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Abstract:

Bricolage as a research methodology in the creative arts, and creative writing in particular, has become popular in the twenty-first century, following the lead of qualitative researchers in education and the social sciences. Although many base their understanding of bricolage on Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminal explanation in *The Savage Mind* (1966), they have neglected to consider how he differentiates the bricoleur from the artist. This distinction also escapes a number of creative writing researchers who have adapted bricolage as a research methodology. They enumerate the benefits without sufficiently acknowledging the drawbacks, which include superficiality, overgeneralisation and misinterpretation of the theories and practices of other disciplines. Exploiting multiple disciplines can lead to insights that might not arise following a more conventional approach, but appropriate support needs to be given otherwise creative researchers risk producing work that cannot be deemed rigorous.

Biographical note:

Emeritus Professor Jeri was the inaugural Dean of Graduate Research at Flinders University and a supervisor of many creative practice research degrees. Past President of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, she has published widely on creative writing research and pedagogy, research higher degrees, and has written over twenty-five titles for adults and young people. Her most recent book is *Creative Writing: Drafting, Revising and Editing*, co-edited with Graeme Harper (Red Globe Press-Macmillan International Higher Education 2020).

Keywords: bricolage, practice-led research, interdisciplinary research, Lévi-Strauss, creative arts research

Introduction

This article considers the benefits and drawbacks of bricolage in the twenty-first century as a research methodology in creative writing. It grounds the discussion by first briefly reviewing its use in qualitative research. As someone who has undertaken creative research over decades and has supervised and examined a large number of higher degree theses, I have had to advise candidates and to assess the efficacy of this popular methodology. These experiences suggest that the concept of bricolage is often superficially understood by emerging as well as seasoned researchers and certainly that many in both the social sciences and the creative arts have only adopted part of Lévi-Strauss's seminal explanation in *The Savage Mind* (1966). This article discusses how it can result in cursory or distorted analyses as well how it can underpin innovative creative projects. In particular, the disadvantages can be exacerbated in the context of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research (which I will define shortly), as it demands competence in myriad and sometimes unfamiliar theoretical systems. Initially, I compare the social sciences' exploitation of bricolage with that of the creative arts overall, rather than creative writing in particular, because they face similar challenges.

The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (2018), already in its fifth edition, has influenced scholars in the field since its first publication in 1994, and demonstrates how fluid the research landscape is. The editors Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln outline in their preface its historical and political foundations, particularly in the education discipline in the United States, and the resistance of evidence-based positivists to qualitative research in general, which clarifies the latter's struggle to gain legitimacy. Conventional stakeholders who call the research shots, so to speak, often determine funding and promotion opportunities for academics and professional therapists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 2). These disciplinary struggles will sound familiar to creative arts and writing academics [1] still sometimes forced to argue for the validity of creative research. The editors then proceed to map the current "qualitative research community" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. iii), pointing out that even the term "qualitative" is "open-ended" (p. xv), which has led to contention about its parameters as well as its political, social, and moral purposes.

Most relevant to this article is the editors' focus on "The Qualitative Researcher-as-Bricoleur," which facilitates multiple identities: "scientist, naturalist, fieldworker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11). They therefore avoid imposing limits on types of viable practice. Quoting their analysis at length will facilitate a comparison and critique of bricolage as applied in creative arts and writing later in this article.

> There are many kinds of bricoleurs–interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political. The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. 'The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the bricoleur's method is an [emergent] construction' (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161), which changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) describe the methodology of cultural studies 'as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic, and *self-reflexive*'. (p. 11)

Suffice it to say that this multiskilled qualitative bricoleur can have many incarnations that are not mutually exclusive, but all need to be self-critical or self-reflexive (which is also the case for creative researchers). At various points, therefore, they need to be "adept" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12), theoretically informed, politically astute and sensitive to how they interact with research subjects and communities. The manner in which they deploy disciplinary and theoretical resources to projects can involve "case study, ethnography, ethnodrama, phenomenology, grounded theory, biographical, historical, participatory" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. xiii) approaches and which the editors claim makes them "interpretive bricoleurs" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. xiii). [2]

In comparison, creative projects need to reach a certain standard as aesthetic artifacts for professional practitioners and postgraduate candidates, because all of the publics they address will assess those outputs in that context, whether they be examiners, agents, curators, reviewers, funding bodies or a wider audience. If not an absolute reversal of the priorities required of qualitative researchers, certainly they are significantly different from the professional, therapeutic, or practical results desired in the social sciences.

In sum, the editors state that "qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another … .It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own" (Denzin et al, 2018, p.12), nor does it, they go on to say, own "a distinct set of methods or practices" (p. 12). [3] This free-wheeling definition has affinities with Tess Brady's influential "bowerbird" methodology (published in TEXT in 2000) that I turn to later. It is worth noting that there is no discussion here about the training necessary to achieve competence let alone expertise in all of the above. I will consider this too in due course.

