

THE BODY AND PSYCHO; OR, OF "FARTHER USES OF THE DEAD TO THE LIVING" MIRAN BOŽOVIČ

The stuffing of dead human bodies and their subsequent animation is not something that originates with Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. There is in fact a quite respectable philosophical history to human taxidermy and bringing stuffed bodies back to life that reaches back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus, in her post-mortem fate, in her "after-life," Mrs. Bates is not alone; her resurrected body has at least one distinguished historical predecessor, namely the stuffed body of the British utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham.

I

Bentham's last wish was that, after his death, his body be publicly dissected, and then preserved and exhibited. The ideas behind this somewhat extraordinary wish were elaborated in his work *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living*.¹ While other philosophers who reflect on death are mostly concerned with the destiny of the soul after the death of the body, Bentham, in *Auto-Icon*, is concerned exclusively with the destiny of the dead body, that is, the body that the soul leaves behind. Accordingly, whereas other philosophers' reflections on death usually take the form of meditations on the immortality of the soul and completely disregard the post-mortem fate of the body, Bentham's reflections take the form of meditations on the body — first and foremost on his own dead body — and disregard the destiny of the soul. As a treatise on the author's own dead body, Bentham's *Auto-Icon* is perhaps the only work of its kind; it thus constitutes its own genre, for which Bentham coined a new term: "auto-thanatography,"² a natural sequel to the autobiography.

While people generally find the very thought of death or dead bodies revolting, Bentham, by contrast, respected dead bodies — the bodies of animals and humans, preserved after death "in the torrid regions of Africa," "in the ice of the poles," "in the ruins of

Herculaneum and Pompeii," "in rocks," and in "bogs, impregnated with tannine matter" — for providing "valuable materials for thought" (1). While others, as a rule, rarely talk about death, particularly not their own, Bentham says of his own death, and of the fate of his body after death, that "for many a year the subject has been a favorite one at my table" (2).

A good example of the way people generally try at all costs to ward off the idea of their own death can be found in Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. In the novella, not only do all the friends of the recently deceased Ivan Ilyich behave "as though death were a chance experience that could happen only to Ivan Ilyich,"³ and not to themselves, but Ivan himself dies believing that death is an experience that happens only to others and not to himself:

Ivan Ilyich saw that he was dying, and he was in a constant state of despair.

In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he unaccustomed to such an idea, he simply could not grasp it, could not grasp it at all.

The syllogism he had learned from Kiesewetter's logic — "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal" — had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but by no means to himself. That man Caius represented man in the abstract, and so the reasoning was perfectly sound; but he was not Caius, not an abstract man; he had always been a creature quite, quite distinct from all the others....

Caius really was mortal, and it was only right that he should die, but for him, Vanya, Ivan Ilyich, with all his thoughts and feelings, it was something else again. And it simply was not possible that he should have to die. That would be too terrible.⁴

Although Ivan is terminally ill, he still thinks that it will be Caius, that is, "man in the abstract," who will die, not he himself.

Although Bentham wrote his *Auto-Icon* shortly before his death and referred to it as his "last work,"⁵ he betrays in the treatise no fear of death; instead, he reflects on his own death just as objectively as he reflects upon everything else, that is, from the point of view of its possible utility. Although he usually writes in a cold and dull manner, this utilitarian sage, when writing his auto-thanatography, becomes lively for the first time and does not even try to hide his enthusiasm in contemplating the post-mortem fate of his body. As a utilitarian, he was exclusively interested in how he could be of use to his fellow humans even after death, that is, in what way even his dead body could contribute to the happiness of the living. As he wrote already in 1769, he wished "that mankind may reap some small benefit in and by my decease, having hitherto had small opportunities to contribute thereto while living."⁶

Other philosophers, such as Nicolas Malebranche or George Berkeley, similarly display no fear of death, but Bentham's lack of fear stems from different causes. It is, perhaps, not hard to face death if we share Berkeley's belief that the soul is "naturally immortal"⁷ and that "the Resurrection follows the next moment to death."⁸ The latter idea constitutes one of the "several paradoxes" that follow from Berkeley's radical theory of time. If, as a mind, I only exist as long as I perceive, then, of course, the moment I cease to perceive — that is, the moment I fall into a totally dreamless sleep or lose consciousness — I should cease to exist. Subsequently, in order to avoid this conclusion, Berkeley introduces his theory of time. According to Berkeley, what constitutes the time of each individual mind — and each individual mind has its own wholly subjective time, there is no absolute time — is "the succession of ideas"⁹ in the mind. It follows that the moment the succession of ideas ceases to exist, so does time. But if, when there is no longer any succession of ideas, there is also no time, then between death (the moment when I lose consciousness) and the resurrection (the moment when I regain consciousness) there is no time for me not to exist.¹⁰ Thus, what Berkeley is claiming is not that *I* myself do not exist in the interval separating my death from the resurrection, but rather the *interval* itself does not exist. Since he believed that the "intervals of Death or Annihilation" were "nothing,"¹¹ is it any wonder that he got a friend to assist him in hanging himself because he was curious to know "what were the pains and symptoms...felt upon such an occasion"?¹²

