Assessing Theories of Religion: A Forum on Thomas A. Tweed’s *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*

Ann Taves

IN CROSSING AND DWELLING: A Theory of Religion (Harvard, 2006), an important new attempt to theorize religion, Thomas A. Tweed draws from his research at a Cuban Catholic shrine in Miami to conceptualize religion from the perspective of movement and place. Taking up what he considers his “role-specific obligation to reflect on the field’s constitutive term,” Tweed defines “religions [as] confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (54). Tweed’s theory highlights movement (the dynamics of religion across time and space), relation (interactions between religions, generations, perspectives, and spheres of influence), and position (most notably, the place of theory and theorists in relation to their subjects).
In a series of essays that originated in a panel discussion at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the AAR in San Diego, four scholars take up themes raised by Tweed’s theory. Aaron Hughes explores the tensions between the ethnographic and the encyclopedia modes of understanding data. Drawing from the local particularities of his own minyan, Aaron considers whether Tweed’s theory, by casting individuals as “Jews” or “Muslims,” deprives individuals of their singularity.

Kim Knott compares Tweed’s approach with what she advocates in *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (Equinox, 2005), arguing that while the two approaches have much in common, Tweed emphasizes spatial theory, while she emphasizes spatial methodology. To test out the strengths and weakness of both approaches, she applies her methodology to Tweed’s case, Tweed’s theory to her case, and finally examines the intersections between spatial theory and spatial methodology.

Finbar Curtis focuses on the way Tweed positions his theory and himself as a theorist within the pragmatic tradition, considering what role social locations actually play in relation to theorizing. He suggests that social position does not so much limit our ability to see religions in the world as structure our relationship to contested discourses about religion. From that perspective, he concludes that Tweed’s work is better understood as a set of “nuanced and thoughtful strategies” for approaching the fluidity of religious phenomena than as a theory of religion.

Manuel Vásquez focuses directly on Tweed’s use of aquatic metaphors of motion and flow to define religion. Though he shares Tweed’s positioned interest in transnational migration, he questions whether aquatic metaphors taken on their own do not underplay the importance of power and resistance in social analysis. He suggests that Tweed’s welcome emphasis on hydraulic metaphors should be supplemented by notions of “networks and social fields.”

In a thoughtful response, Tweed weaves together the concerns of his interlocutors, reflecting with them on issues of representation, comparison, definition, and the social and moral implications of our scholarship. Finally, although the commentators focus on key aspects of Tweed’s theory—particularly its emphasis on positioned sightings, theory construction, and aquatic flows as defining religions—they overlook another important aspect of his theory—his emphasis on the interaction between the cultural and the organic. His definition of religions as “organic-cultural flows” presupposes that shifting cultural currents are always constrained by organic channels, that is, by the “embodied physiological, cognitive, and emotional processes that limit—but do not
determine—the range of interactions with other humans and the environment” (66). This interface between the cultural and the organic (or biological) is a crucial one and this aspect of his works deserves further discussion and reflection in other contexts.

doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfp029 Ann Taves
Advance Access publication June 20, 2009

Crossing, Dwelling, and A Wandering Jew

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IN HIS BOLD NEW BOOK, Crossing and Dwelling, Thomas Tweed attempts the impossible: to construct a theory of religion that not only explains his own data in working with Cuban immigrant communities in Miami, but will also ideally be of use to those working with other data in different geographical and temporal contexts. Although he certainly does an excellent job with the former, this presentation will test the limits of the latter in two overlapping ways. First, I wish to draw attention to Tweed’s use and presentation of data; secondly, I wish to counter his encyclopaedism with a specific test case of another diaspora religion, in fact probably the diaspora religion par excellence, that of Judaism. Jews, both individually and collectively, have been “crossing” and “dwelling”—not only between eretz Israel and the diaspora, but also between diasporas—for the past two millennia. Yet, I want to suggest that perhaps conceptual terms such as “crossings” and “dwellings” are not helpful in understanding the dynamics of Judaism in any real sense. In what follows I will, in part, use as data my local minyan.

The aim of this two-pronged critique is that if one fails to recognize the particularities and the nuances of either one’s own religious

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tradition or that which one studies, there is a real problem. As such, I am less concerned with Tweed’s actual definition of or his subsequent elaboration of a new theory of religion than with whence he draws his data, his subsequent use of this data, and the concomitant conclusions he derives from it.

In his often cited “Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit,” Jonathan Z. Smith (1978) names and categorizes four comparative models that have driven the academic study of religion, only two of which will interest me here. I refer primarily to the “ethnographic” and the “encyclopedic,” both of which derive from specific encounters with others and which, accordingly, possess distinctive presuppositions and methods of presentation. The hallmark of the ethnographic model, to use Smith’s words, is when “something other has been encountered, and it is surprising either in its similarity or dissimilarity to what is familiar ‘back home’” (246). The encyclopedic model, on the contrary, offers “a topical arrangement of cross-cultural material (arranged either by subject matter or alphabetically) culled from reading” (250). Here the tendency is to give a certain epic quality to lists, in which depth is frequently forfeited in favor of the seemingly endless enumeration of data.

I want to suggest that what Tweed does is to conflate—intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, is not my concern here—the encyclopedic and the ethnographic modes of comparison. Although I do not want to imply that there necessarily exist airtight borders separating these models, their genealogies present aims and purposes that are, potentially at least, at cross-purposes with one another. Moreover, I certainly do not want to intimate that Tweed is guilty of the categorical mistakes that have traditionally plagued these classical models; I only want to highlight that his isolation of a theory is ethnographic (i.e., that is developed out of his own work on Cuban immigrant communities in South Florida), and that his method of making this into a universal category is encyclopedic. As such, I want to raise the possibility that, more generally, perhaps the encyclopedic presentation of data may not be the most useful method to give support to that encountered ethnographically.

It is precisely in Tweed’s presentation of data, the accumulation and invocation of an increasing number of relatively context-less examples, that the nuances of the local ethnographic insights are potentially lost. For example, in his discussion of the body in a chapter devoted to “Dwelling,” Tweed writes:
One famous Buddhist text, for example, imagined the body as a chariot. In *The Questions of King Melinda*, the Buddhist Nāgasena explains the nature of the embodied person. Some passages in the Hebrew Bible propose that embodied humans resemble the divine. Other narratives, from the Zoroastrian tradition, use martial images to imagine the body as battleground between cosmic forces of good and evil. (99)

Too much occurs too quickly in this one paragraph. Sure Tweed can point to Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:1–3 as supporting his general claim of divine embodiedness, but these are widely considered to come from the theological school of the so-called J (or Y) level of the Torah, a school that had an ideological ax to grind with other competing schools or ideologies, some of which also made their way into the final redaction of the Torah. What about all those places where strict lines are drawn between humanity and God (e.g., Genesis 1:1–3)? The manner in which all of the data sit univocally in passages such as this that, for me, potentially limits the utility of Tweed’s book. This is compounded once we remember that the genealogy of this mode of comparison takes us back to Herodotus *via* the likes of Tylor and Frazer.

Where Tweed is at his best is in working with his own data. The further he strays from this, however, the less certain he is and, as such, the more he is forced to rely upon the secondary work of others, operating on the assumption that such work accurately images or reflects reality “on the ground.” Yet, as Smith’s essays have so poignantly demonstrated with respect to Eliade’s sources, we cannot always read the reports of others at face value. Much of chapters 3 and 4 are awash with example after example, becoming a set of lists. Here Tweed moves from Buddhism to Islam to Judaism to Hinduism and back again. One always hates to criticize an important generalist work like this, one with potential wide appeal, through recourse to area studies or one’s own area of specialization. Yet, when one either fails to recognize the tradition that one studies in such a theory or it is presented very generally and context-less, a number of problems ensue.

Related to Tweed’s presentation of data is my own inability to recognize the nuances of my own tradition, Judaism, in it. Tweed mentions “Judaism” in his index 16 times; of these 16 instances, ten are simply generic (e.g., Judaism does “x”), and three conflate Judaism with the Hebrew Bible. Only twice do we encounter real Jews: on pages 108–109, Tweed tells us about “Orthodox Jews” in Toronto who have constructed an *eruv* around their neighborhood so that they can perform certain acts on Shabbat. The only Jew we meet in the work is Arthur
Hertzburg who, speaking in the context of the *Shoah*, writes “I have never found a way to absolve God” (140).

This, to me, is a real problem. What about real flesh and blood Jews, whether now in the present or who lived in other times and places? It is precisely real people that Tweed lived with, talked with, ate with, and worked among in South Florida, and which are wonderfully documented in *Our Lady of the Exile*. However, it is precisely such people that become lost in *Crossing and Dwelling*’s movement between the ethnographic and the encyclopedic.

Let me briefly address some of the messiness and nuance of a community I know fairly well, my local minyan. Rather than focus on some generic sense of community, I prefer to rely, as Tweed himself does at least in the first pages of his book, on the shards of ethnographic narrative picked up from a local situation. In the introductory chapter, Tweed emphasizes the situatedness of theorists, whose theories, contrary to his opinion, do not emerge from an objective vantage point, but refract categorical schemes and social contexts. This “locative” approach forces Tweed to situate himself as a traveler and observer in search of, to use his own words, a “new language that might make sense of the movement, relation, and positionality [he] noticed at the annual festival in Miami” (26).

What happens, however, if one participates in and observes a particular “religious” situation and does not encounter movement, relation, or positionality? Or, if one does so, only in the most generic sense, so that any traces of motion toward or from becomes lost if not actually meaningless? What if, on the contrary, one encounters stasis, a free-floating and undetermined tension, and a lack of precisely the same positioning that Tweed has in mind? This certainly need not be terminal, nor do I think that Tweed’s argument necessarily unravels because of it. However, the return to the ethnographic returns us to lived experiences and shared imaginings of real people.

My goal, stated more theoretically, is to juxtapose a metadiscourse on community with a community that does not necessarily indulge in the discretely theoretical modes of discourse of the type that Tweed engages. That is, I use personal anecdotes, both like and unlike Tweed, as necessary antidotes to those totalizing discourses whose sworn mission is to overcome the discourse of totality.

On the one hand, a minyan is a provisional Jewish center, one founded on the loss of the Temple in 70 CE. However, the qualification for being part of a minyan is genealogical, and not what we might call “religious” or, heaven forbid, “spiritual.” One shows up to a minyan, then, not to cross some boundary, but to help someone have enough
(often male) Jewish bodies to say, more often than not, qaddish for the dead. My local minyan meets in North West Calgary in houses far removed from the “center” of Jewish life in the South West corner of the city (let alone Montreal, Toronto, New York, or Jerusalem). Here a group of disparate Jews with very little in common except genealogy meet regularly or irregularly, depending upon need, to carry out a complete prayer service, including that of the mourner’s qaddish. Certainly one crosses a threshold, signaled by a mezuzah on a front door, but once inside there is little fondness for either recollecting or crossing toward Jerusalem (or anywhere else), nor is there any attempt to move, migrate, flow, or travel across anything. Moreover, if one arrives at the house and finds that there are already enough people to form a minyan, more often than not one just goes home. And, once over, there are usually arguments about recent discussions of same-sex unions in the Conservative movement or complaints about this or that. Obligation to Jewish community—I have worked all day, I am tired, but David might need an extra body so he can say the mourner’s prayer for his mother—thus trumps any generic terms that imply “crossing” or “dwelling.”

Tweed defines religions as “confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (54). On one level, this is certainly what the above does, but then again this is what virtually every inter-human encounter does. Every time humans get together of their own volition—to go for dinner, to a movie, to a concert—they “intensify joy and confront suffering.” I am thus not sure what the utility or value of calling this “religion” is. Does one go to a minyan for religious reasons? Or, for familial/genealogical ones?

