

From Anthropology to Artistic Practice: How *Bricolage* Has Been Used in the Twentieth Century as an Ideal Model of Engagement with the World

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to return to the concept of *bricolage* as theorized in 1962 by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and examine its presence and utility in the art and architectural history of the twentieth century. While Lévi-Strauss was the first theorist to present *bricolage* as an analogy for the creation of mythical thought among indigenous cultures, the concept has seen a wide range of conceptual, methodological and practical applications across different fields, including design, visual arts, urban planning and the built environment. This article will examine the applicability of *bricolage* as a technical metaphor for the creative process and its relevance to artistic creation by tracing its trajectory over the course of the twentieth century. It will evaluate the significance of objects and events of ‘everyday life’ in the creative practices of contemporary artists, and draw attention to the emerging role of the architect as *bricoleur* or improviser, to conclude that it was the art of the ‘ordinary’ that gave creative inspiration to twentieth-century artists and architects to engage with the materiality and past experiences of the world.

Keywords

Assemblage, collage, contemporary art, postmodern architecture, *bricolage*, *bricoleur*

The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of devious tasks.... 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’....

—Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968, p. 17).

The concept of *bricolage* theorized in 1962 by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was originally presented as an analogy for how mythical thought works. It has since transcended its use as a metaphor applied to ‘savage thought’ and travelled beyond anthropology, in various directions including scientific discourse, humanities and arts. The French word *bricolage* and the theory posited by Lévi-Strauss achieved greater relevance in the contemporary art world of the latter half of the twentieth

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century. It evoked the do-it-yourself process of constructing objects from odds and ends that characterized the newly evolving arts of the period, as a nexus between collage, assemblage and found objects. The aim of this article is to return to Lévi-Strauss's original conceptualization of *bricolage* in order to examine its trajectory as a technical metaphor—from its appropriation from structural anthropology to its assimilation into art historical usage—making it more of a universal concept in the post-war world of twentieth-century art and architectural practice. Looking at the significance attributed by contemporary artists to objects and events of 'everyday life' across assemblage, installation, and conceptual art, as well as evaluating the role of an architect as a *bricoleur*, the article concludes by demonstrating that it was the art of the 'ordinary' and the skill of improvisation that gave creative inspiration to twentieth-century artists and architects to use *bricolage* as an ideal model of engagement with the world. In its conclusion, it will also present to the reader the concept of *jugaad* as the Indian equivalent of resource-*bricolage*, and *Zoukei-Asobi* or the artistic play activities that teach creative meaning-making to Japanese schoolchildren, in order to demonstrate the universal applicability of the *bricolage* metaphor.

A Technical Metaphor for the Creative Process

After Lévi-Strauss introduced into the English language a French word that translates as 'tinkering' or 'making do', *bricolage* has come to mean the construction or creation of something from a diverse range of available materials or sources. In art, it is defined as the skill of using whatever items are at hand and recombining them to create a miscellaneous collection of found objects. It was Lévi-Strauss's illustrations in *The Savage Mind* (1966) of how *bricolage* works that contributed to the seamless assimilation of the term into the art historical lexicon of the 1960s. At the simplest level, *bricolage* is presented by Lévi-Strauss as a technical metaphor for a cognitive and creative process for the generation of mythical thought, which can reach 'brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane' (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 17). The *bricoleur* who is the equivalent of a 'handyman' or a 'jack of all trades' is constrained to work with existing materials, and in contrast to an engineer (a profession that personified Western science for Lévi-Strauss), they cannot plan or make projects, since to do so implies that the necessary tools and materials can be obtained as required. The fact that 'he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution' (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 21) makes him rely more on his personality and life to influence the choices that he makes from the limited material possibilities available. While the overall purpose of the work may not be completed, 'he always puts something of himself into it' (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 21), producing an output that is unique and unpredictable. **It is this continual reconstruction from the same materials and experiences of 'everyday life' that differentiates the *bricoleur* from an engineer or a scientist.** While the former creates structures by means of life events, the latter, whose purpose is always to produce an object of precision and according to scale, creates events that bring about changes in the world by means of structures. While this inverse relationship between the scientist and the *bricoleur* has been questioned by other scholars, a more comprehensive analysis of Lévi-Strauss's original formulation of *bricolage* as applicable to the artistic creative process is useful in order to demonstrate its relevance to our understanding of the contemporary art and architectural practices of the twentieth century.

