**Unconventional Wisdom – Wisdom Theology in Practice**

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**Introduction**

This chapter will set out the way in which I have developed these ideas in terms of practical applications of a transdisciplinary nature. It will cover the range of disciplines in which I work. As such it uses a methodology of crystallisation - an interdisciplinary weaving together of philosophy, theology, music, hymns, poetry, professional and musical practice (Richardson 2000). I have gradually moved towards this way of working and presenting which sees truth as a crystal with different facets revealing different aspects of truth:

Crystallization 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 problematizes 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)

It will also explore in more detail the parts of the underlying model unexplored in the keynote due to lack of time.

This was an important keynote for me to prepare and was based on the work I had done for my work on the place of music in the healing cultures of the world – *Constructing musical healing - The Wounds that sing* (Boyce-Tillman 2000a)*.* This book set out a model of healing as balance and concentrated largely on healing at a personal level. It panned over a great variety of cultures. This thinking had enabled me to develop a model of dis-ease as a dissatisfaction with the dominant values of a culture. It was social constructionist model of dis-ease and well-being. I saw normativity as established by those in power by means of the exclusion of the deviant ‘other’. These subjugated ways of knowing are always in flux and cannot be defined specifically but only in relation to the dominant value system of any particular culture at a particular time. I identified a number of polarities that are in dynamic relationship within the self and within society. The model presented a way of looking at the health of a society and a person. In a balanced person and a balanced society all the possibilities are held as of equal value but in most people and societies this is not the case. It is a both/and logic not an either/or. It is the either/or is that is dominant because of issues of power. However, the more dominant one of the pairs that make up the polarities becomes, the more the alternative value system will tend to be projected onto the marginalized ‘other’, which will consist of groups who have no power. Within the self, as theorists like Myers (Myers1993, Myers and McCaulley 1985) have written, each of us also chooses particular ways of knowing so that the others become subjugated - making up the ‘shadow’ as Jung called it.

To explore this further I turned to the place of Wisdom theology in the history of the church - a strand that has continually been subjugated by the dominant patriarchal Christian traditions. They surface from time to time in the history of Christianity in Europe but are often persecuted and suppressed by such processes as the Inquisition. Hildegard of Bingen is the chief Wisdom theologian on whom I have drawn. My thinking for this keynote was very influenced by the second book of her theology – *Liber Vitae Meritorum - The Book of the Rewards of Life* (Hozeski 1994)*.* This was not clearly explained in the initial keynote. In this (much less often quoted book) she sets out a theology that sees good and evil as inextricably intertwined. It is part of her Virtue theology:

These are the Virtues, which spring up in the hearts of believers, and in ardent charity build in them a lofty tower, which is their works; so that in their reason they show the deeds of the elect, and in their strength they bring them to a good end with great glory of blessedness. (Hart and Bishop 1990 p141)

The virtues in her thinking form a vital link between the work of God within the soul of believers and its expression in good works. They feature prominently in her musical morality play *Ordo Virtutum* - *The Play of the Virtues*. Here they represent the protectors of the soul against the wiles of the Devil and finally form a powerful army that in the end defeats him. In *The Book of the Rewards of Life* each virtue is set against its corresponding vice. The vice appears as a twisted, mangled form of the virtue. So Caritas responds to her twisted form, the vice, Envy:

Oh most filthy filth, you are like a snake that attacks itself, for you cannot sustain anything that is stable and honourable…I, however, am the air, I nourish all greenness and bring flowers to mature fruit…. I bring forth tears from a good sigh as I also bring forth a good aroma from tears through most holy works. I am also the rain that rises from the dew through which the grass rejoices with rich life. You, however, the most wicked and worst poison, devour these things with your punishments, but you cannot trample all things under your feet. For the more you rage, the more they grow.. … I spread my mantle upon the day and night; I do a lot of good works by day and anoint the sorrows of the night. This no one can accuse me either way. I am the most prized of God’s friends on God’s throne; God hides no counsel from me. I have a royal dwelling place and all things that are from God are mine. (Hozeski 1994 p127)

She sets out **thirty-five creative spiritual forces each paired with its own vice – the virtue in its corrupted form (Strehlow 2002). So** tranquillity (patientia) in its twisted form is Anger (ira); God’s victory (Divina Victoria) can be twisted into cowardice and resignation (ignavia),blessedness (beatudo) into unhappiness (infelicitas), Compassion (misericordia) into hard-heartedness (obduratio), humility (humilitas) into arrogance (superbias) and satisfaction (Sufficentia) into avarice (avaritia) (Strehlow 2002 p40). The vices are seen as paralysing the human being with an effect that today we might associate with clinical depression. I saw Hildegard’s theology as a way of challenging the dualisms of our own culture.

