

*stereo hi-fi*

# BLIND FAITH

Baudrillard, fidelity,  
and recorded sound



David J. Gunkel, Northern Illinois University (USA)

**GO HOME PRODUCTIONS**



**Girl Wants (to say goodbye to) Rock And Roll**

**Mark Vidler**

<http://www.gohomeproductions.co.uk>



**GO HOME PRODUCTIONS**



Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal (p. 1).

**Girl Wants (to say goodbye to) Rock And Roll**





JEAN BAUDRILLARD

  
 SIMULACRA  
 AND  
 SIMULATION

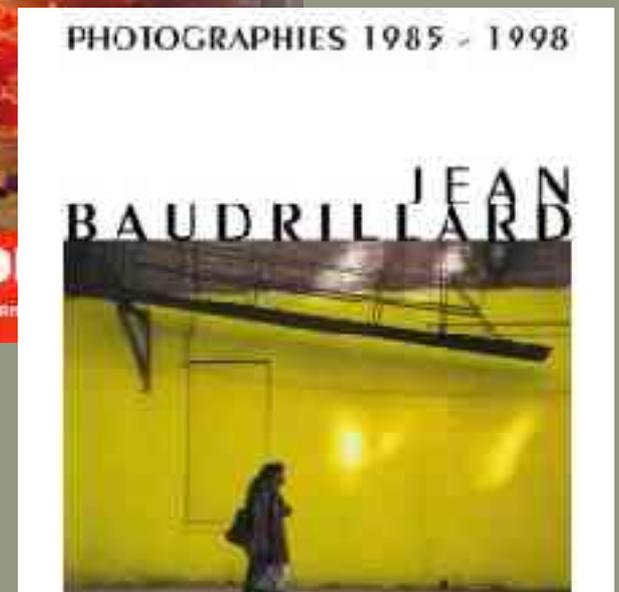
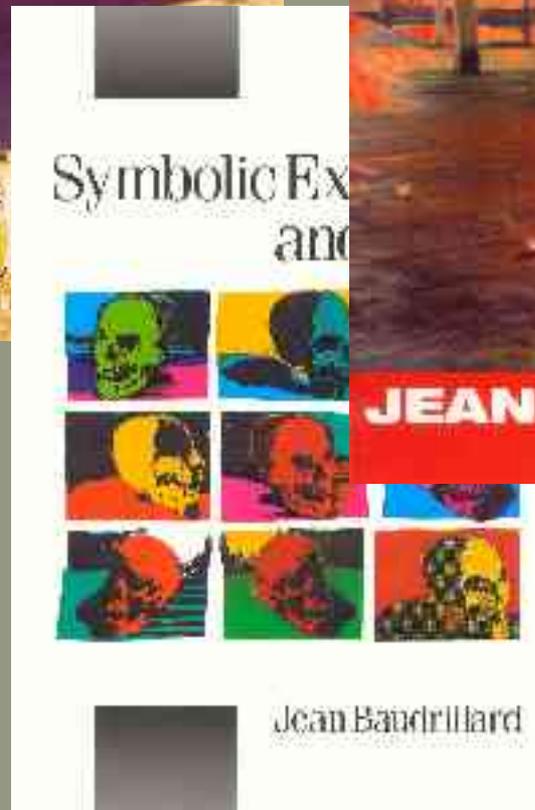
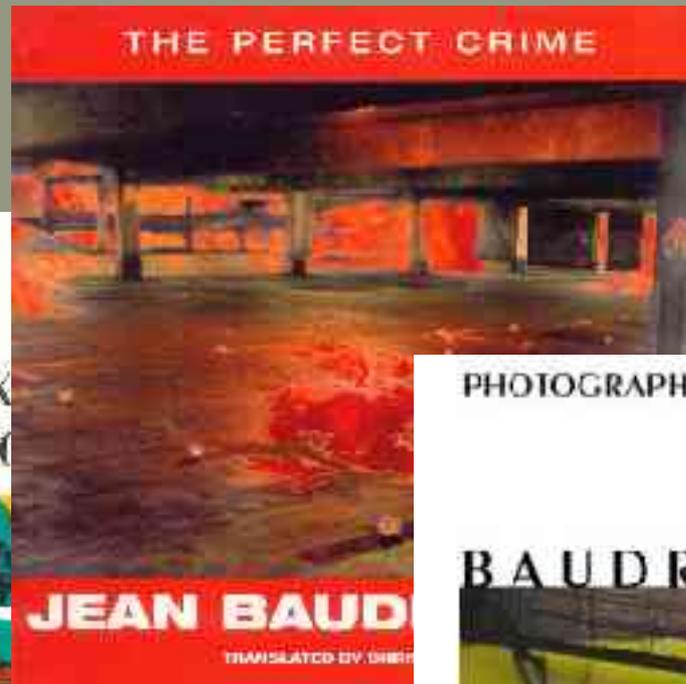
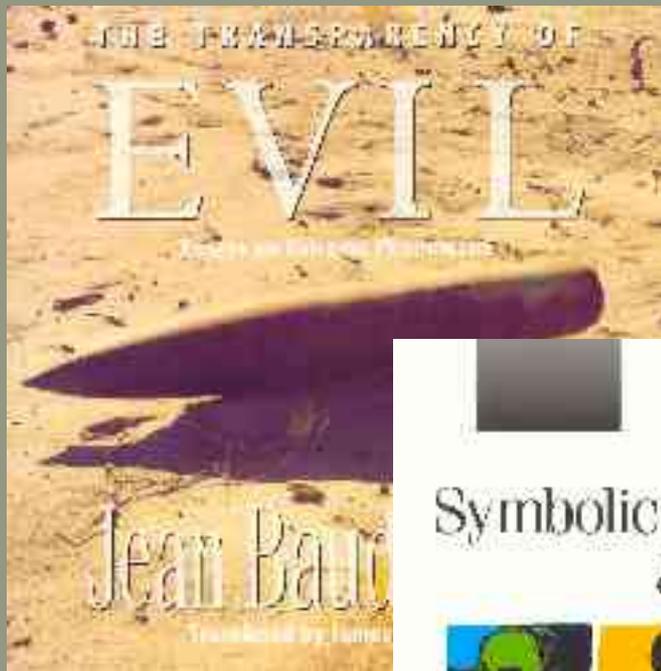
Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser

