

This talk elaborates the tension between the effulgence of the failed state as a verdict on postcolonialism and attempts to reimagine postcolonial spaces. The postcolonial struggle to produce states that are relatively autonomous from colonial predations has, since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of actually existing socialism, become more intense and vexing. On the one hand, this talk seeks to understand the complex logics of paroxysm that give us the failed state; on the other, Hitchcock suggests to theorize this as an imaginative challenge rather than simply one of structural adjustment within the statecraft of the South. While errant states might seem a cruel reversal of postcolonial delinking, they also critique the doxa of stable nation narration. The postcolonial imaginary has no need to suture the modern nation state but it can make it “fail better” (as Beckett would say). Hitchcock will consider the aesthetic implications of such material conditions.

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The English verb ‘to err’ has largely lost its positive connotations. It no longer invokes wandering, rambling, or roaming, and is now understood negatively in relation to a prescribed path or goal. To be sure, errors are acknowledged to play an important role in the pursuit of knowledge and happiness, but usually only to the extent that their recognition allows for their elimination, correction, and avoidance. Recognizing that a critique of ideals of productivity, success, goal-orientation, and determination is necessarily paradoxical, the **ICI Lecture Series ERRANS** will take the shifting meanings of ‘erring’ – connoting the violation of norms as well as the activity of wandering – as a prompt to explore the critical potentials and risks of embracing error, randomness, failure, and non-teleological temporalities, and to do so across different disciplines and discourses.

# Peter Hitchcock

**Errant States:  
On the Geopolitical Aesthetics of  
Postcolonial Failure and Possibility**

