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**Master's Thesis of Fine Arts**

**A Study of Analogous Authority  
Generated while Imitating the Process  
of Acquiring Authority**

권위 획득의 과정을 따라하는 중  
생성되는 유사권위에 대한 연구

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# **Abstract**

## **A Study of Analogous Authority Generated while Imitating the Process of Acquiring Authority**

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This paper accompanies my thesis and some previous works from my undergraduate studies to examine how I came to the work I have done during my time at the graduate program.

First, the introduction defines the meaning of authority and discusses the process of acquiring it. It explains the reasons for choosing the specific institutions as the medium for exploring the process of acquiring authority and discusses the authorities within the institutions. It also defines the term “analogous authority.”

Second, the works section examines the different approaches in my works that recreate the process of acquiring authority. This section explains the chronological progress of my ideas about authority and how my interest in authority started. The first part of the works section describes how questioning the reasons for making art has led me to borrow the institutional

authority on art, which developed into questioning the authority of art institutions. The second part concerns the works that have developed into questioning the validity of authority in general. By exchanging the elements of a ritual or a religious object, I sought to define the sacredness and theatricality in religions, defining them as the components used to reinforce authority.

Throughout this thesis, the works made during my MFA are identified as <<*Title*>>, and the works done before my MFA are identified as <*Title*>.

**Keywords:** Authority, Sacredness, Theatricality of Authority, Formality, Analogous Authority, Institutional Authority

**Student Number:** 2013-23289

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social creatures. We live in a society where we are obliged to take part in various kinds of relationships. In the course of the formation and continuation of the relationship, authority is created. We believe that everyone is equal and free, but despite the fact, we do have authority to the degree that, at times, with a mere word can change one's actions. If such thing exists—the power to control another person at will—where does such power come from? What are the grounds for the one with authority to have such great power over another person?

To further discuss the characteristics of authority, we must first define the term. Authority is the power to control. However, *power* and *authority* are not synonymous. Power is the ability to control, whether it is legitimate or not. Authority, on the other hand, is the sanctioned practice of this power. These two terms overlap and can be confusing at times. However, it is important to distinguish them in this thesis. The focus of this paper is authority, which is the power to control, approved by the object over which this authority is practiced. Authority, therefore, requires legitimacy.

## 1.1 PREFACE

Preoccupancy plays a significant role in gaining authority. By claiming control for the first time in a particular field, the first-comer gains authority over his successor and followers. The progenitor creates the rules, which consequently gives him the power. In an attempt to analyze the elements comprising authority, I have examined institutions, especially those regarding art and religion, and have identified a few components which I found to enhance the authority held by institutions. I chose art as a medium for assessing authority because of my personal proximity to the subject matter. My experience of the art institution and its power structures have been very authoritarian.

*<Artist's Labor>* is a work that addresses the question of the artist's work. It was made by tearing a canvas fabric into long strips and weaving them together. I used canvas in order to incorporate the tradition it holds as an art material. A weaving technique was chosen to represent labor because weaving has an element of "labor" in it. Weaving was used as a method of textile production rather than an artistic technique starting as early as 27,000 years ago. Weaving also was one of the first techniques to be automatized and can therefore signify the beginning of the industrial revolution. Weaving was therefore used to symbolize labor: in this case, the artist's labor.

Making this work led me to question what defines a piece of art as art. There is nothing new about weaving strips of fabric. Weaving is a technique used by many people to make daily objects like rugs and blankets. How is this piece different from those objects? Where does the distinction between art and daily objects lie? The difference between my weaving piece hanging on the wall and the rugs made by a grandmother is that I made the piece, and I call it art. The piece was presented in a certain way so that the audience would perceive it as a work of art. If I have the power to claim that this object is a piece of art, what gives me this authority?

“I” am not the only factor that made the piece a work of art. It was more complex than that. It was the tradition, the authority that had been accumulated for thousands of years, which granted it the status of a work of art. As a self-proclaimed artist, I was in a position to be able to claim that the weaved canvas is art, but I merely borrowed this authority to assign the status of art to an object from tradition.

