INTRODUCTION

A BODY FOR ALL SEASONS

"But I'm Alfred Hitchcock, I am, I can prove it."
"Sure, sure everybody is."
"I am, I insist."

Alfred Hitchcock's double when removed by the orderlies, as scripted by James B. Allardice for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*

"Goooood eve-en-ing," and welcome to a study of the intertwined strands of Alfred Hitchcock's creative world. As Hitchcock's trademark television greeting suggests, this is predominantly a foray into TV territory, where Hitchcock's famously rotund profile ushered in a teleplay per week for ten seasons, summer reruns included. Though they were most obviously paraded in his television hosting, Hitchcock's impish designs and voluble conceits spread across a vast body of work that is inseparable from Hitchcock's commanding physical form. Scaling one of the most written-about bodies in the twentieth century as a matter of course, countless texts equated Hitchcock's poundage with excessive fat. Through such slanted, unblushing stabs, and the sheer volume of these ink ruses—mainly found in gossip columns—blots, patterns, and identity markers were affixed to a body that fronted for the franchise.

Take this "portrait" from the *New York Times*, for example, offered as a lead-in to an exchange around Hitchcock's film poetics, which the director outlined in a series of talking points while eating lamb chops:

> If you look at Alfred Hitchcock obliquely, which is the way he likes to look at things, he appears absolutely the same from any angle—as nearly spheroid as a man can be. Push him gently and he might rock on his axis like a humpty-dumpty. Reaching their greatest girth at approximate

> equator, Mr. Hitchcock's 290 pounds taper off evenly to both extremities. Beyond the undulating chin, the immense jowls, the dome of his head glistens like an inaccessible summit. His small buffoon's eyes twinkle beneath high brows in the vast expanse of his face, and the sagging lower lip is permanently compressed between the heavy cheeks on either side of which the immense lobes of his indented ears sprout incongruously like pink buds. Mr. Hitchcock, in short, resembles a baroque cherub.[1]

This flippant style illustrates a prevalent mode of writing that pivoted around outlandish descriptions of Hitchcock's body, like the derogatory remarks one associates with a demeaning variety of private gossip. In the public genre of gossip columns in the 1940s and '50s, it is hard to find similar unflattering inventories of bodily traits in regard to anyone else.

Not merely an abstract logo or cameo figure, Hitchcock created his franchise via bodies or embodiments in a variety of ways. He began by playing up and using his own body—fat by default, except after crash dieting, and English by design. Strategies of multiplicity, doubling, and surrogacy—both textually and in a production sense—were also key. Actors' bodies, not just his own, also became brand signifiers on and off the screen, while his production team conjured up stylistic earmarking in his name. And of course, there are the countless bodies that were strangled, poisoned, bludgeoned, stabbed to death, and buried under his macabre trademark. Over the years and through this corporeal prism, audiences, critics, scholars, and the talkative biographical legend himself partook in cooking up the discourse on a public figure tantamount to a brand: Hitchcock. Thus, as one writer explains, "for many years he was known as fat man, a description that never particularly troubled him. In a sense it was his trade mark."[2]

Television turned Hitchcock into a star, and the trappings of television marketing shaped his public performance all the way to his last film. In this book, Hitchcock's cinema will play second fiddle for a change, in spite of the celebrity status the director managed to stir up around his films and his persona. Hosting the television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (AHP, 1955–1962) and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (AHH, 1962–1965) for a decade gave Hitchcock a novel scope of visibility, ample screen time, and a reverberating voice in a medium with a deeper cultural penetration than cinema. As Hitchcock spiritedly performed Hitchcock on television, the convergence of art, commerce, and ingenious brand building formed "a multi-million dollar suspense factory turning out feature-length films, a weekly television series, and a line of books and magazines."[3] The media confabulation around the versatile Hitchcock figure resulted from a calculated strategy of staging and performing starting in the mid-1930s, as he began perfecting his recipe for stardom during his transition from England to Hollywood.

