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**PAUL TARRAGÓ:
THE FUN OF FAILURE**





*In failing to prepare
You are preparing to fail!*





Paul Tarragó

The Fun Of Failure.
Why celebrate failure?

That wasn't the point - we weren't toasting its good health, making merry. Rather, we were embracing it, acknowledging its usefulness. There's a strange contemporary notion of failure: that with prolonged or intensive exposure it can soak into you, somehow turning you into a failure. It works a bit like our popular understanding of exposure to radiation (and I'm putting the stress on popular here, as I realise scientists are pretty clear on this): very few of us know how much is too much, so it's assumed to be one of those things probably best avoided whenever possible.

"The concept of failure as something that defines your whole identity is a new thing. In terms of language it didn't exist at all before the Civil War The construction was 'I made a failure' rather than 'I am a failure'. It was an event that could be discrete, without touching upon one's moral and existential being."

Scott Sandage, 'Born Losers: A History of Failure in America'

It's this incarnation of failure as a potential taint that seems to hold people back, yet failure is also at the heart of successful creative exploration: you usually have to wander into not-really-where-I-thought-I-was-headed territory at least once or twice when you're making something in order to temper and test your ideas. Even though I'm loath to use terms such as 'crucial' it's ... necessary; vital; key; paramount; maybe not compulsory, but definitely important, maybe critical, certainly elementary, arguably pivotal etc.

That wandering into an area of questionable merit could be disappointing if you believed you needed to have figured out every step of your route at the beginning in order to advance on an incremental march to success. You could be feeling giddily disorientated, maybe lost.

Conversely, it could be understood as a surprising detour, one that tests your ideas, provides a new challenge, reveals a little more than you'd first considered...

This heuristic approach - moving to a solution by trial and error - gives you a whole lot more info than you had when you first formulated your idea: you've learnt in the doing, had the opportunity to test your assumptions, and to re-evaluate what your ideal looks like now, from that place - that wrong place - that you now find yourself in. You reflect, re-plan your route accordingly, and set off on the next leg. So you've:

- i learnt what doesn't work
(probably helpful - at least you now know what not to do)
- ii may have insights into what's needed to improve your approach (things you need to learn, do, or what needs resolving)
- iii could have chanced upon something unexpected and useful in your wanderings upon the way (serendipity)
- iv can see what your ideal finished product now looks like from a different angle (still look good? or can be improved? how?)
- v started testing the rigour/logic/sense-making of your creative endeavour and your presumptions
- vi have actually started doing, so have taken the pressure off yourself to come up with ideas, which is often the time when new ones most readily appear

LOCATION: POLYPHEMUS's cave on a small island off the coast of Sicily

SOCRATES: Is this a small living room, a playroom, or a bedroom? How about all three?

POLYPHEMUS: I'm undecided.

SOCRATES: On the plus side, small space living means you consume less energy, and therefore spend less.

POLYPHEMUS: But could six friends live together in 40 square meters?

SOCRATES: Do you have five friends?

POLYPHEMUS: Acquaintances, then.

SOCRATES: That might seem like a recipe for disaster -

POLYPHEMUS: It does -

SOCRATES: But when everything - and everyone - works together, almost anything is possible.

POLYPHEMUS: That's easy to say, but can you prove it?

SOCRATES: There are tips and ideas at IKEA.co.uk/smallspaces The URL bounces into shot coincident with five of POLYPHEMUS's friends making a surprise visit: a basilisk, a wyvern, a chimaera, Empusa (a vampiric demon with a leg of bronze and a hoofed foot of a donkey) and Python.

TOGETHER: Surprise!!!
As the five newcomers make approving, nodding sweeping glances around POLYPHEMUS's living space. SOCRATES watches on and nods approvingly. POLYPHEMUS is touched by his friends' impromptu visit and joins in the universal nodding. The final shot shows the basilisk opening a box to reveal s/he has brought along cupcakes.

