

Dispatching Art: Building Peaceful Solidarity with Laid-Off South Korean Workers, 2012-2015

Jae Hwan Lim

University of California, San Diego (UCSD), USA

Abstract

In the process of the dismissed workers' struggle to return to the South Korean guitar manufacture company Cort and Cortek, a group of Korean artists from the art collective Dispatch Art stood alongside the workers and communal protestors. The Dispatch Art artists, who are successors of Minjung activists in the 1980s, shared their solidarity with contemporary social minorities, including dismissed workers and displaced residents. Dispatch Art's notion of and approach to socially engaged art differ from the art world's conventional engagement with political art, typified in the dominant model of Avant-Garde art and defined by principles of artistic autonomy. Dispatch Art's collective members and their collaborative projects can be found more at protest sites than inside art institutions. Exactly how artists can socially engage the public and become politically active leaders of underrepresented social issues may be questionable. This article extends this line of questioning. Here, I analyze Dispatch Art's factory occupation project that included emphasizing workers as artists, various visual protest tactics and object displays to extend worker presence, and deliberately peaceful demonstrations with broader worker struggle to strengthen ties among workers and cultural producers. Dispatch Art's collaborative, visual, and peaceful artmaking with the Cort-Cortek dismissed workers functioned as prefigurative elements for the workers' partial reinstatement. From the factory, where the workers protested, to the streets, where the workers shared solidarity with other marginalized communities, Dispatch Art constantly inspired the workers to protest non-violently through cultural praxis. This article underscores Dispatched Art's cultivation of genuine and ethical human relations with South Korean social minorities.

기타·악기 제조업체 콜트-콜텍에서 해고된 한국 노동자들의 복직 투쟁에 한국 예술가 콜렉티브 '파견미술'이 해고 노동자, 시위자들과 함께 했다. 소위 한국 1980년대 민중 운동가들의 후임자로도 보이는 파견미술 예술가들은 해고 노동자들과 쫓겨난 거주민들 같은 현대 사회적 약자들과 연대해 왔다. 하지만 파견미술의 사회참여예술 개념과 접근은 전통적 예술계가 예술적 자주권의 요소들을 기반으로 정의한 우세하고 정형적인 아방가르드 예술의 참여 및 정치적 예술과는 다르다. 파견미술 구성원들과 그들의 협동 프로젝트는 예술 기관보다 시위 현장에서 더 많이 발견된다.

누군가는 예술가들이 사회적으로 대중을 참여시키고 정치적으로 사회에 잘 조명되지 않는 이슈의 능동적인 리더가 되는 것이 가능한지 질문할 수 있다. 본 연구는 노동자들을 예술

가로 인지시킨 공장 점령, 노동자들의 존재를 확대시킨 다양한 시각적 시위 전략과 물건 배치 그리고 신중한 평화 시위를 통해 다른 노동자들의 투쟁에 참여하고 노동자들과 문화 창작자들 간의 관계를 강화시킨 파견미술의 역할을 알아본다. 파견미술이 콜트-콜텍 부당해고 노동자들과 펼친 협력과 시각적이고 평화로운 예술 만들기 활동들은 노동자들의 부분적 복지를 예시하는 중요한 요소로 작용했다. 노동자들이 시위했던 콜트 공장 내부부터 노동자들이 다른 사회적 약자들과 연대했던 야외 길거리까지, 파견미술 구성원들은 지속적으로 노동자들이 문화적 방법을 사용해 비폭력적으로 시위하도록 영감 주었다. 본 연구는 파견미술이 한국의 사회적 약자와 형성한 진실되고 도덕적인 인간관계를 강조한다.

Key words

Dispatch Art, Art-Activism, Socially Engaged Art, Deliberation, Social Issues, Peace, Ethics, Cooperation

Introduction: De-Fetishization of Social Engagement

South Korea has a peculiar conglomerate social structure, where private corporations monopolize into almost all industries and services, limiting citizen choice and autonomy. The unfortunate fate of the workers living under this structure exacerbates issues of human rights, continuously leading to people's struggles against bureaucratic corruption, gender inequities, and regional discrimination.¹ In such a climate of conflict in contemporary South Korean society, Korean artists and art collectives have participated in social movements and worked with evicted residents, dismissed workers, discriminated foreigners, and other victimized citizens to bring positive change and hopes for greater sociopolitical humanization in Korea. This essay centers Korean art collective Dispatch Art (*Pagyeon Misul*, 2008–Present) as an example of socially engaged artists who prioritize reciprocal communication despite the global tendency to fetishize community-based art and its ephemera in institutional settings. When compared to similar collectives, Dispatch Art artists have protested with social minorities on the streets, created art collaboratively, and collectively learned ways to disseminate peace with public protest. One aim of this article is to closely assess Dispatch Art's proactive communications with marginalized communities. It is to provide a case study for socially engaged artists, art collectives, and scholars that move away from the romanticization of relational aesthetics and the fetishization of genuine social engagements.

I adopt both institutional critique and socially engaged art methodology in looking at Dispatch Art. These methods underscore the artists' de-fetishization of collaborative processes with social minorities and their commitment to ethical communication that prevents abuse of human relations, an issue that can be seen in other socially engaged art projects to be explored later in this article. My working definition of institutional critique differs from what art critic Hal Foster defines as Neo-Avant-Garde art that is presented at art institutions, as my epistemology of institutional critique

relates to non-art institutions and systems outside galleries.² Here, I build from the socially engaged art methodology introduced by art historian Grant H. Kester, which focuses outside institutional spaces; the locus where Dispatch Art's projects engagement can be more directly sociopolitical. Throughout this paper, I argue for the crucial role that conducting cultural collaborations with social minorities outside bourgeois institutions plays in Dispatch Art's projects, as they critique the corporate capitalist and its inhumane treatment of workers. By documenting their humane relationships with underrepresented communities, Dispatch Art highlights the reciprocal communication they established with people struggling out in the streets. Through a consideration of how Dispatch Art emphasized workers' rights, built solidarity with community, and humanized engagement in social practice projects, this article analyzes the efficacy and positive effects of their embracement of socially marginalized people in South Korea.

Dispatch Art is in line with broader practices of 21st-century Korean socially engaged art collectives, alongside other groups, such as Listen to the City, Okin Collective, and Mixrice. In the case of the Korean art collective Listen to the City (2009-Present), its members have been ardently engaged with and made works of art through community events and publications on the issues of environmental and social irresponsibility that destroy cultural diversity.³ The collective has dealt with issues of disabled people, gender inequality, and disasters; their recent projects involve the urban renovation and eviction forced by the Seoul Metropolitan Government over Cheonggye Stream and Euljiro region's master artisans and artists, who have preserved the history and culture of industrialization in Seoul, Korea.⁴

Likewise, Okin Collective, which started in 2009, was one of South Korea's most prominent art collectives that cared for residents about to be evicted due to the demolishment of the Okin Apartment complex in Jongno District until indistinct issues arose within the collective in 2019; thus it is unclear whether the collective ended in 2019.⁵ Creating exhibitions, performances, installations, and communal activities with the apartment residents, Okin poised as a community organizer and expanded their solidarity with other social minorities, such as the wrongfully laid off workers of the Cort-Cortek factory, a group of people whom I explain in more depth throughout this essay.⁶ Another South Korean contemporary art collective known to support such minorities is Mixrice (2002-Present, currently more active as ikkibawikrrr). Its members fortified relations with Southeast Asian migrant workers in South Korea through concerts and videos to reflect the community's hardships.⁷