It might be even less difficult to face death, if we were to share Malebranche's belief that "at death we do not lose anything."¹³ According to Malebranche, in addition to the material body, which is inaccessible and inefficacious, we possess yet another "ideal" or "intelligible body"; and it is only the latter body that is capable of acting on us. It is not simply that the ideal body begins acting on us after death, when we have lost the material body; rather the ideal body acts on us all along. Thus, although we believe that it is our material body that causes pain when we are injured, for example, it is in fact the ideal body that is the source of pain. Since, according to Malebranche, the soul can be united only to that which can act upon it, it follows that the soul is not, and cannot be, united to the material, but only to the ideal body. The ideal body is "more real" than the material body; moreover, unlike the material body which no longer exists after death, our ideal body is "incorruptible,"¹⁴ and we therefore possess it even after we have lost the material one. Since death cannot separate us from the ideal body, to which we are really united, but only from the material body, which even while we were still alive was incapable of acting on us and was thus actually dead even before death, it is clear that "at death we do not lose anything": "therefore death which separates the soul...from this insensible body...is not to be feared at all."¹⁵ Furthermore, since the body that acts upon us even while the material

body is still alive is precisely the body that also acts upon us after the material body's death, it follows that, in Malebranche, resurrection *precedes* death itself.¹⁶

On the other hand, the "soul, existing in a state of separation from the body," cannot even be said to be a "real entity." Indeed, it may well turn out to be only a "fictitious entity"¹⁷ and our entire post-mortem fate that of "a senseless carcass" (7). Consequently, if we share Bentham's uncertainty about the ontological status of the soul after the death of the body, there clearly is not much we can hope for in the afterlife. While Malebranche, in *Entretiens sur la mort*, views his post-mortem fate as dependent on the immortal soul, which, even after the death of the material body, remains united to the ideal body, Bentham, by contrast, in *Auto-Icon*, sees his post-mortem fate as dependent solely on his dead body. Although this body will remain soulless even after the resurrection, it will nevertheless be this body that Bentham will claim as "his own self."

2

According to Bentham, the conventional disposal of the body after death goes against utilitarian wisdom, if not against common sense: not only does it actively harm the living — "undertaker, lawyer, priest — all join in the depredation" (1) — it also deprives them of the good they might otherwise have obtained from the dead. But what is the good that can be extracted from the dead? In what way can the dead, through their bodies, contribute "to the common stock of human happiness" (2)?

After death, human bodies can serve two purposes: one, "transitory," and the other, "permanent." The transitory purpose is "anatomical, or dissectional," and the permanent one is "conservative, or statuary" (2). "The mass of matter which death has created," should not simply be disposed of, but should be used "with a view to the felicity of mankind." Bearing in mind his "greatest-happiness principle," Bentham argues that the dead body can be put to the best use if "the soft and corruptible parts" are employed "for the purpose of anatomical instructions," and "the comparatively incorruptible part" converted into "an Auto-Icon" (2).

Let us first look at the "transitory," that is, "anatomical, or dissectional" purpose of dead human bodies. It might seem unnecessary for utilitarians to have to persuade anyone about the utility of the dead in teaching anatomy — by now most of us will admit that by dissecting and studying the bodies "of the insensible dead," the "susceptible living" may be spared pain, disease, and premature death. Yet, in Bentham's time, this position was not widely shared. As Ruth Richardson observes, in Great Britain during this period, the only legal source of bodies for medical dissection were the bodies of hanged murderers. The dissection, performed by a surgeon-anatomist, was considered part of the punishment, an

extension of the hangman's task.¹⁸ Consequently, anatomists acquired a particularly low reputation in public opinion and the act of dissection itself was viewed with suspicion. The dissection of murderers was made compulsory by the 1752 Murder Act, in which dissection is described as a "further Terror and peculiar Mark of Infamy."¹⁹ But since the bodies from this source clearly were in scarce supply, to satisfy the ever-increasing demand of the anatomy schools, the so-called "bodysnatchers" (or "resurrectionists") emerged and began digging corpses up from their graves and selling them to anatomy schools. Bodysnatching was not technically a crime of theft — dead bodies were not thought to belong to anyone by law and consequently "could neither be owned or stolen" — but was considered merely as an offense against public morality.²⁰ However, the most notorious of the body snatchers, Burke and Hare from Edinburgh, mentioned by Bentham in his *Auto-Icon*, did not simply dig up dead bodies, but actually murdered living people with the intention of selling their bodies to anatomists.

It is in this historical context that Bentham's extraordinary last will must be understood. Bentham left his dead body to his friend and disciple, Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith; it thus became his property and could not be stolen from him with impunity. He was to dissect it and use it

as the means of illustrating a series of lectures to which scientific & literary men are to be invited.... These lectures are to expound the situation structure & functions of the different organs.... The object of these lectures being two fold first to communicate curious interesting & highly important knowledge & secondly to show that the primitive horror at dissection originates in ignorance....²¹

Bentham left his own body to an anatomist for dissection in a period when there was a growing demand for corpses in the medical schools, but only a scant supply, since only convicted criminals could be dissected. Indeed, corpses were so much in demand and so scarce in supply, that murder began to pay. According to Bentham, it was "the pecuniary value attached" to the corpses that "created murderers in the shapes of Burkes and Hares" (7). Rather than an empty gesture of a capricious philosopher, who had lost his mind in old age, Bentham's donation of his body was an "exemplary bequest,"²² intended to inspire others to bequeath their bodies for dissection after death, and thus ultimately to make murder unprofitable. Smith executed Bentham's last will faithfully, and dissected his friend's body in front of his disciples and medical students. Before the dissection, he gave a long oration, entitled *A Lecture delivered over the remains of Jeremy Bentham*, over the corpse.

