

26. Simulacrum as Nichtseyende. Baudrillard and Schelling on the Effectiveness of What Is Not

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Abstract: This paper proposes a Schellingian interpretation of Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum. It advances five interconnected claims: (1) that Baudrillard's engagement with Schelling has left recognizable textual and conceptual traces in his work; (2) that Baudrillard's figures of transvestism, illness, obesity, and speed operate according to a Schellingian logic in which things manifest themselves in their contrary, or non-identity; (3) that Baudrillard employs Schellingian concepts from a logical rather than an ontological point of view; (4) that Baudrillard and Schelling share a common philosophical engagement with the problems posed by Plato in the *Sophist*, from which Schelling derives his notion of the simulacrum; and (5) that this intertextual relation clarifies Baudrillard's philosophy of simulacra by explaining how what is not can nonetheless produce real effects.

Introduction

This paper proposes a Schellingian interpretation of four conceptual figures in Baudrillard's thought: transvestism, psychosomatic illness, obesity, and speed. Little has been written on the relationship between Baudrillard and Friedrich W. J. Schelling.¹ However, the Schelling scholar Ana Carrasco-Conde has advanced a suggestive hypothesis. Reflecting on a "logic of the phantom" — that is, of what is not, but nevertheless has real effects — she pointed out a conceptual convergence between Baudrillard's simulacrum and Schelling's "non-entity" (*Nichtseyende*). Both share a negative, fictional, parasitic ontological status,

¹ For an initial insight into this correlation, see Iain Hamilton Grant, "Schellingianism and Postmodernity," *The Paideia Archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, no. 27 (1998), 32–38.

which is nevertheless capable of producing positive ontological effects.²

Carrasco-Conde's hypothesis is fascinating. However, pursuing this development exposes it to two reasonable objections. The first objection is textual: there is no evidence that Baudrillard ever made any reference to Schelling. The second one is theoretical: whereas Schelling's concept of "non-entity" originates from an ontological tradition that goes back to Plato's *Sophist*, Baudrillard's concept of "simulacrum" arises from a reflection on the semiological status of the sign. Developing the comparison between the two concepts would tend to "over-ontologize" Baudrillard.

In this paper, I respond to both objections. On the one hand, I show that there is evidence of direct and indirect references to Schelling in Baudrillard's work. On the other hand, I show that Baudrillard uses Schellingian ontological concepts—essence/existence, potency, *Steigerung*, doubling—and that he demonstrates an interest in the problematic posed in Plato's *Sophist*, from which Schelling derives his concept of non-entity.

I argue however, that he employs them not ontologically but logically. The comparison is more productive if it starts from the Schellingian perspective according to which things manifest themselves by reversing into their opposite, that is, into their non-identity. This entails a shift from ontology to logic. In Schelling, these dimensions are not distinct: *non-identity* is the *non-identity* of the entity. Baudrillard however, speaks of an "other logic" when referring to Schellingian conceptual operators, suggesting that he drew a logic from Schelling without embracing his ontology—a logic that clarifies how his fictional realities operate.

In each of the four figures re-examined, it will emerge that for Baudrillard what is at stake each time is a reversal of the identity of something into its non-identity, that is, its capacity to manifest itself and to behave as what it is not—and therefore as a simulacral reality, a fictional reality. On this basis, a Schellingian interpretation opens a new angle on Baudrillard's conception of the effectiveness of what is not.

² Ana Carrasco-Conde, "Schelling, Žižek, Baudrillard: la lógica del fantasma." *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, vol. 30 no. 2 (2013), 505-525.

1. Transvestism, woman / non-woman

Contrary to what one might think, Baudrillard's concept of the "feminine" *does not* denote women. He considers it as the principle of uncertainty applied to sexual/gender difference. Consequently, he argues that it manifests more where the certainty of the feminine itself—woman's sexual identity—is called into question: in transvestism. For Baudrillard, transvestism is a "challenge to woman/woman through woman/sign."³ If woman/woman is the woman identical to herself, woman/sign is the putting at stake of this identity. This occurs through a staging of makeup, maquillage, adornment, and semiotic parody characteristic of cross-dressing performances, which is consistent with Baudrillard's semiocentric interpretation. The very formula "woman/sign" adds to a whole series of similar formulas Baudrillard has accustomed us to: object/sign, function/sign, value/sign, exchange/sign, etc.