Defining key terms

Before proceeding, I define key terms frequently applied to designate research from more than one discipline or theoretical framework. Many articles I have read do not adequately distinguish between them. I quote from Donna Lee Brien and Margaret McAllister's definitions at length for their clarity:

> … single disciplinary approaches [are] those where researchers use the research methodologies and tools that are recognised as appropriate to a particular, individual discipline. This might … involve a number of methodologies, and may include a mixed methods approach. It is worth noting in this context that the designation 'mixed methods' is often incorrectly used to refer to research involving a number of research methodologies. Yet, mixed methods has a more specific meaning and features processes associated with 'the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data' (Creswell 2003: 21) and its analysis. (Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 3)

The next term they define often seems to be used interchangeably by some scholars. For Brien and McAllister (2016), a multidisciplinary project involves "investigators from two or more different disciplines" (p. 3), which increases the research know-how of a team. The proviso for them is that they "work relatively independently and separately, on different tasks (Klein, 2010, as qtd. in Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 3). The third type of research involves

> interdisciplinary researchers [who] jointly design an approach that explores a complex issue or problem … by utilizing methodologies particular to multiple disciplines, and aims to achieve a more holistic understanding of both the issue/problem under the investigation and the way to approach it. Val Brooks and Jill Thistlethwaite (2012) note that interdisciplinary moves beyond disciplines working together to the 'linking, blending and integration' of specialised knowledge fields (2012: 404, as qtd. in Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 3).

All of these types have been employed by creative arts and writing researchers either wholly or in part. In research higher degrees, in particular, supervisors can be sourced from more than one discipline to add expertise to the team, but the critical difference in this context is that candidates alone are normally responsible for outcomes. [2] An interdisciplinary approach as defined above seems a good fit for what qualitative researchers consider "bricolage" or "the bricolage", whether they work solely or collaboratively.

I now consider how bricolage as a working method is understood by qualitative researchers in the social sciences, before turning to Claude Lévi-Strauss's explanation in *The Savage Mind* (1966) in order to underscore interpretive weaknesses. Finally, I critique how it has been adapted in the creative arts and creative writing specifically. Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg and Monzó's Chapter in the *Sage Handbook* provides a relatively recent definition of "The Bricolage," which in various forms appear in a range of qualitative research publications. The authors frame "bricolage as an emancipatory research construct. Ideologically grounded …" (Kincheloe, et al, 2018, p. 244). Their social and political agendas per se are not this article's concern, but the focus on bricolage as a practice that frees researchers to work without disciplinary, administrative and ideological constraints – the "modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis" (Kincheloe, et al, 2018, p. 245) – is certainly relevant to its possibilities as well as to disputes within and outside the creative arts research community. Kincheloe, et al. (2018) speak about "employing these methodological processes as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation" (p. 244), which has affinities with the now established concept in creative writing of the practice-led research loop, a non-linear periodic movement between creative artifact and analysis or exegesis.

This chapter offers some caution to researchers, which I raise later in my discussion of bricolage's disadvantages. The "interdisciplinary feature" (Kincheloe, et al, 2018, p. 244) can be fruitful, but guided by curiosity and serendipity as well as purpose, it is "eclectic … which raises numerous issues that researchers must deal with to maintain theoretical coherence and epistemological innovation. Such multidisciplinarity demands a new level of research self-consciousness …" (Kincheloe, et al, 2018, p. 244). Note how the terms interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary are used interchangeably here, which muddies the discussion somewhat. This definitional bleed occurs in many critical essays that also pay lip service to the potential dangers of patching together a research project utilising multiple theories and methodologies. Here Kincheloe et al (2018) talk about *tinker*[ing] in the Lévi-Straussian sense with research methods "… a high-level cognitive process involving construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation, and readjustment" (p. 245), where project preplanning might not be workable. Except for the proviso that bricoleurs need to be widely read, self-reflexive, and rigorous (p. 247), there are no suggestions about how to ensure a complex research process avoids the pitfalls I later enumerate in the case of creative writing.

Matt Rogers's 2012 article, "Contextualizing Theories and Practices of Bricolage Research" (published before the 2018 *Sage Handbook*, but heavily influenced by an earlier Denizen and Lincoln edition), offers an overview of bricolage and how it became popular with some schools of qualitative research. His sources relate to sociological and educational scholarship and experimentation. Arts practice is only involved within the context of furthering disciplinary, educational or therapeutic goals. The quality or impact of creative works themselves are not primary or essential to project success, yet Rogers (2012) asserts that "bricoleurs have an aptness for creativity – they know how to artistically combine theories, techniques, and methods. Furthermore, they are able to create their own methodological tools when needed" (p. 6). Clearly he is using the term "creative" in a sense more aligned with Richard Florida's (2002) concept of the creative class, where universities in particular become creative hubs (p. 29), or the way in which scientists have either co-opted the concept of creativity, claiming that beauty and elegance are not the preserve of artists alone (Davies, 1992, p. 175), or at least arguing that their processes have synergies (Amsler, 1986, pp. 7–10).

Rogers provides this umbrella definition of bricolage, derived from key scholars: it is a "critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach to inquiry" (Rogers, 2012, p. 1), adding that some of the elements compete rather than complement a project's conceptual underpinning. What is most relevant to this article's argument is his reiteration of Denizen and Lincoln's point about disciplinary bleed: "the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities [were] blurred. Social scientists were now turning to the humanities for models, theories, and methods of analysis … A form of genre diaspora was occurring" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, pp. 17–18, as qtd. in Rogers, 2012, p. 4). This sounds liberating and optimistic, but again there is no discussion to guide researchers in attaining the expertise, or at least the agility, necessary to pursue projects that require comprehending a wide range of disciplinary discourses.

