YODA GOES TO GLASTONBURY:
AN INTRODUCTION TO HYPER-REAL RELIGIONS

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Introduction

Hyper-real religion refers to a simulacrum of a religion, created out of, or in symbiosis with, popular culture, which provides inspiration for believers/consumers. The most commonly known twenty-first century examples are Jediism (from the *Star Wars* films) and Matrixism (from the *Matrix* films). However, this phenomenon is not limited to full-blown cases and can also involve people being religiously inspired by popular culture while playing a game such as *World of Warcraft* or being influenced by conspiracy theories.

Western culture appears to be dominated by simulations (Baudrillard, 1988), which are objects and discourses that have no firm origin, no referent, no ground or foundation. The 'spectacle' and these simulations are part of consumer culture in which signs get their meanings from their relations with each other, rather than by reference to some independent reality or standard. Baudrillard's (1988) theory of commodity culture, which is the source behind the coining of the term hyper-real religion, removes any distinction between objects and representation. In their place, he pictures a social world constructed out of models or 'simulacra' which have no foundation in any reality except their own: for example, theme parks representing Hollywood films or Mickey Mouse cartoons rather than 'reality'; day-time television viewers speaking about soap opera characters rather than 'real' people; and popular news broadcast that are more about entertainment than information about 'real' social issues.

In this world, there is no fixed meta-code. (Post/Late)Modern society is saturated by images with the media generating a 'non-material', a de-materialised concept of reality. It seems we live in an economy of signs in which signs are exchanged against each other rather than against the real.

If Marx's vision of society was a giant workhouse, Baudrillard's (1998) vision is that society is now structured by signs and symbols in which it becomes difficult to distinguish the real from the unreal: from this, hyper-reality—that is a situation in which reality has collapsed—takes over.

This vision portrays contemporary Western society in which people seem to seek spectacle more than meaning. In this hyper-real world, fictions offer a library of narratives to be borrowed and used by anyone ready to consume them.

Although hyper-real religions have existed since at least the 1960s, the Internet has been instrumental in the growth of this phenomenon. The Internet is now more than just a tool for work or research for academics and the military. It expands the realm of democracy beyond any possible dreams of a 1789 French revolutionary. As regards religion, the Internet is no longer simply a cyber-billboard where people simply post messages; through Web 2.0 the Internet is now a powerful social technology allowing people to interact at broadband speeds about issues ranging from personal to political and religious. A broad range of groups adopted this new technology and some of them established this symbiosis between religion and popular culture which is observable in cyberspace. Rather than standing up on a soap box and speaking about the faith derived from *Star Wars*, or spending hours photocopying a Jediist manifesto and mailing it to a list of people (and paying for stamps), one can simply create a website that anyone in the world can access. Further, 'preachers' do not have to reveal their identity. They can hide their identity behind a screen and even use pseudonyms and are thus protected from the threat of stigmatisation in the offline world.

Referring to Luther's reformation, Horsfield and Teusner (2007: 283) argue that "the development of printing did not instigate changes in Christianity but Christianity was affected by these changes taking place in the wider culture." The same could be argued with regard to the Internet and hyper-real religion. It is tempting to argue that just as Luther was able and ready to capitalise on the printing press to promote an alternative Christianity addressing the cultural and social issues of his time, these hyper-real religious promoters on the Internet are also addressing the social and cultural issues of our time. But this comparison is far from being extendable to a full-blown reformation, akin to the Protestant one, in our current religious landscape.

It is one thing to claim that, especially since the advent of the Internet, people are creating new religions out of popular culture, and another to analyse the different levels of creation and reaction associated with this phenomenon. Some people might get a thorough inspiration from popular culture, whereas others might get just a touch of inspiration. Others might be firmly located within a mainstream religion and also find inspiration in popular culture, or even counteract this hyper-real phenomenon

by claiming, for example, that it needs to be abolished. To distinguish between these shades of grey in the interrelations between popular culture and religion, this chapter aims first to describe three ideal-types (in the Weberian sense) of social actors involved in this phenomenon. Ideally, statistical data from these spiritual actors would have been helpful to refine these idea-type categories. Unfortunately, no research so far has been able to survey these practitioners. However, we do have data concerning people's perception of this phenomenon, the analysis of which will form the basis of the second section of this chapter.

