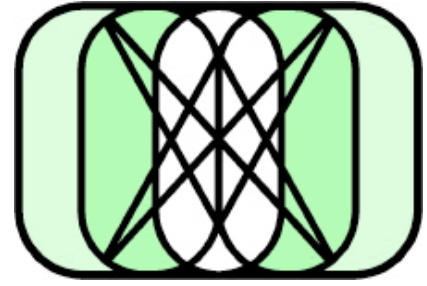


Church of Creation

Order of Service

Sunday, December 14, 2008 8:00 AM



Welcome:

You are always already chosen

Hymn:

Announcements and sharing

This week in Semiotics: **Threes**

Lost In Space...

Birthday acknowledgment:

Nostradamus (December 14, 1503 – July 2, 1566, 62 yo)

Anne Conway (December 14, 1631 – February 18, 1679, 47 yo)

Process:

Trees...

Message:

Preposterous Prognostications?

Dialogue on Preposterous Prognostications

Next week: December 21

Winter Solstice: Telling Time (Communion Service)

Welcome:

Welcome to the Church of Creation! ‘Welcome’ is one of those everyday words mostly spoken and heard automatically. ‘Welcome’ comes to us from the Old English, *wilcuma*, which means, “your arrival is in alignment with our choice.” This coming together and welcoming is an act of choosing. By welcoming you, we are communicating that you are always already chosen. You don’t have to do anything to be chosen; you already are. Thank you for Being.

There is also nothing to believe or disbelieve. This is a church without a creed or a code. Recognizing that believing or disbelieving may get in the way of living authentically, one of our practices is to suspend belief in favor of inquiries into the unknowable infinity of Being. Notice that I said suspend: you do not have to give up your beliefs. Your beliefs will still be available to you, if you want to take them up again. It is always your choice.

Inquiring into the unknowable produces distinctions that make a difference in one’s experience of life. We promise that an open inquiry will give you power over the matter in question.

The distinction between what and that is a basic example of a distinction. The what-it-is of something (its whatness) describes the properties of the thing: its weight and measure, its content and dimensions, how it shows up in consciousness. That-it-is, or thatness, is the ontological aspect of a subject: the fullness of its existence. While whatness is considered important, it is mostly a matter of preference or point-of-view. Thatness is crucial and primary. **What** you eat is important to your life and health. **That** you eat is crucial. This distinction shows up everywhere. Given the subject of church music, we could say that **what** you sing is merely important. What matters is **that** you are joyfully expressed. In our ongoing experiment on bringing aliveness to our music, we invite you to...

Announcements and Sharing:

Happy Monkey Day

Monkey Day is an unofficial holiday celebrated internationally on December 14. The holiday is primarily celebrated with costume parties intended to help draw attention to issues related to simians, including medical research, animal rights, and evolution. The holiday also cuts across religious boundaries and provides opportunities to share monkey stories.

The holiday was created in 2000 by art students at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, including Casey Sorrow, a cartoonist who draws the web comic 'Feral Calf,' David Malki who draws 'Wondermark,' and Rob Balder who draws 'PartiallyClips.' The holiday may have been the product of too much idle time and pot, although it is beginning to have an international influence. There are 1,552 people who have signed their petition to make Monkey Day an official National holiday.

In 2005, Peter Jackson's film *King Kong* was released on the fifth anniversary of Monkey Day.

Speaking of monkeys...

Governor Rod Blagojevich, Democrat of Illinois, who looks more like a monkey than anyone I have ever seen, was arrested on Tuesday morning at his home on west Sunnyside in Chicago. He apparently had been trying to put the squeeze on Senate hopefuls, so that he could turn his duty to appoint a replacement for Barack Obama into money or position or title or job security. After eight years of Bush-Cheney, a good old fashioned pay-to-play scandal is refreshing. Unfortunately, it looks like Jesse Jackson, Jr. may get crushed by this scandal also, and I am sad about that. Meanwhile, Barack Obama has set a new record for approval of a US President-elect prior to inauguration: 72% approval rating.

