



Errans: Going Astray, Being Adrift, Coming to Nothing, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, Cultural Inquiry, 24 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 1–18

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## 'Submit Your References'

### Introduction

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ABSTRACT: The principles of ERRANS are introduced by considering two radically different contexts: Within academic publishing, the literary form of the edited collection is as common as it is denigrated and rarely reflected upon. The account being offered (within an edited collection) seeks to not only reinterpret the status of the genre, but argues in favor of a curatorial errancy within scholarly communication. Yet errancy has also become a crucial touchstone in management and leadership studies, whether as 'disruptive innovation' or 'VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) worlds', inviting a different consideration of the relationship between capitalism and its political and artistic critiques than the one offered by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello — one which does not consider itself untouched by the errant logics it discerns in its 'subjects'.

KEYWORDS: Errancy; Anthologies—Editing; Scholarly communication; Academic publishing; Curation; Disruptive innovations; VUCA; Management literature; Creative destruction; Capitalism; Boltanski, Luc; Chiapello, Ève

# 'Submit Your References'

## Introduction

ARND WEDEMEYER

We are constantly told to get lost — and not just in the unfriendly way. And we are very much celebrating our having gone astray with a new research interest, letting it take us far afield, its vagaries requiring many a detour, and in any case, the search itself is already marked by a necessary surrender to the inexhaustible intractabilities of our 'archive'. Exhortations of errancy, vindications of failure abound in a variety of critical discourses today — but they also do in self-help manuals, career-advice columns, and business mantras. The taste for a departure from progress and other teleologies, the fascination with disorder, unfocused modes of attention, or improvisational performances cuts across wide swaths of scholarly and activist discourses, practices in the arts, but also business, warfare, and politics. Is there a clear line, a fixed measure or threshold of 'negativity', that sets apart Samuel Beckett's notorious 'Fail again. Fail better' from the slightly menacing adage being handed around management tracts and leadership manuals: 'Failure itself may not be a catastrophe, but failure to learn from failure definitely is'? And conversely one might ask whether radical

On the memeification of the Beckett quote from Worstward Ho (New York: Grove, 1983), p. 7, see Mark O'Conell, 'The Stunning Success of "Fail Better": How Samuel Beckett Became Silicon Valley's Life Coach', Slate, 29 January 2014 <a href="https://slate.com/culture/2014/01/samuel-becketts-quote-fail-better-becomes-the-mantra-of-silicon-valley.html">https://slate.com/culture/2014/01/samuel-becketts-quote-fail-better-becomes-the-mantra-of-silicon-valley.html</a> [accessed 31 May 2022].

critiques of ideals of productivity, success, and determination can ultimately amount to something other than the 'I would prefer not to' of Bartleby the scrivener,<sup>2</sup> 'the most implacable vindication of th[e] Nothing as pure, absolute potentiality'.<sup>3</sup> The crucial touchstone for this search proved to be Lauren Berlant's reflections on attachment's cruel time warps and the syntactically cooled distance she takes from Bartleby:

Cruel optimism is [...] a concept pointing toward a mode of lived immanence, one that grows from a perception about the reasons people are not Bartleby, do not prefer to interfere with varieties of immiseration, but choose to ride the wave of the system of attachment that they are used to, to syncopate with it, or to be held in a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation that does not mean defeat by it.<sup>4</sup>

~

In the fall of 2014, the ICI Berlin convened a group of scholars from a wide variety of disciplines and backgrounds to explore these questions over the course of two years. The starting assumption of their collective research project was, on the one hand, that many of the above-mentioned critical concerns of the day could be bundled and brought into focus using the Latin word *errāre*, its derivations, formations, and transmutations in several modern languages, but also, on the other, that this very rich word-field and its heterogenous history would provide the resources for a new and multiplicitous rethinking of phenomena and modalities of erring, of errors, errantries, and errancies across discourses, disciplines, and demarcations. The project, hence, was placed under the name 'ERRANS'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Herman Melville, 'Bartleby, the Scrivener', in Melville, The Piazza Tales, and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860, ed. by Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, G. Thomas Tanselle, and others (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), pp. 13–45.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'Bartleby, or On Contingency', in Agamben, Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy, ed. & trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 243-71 (pp. 253-54).

<sup>4</sup> Lauren Berlant, Cruel Optimism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 28.

For a description of the project, related documentation of its activities, and an extensive video archive of its lecture series, see 'ERRANS, ICI Focus 2014–16', website of the ICI Berlin <a href="https://www.ici-berlin.org/projects/errans-2014-16/">https://www.ici-berlin.org/projects/errans-2014-16/</a> [accessed 2 May 2022].

