

Excerpt from:
IMPROVISATION AND *BRICOLAGE* IN NON-MUSICAL SYSTEMS

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We live in a society with an unhealthy dependence on perfection. Error and failure are collectively identified as “surprises”: unanticipated roadblocks on the unrealistic Highway of Perfection. So why does failure happen? I pose this question not in a ‘why do bad things happen to good people’ sort of way. I also make this inquiry knowing that there cannot be one single answer. Are there any general conditions or foundations necessary to generate failure? In my experience as a jazz improviser, I find that my most resonant feelings of failure occur after a performance in which I did not navigate the errors to my satisfaction. As stated above, there are critical connections between process and product for improvising musicians. For myself, there is actually little middle ground here between peak performance and supposed disaster. I have reached a point in my playing in which I embrace *and* anticipate errors. They will always happen. I try to play not in a tentative manner full of hope alone, nor in a manner of negative expectations.

A shifting in mindset regarding failure is imperative. It would involve viewing errors in the course of performance [life] as “transient flaws that will make sense as events unfold.”¹ Errors ought to be observed as experiments that will lead us to new solutions. Imparting this mindset of imperfection through musical channels would open the student to a world where awareness and ability constantly intersect in every action, on and off the bandstand.

¹ Organizations: Ivory Tower Visions & Real World Voices. Ed. Cameron M. Ford and Dennis A. Gioia. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995. 187.