

ASSEMBLAGE OF WOOD PIECES AS AN EXPERIENCE OF POWER DIALOGUE IN INSTALLATION

Awuni Samuel^{1*}, Opoku-Bonsu Kwame², Donkor Eyrarn Emmanuel³,
Owusu Panin Kwame Baah⁴

Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology,
Ghana

Email: samawuni@gmail.com*

Abstract

The powerful presence and physicality of wood has changed over time with contemporary art practices. Woodworking techniques have evolved, which has led to the expansion of its expected limits. This change and rethinking, process, forms and materiality creates a very interesting conversation. The aim of the study employed assembling of wood off cuts by using connectivity as a technique in place of carving and other methods, generating a flexible sculptural form being able to take different display experiences. Studio-based research under qualitative research design was adopted for the study. The research instruments used were observation and photographs. This expository experience in the study was used to question the dialogue of society's experiences of power. The study displays an examination of structure, convention and circumstances of power in the dialogue form depicted in the assemblage of wood pieces as an experience.

Keywords: Assemblage, Contemporary Sculptor, Experience, Power Dialogue, Wood Pieces

INTRODUCTION

Assemblage serves as an opportunity to construct provocative combinations of artist-made objects or found objects. These provocative combinations create a mixed reaction, which the artist does on purpose. A work of art can be very surprising and difficult to understand or imagine. This can be seen in situations where the unexpected is presented in a way where the viewer has to choose whether to take the value of individual objects in the composition or evaluate the composition as a whole through the concept expressed by the artist.

The idea of taking ordinary objects and transforming them through thought suggests the power given to them to exist as art. At the beginning of the 20th century, the tradition and classification of art materials were disregarded (Oldmeadow, 2004). Stiny and Gips (1971) opine that painting and sculpture were respectfully separated from what were not art, as well as their materials. Baigell (2008) supports the view that oil on canvas was consecrated to painting, clay or plaster, bronze and marble to sculpture, and other materials were not considered as art materials. No matter how much skill or ingenuity it required, it carried as much cultural weight as authority. It provided a visual representation of a person's task. This challenge to craftsmanship and beauty has sparked many conversations from them and has reached the 21st century (Cottingham, 2005).

In light of this, wood is one of the dominant materials that has evolved for its use as a support for sculpture. It is worth noting that the appearance of different representations of wood sculptures from traditional carving, drilling or their combination with other media (Brostow et al., 2010). Now each material presents its own themes, which the artist then adapts to the expressed thoughts. According to Wegner et al., (2010), the aesthetic landscape

of wood in the 21st century is increasingly multidisciplinary. This resulted in clarifying the limits of how wood can be used as a means of artistic expression, how it looks, how it lives in space, how it is made and how it relates to previously published works and changes. Are there new ways wood appearing in physical space, shape and form, or joins media history? Thus, it is worth exploring what it might mean for an artist working with wood to break or cross the assumed boundaries, whether they are social, material, aesthetic or narrative. Therefore, the study seeks to use the power that this wood pieces presents as metaphor to question systems created in our society and how we are manipulated or subordinated to this power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of power examines the dynamics and structures that influence the distribution and use of power in society. It examines how power is acquired, maintained and contested and its impact on individuals and social systems. Different theories, such as Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism, offer different perspectives on power relations and their intersection with other social factors such as gender, race, and class. Understanding power dynamics can help us analyze and address issues of inequality, oppression and social change. There are several theories of power that offer different perspectives on how power works in society. The study adopts Foucauldian theory which was developed by Foucault (2009). This theory focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge. It argues that power is not solely held by individuals or groups but is diffused throughout society expressing as an experience. Power operates through various institutions, discourses, and practices, shaping and controlling individuals' behavior and identities.

Concept of Power

Power is marked by deep disagreement over how it is manifested, making its definition very difficult. One such disagreement put those who define power as getting someone else to do what you want them to do that is an exercise of power-over, against those who define it as an ability or capability to act, that is the power to do something (Guzzini, 2005). Dahl (2008) offers what he calls an intuitive idea of power according to which 'A' has power over 'B' to the extent that he can get 'B' to do something that 'B' would not otherwise do. Dahl's (1957) definition sparked a vigorous debate that continued until the mid-1970s, but even Dahl's best-known critics seemed to agree with his basic definition of power as an exercise of power-over. One of such critics Luke's notes, Dahl's (1957), one-dimensional view of power, and other's two-dimensional view, and his own three-dimensional view are all variations of the same underlying conception of power, according to which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests Luke's (1974).