Moreover, Tweed subdivides “crossings”—movement beyond—into three types: terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic (123). Applied to the minyan, where does the crossing take place? And of what type is it? As I stated earlier, one certainly crosses a threshold, signified by a mezuzah; yet, I am uncertain as to how many of the individuals would perceive this as such. Moreover, is it a terrestrial crossing (which Tweed seems to reserve for pilgrimages and the like) or is it a corporeal one, where devotees become aware of their embodied existence? I am not convinced that it is either, unless of course we invoke a radical hermeneutics of suspicion.

Tweed’s earlier work is based on keeping “close to the ground” (85). In other words, his main concern has been with providing close and contextual thick descriptions of particular case studies (e.g., Victorian America, Cuban Americans) in order to illumine a larger problem. In Crossing and Dwelling, however, he takes the opposite approach by
attempting to establish a general theory and then presenting copious amounts of context-less data in order to back it up.

The question emerges: what exactly are we supposed to do with a new theory of religion? I, for one, am not entirely sure. Will Tweed’s theory help us to understand the form of cultural work that scholars rather lazily call “religion” any better? Parts of this work certainly will. In this context, Tweed is at his most lucid and most sophisticated when he is working with the data that he knows well (e.g., the religious forms and idioms of Cuban immigrants).

Yet, it is precisely when Tweed moves beyond the data with which he is familiar that categorical problems arise. His movement from the local to the global, from the ethnographic to the encyclopedic, creates a number of tensions within the book, but that also, more broadly, are indicative of the tensions that have traditionally plagued the academic study of religion. To just what extent, for instance, is it useful to take the nuances and particularities of specific micro-traditions and attempt to subsume them within larger categories? Does what is gained (e.g., a universal theory) outweigh what is lost (i.e., local religious idioms)? Or is the case the opposite: that we level the particular by forcing it to fit into a larger theory that is often not interested in the particular to begin with?

An interesting counterpoint to the work of Tweed is that of Robert A. Orsi. Both count as their data religion in America and, more specifically, that of “lived religion.” Yet, Orsi takes a much different approach. He prefers to show how the dynamics of lived religion—for him, primarily post-industrial Italian-American Catholicism of New York and Chicago—cannot be subsumed into larger categories precisely because this activity edits out the particularities that are inherent to their specific religious idioms. For Orsi, religious cultures are local and to study religion is to study local worlds. There is no such thing as a “Methodist” or a “Southern Baptist” who can be neatly summarized by an account of the denomination’s history or theology. There are Methodists in Tennessee in the 1930s struggling with particular realities of work and home, politics and gender, with children leaving, old people dying, work closing, and so on ….. What exists are histories of people working in their worlds in specific ways at specific times and places. (2005, 167–168)

Tweed, in his earlier work, might well have agreed with such a statement. However, in Crossing and Dwelling, he has relinquished the local and the contextual for the sake of establishing a universal paradigm that can ideally be applied to any religious datum, irrespective of time
or geography. And while he is certainly to be congratulated for his boldness and his vision, it must be realized that both of these virtues are not without their fair share of problems.

It is precisely this problem or tension—between the specific and the universal—that I have tried to isolate here. Tweed has a tendency to conflate the ethnographic and encyclopedic modes of encountering, juxtaposing, and understanding data. In short, the ethnographic model demands that we observe, on a local level, those that are “not us” in order to understand another culture and ultimately ourselves. In the case of earlier scholars, this involved traveler’s accounts, but in the case of Tweed’s earlier work, it involved disciplined and sensitive participant observation. Precisely because of this, it involves listening to these subjects, trying to understand their hopes, fears, desires, and imaginings.

Yet, juxtaposed against this is the encyclopedic model presented in most of Crossing and Dwelling. This model is not interested in hearing the voices of others. On the contrary, it is obsessed with the collection of more and more data. This necessarily involves moving away from fleshy humans and into the activity of presenting and processing cross-cultural data, often once, twice, or even thrice removed from real people. Individuals are now “Jews” or “Muslims” who, deprived of their singularity, become shadows or ideal essences of themselves. As such, they are easier to fit into a discourse of which their concrete manifestations may well disagree with or with which they may feel uncomfortable.

REFERENCES


Spatial Theory and Spatial Methodology, Their Relationship and Application: A Transatlantic Engagement

Kim Knott

THE AIM OF THIS PAPER is to consider further the relationship between theory and methodology in the study of religion by engaging Thomas Tweed’s theory of “crossing and dwelling” with my own spatial methodology.¹ Both of these were constructed with issues of space, location, position, and movement in mind. In Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion, Tweed writes, “I was looking for a theory that made sense of the religious life of transnational migrants and addressed three themes—movement, relation and position” (5). His theory was developed inductively from in-depth field study of a particular case, that of the diasporic religion of Cuban Catholics in Miami. As he demonstrates, however, his theory reaches beyond this case, inviting application to other transnational religious examples and, potentially, to those not informed directly by the history, narratives, or practices associated with diaspora or migration.

Knott’s methodology—in The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis—arose from the intention to look closely at contemporary everyday spaces in order to discern the location of religion within them, by considering its dynamic relations with the other features of those spaces (social, cultural, political, physical, economic), the place of religion in their structure, its active and passive modes, and its possibilities for dominance, resistance and liberation. (5)

¹ Hereafter I shall refer to myself and my work in the third person for balance (with Tweed) and ease of reference.
Her work grew out of earlier interests, of studying religion “in locality” (Knott 2009), and, indeed, Tweed also noted its significance for understanding identity and religion. In addition to their initial spatial interests—Tweed particularly in movement and flow, Knott in location and space—both scholars extend their use of spatial terminology to their own position or standpoint (Tweed: 20–27; Knott 2005a: 2–3, 89–93), taking a locative approach to the development of theory and method.

They have much in common in terms of their use of spatial terminology and theoretical inheritance, with both drawing to varying degrees on the work of cultural geographers and social theorists such as de Certeau and Lefebvre, but the end results of their work are rather different. Tweed has produced a spatial theory of religion, whereas Knott has produced a spatial methodology. The former offers a definition of religion that employs tropes of dwelling and crossing, as well as flow: “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” (54). This definition has substantive and functional elements that enable it to be tested in relation to different religions in various contexts. In his book, Tweed proceeds to discuss and illuminate the various terms in his definition before, in the final chapter, offering a series of challenging questions that might be directed at his theory in order to assess its scope and adequacy (165–167). Although he leads by example in showing how his theory can be supported with evidence from a variety of religious contexts, it is not his aim to turn his theory into a working methodology. It is for those who follow to work out how to apply it and then to assess its empirical value.

Knott stops short of developing a spatial theory of religion, and prefers a stipulative approach based on negotiated discursive uses of the terms “religious” and “secular” to a formal definition. Instead, she uses the work of other spatial theorists (social and cultural theorists, geographers, and scholars of religion) to develop an analytical approach with which to interrogate the location of religion, particularly in ostensibly secular contexts. The terms of her methodological approach, which has its origins in the spatial theory of Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault (1986) in particular, are as follows: the body as the source of “space” (and as a key resource for religion); the dimensions of space (physical, social, mental, and the unification of the three); the properties of space (configuration, extension, simultaneity, power); the aspects of space (spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation); and the dynamics of space (Knott 2005a, 2005b, 2008a).
These terms can be applied in part or altogether as a systematic spatial approach, with the aim of providing a deep contextualization, a series of operations for locating religion and examining its situation and wider relations.

What happens if the two—Tweed’s theory and Knott’s methodology—are brought together to examine particular cases? Taking the cases most closely allied with the spatial work of these scholars—the diasporic religion of Cuban migrants in Miami (Tweed) and the relationship between religion and the secular (Knott)—I critically assess their theoretical and methodological scope and adequacy for illuminating the other’s case. Can Knott’s methodology be used successfully to analyze Cuban migrant religiosity? Does Knott’s methodology lead to a theorization of religion of the kind Tweed proposes—a theory contingent upon concepts of space, movement, and relation? While it is unlikely that Tweed’s theory actually requires a spatial methodology in order to be tested, it does demand a willingness to engage with and apply spatial metaphors to religious contexts (as it is precisely upon these that Tweed’s theory is built). How does one go about operationalizing Tweed’s theory? How does it fare for explaining non-diasporic religion, particularly for getting to grips with secular and post-secular value positions? Furthermore, are the two compatible or are there hidden tensions—for example, around contending metaphors of flow and place—that come to light on more in-depth investigation and application? Does a spatial theory of religion benefit from a spatial methodology? Can the latter function without recourse to a spatially informed theory?

These issues will be discussed in three movements, the application of Knott’s methodology to Tweed’s case (Knott → Tweed), the movement from Tweed’s theory to Knott’s case (Tweed → Knott) and, finally, the intersection between spatial theory and spatial methodology (Tweed → ... ← Knott).

KNOTT → TWEED

Can Knott’s Methodology Be Used Successfully to Analyze Cuban Migrant Religiosity?

Knott’s spatial approach is best and most easily applied to particular focused cases, such as the following “time/spaces” in Tweed’s work on Catholic Cuban migrants: the “rainy Friday in 1961,” 8 September, when Our Lady of Charity moved to Miami (Tweed 1997: 15); the consecration of the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity in Miami in 1973
or the annual feast day in 1993 at the Dinner Key auditorium depicted at the start of Tweed’s theoretical exposition (1–7) and analyzed at the end (167–171).

Taking the latter case and applying the analytical terms mentioned earlier, we may note that it opens with reference to the traditionally clad bodies of male Cuban participants as they carry the statue of Our Lady of Charity in procession into the auditorium for the mass (2–3). The embodied, migratory form of Our Lady is central to the diasporic narrative of Miami Cubans who annually express both their spiritual and nationalist sentiments through emotion and dress. The body is clearly a resource for religious expression, but it is also central to the spatial practices enacted on this feast day, not least of all the relationship between worshippers and the divine. The event extends into other physical spaces too, some actual, such as the auditorium, stage and altar, and the shrine from which Our Lady makes her journey, some affective and memorial, such as the island of Cuba and the boat that brought her so prophetically to the United States in 1961. Overlapping these are the social and mental spaces associated with the feast: the confraternity of migrant Cubans, the familial relationships noted by Tweed in his account, the chants and responses, banner and songs that connect la Virgen de Caridad with the hope of a free Cuba.

“Places gather” (versammlung, Heidegger in Krell 1993: 355) and the Dinner Key Auditorium on this occasion was no exception, being a configuration of those physical, social, and mental spaces noted above, and of a variety of powers, relations, and forces inscribed with gender, generation, migration, nationalism, American interests, and Catholicism. The two spatial properties of extension and simultaneity are revealing, one opening up the present space diachronically to earlier and future events, the other, synchronically, to contemporary interconnected spaces. Thus, this feast day becomes the occasion through which to read the real and imagined history of migrant Catholic Cubans in the United States and to ponder its future. Tweed makes clear the importance of diasporic longing with reference to the prediction inscribed on the back-drop at the back of the stage, “Libre ’94”, “signalling the people’s hopes that the homeland would be ‘liberated’ from communism during the coming year” (3). The time/space of the 1993 Miami feast day also intersects with contemporaneous celebrations in Cuba, the United States, and beyond that connect it with the Catholic Church, other parts of the Cuban diaspora, as well as with Castro’s Cuba itself. These simultaneous sites provide a broader context, open up the power dynamics of the time/space, and present potentially different and sometimes challenging voices and perspectives.
The aspects of space—developed from Lefebvre’s spatial triad—provide a way of breaking open a place, object or event with reference to its spatial routines and representations (Lefebvre 1991: 33, 38–40; Knott 2005a: 35–58). Tweed’s observation of the Miami feast day reveals some of the many gestures and movements that constitute this part of the ritual event (the arrival and establishment of our Lady prior to the mass): carrying, waving, swaying, smiling, lifting, pushing, crying, shouting, and singing. In and of themselves habitual practices, they derive their contextual meaning and significance from the religious nature of the occasion. Everyday spatial movements become ritualized in a place made sacred (Smith 1987), the whole time/space constituting for the duration of the event a “lived space” or “space of representation” (Knott 2005a: 52–57), a space evoking future promise, political transformation, national liberation, and the reunification of exiled people with their homeland. For those present, the figure of Our Lady embodies and concentrates this ‘moment,’ to borrow a term from Lefebvre (2002: 340–58). This space of representation contrasts with other “conceived spaces” located in the auditorium: dominant, authorized discourses—one nationalist, the other religious—are present in the emblems of flag and priest. Communist Cuba is also present, implied in the chants and predictions, the as-yet-to-be-transformed Other that provides the context and incentive for the occasion, and stimulates the diasporic longing of the crowd.