My thinking had been deeply influenced by Mary Field Belenky’s *Women’s ways of knowing* (Belenky et al 1986)*, w*hich had been mediated to me by the work of Mary Grey (1989, 1993). I wrote several papers in educational contexts based on my own research into children’s musical development combined with these ideas. One bore the title *Women’s ways of knowing and its implications for the School curriculum.* It was attended by a music advisor from Canada who was black – one of the few men who opted to come. “I wish you had not called it women’s ways of knowing” he commented. “Because would like to know in these ways. They all wanted me in their lecture halls but all they wanted was my black face. I had to leave all that it meant to be black at the door of the lecture hall.” This proved to be a seminal comment and set me on a course towards combining the theories of Belenky, Hildegard (Boyce-Tillman 2000b) and Foucault (Foucault/Gordon 1980). So women’s ways of knowing became subjugated ways of knowing which many subjugated groups in Western societies might share.

I also became aware of a twisted form of some of the values of feminism such as community. Through my interfaith work particularly with Muslim women, community – a value subjugated in a culture filled with rampant individualism – was not necessarily the blessing as it is set out to be in feminist circles. One Muslim woman trying to escape an abusive marriage was pursued all over the country. I saw that community could be twisted and that this situation demanded a greater appreciation of the rights of the individual – a greater individualism. Community has a twisted ‘vice’ form as well as a ‘virtuous’ one.

I also became aware that simply substituting the subjugated values for the dominant values only led to another set of oppressive values. It was then that I saw that the subjugated values needed to be in some sort of relationship with the dominant values of any culture. Without that relationship both sets of values could become corrupted ‘vice’ forms of themselves. So the model for Unconventional Wisdom was born. I spent the next years developing the theory further – exploring each of the pairings in their ‘virtuous’ form and their corrupted ‘vice’ form. I was aware that I could work it out at the level of society and within the person. Some of this was explored in the keynote but time prevented a detailed exploration of all the polarities. In the end it was in the book entitled *Unconventional Wisdom* (Boyce-Tillman 2007a) that they were fully explored. Here the theory became developed in relation to Jesus’s attention to those at the margins of his culture and Wisdom theology

**The Model of Self and Society**

These polarities were drawn as having a constant flow between them. Balance is defined as being when that flowing is fluid and dynamic. The subjugated and dominant knowings have to be in dialogue with one another to achieve a wholeness. The dominant culture will validate one of the poles more highly than the other so effort will be required to keep the flow moving to the subjugated way of knowing. When the balance is achieved, the self or the society will have developed the new paradigm

**Unity/Diversity**

This polarity was explored in detail in the keynote but it is one that I have worked on practically trying to bring together diverse ideas and cultures together in structures which do not deny the diversity. Here I was heavily influenced by Jonathan Sack’s book *The Dignity of Difference* (2002)*.* I was becoming aware through my supervisions of research students of the orate and literate ways of knowing in music and how differently these two cultures operate in terms of the materials used, the construction systems by which they organise themselves and the Value systems that they espouse. I encountered these through two African drumming traditions and also through a community choir leader using the English folk tradition in the community choir repertoire. Traditionally the literate has been regarded as more valuable and has – often through the process of imperialism – replaced or attempted to obliterate orate traditions. I had started the process in 1998 with a piece called *the Call of the Ancestors* ( a piece with holes in it to accommodate the Thai piphat, a rock group and Kenyan drumming). This was followed by a number of pieces which accommodated orate traditions like children composing in a variety of ways. *Step into the Picture* (Boyce-Tillman 2008) was a commission from the Southern Sinfonia for audience, orchestra and children. *Weaving Wisdom’s Way – St Ethelfleda* (Boyce-Tillman 2009b) included the idea of pilgrimage for everyone and improvisation for the children. The narration was carried by English folk tunes carried by a folk singing trio who prepared their own harmonies in an orate way.