Sub-Types of Hyper-Real Religions

Three ideal-types of hyper-real religious actors could be argued to exist. These are:

1. *Active consumers of popular culture leading to the practice of hyper-real religions.*
According to previous research, some individuals actively consume popular culture to create new types of spiritualities, e.g. Jediism (McCormick, this volume) and Matrixism (Morehead, this volume) or to enrich existing spiritualities (e.g. neo-paganism). For example, the Church of All Worlds is a neo-pagan group that was founded by Tim Zell in Missouri in 1962 and moved to Ukiah, California, in 1967. This group bases its teaching in part on Robert Heinlein's science-fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* which narrates the story of Valentine Michael Smith, a Martian-raised human with god-like powers, who taught humankind how to love. The group does not limit its reading to this novel and even extends its consumption to the *Star Trek* mythos. As one of its members states:

> [t]his whole period (late 1960s) fell under the shadow of the Damoclean Sword of impending nuclear holocaust, and a dominant Christian culture that fully embraced an apocalyptic mythos. For many of us, a powerful antidote to that mythos was found in science fiction, and particularly Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*, with its Vulcan IDIC: 'Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations.' CAW [Church of All Worlds] and *Green Egg* avidly embraced this vision of, as Roddenberry said, 'a future everyone will want to be part of.'[1]

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[1] Internet site, http://www.greenegg.org/issues/123/oberonedit123.html. Accessed 05/01/00.

As part of the consumption of science-fiction narratives by specific groups, one should not forget the Heaven's Gate group that committed mass sui- cide in San Diego in 1997 (Zeller, this volume). Its members believed that a UFO was travelling behind the Hale-Bopp comet and that by leaving their physical bodies behind, they would reach the extraterrestrial realm. They also watched *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* almost religiously and took fiction seriously. Indeed, as one member expressed a week before the infa- mous event:

> [w]e watch a lot of *Star Trek*, a lot of *Star Wars*, it's just, to us, it's just like going on a holodeck. We've been training on a holodeck . . . [and] now it's time to stop. The game's over. It's time to put into practice what we've learned. We take off the virtual reality helmet . . . go back out of the holo- deck to reality to be with, you know, the other members on the craft in the heavens . . . (cited in Robinson 1997).[2]

Horror stories can also provide a reservoir of cultural content to be reli- giously consumed. In 1966, in San Francisco, Anton LaVey founded the Church of Satan as a medium for the study of the black arts. His assump- tion of the inherent selfishness and violence of human beings is at the base of its non-Christian teaching. According to LaVey, Satan is mistakenly believed to be a long time opponent of God, and is rather a hidden force in nature that can be tapped into. In *The Satanic Rituals*, which is used by some (see below) as a basis for metaphysical growth, LaVey (1972) refers to the metaphysics of H. P. Lovecraft, the author of weird fiction who wrote most of his tales during the 1920s and 1930s. H. P. Lovecraft developed a pantheon of gods called the Ancient Ones, for example Cthulhu, Yog- Sothoth and Nyarlathotep, who are waiting in secrecy before coming back to earth to conquer the human race. In *The Nameless City* (1921), Lovecraft introduced the mad Abdul Alhazred, who had penned the ancient tome *The Necronomicon*. This book claimed to reveal all secrets of the world, especially those of the Ancient Ones. It became a standard prop in all later stories, and many readers believed it actually existed. Lovecraft always claimed that his stories were fictional and that he was a total agnostic. However, LaVey (1972), believing that "fantasy plays an important part in any religious curriculum", developed some rituals for his Church of Satan based on this fictional mythology. The following is a ceremony extract:

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    [2] As Robinson (1997) comments, these members had envisioned death as the ultimate Trekkie trip to the final frontier.

N'kgnath ki'q Az-Athoth r'jyarh wh'fagh zhasa phr-tga nyena phragn'glu.

Translation: Let us do honor to Azathoth, without whose laughter this world should not be.

Hanegraaff (2007) lists groups who are more or less directly inspired by Lovecraft stories for their magical works, such as the Illuminates of Thanateros and the Autonomatrix. His analysis confirms the view among these religious actors that all systems of knowledge are socially constructed and culturally biased, and that in a Nietzschean sense, no one belief is more true than any other. Following this nihilist logic, their ideology is open to refusing the distinction between fiction and reality.

Coming back more specifically to neo-paganism, the literature labelled "fantasy" (Harvey 2000, 2006; Lurhmann 1994) and "medieval romances" (Rose 2006) seems to express and explore neo-pagan issues. J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mist of Avalon*, Brian Bates's *The Way of Wyrd*, Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* corpus, and even William Gibson's cyber-punk *Neuromancer* and Richard Wagner's operas are all parts of a cultural reservoir which contributes to neo-pagan thinking. While there is no 'biblical' text of reference in neo-paganism, the construction of the pagan self entails reading works of fiction. These fantasy books describe a pagan world and consequently contribute to the pagan experience of the reader (Harvey 2006).