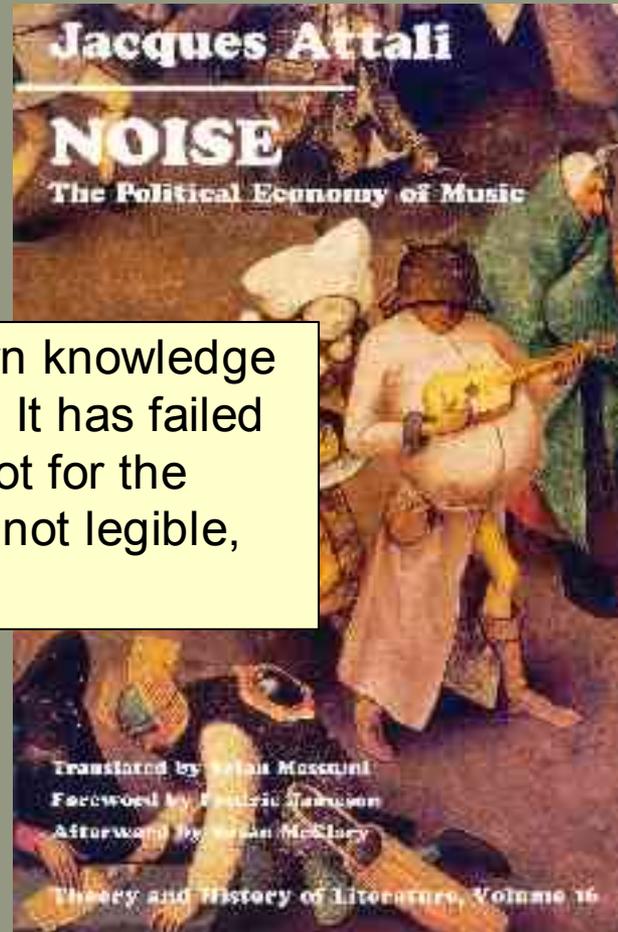
MICHIGAN

# Fidelity

I have some difficulty replying to this question because sound, the sphere of sound, the acoustic sphere, audio, is really more alien to me than the visual (Baudrillard, 1997).







For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible (p. 3)



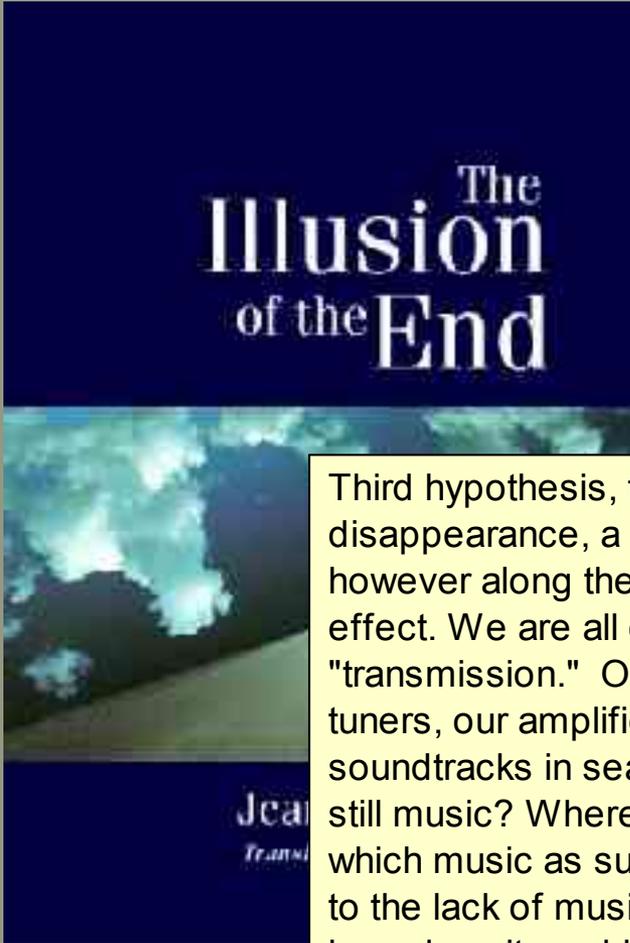


A bewildering, claustrophobic and obscene image, that of Japanese quadrophonics: an ideally conditioned room, fantastic technique, music in four dimensions, not just the three of the enviroing space, but a fourth, visceral dimension of internal space. The technical delirium of the perfect restitution of music (Bach, Monteverdi, Mozart!) that has never existed, that no one has ever heard, and that was not meant to be heard like this. Moreover, one does not "hear" it, for the distance that allows one to hear music, at a concert or somewhere else, is abolished. Instead it permeates one from all sides; there is no longer any musical space; it is the simulation of a total environment that dispossesses one of even the minimal analytic perception constitutive of music's charm. The Japanese have simple-mindedly, and in complete good faith, confused the real with the greatest number of dimensions possible. If they could construct hexaphonics, they would do it. Now, it is by this fourth dimension, which they have added to music, that they castrate you of all musical pleasure. Something else fascinates (but no longer seduces) you: technical perfection, "high fidelity," which is just as obsessive and puritanical as the other, conjugal fidelity. This time, however, one no longer even knows what object it is faithful to, for no one knows where the real begins or ends, nor understands, therefore, the fever of perfectibility that persists in the real's reproduction (p. 30).