This idea of authority was illustrated for me by the layers of paint I discovered under the white paint on a wall when working on a performance piece called *<Justice>*. In this piece, I carved the Chinese character 正 (zheng) onto the gallery wall. It is a tally mark used in Northeast Asia, and it also means “just and fair” in Chinese. I carved 5,862 marks on the right side of the wall to represent 29,310 days, the average life span for a Korean woman, and I carved 238 marks on the left side of the wall to represent 1,189

days, the average sentence for sex offenders. The numbers show how long the victims suffer in contrast to how long the offenders are sentenced.

While I was engraving the wall, I noticed layers of paint in different colors beneath the white paint. Removing the top white layer revealed a layer of mint green paint underneath it, and whenever I accidentally went deeper, I could see the mint, beige and white layers underneath. Observing the layers of different color paints below the crispy white paint, I was able to get a glimpse of the past. The fact that the walls eventually returned to white indicated, to me, the authority of white paint over other paints, granted by the history and tradition of the white cube. This felt like a violent gesture of authority against the other possibilities. The relationship between the white layer and the varying colors underneath it resembled the relationship between attempts at rebellion and the authority granted its power by tradition and time.



Figure 1. <Artist's Labor> Canvas Strips 2011

Figure 2. <Justice> Performance video still, 2013

Religion is another medium I used to experiment with the elements of authority. Socially and politically, religion has held a lot of meaning throughout history. Even people who no longer believe in a traditional notion of religion replace it with some kind of belief. Any set of beliefs can become a religion under the right circumstances. Sports, for example, can play the role of religion for their enthusiastic fans; many aspects of sporting events overlap with those of traditional religions. Furthermore, within religion, one can observe varying theatrical elements implemented by the authorities.

Ritual and formality are synonymous. The only difference is that formality is procedure in the secular world, and ritual is procedure within religion. By analyzing the rituals in religions, I aim to grasp the role of formality in establishing authority.

Since I was raised in a Christian family, I was greatly influenced by Christianity and church. My family spent most weekends participating in and hosting various church activities, and I was no exception. As a child, I attended every church retreat. At one retreat, I experienced an incident that is still imprinted in my mind to this day. On the last day of the retreat, we were split up into small groups and were instructed to go through the corridor, visiting each room. The lights were off. We had only flashlights to guide ourselves along the passage. The teachers set up small plays in each room, showing different aspects of hell. They lit candles, dressed in black and whispered. Little children started to cry. At the end of the passage, the

teachers played a video clip about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The first thing that came to my mind after the whole event was, “Why are they forcing their beliefs on me?” Then it occurred to me that they were trying to manipulate me.

From then on, I listened closely to what the teachers, pastors and other authorities said in church. It was amusing to find that all the people spoke and prayed in the same parlance, using peculiar tones. There were shared rhythms to their speech. The authorities spoke in ways that made them sound more grand, solemn, and sacred.

Sacredness is a device used to establish the authenticity of religious authority. It provokes emotions to achieve the goals of those in authority. These authorities use various means to reinforce their authenticity. I define those various means as “theatricality” due to their use of stage, light, and sound resembling theater. Theatricality refers to devices used to strengthen authority.

## **1.2 DEFINITION OF ANALOGOUS AUTHORITY**

Authority only exists when the subjects accept its power. The subjects are people, and the authority—often an institution—utilizes theatrical elements to reinforce its power. I recreated this process to attain authority. The process of recreating these theatrical elements to reproduce authority generates analogous authority instead of authentic authority, which is

inevitable since the process I used to create authority is only an imitation of the real process.

Analogous authority is a byproduct of the authority process I recreated in order to generate authority. It shares some characteristics with true authority, but it is not authentic. I fabricated a process that resembles the actions employed by institutions to establish their authority. For example, I changed the content of the prayers and chants in my process, but they are still perceived as sacred, which lends them analogous authority.