Although a potential limitation of a spatial methodology focused on a particular time/space may be that it is too limited and static, I hope I have shown that that is far from the case. Any place or event that occurs there is interconnected outwards both diachronically and synchronically, and contains competing spatial aspects in which a variety of forces and relations obtain. Furthermore, such a time/space may create others, reproducing itself in annual events and generating mental spaces of memory both individual and collective.

Does Knott’s Methodology Lead to a Theorization of Religion of the Kind Tweed Proposes, a Theory Contingent upon Concepts of Space, Movement, and Relation?

If Knott’s methodology leads to a theory of anything, it is a theory of the nature of space, not of religion. Knott’s aim is not to theorize about religion as such, but to develop tools for examining its location, relations, and contestation. In research in which she applies a spatial methodology, Knott focuses on discourse about “religion,” in particular on controversies between religious and secular exponents, as a means of locating “religion” in secular places. Her attention is thus on the constructed nature of religion.
Does her methodology lead to a spatial theorization of religion? While there is no necessary relation between the use of a spatial methodology and the formulation or selection of a spatial theory of religion, the connection is nevertheless a tempting one. What Knott’s methodology reveals about the relational nature of religion, its synchronic and diachronic developments, traces and movements, and its ability (along with other ideological and practical systems) to produce spaces suggests that a spatial theorization like Tweed’s, can be fruitful. Knott has in fact drawn on a different spatial theory in some of her recent work (2005a: 221–6; Knott 2005b, 2008b): Veikko Anttonen’s category-theoretical approach to the “sacred,” based on body, territory, and boundary, to which I will return in the final section.

**TWEED ➔ KNOTT**

**How Does One Go about Operationalizing Tweed’s Theory? What Type of Theory Is It?**

Tweed operationalizes his own theory by taking the key words in his definition and exploring them in the context of the case of the 1993 feast day in Miami that I examined earlier: namely, confluences of organic-cultural flows, intensify joy and confront suffering, human and suprahuman forces, to make homes, and cross boundaries (167–171). I would suggest that Tweed’s theory is a series of interconnected tropes to think with, indeed, to travel and observe with (cf. James Clifford on theory, Tweed, 1); it is not an explanation of religion (as in cognitive theories, for example). Neither is it a theory that convincingly differentiates its object from other potential objects of study. Tweed’s thought-provoking definition of religion does not really help us to distinguish “religion” from the surrounding terrain of “non-religion,” except in so far as, like many definitions, it mentions the role of “suprahuman forces.” However, to focus upon the issue of differentiation suggests that the only test of a theory of religion is its substantive capacity. Tweed’s theory provides something more in offering us a new way of thinking about what religion does and what it enables religious people to do. The emphasis is on function rather than substance.

**How Does Tweed’s Theory Fare for Examining Non-diasporic Religion, Particularly for Getting to Grips with the Religious, Secular, and Post-secular Value Positions such as Those Entailed in Knott’s Recent Work?**

Can we take the key concepts in Tweed’s theory and apply them to such positions, to secular and post-secular as well as religious ones?
Taking Knott’s examination of the location of religion in late-modern representations of the left hand (2005a, 2006), it is surely the case that, like many collective representations, the hands are a powerful ideological resource for making homes and crossing boundaries, whether for those from religious, secularist, or post-secularist persuasions (2005a: 151–169, 203–204, 215–227). However, Tweed’s theory was not developed in order to explore the location of religion in the fabric of the secular. Its focal point is that which is ostensibly religious, not the context where religion might or might not be at work.

Would the application of Tweed’s theory to a case where Christian or Muslim exponents are in contention with secularists over a matter of “sacred” concern to both, such as the teaching of creation/evolution in public schools or the ethics of abortion, help us to make sense of the difference between the two positions? Does his theory apply to the religious position but not the secularist one? If so, is that only because the latter eschews the notion of “suprahuman forces”? Are not secularist positions “confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering” for those who hold them, that assist them to “make homes and cross boundaries”? Arguably, they both help their adherents “confront limit situations” (137), for example, on the right to life, what constitutes freedom, and where ultimate authority lies. Is secularist identity and belief—for example, as experienced and held by members of the Council for Secular Humanism or the British National Secular Society—“like” religious identity and belief except insofar as it does not draw on “suprahuman forces”?

This poses the question of whether Tweed’s theory could be applied fruitfully in other, ostensibly non-religious ideological contexts. It also invites us to consider further the purpose of differentiating religion from non-religion, and of developing tools specifically for the former without reference to the latter.

Irrespective of whether Tweed’s theory works for non-religious ideological positions, we should also consider whether it works for non-diasporic religions. Devised inductively for the Miami Cuban Catholic case, Tweed has applied it to a wide range of other examples in Chapters 4 and 5 of his book on the basis that settled as well as diasporic religions, in addition to offering resources for dwelling, are translocative and transformative in terms of their beliefs, practices, and soteriological objectives. Would Tweed want to hypothesize that all religions are in some sense diasporic, in so far as they both cross an array of geographical, social, and cosmic boundaries and help their adherents to deal with limit situations of one kind or another? Scholars have gone to some lengths in recent years to define “diaspora” and to distinguish it from
“migration” and “transnationalism”—the work of Vertovec is a case in point (2000, 2004)—but have they yet got to the bottom of the relationship between religion and diasporic consciousness and activity? What Tweed has done is hone his theoretical tools for conceptualizing religion on this one diasporic religious community and then offered them for wider application. What the effects of this will be for analyzing in depth different types of religion and religious groups has yet to be seen (Tweed’s own examples in chapters four and five are necessarily rather cursory). Will the diasporic starting point and undertone of his theory make us see religion in a new way or will it inappropriately skew our understanding of religion in the direction of movement, change, and translocation?

TWEED → ⋯ ← KNOTT

Are Tweed’s Theory and Knott’s Methodology Compatible or Are There Hidden Tensions—for example, Around Contending Metaphors of Flow and Place—Which Come to Light on More In-depth Investigation and Application?

Although Tweed’s theory and Knott’s methodology have different purposes and focal points, as well as different limitations, they both offer spatial tools to think with: Knott refers to the series of spatial terms in her methodology as an aide mémoire for analyzing the location of religion once data have been collected. Tweed depicts theories of religion, including his own, as positioned sightings (167). He offers his definition as a series of aquatic and spatial tropes that can be applied for the interpretation of data from ethnographic observation.

Where Do These Two Bodies of Work Intersect?

Knott’s methodology acknowledges what many spatial theorists have noted that space is a configuration of forces or elements: Heidegger states that places gather; Lefebvre that a space envelopes the various physical, social, and mental objects, relations and representations that constitute it (Knott 2005a: 22–23). As confluences, Tweed suggests that religion is a site where currents cross and through which organic and cultural flows can be observed. Taking these two observations together, we may say that religion is itself a complex space, multi-dimensional, and dynamic, with the properties and aspects I outlined earlier. As such it is amenable to analysis using a spatial methodology.

If, as Tweed claims, “religions are flows, translocative and transtemporal crossings” (158), then they flow through places. A spatial
methodology, which sees space as dynamic and seeks to investigate religion in secular as well as religious places, should capture these flows as they pass through and be sympathetic to their translocative and transtemporal nature. With its focus on the extensive and simultaneous properties of space, it should pick up the spatial traces of religion and its interconnectedness with other spaces (homelands, originary places, sites of authorization, etc). Arguably, it may be better at recognizing traces and relations than movements.

A major intersection in their work is the idea that boundaries and the need to confront and cross them is fundamental for thinking about religion and its wider relations. Clearly this is central to Tweed’s theory that articulates the importance not only of the home-making (dwelling) aspect of religion but also the translocative and transtemporal aspect (crossing). As he says, religions confront and mediate limit situations; they mark boundaries and clear pathways (137–138).

The importance of boundaries to Knott’s approach is present not only in her spatial methodology, but also in her representation of a field of religious and secular knowledge/power relations, and her subsequent focus on the struggle between contesting value positions and the boundaries between them. In trying to make sense of these she has drawn on the neo-Durkheimian theoretical work of Anttonen who examines folk and scholarly conceptions of the “sacred” for marking those categorical boundaries that distinguish non-negotiable beliefs and values (which may or may not be religious) from those that are negotiable (Anttonen 1996, 2000, 2005). The attraction of Anttonen’s approach for Knott’s spatial methodology lies not only in his focus on sacralization and category-boundaries, but also in his focus on space, in particular on body and territory—and the boundary between them—as organic and conceptual structures for the generation of discourse and practice pertaining to the “sacred.”

In focusing on the concept of the “sacred” as a boundary marker, Anttonen follows Durkheim in leaving open the door between what we in the West have referred to as “religion” and its ill-defined Other, “non-religion.” The attribution of sacrality to things, places, objects, persons, and situations is not confined to religious concerns, but may be applied “to some supreme principle of life such as love, freedom, equality or justice” (Anttonen 2000: 281). Arguably, it is this cross-cutting application (transcending the religion/non-religion boundary) that makes the “sacred” a more useful tool than any conception of “religion” could be for interrogating contemporary religious, secular, and post-secular discourses and practices.
Attempting to focus on the location of religion in ostensibly secular contexts has necessarily raised for me the issues of the relationship between religion and non-religion, the character and values of the secular (as well as the religious), and the adequacy of the tools we have for investigating these issues. So, whilst I would entirely agree with Tweed that religions confront and mediate limit situations, they denote boundaries and clear pathways (137–138), they facilitate crossing as well as dwelling, I am bound to ask whether this is indeed what separates them from other social and cultural arenas. Is it not the case that all institutions, groups, and individuals engage from time to time in such “sacred”-making activities and processes of signification in accordance with their beliefs, behavioral conventions, and values?

Tweed’s theory and Knott’s methodology have more in common than at first sight—though one is referred to as a “theory” and the other a “methodology,” both are interpretive devices for thinking about religion and, in Knott’s case, its location. One uses spatial tropes to think about (and indeed to define) religion; the other identifies spatial terms to interrogate a place or context (and the location of religion within it). Tweed’s work might best be called a poetics, whereas Knott’s is much more a set of tools.

A comparison of their work not only raises questions about their dissimilarity in terms of purpose, application, and limitations, but also shows the different preoccupations of the two scholars with regard to what constitutes religion and how it might be distinguished from that which is not religion.

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No Universalizing Deductive–Nomological Explanations, Please; We’re Irish: A Response to Thomas A. Tweed’s Crossing and Dwelling

Finbarr Curtis

Reading Thomas A. Tweed’s Crossing and Dwelling reminds me of a repeated scolding I got from my Irish Catholic mother when she felt that her son’s attendance at an Ivy-League school might imperil the Old World manners she had sought to instill. My mom would say: “you’re getting this fancy education and you can’t even be polite.” Implicit in her scolding was an anxiety that an overvaluation of intellectual life could inculcate a sense of superiority and condescension to values and habits not shared by the cosmopolitan intelligentsia. For his part, Tweed develops an eminently polite theory of religion in that he is exceedingly careful to avoid intellectual arrogance and to respect the integrity of the religious communities that he studies. To this end, he identifies his own positionality, both as an academic and as a
“middle-aged, middle-class, Philadelphia-born white guy of Irish Catholic descent,” and proffers it as a simultaneous limit and a resource for his study of religion (181).