On the other hand, when speaking of transvestism, Baudrillard does not emphasize the traits of hyper-resemblance or hyper-simulation of the "woman" model (breasts, high heels, makeup), but rather the opposite traits. He emphasizes that "the Barcelona *travelos* keep their mustaches and display hairy chests."⁴ Transvestism is a manifestation of the opposite of what one is. On the contrary, for Baudrillard it is a feminine manifesting as *non-feminine*. It is no coincidence that Baudrillard pairs the more famous definition of "woman/sign" with another, less explored and more fascinating definition: that of "woman/non-woman."

He writes: "a woman/non-woman, self-moving in signs, is more likely to go to the limits of seduction than a real woman already justified by her sex."⁵ This definition highlights an aspect that "woman/sign" obscures. The two formulas are equivalent in the economy of Baudrillardian discourse and mean the same thing: the calling into question of the truth of woman, justified in her sexual identity. But they do so in two very different ways. The formula "woman/sign" valorizes the semiological side. The formula "woman/non-woman" elicits a logical problematic: the blatant violation of the metaphysical principle of identity. This expression is literally nonsensical. Whereas one may more or less agree on the anti-realist consequences of Baudrillardian semiocentrism,

³ Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1979), 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

one cannot deny that the expression “woman/sign” makes sense and the issue is interesting for two reasons.

The first is: if the two formulations are equivalent, it follows that they are interchangeable. The formula “/sign” can therefore be replaced with “/non-identity.” This suggests rereading Baudrillard’s formulations such that object/sign corresponds to object/non-object, function/sign to function/non-function, and value/sign to value/non-value. Baudrillard does not employ this formula only in reference to the feminine, but has also extensively spoken of *non*-response, *non*-reciprocity, *non*-equivalence, *non*-ambivalence, *non*-communication, *non*-events, and *non*-place. Baudrillard’s conception of the sign—and thus his simulacra—rests on an overlooked philosophical issue concerning the relation between identity and *non*-identity. The second is more compelling, as it brings Schelling into play.

2. Existence, essence, potency

The key to understanding the formula “woman/non-woman” and solving this enigma lies in Friedrich W. J. Schelling, an author almost never associated with Baudrillard. How can this be argued? By noticing that, in explaining the reason why his concept of “femininity” *does not* denote women, Baudrillard resorts to the Schellingian distinction between essence and existence. In *Philosophie der Kunst*, Schelling states that “we say that a thing *endures* because its existence [...] is *inadequate* to its essence.”⁶ In *De la séduction*, Baudrillard writes: “As it is said that a thing endures because its existence is inadequate to its essence, one must say that the feminine seduces because it is never where one thinks it is.”⁷ Therefore, Baudrillard’s text incorporates Schelling’s thesis and uses it as a comparative term to characterize his conception of feminine seduction. But to understand why “the feminine seduces because it is never where one thinks it is,” that is, in women—the reference/denotation we would immediately associate with the term “feminine”—we must decipher the Schellingian reference.

In his Doctrine of the Potencies (*Potenzenlehre*), Schelling substracts essence from its conventional reduction to identity to rethink it as

⁶ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart–Augsburg: Cotta, 1856–1861), I,5,376.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, 17.

the potency of being-other. The premise to the quote from Schelling is: “the feminine is elsewhere, it has always been elsewhere. That is the secret of its potency (*puissance*).”⁸ Therefore, as we can see, Baudrillard places his seduction under the Schellingian sign of “potency,” but also gives it an idiomatic twist. For Schelling, essence is the potency of being-other; for Baudrillard, seduction is the potency of being-elsewhere. Thus, in Baudrillard’s comparison, seduction stands to essence as women stand to existence.