The idea that dissected human bodies, having once served their "transitory" purpose, should be preserved, that is, put to their "permanent," or "conservative, or statuary" purpose, is urged by Bentham as follows:

What resemblance, what painting, what statue of a human being can be so like him, as, in the character of an Auto-Icon, he or she will be to himself or herself. Is not identity preferable to similitude? (3)

Since nothing resembles an individual as well as that individual resembles him or herself, the bodies of the dead need to be preserved as their own most adequate representations. While one is usually represented after death by various icons, that is, “resemblances,” “paintings” and “statues,” preserving the body makes it possible for anyone to become his or her own icon, that is, an “auto-icon.” The term “auto-icon,” invented by Bentham, is, as he says, “self-explanatory”; it means “a man who is his own image” (2). Converted into an auto-icon, every man could, even after death, continue to represent himself, to be “his own image.” Since each man would be “his own statue” (2), auto-iconism would, of course, “supersede the necessity of sculpture” (4); that is, since each man would be “his own monument” (4), “there would no longer be needed monuments of stone or marble” (3). The art of auto-iconism, in short, would provide “likenesses more perfect than painting or sculpture could furnish” (5). Bentham is thus interested in the dead body in the same way that DeQuincy is interested in murder — as the object of “one of the fine arts.”

Bentham set a personal example not only for the “transitory,” that is the “anatomical” purpose, but also for the “permanent” or “statuary” purpose of dead human bodies: in his will, he directed Smith, after he had performed the dissection and anatomical demonstrations, to reassemble his bones into a skeleton, place on it the head, which was to have been processed separately, and then clothe the skeleton “in one of the suits of black usually worn by me” and seat it “in a Chair usually occupied by me when living.” Thus clad, the skeleton was to be equipped with “the staff in my later years borne by me” and put in “an appropriate box or case....”²³ As a result, Bentham can still be seen today exemplifying the “permanent” purpose of dead human bodies: he sits as “his own statue” in a glass and mahogany case in a corridor of University College London — and still represents himself more than a century and a half after his death.

While the conservative preparation of the trunk and extremities amounted to no more than ordinary taxidermy — the skeleton is tied together at the joints by copper wires and wrapped in straw, hay, tow, cotton wool, wood wool, and so on²⁴ — the auto-iconization of the head required a special treatment. That special attention should be paid to the head was clear to Bentham: “The head of each individual is peculiar to him and, when properly preserved, is better than a statue” (2). Accordingly, it was advised that the head be treated like the heads of indigenous New Zealanders, that is, by exsiccation. (A head, processed in this way, can be seen, for example, in Hitchcock’s *Under Capricorn*.) In striving to contribute to human happiness, then, a civilized man was not to scorn the “savage

ingenuity” of “the barbarous New Zealanders,” who have “preceded the most cultivated nations in the Auto-Icon art” (2). The eyes, one of the “soft and corruptible parts” of the body, did not have to present a problem, since artificial eyes would be made out of glass and would not be “distinguishable from those which nature makes” (2).

A curious irony had it that the auto-iconization of Bentham’s body failed precisely at the head. Although Smith faithfully followed Bentham’s instructions, the desiccated head was markedly dissimilar to the head of the living Bentham, and the anatomist therefore had a wax replica made to replace it. Although “identical” to the head of the living Bentham, the original head of the auto-icon was no longer “similar” to it, and Bentham, converted into an auto-icon, no longer resembled himself. It was, then, the wax replica that turned out to be more “like” Bentham, than Bentham, in the character of an auto-icon, was “like himself.” However, as it is the head that, according to Bentham, is what is “peculiar” to each individual, Bentham’s auto-icon, with its wax head, turned out to be no “better than a statue.” The irony of this lies not only in the fact that it was the example of Bentham himself that proved that an individual is not necessarily his or her own most adequate representation after death, but also in the fact that in considering how to preserve his own head after death, Bentham was led to toy with the idea of experimenting in “the Auto-Icon art” of the New Zealanders: he planned to obtain a human head from an anatomist and dry it out in a stove in his house.²⁵ It is not clear if the experiment was ever actually carried out, although Bentham, in his *Auto-Icon*, does somewhat cryptically refer to experiments in “the slow exhaustion of the moisture from the human head,” which have been going on “in this country” and “which promise complete success” (2).

3

How exactly were the auto-iconized dead supposed to “contribute to the happiness of the living”? Besides their numerous other uses — moral, political, economical, genealogical, architectural, phrenological²⁶ and so on — the auto-icons were also supposed to benefit the living through their “theatrical, or dramatic use” (12). Auto-iconism would make possible an entirely new kind of theater, in which the auto-icons performed as actors. On the stage, the auto-icons would speak and gesticulate; they would be animated either from within (moved by “a boy stationed within and hidden by the robe”) or from without (“by means of strings or wires,” operated by “persons under the stage”). By special contrivances, it would seem as if the auto-icons breathed and as if their voices, lent by actors, issued from their own mouths; since the skin on their faces “would be rendered of a more or less brownish hue,” as a result of “the process of exsiccation,” (13) they would need to wear stage make-up. Thus, for the ulti-

mate good to be extracted from them, the dead would have to be, as it were, brought back to life.