No money for industry...

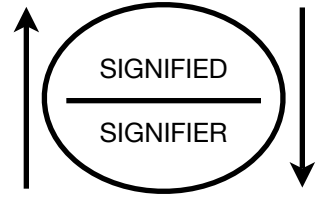
We bailed out Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, assuming 5 trillion dollars worth of risky assets. We bailed out AIG with 236 billion. CitiCorp, Bank of America, we got your back. 335 billion of the first 350 billion tranch of the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) has been spent, and aside from some bonuses for millionaires and some mergers and acquisitions, we don't know where the money went.

This week, southern Republican Senators, led by Mitch McConnell (KY), Richard Shelby (AL) and Bob Corker (TN), blocked the Senate from loaning 15 billion to GM, Ford and Chrysler so that thousands of union auto workers could keep their jobs. These Senators are from states that have non-union auto plants owned by Toyota, Honda, Mercedes, Volkswagen and Hyundai — foreign corporations. Is this what they mean by country first? This is part of the Republican Party's war on organized labor unions.

Semiotics is a general term for the theory of sign systems. It is an inquiry into the way human beings signify their world in language. Through the study of semiotics, we can see how sign systems are used by media, politics and popular culture to manipulate reactions and manufacture consent. It provides us with a valuable look behind the curtain, and insights into how it works and how it doesn't. Beyond what is merely important and interesting about semiotics, we find that language is the medium in which human beings create the Universe. Using language rigorously and precisely supports complete communications and the fulfillment of possibilities.

This Week In Semiotics: Threes

We've been talking about the Saussure's semiotic model, which consists of an arbitrary dyad: two parts, the signified concept and its arbitrarily and conventionally assigned signifier.



This week we'll begin to take another look at the semiosis of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), a US philosopher and logician, contemporary of Saussure.

Unlike Saussure's model of the sign in the form of a 'self-contained dyad', Peirce offered a triadic model:

The Representamen: the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material);

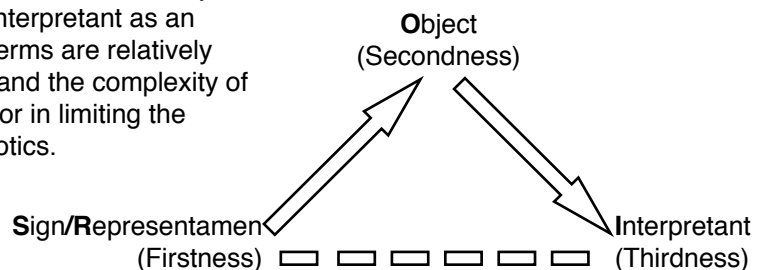
An Object: to which the sign refers;

An Interpretant: not an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign.

'A sign... [in the form of a representamen] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.228). The interaction between the representamen, the object and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as 'semiosis.' Within Peirce's model of the sign, the traffic light sign for 'stop' would consist of: a red light facing traffic at an intersection (the representamen); vehicles coming to a stop (the object) and the idea that a red light indicates that vehicles must stop (the interpretant).

Peirce's model of the sign includes an object or referent - which does not, of course, feature directly in Saussure's model. The representamen is similar in meaning to Saussure's signifier while the interpretant is similar in meaning to the signified. However, the interpretant has a quality unlike that of the signified: it is itself a sign in the mind of the interpreter. Peirce noted that 'a sign... addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign.' Umberto Eco uses the phrase 'unlimited semiosis' to refer to the way in which this could lead (as Peirce was well aware) to a series of successive interpretants (potentially) ad infinitum. Peirce added that 'the meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation.' Any initial interpretation can be re-interpreted. That a signified can itself play the role of a signifier is familiar to anyone who uses a dictionary and finds themselves going beyond the original definition to look up yet another word which it employs. This concept can be seen as going beyond Saussure's emphasis on the value of a sign in its relation to other signs. Another concept which is alluded to within Peirce's model which has been taken up by later theorists but which was explicitly excluded from Saussure's model is the notion of dialogical thought. It stems in part from Peirce's emphasis on 'semiosis' as a process which is in distinct contrast to Saussure's synchronic emphasis on structure. Peirce argued that 'all thinking is dialogic in form. Your self of one instant appeals to your deeper self for his assent.' One important aspect of this is its characterization even of internal reflection as fundamentally a social discourse.