This reference to Schelling allows us to decipher the “woman/non-woman” definition. Indeed, one of the most characteristic theses of *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* is the idea that “everything can become manifest only in its contrary, therefore identity in non-identity.”⁹ Schelling made extensive use of this formula throughout his writings, speaking not only of *non*-entity or *non*-identity but also of *non*-reality, *non*-freedom, *non*-movement, *non*-act, *non*-expansion, *non*-necessity, *non*-unity, and even *non*-God. This constitutes, in other words, a stylistic hallmark of his philosophy, correlated with his central thesis concerning the absolute identity of the ideal and the real, that is, of two contrary dimensions, each of which, taken separately, is the *non*-identity of the other: the ideal as the *non*-real, and conversely the real as the *non*-ideal. My hypothesis is that this problematic of the reversal of identity into *non*-identity underlies the question of the simulacral status of the sign in Baudrillard.

Furthermore, if transvestism calls a woman’s identity into question, it is not because, as “woman/sign,” it achieves a hyper-resemblance of the feminine. On the contrary, it is a woman who manifests herself by displaying the outward traits of her masculine opposite (mustache, hairy chest, and the like). Consequently, its “sign” status consists precisely in behaving and manifesting as a “*non*-woman.” Then Carrasco-Conde’s intuition concerning the simulacrum as “*non*-entity” (*Nichtseyende*) in the Schellingian sense appears more plausible from a logical point of view.

3. Illness, ill/non-ill

In bringing Baudrillard’s simulacrum closer to Schelling’s *non*-entity (*Nichtseyende*), Ana Carrasco-Conde focuses on the question of evil and illness. In order to show that evil is not simply *privatio boni*—and thus a

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I,7,424.

pure non-being—Schelling turns to illness, drawing on the theories of Franz von Baader. In relation to the body, illness has a negative ontological status. Carrasco-Conde speaks of a “parasitic” status, insofar as illness depends on the body that hosts it in order to produce its effects.¹⁰ Yet it would be absurd to regard the effects of illness as *unreal*. Illness is not pure nothingness; rather, it is a “non-entity” (*Nichtseyende*). It is the *non*-entity of the body, that is, the *non*-identity of bodily being. If the body is an organic balance, as von Baader maintains, then illness is its imbalance, that is, its *non*-balance.

As Carrasco-Conde explains, Schelling’s concept of “non-entity” (*Nichtseyende*) derives from Plato’s *Sophist*. It is in fact a reworking of the Platonic *symplokē* of being and non-being. In the *Weltalter*, Schelling explicitly acknowledges this Platonic derivation and regards the recognition of this hybrid of being and non-being as the greatest merit of Platonism. At the same time, he claims for himself its rediscovery and revaluation within German Idealism. Precisely because it derives from the *Sophist*, Schelling also refers to this concept using another Platonic term, “appearance” (*Scheinbild*). It is worth noting that Schelling himself uses the concept of “simulacrum” (*simulachrum*) in other works to refer to this appearance.¹¹

The point is that this appearance/simulacrum that constitutes the “non-entity” (*Nichtseyende*) is not a mere illusory semblance, but something that is not and yet nonetheless produces real effects. From this perspective, a convergence with Baudrillard’s problematic emerges—one that Carrasco-Conde develops through a rereading of key passages from Baudrillard’s 1978 essay *La précession des simulacres*, later included in *Simulacres et simulation*. Here, the simulacrum’s distinctive feature lies precisely in its capacity to substitute itself for the real while nonetheless producing real effects. This raises the following question: if Schelling’s “non-entity” is a simulacrum, can Baudrillard’s simulacrum in turn be a “non-entity”?

This hypothesis already finds support in a passage from Baudrillard’s 1978 essay that Carrasco-Conde does not discuss, but which moves precisely in the direction she indicates. Baudrillard also addresses the issue of illness, discussing psychosomatic pathologies on the basis of the distinction between dissimulation and simulation. Dissimulation

¹⁰ Ana Carrasco-Conde, “Schelling, Žižek, Baudrillard”, 523.