Relevance of *Bricolage* to Artistic Creation

Lévi-Strauss's proposition is that art lies halfway between science and myth, and the artist is both scientist and *bricoleur* using 'design and anecdote' (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 25) to create both a

well-balanced synthesis of structures, knowledge, and events, and a unique representation that exists only in the final work of art. An important point that he makes is not to mistakenly think of the two approaches of scientific and mythical thought as different stages or phases in the evolution of knowledge but as equally valid processes of creation. It is this argument that distinguishes thought processes that is equally relevant to aesthetic creation. The balance that a creator needs to maintain between structure and event, necessity and contingency, and internal and external knowledge, is as precarious in the world of art as it is in anthropology—with constant threats to its stability being posed by changes in styles, politics, and society. The various art movements that have characterized Western art over the past—from impressionism and expressionism to symbolism and cubism—can therefore be considered not as successive stages in the development of painting but as ‘partners in the same enterprise’ that worked collaboratively to ‘prolong a mode of (artistic) expression whose very existence ... was seriously threatened’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 30).

The twentieth century has witnessed some of the most tumultuous changes in the history of humankind—from world wars and political upheavals to degradation in resources and economic fluctuations. Along with the impact of developments in photography and motion pictures in the early decades of the century, the spread of computers and the digital revolution in the latter half, the varied external forces that have acted as threats to creative expression, caused artists to respond differently to each one. Many eminent names such as Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as more recent contemporary artists such as Atul Dodiya and Tomoko Takahashi, began to use a diverse range of non-traditional art material in their practice. As a result of which, aspects of cubism, Dadaism, surrealism, collage and conceptual art have a *bricolage* character—both with the ‘do-it-yourself’ nature of the works and the respect that their makers accorded to everyday objects that were available close at hand. The *bricolage* approach to artistic creation became popular in the early twentieth century also because resources were scarce and artists needed to innovate during times of the rationing imposed by the two world wars. Lévi-Strauss’s own illustration of the ‘transposition of *bricolage* into the realms of contemplation’ is visible in the art of the collage which originated when ‘craftsmanship was dying’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 30).

As Lévi-Strauss states in the concluding part of ‘The Science of the Concrete’, we are better able to appreciate today how various artists used *bricolage* as a metaphor throughout the twentieth century. It all started with the liberation and emancipation of objects in the first decade with the evolution of the cubist form by artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque who constructed a new order that pointed towards abstract art. The Germany-born art historian Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler described cubism as the ‘reconciliation of a conflict between representation and structure’ (Kahnweiler, 2008, p. 1) wherein the everyday objects depicted were pressed forward out of the picture plane, making it an art of the close-up that dealt with what was literally and figuratively ‘close at hand’ (Seitz, 1968, p. 22). As a creative response to the growing disdain that early-twentieth-century artists had for the outdated modes of representation in Western art, they moved away from oil painting towards the three-dimensional constructions of Duchamp’s ‘ready-mades’, Rauschenberg’s ‘combine paintings’, and the collages of Picasso and Schwitters. This evidence of Lévi-Strauss’s concept of artistic *bricolage* is evident in the fact that these works of art reflected the eclectic personalities and lives of their artists while producing an item that was as ‘unique and unpredictable’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 21) as its creators. Kahnweiler attested this when he wrote that path-breaking artists such as Picasso and Juan Gris wished to ‘display the pre-eminence of the creator’s personality over his creation’ (Seitz, 1968, p. 23).