We are all obsessed (and not only in music) with high fidelity, obsessed with the quality of musical 'reproduction.' Armed with the tuners, amplifiers and speakers of our stereo systems, we adjust bass and treble, we mix, we combine, we multiply tracks, in search of an impeccable technology and an infallible music. I still remember a sound booth in a recording studio where the music, broadcast on four tracks, reached you in four dimensions, so that it seemed visceral, secreted from the inside, with a surreal depth... This was no longer music. Where is the degree of technological sophistication, where is the 'high fidelity' threshold beyond which music as such would disappear? For the problem of the disappearance of music is the same as that of the disappearance of history: it will not disappear for want of music, it will disappear for having exceeded that limit point, vanishing point, it will disappear in the perfection of its materiality, in its own special effect (beyond which there is no longer any aesthetic judgment or aesthetic pleasure, it is the ecstasy of musicality and its end) (p. 21).



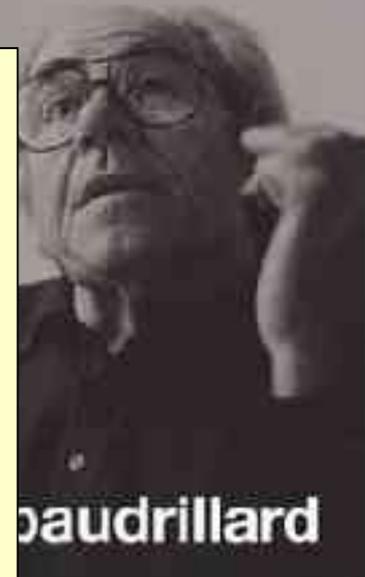
The image shows the cover of the book 'The Illusion of the End' by Jean Baudrillard. The top half of the cover is a solid dark blue color with the title 'The Illusion of the End' in a white serif font. Below the title is a photograph of a landscape with a bright, hazy sky and a dark foreground. At the bottom of the cover, the author's name 'Jean Baudrillard' is partially visible in a smaller white font.

# The Illusion of the End

Third hypothesis, third analogy. But we are still dealing with a point of disappearance, a point of evanescence, a vanishing-point, this time however along the lines of music. This is what I call the stereophonic effect. We are all obsessed with high fidelity, with the quality of musical "transmission." On the console of our channels, equipped with our tuners, our amplifiers and our baffles, we mix, regulate and multiply soundtracks in search of an infallible or unerring music. Is this, though, still music? Where is the threshold of high fidelity beyond the point of which music as such would disappear? Disappearance would not be due to the lack of music, it would disappear for having stepped beyond this boundary, it would disappear into the perfection of its materiality, into its own special effect. Beyond this point, neither judgment nor aesthetic pleasure could be found anymore. Ecstasy of musicality procures its own end (p. 5).

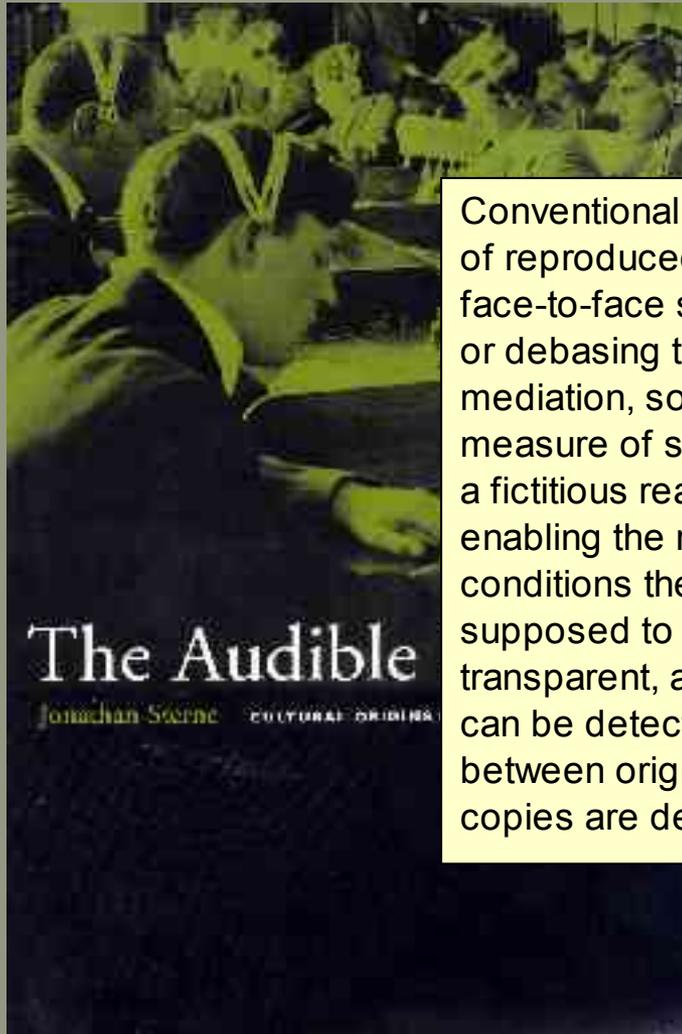
When they began to build quadriphonic [sic] rooms—I'd tried them myself in Japan—there was absolutely perfect sound reproduction, a sort of musical perfect crime. You had the impression that the specifically musical illusion, which is also a parallel universe, was eliminated. Sound was elevated into an object; in its perfection it became an object, and no longer something you can perceive at a distance. When you compare listening to an opera on CD or in a concert hall, it isn't really the same thing! The stereo puts out music in which you're immersed, as in a bubble, whereas in the opera house it's listened to at a certain distance. The latter is real music; the other is a circulation in the mind. Obviously, you can be much more immersed in it with the CD player, as you can in the virtual world. And indeed it's virtual music: the more perfect the reproduction, the more it becomes virtual. Where is the real music? Who's to say? They've even felt the need to reintroduce noise and static to give it a natural effect, or an effect of the hyper-simulacrum of the natural (p. 65-66).