Claude Lévi-Strauss and bricolage: What does he actually say?

Before analysing bricolage as a functional methodology, I need to return to the source: Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1966). As an anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss is interested in the ways in which cultures both make (in the sense of produce or create) and make meaning. He says that "in our own time the "bricoleur" is still someone who works with his [sic] hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, pp. 16–17). It is worth noting that craftsmen are given credit for being more direct, while bricoleurs follow a circuitous route. Craftsmen do attain a level of expertise that sets them above bricoleurs, therefore, and in Plato and Aristotle both *epistêmê* and *technê* – or knowledge and art (or craft) – sometimes overlap (Kroll, 2015, pp. 156-57). [5] These might be familiar ideas to creative writing researchers, but the distinctions that Lévi-Strauss makes here and goes on to make problematise the indiscriminate adaptation of bricolage as a methodology.

On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss takes pains to give credit to the bricoleur, yet on the other differentiates his skill from that of the engineer, who functions as his proxy for the expert – someone who follows a scientific method.

> The ‘bricoleur’ has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who understands odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but … is of a different standing from, for instance, the English ‘odd job man’ or handyman. (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, note 17)

The qualifications Lévi-Strauss makes on the same page, however, raise doubts for the contemporary creative writing researcher who wholly adopts the bricolage method:

> The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogenous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project … (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17)

The positives for the “bricoleur” have to do with exploiting “already existent … tools and materials” (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 18), the possibility of “engag[ing] in a sort of dialogue … before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem” (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 18). In other words, these individuals are professionals at innovating at the ground level rather than experts in a particular area, which allows them to complete disparate tasks. Their focus, allegiance, or will is not directed toward a project per se.

But the thrust of a major creative artifact or indeed a creative writing higher degree driven by research questions embodied in the creative work and/or critical argument, is to set it into a theoretical framework that suits its multifaceted nature and no other – even if the discovery of the best possible theories happens fortuitously through the research process. I agree therefore that creative writing research is heuristic, but that does not bind the writer only to cobble together odds and ends of their previous education or to settle for superficial summaries of key texts. They can range widely and narrow down their research based on the project’s requirements. Lévi-Strauss (1966) pinpoints the difference: “It might be said that the engineer questions the universe, while the “bricoleur” addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture” (p. 19). He uses the term “interlocutor” frequently, which calls to mind the concept of research questions. Artists ask their materials to yield answers, manipulate them to wrest meaning, and in the tussle often discover new questions. Lévi-Strauss sees the limitations of the bricoleur, who is “engag[ing] in a sort of dialogue … before choosing between tools and materials” (p. 18), but not probing in the way a seasoned interviewer or indeed a creative practitioner does. If the pathways available do not seem promising, they will search out others.

Lévi-Strauss further differentiates bricolage from art, claiming that “art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought. It is common knowledge that the artist is both something of a scientist and of a “bricoleur”. By his craftsmanship he constructs a material object which is also an object of knowledge” (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 22). And later: “Art thus proceeds from a set (object + event) to the discovery of its structure” (p. 26). Perhaps most significantly distinguishing the bricoleur from the artist, Lévi-Strauss emphasises that the artist can be working toward a non-utilitarian goal: “… he also tries to make his work into an object independent of anything contingent, of value in itself and for

itself" (p. 28). This is his version of "art for art's sake". I have argued elsewhere (Kroll, 2013 and 2015) that this drive to create something new and perhaps non-commercial has encouraged successful practitioners to return to the academy, where they can pursue intellectual and artistic goals unhindered. In sum, according to Lévi-Strauss artists are more than bricoleurs, pursuing goals that push toward excellence in process and product and not simply settling for what is at hand, exploiting past experiences, tools and knowledges, seeking to discover new ways of making.

The concept of bricolage in the creative arts and writing

Tess Brady is one of the first creative writing scholars to tackle the problem of expertise versus functional knowledge in a *TEXT* article titled "A Question of Genre: de-mystifying the exegesis" (2000). This issue is implicit in bricolage as a research methodology. How far do writers have to immerse themselves in a discipline or subject area in order to construct an argument utilising some of its substance and/or its theories, which of course is what happens in bricolage? With a recently awarded PhD in hand, Brady argues that creative writers do not have to play by the same rules as what she calls "traditional" researchers. She differentiates functionality from mastery.

> Unlike my colleagues in other more traditional disciplines I needed to acquire a working rather than specialist knowledge, not in one area but in a range of areas and disciplines. I needed to function a little like a bowerbird that picks out the blue things and leaves all the other colours. (Brady, 2000)

This is an effective metaphor as far as it goes, but even without being an ornithologist I gather from any number of online sources that the male bowerbird is the one that collects and decorates; his behaviour is instinctual, driven by the mating drive, not obtained through years of training.