## II. WORKS

### 2.1 FAKING IT

The reason for making art is something I contemplated for a long time. This question troubled me throughout my undergraduate years, and it still does to this day. What is the use of all the effort put into making art if it has no significance to anyone? People say art is about doing whatever the artist wants to do. In my fantasy world, all artists would be able to make a living by making art. Unfortunately, we don't live in that utopian world, and consequently, many artists are forced to work multiple part-time jobs. I call my peers and myself, the yet-to-be-established artists, the plankton of the economic food chain. We are the ultimate consumers, creating objects that are, in most cases, not considered of particular value to society or the art world.

Years of education enabled me to mimic art, to create objects that copy the forms of art but lack the power of the real thing. However, I insist on calling my productions art. Pretending to be art becomes a mechanism, a formality that generates analogous authority. Restrictions and rules influence the actions of the audience and create analogous authority.

My failure to logically explain the reasons for making art paralyzed me, with the result that my work only imitated the process of making art. This is

especially visible in my earlier works in that they focus more than my later works on following the formalities of art. I borrowed established authority to decorate my objects. This caused my earlier works to be more sporadic in my choices of medium and themes.

*<<Annoying you>>* is a participatory installation piece in which people are invited—or rather tricked—into stepping on the pieces of clear tape positioned on the floor. The sticky side is up, so when audience members step on them, the pieces of tape stick to their shoes, annoying them.

This work started with a simple wish to provoke certain emotions in the audience—specifically, irritation. To be able to alter people's emotions was indeed empowering, and this led me to question why participants come to an exhibition and engage in the act of art. The audience takes part in the artwork because the moment they walk into the exhibition space, whether a critique or an exhibition, a social contract is formed between the artist and the audience. The object presented by the artist gains the status of “art,” and the audience is expected to play the role of participant or spectator of the object presented to them as art.



Figure 3. <<Annoying you>> Installation, Tape on the floor, 2014

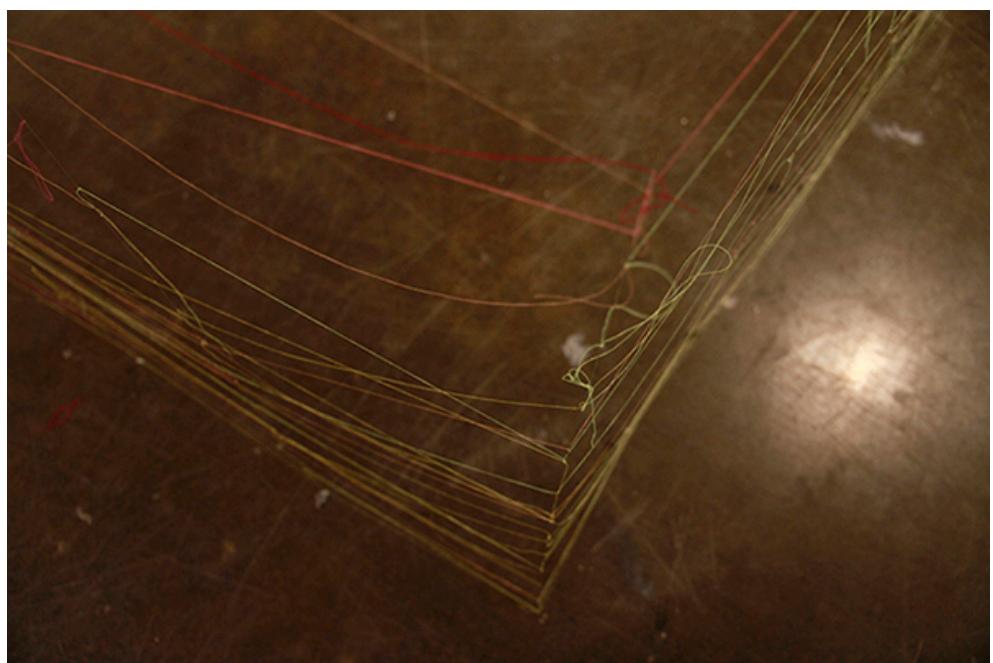
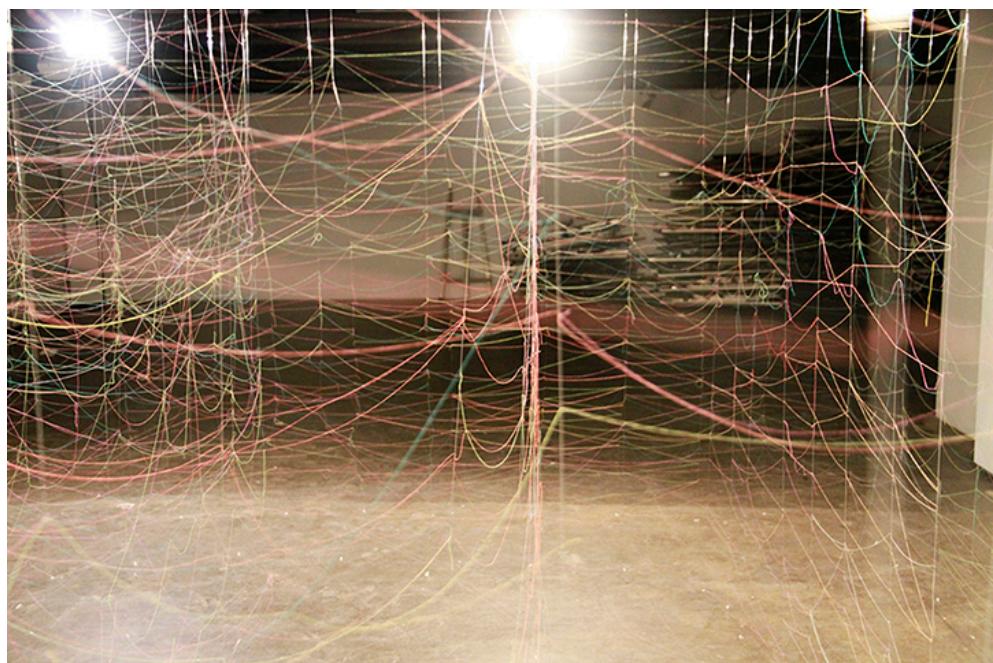


