# Widening circles[1]: An exploration of congruence, identity and diversity

Developed from a Keynote given by Gill Wyatt at BAPCA Conference
2nd –5th Sept 2004,
Loughborough University.

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Giving a talk, is not a format I prefer. I think best and express myself best in dialogue where the meeting between me and the other calls forth ever more of who I am, my potential – this for me is the actualising tendency (Rogers, 1959, 1963) in process. The qualitative nature of this relationality is I believe central in this process. Rogers' six conditions describe the qualitative nature of person-centred relationships (Rogers, 1957, 1959).

I unfold within relationship. We are all in relationship with each other now. What is the qualitative nature of our connection here?  Your openness and interest will help me to both centre and connect with myself, and to open and connect with each of you. This will likely enable me to speak from a more centred, vibrant whole me.  How I speak and what I say will effect you … will influence your openness and interest. We are living in an ever unfolding dance of interconnectedness and interpenetrative influence.

I'm going to be reading and my apologies for this, as I know it can be hard to make contact with material in this way. I also know it is a bit dense and a bit undigested as yet … very much 'work in progress'. I'm presenting ideas from outside of the Person-centred approach (PCA) that I think have a relevance and extends or deepens PCA philosophy and practice. This is not intended as an analytical paper but rather as an exploration. I invite your participation with my exploration so a process of unfolding can occur here today.

I have four intentions for my talk
- To convey something of my experience and understanding of the interconnectedness of the universe (Capra, 1976,1983; Macy, 1991) and it's implicate and explicate nature- how there is unfolding and enfolding (Bohm, 1980, 1986).
- To stress the centrality of relationality and the significance of the qualitative nature of this relationality. I suggest in determining the social and political structures and processes.
- To start to explore the idea that diversity can lead to oppression … or creativity.

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[1] I acknowledge Joanna Macy with the phrase 'Widening circles' being the title for her autobiography New Society Publishers, 2000.

- To develop a whole person conceptualisation of congruence that is synonymous with coherence. With this meaning of congruence there is a similarity between identity and congruence and I hope to show the significance of this in relation to diversity both within ourselves, within our PC community and the wider societal and global world.

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**My identity**
The next part of my talk I hope will illustrate some of the first two of my intents, it is about who I am, what my identity is and what my worldview is. This shapes my knowledge and shapes this talk … my talk is not meant to be person-centred or human ecological (I'm completing a Masters in Human Ecology at the moment)… it is 'of Gill'. I don't mean this in an ego-centric way but rather naming an actuality … accepting a truth. All research is personal as John Shlien's quote 'All theory is auto-biographical' suggests (Shlien, 1994 in Sanders (ed), 2004, p.217).

Whenever I research something my subject takes me over. I dwell ever deeper within my subject (as in heuristic (Moutaskas,1994) or Goethian methodology (Bortoft, 1996). I let the subject unfold in my psyche and my consciousness, allowing the subject to teach me and transform me as I open to it. Thus learning about myself and my subject happens together. This might sound grand but I struggle as I ride this roller-coaster … there are times I can make no sense, I feel lost, overwhelmed … I can't really convey the torturousness of this process. I have to be able to roam through the whole spectrum of my knowledge whether it is defined as PC, psychology, Buddhism, new physics, sociology … or in terms of the rational, sensorial, experiential, intuitive, poetic or of the 'naquel' that which is beyond ordinary consciousness.

Henryck Skolimowski in his book the Participative Mind (1994) talks about a 'spiral of understanding' and this concept has helped me understand this process I have been describing. He explains the 'spiral of understanding' as being 'where the inner walls of our mind' define our understanding and our reality. He continues … 'We simply cannot find, see or envisage in reality more than our senses, our intellect, our sensitivities, our intuition … allow us to find and see. The more sensitive and knowing we become, the richer and larger becomes our reality'. (Skolimowski, 1994, p.15).

So where I just said all research is personal … I am now suggesting our reality is personal …it is shaped by our mind. This gives each of us our unique perspective. Each one of you will hear my words differently and will create a different meaning to what you hear. The significance of this is far reaching. Each of us creates a different universe within which we live.