Weber (1978) also defines power as being the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them. From this Weber identified power as being either authoritative or coercive. Authoritative

power is exercising power which is seen as legitimate. By being legitimate it is effective because those who are subject to the power do so with consent. In contrast coercion is where someone exercises power through.

Michel Foucault is also one of the early writers on power. He defines the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions Foucault (1983). In this definition, power is analysed as the way actions from one party influence the actions of another. It can be an action of giving a command from one party in a relationship with another party. Power is exercised when the party receiving the command obeys the actions of the party who gave the command. Thus, power is exercised when the action of one-party influences or leads to other actions of another party. There are always two or more parties involved.

Foucault in a critical inquiry sought to investigate power from philosophical understandings to its practicality in society. Michel Foucault's analysis presupposes that power is a kind of power-over; and he puts it, if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain person's exercise power over others Foucault (1983). Notice that there are two salient features of this definition of power: power is understood in terms of power-over relations, and it is defined in terms of its actual exercise. Allen (2014) opines that power must therefore be strategized to prevent any form of excessive power with known opportunities and limitations. If these are not well set, they lead to struggles and opposition which throughout history has been common. Struggles exist since power is based on relationships between two or more.

Power is expressed in many forms and may originate from different sources. According to Foucault (1982), power of western states originates from Christian institutions. This is true of most states, especially Ghana where the origins of power institutions even of the state have backgrounds in the major religious bodies. Foucault calls this power technique pastoral power. Foucault writes, it has Christianity brought into being a code of ethics fundamentally different from that of the ancient world. Less emphasis is usually placed on the fact that it proposed and spread new power relations throughout the ancient world Foucault (1983).

Foucault (1983) further states Christianity is the only religion which has organized itself as a church. And as such, it postulates in principle that certain individuals can, by their religious quality, serve others not as princes, magistrates, prophets, fortune-tellers, benefactors, educationalists, and so on but as pastors.

Assemblage in Art (Wood)

Assemblage is a voice and language in art. Over the years of making useful and useless things out of wood, the physical sawing, carving, turning and polishing has become an afterthought. The real struggle is figuring out what to do next (Sergey, 2018).

This diversity can be seen as the strength and vitality of wood as a tool for dialogue and its transformation in new contexts. El Anatsui's, Akua's Surviving Children (Figure 1) shares innovative approaches to materials and production processes. The inventive

adaptation of materials, ideas and the way these artists interact with the subjects is remarkable. El Anatsui prioritized the direct experience of the material as well as new techniques and design methods.



Figure 1: El Anatsui 'Akua's Surviving Children', 1996 Wood and metal; Installation dimensions variable.

Source: Collection of the artist and October Gallery, London

Ingrid Jensen a designer from the Netherlands who employ wood off cuts to make delightful wooden stools with knitted seats, along with many other wonderful objects. She repurposes all her wood offcuts and uses a selection of discarded pieces of various lengths to fashion these gorgeous Christmas trees (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Ingrid Jensen, 'untitled' woods off cuts knitted doll.

Source: Brooklyn Museum (2012)

Christo and Jeanne Claude assembling of the wall 1300 oil barrel shows their concern but oil and human dependency on oil. The dependency of most of the oil and its by-product leads to a rapid depletion of this natural resource, but oil has become a measure of power between nations. He investigated the power relations generated by this material and how those who have it exercised their power through its commodification. This shows how a material can become a symbolization of one the power manifestations (Figure3).



Figure 3: Christo and Jeanne-Claude the Wall - 13,000 Oil Barrels, Gasometer
Source: Oberhausen, Germany, 1998-99 Photo: Wolfgang Volz © 1999 Christo

METHOD

The qualitative research approach opined by Leedy and Omrod (2005) for a descriptive procedural of the various processes in a study was employed in the research. Under qualitative research, studio-based research was employed for the conduct of the study. The researchers employed wood pieces from off cuts for the assemblage process. The researchers identified a large chunk of wood pieces disposed of by shop operatives and sawmills at Sokoban in the Ashanti region of Ghana. It was observed that, on a regular basis, shop operatives and saw millers dispose of wood pieces such as Wawa, Odum, Sapele, Mahogany and Danta. These shops working on various woods were sampled and cut into square shapes to be assemblage into an art form. The data collection instruments used for the research were observations at various shops and sawmills where these wood off cuts were generated and disposed. In all, 54 shops with disposable wood pieces around them were counted in the Kumasi metropolitan area out of which 18 shops, representing 30% of the shops counted, were conveniently sampled and visited for the collection of various wood pieces for assemblage. Convenient sampling of 30% (18 shops) of the total population (84 shops) for the study was in tandem with Cohen and Manion's (1985) prescription. Considering the nature of the study, the identities of the sampled shops and sawmills were ethically shielded

to protect their anonymity. The study was done between July 2013 and January 2015. The research made use of thematic analysis of organizing data by Creswell (2014). The data analysis shows the organization, transcription, generation of themes, coding and short quotations. Table 1.0 presents the distribution of the accessible and sampled population for the study.