FRAG  
MENTS



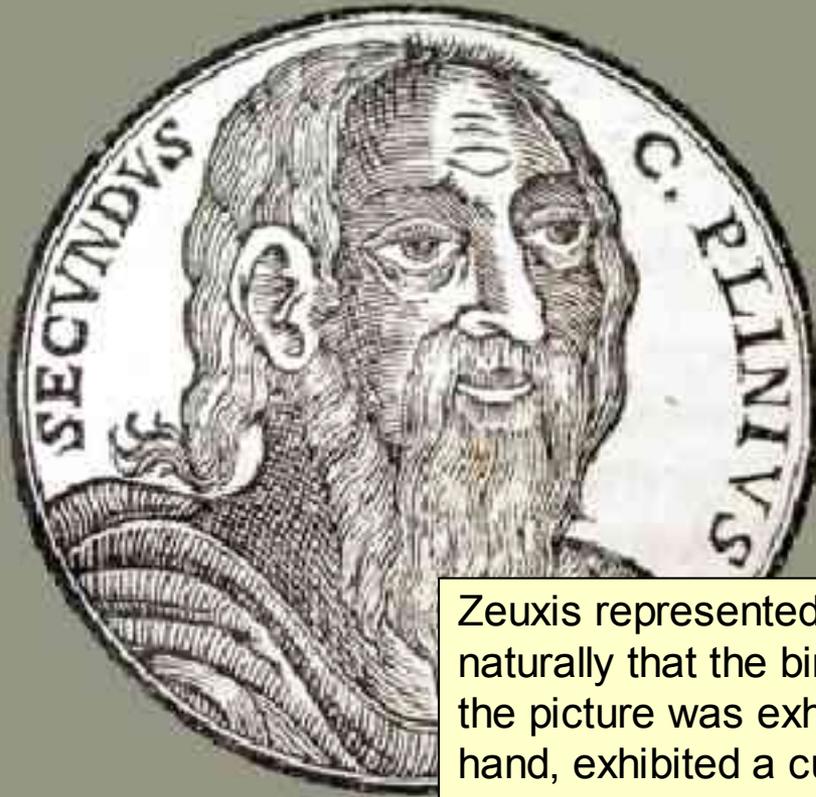
Baudrillard





Conventional accounts of sound fidelity often invite us to think of reproduced sound as a mediation of 'live' sounds, such as face-to-face speech or musical performance, either extending or debasing them in the process. Within a philosophy of mediation, sound fidelity offers a kind of gold standard: it is the measure of sound-reproduction technologies' product against a fictitious reality. From this perspective, the technology enabling the reproduction of sound thus mediates because it conditions the possibility of reproduction, but, ideally it is supposed to be a 'vanishing' mediator—rendering the relation transparent, as if it were not there. Inasmuch as its mediation can be detected, there is a loss of fidelity or a loss of being between original and copy. In this philosophy of mediation, copies are debasements of the originals (p. 218).





Zeuxis represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen (bk. 35, line 65).

**Which  
is  
which?**



You think you can tell the difference  
between hearing grand opera actors sing and  
ing their beautiful voices on the *His*  
can you?

Victor Gramophone Company Ltd. 1940

**Victor**



**Is it live,  
or is it Memorex?  
Well, Melissa?**

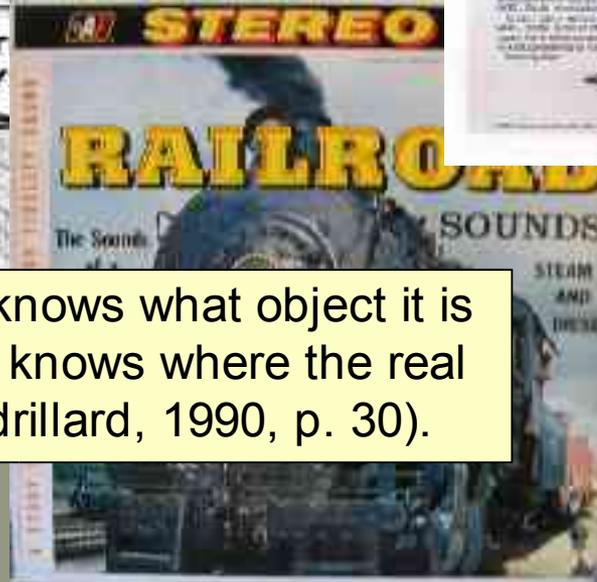
The answer is... it's both! In the Memorex  
line, you can hear the real thing... or you  
can hear the real thing... on a Memorex  
recording. It's the difference in  
the sound. It's the difference in  
the quality. It's the difference in  
the way you feel. It's the difference in  
the way you think. It's the difference in  
the way you live.

