

Introduction to the Symposium on ‘Intuition in Futures Work’

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Introduction

This special “Symposium” issue of the *Journal of Futures Studies* was birthed in the spring of 2014, during a downtown Singapore luncheon conversation between JFS Editor Sohail Inayatullah and myself. As we were sharing some of the proudest prouds and sorriest sorries of our respective professional lives, *intuition* stood out as something we both had in common: We both confessed to pride about the ways that each of us had found to use the intuitive function for ourselves personally and as something we teach others to tap into in spite of the dubious “political correctness” in many settings to do so; and our sorrow that this essential way of knowing has not caught on more widely as a credible methodological tool for use in futures studies and proactive leadership generally.

As we explored ways to rectify this, Sohail suggested some type of a special issue of the journal on this topic. As we talked about it, we agreed that such an issue shouldn’t involve a lot of ivory tower rhetoric, but be more juicy, with personal reflections of how different futurists have experientially come to value and practice intuition-based methods in their futures work. Such an approach was used to advantage in *Intuition: The Inside Story*, a collection of interdisciplinary perspectives edited by Robbie Davis-Floyd & P. Sven Arvidson (1997). Ultimately, we decided on a special “Symposium” issue of the journal that would have precisely these characteristics, written by recognized practitioners of the art. I reluctantly agreed to take on the role of editor for this initiative, and in retrospect, am glad that I did.

A Brief Culture-Specific History of Thinking About Intuition

Intuition (defined in a later section), seems to be one of those elusive concepts that have been widely known throughout history to exist in all cultures, but rarely understood by most because it has generally been thought to be the province of seers, oracles, medicine people, or prophets; and in the realm of spiritual disciplines, a capacity to be achieved through meditative discipline of the mind.

Historically, many leading philosophers in Western Culture made intuition a key part of their systems of thought (e.g., Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Bergson). But in the 20th century, with the advent of logical positivism and other variants of what can be called “scientific materialism,” intuition fell into disrepute as compared to rational/

analytic thinking as a credible path of learning and knowing for participants of that intellectual paradigm.

Intuition nevertheless continued to be championed by a few intellectual thought leaders such as Jung (1921), for whom intuition was one of the four essential functions of mind (Sensing, Thinking, Feeling and Intuition); and the great inventor and futurist, R. Buckminster Fuller (1970), who believed that intuition was a core skill for human evolution, being central to major breakthroughs in science, art, industry, and all human endeavors - a vital tool for our individual and collective positive evolution (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 37). And, of course, there is that widely cited quote - perhaps wrongly attributed- from Albert Einstein¹:

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift” .

For better or worse, the emerging discipline of futures studies has largely followed the prevailing intellectual paradigm’s emphasis on rational/analytic thinking and corresponding disdain for intuition as a methodology of choice. *A central mission of this Symposium on Intuition in Futures Work is to help rectify this imbalance.*

Highpoints from the Literature on Practical Executive Intuition

Before introducing each of the essays making up this symposium, it is useful to set the stage by sharing some of the summary conclusions from a brief review of the executive management literature on practical intuition that I did for a client interested in promoting the use of proactive intuition by executives. The use of the adjective “practical” in this regard is meant as a signal - to all who may have a pejorative view of intuition as being some mystical vagary that has no place in the hard-headed realities of the day-to-day work place - about the operational usefulness of intuition for many different purposes, including visioning and futures studies.

Intuition has been described and defined many different ways in the literature, most of which are very similar. Based on their extensive survey of the literature on how intuition is defined, Dane and Pratt (2007, p. 40ff) formulated a four-part formal definition that includes virtually all components of other definitions they reviewed:

“Intuition is a

1. non-conscious process
2. involving holistic associations
3. that are produced rapidly, which
4. result in affectively charged judgments.”

That is, intuition (either/both as a noun or as a verb) is based on mental processes that differ in kind from conscious rational/analytic thought. Intuition “connects the dots” of all manner of different contextual factors shaping the thing intuited, and intuition often comes as a sudden insight that arouses the emotions, causing the recipient to feel very convinced about the truth-value of the intuition, in spite of opposing views.

Goldberg (1989) identified the major overlapping functions of intuition as including:

- Discovery / Serendipity
- Creativity / Innovation
- Evaluation / Option choosing
- Operation / Being in the right place at the right time
- Prediction / Foresight
- Illumination / Transcendence.

