

**“Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living”:  
Reading the Felicity of the Body in  
Jeremy Bentham’s Auto-Icon**

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This paper investigates the status of the human body in Bentham’s utilitarianism by closely reading his quirky and idiosyncratic final essay, “Auto-Icon, or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living”—an essay which was held back from publication by his editor John Bowring because of what Bowring considered to be its completely mad eccentricity. Clearly very important for Bentham himself, “Auto-Iconism” realized the culmination of an individual’s contribution to the Greatest Happiness principle. What I would like to propose is that reading this unpublished essay, a companion piece to Bentham’s Last Will and Testament, alongside the *Theory of Fiction* texts, brings forth a theorization of “the body” which arguably persists throughout Bentham’s prolific career. Although Bentham himself may not have consciously undertaken a theorization of the body, in some ways, “the body” manifests as a site of contention for Bentham from his earliest writings to his last, comprising the staging ground for the benefits of Utilitarianism over the more established and predominant Natural Law, propagator of the “pestilence” of Fiction. Bentham’s passionate argument that Fiction subsumes and overtakes the “real” can be contextualized within a larger background of an 18<sup>th</sup> century enquiry into the relations between the body-as-figure and the corporeal body, but more relevant to this paper, it can also be situated in a more 20<sup>th</sup>-century theoretical framework: Bentham’s foregrounding of the relation between fiction and reality will eventually be cited by the structuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose fundamental registers of subjectivity, The Imaginary, The Symbolic and The Real, bear strangely fruitful compatibility with Bentham’s theories of Fiction. Both Bentham and Lacan bring forth the *automaton* as a figurative counterpart to the “real”, but the counter-relation is complex, and ambivalent, because it is also a relation of metonymy and annexation. This ambivalence may compromise the felicity of Bentham’s final calculus.

My paper will situate *corporeality* and its vicissitudes within a philosophical trajectory that arguably begins with Locke (according to Bentham) in which “the body” becomes the venue for a contiguous or metonymic relation between corporeality and figurality. I would like to investigate and calculate the felicity of Bentham’s proposed corpo-real performativity – it may, or may not be, a “happy” performative— but either way, Bentham’s unpublished final essay, “Auto-Icon, or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living” can be read as a happily performative text which brings forth questions of “the body” persisting throughout Bentham’s corpus.

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