

Intuiting the Future(s)

Sohail Inayatullah
Tamkang University
Taiwan

The Works of P.R. Sarkar

My own encounter with intuition as a legitimate way of knowing came from the works of P.R. Sarkar. Following the Tantric tradition, in my limited understanding, he argued that intuition develops once the intellect is pointed, has reached its pinnacle. By this, he meant that once the intellect is focused - like a laser - intuition can further develop. Intellect is a necessary factory, thus, in the development of intuition (Inayatullah, 2002; Inayatullah, 1999; Inayatullah and Fitzgerald, 1999).

Sarkar as well divides intuition into that which is cerebral, i.e. individual based and that which is extra-cerebral, i.e. shared among others, outside the brain. Within his worldview this means that intuition is both grounded in the person and outside of the person. Without entering into his ontology, essentially there is the limited intuition of the self and an expanded intuition that is derived from being connected to some other level of consciousness outside of the individual

The first form requires a sharp focus - an alert sensitivity to the present, an awareness of everything around one. The second requires an emptiness, a surrender from the fullness of the self (cerebral and even extra-cerebral, individual or cosmic). The challenge for each one of us, if once accept these premises, is to develop focus and surrender at the same time.

Five Uses of Intuition in Foresight

While Sarkar may acknowledge intuition as a way of knowing, formal education has been about its suppression and often an unconscious acceptance of authority as a primary way of knowing. Thus, to re-discover intuition - but not at the expense of reason and sense-inference- while difficult, can be rewarding. For me, I have used this approach throughout my last thirty five years working in the futures field.

First, when writing on the future, it is intuition that guides when to write and what to write. Intuition for me occurs in deep meditation where the core argument appears, words flow from what feels like a different place in my brain. When I don't write in this way, then writing is a chore, a burden - an act that should be done, instead of a process of reception, and act which is effortlessly allowed.

This is not to say that struggle disappears; rather the perspiration is in the rewriting, in crafting the work. Intuition provides the insight.

Second, when workshoping the future, intuition works as it guides me how to engage with participants. While I follow the linearity of the six pillars process and accompanying tools (Inayatullah, 2015), it is through intuition that I may decide to focus more on one tool or another; or even to skip a tool. This may occur, as my sceptical colleagues have reminded me, because I am present to the body language of participants, and not because of any connection to the non-material. Certainly this is true, but being present in itself is an intuitive act. Of being. By noting the “energy” in the room - the humour, or heaviness, the puzzlement, the excitement, I can name the issue and then gently make suggestions. “I sense fatigue,” I might comment. “Perhaps we should take a break,” or, “lets skip scenarios...and....” And: any teacher worth her salt knows this process.

Awareness also tells me when I make mistakes, more often than not this occurs when I am not present, or when an issue is raised where I am uncomfortable. In this situation, I am neither focused nor am I surrendered. And thus, there is a derailment. If I do not do the inner work of getting back on track, i.e. noticing what is wrong, then the initial conditions, as chaos and complexity would predict, amplify. The initial problem becomes a major issue. I often need to step away. Reflect, Meditate. Exercise. Seek advice from colleagues. And then return to the challenging issue.

Third, intuition becomes a way to notice weak signals in a pedagogical process. What is working, what needs to change, who do I need to connect with? If these signals are not allowed into one’s field - then whether it is the pedagogy of doing futures or the act of empirical or text based research - the process can certainly go toward undesirable directions (Inayatullah, 2015).

Fourth, intuition is of great use in finding solutions to complex problems. While Graham Molitor (2003) did not include intuition as an asset in his ground breaking research on emerging issues analysis, I do believe he would be open to its inclusion. Indeed, it is the intuitive jump that leads to the sudden understanding, the creative leap, the discovery of a new emerging issue. Intuition is also useful in the Causal Layered Analysis process of finding metaphors to describe an emerging situation (Inayatullah and Milojević, 2015). And this is also true for scenarios as well. While much of scenario writing is deductive, especially in the incasting phase, there are certainly times where the intellect has reached its limit, and an intuitive jump provides the new solution - the new scenario. The ontological debate of whether it came from outside (spirit, cosmic mind, the field, colleagues in the room) or inside is far less important to me than Sarkar’s call for simultaneous focus and openness.