I was also exploring interfaith dialogue in a variety of ways – an area in which the embracing of diversity and respect for difference is essential. Because I had started the dialogue a long time before in 1986 and it has been largely with groups of women. Gradually I have become aware of the fact that our group functioned differently from the way in which interfaith dialogue between men developed. Jeannine Hill Fletcher criticised theologies of religion for their universalising tendencies (Fletcher 2005) and the fact that difference is regarded as a problem rather than a resource. This is in line with the dominant tendency to unify. Often, in the dominant discourse there are two extreme positions – the notion that we are all the same really or that we are so different there can be no dialogue. The notion that we shall explore below of women’s lives containing multiple identities and the fact that they are regularly marginalised, gives them a special position in resolving the tension between the two polarities. Kwok Pui Lan using her postcolonial stance, calls for a “theology of religious difference “which explores how Christianity has constricted religious difference in various periods and how postcolonial hybrid identities provide a possibility (Kwok 2005). So, for example, in our group a Sikh was educated in India in a Roman Catholic School and learned to write by copying the Bible. By night he was a Sikh.

Another aspect of women’s prioritising of community is their relationality, although I have been very influenced by Levinas (1969) and his dilemma over relating to the Other. Women’s marginalisation has meant that they are familiar with the process of ‘othering’ and their desire for relationality makes the potential divisions less clear and threatening. In general, they do not hold poisons of power and have less to preserve in defending a particular tradition.

“The margins is a good place for dialogue” said Diana Eck. Commenting upon the WCC omen’s interfaith consultation in 1998, “the reach is not so far, the investment in centrist positions not so great.” (Quoted in Egnell 2006 no pages)

Helen Egnell creates an image of religions as countries with capitals in the middle:

[The capital] is the place of established theology, authorized scriptures and liturgies, guarded by religious dignitaries – and a borderland, where people often have more in common with those living on the other side of the border than with those in the capital. (Egnell 2006 No pages)

She distinguishes between religion as prescribed and religion as practised. That was certainly my experience with women who have synthesized and syncretized various traditions.

The end of the interfaith line was Space for Peace (described in Boyce-Tillman 2011, 2012, 2013).This was/isa radically innovative event in Winchester cathedral - a musical vigil for peace. We have now arranged this event for some six years. The idea was to get together a range of choirs from a variety of backgrounds both musical and faith. Some choirs used notation, some had no grasp of it and learned everything orally, some were older and singing for fun, others were skilled musicians; some were Hindus, some Jews, some Muslims, some Christians - from a range of denominations - and some secularists. The age range was 7-85. It used the cathedral as a resonant meditative space able to contain and merge diversity in a way that accepted it without obliterating it. The groups were situated around the cathedral in various chapels and the transepts. Each had chosen in advance what they would sing – some of their favourite pieces. The centrepiece was a movement which was created by the participants on the basis of choice. Each group chose when to sing and could also be invited by the congregation to sing. The congregation moved around the building, lighting candles, praying, being quiet, as they chose, but also participating in creating the musical sound. My experience of pieces involving choice of this kind had been that people become very sensitive to their surroundings and to one another. Some of the soundscapes were very complex as a number of pieces were performed simultaneously in various areas of the cathedral and sometimes it was quite simple. Sacred peace chants threaded their way through the sound from time to time. This section contains possibly the greatest diversity an event can accommodate. After it, the choirs light candles, find a D and sing shalom (or any word for peace they choose) on it and move back to their place on the chancel steps following the choir leader. The instrumentalists and singers improvise from the organ loft. The congregation joins the back of these processions. So the structure includes diversity and unity – everyone singing a single note is probably the greatest unity possible in music. The vigil is designed therefore to reflect a new model of peace making based on the principle that it will only work if we all do what we want to do but also then have the responsibility of working out how far it fits with what other people want to do. Everyone present had a part in the creation of an experience of beauty and togetherness and experience intuitive ways of relating to and co-operating with others. The comments on the event reflect these ideas:

It was an incredibly brave and innovative venture which worked brilliantly. The acoustics in the Cathedral are not generous to choirs (I’ve performed in a choir there myself) but your inspired idea of removing the pews and placing individual choirs in different areas and having them sing spontaneously meant every nook, cranny and nave was filled with the most incredible music. I loved the fact that you could walk around, sampling different styles and interpretations and, along the way, enjoy the surprise of a lone voice suddenly appearing from a balcony or behind a pillar.