The only roles the dead would play would be themselves. Thus, for instance, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, staged according to Bentham's principles of auto-iconism, would feature Julius Caesar himself, that is, his auto-icon, in the title role. "What actor can play Julius Caesar better than Julius Caesar, in the character of an auto-icon, can play himself?" is how the first sentence of Bentham's manifesto of the auto-iconic theater would no doubt read. All the roles in this theater would thus be the posthumous equivalent of Hitchcock's personal appearances in his films (in which the director plays himself). Moreover, the auto-iconic theater would make it possible for the characters that actually lived centuries and continents apart to meet on stage face to face.

It is in this spirit that Bentham briefly sketches some dialogues that could be staged in the auto-iconic theater. The dialogues are categorized according to different disciplines, such as ethics, mathematics, politics and so on.²⁷ Each of the performers discusses his own work and his achievements. The performers include thinkers as ancient as Confucius, Aristotle and Euclid, and as recent as John Locke, Isaac Newton and D'Alembert. In all the draft dialogues, there is one name that persistently pops up, that of Bentham himself. Bentham would thus appear in all these dialogues and of course play himself (just as Hitchcock appears in each of his films and plays himself). But unlike Hitchcock, who assigned himself brief walk-ons in his films, Bentham reserves for himself absolutely pivotal roles in which he would compare his various achievements to the leading authorities in each particular field. Bentham also works out the choreography of the corpses on the stage, down to the smallest details: when all the representatives of a particular discipline were gathered on the stage, Bentham would enter and be greeted in the name of all the performers by one of the interlocutors who would then introduce Bentham to each of the others and briefly sketch the principal achievements of each in his respective discipline.²⁸ The following exchange on ethics is a good example of the typical course of these dialogues. "The sage of the 1830th year after the Christian era," that is, Bentham himself, says to "the sage of three centuries and a half before the same," that is, Aristotle:

In your work on morals, at the very outset of it, you bring forward the observation, that good in some shape or other, is the end in view of all men. Two thousand years have passed, and in all that time, nothing has been done on the subject by anybody else. Nobody has given a precise and clear import to the word corresponding to good, by translating the language of good and evil into the language of pleasure and pain... (14).

Nobody but Bentham himself, of course, who considered paraphrasis — namely replacing words referring to abstract and obscure entities, the reality of which is merely "verbal,"

with words referring to perceptible, really existing entities, such as pleasure and pain — to be one of his most important achievements! More or less the same story is repeated also in Bentham's dialogues on mathematics with Euclid and Newton, on politics with John Locke, and so forth.²⁹

Dialogues between *these* dead clearly could not have been staged auto-iconically, since, with the exception of Bentham himself, none of them could play themselves any longer. While Bentham might well have hesitated as to the exact ontological status of their souls existing in a state of separation from their bodies — are they “inferential real entities” or “inferential fictitious entities”? — he had no doubt as to their bodies: there were no “perceptible real entities” in the external world corresponding to the names of his interlocutors after their death. Nowadays, that is, more than a century and a half after Bentham's death, such a performance should, in principle, be possible, although the selection of Bentham's co-actors and interlocutors would be rather limited. Apart from Bentham, the only eminent sages that could play themselves after their death would be, for instance, Lenin (one can easily imagine a dialogue between Bentham and Lenin, let us say, on ontology, in which the two interlocutors would jointly mock Berkeley and his belief in the nonexistence of matter, with Bentham probably quoting from his *Fragment on Ontology*, and Lenin from his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*), Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-Tung, Kim Il Sung and few others. Like Bentham, these men were all “auto-iconized”; even after death, they all continue to represent themselves. In one significant respect, they can even be said to represent themselves more adequately than Bentham does: unlike Bentham's auto-icon, their embalmed bodies are indubitably “better than a statue.” Yet, even though they are all unquestionably “their own statues” or “their own monuments,” they are nevertheless nothing more than just that, that is, *monuments* to themselves. What Bentham would probably have found objectionable about all these auto-iconized thinkers is that they all, as a rule, represent themselves as *dead*, that is, as corpses: even though they look exactly the same as they did when they were still alive, they nevertheless lie like dead people with their eyes closed, whereas Bentham himself is sitting upright in a chair, his (glass) eyes opened, his hat on his head and his walking stick in his hands, as if he had just sat down, or as if he were just about to rise from his chair and leave for his daily “antejantacular circumgyration” — in a word, as if he were *alive*. While Bentham's auto-icon is flexible at the joints (if necessary, it can even be dismantled),³⁰ the rigid, embalmed corpses would be impossible to animate or to bring back to life even on the stage. So in the auto-iconic theater, in which the dead are brought back to life by the staging of dialogues between them, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-Tung, or Kim Il Sung could only play themselves at the moment of their deaths. It is perhaps because they only represent

