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Crystallising the Angels: A Methodological Proposal for the Study of Angels

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This article will explore the complex issues involved in the study of angels, examining various frames to accommodate the variety of data available. The data includes accounts of people's experiences and questionnaires associated with them, reported visionary experiences and a variety of artistic sources. These will include images (such as Hildegard's choir of angels), poems (such as those of Rilke), historical accounts (such as the biblical account of the Annunciation) and music (such as Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* and hymn texts). The methodology will build on Fiona Bowie's cognitive empathetic engagement (2014), adding to this, methodologies from the area of Performance-As-Research (Boyce-Tillman et al 2013). These will be put together within the developing methodology of crystallisation which "combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text", to build a rich account of the phenomenon problematising its construction, highlighting researchers' positionality and examining socially constructed meanings to reveal the indeterminacy of knowledge claims (Ellingson 2009). Within these it will draw on Boyce-Tillman's analysis of elements within the spiritual experience (Boyce-Tillman 2016) into the areas of Metaphysical, Narrative, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Extra-personal and InterGaian.

Keywords: Angels, Methodology, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen, Music, Art, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

This paper is concerned with a complex topic because of the nature of the available data on angels. The story of angels is one that has been an extraordinarily resilient story in human history,¹ epitomised by the centrality of the Sanctus² to the Eucharistic liturgy. The question for this paper concerns why the stories of angels have succeeded and what evidence has been used to support them. Have they survived because they are true, or because they are helpful or because the dominant culture has supported them (Foucault/Gordon 1980)? In the latter area the attitude of the dominant culture has changed dramatically over the years in Europe. Brynjulf Stige (2002) emphasises

¹ It was Beth Shapiro¹, Assistant Professor in the Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz who linked fiction and non-fiction books in at the Hay Literary festival who asked why some stories succeed.

²What do people think of this act? There are those who see it simply as part of a tradition, and that angels are simply relics of a bygone age and we have moved on, while others still rejoice in the continual help of the angels especially their guardian angel or see each time a beautiful image of the glories of heaven.

how meaning necessarily reflects the norms, values and assumptions of a particular context. Interestingly it is a debate of the relative value of human reason and intuition (Boyce-Tillman 2005) – the interface within human experience of two different but interfacing ways of knowing which at some times have been seen in our history as opposed to one another and incompatible. The notion of holding these two ways of knowing together with several others is the substance of this paper.³

The evidence concerning angels draws on a variety of different sources. There are historical texts of one kind or another and theological expositions. There is data from a number of artistic sources such as music, poetry, image and drama. These have been analyzed from cultural perspectives using methodologies from such disciplines as religious studies. Finally, there are accounts of experiences from a variety of historical periods including the last century in the Alister Hardy RERC Archive. There is also the burgeoning area of performance-as-research (Boyce-Tillman et al 2012) which I have used to present the visionary experiences of several mystic women. There will also be some autoethnographic material.

All of this problematises the methodology appropriate for a subject which lies broadly in the area of spirituality. There are a number of texts outlining and attempting to chart the dilemmas:

In the present debate, theorists that base themselves on, on the one hand, the diversity of culturally constructed spiritualities with variable overlap and, on the other hand, a strong intertwining of concrete cultures are the most convincing. ...New forms of spirituality are often not encountered in an explicitly religious domain but rather in a secular context, such as education, health care, the work place, psychotherapy, and the arts...In this type of research, the interest lies in the social, material and symbolic dimensions of culture, human physicality, and language. (Hense 2011 p14)

Frans Jespers (2011) *Investigating Western Popular Spirituality* (where much of contemporary thinking about angels exists) identifies a typology of popular spirituality that include classical engaged spirituality, classical folk spirituality within established religions such as devotions to saints, holistic engaged spirituality such as deep ecology, and theosophy, holistic ordinary spirituality such as holistic health, astrology and wellness, inner-worldly (secular) spiritual practices using religious symbols as found in engaged environmental, feminist and gay movements and human potential movements and spiritual fragments such as temporal devotions such as 'silent marches' and religious imagery in films and pop music (Jespers 2011 p110). Despite this helpful and detailed typology, he concludes:

How shall we continue this investigation into popular spirituality? For the present, anthropological, psychological and sociological research of religious studies are more desirable than philosophical or theological judgements. (Jespers 2011 p111)

From the Titus Brandsma Institute based in Nijmegen University comes the SPIRIN project – Spirituality International – 'an academic forum, multi-disciplinary in structure and multicultural in approach.' Within the SPIRIN Encyclopaedia they distinguish ten dimensions of spirituality: words, things, arts, texts, forms, connections, processes,

³ Howard Gardner set out a set of multiple intelligences: musical–rhythmic (musicality), visual–spatial (spatial), verbal–linguistic (facility with words), logical–mathematical (reason), bodily–kinaesthetic (motor skill), interpersonal (social skills), intrapersonal, (introspective) and naturalistic. (nature, existential (spiritual) (Last two added later). These were set out Gardner 1963, 1983, 1999, 2011).

professions, disciplines and theories. This sets out clearly the complexities of the field. So the study of spirituality is no longer enclosed in faculties of theology, Christians of catholic traditions or the privilege of the western culture of the Northern hemisphere. On the contrary, the study of spirituality has to be reinvented beyond all fragmentation linked to identity, research tradition, culture, religious adherence or ideology (Huls, 2011 p141).