Peirce, clearly fascinated by threes, made a phenomenological distinction between the sign itself [or the representamen] as an instance of 'Firstness', its object as an instance of 'Secondness' and the interpretant as an instance of 'Thirdness'. Such unfamiliar terms are relatively modest examples of Peircean coinages, and the complexity of his terminology and style has been a factor in limiting the influence of a distinctively Peircean semiotics.



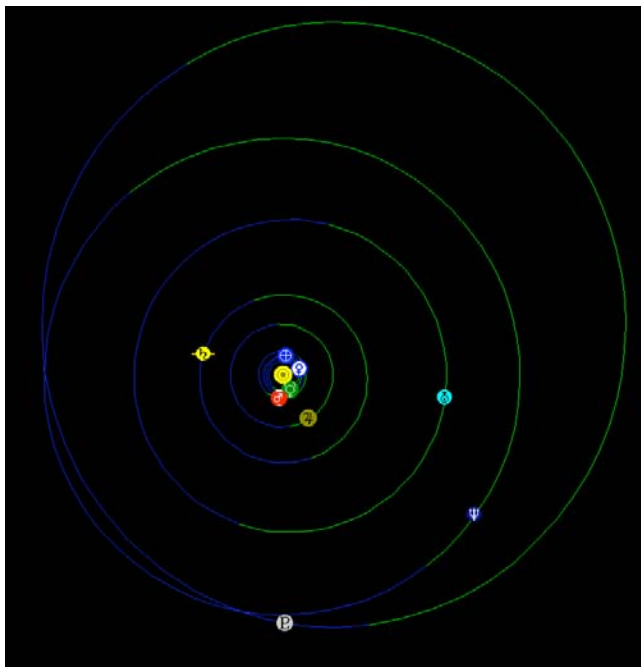
The ever-present sky is, in a way, an overarching context for all that happens here on Earth. Reason would doubt that the stars could move us any more than we could move the stars, although it is possible. Even when astrological projections correlate with what is going on with our lives, it is useful to remember that correlation does not indicate causation, and whenever one considers a possibility to be the “Truth,” it becomes a lie. For us of course, it is just inspiring to look upward and see the Universe showing off. Our purpose here is to expand our awareness and explore all inquiries, and so we look outward from this planet to get...

Lost In Space...

I hope you all got to see the beautiful, big and brilliant “Long Night Moon” on Friday night. Around here the sky was uncharacteristically clear on Thursday and Friday, and the light reflected from the snow covering the ground was incredibly bright.

This week, December 14th through December 20th, brings even more energy and attention to this time of transitions and transformation that are occurring in our government, economy and society.

Reflecting our current energetic



anticipation of the coming year and all the aspects of our lives that are in flux, are the planets. The astrologers say that the planets are causing the transitioning and transforming energy. As we’ve said, correlation does not indicate causation, so we’ll simply note the arrangement. Five of the nine traditional planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Pluto) are lining up, within 10° of arc behind the Sun, from our point of view, here on Earth. This is a rare alignment, and later this month, you’ll be able to see some of this celestial traffic jam of heavenly bodies, along with the New Moon.

Birthday Acknowledgement: December 14

Michel de Nostredame (December 14, 1503 – July 2, 1566), usually Latinized to **Nostradamus**, was a French apothecary and reputed seer who published collections of prophecies that have since become famous worldwide. He is best known for his book *Les Propheties* (The Prophecies), the first edition of which appeared in 1555. Since the publication of this book, which has rarely been out of print since his death, Nostradamus has attracted an enthusiastic following who, along with the popular press, credits him with predicting many major world events.