themselves as dead that their embalmed bodies have not superseded “the necessity of sculpture,” but on the contrary, have inspired innumerable likenesses that represent them as living, even though, according to Bentham, their bodies are without question “better than a statue.” Although these others may “contribute to the happiness of the living,” not *all* the good has been “extracted” from them. They offer “anatomico-moral instruction” (7), but do not serve any “theatrical, or dramatic” purpose. It is therefore questionable whether the “extracted” good in fact outweighs “the evil done” (1), that is, the expenses. For example, until a short time ago, Lenin’s mausoleum laboratory in Moscow employed a staff of almost one hundred scientists — histologists, anatomists, biochemists, physical chemists and opticians — who maintained the embalmed corpse around the clock, treating it with special chemicals and by means of equipment worth several million dollars.³¹ In contrast, Bentham’s auto-icon has been restored only twice since 1832: on both occasions, the moth-eaten clothes were simply cleaned and patched up, the stuffing replaced, and a bag of naphthalene and a bunch of lavender added for good measure.³²

Let us briefly recall some typical difficulties concerning the dead human body in medieval philosophy. If the rational soul is the only substantial form of the human body, then after death, that is, after the separation of body from soul, Christ’s body can no longer be called his. If, however, the dead body on the cross cannot be said to be identical with Christ’s body, then it cannot be a fit object of worship.³³ For the utilitarian sage, however, this dilemma would present no difficulty; as he tersely puts it: “a man’s Auto-Icon is his own self” (10). Converted into an auto-icon, the “comparatively incorruptible part” of the matter created by death is identical with the living body and therefore a fit object of worship (or scorn), to the extent that people, while still alive, will take into account the judgment they will receive after death in the eyes of their fellow men when deciding upon any course of action: “What will be said of my Auto-Icon hereafter?” (7). Public opinion, then, would assign the auto-icons their place in “the temple of honor” or in “the temple of dishonor” (6), but since it would not always be possible to assign this place unequivocally, Bentham supplements his secular version of heaven and hell with “the Auto-Icon purgatory” (7), that is, a temple in which the auto-icons would await the definite judgment of public opinion. Bentham believes that, although the utilitarian eschatology cannot threaten with suffering or entice with pleasure after death — auto-icons are merely “senseless” carcasses — it can, by exposing the auto-icons to the public eye, nevertheless introduce “into the field of thought and action...motives both moral and political” (7).

Furthermore, Bentham predicts that his auto-icon will become sacred. It is true that he designates his auto-icon merely “quasi sacred” (15), but this was only because he thought that the term “sacred” had become “so open to abuse, as well as already so much abused”

(15), not because he considered its use in this case exaggerated in any way. How was this anticipated beatification supposed to come about? Once the principles of auto-iconism had been generally accepted and people, following Bentham's example, had begun to auto-iconize their dead, the auto-icons would, by themselves, arouse in people a "virtuous curiosity" (7). This, in turn, would trigger pilgrimages to "the Auto-Icons of the virtuous," of the "benefactors of the human race," that is, to the auto-icons of those who, while living, had acted in accordance with Bentham's principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." These auto-icons "in their silence would be eloquent preachers"; and the lesson they would preach to the pilgrims would be: "Go thou and do likewise" (7). Therefore, what would be propagated in this way would be virtuous behavior, that is, action in accordance with Bentham's greatest-happiness principle.

While pilgrimages to the auto-icons of the benefactors would be undertaken by the masses, the pilgrimages to "the old philosopher preserved in some safe repository" would be made only by the "votaries of the greatest-happiness principle" (15). Bentham's own auto-icon would thus be worshiped by only those few who understood that the good that made the auto-icons of the benefactors worthy of worship in the eyes of the masses was the direct result of their acting in accordance with Bentham's greatest-happiness principle; that is, his auto-icon would be worshiped by those who realized that the one who had first introduced this principle was, for that very reason, himself the greatest benefactor of the human race. In short, Bentham's auto-icon would be worshiped by the converts to utilitarianism.

It would be the auto-icon of Bentham himself that would, in the eyes of the converts, make all other auto-icons worthy of worship. Thus, although like all the other auto-icons of the illustrious dead, Bentham's would be nothing other than "a senseless carcass of the biped" (7), in the eyes of the converts, it would be the only one to deserve the elevated status of a "*quasi* sacred Auto-Icon" precisely because it would be the only one that would be worthy of worship on account of the person *whom it represents*, that is, it would be the sole icon worthy of worship *in its own right*.

In his will Bentham directed his disciples, whenever they met to commemorate "the Founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation," to bring the case-box containing his auto-icon into the room with them.³⁴ Thus, while in other sects, as a rule, other leaders succeed the founder after his or her death, in contrast, Bentham as an auto-icon would continue to "preside bodily" (5) over the sect of his followers even after his death:

But when Bentham has ceased to live (in memory will he never cease to live!), whom shall the Bentham Club have for its chairman? Whom but Bentham himself? On him will all eyes be turned — to him will all speeches be addressed (5).