On the threshold of his television tenure, Alfred Hitchcock was the consummate purveyor of ritzy consumerism, flight of fancy, and ultra-elegant fashion. Off frame and in public print, he was an enigmatic, eloquent figure with a conspicuous appetite and a perennially discussed and photo-friendly body. His film fame, food reputation, and fabulous physicality were supreme assets when he signed up for AHP in 1955, on the cusp of Hollywood's television era. Hitchcock television, designed for the suburban living room—a symbolic site of media consumption indicative of 1950s middle-class ideals—and elsewhere, dished out stories with humorous subtexts about dysfunctional domestic life that was often cut short by murder at the dinner table.[4] At the time, black-and-white television images came with less lustrous connotations than did Hollywood movies, but Hitchcock was able to bring star charisma and Hollywood glamour to the home screen as he straddled two forms of moving images. Similarly, he traversed the cultural divide between England and America, mainly by standing apart and quizzically observing and reflecting on both societies with a cool eye and glib tongue.

Eye and tongue apart, I argue that the enduring success of the Hitchcock franchise hinged on embodiment in all senses of the term: Hitchcock's own sensational English figure and how he performed it for American media; hosting a television series with his own body as mediator; inserting himself in the frame through strategic body doubling via cameos and surrogates; and, not least, manipulating audience bodies by creating suspense and fear that swirled around imperiled character bodies. Combined, these brand-building strategies distanced him from the run-of-the-mill role of mere film director. Hitchcock's tactic from the beginning was to ceaselessly draw attention to his larger-than-life persona and pose as the only true star of the franchise. His pert comment comparing actors to cattle took the spotlight away from the movie stars in his productions by repurposing screen dazzle as an effect of his own storyboarding—actors were mere afterthoughts and "dummies" articulated by the master ventriloquist.[5] From a related vantage point, a set of weighty film characters figured readily as Hitchcock stand-ins or surrogates of sorts. In such convoluted processes, the ventriloquist has total command and crafts the characters he controls. The impression of a singular Hitchcock experience across the production process, created by his role as host for the series, bracketed the formidable team in charge of the day-to-day operations of the television franchise. As I will show, the spin and marketing efforts, the hosting and directing, the intricate presence through cameos and surrogates, and the palpable fingerprints on the stylistic manipulation of screen content (irrespective of hand and screen size) ushered in the generic quality labeled "Hitchcockian."

American journalists were taken aback when encountering the incongruous figure behind the stylish story worlds. Hitchcock cleverly capitalized on this shock and quickly turned his "real" grotesque body into the embodiment of the suspense thriller. This conflation was created by his super-visibility and talent for generating copy, as he blended himself with his genre through witty talking points, cultural observations, and outlandish pranks. John Belton has perceptively theorized the stakes of Hitchcock's relation to classic filmmaking: "Hitchcock's visibility tends to function in a somewhat paradoxical fashion. It undermines the invisibility of the classical paradigm while harnessing his own authorial visibility as a dominant feature of the narrative experience, as that which makes it 'Hitchcockian.'"[6] As I will make evident, excessive "authorial visibility" goes way beyond his literal visibility in cameos, for example, to the inescapable but somewhat nebulous identity markers associated with the term "Hitchcockian." I begin, in chapter 1, with the mise-en-scène of the Hitchcock figure in the transition from England to Hollywood.

Before taking on television, Hitchcock had indeed marketed himself in table talks, promotional contexts, and photo-essays. His celebrity, still not fully flourished, relied heavily on an appropriation of the grotesque as he stuffed himself, dieted, and cheerfully talked about his embonpoint while journalists tried to outdo both each other and Hitchcock in whipping up grotesque, often belittling physical cracks. This discourse was partly the result of a novel type of gossipy celebrity journalism bent on producing slangy barbs and pointed lampooning. The pioneer and unrivaled master of this was the legendary columnist Walter Winchell. The vilification of Hitchcock in America, however friendly and benign, is directly connected to the type of columns Winchell and his colleagues Leonard Lyons, Hedda Hopper, and Louella Parsons—to mention only the stars—excelled in. Evidencing his allegiance with leading columnists, on several occasions Hitchcock stepped in as a temp for journalists on a break from typewriter duties. More important, this style existed alongside a somewhat more sober focus on personalities that animated magazines like *Time*, *Life*, and *Look*.[7] Hitchcock ingeniously straddled this discourse when posing as master craftsman and prankster in one magnetic package. One of Hitchcock's associates summed up the penchant for showmanship in paradoxical terms: "Hitch is . . . painfully shy, but a genius of self-promotion. For all his enormous dignity, he'll still lend himself to corny publicity layouts that would embarrass a burlesque comic."[8] This "corny" buildup of the Hitchcock persona in the United States was the result of his little-discussed role as a fixture for leading American photo journals alongside the Hitchcock prose in public print from his first visit to America in 1937 up to the mid-1950s. To fully appreciate the inventive consolidation of Hitchcock's detached, mischievously playful yet very formal English persona for television we need to walk through the period of full-blown grotesque and the lampooning of Hitchcock by columnists, which began when the director disembarked in New York City in 1937 and continued as he gradually moved west.