In Ellwood (2004), we discover how some people involved in the 'craft' use popular culture as a method of practising magic. In this text, the author explains how he uses the character of Buffy the Vampire Slayer as a god-form of protection, equality, and magic. Instead of using magic and incantation in the name of one god, as often practised in religions comprising a large pantheon of gods, certain neo-pagans replace more traditional gods with icons of popular culture. The importance behind these magical practices/rituals is to focus one's energy on the characteristic of this god/pop icon. For example, as the author explains:

> [l]et me give you a quick example. You may want to go on a diet, but know under ordinary circumstances you'd have trouble keeping to it. You can use the magick of working with a pop culture entity to help you. Who do you use? Were I to go on a diet I'd use the pop culture entity Jared, who represents the Subway franchise. You'll see him a lot on US television and each time he's showing the benefits of a successful diet. So what you do is create a god-form out of Jared. Observe the commercials, take notes on attributes you'd want your Jared god-form to have and then on the first night of the diet and each night after invoke the Jared god-form to help you keep to the diet. Now on a humorous aside you may find yourself having an inexplicable

> craving for Subway subs, but so be it. As long as you are dieting and reach-
> ing your target weight it doesn't matter. What does matter is that you invest
> Jared with your belief that he will keep you dieting. Use chants, images, and
> whatever else as needed. (Ellwood 2004, p. 187)

According to this testimony, a pop icon should be used only as long as a
person needs it. After this, the practitioner should move to another. If this
is not done there is a danger that the person might start believing in the
icon too deeply, instead of using it for a specific purpose.

Whereas twentieth century forms of hyper-real religions were using
popular culture in a secondary fashion (for example, the Church of Satan
being inspired by the stories of Lovecraft and neo-pagan groups by SF
stories), the twenty first century hyper-real religions (e.g. Jediism and
Matrixim) use works of popular culture as their central themes. These
twentieth century hyper-real religions have their spirituality defined
somewhat independently from popular culture. There are no Lovecraft
or *Discworld* spiritualities; however, there is now a *Star Wars* spirituality.
Indeed, in Jediism, for example, the *Star Wars* works of popular culture
are used as a direct source of inspiration (Possamai 2010).

Parts I and II of this handbook explore these specific types of hyper-real
religions. Part I deals with pre-Internet cases such as Discordianism, the
Church of the SubGenius and the Temple of Psychick Youth (Kirby), and
Heaven's Gate (Zeller) and the Raelian movement's (Machado) inspira-
tion from science fiction. Part II moves to the Web 2.0 realm with groups
and networks such as Matrixism (Morehead), the Otherkin (Kirby) and
Vampires (Laycock), Star Wars (McCormick), and Tolkien's Middle Earth
(Davidsen).

*2. Casual consumers of popular culture leading to a sharing of characteris-
tics with hyper-real religions.*

Some consumers are already part of established mainstream religions
and use popular culture to strengthen their belief system. As explained
in Possamai (2005), a case in point is *ChristianGoth.Com*, which is a vir-
tual environment for Christian Goths and other Christians. It does not
aim at converting regular Goths to Christianity, but at proving to pastors
and anyone else that not all Goths are Satanists or witches. This site even
quotes Isaiah 9:2: 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great
light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a
light has shined.' As one Christian Goth claims:

> [o]nce I received the Christ, I never lost my culture. There were certain
> things that had to go, certain things that didn't glorify God. But I still loved

> Siouxsie and Bauhaus [popular Goth bands] along with my new found faith in the Lord Jesus. I found that contrary to popular 'Christian' opinion, I could still wear lace and velvet (and, God forbid—eyeliner?)[3]

Some heavy/black metal bands view themselves as Christians. The popular group, Demon Hunter, has appeared on the soundtrack of the movie *Resident Evil 2*. It lies between being a 'Christian band' and a group of Christians in a secular band, even though it is on a Christian recording contract.[4] Mortification is another band, based in Australia.[5] This Christian style of music is sometimes referred to as 'White Metal' or 'Unblack Metal.'

There are Christian role-playing support and advocacy groups such as the Christian Gamers Guild.[6] These groups promote Christian role playing groups without rejecting science fiction and/or fantasy narratives. One statement on this site sums up quite well this tendency among Christians to use the newest forms of popular culture for their faith:

> Christians have too long allowed non-Christians to dominate the imaginal world of role-playing, which was originally inspired by Christian men like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, not to mention Dante, John Bunyan, and John Milton. I think it's time to be a creative force in role-playing and other forms of gaming for the true author of all creativity and imagination, Almighty God Himself.