The present volume features some of the work resulting from the varied activities of the research group, from weekly colloquia, reading groups, film screenings to intimate workshops and public conferences, but of course also reflects the individual research and commitments of its authors. It presents it in a form that will appear familiar if not trivial to some, a form that upon closer inspection invites a reflection on its entanglements with errancies and ambivalences — the form of what is commonly called an edited collection, something between a genre of scholarship and a publishing format, and one that has acquired a particularly bad reputation. A quick flashback to understand its discomfited situatedness within scholarly communication: Roughly with the beginning of the millennium, talk of a crisis in academic publishing had intensified. Complaints about this crisis certainly took note of the larger technological changes in book publishing — affecting commercial and academic, trade and university presses alike. Yet while the digital transformation challenged the existing formats of publishing at large, including those of newspapers and magazines, scholarly publishing was affected by new media and technologies in particular ways and was arguably facing more profound changes on several fronts — articulated and attenuated in the desperate pleas, presidential letters, reports, and special commissions of the professional associations of scholars across many disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (in particular those not entirely relying on journal publications), <sup>6</sup> but also registered

In 2002, Stephen Greenblatt, in his capacity as president of the MLA (Modern Language Association) wrote an alarmist letter to his society's members, pointing out the economic underpinnings, but also the uneven ways in which different disciplines were affected by the crisis in academic publishing: 'Call for Action on Problems in Scholarly Book Publishing: A Special Letter from Stephen Greenblatt', 28 May 2002 <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/j.jeph.10 //www.mla.org/Resources/Guidelines-and-Data/Reports-and-Professional-Guidelines/Publishing-and-Scholarship/Call-for-Action-on-Problems-in-Scholarly-Book-Publishing/A-Special-Letter-from-Stephen-Greenblatt> [accessed 20 April 2022]. The MLA formed an Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing, which shortly thereafter published its report: 'The Future of Scholarly Publishing', Profession 2002 (New York: MLA, 2002), pp. 172-86 <a href="https://doi.org/10.2002/j.jpp.172-86">https://doi.org/10.2002/j.jpp.172-86</a> //www.mla.org/Resources/Guidelines-and-Data/Reports-and-Professional-Guidelines/Publishing-and-Scholarship/The-Future-of-Scholarly-Publishing> [accessed 21 April 2022]. The AHA (American Historical Association) followed suit: James McPherson, 'From the President: A Crisis in Scholarly Publishing' and Robert B. Townsend, 'History and the Future of Scholarly Publishing', Perspectives on History, 41.7 (October 2003) <a href="https://www.historians.org/">https://www.historians.org/</a> publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2003-x43317>

by academic librarians.<sup>7</sup> The crisis was primarily understood as the result of a massive privatization and commercialization of scholarly communication, with dramatic price increases of institutional journal subscriptions eating into university library budgets — between 1982 and 2002, the prices of scientific and medical journals rose by 600% —,8 and an equally dramatic loss of profitability for book publications across the board, but in particular in smaller academic disciplines.9 These economic difficulties reflected a large-scale transformation of, as of today, still uncertain outcome. 10 Modern scholarly communication has of course always been a commercialized (albeit generally subsidized) interaction between scholars, publishers, and libraries that at best amounted to a fragile equilibrium. In some privileged parts of the globe, the academic 'marketplace of ideas' could seem to constitute a short circuit or, to put it more politely, an 'ecology', inasmuch as larger universities would operate university presses publishing scholarly work to be sold to university libraries and assigned in university courses. Yet the large-scale defunding of higher education — arguably motivated politically more than economically — threatened the closed circuits of non-profit academic publishing. At the same time, universities were pressured to institute evaluative controls in their operations, mimicking the tools of financialization becoming ever more prevalent in corporate and political governance. These controls would consist in tracking the acquisition of research funds (with respect to the humanities, this was more decisive within European university systems),

and  $$\operatorname{https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2003/history-and-the-future-of-scholarly-publishing> [accessed 3 May 2022].$ 

<sup>7 &#</sup>x27;Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication 1', American Library Association, 1 September 2006 <a href="https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/principlesstrategies">https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/principlesstrategies</a> [accessed 15 April 2022], which makes the crucial point that traditional arrangements of library access and intellectual property rights are being obviated by the digitization of scholarly communication, which submits access to contract rather than copyright law.

<sup>8</sup> Townsend, 'History and the Future of Scholarly Publishing'.

<sup>9</sup> Greenblatt, 'Call for Action'.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsay Waters, executive editor of the Humanities at Harvard University Press, would register the collapse of the system despite appearances (i.e., the steady increase of academic publications): 'It is a paradoxical moment that is very hard to read, just like the last days predicted in the Bible.' Waters, Enemies of Promise: Publishing, Perishing, and the Eclipse of Scholarship (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), p. 3.

but also shaped the universities' hiring and promotion practices, relying on the quantification of 'output', efficiency, quality of teaching, etc., which in turn led to a dramatic overvaluation and fetishization of 'double blind peer-review' practices, which previously had largely been a way to manage publication decisions in large-scale, field-dominating journal publishing. As a result, the edited collection became marked as doubly undesirable: It is generally assumed to not have been peer-reviewed (blindly) and it comes as a *book* — and an undesirable one at that, with a severe disadvantage over monographs. <sup>11</sup> One might add that its loose boundaries also seemed to make it particularly vulnerable to the challenges of digitization, with the introduction of electronic reserves and made-to-order course packs making it increasingly unlikely for collections to serve as course material.