Hitchcock's first American boss, the legendary film mogul David O. Selznick, was one of the earliest to elaborate on Hitchcock's role as a cultural fixture beyond the frames. By 1943 Hitchcock had already established himself as a linguistic entity, according to his producer, who expanded on the adjectival Hitchcock in a perceptive memo:

> Hitch loves publicity, has been made into one of the most important figures in his field in the industry, and indeed into a figure known throughout the world by publicity, and he has a real genius for it himself. I am sure you will agree that Hitchcock has practically come into the language as not merely a name but an adjective, as is demonstrated by the use of his name in hundreds of stories and articles every year, and by such references as appear in book advertising almost every week: "As thrilling as a Hitchcock movie, et cetera."[9]

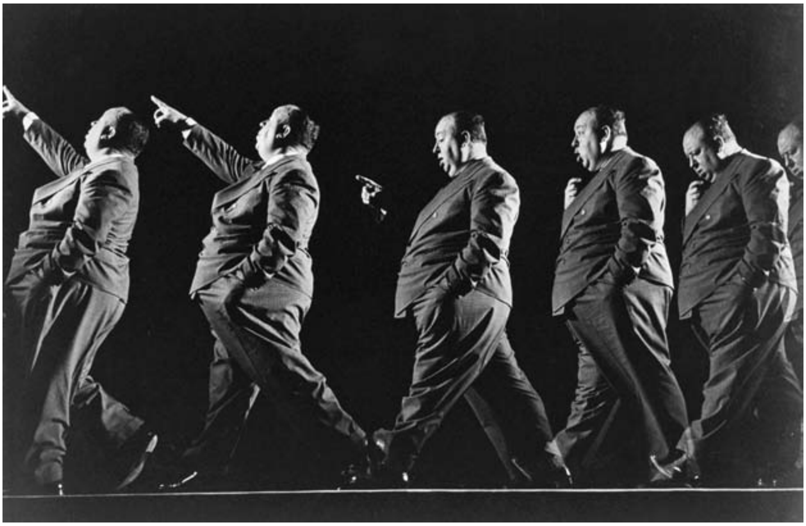
In 1949, in an off-the-cuff aside in a syndicated piece commenting on Hitchcock's recent weight loss, Walter Winchell also tersely weighed in on the meaning of the adjective "Hitchcockian," pronouncing it "synonymous with suspense." It had, Winchell opined, "been an adjective for good melodramas for years."[10] Much later, in the release material for *Marnie* (Universal Pictures, 1964), it was reported that the term "Hitchcockian" had found its way into modern American slang and that the term's domain had expanded somewhat to denote something macabre, bizarre, and suspenseful. Paula Marantz Cohen puts it well in terms of the television context: "But more than the idea of the man was the idea of the Hitchcockian experience, a composite of elements associated with the films, the thriller genre, and cinema itself."[11]

Hitchcock was an instant hit on television in 1955, and his performance as host was sensational and very cleverly crafted. I elucidate this process in chapter 2, with an emphasis on the hosting rather than the teleplays. Critics raved about the playful irreverence in the way he always chided the sponsor, and they celebrated the absurd pontifications regarding the meaning and afterlife of story events. James B. (Jimmie) Allardice is the unsung presence behind the franchise's distinctive hosting. He was the scriptwriter for the prologues and epilogues during all ten seasons of the show, and a ghostwriter for many of Hitchcock's public performances during the show's tenure.[12] Allardice's genius was in finding a truly unique style for Hitchcock's television performance. And it was the Hitchcock franchise's genius to sense the value of marrying Allardice's oblique creative mind to Hitchcock's curious performance range.

The core context for this study of the Hitchcock brand is the popular reception of his persona in newspapers, general-interest magazines, and photographic periodicals; this mise-en-scène served as a prism for creativity throughout Hitchcock's American career. Here salient aspects of his self-styled identity as food connoisseur, fatso, and film director were inimitably intertwined and rhetorically set off in exchanges across high-end tables and in the Hitchcock family kitchen. In this spirit, the two television episodes discussed as interludes between the chapters feature fine dining and murder with food-related twists.

