

## **A Tale of Two Cities**

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times”.

**Both Terrassa and Mataró, with their well known industrial pasts, are good places in which to locate this tale about the relations between representation and the changes occurring in the fields of work and labour, in what seems to be, more or less, a contemporary global process: a shift from a centralized factory based production system to a flexible and informational based system.**

Salvador Cardús (sociologist, Terrassa).

People find it hard to recall that during the first third of the century in our country, in our city, that in a place like Terrassa, there has been an important migrant movement, nobody has a clear notion of the theme. It's like if immigration had started during the fifties, but that's not true. Immigration has been a constant process here...We have found the “rejection lists”. It's as if things haven't changed. They took the people to an internment camp in Barcelona; once there they were put onto a train and returned home...

## **Overlock**

Just like an overlock operator with a garment, I start the assemblage of pieces that ensemble this narration.

## **amphibious fictions**

**precariousness, domesticity and flexibility  
under the new work conditions.**

## **Female Spinners**

Josep Palacios (Town Councillor in Mataró)

The textile sector has historically been extremely relevant to Mataró. The city shifted from having an agrarian based economy which relied on the earth and sea, to develop a

secondary sector based economy, with an important industrial and cooperative movement, where huge textile factories appeared.

As you have mentioned, there was change that occurred with the arrival of...

The worker tradition, understanding worker as an extended concept, and specially related to gender issues, feminist struggles, were very important here in Mataró

Carmen Lázaro (textile worker, Mataró)

I think that we can now lose a large number of things that we once gained...and I'm certain about this. Now there are loads of people, some are locals and some foreigners, that...obviously need work, and they work as much as they are asked to and take ridiculous wages for it. I think people take too much on board.

Patricia Soley (former fashion model, Barcelona).

Con formato: Inglés (Reino Unido)

Cindy Crawford used to talk about this, and she is a cold person, and I'm using the best meaning of the word...She states that there is a business named Cindy Crawford and she is its manager. She has created a space between her personal dignity and her body and appearance as a work tool.

María Ruido

...it was the factory owners, the same owners who sometimes...

Carmen Lázaro (textile worker, Mataró)

Yes...they were no longer interested in dealing with the factory so they started to give out the work...which I think was a good idea, but in that case, it should have been done legally, don't you think?...Then...a lot of people made loads of money this way, with illegal workshops...

María Ruido

Is this process being repeated?

Carmen Lázaro (textile worker, Mataró)

Now...it's possibly happening again, the only difference is that instead of being local people doing it, it's being done by people from other countries...they have the same right to do it, don't they?

# Amphibians

**Amphibians are animals or plants defined by their possibility to live inside or outside the water. The dictionary describes them as tetrapod vertebrates which live a semi-aquatic life, they breathe through their branchie during the larva phase and breathe using their lungs during their adult life, the dictionary also states: amphibians are cold blooded animals.**

**When my train arrives to Mataró I'm received by an amphibian.**

Joseph Palacios (Town Councillor in Mataró)

In 1950 or 1955 Mataró had about 45.000 inhabitants. In 25 years we have gone from having 45.000 to 95.000 inhabitants...

Since the eighties we see how they start to come from several different places, with a large number of people coming from Morocco...these are still coming...

They also come from Sub-Saharan places such as Gambia or Senegal but also Mali, Mauritania, Guinea etc... There is a large number of them (about 45% of all immigrants) that come from Morocco...and we also have a large number coming from Central or South America, they also come from the old Eastern European countries, and since 4 or 5 years ago, they also come from the south east, but especially from China.

Gymtonic S.A (Mararó)

Ten years ago it wasn't as easy as it is now...

Now, we have people working for us in Tunisia...then we finish up the garment over here, in Tunisia they only make the pieces...we also have a couple of companies working for us here, outside Mararó, they also prepare the stuff for us...

Maria Noise

What do you think about big corporations like Inditex that produce very very cheap stuff, of questionable quality...?

Gymtonic S. A. (Mataró)

I think that they behave very aggressively...they were smart and were the first to go into direct distribution...they were lucky enough to have the money in the right moment...because all this process is really expensive...

They have pushed globalization to the limit...and managed to get incredible prices...

María Ruido

So they were the first to outsource production...?

Gymtonic S. A. (Mataró)

Yes...yes...

María Ruido

...but they have also been producing stuff here in Mataró for a long time...

Gymtonic S. A. (Mataró)

...yes, now I don't think they do that much...but yes, a long time ago...It has been tough for Mataró, because only 5 years ago, the 20% of the stuff produced here went to Zara...

Patricia Soley (former fashion model, Barcelona)

Fashion models become role models...this has happened because...well it's a long story...