¹¹ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I,7,164.

leaves intact the distinction between reality and fiction: to feign symptoms is to conceal a distinction that remains operative in itself. Illness is either present or absent; the patient is either ill or not. In simulation, by contrast, this distinction collapses: even in the absence of illness, real symptoms appear, and it becomes undecidable whether illness is present or absent. As Baudrillard writes: “One can treat him neither objectively as ill nor as *non-ill*.”¹²

Psychosomatic illness thus appears to constitute a paradigmatic example of the Schellingian “non-entity” as the reversing of the identity in *non-identity*: it possesses an undecidable ontological status and yet produces real effects of its opposite. To clarify the point, one might say that a psychosomatic patient is a *non-ill* person who becomes manifest as ill, just as an asymptomatic patient is an ill person who becomes manifest as *non-ill*. So too in transvestism: the woman who manifests herself as a *non-woman*.

We should not forget that Schelling’s conception of illness is indebted to the theories of Franz von Baader. It is therefore interesting to note that Baudrillard also refers to von Baader when discussing two other pathologies—cancer and obesity—introducing the philosophical concept of *Steigerung*.

4. *Steigerung*, *Doublierung*, *Aufhebung*

When Baudrillard speaks of obesity, he introduces the concept of *Steigerung*. He writes: “obesity would thus be a fine example [...] of this revolution in things that no longer lies in their dialectical overcoming (*Aufhebung*), but in their potentiation (*Steigerung*), in their elevation to the power of two, to the power of *n*.”¹³ The concept of *Steigerung*, which derives from the German verb *steigern*, has a rich semantic range (to increase, to intensify, to amplify, to raise to a potency, to transform a comparative into a superlative), which Baudrillard fully deploys. Yet the term also has a philosophical history that passes through Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*. The way Baudrillard employs this concept has three features which, taken together, can be found only in Schelling. The first is its explicit opposition to Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The second is its articulation as an exponential process, an elevation to a numerical power (A^2 ,

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 12 (italics mine).

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales* (Paris: Grasset, 1983), 49.

Aⁿ). The third is its relation to the concept of “doubling.” What Baudrillard seeks to outline through these features is: “this other logic, this exponential strategy in which things [...] double themselves in a kind of *jeu en abyme*.”¹⁴

This logic is “other” than Hegelian logic. When Baudrillard advances the well-known thesis that critical theory must be replaced by a fatal or ironic theory, and introduces the distinction between the irony of the subject and the irony of the object, he draws precisely on doubling and exponential logic to account for this shift:

Critical theory must be replaced by a fatal theory, one that accomplishes this objective irony of the world. [...] No longer the irony of the subject confronting an objective order, but the objective irony of things caught in their own play—no longer the work of the negative, but the work of doubling and ascent to potency.¹⁵

If the irony of the subject is based on the Hegelian logic of determinate negation, the irony of the object is based on the logic of doubling and exponentiation. Schelling presents this opposition with clarity when he advances the thesis according to which everything manifests itself by overturning into its *non*-identity. Aware that this thesis may be confused with Hegel’s position, he adds: “this passage has very often been understood [...] as a sublation (*Aufheben*) of identity, but [...] it is instead merely a duplication (*Doublirung*) of essence and thus a potentiation (*Steigerung*) of unity.”¹⁶

This conception is then developed in the 1813 version of *Weltalter* but also in the *Münchener Vorlesungen*, where he elaborates the doctrine of *reduplicatio* or “reduplicative identity,” which constitutes its logical basis.¹⁷ Schelling’s problem is that the Hegelian conception of becoming-other through determinate negation applies only to the conceptual realm, and is incapable of accounting for the complexity of the natural process. Schelling thus elaborates a conception in which a thing manifesting itself as its other does not imply the negation of identity, but rather its doubling or duplication, and hence its exponentiation or elevation to a higher potency. In other words, for Schelling, A manifests itself

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales*, 49.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *L’autre par lui-même* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 72.

¹⁶ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 7, 424–5.