Figure 4. <<Crisscross>> Installation, Thread, 2015

<<*Crisscross*>> is another piece that let me observe the impact a work of art can have on the audience's behavior. My initial goal was to simply create a space and wall with thread. I wanted to see the intersection of the threads I chose. It was a representation of my choices.

As the piece developed it created a kind of space, a passageway. With threads, I made an entrance and a path. I wanted to build walls that were visible yet transparent so the audience could see through the walls. So I built the path from entangled threads, sparsely knotted to create transparent walls. The audience was able to identify the threads as walls because they created planes.

It was very obvious from the outside that there was nothing at the end of the path. To my surprise, people went in and followed the path even though there was nothing at the end of it. This was another work that showed me the possibility of playing with the dynamics of the relationship between the art and the audience. Where and when a piece of art is shown changes the audience's reaction. It might very well be the specificity of critique setting that made the audience actively interact with the piece, and perhaps I would not get the same result with another group of people. However, the social contract kicks in no matter the audience; only the degree of engagement differs.

Continuing my search for the presence of authority in the exhibition space, <<*Pedestal*>> is a literal pedestal painted with different layers of

color. The audience can only glimpse the colors underneath the white paint in a small corner where the paint was slightly sanded. The viewer has to look closely at the pedestal to really see the piece. I chose to only sand one small corner because I wanted the viewers to look closely, to search for the work, to question and at times to possibly mistake the piece for a regular pedestal.

I made it hard to spot what makes this pedestal a piece of art in an attempt to engage in a power play with the audience through this piece. A white pedestal is charged with historical meaning in an exhibition setting. The viewer is likely to assume that the pedestal is the display stand for some other artwork, instead of being the art itself. I believe this preconception gives the pedestal a kind of authority over its viewers. This authority is bestowed by the history and context surrounding the piece. <<*Pedestal*>> therefore portrays the authority generated by the relationships between the artist and the viewer, tradition and residue.



Figure 5. <<Pedestal>> Pedestal and paints, 2016

<<Wall>> is a work which seeks to create nostalgia for what once took place at that very location. I sprinkled remnants of paint peels in the shape of the wall. The paint peels exposed the layers of different paint colors under the layer of white paint. The shape of the wall, without the real wall, implies the existence of what was once there. The viewer only sees the dead skin of the wall.



