

## ***Interview with Sol Prado about Endless Waiting Game***

**Raúl Hott**

**Raúl Hott: Your previous works have approached the relationship between capitalism and depression, with many references to the influence of the pharmaceutical industry on the current production of subjectivity. You soon started to inquire about different psychiatric disorders and about how they relate and are linked to capitalist consumption culture. It'd be interesting to know how the interest for immigration issues arose, and in what way that's related to the previous themes.**

Sol Prado: Two previous projects, undertaken in collaboration with Franco Castignani and called *Like 50mg* and *International Consumer Pole (ICP)*, approached the idea of neoliberal subjectivity; a subjectivity that is mobilized by and built upon debt and the affective pair anxiety-depression. These projects have been developed from my personal experience as a body medicated with antidepressants and inserted in the cognitive-creative work-market. When I entered the process of depression I already practiced the political exercise of inhabiting my own frailty, which allowed me to adopt a sensitizing approach, far away from the habitual pathologizing of depressive states. It was a daily and collective exercise of building up agency and empowerment starting from vulnerability, and avoiding taking the position of a victim.

My search resided (and still resides) in how to compose new sensibilities and open creative horizons from the cracks of normality. In my case, the first pharmacological treatment for depression had as a consequence that I was able to build a body clearly focused on short-term satisfaction linked to productive work, since the use of these drugs debilitates my empathy and annuls the possibility of feeling sexual satisfaction—which obviously frustrated my sexual-affective relationships. This experience made me question a lot of things. With a little bit of attention I could notice the way in which my body and my psyche were being tamed by the voluntary consumption of technologies of control. In parallel, I resorted to key

texts during this period, including *Testo Junkie* by Paul Preciado, which helped me understand the power of big pharma and how it exerts control over populations. *The Uprising*, by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, was also essential: in this book he approaches depression as a form of social imposition of discipline.

**RH: If there are innumerable islands in Greece, and therefore innumerable entry points for refugees, what prompted you to focus specifically on the island of Leros?**

SP: An Argentinian friend, a student of the work of Félix Guattari—Diego Sztulwark—recommended me the book *De Leros à La Borde* when I told him I'd be coming to live in Athens during 2017. It's a very simple book, a kind of diary in which Guattari tells of his trip to the island and his experience resorting to the psychiatric hospital of Leros. The trip happened as a consequence of a very controversial piece that the *London Observer* published in late 1989. The piece, entitled 'Leros: Europe's guilty secret', publicly exposed for the first time the inhuman situation ailing the psychiatric patients of the island. I soon started investigating further and discovered that currently there's a refugee camp in the same building as the old abandoned hospital, and so I decided to go to Leros.



**RH: To me it was always very interesting that in each of our conversations you always spoke of the superposition of realities operating on the island, and you mentioned that it had had a very particular ‘function’ during history.**

SP: So it is, it has to do with the history of this island and its destiny as ‘human warehouse’. The island was occupied by Italy in 1912 during the First World War, and they built huge buildings to lodge their more than 40.000 men. When they left in 1943, these buildings were used as a technical school for a brief period; later, in the period of the Greek civil war and of the dictatorship, they were used as prison centres for political dissidents. In parallel, in 1953 some buildings were used to install a psychiatric hospital (then called ‘Leros Psychopath Colony’), since the psychiatric hospitals of Athens and of the other islands were full. The authorities decided to put patients there who didn’t receive visitors or those whose irregular status made their identification difficult—basically, they were ‘forgotten ones’. The number of patients varied between 1.000 and 4.000 patients in abhorrent and miserable conditions, with the local inhabitants—ex-fishermen, generally—working as caretakers in the hospital.

**RH: When was the refugee camp opened?**



SP: There was a lot of empty space in these abandoned buildings as the hospital was permanently closed in the early 2000s, and that how it should be. Today the refugees don't arrive directly at Leros, but generally come to the island of Farmakonisi, a military island very close to Turkey. Because they must be rescued by the Greek Coast Guard to enter European territory, they prick leaks in their lifeboats when they're close to the coast. Risking death is the beginning of the legal application for asylum.

**RH: It's very peculiar, this insular space that turns a prison, psychiatric hospital, refugee camp, etc. into a place for tourists. I had never heard about a space with such a degree of exclusion and seclusion. This may be connected to our incapacity (on a human level) to see reality as it is. In this case, we dispose of everything we don't want to see. This is what this island is: a 'trash bin' where one throws away what is not supposed to be seen.**

SP: I think this is a clear example of what we do as human beings on a variety of levels. Why don't they want refugees to enter? Because they don't want to see the results of their war-mongering in other people's homelands. It's about excluding others and avoiding to see them. It's a constant process of categorization and dehumanization, where the different person will remain different, excluded, made

invisible.

To this exclusionary system, it's despairing that this mass of people 'invade' their privileged grounds, that they try to have rights and invade their streets. To this system, imprisonment and physical and emotional abuse are ways to maintain the privileges of their population.