¹⁷ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 10, 103.

or behaves as B, overturns into B, only because it doubles itself as $A \cdot A$ (A^2). The difference with Hegel is that when A manifests itself as B, it does not lose its identity ($\neg A$), but instead doubles ($A \cdot A$) and potentiates itself (A^2).¹⁸

5. Obesity, body/non-body

Baudrillard presents obesity as an example of this (Schellingian) logic of doubling and exponentiation. To understand this, we must clarify the reference to Franz von Baader. He mentions the essay *Über den Begriff der Ekstasis als Metastasis*.¹⁹ The concept of metastasis later acquires a theoretical value in Baudrillard's lexicon. In *La Transparence du Mal* he introduces a fourth order of simulacra, beyond the three orders distinguished in his classical genealogy. What characterizes the simulacral status of reality at this further level is metastasis, fractality, and dissemination.²⁰ It is also worth noting that Schelling makes use of this Baaderian concept of "metastasis," with the same connotation of metonymic transfer and fractal decomposition of a whole into parts, arguing once again—as in the passage cited in *De la séduction*—that, as a result of metastasis, things are no longer adequate to their idea.²¹

The concept of metastasis serves Baudrillard to reveal a logical similarity between cancer and obesity. Both are characterized by an excess of bodily organization that overturns into dis-organization. It is well known that cancer cells develop, just as healthy cells do. Yet whereas the development of healthy cells has limits, determination, and a physiological purpose, that of cancer cells is metastatic: it has no limits and is not indeterminate. It is hyper-determined, Baudrillard argues—which means that its determination is not negated but doubled—and its purpose therefore becomes hyper-telic: a purposiveness without purpose. Cancer grows, but it grows too much; it is an excrescence no longer commensurate with the physiological ends of the body. Yet this growth is not con-

¹⁸ For a detailed and systematic account, see Manfred Frank, *Reduplikative Identität: der Schlüssel zu Schellings reifer Philosophie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2018). See also Xavier Tilliette, *L'Absolut et la philosophie. Essais sur Schelling* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987).

¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales*, 46. See Franz von Baader, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Hermann Bethmann, 1853), Part 4, vol. 4.

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *La Transparence du Mal* (Paris: Galilée, 1990).

²¹ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, II, 4, 285.

ceptually distinguishable from physiological growth; it is not its determinate negation but the *same* growth, doubled and exponentiated. Cancer is more body than body: it behaves so perfectly as body—so fully executing the cellular program—that it ultimately comes to behave as what body is not.

Baudrillard argues that the body has a form, a delimitation which precisely disappears in obesity. By comparing cancer and obesity under the sign of metastasis, Baudrillard does not mean that obesity is a (social) cancer, an epidemic, or something that spreads in a way analogous to metastatic cells. The relation is not metaphorical but literal: obesity literally behaves like cancer. Just as in cancer, the process of tissue growth exceeds its own limits. “In obesity this process does not come to a halt. Losing its specific traits, the body continues the monotonous expansion of its tissues.”²² For this reason, Baudrillard also defines it as “the more massive than massive (the obese).”²³ Unlike cancer however, in obesity this doubling or potentiation is more visible. It is clear that the obese body is something like more body than body. Accordingly, Baudrillard states that “through the indivision of the full body [...] it does not separate the body from the *non*-body.”²⁴

These two dimensions are not separated but collapse into a single “indivision”—a term with clear Schellingian resonance (*ungetheilte*)—into, once again, undecidability. Just as the transvestite is a woman who manifests herself as non-woman, and the asymptomatic patient is an ill person who manifests as non-ill, the obese subject is a body that manifests itself as non-body. Here we can see how deeply the correlation with Schelling’s conception of illness resonates. For Schelling, illness is a “non-entity,” an “appearance,” a “simulacrum,” because it is the *non*-identity of the body understood as organic equilibrium. In Baudrillard’s analyses of cancer and obesity, we likewise encounter a body that manifests itself as *non*-body, an organization that overturns into disorganization—cellular or lipidic—an organic balance that turns into an organic imbalance. A simulacrum in the Schellingian sense.

²² Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales*, 46.

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *L’autre par lui-même*, 71.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales*, 44 (*italics mine*).

