There are itinerant, ambulant sciences that consist in following a flow in a vectorial field . . .

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

No single word, neither substantive or verb, no domain, or specialty alone characterizes, at least for the moment, the nature of my work. I only describe relationships. For the moment, let's be content with saying it's "a general theory of relations." Or "a philosophy of prepositions."

Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*

Skim the sections highlighted in green. - JL

CONFLUENCES

Toward a Theory of Religion

In this chapter, I meet my role-specific obligation to reflect on the field's constitutive term by offering a definition of religion, a positioned sighting that highlights movement and relation. This definition, which draws on aquatic and spatial tropes, is empirical in the sense that it illumines what I observed among Cubans in Miami and stipulative in that I think it might prove useful for interpreting practices in other times and places: *Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.*

This definition, like most others, is hardly transparent. I doubt that, upon reading it, you thought to yourself: Well, thanks for clearing that up. Offering a dense definition of this complex term doesn't end my professional obligations or settle the issue. There is much more to say,

and I try to say it in these last three chapters. Attending to each word and phrase, here I explain my choice of tropes and lay out some of the theoretical commitments inscribed in this definition.

Religions. Readers will notice that in my definition I shift from the singular to the plural, marking the boundaries of *religions,* not *religion.* That's not because I want to resist talk about the field's constitutive term, as I hope I've made clear, but rather to emphasize that interpreters—even armchair theorists—never encounter religion-in-general. There are only situated observers encountering particular practices performed by particular people in particular contexts. So even if I suggest that this definition might have interpretive power for the study of religion in a wide range of times and places—though not "universally"—it is never more (or less) than a sighting from one shifting site that might offer an illuminating angle of vision at another site.

Confluences. As I moved back and forth between definition and theory, I pondered which orienting tropes might be most illuminating. I considered the dozen I outlined in Chapter 2, as well as many others. To make sense of what I encountered at the Miami shrine I looked for metaphors, and philosophical and religious frameworks, that highlighted movement and relation.

There are some resources for reimagining religion as dynamic and relational. Philosophical reflections inspired by religious traditions, for example, Buddhism, offer some help. In the *Mahāvastu,* the Buddha affirms that all reality is constantly changing or impermanent *(anitya)* and empty of any enduring and substantial reality *(anātman).* Other Buddhist notions—including dependent co-origination and Indra's Jewel Net—provide resources for thinking about the interrelatedness of all things. The doctrine of dependent co-origination *(pratītya-samutpāda),* which might be described as inter-becoming, traces a circle of twelve interrelated factors that sustain the ongoing flux of human existence through birth, death, and rebirth. The Jewel Net of Indra has been a fa-

In the twentieth century several other thinkers who turned to mathematics and physics as much as to psychology, biology, and geology rooted their philosophical systems in similar insights. The mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who directly endorsed Heraclitus' view by suggesting that "the flux of things is one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system," produced a new lexicon of technical terms—*actual occasion, prehension,* and *nexus*—to replace static and essentialist notions of "substance-quality" with "description of dynamic process." Whitehead acknowledged his debt to another philosopher, Henri Bergson, the Nobel Prize–winning French thinker who proposed *élan vital* as the central category in his dynamic scheme and argued "there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement." "What is real," Bergson suggested, "is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition." Later in the twentieth century Whitehead and Bergson were joined by other theorists with very different interests who also emphasized dynamism and interdependence, including Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. Communication studies specialist and cultural theorist Brian Massumi, an interpreter of the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, also has advocated a "Bergsonian revolution" that would emphasize "movement" and "relation."[3]