Subsequently, Brady's bowerbird metaphor appeared in many articles that applauded this approach. Researchers in the creative arts could pick and choose evidence and theory best suited to their projects, aware of their limitations and not claiming more than necessary. Brady asserts: "I needed to be able to write on a range of issues and yet I knew I was not an authority in any of them" (2000). Concomitantly, she argues for an alternative type of expertise or skill, couching the bowerbird metaphor in terms of the bird's ability to sift shape and colour. Creative writing researchers must develop:

> … the skill of knowing where to look, where to find the blue pieces in the first place. It may sound easy but to be able to accurately and quickly isolate the turquoise from the aquamarine at one end of the spectrum and the indigo from the purple at the other, requires nerve, a great eye and a lot of know-how. With so much information to gather, the writer needs to be able to work quickly, to know the questions to ask and to be able to isolate the essence. (Brady, 2000)

As a practical statement of working method, her article makes a case for creative research as a kind of bricolage; the researcher does not pretend to be an expert, but a bricoleur, in line with Claude Lévi-Strauss's term. Certainly, in the early days of creative writing as a discipline, practitioners, postgraduates, and supervisors were feeling their way toward an

articulation of the interface between theory and practice as well as the nature of creative research. Her article argues for latitude in the research process and the primacy of the creative artifact without going into detail about possible drawbacks to her approach. Subsequently the concept of bowerbirding and bricolage has been adopted in whole or in part by creative researchers.

A brief survey of the term bricolage as it appears in relevant literature after Brady's noteworthy article reveals its frequency as well as its sometimes perfunctory use. Some practitioner-academics choose to employ bricolage not as a research methodology per se, grounded in one or more disciplines, but as an artistic one to facilitate the making of an artifact. This article does not intend to critique its use in that context. I will only examine a few instances that highlight how the term has been understood and how it functions as a research methodology most often within and about creative work, with the practitioner clearly at the centre.

Three years after Brady's introduction of the term "bowerbird" (Brady, 2000), dramatist and drama therapist, Michael Barham, offers a foundational explanation of bricolage for his profession, asserting that to move practice and research forward he and his colleagues "needed to become 'bricoleurs'" (Barham, 2003, p. 4). As many after him, he paraphrases Lévi-Strauss's definition of bricoleur but does not neglect the "shamanic spontaneous creativity" (Barham, 2003, p. 4) also discussed by the anthropologist. At this early stage in the debate about creative arts research, he focuses on the self-reflexivity and union of theory and practice characteristic of praxis (Barham, 2003, p. 5).

He employs the term bricolage loosely, however, asserting that in the search for appropriate methodologies researchers create "a kind of intertextuality, a bricolage" (Barham, 2003, p. 6), suggesting that Lévi-Strauss's term applies to arts research practice without qualification. Given that arts therapy in general, by its very nature, concerns itself primarily with clients and artists rather than with the quality of aesthetic outcomes, Barham frames his argument in terms of problem-solving. In creative writing research, however, as in other art forms, the questions and possible answers to research questions might depend more on how they influence the type and quality of the creative artifact in the first instance, even if they have additional applications, such as in social or political spheres. For Barham, another aspect of any project concerns the methodology(ies) that produce a work itself. Bricolage can also then connote an artistic process of construction.

New Zealand poet and academic Bill Manhire concerns himself primarily with the productive possibilities rather than research opportunities of bricolage and in doing so only partially adapts Lévi-Strauss. In a talk to English teachers, "unconsidered trifles: the writer as thief" (2009), he states that the anthropologist distinguishes between "two kinds of artist, or two kinds of thinker who intervene in the world" (Manhire, 2009, p. 7). Manhire finds bricoleurs significant as makers because in discovering the detritus of everyday life, they create "a fresh arrangement and [offer] them back to [the world] as information about themselves" (Manhire, 2009, p. 7). But Lévi-Strauss does not call bricoleurs artists. Artists can certainly do what Manhire suggests, but they can also perform on a higher level, because their artifacts do not have to have a utilitarian value, as noted above.

Lisa Kay, a music therapist, educator and musician, charts her own artistic and professional biography in "Research as Bricolage: Navigating in/between the Creative Arts Disciplines"

(2016), explaining how she developed an innovative practice that crosses disciplinary boundaries. She uses the term "bricoleur" and researcher interchangeably. As other scholars and practitioners she quotes Lévi-Strauss, but again does not move beyond the few pages where he analyses bricolage as a term. Emphasising the profusion of materials open to practitioners in both research and creative contexts, she advocates a freewheeling process "that does not need to obey time, knowledge and genre constraints" (Kay, 2016, p. 27). Her highly optimistic characterisation of bricolage would not apply to higher degree candidates, professionals or academics facing grant or tertiary review deadlines. As a therapist and educator, Kay concerns herself with problem-solving rather than outcomes; the pressure to make original contributions to knowledge aligned with the OECD definition do not seem relevant.

Pamela Greet's more recent article, "Writer as perv: bricolage, bowerbirding, observation" (2016), draws affinities between the research methodology and Tess Brady's elaboration of it, in fact fusing them to suggest that the process of gathering real-world data, creating artistic products and forming research concepts about them occur jointly or sequentially: "… through bowerbirding and bricolage, the contributive experience of the writer and her observations are closely interwoven" (Greet, 2016, p. 186; see also p. 188). Aware of the necessity to argue, if not for the legitimacy of creative arts research in general, at least for her approach to her exegesis in creative writing in particular (Greet, 2016, p. 186), she conceives of the writer as a thief of sorts as Bill Manhire has: "Writing the exegesis is a choreographed manifestation of the constant muttering and shuffling of poached ideas, adopted concepts, borrowed tools, personal provocations and prevarications in my mind as I create" (Greet, 2016, p. 187). This strategy has affinities with Ainslie Yardley's (2008) "theoretical montage" that results from a "multi-textual development of the argument".