As I write this, I realize that in the aggressive and combative culture of academia, labeling a work as polite might appear as a backhanded compliment, akin to the deadly “He’s a nice guy, but …” qualifier that ritually prefaces an attack on scholarly credentials as “nothing personal.” Implicit in this is a kind of philosophico-scientific attitude, found in the personal style if not the stated conviction of even the most postmodern or poststructuralist of scholars, that the work of discovering the truth is too vital to be compromised by sentimentality or manners. An education in critical theory teaches us that, unless employed as a ruse, an excess of deferential niceness is the sort of thing that gives power to psychological repression or ideological distortion. In this sense, theory is theory to the extent that it exposes the lies of social institutions and actors. The work of exposing lies, then, begins with a presumptive suspicion of whatever it is one is trying to explain, and a certain amount of assertive rudeness helps to advance the truth over and against the distortions of the world.

This is not the kind of theory that Tweed develops. While Tweed adopts a different approach to his material, he is neither directly critiquing nor eschewing the political dimension of scholarship. Rather, he takes issue with positivist approaches that assert their apolitical orientation and focus on the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. According to the ideal of apolitical scholarship, the positionality of the scholar is either irrelevant or, at most, an obstacle to be overcome. While Tweed’s emphasis on social location may be familiar, it remains relevant in a field in which the apolitical pursuit of knowledge about religion continues to be what most scholars do in practice, even if they do not frame their work in terms of a positivist ontology. His suspicion of unpositioned, apolitical scholarship shares a critical theorist’s political concerns, but with the important difference that Tweed sees himself in the position of power. From this perspective, polite deference is an ethical activity. Rather than worry about the ways in which religion distorts reality, Tweed worries about the ways in which an overly assertive or exclusive theory will distort our ability to understand religions.

1 Every citation in this article that has only page numbers refers to the Tweed book.
On this last point, however, there is an underlying presumption that Tweed shares with the positivists. Namely, he assumes that scholars of religion are, in some way or another, trying to develop the most faithful and accurate accounts or explanations of religion. In other words, a historian or ethnographer begins with an area of study and then imagines ways in which theory might help to foster a deeper and more nuanced grasp of one’s subject. Tweed’s affinity with this approach is demonstrated in the first few pages of his book, in which he expresses his frustration with the inadequacy of existing theories to account for what he encountered in the ethnographic field:

Other theories illuminated some of what I encountered, but I had a sense—at first, poorly articulated—that there seemed to be more to say than other theoretical lexicons allowed me to say. It was not only that few theories were inclusive enough to consider beliefs, values, rituals, institutions, and feelings or that almost all seemed to overlook or minimize some religious expressions… As I tried to name and ease my disquiet I came to the conclusion that I was looking for a theory of religion that made sense to the religious life of transnational migrants and addressed three themes—movement, relation, and position (4–5).

From this perspective, a theory that distorted or misrepresented the character of particular religious beliefs, practices, or institutions would defeat its own purpose. Therefore, any ambition to talk more broadly about religion, such as in Tweed’s own study of space and orientation, faces the daunting task of trying to account for all of the particular nuance and specificity of diverse religions. Because he presumes that any general theory of religion should account for all religions, it is a matter of great concern if there is some religious belief, value, ritual, institution, or feeling that does not conform to the expectations of the theoretical model.

Where Tweed diverges from positivism is in his insistence that scholars need to be wary of their desires to advance universalizing theoretical agendas at the expense of nuance and specificity. Related to this is his assertion that any theory should take seriously the ways in which the fluidity and flexibility of religious phenomena defy neat categorization. Tweed challenges scholars to imagine religions in “flow” and to consider the ways in which religious actors spend as much time redrawing cultural boundaries as they do enforcing them. Therefore, universalizing explanations, such as a “deductive-nomological view” that posits laws that hold true for religions in all times and places, sin
on both points of failing to recognize the subjective character of scholarship and the objective fluidity of religious phenomena.2

Tweed situates his theory within a pragmatic tradition and favorably cites the idea of “warranted assertability” as developed in the work of John Dewey and Hilary Putnam. As Tweed explains, “The notion of an acceptable interpretation is always contested and contestable and is always a matter of offering a plausible account within an accepted categorical scheme and within a particular professional setting, with its scholarly idiom and role-specific obligations. This means that—to borrow Putnam’s phrasing—anything does not go” (17). I believe that this makes sense as warranted assertability is, consistent with Tweed’s arguments, a correction to positivist confidence in a universal science based upon stable facts that inhere in the world. For a pragmatist, there is no such thing as knowledge about the world without the conventional forms of measurement and verification developed by people who wanted to know something for some practical reason. As Putnam argues, “Elements of what we call ‘language’ or ‘mind’ penetrate so deeply into what we call ‘reality’ that the very project of representing ourselves as being ‘mappers’ of something ‘language-independent’ is fatally compromised from the very start” (Putnam 1990: 28). Because these conventions and artifices of knowledge develop in particular social settings for particular reasons, they are always, as Tweed states, contested and contestable. But in my reading, Tweed’s account of warranted assertability inverts Dewey in a subtle but significant way. Dewey’s notion’s of warranted assertability addresses the way in which the world, or nature, limits the range of plausible answers to a subjectively framed question. In other words, warranted assertability is a qualified realist corrective to subjectivist idealism in that certain theories are tested and found to be unwarranted. This is where Tweed’s underlying assumption that religions are the starting point for religious studies creates some confusion. Instead of beginning with subjectively formulated theoretical claims that are then tested against the world, Tweed begins with religions in the world and casts scholarly subjectivity as the measure of whether the truth claims of any proposition are warranted. This subtle inversion has major effects on the way Tweed imagines scholarly positionality.

Therefore, two issues might complicate Tweed’s status as a pragmatist. First, from Dewey’s perspective, the reason that someone would

2 “Deductive-Nomological” is a term that Tweed borrows from Robert Baird and actually rarely uses in this book. I am using it because I think it is a useful contrast to Tweed’s project.
want to know something about the world is that he or she may seek to change it. That all knowledge begins as an answer to some practical question means that one must always critically reflect on why it is that someone would want to know something. For a pragmatist, it is not a self-evident good for historians and ethnographers to develop the most faithful and accurate accounts of religious phenomena. Rather, it would be necessary to explain why one would want to understand religion in the first place and what practical action this was supposed to effect. While Tweed is clearly sympathetic to the idea of changing the world for the better, his insistence that the purpose of theory is to augment accurate accounts of religion creates some confusion about the place of scholarly normative agendas. On one hand, he claims to make no apologies for his positioned politics. On the other hand, his assertion of self-awareness still has the tone of a confession, an admission by a good Catholic boy that some trace of selfish desire taints an otherwise polite attempt to defer to others.

Second, the possibility that certain assertions might be unwarranted would require that any theory be testable and falsifiable. As Dewey explained, “The position which I take, namely, that all knowledge, or warranted assertion, depends upon inquiry and that inquiry is, truistically, connected with what is questionable (and questioned) involves a sceptical element, or what Peirce called ‘fallibilism’” (Dewey 1941: 172). Here it would seem that Tweed’s insistence on faithful and scholarly accounts of religion would serve him well. However, because theoretical validity is contingent on scholarly convention, but religions in the world pre-exist these theories, it is not clear how falsification is supposed to work. Indeed, it would almost appear that any effort to falsify a theory would judge the adequacy of religious phenomena themselves. Practically speaking, Tweed responds to this conundrum by trying to imagine a theory that would be unfalsifiable. From this perspective, falsification conjures images of a universalizing science of religion made impossible by the fluid, complex, and interrelated character of religious phenomena. Tweed’s aversion to deductive-nomological theorizing is motivated by his project of trying to imagine a flexible and inclusive approach that can account for many different kinds of religious phenomena without having to work them into any single explanation. Thus, the second half of Tweed’s book is a masterpiece of inclusion in which he tries to imagine all of the ways in which exclusive explanations or definitions are outdone by the complexity of the world. For example, religions challenge entrenched authority and solidify the status quo; religions are political and apolitical; religions posit rigid, exclusive boundaries and
destabilize markers of difference; religions involve crossing and dwelling. All of this is convincing. However, it is not clear how someone might prove Tweed wrong. Would anyone reasonably argue that religion is actually static and stable and exists in isolation from other social phenomena? This is an important question if Tweed’s theory is to qualify as a theory, at least in the pragmatic sense. The issue here goes beyond the semantic question of what defines a theory. The deeper problem is that, in recognizing that every example has a counterexample, his theory runs the risk of becoming “Clintonian” in that it seeks to please everyone without taking sides.

Of course, the rigid certainties of the post-Clinton political dispensation might have caused some to wax nostalgic for the halcyon days of polymorphous Clintonian fluidity. And in Tweed’s defense, to the extent that the porosity and flexibility of religious phenomena is his subject, he is working against the theoretical impulse to clarify and stabilize. In this way, he typifies the instincts that Jonathan Z. Smith identifies as markers of an historian’s sensibility. As Smith states, “The historian’s task is to complicate not to clarify. He strives to celebrate the diversity of manners, the variety of species, the opacity of things. He is therefore barred from making a frontal assault on his topic” (Smith 1978: 290). However, Tweed mentions the inadequacy of Smith’s emphasis on mapping space because of the static quality of this analytic model. For example, Tweed mentions the inadequacy of Jonathan Z. Smith’s emphasis on mapping space because of the static quality of this analytic model. But Tweed does not address Smith’s distinction between map and territory as a methodological principle for the study of religion. The mapmaker has to make choices about what details to leave out and, in important ways, willfully misrepresents the infinite complexity and interrelatedness of territory. This is not because Smith thinks that the world itself is flat or static as much as he recognizes that imagining religion is a purposefully artificial and conventional scholarly project. As Smith famously states, “Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy” (Smith 1982: xi). Importantly, Smith’s theories are not deductive-nomological in that he does not pretend to discover laws that inhere in the world. Rather, the conventional and artificial nature of academic theories allows for comparisons and generalizations. From this point of view, Tweed’s obsession with flows and inclusivity has to do with his desire to develop a theory that could account for the infinite complexity of the stuff that makes up territory.
In my reading, Tweed’s desire to develop a theory of territory leads him to his version of positionality. Because the task of historians and ethnographers is to develop the most faithful and accurate accounts of religious phenomena, and because this will always be incomplete, the scholar must recognize his or her own limits and biases. That Tweed’s theory may not be testable and falsifiable is not necessarily a flaw, considering that he is not trying to develop a universal explanatory model. But the same thing could be said in the other direction. In other words, it may be the case that comparable and generalizable explanations may fail to give the most descriptively rich and inclusive accounts of religious phenomena, but it may also be the case that they are not trying to do this.

On this point, it might be useful to consider different motives for the study of religion. For example, Smith’s archetypal scholar might be usefully contrasted with the position of the theorist in the genealogical approach of Talal Asad, for whom religion has no independent analytic coherency apart from the historically specific institutional logics in which religion has been embedded. For Asad, religion may have once been the creation of the scholar’s study, but it has a taken on a life of its own by participating in defining the legitimate institutional boundaries between private and public spheres in modern, liberal, democratic states. Thus, there is no such thing as religion apart from the discursive regime that distinguishes between the religious and the secular.

Tweed’s sense of positionality mirrors this postcolonial move in that he does not shy away from the discursive contests over the classification and definition of religion. In this way, he does not entirely share Smith’s commitment to Enlightenment reason. For Tweed, the quest for intelligibility is not itself an adequate response to politically loaded contests over how to classify and categorize religion. But Tweed also does something that Asad does not do, namely, define religion. As Asad argues, “I urge that anthropologists should not offer theoretical definitions of religion, whether taken from learned experts in the society studied or invented by ourselves, as the real site of its meaning or as the real (i.e., social-scientific) explanation of its manifestations… I urge not that we give up theorizing—which is impossible—but that we observe its proper place. This includes examining how theoretical definitions are made by particular people in particular times and places and for particular purposes” (Asad 2006: 215–216). Because Asad believes that religion is neither an independent scholarly category nor something that inheres in the world, he does not propose to rectify the exclusivity of secular definitions of religion by proposing a better, more inclusive definition.
In some ways, the project of definition is where Tweed’s work ventures into empirically falsifiable territory in that he makes contestable claims. Tweed prefaces his definition with a thoughtful metacommentary on the problematic but necessary task of developing some kind of working definition. For this task, he draws on Robert Baird’s discussion of the differences between functional, lexical, and real definitions. While a real definition most closely follows common sense usage in that it claims to be a true statement about something in the world, functional and lexical definitions make more modest claims. Lexical definitions refer to how words have been used in particular historical and social contexts. Functional definitions are self-consciously theoretical in that they define usage for a particular study. As Baird points out, “The precision of the functional definition is dependent on the clarity of our language and not on the data. Hence one cannot say a certain functional definition of ‘religion’ or ‘magic’ lacks precision because of what it includes or excludes, thought one might judge it because it is not useful” (Baird 1991: 8). But because religious studies is not an exercise in purely formal logic, all functional definitions are lexical to a certain extent.