The denigration of the edited collection primarily registers in two areas: In the general unwillingness of university presses to publish them<sup>12</sup> and in the advice literature geared towards emerging scholars warning against them.<sup>13</sup> Any rehabilitation of the edited collection, thus, has to assuage young academics fearful that their publications only 'count' in peer-review journals or as monograph. Most commen-

<sup>11</sup> Much of this seems strictly based on hearsay: 'Edited volumes are a curious hybrid. They are neither journal articles (although some may have chapters that have been recycled as journal articles), nor exclusively conference proceedings (although some may be), nor always representing original works. Long the stepsister of monographs, conventional wisdom had it that the printed edited volume sold less well than single-authored monographs.' Frances Pinter and Laura White, 'Development of Book Publishing Business Models and Financing', in Academic and Professional Publishing, ed. by Robert Campbell, Ed Pentz, and Ian Borthwick (Oxford: Chandos, 2012), pp. 171–93 (p. 187).

<sup>12</sup> Two pick but two examples: Columbia University Press: '[W]e do not consider edited collections unless they are specifically designed for course use.' 'Manuscript Submissions', publisher's website <a href="https://cup.columbia.edu/manuscript-submissions">https://cup.columbia.edu/manuscript-submissions</a> [accessed 7 May 2022]; Harvard University Press: 'We do not publish original fiction, original poetry, religious inspiration or revelation, cookbooks, guidebooks, children's books, art and photography books, \*Festschriften\*, conference volumes, unrevised dissertations, or autobiographies.' 'Proposal Guidelines', publisher's website <a href="https://www.hup.harvard.edu/resources/authors/proposal.html">https://www.hup.harvard.edu/resources/authors/proposal.html</a> [accessed 7 May 2022].

In particular junior faculty is routinely warned against getting involved in editing a collection in the strongest terms possible. To quote two bestsellers of the genre: Karen L. Kelsky, 'Should I Do an Edited Collection?', The Professor Is In, 24 July 2012 <a href="https://theprofessorisin.com/2012/07/24/should-i-do-an-edited-collection/">https://theprofessorisin.com/2012/07/24/should-i-do-an-edited-collection/</a> [accessed 7 May 2022]. William Germano, 'Ten Reasons Why You Shouldn't', in Germano, Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 123.

tators remark the absence of reliable studies of either the economic or scholarly value of edited collections, hence most defences rely on anecdotal evidence, marshalling the successes of exemplary edited collections that came to define a new discipline, paradigm, or a new generation of scholarship, though these 'successes' might well, in the long run, undermine themselves, inasmuch as the contributors of successful, that is, paradigm-shifting collections are more likely to reuse their contributions in single-author monographs that, in the long run, tend to become more canonical than the collection that might have functioned as an incubator of sorts.<sup>14</sup>

The occasional defences of the edited collection therefore have had to resort to other measures: For William Germano, former editorin-chief at Columbia University Press and former publishing director at Routledge, the edited collection simply needs 'clear focus' and 'star power' to succeed. 15 For less cynical defenders the 'collection' is supposed to be justified by the genuine accumulation of knowledge it projects: 'Edited volumes tend to include reports on original research or they are commissioned instead of a single-author work because there is no one who knows enough in both breadth and depth to cover all the topics pulled together in the volume.'16 In reality, however, this simple accumulation — or 'coverage' — is at issue in and guides the selection of contributors to only a few select subgenres of the edited collection: 'handbooks', 'companions', 'guide books', and similar enterprises that purport to exhaustively treat an author, a period, field, work, etc. As a weak criterion, of course, it should hold for any edited collection of research papers: It is indeed hard to imagine that an edited collection has ever been published that could have also been authored by a single person. These radically divergent spatial metaphors — the 'clear focus' guided by 'stars' against the 'breadth and depth' of a quilt of specialization— already signal the fundamental errantry of the col-

<sup>14</sup> Edited collections have played a crucial role, for example, in Queer Theory. To pick but two relatively early examples filled with a disproportionate amount of material that would later become part of discipline-defining monographs: Displacing Homophobia, ed. by Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum, and Michael Moon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory, ed. by Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Germano, Getting It Published, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> Pinter and White, 'Development of Book Publishing Business Models', p. 186.

lection. In most cases, contributions are 'collected' only in the weak sense that they are not assigned, and anyone with any familiarity with the process knows that a metaphor more suitable than 'coverage', let alone 'focus', would be that of scattering or dispersion. Why, then, is it so hard, even for the few who don't wish to dismiss edited collections in book form as a significant part of scholarly communication, to acknowledge their inherently unruly, errant, unpredictable nature? When William Germano refers to the fact that Italian title pages identify editors with the phrase 'a cura di ...', he quips about the phrase's 'overtones of medical assistance', which to him aptly describe the difficulties of compiling academic work.<sup>17</sup> But one might also take it as a hint that edited collections are shaped not by muscular research programmes, resolute marching orders for scientific avantgardes, but rather by a curatorial logic curiously disavowed among scholars. 18 Their construction principles are decidedly exogenous, their parts are not organized to amount to an integral whole but relate to one another according to varied contextual parameters or networked tangents.