I bring together these three Korean socially engaged art collectives because they were untrammelled in presenting and selling their ephemera from social practice projects where the collective members felt genuine connections with their collaborating communities. The three collectives' participated in exhibitions and biennales, as well as the sales of their works of art involved with international art institutions such as the Seoul Museum

of Art, Korea; Nam June Paik Art Center, Korea; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts; Museu Coleção Berardo, Spain; and National Gallery of Indonesia.^{8 9 10} Among these institutional affiliations, Mixrice's *A Song Connected from 'A Stage'* (2009) is an important example. This work is now part of a collection at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea. The group showed an installation that reformulates the theatricality experimented during Southeast Asian migrant workers' play in Korea.¹¹ By disposing and exhibiting the ephemeral items from concurrent and recent struggles in which these art collectives participated, the museumization of such collectives' collaborated projects and objects become fetishized through what anthropologist William Pietz defines as the process of "reification" and "personalization."¹² Pietz defines this process as a fundamental theme of the "institutionalized or routinized codes of social value."¹³ Implying exchange values like a commodity, these art collectives' works of art subsumed in art institutions and reified inside gallery spaces cause audiences' personalization through unilateral visual and audio interactions. This phenomenon raises questions of whether it is appropriate to epitomize their ephemeral objects in art institutions and how effective it is to deliver the full significance of their communal moments to audiences through the displayed items.

Admittedly, Listen to the City, Okin Collective, and Mixrice all collaborated with minority communities before they presented their works in art institutions. However, it is crucial to highlight the distinction that Dispatch Art's practices continue primarily outside the institutionalized environment, preventing material object fetishization. To contrast Dispatch Art with the above art collectives, I apportion this article into three sections emphasizing Dispatch Art's determinate unison with dismissed Korean workers from the guitar companies Cort and Cortek between 2012 and 2015. First, I predicate Dispatch Art's work in the factory itself, and second, I ascertain their broader collaborative works after being evicted from the space. The last demonstrates the art collective's critical role in encouraging peaceful solidarities with workers and other minorities who struggle with similar underrepresentation. Throughout the following pages, I contend that the collective's collaborative, visual, and peaceful artmaking function as prefigurative elements for dismissed Cort-Cortek workers' partial reinstatement, which took over a decade to achieve. It was accomplished through Dispatch Art's factory occupation that included presenting workers as artists, various visual protest tactics and object displays that extended the workers' presence, and deliberately peaceful demonstrations that strengthened ties among workers and cultural producers.

Dispatch Art members changed project by project, so I interviewed the collective's continuing member, Jeon Jin-kyung, and former member, Chung Yoon-hee, in May 2023 and refer to the writings of its member, Shin Yoo-a, among others. Including these three Dispatch Art members' voices in this article was salient as they most actively shared solidarity

with the Cort-Cortek workers until three dismissed Cortek workers could return to work in 2019. I also interviewed Kim Kyung-bong, one of the three reinstated Cortek workers who collaborated with Dispatch Art for over a decade, to reflect on the workers' experiences with the art collective.

Dispatch Art in the Cort Factory

Dispatch Art's name comes from the Korean notion of dispatch laborers (*Pagyeon nodongja*). According to the South Korean Act on the Protection of Temporary Agency Workers, dispatch laborers are employees of subcontractors outsourced to other companies who can only be contracted for two years.¹⁴ The Act aims to promote the proper operation of the temporary work agency business and establish criteria for working conditions, but many companies violate the Act. Even if the Supreme Court held that the dispatched workers should be treated equally as full-time employees, myriad companies externalize their liability for the dispatched workers' injuries and welfare to their subcontractors and disregard them.¹⁵ Due to the frequent layoff of dispatched workers, a group of Korean artists founded Dispatch Art to stand against neoliberal violence alongside unfairly treated people. Since 2008, Dispatch Art's projects and solidarity have become the bridge for underprivileged workers and underrepresented citizens to be more outspoken and righteously ask for their human rights to work and live safely in South Korean society.

The dismissed workers of the company Cort-Cortek are the community that Dispatch Art cooperated with the most between 2012 and 2015. Until 2007, musical instrument companies Cort and Cortek sold thirty percent of the world's guitars.¹⁶ Their financial status was stable, however they suddenly closed the factory in Korea and laid off thousands of workers, claiming financial distress.¹⁷ After closing the Korean production lines, both Cort and Cortek moved to Indonesia and China, where they could increase their profits by hiring less expensive workers. The Korean Supreme Court took the side of the workers in 2012, ruling the invalidity of the layoff.¹⁸ However, the corporations ignored this decision, sending a second notification to the workers to reaffirm their discharge. Cort's reason for dismissing the workers again was that it sold its musical instrument retail business to Cortek and is now doing business in real estate leasing; Cort's main client for real estate leasing is Cortek.¹⁹ Meanwhile, most of Cortek was based outside Korea, so it insisted it could not reinstate the dismissed workers in South Korea.

The sincerity of Cort and Cortek's responses becomes skeptical when considering both companies' history. Cortek was founded in 1988 by the Cort CEO Park Young-ho after Park discovered that Cort workers had formed a union in his company.²⁰ Furthermore, Park's two brothers run Cortek's divided companies that were founded after Park laid off 250 Cortek employees in 2007. Park's son and wife also work in Cortek

as its internal director and auditor.²¹ These suspicious circumstances behind the close ties between Cort and Cortek management illegitimate their layoff of the workers. To resist and substantiate the companies' false treatment of the workers, the dismissed Cort-Cortek workers have protested since 2007. While they hoped to return to work, where they shared commonalities in craftsmanship as guitar makers, Korean artists and labor activists shared solidarity with the workers since the protests began. By 2007, Dispatch Art members individually participated in the Cort-Cortek movement.

It is important to note that while many sources frame that this project was conducted with Dispatch Art members' cooperative leadership, Dispatch Art members Jeon Jin-kyung and Chung Yoon-hee refuse to call the Cort-Cortek project Dispatch Art's sole collaboration with the workers.²² Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize Dispatch Art members' efforts for Cort-Cortek struggle as artists, activists, and the workers' companions. Dispatch Art's history of supporting socially marginalized communities and its mission to stand with Korean minorities was initiated through antecedents of dispatching a group of individual artists to share their solidarities with unjustly treated workers. Before Cort-Cortek projects and the collective's formation, the members of Dispatch Art shared individual solidarity in 2004-2006 with the residents of Daechu-ri, Pyeongtaek City, who opposed the new establishment of the United States Army Garrisons in their town due to the unwanted military presence.²³ For Dispatch Art member Jeon Jin-kyung, who majored in Korean traditional painting and was one of the members of the Minjung Art Movement in the late 1980s, art is not separated from life, and vice versa.²⁴ She made hanging paintings for protestors and started living with the Daechu-ri residents in Pyeongtaek City to support their resistance against the US military power.