All of these attempts at analysis have fed into this paper which represents an interdisciplinary weaving together. It weaves many strands and traditions with their associated methodologies. I have gradually come to see truth as a crystal with different facets revealing different aspects of truth:

Crystallisation combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematises its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (Ellingson 2009 p4)

In line with this crystallisation methodology (Richardson 2000) it sets out a complex landscape made up of pieces similar to those of a jigsaw without a completed image. It does not make claims to a definitive truth (Haraway 1988), but sets itself up as a survey of a landscape and the variety of methodologies that might be used to explore it. It will examine the competing truth claims of various traditions and individuals, power relations and where spirituality/spiritualities fit within these:

I propose that the central image for "validity" for postmodern texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. (Richardson 2000 p934)

The crystallisation model enables us to examine the complexity of the landscape with its diverse facets that we experience with different intensities at different times and in different contexts. Crystallisation offers a thick description of the angelic phenomenon (Geertz 1973) and accepts the place of subjectivity in the experience - with different aspects becoming apparent, depending on the face of the crystal through which the experience is being viewed. So for example, quantitative psychological methodologies testing, for example, common elements in people's experience may in some areas be appropriate whereas textual analysis may be more appropriate elsewhere:

Crystallisation provides another way of achieving depth, through the compilation not only of many details but also of different forms of representing, organising, and analysing those details. Strong themes or patterns supported by examples provide a wide-angle view of the setting or phenomenon; stories or poems highlight individual experiences, emotions, and expression. (Ellingson 2008 p11)

It will show in a story spanning cultures and centuries with insights drawn from a huge variety of disciplines and methodologies. These will include textual analysis of various kinds, historical analysis, feminist methodologies, cultural analysis, artistic methodologies, autoethnography and grounded theory.

One of the central problems here is what constitutes a fact and what constitutes a belief. It is easy today to dismiss angels as a product of human imagination for:

The big challenge is to recognise the objective existence of nonhuman intelligences. (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p 27)

Malcolm Godwin starts his text *Angels: An endangered species*, by debating these issues:

There seems to be two basic methods to approach a subject like angels. One fruitful approach appears to be historical. This can be summarised as the method in which *facts outweigh faith*.... Each separate species can be traced back to its particular cultural origin. ...There is, however, another method that may be labelled supernatural. In this *faith outweighs fact*. This is actually the one most of us apply to a subject like angels without really thinking. (Godwin 1993 pp14)

Godwin goes on to look at the possibilities of a scientific method in which faith is created by fact, verified by careful observation:

But modern scientists are discovering that the world is not quite so simple and that *fact is created by faith*. Quantum physicists know that if they expect a particle to behave like a wave, it does...This is partially due to the fact that any method of observing the world necessarily changes it. More fundamental is the notion that we cannot stand outside of the universe to observe it. We are part of our own experiment. (Godwin 1993 pp15)

This links with the idea of Dionysius the Areopagite who sees God as adapting visions to the nature of the visionary person, giving appropriate form to the formless (Dionysius the Areopagite from *the celestial hierarchies quoted in Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p 45*).

In the context of this paper it is the artefacts that may be regarded as facts, and the culture in which they are placed, whether personal or cultural, the faith. This thinking necessarily places the experiencing subject as an important part of the discourse rather than relying exclusively on the tradition of objectivity rooted in dogmas and doctrines (Conn 1980 pp24-7). There is a theological methodology called by Kwok Pui Lan 'dialogical imagination'. She draws this way of working from the work of Asian Christians who are heirs to both the biblical story and to their own story as Asian people; these need to be in creative dialogue with another (Kwok 1995 p13).

Many feminist methodologies use interviews (particularly of an unstructured or semi-structured kind) as a way of accessing a spirituality rooted in people's lived experience, rather than logic and argument; interviews clearly have a significant place here including a variety of ways of analysing them such as narrative analysis and grounded theory. Academic philosophers and theologians like Grace Jantzen base their work on a philosophy of desire rather than the rationality of creedally based belief systems, drawing on the gap between these creedal statements and the lived experience of women. Her concern is not with an objective truth of the traditional kind but of the effect of the religious symbolic on human subjectivity both at a personal and a global level (Jantzen 1998 p.192).

It is in this context that Fiona Bowie (2014) called for cognitive empathetic engagement as an ethnographic method. The characteristics of this methodology are openness to the other, critical awareness of one's own perspective, reluctance to move too quickly to explanation and inclusive of an anthropology of wonder. Many of these characterise this paper.

Also, in this cultural complexity, the role of the visionary experience is being re-evaluated and rediscovered; honour is being given in the contemporary world to the meaning given to the experience by the visionary themselves. This development has been fuelled by an increasing interest in medieval visionaries like Julian of Norwich, Margery Kemp and Hildegard of Bingen. Women, in particular seek the validation of their own visionary experiences through the lens of these visionary women from the past. This has helped to redress the oppression of the intuitive response by the tools of the Enlightenment objectivity project. Although it is important to remember that Descartes was in favour of angels and thought one had inspired him, what Descartes did was to eliminate the soul from the medieval model of body, soul and spirit. He retained human intellect, angels and God in the spiritual realm and placed the body in a separate sphere like an inanimate machine (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p95). This simplified the Aquinas model we shall explore below. From an encounter with the spiritualities of the so-called New Age (Boyce-Tillman 2000a p53-166) comes a rediscovery of a working spirituality of angels redressing their status as dusty relics of a bygone irrational age. So the challenging of the rational leads us inevitably to a re-evaluation of the mystical. The restoration of the notion of a God who is unknown is a necessary rebalancing of the rationalism of fundamentalism with all its rational answers and its confident security. Perhaps a significant part of the angels' functions in our society is to restore a link between the known and the unknown – the re-establishment of the mystical or the enchanted as a valid way of knowing and to ask such questions about the relationship between fact and faith, the various cultural shapings of angels, and the effect of experiences of angels have on the lives of experiencers. It asks whether the experience is pathological or mystical and how angelic experiences have been validated in history and are validated now.

