

A Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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Navigating “Relational Disquiet”

By [Monica Sesma](#), Taos Board Member



I was first introduced to the concept of *relational disquiet* by Karl Tomm, Director of the Calgary Family Therapy Centre, Professor of Psychiatry at the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, and a dear Taos Institute associate. I was highly intrigued by this notion, as an ESL (or English as a Second Language person) I had never read, heard, or captured the word “disquiet” before Karl mentioned it. When I caught him using the concept, I even checked with Dr. Google and found that Merriam-Webster (2022) defines the word *disquiet* as “to take away the peace or tranquility of”. In conversations with Karl, he defines relational disquiet as “passionate differences that arise spontaneously among us as human beings” (Tomm, 2022). As I continue to be curious and motivated to explore this concept further, I want to invite my dear fellow social constructionist relational thinkers to reflect on how we navigate relational hiccups, tensions, moments of discomfort or awkwardness, instances of resistance or conflict, disagreements, and those interactional moments that can take some peace from us in all kinds of relationships.

How do you navigate relational disquiet? As an ESL Mexican living in Canada, I found myself putting more effort onto understanding relational disquiet in my daily interactions whether I am in a social, therapeutic, teaching, or professional context. When I am interacting with Spanish speaking people, I might have a better sense or understanding when something disquieting is happening, especially capturing verbal expressions. In addition, as a cinephile who has watched so many movies in English and other languages, I can tell most of the time when characters are having a relational disquiet moment. I am captivated by the role of context, language, and culture, and other indicators, and wondering what else makes the difference in identifying and navigating relational disquiet.

As we know, body language expressions might vary from culture to culture, the use of sarcastic phrases, popular sayings, or language expressions, so it is not as easy as it seems to notice relational disquiets. Even when we belong to the same family or social circle, we might not be aware of engaging in disquieting interactions. Thus, I committed to paying more attention and raising my awareness of these. My main goal is not only to “notice” but reflect if I need to do something about it. I want to be more congruent with my relational stance, show that I care for the relationships, and be accountable for anything I do or say. I also have Karl’s ideas in mind about how:



Meet the Fockers (Roach, 2004)

“[these] differences unfold and/or are managed make a huge difference in terms of outcome. Differences can become extremely divisive and destructive but at other times they can be channelled

into remarkable creativity. Rather than trying to evade such disquiet, we intend to befriend it in ways that opens space to bring forth relational preferences at a variety of levels” (Tomm, 2022).



The War of the Roses (DeVito, 1989)

Finally, I am trying to move from “I” notice, and I feel tension and pay attention to when WE notice something is happening in our relationship, when we notice together. I am trying to pause my self-awareness when I feel discomfort or “lack of peace” and be more aware of when WE notice the passionate difference.

DeVito, D. (1989). *The war of the Roses* [Film]. Gracie Films.

Merriam-Webster (2022). Disquiet. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disquiet>

Roach, R. (2004). *Meet the Fockers* [Film]. Tribeca Productions.

Tomm, K. (2022, August). Calgary Family Therapy Centre 50th Anniversary Celebration and Conference “bringing Forth Generativities within Relational Disquiet”. <https://www.familytherapy.org/coming-soon-01>