**MEMOREX**  
A Division of RCA



A composite image featuring two women. In the foreground, a woman with curly hair is smiling. In the background, a woman in a blue dress stands with her hands on her hips. In the bottom right corner, there is a glass of wine and a Memorex cassette tape.





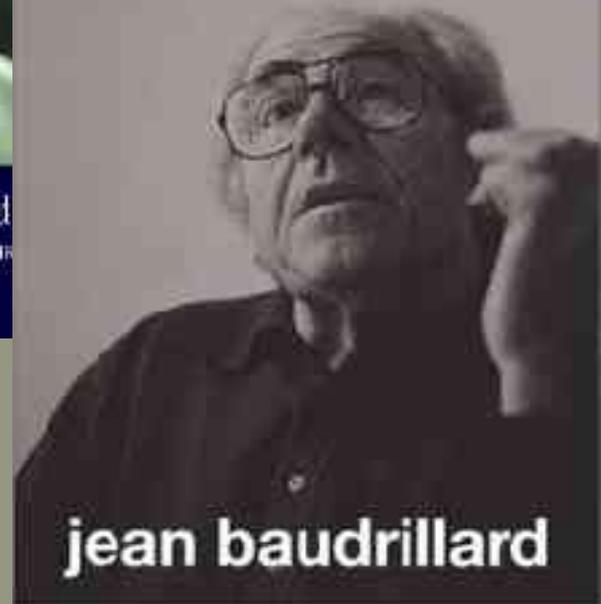
One no longer even knows what object it is faithful to, for no one knows where the real begins or ends (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 30).

The  
**Illusion**  
of the E



Jean Baud  
*Translated by CBF*

**FRAG  
MENTS**



**jean baudrillard**

*Seduction*

**JEAN BAUDRILLARD**

# Infidelity

The most striking signs—such as those of fidelity, for example—may, in any particular case, be interpreted the opposite way, since they are produced just as well—and even better—by infidelity (Baudrillard, 1997).