It has to do with...it also has to do with industrial issues...in the sixties we see the whole fashion boom, the youth generation boom ...this lead to big scale fashion production, prêt-à-porter...and then, there were pictures reproduced in newspapers, magazines become cheaper etc...This is something that keeps growing and that...it's something that starts in the sixties, women start using...fashion models become youth idols...

Josep Palacios (Town Councillor in Mataró)

It's depressing to be twelve hours a day in front of a machine, it's depressing to be responsible for all the housework, to stand your husband, to hurry and pick up the kids from school...and...not having a private life...not having a social life...

## The origin of double respiration

**I can not find a better image than an amphibian to help me define how workers adapt to the changes in the production system. Nothing looks more like a woman going through her long working day shifting from paid to invisible work than the amphibian's double respiration or their cold blood.**

Off Voice

“The 35 hour work schedule is a social system in which the elder have to face more institutional controls and in which trade unions are installed permanently in your company; this provokes a decrease in production and competition”.

María Ruido

Talking about the company AEG where you used to work, when did the strikes start and finish and what consequences did it have for the workers?

Joseph Arán (ex – trade unionist, now Town Councillor for Terrassa)

Let me see...it was one more of a long string of strikes that happened in that extreme political moment. The strike lasted 40 days...but I can't remember much about it...

María Ruido

Was it in 1973?

Josep Arán

It was in 1970. The first strike was on 1969...This is how it started: we first discussed an agreement, the members of the trade union were laid off, in this case they belonged to FOC...there was a strike...the strongest force in the strike committee was the Socialist party PSUC...so the strike started...the first state of exception was on 1969 and then in 1970 we tried to negotiate an agreement again, our colleagues that belonged to the committee were laid off, they belonged to the PSUC...then all of us in the FOC got completely involved...and now there was no way forward but there was no going back...

Nuria Corbera (former textile worker, Terrassa)

There were loads of strikes...at the beginning these were not legal...later on they started being legalized...these strikes finished up with many factories...

Many people...people started wanting more and more things...And I agree, these were things we deserved...more rights for the people...but people then didn't fulfil all their obligations...

I remember my mother telling me that work was not easy, you had to do what you were told, you couldn't do what you wanted...you had to do as told by your supervisors or bosses...My mother, can tell you if you speak with her, she thinks people are losing the sense of responsibility...that started with the seventies, not in the sixties...in the sixties you had to accept what was given...

Minerva Rojas

...if not, you were laid off...

Nuria Corbera

...yes....

Josep Arán

We inherited cities that had been completely de-structured...not only from the town planning point of view, that was always the case...no social equipments...but socially de-structured. At the same time massive social movements were taking place...It was really

contradictory...some movements were beginning, with a great amount of energy and enthusiasm...

Off Voice TV

"The workers in this electronic components factory have received a letter in which they read that the only way to guarantee their jobs is by going to Romania and work for 110€ a month".

## The Tamed Factory

**Generated in the crossroads between the appliance of new technologies and the implementation of resource and workforce optimizing economies, industrial relocation is a phenomenon that does not just happen abroad but right here, now. Behind doors, labour conditions can be really different: amphibians move through new productive spaces.**

Josep Palacios

Irregular textile workshops have always existed...I use irregular but I could be perfectly using the term illegal workshops...anyway, they do not follow work related policies...And here another thing happened simultaneously during the eighties, when the industrial reconversion started. What can these companies do?

They start a suspension of payments, they declare themselves economically insolvent...this is because the huge crisis...because of the competition with Europe...specially with the textile sectors in Italy and France...it is then when factories close down or relocate production...and 15 days later, you saw them coming in their Mercedes bringing you the sacks of work home...

M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Mandri (Textil Worker, Mataró)

...By then my parents didn't want me to go and work in a factory, they didn't like that kind of environment, so they bought me the machines and I stayed working at home...and I'm still doing it...

María Ruido

Since you were 12 years old?

M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Mandri

When I started I must have been 14 or 15 years old...

María Ruido

I thought that the main crisis was during the eighties, but they say this is not true...that the real crisis is taking place now...

Gymtonic S. A. (Mataró)

Now...yes...and no, there was a crisis in the eighties...from 1978 or 1979 until 1984...those 4 or 5 years were terrible... now...with all this going on...

This is a different kind of crisis...this is a crisis in competitiveness, industrial relocation is going on ...now everything is bigger...I mean, the world is smaller, and distribution and selling...it's all bigger...

M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Mandri

I don't know...it's something you start thinking; if we have struggled so much to get free Saturdays, back then, when my parents used to work, everybody worked on Saturday morning...we have struggled so much to work less hours, to have the things we used to lack...¿do we have to lose it all just because these people come from abroad and destroy everything? ...I can't understand it...