What we encounter in Bentham's *Auto-Icon* is the obverse of Spinoza's project outlined in the second half of the fifth part of his *Ethics*. Here Spinoza considers "the mind's duration without relation to the body,"³⁵ not, as Bentham does, *the body's duration without relation to the mind*. While Spinoza's attention is focused on the part of the human mind that is eternal, Bentham is concerned with *the part of the human body that is eternal*: Spinoza believed that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but [that] something of it remains which is eternal,"³⁶ whereas Bentham no doubt believed that, after death, something of the human body remains that is "imperishable" (12), namely, its "comparatively incorruptible part," converted into an auto-icon. Thus, if Spinoza's project in the *Ethics* can be termed an "alternative, secular salvation"³⁷ of the mind, Bentham's may be termed an *alternative, secular resurrection of the body*.

4

One of the most faithful proponents of Bentham's principles of auto-iconism can be said to be Norman Bates from Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Norman's attitude toward dead bodies is no less utilitarian than Bentham's own, for, like the philosopher, Norman believes, as we read in the novel, "in the preservative powers of taxidermy."³⁸ He does not leave his mother's dead body to the processes of natural decay and corruption, but digs it up from the grave, stuffs it and preserves it as her own most adequate representation. Like his stuffed birds — ravens and owls — so Norman's mother becomes after her death "her own image" or "her own statue." Admittedly, the auto-icon of Mrs. Bates assembled by Norman looks somewhat less lifelike than the auto-icon of Bentham, but we should bear in mind that the latter owes its lifelike appearance primarily to the fact that Bentham's desiccated head was later replaced by a wax replica into which glass eyes were inserted. Artificial eyes were the only concession Bentham was prepared to make within his strict principles of auto-iconism; that is to say, the only parts of his body that he did not insist on preserving as auto-iconic after death were his eyes. Instead, Bentham had a pair of glass eyes, later to adorn his desiccated head, made in his own color twenty years before his death that he used to carry around in his pocket to show to his friends.³⁹ (Similarly, according to Zbarsky, false eyes were also inserted into Lenin's mummified head.⁴⁰) In contrast, Norman Bates allows the dried head of his mother to remain attached to her body and leaves her eye sockets empty, rather than betray the principles of auto-iconism. Thus, even though Mrs. Bates, in the character of an auto-icon, no longer resembles herself, nevertheless in Norman's eyes, she represents herself more adequately than Bentham and Lenin represent themselves.

Nor does Norman leave the bodies of his other two victims, Marion and detective Arbogast, to natural decay and corruption, but drops them into the swamp, where corpses can remain more or less preserved over long periods of time. (The fact that swamps were places where bodies were known to have been preserved, is also mentioned by Bentham.⁴¹) Thus, even if they had been brought to light many years after their deaths, Marion and Arbogast would still have represented themselves, no less than Mrs. Bates. Naturally auto-iconized, their bodies would perhaps have looked even more lifelike than the taxidermically treated body of Mrs. Bates. So, Norman is still experimenting with the art of auto-iconography.

Norman manifests a utilitarian attitude not only toward dead bodies but also toward taxidermy itself, that is, to the very procedure by which the dead are rendered useful to the living. As he observes, “stuffing things” is an inexpensive hobby: “It’s not as expensive as you might think,” he says, “It’s cheap, really. You know, needles, thread, sawdust. The chemicals are the only things that cost anything....”⁴² Furthermore, while the good is being extracted from the dead by Norman at minimal costs, it is also “more than a hobby”: while people normally take up hobbies “to pass the time,” Norman Bates goes about stuffing things “to fill it.”⁴³ Thus, even before they can be put to their “farther use,” the dead are already of benefit to him: “stuffing things” is what, in itself, gives him a sense of personal fulfillment, satisfies him. Stuffing the dead, in short, is what he lives for.

Norman’s pragmatic attitude toward dead bodies draws not only on the tradition of utilitarianism, but on its immediate precursors as well. He does not leave the death of the bodies, which he will later put to “farther use,” to chance; it is the bodies of his victims that he stuffs and auto-iconizes. The stuffed ravens and owls most likely have not died of natural causes, but, like Mrs. Bates, must have been killed. In his utilitarianism run amok, Norman therefore resembles the infamous assassins Burke and Hare, who murdered people so that their bodies could be used for utilitarian purposes, that is, for anatomical instruction. But while the bodies of Burke’s and Hare’s victims served Bentham’s “transitory,” that is, “dissectional, or anatomical” purpose, the bodies of Norman’s victims — his mother as well as the ravens and owls — serve Bentham’s “permanent,” that is, “conservative, or statuary” purpose. After Burke was finally caught, he was sentenced to be hanged and publicly dissected; that is, the one who had engaged in murder to serve utilitarian ends, was himself, in turn, murdered and his own body put to “farther use to the living.” In fact, Burke’s body was used not only for “transitory,” but also for “permanent” purposes: the presiding judge decreed that after the execution and subsequent dissection of his body, Burke’s skeleton should be reassembled and preserved in memory of his atrocious crimes.⁴⁴ Thus, Burke can still be seen today, displayed in the Edinburgh University

Museum. Even today he continues to represent himself, even today he continues to be “his own image,” his own icon. Is not this exemplary punishment also the one to which Hitchcock, in *Psycho*, condemns Norman Bates by showing him in the end just sitting and staring vacantly, uncannily like the stuffed figures of his mother and Bentham? Does it not seem, then, as if Norman has been stuffed while still alive, since all he is capable of doing henceforth is *representing* himself? Ultimately, Norman comes to realize this himself, when, in the novel, he decides, through his mother’s voice, that the best thing for him to do is to pretend to be “a stuffed figure” — “a harmless stuffed figure that couldn’t hurt or be hurt but merely exist forever.”⁴⁵ Isn’t Norman, then, condemned to exemplify, with his body, “a farther use of the dead” even before his death?