Other casual consumers of popular culture leading to a religious work might not belong to a religious group, but might nevertheless believe in something beyond their everyday life. With the growth of spirituality in western societies, more and more people find their inspiration from popular culture. If the following analogy is permitted, hyper-real actors of the first type would be like Catholics attending church regularly, whereas actors of the second type would be like Catholics who believe without belonging. They might, for example, find inspiration in *The Da Vinci Code* and feel more spiritual thanks to this work of popular culture, but they do not necessarily actively engage in (hyper) religious practices. Taking into account this ideal-type, we can assume that the hyper-real religious phenomenon is more extended than initially thought.

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[3] Internet site, http://www.fehq.org/public/gothchrist.htm. Accessed 23/08/2004.
[4] Internet site, http://www.demonhunter/net. Accessed 23/08/2004.
[5] Internet site, http://hem.passagen.se/bransell/mortification.html. Accessed 23/08/2004.
[6] Internet site, http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/2964/. Accessed 23/08/2004.

For example, one Generation X respondent mentioned that he had a Catholic upbringing and watched the *Star Wars* series when he was young. Years later, when he became a young adult and re-watched the series, he realised how much these works of fiction influenced his current view on spirituality, even more than Catholicism. However this is far from making him a Jediist.

Whereas the first type of consumers deals with popular culture as a primary or secondary source of inspiration for their religious work, in this second ideal-type, we find actors who, in a way, tend to dabble with this phenomenon. They might get some sort of inspiration from popular culture rather than be part of a more organised set of beliefs. Part III of this handbook explores some of these more casual dealings in, for examples, the computer game of *World of Warcraft* (Aupers), role playing games (Wallis) and Tarot cards (Cowan). Conspiracy theories (Introvigne) are also shown to have some connection with the hyper-real religious phenomenon when the demarcations between culture, mythical history and religion are blurred. To finish Part III, we move to a popular Indian television series (Cusack) and Hinduism in cyberspace (Scheifinger) to realise that this hyper-real religious phenomenon might be new only in a Western context.

3. *Religious and secular actors opposed to the consumption of popular culture leading to the practice of, or to the sharing of characteristics with, hyper-real religions.*

In this category, members of a religious or secular group would be against the hyper-real religious phenomenon. This is seen, for example, in a Christian forum with texts such as: "[t]hough not as overtly and sympathetically occultic as the Harry Potter series, Tolkien's fantasies are *unscriptural* and present a very dangerous message."[7] On a promotional Internet site[8] for a video against Harry Potter, 'Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged. Making Evil Look Innocent,' we are told that sorcery is being introduced in schools disguised as children's fantasy literature. The video/DVD is aimed at explaining to parents how to teach children that spell-casting is forbidden territory. The site then lists a few accounts from children, such as "I feel like I'm inside Harry's world. If I went to wizard school I'd study everything: spells, counterspells, and defence against the

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[7] Internet site, http://forums.christianity.com/html/p681045. Acccssed 23/08/2004.
[8] Internet site, http:///www.chick.com/catalog/videos/0127.asp. Accessed 04/08/2004.

dark arts" (Carolyn age 10) or "It would be great to be a wizard because you could control situations and things like teacher" (Jeffrey age 11). It then concludes by stating: "Stop and Think: what will these children do when invited to visit an occult website, or even a local [neo-pagan] coven?"

Fundamentalist/literalist Christian groups are more than just a marketing niche for global popular culture. For example, Walt Disney's promotion of its adaptation of C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a '*Passion of the Christ* for kids' is an attempt to secure worldwide Christian support for the film (Hastings and Laurence 2005). There are also pressure groups against certain forms of popular culture (for example, Imax cinemas' refusal to show movies such as James Cameron's *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* that suggest that Earth's origins do not conform with biblical description [McKie 2005]) and against the use of non-Christian popular culture for religious practice. For example, while Dan Brown's film adaptation was shown at Australian cinemas, the Anglican Church in Sydney showed a trailer in two hundred and fifty cinemas telling cinemagoers about their website, which challenges the theories in *The Da Vinci Code* (described as '*Harry Potter* for adults'). The film was banned from a cinema on the Central Coast, N. S. W., because of the way it depicts the Catholic Church. As detailed above, these pressure groups demonise hyper-real religious actions on the Internet and at church, and one might wonder if they are working towards setting off the type of full-blown moral panic which turns minority groups into scapegoats for negatively perceived social changes (see Possamai and Lee 2011).

Part IV of this book explores these various reactions such as that from various Muslim communities trying to weaken the hyper-real religious component of Muslim hip hop music (Nasir), or of Christian groups trying to prevent their believers from accessing hyper-real types of content in computer games (Bernauer). Finally the cases of Polish Catholics' rejection of Harry Potter due to the fear of the manifestation of hyper-real religious elements based on that character (Olechnicki) and the push towards a hyper-real irreligious phenomenon by the new atheism (Nixon) are explored.