Economist 1

"They are using this kind of alibi, with which they are trying to finish with the welfare state, with the social state, and they are trying to finish with all those achievements gained by the workers, don't you think so?...Using this excuse, if we don't finish with these achievements we are deemed less competitive...and this is affecting both rich and poor countries, because in this race towards competition, we all seem to lose them...and the only winners are capital and the corporations...don't you think so?"

Economist 2

"We could also argue that the European welfare state has been made possible because of China's misery, hasn't it?"

So it's not only that industrial relocation or globalization are killing the welfare state, but that world justice is being achieved, this helps Chinese people to be able to eat regularly, instead of only helping us Europeans to have six weeks of holidays a year".

Mouscha and her friend (former textile workers, now working in the service sector, Mataró)

- It depends on the factory...there are some factories that had a Spanish boss, these worked better...When the boss was from Morocco it was different...With the Spanish boss people are better...The Moroccan boss keeps part of...

María Ruido

So they kept part of the Money...

Mouscha y su amiga

-Oh, yes...

María Ruido

...also there girls start working really young, before the legal limit...

Mouscha y su amiga

- Because their parents don't earn that much...

- I went to the factory to learn things...I never went to the factories to work...I used to have a small workshop at my family's place, with sewing machines...I used to sew things...well, in my particular case I use to embroider...Because a girl working in a factory earns little money...

María Ruido

Don't they pay well?

Mouscha y su amiga

-Yes, they don't pay well, and in Morocco we don't even have food...We had precious things I have never ever seen over here, such as gold, fabrics or shoes...But couldn't afford them...

All these things are done over there to later be imported here...it has a "label" with "El Corte Ingles" written on it...but it was made in Morocco...

Josep Palacios

What happened in 2003? The institutions start carrying out a really tough control: town halls, local and national police forces, work department, etc. All these actions are triggered by the numerous reports received concerning illegal textile workshops run by Chinese people.

Why? Because suddenly we see a big number of Chinese workshops appear...popping up like mushrooms...all over the place...and this simultaneously to the emergence of clandestine workshops that provided shops like Zara...

It was a big blow for the local factory owners, these started to report things like informal economies but they were especially upset with the unfair competition...

What nobody ever mentioned was that these owners had done the exact same thing here some time ago, and they had the nerve to state: when workers here are willing to work the long hours...with the same conditions and wages that the Chinese workers do, we will have no problems. Only then we can provide the work.

María Ruido

Under what labour conditions do workers work here? Are they self-employed? Are they

being contracted by the company?

A Kun (Assemblage Factory Owner, Mataró)

Well, some are self-employed...

María Ruido

..Freelance...?

A Kun

...my workers have papers...all have working papers...if they don't have work permit they can't work with me...my work agency tells me so, and Spanish law works this way...if no papers, no work..

María Ruido

Yes, this is because of the problems in 2003, isn't it?...some of the people in the workshops were not doing it legally...

A Kun

...yes, yes...many...a lot of Chinese workshops...but not mine...

María Ruido

Haven't any Catalans ever worked here?

A Kun

Yes...before...two Spanish people worked here...but I say...you are here to work...and they talked too much...

María Ruido

...they talked too much!...you people from China have very tough work rhythms...you work a lot...long hours...don't you?

A Kun

...Mine not...here we come mornings...at eight o'clock and we finish at night at 9 in the evening...

María Ruido

...do you only work those hours, do you ever work by night? Don't you work by night when you have big amount of work?

A Kun

No...never...

Tertuliano

"I just wanted to remark that 40 years ago, I used to collect money for the Domund (Christian NGO)...for those poor little yellow guys in China..."

## **The Produced City**

Josep Valldeperas (INTEXTER, Terrassa)

What is valuable now is knowledge...

Minerva Rojas

Economic value?

Josep Valldeperas

Yes, absolute value...it creates richness...

Nowadays, I would say that in this post-industrial civilization there no longer are workers...nobody produces...workers only control the production tools...and when you control, you have time to think, how could I make this easier, faster?

Patricia Soley

It's true, there's a constant control. And as you mentioned, this is also due to the fact of being women. I remember being young and feeling things that I have later read about...that sensation you have of your body being something dirty, something that must be constantly controlled so it has the right appearance and is accepted in society.

Xavier Martín (Knowledge Society Council, Terrassa)

We imagine very ambitiously that Terrassa can become something like Hollywood, but not only for the movies, but as a place for media and audiovisual activities, this place can become a reference point in Europe where people come and develop their projects, their productions, research media related topics...

