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II

There Is No Spoon? Teaching *The Matrix*, Postperennialism, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism

Gregory Grieve

Do not try to bend the spoon. That is impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth . . . that there is no spoon. Then you will see that it is not the spoon that bends but only yourself.

—Spoon Boy (01:11:23–01:12:23 [70])

Written and directed by Larry Wachowski and Andy Wachowski, *The Matrix* (1999)¹ welcomes us to "the desert of the real": a dystopic future in which (for most of humanity) the perceived world is the "matrix"—a simulated hyperreality created by sentient machines who control the human population.² For those select few who have been freed by the "red pill," the real world is a postapocalyptic wasteland of ruined cities and sunless skies. It has been argued that the film alludes to many philosophical and religious systems: Advaita Hinduism, Buddhism, gnosticism, Judaism, Kantianism, Dostoevsky's nihilism, Sartre's existentialism, and Platonic idealism.³ The case has also been made that the film's foregrounding of awakening is a treatise on empiricist skeptic ontology and an example of the Buddhist concept of emptiness and even indicates a Christian gnostic cosmology.⁴ Yet there is little in the film to raise Bishop Berkeley's ghost; the *Matrix*'s epistemology is closer to Platonism than it is to the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, and the gnosis achieved has more to do with Emersonian voluntarism than with the *pleroma*.⁵

Because no direct relationship exists between traditional religious systems and *The Matrix*, it would be easy to dismiss the film's spiritual elements as shallow quackery used only to legitimize extreme

wire-fu martial arts action and digital eye candy. As film critic Todd McCarthy writes, "It's Special Effects 10. Screenplay 0 for *The Matrix*," an eye-opening but incoherent extravaganza of morphing and superhuman martial arts" (*Daily Variety*, March 29, 1999). In such a case, one could argue that the film does not discuss religion but rather uses religious imagery to create a "popular metaphysics" to support "the best action scenes and the coolest computer graphics ever."⁶ However, as *The Matrix*'s editor, Zach Staenberg, maintains, the film's visual effects are not "razzle-dazzle . . . but conceptual tools, which the [Wachowski] brothers use to move ahead the story."⁷ As the Wachowskis themselves point out, *The Matrix* is about "mythology, theology, and to a lesser extent, higher-level mathematics. . . . All are ways human beings try to answer bigger questions, as well as the Big Question."⁸

Yet, what is the film's big question? In the "Oracle's apartment" scene the protagonist, Neo (Keanu Reeves), goes to learn his spiritual fate. Is he the One? Or is he just another human battery? Before he can consult with the Oracle (Gloria Foster), however, Neo is left in a waiting room with a half-dozen children with paranormal powers (1:10:57–1:12:23 [69–70]).⁹ Two girls levitate alphabet blocks as they watch a television program about giant white rabbits. A second boy reads from an ancient Chinese book. Another child, a skinny boy with a shaved head and dressed in Gandesque clothing, meditates in front of a pile of twisted spoons. Neo walks across the room and sits next to him. The boy holds a spoon in his hand and uses his telekinetic power to cause it to sway back and forth like a blade of grass. The boy hands Neo the spoon and calmly states: "Do not try to bend the spoon. That is impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth . . . that there is no spoon. Then you will see that it is not the spoon that bends but only yourself" (0:11:23–0:11:23 [70]).

Many have interpreted *The Matrix*'s "no spoon" message as an updated version of Descartes' epistemological skeptical conundrum (the brain-in-the-vat question: "How do you know that you are not dreaming?")¹⁰ or an ontological investigation into "what is really real." As the Spoon Boy's statement indicates, however, *The Matrix* is less about epistemological or ontological questions and more about spiritual emancipation.¹¹ For instance, in the film, after Neo opens his door and hands the cyperpunk character, Choi, a computer program, he exclaims, "Hallelujah! You are my Savior, man! My own personal Jesus Christ!" (8:33–8:44 [10]). Precisely from what, however, is the audience being saved? Many have contended that *The Matrix*'s message is about salvation from the ideology of the simulated reality of late capitalism. As Read Mercer Schuchardt writes in "What Is the Matrix?" it is "a new testament for a new millennium, a religious parable of the second coming of mankind's messiah in an age that needs salvation as desperately as any ever has."¹²

What spiritual logic is employed here? Unlike films such as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which reach back to premodern religious logics for emancipation from contemporary society, *The Matrix* relies on the religious logic of "postperennialism." I coin this term to cover that broad

spectrum of alternative spiritualities "from Jungian-based paganism to ecologically sound yuppie entrepreneurship"¹³ that have been called postmodern religions and, more specifically, consumer religions.¹⁴ What postperennialists have in common is that their religious practice is based on the logic of late capitalism, which, as Fredric Jameson writes in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, is "a new depthlessness . . . a consequent weakening of historicity . . . a return to older theories of the sublime . . . which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system . . . in the bewildering new world space of late or multinational capital."¹⁵ In action, postperennialists pursue their spirituality through the consumption of consumer goods—from angel cards to Wiccan craft supplies.¹⁶ In theory, postperennialists approach salvation through the postmodern skeptical ethic that "there is no spoon." That is, since all systems are ideological cages, one cannot change the cage, and one can therefore spiritually develop only oneself. Structurally, postperennialism has three chief beliefs: (1) that the universe is integrated and monistic; (2) that the purpose of life is personal spiritual growth; and (3) that because authentic spirituality is not limited to any one tradition: one's personal religious practice should be assembled from all of the planet's faiths.

This chapter aims to help students understand the ideology of *The Matrix*, in particular the ideological relation between postperennialism and late capitalism. I pursue this goal through three main lines of analysis. First is for the student to analyze how *The Matrix* is a product of and a response to the culture of late capitalism. Second is to use the film to decode postperennialism's skeptical ideology of the self and to illustrate for students how a "no-spoon" ethic naturalizes the individual. Third is to describe the late capitalistic economic conditions that brought about the need for postperennialism. What I am particularly interested in is fostering in students an understanding that while many might argue that postperennialism is "constructed," "inauthentic," and a form of colonialism, it is still a real expression of particular material realities. That is, as Karl Marx writes, because religion stems from economic and social injustices, "*Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering.*"¹⁷

Goal 1—What Is the Matrix? The Culture Industry as the System of Late-Capitalistic Ideology

It's the question that drives us, the question that brought you here. You know the question just as I did.