In contrast, most academic sources maintain that the associations made between world events and Nostradamus's quatrains are largely the result of misinterpretations or mistranslations (sometimes deliberate) or else are so tenuous as to render them useless as evidence of any genuine predictive power. Moreover, none of the sources listed offers any evidence that anyone has ever interpreted any of Nostradamus's quatrains specifically enough to allow a clear identification of any event in advance.[2]

Nevertheless, interest in the work of this prominent figure of the French Renaissance is still considerable, especially in the media and in popular culture, and the prophecies have in some cases been assimilated to the results of applying the alleged Bible Code, as well as to other purported prophetic works.

Born in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in the south of France, where his claimed birthplace still exists, Michel de Nostredame was one of at least nine children of Reynière de St-Rémy and her husband, a grain dealer and notary Jaume de Nostredame. The latter's family had originally been Jewish, but Jaume's father, Guy Gassonet, had converted to Catholicism in around 1455, taking the Christian name "Pierre" and the surname "Nostredame" (the latter apparently from the saint's day on which his conversion was solemnized).

At the age of fifteen the young Nostredame entered the University of Avignon to study for his baccalaureate. After little more than a year (when he would have studied the regular Trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic, rather than the later Quadrivium of geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy/astrology), he was forced to leave Avignon when the university closed its doors in the face of an outbreak of the plague. In 1529, after some years as an apothecary, he entered the University of Montpellier to study for a doctorate in medicine. He was expelled shortly afterwards when it was discovered that he had been an apothecary, a "manual trade" expressly banned by the university statutes.[8] The expulsion document (BIU Montpellier, Register S 2 folio 87) still exists in the faculty library. However, some of his publishers and correspondents would later call him "Doctor". After his expulsion, Nostredame continued working, presumably still as an apothecary, and became famous for creating a "rose pill" that supposedly protected against the plague.

Around 1550, he began his project of writing a book of one thousand mainly French quatrains, which constitute the largely undated prophecies for which he is most famous today. Feeling vulnerable to religious fanatics, however, he devised a method of obscuring his meaning by using "Virgilianized" syntax, word games and a mixture of other languages such as Greek, Italian, Latin, and Provençal. For technical reasons connected with their publication in three installments (the publisher of the third and last installment seems to have been unwilling to start it in the middle of a "Century," or book of 100 verses), the last fifty-eight quatrains of the seventh "Century" have not survived into any known edition.

The quatrains, published in a book titled *Les Propheties* (The Prophecies), received a mixed reaction when they were published. Some people thought Nostradamus was a servant of evil, a fake, or insane, while many of the elite thought his quatrains were spiritually inspired prophecies — as, in the light of their post-Biblical sources (see under Nostradamus's sources below), Nostradamus himself was indeed prone to claim.

Catherine de Médicis, the queen consort of King Henri II of France, was one of Nostradamus's greatest admirers. After reading his almanacs for 1555, which hinted at unnamed threats to the royal family, she summoned him to Paris to explain them and to draw up horoscopes for her children. At the time, he feared that he would be beheaded, but Catherine had made him Counselor and Physician-in-Ordinary to the King.

By 1566, Nostradamus's gout, which had plagued him painfully for many years and made movement very difficult, turned into edema, or dropsy. In late June he summoned his lawyer to draw up an extensive will bequeathing his property plus 3,444 crowns (around \$300,000 US today) — minus a few debts — to his wife pending her remarriage, in trust for her sons pending their twenty-fifth birthdays and her daughters pending their marriages. This was followed by a much shorter codicil.[4] On the evening of 1 July, he is alleged to have told his secretary Jean de Chavigny, "You will not find me alive at sunrise." The next morning he was reportedly found dead, lying on the floor next to his bed and a bench (Presage 141 [originally 152] for November 1567, as posthumously edited by Chavigny to fit).[11][2] He was buried in the local Franciscan chapel (part of it now incorporated into the restaurant La Brocherie) but re-interred in the Collégiale St-Laurent at the French Revolution, where his tomb remains to this day.