Thomas Aquinas

In the area of theology, the first person who tried to bring angels under the scrutiny of reason in the later Middle Ages was Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). The awed contemplation of the early Middle Ages gives way to a sense of mastery by means of reason. It was the beginning of the age of disenchantment. Aquinas strove to Christianise philosophy through the development of a systematic theology as a way of distinguishing between the true and the false. His great unfinished work *The Summa Theologica* included a treatise on angels whom he did not reject as products of superstition and included such chapter titles as *Of the Substance of the Angels Absolutely Considered and Of the Knowledge of the Angels*.

Here⁴ he develops a theory of angels at the extreme end of reason, all the time keeping his thinking within the confines of Church doctrine. Angels become purely intellectual beings; God's act of creation involves knowing the universe and then loving it into being. Therefore, thinking must be part of the creation and as it cannot be corporeal, it requires the existence of non-corporeal beings. So Aquinas accepts that angels exist and then sets about applying logic to their existence. They become creatures of pure spirit who speak to one another as spirit to spirit and also communicate with God. He subscribes to the Church's teaching on a hierarchy of angels with upper, middle

⁴ <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/FP.html#TOC03> Contacted May 18th 2015

and lower orders, the upper ones having a higher gift of grace. There are in total twelve orders which appear to parallel the aristocracy, the middle classes and the common people in the culture of his day. From the lower orders he postulates the existence of guardian angels for each person. Angels have pure knowledge; they can, however, acquire bodies from time to time to undertake acts like the Annunciation when they may be seen by human beings in bodily form. This counterbalances those who would see phenomena like the appearances to Abraham and Tobias as purely imaginative acts for 'angels do not need bodies for their own sake but ours' (Aquinas quoted in Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p 87).

The purpose of angels is to enable people to commune with the other world and lead people into deeper understandings. Angels have a function in governing the universe, celebrating God's glory and distributing his goodness. Some Angels have executive powers in governing the universe, namely the Virtues, Powers and Principalities. Angels can operate at a macrocosmic and microcosmic level:

[Angels] can be operating in small individual situations, as in the tradition of guardian angels, or in terms of nations, continents, planets, solar systems and galactic systems. (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p76)

Interestingly it is from this desire for mastery and intellectual control that the first numerical or maybe even quantitative methodology possibly emerges. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we see in Europe the rise of an interest in Arabian Aristotelianism, which, in the new universities, was developing an antagonism towards what was seen as superstitious. The study of Aristotelian Physics was forbidden by the Church and there was a need for a bridging of the gap between the burgeoning natural sciences and theology. This was started by Albertus Magnus, teacher of Aquinas, who does ask whether several angels can be in the same place at the same time or be in more than one place simultaneously. Here we have parallels with some of the current debates in quantum physics.⁵ It is from these ponderings that the satirical question came about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin; this was a way of making fun of the scholasticism of the thirteenth century. This is still being carried on today in internet blogs.⁶ Dorothy Sayers joined the debate (see *The Zeal of thy house*, later). Still influenced by Aquinas she likens it to how many thoughts can be concentrated by a group of people on a particular pin at any given time. She draws on the concept of infinity for angels as they occupy no space.⁷

There are shades of sacred geometry around the numerical sequences allocated by various writers to angels. Dionysius and St Ambrose, St Hildegard, St Gregory the great, St Isidore of Seville, Thomas Aquinas and the poet Dante have nine orders. St Jerome has seven and Moses Maimonides in the Middle Ages has ten. Matthew Fox

⁵ *In Search of the medieval mind* BBY TV 4 May 18th 7-8pm

⁶ <http://everything2.com/title/How+many+angels+can+dance+on+the+head+of+a+pin%253F>.

Contacted May 18th 2015

⁷ <http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/1008/did-medieval-scholars-argue-over-how-many-angels-could-dance-on-the-head-of-a-pin> May 18th 2018 which also includes the following

Various calculations have been carried by satirists such as the magazine *Annals of Improbable Research*, where Anders Sandberg has presented a calculation based on theories of information physics and quantum gravity, establishing an upper bound of 8.6766×10^{49} angels.^[13]

The comic *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal* poses an answer derived from physics to this question, i.e. between one and 30 vigintillion angels.

links these with the nine spheres of the universe – seven planets plus the earth's sphere and the sphere of the fixed stars (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p54). In this way he links the macrocosm of the cosmos with the microcosm of the chakras in the person:

So we have the macrocosm of the celestial spheres and the microcosm of the human sphere. The angels are connectors, administrators, messengers that touch and connect the microcosm, the human being and integrate us with the sphere of cosmic forces. (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p55)

Another numerical relation is suggested by Rupert Sheldrake, although not linked with particular numbers:

The gods of polytheistic traditions are assimilated into monotheism by being treated as angels. (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p66)

The Texts

Texts like Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and Dionysus' *Celestial Hierarchies* provide a valuable source for evidence that can be analysed using methods of textual analysis and theological reflection. However, the bulk of this material exploring the concept of angels comes from outside the orthodox texts of the religions. Many of these texts have been declared heretical, pseudepigraphical or apocryphal, like the *Chronicles of Enoch*, although some of Enoch's thinking infused the New Testament. The story of the Annunciation has been subject to much scrutiny from many different perspectives. Several pictures show Mary being drawn away from the ordinary world with its sewing and reading into an upper realm of pure spirit as we saw in Aquinas. Others see it as a much more ordinary event with Gabriel appearing in an almost human form. These texts can be subjected to hermeneutical scrutiny as well of debates over authenticity. It is from them, however, that various tables of angel hierarchies and the various concepts of angelic purpose have been drawn – as much within popular or folk religion as in academic contexts.