—Trinity (*Carrie-Anne Moss*, 11:26–11:39 [13])

The question that drives *The Matrix* is, what happens when alienated, mediated existence completely replaces an "unplugged" existence? When, in our globalized technological age, are we no longer even able to discern that we have lost touch with reality? The idea of media as a form of social control is

epitomized by Guy Debord and the Situationist International. For Debord, the world we live in is unreal because "the spectacle *holds up to view* the world of the commodity dominating all lived experience."¹⁸ What has occurred in contemporary society, he argues, is that consumer capitalism has taken away authentic human experience and transformed all of life into a commodity that it then sells back to us: "Reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and support of the existing society."¹⁹

What is the relationship between the spectacle and *The Matrix*? The word "matrix" can refer to a womb, a tubular representation of data, or a mold.²⁰ In the language of the Internet, the matrix is "a superset of the Internet that includes all networks and computers that can exchange email."²¹ In the film, the matrix is depicted as a downward "digital rain" of fuzzy neon-green CRT character code.²² The matrix is also represented audibly by a "modern mantra," the squeal of the carrier signal used on early modems.²³ Both the visual and audio representations of the matrix are used throughout the film. Visually, for instance, when Neo first goes to meet Apoc, Switch, and Trinity, he sees rain pouring on the window like cascading code (22:40-25:15 [23-26]). Also, throughout the film, the scenes inside the matrix have a predominately money-green tinge, the "real" world—or "meatspace"—of humans is emphasized by blue, while the world of the machines, such as the city 01 and the power plants, is overwhelmingly red. Audibly, as we move closer and closer to the matrix's cascading green characters, the hum turns into an ominous roar.

In the film, the matrix is a simulated virtual environment created by a malevolent Artificial Intelligence to enchain the human race. As Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) explains, "The Matrix is a system, Neo, and that system is our enemy" (57:03-57:11 [53]). As Morpheus tells Neo earlier, it hides the truth, "that you are a slave... [and that] like everyone else, you were born into bondage, kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind" (28:14-28:30 [30]). In the film, the matrix is ubiquitous and nearly undetectable. As Morpheus states earlier, "The Matrix is everywhere. It's all around us, here even in this room. You can see it out your window or on your television. You feel it when you go to work or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth" (27:46-28:13 [29]).

This plugged-in existence is malevolent because it keeps humans from being free. As Morpheus bluntly puts it, "What is the Matrix? Control." The matrix is even more dangerous because it is so comfortable and familiar that people will fight to maintain it. As Cypher (Joe Pantoliano) declares through a virtual piece of scrumptious steak, "Ignorance is bliss" (1:04:16 [61]). Accordingly, as Morpheus explains to Neo in the "training program," "until we [free people], these people are still a part of the system and that makes them our enemy" (57:13-57:23 [53]). But what is the system? As many scholars have shown, *The Matrix* is a metaphor for the system of technological globalized society come to full and horrifying but prosaic fruition.²⁴ In this light, we can

understand the film's constant reference to mediated existence: the Internet, television, and telephones. As Cornel West states in "the philosophers'" commentary of *The Matrix* DVD in the "Ultimate Matrix Collection," the film depicts "a global information system, surveillance" (1:52:00). What is at stake for the directors, according to Larry Wachowski, is that "so much of our reality is our [own] construction based on communication."²⁵

The Matrix is alluding to the "culture industry," the alienated-reified social substance of capital—"a computer-generated dream-world built to keep us under control" (43:37-43:44 [42]). The "culture industry" is a term coined by two key members of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, to describe how the entertainment industry produces popular culture through commodified cultural goods.²⁶ As critical cultural theorists, these two scholars argue for a shift from nineteenth-century "base structure" capitalism organized around production to a later form of "superstructure" capitalism organized around consumption, media, information, and technology. In this media-driven society new forms of domination and abstraction appear. Through gradual bureaucratization, rationalization, and commodification of all social life, the "culture industry" defuses critical consciousness through distraction and stupefaction. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry produces a shallow, homogenous, but safe product and "pollutes" the high arts but is most dangerous because its easily consumable nuggets of entertainment ensnare the masses into the capitalistic system through the creation of "false needs." Like Cypher's steak, which "doesn't exist [but which is] mmmm so goddamn good," the culture industry's "media systems," like imperial Rome's bread and circuses, fill leisure time with amusements to distract consumers from the truth of their real situations.

The Frankfurt School operates from within a modernist critique that attempts to emancipate the masses through the demystification of capitalism's ideological systems. *The Matrix*, however, has a postmodern "no spoon" ethic, which operates as if all systems are ideological, and thus does not agitate for demystification but rather is suspicious of all metanarratives. The film's skeptical postmodern stance is clear, for instance, in the irony of being saved from the control of the matrix only to be awakened as a "battery" in the apocalyptic, ruined real world. This is Neo's fate, when, after taking a red pill, which leads him to the truth, he spasms awake inside a glowing pod. Naked, bald, his body slick with gelatin, Neo is floating in a magenta amnion with tentacle-like tubes the diameter of lawn hoses hooked up to every part of his body. Outside his pod, level after level of identical pods stretch out to the horizon. From above, a machine sizes him up, seizes hold of him, and then violently unhooks the cables. Suddenly, like the opening of a jet's door, Neo is sucked out of his pod and slides down a waste line into the main sewer. Neo struggles in the thick waste and then is plucked up into the belly of a futuristic hovercraft. He finds himself aboard the cramped, cold, submarine-like space of the hovercraft, the *Nebuchadnezzar*. Neo blurrily awakes, and Morpheus whispers, "Welcome to the real world" (35:23 [33]).