6. Speed, movement/non-movement

Obesity is not the only example of *Steigerung* discussed by Baudrillard. There is another: speed. He writes: "In the image of speed, which alone is the perfect expression of mobility, because—unlike movement, which has a meaning—it no longer has one, goes nowhere, and therefore has nothing more to do with movement: it is its ecstasy." The concept of "ecstasy" is also linked to Franz von Baader, and is likewise taken up by Schelling. Baudrillard develops this idea in his theory of "ecstatic" qualities, according to which "every characteristic elevated to a superlative potency and caught in a spiral of doubling"²⁵ can pass into ecstasy, provided that it ceases to be relative to its opposite by absorbing its energy—its effectiveness—and thereby comes to behave like the quality it is not. As in Schelling's philosophy.

Baudrillard argues that speed is the perfect, ecstatic form of movement because it displays the traits of its opposite. Whereas movement has a meaning, a direction, a purpose, speed behaves otherwise: it has no determinate direction, goes neither here nor there, and has neither meaning nor purpose. Speed is thus also hyper-telic. It performs its purpose beyond its own finality. For all these reasons, it no longer has anything to do with the identity of movement. Speed, therefore, is likewise simulacral, because it is a movement that manifests itself as the opposite of movement: a non-movement.

Not by chance, Baudrillard states that "movement does not so much disappear into immobility"—that is, into the determinate negation of the identity of movement, according to a dialectical logic—but rather disappears "into speed and acceleration," that is, into a doubling and potentiation of the identity of movement. Into what he calls "something more mobile than movement itself, so to speak." It is worth noting that in the *Erlanger Vorlesungen* Schelling uses almost the same formula: "more mobile than every single movement" (*beweglicher als jede einzelne Bewegung*).²⁶

This theory of speed has a significant precedent in Baudrillard's work. It appears for the first time in his doctoral dissertation on objects in the section devoted to the automobile, where Baudrillard for the first time refers to the German philosopher: "Movement, says Schelling, is

²⁵ Ibid., 11.

²⁶ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 9, 244.

nothing other than the search for rest.”²⁷ Baudrillard does not provide the source of this quotation, but comparison with Schelling’s works shows that it derives from the 1813 version of the *Weltalter*.²⁸

In the passage from the *Weltalter* cited by Baudrillard, Schelling addresses an extremely dense metaphysical problem, also derived from Plato’s *Sophist*: the problem of movement and quietness (or rest) and of the first principle. Against Fichte, Schelling maintains that the First (*das Erste*), the Beginning (*der Anfang*), cannot be an act, an activity, or an unconditioned action, because every act stands out against a background of will at rest (*der ruhende Wille*). For “rest is its nourishment” (*die Ruhe ist ihre Speise*), in the sense that movement tends toward rest: “every movement exists only for the sake of rest,” Schelling says, or, more precisely, “every movement seeks only rest” (*alle Bewegung sucht nur die Ruhe*).²⁹ Rest must therefore, in a certain sense, precede all action.

Baudrillard cites Schelling to discuss speed as that which brings the world and its becoming—that is, movement—back to a kind of “sublime immobility” that “presupposes eternity.” This eternity appears in the corresponding version of the quoted passage in the 1815/1817 redaction: “Every movement has only eternal immobility as its end.” (*Alle Bewegung hat nur die ewige Unbeweglichkeit zum Ziel*).³⁰ Baudrillard also registers Schelling’s guiding idea according to which rest is the nourishment of movement, which therefore presupposes it. This presupposition of eternal immobility constitutes “the nourishment of automobile euphoria,” that is, the motive force of automotive displacement.

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 94.

²⁸ The 1813 version cited by Baudrillard is not included in the *Sämtliche Werke* and had not yet been translated into French. This suggests that Baudrillard, trained as a Germanist, may have consulted the edition assembled by Manfred Schröter (*Die Weltalter. Fragmente*, Munich: Biederstein und Leibniz Verlag, 1946). At the same time, his reception of Schelling may have been mediated by contemporary French scholarship, notably Vladimir Jankélévitch’s *L’Odyssée de la conscience dans la dernière philosophie de Schelling* (Paris: Alcan, 1933) and, above all, Xavier Tilliette’s “Schelling contre Hegel,” *Archives de Philosophie*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1966), 89–108. Written in 1965 and published the following year—when Baudrillard completed and defended his dissertation, in which he mentions Schelling—Tilliette’s article explicitly foregrounds “the law of *Steigerung* or *Potenzieren*.”