It is on this question of definition where my reading of Tweed’s reading of warranted assertability would work perfectly. What functional and lexical definitions have in common is that they are falsifiable in relation to subjective conventions of language. To take an overly simple and somewhat trite example: if one was to invent a functional definition of religion as the worship of walnuts, then that would be religion. Counterexamples from Judaism, Scientology, or Islam that seemed to contradict this would be irrelevant because these things would, by definition, not be religions because they did not worship walnuts. This is not to say, of course, that defining religion as the worship of walnuts would be useful, but this would not be because of any empirical problem. Rather, this definition would be so wildly inconsistent with existing discursive uses and scholarly definitions of religion that it would be a private language and essentially meaningless. Therefore, definitional work is useful when it engages the histories of existing definitions. But what recent scholarship about the invention, manufacture, and construction of different religious traditions has shown is that the category of religion has developed for a variety of normative, political, and analytical purposes and has no internal coherency (Asad 2003; Masuzawa 2005; McCutcheon 2003). What this ensures is that there is no single conventional standard that exists in language or in the world that could make religion analytically coherent. Therefore, any definition that presupposes that it must include those things that have already been called religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and
Scientology, will always be reflecting diverse definitional logics because these things were classified and designated as religions at different times and for different reasons.

In other words, the problem of definitions is better framed as a political, rather than an empirical, problem. Therefore, the degree of trepidation with which scholars approach universal definitions and theories of religion is a measure of their concern (or lack thereof) about their relationship to the imperial projects that haunt the creation and development of something called religious studies. Trying to ignore this by proposing purely analytic or functional definitions does not make those imperial histories go away. Thus, Tweed is basically right to tell us that his work reflects the ethical anxieties of an academic who is a middle-aged, middle-class, Philadelphia-born white guy of Irish Catholic descent. But where this positionality is crucial for recognizing that any attempt to define religion necessarily takes a public and normative stand on a matter of great social controversy, it is somewhat incoherent when posed as the standard for adjudicating whether a theory is verifiable. Thus, the task remains to consider what the place of verification and falsification is within the work of a politically positioned and engaged critical theory.

In conclusion, social location is not best thought of as an epistemological limit that biases or conditions our ability to see religion as it really is in the world. Rather, it is more useful to think about scholarly position in terms of one’s relationship to contested public discourses over how to talk about religion. For these reasons, universalizing deductive–nomological explanations may be profoundly problematic, not so much because they are wrong or impossible (I believe that they are intellectually possible as long as one recognizes the conventional and artificial nature of theoretical abstraction), but because they are politically irresponsible. What I am trying to do is to get beyond is the conception of scholarly subjectivity as a bias and move toward a positioned engagement with political contests that are real (and I want to be clear that Tweed’s conception of location is more complex than a mere bias, so I see this work as a valuable contribution to an engaged religious studies).

To the extent that I have some quibbles with Tweed, then, they are largely semantic ones (but with some significant effects) in that I am not convinced that the subtitle “A Theory of Religion” is entirely appropriate. It strikes me that the ultimate value of this book is as a collection of remarkably nuanced and thoughtful strategies for historians and ethnographers hoping to approach the fluidity of religious phenomena, and may better be thought of as “A Method of Religion.” To this end, Tweed’s book is a seminal (but not in the Clintonian Sense)
methodological treatise that will encourage greater conceptual depth and complexity in historical and ethnographic accounts of religious traditions, organizations, or communities.

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doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfp032
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Advance Access publication June 25, 2009
LIKE THOMAS TWEED, I am strongly interested in studying religions on the move, particularly as they are practiced in everyday life by transnational immigrants in their struggles to negotiate “simultaneous embeddedness,” to construct identities and spaces of livelihood that span national borders. From this perspective, Tweed’s work has been extremely helpful. At the epistemological level, his call to abandon the search for “the view from everywhere-at-once or nowhere-in-particular” (7) and to see theory as situated, embodied, open-ended, and humble, but strategically effective clusters of tropes is profoundly salutary. This is particularly true at a time when all the dichotomies and teleological narratives of modernity fail to make sense of the furious dialectic of “time-space compression” and “distantiation” brought by the current phase of globalization (Giddens 1990, Harvey 1990). Rapid innovations in the fields of communication and transportation have facilitated widespread flows of goods, capital, ideas, and people that have placed us in each other’s backyards. At the same time, locality, which has been traditionally built around territorialized face-to-face interactions, has become disembedded, often beamed across the world to satisfy the demands for uniqueness and diversity in global cultural markets. As Tweed rightly points out, religions as “sacroscapes,” as “confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries,” are central to this radical redrawing of our cartographies (2006: 54).

Methodologically, I have found Tweed’s emphasis on mobility, relatedness, and cross-fertilization very helpful in highlighting the creativity of transnational immigrants, as they draw from religious resources to construct practices, identities, and institutions that operate at multiple spatio-temporal scales and are characterized by flexibility.
and hybridity. His critique of essentialist and static readings of religion that tend to see it as isomorphic with the nation-state (one nation, one language, one culture, and one religion) has been extremely liberating, showing how religion has historically been implicated in age-old translocal processes including trade, wars, missions, colonialism, pilgrimage, tourism, as well as more recent dynamics such as the rise and spread of mass and electronic media (Vásquez and Marquardt 2003).

While Tweed has made undeniable contributions toward a new theory of religion, the collaborative field work I have been conducting among transnational immigrants from Latin America in the New South points to some significant limitations in his work. I believe that the robustness of a theory resides not just in its capacity to critique old paradigms or in its coherence and elegance. For me, the real “cash value” of a theory of society and culture, to use William James’s expression, lies in its ability to make sense of saliences and tackle problems we encounter in the lifeworld. More concretely, useful theories of society and culture allow us to continue what Foucault calls, “a permanent critique of ourselves,” “a philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historical-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, thus as work carried out by ourselves upon our selves as free beings” (Foucault 1984: 47). I see social and cultural theory as necessarily a transgressive practice, an attempt to make power more transitive, to ask the question: “in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?” (Foucault 1984: 45).

My sense is that Tweed himself is committed to a similar version of “wirkliche Historie” (effective history), which, in the Nietzschan tradition, “introduces discontinuity into our very being” and “composes a genealogy of history as a vertical projection of its position” (Foucault 1977: 154, 157). Tweed tells us, for instance, that in addition to their commitments to research and teaching, scholars of religion “also are always in place and always in transit. They are dwelling and crossing” (180–181). Tweed also states that he wants his theory to “allow the interpreter to consider negotiations of power as well as meaning as religion constrains as well as enables crossings of all sorts” (177). I believe, however, that his almost exclusive reliance on aquatic metaphors, while offering a powerful critique of dominant categories in religious studies, leads to a troubling “blind spot” in Tweed’s own words: a failure to give widespread dynamics of exclusion and closure their proper epistemological weight.
For the past five years, I have been studying Latino immigrants who have increasingly settled in new destinations like Siler City, North Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; and Marietta, Georgia (Vásquez et al. 2008). In contrast to immigrants who came to traditional gateway cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, Latino immigrants in new destinations cannot rely on established networks to facilitate the integration, to assist them in the process of dwelling and crossing. Thus, these recent immigrants are particularly vulnerable to the power of local, state, federal agencies that are harassing them as part of a growing anti-immigrant climate. In this context, the religious organizations that immigrants build become ever more crucial to their survival, very often providing the only spaces where immigrants can find protection, solidarity, intimacy, and spiritual and financial help. It is precisely this reality of control and exclusion as well as resistance that I wish to underscore as I reflect on Tweed’s valuable work.

From the point of view of these immigrants, Tweed’s theory of religion overemphasizes mobility, ultimately undermining the critical force of his arguments. Since July 1, 2007, Latino immigrants in Georgia, both documented and undocumented, report a generalized climate of fear and uncertainty, as the state began to implement SB 529, the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (Lovato 2008). Among other things, this law empowers the local police to check the legal status of any suspicious person and to report any undocumented person directly to ICE (Immigration & Customs Enforcement). Many told us stories of police officers hiding by traffic lights, waiting for any Latino-looking individual to make small mistakes, such as going slightly over the speed limit or not putting on the turn signal when switching lanes, so they can stop drivers and check papers. Our informants also tell us of the fear they have driving without a license, since the law makes it impossible for any undocumented immigrants to secure one, and getting into an fender-bender that could result in spending days in a local jail and being deported while their children, who often are U.S. citizens, can only stand by. Many informants tell us now that they go out only to do what is necessary to survive: they leave home to go to work, or for a quick trip to the store, or to pick up kids from school, or maybe to go to church, where they feel a small measure of safety. However, even churches are not safe places anymore. In Oklahoma, where the state adopted another harsh law (HB 1804), there are reports that enforcement officials, knowing that centrality of religion for Latin Americans, have intercepted immigrants entering churches (Scaperlanda 2008).
To be sure, among immigrants in Georgia and Oklahoma, there continue to be flows of all kinds. They are still sending remittances to their home towns in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Huehuetenango, often to build the local Catholic church or to support the transnational ministry of Pentecostal churches. In fact, some of our interviewees tell us that, given their precarious legal status, they have been working harder, often taking two or three jobs, to send more money to Mexico, Guatemala, and Brazil, knowing that they might get caught and get deported at any moment. Nevertheless, what is more striking is the susceptibility of these flows to the panoptical control of state apparatuses. The mobilities that are a normal part of everyday life have become perilous, if not extremely difficult. The Guatemalan community in Atlanta has been particularly affected. Many of those who came in the early and mid-1990s, fleeing a civil war to which the United States contributed, applied for asylum and, while their applications were pending tried to make a life in this country, securing jobs, buying houses, opening businesses, forming families, and having children. Few of the asylum applications were granted, but now that there is increasing pressure to enforce the immigration laws, the information the Guatemalan immigrants provided has been used to track them down, and in many cases to arrest and deport them. Without its most established members, the Guatemalan community feels particularly vulnerable among the city’s Latin American immigrants.

The issue of undocumented immigration is a complex one, and reasonable people may disagree on how to solve it in a comprehensive and humane fashion. Nonetheless, our field work raises an unavoidable question: how do we theorize fluidity and mobility while taking into account what Foucault called “bio-power,” the increasing power of nation-states the monitor, regulate, exclude, and exploit transnational populations? Thus far, the tendency in the study of the cultural dimensions of globalization has been to stress movement, heterogeneity, paradox, and hybridity. For example, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai characterizes globalization as “a complex, overlapping, disjunctive” interplay of flows, among which are ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. Appadurai uses the suffix -scape “to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles” (1996: 33). While Appadurai does not explicitly mention religion among globalization’s scapes, it is clear that his influential approach dovetails with Tweed’s “hydraulic model” of religion—religions as “flows – analogous to movements of electric charges, solids, gases, or liquids” (59). As Tweed eloquently puts it: “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 metaphors, 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” (Tweed 2006: 60).