The spirit of creativity and originality that pervaded the Western art world in the twentieth century was witness to the introduction of terms such as collage, *décollage*, *bricolage* and *assemblage* into the lexicon of art historical terms, with contemporary scholars continuing to be on the fence about whether these should be considered independent of each other or as a ‘semantically linked family’ (Kjellman-Chapin, 2006, p. 86). While collage involves creating a work of art by pasting together items like

newspaper clippings on a single surface, assemblage is its three-dimensional counterpart which creates an artwork out of a group of seemingly unrelated objects, and *décollage* is the unravelling of a previously made collage. On the other hand, the term *bricolage*, when appropriated into the artistic vocabulary of the times, came to refer to the ‘construction or creation of an artwork from “any” materials that come to hand’ (Tate Art Terms, 2022). These terms, as well as those like montage, pastiche and palimpsest, that also allude to creating newer artworks from work that existed before, all evoke the do-it-yourself and reconstructive spirit of Lévi-Strauss’s concept of *bricolage*. It is these non-traditional approaches to materials and meaning-making that pervaded an artistic community that was wrestling with two basic questions—the nature of reality and the nature of painting itself. The incorporation of the techniques of collage, ready-made objects, everyday utilitarian items, and other three-dimensional constructions into works of art by the Dadaists, the surrealists, the cubists and the conceptual artists were all means of ‘incorporating reality in the picture without imitating it’ (Seitz, 1968, p. 6). As early as 1912, Picasso juggled reality and abstraction in *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1911–1912) in which he initiated the process of assembling objects into the method as well as the subject matter of a painting by using pasted oil cloth that simulated chair caning and hemp rope in lieu of a frame. It is evident, therefore, that the idea of *bricolage* which showed a new way for artists to present reality to the world by using ‘the fossilised evidence of the history of an individual or a society’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 14) had permeated twentieth-century art decades before Lévi-Strauss gave it a conceptual framework. It was the growing popularity of the art of assemblage, described by William Seitz, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as ‘the fitting together of part and pieces’ (Dezeuze, 2008, p. 31) that enabled mid-century artists to identify closely with Lévi-Strauss’s theorization.

In 1961, shortly before the publication of *The Savage Mind*, the Museum of Modern Art held a landmark exhibition entitled ‘The Art of Assemblage’, which displayed over 250 works by 130 artists and formally introduced the concept of assemblage to the art world—as a more inclusive term for art that was made from objects that were not originally intended as art materials. Seitz who curated the exhibition presented an argument very similar to Lévi-Strauss’s comments on the artist as a *bricoleur* as someone who speaks not only *with* things but also through the *medium* of things, by using the remains and debris of events to build up structures. In the book that accompanied the 1961 exhibition, Seitz wrote:

No mode of creation is more direct or naturally arrived at than the accumulation of materials found close at hand... But art does not always derive from art. Artists draw sustenance from everywhere: from the totality—moral, intellectual, and temporal as well as physical and sensory—of their environment and experience. (Seitz, 1968, p. 72)

With the Italian Arte Povera movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the *bricolage* approach to art-making took on a political intent, with artists using it to take a radical stance against the commercialism of the art world and attack the values of established institutions of government, industry and culture. Their response was in a manner similar to what Lévi-Strauss draws our attention towards in *The Savage Mind*, when artistic creation verges on *bricolage* with events taking precedence over structure as a result of a greater emphasis on transient social and political phenomena. The term ‘Arte Povera’ which literally means ‘poor art’ was used by artists to refer to a wide range of unconventional processes and non-traditional ‘everyday materials’, instead of traditional ones such as oil paint, canvas, marble and bronze, in an attempt to challenge the elitist values of the contemporary gallery system. One of Arte Povera’s foremost proponents was Italian art critic Germano Celant, who promoted the notion of a revolutionary art that was free of convention, power of structure and marketplace. Artists such as Jannis Kounellis and Mario Merz constructed sculptures out of rubbish in an attempt to devalue the art object and assert the

value of the ordinary and the everyday. The movement went beyond being the ‘art of the impoverished materials’, and artists tried to bridge the natural and the artificial, by closely connecting the spectator with the natural world, within the gallery setting. In order to make the experience of art more immediately real and celebrate unity between life and art, artists like Kounellis used natural materials such as wood, stone, coal, and even live animals and plants in their installations. One of Kounellis’s most famous works, created in 1969, was *Untitled (12 horses)*, which consisted of 12 live horses tethered in the gallery for several days, as an extreme manifestation of the desire to make art that could not be sold, as it was a part of life.