Nostradamania

True believers, such as Erika Cheetham (*The Final Prophecies of Nostradamus*, 1989), believe that Nostradamus foresaw the invention of bombs, rockets, submarines, and airplanes. He predicted the Great Fire of London (1666) and the rise of Adolph Hitler and many other events.

Some claim that Nostradamus predicted the Challenger space shuttle disaster on January 28, 1986. Of course, they didn't recognize that he had predicted it until it was too late. Here is the passage:

**From the human flock nine will be sent away,
Separated from judgment and counsel:
Their fate will be sealed on departure
Kappa, Theta, Lambda the banished dead err (I.81).**

Thiokol made the defective O-ring that is blamed for the disaster. The name has a 'K', 'TH' and an 'L'. Never mind that there were seven who died, not nine. The rest is vague enough to retrofit many different scenarios.

Some scholars claim that the quatrains are not really prophecies at all, but were written about things that have already happened.

**Earth-shaking fire from the centre of the earth
shall cause earthquakes around the New City.
Two lords shall long wage a fruitless war,
Then Arethusa [the nymph of springs] shall redden a new river**

Prophecy of 9/11 and the Iraq war, or a recap of the 1036 eruption of Mt. Vesuvius? What about this prophecy of 9/11...

**In the valley of the giants where the stars and stripes explode
There's a black Mercedes rollin' through the combat zone
Your servants are half dead; trying to take heaven by force
Begging God for mercy and weepin' in unholy places**

This was written by Bob Dylan in 1981, *Angelina*. If you make your prophecies sufficiently vague and miasmic, and leave them open-ended and undated, you will be right 100% of the time.

Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway (December 14, 1631 – February 18, 1679), was one of a tiny minority of seventeenth-century women who was able to pursue an interest in philosophy. She was associated with the Cambridge Platonists, particularly Henry More (1614-1687). Her only surviving treatise, *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, was published posthumously and anonymously in 1690. This propounds an ontology of spirit, derived from the attributes of God, which she sets out in opposition to More, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza. Her concept of the *monad*, an indivisible and hence ultimately simple entity, such as an atom or a person, probably derived from her study of the Cabbala, anticipates Leibniz.



She was born to Frances (daughter of Sir Edmund Bell of Beaupre Hall in Norfolk) and Sir Heneage Finch (who had held the posts of the Recorder of London and Speaker of the House of Commons under Charles I). Her father died the week before her birth. Her early education was by tutors and included Latin, to which she later added Greek and Hebrew. Her stepbrother, John Finch, was educated at Cambridge, and Anne Finch (as she then was) came into contact with one of his tutors, the Platonist Henry More. This led to a correspondence between them on the subject of Descartes' philosophy, in the course of which Anne grew from More's informal pupil to his intellectual equal. More said of her that he had "scarce ever met with any Person, Man or Woman, of better Natural parts than Lady Conway" (quoted in Richard Ward's *The Life of Henry More* (1710) p.193).

In 1651 she married Edward Conway, later 1st Earl of Conway, and in the following year More dedicated his book *Antidote against Atheism* to her. Her husband was also interested in philosophy and had himself been tutored by More, but she went far beyond him in both the depth of her thought and the variety of her interests. She became interested in the Lurianic Cabbala, and then in Quakerism, to which she converted in 1677. In England at that time the Quakers were generally disliked and feared, and suffered persecution and even imprisonment. Conway's decision to convert, to make her house a centre for Quaker activity, and to proselytize actively was thus particularly bold and courageous.

Her life from the age of twelve (when she suffered a period of fever) was marked by the recurrence of severe migraines. These meant that she was often incapacitated by pain, and she spent much time under medical supervision and trying various cures (at one point even having her "jugular arteries" opened). None of the treatments had any effect, and she died in 1679 at the age of forty-seven.