Figure 1. Dispatch Art member Jeon Jin-kyung (second to the left) and Cort-Cortek workers at the Cort Factory Residency studio, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2012. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

Describing the complexity of building community through mainstream forms of art, Kester exemplifies the performance work by Francis Alÿs, *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002), as an instance of socially engaged art abusing project participants.²⁵ Alÿs hired 500 people from outside Lima, Peru, to make them “move” the 1,600-foot-tall dune in Lima to another location by shoveling under hot weather. The gathering of people to Lima was to convey the artist’s immanent message, “maximum effort, minimum result,” which was documented as a video and was sold to become a fetishized object of art institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York.²⁶ In contrast to Alÿs’s detracted awareness of an ethical approach to a community of people, I contend that Jeon’s art activism with the Daechu-ri residents, while living there and making paintings with the protesting residents, was more sincere and mutual. In 2008, Jeon continued her interpersonal art-activism with the protestors against the Yongsan redevelopment plan in Seoul. Jeon and around twenty individual artists who shared solidarity in Yongsan formed Dispatch Art. Another Dispatch Art member Shin Yoo-a and other artists who collaborated for Cort-Cortek highlight Dispatch Art’s significant role in conducting the Cort-Cortek projects in their memoir.²⁷ With my analysis of Dispatch Art artists’ leadership in Cort-Cortek’s socially engaged art projects conducted from 2012 through 2015, I underline the collective’s vital position in working with and artistically inspiring underrepresented citizens.

Dispatch Art’s occupying of the Cort factory, where the laid-off Cort-Cortek workers protested, and cultural collaboration with dismissed



Figure 2. Dispatch Art members Jeon Jin-kyung (left) and Chung Yoon-hee (right) at the Cort Factory Residency studio, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a’s Cultural Action article, 2012. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

workers inspired the workers to perceive their own artistic capabilities. In 2012, twenty artists and cultural producers occupied the Cort factory in Bupyeong-gu, Incheon City, to support the workers who protested perpetually for 2,000 days (about five and a half years) since their layoff in 2007. The Dispatch Art members Jeon, Chung, and Shin were among them. Jeon recalls her first move into the factory space when the workers forlornly protested at the site. It was hard for the artists to convince the workers about the artists' move-in as the workers were concerned that the artists may get injured while protesting and conducting collaborative projects at the factory.²⁸ However, after the artists persuaded the workers, the occupying artists renovated empty factory spaces into artist studios (Fig. 1). Jeon wanted the artists to become the workers' close neighbors.²⁹ The new building owner who supervised the empty factory wanted to remodel the space, which required the occupying protesters to leave the factory. To achieve this goal, the building owner hired paid gangsters to intimidate the artists and workers and entirely evict the protestors from the property.³⁰ Even as the gangsters threatened the protestors to get them to leave the space, Jeon insisted she came to the closed factory to build a symbiotic relationship with the workers, not to bother anyone. She contended that she would care for the factory space full of dust and mold and work as the "brake against capitalist greed."³¹ Dispatch Art and other artists created their artist residency program at the factory. Some occupying artists, including Jeon and Chung, were residents (Fig. 2).

The artists organized gatherings every Tuesday, such as *Korean Ginseng Chicken Soup Party*, *Talk Concert for Art and Labor's Solidarity*, and *Factory Rock Festival* at the site (Fig. 3).³² These events invited protesting workers and 100 organizations related to art and labor rights to the factory's front yard. The space where artists, workers, and supporters gathered became a public sphere for solidarity (Fig. 4). The respectable cooperation between artists and protestors to create a coexisting space is reminiscent of another example of Peruvian protestors in 2000. They stood throughout public sidewalks and squares for numerous days to express their political struggles outside institutional spaces in response to governmental corruption issues with President Alberto Fujimori.

Peruvian citizens washed the red and white national flag out in the streets, playing a crucial prefigurative role in ousting Fujimori.³³ The protestors collectively used the spaces in the public streets. They washed the flag every week since the election, calling for the President to step down and conveying the inherent insinuation of cleaning their nation through recurring bold public actions against the bureaucratic power. The Peruvian citizens' acts of washing the flag in 2000 starkly differ from the artificial recruitment of the performers in Francis Alÿs' *When Faith Moves Mountains* in Lima in 2002. While the act of flag washing was done through cooperative Peruvian citizens who had sincere collective wishes to oust their corrupt president, Alÿs's hired performers had to act

in a staged environment for the artist who had a specific purpose to express his aesthetic autonomy. Like the Peruvian protestors, who effectively disseminated their political message with citizens, acute gatherings, and actions, Dispatch Art's humanized and multifront social events at the factory yard allowed Cort-Cortek workers and their supporters to share their concerted messages through multilateral communications.

Furthermore, the artists' projects at the Cort-Cortek factory made the workers feel proud and excited, which encouraged them to stay strong together.³⁴ The public sphere the artists formed had no end date. However, the new building owner sued the artists for illegally occupying the spaces. Hence, the artists and workers faced much pressure from the plutocratic power.³⁵ Kim Kyung-bong, who protested with his laid-off peers and occupying artists at the factory, did not consider the artists as intruders or interferers in the workers' collective struggle.³⁶ He recalled when Dispatch Art members, including Shin, Jeon, Lee Yoon-yeop, and others, joined the workers protesting under a tarpaulin tent in the Cort factory.³⁷ The artists made guitar-shaped plywood and drew and wrote phrases empowering workers. Responding to my question on whether he ever felt that Dispatch Art members interrupted the protestors, Kim responded that he was rather excited that the artists supported the workers and was "amazed" by the potential and power of art that could express oppressed voices in creative ways.³⁸

Kim's positive response to the artists' cooperation with the workers challenges philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's 1969 contentious yet lesser-known statement: "Those who compulsively shout down their objective despair



Figure 3. Gathering event at the Cort factory front yard, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2012. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

with the noisy optimism of immediate action in order to lighten their psychological burden are much more deluded.”³⁹ The “noisy” cultural activism praxis that the occupying artists embraced adjacent to the political demonstration and cultural gathering did not “delude” or blemish the workers’ struggle but conjured up the worker community’s energy to fight against Cort-Cortek’s uncommunicative bureaucracy. In the same year Adorno made the belittling statement in 1969, the Socialist German Students’ Union at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research protested the Vietnam War, occupying classrooms to strike.⁴⁰ Adorno, who taught at the institute, called the police to remove the students from the classrooms, so the students denounced him through a guerilla performance during his last public lecture before he died of a heart attack four months later.⁴¹ Four to five female students dressed in leather jackets rushed to the podium where Adorno was lecturing, showered him with flowers, exposed their breasts, and tried to kiss him, as Adorno stormed out of the lecture hall.⁴² We cannot know whether Adorno would have regretted his undermining argument on actionist’s despair if he had lived longer and encountered Dispatch Art and Cort-Cortek workers’ reciprocal communication through art-activism. However, the worker Kim Kyung-bong’s optimistic response to the art collective’s engagement, and the tangible outcome of worker reinstatement that the project helped usher in, proves wrong Adorno’s judgment that protestors’ bold and noisy resistance is “predestined to fail.”⁴³

To further understand what excited Kim, it is paramount to build out Dispatch Art and other artists’ praxis of social engagement. In her memoir of the artist’s solidarity with workers, Shin writes that the protestors



Figure 4. Gathering event at the Cort factory front yard, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a’s Cultural Action article, 2012. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

did not categorize and create boundaries “between the workers and artists” during the Cort factory occupy protests.⁴⁴ Respective protestors evolved their praxis through art and activism. The workers learned cultural actions from the artists, and the artists reflected workers' lives in their projects while occupying the factory with workers. Chung also shares that the artists could learn how to cooperate with other artists through discussing art's value in and relationship to Korean society.⁴⁵ Chung observes that workers perceived Dispatch Art artists' collaborative projects as “interesting events” that helped visualize the workers' struggle through art, which further supported the protestors to come together.⁴⁶ There was legitimacy for the artists to protect their factory studio and art products. It was an intersectional point where the workers' struggles became the artists', and the artists' fights became the workers.'