Pointing to terms such as *field, force,* and *chaos,* Massumi has suggested that the most useful concepts for a dynamic and relational philosophical perspective are "almost without exception products of mathematics or the sciences." Yet other contemporary theorists from the social sciences and humanities have come to celebrate movement and relation for different reasons—because they have tried to make sense of transnationalism. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has pointed to "global cultural flows." Marcus Doel has noted that geographers "now routinely speak of 'spaces of flows'" to interpret "the flows of money, desire, capital, pollution, information, resources, ideas, images, people, etcetera." Anthropologist Anna Tsing has proposed we speak of *movements*—in the sense of both social movements and the movements of

products, ideas, and people. Taking *traveling* as a root metaphor and highlighting the movement of peoples, anthropologist James Clifford has suggested we talk about *translocal culture.* Historian Paul Carter has proposed *a migrant perspective.* In a similar way, cultural studies scholar Iain Chambers has suggested *migrancy* as a useful metaphor, since it "involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation." In Chapter 1, as I explored the nature of theory, I emphasized a related theme, itinerancy, and here I have in mind that image, as well as these other Asian and Western resources for putting *religion* in motion.[4]

There are other possible metaphors that signal movement. For example, some religion scholars have turned to the metaphor of a *system,* as I have noted. And in mathematics and the natural sciences, *system* does refer to disorder and dynamics as well as to order and stability. In that idiom we can talk about dynamic systems. Yet the underlying image is still one of distinct parts coming together to form a coherent whole. And, as anthropologist Sally Engle Merry noted about the term *culture,* "classic conceptions of bounded, coherent, stable, and integrated systems clearly are inadequate." To avoid those possible misunderstandings of *religion,* then, I searched multiple academic fields for alternatives to *system.* Bruno Latour's proposal, for instance, has much to offer: "To shuttle back and forth, we rely on the notion of translation or *network.*" That term is, Latour argued, "more supple than the notion of system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity." As Mark C. Taylor has persuasively argued, this image is especially compelling in interpreting contemporary culture, what Taylor and others call "network culture." French sociologist and social theorist Michel de Certeau has offered an even more compelling alternative, one that resonates with scientific idioms but more clearly marks religion as dynamic. "Generally speaking, the cultural operation might be represented as a *trajectory* relating to the places that determine its conditions of possibility." "Thus," Certeau con-

tinues, "cultural operations are movements." The English word relates to the French *trajectoire,* "conveying through or over." It takes its meaning here from usage in physics (the path of a wave or body moving under the action of a force) and mathematics (a curve or surface passing through a space). James Clifford tried to make a similar point when he turned to *travel* and *routes* as orienting metaphors for understanding theory and culture. The term *trajectory,* however, folds into it these references to the movement of peoples across boundaries, but is a bit more elastic as it expands to more easily include the artifacts, practices, and forces (agency changing the momentum of a body) that cross temporal and spatial boundaries.[5]

These interpretive categories—*network, system, movement, migrancy,* and *travel*—each have some advantages, and I use Certeau's *trajectory* as a synonym to point to religions' dynamism. I decided, however, that two other orienting metaphors are most useful for analyzing what religion is and what it does: spatial metaphors (*dwelling* and *crossing*) signal that religion is about finding a place and moving across space, and aquatic metaphors (*confluences* and *flows*) signal that religions are not reified substances but complex processes. I say more about those spatial metaphors below. Here I analyze the first key term in my definition: *confluences.*

The metaphor, taken from physics, suggests that religions are *flows*—analogous to movements of electric charges, solids, gases, or liquids. If we are trying to formulate a theory that accounts for the dynamics as well as the statics of religion, I suggest, it can be especially helpful to turn to fluid mechanics and aquatic metaphors, applying what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called a "hydraulic model" from the "itinerant, ambulant sciences." As with scientists who study hydrodynamics, interpreters of religion "follow a flow in a vectorial field." Or to turn to Bruno Latour's explanation of his actor-network theory, which he designed to interpret both natural forces and cultural forms, we need "a theory of space and fluids circulating." So the picture of religious history that I'm drawing is not that of self-contained traditions chugging

along parallel tracks. To return to the aquatic metaphor, each religion is a flowing together of currents—some enforced as "orthodox" by institutions—traversing multiple fields, where other religions, other transverse confluences, also cross, thereby creating new spiritual streams.[6]