Table 1. Distribution of the Accessible and Sampled Population of the Study

Population of the study	Accessible population	Sample size30%
Sawmills with Wawa	12	4
Shops with Odum	9	3
Shops with Sapele	15	5
Sawmills with Mahogany	9	3
Sawmills with Danta	9	3
Total	84	28

(Source: Fieldwork, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exploration of Wood Pieces

To explore the concept of power metaphorically presented many thoughts in the choice of materials to articulate the arguments to be presented in the form. Working in the Indigenous Rural Art studios in the Art Faculty was an opportunity for researchers to visit so many sawn wood mills and saw the way wood off cuts were being handled. They were either sold to consumers to be used for firewood or burnt into charcoal. When the buyers are not readily available, they become a nuisance to them.

Pre-Production Stage

Experiment was done before the main project commenced by the researchers. Various wood pieces were sorted at the various shops and sawmills in Sokoban. The experiment was conducted before the researchers started the main project. Different pieces of wood are sorted in various shops and sawmills in Sokoban. The wooden pieces were cut into 10.2 cm x 5.2 cm rectangles (Figure 4) and connected with screw eyes. The screw eyes were to act as a connection to all four sides of the wood piece. Each piece of wood has two short vertical sides and two long horizontal sides. There is one screw eye on each vertical side and two screw eyes on the horizontal side. This makes the execution even, creating a uniform shape. Screws eyes help create flexibility. The flexibility of this experiment gave rise to the idea of power through associations and networks, where the system created is flexible enough to accept other members into a group or team. It also gives room for improvement. Connecting the wood pieces creates individual elements that can be controlled. This practice represents how the social systems are experienced. The Church is one of those systems where people

are taken into it by submitting to its dictates and living in it. It shows the experience of control and submission.



Figure 4: Exploring the idea of traditional breaks by the use of wood pieces.
(Source: Studio work, 2020).

Production Stage

The experiment in Figure 4 gained some flexibility but was still a little bit stiff because the shapes not being regular, 10.2 cm x 5.2 cm. this means that one side of the piece is longer than the other side and in terms of the arrangement it is not evenly arranged. All these previously researched methods gave birth to different ideas to create the main project. It was realized that the wood off cuts had to be cut into a regular shape to great flexibility which makes it possible to be manipulated and controlled. Each piece of wood was cut into 3.8 x 3.8 squares.

The wood pieces were cut into regular square shapes 3.8cm x 3.8cm square thickness by 1.4cm thickness. The square shapes make arrangement uniform. It also represents the idea of power through connectivity which an individual piece represents a unit of a mass while they are being joined together also represent another mass of a form. To explore the idea of power through mass, the individual piece is shaped into a uniform piece so that when they are joined together will give a uniform pattern and even spaces which enhance its flexibility. Which implies that the masses can demonstrate against authority whiles authority can also make polices for the masses without flexibility systems become authority become dictatorial and rigid.

Exploring the concept of power through connectivity, where woodcuts were connected using superglue and screw eyes. A single piece of wood represents a unit of mass, and those connected also represent another mass of the piece. The pieces were joined using this method because the screw eyes have the ability to be screwed, their eyes can be opened to accept another eye, and also because the screw eyes have enough room to fit each other. Superglue was used on the hole greeted to help screw eyes stick to the wood, giving strength to the work so that the screw eyes would not come off the wood easily.

Large boards were cut into strips with a cutting machine. After that, the strips were cut into smaller squares. The square shapes were sandblasted to remove coarse fibers and sanded in (Figure 5). The parts of the shapes were marked with a pencil or pen and the pillar drill was used to drill the marked parts with a drill bite to ensure easy penetration of screw eyes.



Figure 5: Sanding of wood pieces
(Source: Studio work, 2020).



Figure 6: Wood pieces with drilled holes.
(Source: Studio work, 2020).

Super glue was used to aid the bonding of the screw eyes in the wooden holes (Figure 6). The screw eyes were then screwed into the drill holes. This process was applied to all the parts of the wood pieces. To be able to join one screw eyes to another, one of the screw eye was opened with pliers then the other one that is already closed is joined into the open one and is closed again with the same pliers and is to lock the two screw eyes together (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Many wood pieces joined together.
(Source: Studio work, 2020).