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) pushes against traditional pedagogy, which Freire defines as banking-style education, in which students function as empty vessels for educators to deposit their knowledge.⁴⁷ These traditional pedagogical approaches, as critiqued by Freire, are not only opposed to the communal and educational relations Dispatch Art members and the workers created but also suggests that the oppressed have no power to resist and that an educator has the omniscient power to initiate their intellect onto others. The cultural communication approach of Dispatch Art was thus the opposite of banking-style education. The occupying artists were not the only art makers in the protesting site. The laid-off workers from Cort-Cortek were artists and cultural producers, too. They made and assembled guitars in the factory for a few decades until their dismissal. They created musical instruments through artistic craftsmanship, and their crafted products allowed musicians to make music. Artists could practice music, and audiences could enjoy culture with the workers' effort and mastery in producing musical instruments. Thus, the Dispatch Art members' and other artists' interaction with workers at the factory was not a unilateral banking-style communication but a multilateral socialization that inspired the workers to realize their right to return to work for creativity and artistry.

Jeon's argument with the new building owner's deputy undergirds the point about the workers being artists. When the deputy raided the artists' studios and intimidated the artists to leave the space, Jeon contended that the occupiers were artists.⁴⁸ Whether the occupying protestors were artists or laid-off workers did not matter to the deputy because his purpose was to remove people from the factory.⁴⁹ However, Jeon mentioned the artistic concept of squatting in France, where artists occupied abandoned buildings to create their studios.⁵⁰ The bewildered deputy warned Jeon of the possibility of homeless people making a mess at the factory.⁵¹ However, Jeon further claimed that the occupiers would manage the building as they were familiar with the space and surroundings.⁵² Jeon's debate with the deputy hints at Dispatch Art's strong will not to leave the workers, their fellow creatives, behind. The artist collective aimed to function with

the workers as an interdisciplinary and multi-identity cultural group while serving as resident artists, event organizers, brakes against capitalism, building managers, and interactive creative humans. Jeon's comparison of the artists' factory occupation to the French squatting could be expanded to the street battle of a cultural collective Park Fiction (1994-2013).

Park Fiction was renamed to Gezi Park Hamburg in June 2013 to show solidarity with the protests and the occupation of Gezi-Park in Istanbul.⁵³ Prior to its name change, Park Fiction has a history of squatters in Hamburg, Germany, which occupied a public park to stop the city's violent development of the space.⁵⁴ Like the Dispatch Art squatters in Korea, a group of squatters in Germany protested the Hamburg government's development plan since 1981 through a community network.⁵⁵ The squatters' long resistance to the city's development plan led to title their gatherings Park Fiction. Park Fiction members created platforms of exchange between people from different cultural fields, such as musicians, priests, a cook, café owners, children, and artists whom they call Interventionist Residents.⁵⁶ While these squatters' gatherings led to their negotiation with the city government and construction of a park, not buildings, in the city, Kester observes, the squatters in Hamburg created visibility and centrality of the protesting citizens' vulnerability.⁵⁷

Similarly, Dispatch Art's squatting in the factory publicly exposed the artists' effort to save their art from the new building owner and his deputy. For the dismissed workers who lacked the praxis to publicize



Figure 5. *Labor: Human Rights: Cort-Cortek* archival exhibition curated by Chung Yoon-hee at the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Chung Yoon-hee's Pressian article, August 16, 2012. Image Courtesy of Chung Yoon-hee

their unjust layoff, Dispatch Art members and other cultural producers motivated them to visualize their struggle through collaborations with artists. Dispatch Art's presence at the Cort factory influenced the workers to realize the power of art and their right to stand against capitalist power. Cort-Cortek worker Kim Kyung-bong first encountered the notion of squatting through the occupying artists and realized how such artistic gestures could be socio-politically impactful.⁵⁸ Kim expressed his awe about art's feature to socially engage marginalized communities through squatting, but Chung shared her concern about making art at the site while the workers struggled for their rights.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ She thought creating discussions about workers' rights and bringing hope through art seemed naïve.⁶¹ Chung shared her deep respect for the protesting workers' consistent demonstration. Their struggle reminded Chung of Che Guevara and his revolutionary quote, "We cannot be sure of having something to live for unless we are willing to die for it."⁶² Chung was interested in how art could support the workers who would do almost anything to return to a fair workplace and further dismantle the entire system of industrial capitalism.

Chung's admiration for the workers' constant fasting and sit-in protests on the streets led to her creating an archive exhibition that consisted of donated archives, records, and visual ephemera collected during the occupation. Chung's *Labor: Human Rights: Cort-Cortek* exhibition occurred in the factory space (Fig. 5). During her solidarity at the factory, Chung questioned, "how can art intervene in social issues?"⁶³ Chung's point can be explored through comparison with a public sculptural installation by Richard Serra and public dialogic projects by Suzanne Lacy. Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981-1989) was a monumentally huge piece of metal erected in the Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan with the artist's aim to negate the openness of the plaza, immanently critiquing the oppressive state apparatus that surrounded the square.⁶⁴ The massive sheet of curved metal was successful in upsetting the civil servants because they could not access the fountain in the plaza due to Serra's work.⁶⁵ Due to its impenetrable form, it is questionable whether Serra's public art displayed outside the gallery space was effective in how it engaged with his audiences. In contrast, Lacy's numerous dialogic projects in public spaces in the 1980s through 2010s were impactful in raising social consciousness through their communicative components. Lacy's conversational gatherings focused on the issues of sexual assault, aging, youth, and gun violence.⁶⁶ For *The Oakland Project* (1991-2001), for example, there were 100 parked cars on a rooftop garage with over 1,000 Oakland residents listening to unscripted and unedited conversation on family, sexuality, drugs, and education among 220 public high school students.⁶⁷ Different from Serra's public sculpture that tried to awaken the habituated public, which was eventually removed from the plaza after seven years of public controversies, Lacy invited women, elders, sexual assault victims, and youths from diverse backgrounds to her gathering projects, which allowed open discussion about sociopolitical matters based

on the participants' experiences.⁶⁸ In contrast to public projects that unilaterally force participants to follow what the artist suggests, like Serra's *Tilted Arc*, Chung's exhibition cooperatively engaged the workers as artistic collaborators, similar to Lacy's dialogic projects. While cross-checking the facts of the archive contents they presented, Chung stringently enacted the embodiment and reflection of the workers' experiences in creating the exhibition, not disdaining their voices nor positioning herself with the central organizer title.