Since the 1970s artists have continued to make art out of detritus—for example, London-based Japanese artist Tomoko Takahashi constructs vast sculptures of junk found on the streets as a comment on the disposable nature of our culture and society. Similar to the *bricoleur’s* creative act, the overall purpose of the work in Takahashi’s sprawling installations does not appear to be complete, and her artistic intent is not always apparent in what may first appear to be a random pile of discarded refuse. It is only on closer inspection that a spectator notices that despite their abstract nature, the works have an underlying order to them and are highly schematic, yet also deeply intuitive. In a further application of the *bricolage* metaphor to Takahashi’s practice, she reconstructs materials scavenged from the streets of urban human life to create an idiosyncratic map of cities as seen through her eyes, thereby posing a challenge to her audience to think at a different level on the intellectual plane—akin to Lévi-Strauss’s theorization for the process that generates mythical thought.

Indian contemporary artist Atul Dodiya, on the other hand, uses his paintings and assemblages to engage with both political and artistic history by imbibing his own personal experiences into public memory. He uses shop shutters, personal items, photographs, cabinet and closet paraphernalia, blackboards, prosthetics and colonial vitrines to pay homage to past events while, at the same time, commenting on cultural, social and political developments in India. Dodiya’s installations speak to us in a language very similar to the *bricoleur’s* by using the remains and debris of events and experiences, both personal and public, to build up his structures. These remains are not discarded objects of everyday life, but souvenirs, memorabilia and objects, which relate to his upbringing and artistic development. In his 2011 work, *Meditation (with open eyes)* he pays tribute to artists and cultural figures who have inspired him by assembling portraits, artworks and quotations in glass cabinets resembling museum showcases—as a shrine that celebrates the everyday lives of these iconic individuals. In this manner, while Dodiya’s creative intent in speaking through the medium of things is different from Takahashi’s, it is similar in its attempt at making possible new ways of putting existing materials together. While the term ‘assemblage’ has been superseded by newer terms such as environment, performance, process and conceptual art, the practices of contemporary artists such as Takahashi and Dodiya display evidence of the continuing relevance of Lévi-Strauss’s technical metaphor of *bricolage* as a tool that enables them to engage with the material world through a dialogue with everyday recognizable objects.

The Art of ‘Everyday Life’

It is through the example of the *bricoleur* that Lévi-Strauss illustrates a model of engagement with heterogeneous objects including the remains of life events that involves interrogating them to discover what each one of them could ‘signify’ and contribute to the project at hand. William Seitz furthered the use of this metaphor by emphasizing that all works in the exhibition ‘The Art of Assemblage’ should not only combine two different material objects but that these should also be ‘discarded or purloined ... rather than new’ (Dezeuze, 2008, p. 31) akin to the debris with which the *bricoleur*, according to Lévi-Strauss, builds

up their structures. The idea that the various components of the artwork should be recognizable and identifiable as familiar objects was a defining moment in the contemporary art world of the time, as a result of which there was a renewed focus on process-based practices and a new dominance of the commodity began to seep into artistic expression in the latter half of the twentieth century. Just as the cubist and collage works of Picasso and Braque made us recognize and appreciate the beauty and utility of simple, unassuming everyday objects, the pop art of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and David Hockney celebrated images and icons from popular media and mass culture. Pop art began in the 1950s as a revolt against traditional views on art, with young artists objecting to the difference between their art education and the art in museums, and their everyday lives. Instead of traditional subject matter, they turned to sources such as Hollywood movies, advertising, product packaging, pop music and comic books for their imagery. In this way, the figure of the *bricoleur* did not disappear in the latter half of the twentieth century, as pop artists continued to look for inspiration from existing sources in popular and commercial culture, in an attempt at ‘continual reconstruction from the same materials’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 21). It is this artistic intent of imbuing ordinary objects with renewed life that unites artists from the early twentieth century such as Picasso, Schwitters and Braque to contemporary artists such as Hockney, Takahashi and Dodiya, despite the hundred years that separate them. The intimate relationship with their surroundings that they have celebrated through their work—while describing modern and contemporary life at the same time—has helped the world address deeper questions as to what happens to objects when they are thrown away. Most of their works are not simply sociopolitical commentaries on conspicuous consumption or the benefits of recycling. Instead, by freeing discarded objects from their recognizable social and symbolic roles, and using them to create new environments, these artists have reminded us that ‘the anarchic impulse can be a powerful and productive force of creative transformation’ (Isé, 2002).