When Greet turns to Lévi-Strauss's unpacking of bricolage she focuses on the way he connects it to "mythical thought and meaning making in "primitive" cultures" (Greet, 2016, p. 190), as she is interested in bricolage as a creative rather than research methodology. She extends the bowerbird metaphor to explain not only how it aptly describes both her present exegesis and creative work (Greet, 2016, p. 192), but also how it transforms mental, physical, and social aspects of any artist's life into creative products: "The bricoleur-bowerbird's work is never done" (Greet, 2016, p. 193). This concept of an ongoing project that mirrors the development of the self has similarities with Dallas Baker's formulation of subjectivity. In his article, "Writing and reading queerly: Foucault's aesthetics of existence and queer self-making", an individual's aesthetic and research journey are integrated: "an ongoing assembly and disassembly of subjectivity – that constitutes a kind of self-bricolage; a making and re-making of subjectivity that can be seen as an aesthetic struggle towards an artistic ideal" (Baker, 2015).

Following Robyn Stewart (2001), one of the earlier proponents of bricolage as a methodology suited to the creative arts, Greet also holds that when artists take their research seriously (Stewart, 2001), situating themselves within their field, critiquing and theorising their own practice, ensuring it becomes praxis, they transform it into research equivalent to the results of more conventional forms. As other artist-practitioners in the field, Stewart (2003) went on to refine these ideas, ringing changes on the options for "critical reflective investigate praxis" (p. 3). Proponents like Stewart normally do not entertain the possible difficulties arising from integrating complex theoretical frameworks from other humanities,

let alone social science and scientific disciplines, although Yardley does raise the issue of coherence and scope, as Brady did years before:

> How could I, as an artist, writer, and researcher best accommodate the transdisciplinary tensions (of language and meaning) and navigate the great sea of information, opinions, ideas, and prejudices that surround the development of any new transdisciplinary methodology in … a relatively untried medium? (Yardley, 2008)

Her initial response depends upon the way in which she interweaves images and ideas in her creative work, framing herself as "a researcher, a bricoleur, a maker of patchwork, a weaver of stories, an assembler of montage" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, as qtd. in Yardley, 2008), which does not directly confront what Brady does: the question of competence as well as contributions to knowledge.

Bricolage and its relationship to theory: Citton's theoricolage

The introduction to eighteenth-century scholar Yves Citton's article, "From theory to bricolage: indiscipline and the exemplary gestures of interpretation," would sound more familiar to Australian academics teaching literature rather than creative writing. As schooled as Citton is in theory, he admits that he never believed that there was only one (*la théorie*). He explains: "As far as I was concerned, there were *theories* (in the plural), contradicting or completing [with] each other, calling for each one of us to choose, reject, discuss, denounce, correct, refine, pursue or deepen them" (Citton, 2014). Teaching postgraduates clarified his position about clinging to the exclusivity of one theory alone, which could lead to misinterpretation and frustration, as it did for his students who felt that "theory was an obstacle rather than a help …" (Citton, 2014). This attitude certainly echoes that of many Australian literature undergraduates let alone those who study creative writing at the Honours or postgraduate level.

Citton's article offers a fresh interpretation of bricolage as a response to the exclusivity of Theory's proponents, arguing that the dominant discourse does not only (or even usually) facilitate intellectual or creative leaps forward: "If important knowledge mostly comes from the margins, we need to put ourselves in position to integrate without neutralising it, which is why *pluralism* is our most important requirement" (Citton, 2014). For Citton, "*all* forms of knowledge have some truth in them, and, conversely … no form of knowledge can pretend to be valid through and through" (2014). Since all disciplines have their biases, strengths and weaknesses, theory should not be ranked above practice, as they exist on a continuum. Richard Sennett (2008) offers an earlier formulation of this divide, or at least its effect: "History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance" (p. 11).

Citton's flexible conception of research leads him to postulate what can be deemed the next stage of bricolage, where critique and interpretation can be considered "gestures, as performances … with their own rules along the way of their unfolding" (Citton, 2014). He names this process "theoricolage" (2014).

> The exemplary nature of the interpretive gesture results from the fact that it attempts to conciliate, rather than oppose, theory with bricolage – generating a hybrid we could baptise *theoricolage*. If the bricoleur's versatility results from his attempt 'always to make do with "whatever is at hand"', his horizon is limited by the fact that 'his universe of instruments is closed'. And this is why we need interpretation to be the continuation of theory by other means, rather than its replacement or burial. The theoretical drive which expresses itself in the activity of speculation is more necessary than ever, if we are to expand our universe of instruments beyond its current limitation and closure. (Citton, 2014)

Citton provides his own interpretation of Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, asserting that even supposedly well-trained theorists, whether consciously or unconsciously, "have always worked … with "a set of tools which is always finite" – always insufficient to do justice to the complex realities facing us" (Citton, 2014). This truth supports the necessity for what he and other critics have called indisciplinarity, because "the disciplines are always necessarily *lacking*, in constant need of supplementation, correction, sharpening, and weeding" (Citton, 2014). Improvisation is a fact of research life therefore.