Goal II—Postperennialism: A Strategy for Survival in the Desert of the Real

[You cannot change your cage. You have to change yourself.
—Neo (2:08.41 [125])]

What is this real world? In *The Matrix*'s "construct" scene, Morpheus asks Neo, "What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you feel, taste, smell, or see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain." He goes on to explain to Neo that he has "been living inside a dream world. . . . This is the world as it exists today." Morpheus turns and points off into the distance, where we see the long dead ruins of a city, and he says to Neo, "Welcome to the desert of the real" (40:15–41:16 [39]). Viewers seemed to be offered a dilemma. One can either be blissfully ignorant, a slave to illusionary, Matrix-like master narratives of late capitalism, or one can live skeptically in the ruined posthumanist world.²⁷ However, *The Matrix* offers the viewer a third path, a guide for spiritual emancipation in the desert of the real. The film ends with a scene that mirrors the opening sequence. The screen is filled with a pulsating cursor. A phone begins to ring, and the screen fills with the trace program. Over the image of the running program, Neo's voice tells us that "to be free, you cannot change your cage. You have to change yourself" (2:08.31–2:08.39 [125]). We dive through the numbers of the trace program and are sucked toward a tight constellation of stars. Neo tells us that "a different world is possible. A world of hope and peace." The stars transition into the holes of a phone's mouthpiece. Neo hangs up the phone, slides on a pair of sunglasses, and then blasts into the sky like a speeding bullet (2:08.41–2:09:17 [124–26]).

What kind of spiritual emancipation does this scene suggest? To articulate the Wachowskis' conception of salvation, we need to return to the "no-spoon" scene in particular, with its multiple, conflicting allusions.²⁸ On one level, the "no-spoon" statement denotes a famous saying by Zen Buddhist sixth patriarch, Hui Neng. Two monks are arguing about a flag. One says, "The flag is moving." The other says, "The wind is moving." The sixth patriarch happens to be passing by and states: "Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving."²⁹

At the same time, however, the replacement of the flag with a spoon undercuts the implicit authority of this reference to Buddhist koans because the spoon alludes to the trickery of spoon bending, which has become, due to the publicity in the 1970s surrounding magician Uri Geller, a common visual symbol for fraudulent paranormal ability.³⁰ A similarly playful skeptical "no-spoon" ethic is evident in the packaging of the "director's" commentaries for the DVDs of the "The Ultimate Matrix Collection." The Wachowskis feel that the best way for fans "to find an answer" to the film's meaning is to offer them two opposing tracks of commentary. The first track is by "the critics," Todd McCarthy and David Thomson, both of whom "kill the film for six hours." The second is by "the philosophers," Cornel West and Ken Wilber, "who enjoyed the film."³¹

As the Wachowskis maintain, "[t]he point," of the juxtaposition between the two tracks, "was not to suggest that one was right and was not." Like the "no-spoon" statement, the juxtaposed tracks are attempts to show that all metanarratives lie and that the curious can "make up their own damn mind."³² The Wachowskis' position is similar to the postmodern nominalist stance toward any metanarrative: those "global totalizing cultural narrative schemes that order and explain knowledge and experience."³³ In postmodernism, metanarratives depict "master" stories such as Christianity, the Enlightenment, Freudian theories, and Marxism, which are typically characterized by some form of legitimizing transcendent or universal truth. These master stories organize and have authority and thus subordinate *petits récits*, the multitude of small local narratives. As theorist Jean-François Lyotard argues, the defining condition of postmodernism is in fact "incredulity towards metanarratives."³⁴ In a similar fashion, the Wachowskis believe that since all systems are, in the end, simply another bad choice, one must change oneself.³⁵ In *The Matrix* they demonstrate this postmodern skepticism by making the "meatspace" of Zion not a spiritual Shangri-La but a dystopic, ruined, postapocalyptic world. As Sarah Worth writes in "The Paradox of Real Response to Neo-Fiction," "*The Matrix* suggests the 'real' reality is much worse than the illusion we live in."³⁶

The most developed version of such postmodern religions is the "integral thought movement," which seeks to go beyond the dogmas of both science and religion in order to form a spiritual understanding of the evolving relationship between humans and the universe.³⁷ That the Wachowskis are knowledgeable of at least the basics of integral thought is clear because they invited Ken Wilber, a prominent spokesperson for the integral thought movement, to be on "the philosophers'" commentary of *The Matrix* DVD in the "Ultimate Matrix Collection." Moreover, Larry Wachowski has read Wilber's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*.³⁸ Wilber follows what he calls neoperennial philosophy, which argues for a type of cosmic evolution through the unfolding of the "great chain of being."³⁹ He argues that individuals play a direct part in this process of spiritual growth and that all authentic religions are ultimately the same and can be mapped out through an "Integral post-metaphysics."⁴⁰

At first blush, it may seem that the emancipation that *The Matrix* advocates consists of this: If you cleanse your mind of all metanarratives, you will be set free. In perennial liberation strategies, if one wipes the mind clean of all culturally constructed systems, what remains is a perception of the true underlying reality. In *The Matrix*, the spiritual notion of "cleansing" can be traced to Aldous Huxley's short book *The Doors of Perception*. The book's title stems from a quote from William Blake's *A Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."⁴¹ *The Doors of Perception* is a detailed theorizing of Huxley's experience of mescaline, in which he argues that reality can be perceived only when we disintegrate the "cosy [sic] world of symbols." That the Wachowskis are familiar with *The Doors of Perception* is clear. In the scene in Neo's apartment, after the protagonist opens the door for the cyerpunk Choi, Neo asks, "You ever have the feeling that you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?" Choi

answers, "All the time. It's called mescaline and it's the only way to fly" (9:00-9:09 [11]).