Hildegard of Bingen

For many of the images of angels we do not have words to describe them, leaving us dependent on methods of pictorial analysis. However, in the work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) we not only have the images of her visions but also her theological exploration of them. There is a real dilemma here for those who wish to see the mystical experience as ineffable (James 1902); for Hildegard on the one hand trusts the intuitive visionary experience from which she draws her theology and authority, but on the other hand is prepared to interpret her visionary images in words. She struggles and wrestles with interpreting her visions for she saw them as given to her not as a private experience but for the meaning they had for the world of her day, particularly the church. Madeline Caviness highlights how difficult it is for our age to recognise visual perception as a cognitive activity. She identifies how the Renaissance:

Excluded from the curriculum the “mechanical” arts (that is, the practices of making art, as opposed to the study of the “fine arts” as a branch of history) and gave primacy to verbal skills and textual study. (Caviness 1998 p110-1)

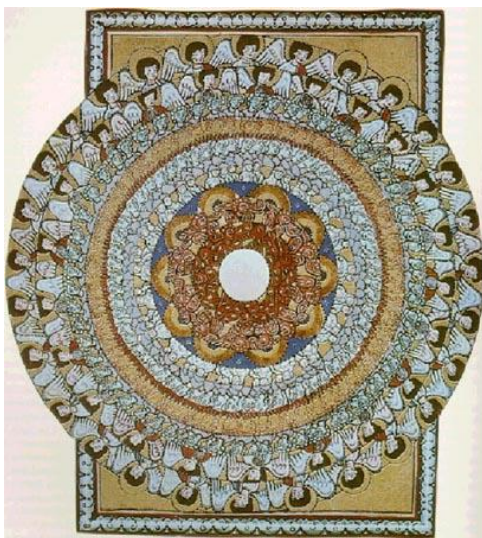
There is a fundamental problem in pursuing this relationship in Hildegard’s thinking further. The pictures go with two of the texts – *Scivias* and *The Book of Divine Works*. The problem relates to the loss of the manuscript of Rupertsberg *Scivias* which disappeared from Dresden during World War II. Contemporary work can only be done from black and white photographs of this MS and a handmade copy in full colour in the Abtei St Hildegard at Eibingen. It means we do not have any access to Hildegard’s original paintings. But even here there is an area of mystery. It is not clear what part Hildegard had in the production of the illuminations. It is likely that they were painted by her nuns in the scriptorium under her direction.

Her use of concentric circles for angels rather than the traditional ladder image links with the thinking of Fox and Sheldrake. They want to see the traditional hierarchy of angels as a nested hierarchy or, to use Koestler’s term, a holarchy (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p37). They go on to link them with morphic fields:

The same goes for the electromagnetic fields within a crystal; within the crystal field are the molecular fields; within those, the atomic fields, the fields of electrons, and the atomic nucleus. These are not only electromagnetic fields but quantum–matter fields. (Fox and Sheldrake 1996 p39)

This gives a far greater sense of angels as process - activity flowing from participation in God’s beauty and grace, drawing on ideas from Dionysius the Areopagite. Hildegard encapsulates this in her antiphon *Laus Trinitatis*:

Praise the Trinity
Our life-giving music.
She is creating all things.
Life itself is giving birth.
And she is an angel chorus praising
And the splendour of arcane mysteries,
Which are too difficult to understand.
Also from her true life springs for all.
(Hildegard translated June Boyce-Tillman, Boyce-Tillman, June, 2000b p130)



So the singing of the angel choirs permeates the universe. It transforms the angels’ traditional role as messengers – gives them a cosmic role of interconnectivity.⁸

Her amazing picture of the armies of angels, centring around the mystery of God, shows one of the main characteristics of her work – the blending of the radical with the conservative. Here it is seen in the expansion of the image outside the frame in which sit relatively archaic images. We also have from her descriptions of the experience which gave her these images. She received the first visions at three years of age;

⁸ This image is considered to be out of copyright.

they appear to be colourful moving images with sound and speech (Bowie and Davies 1990 p20). In *The Life of Hildegard*, she describes how she saw these things deep in her soul but still retained her outer sight and blushed profusely and said unfathomable things (Bowie and Davies 1990 pp 63-5). It is the quality of living light that pervades all her visions, which perhaps reflects the new quality of knowing that they give her – a sense of seeing clearly for the first time. In the visions she sees and she knows simultaneously:

But I do not hear these things with my outer ears, nor do I perceive them with the rational parts of my mind, nor with any combination of my five senses; but only in my soul, with my outer eyes open, so that I never suffer in them any unconsciousness induced by ecstasy, but I see them when I am awake, by day and by night. (Bowie and Davies 1990 pp143-7)

There is also a conservatism in the way she shapes her angels:

Before Hildegard's death a changed attitude to naturalism had begun to transform the art of the region, as elsewhere in northern Europe. Often ascribed to Byzantine influence, draperies began to cling to limbs that were modelled to look three dimensional, and the movement of figures as well as their interactions looked more natural. (Caviness 1998 p116)

At the Enlightenment the production of texts concerning angels stopped, as Protestantism developed and problematised the mystical area:

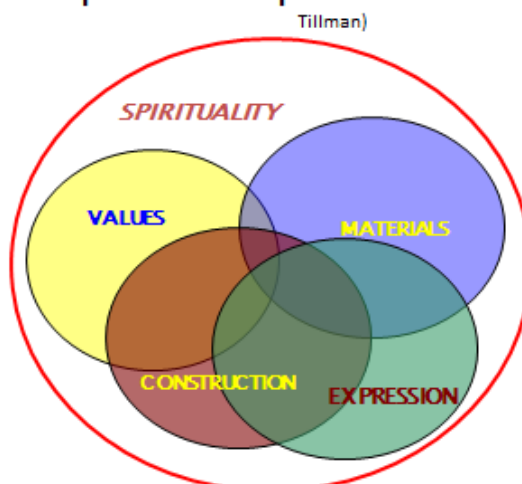
With the Reformation in Europe the mighty angels of the old Christian world became charming cherubs.... Scientific rationalism abandoned angels, and so reduced religion to a private matter, severing the ancient link between human beings and the wider cosmos...Great fragmentation [was] presented as freedom, and [there was] no sense of belonging or of personhood, beyond that of producing and consuming. Despite all this, the great thinkers and innovators continued to recognise that the source of their creativity, their inspiration, lay outside themselves. They did not use the word angels – but they entertained angels unawares. (Barker 2004 p411)