The more ambitious defence of the edited collection Peter Webster has recently provided proceeds from the rather surprising fact that really all the scorn, all the dismissals directed at the format are based on absolutely no hard evidence whatsoever. Indeed, many of the claims made can easily be refuted: there is no reason to assume that collections involve less peer review than journals; it is simply not the case that a publication in a collection is any less visible or less widely available as the same contribution would have been in a journal; and in terms of quantifiable evidence, citation indices are not showing any

<sup>17</sup> Germano, Getting It Published, p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note, in this connection, that the focus on the disintegration of an alleged unity ('mono') of the book ('graph') — electronically or otherwise — has distracted from the perhaps much more consequential transformation, that of the library, that is, the spatial scatter of books responding to 'call numbers', into an algorithmically sequenced and mined blend of information streams. Curatorial operations in other practices have sought to very much define themselves in opposition to these transformations.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Webster, The Edited Collection: Pasts, Present, and Futures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). See also the forum discussion, Peter Webster, Pat Thomson, and Mark Carrigan, 'Edited Collections May Still Have Much to Offer Academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences', LSE Impact Blog, London School of Economics, 23 July 2013 <a href="https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/07/23/in-defence-of-edited-collections/">https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/07/23/in-defence-of-edited-collections/</a> [accessed 2 May 2022].

disadvantage of collected essays as opposed to those fed through journal pipelines.<sup>20</sup>

Yet in his considerations of the virtues of edited collections, Webster seems to acknowledge that it is impossible to justify the format by any reflection on its immanent form. He would rather we understand collections as representing and materializing scholarly communities and argues that it can foster a more collaborative enterprise, counteracting the competitiveness and hierarchization of the contemporary university, cultivating mutual obligation and extending, rather than merely reproducing, existing networks.<sup>21</sup> But for this 'communitarian' revaluation of a publishing format, Webster, too, needs to insist on a compactness of purpose, the coherence of contributions, the collaborative closure of the form. He therefore does not register the fact that perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the vilification of the edited collection — what Webster calls the 'meme complex' of unfounded prejudices — is the close correspondence of the format to the generally appreciated if not cherished forms of ad-hoc interdisciplinarity increasingly dominating the humanities and social sciences. Even more than the traditional (disciplinary) conference proceedings, the edited collection has become the go-to format for interdisciplinary work pursued in ever changing constellations within the universities and in their orbits. The conventional idea of interdisciplinarity, according to which scientific disciplines explore their shared border regions in order to ultimately establish a new discipline out of this multidisciplinary encounter, typically generates new journals as flag posts marking territorial gains. But the much more unpredictable, confusing, errant exchanges in the 'curated' encounters of many transdisciplinary networks, topic-based cohorts in societies of fellows, thematically bounded research centres, etc. tend to pool into edited collections.

<sup>20</sup> These ideas ('the meme complex') are debunked at length in Webster, The Edited Collection, pp. 38-54.

Webster, The Edited Collection, p. 47. Webster's conception has decidedly more evidence-based substance than many of metaphorical associations of collections and sociability à la 'Academic communication is often likened to an ongoing conversation. The edited volume is an excellent forum where scholars can conduct such a conversation on a specific topic.' Andrea Hacker, 'In Defense of the Edited Book', A Hacker's View, blog, 3 December 2013 <a href="http://www.andreahacker.com/in-defense-of-the-edited-book/">http://www.andreahacker.com/in-defense-of-the-edited-book/</a> [accessed 2 May 2022].

Their fascination does not primarily result from collaborative exertion and mutual aide, but more often from the frictions or misalignments part and parcel of a non-territorial understanding of extra-disciplinary exploration. The 'success' of many edited collections might very well depend on its capacity not to survey or claim new fields, but to till the ground, to aerate rather than solidify, to suspend disciplinary intelligibilities, allowing itself to scatter.<sup>22</sup>

But Webster's insistence holds true: The exogenous nature of the edited collection refers to its reliance on and active transformation of scholarly sociabilities, whether they are institutionally fostered, based on solidarities, or threaded by affect.

This present volume, from 'within' which this reflection on the errancy of its form is undertaken, is, as indicated already, based on the temporally limited scholarly community of a group of twelve post-doctoral fellows who convened at the ICI Berlin to pursue their own research in collaboration, confrontation, corroboration, and conflict with one another and a collective question. It is based, hence, on a particularly intense form of scholarly community, compared, say, to academic conferences or even geographical dispersed research networks. And yet, the 'communal' aspect of the work gathered here will not be evident to the outsider. There is no 'division of labour', no relay, no platform. The notoriously errant question of influence rarely imposes itself, or one could say that mutual influence in this case is best thought of according to a model of marination.