Fifth, intuition is crucial in visioning. Perhaps intuition is not quite the correct word here. As Ramos (2015) has argued, following the work of Hal and Sidra Stone (1993) it is accessing another self which is necessary in the foresight process. When I run a group through visioning, using as context, the work of Elise Boulding (1995), Oliver Markley (1992), David Loye (2004) and others, I have them close their eyes and imagine a happy time in their life, as I wish for them to feel their way into the future. Earlier methods in the workshop process (the futures triangle, for example) have been heavily cognitive, and thus, I wish to move participants to a different part of their brain, a different ‘self’, And indeed even to access the extra-cerebral part of themselves, i.e. the collective mind in the room. Once they have accessed this feeling, we walk - in the mind’s eye - into the future, often fifteen steps, for example, to the year 2030. They walk up to a hedge, which represents the boundary to the preferred future (not predicted, as I do not wish to privilege the psychic but the

preferred, what they truly wish for). A gate opens and they walk into the the desired future, allowing images of what-is to come to them. For a few minutes, they explore this desired future. They then see a six story building in front of them. The six story building is a representation of the *chakras*. They then go up a spiral staircase (the *kundalini* in Tantra) to the sixth floor (the eye of intuition) and walk toward a balcony. There, they meet their future self (or friend, mentor, or guru, or...) who gives them a message. They read the message to themselves and after bowing down (acknowledging the wisdom of a force beyond the directed self), they walk back down the staircase and then slowly walk back toward the hedge. Going back through the gate, we retrace the steps back to the present.

Participants then, if they wish to, share their visions and messages. This process succeeds in that it helps synthesize the thoughts and analysis of the past few days of the foresight course. It also tends to remind people what is truly important. This tends to be in three areas: 1. family and friends. 2 nature and peace and 3. new technologies that make the world easier in seamless ways.

Essentially, this process works because participants are both focused and relaxed. Open.

Sixth, and finally, intuition can be wrong, indeed, not helpful. We can err and be led by what the Buddhists call a hungry ghost. Our desire for a result, a reality overwhelms us, and thus, instead of being focused and relaxed, we grasp and tense. Intuition then needs to be balanced with other ways of knowing, just as in futures studies, where we move from the future to alternative futures. Intuition is not a replacement for being present to the unknown.

Intuition is Central

Intuition, for me, has played a central role in how I engage in futures studies. What to write, when to write. How to negotiate a workshop, what to change and how to keep myself and others present. Intuition is also useful in picking up weak signals, within teaching environments but also in environmental scanning in general. It assists in finding solutions to complex problems - the intuitive jump. And intuition is crucial in foresight in that moves participants away from what they don't want to what they truly wish for. What could be more important than clarifying intent and using the tools and methods from the futures field to help realize that intent? While many futurists are certainly intuitive, the value of this symposium is that it challenges us all to be conscious of not just how we use the future but how we use intuition to create alternative and preferred futures.

Correspondence

Sohail Inayatullah
Professor, Tamkang University,
Adjunct Professor, University of the Sunshine Coast
www.metafuture.org
Tamkang University 251 Tamsui, Taipei, Taiwan
E-mail: sinayatullah@gmail.com
Phone: 886-2-2621-5656 ext.3001
Fax: 886-2-2629-6440

References

- Boulding, Elise and Boulding, Kenneth. (1995). *The Future: Images and Processes*. London: Sage.
- Inayatullah, Sohail. (1999). *Situating Sarkar*. Maleny, Australia: Gurukul.
- Inayatullah, Sohail. (2002). *Understanding Sarkar*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.
- Inayatullah, Sohail and Fitzgerald, Jennifer. (1999). *Transcending boundaries*. Maleny, Australia: Gurukul.
- Inayatullah, Sohail (2015). *What Works: Case Studies in the Practice of Foresight*. Tamsui, Taiwan: Tamkang University Press.
- Inayatullah, Sohail and Milojević, Ivana (2015), eds., *CLA 2.0. Transformative Research in Theory and Practice*. Tamsui, Taiwan: Tamkang University Press.
- Loye, David (2004). ed., *The Great Adventure: Toward a Fully Human Theory of Evolution*. New York: SUNY.
- Markley, O.W. (1992). Using Depth Intuition In Creative Problem Solving And Strategic Innovation. Selection Forty in Sidney Parnes (Ed.), *Source Book for Creative Problem-Solving — A Fifty Year Digest of Proven Innovation Processes*. Scituate, MA: Creative Education Foundation. Retrieved July 31, 2015, from <http://www.inwardboundvisioning.com/Docs/UsingDepthIntuition.htm>.
- Molitor, Graham. (2003). *The Power to Change the World: The Art of Forecasting*. Potomoc, MD: Public Policy Forecasting.
- Ramos, Jose. (2015). The Inner Game of Futures. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 20(1), 91-100.
- Sarkar, Prabhat Rainjan. (1987). "Extra-Cerebral Memory," *Ananda Vacanamrtam*. Kolkata, India: Ananda Marga Publications. Retrieved July 28, 2015, from <http://www.speakingtree.in/spiritual-blogs/masters/science-of-spirituality/cerebral-and-extracerebral-memory>.
- Stone, Hal, & Sidra Stone. (1993). *Embracing your inner critic: Turning self-criticism into a creative asset*. New York: HarperOne.