In this context, Godwin sees the concept of the angel as re-emerging in popular figures, such as *Superman* in the 1940s; a cloak replaces angelic wings, but like Archangel Michael the figure is portrayed as battling evil. *Batman* takes on the same function in the 1980s (Godwin 1993 p207).

The Spiritual Experience in music (Boyce-Tillman)

A Phenomenographic Map for the Analysis of the Arts

If we turn to the area of artistic representation of the angels, this map (explained fully in Boyce-Tillman 2016) shows us the variety of methodologies necessary, especially when we have no help of accompanying explanatory text:



To take Allegri's choral piece *Miserere* from sixteenth Italy, as an example, in the domain of Materials it consists of a choir. In the domain of Expression, it is peaceful with fluctuations as the plainchant verse come in. In the domain of Construction, it is an alternating psalm with full harmonic verses and plainchant alternating verses. This is intimately related to its role as a psalm liturgically. In the domain of Value, it is held as a masterpiece within the western canon of music and is frequently recorded and achieved a place in classical music charts; it represents an important statement about the Christian's attitude to penitence based on a Jewish psalm, especially as expressed at the beginning of the penitential season of Lent. It has a declared Spiritual intention.

So, if we apply this form of phenomenographic analysis to the arts we will need methodologies from engineering to look at the Materials domain in the plastic arts or from semantics in verbal arts. Expression takes us into the realms of psychological and therapy. Construction takes us into the academic disciplines that have developed around artistic analysis such as musicology whereas Values takes us into cultural studies and anthropology.

Visual Images

One of our main evidence sources for a theory of angels is visual art. Here one methodology concentrates on the facts – the paintings; It concerns the Materials used and the use of such devices as perspective – the technical aspects of the images. This can be combined with the information from contemporary texts to build up an angelic theology. The other is concerned with the cultural context including the faith tradition; it is this methodology that is more useful in this context. It is well illustrated in Malcolm Godwin's *Angels: An endangered species* (1993). He describes how the Church did not allow images of angels until the second council of Nicaea in 787 and these initial figures were ethereal figures with no gender. As the natural sciences progressed (as we saw above in the work of Aquinas) the angels acquired more flesh and sexual characteristics; these were sometimes painted out by the Church authorities. Aquinas does not mention angels as having wings but the contemporary visual art suggests archetypal beings capable of powerful movement and soaring high.

Hildegard's images represent an astonishing blend of the vernacular of the period and her own unique personality. In the domain of Materials, the unique features concern the use of burnished gold and the amount of silver which she uses to represent the living light that characterised her visions. It was a risky technique because silver tarnishes. The other colours referred to in the text are blue, green, purple, red and the colour of iron. To these were added 'subdued colours' - soft pinks and beige, orange and ochre. In the domain of Expression, they are often considered deeply moving with a variety of interpretations possible of their complex imagery. In the domain of Construction, they reflect the orderliness of the period; however, the figures are often too large to fit the drawn frames. Large figures are juxtaposed with tiny ones and some images are upside down or sideways (Caviness 1998 pp110-12).

Later the development of science saw the design of the angel wings adapted to reflect the technology of flying. However, in the 15th century the designs stop developing and they are reduced to round cherubic figures used that are to fill small architectural spaces. Godwin links this with the disillusionment with religion around the Great

Plague. The development of an interest in Hell and fallen angels he links with the rise of the Inquisition and burning of witches. Angel images re-emerged in the images of the Pre-Raphaelites which were popular in the late Victorian era and popularised through the development of the religious postcard and illustrated religious texts.

So we can see that the designs of the representation of angels changed as the cultural context changed. In the twentieth century, Paul Klee⁹ completed a dramatic set of angel paintings associated with the onset of scleroderma in the 1930s and reflecting a new approach. They have a variety of characteristics both whimsical and anxious and sometimes even malicious. Christine Hopfengart sees them as personifications of part of Klee whom she describes as a loner who 'though estranged from the church nonetheless harboured a devout Protestant heart' (Hopfengart 2013 p111). This she links in a secularising Europe with the development of a 'quasi-religion of art':

The art of Paul Klee... seeks, with dialectical consistency, to be a quasi-religion itself – as art. It embodies a striving for the absolute on the foundation of a secular concept of art. Its basic dogma – that the absolute is unattainable and that art is a medium of longing – is placed beyond doubt and its validity extended to every area of life. (Hopfengart 2013 p111)

This quasi-religion is centred on what it is to be human:

In them [the angel pictures] we recognise ourselves, since they both represent the "human, all too human" and satisfy an existential need for reflection on the hereafter, on life after death. Their petty inadequacies bring heaven and earth closer together and turn them into congenial helpers. (Hopfengart 2013 p111)

These images and commentary reflect the new location of the sacred in the twentieth century using the development of psycho-analytic techniques within the human personality (Boyce-Tillman 2016 pp103-5).