Figure 6. <<Wall>> Installation, 2016

I made this work hoping to make the viewer wonder what happened to the wall that was once there. Instead of the wall, the viewer is left with the wall's residue. However, the paint peelings create an invisible wall, the boundary line interrupts one's passage.

*<<Annoying you>>*, *<<Crisscross>>*, *<<Pedestal>>*, and *<<Wall>>* all affect the audience's actions and the way they engage with the work. They attempt to instill authority in art as an institution. However, they are mere recreations of the original process, so they can only create analogous authority.

## 2.2 VALIDITY OF AUTHORITY

Borrowing another authority's power to support and justify my works prompted my next question about authority itself. What allows anyone to have such authority? Where is it from, and who bestows it? My search for a rational explanation for authority led to a series of works concerning the validity of authority. By switching the contents of an object, I create conditions where the audience is invited into the process of developing authority. Focusing on the change of tone and the power it holds to confirm authority, I decided to experiment with removing and exchanging the contents of religious actions to see the ramifications of such endeavors.

*<<Gregorian Chant in Pig Latin>>* is a work that grew out of my questions about the validity of sacredness. I changed the lyrics of a famous Gregorian chant, which is a type of Catholic church music developed between the 9th and 10th centuries. When people listen to Gregorian chant, they immediately recognize the religion integrated in the song, even if they do not understand the lyrics. It is composed and sung in particular ways and tones

and projects the idea of holiness. To question its validity, I changed the words of the song but retained the music. I changed the Latin lyrics to pig Latin, which is not actually a language but a child's game. Listeners who knew pig Latin could understand the lyrics. Listeners might have also assumed the text was real Latin. The melody was unchanged, but the audience would assume it was real Latin because of the recognizable style and melody.

To further examine the impact of changing religious content on cognition, I made two videos using Buddhist and Christian prayers. <<*Heart Sutra*>> is the first piece in the prayer series. It is a video of a pastor praying as he would normally pray in front of a congregation, but instead of a Christian prayer, he says the Buddhist Heart Sutra. The second video, <<*The Lord's Prayer*>>, is of a Buddhist monk chanting as he would at a Buddhist service, but saying the Lord's Prayer. I chose to exchange the content of Buddhist and Christian prayers because they are the two most prevalent religions in Korea.



Figure 7. <<Prayer Series-Heart Sutra>> Video 2 min 46 sec 2016

Figure 8. <<Prayer Series-Lord's Prayer>> Video 2 min 23 sec 2016

Religious objects acquire their status through the sanctification of a religious authority. That means that before sanctification, they are merely factory-made objects just like any other secular object. Only after sanctification does the object obtain the authority of a holy object.



Figure 9. <<You may have it>> Participatory installation, 2015

<<*You May Have It*>> is a participatory installation that allows the audience to interact with the piece. Communion, also known as the Eucharist, is a Christian ceremony that involves consecrating and consuming bread and wine to commemorate the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples before death. The Catholic Church believes that the bread and wine are literally the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. I changed the presenter from the

church authorities to myself, replacing the primary operating authority of the ceremony. Communion wafers (bread) were placed in a golden plate and presented on a pedestal on which were written the words, “You may have it.” The audience was invited to take a piece or not. People who believe in the wafer’s sacredness would hesitate or even consider eating the communion wafers out of its context a sin. People who do not believe the sacredness of the wafers in the context I provided will eat the wafers without much thinking. I intend to start a conversation where the audience can question the meaning of the ritual and authority.

Another piece was inspired by something I saw. I was walking down the street in Hongdae, and between contemporary cafes and restaurants, I saw a house. It was not particularly different from the other houses except that there were pieces of colorful fabric hanging all around it. The colors immediately changed what would have been a regular house into something eccentric. I was fascinated by how a simple color scheme can change how we perceive things. By simply adding the brightly colored fabrics around the house, the homeowner, whom I presumed to be a shaman, gave his house a mystical, otherworldly look and let people know that the house was a shrine. I was interested in how effortlessly the addition of color could change the whole house into a shrine.