The emphasis on fluidity, mobility, and hybridity is a much needed corrective to readings of globalization that present it an inevitable economic process that flattens all differences and localities. Reductive and totalizing readings of globalization fail to see how individuals and localities resist and contest global forces, even if these forces carry an enormous power to transform everyday life. By including culture and showing how globalization is polyvocal, Appadurai not only offers a more nuanced picture of globalization, but also allows scholars to identify alternative translocal engagements, “grassroots globalizations,” which, for example, may include local indigenous activists fighting for their land in Latin America linking with environmental activists in North America and Europe through dense transnational networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In turn, Tweed’s strategic use of aquatic metaphors “avoids essentializing religious traditions as static, isolated, immutable substances” (60).

However, as the example of Latino immigrants in the New South shows, globalization is as much about cultural melange as it is about the concentration of wealth in the metropole, the reinvigoration of the national security state, and the emergence of virulent nativist movements. How then do we study religion in motion without falling back on the old static, essentialist, and functionalist models or uncritically celebrating mobility?

Following theorists such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Zygmunt Bauman, I argue that today’s globalization can be better characterized as a “mobility regime” than as the juxtaposition of transborder flows. Today, global capitalism thrives as much on mobility and deterritorialization as on the operation of integrated systems of surveillance, control, and containment (Hardt and Negri 2000: 45). On the one hand, globalization encourages people to migrate by undermining local ways of life and beaming cosmopolitan images of wealth and success to be found in the metropole. On the other hand, as the tightening of immigration laws worldwide, from the United States to Europe to South Africa, demonstrates, globalization involves limiting the movement of people. This interplay between mobility and containment/closure allows for a new global bio-politics, the extraction of surplus from dislocated individuals, who, as “illegal” immigrants, provide cheap and disposable
labor without the right to demand any recognition and political power from their host societies and states (Ngai 2004).

According to Shamir, “the engine of the contemporary mobility regime is a ‘paradigm of suspicion’ that conflates the perceived threats of crime, immigration, and terrorism (hence the notion of ‘integrated risk management’), and … the technology of intervention that enables it is biosocial profiling” (2005: 200). The result is a “gated globe” in which selective osmosis regulates and monitors the flows of people (Cunningham 2004). “Thought of in spatial terms, globalization is a process constitutive of a global mobility regime that aspires to screen those substances (viruses, people, and hazardous materials) that may cross the boundaries of some designated social containers (e.g., national borders and gated communities) from those that may not” (Shamir 2005: 208–209). This is why Bauman claims that today “mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor; the stuff of which the new, increasingly world-wide, social, political, economic, and cultural hierarchies are daily built and rebuilt” (1998: 9).

If it is more appropriate to characterize the post-911 environment as one of “enclosed mobilities, regulated transnationalisms, and monitored rather than simple flexible sovereignties” (Cunningham 2004: 332), as a gated globe, rather than a confluence or a dissemination of multiple flows, the dialectic of power and resistance must be front and center in our social analyses of immigrants and their religions. To account for this dialectic, Tweed’s theory of religion would have to be enriched with relational metaphors beyond aquatic tropes. For example, Tweed writes:

Sacrospaces, as I understand these religious confluences, are not static. They are not fixed, built environments – as the allusions to landscape in the term might imply – although 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. (62)

At stake in today’s globalization are not just traces or trails but sharp boundaries, fortified borders, segregated spaces, stipulated and illicit paths, strategies of inclusion and exclusions, and post-colonial practices for generating and managing difference. And while the boundaries and borders created may be permeable, contingent, and contested, they are binding. They have the power to mark bodies, create (criminal)
subjects, and channel flows of goods, ideas, money, and people in certain directions, according to certain power logics. Tweed is certainly careful not to celebrate flows uncritically, he readily acknowledges that “sometimes trails are sites for mourning.” He also refers to “compelled passages and constrained crossings,” in which religions may “justify the forced or coerced migration of peoples, as with slavery to the United States and Latin America, where slavery’s Christian advocates in the Atlantic World appealed to sacred narratives to defend their practices” (135). However, most of the metaphors Tweed uses to illustrate how religion moves tend to underplay how social and religious practices are both “structured” and “structuring,” as Bourdieu would put it.

I suggest that the notions of networks and the associated concept of social fields can provide good counter-points to the excessive anti-structuralism of hydraulic models (cf. Clarke 2004, Cooke and Lawrence 2005, Taylor 2003). I have in another article sketched the outlines of a networks approach to religion: the need to see networks not as inherently integrated wholes that automatically dictate the behavior, choices, and tastes of their individual members, but as shifting relational social fields characterized by cooperation as well as tension and competition, inclusion as well as exclusion. I also stressed the need to see networks not simply as inert mathematical models, but as historical and phenomenological realities saturated with religious narratives, moral trajectories, memories, utopian horizons, and cognitive maps. Networks are meaningful and meaning-bearing structures of relationality from which and through which embodied individuals “invent within limits” in response to everyday predicaments (Bourdieu 1977: 96; Vásquez 2008). In addition, borrowing from Bourdieu, I argued that social fields are relatively bounded domains of intermeshed practices inhabited by individuals with differential access to resources of various types, including economic, political, educational, and religious. A social field is “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed” (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004: 1009). In this sense, a social field is both “an arbitrary social construct” and “objectified history” (Bourdieu 1990: 66, 67). In it “individuals do not move about … in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space … and partly because they resist the forces of the field with their specific inertia, that is, their properties, which may exist in embodied form, as dispositions, or in objectified form, in goods, qualifications, etc” (Bourdieu 1984: 110). In other words, networks and social fields define “probable trajectories” for
individuals and groups. They delineate the horizons of what is possible at given juncture.

Conceptualized in this fashion, the notions of networks and social fields are excellent tools to theorize mobility, change, and creativity from a perspective that acknowledges the widespread interplay between domination and resistance. Although networks and fields are deterritorializing—deeply implicated in globalization’s time-space compression and distanciation—they are always territorialized and prone to stratification and centralization. Working from the synapses, the terminal points, at which power is directly applied on and resisted by embodied individuals, we can construct erudite “ascending analyses” of the “infinitesimal mechanisms of power” that constitute self, society, and religion as legitimate and authoritative realms of experience and activity (Foucault 1980: 99).

Tweed mentions networks throughout Crossing and Dwelling. He even cites sociologist Michael Mann’s point that “societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power” (Mann 1986: 1) as helpful for “reminding us that power as well as meaning is involved” (Tweed: 210). However, in the end, Tweed concludes that “flow is a better metaphor than network for cultural analysis” (210). For him, networks appear to be derivative traces of motion, relatively stable reifications of flows. “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” (69). This understanding of networks as a second residual, structuralist moment in the process of religious generativity runs the danger of representing flows as disembedded and decontextualized realities, with no particular agents, vehicles, trajectories, and targets. Religious flows are always produced by individuals embedded in socio-cultural and ecological networks of relations that shape and are shaped by confluences. In other words, praxis and structure are not separate dimensions of our lifeworld, with one preceding the other. They are rather mutually implicative. Further, mobility does not undermine this recursive relation by heightening the itinerancy of practices against the staticity of reified networks and institutions, which then seek to control flows post facto. Mobility only underscores how much practices and structures are, from the outset, dependent on each other to provide a relative measure of stability to our experience as part of the pragmatic realism, “realism with a small r” that Tweed rightly defends (8).

Tweed is aware of the limits of his “hydrodynamics of religion.” Toward the end of Crossing and Dwelling, he asks:
if religious flows are nonlinear systems, like heart rhythms or faucet drippings, does that mean that the only appropriate aim is interpretation, not prediction or control, as some scholars who have pondered the implications of chaos theory for the humanities and social sciences have argued? If so, what would that interpretation entail, for example in historical analysis? … if we try to trace the complex flows that emerge from “initial conditions” will interpreters be washed away while trying to chart the transfluence of innumerable causal currents? … Which flows should the interpreter follow, and if the answer is all of them, and more, then would that ever allow analysis of more than a single event, and even then only with the sense that surely we have missed some of the transverse currents that have propelled religious history? (173)

In other words, if the world is nothing more than an ever-changing sea of amorphous flows, how can we study it? Paradoxically, here the hydrodynamics of religion is in danger of washing the positioned scholar away and re-inscribing “the view from everywhere-at-once or nowhere-in-particular.” According to Cunningham, “one of the central fallacies of the turn to a porous world and an emphasis on cultural flows has been the assumption that flow connotes mobility and, consequently, fluid, unpredictable interconnection. Flows, of course, can equally connote boundedness, exclusion and the systematic regulation of movement” (2004: 334).

Moreover, does the shift to aquatic tropes offer scholars and activists interested in questions of justice the critical resources to uncover and challenge domination, to continue the “work carried out by ourselves upon our selves as free beings,” as Foucault puts it? Can chaos theory, to which Tweed tentatively points, provide sufficient tools to critique persistent, egregious, and intransigent forms of power, such as those that many immigrants face in their daily lives?

In a gated globe, regulated by panoptical regimes of mobility and characterized by selective osmosis, the metaphors of networks and fields provide a necessary corrective to the model of flows, which runs the danger of overstating the pervasiveness of porous boundaries and movement. As Shamir rightly complains, globalization has hitherto been “overtheorized in terms of social openness and under-theorized in terms of social closure” (2005: 214). I hope that a strategically deployed networks approach can correct this imbalance, giving us the resources for both a fallible but robust emancipatory philosophical ethos and a more context sensitive methodology to study religion in motion. My aim in this piece has not been to disqualify Tweed’s hydrodynamics of religion as not viable or fruitful. Instead, I
have tried to point to some of its limitations and to offer ways to overcome them. I believe that approaches built around the notions of networks and fields are compatible with those relying primarily on aquatic or spatial tropes (such as Kim Knott’s or J. Z. Smith’s). All of these approaches ultimately seek to emplace, historicize, and re-materialize (i.e., to recover the dimensions of practice and embodiment) the study of religion. Indeed, a contextual combination of relational, hydraulic, and spatial tropes may be way to explore the complexities of religion today.

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Crabs, Crustaceans, Crabiness, and Outrage: A Response

Thomas A. Tweed

IN HIS RESPONSE to my book, *Crossing and Dwelling*, a theory of religion that emerged from five years of fieldwork among Cuban American Catholics at a shrine in Miami, Aaron Hughes raises two criticisms. First, my theory does not account for his *minyan* in North West Calgary. I would have to know much more about those “real flesh and blood Jews” and more about what he wants to interpret to offer a sustained analysis, but I suspect that such an analysis is possible. If I am right in concluding that Hughes wants to interpret “the mourner’s *qaddish*” in domestic spaces, then my fuller account might begin by noting that religion as dwelling situates devotees in time and space—
including in the body, the home, and the cosmos—and religion as crossing imagines an ultimate horizon of human life and prescribes ways of crossing it. I then could continue with a textured representation of that mourning ritual as a corporeal crossing that confronts embodied limits and traverses a stage in the life cycle (136–150). After learning much more about how the Canadian Jewish mourners in that minyan understand death—and I suspect they disagree among themselves—I might continue by discussing how they map and traverse life’s ultimate horizon (150–156). Those Jews might imagine that cosmic crossing as a change in condition or in location, as transformation or transport, to use terms taken from my typology of religious teleographies (152). That, in any case, is the outline of a possible interpretation. Hughes might not find this analysis illuminating—as always, much depends on the particular interests of the interpreter—but I do not have enough information—or space—to give a fuller account here. So, I decided, it might be helpful to engage another issue raised by him.

This leads me to Hughes’s second point. While I do a good job of representing Cuban Catholics in Miami (Tweed 1997; Tweed 2006), he suggests, my theory is less satisfying as it moves “away from fleshy humans and into the activity of presenting and processing cross-cultural data.” In laying out this criticism he appeals to an essay by Jonathan Z. Smith to suggest that I “conflate” two ways of doing comparison, the ethnographic and the encyclopedic.

Let me frame my response to Hughes, and the other commentators, by gesturing toward Smith’s typology and recalling a passage from William James’s Varieties of Religious Experience that Smith quotes approvingly in his essay on comparison: “The first thing the intellect does with an object is to class it along with something else. But any object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us also as if it must be sui generis and unique. Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a crustacean, and thus dispose of it. ‘I am no such thing,’ it would say: ‘I am myself, myself alone’” (Smith 242–243; James 9).