If this aquatic metaphor avoids essentializing religious traditions as static, isolated, and immutable substances, and so moves toward more satisfying answers to questions about how religions relate to one another and transform each other through contact, it also allows a preliminary answer to the question about how religion relates to economy, society, and politics. This question has attracted scholars' attention since the nineteenth century: is religion *sui generis?* Is religion "of its own kind"? As with most questions, the answer depends on what we mean. If we are asking if scholars are justified in marking religion's boundaries by defining and theorizing their field's constitutive term, then religion is *sui generis* in that weak sense of the term, as are other constitutive terms—culture, space, music, and literature. However, I reject strong versions of the *sui generis* argument: humans do not have a distinct "faculty of faith," as Max Müller claimed; "special revelation" does not set some religions apart, as Hendrik Kraemer argued; the feeling of the "numinous," as Rudolf Otto proposed, does not make religion "qualitatively *sui generis*." At the same time, religions cannot be reduced to economic forces, social relations, or political interests, although the mutual intercausality of religion, economy, society, and politics means that religious traditions, as confluences of organic-cultural flows, always emerge from—to again use aquatic images—the swirl of transfluvial currents. The transfluence of religious and nonreligious streams propels religious flows.[7]

If this talk about *confluence* and *transfluence* opens new angles of vision—and I think it does—it is important to acknowledge that there are limits to the interpretive elasticity of the metaphor *flow.* Tsing has suggested that we replace *flow* with *movement,* because the former does not seem to call our attention to the personal, and she wants to highlight social movements. So perhaps here is a blind spot, or at least a site along

though religions do transform the built environment. I have in mind much more dynamic images. Imagine the wispy smoke left by a skywriter, the trail of an electron, the path of a snowball down a steep icy hill, or the rippled wake left by a speeding boat. Whatever else religions do, they move across time and space. They are not static. And they have effects. They leave traces. They leave trails. Sometimes those trails are worth celebrating: not only Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Deep North,* but also the annual dancing procession to honor Saint Willibrord that has wound through the cobblestone streets of Echternach, Luxembourg, at least since the mid-sixteenth century, or Abū 'Abdallah ibn Battuta's fourteenth-century wanderings from Fez to Peking and the tracings he left behind in his *rihla,* the multivolume account of that Muslim's twenty-nine years of travel. Sometimes trails are sites for mourning: the paths worn away by Jews fleeing the medieval Spanish Inquisition or the Cherokee's westward "trail of tears," prompted by the United States' policy of forced "removal," which was supported by a taxonomy of religions that classified indigenous peoples as "lower," as heathens and barbarians (Figure 5). So this term, sacroscapes, invites scholars to attend to the multiple ways that religious flows have left traces, transforming peoples and places, the social arena and the natural terrain.[10]

Organic-cultural flows. If religions can be imagined as flows, what kind of flows? I suggest that these flows are spatial and temporal and—as this phrase in my definition signals—organic as well as cultural. These flows involve, as I will explain, both neural pathways in brains and ritual performances in festivals.

Religious flows—and the traces they leave—move through time and space. They are horizontal, vertical, and transversal movements. They are movements through time, for example, as one generation passes on religious gestures to the next: this is how we do it, this is how we offer *pūjā* to Vishṇu or make the sign of the cross. And religious flows move across varied "glocalities," simultaneously local and global spaces, as for example when missionaries carry their faith from one land to an-

other. In other words, flows, or sacroscapes, are historical as well as geographical. They change over time and move across space. To signal this, I turn to adjectives I coined in *Our Lady of the Exile—translocative* and *transtemporal*—and a term I have borrowed from literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, *chronotopic*. Sacred flows cross space-time. In the analysis that follows there is always the implied hyphen, even if I appeal more to spatial than to temporal tropes.[11]