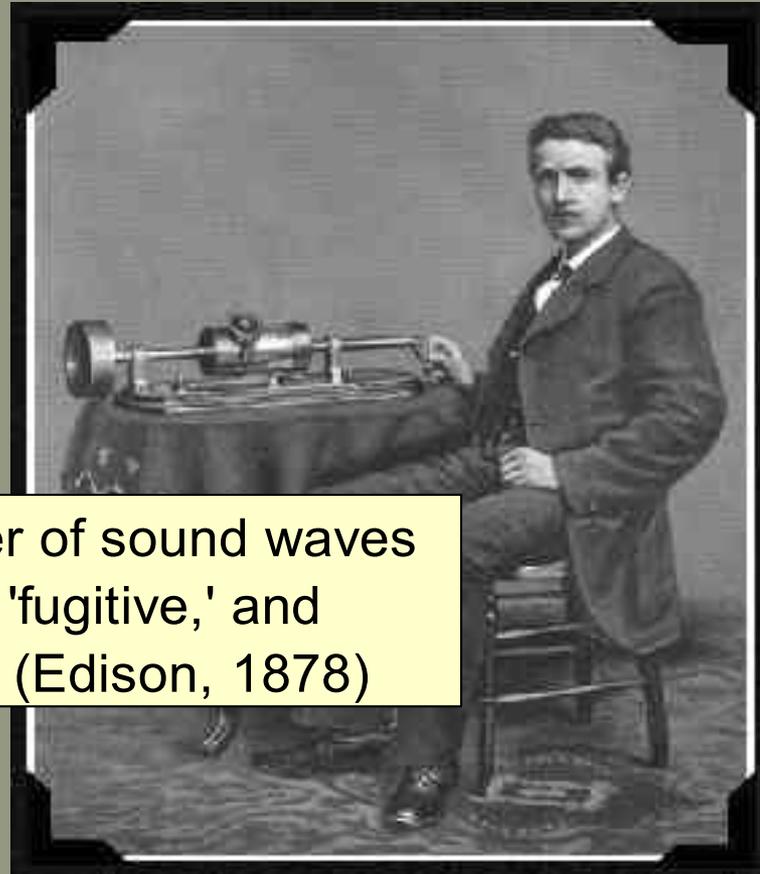




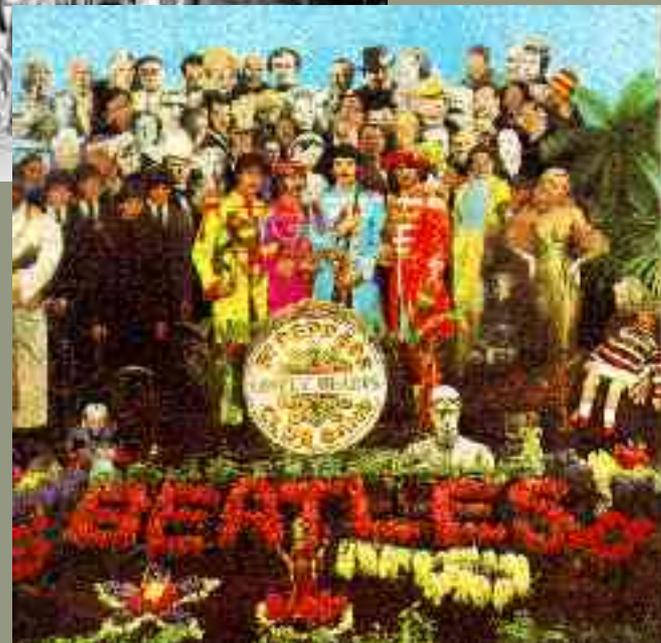
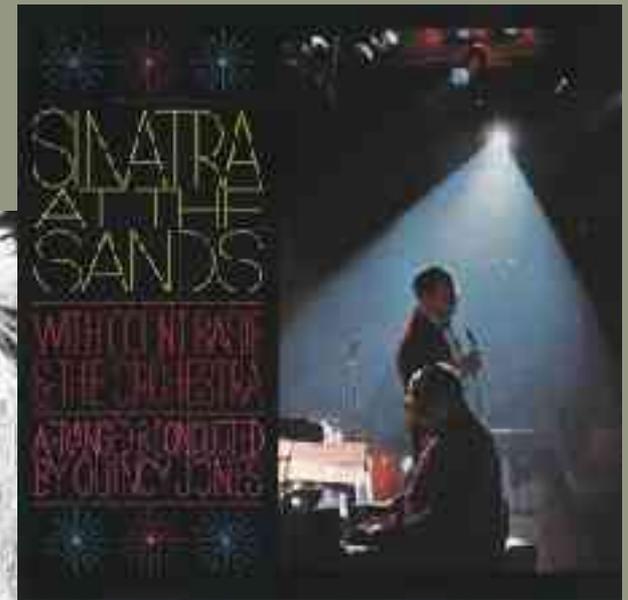
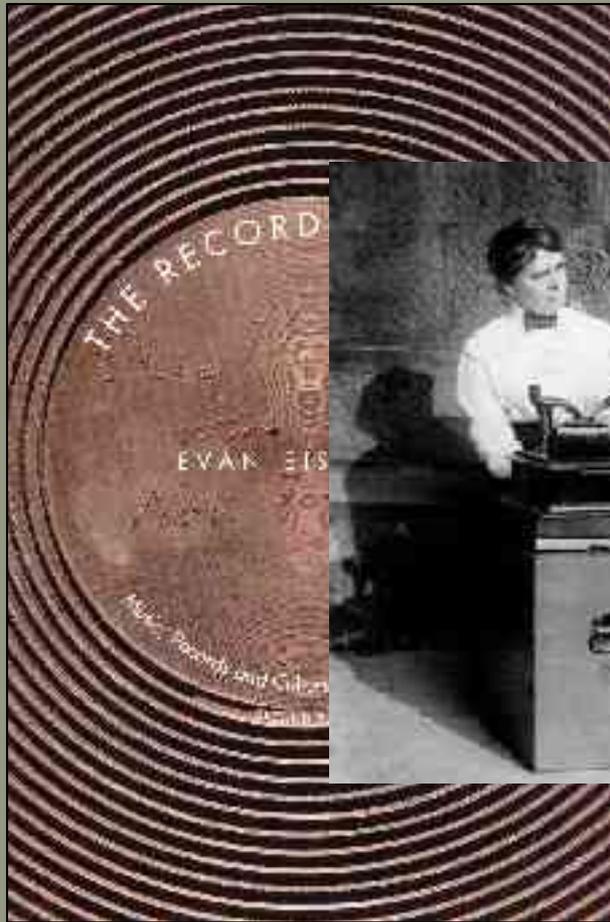
Only live recordings record an event; studio recordings, which are the great majority, record nothing. Pieced together from bits of actual events, they construct an ideal event. They are like the composite photograph of a minotaur (p. 89).

