

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference
University of Missouri
Presented April 12, 2008

Ramsay Wise

MU Department of English

Oral presentation

"Why Does The Birds Attack?: Teaching the Body in Hitchcock

The body is a central feature in Hitchcock both in the way he shoots and cuts it and shoots and cuts it. True, his bodies are shot and stabbed; they fall off Mt. Rushmore, get chopped up and carried away in suitcases on rainy nights. However, Hitchcock's attacks on the body are not, of course, only about flesh. It is not simply visceral. The body always reflects psychology and/or society; the body always holds larger intellectual meaning. For instance, the unseen body hidden in Rope's chest is inextricable from the socially marginalized homosexual. The new Mrs. De Winter is made a powerless little girl sitting in oversized chairs and reaching toward the oversized doorknobs of Rebecca's mansion. Jefferies' broken leg is his fractured masculinity.

In my talk I will use The Birds as an example of Hitchcock's treatment of and attack on the body as psychological and social metaphor. My intention is to give the talk as a sort of teaching exercise; that is, I want to demonstrate how I have taught The Birds in the undergraduate film analysis classroom as a means of getting students to link film form to larger intellectual meaning-(in this sense, my talk could fit on a film panel or possibly one concerned with pedagogy, film or otherwise). The best possible scenario for my talk would be to have a screening of The Birds the day before my talk open to conference goers, participants, and anyone interested. However, my talk is in no way dependent upon this. The Birds is a widely seen film and my talk will involve clips as to orient the audience.