That reminds me of an experience my nine-year old son Kevin and I had at the beach, where we realized that crabs could be both crustaceans and just themselves alone. We hiked to the Sound side of a coastal island in North Carolina on a muggy night at sunset. As Kevin and I emerged from the thick brush we were startled, and transfixed, by the sight of thousands of small crabs on the shore. Both of us—he’s now an adult—remember that as a formative moment. The wonder we shared emerged from our perception of the overwhelming number of
crabs illumined by the orange sun sinking behind them. Yet as we crouched silently together watching carefully, we then saw not the homogenous multitude that had met our initial gaze, not just crustaceans or even crabs but fiddler crabs. And not just fiddler crabs. We encountered distinctiveness. Those crabs, as James might put it, were just themselves. We noticed: this one has a larger right claw. The shell of that one, over near the heron, is a bit darker in color. It was the combined force of both perceptions—as well as the joy at having a witness—that gripped us: the sense of the multitude and of the individual, the general and the particular.

In these terms, Hughes might be seen as protesting that while the representation of my “crabs”—Cuban Catholics—is richly contextualized, I do less well with his “crabs”—Jews in his minyan, which I disservice by classifying as “crustaceans.” Those Canadian Jews, like Cuban Catholics, are themselves and themselves alone. If that’s his point, while I include 19 references to Jews and Judaism, and my central themes of emplacement and displacement certainly make sense of Jews in many times and places, it’s true that there are no extended case studies of Jews in the book. That does not seem surprising to me, however, since, after all, it’s a theory and not a history or ethnography. But maybe my Buddhist and Christian examples are richer since that has been the focus of my historical and ethnographic work (Tweed 1997; Tweed 2000). I am not sure. I will leave that assessment to readers.

I think Hughes has another point, however, though I am not fully certain I understand it. Is it that we shouldn’t mix modes of comparison or that only the ethnographic mode, which he praises in my work, is defensible? Or—and at times this seems to be his point—is Hughes suggesting that we focus only on our own “crabs,” in all their robust particularly? In other words, to coin a term, is his problem “crabbiness”—that inclination to be suspicious about transcultural comparison? If so, I share his concern. I can be a bit crabby too. I’m impatient with decontextualized encyclopedic comparisons and wary of over-generalizing ethnographic analysis. And, like James’s crabs, I’m “outraged”—not by classification, which is inevitable, but at some morphological and evolutionary comparative schemes that have had morally disastrous consequences, marginalizing peoples, and sanctioning colonization, slavery, sexism, racism, and violence.

In any case, my own approach to comparison is closest to the ethnographic, but not really any of the four identified by Smith or Hughes. As I indicated in Crossing and Dwelling, I advocate a version of the “dialogical” approach originally proposed by William Clebsch, as that
approach might be revised in relation to more recent scholarship, especially postcolonial theory (Tweed 2006:249; Clebsch). In other words, I favor translocative comparison that alternately uses the terms of the one to interpret the other and takes historical context seriously, as in my article on occult influences in Victorian Japan and Meiji America (Tweed 2005). I did not try to do that sort of comparison in the book, however. Rather, I included examples to illustrate a theory that emerged from fieldwork. Illustrations were needed, I think, to make it livelier and to persuade readers who do not share an interest in Cuban American Catholics, my crabs.

And, in fact, I anticipated Hughes’s objection and defended my strategy of citing examples from beyond the Miami shrine (84–85). I explained that in the last two chapters, as I tried to show the theory’s potential usefulness, I would move “back and forth between the shrine and the study, between the historical particular and the transcultural theme, between positioned questions and tentative answers” (85). “The primary criterion for the assessment of all this transtemporal and transcultural traversing,” I went on to suggest to readers inclined toward a principled crabiness, “is not whether I have fully represented the complexities of each case I cite. I haven’t. It’s this: do these interpretative transmigrations produce categories and prompt questions that allow more illuminating sightings at other sites” (85)? The jury on that, of course, is still out. Readers, including Hughes, will have to decide that for themselves.

The other panelists raise other important issues—about the boundary of the religious, the nature of theory, and the moral function of theorizing. To continue—and overuse—our crustacial metaphor, Knott wonders about whether my theory can adequately distinguish crabs from non-crabs and locate crabs away from shore, where we might not expect them. Curtis welcomes my emphasis on positionality but wonders if it allows me to have a theory at all since there seems to be no way to falsify claims about anyone’s crabs. Vásquez asks if “network” might not be a better metaphor than “flow,” at least for his purpose—to allow “scholars and activists interested in questions of justice … [to] have critical resources to uncover and challenge domination.” He wonders, in other words, if my position on shore provides a vantage from which to express outrage of a different sort—at the ways that state power has endangered his crabs and impoverished their habitat.

Let me begin with Knott’s question about the boundary of the religious. She generously notes that my theory originated with different questions in mind but suggests that it does not help us “distinguish ‘religion’ from the surrounding terrain of ‘non-religion’” or locate religion in “contemporary everyday spaces.” In her book The Location of
Religion, which appeared about the same time as Crossing and Dwelling, Knott explored similar interests. I share her sense that we have a great deal in common, and I could say more about those commonalities. But let me address her concern by pointing to the elements in my account that distinguish the religious and the secular and by identifying the resources that allow us to analyze how religion and other cultural trajectories function in similar ways. In her work, she has been most concerned to interpret practices in sites usually identified as “secular”—including medical centers and urban landscapes. My theory acknowledges this sort of complexity. I talk about “the mutual intercausality of religion, economy, society, and politics” and acknowledge “the transfluence of religious and non-religious streams” (60). I note that “religions are among the cultural trajectories that help construct spatial frames of reference as institutions record and transmit tropes, artifacts, and rituals that encode representations” (95). So let me be clear: other cultural forms can function in similar ways and have some, if not all, features of religion, including medicine, therapy, sports, fiction, music, and film. Further, in my emphasis on four chronotopes or time-spaces—the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos—I acknowledge that religion can be found outside churches, mosques, and temples: “Religions also imagine and transform other spaces—including the street … the neighborhood, the region, and the city” I proposed. “These are only some of the myriad, shifting, and interpenetrating sites that religious men and women chart, make, and occupy” (222–223 n14). Other cultural forms can function as watch and compass, as orientation in time and space, and they can also “negotiate collective identity” and “establish social hierarchies within the group and taxonomies beyond it” (97–98). Other cultural practices also “intensify joy and confront suffering” (54).

So what distinguishes religion? Two things: the appeal to suprahuman forces and the imagining of an ultimate horizon. I addressed this issue explicitly. “Religions mark and traverse not just the boundaries of the natural terrain and the limits of embodied life,” I suggested, “but also the ultimate horizon—a phrase that, with suprahuman forces, distinguishes religious and nonreligious cultural forms … religions mark and cross the ultimate horizon of human life.” “Other cultural trajectories—for example, art, music, and literature—can mark and traverse the boundaries of the natural terrain and the limits of embodied life. Those other cultural forms, however, usually do not appeal to superhuman forces or map cosmic space—and they do not offer prescriptions about how to cross the ultimate horizon” (76).
Knott overlooks the first phrase (ultimate horizon) and dismisses the second (suprahuman forces). In the passage in which she indicates that my theory does not distinguish religion and non-religion, she adds a qualification: “except in so far as, like many definitions, it mentions the role of suprahuman forces.” She does not say why that phrase is inadequate, however, though presumably it is because it excludes much more from the study of religion than she wants to include. In turn, that seems to be why Knott finds the work of Veikko Anttonen, who prefers the term “sacred,” so helpful (Anttonen). Knott also fails to note the potential usefulness of the other distinguishing phrase, “ultimate horizon.” Since she is a careful and charitable reader, I am led to wonder whether I should have made that point more prominent by adding that phrase to my definition: “by drawing on human and suprahuman forces and imagining an ultimate horizon of human life.” I am not sure that additional phrase would settle the issue for Knott, unless I could go on to show, as I think I could, that the interpreter thereby might subtly analyze a wide range of practices that occur outside “religious” institutions.

In any case, Knott also raises another important question by proposing that my theory can be understood as a “poetics,” as “a series of interconnected tropes to think with” and “not an explanation of religion.” Curtis, who more fully recognizes the ways I enact a politics as well as a poetics of religious representation, makes a similar point and raises a crucial question about the nature of theory: must it be “falsifiable” to count as theory? This question, in turn, raises complex issues about knowledge and interpretation, and I cannot repeat all the arguments of the book here. Let me just give a brief response. Curtis favors, I think, one notion of theory, a perfectly reasonable one—but not mine. In chapter one, I suggest that there have been five primary views of theory. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have imagined theories as (i) universal laws; (ii) law-like regularities; (iii) ideal types; (iv) “contextual understandings of interacting motives;” or (v) instruments for unmasking power relations and exploring ethical issues (7–8). My own view, which I call (after Hilary Putnam) pragmatic or nonrepresentational realism, “takes seriously critical theory’s highlighting of power relations while it also resonates with some moderate versions of the constructivist view” (8).¹ But I depart from all five types

¹ Curtis offers a very productive analysis of my theory, but he slightly misrepresents my views about assessment when he cites John Dewey more than Hilary Putnam, to whom I am most indebted, as he tries to understand, and even sympathetically engage, my pragmatic viewpoint. Dewey and Putnam held different views on this issue. To the extent that Putnam’s views changed
in emphasizing that theories and theorists are not static. I re-imagine theories as itineraries—that is, as embodied travels, positioned representations, and proposed routes (7–20).

What does all that mean as we try to answer Curtis’s helpful question? As I note in the conclusion, “this theory does not try to formulate universally applicable laws … [and] it does not aim at explanation or prediction … Instead, it offers an interpretation, a positioned sighting of the shifting terrain, a situated account of the complex ways that women and men have negotiated meaning and power through religions” (165). But, Curtis protests, “it is not clear how someone might prove Tweed wrong.” I admit to being somewhat less troubled that he can’t prove me wrong. Yet to be less playful, let me try to clarify my views. That clarification might begin by emphasizing “the reciprocal triadic relation” that holds among definition, theory, and trope: “definitions,” I proposed, “imply theories and employ tropes” (42). The choice of orienting tropes—in my case, flow and space—is not true or false. That choice is more or less useful in making sense, first, of devotion at the shrine and, by extension, talking about practices beyond the shrine. In turn, my definition and theory, which interconnect with those guiding tropes, initially emerged as useful for a particular purpose: interpreting practices at the shrine. Applied in the study of practices in other times and places, my proposed trope, stipulative definition, and situated theory are only more or less useful.

But what, if anything, would count against this theory? How might we assess it? First, to the extent the book emerged from fieldwork, and its definition of religion—as well as the tropes it employs and theory it implies—is empirical, it would count against it to say that it does not offer a persuasive interpretation of devotion at the Miami shrine. Second, assessment is always a judgment by a particular interpreter for a particular purpose, and if an ethnographer, historian, or experimentalist wanted to isolate and test claims from the substantive and functionalist components of my definition, or generate hypotheses from my extended analysis in the book, that would be easy enough to do.

For example, as Ann Taves notes in her introduction to this forum, one of my central concerns in the book was to attend to the complex interplay of organic and cultural forces, and in the chapter on the kinetics of dwelling I directly engaged scholarship from the natural and behavioral sciences about temporal and spatial cognition. I analyzed

over the years, Putnam does not even always agree with himself, much less Dewey. It is the view that Putnam expressed in the works I cited in Crossing and Dwelling that I find most persuasive.
how religions function as watch and compass to orient devotees in time and space. With regard to spatial orientation, I distinguished *autocentric* (self-centered) and *allocentric* (object-centered) reference frames or spatial representations (93). I noted that the latter involves “the hippocampus and adjacent cortical and subcortical structures, concern large distances and long-term spatial memory, and aid humans in orienting and navigating space beyond the body and the immediate environment” (93). I went on to propose that religions construct allocentric reference frames, giving examples from the shrine and elsewhere (95). A scholar searching for a claim to assess could study the allocentric spatial representations of the transnational migrants who, I propose, are propelled back and forth between homeland and the new land by the translocative practices and artifacts at the Miami shrine or, to cite another example I mention, that researcher could analyze the cognitive mapping of Muslims in North India who face west as they place their prayer rug on the floor for the midday prayer (94). Does religion provide allocentric spatial orientation for these devotees, as my analysis proposes? If not, I would feel compelled to rethink that aspect of my account.

