

The prop names a category of ubiquity: props are everywhere in cinema. The term, short for property, is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘any portable object (now usually other than an article of costume) used in a play, film, etc., as required by the action’. The straightforwardness of this definition, however, belies the strangeness of the prop. The prop begs questions of scale, ambience, contingency, commodification, objecthood, and narration. In the context of narrative cinema, props seem as necessary as actors, sets, and locations. Regarding cinema through the lens of the prop – which is the lens of property – helps us to see how an ontological instrumentality courses through the very nature of the cinematic medium. This talk, which will veer from theory to history to questions of close reading, emerges from Rhodes’s recent book on domestic architecture and cinema, *Spectacle of Property: The House in American Film* (2017). It will show how foregrounding cinema’s prop-ness summons into view some of the medium’s most curious and most unsettling features.

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ICI Lecture Series ERRANS environ/s
There is hardly a discipline, field, or discourse within the natural and social sciences nor the humanities that hasn’t long been touched and transformed by the notions of milieu, environment, or Umwelt. The recent revival and proliferation of ecological discourses can be understood, at least in part, as a response to the increasingly complete immersion in technologically in-formed environments.

The transdisciplinary impact of these new concepts has not yet been captured, nor is it clear that it can be captured, but while the life sciences play a prominent role in them (having adopted, in the 19th century, concepts from physics and transgressed into the social sciences, for example, as racist discourses and social Darwinism), they don’t operate as the leading science in this transformation. Instead, this process appears to be a multidirectional, non-hierarchizable, and errant movement, itself constituting a complex ecology of knowledge.

ERRANS environ/s contemplates aspects of this frequently divergent, potentially errant, and certainly ongoing transformation of not only the sciences or cultures of knowledge, but also cultural and artistic production at large. It will investigate the ways in which an attention to environments can have the effect of dissolving boundaries or making them permeable, questioning clear-cut distinctions, undermining naive ontologies, decentering the subject, folding nature and culture, and producing complex political ecologies attuned to far-reaching entanglements.

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The Prop and its Properties