Will then the transept walls give up their sounds,

poems re-echo round the arches

pillars resound with Benedictine psalms?

Will youth guitars, visiting choirs,

sermons of deans and Handel's hallelujahs

all combine with organ notes

in one triumphant shout of praise

before the world dissolves?

 For me the process began last night.

Thank you.

My thinking theologically on the bringing together of unity and diversity also has led me to develop a theology of the Trinity based on one of Hildegard’s visions. I gradually became aware what a brilliant doctrine it is in holding together these two polarities. In Hildegard’s vision *Cosmic Humanity* the cosmos and the human being sit inside the body of God:

God the Father bears the great wheel of creation in his breast. It is supported and embraced by the figure of flaming Love [the Spirit]. In the middle of the universal wheel stands a human being, projecting beyond the tiny earth into the realms of universal forces with their various elements and rays. The human figure seems to hold the universal network or system in its hands, thus accepting humanity’s task of creative commitment to the world. (Schipperges, 1997 p75)

The world appears to be God’s body as in the work of Sally McFague:

We are asking whether one way to remythologize the Gospel for our time might not be through the metaphor of the world as God’s body’ rather than as the king’s ‘realm’. … When the world is viewed as God’s body, that body includes more than just Christians and more than just human beings. (McFague 1987 p61 -71

So the body of God contains the entire cosmos in all of its diversity. Even in its traditional form as three persons in one God, the doctrine contains unity and diversity within a single idea and represents the paradox represented often by the phrase ‘three in one and one in three’. It thus enables Christianity to dialogue with polytheisms like Hinduism and paganism as well as monotheisms like Islam and Judaism. However, in dialogue with Muslims the notion of the diversity has sometimes proved difficult to explain.

Another part of the unity and diversity polarity was the need for chaos in the creative process also enabled me to make sense of my own creative life. I had had periods of depression which was now past; but the thinking enabled me to situate my creativity within my own experience and to realise that the depression was necessary. I developed this much more carefully when BISFT asked me to write a piece for their anniversary and here I explored another polarity that was not in that keynote - private/public – along with unity/diversity. The depressive part of my life had, up to that moment, been very carefully hidden; but now I was able to reveal it in music and finally in a written text. Had I not done the thinking this would have been impossible. The article published in Feminist theology saw this chaotic part of my life as an essential component in my current creativity (Wallas 1926); it became not an aberration but a necessary part of my life. This is the end of my poem that went with the piano piece entitled *Tunnelling:*

But through it all I was held

By a shimsilk love that could not let me go.

The tunnelling – when it came - turned out to be long

The way out dirty and confusing.

But I am grateful to all who resisted

My being NORMAL

Saw the God-given me under the cultural rubble

Those who held the Christlight in the night-time of my fear.

That saw the tiny glimmers of freedom -

A door that could not be closed

By anyone ever again.

The journey out was the length of the prison stay

25 years

But now I see meaning in the agony in the cell

The bittersweet flowers of a life beyond dying

For what it was –

A rich seam of coal glinting in the midst the gloom of the mineshaft -

The gift of darkness.

(Boyce-Tillman 2013d)

The unity/diversity polarity also enabled me to develop ideas from theorists like Rosi Braidotti (1994) on the multiple self. It led to a new show called *Juggling – A question of identity* (Boyce-Tillman 2005)*.* This challenged the ideal of an integrated self by means of a performance piece. This set out the self as multiple and consists of exploring performances which are learned over the course of a life. These learned and developed performances create a network of performed selves that can be revisited as life progresses. This has been explored many feminist theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) and Rosi Braidotti (1994) with rhizomic notions of the self based on Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). This pattern of life is often associated with women who often have to juggle multiple roles of mothers, professionals, partners, carers and so on. It presents these multiple identities which interact with one another and the process of constructing an identity out of a lifetime of experience. The performance used story, song, extended vocal work and mime in the way I have explored in previous one woman performances. It challenges notions of the age and shape of the public performing woman’s body. It also involves the audience in using catch phrases to name the various selves and create a counterpoint of them.