The term closest to Tess Brady's bowerbirding that Citton offers is Tim Ingold's concept of "wayfaring" (Citton, 2014):

> In contrast to our modern ways of life which favour both 'transport' … and 'survey', hunters and gatherers walk *along* unpredictable paths, turning right or veering left in order to follow one prey's track or to get nearer to another prey's cry. While we can sleep or read a book during transport in a train, while the surveying gaze provides us with a deterritorialised point of view, wayfaring is defined as 'the intimate bond that couples locomotion and perception'. (Ingold, 2007, p. 78, as qtd. in Citton, 2014)

The researcher as bricoleur is also a wayfarer, wandering the mazes of the imagination and the intellect, attempting to create stories that "weave 'together what classifications split apart'" (Ingold, 2011, pp. 160,164, as qtd. in Citton, 2014), all the while taking account of multiple perspectives, "maximis[ing] his polyvalence" (Citton, 2014).

Many creative writing researchers (too many to cite) have noted or advocated a form of rhizomatic research and pedagogy that approximate this fluid and opportunistic process, based on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's discussion of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). In "The Pedagogy of Rhizomatic Research" (Kroll, 2013), I argue that any text can have "multiple inputs and outputs, or entry and exit points, or windows into other bodies of knowledge" (Kroll, 2013, p. 119), depending upon the researcher's purpose, an approach that can cross disciplines in a manner similar to that often favoured by qualitative research "in today's climate of blurred disciplinary boundaries" (Kincheloe et al, 2018, p. 237). In a similar manner artists can begin projects with a clear path in mind or alternatively begin wandering; they can operate in a linear way, diverge into generic hybridity, digress and backtrack in order to move forward. Workbooks or journals often chart this peripatetic movement, which can make their way directly or tangentially into postgraduate theses, performance and exhibition notes and interviews. I suggest that the creative equivalents of Citton's wayfaring theorists are artists, who necessarily plan, improvise and revise as a matter of course. Just as Lévi-Strauss's artists, they possess expertise and imagination, which are mutual supports, making them more than either a scientist (engineer or expert) or a bricoleur.

The drawbacks and benefits of bricolage in creative writing research

In the two decades following Brady's publication of her article, I have become increasingly alert to the dangers of bricolage and its fellow traveler, interdisciplinarity, of endeavouring to exploit unfamiliar disciplinary codes or subject matter in order to integrate them into a critical discussion and/or creative work without a certain degree of competence. This understanding of the drawbacks of bricolage as a method has been underpinned by my experiences as a supervisor and examiner, and now a postgraduate student myself, who is attempting to integrate qualitative and empirical social science research on equines and humans in therapeutic environments. [4] The pitfalls are manifold: superficiality and overgeneralisation, not to mention basic misinterpretation of what is often challenging and dense material.

I begin with the obvious, and common, problem of overgeneralisation. My comments stem from my identity as a critic, peer reviewer and supervisor. Researchers should argue only for what they can prove or reasonably suggest, rather than casting the net wide and claiming too much. Readers distrust unsupported statements, whether in a strongly evidenced-based discipline or not. For example, does an author have to assert that a particular point is valid for every work in a period, or does it only apply to a few? As an examiner and supervisor, I have come across this problem, with candidates basing their assessment of a literary period with which they are not familiar on one or two articles (which themselves can be insufficient), and without having read much in that period themselves. A project or candidature will have a limited time frame, and the researcher only so much capacity to read and absorb new material. Individuals should pay attention to those constraints.

The companion difficulty is inadequate knowledge of other subject areas and theories. This failing can lead to skirting key points or hastily summarising them, leaving readers wondering if the writer has grasped the material. Candidates and experienced researchers can only be an expert in so many disciplines. Ensuring that they possess the right degree of competence, even without becoming an expert, takes its own form of dexterity. Brady herself admits this. Since 2000, when she published her bowerbird article, undergraduate and Honours degrees have dropped many requirements and narrowed syllabi, responding to financial pressures. It is a common complaint anecdotally that students read less than previously and hence teachers do not require them to. It is demanding for students to articulate the methods and contributions to knowledge of disciplines outside the humanities if they have primarily studied literature or creative writing, even when those majors include survey or capstone subjects. From my own experience, I find many postgraduates have not sufficiently mastered the discourse or ideational content of disciplines they seem to have studied only for a doctoral project and inadequate literature reviews are a symptom of this problem.

Brien and McAllister have addressed this problem by developing a group pedagogy: "Our intervention in this area has encouraged and supported research students" learning though what we have termed "the safe crossing of knowledge borders" via designing and delivering innovative and responsive multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning experiences. This has included – but not been confined to – our own students and disciplines' (Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 9). Generic research methods seminars go only so far if there is no

regular oversight, so Brien and McAllister's solution is commendable. One might ask, though, how widespread this hands-on approach is, given the financial exigencies facing the humanities? In fact Citton laments the degradation of the arts and humanities, which he argues have the ability to be at once inclusive and functional:

> The arts in general, literature in particular, and 'theory' in its short lifespan during the past decades, have traditionally played the role of an indisciplinary platform on which societal issues could be addressed in a way that could integrate rational analysis and affective resonance, ethical questions and political positioning, judgement and empathy. It is therefore no surprise if indisciplinarity feels at home in literary, artistic, and cultural studies. It is worrying, however, to see the traditional territory of indiscipline – the Humanities – progressively lose their status, their place, and their funding. (Citton, 2014)

In some institutions sourcing supervisors from other disciplines helps to plug pedagogical and research gaps, but one has to ask how well colleagues understand the nature of creative degrees, including the length limitations of theses? Supervisors and sympathetic readers need to be well enough versed in a specialty to know when the "safe crossing" has been negotiated well. In addition, institutional pressures and faculty and/or college rivalries might preclude this type of supervisory assistance, with Deans, for example, unwilling to free up staff time for postgraduates they might not gain credit for. A related issue, which I only have space to note here, is finding competent examiners for theses that have a strong interdisciplinary grounding.