When Chung heard that one of the leading workers, Bang Jong-un, collected documents to prove the illegitimacy of dismissal for the past five years, she suggested he work with her to make the chronological history into a map for the exhibition. Bang generously brought the documents and photographs to Chung. She learned how to engage with the workers ethically by fact-checking the chronological order of their struggles rather than assuming or manipulating them. Chung and Bang discussed the worker's life and struggles by asking about his memory.⁶⁹ This actively engaged the workers in creating the history map to display in the exhibition. By the time she announced curating the show, Chung had already built a genuine relationship with the workers since her occupation at the factory. She understood the workers' strong volition to raise their voices against oppression using creative production made through reciprocal relations with the occupying artists in the factory.⁷⁰ When the exhibition reflected the worker's will to share his story and Chung's support for the workers, the worker and artist could unite to share their presence and resistant voice to the public creatively. It was not only the map of the chronological history that Chung and Bang made but also the artist and the dismissed workers' re-presentation of collected items from the factory, allowing the viewer the opportunity to track the workers' daily patterns before the layoff. Weary worker uniforms, debris from the manufactured guitars, thin masks that helped prevent dust, commute cards containing workers' work hours, workers' awards, slogans that encouraged an increase in productivity, and dusty mirrors that workers used to check their faces were some Chung found in the factory (Fig. 6).⁷¹

Chung and the workers' collaborative exhibition outside an art institution object to Adorno's notion of "The Artist as Deputy." Adorno insists that artists' art practice is the only place in culture where the potential for social consciousness could emerge, "...through his [artist's] work, through passive activity, he becomes the representative of the total social subject."⁷² Chung and the workers' proactive interaction with their audiences through displayed found items at the site of the protestors' struggle differentiates them from Adorno's definition of "Deputy," who mostly challenges audiences at a cognitive level. In Adorno's writing *The Artist as Deputy*, music composer Arnold Schoenberg is Adorno's referenced "Deputy" artist.⁷³ For example, Schoenberg's experimental Twelve-Tone Matrix composes music by displaying each of the twelve pitches equally unlike conventional tonal music that diversify and harmonize

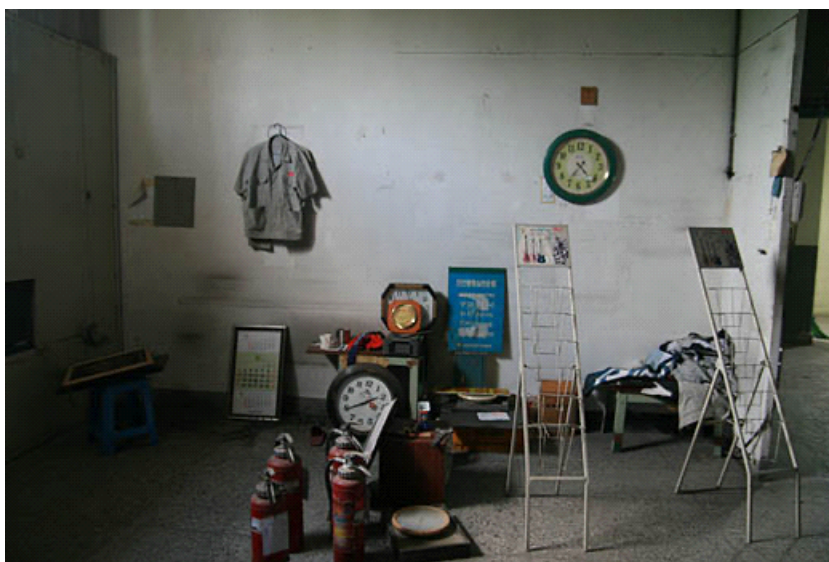


Figure 6. *Found objects for Labor: Human Rights: Cort-Cortek* at the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Chung Yoon-hee's Pressian article, August 16, 2012. Image Courtesy of Chung Yoon-hee.

pitches.⁷⁴ Schoenberg's artistic approach prevents the emphasis of any one note and avoids any sense of key or tonality through his idea to "replace those structural differentiations provided formerly by tonal harmonies."⁷⁵ Schoenberg's atonal music rejects the previous tradition of artistic production by preventing the audience's intellectual understanding of the piece and represents himself as the artist who is the chief delineator of reality.⁷⁶ Like Neo-Impressionists' criticism of Impressionism that did not resist the actual society but the convention of the art field, Schoenberg's dismantled composition inherently did not oppose sociopolitical matter but collapsed the "traditional hierarchy of understanding" against the canonical music field.⁷⁷ This was communicated with his audience to immanently awaken the revolutionary struggle through the work of art's aesthetic autonomy.⁷⁸ In contrast, Chung and the workers did not focus on their autonomy as deputies/artists but instead encouraged the audiences' understanding of the workers' struggle and invited the audiences to join the fight with the workers. The factory closed in August 2008.⁷⁹ Four years after the closure, Chung's exhibition revitalized the workers' presence in the factory space through items that implied the workers' history. Chung's selection and curation of the archives and items from the factory motivated the audience to reinterpret the objects as the factory's past and present, where the workers struggled to resume their creative activities as guitar makers. Compared to other artists who present exhibiting materials for their autonomy that prevent interactive communications and accessible understanding with audiences, like Schoenberg, Chung's collaborative

exhibition engaged outside audiences to speak to the workers and learn about their struggle in the factory where they used to work.

Kim Kyung-bong, who initially demonstrated at the factory without the artists' support, emphasized the exhibition's impact.⁸⁰ Along with Chung's curations, Dispatch Art and other artists organized multiple exhibitions that displayed their murals and sculptures throughout the abandoned factory buildings. This cultural representation of the factory invited outside visitors, including people from cultural and civic fields. These outsiders came to the factory to see the artists' shows and to interpersonally communicate with the workers and artists about the Cort-Cortek workers' struggle. Kim remembers the fascinating moments when he shared workers' struggles with people who did not know the situation before their visit.⁸¹ If Chung and the workers presented their collaborative exhibition in an art gallery or museum, the artists and workers' political messages would have been confined within the context of the art field. Such an attempt would have also prevented a wide range of media coverage and public recognition beyond the art world of the workers' struggles and pressure towards Cort-Cortek's industrial capitalism. Chung and other artists' creative cooperation in the factory by organizing the exhibitions amplified public's solidarity and raised awareness using archived items and cultural representations of the workers' struggles.

Evicted Yet Consolidated

Along with such collaborative praxis inside the factory property, Dispatch Art and workers extended their traces through various visual protest tactics and object displays outside the factory. Until late 2012, gathering events and exhibitions at the factory invited artists, ally protesters, and outside supporters to the factory space. However, in February 2013, right before the Korean Lunar New Year, police and paid gangsters raided protest sites in the factory, so the resident artists and workers were immediately evicted from the space.⁸² Chung's collaborative exhibition materials and residency artists' works were treated as trash by the police and the building owner's paid gangsters. Cort-Cortek also set up high gray metal sheet fences around the factory.⁸³

The workers' and artists' presence were denied, and ally protesters were prevented from entering the factory, but they explored different forms of visual experimentations and props outside the fences. For instance, they threw balloons filled with vine seeds toward and over the fence (Fig. 7). Through the action, Shin hoped the seed balloons would cover the factory space and the fence so the green vines that would grow from the seeds, cover the metal walls on both sides.⁸⁴ Through the vine seeds that could potentially sprout, the protesters expressed their anger while leaving their traces on both sides of the fences. The artists' use of vine seed balloons shares similarities with the history of



Figure 7. Artists and workers throwing vine seed balloons over the Cort factory fences, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

seed bombs created in Brooklyn by Green Guerillas.⁸⁵ The organization and seed bomb recipe were created in the 1970s by a local activist Elizabeth Christy, who continued the effort of another activist Hattie Carthan's work, to plant more trees in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. When African Americans were segregated to a then-decayed and vacant part of the city where trees were not planted, Carthan enrooted trees to nurture the marginalized and neglected citizens' lives with improved air quality and cooler temperatures.⁸⁶ The lack of governmental support for African American communities inspired Carthan's social activism through seeds, which shares a similar material tactic with Dispatch Art's vine seed protest against Cort-Cortek's neoliberalism. These Korean protestors outside the Cort factory continued extending their presence in public through the growth of the vines against the authorities that physically and psychologically redlined them.