²⁹ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter/Le età del mondo* (Milano: Bompiani, 2013), 292–295.

³⁰ Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter/Le età del mondo*, 494–495.

Schelling maintains that this motive is not an act, an activity, or an unconditioned action, and Baudrillard acknowledges that it “has nothing of an active drive.” Rather, it is “a passive satisfaction,” just as the will at rest of which Schelling speaks is passive.³¹

To sum up, all four figures—transvestism, psychosomatic illness, obesity, and speed—respond to a single logic of reversal, whereby each thing overturns into its contrary. This logic refers to the philosophical thesis that Schelling considers distinctive of his thought: everything can become manifest only in its non-identity. The “non-entity” (Nicht-seyende)—Schelling’s simulacrum—is one case of this logic. Non-woman, non-ill, non-body, and non-movement are further instances of the same logic, insofar as it rests on the conceptual and speculative operators of doubling and exponentiality shared by Schelling and Baudrillard. We have also addressed the textual objection by tracing Baudrillard’s engagement with Schellingian philosophy back to its first explicit mention in *Le système des objets* (1968). The next section turns to the second objection introduced at the outset.

7. Baudrillard and the Sophist

The theoretical objection is that developing Carrasco-Conde’s hypothesis “over-ontologizes” Baudrillard. This objection makes sense as long as Baudrillard remains unassociated with Schelling and the intertextual relations between their works remain unexplored. There is still much to be understood about this, of course. However, now that we know more about Baudrillard’s use of Schellingian ontological categories—essence, potency, metastasis, indivision, doubling, exponentiality, and non-identity—the objection must be reconsidered. Perhaps the issue is not that bringing Schelling closer to Baudrillard over-ontologizes him, but that Baudrillard’s work has so far been under-ontologized by precisely missing this Schellingian resonance.

Commenting on the *Sophist* Ana Carrasco-Conde notes a “curious correspondence” between Plato and Baudrillard. She writes: “thus, in a curious correspondence with what Baudrillard affirms about simulacra, it is stated that ‘when the false exists [...], everything necessarily becomes filled with images, figures, and appearances.’”³²

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*, 94.

³² Ana Carrasco-Conde, “Schelling, Žižek, Baudrillard,” 523.

This correspondence, however, is not so “curious” if one considers that in *L'échange symbolique et la mort* Baudrillard engages critically with Julia Kristeva precisely regarding the Platonic *Sophist* passage from which Schelling derives the notion of “non-entity.” As reported by Kristeva, Plato writes: “what we say is truly an image, a semblance, is that which, without being truly non-existent, nevertheless does not exist. [...] It may well be that such an interweaving is that in which Non-Being is interwoven with Being, and this in a thoroughly derouting way.”³³ Here one can recognize, in the *semblant*, Schelling’s simulacrum: that which, without being truly non-existent, nonetheless is not and—reversibly—despite not being, nevertheless produces real effects.

Baudrillard’s position with respect to Kristeva is clear: she is right to locate the poetic precisely in the “derouting interweaving” of being and non-being, but she is wrong to treat this topology (the Platonic *symplekē*) as a “topic,” that is, as a space of locatable unconscious instances (identities) between which a Hegelian dialectic of determinate negation can be established.³⁴ It is therefore worth recalling that seduction seduces precisely because it is not locatable, not identifiable in women, and for this reason it stands in relation to Schellingian essence as the potency of being-elsewhere, that is, as the potency of having no place. Not by chance, Baudrillard defines the poetic as “utopical,” in the literal sense of what is non-topical, without localization. The poetic therefore, is not a “space,” since space is by definition topical and composed of separate or separable, locatable instances—that is, of identities that will end up negating one another through determinate negation. In other words, Baudrillard agrees with Kristeva on the decisive Platonic point—also the Schellingian one—but rejects her topical reading insofar as it risks falling back into a dialectical logic.