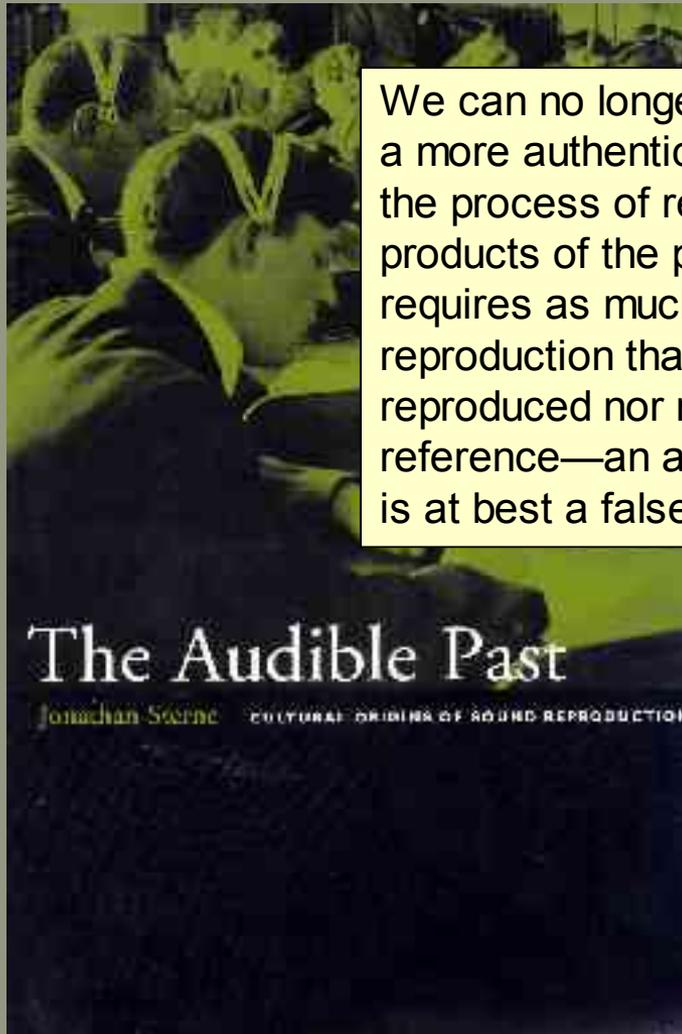


The captivity of all manner of sound waves heretofore designated as 'fugitive,' and their permanent retention (Edison, 1878)





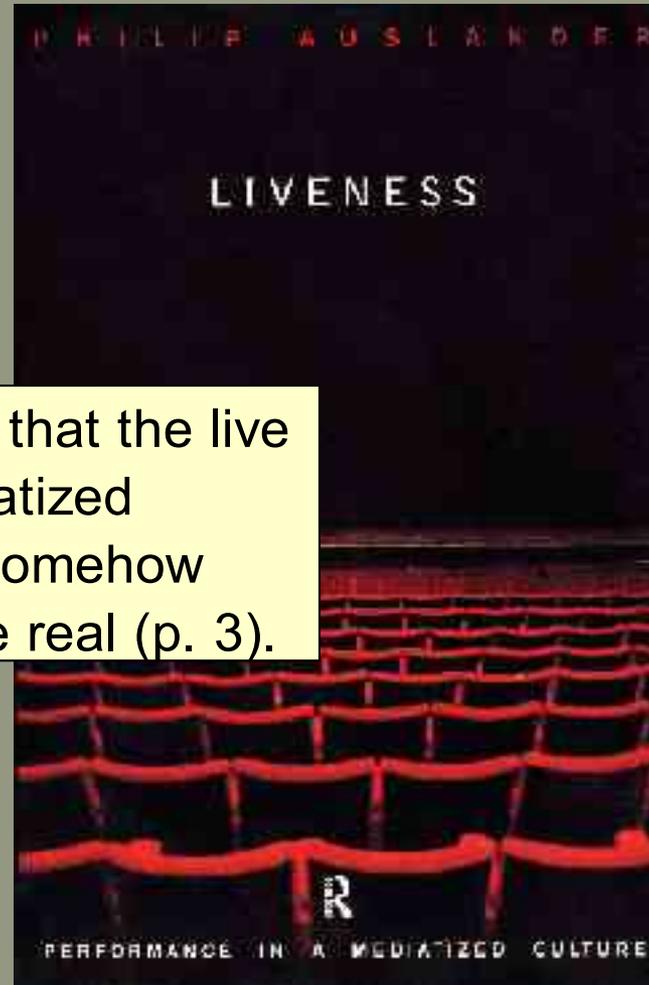


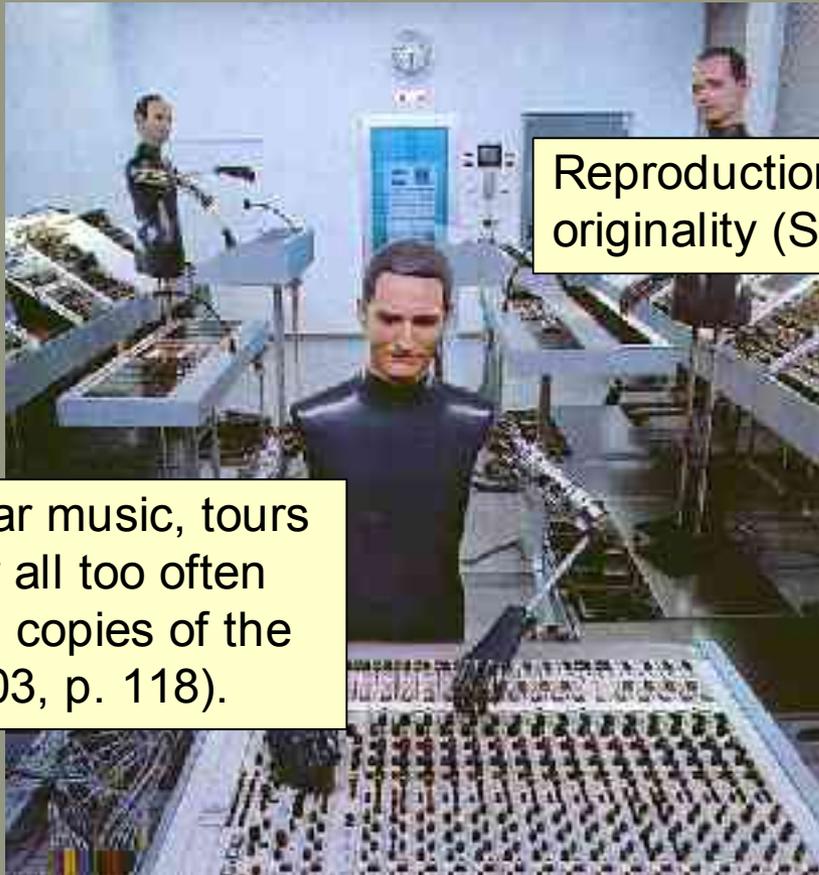


We can no longer argue that copies are debased versions of a more authentic original that exists either outside or prior to the process of reproduction. Both copy and original are products of the process of reproducibility. The original requires as much artifice as the copy. Philosophies of sound reproduction that reference a prior authenticity that is neither reproduced nor reproducible are untenable since their point of reference—an authentic original untainted by reproduction—is at best a false idol" (p. 241).