Philosophy

Anne Conway is known to be the author of a single treatise of philosophy. This was written at the end of her life and published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1690 in a Latin translation with the title, *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae*. It was translated back into English and printed in London in 1692 as *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. The other source for her philosophical activities is her correspondence with Henry More.

Anne Conway's treatise is a work of Platonist metaphysics in which she derives her system of philosophy from the existence and attributes of God. The framework of Conway's system is a tripartite ontological hierarchy of 'species', the highest of which is God, the source of all being. Christ, or 'middle nature', links God and the third species, called 'Creature'. God as the most perfect being is infinitely good, wise and just. A principle of likeness links God and creation. Since God is good and just, his creation

too is good and just. Created substance, like God, consists of spirit, but, unlike God, is constituted of particles called monads. All created substance is living, capable of motion and perception. Anne Conway denies the existence of material body as such, arguing that inert corporeal substance would contradict the nature of God, who is life itself. Incorporeal created substance is, however, differentiated from the divine, principally on account of its mutability and multiplicity. Even so, the infinite number and constant mutability of created monads constitute an obverse reflection of the unity, infinity, eternity and unchangeableness of God. The continuum between God and creatures is made possible through 'middle nature', an intermediary being, through which God communicates life, action, goodness and justice. 'Middle nature', partakes of the nature of both God and creation, and is therefore both a bridge and a buffer between God and created things. Thus, although she conceives of created substance as a continuum, and understands mutability as capacity for increased perfection, she sought to avoid the charge of pantheism. The spiritual perfectionism of Anne Conway's system has dual aspect: metaphysical and moral. On the one hand all things are capable of becoming more spirit-like, that is, more refined qua spiritual substance. At the same time, all things are capable of increased goodness. She explains evil as a falling away from the perfection of God, and understands suffering as part of a longer term process of spiritual recovery. She denies the eternity of hell, since for God to punish finite wrong-doing with infinite and eternal hell punishment would be manifestly unjust and therefore a contradiction of the divine nature. Instead she explains pain and suffering as purgative, with the ultimate aim of restoring creatures to moral and metaphysical perfection. Anne Conway's system is at once an ontology and a theodicy.

Anne Conway presents her system as an answer to the dominant philosophies of her time. Several chapters of her treatise are devoted to a refutation of the dualism of Henry More, and Descartes. (She does, however, express her admiration for Descartes' physics). She also takes issue with Hobbes and Spinoza, whom she charges with material pantheism, which confounds God and created substance. Anne Conway's concept of substance probably owes much to Platonism and Cabbalism (which, in the version she encountered was heavily Platonized). Her thinking also shows the impact of the teachings of the heterodox Christian theologian, Origen, who was much admired by her teacher, Henry More. As a theodicy and monadology, her system anticipates the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who owned a copy of her treatise (probably a gift to him by their mutual friend, Van Helmont), and who received her work favorably. However, although she was unusual as a female philosopher of the seventeenth century, by virtue of the fact that her philosophy achieved publication, the anonymity of her work has ensured that she has suffered the same neglect that has been the lot of most pre-modern female philosophers.

Process:

Trees...

We are about to participate in a process. The process is a way to bring something that has not been experienced or experienced fully — or even something impossible to experience — into ordinary experience. There is nothing that you are supposed to get from it. There is no way that it is supposed to look. You get to experience what you experience and you get whatever you get.

Please position yourself comfortably, and close your eyes, if you would like to. Bring your awareness to your breathing and the words you are hearing. Allow your attention to your own thoughts to fade into the background. Create a rhythmic method for your breathing, inhaling through the nose, pausing after you inhale to allow the air to fully enliven your cells, then exhaling completely and pausing for a moment to consider the precious gift of air before receiving it gratefully, inhaling and smiling with joy.