So there are things that would count against my account, and assessment is possible, but that does not mean that the triadic interplay of trope, definition, and theory is “falsifiable” or “verifiable” in any strong or usual sense of those terms. To the extent that my analysis gestures beyond the Miami shrine, my choice of orienting trope is tentative, my definition is stipulative, and my theory is interrogative. It is interrogative in the sense that I am asking: How’s this? How does this interpretation, which emerged from systematic study of my crabs, help in the analysis of your crabs? But, as I emphasized in the book, “there are more or less acceptable interpretations, where acceptable means internally coherent and contextually useful” (165). “Contextual utility,” in turn, is judged in terms of the interpreter’s specific interests. To be as clear as possible on this point, I listed 12 questions that readers might ask of this theory or any theory (165–166).

To make the point about assessment in a related way, I also noted that values are involved in the theory’s construction and evaluation: “I appeal directly or indirectly to internal coherence, methodological self-consciousness, epistemological humility, theoretical generativity, definitional adequacy, professional utility, analytic complexity, historical relevance, social justice, and gender inclusiveness. As I do so, I am identifying and enacting epistemic values, moral values—and to the extent that coherence and complexity are about beauty as well—even aesthetic values” (247 n1). In terms of those criteria, Curtis seems to
think my theory does fine. He suggests it’s a contribution to “a politically positioned and engaged critical theory” and “an engaged religious studies.” Yet, applying another epistemic value, he still wonders if it can be “falsified.” If Curtis can accept as sufficient the two ways a researcher might assess the limits of my account—by evaluating its empirical claims about practice at the shrine or generating testable hypotheses from my theoretical analysis—and if he can acknowledge other notions of theory and other modes of assessment—then we have the making of a good conversation about whether my theory enacts his, and other readers’, epistemic and moral values.

Moral values are at the heart of Vásquez’s comments on my book. As with Knott, I’m struck by how much we have in common. Vásquez suggests—and I agree—that we might see our viewpoints as “compatible.” Our views emerge from analyses of similar species of “crabs”—Latino transnational migrants—although, in an important difference, he focuses on those who have bypassed gateway cities like Miami, New York, and Los Angeles and settled in “new destinations like Siler City, North Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; and Marietta, Georgia.” I also have done some limited study of Latino migrants in North Carolina, and supervised theses and dissertations on the topic (Tweed 2002). And I agree that the challenges facing post-9/11 Latino migrants in those new destinations are very different than those that faced 1990s Cuban migrants, who enjoyed the advantages of refugee status and the support of a large community in South Florida.

Since we agree about all that, and much more, I think it might be more useful if I focused my response on a few differences. Toward that end, let me begin by identifying three related but distinguishable moral concerns that a researcher might bring to the task of constructing and assessing a theory of religion. A scholar might ask (i) whether, on empirical grounds, a theory adequately represents the complex ways that religions historically have functioned to both oppress and to liberate; (ii) whether, on ethical grounds, it provides adequate theoretical tools for offering a moral critique, even if it does not provide such a critique; and (iii) whether a theory actually offers an adequate moral critique and, crossing into the realm of politics, proposes an ethic of engagement.

I take Vásquez to be suggesting that on the first criterion my theory has some merit since I refer to “compelled passages” and “constrained crossings” and point out that religions may “justify the forced or coerced migration of peoples, as with slavery to the United States and Latin America, where slavery’s Christian advocates in the Atlantic World appealed to sacred narratives to defend their practices” (135).
I do not do as well with his crabs, however, since I underemphasize the ways in which recent transnational migrants in the New South live in a “gated globe” and suffer from the power of nation-states, as with the ill effects of the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act. In other words, I recognize that flows can be stopped or slowed, but that recognition seems insufficient for scholars primarily interested in moral critique and social change. That brings me to the second criterion. Vásquez suggests that aquatic metaphors have some advantages in the analysis of religion, but they have some limitations too (Vásquez 2007). Network and social field are better orienting tropes, he proposes, for “scholars and activists interested in questions of justice” since it gives them “the critical resources to uncover and challenge domination.” In other words, his network theory is more adequate on moral grounds: it provides better tools for offering a critique. Finally, in places Vásquez seems to be appealing to the third criterion as well, as when he suggests that the real “cash value” of theorizing, which he sees as a “transgressive practice,” rests in its ability to “tackle problems we encounter in the life-world.” In my terms, Vásquez finds my theory less adequate because it fails to go beyond moral critique to offer an ethic of civic engagement, a program for enacting social change.

My theory, as I see it, does adequately meet the first empirical criterion by emphasizing the ways that crossings can be forced, coerced, or obstructed and by noting that religions have been morally ambivalent, both sanctioning injustice and prompting change. I welcome Vásquez’s friendly critique and its emphasis on institutional networks and social fields, however, since it invites me to clarify this point: I talk about institutional networks, as he acknowledges, and I even put institutions literally at the center of my theory, as on the diagram on page 67. As I imagine it, all flows are channeled but not fully determined (because some personal agency always remains) by the power of institutions. To put it differently, just as all space is striated, marked by social power, there are no unimpeded flows. Organic-cultural flows, in other words, are propelled, compelled, and blocked, directed this way and that by institutional networks. I am thinking here not only of the Georgia statute, but also of the Coast Guard’s attempts over the years to block aquatic crossings to South Florida and the border patrol’s attempts to imprison migrants trying to cross from Mexico to Texas, where I now live and work. So I welcome his emphasis on institutional networks as a refinement to my account—or perhaps a slight shift of theoretical attention—though I’d be inclined to suggest (appealing to epistemic values like complexity) that, overall, my theory is a bit richer because it illumines a wider range of practices, including, as Curtis notes, the
multiple ways that religions have functioned to both sanction and alleviate injustice.

On the second criterion, although I didn’t call it that, in *Crossing and Dwelling* I offered an ethic of representation, an account of the role-specific obligations of scholars. I suggested that they have a duty to reflect on the constitutive term of the field—“religion.” I also argued that fact and value are entangled. There are no value-neutral scholarly representations: we appeal, self-consciously or not, to epistemic values (like coherence) and to moral values (like fairness) in our work. Further, representations negotiate power as well as meaning. They not only help us understand self and other, they also situate us in social space. We enter and leave the contact zone of scholarly representation—in the classroom, the library, the bookstore, and the lecture hall—with more or less power. Finally, emphasizing my own blind spots, and offering a pragmatic understanding of truth and knowledge, I also implicitly celebrated a particular virtue—humility—as necessary for research and teaching. We each stand in a particular place, a site that continually shifts, and our representations of religious women and men are positioned sightings, representations along the way. What we say is not the first word—or the last.

On the third criterion, even though one political scientist has suggested that my theory points toward an agonistic democratic theory, I did not set out to propose a theory of politics or an ethic of engagement. But, I think, the theoretical resources are there. If humility is a fundamental virtue in my ethic of representation, other virtues, and other concomitant habits and practices, are crucial for my view of our obligations in the civic arena. Scholars function as public intellectuals whenever they enter a classroom, talk to reporters, take the podium, or publish a book. Like everyone else, scholars also are citizens of local, national, and global communities. But which civic obligations, if any, do we have as scholars of religious studies? Specialists can’t agree on this point. Some say we have no obligations. Others recognize a duty, but can’t agree if that entails describing, legitimating, or criticizing religions. Some make normative theological judgments from and for

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2 For example, Donald Wiebe (ix) has argued that as specialists in a scientific field dedication to explanation “academic students of religion must eschew politico-ideological interference of any kind, even though the field of religious studies as a whole possesses an inevitably political quality.”

3 Russell McCutcheon (140–141), for example, suggests that scholars should be “critics.” Religions are “social authorizing practices” and the task is to show how the historical and social process works. That involves an explanatory “redescription” of religion: “To accept the role of public intellectual requires us consistently to lay bare these mechanisms of power and control. Our role is not to act as caretakers for religion… but rather our role is unfailingly to probe beneath the
communities of faith. But is it appropriate for religious studies scholars, as specialists in the comparative study of religion, to enter the public conversation about how they—and others—ought to act in the civic arena, at the PTA, the mall, or City Hall? I don’t think, as Vásquez does, that theories of religion as such must directly offer normative judgments—this religion is better, that one is worse. I’ve begun to think, however, that it might be appropriate to tease out the implications of such theories, including mine, for larger ethical questions that confront us all, even if in doing so I am approaching, or even crossing, the boundaries of my field.

The first steps toward such an ethic of engagement, which I have taken in another paper, would outline an agonistic democratic theory that celebrates contestation among coalitions (Tweed 2008). An ethic of civic engagement that emerges from my theory of religion seeks to cultivate one central virtue. To borrow a phrase from political theorist Romand Coles, I propose that civic engagement requires “receptive generosity” (Coles 1997; Coles 2005). It requires a dialogical giving and taking. Giving without taking risks arrogant imposition. Emboldened by a false certainty, the unreceptive giver has colonized peoples, destroyed nature, and sanctioned violence. At the same time, taking in isolation from giving is greed. With Coles, I believe that “hope lies in hyperactive efforts to invent arts of receptive democratic engagement across differences, through which alternative collective powers might gather the strength to actually make another world possible” (x).

I do not have the space to say more here, but I hope I have said enough to persuade readers that my theory does address the first two criteria for moral assessment, though perhaps not as Vásquez rhetorical window dressings that authorize conceptual and social constructions of our own making.”

My thinking on this issue also has been refined in conversation with the participants at another conference panel about my book, especially Brian Pennington and Bruce Lawrence. Some scholars of the academic study of religion have been more open to considering moral questions, either explicitly or implicitly. They might report varied sources of inspiration and accept different labels for their positions, but they share an emphasis on questions of power. These include David Chidester, Richard King, Donald Lopez, Russell McCutcheon, Tomoko Masuzawa, and Bruce Linclon. I have learned from their work.

I am very grateful to Michael Lienesch, the political scientist who offered insightful observations about the implications of Crossing and Dwelling for political theory. In identifying my emerging political theory as “agonistic,” as Lienesch also did, I am positioning my views in terms of a typology of democratic thought. Expanding the models proposed by Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib (1996) proposed four main models of the democratic: the liberal, the republican, the deliberative, and the agonistic. My view shares some commitments expressed in deliberative theories but are aligned most closely with agonistic accounts.
might prefer, and that for those who think that theories of religion should be able to “tackle problems we encounter in the lifeworld,” an ethic of civic engagement could be worked out from the theory’s basic commitments and guiding tropes.

I have been focusing on moral criteria in my response to Vásquez, but I identified other standards for evaluating theories. One criterion is “theoretical generativity” (247). “This theory will be useful,” I proposed in the book, “if it sparks more conversations and generates other accounts—even, or especially, accounts that challenge this one” (166). Judged by that standard, and the four analyses collected here, the theory has been generative, prompting not only appreciative affirmations, but also friendly revisions and productive counter proposals. There might be some principled crabbiness in these four responses, the productive kind that worries about the difficulties and dangers of transcultural analysis. But there is not crankiness. And there is a great deal of good will as the forum participants raise important issues all of us face—how to represent our own crabs, how to distinguish crabs from non-crabs, how to assess claims about anyone’s crabs, how much we should highlight moral concerns in our scholarship and express outrage in all its useful forms—not only because our crabs are irrevocably just themselves but because we worry about the social effects and moral consequences of our shared work.

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doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfp034

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Advance Access publication July 17, 2009