The common assumption is that the live event is 'real' and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real (p. 3).





Reproduction precedes originality (Sterne, 2005, p. 221).

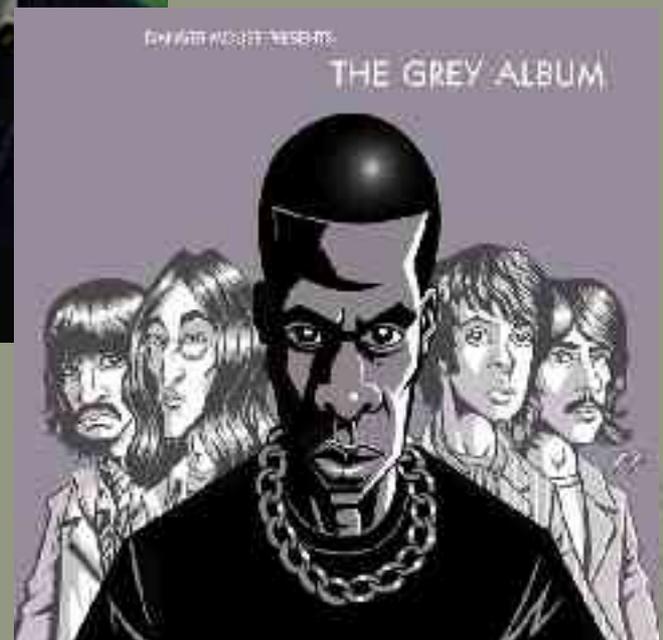
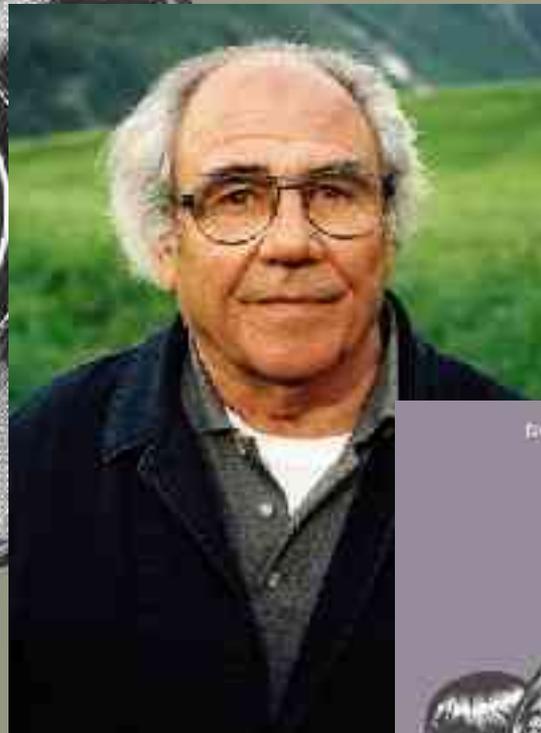
Concerts of popular music, tours by artists, are now all too often nothing more than copies of the records (Attali, 2003, p. 118).



# Conclusions

As far as art is concerned, take music for example.  
This is something I don't know much about  
(Baudrillard, 1993).





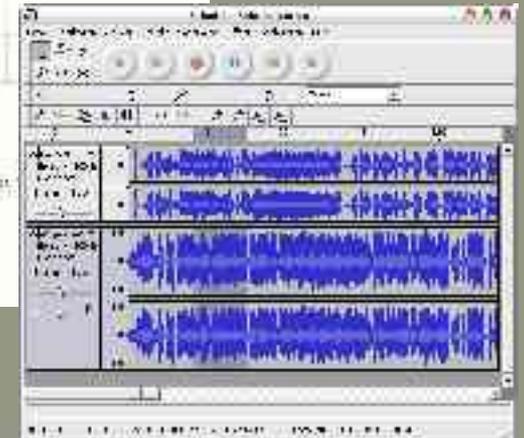


# Symbolic Exchange and Death



JEAN BAUDRILLARD

# SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION



LE PORTATIF  
**GRAMOPHON**  
LE MEILLEUR EST  
N°97  
**NOUVEAU  
MODELE. 395 f<sup>rs</sup>**  
MODELE DE LUXE (102): 800 f<sup>rs</sup> / 875 f<sup>rs</sup>





Donna J. Haraway



*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women  
The Reinvention of Nature*

## THE PRESSION OF SIMULACRA

The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth  
that hides the fact that there is none.  
The simulacrum is true.

Ecclesiastes

**I**f once we were able to view the things (able in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up their maps) detailed that

of a world up-  
to a point witness  
full late times.  
desire—the au-  
thorizing to a prin-  
termining to the  
having corrupted  
ful allegory of si-  
as, and possessi-  
simulacra

The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

- Ecclesiastes

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the simile, the metaphor, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory; a referential being, even a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precision of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, to be it is the territory whose shade shows out across the extent of the map: it is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire (any more: *The desert of the real itself*).

In fact, even inverted, Baudrillard's fable is possible. Only the allegory of the Empire, perhaps, remains. Because it is with this some-



*stereo hi-fi*

# BLIND FAITH

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and recorded sound



Full paper available:  
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