



Artistic intervention in front of GEOX store, Via Ruggiero Settimo, Palermo, 9.7.2018. Photo credits: Cinzia Delnevo

Deaf Shoes

Artistic intervention with speech, banners and props (2018)

Politics of Dissonance, a collateral event of Manifesta 12 curated by Mike Watson
7-9 July 2018, Palermo, Italy

The piece is dealing with the production chain of the garment industry established between Italy and Serbia. One of the Italian companies producing in Serbia is the shoe producer GEOX. The investment by GEOX was helped by Serbian government with high subventions and tax releases. GEOX is just one amongst many companies operating within the Outward Processing Trade system, the EU's way of customs free outsourcing labour-intensive manufacturing to the european periphery while saving its own textile industries. Labor conditions at GEOX are far below legal standards in the country. Workers that openly talked in the media about infringement of labor rights, mistreatment and humiliating attitudes of the management or looked for legal help were dismissed immediately as unionization of workers is not permitted. The performance brings the story of the workers from the EU-periphery to the streets of Palermo.



Artistic intervention, Via Ruggiero Settimo, Palermo, 9.7.2018. Photo credits: Cinzia Delnevo



Photo credits: Marita Muukkonen



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Deaf Shoes / Words

Worker 1: The room was terribly hot and the worst it was next to the machine. I asked the supervisor if we could open the window. She intentionally pointed hot air from the exhaust pipe of the machine towards us and said that we could leave immediately if we were not satisfied. There were many who are waiting to replace us in this job.

Worker 2: Did you know that this factory has air condition? They don't want to turn it on because electricity is too expensive. Three people fainted yesterday and the ambulance came. It's no wonder, because since the taps have been blocked people are simply dehydrating.

Worker 4: You still don't get it, you are here to work and not to ask questions. If air conditioners were to be switched on, they would deduct that cost of electricity from our salary.

Worker 2: They don't let us use the rest room. The supervisor told me to wear nappies if I could not bear it. Is she normal?

Worker 4: Psst! She declared that all of us will end up at the graveyard if the company would leave Serbia. And the company will leave if workers do not meet the quota that is required of them.

Worker 3: If they find out that somebody is not at the assembly line, we will be punished by a reduction in salary and one working hour will be subtracted. I can't stand any longer the constant threats that we will be fired.

Worker 1: You should take tranquilizers. I drink pills for blood pressure because it jumped to 190/100 since I'm working here. Concerning the electricity bill, this month again I did not have enough money to pay it, let alone interest and debt. I'm working 12 hours a day, I work on Saturdays, and yet I don't have enough to live on.

Worker 3: You need to find cheap accommodation somewhere in the countryside. Don't pay the bus, better go to the factory on foot. That's how I do and how I can manage to save a few cents for my son.

Worker 4: Have you heard that the president advertises us as cheap labor? The Serbian government subsidizes investors for every job they open and promises them that trade unions won't complain about violations of workers' rights.

Worker 2: Look at my hand! I've hurt myself at the press. What am I going to do now? I still haven't got my new labor contract, and my old one expired two months ago. The company didn't pay my health insurance and now I can't go to the doctor. I will not be able to work anymore.

Worker 4: Let's get in contact with the union. This morning they told us that we will not be able to go on holiday, because the order has to be completed.

Worker 2: If I turn to the union, they will not give me a new contract, that's for sure.

Worker 3: They canceled our vacation and ordered overtime until we're done. Everybody is revolted!

Worker 4: When the second shift comes, we will stop working!

All: Agreed!

This dialogue was written by Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić for the artistic intervention "Deaf Shoes". It refers to the happenings in September 2016, when workers of the GEOX factory in Vranje, Serbia, went on a short-term strike due to harsh working conditions. The used information relies on statements of workers in the garment industries in Serbia that were published in local media and collected by researchers of the Clean Cloth Campaign Serbia.