And finally, Norman also puts the stuffed body of his mother, her auto-icon, to its “theatrical, or dramatic use.” As we have seen, Bentham would have wished to have his philosophical monologues staged after his death in the form of dialogues between himself and various illustrious dead thinkers. It was precisely in order for him to be able to play himself in these “dialogues of the dead,” that Bentham had his body auto-iconized. These dialogues did not take place, mainly because with the exception of Bentham’s own body, the bodies of those with whom he would have wished to converse after death were not preserved. In contrast, Norman Bates puts Bentham’s fantasy of the auto-iconic theater into practice: his fantasy scripts are not taking place merely in his head, that is, in the form of imaginary conversations or interior monologues. Rather, they are *acted out* in the form of dialogues between himself and his dead mother, who in his little theater, plays herself, while Norman animates her body (or her auto-icon), and lends it his voice. “What actor can play my mother better than my mother, in the character of an auto-icon, can play herself?” is how, no doubt, the first sentence of Norman’s version of the Benthamite auto-iconic theater would read.

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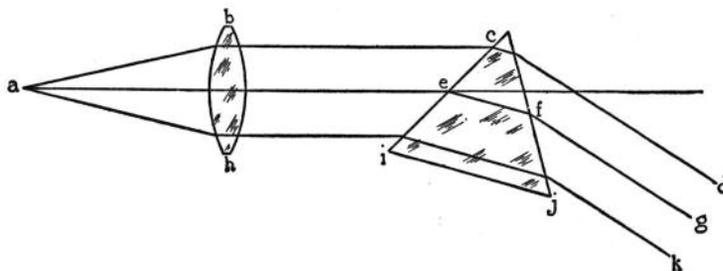
Bentham’s central principle of auto-iconism — that is, since nothing can resemble a thing as closely as that thing represents itself, the thing must act as its own representation — ultimately derives from Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles. According to Leibniz, no two things in nature can be exactly alike. If two things perfectly resemble each other, they are also numerically identical, that is, one and the same thing; two things that are indiscernible from one another are in reality nothing other than “the same thing under two names.”⁴⁶

From a Lacanian perspective, however, it is rather the reverse that holds true. In an old racist joke, a gypsy is examined by a psychiatrist who first explains what free association

is: you immediately say what comes to your mind in response to the psychiatrist's cue. Thereupon, the psychiatrist proceeds to the test itself: he says "table," and the gypsy answers, "Fucking Fatima"; the psychiatrist then says "sky," the gypsy again answers, "Fucking Fatima," and on and on, until the psychiatrist explodes: "But you did not understand me! You must tell me what pops into your mind, what you are thinking of, when I say my word!" The gypsy calmly answers: "Yes, I got your point, I am not that stupid, but I think all the time about fucking Fatima!" This racist joke should be supplemented by the crucial final twist at work in another well-known joke about a pupil who, when questioned by his biology teacher about various animals, always reduced the answer to the definition of a horse. When asked, for instance, "What is an elephant?" the pupil answers, "An animal that lives in the jungle where there are no horses. A horse is a domestic mammal with four legs, used for riding, working in the fields or pulling carts." Or again, to the question "What is a fish?" he says, "An animal that, unlike a horse, has no legs. A horse is a domestic mammal...." And to "What is a dog?" he responds, "An animal that, unlike a horse, barks. A horse is a domestic mammal..." and so on, until, finally, the desperate teacher asks the pupil: "OK, what is a horse?" Perplexed and totally thrown off balance, the pupil starts to mumble and cry, unable to provide an answer. Along the same lines, the psychiatrist should have given to the sex-starved gypsy the cue "Fucking Fatima," to which, undoubtedly, the poor gypsy would have broken down in a panic, unable to generate any association.

Why would this be the case? Because, precisely (and in contrast to Bentham's principle of auto-iconism, according to which a thing is its own icon, that is, resembles itself) a horse *is* a horse; it does not *look like* or *resemble* a horse, in the same way that "fucking Fatima" *is* "fucking Fatima," and not some association generated by the idea of "fucking Fatima." (Another homologous structure is that of a well-known tribe mentioned by Levi-Strauss for whose members all dreams have hidden sexual meaning — all except those with explicit sexual content.) To put it in philosophical terms, what we encounter here is the obverse of Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles: the anti-Leibnizian lesson of the Lacanian logic of the signifier is that, since a thing does not "look like itself," resemblance, on the contrary, guarantees non-identity. It is this paradox that accounts for the uncanny effect of encountering a double: the more he looks like me, the more the abyss of his otherness stands out. It is in accordance with this logic that, in the film *Lady Eve*, a character played by Henry Fonda sees the same woman for the second time (a woman who still looks exactly the same but is now pretending to be somebody different) and exclaims: "They look too much alike to be the same!" What distinguishes the two women for him is precisely the fact that they are indistinguishable: they simply resemble