It also illuminated *Lunacy or The Pursuit of the Goddess* which I had made in 2002 and carried on performing. This had been illuminated by Mary Grey’s notion of Psyche returning to the Underworld in her journey but not conquering death like Jesus but learning to see in the dark (Grey 1995). It dealt with the need to de-integrate in order to re-integrate and that that process can be chaotic involving a descent into an underworld. My latest show explored this further and was entitled *Seeing in the dark* (Boyce-Tillman 2013c). It not only looked at the descent into the underworld that is necessary in dealing with childhood abuse but also with the tools people have developed to find their way through. These were based on actual accounts.

**Public/Private**

I developed this further in relation to women hymn writers, making their work better known in papers and chapters (Boyce-Tillman 2010 c , 2013e). My own work was profiled on Songs of Praise on BBCTV and in a book on contemporary hymn writers (Boyce-Tillman 2010a). This has finally come together in a book on Women in Christian Liturgical Music in general entitled *In Tune with heaven or not* (Boyce-Tillman 2014b)*.* I have continued to encourage women composers as well as having had immense opportunities to develop my own capacities as a composer and a conductor. I had long been aware that the privacy or hiddenness of women’s contributions to music and the Church had affected my own development in these areas. I was becoming aware that role models were important for other women. Women had been hidden in music history; the struggle to get these texts published reflected the resistance to having their stories told. The book contains nearly twenty interviews with women from a variety of European cultures which reveal their dissatisfaction with the place they can occupy and the variety of ways that they have used to negotiate it. As discussed above, I thought it important to reveal something of my own struggle. This started with the article (Boyce-Tillman 2013d) and is now proceeding with an autobiography entitled *Trying to be Good.*

**Rational/intuitive**

This was not addressed in the first keynote but has occupied a great deal of my thinking and people who come to me for spiritual advice. Post enlightenment western culture has valued reason and devalued intuition. The Enlightenment project based on ‘I think therefore I am’ saw the answer to successful human society as the dominance of reason over human beings’ unruly passions and imaginings. The intuitive aspects of the Church were suppressed in favour of theological codifications Academe was suspicious of anything that smacked of the emotional or spiritual. Disconnection between the observer and the observed was pursued and a culture of alienation and violence was developed as intuition and empathy became marginalised.

I was presenting visionary women[[1]](#footnote-1) dramatically, and was finding it interesting that following many performances women in particular will seek validation of their own visionary experiences. They will start tentatively with statements like ‘I have never shared this with anyone before but …’ The telling of the stories of women of the past as a way of validating the experience of contemporary women has helped to redress the oppression of the intuitive response by the tools of the Enlightenment objectivity project. The latest of these was a commission for a conference in Lourdes on Bernadette (Boyce-Tillman 2013b). This meant an immense of work – a pilgrimage to Lourdes – and - as an Anglican – trying to get inside the mind of an uneducated teenage French peasant. It was a real challenge and for some time I thought impossible. But when I had finally found a way of representing the visionary experience dramatically with the help of a beautiful French wind chime it became much clearer. This particular performance proved remarkable in opening discussions of visions of the Virgin Mary, angels and other figures such as Jesus. Sometimes these lasted long into the night. It also brought me in touch with in Leuven a whole range of accounts of the visionary experience in Belgium, for example, that I had never encountered before. I was also in touch with how the dominant culture has handled , persecuted, ridiculed, denied these in a variety of ways.

From an encounter with the spiritualities of the so-called New Age 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 the mystical.

As a trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust I was pursuing my interest in the spiritual experience and entering into dialogue with people who see their inspiration as coming straight from the Divine like the composer, John Tavener, and others who appear to receive musical material spontaneously from the Spirit. I have run workshops on the visionary experience[[2]](#footnote-2) attempting to move it from its pathologised position to one in which it is brought into right relationship with the rational rather than as its shadow side.