The notion that, if one "cleansed one's perception" of all metanarratives, what would remain would be the ultimate truth stems from Huxley's "perennial philosophy," a term Huxley uses to designate a common, eternal set of beliefs—especially in contemplative and esoteric mystical practices—underlying all religions. While the term was used as early as the sixteenth century, perennial philosophy was not popularized until 1944 by Huxley's book *The Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley argues that all humans possess a capacity for intuitive perceptions of ultimate or absolute truth and that this perception is the final goal of human beings; in addition, its pursuit marks the core of all authentic religious practice. Accordingly, Huxley argues that if one jettisons religions' external trappings—what Max Müller has dismissed as "genuflections and candlesticks"—all religions are ultimately the same.

The difference between Huxley's perennialism and what I am calling postperennialism, however, is that Huxley still mystically argues for an ultimate reality beyond all humanly constructed cultures. Structurally, this is a stance similar to that of the Frankfurt School, which argues for a nonalienated level of cultural production. Following Vedantic Hinduism, Huxley argues that "that art thou," that our individual Atman is in reality the greater world soul of the Brahman.⁴² He writes, "Divining the One within and beyond the many, we find an intrinsic plausibility in any explanation of the diverse in terms of a single principle."⁴³ On the other hand, *The Matrix's* "red pill" stance is actually closer to the liquefying logic of capitalism, especially late capitalism. As Marx writes, "all fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned."⁴⁴ As in late-capitalistic society, in postperennialism, since all social structures are leveled, all that is left is the lone reified individual—no longer trapped in Weber's iron cage but quagmired in an infinite swamp of convenient but empty commodities, all available at the click of a mouse. As Larry Wachowski comments in a conversation with Ken Wilber, "This is very complicated, but essentially the Hegelian idea that the development of everything is leading towards the singularity of the individual, right?"⁴⁵

While an almost infinite number of groups fit under the category of postperennialists—from the joke religion of discordianism to the ultraorthodox Gardnerian Wiccans—all share three basic elements.⁴⁶ First is the notion that the universe is integrated and monistic. That is, as integral philosopher Ken Wilber argues, everything in the universe is part of the "Great Hierarchy of Being," and the core of the great contemplative religious traditions is the spiritual quest to become conscious of this fact.⁴⁷ Much like Wilber's vision of the universe, in the film the monistic nature of reality is demonstrated by the matrix's code itself—the neon-green alphanumeric data cascading down the screen. In the matrix everything is a code, all reality is merely the arrangement of computer instructions, and one of the powers that Neo receives as he pro-

ceeds along his spiritual journey is the ability to see the underlying grid of reality. For instance, after Neo has been brought back to life by Trinity's kiss, he is able to see through the curtain of the matrix: "For a moment, the walls, the floor, even the agents become a rushing stream of code" (2:05:26-2:05:38 [122]).

Second, for postperennialists, because all systems are cages, what remains constant across all traditions is the individual self, which is held to be the perfect, natural source of all things that are good. This is similar to capitalism's "elementary ideological effect," which reduces all social relations to the individual in order to make it appear obvious that people are autonomous selves who are possessed of a unique subjectivity that is the source of their actions and beliefs.⁴⁸ Much like perennialism, integral thought maintains that contemplative mystical practices are at the heart of all religions. As the authors of *God and the Evolving Universe* maintain, "[s]uch devotion, called *bhakti yoga* by Hindus is fundamental to Christian contemplative life, as well as to Jewish and Islamic mysticism."

Yet, unlike perennial practices, integral thought does not want to wipe away our everyday habits but "give us more command of habitual behaviors, promote access to our spiritual depths, and begin to reveal our deepest self within all mental and physical events."⁴⁹ Historically, one can see the relation between postperennialism and the ideology of late capitalism. As Paul Heelas maintains, "[i]n tandem with the triumphalist capitalism, which developed during the 1980s, increasing numbers of avowed New Agers have become active in the world of business."⁵⁰ Or from an ermic perspective, Phil Laut, author of *Money Is My Friend*, argues, "the more spiritual you are, the more you deserve prosperity."⁵¹ As such, the postperennialist practices that naturalize the individual self are radically different from traditional Asian wisdom traditions, whose practices are meant to overcome an attachment to the self, not to reify it.⁵²

Reflecting the ideology of the self, the purpose of postperennialism is to pursue personal growth. In *The Matrix*, that spirituality is about personal growth is seen through Neo's transformation into the One. As the Oracle says to Neo, after he has decided that he is not the One, "Sorry, kid. You got the gift, but it looks like you're waiting for something" (1:15:10-1:15:18 [73]). What Neo is waiting for is to believe in himself. For example, when Neo finally starts to overcome the agents, Morpheus says, "He's beginning to believe" (1:51:32 [112]). Such emphasis on personal growth leads to what Paul Heelas calls "self-religiosity," the belief that authentic religion is the language of the heart; furthermore, what a particular religious tradition says is neither orthodox nor the academic "exact truth."⁵³ Instead, for postperennialists, authentic religious practice is what makes your self feel "integrated."⁵⁴ That is, in what Steven Tipton calls the "expressive ethic," all dogmas and other encoded moralities of traditional religiosity count for nothing, and one should accept as genuine only what rings true to one's own inner self.⁵⁵ As Trinity says to Neo before he sees the Oracle, "the Matrix cannot tell you who you are" (1:08:43 [65]).

The third basic postperennialist belief is that authentic spirituality is not limited to any one tradition. Instead, each individual's personal religious practice should be assembled—like a trip through the supermarket—from those religious myths, practices, and symbols that work best for oneself. Ken Wilber calls the reliance on one tradition the “monological mode” and compares it unfavorably to the “translogical,” which seeks a nondual gnosis in the authentic core of all traditions.⁵⁶ As Adam Possamai argues, this leads to religious bricolage à la carte, “in which people no longer accept religious ‘set menus’ offered by traditional religions” but are more interested in constructing personal subjective mythologies.⁵⁷ The cultural buffet is clear in how the Wachowski brothers borrow from many religious traditions. In an interactive Internet chat, on November 6, 1999, a participant asked the Wachowskis, “Your movie has many and varied connections to myths and philosophies, Judeo-Christian, Egyptian, Arthurian, and Platonic, just to name those I’ve noticed. How much of that was intentional?” The Wachowskis answered, “All of it.”⁵⁸

Goal III—Postperennialism and the Late-Capitalistic Mode of Production

The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist.

—Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*

If the question *The Matrix* asks is what happens when alienated, mediated existence completely replaces an “unplugged” existence and the reality that the film illustrates is a ruined world of technological domination, then the historical condition that makes this possible is late capitalism. Fredrick Jameson argues in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that we are living in an age of simulacrum in which “the very memory of use value is effaced.”⁵⁹ Jameson’s description of contemporary society is similar to that of Jean Baudrillard, who maintains that in our late-capitalist society, reality has been replaced with symbols and signs—we live in a postmodern world in which the real territory has eroded and been replaced by a map of simulated images. According to Baudrillard (and not unlike Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*), in contemporary life, the signs that the media system controls are all one can know, and therefore all we think and feel is actually a simulation of reality. This prison of virtual reality is what the Wachowskis have in mind for the matrix. When Neo is visited at his apartment by cyberpunks in need of digitized information, he reaches inside a hollowed-out copy of Baudrillard’s *Simulations and Simulacra*.⁶⁰ The phrase “desert of the real” (discussed earlier) was also inspired by Baudrillard.⁶¹ The reference to *Simulations* is even clearer if we look at the 1997 draft of the screenplay. As in the earlier citation, the Wachowskis had inserted the following into Morpheus’s monologue: “As in Baudrillard’s vision, your whole life has been spent inside the map, not the territory.”⁶²

Our simulated lives, however, are neither something that appeared magically nor something that humanity consciously willed into existence. Instead, as Karl Marx writes in *A Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will . . . [t]he mode of production of material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.⁶³

How did we enter into this condition of postmodernity? When did it start?⁶⁴ In his work *Late Capitalism*, Ernest Mandel argues for three “long waves” in the development of capitalism.⁶⁵ First is market capitalism, which occurred from 1700 to 1850 and is characterized largely by the growth of industrial capital in domestic markets. Second is monopoly capitalism, which lasted until approximately the late 1960s and is characterized by the imperialistic development of international markets, as well as the exploitation of colonial territories. Third is late capitalism, which displays features such as Western deindustrialization, suburbanization, and a dramatic increase in flexible capital accumulation that leads to multinational corporations, globalized markets, and labor.⁶⁶ Fredrick Jameson argues that the postmodern turn toward the ultimate reality of pessimism stems from the conditions of intellectual labor imposed by the late-capitalist mode of production.⁶⁷ He maintains that postmodernism’s merging of all discourses into an undifferentiated whole is the result of globalized corporate capital’s colonization of the entire cultural sphere.⁶⁸ As in the matrix, from almost any point on the planet and through a network of constantly changing liquid nodes, each of us is a human battery whose very life powers the late-capitalistic system of shifting, increasingly flexible corporate structures of accumulation and modes of consumption.

Taking Marx’s argument that religious practice, along with other aspects of culture, reflects the historical mode of production, each of these periods of capital produces a different characteristic dominant religious form. As Max Weber has argued, market capitalism stemmed from the iron cage of Protestant, rule-based, rational control of the world, which tore individuals away from the premodern enchanted world.⁶⁹ In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber writes that, for the Puritans, “no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces on salvation should creep in.”⁷⁰ With the dominance of capital and the consequent increase in imperial British power, perennialism—as the Protestantization of other religions from colonized regions—became the dominant religious mode. As Georg Simmel argues, this period witnessed the emergence of a “post-Christian religiosity.”⁷¹ However, in the same way that European culture was used to structure the content of non-Western cultures, it was an idealized Protestantism that provided the underlying organizational structure of the world’s religions.

With the shift to late capitalism, the most obvious aspect is that the logic of the marketplace has been extended into all facets of culture. Like Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, all life has been repackaged for sale. Comparing such consumption to Max Weber's concept of bureaucratization, George Ritzer has described it as McDonaldization, "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the world."⁷² In this hypercapitalistic McWorld, there is a general loss of faith in any grand narrative, and people suffer intense feelings of fragmentation, pluralism, and dissolving that mirrors the bewildering diversification in the liquid modernity of contemporary consumer society itself. As Zygmunt Bauman writes, the "Liquid modern" is a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines."⁷³ The "no-spoon" ethic that *The Matrix* and other postperennialist texts profess is a hyper-Protestantized strategy for allowing the "individual" to survive in this desert of the real. The symptom that postperennialism alleviates is the late-capitalist alienation created by the totalizing global system that melts any permanent social identity. As Jean Baudrillard writes in *America*, "you are delivered from all depth... a brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality... an outer hyperspace, with no origin, no reference-points."⁷⁴

Conclusion: The Red Pill as Poison or Cure?

There is no spoon.
—Neo (1:45:36 [102])

Near the conclusion of *The Matrix*, in order for the machines to learn the encrypted codes to the mainframe of Zion and thereby destroy the last remaining free human city, Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) attempts to break Morpheus's mind. To save their leader, Neo and Trinity return to the matrix and storm the military-controlled government building in which Morpheus is imprisoned. After an intense fight scene, Neo and Trinity are precariously suspended above an elevator shaft. Neo looks down the long, dark throat of the shaft, takes a deep breath, and says, "There is no spoon." He whips out his gun and shoots the cable. The counterweight plummets, yanking them upward. The elevator falls away beneath them and hits the bottom, spreading out a massive wave of flame (1:41:05–1:45:36 [101–102]).