Hitchcock's already intense marketing mode culminated with the television show during its decade on the air. The fame Hitchcock had managed to stir up as an integral part of his cinema was a prerequisite for the television engagement, which in turn had repercussions for his cinema and particularly its marketing. This media strategy turned the already showy Hitchcock into a full-fledged celebrity. In the transition from cinema to television and back, the Hitchcock figure underwent considerable tweaking. The series names, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, clearly put premium on presenting and hosting. In this quaintly framed role, Hitchcock became an icon on American television, and soon across the globe, while the teleplays offered refracted perspectives on both English and American culture. I therefore give the prologues and epilogues for AHP and AHH as much attention as, if not more than, the crime stories. As paratexts, they are tucked into and channel the text proper, in this case the stories, while regularly flogging the commercials in between.[13]

Over the years, Hitchcock's talking points and appearances across media formed a poetics in fragments by providing interpretations for salient scenes, singling out the most important films and teleplays, and in general reinforcing the director's mastery of his oeuvre. In the late 1950s, with a mystery magazine in his own name, edited book collections, and television ventures going strong, the Hitchcock figure became increasingly cross-medial, permeable, and ubiquitous.



Intro.1. Stroboscopic exposures by Gjon Mili. Courtesy of Getty Images.

A set of unpublished photographs from a photo session for *Life* magazine in conjunction with the shooting of *Shadow of a Doubt* (Skirball Productions / Universal Pictures, 1943) perfectly captures Hitchcock's figurative multiplicity on a metaphorical level (fig. Intro.1). Gjon Mili later published one of them in his *Photographs and Recollections*, adding the telling caption comment that Hitchcock "found the idea of being directed very amusing and behaved accordingly."[14]

This convoluted doubling, or serializing, of the multimediated Hitchcock figure provides the critical focus for this book. Hitchcock's own body and his figure at large offer the grounding and rationale for expanding him into a franchise. He enlisted a phalanx of other bodies as surrogates to bolster the brand together with his own cameo figures, his hammy marketing efforts, and his friendly interaction with journalists, all under the marquee of a style that was read and experienced as Hitchcockian.

Mili's photographic technique captures this multiplicity by bringing together fragments in suspended motion into an imaginary bigger picture—a stroboscopic poetics featuring malleable bodies summed up under Hitchcock's logotype, if you will. Similarly, this book moves across printers' ink, photographs and photo-essays, big and small screens, and big and small plates when analyzing the ingredients and recipes for this multiple-body-centered branding. Symbolically, Hitchcock's body, in different postures and by way of complex forms of surrogacy, is splendidly alone on the stage. In chapter 3 I track down traces of Hitchcock's corporeal specter and multiple modes of surrogacy in both his television stories and some exemplary films.

In the way that so many critics, including Hitchcock himself, have used the term, I refer to his "figure" to highlight the constructed nature and multiplicity of this renegotiated, refashioned, and paradoxical Hitchcock as a discipline and identity in motion, across a body of works and with many working bodies. The figure came with a conspicuous physical frame that became a logotype for the brand, yet it was highly malleable and fraught with anxieties and constant scrutiny and supervision. Seemingly, there was always an extra Hitchcock figure to mobilize for a brand obsessed with doubling in a multitude of constellations, some vertiginous, uncanny, and abyss-like, others playful, upbeat, and jolly.

During the first season of AHP, this doppelganger (or "multiganger") motif had its thematic counterpart on television in a story cleverly labeled "The Case of Mr. Pelham" (AHP 10). Mr. Pelham (first name Albert) is removed from his humdrum life in a hostile takeover when a doubling copycat begins showing up everywhere in his place. Tom Ewell played both Pelhams. Exasperated, the first/original/real Mr. Pelham fatally tries to distance himself from the intruder/copy by sporting an out-of-character tie. The tie tactic backfires and is used as evidence against him, making *him* seem like the impostor.[15] In the epilogue to this Hitchcock-directed episode—and indicative of Allardice's scripting style—Hitchcock doubles the spoof by turning it on himself when he encounters a second Hitchcock, complete with gaudy tie, and is forcefully taken by orderlies to a mental ward. The discursive Hitchcock personages and look-alikes function much like rotund *matryoshka* nesting dolls, but without the progressively shrinking size. Although his physical format fluctuated dramatically over the years, the dark-suit uniforms were tailored to fit all imaginable Hitchcock sizes. The gaudy tie, fatal in Mr. Pelham's case, later became a signature article of clothing for Hitchcock's imaginary brother, a frequent guest in the host segment's identity game and substitution play.[16]