This quite lengthy consideration of the scholarly genre of the collected edition was meant to sketch, on the one hand, how the project was understood to also always reflect on our own practices, including those configuring the institutional setting of the research project, and on the other hand, it also demonstrates that ERRANS has a way of practically peeling itself out of the most innocuous assumptions and everyday actions. This is to be blamed less on the fact that any lengthy pursuit ultimately tends to recognize its topic everywhere, then on the inherited (although often genealogically obscured) errantries of a

<sup>22</sup> This insistence on a radical passivity of dispersion ought to credit Geoffrey Bennington's attempt to refine familiar critiques of teleology by following the word(s) 'scatter': Scatter 1: The Politics of Politics in Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), in particular pp. 243–49.

certain kind of 'endeavouring' research. Michel Serres has tried to reconstruct a wider frame of this errancy in his *Troubadour of Knowledge*:

[T]he philosopher who seeks [...] has chosen to wander [a choisi d'errer]. Wandering includes the risk of error and distraction. [L'errance comporte des risques d'erreur et d'égarement.] Where are you going? I don't know. Where are you coming from? I try not to remember. Through where do you pass? Everywhere and through as many places as possible, encyclopedically, but I try to forget. Refuse to recognize your references. [Décline tes références.]

ERRANS had started, as mentioned before, from the observation that the word-field surrounding the Latin *errāre* had generated a multiplicity of meanings strained by ever diverging valuations. Errors seem to call for correction. Even scientific vindications of the category of error and falsification nonetheless hold that errors are to be and over time have a good chance to be eliminated. And yet the historical epistemology of Georges Canguilhem has invited a more radical understanding of the ineluctability of error.<sup>24</sup> The medieval institutions of knighterrantry (alongside the troubadour's *trouver*), defining crucial conceptions of the epic still in play today, might seem foreign in a world in which the territorial enclosure of nation-states and the notion of 'real estate' largely go unquestioned, yet in decidedly less heroic registers, talk of nomadic errancies — of its strategic necessity, indisputable joys, and entanglement with fantasy — have proliferated.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Michel Serres, Le Tiers-Instruit (Paris: François Bourin, 1991), p. 155; English as Serres, The Troubadour of Knowledge, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 98. The translation, quite wonderfully, renders errantly: The quote's last sentence should also — or primarily — be translated simply as 'Submit your references.'

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Talcott surveys the importance of error for Canguilhem: Georges Canguilhem and the Problem of Error (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). The origin of the category in Canguilhem's engagement with French philosopher Alain's (Émile-August Chartier) subversion of Cartesianism is explored further in Michele Cammelli, Canguilhem philosophe. Le Sujet et l'erreur, preface by Etienne Balibar (Paris: PUF, 2022). On the surprising proximities of Donna J. Haraway's far-reaching work on the sciences and their histories to Canguilhem, see Situiertes Wissen und regionale Epistemologie. Zur Aktualität Georges Canguilhems und Donna J. Haraways, ed. by Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky and Christoph F. E. Holzhey (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2013) <a href="https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-07">https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-07</a>.

<sup>25</sup> This enthusiasm for the nomad was generated by the extraordinary revival of interest in the work Gilles Deleuze, which peaked, according to the Google N-Gram Viewer,

But idioms of failure, errancy, interruption, serendipity, metanoia have also entered common parlance in human resource departments, sugarcoating the systematic proliferation and instrumentalization of precarity and the circumvention of labour laws and protections. This corporate glorification of errantry has been filtered through the shifting discursive machinations of management and organization theory, leadership studies, military science, and self-improvement manuals, only to take on an even more threatening dimension in recent years. The end of the fellowship period, and with it the end of the ICI's first focus on ERRANS, in the summer of 2016 would coincide, with Clayton Christensen's concept of 'disruptive innovation', 26 having echoed through Silicon Valley for several years, being transposed into the realm of US-American presidential politics.<sup>27</sup> The very fact that the celebrations of 'heroic disruptors' frequently forget the technical specificities of Christensen's conception (and increasingly run counter to his own political inclinations, marked by his devout Mormonism), can be attributed to a widespread fascination with the destructive aspects of capitalism, which hears in 'disruptive innovations' vague resonances of Joseph Schumpeter's 'creative destruction' and the attendant hope that this destructive dynamic would ultimately dismantle the exist-

in 2013 (in English-language books, earlier in other European languages). See, in particular, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie (Paris: Minuit, 1980), but notably also Rosi Braidotti, Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) and, resituating errancy in the Carribean and other archipelagos in ways that have become wonderfully generative, Édouard Glissant, Poetics of Relation, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Clayton M. Christensen and Joseph L. Bower, 'Disruptive Technologies: Catching the Wave', Harvard Business Review, 73.1 (January 1995), pp. 43–53 <a href="https://hbr.org/1995/01/disruptive-technologies-catching-the-wave">https://hbr.org/1995/01/disruptive-technologies-catching-the-wave</a> [accessed 4 May 2022].