On the other hand, Carrasco-Conde is not entirely wrong in describing this correspondence as “curious.” While it is true that interpretations of Baudrillard have rightly emphasized his contribution to the reversal of Platonism,³⁵ it is equally clear that the philosophical underpinnings of this reversal—and its connection with the *Sophist*—have not been made fully

³³ Julia Kristeva, “Poésie et négativité.” *L'Homme. revue française d'anthropologie*, vol. 8, no. 2, 40.

³⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 317.

³⁵ See Vanessa Freerks, “Nietzsche’s Reversal of Platonism and the Simulacrum,” *Sofia Philosophical Review*, vol. XII, no. 2 (2019), 33–56.

explicit. Otherwise, one might think that these intertextual and theoretical convergences with Schelling would have emerged earlier.

It is well known that the critical reception of Baudrillard's work initially developed through a series of misunderstandings—concerning Marxism, postmodernism, and related issues—which later Baudrillard studies have worked extensively to clarify. A decisive turning point in Baudrillard criticism is represented by the work of Rex Butler, who proposed a precise and compelling methodological principle: reading Baudrillard “on his own terms.”³⁶ The issue, however, is that some of these “own terms” of Baudrillard are in fact Schellingian terms. And a philosophical interpretation of Baudrillard cannot avoid reckoning with this.

On the other hand, Butler's interpretation remains one of the most fascinating to this day, even though it rests on the counterintuitive assumption that Baudrillard's thought revolves around a Platonic paradox—articulated by Plato in the *Cratylus* and commented on by Derrida—that Baudrillard *never* refers to in his own work. Although I fully share the deconstructionist background of Butler's reading—since I take Baudrillard's use of Schelling to be itself a gesture of deconstruction—I nevertheless wonder why one should look to the *Cratylus* for what can be found in the *Sophist*, to which Baudrillard *does* refer.

The more general problem is that philosophical readings of Baudrillard have been highly selective in their choice of texts to comment on. An interpretation however, should aim at the whole. Even if it cannot reconstruct the whole in its entirety, it cannot arbitrarily choose what to interpret and what to leave aside, at the cost of producing a partial and one-sided account. Consequently, if reading Baudrillard “on his own terms” also means recognizing that these terms are not entirely his own, but rather the result of appropriation and intertextual “theft,” I would add a different methodological criterion, one that reverses Butler's proposal: reading Baudrillard “within his own text”—that is, foregrounding the resources embedded in his textuality, such as his references to Plato's *Sophist* and to the Schellingian concept of *Steigerung*.

Conclusions

This paper has proposed a Schellingian interpretation of four key figures in Baudrillard's thought: transvestism, psychosomatic illness, obesity,

³⁶ Rex Butler, *Jean Baudrillard. The Defense of the Real* (London: Sage, 1999), 13.

and speed. Starting from a hypothesis advanced by Ana Carrasco-Conde, it has re-examined, expanded, and supported it with new textual and conceptual evidence. What emerges is that, contrary to the prevailing view in Baudrillard Studies and in continental philosophy more broadly, the relation between Baudrillard and Schelling is far more complex and significant than has so far been acknowledged.

The paper has addressed two main objections. Textually, it has shown that Baudrillard's work contains direct and indirect references to Schelling, as well as sustained engagements with Schellingian conceptual operators. Theoretically, it has been argued that Baudrillard's use of notions such as essence, potency, doubling, and *Steigerung* is logical rather than ontological. This allows one to avoid "over-ontologizing" Baudrillard while nevertheless taking his philosophical apparatus seriously.

Finally, the paper has challenged the assumption that Baudrillard lacks a genuine ontological problematic by showing his sustained interest in the Platonic question articulated in the *Sophist*, from which Schelling himself derives the concept of non-entity. Read through this lens, Baudrillard's simulacra appear less as purely semiological effects than as figures of non-identity endowed with real efficacy. A Schellingian perspective thus offers a new way of understanding the effectiveness of what is not in Baudrillard's thought.