Religions also are simultaneously individualistic and collective. We should combine the perspectives of, for example, William James and Emile Durkheim. As philosopher Charles Taylor noted in his analysis of "the Jamesian view of religious life," James claimed that "there are people who have an original, powerful religious experience, which then gets communicated through some kind of institution; it gets handed on to others, and they tend to live it in a kind of secondhand way." In this view, institutions play a "secondary role." And, at least in his *Varieties of Religious Experience,* James acknowledged but minimized the ways that culturally shared linguistic categories and institutionally transmitted practices shape individual experience. In the same way, as reviewers began to note soon after *Elementary Forms* first appeared, the Durkheimian view "prejudices the investigator in favor of the social elements in religion and at the expense of the individual elements." Here too an inclusive definition answers an either-or question with a both-and. We, once again, invoke the hyphen. Religions are always both solitary and social.[12]

And there are other hyphens to invoke: *mind-body* and *nature-culture*. To say that religions are individual as well as collective does not go far enough, since that formulation does not highlight the ways that those individual processes are biological as well as cultural. To signal this, I talk about religions as *organic-cultural* flows, but that does not mean I agree with accounts that reduce religion to *only* neurons firing. Religions, and other cultural forms, are about neurons firing, but no satisfying account of what they are and what they do can stop there. So the anthropologist Dan Sperber was right when he suggested that inter-

To say that religions are organic-cultural flows, then, is to suggest they are confluences of organic channels and cultural currents that conjoin to create institutional networks that, in turn, prescribe, transmit, and transform tropes, beliefs, values, emotions, artifacts, and rituals.[15]

But why do these religious flows exert such a hold on devotees, and how are sacroscapes distinguishable from other cultural trajectories? The next two phrases in the definition—*intensify joy and confront suffering* and *human and suprahuman forces*—propose answers to those questions.

Intensify joy and confront suffering. This phrase reaffirms what I have suggested above in my analysis of religious flows—that religion involves emotion. Recent research on emotion in a number of fields—from neuroscience to anthropology to philosophy—varies on the question of whether it is an organic universal process or a culturally relative practice. Scholars who tend toward the view that emotions are cross-cultural universals have identified sentiments that seem to be labeled and expressed in multiple times and places. Building on Charles Darwin's classic study *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals,* Paul Ekman has claimed that there are six common human emotions; using an analysis of language, Anna Wierzbicka has counted eleven "emotional universals." Scholars who lean toward the other end of the continuum point to the cultural and historical variations in the ways that humans label and experience emotions. They emphasize the variety of culturally constructed and historically variant "feeling rules": for example, Jean Briggs's ethnography of the Utku Eskimo suggested they do not have an equivalent of *anger,* and studies of the Ifaluk of the Caroline Islands proposed that *fago,* an emotion that combines compassion, love, and sadness, has no obvious parallel in other cultures.[16]

My own view again invokes the hyphen. Although a convincing synthesis has not yet appeared, it seems that emotions are *organic-cultural* processes that have a biological basis but vary across cultures. Neurological and physiological processes set certain constraints, but cultural

practices—including religious practices—generate emotional idioms and rules that frame affective life. Religions label, prescribe, and cultivate some emotions and obscure, condemn, and redirect others. For example, in some forms of Christianity regret—framed as guilt for sin—is valued as a necessary condition for any genuine turning of the heart to God; on the other hand, Sōtō Zen Buddhists might be told to notice the arising of regret—and all other emotions—but exhorted to put it out of mind by returning to focus on the breath. So even when traditions name similar emotions they encode them differently. Affect also varies within religious traditions and across time. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that Cuban American Catholicism at the Miami shrine during the 1990s was most fundamentally about sadness. As many devotees signaled to me as their eyes filled with tears or as they actually began to cry, their piety was about the naming and overcoming of the sadness prompted by the dislocation of exile. In that sense, the emotional coding of religious practices among Cuban American Catholics might have more in common with the piety of other diasporic groups than with that of other Catholics in other times and places. And religions mediate a wide range of emotions—not only sadness and joy but also Schleiermacher's absolute dependence and Kongzi's filial sentiments as well as shame, love, anger, contentment, awe, and fear. To suggest that religions *intensify joy and confront suffering,* then, is shorthand for saying this: they provide the lexicon, rules, and expression for many different sorts of emotions, including those framed as most positive and most negative, most cherished and most condemned.[17]