In innovative creative writing higher degree projects, for example, the challenge becomes more than providing training in Kiley and Wisker's "generic threshold concepts in research" (as qtd. in Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 9). An argument might be well articulated, but whether the candidate has understood a primary theoretical text sufficiently is another question. A case in point might be a student who wants to employ Lacanian psychoanalysis but has no previous training in the area, only reading enough to thread quotations and comments through the exegesis. An examiner familiar with Lacan might well criticise superficial treatment. Barham (2003) gave a cursory nod to this research challenge when he wrote that "a bricoleur works within and between competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms (and is familiar with these). To do so they must read widely, to become knowledgeable about a variety of interpretive paradigms that can be brought to a problem …" (p. 6), going on to list fifteen, concluding with "and so on" (p. 6). But where does "and so on" end? How easy it will be for practitioner-teachers and postgraduate students to achieve this competence is not canvassed. "Rigour" is a term that appears frequently in the literature in relation to how individuals justify their research and earn their credentials as equals with their conventional or traditional academic peers. But what exactly is rigour in research? Any dictionary will suggest that it means diligent, careful, thorough, exact, etc. Without offering an answer, I can only ask the question: in how many disciplines or methodologies can an individual hope to achieve that level of competence?

A related question is how far must individuals intellectually roam in order to remedy knowledge shortfalls? The companion stumbling block of under-researching is its reverse: over-researching. The temptation to keep reading can lead to a sense of being smothered by information that a novice, let alone a seasoned practitioner, does not have the time to digest. That is where an objective critic or trusted advisor, such as a peer or supervisor, can be

invaluable; to complement the process of being one's own "interlocutor" (to use Lévi-Strauss's term), trying to wrest meanings from all of the diverse materials gathered.

I turn now to the issue of scope, related both to the tendency to overgeneralise and to treat essential material hastily. For convenience, I will use the example of a creative writing research higher degree. It is a truism that any thesis can potentially muster multiple arguments, depending on the questions that writers pose and the manner in which they manipulate subject matter, but they are composed within a circumscribed time frame with a restricted amount of resources. Focusing the critical lens on a specific problem or key factors in case studies enables researchers to avoid the sprawl and pitfalls of attempting to cover too much territory. Concentrating on linguistic or thematic comparisons in case study texts is a useful way of managing an argument. In my Doctor of Creative Arts project, I have chosen to zoom in on metaphor as a way of circumscribing the research I need to conduct.

Frequently in research as well as in higher degree theses, writers select case studies (or exemplary texts – I take these terms to be equivalents) from one genre in order to set manageable boundaries. For example, they might analyse three novels, poetry collections or plays. This process is efficient, particularly if the research manipulates frameworks from literary or cultural criticism, assessing and comparing whatever attributes are germane to their argument can be relatively straightforward. I must qualify this by observing that an inadequate literature review also results in an inability to justify selection of exemplary texts, hence an inability to clarify how and why they were chosen to underpin the project's central arguments.

Constructing an article or indeed an exegesis can become unwieldy if more than one genre is involved. A researcher's decision to take this route might have been made because the principal points of the discussion do not concern genre itself, instead revolving around the period in which works were composed and their cultural perspectives, or the gender of characters. As exemplary texts, however, they must still be "both unique and representative" (Meyrick, 2014, p. 7), and help to pinpoint what the argument demands.

On the positive side, integrating new disciplinary knowledge and exploring more than one genre can enrich creative writing research. Although, as I have discussed above, there are drawbacks in trying to master enough about a new discipline or theoretical position to talk about it competently, if writers can put in the time and concentration necessary, they will find their creative products enhanced. Being open to alternative perspectives might allow them to gain insights they might not have had before. New epistemological frameworks and the language best able to express them can deepen creative and critical sections of a project. In interdisciplinary work, consulting an expert in other areas either as colleague or co-supervisor can be beneficial. Another positive is that writers might find that they have broadened the relevance and impact of their research. Disciplines outside the humanities might also find insights in creative writing research, because their eyes have been opened to other ways of knowing. As evidence of this, I can attest that since I published two articles on the horse-human bond in case study texts, I have received requests for these articles not only from literary critics but also from social science researchers.