In the concluding chapter to this handbook, Roeland, Aupers and Houtman analyse this whole phenomenon in the light of the classical theories from Durkheim, Marx and Weber on alienation and anomie to argue that this whole phenomenon might propose salvation for a meaningless world devoid of magic and mystery and counter-act the spread of anomie.

Results From A Survey

I was commissioned by an academic unit of my university to design a survey of religious and spiritual practices by students and staff, the results of which form the basis of another article (Possamai and Brackenreg 2009). This university has six campuses spread through Sydney's western suburbs and is one of the largest in Australia, with more than 35,000 students and almost 2,600 staff. I took the opportunity to insert four extra research questions into this survey.

The survey was posted online in 2007–2008. A sample of 2,000 students and 500 academic and administrative staff was randomly selected via computer software. Two different emailing lists were then generated. Two emails were sent towards the end of the second semester in 2007 and one at the beginning of the first semester of 2008 inviting staff and students (in a separate email) to fill out the questionnaire.

In total, 217 people completed this survey which is an overall response rate of 8.7%. 94 students and 100 staff replied to the survey. 23 respondents remained silent about their status within the university. The minimum response rate for staff is strong at 20%, with that of students much weaker at 4.7%. This sample reflects a randomised selection across religious and atheist groups, gender, and generations of people working and/or studying in a university environment.

As detailed in Table 1, this sample represents a group of students and staff from a university which has a religious diversity almost in line with the regional and national one. The survey clearly under-represents the Christian average (by around 10%) and over-represents the Muslim one (almost two times the Sydney average). The percentage of Other Religion such as Baha'i and neo-paganism are also over-represented in the survey.

Table 1. Religious diversity of the sample

	Australia (%)	Sydney (%)	Survey (%)
Buddhist	2.09	3.69	2.8
Christian	63.23	63.32	53.5
Hindu	0.74	1.69	0.9
Judaism	0.44	0.83	0.5
Muslim	1.7	3.88	7.8
Other Religion	1.19	1.21	4.5
No Religion	18.48	13.98	18.5
Religious Affiliation Not Stated	11.09	10.26	11.5

Overall, it can be stated that this sample is a reflection of the increasing religious diversity in Australia (Bouma 2006) but is more post-Christian than the Australian average.

Specifically regarding the use of popular culture for religious/spiritual purpose, a previous survey by Hjarvard (2008) in Denmark found that people's interest in spirituality can grow from being exposed to the stories of *Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings* and *The Da Vinci Code.* The computer game, *World of Warcraft*, as explored by Aupers in this volume, can also facilitate an interest in spirituality. The survey designed for this chapter also confirms similar findings.

Table 2 indicates that the respondents in this university based sample regard popular culture as a source of inspiration. However, people who indicated in the survey that they were religious and/or spiritual are also inspired by genres of popular culture such as music (40.6%), movies (30.4%), television series (15.2%), and it is mainly nature (52.15%) and philosophy (45.6%) that provide the greatest source of spiritual/religious inspiration. It should be noted from the previous section that inspiration from popular culture can be understood at different levels, and that the survey question was not framed to explore these distinctions. The results of the survey that we are exploring for this section of the chapter are not about people's growing interest in these works of popular culture, but rather their opinion on the process of using popular culture for one's religion/spirituality. As there is a difference of level of inspiration from popular culture, it is expected that there would be a difference of level of opinion on the use of popular culture for religious/spiritual work.

Table 2. Sources of Inspiration

As part of your religion and/or spirituality, do you also find spiritual inspiration from other sources such as (tick as many boxes as you wish)

	Frequency	Percentage
Computer Games	2	0.9
Graphic Novels	3	1.4
Films	66	30.4
Music	88	40.6
Nature	113	52.1
Novels	57	26.3
Philosophy	99	45.6
Television series	33	15.2
No, my only source of inspiration is from my religion and/or spirituality	32	14.7
Other	37	17.1

Table 3 focuses on people's opinions about the use of a recent piece of popular culture for spiritual/religious purposes: *The Da Vinci Code*. 29.3% of those who knew about this story thought that it could provide people with spiritual/religious inspiration, whereas 8% people were of the opinion that people using that type of inspiration should be opposed. The majority of the respondents (44.3%) thought that this is just a work of fiction and that it should only be considered as such.

The answers to the next question (see Table 4) are even more telling. 24.1% of those who replied do not see a problem with people creating a religion out of popular culture, 43.7% do not mind that these works of popular culture lead to some inspiration but think they should not lead to a religion per se. 14.1% of people feel that this hyper-real phenomenon is wrong and should be opposed.

