stages:

- Stage 1. First visit to the Penitentiary Centre (Marcelo Expósito). Estimated date: between January 18 and 22, 2010 (3 days in total) First contact with the group of inmates who will participate in the workshop; discussion of the proposed workshop so that initial ideas can be adapted, and participants can formulate their own ideas, etc.
- Stage 2. Second visit to the Penitentiary Centre (Verónica Iglesia, Marcelo Exposito). February 10-13, 2010 (four days in total). Execution of the practical aspect of the workshop.
- Stage 3. Third visit to the Penitentiary Centre (Marcelo Exposito). Presentation and group discussion around the material produced in February, as well as the ideas and practical outcomes of the overall project by Marcelo and Verónica. (Date: to be determined. Approximately three days in April and/or May).

## PRACTICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP

Our initial proposal for a training and production workshop using photographic equipment was inspired by Verónica Iglesia's earlier work in collaboration with Finmatun cultural association in workshops that were held at Barcelona's La Trinidad jail for young people in 2007, as well as workshops on community media tools carried out in different parts of Argentina as part of the community media collective Abriendo Caminos.

The proposal involves working conceptually and physically with a group of inmates from Murcia Penitentiary Centre to produce images that counteract the usual representations of the life of the "prisoner". The idea is to work together to produce images that avoid any attempt to represent day-to-day life "inside" the prison, or any other kind of stereotype that victimises individuals who have had restrictions imposed on their freedom.

During stage one (the first visit to the Penitentiary Centre), the working group will be shown images produced in previous workshops carried out in conditions similar to the ones proposed for the current project. The initial proposal to the working group will be as follows: the inmates are to imagine, propose, discuss, transform, execute, put together and, finally, photograph representations of themselves on the outside, or else to create characters that are themselves-others. These images may be constructions of the self in real surroundings that the inmates are emotionally attached to (their neighbourhood, their home...), real places that trigger images of desire (Morocco, Latin America, New York, Paris... places where they may never have been), made-up places or abstractions (to fly, alone or in a group...) Following are some images produced collectively in a previous workshop carried out in a prison:



The idea behind this project is to trigger a multiplicity of antitheses (to counteract victimizing images or images that correspond to a humanist understanding of "the prisoner", to counteract images of the inmates' own situation of confinement that duplicate the real, physical confinement onto the symbolic plane, etc.) and also generate new proposals (how to activate desire and the imagination in conditions of restricted freedom). Obviously, the images produced as a result of this process will not be in any way "innocent"; but the idea is also to ensure that they cannot be read in any linear or one-dimensional manner.

Group discussions about the stereotypes of the self that are almost certain to be contained in the representations initially proposed by the inmates themselves will be an important part of the workshop.

### **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WORKSHOP AT THE PENITENTIARY CENTRE**

The first visit will require minimal equipment: a portable computer, together with a projector for group viewing of large scale images. The same applies for the third visit. The second visit will require a slightly more complex production set, as shown in the images:





As we can see, the set consists of:

- a sheltered working area, at least 7 x 5 m.,
- a portable computer with several image-processing software programs (primarily Photoshop),
- a video projector that can cater for front-projection and rear-projection,
- a large screen,
- three digital still cameras, with the following brands and kinds being recommended: Canon G10, Canon G11 or digital single-lens reflex cameras,
- a tripod for a still camera,
- two tripods for lights
- two Minina Pan 1000 tungsten lights with flange and extension cords,
- two polystyrene sheets, approximately 1.20 x 2 m.,
- a basic stereo with a CD player.

## AUTHORS/COORDINATORS OF THE PROJECT

*Marcelo Expósito* (Puertollano, 1966) usually lives in Barcelona and Buenos Aires. He is an artist, and his practice usually expands into the areas of critical theory, editorial work, curatorship, teaching and translation. He teaches at Independent Studies Program, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), among other places, and also forms part of the Universidad Nómada and the Red Conceptualismos del Sur. He has written, edited or co-edited books such *Chris Marker. Retorno a la inmemoria del cineasta* (2000), *Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa* (2001), *Producción cultural y prácticas instituyentes. Líneas de ruptura en la crítica institucional* (2009) and *Los nuevos productivismos* (2010). His video series *Between Dreams. Essays on the New Political Imagination* explores the interweaving between art, activism, politics and communication (<http://marceloexposito.net/entresuenos>). His theoretic and research output can be found at: <http://www.marceloexposito.net/materialesteoricos.html>.

*Verónica Iglesia* (Buenos Aires, 1972) lives in Buenos Aires. She is a freelance photo-reporter working with several print publications, a teacher at the Escuela Argentina de Fotografía (EAF) and an activist in the field of community media. She is part of the collective Abriendo Caminos / La Comunitaria TV, which uses principles of popular pedagogy to carry out training workshops on media tools. The collective also works towards producing documents and records of social struggles, and on political intervention in public space using different types of visual and other media (independent television, video, photography, graphics, posters, radio, etc.). See: [http://colectivoabriendocaminos.blogspot.com /](http://colectivoabriendocaminos.blogspot.com/)  
[http://tallerdeherramientasdecomunicacion.blogspot.com /](http://tallerdeherramientasdecomunicacion.blogspot.com/)  
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