In addition, writers can discover that other disciplines widen the linguistic pool for their creative artefact. Although they possess their own types of discourse, they often make use of figurative language to clarify arguments that can be adapted. This cross-fertilisation sharpens

awareness of how language functions and sparks new perceptions, at once highlighting differences and identifying common ground, encouraging a closer look at both style and logic. Crossing generic boundaries enables practitioners to discover aspects of their own work that might have been overlooked, facilitating revision. Drawing on multiple disciplines and genres, therefore, can lead to revelations that might not arise following what one could call a more conventional or balanced approach.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, bricolage as a methodology in the creative arts, and creative writing in particular, has become popular with researchers, who have adapted its use from some sectors of the qualitative research community. Attracted by its flexible and dynamic nature, which privileges diversity and individuality, they have found the idea of using this approach liberating, compared to stricter theoretical paradigms, and its rewards manifested in critical and creative work. For example, engaging with multiple disciplines can lead to insights that might not arise following a more conventional approach. Unbalancing, unsettling or surprising writers can have the effect of shaking up perspectives. Patterns can lull the mind, lead it along certain tracks, encouraging it to predict or anticipate what comes next. Immersion in other disciplines can expand the range of linguistic resources available to writers and open them to fresh insights. They might see their work from other angles and hence reach unexpected or alternative conclusions, or find that new questions arise. To return to Brooks and Thistlethwaite's (2012) formulation of interdisciplinarity as an approach that "moves beyond disciplines working together to the 'linking, blending and integration of specialised knowledge fields'" (p. 404, as qtd. in Brien & McAllister, 2016, p. 3), I suggest that this fusing can occur both in critical and creative work. Unlike in the social sciences, the aim might be not to solve problems, but to encourage artists to question their materials, processes and goals.

In fact, creatives who grasp Claude Lévi-Strauss's distinction between the bricoleur, the artist and the scientist (or engineer) can find their sense of potential expanded. As noted earlier, the bricoleur makes do with what is at hand, while the expert, who can do the same, also has the skill to design new tools and materials for each project as needed. Lévi-Strauss (1966) asserts that "art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought … [so] the artist is both something of a scientist and of a 'bricoleur'" (p. 22). An imaginative craftsperson, a magician, a storyteller, a researcher – creative writers and artists are able to push the boundaries of their practice, to move beyond what they now know, interlocutors in the fullest sense, questioning "the universe" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 19).

Nevertheless, enthusiasm for bricolage has overshadowed its multiple drawbacks. Although no one size-fits-all approach to address those exists, consciousness of them must be the first step for practitioners, teachers, supervisors, and professionals if they aim to produce rigorous work. The dangers of superficiality, overgeneralisation and misinterpretation are ever-present if a writer subscribes to bricolage as a research method without a clear understanding of its pitfalls. Balancing between competing benefits and drawbacks is the challenge for creators. In conclusion, therefore, I would like to suggest that a detailed study of how academic writers/creatives, supervisors, examiners, and higher degree candidates grapple with the above challenges would be beneficial. It could be executed using both qualitative and quantitative methods, yielding rich data. Some of the possible questions that might be asked

are: Do researchers in any of those categories call their methodology bricolage? Do they use the term to identify a part or the whole of their process? What responses have they had to creative projects or artifacts produced using bricolage? How many have read Lévi-Strauss's seminal explanation in *The Savage Mind* (1966)? In order to exploit bricolage methodology without falling prey to its drawbacks, creative practitioners require a fuller understanding of its limitations as well as its benefits.

Notes

[1] Subsequently, when appropriate, I speak about creative arts and writing together.

[2] Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest that humanities disciplines lack the same flexibility as qualitative research, taking the example of "textual analyses in literary studies", which they assert "often treat texts as self-contained systems" (p. 12). The use of "often" here is problematic, because in fact this type of close reading stems from the early twentieth-century New Criticism, inspired by I. A. Richards's work. Literary critics such as William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and Allan Tate, among others, developed a practice that focused on close reading of exemplary texts instead of relying on the philological, biographical or historical analyses favoured by predecessors. The rise of deconstruction, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, among other movements, as ways of analysing literature, became established in academia in the Anglophone countries by the 1970s, expanding reading perspectives in just the way Denzin and Lincoln champion, deploying feminist, cultural studies, postcolonial, queer theory, et al as needed.

[3] See Nigel Krauth, Chris Bowman and Zoe Fraser, "The exegesis and co-authorship: collaboration between supervisors and research students" http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue44/Krauth_et_al.pdf. Also see *TEXT Special Issues Series* No 59, October 2020: "Creating communities: Collaboration in creative writing research," edited by Alex Philp, Ella Jeffery and Lee McGowan for discussions about the Australian context. There has been debate in America about collaborative dissertations given the length doctoral degrees take and the complexity of some research projects.

[4] See my discussion of knowledge and art or craft in "Originality and Research: Knowledge Production in Creative Writing Doctoral Degrees" (2015). Also see Richard Sennett's 2008 book, *The Craftsman.*

[5] My Doctor of Creative Arts Project, "The Horse-Human Bond in Literature: Healing Metaphors and Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse," takes an interdisciplinary approach, employing empirical and qualitative social science research on equines and humans in therapeutic environments by focusing on metaphors that speak to how humans and animals adapt to each other, interacting on physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual levels. My project discovers a common metaphorical language between that literature and my case studies that provides an evidentiary basis for my novel's figurative language. See Jeri Kroll, "'A Horse is no machine': Character in Jane Smiley's *Horse Heaven*", "Riding the Centaur Metaphor from Past to Present: Myth, Constellation and Non-gendered Hybrid", and "The Horse-Human Bond as Catalyst for Healing from Sexual or Domestic Abuse: Metaphors in Gillian Mears' *Foal's Bread*".

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