My interpretation of Hitchcock's multiplicity follows Thomas M. Leitch's perceptive analysis of Hitchcock's work for television. To authorship theory's three concentric circles as developed by Andrew Sarris—technique, personal style, and interior meaning—Leitch productively adds a fourth: the director as a celebrity spreading his name beyond the confines of his own creative work to a franchise.[17] Leitch's fourth circle either encloses the three others or is at the very core of the enterprise, if not oscillating between them all. Leitch performs an inspired critical twist by moving the outer celebrity circle into the very core of the authorship project via the assumption that the television episodes, mainly those that Hitchcock directed, "are as typical of his work, as revealing of his range and his preoccupations, and as constitutive for our image of Hitchcock as his feature films."[18] For Leitch, the outer and inner circles function as mutually reinforcing fields of criticism blending with marketing spins, depending on the angles from which Hitchcock's figures are perceived. The all-embracing figure, or the deck of multiple figures à la Mili, is fully aligned with the adjectival form "Hitchcockian," which encircles not only the films and the Hitchcock-directed teleplays but also the franchise's overall story universe and the photo-essays featuring Hitchcock. Television, arguably, is at the top of the food chain in the feeding process for the franchise.

Critical standards and unflattering physical barbs aside, commentators invariably noticed a novel type of Hitchcock marketing across popular media during the combined run of AHP and AHH from 1955 to 1965. Hitchcock directed episodes quite regularly during the first seasons, then progressively less often as time passed—though he still put his indelible stamp on the show and bracketed others' contributions with his wit, whimsy, and overpowering screen command as host. Where to place Alfred Hitchcock's television work in relation to his cinema within this rich cocktail of artistry and self-serving promotion still poses a critical dilemma. In this sweep of media, with a magazine in his name (*Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, 1956–) and a phalanx of book anthologies, all elements feed off each other. The lack of scholarly attention to small-screen Alfred—with the exception of excellent contributions from Robert E. Kapsis, Thomas M. Leitch, and some minor overviews and ambitious documentation volumes[19]—seems to indicate that the television venture stands thematically decoupled from Hitchcock's cinema and at best resides among the footnotes to his film work. I argue that rather than just an intertwined strand in the larger fabric of the Hitchcock oeuvre, it represents a resounding echo chamber for reception and reputation. For marketing and global brand recognition the television work was truly paramount and served Hitchcock well all the way to *Family Plot* (Universal Pictures, 1976).

Hitchcock's television kitchen cooked up lethal fare 24/7. A morning omelet spiked with ground glass eliminated the need for lunch. For those who survived breakfast, lunch was no picnic owing to premeditated aftereffects. The nice cup of tea or coffee in the afternoon could be fatal for anyone still around, as arsenic lurked in many a pot or was mixed into the sugar bowl. Next trial: the cocktail hour, featuring an array of killing concoctions. And then the dinner specials: not only was murder committed with the famous frozen leg of lamb, but prepared food also came fraught with murderous designs, and the truly devious chefs even cooked up their dinner guests. When a dinner dish went around for the second time, some husbands, as an inspired afterthought, penciled botulinum bacteria on the leftover ham for the benefit of their wives. Desserts, too, reaped victims, while some killers preferred to strike during the after-dinner liqueur. Late-night cocoa or tea was particularly perilous, as wives poisoned husbands, husbands wives, and daughters their mothers. The truly clever operators duped spouses trying to poison them with bedtime cocoa by siphoning away the beverage and playing dead, thus turning the game around come breakfast time. Around the clock and across the menu, Hitchcock's television world was a culinary ordeal running in tandem with the marketing of the host as a prandial authority.