one another too much to be identical. And it is precisely the same logic that, in *Animal Crackers*, governs Groucho Marx's speculation about Emmanuel Ravelli's identity: upon learning that someone who looks "exactly like" Emmanuel Ravelli is in fact Emmanuel Ravelli, he nevertheless protests: "But I still insist there *is* a resemblance." It is because Emmanuel Ravelli resembles himself exactly that Groucho finds it hard to believe that he is, in fact, Emmanuel Ravelli: how could he possibly be Emmanuel Ravelli when he looks "exactly like" him? It seems then that, according to this logic, an individual could only remind us of himself or be recognized unequivocally if, despite the fact that everything about him reminds us of him, *he himself does not remind us of himself*. In the same way, Margaret Dumont, in the opening scene from *A Night at the Opera*, reminds Groucho Marx of herself: "Your eyes, your throat, your lips — everything about you reminds me of you. Except you." Or, in Hegelese, the "oneness" of a thing is not grounded in its properties, but in the negative synthesis of a pure "One" that excludes (or relates negatively to) all positive properties. This "one," which guarantees the identity of a thing, does not reside in its properties, since it is ultimately its signifier.



1. Jeremy Bentham, *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living. A Fragment*. From the MSS. of Jeremy Bentham. (Unpublished).
2. Bentham, *Auto-Icon*, 2. All further references to this work are made in the text.
3. Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, trans. Lynn Solotaroff (New York: Bantam, 1981), 44. See also 37.
4. *Ibid.*, 93-94.
5. *Ibid.*, 1, note by the editor.
6. Quoted in Thomas Southwood Smith, *A Lecture delivered over the remains of Jeremy Bentham* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), 4.
7. George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 156.
8. Berkeley to Samuel Johnson, 24 March, 1730, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. M. R. Ayers (London: Dent, 1992), 354.
9. *Ibid.* See also Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 138.
10. For a fuller account of Berkeley's theory of time, see Ian C. Tipton, *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism* (London: Methuen, 1974), 271-96; George Pitcher, *Berkeley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 206-11; A. C. Grayling, *Berkeley: The Central Arguments* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 174-83; David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 61-70; and E. J. Furlong, "On Being 'Embrangled' by Time," in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 148-55.
11. Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, in *Philosophical Works*, 308.
12. See "Some Original Memoirs of the late famous Bishop of Cloyne," in *Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. A. Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), vol. III, 35; quoted in David Berman, *Berkeley: Experimental Philosophy* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 38.
13. Nicolas Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la mort*, in *Oeuvres completes de Malebranche*, ed. Andre Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1972-84), vol. XII-XIII, 410.
14. *Ibid.*, 405.
15. *Ibid.*, 409-10.
16. Incidentally, there is an apocryphal story — quoted by Thomas DeQuincy in his brilliant essay *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* — according to which Berkeley is supposed to have caused Malebranche's death. When Berkeley called on the famous philosopher in Paris he found him in his cell cooking. A dispute arose about the latter's system. Berkeley urged Malebranche to retract his doctrine of occasional causes, while the latter stubbornly stood his ground — "culinary and metaphysical irritations united to derange his liver: he took to his bed, and died" (Thomas DeQuincy, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts & On War* [London: The Doppler Press, 1980], 19). Berkeley thus came to be considered as "the occasional cause of Malebranche's death." For more on this point, see A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 208-10.
17. Bentham, "A Fragment on Ontology," in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh, 1838-43), vol. VIII, note 196.
18. Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 34.
19. Quoted in Richardson, 37.
20. See *ibid.*, 58-59.

21. Bentham MSS. Box 155, UC Library; quoted in C. F. A. Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham at University College London," *Medical History* 2 (1958): 80.
22. Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz, "Jeremy Bentham's self image: an exemplary bequest for dissection," *British Medical Journal* 295 (July 1987): 195.
23. Bentham MSS. Box 155, UC Library; quoted in Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham," 80.
24. See Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham," 85.
25. See John Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections* (London: H. S. King, 1877), 343; quoted in Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham," 78.
26. See Bentham, *Auto-Icon*, 3.
27. *Ibid.*, 14-15.
28. *Ibid.*, 13.
29. *Ibid.*, 14-15.
30. See Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz, "Jeremy Bentham's self image," 197.
31. See Ilya Zbarsky and Samuel Hutchinson, *Lenin's Embalmers*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: The Harvill Press, 1998), 181.
32. See Richardson and Hurwitz, "Jeremy Bentham's self image," 196.
33. For an account of the controversy, see Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 47. For an ingenious solution, see Meister Eckhart, *Did the Forms of the Elements Remain in the Body of Christ while Dying on the Cross?* in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 71-75.
34. For the text of Bentham's last will, see Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham," 80.
35. Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 606.
36. *Ibid.*, 607.
37. Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 154.
38. Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 149.
39. See Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham," note 84.
40. See Zbarsky and Hutchinson, *Lenin's Embalmers*, 85.
41. See Bentham, *Auto-Icon*, 1.
42. Richard J. Anobile, ed., *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho* (London: Pan Books, 1974), 78.
43. *Ibid.*
44. See Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 143. See also 340, note 52.
45. Bloch, *Psycho*, 152.
46. Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Dent, 1973), 216.

