

For centuries, perhaps since the emergence of poetry itself, Western culture has engaged in the project of “writing the sea,” or hydrography, and within this project the compass has played a fundamental role. The talk serves as a brief introduction into the cultural history of the compass and shows how, ever since its first use, the compass has guided specific techniques of writing and notation and has been both poetically and epistemically productive. It argues this claim through a historical argument reaching from Dante’s reception of the *Odyssey* and Ripa’s *Iconologia* to Bacon, who considered the compass one of his age’s emblems, and to the technological thinking of Heisenberg and Heidegger.

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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.

# Burkhardt Wolf

**Compasso.  
Poetic Orientation in  
Modernity’s Grand Sea of Being**