Read Mercher Schuchardt writes, "many people watching *The Matrix* see only the 'content'... while missing the serious sermon."⁷⁵ What is the film's sermon? What is the big question the Wachowski brothers are asking? They are infamously silent about this and refuse to comment on the film's ultimate meanings. As Larry Wachowski states, "you don't want [the audience] to rely on somebody to tell them what it is, or... it's like, the whole nature of the movie is exactly that... inspect it and pursue it yourself."⁷⁶ Yet, just because the Wachowskis are reticent about the meaning of their film does not mean

that *The Matrix* does not have an ideology. As Louis Giannetti writes, "every film has a slant, a given ideological perspective that privileges certain characters, institutions, behaviors and motives."⁷⁷

In this chapter I have demonstrated that *The Matrix* is a sermon in postperennialism, that wide spectrum of alternative spiritualities that displays the religious logic of late capitalism. As I have shown, postperennialists pursue their spirituality through the consumption of consumer goods, believe that the universe is integrated and monistic, have faith that the purpose of life is personal spiritual growth, and act as if authentic spirituality should be assembled from all possible religious traditions. Pedagogically, an instructor of religion and film can use *The Matrix* to illustrate the culture of late capitalism and its relation to postperennialism's skeptical "no-spoon" ethic, which justifies the colonization of others' traditions through the naturalization of the "individual." However, the most important question to pose to the students is whether the Wachowskis' sermon, the ideological stance of postperennialism, should be considered a cure or poison. Does swallowing the red pill heal the liquid life of late capitalistic existence? To compare and continue the pharmaceutical metaphors, is *The Matrix* a cinematic dose of Huxley's mescaline, which awakens the viewers by cleansing our doors of perception, or is it Marx's opium, which relieves the symptoms of suffering but only deepens the actual causes?⁷⁸

For Neo, dangling perilously from the elevator's cable, the pondering of the late capitalistic koan, "there is no spoon," gives him the courage to excel within the world of the matrix. What the "no-spoon" religious logic creates is faith in oneself, which is necessary because the modern liquid-life logic of late capitalism has all but dissolved all other social forms. As such, one could argue that postperennialism is the ideal salve or, to continue the pharmaceutical metaphor, the perfect OxyContin for a late-capitalistic, postmodern society. Yet, because its practices consist of the consumption of commodities in the form of products, services, and experiences, postperennialism is not opposed to late capitalism but rather hides a liquid-modern wolf in the sheep's clothing of other traditions.⁷⁹ Such spiritual repackaging might take the form of the appropriation of indigenous cultures, historical periods, or popular culture.⁸⁰ Using this spiritual logic, practitioners describe their spirituality as a unique, personalized collage that consists of bits and pieces of a seemingly infinite number of religious traditions.⁸¹

Yet, as one of my students skeptically asked the last time I taught Marx, "If you are in pain, what is wrong with opium?" If we take a step back and reflect meaningfully on this question, we see that, although opium relieves pain, it causes hallucinations, stupor, addiction, and ultimately acceptance of suffering. Accordingly, in Marx's use of the metaphor, religious practices relieve the symptoms but do not eliminate the cause. Still, just as the pain that opiates relieve is real, the distress that postperennialism relieves is also real. Like Neo, dangling precariously from a disintegrating lifeline, the inhabitants of late capitalism need all of the resources they can muster so as not to be crushed under the cresting wave of liquid modernity. Nevertheless, postperennialism is

not an alternative to, or even an escape from, late capitalism but rather a strategy to manage its alienating effects. That is, postperennialism does not clear culture away so as to free perception; instead, through cultural strip-mining, consumes cultures and repackages them into bite-sized nuggets of personal mythology. Postperennialism is not an alternative to late capitalism but a reification of the globalized, consuming self. In fact, *The Matrix* leaves unquestioned the very thing that is most in need of problematizing in late-capitalistic society. That is, it reifies an individual bounded Self and the illusion of freedom that it entails. Rather than being liberated, postperennialism makes the commodification of life and the corporate colonization of life just a little less painful.

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NOTES

1. My interpretation is based upon the original *The Matrix* (1999) DVD (Warner Bros., 2001); the section of the film referred to is indicated by the time signature (e.g., 1:10:57-1:12:23). Along with the DVD I employ *The Matrix*'s "numbered shooting script," dated Mar. 29, 1998; the page number of the script follows the time signature (e.g., [69-70]). I also utilize the "Ultimate Matrix Collection" (Warner Bros., 2004), which includes *The Matrix Reload* (2003), *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), *The Animatrix* (2003), and other supplemental discs. In addition to the 1998 script, I refer to the 1996 and 1997 drafts. All of these can be downloaded from http://www.horrorlair.com/movies/the_matrix.html (accessed Nov. 27, 2007). The scripts for *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions* are also available on this site.
2. Coproduced by Warner Brothers and the Australian Village Roadshow Pictures, *The Matrix* earned more than \$456 million in worldwide sales. The film is the jewel of the *Matrix* franchise, a group of entertainment vehicles that includes the other two films of the trilogy, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003; 138 min.) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003; 129 min.), as well as the collection of animated shorts known as *The Animatrix* (2003; 89 min.). Along with the films appeared a number of video games, *Enter the Matrix* (2003), the two MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games), *The Matrix Online* (2005), and *The Matrix: The Path of Neo* (2005).
3. On Plato see Stephen Fuller, *Beyond the Matrix: Revelations and Revelations* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 19. The following works can all be found in *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, ed. William Erwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2002): On Kant see James Lawler, "We Are (the) One! Kant Explains How to Manipulate the Matrix," 138-52. On Dostoyevsky see Thomas S. Hibbs, "Notes from the Underground: Nihilism and the Matrix," 155-68. On Sartre see Jennifer L. McMahon, "Popping a Bitter Pill: Existential Authenticity in *The Matrix* and *Nausea*," 166-77. See

Jorge Gracia and Jonathan J. Sanford, "The Metaphysics of *The Matrix*," 55-65. On Socrates see William Irwin, "Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates," 5-15.