Music

Angels have been associated with music-making since the Middle Ages as part of a conceptual frame that includes the music of the spheres (Boyce-Tillman 2000a pp71, 107); but in the literature on music it is in the accounts of composers' inspiration that they play the clearest part. Handel's *Messiah* was written when the composer was at a low ebb, physically and financially and he may even have had a stroke disabling his right hand. After receiving the commission, he remained in seclusion for three weeks; his servants heard him crying and moaning and he barely ate anything. He himself talked of visions:

I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and God Himself seated on his throne, with his company of angels.¹⁰

If the angels figure in composers' accounts, they also feature in musical works. Musical analyses of the movements involving angels in *Messiah* - which occur around the experience of the shepherds - have commented on the semiquavers in the

⁹ <https://web-2.theartstack.com/artist/paul-klee/angelus-militans-1940>. Contacted November 9th 2016

¹⁰ <http://supernalliving.com/2012/12/24/legend-of-the-angelic-inspiration-of-handels-messiah/>

Contacted June 14th 2015

orchestral part as signifying their fluttering wings. The representation is bright and in a major key - F major leading to a much sharper D major. The discipline of musicology will also apply itself to critiquing editions and examining different versions of the text. It will produce new critical editions like the revolutionary one by Watkins Shaw in 1992.

There are many pieces of music including angels; perhaps the best known is Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* (1898). Here we have Cardinal Newman's view of angels interpreted by Elgar. Again methodologies can concentrate on the musical structures or on the cultural interpretation of angels. The poem sets out the theology of the passage of the soul after death with a significant part for the choir of angels as well as the angel of death which draws on the concept of a guardian angel who is taking the Soul home. The Soul describes the angel as 'a member of that family of wondrous beings' who stand around the throne of God. The whole event is portrayed against the backdrop of the angel choir continuously singing *Praise to the Holiest in the height*. A new angel (the Angel of the Agony) appears as the Soul approaches judgement; this angel draws on the concept of purgatory to receive the Soul's response in *Take me away, and in the lowest deep let me be*. This leads to the most famous piece from the work – the so-called *Angel's Farewell*. Here Newman and Elgar draw heavily on Aquinas who saw people as terrified in the presence of the dazzling light of God.

A methodology in musical analysis would include how these ideas are transferred into sound:

At the words 'Go in the name of Angels and Archangels,' the chorus joins in, building to a triple forte on the words 'Go forth.' The Priest sings a second benediction, the accompaniment softens to a single melody for the first violins, and then one last, gentle swell of orchestra and voices on the words 'through Christ our Lord' brings the movement to an end in D major.¹¹

A musical analysis of *The Angel's Farewell* would look at its D major start and then its chromaticism and the way in which themes from earlier in the work are integrated into the accompaniment. The use of many of the musical themes in *The Angel's Farewell* is in tune with Aquinas's notion that angels have direct complete knowledge synthesising human knowing processes which are often fragmentary and disconnected. The instability of the key structure towards the end could be seen as expressively reflecting the insecurity of the soul. The $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature could be seen perhaps as reflecting the fact that three is a holy number.

Such a musicological methodology would see the centrality of the musical notes themselves and their effective performance. However, John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) would see it necessary to include the total experience the perception by the audience (Boyce-Tillman 2016). Here interviews and maybe questionnaires could well be used especially about the regular use of *The Angel's Farewell* in funeral ceremonies.

Poetry and intercultural dialogue

If we turn to poetry, we find at the beginning of the twentieth century, new concepts emerging as the nature of religion/spirituality changes. In the work of Rilke (1875-

¹¹ <http://www.elgar.org/3gerontt.htm>. Contacted May 25th 2015

1926) the angel is part of a visionary experience but is now terrifying rather than comforting, as the growth of secularisation starts to problematise the visionary experience. Rilke was climbing on the cliffs at Duino when he hears a voice saying:

“Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?” (Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?)

This inspires him to take his notebook and write the words down together where a few more lines of his subsequent elegies were (started 1902 and published 1922). Writing about it in 1925 he warns a friend not to think that it is Christian angel, declaring it to be an Islamic angel. He describes how he had visited Spain and been overwhelmed by the Qur’an and the Prophet. Here he had met articles of the Islamic faith which include angels. Here they are light beings which can assume any form and travel at the speed of light or faster. They are associated with fire - a significant motif in the *Elegies*. The angels’ task is to move between the two worlds. A cultural analysis of the poem would see him expressing Islamic ideas through a European/Christian poetic form; this could be seen as expressing his dissatisfaction with European attitudes to Islam:

But the poet is also very concerned about cultural reconciliation and is stirred by a very troubled vision of the struggle that Europe and the world have ahead of themselves. These qualities make for a work which is more modern than romantic. This poem is an ultimate act of transcendence.¹²

The angel here is a way of reconciling two cultures, which is to become a trope in twentieth century thought (Illman 2010 p192-3, Boyce-Tillman 2013). He uses the poetic image of the angel to deal with the issues of a troubled Europe:

The First Elegy

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?
and even if one of them pressed me suddenly against his heart:
I would be consumed in that overwhelming existence.
For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.
Every angel is terrifying. (Rilke 1992)

Rilke’s angelic concept becomes an expression beyond the Christian frame that had been the generating frame for much of European history.

Drama

Behind Hildegard’s great musical play *The Play of the Powers of the Virtues – Ordo Virtutum* – lies her theology of angels (as we shall see in Dorothy Sayers below). The Virtues/Powers are those angels that order the universe and in the play they give the soul the robe of faith; this she abandons to go away with the Devil. Eventually the Powers get the soul back and chain the Devil. This – the earliest European musical play – sets out in great detail the ideas of the angels as carrying out the governance of the world. She calls her collection of songs *Symphoniae* and for her that meant living a virtuous life in tune with the choirs of angels.