The ubiquity of on-screen food reflects a brand built around a Hitchcock who was perennially at the table, expounding on food culture in between his observations on screen culture. Sizing him up for his poundage and perplexing prowess, journalists joined Hitchcock in his element at the very best table. Meanwhile, his characters sometimes celebrated food frugality to a fault. An illustrative tidbit in the latter register seems in order before we turn to Hitchcock's trendsetting table riches in New York City in 1937. "Cheap Is Cheap" (AHP 143) is a witty, original gem featuring Dennis Day as a supreme penny-pincher.[20] The teleplay was scripted by the writing duo Albert E. Lewin and Burt Styler, who formed as a team for radio and wrote primarily for Bob Hope before their long television career. The premise is immediately set up in the inner monologue, as Day's character, Alexander Gifford, comes home to his dreary apartment, disappointed about not receiving a Christmas bonus. For him, life is all about saving money—and so is death, as it turns out. In the absence of a bonus, he is too depressed to even sneak-read the neighbor's evening paper. From this sorry state of affairs things turn even worse, as his wife, Jennifer (Alice Backes in her first of many roles for the show), has found Alexander's six hidden bankbooks holding a grand total of $33,000. After discovering the couple's relative affluence, she wants a divorce to escape their gloomy life. She reveals her find when she serves dinner that night. To Alexander's horror, his wife replaces the cheap stew meat he habitually eats with an expensive steak for herself. Later, as they once more sit down for a shared dinner, again with separate dishes, the teleplay approaches its "happy" but one-sided resolution.

In between the dinner scenes, Alexander enterprisingly explores all kinds of options for killing off Jennifer, since a divorce would rob him of half the money. He ponders the situation in voice-over, eliminating one alternative after the next as being too costly a solution to his dilemma. Inspiration from crime novels takes him nowhere, but then a visit to the county jail puts him in touch with a contract killer. The gun for hire is far too expensive for Alexander, but he is a family man himself and very sympathetic, so he offers numerous helpful suggestions. The wittiest, perhaps, is a method he has seen on television (and we all know on which show): “A dame did it, she clobbered her husband with a frozen leg of lamb.” At fifty-nine cents a pound, the meaty murder weapon is unthinkable for the cheapskate. Finally, a perfect method virtually presents itself: food poisoning. Alexander even manages to steal botulinum bacteria from a lab, putting it on the leftover ham Jennifer eats for dinner while he cautiously sticks to a hamburger. Predictably, she gets sick, but after the doctor’s prognosis that she might in fact recover, Alexander feels obligated to secure the hoped-for outcome. He suffocates her with a pillow embroidered with the cheerful but misplaced adage “Home Sweet Home.” As the doctor signs the death certificate, the next chilling cost dawns on Alexander: the funeral. Once again, a happy solution rescues him. Alexander sells Jennifer’s body to a medical institution and turns a threatening cost point into a healthy seventy-five-dollar profit.

The Lewin-Styler brand of humor, predicated on a low-key acting style with absurd inflections, bizarre plot premises, and characters carrying out nutty schemes in vignette style, worked splendidly in the AHP context of merry murders, not least owing to the producers’ inspired casting of Day. This episode ingeniously blends the Hitchcock brand’s prime features: murder in the family circle executed in a food context, here delectably humorous; a modicum of suspense; and ingenious casting that takes advantage of, and sometimes tweaks, established roles, often in highly intricate ways—all in the hands of a capable production team, with Hitchcock on the sideline as “mere” host. Here the outsourcing of the Hitchcock experience to the producers and the director, Bretaigne Windust, featured an original script with a Hitchcockian in-joke: the sly reference to one of the most classic episodes, “Lamb to the Slaughter” (AHP 106), a veritable master recipe for the show. Otherwise, the series overwhelmingly favored published material, much of it English. Hitchcock’s macabre, often self-deprecating humor as scripted by Allardice took hosting to an unprecedented level of creativity. In “Cheap Is Cheap” the prologue is cut in half on the screen, with half the screen blackened out. Hitchcock, too, has to economize in one of the show’s many televisual jokes, always in tune with the upcoming teleplay and with sly commentary concerning the sponsor. As often was the case, murderous accomplishments are absurdly punished by an off-hand comment. In the epilogue, Hitchcock returns with most of the screen blackened out, telling the audience that Alexander did not live happily ever after: “He was caught and paid the supreme penalty. In his case, a heavy fine." Furthermore, "the perfect murder should also include a happy funeral and a decent burial." Jolly interments, at times serialized or performed in impromptu fashion, were closely associated with the franchise and its focus on bodies—dead and alive—and body approximations. This particular host commentary neatly illustrates the tenet of this study: that Hitchcock, by way of his television hosting, reclaimed the body discourse—set in motion during his 1937 gastronomic holiday in New York City—for his own purposes and on his own terms. By the time the suspense factory was going strong in the late 1950s, Hitchcock had found a template for his performance and a perfect rapport between television and cinema, with added support from photojournalism and print media. The Hitchcock brand, propelled by the success of his television show, turned the Hitchcock figure into a global household name, eponym, and legend.