The world I inhabit is not linear and causally determined but is a world of inter-connections (See Fig 1). Systems theory (Macy, 1991, Capra, 1997, 2003), Chaos theory (Gleik, 1998) and Buddhism (Macy, 1991; Kornfield, 1994) all

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speak of the interconnectedness of the world. Gregory Bateson talks about the 'pattern that connects' (1979, p.19) and Buddhism's paticca samuppada explains the dependant co-arising of known and knower, body and mind, doer and deed, self and society, the pragmatic and the moral (Macy, 1991). This is a world of mutual causality and of an objective/subjective reality.
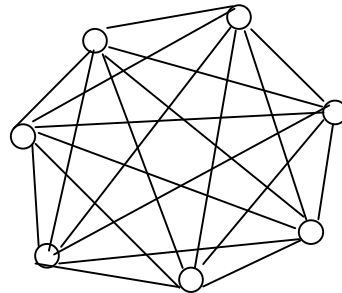


Fig. 1.  A web of interconnections

I use the words unfolding and enfolding … this comes from David Bohm's, concept of implicate and explicate order (Bohm, 1980. 1986). This grew out of his research into quantum physics and the disjuncture between the laws of physics at the macro level from those at the quantum level. Instead of seeking one unifying law as other physicists were, he looked for a new order. Despite the differences between the law of relativity and those of the quanta, Bohm saw they had in common an implication of 'undivided wholeness'. It was from this awareness that he developed his concept of implicate order which entailed internectedness and the enfolding and unfolding nature of the universe.

> … the whole of the universe is in some way enfolded in everything and that each thing is enfolded in the whole. From this follows that in some ways, and to a certain degree, everything enfolds or implicates everything. The basic proposal is that this enfoldment relationship is not merely passive or superficial. Rather it is active and essential to what each is. It follows that each thing is internally related to the whole and, therefore to everything else. The external relationships are then displayed in the unfolded or explicate order in which each thing is seen as separate and extended and related only externally to other things. The explicate order, which dominates ordinary experience as well as classic physics, is secondary, however, in the sense that ultimately it flows out of the primary reality of the implicate order. (Bohm, 1986, p.114-115).

I'll use the concept of identity to illustrate. There are different dimensions of identity – the psychological, the philosophical, the cultural, the social and political, the ecological and the spiritual. There is a whole and as the focus rests on one of these dimensions, that becomes the explicate and we will we see what is related to that dimension but at that time we won't be aware of everything that is enfolded (of the implicate order).
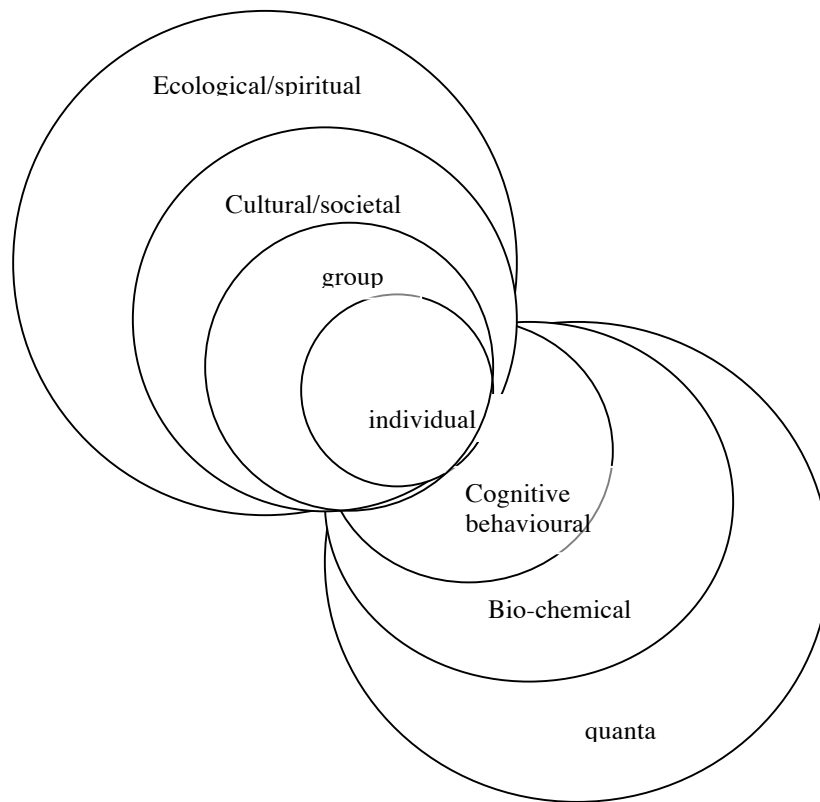


Fig, 2.  A representation of the implicate order showing its interpenetrative nature and holarchical structure.