The twentieth century, with its tumultuous events that redefined the modern era, had always been a challenging time for artists to connect with the ‘everyday’ and find an appropriate artistic metaphor or method to represent it. It is a challenge that continues to face cultural commentators in the twenty-first century, be they artists or anthropologists, and as British cultural theorist Ben Highmore forewarns, ‘The everyday will necessarily exceed attempts to apprehend it’ (Highmore, 2001, p. 21). With day-to-day experiences of people being diverse, depending on their country, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, gender, class or economic status, the aesthetic form that represents these has to be equally heterogeneous. *Bricolage* has therefore been the most appropriate image-making tool for artists like Takahashi, and her chaotic installations which are designed to look disordered are a perfect reflection of the multiplicity and diversity of everyday life.

The Engaged Viewer

With the amelioration of ordinary and recognizable material objects, twentieth-century artists adopted a *bricolage* model to set up open systems in which new relations between art and the everyday could be articulated, making it incumbent on the spectator or the viewer to play an active part. Those who followed the assemblage artists of the 1960s further redefined the boundaries of art by blurring the lines between ‘object and process, between artwork and viewer participation’ (Dezeuze, 2008, p. 33). The French artist Robert Filliou associated with the Fluxus movement, who described himself as a *bricoleur*, created a number of assemblages like *Permanent Playfulness* (1973) that consisted of words and drawings on pieces of cardboard hung together with hooks and strings. Filliou believed that everyone carried genius within them, which could be brought to the forefront using his notion of ‘constant creation’, a concept based on participatory and emancipatory art that can arise anywhere and at any time. The simplicity and

ease-of-making of his constructions helped encourage a new conception of art as an activity in which anyone can engage—as both viewer and performer.

In the 1980s, there was a further development in the analogy between assemblage art and *bricolage* with cultural critics like French philosopher Michel de Certeau using *bricolage* to describe the ways in which we engage in day-to-day activities such as shopping, walking and cooking. It is this emancipation of common activities by scholars such as Certeau who sought to define them as a complex field of study, which encouraged contemporary artists to explore the possibilities of including these in their performance art practices with the active collaboration of their audience. Similar to Filliou's cardboard construction, the work of Hélio Oiticica also encouraged viewer–spectator participation in the process of creation. Oiticica, one of the most important Brazilian visual artists of his generation, has been acknowledged as a formative figure in the history of contemporary art. In one of his most iconic artworks entitled *Parangolés* (1964–1979) or wearable, experiential garments, participants use cheap materials such as cotton, plastic and jute to collaboratively create colourful capes which are then worn by them while dancing to samba music. Artists like Oiticica were successful in not only liberating activities such as stitching and dancing from their everyday descriptions but also releasing artistic concepts like colour from the picture plane and giving it spatial form by injecting it into the surrounding environment, and animating it through improvisatory dance. This integration of the audience with the artistic process enabled art to be brought into the street by building a sense of community through public participation and engagement, and as a result, the *bricoleur's* tools that were once wielded only by the creator were now also available to the spectator.

In the Built Environment

The realm of architecture had also turned to *bricolage* as a design process at various times in history when more appropriate materials were not available, through the use of second-hand materials and by using non-conventional architectural elements, methods and tools, usually intended for a different purpose. Many architects and builders of the past have thought like a *bricoleur* who as an improviser and inventor inspects materials close at hand as active entities, rather than inert objects, in order to provide innovative solutions to new constructions—such as in the *spolia* of the Roman world where architectural fragments were taken out of their original context and repurposed. In this manner, buildings once completed are never permanent or final and can continue to contribute to newer histories. This is evidenced in the reuse of older reliefs in the Arch of Constantine in Rome completed in 315 CE, repurposing of ancient Roman columns in the hypostyle hall of the Great Mosque at Cordoba constructed in 786 CE, and additions and removals over centuries of the second-century Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in Rome that converted it into the Roman Catholic Church of San Lorenzo. This process of reusing things at hand to create something new that often serves a different purpose or assumes a different identity was exactly how Lévi-Strauss described myth-making in *The Savage Mind*—as the work of *bricolage*.