In that sense, this phrase not only reaffirms that religions are about emotion as much as cognition, feeling as much as thinking, but it also points to why religions are satisfying to adherents. I don't speculate about the "origin" of religion, a long-standing preoccupation of religion's interpreters. If we mean by that term a temporal starting point, I assiduously resist all attempts to speculate about origins. I am unapologetically agnostic on that historical issue, and leave it to archeologists, evolutionary biologists, and others with longer memories and

Human and suprahuman forces. Although there can be no intransient boundary between the religious and the secular since that border shifts over time and across regions, satisfying theories of religion say something about what distinguishes religions from other cultural forms. For that reason, I add another phrase—*human and suprahuman forces*—to note that adherents appeal not only to their own powers but to suprahuman forces, which can be imagined in varied ways, as they try to intensify joy and confront suffering. Concurring with Durkheim but not Spiro, I use the term *suprahuman* to avoid narrower alternatives—such as *God, gods,* or *spiritual beings*—and to respect the multiple ways that those forces are imagined. The classic example is Buddhism, which in most formulations does not affirm theism—the belief in a personal creator of the universe—but in devotional life does appeal to human and suprahuman beings—bodhisattvas and buddhas—for aid in treading the religious path. I include reference to *human* forces because some traditions imagine the suprahuman as imbedded in the human in some way and to some extent: for example, in some Christian interpretations of *imago dei* (the image of God) and some Buddhist views of *tathāgata-garbha* (the embryo of the Tathāgata, or Buddha-nature). So to include Buddha-nature—as well as the Neo-Confucian *li* (principle) and the Daoist *dao* (way)—I talk about *forces* rather than beings, since not all lineages in all religions personify the suprahuman, despite some interpreters' arguments for the ubiquity of anthropomorphism.[21]

Make homes and cross boundaries. Shifting from aquatic to spatial tropes, this phrase, which is the heart of my theory, says more about *how* the religious draw on human and suprahuman forces to intensify joy and confront suffering. If aquatic metaphors can be helpful for putting religion in motion, spatial images, while still too static as they have been employed, offer promise for making sense of the practices of transnational migrants at the Miami shrine and for interpreting other traditions at other sites. The tentative definition I offered in my ethnography of devotion at the Cuban shrine was a good starting point, although only that: religions, I suggested, are spatial practices. "Religious women

and men are continually in the process of mapping a symbolic landscape and constructing a symbolic dwelling in which they might have their own space and find their own place." Even if I now think that definition is more narrow and less useful than the one I have proposed here, I remain convinced that *place* is a useful orienting metaphor. And as I was just beginning to work out when I wrote that earlier book, two other spatial images—*dwelling* and *crossing*—are helpful terms to add to the interpreter's lexicon.[22]

Religious women and men make meaning and negotiate power as they appeal to contested historical traditions of storytelling, object making, and ritual performance in order to make homes *(dwelling)* and cross boundaries *(crossing)*. Religions, in other words, involve finding one's place and moving through space. One of the imperfections the religious confront is that they are always in danger of being disoriented. Religions, in turn, *orient* in time and space. As Charles Long noted in a highly suggestive but mostly overlooked stipulative definition, "For my purposes, religion will mean orientation—orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world." So, as long as we keep in mind the cautions I noted in Chapter 1 about the limits of cartographic metaphors and as long as we put the cartographers, the terrain, and the representations in motion, we can understand religions as always-contested and ever-changing maps that orient devotees as they move spatially and temporally. Religions are partial, tentative, and continually redrawn sketches of where we are, where we've been, and where we're going. Unlike most life forms—although certain mammals might be less dissimilar than some might imagine—humans require orientation that genetic coding and neurophysiological processes alone cannot provide. Religions, then, survey the terrain and make cognitive maps—and sometimes even graphic representations of space. In other words, as I argue more fully in the next chapter, they situate the devout in the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos. Religions position women and men in natural terrain and social space. Appealing to supranatural forces for le-