

## Originalfassung des Artikels *Berührung und Distanz* von Lorraine Pratt

### Distance and Touch

Two weeks ago I stood on the edge of an open space on Putney Heath *Heidland*, and looked round to make sure I was alone. In that large open space I began the opening moves of Meditation en Croix. From deep within I needed to reach out beyond myself and what had become my normal boundaries. My peripheral vision detected movement, so I became still, but continued the movements in my mind. (My pride didn't want a fellow walker to think there was a mad old woman in the clearing!) Later that same day, sitting in my garden, I observed soap bubbles coming over the fence, two small boys having fun. The opaque round bubbles made me smile and reflect. Our Government has used the word bubble to describe how we should be living, a space which keeps each one safe by keeping everything else out. As I write our bubbles have been enlarged, but they remain bubbles. I remember years ago working with children and young people when they had to imagine a bubble around them, a bubble as small or large as they wanted to protect them and keep others out. We respected each other's imaginary bubbles and bounced off them. It was a way to teach about body language and safety. These imposed bubbles have done just that; they have provided a safe space – we cross roads to avoid others. We have created barriers – some are barriers of fear and frustration so that as some bubbles burst anger flares.

As a personality type I am an extrovert. I am energized by people. I am impulsive. There are not many extroverts in religious life and I live in community with introverts. I am also a professional contemplative, a training which has helped over these months. I have enjoyed having more time to pray and read, time to contemplate and reflect. There have been moments when I have thought that moving out of this bubble will be like coming out of retreat and re-entering a world that is noisier, that moves at a different pace, a world that makes more demands of me. I have also been aware that it would have been simpler to be by myself, I would have had a different sense of freedom.

Zoom meetings extended gathered circles to an oblong on my screen. At a particular zoom gathering it was 5 in the morning for one person, for another 10 at night, for the rest of the group every time zone in between! We reached out to each other exchanging pieces of news. We muted ourselves so that communication was clearer but sometimes technology won! Do I like zoom bubbles? Not very much. They have provided a way to bring people from 5 continents together, or helped planning to continue, but I use all my senses in communications and though I can see a face and hear a voice so much is lost. – I look forward to sitting round a table with people, to meet in a dance space and even travelling for hours to meet up.

My bubble: my space and time with God. In a room of dancers I prefer to withdraw to the periphery so that I have space behind me. Physical distance is important and I want space so that I can dissociate and detach myself from the group. As I stand to begin Meditation en croix I become aware of two things, my feet, firmly planted on the ground in first position and my breathing. My arms make the connection between heaven and earth and my knees sink towards the earth (*plié*) and then straighten. On this occasion I want to elevate, to take that ascent to *la couronne* and then as the arms open to create my circle, my space. I have read that when Pope Benedict XII was looking for artists to work in the Vatican Giotto

submitted a freehand drawn circle and it won him the commission. The circle was understood by ancient mathematical philosophers to be the source of all following shapes. It was a glimpse into wholeness, to awareness and has become the symbol of perfection used by artists to symbolise divinity, eternity and enlightenment. "Giotto's perfectly drawn circle communicated this universal ideal." (A Beginner's Guide to constructing the Universe. M.S. Schneider) For me this circle often connects with Teilhard de Chardin's descriptions in 'Hymn of the Universe' It is my sacred space.

My hands will come to first position and open to second; at least that would be what anyone watching would observe! In fact I open the space before me and open my whole being, body, mind and spirit. I make myself totally vulnerable and sometimes I hold that stance. It is a hallowed moment, I am blessed and I bless in total giving. That sanctified open space is then either drawn down or raised. In some ways I play within this circle, it is after all my space. Though I do not welcome you into it, I extend my reach towards you. My inner compass looks both into myself and outwards. I need to touch my hidden self, a centre deep within, to be alone in this space. My arms will draw other shapes within my protected shield and there will be a moment when I open to second position preparing myself to open with greater awareness of what is beyond. It is from an open heart that the arms and feet move to second position.

The extrovert may be spontaneous, discover what they think through the spoken word or action but they too reflect on questions posed or situations that face them and come back, often with a new perspective. My vows call me to be a woman of compassion and communion. They commit me to be prayerful, capable of listening, open to learning, sensitive, courageous and compassionate. In second position I embrace this constant call to transformation. In this position I do not look inwards. I am aware of the movements around me, of the many personal circles. Eyes are said to be the mirror of the soul and I hope that during these movements my glance holds warmth. There is connection even when we hold our own space.

Perhaps it is in third position that I communicate. The diagonals extend way beyond me and they are often dynamic. They go beyond my reach. They are powerful. The spiral in my spine demands a new focus. My centre rebalances and I move to new territory. If there is music my antennae are aware of it. It enhances and drives my pace. On occasions when we have worked on this position with a partner so much communication takes place! We are prepared to work at the pace of the other, to trust the other, to explore the circle in which we move, to laugh at our struggles and begin again. There is only distance when the partnership does not really exist and is simply two people facing each other but not communicating.

Alone in my individual circle I need time to close in again, time to move through second position to first, to stillness. It is out of that stillness I can physically move towards others and, taking hands create and embrace that greater circle which we will accompany me on the dance journey of the day.

As I reflect on this I am conscious that these last months have been a lived expression of this meditation. It is one thing to choose a bubble or circle to live within and another to have it enforced. We are created to come together. Communication is more than words. We reach

out with our eyes, our arms. To be touched is not only to respond inwardly to words but to embrace the joys and sufferings of another. To touch is to make contact, to close the space between us, to be present.

So in these uncertain times and with a distant embrace: Namaste. I greet the god in you.  
(Putney is an area in SW London)

*This earth walk.*

*I walk green summers and white winter  
I walk orange autumns and blue springtime.  
As I walk I change my seeing  
and this new seeing becomes my Teacher  
and the wind reminds me to listen  
and learn things long known.*

*On this journey  
I walk beside,  
between  
before  
below  
and beyond.*

*I walk a sacred path  
along  
among  
around  
and above.*

*On holy ground  
with divinity  
I walk  
feeling light within  
to the place of Mystery  
I walk.*

*Gina O'Meara rscj*