Sheldon Filger made this observation in September 2015 already: 'Donald Trump, Presidential Politics and the Art of Disruptive Innovation', Huffpost, blog, 23 September 2015 <a href="https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-presidential\_b\_8183138">https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-presidential\_b\_8183138</a>> [accessed April 27 2022]. At the same time, Christensen felt compelled to protest the misuse of his theories: Clayton M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor, and Rory McDonald, 'What Is Disruptive Innovation?', Harvard Business Review, 93.12 (December 2015), pp. 44–53 <a href="https://bbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptive-innovation">https://bbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptive-innovation</a> [accessed 10 May 2022], presumably also because, in the year prior, he had been prominently mocked by historian Jill Lepore, 'The Disruption Machine: What the Gospel of Innovation Gets Wrong', The New Yorker, 23 June 2014 <a href="https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine">https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine</a> [accessed 10 May 2022].

ing economic order.<sup>28</sup> Yet while 'disruption' — as it is used today — can also be seen as a camouflaged theory of market domination (and, under certain circumstances, an attack on democratic processes and the rule of law), <sup>29</sup> other mobilizations of errancy in management literature have included talk of a 'VUCA world' (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity), a conception of somewhat uncertain origin. The approach or 'practical code' was, inasmuch as it can still be reconstructed today,<sup>30</sup> inspired by the post-Weberian reconfigurations of the sociology of organizations introduced by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus in the 1980s in what came to be called 'New Leadership Studies' — emphasizing 'leadership' against the prevalent functionalism of management studies while committing to a post-hierarchical, 'democratic' fluidity of the concept of 'authority'. Bennis and Nanus explicitly attacked the command-and-control approaches dominant in corporate management and other organizational structures. The four dimensions of VUCA were supposed to cast doubt on the reliance of traditional governance on rigid and determinable mechanisms of cause and effect. What is more remarkable, however, is the particularly errant trajectory of the conception: From the theoretical labs of

[accessed 23 January 2022].

Joseph A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942). The resonance is noted in the magisterial Thomas McCraw, Prophet of Innovation: Joseph Schumpeter and Creative Destruction (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 689-90, ftn. 10. The most recent, politically volatile standard bearers of these expectations have branded themselves 'accelerationists'.

<sup>29</sup> For a glimpse of the Silicon climate created by such discussions, of considerable political consequence, see Drake Baer, 'Billionaire VC Peter Thiel Says Silicon Valley's "Obsession" with Disruption Is Totally Misguided', Business Insider, 18 September 2014 <a href="https://www.businessinsider.com/peter-thiel-disruption-is-stupid-2014-9">https://www.businessinsider.com/peter-thiel-disruption-is-stupid-2014-9</a> [accessed 15 June 2022]. But these omnipresent obsessions are perhaps more efficiently reflected in popular culture's more recent archeologies, such as the TV series WeCrashed, created by Drew Crevello and Lee Eisenberg (Apple TV+, 2022-) or Super Pumped, created by Brian Koppelman and David Levien (Showtime, 2022-), reconstructing the rise (and fall) of the supposed disruptors WeWork and Uber, respectively.
30 'Q. Who First Originated the Term VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity)?', website of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center at the U.S. Army War College, 22 November 2021 <a href="https://usawc.libanswers.com/faq/84869">https://usawc.libanswers.com/faq/84869</a>

<sup>31</sup> Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge (New York: Harper & Row, 1985). Bennis had been considered a radical throughout the 1960s and 1970s, advocating for 'participatory management' and outright corporate 'democracy' in, for example, Warren Bennis and Philip Slater, 'Democracy Is Inevitable', Harvard Business Review, 42.2 (March-April 1964), pp. 51–59.

sociologically inspired organizational studies at MIT to the explosion of management literature in the 1980s, on to the US Army War College curriculum. The superior talent of the US military to create memorable acronyms seems responsible for enshrining the fourfold 'VUCA', but its career really took off with the loss of Cold War certainties at the end of the decade and the emergence of the so-called 'new wars' thereafter. Firing on the fuel of geostrategic uncertainties, VUCA reentered business guru stratospheres and has been spreading beyond warfare and management into higher education, philanthropy, environmental policy, linking up with newer buzzwords such as sustainability and resilience.<sup>32</sup>

In their 1999 Le Nouvel Esprit du capitalisme, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello proceed from a discussion of corpora of management literature not unlike the ones invoked above. The book has been enormously influential, far beyond the confines of its discipline (sociology), dominating many discussions of the new century relating to, for example, contemporary art under capitalist regimes or structures of urbanization and gentrification. For Boltanski and Chiapello, their object of study, the tracts on management, serve as 'main vehicles for the diffusion and popularization of normative models in the world of enterprise', unburdened, they argue, by 'realism' and quintessentially hybrid, advising how to profit but also justifying profiting itself: 'In the manner of edifying books or manuals of moral instruction, they practice the exemplum.'<sup>33</sup> They compare two corpora, one from the 1960s, the other from the 1990s, in order to argue that even the most radically anti-capitalist impulses of the 1960s rebellion in both polit-