These questions were not created to test the validity of the ideal-types illustrated in the previous section, as the intention was not to find out about people's practices, but rather about people's opinions on these practices. There are strong indications that there are two extreme minorities:

Table 3. *The Da Vinci Code*

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown describes the story of a secret organisation aiming at protecting the direct line of descendants from Jesus. Which of these statements would better fit your position on this novel/movie (only tick one (1) box)

	Frequency	Percentage
This is a fiction story and should only be read as such	94	44.3
This is a fiction story that can provide inspiration for people who have a religion and/or spirituality	29	13.7
This is more than a fiction story and it provides some clues about religion and/or spirituality	33	15.6
This is just a work of fiction but because it can provide the wrong inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, something should be done about this.	17	8
I do not know what this story is about and cannot answer this question.	39	18.4

Table 4. *Star Wars* and *The Matrix*

Some people use works of popular culture such as the movies *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* for inspiration as part of their religion and/or spirituality. Which statement do you agree with (only tick one (1) box):

	Frequency	Percentage
It is reasonable for people to create new religions/spiritualities from works of popular culture.	48	24.1
It is reasonable for people to select works of popular culture and be inspired by them for their existing religions/spiritualities but it is not reasonable to create new religions and or spiritualities.	87	43.7
It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/spirituality but nothing needs to be done about this.	36	18.1
It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/spirituality and something should be done about this.	28	14.1

some people are at various levels supportive of this type of activity and others are of the opinion that it needs to be actively opposed. In between, the large majority of people surveyed are amenable that these narratives should serve only as a source of inspiration. To shed more light on the respondents' perspectives, some cross-tabulations have been constructed. As in previous research (Hughes et al. 2004; Marler and Hadaway 2002) respondents were asked to align themselves with one type of religious and/or spiritual identity, as presented in Table 5.

The larger group of the sample claim to be religious and spiritual (46.5%), and more people claimed to be neither religious nor spiritual (17.5%) than religious only (13.4%). This is in agreement with previous research conducted in Australia (Hughes et al. 2004) and in the United States (Marler and Hadaway 2002). Across age groups, the 'religious and spiritual' category is also stronger than the 'religious only' and the 'spiritual only' categories. These 'spiritual only' actors are not churchgoers and are more likely to be agnostics who experiment with alternative spiritualities and/or Eastern practices. From such research, it appears that there are

Table 5. Religion and Spirituality

Would you say that you are (only tick one (1) box):

	Frequency	Percentage
Religious Only	29	13.4
Spiritual Only	46	21.2
Religious and Spiritual	101	46.5
Neither Religious nor spiritual	38	17.5
No Answer	3	1.4

two types of spiritual actors; one that claims that he or she is still religious (the majority according to the two tables above), and one that is not religious. The 17.5% claiming 'no religion' in the sample is close to the result of the latest Australian national census (18.48% in 2006).

When this variable is cross-tabulated with the question on *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* above, (see Table 6) some interesting findings emerge. It appears the people who are against this phenomenon and would want to actively oppose it will more likely be both religious and spiritual (68%) than neither religious nor spiritual (11%). Out of all those who claim that this phenomenon is reasonable, those who are religious only (6%) are the least likely to agree with this statement.

The results for people from the sample who are neither religious nor spiritual are more polarised. They either state that the phenomenon is reasonable (32%) or not reasonable (31%), but only 8% would wish to act against it. Those who are 'spiritual only' tend to be more positive with this phenomenon than all other types. 58% of them consider reasonable the use of fiction as only a source of inspiration, and 35% condone the further step of the creation of new spiritualities. Except for the 'neither religious nor spiritual' category, all categories ('religious', 44%; 'spiritual', 58%; 'religious and spiritua'l, 42%) consider it valid that these works of fiction be used as a source of inspiration.

From this cross-tabulation, it appears that being 'spiritual only' is an indicator of a more positive attitude towards this phenomenon, whereas being both 'religious and spiritual', rather than 'neither spiritual nor religious', or 'religious only', is a signpost for people ready to act against it.

Table 7 shows that of the people who oppose the use of *The Da Vinci Code* for inspiration and want to act on this, those who claim to be both religious and spiritual (94%) are still in the majority, but at a much higher

Table 6. Type of Religious Actor, *Star Wars* and *The Matrix*

Type of religious actors	It is reasonable for people to create new religions/ spiritualities from works of popular culture.	It is reasonable for people to select works of popular culture and be inspired by them for their existing religions/ spiritualities but it is not reasonable to create new religions and or spiritualities.	It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/ spirituality but nothing needs to be done about this.	It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/ spirituality and something should be done about this.	
Religious Only	6 / **11**	14 / **44**	19 / **26**	18 / **19**	**100**
Spiritual Only	31 / **35**	29 / **58**	6 / **5**	3 / **2**	**100**
Religious and Spiritual	40 / **20**	45 / **42**	44 / **17**	68 / **21**	**100**
Neither Religious nor Spiritual	23 / **32**	12 / **29**	31 / **31**	11 / **8**	**100**
	100	100	100	100	

level than above. No one who is 'spiritual only' or is 'neither religious nor spiritual' is ready to oppose this phenomenon. Of the people who seem to see more than a fiction in this story, it is those who are 'spiritual only' (45%) who are in the majority.

