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Follow the Bricolage Road: Walking-Writing Research Tools for Cultural and Civic Engagement

Introduction

Hi, I'm Krista Carson. I am a creative writing PhD student in the School of Creative Arts at the University of Gloucestershire.

The research methods described in my poster are for a project called, *Stories of a Walker-Writer: A Practice-Based and Autoethnographic Exploration into Walking, Embodiment, and Creative Writing*. For that, I adopt a bricolage approach predominantly comprised of a few methods I'd like to discuss further here.

Methodology

First, what is bricolage? We could use the analogy of a cobblestone road with each stone carefully placed like a jig-saw puzzle. Much like this, bricolage is a methodological approach that involves intentionally using together various qualitative methods to solve a problem (The Association for Qualitative Research, 2022). ~~Indeed Pratt et al. (2022) refer to how 'various analytic moves "cobbled together" fit with each other' (p. 220).~~

It allows for a deep and responsive exploration of the complexities that are an inevitable part of today's largest and most pressing issues. My approach to bricolage includes adopting various methods that share unique qualities useful tools for cultural and civic engagement.

The first is...

Autoethnography

Autoethnography makes use of both autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011, sec. 2). It situates/examines personal narrative within broader arenas, thus emphasizing the embeddedness of researchers within the communities they study, as well as other sociocultural contexts (Poulos, 2021; Wall, 2006). As Wall (2006) points out, 'no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of co-constructed meaning' (p. 155). Autoethnography can reflect, critique, and/or subvert cultural and social norms and practices; Cooper and Lilyea (2022) refer to autoethnography as 'a form of cultural analysis' (p. 198). It can also reveal power dynamics, thereby disrupting social issues (Keleş, 2022).

Autoethnography is heartfelt work (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Ellis (2007) emphasizes thoughtful approaches to relational ethics (which acknowledge the ways we are interpersonally bound up

with and responsible for others) (Ellis, 2007). Honouring subjectivity, relationality, and emotionality in research creates space for evocative and engaging scholarship that centres our shared humanity. Relating the individual to broader systems and structures, using thick descriptions and creative and adaptable use of storytelling conventions offer a resonant, engaging interface that can be accessible and relevant to audiences outside of academia.

The next tool I'd like to discuss is...

Poetic Inquiry

This involves using poetry in some or all stages of the research process, ~~including data gathering, interpretation, and dissemination/presentation~~ (Butler-Kisber, 2012; Prendergast et al., 2009). It can help us to better understand the affective and relational aspects of our and others' experiences (Görlich, 2023). Further, poetic inquiry can act as embodied, evocative, and resonant tools to actively speak to social justice causes (Faulkner, 2018). Given the depth and emotional rendering of experience, as a mode of inquiry, this tool offers empathy-building potential—a crucial human skill for nurturing compassionate relationships with human and non-human persons, including life-sustaining ecosystems.

Walking

Coming back to the metaphor of the road, one of the main tools I use within bricolage is walking, which has a long history of inspiring notable thinkers and writers in introspective ways (Coverley, 2012; see also Keinänen, 2016; Matko & Sedlmeier, 2023). But walking is also a tool for art and creativity (O'Neill & Roberts, 2020; Oppedizzo & Schwartz, 2014; Reading & Moriarty, 2022) and activism and resistance (see Mueller, 2023; Solnit, 2000), including protest (see Mueller, 2023; Solnit, 2000). Indeed, it is a tool for community and/or civic engagement (see Solnit, 2000).

Perhaps lesser known are the numerous research applications for walking methodologies, which are often useful for their embodied and participatory/experiential aspects. These include walking interviews, walking as a form of artistic practice/performance art, and more (O'Neill & Roberts 2020; Springgay & Truman, 2019).

The slowness inherent in walking is incompatible with the capitalist/neoliberalist aspects of our culture; when we are present and engaged, we can more readily tap into the pulse of our communities and the world around us. Thus, walking can be an embodied act of preservation that aligns with an ethic of social and environmental care, situating us as both local and global citizens and researchers. When we look at it this way, the ubiquitous act can be multi-faceted, subversive, and even radical.

Further, the creation of a cultural artefact (e.g. literature) about walking contributes to the cultural milieu of the places explored and simultaneously mobilizes ideas to audiences beyond the academy. The use of walking methods in research, as well as the proliferation of walking

discourse in scholarly, literary, and other contexts, has tremendous potential for cultural and civic engagement.

Still, certain groups (POC, women, and disabled folks) have been excluded from walking because of inadequate infrastructure, fear, and violence. When I talk about walking, I intend for the term to include other(ed) mobilities, including, for example, wheelchair use (see Parent, 2016). To create a walking culture, we must centre walkability, and thus accessibility, inclusivity, equity, and belongingness; we must find ways to embed these in public policy and urban design (see Kern, 2019; Speck, 2018).

Conclusions

In sum, the pivoting that the bricoleur does between and among different methodological constructs resembles the actualities of life and represents a responsive, tailored, and reflexive approach to addressing contemporary social and environmental issues in our rapidly changing world. The information presented here suggests that the methods used in this bricolage approach have the potential to expand and elevate epistemological understandings and acts in a practice-based sense and beyond.

Thank you for listening. If you have any questions about my research, adopted methods, etc., please reach out. My email is kristacarson@connect.glos.ac.uk

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