In *Collage City* (1993), architectural historians Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter describe the city as a collage and architects more like *bricoleurs* than scientists or engineers. They posit that architecture being ‘hopelessly involved with value judgments can never be scientifically resolved’ (Rowe & Koetter, 1993, p. 105) as it is perceived as a function that is supposed to make life better or make a building or a city how it ought to be. Rowe and Koetter also evaluate the artistic temperament of Le Corbusier, one of the most influential architects of the modern age, by presenting the possibility of him being a *bricoleur* disguised as an engineer. Le Corbusier as an urban planner set up platonic city structures, while the interiors of the homes that he designed were full of architectural details, and it is these two completely different strategies—a simple public world and an elaborate private one—that prompts Rowe and Koetter to suggest that

Le Corbusier was in fact a ‘fox-in-hedgehog’ disguise. The latter analogy is in reference to Latvia-born British philosopher Isaiah Berlin’s 1953 essay ‘The Hedgehog and the Fox’, which outlines two temperaments—the hedgehog who is concerned with a single big idea as opposed to the fox who, like a *bricoleur*, absorbs multiple stimuli and draws on a wide variety of experiences. Le Corbusier’s architecture also invites inhabitants to become *bricoleurs* themselves, as had happened in the 1960s at the Quarter Moderne Fruges at Pessac, a low-cost housing for saw-mill workers constructed in a suburb of Bordeaux in the 1920s. Although this was not Le Corbusier’s intention, the house owners became active participants in the transformation of the Quarter whose brightly painted, modular design had been badly received by the public—with creative improvisations such as pitched roofs, decorative windows, terraces, garage extensions, garden sheds and repainted exteriors. Sociologist Philippe Boudon in the 1960s suggested that these owners engaged in a process of aesthetic ‘vernacularization’ in order to remake their houses in the local Bordeaux-style, and his book *Le Corbusier’s Pessac: 1927–1967: A Socio-architectural Study* (1969) became part of a movement that rallied against the imposition by architects of their ideas about how people ought to live and argued for greater involvement of occupants in housing design. This idea of integrating all participants in the architectural world in order to build a better community was in many ways similar to parallel movements in contemporary art which were promoting public participation and engagement.

The architect as a *bricoleur* was more apparent in the postmodern movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which in a reaction against modernism and its strict doctrines and uniformity sought to create a new form of expression by pulling together an assemblage of pieces from architectural history. One of the movements’ most provocative acts of architectural *bricolage* came from Philip Johnson, an erstwhile modernist master who in the late 1970s mashed styles and periods together in the AT&T Building in New York. The building whose top storey is fashioned after a cabinet designed by the eighteenth-century furniture-maker, Thomas Chippendale, which itself was a baroque comment on the Greek temple pediment and transplanted from architecture, also has stories that resemble the drawers of a Chippendale cabinet. Just as Lévi-Strauss’s *bricoleur* pieced together past histories and experiences for myth-making, postmodern architects broke all rules of modernist architecture to return to history and replace the visually unified form of early-twentieth-century structures with the ‘multi vocalism of allegory, as buildings designed by historical analogy began to dot the landscape’ (Willette, 2012).