Of the people who are 'religious only' (64%), or 'neither religious nor spiritual' (66%), the great majority see in this story only a work of fiction. Of those who are 'spiritual only', 33% see more than a story and 18% see a source of inspiration.

These results should be considered in the light of findings from Possamai and Lee (2011) in which we find from the same sample and survey, that of the people who believe that 'Only one religion and/or spirituality is the expression of the truth and only this one is valid', 82% claim to be both spiritual and religious.

If we take as a working assumption that 'spiritual only' people tend to work in networks outside of a specific religion, that the 'religious only' category pertains to people who are not strongly active in their religion

Table 7. Type of Religious Actor and *The Da Vinci Code*

Type of religious actors	This is a fiction story and should only be read as such	This is a fiction story that can provide inspiration for people who have a religion and/or spirituality	This is more than a fiction story and it provides some clues about religion and/or spirituality	This is just a work of fiction but because it can provide the wrong inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, something should be done about this	I do not know what this story is about and cannot answer this question	
Religious Only	19 / **64**	3 / **4**	6 / **4**	6 / **7**	15 / **21**	**100**
Spiritual Only	17 / **33**	28 / **18**	45 / **33**	0 / **0**	18 / **16**	**100**
Religious and Spiritual	37 / **35**	59 / **17**	37 / **12**	94 / **16**	51 / **20**	**100**
Neither Religious nor Spiritual	27 / **66**	10 / **8**	12 / **11**	0	16 / **15**	**100**
	100	100	100	100	100	

(perhaps even claiming to be part of a religion without necessarily believing in it), and that people who are both religious and spiritual are reasonably active within their own religion, we would expect that it is these people, adhering to and active within one faith (rather than, for example, atheists), who are most likely to have the strongest reservations regarding this phenomenon. Those most likely to support it would tend to be part of what can be assumed to be the alternative spirituality scene. Research of the qualitative type would need to be conducted to shed more light on these findings.

The data from this survey on people's opinions on the hyper-real phenomenon indicate that those who are 'spiritual only' are the most likely to be supportive of it whereas those who are 'both religious and spiritual' are more likely to be actively opposed, and more strongly, than those who are 'neither spiritual nor religious', or who are 'religious only'.

How then to explain antagonism towards hyper-real religions? The implication here might be that these religions are simply not regarded as *bona fide* religions. This suggests a struggle when it comes to defining what is to be considered a religion and what is not, especially in a field where authority is fluid.

Authentic or Fake Religion in a Weak Authorative Field?

In a devolved and 'glocalised' consumer world of instant and continuous communication, who can speak authoritatively for these diverse hyper-real religious groups and reflexive religious individuals? In Max Weber's theory of authority, it is clear that the legitimacy of information cannot be understood as being under either traditional authority or charismatic authority. Jediism is not traditional, and Jediists make no claim to traditional legitimacy. The network is clearly not charismatic because it cannot be legitimised by a single person who can rise above the e-network to assert global authority, and no routinised charisma could significantly influence the ever-changing Web. The new forms of authority are not legal-rational, because there is no hierarchical organisation, and no linear chain of officers.

Authority on the Internet is devolved, dispersed and dissipated (Turner, 2007). As the educated and elite purveyors of religion are now challenged by a global spiritual marketplace, especially on the Internet, forms of religious authority are being redefined. Looking at Weber's typology of authority, Turner (2009) proposes that global commercialism has inverted the traditional relationship between the virtuosi (purveyors of official religions) and the masses (consumers of popular religions). In this sense we see religions created out of popular culture at the grassroots level rather than by certain forms of religious authority. But does a lack of authority undermine the validity of a religion and turn it into a fake religion?