And Sadler-Smith & Shefy (2007) developed this list of commonly used methods for developing intuitive awareness:

- Passive volition
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Somatic awareness
- Insight
- Spontaneity
- Visual imagery
- Relaxation

Not mentioned by them are other powerful methods for tapping intuition through use of profoundly non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) such as:

- Dream work (Jung & Hull, 1972)²
- Holotropic Breathwork³
- Brainwave Entrainment (BWE)⁴
- Psychochemicals (Roberts, 2013, 2014).

Although there are arguably many different types of intuition, three major types of intuition found in the literature are summarized by Table 1.

Table 1. *Types of Intuition and their Sources*

Type of Intuition	Definition	Examples
<p>1. Automated expertise or “job smarts” – primarily memory-based</p>	<p>Judgment or choice made through a partially subconscious process involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps borne of past situation-specific experiences • A replay of past learning • A feeling of familiarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large bank loan officer making routine commercial loan decisions for existing large customers • Airline pilots or fire chiefs making instantaneous decisions how to handle emergent crisis situations • Executives and managers of all types who trust their “savvy” in rapid response situations
<p>2. Holistic hunch or “gut feeling” – partially memory based</p>	<p>Judgment or choice made through a subconscious process involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of diverse experiences • Novel combinations of information • Strong feelings of being right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ray Croc’s decision to buy the McDonalds brand • Chrysler’s decision to develop the Dodge Viper; • Honda’s decision to introduce motorcycles in the U.S. • Peak performing executives who trust “gut feelings” in uncertain situations
<p>3. Transcendental insight or “vision” – not memory based</p>	<p>Judgment or choice made through a “supraconscious” process often involving:</p> <p>A non-ordinary level or state of consciousness (NOSC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of how something should be rectified or made more whole • Often comes as a sudden flash of insight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous artists and thinkers of all types being inspired by an inner daemon • Niels Bohr, dreaming of a planetary system as a model for atomic structure that won the Nobel Prize • Ordinary people of all types who have opened their inner channels of wisdom and creativity through human potential courses, meditation, etc.

The first two types of listed on Table 1 are due to Miller and Ireland (2005); the third is my own contribution based on sources such as Vaughan (1979), Harman and Rheingold (1984), Hendricks and Ludeman (1996), and my own experiential knowledge.

Interestingly, the vast majority of the published literature on intuition doesn’t even acknowledge the third type, suggesting that it represents something of a different professional paradigm—as has been commented on by many, such as Laszlo (2004), who made a number of both theoretical and practical suggestions for the further development and evolution of *akashic* (aka *transcendental*) ways of knowing. And of course it should be recognized that while Table 1 represents an idealized typology of pure types, real-world practical intuition often has elements of all three.

Regardless which type of intuition is referred to, by and large there is a consensus in the literature, summarized by Table 2, about the contexts for strategic decision-making where intuition works better and where worse. Most of it is anecdotal with a few empirical studies described by Dane and Pratt (2007), and Sadler-Smith (2008).

Table 2. *Where Intuition is Most / Least Useful*

Intuition leads to better decision making	Intuition leads to worse decision making
In situations involving novelty, uncertainty, and time pressure (immediacy of decision) where rational methods break down.	In situations involving regularity, high data availability, etc. where rational methods do better.

Obviously, intuition is a needful component of best practices for futures studies where exploration of futures involving great volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) is essential.

To complete this brief summary review of the literature, it is appropriate to also cite the recent contributions of Marta Sinclair. Her “Misconceptions about Intuition” (2010) and the two handbooks she has edited—*Handbook of Intuition Research* (2011) and *Handbook of Research Methods on Intuition* (2014)—are signal efforts toward the refinement of intuition as an intellectually rigorous topic. Many additional citations relating to intuition in futures studies are carried in the various essays making up this Symposium. These contributions are as follows:

The Contributions Making Up This Symposium

The essays making up this Symposium are:

- The Inner Game of Futures, by Jose Ramos
- Intuition in Futures Research, by Ruth-Ellen Miller
- Intuition and Evolution, by Barbara Marx Hubbard
- Intuiting the Future(s), by Sohail Inayatullah
- Learning to Use Intuition in Futures Studies, by Oliver Markley
- Integrated Intelligence and Critical Futures, by Marcus Anthony
- Intuition, Rationality and Imagination, by Marcus Bussey

Each is briefly described below, following in a sequence that moves from being more experientially autobiographical to more reflectively theoretical. And although they are quite varied, they all generally focus on the third type of intuition noted on the Table 1 above: Transcendental Insight or “vision.” Thus the “value add” of this symposium lies well beyond what is generally available from the literature that honors only the other two types of intuition.