¹²<http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/78258-rilke-s-angels> Contacted May 25th 2015

Dorothy Sayers in her play *The Zeal of Thy House* draws clearly on Aquinas with angels as the governing power of the universe. Here the construction work on Canterbury cathedral is paralleled by the angels whose world is interfacing with that of the earthly builders:

Avoiding sham archaism and the fusty language which is too often expected and provided in plays of period, it presents the Middle Ages as being very little removed in essentials from our own. Petrol and patent medicines have taken the place of the windlass and the faith-healing of the pilgrims, but human fallibility and the inspiration of the artist remain constant. The Archangels who from time to time descend into the arena and direct the destinies of the groundlings need not bewilder the reader or the spectator. They represent the Will of God, Fate, Providence, Accident or what you will and, in the final scene, that bright flash of Intuition which occasionally illuminates even the most clouded conscience.¹³

Here we see the critic equating the angels with functions rather than leaving them as real players in the human game, as Sayers sees them. At the end of the play Sayers puts into the mouth of Archangel Michael her most concentrated statement about the creativity of God:

Praise Him that He hath made man in His own image, a maker and craftsman like Himself, a little mirror of His triune majesty.

For every work of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly.

First: there is the Creative Idea; passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at one, the end in the beginning, and this is the image of the Father.

Second: there is the Creative Energy, begotten of that Idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being, incarnate in the bonds of matter; and this is the image of the Word.

Third: there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lovely soul; and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit.

And these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without other and this is the image of the Trinity. (Sayers quoted in Brabazon 1981 p206)

Literature: Philip Pullman

Interestingly this contemporary atheist writes of a similar approach to angels which appear in his books as crystallisations of something called Dust:

I was uneasy about the notion of using angels at all, until I realised that I could take a hint from *Paradise Lost* and view them not as actual beings but as analogue of states of mind. (Barker 2004 p236)

Such an approach to angels leads straight to a methodology drawn from psychology. In his cosmic scene 'the liberating angels continue to work in secret' challenging the

¹³ Laurence Irving

http://archive.org/stream/zealofthyhouse012297mbp/zealofthyhouse012297mbp_djvu.txt May 18th 2015

Church which is an organisation ‘that seeks only to perpetuate its own power’ (Barker 2004 p237). Here we are drawn into a cultural studies methodology, in the context of secularism and post secularism (Boyce-Tillman 2016 pp28-9).

Sculptures

Three dimensional representations of angels reveal the cutting down of the majesty of the cherubim into the chubby children that were used to fill in architectural corners in the European Baroque. They become very common in Victorian graveyards. In these, the images are usually feminine and quite large. Their shape and form are often shaped by pre-Raphaelite visual art.

In the late twentieth century Marit Benthe Norheim’s concrete rolling angels¹⁴ reveal a new turn in angelic images with their immensely varied faces and shapes. They are strong figures on rollers so that it is possible to dance with them as people did in Salisbury Cathedral and Trafalgar Square. Here we have new concept of angels as heavy and willing to dance with humans.

The Angel of the North by Anthony Gormley shows an industrial angel presiding over a motorway. Both it and Norheim’s angels demonstrate new methods of construction and have been the subject of explorations of their technical excellence in construction. Again, however, as with the music there is a fertile field of interviews with people who have encountered them.

Angels, Fairies and the New Age

In the so-called New Age (Boyce-Tillman 2000a p53-166), we encounter again a merger of pagan and Christian images; this is similar to the beginning of angelic representation when the gods Cupid and Nike formed the basis of many of the earlier angelic pictures. Cecily Mary Barker (1896-1973)¹⁵ produced both popular books of Flower Fairies as well as illustrations for Christian texts¹⁶, including postcards and birthday cards. This is taken up by Hannah Wave Karma Hardy (2014) in her book entitled *Where the Fairies, Angels and Goddesses Hide*. Here chapters on becoming an angel are placed in the context of Flower Power and Paradise.

Personal Accounts

If all of the art works constitute the facts about angels and reveal the faith of their time, the other source is people’s accounts of angelic encounters. These stretch through history including Ezekiel seeing the wheel, the Annunciation and Hildegard’s visions

¹⁴ www.norheim.dk. Contacted June 12th 2015

¹⁵ <https://uk.pinterest.com/explore/cicely-mary-barker/>. Contacted November 9th 2016

¹⁶ <http://www.printspast.com/pwap1004010009.htm>. Contacted November 8th 2016

and going on through mystics like Swedenborg anxious to validate his experience in the face of a dominant culture that would deny it:

I am well aware that many will say that no-one can speak to spirits and angels so long as he is living in the body; many say it is all fancy, others that I recount such things to win credence, while others will make other kinds of objection. But I am deterred by none of these: for I have seen, I have heard, I have felt. (Swedenborg quoted in Godwin 1993 p8)

As a performance-as-research project I prepared a one woman show about Bernadette of Lourdes entitled *A Crack in the Cosmos*. The performances were often followed by discussions of people's visionary experiences which often involved angels. In one situation a profound experience of pink angels was nearly ridiculed by another member of the congregation on the grounds that angels were not pink and that the experience could not be validated by any evidence.

What often becomes clear, in accounts that I have heard and read, is that, for many people, angels appear in desperate situations. For example, a seven-year-old child being abused by an older relative sees an angel appear the corner of the room to keep her safe. This is well illustrated by a shout-type North American spiritual called *If-a you can't come Lord, send-a one angel down*, where God is asked to "Send him in a hurry, send him for to win me." If I use an auto-ethnographic perspective here, as a practising Christian, I am not surprised that God might use angelic beings when no human beings are at hand nor that a generation brought up on Cecily Mary Barker's illustrations and concepts of a guardian angel should find these reflected in difficult times.