I decided to incorporate this idea in a piece using a pulpit. A pulpit is where the pastor in a Christian church stands in front to preach. Inevitably, it

is decorated to accentuate the speaker's authority. In Korean churches, the pulpit is located on a platform, with three chairs at the back and two vases right next to the pulpit. This is standard in every church. The platform and pulpit symbolize the pastor's authority. They are theatrical mediums that reinforce and empower the speaker, and they are embellished with religious symbols.



Figure 10. <<Pulpit>> Pulpit, Paint, 2016

I changed the color of the pulpit to something resembling a traditional Korean talisman. Traditional Korean talismans contain red writing on yellow paper. I decided to paint the pulpit in yellow with red embellishments to examine how simply altering the colors can change how an object is

perceived.

These rituals and religious objects are publicly agreed to be sacred objects. By interfering with and distorting the original form, which was agreed on by the participants in the institution, I can introduce the audience to the newly fabricated authority.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **3.1 REFLECTIONS**

In this study, I focus on social pressures created by institutions; a formality-inflicted strain. I research the elements that comprise authority through the medium of art and religion. Traditions in art and religious rituals play pivotal roles in the acquisition of authority.

Institutional authorities utilize theatrical elements to reinforce power. Theatrical elements induce people's approval and reinforce dominance. The process of recreating theatrical elements to reproduce authority generates a force similar to authority instead of authentic authority.

I call this recreated authority "analogous authority." I have fabricated a process that resembles institutions' artificial attempts to acquire authority. I alter the content of rituals and traditions. "You may have it" is a participatory installation piece in which the audience is given a choice to eat the communion wafer. The Catholic Church believes that bread and wine are flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. I replace the authority figure that bestows the power upon an object with me. The forms of the objects I create are perceived as sacred despite the changes.

My works lead people to enter the cycle of the authority, utilizing the theatrical elements to reinforce its power. However, the process is not genuine

but a replica. I create conditions for the authority. The authority generated by the conditions I make resembles real authority. I hope my works will help people reflect on and question the formality surrounding them.

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<< Gregorian Chant in Pig Latin>> available at

<https://vimeo.com/182207914>

# 국문 초록

## 권위 획득의 과정을 따라하는 중 생성되는 유사권위에 대한 연구

강지수

미술대학 조소과

서울대학교 대학원

본 논문은 대학원 재학 중 진행한 한 작업과 그 작업으로  
진행된 과정을 설명하기 위해 첨부한 그 전의 작업들이 포함되어  
있다. 첫째로, INTRO에서 권위의 뜻을 정의하고, 힘을 얻게 되는  
과정에 대해 언급한다. 특정 기관을 골라 재료로 삼으면서 권위를  
획득하는 과정을 연구하는 이유에 대해 설명하고, 기관 안에서의  
권위에 대해 논의 한다.

두 번째로, WORKS에서는 본 작업에서 보여지는 권위 획  
득 방법의 재현에 대해 알아본다. 이 문단에서는 본인이 권위에  
대한 관심사를 시간에 따라 어떻게 발전시켰는지 설명하고자 한다.  
WORK의 첫 번째 섹션은 예술 작업을 만드는 행위 자체에 대한  
의문이 그로부터 어떻게 권위의 형식을 빌려오는 형식으로 이어졌  
고, 또한 점차 미술의 형식 안에서 존재하는 권위에 대한 질문으  
로 발전하였는지 이야기한다. WORK의 두 번째 섹션에서는 첫 번  
째 섹션에서 발전된 미술 안의 권위에 대한 질문을 보편적 권위의  
정당성에 대한 질문으로 연결되는 작업을 보여준다. 의식이나 종

교적 물건의 일부분을 교체함으로써 종교에서 보이는 성스러움과 연극성을 찾아 권위의 강화를 위해 사용되는 요소로 정의한다.

이 논문에서 대학원 기간 동안 작업한 작품은 <<제목>>으로, 대학원 전에 작업한 작품은 <제목>으로 표기하였다.

**키워드:** 권위, 성스러움, 권위의 연극성, 형식, 유사권력, 기관 권력

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