**RH: Do you plan to keep traveling to the island and, if you do, what will you look for during the next trips?**

SP: Yes, I'm going there next April. This time I'll be accompanied by Anna Papaeti, a Doctor in Musical Therapy from Crete who has been researching the use of music as a torture tool in detention centres during the Greek dictatorship. I'm interested in the collectivization of this project with other people who are approaching similar themes.

**RH: How would you describe what you did with your performance *Endless Waiting Game*, and your use of irony?**

SP: I think the clash of materials and realities I use with different filming techniques is ironic, but... to be honest, I don't believe that the satire in my work comes from any place other than the real, I just juxtapose preexisting material. I believe that the biggest possible satire is having normalized so many dehumanization, having crystallized our empathy towards the suffering of others—and our own, for that matter.

But going back to the question of the ironic composition of the material, I work with assembling/disassembling, and with manipulation. I'm interested in thinking and working the image as sensation-equalizer. These are acts of controlled manipulation that don't allow you to completely enter a fantasy territory, because I rupture it before that happens. At the same time it has the capacity of showing you that you are part of the mechanics of manipulation on a daily basis.

I believe that it is, as they say in Argentina, *a montage that shows its loose thread* to trigger you to pull at it and see how the reality production machinery works.

To show the crack, to open escape routes.

**RH: Can you describe what happened during the performance?**

SP: The performance *Endless Waiting Game* took place on 12 November in Athens,

with the collaboration of Open Form. It was a presentation consisting of four chapters, with the aim of breaking with the possibility of believing in a single story. It presents a fragmented theatricality that operates on the constant borderline between fiction and reality. I wanted to deliver a story or narrative that is not closed, to avoid self-reference as if I'm the enunciator of some truth. For this reason I do not resort to 'truth' formats such as documentary, since this is a work linked to an attempt at artistic reflection. The first chapter is called 'Lépida' and is a looped introduction where I present on four occasions in the same video each of the stories of locking up different human groups that have occupied the buildings of Lépida Bay, Leros. In the second chapter, 'Abandoned Hospital', I use the format of a videogame to enter the old hospital, where the camera simulates a tour inside the psychiatric corridors, and on another screen a girl is shown performing ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response). Again, the use of an entertainment structure that does not correspond directly to the classic format of the documentary produces a tension in the pairing of entertainment/truth. The third chapter is a video filmed with a drone that makes a zenith shot of the deserted coast of the island, while I sing 'I am Free' by The Rolling Stones live in front of an audience. The fourth chapter is another drone video that travels around the tourist beach with the song 'Shiny Happy People' by R.E.M. I am very interested in investigating the use of pop culture devices to build, manipulate, and modulate desires, and the consumption of a Western colonial imaginary as part of the motivation for migratory movements to Europe and the United States.

It's a 'freedom' that we—as bodies from the colonies—are able to consume in the form of culture and products, but not in the form of actual rights.

**RH: During our stay in Athens we got to know many Greeks who asked us how the refugee crisis is covered by international media, since the local media seem not to cover it at all. What's your opinion regarding the visibility of the refugee crisis in the media?**

SP: I believe that there is a political will to refrain from showing this migratory crisis, especially after the agreement made between the European Union and Turkey in March 2016. They decided to suppress the migratory crisis between the Turkish coast and the Greek islands; to put a lid on it, basically. At the same time, a good part of the NGOs are currently accused judicially of collaborating with human

trafficking by participating in rescue operations in the Mediterranean, are pushed to eviction and even losing funds for the maintenance of their work around the camps. During 2017 the Greek government took control of these detention centers. The funds and aid are withdrawn, however this does not mean that the crisis has been overcome, just that it has ceased to be profitable.

As part of this “procedure”, it is contemplated that people expect an infinity in these islands, getting sick psychically and physically. These are policies and techniques of greater discipline and oppression, and that is connected with depression. When we are ‘depressed bodies’ that cannot collectively politicize our discomfort, we are more permeable to manipulation, because we are in search of acceptance, of sense for our life. I believe the depression of the ‘social body’—not only referring to the migratory crisis—is a government strategy. This way of governing through fear is a way to weaken a specific population. We constantly receive information and alerts to be in a ‘total state of fear’. All your emotions are transformed into chemical material within a control system. It is very complex. Where are we going?

**RH: That question is never present. I really think it's one of the most fundamental questions not only at this time, but always. I do not see a desire or conscience to generate a discussion, or a real global assembly where people can express where we decide to go.**

SP: That’s because they have taken away the possibility of us thinking we have agency about the future.

**RH: So the question is how do we resume and re-appropriate that agency? What has to happen then? What do we have to do?**

SP: I wish I had the answer, but I believe and practice the way of inventing, of erring, of continuing to prove sabotages. The embrace of error as a war machine. My artistic work is one of my few tools of sabotage, and it’s there that I ruminate on the idea of an imaginary occupation of the future. To once more occupy the idea of the future: what could be the affective relationships at the dystopian horizon of shortage of work, the proliferation of free time together with a lack of cash and cut credit?

Do not let others do and build the future, dispute that practice of creation.

Without us, they cannot make the future. That is the key we mustn't forget.