I talked about us having a unique perspective and yet embedded within that unique perspective are many interpenetrative influences (See Fig.2.). I want to unfold, explicate a few of these- the psychological (at individual and group levels), the cultural – the social/political, the ecological and the spiritual.

The psychological dimension includes the shape of my personality …my self concept is defined by my conditions of worth (Rogers 1959). My personal, familial and cultural history influence this.

I can recount events from my past … I was the youngest in my family … my father's favourite my family told me but I seldom knew or felt this …

At three I took off for the park pushing my pushchair … happy … free …

At 21, after graduating I wanted to work for the UN or the WHO. I cared about the state of the world and wanted to find a way to make a difference. My parents wanting to protect me from disappointment (as they could not entertain the possibility that I could be successful outside of the family's sphere) suggested that perhaps I should set my sights on something more attainable…

Each of these events is enfolded within me today and influences who I am and my reality. In telling you about them I have made them of the explicate order but so many more remain in the implicate.

Our culture influences who we are … whether its our person-centred culture where we value the actualising tendency and the transformation that can result from Rogers six conditions[2] (Rogers, 1957, 1959)… or our multi-cultural British culture where there is an uneasy mix of white Anglo-Saxon, black afro-Caribbean, African, Asian and other nationals. … Or the global culture of global corporations maintaining the thrust for economic growth and ever extending their control into research, politics and the arts.

There's the sociological and the political – I am white, Caucasian, my race holds most of the political power in the world. I am a middle-aged menopausal woman who is divorced and childless. We still unfortunately live in a patriarchical society … although there have been some changes where woman hold more power and authority, there are still far more men holding positions of authority in business, in academia in politics. Woman's value is still tied with home-making, caring and child-rearing. In our own person-centred community at the last world conference in Holland all of the keynote speakers were men.

There's the ecological – I am a human and I live on earth. There is a complex web of interconnections within the natural world, Thomas Berry (1999) in writing about the 'cosmic chain of being' suggests that we are all made up of the particles and molecules that existed all through the ages of our world … whether as a primordial slime, the early oxygen hating organisms, the first organisms that crept from the sea to land, the plants, the mammals that evolved. Much of nature, and in particular the wildness of nature, is being lost, as humans influence spreads ever further through farming, mining, manufacturing, urban living and the resultant pollution, global warming, depletion of natural resources and destruction

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[2]  These six conditions are – there is psychological contact, the client is vulnerable and/or has some incongruence, the therapist is congruent or integrated, experiences unconditional positive regard (UPR) for the client and empathic understanding for the client's world; and that the client perceives to some degree the therapist's UPR and empathy.

of the diversity of the earths ecosystems. Yet that quality of nature, that wildness, is still a quality within me. I suggest not as in Freud's 'id' (Freud, ????) to be controlled but as in Rogers formative and actualising tendency (Rogers, 1959, 1980).

And the spiritual. I don't know how to talk about the spiritual but for that reason I need to say something so as not to avoid or leave it unacknowledged, as this dimension has been nearly squeezed out of existence during the industrial and technological and now the information age. The simplest way for me to talk about spirituality is to say it's about seeking and living the deepest meaning. I think this goes beyond the usual transcendant nature of spirituality, which is about ascendance achieving higher levels of consciousness. For me immanence, the spirituality that is embodied and arises within the material world, within the earth and within ourselves has an equal importance to the spiritual authority of ascendance. And deepest meaning for me comes from the wholeness – the transcendence, the immanence and the interconnectedness of the universe, everything enfolded within, waiting to unfold through our participation – held in balance within a loving, caring heart (Kornfield, 1994, Hawkins, 2002).

The interconnectedness, and all that is enfolded within the implicate as we consciously live in the explicate world is mind boggling.