I have become very taken up with examining the spiritual experience in music using Victor Turner’s concept of liminal space. Musical philosophers like Catherine Ellis (1985) brought ethnomusicological insights into relationship with western classical traditions to offer us reference to a Spiritual domain. She distinguished between three levels of learning – informal, formal and spiritual/visionary which are acknowledged in aboriginal traditions (Ellis 1985 p200). The musickers – be they composers, performers or listeners – enter a different time/space dimension – leaving everyday reality for 'another world – the liminal space of Victor Turner (1969, 1974). In this I was helped by Isabel Clarke’s work on psychosis and spirituality and different ways of knowing (Clarke 2005, 2008):

A limen is, of course, literally a “threshold.” A pilgrimage centre, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a threshold, a place and moment “in and out of time,” and such an actor - as the evidence of many pilgrims of many religions attests - hopes to have there direct experience of the sacred, invisible or supernatural order, either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality. (Turner 2004)

This work on experiencing music brought together my thinking on music and on spirituality (Boyce-Tillman 2006b, 2007, 2009a). It has led to considerable work on the development of spirituality which is an exploration into where the intuitive might fit in contemporary society.

**Embodied/disembodied**

This polarity has become particularly significant in my thinking around a piece I am writing about the First World War. Warfare manifests it most clearly for it would be impossible of the leaders had to use their own bodies to fight or the soldiers could use their minds when in battle.

I have also developed their integration practically. In my position as Head of Postgraduate Research at the University of Winchester I introduced professional doctorates into the university curriculum. Unlike the traditional PhD these demand that ideas can be expressed and applied practically. Purely theoretical thinking will not be acceptable. These seemed to me to be a way of healing this split at doctoral level. They demand that the ideas become incarnate in some form. They reward the thinkers who can embody their ideas. I have also developed the area of performance-as-research (Boyce-Tillman et al 2012b).

In my ministry as an Anglican priest I have looked carefully at the way in which I use my body in celebrating liturgy and consulted with my colleagues in the area of movement to inform my practice. I have had very favourable comments about the gestural components within my celebration and their contribution to the spirituality of the event (Boyce-Tillman 2010b).

## Product/process

## This polarity has been very significant in the development of my theological thinking. It enabled me to accommodate failure within my theology. In 1974 John Navone brought out a book entitled A Theology of Failure, in which he critiques the legacy of the Renaissance in the area of the cult of progress. His view of the biblical text is that the concept of failure is a central theme of life into which the God of liberation appears. Capitalism deals only in products which are officially successfully as Christmas letters reveal clearly. Reconceived as process it is easier to accommodate a theology of failure. Catherine Keller (1986) draws on the process philosopher Whitehead (1929) and Carol Christ (2003) on Charles Hartshorne (1971) to see God as verb which I have used in several hymns:

And we'll all go a-godding

To bring the world to birth.

(Boyce-Tillman 2006a)

Christ’s theology – epitomized in the title of her book *She who changes* (2003) *-*concerns itself with change in the world, creation in constant transformation, rather than fixed eternal laws. In process theology failures have the possibility of yielding the greatest learning because through it we learn what works, deepen our discernment and learn dependence (McCallum and DeLashmutt, 1975). John Pritchard (2014) in his keynote at the Guild of Health seminar on *Flourishing Together* at Holy Rood House saw the essence of being a Christian as inhabiting the story which I expressed in a song:

1. I inhabit the birth, the birth of the world,

Of all that is coming to be.

1. I inhabit the pain, the pain of the world,

The land is laid waste with that pain.

1. I inhabit the tears, the tears of the world,

My eyes flow with grief for the world.

1. I inhabit the hope, the hope in our world,

The shoots of new life in our world.

1. I inhabit the joy, the joy of the world

A blessing restored for our world. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Virtue theology is a process model of Christianity and more and more as I preach I use verbs. For example, the use of the term Mothering Sunday is transformed from a time of glossing over many painful associations of Mother’s Day into a process in which all can engage as related to the nurturing and mothering of the Divine.

Musically my encounter with orate traditions – described above - led me into traditions which are more concerned with process than the product centred Western classical music traditions. The advent of community choirs from people like Sarah Morgan (2013) brought it into Western thinking where the effect of participating is regarded as equally important to the product. The ephemerality of orate traditions means that there is less desire to retain material from particular situations which may be inappropriate for different contexts. People who prefer oracy to literacy[[4]](#footnote-4) in our culture (and, in general, women are more skilled in verbal discourse than men) reflect this capacity to re-member material in ways appropriate to any given situation in which they find themselves. This would include story as well as song. It is characterised by fluidity and adaptability.