4. For Buddhism see James L. Ford, "Buddhism, Christianity, and *The Matrix*: The Dialectic of Myth-making in Contemporary Cinema," *Journal of Religion and Film* 4(2) (2000) (<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/thematrix.htm> [accessed Nov. 27, 2007]). Ford argues that the film embodies the Yogacara school of Buddhism, which asserts that all things are only mind. Ford also has a later article, "Buddhism, Mythology, and the Matrix," in *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in The Matrix*, ed. David Gerrold (Dallas: Benbella, 2002), 125-44. The problem with Ford's work, however, is that the matrix maintains a duality between the real world and the simulated world, which Yogacara does not. Cf. Hattori Masaaki, "Yogacara," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 15. Also for Buddhism cf. Read Mercer Schuchardt, "What Is the Matrix?" in *Taking the Red Pill*, ed. Gerrold, 9, 1-21. Michael Brannigan, "There Is No Spoon: A Buddhist Mirror," in *Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Erwin, 101-10 (Chicago: Open Court, 2002). For Christianity see Chris Seay and Greg Garrett, *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix* (Colorado Springs: Piñon Press, 2003).
5. See Kelley L. Ross, "There Is No Spoon: *The Matrix*," (<http://www.friesian.com/matrix.htm> [accessed Nov. 27, 2007]).
6. Richard Corliss, "Popular Metaphysics," *Time* (April 19, 1999) (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,990761,00.html> [accessed Nov. 27, 2007]).
7. Commentary by Carrie-Anne Moss (Trinity), visual effects supervisor John Gaeta, and editor Zach Staenberg. *The Matrix* (original DVD, 1999) (31:23-31:50).
8. See note 6.
9. See note 7.
10. See Lyle Zynnda, "Was Cypher Right? Part II: The Nature of Reality and Why It Matters." In *Taking the Red Pill*, ed. Gerrold, 33-43. Gerald Erion and Barry Smith, "Skepticism, Morality, and *The Matrix*," in *Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Erwin, 16-27.
11. Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed* (Toronto: Harper and Collins, 2004).
12. *Taking the Red Pill*, ed. Gerrold, 5.
13. See Daphne Francis, "Crystal Balls," *Trouble and Strife* 22 (Winter): 45-47. cited in Paul Heelas, "The New Age in Cultural Context: The Premodern, the Modern, and the Postmodern," *Religion* 23 (1993): 103.
14. I developed this term from the work of Adam Possamai, especially his article "Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Culture and Religion* 4(1) (2003): 33. Possamai uses the term *Perennialism* to differentiate this post-modern religiosity from the perennial philosophy of Aldous Huxley. I use the term *postperennialism* because I do not see a difference so much as a telescoping of perennial philosophy's religious logic. In short, if perennial philosophy is the religious logic of modern capitalism, postperennialism is the religious logic of late capitalism.
15. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).
16. See Magical Gifts New Age and Metaphysical Shop! (<http://www.magical-gifts.com/> [accessed Nov. 27, 2007]).
17. Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." In *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844) (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm> [accessed Nov. 27, 2007]).

18. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Canberra: Treason Press, 2002), 11 (italics in original).
19. *Ibid.*, 7.
20. Gregory Price Grieve, *Rethorizing Religion in Nepal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 20.
21. "Matrix" in the *Net Dictionary* (<http://www.netdictionary.com/m.html>) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
22. The cascade includes mirror images of Japanese half-width Katakana characters and Latin letters and numerals. Katakana, used mainly for writing foreign words, is one of the three Japanese writing scripts. In the film, this cascade of data is an homage to the 1995 Japanese anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995).
23. "Ennnnnnnnnnnnnnn . . . beepboopbeepboopbeepboop . . . brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . . <click> Screeeeeeeeeeeeee! SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! Chrunch-BeCrackleBeCrunch." "Modem," in the *Net Dictionary* (<http://www.netdictionary.com/m.html>) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
24. Mercer Schuchardt, "What Is the Matrix?" 13.
25. "The Many Meanings of *The Matrix*—Larry Wachowski and Ken Wilber" (<http://www.kenwilber.com/blog/show/230>) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
26. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).
27. See Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002).
28. On a critique of the idea that films such as *The Matrix* are liberating see Heath and Potter, *Rebel Sell*.
29. "Case 29: Not the Wind, Not the Flag," in *Mumonkan*. The *Mumonkan* is a collection of forty-eight koans, compiled and provided with commentaries and verses by Mumon Ekai. It was first published in 1228 (<http://perso.ens-lyon.fr/eric.boix/Koan/Mumonkan/index.html>) [accessed Dec. 5, 2007].
30. H. M. Collins, "Editorial: Uri Geller," *Philosophy* 49(188) (1974): 121. T. J. Pinch, "Private Science and Public Knowledge: The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of the Claims of the Paranormal and Its Use of the Literature," *Social Studies of Science* 14(4) (1984): 521–46. To view a film of Geller's technique see <http://www.skepticreport.com/psychicpowers/urispooon.htm> [accessed May 14, 2007].
31. Wachowski brothers, "An Introduction from the Wachowski Brothers," in *The Ultimate Matrix Collection* (booklet; Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2004).
32. *Ibid.*
33. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998), 17.
34. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
35. Gregory Bassham approaches the film's religious neopluralism. However, he misses the point because he simply gives up trying to understand it. As he writes, "while fashionable [the film's religion stance] is very difficult to make sense of, or to defend." Gregory Bassham, "The Religion of the Matrix and the Problems of Pluralism," in *Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Erwin, 125.
36. In *Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Erwin, 178.
37. See James Redfield, Michael Murphy, and Sylvia Timbers, *God and the Evolving Universe: The Next Step in Human Evolution* (New York: Tarcher, 2003).
38. Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (New York: Shambhala, 1995). Larry Wachowski's reading of the book is mentioned in "The Many Meanings of the Matrix—Larry Wachowski and Ken Wilber" (<http://www.kenwilber.com/blog/show/230>) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
39. "The Kosmos according to Ken Wilber: A Dialogue with Robin Kornman" (http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2059) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
40. Ken Wilber online (<http://wilber.shambhala.com/index.cfm/>) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
41. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945).
42. *Ibid.*, 1–21.
43. *Ibid.*, 5.
44. *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) (<http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>) [accessed May 17, 2007].
45. See note 25.
46. Gregory Price Grieve, "Imagining a Virtual Religious Community: Neopagans on the Internet," *Chicago Anthropology Exchange* 7 (1995): 98–132.
47. Ken Wilber, "The Integral Agenda," in *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* (New York: Random House, 1999), 202–14. In the conclusion to *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995) Wilber writes: "See the Kosmos dance in Emptiness; see the play of light in all creatures great and small; see finite worlds sing and rejoice in the play of the very Divine, floating on a Glory that renders each transparent; flooded by a Joy that refuses time or terror, that undoes the madness of the loveless self and buries it in splendor. Indeed, indeed: Let the self-contraction relax into the empty ground of its own awareness, and let it there quietly die." Ken Wilber online (<http://wilber.shambhala.com/index.cfm/>) [accessed May 21, 2007].
48. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 161.
49. "Basic Principles of Transformative Practice," on [Beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/101/story_10100_1.html) [accessed Nov. 27, 2007].
50. "The New Age in Cultural Context: The Premodern, the Modern, and the Postmodern," *Religion* 23 (1993): 106.
51. Paul Laut, *Money Is My Friend* (Cincinnati: Vivation, 1989), 14.
52. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004).
53. Paul Heelas, "The New Age in Cultural Context: The Premodern, the Modern, and the Postmodern," *Religion* 23 (1993): 104. See also "Californian Self Religions and Socializing the Subject," in *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society*, ed. Eileen Barker, 69–85 (New York: Mellen Press, 1982); "The Limits of Consumption and Post-modern 'Religion' of the New Age," in *The Authority of the Consumer*, ed. Nicholas Abercrombie and Nigel Whiteley, 102–18 (London: Routledge, 1993); "The Sacralization of the Self in New Age Capitalism," in *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*, ed. Nicholas Abercrombie and Alan Warde, 139–66 (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1992).
54. Marion Bowman, "Reinventing the Celts," *Religion* 23 (1993): 147–56.
55. Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversation and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
56. Wilber, *Marriage of Sense and Soul*, 36–39.
57. Adam Possamai, "Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Culture and Religion* 4(1) (2003): 35.