Our PCA is of crucial importance because alongside others (for example Buddhism with their heart-felt compassion (Kornfield, 1994), Native Americans for their respect for 'all our relations' (Brooke Medicine Woman, 1991) and social, political and ecological activists that seek a social and political justice that resonates with natural justice) Rogers' six conditions (1957, 1959) attempts to identify the qualitative nature of relationships. If we live in an interconnected universe then the qualitative nature of these relationships becomes of even more importance. This is crucial. I believe it is the qualitative nature of our relationships that determine the sort of world we live in and its societal structures and processes. Wholeness, respect, caring, co-operation and understanding contrast strongly with atomistic, mechanistic, control and prediction. And the law of entropy where all of the material world is winding down is in sharp contrast to the growth tendency posited by Teillhard de Chardin (1969), Albert Whitehead (1925), Prigogine (????) and Rogers' (1958, 1983).


**Congruence and identity**
What happens to congruence viewed within this interconnected implicate/explicate world?

The way I talk about congruence is an extension of Rogers' conceptualisation. And my meaning comes from the related words that Rogers' uses rather than from his 1957 and 1959 theoretical statements. These words are 'integrated', 'real' , 'whole' and 'authenticity'. His theoretical statements describe a two level

definition of congruence involving experiencing and awareness in relation to the self concept. Congruence is when experience is accurately symbolised by the self concept … there is a matching between experience and awareness (Rogers 1959). Ivan Ellingham (1999) emphasised the two level nature of Rogers theoretical statements (Rogers 1957, 1959) and showed us that Rogers also writes about a three level model where communication, expression or behaviour is added to the previous two levels.

I have previously written about the multi-faceted nature of congruence (Wyatt, 2001) where I basically add 'the core of the therapist' and the 'whole beyond the facets' to Rogers three level model of experience, awareness and behaviour. What I mean by the core of the therapist is … who they are, their style and their psychological maturity and 'the whole beyond the facets'. This is the unexplainable, the 'naquel', the mysterious that enters and influences us if we are open to this possibility.

Jules Seeman (1983, 2001) develops a systems approach to congruence where it becomes a whole person concept from the biochemical to physiological, perceptual, precognitive, cognitive, person to person, person to environment and to the interpersonal/ecological.

Jules Seeman, Ivan Ellingham and myself have all focused on congruence as being a whole person multi-level concept. We all see it as a process. Jules Seeman talks about the connection and communication that needs to happen between these different levels and he likens congruence to the organismic integration of the fully functioning person. He also gives us research findings illustrating that we are at our best 'when we have a harmonious rhythm of connection and communication throughout our organism' (2001, p.211).

It is this connection and communication and the possible harmonious rhythm that I want to develop further … and a little later make connections and explain the significance of seeing congruence in this way in relation to identity and diversity.

As soon as we start to see congruence as a whole person concept there starts to be some overlap with identity. It seems that not only does there need to be connection and communication between the multi-levels of our being but also between Dave Mearns' 'configurations of self', (Mearns and Thorne, 2000) or John Rowan and Mick Cooper's 'plural selves' (200?). There needs to be what I have called 'an integrating self' or an 'integral self' (2003, 2004). This 'integral self' develops an ability for the 'harmonious rhythm of connection and communication' that Jules Seeman referred to. There is thus a coherence within this 'integral self'. Let me illustrate what I mean …

I have identified four parts of myself – the 'superior me', the 'inferior me', the 'valueless me' and the 'desperate me'. The 'superior me', who has a fairly rigid structure, creates a safe world by feeling better than others, being self sufficient

and controlling others. This defends the 'inferior me' who is insecure, lacking in self-confidence and is hesitant, shy and tending towards passivity. She can very easily become the 'victim' . There is also a more buried part of me the 'valueless me' who has no right to exist … my right to exist ensues from me caring for others. When I access this 'valueless me' I often escape into my 'desperate me'. A distressing place to be but more tolerable than my 'valueless me'.

Several years ago I realised that the 'superior me' and the 'inferior me' were intricately linked and kept in place by the 'narcississtic needs of my 'desperate' self which inflates my needs above other peoples. There is thus a connection between my 'desperate' self and the intricately linked 'superior' and 'inferior me' … and the 'valueless me'. By learning to hold and love the 'desperate me' I have been released from the dualistic construction of inferior/superior that maintained my oppressive system. Now at times of stress, as the other parts of me are usually held by me, where I descend to, is the 'valueless' me, or more recently the 'unloveable me' … it is now my task to tenderly hold and love this part of me. Thus my 'integral self' ( a term developed from Ken Wilber, 2000) is the deeper, broader dimension that connects and holds previously fragmented parts of myself to create a coherent whole. This deeper and broader self provides a safe container that allows 'connection and communication' so that disturbances can work through the multi-levels and/or the configurations of the self, leading to a greater coherence of self or returning to Jules Seeman's term to a greater degree of 'organismic integration' (2001).