After experimentations with seed balloons, Dispatch Art members, other evicted artists, and workers acted even more boldly to extend their traces around the Cort factory. They wore pink, blue, yellow, and purple vinyl raincoats and taped around the edges of their coats in preparation to paint on the fences. As some artists attached their bodies to the fence, other artists and workers threw color paints onto the gray surfaces around their silhouettes. The shape of their bodies on the fence remained gray and surrounding the figurative shapes were paints dripping



Figure 8. Artists splashing paints towards other artists and protestors attached to the Cort factory fences, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

in primary colors of yellow, blue, red, and green (Fig. 8). Painters also used black spray paint to trace people's bodies with both hands up like a stencil. The word "No Cort!" was spray painted on the wall as the painters' slogan against Cort-Cortek (Fig. 9).⁸⁷ The viewer could sense their



Figure 9. The action painting made by the artists and protestors on the Cort factory fences, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

strong presence fighting against injustice from the posture that mimics a roaring bear and black-sprayed slogan in capital letters with an exclamation mark. In terms of spreading a message of a marginalized community through visual elements on a surface, Dispatch Art and fellow protestors' wall painting resonates with the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC)'s *Wall of Respect* (1967-1971) in Chicago. Like Carthan's seed bombs that expressed African American's social and environmental needs, *Wall of Respect* represented mural drawings of more than fifty portraits of Black Americans in diverse occupational fields on a building wall, providing a positive image of the Black community in Southside Chicago.⁸⁸

While the *Wall of Respect* disseminated the richness, depth, and variety of Black history and culture, the evicted artists' use of Cort factory fences to implant vine seeds and display the marks of colors and figurative shapes of themselves allude to the protestors' expression of their struggle.⁸⁹ Misaligned with the artists and workers' wish for the public's attention to their visual protests on the fences, the news media mainly featured the protestors' physical tension with the police. It is not publicly revealed what conversations the artists had with those passing by about the vine seeds or fence paintings or if there was any interaction with the public. However, it is critical to emphasize that Dispatch Art members and other artists' extension of their presence through visual elements further empowered the legitimacy to strive against industrial capitalism. The artists' and protestors' visual extensions could also be read as prefigurative gestures to their continuous peaceful activisms, which I describe in more detail in the last section of this article. The next day of the action painting, the factory owner replaced the fences with new ones and covered the painted marks on the fence surface.⁹⁰ The workers' presence was effaced from the surfaces, but it stimulated the group to continue making art.



Figure 10. Artists and workers installed a blue tent and occupied a pedestrian way across the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

Instead, they took this chance to protest with diverse artistic praxis to leave a substantial presence surrounding the Cort's factory. They put up a blue tent across from the fences, started sit-in protesting, and slept there (Fig. 10).⁹¹ Every night, the protesters conducted a new series of “fuss” programs and cultural festivals at the site. These programs were extensions of what they did in the factory space, which invited outside supporters from the media, art, and political fields. Dispatch Art members and protesters made plant pots using reusable green plastic bags and planted colorful flowers in the bags (Fig. 11). The artists and workers placed the flowerpots above the street's brick flower beds. They also made signs on wooden boards by painting with colorful acrylics and threads. The group's messages against Cort-Cortek, “No Cort,” and their Twitter (now known as X) account, were written on the board, leaving their alternative presence through social media and inviting people to join their struggle virtually (Fig. 12). With the account organizer's posts and reposts of photos, writings, and news articles about the workers' everyday struggle, the account drew followers and internationally spread compassion for the workers.⁹² By displaying such visual elements hinting at their online presence, artists and protesters worked to gather more solidarity with the broader public. Extending their presence online was a creative praxis to attract more protesters for more supportive public sentiment in favor of the dismissed workers and protesters.



Figure 11. Cort-Cortek protesters making flower pods using recyclable plastic bags in their occupying pedestrian way across the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.



Figure 12. Cort–Cortek protestors displayed a wooden board that mentions their Twitter account and a guitar shape on the pedestrian way across the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a’s Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

From 2009 through 2011, a group of international musicians, artists, makers, and cultural activists created a website called “Cort Guitar Worker ACTION!,” which is “dedicated to supporting the struggle of Cort and Cortek guitar manufacturing workers in Korea against unjust mass firing.”⁹³ As an international action, the website records the dismissed workers’ visit to Anaheim, California to protest Cort CEO, who traveled abroad from Korea for the company’s promotional conference event in 2011. The website archives photographs, videos, and news articles about the support of the workers from artists and activists based in Japan, Germany, Korea, and the US. These visual sources on the website underscore that the action is tackling an international issue about dismissed workers’ livelihoods, which is not restricted to South Korea. For three years, the website organizers archived international supporters’ activities to inform and inspire the public about the dismissed workers’ underrepresented situation in South Korea. The 2009–2011 online archive created by artists and musicians presages the evicted artists’ use and promotion of their “No Cort” Twitter account in 2013. Writing their

Twitter account on the wooden structure shows that visually communicating with the public online and offline could invite more of the public to the movement against Cort-Cortek. Twitter being an international social media platform, the artists aimed to communicate with both Koreans and broader global communities who may not be aware of the Cort-Cortek workers' struggles. Rather than just protesting with the workers on the streets, the artists created physical and virtual elements to grow the workers' domestic and international allies. Flowerpots and gathering events on the demonstration site outside the factory and their Twitter account information on a wooden board all welcomed and engaged the public to the Cort-Cortek issue. Dispatch Art member Shin researched and wrote a series of Cultural Action online magazine articles about the artists' visual protest projects in and outside the Cort factory. In her interview, Shin underlines the importance of making struggles “fun” to engage the public.⁹⁴

An extension of the “fun” was protestors bringing wooden furniture, such as chairs and benches, to occupy the street (Fig. 13). The pedestrian way where the protestors installed the blue tent was filled with furniture like an interactive sculpture installation where people were invited to sit and converse. While the police rigidly blocked the factory entrance with buses to prevent outsiders from entering, the display of the collected furniture in the space of struggle provided engaging messages to the viewer. Even though people did not always sit on them, the furniture's visual, tangible, and physical presence at the protest site invited the public to the movement. The visual protest the artists and workers created across the Cort factory resonates with the physical structure, Shackville, erected in the center of the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa by its students who struggled with the institution's housing crisis in 2016.⁹⁵



Figure 13. Cort-Cortek protestors brought and displayed furniture in their occupying pedestrian way across the Cort factory, Bupyeong, South Korea, Photograph from Shin Yoo-a's Cultural Action article, 2013. Image Courtesy of Shin Yoo-a.