As you breathe and smile, create for yourself the experience of your body changing in shape and structure, as the structure surrounding you dissolves, leaving you outside on a warm, spring day. Your feet are extending below you to find the soil, as they begin to sprout roots that burrow and dig their way into the soil, giving you a firm foundation in the Earth. Still breathing and smiling, feeling safe and content, please create the experience of your torso turning into the trunk of a great tree, as your arms become branches that extend outwards from your fingers and sprouting more branches and twigs, from which little buds begin to emerge. From your buds, please create flowers and leaves for yourself as an expression of who you are as a tree. What blossoms bloom in your branches? What colors and smells? What tree are you? What animals and birds and bugs find a home in you?

Still breathing and smiling, extend your branches upwards toward the sun, and experience being nourished by the warm, golden rays of sunlight on your leaves as you mature into Summer, and your blossoms are replaced by fruit or nuts or berries of some sort. What are you producing? With whom will you share your abundance?

Smiling with joy and feeling comfortable and safe, begin to experience a shortening of days, signaling the onset of Autumn, as your fruit is ripe and either picked or dropped from your branches. Lift your branches into the Autumn wind and dance with it. Allow your brown leaves and weak branches to fall away as you dance with the wind.

Feeling very satisfied and safe, create the experience of snow falling on your branches as you settle in for a Winter of rest as you gather moisture and energy for the Spring to come. Are there any small animals and birds hibernating in your hollow areas, where you are protecting them from the wind? Experience their gratitude as you begin to fall gently asleep.

As you sleep, you begin to dream that you are a person in a church service, listening to the pastor leading a process, requesting that you begin to bring yourself back from your experience of the process into the here and now, and when you are ready to do so, please open your eyes.

Message:

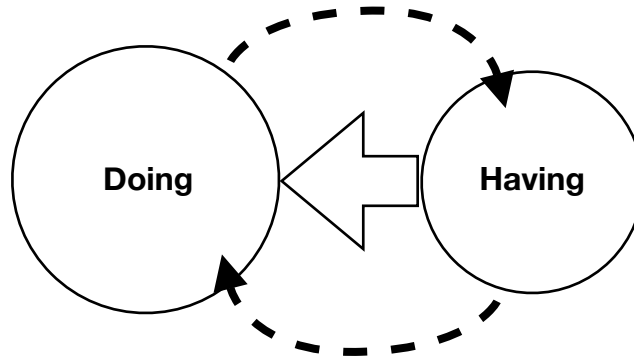
Preposterous Prognostications?

Sunday, December 14, 2008

Week 3 of Year-End Review

preposterous

c.1540, from L. *præposterus* "absurd, contrary to nature," lit. "before-behind" (cf. topsy-turvy, cart before the horse), from *præ* "before" + *posterus* "subsequent, behind."



prognostication

1432, from O.Fr. *pronosticacion* (14c.), from M.L. *prognosticationem* (nom. *prognosticatio*), from *prognosticatus*, pp. of *prognosticare* "foretell," from L. *prognostica* "sign to forecast weather," from neuter plural of Gk. *prognostikos* "foreknowing," from *progignoskein* (cf. prognosis).

Before-knowledge, compared with agnosticism, not-knowing

Contaminating the future with the past
pursuit, suffering

Living into the unpredictable possibilities

Tree in wind, does not consider it a tragedy when the wind blows off weak branches, rotted fruit and dead leaves. If it did, it would be a person, a mask of itself, an inauthenticity.

person

c.1225, from O.Fr. *persone* "human being" (12c., Fr. *personne*), from L. *persona* "human being," originally "character in a drama, mask," possibly borrowed from Etruscan *phersu* "mask." This may be related to Gk. *Persephone*. The use of -person to replace -man in compounds and avoid alleged sexist connotations is first recorded 1971 (in chairperson). Personify first recorded 1727. Personable "pleasing in one's person" is first attested c.1430. In person "by bodily presence" is from 1568. Person-to-person first recorded 1919, originally of telephone calls.

Dialogue on Preposterous Prognostications

Completion

Next week:

Next Sunday is the 21st of December. The message and theme of next Sunday's service is **Winter Solstice: Telling Time**. Please join us next Sunday as we continue to complete the year with a review of distinctions, and share a communion experience.