Congruence then becomes a process and developmental concept of 'organismic integration' characterised by 'connection and communication'. When a certain degree of coherence develops the integral self is up and running holding and facilitating the 'connection and communication' between different configurations of self and between the different multi-levels of a person. Again the quality of the connection and communication is of crucial importance. The coherence or 'organismic integration' cannot occur without love, acceptance, understanding and authenticity from others and for the self.

So now turning to diversity …

**Diversity**
Diversity is about difference. How we respond to difference will be influenced by the qualitative nature of how we relate and embedded within the qualitative nature of how we relate is the issue of power. Difference can lead to oppression and the acting out of the victim/oppressor dynamic, which is so prevalent in our culture … But it is very important to remember diversity can also lead to creativity.

How can two such opposite processes arise out of diversity? Another way to ask this question is … What happens within difference so that the pattern of oppression or the pattern of creativity is formed?

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Now these are questions that interest me.

Because if we lean into or indwell into these questions perhaps we might understand more deeply the dynamics within us, our culture and the wider world that determines the patterns and processes within diversity that gives rise to oppression or creativity. Perhaps there would be the chance of a world evolving that respected all of the diverse cultures and people, the 'more-than-human' world and the earth, the planet on which we reside.

It was this word – diversity, that made me feel unqualified to speak at this conference. I know I have prejudices, I know I am priviledged by being white, hetero-sexual, able-bodied and middle class. And I know my contrasting internal experience of feeling oppressed and feeling a victim, often feeling restricted by others rather than facilitated by others to unfold and expand into becoming more of myself. This oppression I refer to however, is of a completely different quality and quantity than those people externally oppressed by the social and political structures and processes of our culture and society.

Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) identifies the internal oppressor within every one oppressed which acts to maintain the external oppression. I know with myself that my internal oppressor also has an external part ie I can at times oppress others. This internal/external nature of oppression is present within my 'inferiour/superiour dualism, which I identified earlier …. one could not live without the other … my victim and oppressor are wedded together. And I realised that before I acknowledged that both victim and oppressor are parts of me … when I only acknowledged Gill the victim, I projected my oppressor onto others. …And when I only acknowledged Gill the oppressor, I projected the victim out on to others.

I talk about myself in this way to show you the connection between what is inside of us and how our internal processes are mirrored and manifested in the external world. Remember we create our reality (Henryk Skolimowski 'spiral of understanding' 1994, p.15) and we live in an interconnectedness universe. The events of the world and the structures and processes of society exist because of our internal processes.

Let me illustrate what all that I have been saying means.

Imagine a group of people and envisage all of the connections with their possible communications forming a web or matrix of the group (Foulkes, 1975).

Imagine a person, who they are, their history, their identity, their whole person congruence or coherence.

Imagine the relationship between that person and one other in the group created by who the people are, the changing events of the moment both within themselves, within the group, within any organisation involved, the society and the world. (Remember the holarchical structure of the implicate and explicate order … we are both a whole and a part of a whole …). As a person we are a whole. And as a member of a group we are a part, that participates in the whole becoming ie in the group becoming a group.

Imagine all of these relationships in a group … in this group. The changing quality of this relating and how it is influenced by so much.

I know I have an internal oppressive system, which at times of stress I will manifest. I would respectfully suggest we all do, in some shape or other. We live in a society where oppression is prevalent

Sometimes the groups and organisations I belong to have oppressive dynamics and structure … but I have had and I know others have had a recurring experience when creativity replaces this oppression. People talk about being free, having had a transformative experience, of feeling that they have expanded, or unfolded into becoming more of themselves. These groups have not been free of difficulties rather it has been my experience that the group that has been the most chaotic can become the most creative. I know that might seem to be a dangerous thought. The group that has struggled most with their diversity, will be the group that has worked through its assumptions and projections about each other and the group as a whole. They have dialogues, they have been in conflict, they have both found out about themselves and found out what it is like to be a participant of a whole ie.of the group. They have both 'connected and communicated' within themselves and with each other. They have found a changing balance of becoming whole within themselves and becoming part of the whole group … through balancing self assertion and integration. Consensus decision making, dialogue and group directivity (the equivalent of non-directivity for the individual) are the processes and the structures that I have found that helps difference and diversity to lead to creativity rather than oppression.