58. Matrix Virtual Theater, Wachowski brothers transcript, Nov. 6, 1999 (<http://www.warnervideo.com/matrixevents/wachowski.html> [accessed May 15, 2007]).
59. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 18.
60. Originally published as *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981). Available in English as *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).
61. Baudrillard himself discounts the connection between his philosophy and *The Matrix*. As he states in an interview for *Le Nouvel Observateur*:
- There is a misunderstanding of course, that is the reason why I previously hesitated to talk about *The Matrix*. The Wachowski staff did contact me after the first episode to involve me in the following ones, but that really was not conceivable! [Laugh] What we have here is essentially the same misunderstanding as with the simulationist artists in New York in the '80s. These people take the hypothesis of the virtual as a fact and carry it over to visible fantasies. But the primary characteristic of this universe lies precisely in the inability to use categories of the real to speak about it. (http://www.empyree.org/divers/Matrix-Baudrillard_english.html [accessed Dec. 5, 2007])
62. In the film's 1997 draft the statement continues: "This is Chicago as it exists today . . . The desert of the real. The average temperature in Chicago these days is minus eighty degrees Celsius. Of course, the wind chill makes it feel like minus one-twenty."
63. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 389.
64. David Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, argues that the precise space-time for the end of modernity was 3:32 p.m. CST on July 15, 1972, in Saint Louis, Missouri, with the dynamiting of the modernist Pruitt-Igoe housing development (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990, 39). For a sociological study of Pruitt-Igoe see Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls: Black Families in a Federal Slum* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).
65. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres (London: Humanities Press, 1975).
66. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*.
67. Jameson, *Postmodernism*.
68. Fredric Jameson, "Fear and Loathing in Globalization," *New Left Review* 23 (2003); <http://newleftreview.org/A2472> (accessed Dec. 5, 2007).
69. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, 1958).
70. As Marx writes in *The German Ideology*, "The fact is that social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals as they really are, as they operate and produce materially. The same applies to mental productions like politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. It is real active men who are the producers of their conceptions" (chap. 4.a.1) (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/choia.htm> [accessed May 15, 2007]).
71. Georg Simmel, "The Crisis of Culture," in *Georg Simmel: Sociologist and European*, trans. Peter Lawrence (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), 259.
72. George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (New York: Pine Forge, 1993), 1 (cf. "McDonaldization," <http://www.mcdonaldization.com/> [accessed Dec. 5, 2007]).
73. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2006), 1.
74. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988), 124. See also pages 1-13, 66-71, and 123-126. Also see *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
75. "What Is the Matrix?" In *Taking the Red Pill*, ed. Gerrold, 10.
76. "The Many Meanings of the Matrix" (<http://www.matrixfans.net/symbolism/meanings.php> [accessed May 15, 2007]).
77. Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2001).
78. My thoughts on this spring from the essay "Plato's Pharmacy," in which Jacques Derrida argues that the *Phaedrus* hinges on the translation of a single word, *pharmakon*, which in Greek can mean both "poison" and "cure." In *La dissémination*, trans. Barbara Johnson in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 63-171.
79. Zygmunt Bauman, "Postmodern Religion?" in *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity*, 55-78.
80. D. Cuthbert and M. Grossman, "Trading Places: Locating the Indigenous in the New Age," *Thamyris* 3(1) 1996: 18-36. Anne-Marie Gallagher, "Weaving a Tangled Web? Pagan Ethics and Issues of History, 'Race' and Ethnicity in Pagan Identity," *Diskus* 6 (<http://web.uni-marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/gallagher.html> [accessed Dec. 5, 2007]). James Lewis, "Approaches to the Study of the New Age Movement," in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. J. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, 1-13 (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).
81. Jon Block, *New Spirituality, Self, and Belonging: How New Agers and Neo-pagans Talk* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998).

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*The manuscript for this volume happened to be completed
a couple of days after the death of Ingmar Bergman. A
classroom screening of Bergman's The Seventh Seal my
freshman year of college had a profound impact on me.
Having come to college from a small farming town in
Idaho, I had no idea such a movie was possible. My now
deep and abiding interest in the connection between re-
ligion and film started with that screening. I dedicate this
volume to the memory of Ingmar Bergman.*