More recently, in the twenty-first century, with its exponential increase in human population, social inequality, ecological damage and environmental degradation, it has become the architect and urban planner’s ethical responsibility to help address the climate change crisis by creating a circular economy where materials are recycled. They must also engage people most affected by architectural decisions to be active participants in the design process which begins, according to urban design professor and author of *The Architecture of Ethics* (2019), Thomas Fisher, with an empathetic understanding of diverse perspectives and a respect for cultural and climatic differences. It is the *bricoleur*’s materials-based thinking that values things that have already been used and the experience that their usage has given us that is needed to create a truly sustainable economy that produces no waste and regenerates itself. Decades after the publication of *The Savage Mind*, the kind of thinking that anthropologists of the 1960s celebrated in indigenous tribes of being a ‘handyman’ or ‘tinkerer’, present-day scholarship is asking of contemporary architects in times of the varied current crises to be ‘part survivalist, part inventor, and part artist’ (Read, 2018, p. 234).

Conclusion

In the 1960s, the Western art world appropriated the French word *bricolage*, as there was no such term or concept available in the English lexicon. **As discussed in this article, it was the creativity and freedom**

of improvisation that the *bricolage* concept offered twentieth-century artists that made it an ideal way for them to engage with the world. Contemporary artists like Tomoko Takahashi continue to use *bricolage* as a tool in site-specific installations to ‘encapsulate the activity of the people who inhabit that space, often through objects which are left behind by them’ (Preece, 2009).

Before concluding this article, it is also important to consider the possibility that such concepts of resourceful creativity must also exist in other cultures and might be represented by different phraseology. It is likely, for instance, that Takahashi’s usage of found objects in her practice has its origins in *Zoukei-Asobi* or the artistic play activities that she would have been involved in as part of *Zuga-Kōsaku* (art and handicraft), a compulsory subject in the national curriculum in Japanese primary schools. *Zoukei-Asobi* dissuades teachers from directing students’ artistic works and encourages a learner-centred pedagogy based on creative meaning-making through ‘the process of *bricolage*—making use of whatever materials were at hand’ (Kirita, 2017, p. 513). The concept of *bricolage* in the Indian context is not unlike *jugaad*, a colloquial Hindi word for a flexible approach to problem-solving that provides an improvised solution with materials available readily at hand, in order to use limited resources in an innovative manner. Acknowledged as ‘the art of creative improvisation within a framework of deep knowledge and experience’ (Radjou et al., 2010), the positive aspects of *jugaad* thinking have enabled many frugal innovations across various disciplines from agriculture and transportation to the corporate and financial world. Dean Nelson, the author of *Jugaad Yatra* (2018), traces the origin of this thinking to India’s ancient scriptures and epics—in the story of the creation of the elephant-headed god Ganesha and in Krishna’s revelation in the Bhagavad Gita. The former being an example of flexible thinking and creativity on the part of the Indian god Shiva to recreate a young boy whom he beheaded, with the first living creature that was at hand. The latter relates to the Indian god Krishna announcing that He lives in every object and being, thereby implying that there is ‘divinity, value and potential in all materiality’ (Nelson, 2018, p. xix). It is this mythology-rooted, distinctly Indian equivalent of resource *bricolage* that is also visible in design, art and architecture across the country, such as in the critically acclaimed plastic canopy *Jugaad* (2008) created by architect and designer Sanjeev Shankar. The installation was made out of a thousand discarded cooking oil cans in partnership with the residents of Rajokri, an urban village in New Delhi, in order to explore ideas of sustainability, recycling and repurposing.

It is evident that across mediums and geographies, the artist as a *bricoleur* continues to be relevant in the contemporary design strategy of the twenty-first century, years after Lévi-Strauss’s theorization, albeit with the artistic tools being different—the objects and materials that characterized art and architecture for centuries have been replaced with a newer vocabulary and language. With the evolution of process-based, environmental and conceptual artistic practice, art has begun to be viewed more for its performative dimension and as a creative journey of human expression, rather than purely as a deliverable final product. At the same time, the skill of improvisation attributed by Lévi-Strauss to the *bricoleur*—one that encourages a material way of thinking where rationality is replaced by opportunism, and globality with locality—will also help modern-day architects to reinvent and reimagine architecture, to create a sustainable society for the future. *Bricolage* has successfully transcended the field of mid-twentieth-century anthropology, where it was used to describe the complexity of primitive systems of thought, to the field of contemporary art and architecture, where it could be used as a cognitive and creative process for practitioners to engage with the world, its materiality and experiences, and with the practice of everyday life.

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