**Conclusions**
I started with Identity, congruence and diversity and seem to have ended up with so much. I guess this is the nature of this interconnected implicate/explicate type of a universe. As I indwell in what is explicate, the implicate unfolds, as I gradually move out along my 'spiral of understanding'.

I believe there are many implications and consequences enfolded within my exploration. Before I focus on those nearer the surface I want to make a couple of comments about PC philosophy, theory and practice from this relational, participative, process worldview.

Sometimes person-centred concepts are understood as separate concepts for example when only three of Rogers' conditions are taught and each of these are taught separately. David Bohm describes the explicate world as islands in the middle of an ocean. It is only when you explore the depths of the ocean that you discover all the islands are connected by the same land mass. Most of us here will know how crucial it is for all of our person-centred concepts to be joined up, for there to be a 'connection and communication' between them all so there is a coherence to our theory and philosophy.

This means there needs to be a coherence between all of the separate conditions, the growth tendency, personality theory, the process theory – all elements of person-centred philosophy and theory. For example congruence or any other of the conditions cannot be seen in isolation (Wyatt, 2001, p.230),. The depth of their meaning unfolds by seeing them as parts of a whole. They are different faces of the same thing. Congruence cannot be congruence without empathy and UPR; empathy cannnot be empathy without congruence and UPR; and UPR cannot be UPR without congruence and empathy. Recent person-centred research and exploration into such concepts as 'presence' (see Geller and Greenberg, 2004) and 'relational depth' (see Mearns and Cooper, 2005) has started to provide a territory that unites all the elements of person-centred philosophy and theory.

There is a stunning implication for person-centred clinical practice, which arises from this relational, participative, process worldview. I suggest that how a therapist practices from moment to moment and from client to client will arise from the interrelatedness and interaction between
1. Who the therapist is
2. Who the client is
3. The quality of the therapeutic relationship
4. The stage of the therapeutic relationship
5. What is happening for the therapist and client at that moment
6. The history of the therapeutic relationship
7. The contextual setting – agency, organisation, the culture
8. What is happening in the wider world

I think it follows from this that the identity of PCA and the theoretical and practice diversity within our person-centred community with regards classical, experiential and process-orientated takes on a new meaning. There is no one way that is right or wrong – rather there is difference and diversity. Each person will create their unique and very importantly their coherent way of being a person-centred practitioner.

This is work in progress. I have attempted to illustrate to you my interconnected and participative cosmology characterised by wholeness, the implicate/explicate order and mutual causality. I have drawn from PC philosophy, the work of Henryk Skolimowski, David Bohm, and aspects of Buddhism, Systems theory and Chaos

theory. The implications of this interconnectedness and the resulting significance of qualitative relationality is I believe huge – both at a personal, group, cultural and global level and for PC philosophy and for our PC identity and community.

My tentative conclusions are

- At a personal level … the whole person concept of congruence or coherence is determined by the quality of the connection and communication between the different levels and parts of the 'self' . This coherence will not occur without love, understanding and acceptance, Our congruence or coherence will influence the quality of our relationships

- At a group level … The qualitative nature of the web of connections between all people in the group can either create a group coherence that facilitates a creative process ie Rogers actualising tendency or there is an incoherence where oppression and restriction results instead. It is rather when each individual becomes more fully themselves ie living their diversity to the fullest and respecting the others' diversity that there will be an unfolding of creativity rather than oppression.

- At a cultural level … Because of the interconnected nature of the universe and its implicate/explicate order, the qualitative nature of these relationships create the culture of our society and its structures and processes.

  An uncomfortable meaning of all this may be that we all share a responsibility for what has and is happening in Iraq, in Sudan, in the USA, on our streets, in Whitehall, in BAPCA and in this room.

- At a societal and global level there is the hope that the structures and processes will gradually transform in response to the qualitative nature of relating characterised by heart-based respect, understanding and caring.

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