Gradually I have developed musical structures in which orate and literate musicians can work together effectively and fruitfully. The latest of these was *The Great Turning* (Boyce-Tillman 2014a) which distilled an original book on ecology into a musical piece. The musical material varied from unison songs to more complex pieces suitable for choirs that can read notation. The orchestral parts are written for the Southern Sinfonia and include some parts for orchestral players to improvise. The first performance in Winchester Cathedral included community choirs, pupils from eight primary schools and choirs from the university – about 400 performers. It started with recalling the world emerging from the star dust with choirs of children scattered around the cathedral:

At times it sounded ultra-modern, with the University choir singing *a capella* ‘A dark time of uncertainty, with certainty falling apart’. Other parts could have come from a musical, such as the chorus of Economic Growth: "Stuff, stuff, money and stuff. Stuff, stuff, money and stuff" which was energetically delivered by the community choirs in a manner that seemed very subversive… And at the end, the audience joined the choirs in the hymn ‘We shall go out renewed in our commitment’ to the tune of Danny Boy, after which we all rose to our feet to applaud June and her amazing team.

The whole event was simply astounding.  At times I was on the edge of my seat, mouth was wide open in amazement; at other times sharing grins of amusement with my neighbours.  Goodness knows what some of the audience made of it! I find myself wonder what impact it had on the community choirs and especially the children, to be involved in such a dramatic engagement with the themes of the Great Turning. (Reason 2014)

**Excitement/relaxation**

This polarity was omitted form the keynote and for a long time I thought it one of the least significant. Gradually I realised that Western society’s demand for endless excitement is seriously dangerous. The ultimate condemnation of something by the young is not that it is evil or wicked (both of which are now terms of endearment’) but that it is ‘boring’. These are the characteristics of our society:

* The constant flickering images of computer screens,
* The constantly changing sounds of ubiquitously piped music,
* The need to keep up with the latest fashion which changes rapidly enough to ensure that people will spend a great deal to keep up like with the fast moving band wagon,
* The demands of ceaseless production in the workplace
* The constant stimulation to violence of computer games
* The prevalence of stimulating drinks such as coffee, tea and Coca cola

All these testify to the marriage of our society with excitement. The news media only report events that are dramatic with the result that violence gets more coverage than the peaceful and the ordinary.[[5]](#footnote-5) We are constantly exposed to apocalyptic style reporting, that makes our own everyday lives seem flat and boring. Little wonder then that youngsters buy guns to join this hyped-up scenario. The mundane everyday tasks that keep some rhythm in our lives are despised in favour of an over-hyped constant stimulation that keeps the adrenalin flowing freely through our veins. Watching the slower rhythms of the natural world that would have been part of agrarian living or the slower pace of oral story telling around a domestic fire are no longer ‘cool’ because they are ‘boring’. Silence is an endangered species. As the polarity splits relaxation has become boredom while excitement becomes unruliness. Human beings need to establish a rhythm of excitement and relaxation in their lives. Music has long been used for these purposes because it has physiological effects which appear to be transcultural. Loud and fast music induces arousal and slower softer music relaxation.

The development of technology over the intervening years since the keynote has made this much more significant. John Tomlinson (2007) in his book *The Culture of Speed: The coming of immediacy* develops the idea of immediacy and the way in which technology has reduced both time and space:

The key nexus in the dynamics of globalization to be the combination of an accelerating global capitalist economy, the ubiquity of globalizing media and communications technologies and crucially, a new experience of speed associated with these dynamics…Speed [is] the most spectacular manifestation of the intersection of time and space. (Tomlinson 2008 pp2-3)

Le Corbusier’s 1924 vision of the city was that in speed lay the secret of its success (Le Corbusier 1924/1971). In pursuing this he destroyed 600 acres of the historic centre of Paris to make space for a high-rise business hub served by speedways. This he combined with the central tenet of modernism – progress – and in pursuing his dream of industrialism and entrepreneurialism he was followed by many modernists. So the seed was sown for fast capitalism:

What makes contemporary capitalism fast are communication-rich systems: from web-based work flow systems and ‘just-in-time delivery logistics to the near-instantaneous speed of computerised, networked fund-transfer systems combined with the speed of market intelligence via the internet.(Tomlinson 2008 p8)

John Tomlinson develops the notion of immediacy:

This density of communicational connectedness promotes a new kind of intensity in everyday experience, mixing pace and vibrancy with a sense of effortless ness. But also an increase in communicational demands on the individual and, arguably, a new sense of compulsion and ‘drivenness’ in life. (Tomlinson 2008 p10)

He goes on to see how the development of immediacy has blurred distinctions between leisure and labour. But this conceals the fact that:

No satisfying narrative of purpose has yet emerged. In the era of machine speed that I began with, this narrative was built around a relatively stable set of distinctions – of fundamental separations – between here and elsewhere, home and abroad, now and later, desire and fulfilment. The idea of ‘progress’ and its centrality to cultural modernity at this stage was really the promise of bridging these separations by human effort, planning and ingenuity. (Tomlinson 2008 p14)

The development of mindfulness – which I have examined in musical terms – could be seen as an effort at rebalancing the relationship between relaxation and excitement as well as providing some form of narrative of meaning. I am now working on the relationship with dance and music with two research students. It is part of a rising tide of meditative activities designed to rebalance society’s excitement. Some of these use music in some way, whether it is the repeated drum beat of the shamanic journey or sweeping electronic sounds of CD’s with titles like *‘Tranquil essence’*. We can now purchase the sounds of the natural world in recorded form and they are blended into other pieces, usually with the intention of calming.

**Challenge/nurture**

This has carried on being a real concern for me especially in the area of education and the increasingly challenging regimes being set up by the current government. The capitalistic market is based on a false philosophy that competition necessarily produces the best solution. Unfortunately separated from nurture it produces destruction as all sense of connectedness is systematically destroyed. Care separated from competition produces atrophy and the separation of those who need care from those who can withstand competition has left many of the elders of our society atrophying in old people’s homes without the challenges posed by association with other generations or the wider society. It has led to much research into the development of the community choir movement that nurtures those who have been excluded by the competitive nature of the classical traditions (Morgan 2013).

My concern for the nurturing nature of God has led to increasing engagement with goddess traditions. This was particularly true of a trip to Egypt where I was overwhelmed by the goddesses:

**GODDESSES**

1. O Hathor, Isis, Mary,

We know you hear our prayer;

Your silken cow ears listen,

We find your presence there.

1. O Hathor...

We know....

Within our joyful living

We find....

4. We kneel where prayer is valid

5. You bore a new child, Jesus

6. We centre in your stillness

7. We rest within your birthing

8. Within this world of suffering

9. You heal our deepest suffering

10. Enfold us in your loving [[6]](#footnote-6)

**Summary**

This chapter has set out how I have developed the model set out in the original keynote of how certain ways of knowing have become subjugated by the power structures of Western society and need to be brought into relationship with the dominant culture. The original keynote did not examine all the polarities which were developed in my book *Unconventional Wisdom* (Boyce-Tillman 2007a). It has explained how I have developed these in my theology, performance and professional practice. It has shown how I have used the thinking in a variety of contexts and forms bringing together the arts and theology to produce a practical theology for my ministry as a Christian priest and a composer/conductor.

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1. Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Marjorie Kemp [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a summary of this phenomenon see Boyce-Tillman (2000) pp 155-164 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This song was written during the Guild of Health conference at Holy Rood House, Thirsk in April 2014. It was inspired by the keynote address of Bishop John Pritchard and the Gethsemane Garments of Peter Privett of the Westhill Endowment. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The words literacy and oracy refer to processes of communication. The terms literate and orate refer to societies which use either the written word or the spoken word as the prime means of communication (Ong.1982) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Following a performance of my one –woman show *Juggling: A Question of identity* which includes a number of roles that women play, a member of the audience remarked how unusual it was to see in a dramatic presentation the ordinary things of life like sewing, dusting and pouring tea being done. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. January 2011 at the Temple of Philae reflecting on the goddesses of the Egyptian tradition and how they found expression in Mary, the Mother of God in the Christian tradition. Unpublished) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)