Psychoanalysis and the positioning of angels

With the advent of psychoanalysis in the 20th century the location of angels changed for the dominant society but not in the minds of all believers especially those of a Roman Catholic upbringing. We saw above how interest gradually moved from good angels to bad angels or demons at the time of the Inquisitions and the burning of witches. This started the pathologisation of angelic visions be they good or bad. In the nineteenth century Nietzsche declared God dead and the world - that had once been conceived as existing outside of human beings - a cosmos made up of Heaven, Earth and Hell in a three tier universe - became located within the self as the superego, ego and id (Boyce-Tillman 2016 pp103-5).

In Europe the angels found a new place in the developing field of psychoanalysis (Muir 2000 pp237-8). Angels fitted well into the notion of a collective unconscious. Composers' accounts of their inspiration become located in the unconscious (Harvey 1999 p71) rather than in some in a divine realm (Berendt, Joachim Ernst quoted Hamel, Peter 1978 pp134-5).

There is a fine cultural/anthropological project here in exploring the shifting of this landscape from without to within the human being. This gave scope for seeing all these creatures as products of the human imagination. There is scope for much interview and questionnaire data to be collected here to see where contemporary people locate these experiences.

It was a short step from this position to the pathologisation of the visionary experience including that of angels. However, there is a rising tide at present of people both patients and therapists who would wish to revisit this relocation and contemplate a wider world beyond human beings of which angels are important mediators. In this role angels often survive when a belief in God has disintegrated, as the world becomes re-enchanted, a re-emergence of magic (White 2015). Here the notion of a guardian angel remains as a profoundly comforting image. This is particularly true around death.

In dealing with accounts of angelic experiences a variety of methodologies can be used. I have already demonstrated the auto-ethnographic approach, keeping journals of one's work and regarding them as a self-interview. The accounts also lend themselves to qualitative analysis such as a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) where various themes are identified and searched for in the transcribed data. There are now programmes which will help this process like ATLAS.ti and N6. These can produce detailed interconnected maps of themes and enable qualitative researchers to handle larger quantities of material. Various themes have already been suggested by this article:

- Beings of light
- Within or without the person
- The effect of the experience on their lives
- The appearance of the angel and its relationship with images of angels that they have seen in artistic works
- Any artistic expressions of the encounter
- Strength to cope with/accept terminal illness
- Visitations in dreams
- Helping out in a practical hour of need
- Preventing an accident
- Companionship when afraid
- Guardian angels
- Angel experiences around a church

Here quantitative methods have their place. The analytical programmes do, to some extent, convert interview data into quantitative data. Questionnaires have been designed to explore people's belief around angels. For example, a Gallup poll in the US in 1978, for example, found that over half the subjects believed in angels and demons. All of these themes could be addressed in a well-judged questionnaire based on preliminary interviews.

Conclusions

The notion of angels has proved a remarkably resilient motif in Western culture. It has proved itself able to change in the light of surrounding culture especially faith and cultural traditions. Since the Enlightenment, the Church has aligned itself in its theology with the notions of objective truth arrived at by rational thought. The work of

feminist theologians has been to redress the necessary balance in a methodology that validates lived experience as a valid source of truth. Today it is possible to summarise the various aspects of this paper under the headings of a study of the landscape of contemporary spirituality (Boyce-Tillman 2016 pp25-79). The exploration of each of these strands is amenable to a different methodology.

The Metaphysical strand concerns the nature of the experience from both contemporary and historical accounts which can be analysed using a grounded theory methodology or narrative analysis, or expressed through performance-as-research projects.

The Narrative strand concerns the doctrines, stories and creeds underpinning different faith traditions. It is covered by theological methodologies and the interpretation of the associated texts, supported by images. It concerns the dilemma of defining the Divine and the place of figures associated with the Divine (particularly in a post secular age). It explores different religions' positions. The use of quantitative methodologies in this area has been satirised and lampooned following Aquinas but may be supported by contemporary quantum physics (Clarke 2002).

The Intrapersonal strand concerns the experience of the experiencer. It will examine where the vision is perceived as originating and how it relates to personal faith; it is therefore amenable to auto-ethnography in which the following themes may emerge: the transformative effects of the experience, the role of the psyche in it and the place of angels in meaning-making. It can be explored qualitatively by narrative analysis and quantitatively by questionnaires. It will examine the place of the pathologisation of experiences in the contemporary world.

The Interpersonal strand is concerned with relationship of some kind. This enables the examination of experiences where the angel is perceived as coming from an outer rather than an inner world. Here also the metaphor of the angel is regularly used in popular material for the beloved or a close friend; cultural studies type analysis of song texts would serve well here. It also relates to an angelic communion as a remedy for loneliness and figures like the guardian angel.

The Extrapersonal strand is concerned with morality and ethics. A hierarchical theology of the Divine links back with the time when angels were perceived as having a role in the governance of the world; it would look at possible angelic interventions in world affairs with such figures as aliens and extra-terrestrials, explored using cultural studies methodology. It can be examined in a variety of media.

The InterGaian strand concerns our relationship with the natural world and the interconnectedness of creation. Here angels have traditionally played a significant part. It has been seen emerging in the relationship with the fairies in contemporary pagan traditions and traditional angelic images.

This article has set out the complexity of the phenomenon of angels. It is this complexity that has led academe to be wary of it. However, the role of the Academy is to enable people to make sense of their lives. As there can be little doubt that angels still play a part in people's thinking, it is important that the Academy engage with it. The development of the crystallisation methodology in academe would enable a study embracing both qualitative and quantitative strategies. It does therefore involve

challenging the traditional divisions within the academic world. It would bring together diverse areas of human experience but would necessarily see an inextricable relationship between the human being and the surrounding culture. It would see a profound relationship between the mystical and the everyday in the spirit of writers like William James (1902).

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