Post- Production Stage Emphasis on Power

Power is a concept because it manifests itself in different ways on screen and in form. The different theories of the concept of power observed in the research work became the central starting point of thinking. The choice of a piece of wood as the material for this study is essential to the concept of strength being studied. Pieces of wood as a material have an inherent life and characteristics, but the artist has adopted and uses the method of connectivity to combine them into one large form and. They refer to the idea of uniting individual elements into mass having a singular purpose. Connecting a unit of wood pieces does not mean that individual's wood piece does not have power but, a greater power is generated when they connected as into one form (Figure 8). It refers to a greater power possessed by the masses. The wooden pieces are connected to each other using screw loops; screw loops are used because of its ability to open other screw eyes. This bond refers to how the beliefs of people from different backgrounds are united by a common ground in which many ideas are shared. The idea of connections is related to Foucault's idea of knowledge and power, where the systematic knowledge of individuals is created through interconnected practices of observation, recognition and documentation.



Figure 8: wood piece joined together signifying power.
(Source: Studio work, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Exploring the idea of power metaphorically using wood pieces in this project has brought about different disciplines that the concept of power can also be considered. Studies have been made into a lot of literature to bring about its execution and its relationship to existence. Power is born from the idea of gathering a crowd to control and influence a system. Power can also be seen through discipline and education, where bodies and objects are reconstructed to create new gestures, actions, habits and skills. In its background, individual wood cannot be bent or used in terms of flexibility but combining them creates a mass that can be bent. Surveillance is another source of power, creating new structures to organize and increase their visibility to control testing practices such as school tests, as well as medical or psychiatric examinations, job interviews, prison managers and military inspections. Again, power is seen as confession, in which crimes, sins, thoughts and desires, illnesses and diseases are confessed or forced into confession, which are then documented and used for further investigations and sanctions. The concept is manifested in nature, especially in our human institutions, cultural, social, political and economic relations.

REFERENCES

- Allen, (2014) Amy, "Feminist Perspectives on Power", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2014 Edition).
- Baigell, M. (2018). A Concise History Of American Painting And Sculpture: Revised Edition. Routledge.
- Brostow, W., Datashvili, T., & Miller, H. (2010). Wood and wood derived materials. Journal of Materials Education, 32(3), 125. Chicago

- Cohen, L., Manion L. (1985), *Research methods in education*. Elsevier Publishers.
- Cottingham, D. (2005). *Modern art: A very short introduction*. OUP Oxford.
- Cresswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*- Sage Publications
- Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral science*, 2(3), 201-215.
- Dahl, R. A. (2008). *Democracy and its Critics*. Yale university press.
- Foucault, M. (1983). —Afterword: The Subject and Power in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (2014), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edition: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1983). This is not a pipe (No. 24). Univ of California Press.
- Foucault, M., Canguilhem, G., Castel, R., & Boulez, P. (2009). *Michel Foucault* (p. 324). Orange Press.
- Guzzini, S. (2005). The concept of power: a constructivist analysis. *Millennium*, 33(3), 495-521.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research*. Macmillan.
- Luke, S. G. (2017). Evaluating significance in linear mixed-effects models in R. *Behavior research methods*, 49, 1494-1502.
- Lukes, S., & Runciman, W. G. (1974). Relativism: cognitive and moral. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 48, 165-208.
- Oldmeadow, H. (2004). *Journeys east: 20th century western encounters with eastern religious traditions*. World Wisdom, Inc.
- Sergey, Z., Roy, D., Yuri, V., Pryadilina, N. K., & Opletaev, A. S. (2018). Using the wood from improvement felling for assembling small wooden structures. *Increasing the Use of Wood in the Global Bio-Economy-Proceedings of Scientific Papers*, 369-373.
- Stiny, G., & Gips, J. (1971, August). Shape grammar and the generative specification of painting and sculpture. In *IFIP congress (2)* (Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 125-135).
- Webber, M. (1978). *Economy and society*. New York: Bedminster.
- Wegner, T., Skog, K. E., Ince, P. J., & Michler, C. J. (2010). Uses and desirable properties of wood in the 21st century. *Journal of Forestry*, 108(4), 165-173.

**ASSEMBLAGE OF WOOD PIECES AS AN EXPERIENCE OF
POWER DIALOGUE IN INSTALLATION**

Awuni Samuel¹, Opoku-Bonsu Kwame², Donkor Eyram Emmanuel³,
Owusu Panin Kwame Baah⁴

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54443/sibatik.v3i5.1889>