<sup>32</sup> US military strategists were quick to credit the surprising successes of the Ukrainian military response to the Russian invasion of February 2022 to their having received, in the aftermath of the 2014 defeat, US military training, in particular with respect to 'battlefield decision-making', that is lower-ranked junior leadership making unauthorized decisions in what is considered in the Army's leadership courses extreme VUCA environments. By contrast, Russian difficulties were blamed on its continued reliance on command-and-control mechanisms, with logistical failures in particular attesting to what could be considered a non-VUCA-readiness of the Russian military. David Hersenhorn and Paul McLeary, 'Ukraine's 'Iron General'' is a Hero, But He's No Star', Politico, 8 April 2022 <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2022/04/08/ukraines-irongeneral-zaluzhnyy-00023901">https://www.politico.com/news/2022/04/08/ukraines-irongeneral-zaluzhnyy-00023901</a> [accessed 9 May 2022].

<sup>33</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 58.

ics ('social critique') and bohemian counterculture ('artistic critque') have been absorbed into what they synthesize as the 'new spirit' of capitalism.<sup>34</sup> This 'new spirit', for Boltanski and Chiapello, is marked by the eclipse of 'old' family structures, but also by a rhetoric flexibilization, a favouring of networks over hierarchies, creativity against bureaucracy. While this might seem to include, upon first inspection, the celebration of errancy in Christensen, Bennis, and Nanus, a focus on the idioms of 'innovative disruption' and 'VUCA worlds' might also call the overall construction of Boltanski and Chiapello into question: Their very framing clearly is designed to limit or even eliminate any errancy. This is accomplished by insisting that the literature in question has a clearly circumscribed, sociologically defined audience, the cadres or managerial class, that the change in question pivots around a singular unquestioned historical marker— May 1968 — that can be naturalized as a generational divide, and, perhaps the most fraught aspect of the project, results in a synthesis of a unified, singular 'spirit', attesting to a integrative, stabilizing power — in stark contrast to all post-Schumpeterian accounts — of capitalism. Seen in the light of the question of errancy, Boltanski's and Chiapello's account, however, appears not only as preoccupied with insulating itself from its 'ideological' object of study, not only as invested in a rigid homogenization, but as constituting an almost apotropaic ritual warding off the very errancy they seek to relegate to bohemian lifestyles, 'artistic critiques', the 'projective city'. This magical construction is supported by the totemic use of the ancestral founders of sociology (Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, et al.) throughout the book. To clarify: The critique here does not disagree with Boltanski's and Chiapello's skepticism concerning Bohemian critiques of capitalism — who could argue with that? —, but reflects on their inability or unwillingness to consider issues of errancy within a sociological research logic. Their confinement of erring is at issue, not their distaste for it.

These two reflections on errancy — an errancy hidden in edited collections such as this one, and another exhibited in a discourse ut-

<sup>34</sup> The reference here is, of course, to Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. by Talcott Parsons, foreword by R. H. Tawney (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930).

terly foreign to most scholars — are not only showing just how pervasive and far-reaching idioms of errancy have become or how confusing their genealogies can be. They also serve as signposts of the expansive reflections undertaken as part of the ICI project ERRANS and exemplified in the contributions to the present volume. One might seem embarrassingly intimate: the reflection on the difficult 'care work' part and parcel of scholarly communities and communications; the other threateningly alien: the sloganeering prophets of neoliberal labour or technologically determined posthumanism with their uncanny ability to err into view in many unsuspecting moments. Yet in one way or another, the contributions to this volume are marked by similar attempts to think radically different aspects of erring, errantry, errancy in conjunction, most crucially with an awareness of one's own implication in ERRANS, however partial that awareness will have to remain.

The first contribution of the book begins with a consideration of Javanese shadow puppet theatre, its extensive plotlines, exhaustive performances, its interludes and their unruly characters showing an exuberant disrespect bound to lodge the traditional cultural form in complicatedly resistant configurations. Preciosa de Joya follows these mobilizations of the grotesque off-stage and into political history, but she also mobilizes the ambling, loitering, explosive puppeteering to shuffle Western assumptions about the relationship between philosophy and theatre. If Plato's own shadow play has drawn the familiar frontlines in the West, other modes of theatre and theatricality allow the philosopher to reemerge on stage, as a trickster, a buffoon, androgynous, flatulent, and resolutely unassimilable.

Much like de Joya, James Burton is interested in the irreverent stakes of laughter. But in reviewing prominent modern theories of laughter, which are always also theories of indirection, he shows them to be haunted by extremely volatile moral-political valuations: Is laughter inherently cruel or liberating; is its function to destabilize unbearable orders or to exclude from them? Burton focuses the anthropological reflections inherent in theories of laughter on the universalizing camouflage they promote and calls into question these Eurocentric conceptions inasmuch as they rely on the dubious generality of 'Western Man' and his genealogies.