- i don't keep borrowing undigested chunks of text from the IKEA catalogue as a quick-fix solution even if it is close to hand; giving 'classical' names to protagonists may have limited appeal to contemporary audiences; wouldn't the basilisk, wyvern etc. have names too? Polyphemus is a cyclops after all.
- ii is this the first scene of a longer narrative?; Socrates seems a bit sneery - why is he so quick to belittle Polyphemus? maybe they're former flatmates, or there was an incident round Socrates' when Polyphemus last visited?; should probably find something out about Socrates if I'm going to start making up stories about him - will aid verisimilitude, though use of IKEA, URL etc. obviously don't
- iii came across a piece of writing I'd been working on which reads a lot better than this - so just need to get this out the way and then I've got something to look forward to; whilst looking for that article on starfish found a long lost pair of pliers
- iv yes, it can be improved. Have now removed: section on installations in barns, paragraph about how to make books more attractive, and Socrates' comical dog; anagrams and lipograms also discarded
- v *"One must not confuse agitation with excitement"*
Germaine Dulac
Deviation can prove wearing, and being unreadable isn't necessarily an index of formal integrity; integrity isn't necessarily a good thing in writing, though rigour usually is; rigorous deviation could be fun though often isn't.
- vi true



So we used balloons, folding and twisting them. I brought along animal diagrams, but it turns out to be hard to follow instructions when you're talking. So we mostly didn't make animal shapes, or if they were they were quite fantastical or mutated ones: as if from outer space or under a microscope.

Sally did make a very well crafted rabbit, orange and straight-backed, which I took home and have watched get smaller every day: a deflating memento mori. As the air leaked back out it started to shrivel, the rubber retaining a hazy memory of its original shape. Hysteresis in action. So, as it shrank and puckered, its back legs also started to twist back round by 45 degrees but then one day just stopped - like it had forgotten the next steps

The session went well: things were made, discussion had, and then it was 4.00pm and time to make way for the next person. I'd decided beforehand that just me, Jennet and Eddy would have worked fine as a group - anyone else turning up would be icing on the cake; correspondingly we ended up nicely icy.

One thing I hadn't anticipated was that people would happily come up with their own balloon shapes and designs, which in retrospect seems fairly dumb of me - but a forgivable kind of dumb.



Once I've crossed the Bridge I am suddenly, violently sick. I am aware of being watched from a nearby copse and catch a glimpse of the onlookers: a crow and a squirrel, and maybe that roe deer grazing on the ferns. I feel feverish and my head is bowed down, most of my concentration focused on not vomiting on my new shoes: light beige suede and not yet scotchguarded. I can feel the veins on my forehead pulse as my skin flushes cold.

An earthworm wriggles to the surface, and then another, perhaps mistaking my spewing for a sudden downpour. They're joined by a small black beetle. And then, within seconds of their emergence, they start to move jerkily, vibrate and then vomit. It doesn't seem to phase them as they then continue on their way: the worms disappear back down below, the beetle off into the leaf mould.

Within these mini pools within the central pool, just barely visible, some mites emerge and then, seconds later, a slight frothing ensues. I get down on my hands and knees and can see - yes - they're retching too.

This chain reaction will maybe carry on, leading to ... what? As it dwindles to the microscopic does that mean it's becoming less significant or more fundamental? And is there a limit to size for vomiting creatures? If it gets down to atom-splitting level - it's physically less and less, yet symbolically seems more and more. What have I started? What can it mean?

The MEAT THIEF looks up from his dream journal. Police psychiatrist SOCRATES stifles a yawn. Two MAGPIES squabble in the plane tree opposite.

i
ii
iii etc.



South London Press

EVERY FRIDAY
PECKHAM:
MEAT THIEF
SPAT RACIAL
ABUSE FROM
WHEEL CHAIR
South London PRESS

local Newspaper

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Proposals (Index)

Paul Tarragó The Fun Of Failure:

Balloon folding activity b/w round-table seminar discussion on the notion of 'falling short'.

For fifty minutes we shall be attempting to fold balloons into likenesses of animals. For fifty minutes we shall discuss the importance of failing as a strategy. Diagrams and instructions will be freely available. All judgment will be reserved.

No prior balloon folding experience required or desired.

Potential areas of discussion: 'not knowing how to' as a constraint; post-ironic practice; the emotional content of falling short; strategies around inability; formal play vs. 'the experimental'

Potential animal shapes: poodle; swan; lion; rabbit; dinosaur; butterfly; giraffe; fish; sausage dog; dragon fly (I shall be seeking out more).

FAQ

Q. Will pumps be provided as I have difficulty inflating balloons orally?

A. Yes, several pumps - and balloons in a variety of colours - will be available.

Q. Is this a legitimate pedagogical enquiry or 'a bit of a lark'?

A. Define your terms. Qualified, certified educators shall be in attendance.

Q. Will I be able to take my balloon animals home with me afterwards?

A. Certainly.

Q. I'm interested but have a very busy life.

A. That's not really a question.