The Inner Game of Futures, by José Ramos

Ramos defines his essay as in part an auto-ethnographic narrative that attempts to situate his own personal experiences in a broader cultural context, but also details his own learning and experiences with respect to intuition and futures studies; and describes intuition’s pivotal role in both bringing him to futures studies and guiding him within futures studies. By way of ending, he points to the role of an action research framework to make sense of intuition’s role in futures studies more broadly.

Intuition in Futures Research, by Ruth-Ellen L. Miller

Miller’s essay is also something of an auto-ethnographic narrative, detailing the numerous source materials from which she supplemented her naturally occurring intuitive gifts as she learned to apply intuition in various types of futures research, describing several of the specific methods she herself has developed for the co-creative visioning of a “preferred future” scenario. Of significance is that her professional work using intuition bridges the discipline of futures work with that of “New Thought” spiritual leadership and holistic education, each of which informs the other.

Intuition and Evolution, by Barbara Marx Hubbard

Hubbard’s essay is a direct illustration of using the higher or intuitive mind to receive inspiration, guidance, and insights to enhance the rational mind—both how she does it, and exemplary outcomes of doing this in her life, such as being inspired to write a book with “thoughts literally coming to me by some higher knowing beyond the mental mind, yet seemingly logical from the point of view of the new powers of humanity.” Also noteworthy is her description of how “Bucky” Fuller responded to this work, having himself been similarly inspired.

Intuiting the Future(s), by Sohail Inayatullah

Inayatullah’s essay provides a specific guide to the theory and practice of intuition that guides his work. Inspired by P.R. Sarkar in the context of the Tantric tradition, Inayatullah details how intuition plays a role in key aspects of his futures work: writing, workshopping, pedagogy, problem solving and visioning. While he argues that intuition is central, it still “needs to be balanced with other ways of knowing”, as it can be wrong, and needs to serve people’s ability to clarify and realize preferred intent through futures studies tools and methods.

Learning to Use Intuition in Futures Work, by Oliver Markley

Having already published autobiographical summaries of my own use of intuition-based visioning in futures work, I chose to structure my essay as something of an annotated bibliography covering highlights of what I learned on this path, describing the specific sources, methods and explanatory models I have found most useful. I end with suggestions for handling the problem of credibility when doing this type of work in public settings.

Integrated Intelligence and Critical Futures, by Marcus Anthony

The thrust of Anthony’s essay is to situate the idea of intuition within intelligence theory, focusing on what he calls “Integrated Intelligence” (INI), with the identification of seven prime cognitive functions of INI: diagnosis, empathy, recognition, precognition, synthesis, evaluation and creativity, as well as two typical behavioural outcomes: wisdom and transformation. Anthony describes how he came into this area of study, as well as some of the major obstacles this type of specialty necessarily involves.

Intuition, Rationality and Imagination, by Marcus Bussey

This essay is a critique of narrowly shallow empiricism in which Bussey argues that intuition is a cultural resource that when practiced rigorously, can help researchers gain access to rational processes and “personal, social, cultural and transformational imagination” that extend the sense making possibilities denied us via limited empiricism.

Aspirational Conclusion

As you read the contributions summarized above, I hope you not only find new bases for accepting the credibility of intuition as an essential methodology in futures work – but also inspiration for increased reliance on intuition in your own life and professional work as well.

Note

1. <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/09/18/intuitive-mind/>
2. <http://www.depthinsights.com/blog/working-with-dreams-depth-psychology-techniques-of-carl-gustav-jung-and-james-hillman/>.
3. <http://www.holotropic.com/about.shtml>; also, “Holotropic Breathwork: A Conversation with Christina and Stanislov Grof, M.D.”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVILRQ4gHBk>.
4. http://www.transparentcorp.com/research/history_of_brainwave_entrainment.php; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brainwave_entrainment

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