If the problem humour poses is that of the intractable ambivalence of deliberate misdirection, the emergence of what has frequently been called 'slow cinema' also deviates purposefully from traditional theatrical ideas of plot, drama, catharsis, or suspense. Rosa Barotsi considers the strategy of slowness and durational extremes as a detouring device, studying, in particular, the exemplary case of Emmanuelle Demoris's *Mafrouza* cycle (2007–2010), a sequence of five documentary films with a running of time of altogether twelve hours. Set in Mafrouza, a shanty town on the periphery of Alexandria built on or in an ancient cemetery, the films initially follow the lure of a cohabitation with the dead, but by giving room to the routines of Mafrouza's inhabitants, allow the temporal stasis of everyday life invade the screen and question the very preconditions of 'documentary' work.

Franz Kafka's late story 'The Burrow' — reflections on the life of a burrowing animal, its fears and tribulations, perhaps despair — famously presents a scenario of self-entrapment and paralysis, yet it also constitutes a vertiginous form of self-reflexive errancy and disorientation. Antonio Castore argues that the story and the subterranean labyrinth it describes needs to be seen within the context of classical modern reflections on architectural wholeness. In an astonishingly revealing comparison, Castore reads Kafka alongside Georg Simmel's sociological conception and Paul Valéry's poetics of architecture, presented in the polylogue *Eupalinos or the Architect*, carefully preparing an account of non-closure that doesn not amount to openness.

The global turmoil of the financial markets in 2008 left Portugal, like several other European countries, in the chokehold of 'punishing' austerity measures, policies that treated massive hardships and precarities as collateral damage of 'necessary' economic 'reforms'. Maria José de Abreu presents a series of diverse individual fates in reported conversations, stressing the particular way in which the Portuguese case is lodged within history by tracking the economic legacies of the authoritarian, corporatist Salazarismo. Starting from the insight that neoliberal austerity can never be tallied as a simple contradiction, let alone a subtraction of the state, Abreu develops a complex toplogical model that seeks to account not only for the position of the state within the neoliberal crisis, but for the way in which these crises shape, twist, and transform the space of politics itself. This requires an attention, as

well, to the cultural imagineries in which these deformations take hold. In a series of stunning photographs of Portuguese youth in fog-filled spaces, Inês d'Orey has mobilized the messianic dimension of Sebastianism — the expectation that the sixteenth-century Portuguese king Sebastian, who went missing during his Moroccan campaign, would return from the fog of Portugal's coastline.

In a not altogether dissimilar use of photography to question the conditions of visibility and legibility, the Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi has created an oeuvre in which photos are collected, yet not ordered, in large series, exhibited in parallel projections, but ultimately presented in book form. Clara Masnatta shows how these cloud-like assemblages question many of the commonplaces of the theory of photography, instead exploring the constitutive role of blurs, glitches, mistakes, and aleatoric processes for the medium itself, not understood according to a strictly modernist stylization of its specificity, but its frequently frayed and errant contours. As Masnatta shows, in Kawauchi's work, imperfection offers a different reflection on the photographic medium but also of the aesthetic and affective valences of the beholder's engagements with it.

Within the semantic complexities of the word fields spawned by the Latin *errāre*, Zairong Xiang considers those aspects that obstruct, in intricate and subtle ways, considerations and mobilizations of fluidity, flexibility, or elasticity in queer theory and other contexts. Xiang connects these locally observable obstacles or rigidities that often also manifest themselves as willfulness or stubbornness, to the body — not as a phenomenological grounding, but through Traditional Chinese Medicine and the I Ching, with their cosmological and speculative expansiveness. Assembling its own obstacle course out of personal encounters, meme videos, and ethnographic notes, Xiang's essay derives notions of radical indifference and weak resistance from his conception of a tension within Errans.

Ewa Majewska considers the particular counterpublic that manifested itself in the Solidarność labour union in Poland not as a self-contained historical episode, let alone as contributing to a 'victory' of Western liberalism, but as a much larger and more profound political-theoretical problem. To this end she is revisiting the conflictual construction of the very notion of a 'counterpublic', and proceeds to

connect it to questions of the periphery, postcolonial theory, and feminist activism to resituate Solidarność in ways that renders it urgently relevant for contemporary questions, including that of locally instantiated resistant formations and their universal potentials in globalized contexts.

The final contribution also comes to bear on burning political questions, albeit via a considerable, radically innovative detour: Federico Dal Bo tackles the monumental question of the relationship between Halakhic law and the predominantly exilic and diasporic conditions of Jewish life and history. In a radical rereading of Talmudic sources, Dal Bo short-circuits the question of the possibility of an 'exilic law' with fundamental questions of interpretation inherent in Talmudic textual strategies, on the one hand tethered to a conception of the literal, but on the other thematizing deviance, deviation, and heretical errancies as genuine interpretive possibilities. In a final 'displacement', Dal Bo reconsiders the questions posed by the binding of Isaac.



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### FILMOGRAPHY

Super Pumped, created by Brian Koppelman and David Levien (Showtime, 2022–) WeCrashed, created by Drew Crevello and Lee Eisenberg (Apple TV+, 2022–)