Shackville was constructed with metal sheets, wooden bars, and portable bathroom structures, which was installed on UCT Residence Road after the university students occupied it. The students protested the institute's residence admissions office for their limited number of on-campus housing.⁹⁶ Shackville stood for less than two days because the police and campus security destroyed it; however, the students raised their voices even more through visual activism as transformative practices.⁹⁷ They read statements on the plinth where a statue of mining magnate and imperialist Cecil John Rhodes used to be mounted, echoed their chants in the university's tunnel, and invited a pastor to give a speech at their protest site.⁹⁸

Like the UCT students' expression through arts that solidified their community and brought attention to the media, the evicted artists' set-up of items and props outside the Cort factory represented various protesting methods that allowed reciprocal relations with the public, who may not be familiar with the Cort-Cortek struggles. Documented details of the passerby's conversation with the protestors by the blue tent is unattributable. However, the protestors' gestures to create an open and conversational environment contrasted with the rows of police buses blocking the factory entrance. The protestors' visual elements across the factory created an environment where people could sense the presence of the protestors, with or without themselves on site. The seating display in public space invites the mundane street to the public while allowing people to loiter in the pedestrian way. By displaying objects in a pedestrian way outside the space where the workers struggle to return, the workers could show their aspiration for physical presence in the Cort-Cortek factory.

Col-ben: Peaceful Solidarity

The other strength of Dispatch Art in working with the Cort-Cortek laid-off workers was the artist collective's solidarity with broader South Korean social struggles through deliberately peaceful demonstrations. Park Eun-seon, the director of the art collective Listen to the City, defines Dispatch Art as "weird artists who show up in various parts of Korea where injustice happens, but not in art galleries."⁹⁹ Dispatch Art's multi-disciplinary expertise between art and activism allowed them to reach out to oppressed populations, yet they were not recognized in the mainstream Korean art scene. The collective's history of supporting marginalized communities further invited Cort-Cortek laid-off workers to peaceful solidarity with other underrepresented citizens outside art institutions. Jeon Jin-kyung, who has immense experience building peaceful relations with diverse minorities in South Korea, supported Cort-Cortek workers in becoming leaders in a prefigurative and impactful role for other marginalized members of the public.

One of the questions people often asked the Cort-Cortek laid-off workers was whether they knew how to play guitar.¹⁰⁰ As artisans with

creative skills in making wooden guitars, the workers aspired to show their musical skills to share their artistic characteristics. However, the workers generally feared possible physical attacks by paid gangsters while practicing and performing music, which made them feel unsafe. It was Jeon who confidently persuaded the workers that her past peaceful occupation experiences at various protest sites would help her prevent any violence toward them. With Jeon's reassurance, workers formed a music band in 2011, with Jeon as a member.¹⁰¹ With advice and support from activists and musicians, they named their band "Worker's Band, Making Cort-Cortek Guitars." In short, they called it "Col-ben," a phonetic sound of "Cort Band" in Korean abbreviation. Col-ben's presence among the protesting Cort-Cortek laid-off workers was energizing, as referred to in the Cort-Cortek workers' testimonies and artists' blog memoirs. Lim Jae-chun worked at Cort-Cortek for thirty years, but he learned more about art once artists like Dispatch Art and Col-ben exposed him to cultural activities. Col-ben's bassist, Kim Kyung-bong, felt lonely since the factory closure. However, Col-ben and their music filled that emptiness and humanized the protest sites the band visited while expanding their protest sites beyond the factory space.¹⁰²

Col-ben's effort to reach out to others who struggle under similar social oppressions while prioritizing peaceful action is elucidated by comparing different ways to deliver political messages, such as approaches seen in Graciela Carnevale's emancipatory event, *Encierro #26 (Confinement)* (1968), and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's dialogical interaction, *Touch Sanitation* (1978-80). For her piece presented in Rosario, Argentina, Carnevale closed the door and left the space when her "work-action" participants entered an empty gallery room with glass windows.¹⁰³ As time passed, the participants panicked, disassembled the window, dismantled the padlock, and someone from outside the space, not the artist, freed them by kicking the window, which was the end of the piece.¹⁰⁴ The moments of the participants' frustrations and fear were documented in black and white photographs to be exhibited in art institutions. Argentinian artist Carnevale claims she used the concept of violence as an aesthetic "metaphor for what was happening...under a very oppressive military regime" in her country.¹⁰⁵ Despite her artistic ambition, Carnevale forcibly prevented her dialogic relations with the participants and sought to impact their consciousness by "enlightening" them and her audience about concurrent violence in society.¹⁰⁶ While Carnevale's statements about her art practice contend that she, the artist, can "reveal the contradictions" of class society and move towards fixing the totality of social violence through such aggressive methods, Ukeles communicated with sanitation workers through reciprocal conversation.¹⁰⁷ For over eleven months, Ukeles thanked New York's 8,500 sanitation workers for keeping the city "alive" by personally meeting and hand-shaking each one of them.¹⁰⁸ Col-ben's approach to other social victims is far more reminiscent of Ukeles's dialogic art aimed to change social stigma on underrepresented communities than



Figure 14. Col-ben performing for Saengtak Rice Wine workers and taxi drivers on a high telescopic structure of a mobile crane, Busan, South Korea, Photograph by Chung Taek-yong, 2015. Image Courtesy of Chung Taek-yong.

Carnevale's coercive model of participatory art that precluded further discussions about ways to resolve social issues.

The 3,000th day (about eight years) of laid-off workers' struggles was when Col-ben members and workers left for a twelve-day-long trip.¹⁰⁹ Col-ben and supporting musicians visited sites of struggle throughout South Korea to share their solidarity and stories from the Cort-Cortek protests. Jindo Paengmok Port for Sewol Ferry victims, Jeju Kangjung US Naval Base for opposing protestors, and Busan for demonstrating Saengtak Rice Wine workers and taxi drivers on a high telescopic structure of a mobile crane are a few of the sites where Col-ben performed for twelve days (Fig. 14).¹¹⁰ On the side of the vehicle the protestors rode in, the slogan was written, "Cort guitars do not exist in Korea anymore!" sharing their dismissal from Cort-Cortek (Fig. 15). The slogan on top of bright and vivid colors looked like an eye-catching advertisement often seen on the sides of public buses. The colorful SUV filled with messages and slogans led Col-ben members and allies to places where contentious political issues were shadowed by authorities but discussed by the oppressed.

Like the bright colors on the black SUV, Col-ben illuminated the unforeseeable moments the victims and protestors had to walk through. The band's music cheered the protestors, functioned as background music for dancing, and became part of concerts. They performed on stages by the Jeju US naval base entrance, the ground of the high boom structure of a mobile crane where Busan protestors demonstrated, concert halls,



Figure 15. Cort-Cortek protestors' SUV car used for their 12-day-long trip throughout South Korea, South Korea, Photograph by Chung Taek-yong, 2015. Image Courtesy of Chung Taek-yong.

public parks, and play stages (Fig. 16, Fig. 17). Cort-Cortek's laid-off workers who followed the trip shared that Col-ben's role in the trip as musicians functioned as an energizer and even signified a symbolic threat to the former CEO of Cort-Cortek, who fired them.¹¹¹ The wooden guitar, which was the reason the workers struggled for 3,000 days, positively operated as a weapon for the workers to fight against the power they had been oppressed by. Guitars and other musical instruments also worked as mediators, creating stronger and closer ties between the two protesting communities. Kim Kyung-bong recalls that Col-ben participated in the tour to share the Cort-Cortek situation with others.¹¹² However, he was delighted that the tour allowed him to build solidarity with others struggling with additional socio-political issues. As Kim shares, Col-ben shared the collective values with other marginalized protestors by playing live music in protest sites. While playing for the demonstrators, Col-ben expressed values opposite to those that typify the dominant model of Avant-Garde art, which is often defined by principles of artistic autonomy. As political ethicist Mahatma Gandhi used the spinning wheel to protest Britain's unjust policies against Indian citizens and as Ukeles shook hands with sanitization workers in New York to find peaceful ways to overcome prejudices against and acknowledge the importance of these essential workers, Col-ben's peaceful music performance with protestors further influenced others beyond their immediate reach to fight with peaceful demonstration methods.