Debray (2005) demonstrates how the word 'religion' emerged in Latin with the birth of Christianity. Indeed, the word, as we understand it, is not found in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek or Arabic. The author points out how the word 'religion' became a universal entity emerging from a Roman Christian locality. Christianity did not begin as a religion (the notion was unthinkable in the Jewish culture), and did not grow into one during the first two centuries of the Christian era, because Christian theologians formulated their thoughts within a Greek language which ignored this Latin category. It only became a religion—in the sense of the word as

we understand it—in the third century. Christians made a political move to have their faith viewed as a religion so that their belief system would become valid in the Roman world. Before Constantine, Christianity was seen in the Roman world as *superstitio* (pejorative) and was thus perceived negatively as a type of popular religion. Christianity had to become *religio* (laudatory) to be accepted into the mainstream and thus able to develop in the Roman world. In 341 the appropriation by Christianity of the Latin word *religio* (that is, official religion) became so successful that Christianity became accepted as *religio* and Roman paganism relegated to *superstitio* (i.e. popular religion). This reversal of perspectives, establishing Christianity as the official religion, clearly demonstrates the power of labelling politics. It is for such reasons that Beckford, using a social constructionist approach, thinks that

> religion is . . . a particularly interesting "site" where boundary disputes are endemic and where well-entrenched interest groups are prepared to defend their definition of religion against opponents. The history of anti-witchcraft movements in many parts of the world, particularly the Inquisition, is powerful evidence of the deadly length to which some interest groups go to enforce their definition of "true" religion. (2003: 13)

The defining of religion can thus be seen as a site of power in which groups try to impose their personal view and agenda, for example rejecting 'pagan' practices from medieval Christianity, or authenticating miracles and shrines. And this politics of definition could also be reflected in this discussion on religions in symbiosis with popular culture.

Fake religion or parody religion are terms that have been applied to groups like the Discordians and the Church of the SubGenius (see Kirby's chapter in this volume) that appear to profess a religion, even if their satirist approach to facts and beliefs seems to parody religion (Chidester, 2005; Alberts, 2008). Even if they are fake, however, they must follow the template of established religions in order to be able to mock them. Chidester (2005: 209) describes how a campaign by the Discordians using the search engine Yahoo changed people's perspective on this group. Discordianism was listed on the Internet as a 'parody religion' and one member raised this issue thus: "I ask that either you move us into the same category as the rest of the religions, or tell me what the criteria [are] to become a 'real' religion so that I might show how Discordianism meets [them]" (quoted by Chidester 2005: 209). For any social scientists following the cultural constructivist approach to religion, such a reply would imply that labelling this group as fake is problematic.

Recently, Cusack (2010) underlined that religion is not independent from its social and cultural context, and has not been left untouched by a shift to a post or late modern world. Part of these late modern novelties, in this context, are found in the invention of religions from popular culture. What she calls "invented religions" re-shape popular cultural discourses for religious (or quasi- or pseudo-religious) purposes. Popular culture is used here as a source of inspiration. Reality, revelation or historical continuation are not needed to justify the existence of these invented religions. Davidsen (this volume), thinking along the same lines, would rather make reference to fiction-based religion (i.e. a religion that uses fictional texts as its main authoritative, religious texts). Taking a sociological perspective, especially a Marxist one, one could easily argue that we did not have to wait for late modernity to find invented religions, as this label could be applied to all religions and could even be read as a tautology.

The terms "invented religion" and "fiction-based religion" are indeed appealing to those researching in this field. Although Cusack (2010) refers to this invention and localises this recent phenomenon in contemporary culture, the term hyper-real makes specific reference to Baudrillard's hyper-reality (see Geoffroy's contribution to this volume) which only exists in our televised and cyber world.

In 2005 I first used the term "hyper-real religion" to refer to a simulacrum of a religion created out of popular culture, which provides inspiration for believers/consumers at a metaphorical level. Some of the contributors to this book have since advanced some constructive comments. For example, Davidsen (this volume) argues that for some people Middle-earth is a real space, be it an ancient place in our world or a current one on another plane of reality or in another dimension. In the light of this case study, Davidsen is rightly critical of the claim that hyper-real religion exists only at a metaphorical level.

Aupers (this volume) questions the use of this term as it can have negative connotations in referring to some religions as superficial, meaningless, unreal or alienating. I believe that the same comment could be applied to the notion of invented or fiction religion as well. Whatever the appellation, many social commentators would argue that any religion in a state of fusion with popular culture would represent the above traits, and it is only as these religions gain more credibility (perhaps with the following generation) that this stigma might lose its strength. Applying this concept of hyper-real religion to Hindu gods, Scheifinger (this volume) makes the interesting argument that it is a Western construction. In his chapter, he

concludes that although the claim that the Internet and hyper-reality go hand in hand appears highly plausible, online replications of images of Hindu deities are no more hyper-real than their original counterparts in a pre-consuming society. This raises questions as to the universality of the concept of hyper-real religion and suggests that perhaps this concept only fits within a post-Christian environment where popular culture is fully commodified.

These comments and critiques help to refine my 2005 definition of hyper-real religion into one more appropriate for 2011. It becomes: "A hyper-real religion is a simulacrum of a religion created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture which provides inspiration at a metaphorical level and/or is a source of beliefs for everyday life."

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