Figure 16. Col-ben performing on a stage, South Korea, Photograph by Chung Taek-yong, 2015. Image Courtesy of Chung Taek-yong.



Figure 17. Col-ben performing on an outdoor space, Miryang, South Korea, Photograph by Chung Taek-yong, 2015. Image Courtesy of Chung Taek-yong.

Despite Col-ben's creation of engaging and interactive reciprocal platforms through music, Col-ben and the workers had to continue fighting against politicians who degraded their struggles beyond Cort and Cortek. In 2015, conservative Saenuri Party Leader Kim Moo-sung made a false remark that Cort-Cortek had to close its factory because of the protesters' strong union resistance.¹¹³ Demanding an apology and to resolve

the unfair dismissal by Cort-Cortek, the laid-off workers fasted and protested by sitting outside the Saenuri Party building in Seoul. Artists, including Dispatch Art members, gathered at the new demonstration site. Col-ben shared their support for other struggling workers throughout Korea by touring music concerts; this time, other workers, artists, musicians, and actors visited the site to share solidarity with fasting protestors. Artists conducted drawing workshops every week, transmitted podcasts, and musicians came to do busking concerts in the streets for the workers.¹¹⁴ As time went on, Col-ben members became too exhausted to play for themselves and their allies on the site as their health deteriorated from the protesting. However, they received energy from other musicians who supported their struggle for more considerable justice.

Dispatch Art's collaborative decision to form Col-ben with struggling Cort-Cortek workers motivated them to become peaceful activists who use cultural protest praxis to share their voices. By touring protest sites in Korea, Col-ben's music functioned as a healing remedy for the protestors. When the Cort-Cortek workers fasted in the streets, other musicians and cultural producers came to share solidarity with them. Dispatch Art's mediation to begin the workers' journey as musicians played a prefigurative role in spreading peaceful demonstrations against the exploitation under the umbrella of neoliberalism and plutocracy they had to unjustly face. Rather than Dispatch Art representing the whole group of protestors, the art collective members supported the workers in forming their own groups, including the music band Col-ben, and becoming the influential leaders among laid-off workers and artists. The workers' peaceful fasting also reflected the non-violence that the band shared through music performances. The peaceful fasting expressed the workers' will to work again at Cort-Cortek but this time with financial and worker safety nets, which was entailed in their message to the broader public beyond workers and artists.

Conclusion

This article began with my proposition that Dispatch Art collaborated with workers dismissed by Cort-Cortek through reciprocal and sincere communication, distinct from socially engaged and relational aesthetics artists who fetishize their relationship with marginalized communities. To undergird this argument, I map Dispatch Art's occupation of Cort's factory, their visual protest tactics, and the deliberately peaceful resistance that laid the foundation for their coexistence with struggling protestors and influenced them to build an ongoing cooperative society. Dispatch Art's squatting at the factory space where the protestors rallied helped the workers realize the potential for artmaking beyond art institutions. Dispatch Art members' art creations through the factory residency program, cultural producers' public gathering events, and Chung's collaborative

archive exhibition with the workers exposed and expanded the workers' understanding of art and culture as a protest. It inspired the protesting workers to realize themselves as cultural producers and continue protesting in various artistic and creative forms.

Collaborating with Dispatch Art and other artists, Lim Jae-chun, one of the dismissed workers, and many Cort-Cortek workers expressed their voices as musicians, actors, and writers. Lim passed away in December 2022 after a fourteen-year-long fight to return to work. Dispatch Art and other cultural producers' visual resistance inspired the workers, including Lim, to keep creating art during the struggle. Dispatch Art's continued artmaking through seed balloons, action paintings, and displays of colorful objects in streets exposed the workers to various visual protest praxis and ways to extend one's presence in society. Along with the collective's visual approaches, Dispatch Art member Jeon Jin-kyung's cooperative engagements with the workers led to the formation of the band Col-ben. Jeon inspired Col-ben members to become the leaders of solidarity among Cort-Cortek workers. Also, through traveling and playing concerts nation-wide, Col-ben motivated other social minorities in South Korea who are disadvantaged by layoffs and lack social safety nets. While Col-ben toured South Korea to share their struggle through performances, the band members learned and built relations with other marginalized communities. After their tour, Col-ben members and Cort-Cortek workers received support from others when the workers fasted in Seoul against the conservative party leader Kim Moo-sung.

The band's musical and peaceful protest influenced more artists and workers to demonstrate peacefully through fasting and conducting cultural activities like workshops. The conservative party leader Kim, who denigrated Cort-Cortek workers' struggle, eventually apologized publicly after a year of the worker's protest.¹¹⁵ Many trade union members in South Korea have protested with physical violence against police and paid gangsters before, around, and after the period that the Cort-Cortek workers fasted peacefully. Mainstream Korean media has the tendency to overly highlight Korean protestors' use of violence rather than giving platforms to their demands on the Korean government and conglomerates, which is expanded upon in my endnotes.^{116 117} Jeon Jin-kyung mentions the frustration that peace generates.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, she also says non-violence allows legitimacy that justifies cooperative actions.¹¹⁹ The conservative party leader Kim's non-apologetic political leadership cannot be legitimized. But I also contend that the peaceful performances that Col-ben members shared with their protesting peers must be properly recognized for the party leader Kim's decision to apologize.

Dispatch Art and other artists' peaceful approaches continue to influence the workers to-date. In 2019, after twelve years of struggle since Cortek dismissed the workers, Cortek CEO Park Young-ho and the workers agreed to accept three employees, Kim Kyung-bong, Lee In-geun, and Lim Jae-chun, to return to work.¹²⁰ The reinstatement was symbolic as the

three workers returned to work on May 2, 2019, and retired on May 30, 2019. Despite the agreement to reinstate the workers, Cortek refused to include the terms “apology” and “compensation” in the Cortek labor and management agreement. Even if the workers temporarily returned to Cortek, the industrial power did not respect the workers till the end, as conveyed in Cortek’s exclusion of their unfavorable words. However, Cortek’s discourtesy did not discourage the workers. They struggled to fix Cort-Cortek and larger industrial capitalism’s unfair dismissal for thirteen years. Rather than abandoning other Korean social minorities, Kim Kyung-bong continues to share his peaceful craftsmanship with other struggling workers by building tents and houses where the protestors can rest and stay.¹²¹

Dispatch Art's artistic and cultural influence on workers created a positive and impactful precedent in South Korea's socially engaged art practice scene, which is deserving of in-depth scholarly analysis. Dispatch Art appreciated the genuine relationship the laid-off workers allowed the collective members to build through art rather than exploiting the aesthetic aspect of relations the artists formed with the workers. The collective's collaborative, artistic, and cultural projects outside institutional environments deepened its members' connection with the workers. My hope is that this article serves to focus on Dispatch Art artists' coexistence and ethical reciprocity with the workers without the tendency to fetishize their sincere relationships. Dispatch Art remains a valuable precedent for other socially engaged artists, collectives, and scholars to strengthen the voices of broader marginalized members of Korean society.

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