

# The Inner Game of Futures

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## Introduction

This essay details my own learning and experiences with respect to intuition and futures studies. The essay is in part an auto-ethnographic narrative that attempts to situate my own personal experiences in a broader cultural context. It also describes intuitions' pivotal role in both bringing me to futures studies and guiding me within futures studies. I employ the voice dialog perspective of Hal and Sidra Stone (1989) to shed light on intuition's place in an ecology of 'inner' selves, and I also employ the action research framework developed by Reason and Bradbury (2001) to make sense of intuition's place in an approach to triangulation for futures research.

## Embodied cognition

My perspective on intuition in futures studies needs to be situated in the geography of embodied cognition. One of the key insights in critical futures studies is the importance of the viewer / researcher in enacting the categories of the real that we apparently witness 'out there' in the world (Inayatullah, 2004; Slaughter, 1999). We are both products of cultures, which structure the way that we see the world (worldviews), as well as enact perspectives such as disciplines and conceptual frameworks that organize our understanding of the world. The role of culture, metaphor and narrative in shaping our orientation to the future is foundational (Lakoff, 1980; Maturana, 1998; Thompson, 2007).

In this regard, I am a product of California and in particular the counter cultural movement that swept through California and the US in the 60s and 70s. My parents came from Mexico as immigrants and Catholics, but very quickly renounced Catholicism and were attracted to New Age and spiritual teachings. During college my father Claudio began studying and practicing Yoga, Silva Mind Control and other teachings. My mother Elia joined Science of Mind / Religious Science (not to be confused with Scientology) and followed the teachings of Ernest Holmes, which blended the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau with Christian teachings (now associated with the 'New Thought' movement). As well, I can remember at the very early age of about 13 being introduced by my father

to La Gran Fraternidad Universal, a Mexican yoga group and movement, as well as to Silva Mind techniques. Later, I was introduced to Est / Landmark, and the Parmahansa Yogananda's Self Realization Fellowship. I regularly read the works of Zhuangzi and Laozi.

Detailed elsewhere (Ramos, 2010a) I am also a product of the political and cultural struggles for power that swept through the US in the 1960s and 70s. As Chicano/as, my parents were both active in and beneficiaries of the civil rights movement, attending marches, organizing, and gaining the opportunity for tertiary education in the US. This movement was also resisting incorporation into the dominant worldview, and attempting to assert or preserve an indigenous way of knowing and identity. As a consequence, I was not raised exclusively within the framework of scientific materialism typical of some Anglo-American culture (acknowledging that Anglo-America is culturally diverse in itself). My father would talk to me about the indigenous worldview and our indigenous ancestors (the Rarámuri of northwestern Mexico), their connection to land and the belief that 'everything is alive'. All this entailed a complex and sometimes ambiguous engagement with the dominant discourse of science which still gave space for and supported an alternative, if not indigenous, way of knowing. This period can be described as one of open-mindedness, led by an 'open-minded self'. There was also a feeling of wanting to change things, driven by an 'inner activist' and 'post-colonial self' that emerged from this context.

The reason of this self disclosure is to provide a context within which to present my views and experiences on intuition in futures studies. My upbringing both validated the use of intuitive practices as well as provided key frameworks and metaphors for seeing intuition as something real and valuable.

## **Journaling, rationalism and the road to futures**

University life began to create a necessary rationalism and skepticism that strengthened throughout my 20s. Increasingly, I was no longer willing to accept claims without evidential proof and which did not make sense. I rejected the ideological closure of Landmark, and I deeply questioned the seemingly a-political, individualistic, and 'spiritual-materialist' nature of the New Age movement. Despite my origins from within New Age / Counter-culture, it and I still felt somewhat contradictory and without grounding. An 'inner critic' emerged, which challenged my own life direction, and which became increasingly evaluative of the ideas, people and the systems around me.

A slow but powerful shift occurred when I began a practice of journaling. Throughout my 20s I journaled everyday with great discipline. I would make myself journal at least one page per day, rain or shine. My journal topics were wide ranging, and often experimental. They would often be chronicles of the days events, reflections on people, grappling with my own feelings, or cataloguing goals and aspirations, and just about whatever emerged. On a day-to-day basis the process of journaling was emotionally grounding, but it also had the more powerful effect of helping me to tap into a deeper sense of life purpose, as well as develop skills in self-observation. Journaling led me into a very deep inner conversation about my and our collective human existence. Combined with living and traveling in Japan, Taiwan, Spain and elsewhere, the effect over time was dramatic. Journaling awakened a new

voice, the ‘inner guide’. Unlike my experiences with school, church or seminars, knowledge / insights were generated from within – discipline, work and practice I held.

I took a solo backpacking trip to Europe for 5 months that I like to describe as a ‘vision quest’, because I was genuinely looking for personal existential answers, where I opened myself to this ‘inner guide’. One of those questions concerned what I would study next. I wanted to do a Masters degree, but was unsure of what to study. It was at an encampment just outside of Gibraltar, in my tent journaling, when I had a strong intuitive moment. An inner voice said “study the future”. I would not describe it as a dis-embodied voice, but it was not just a thought either. It was connected to a powerful sense of life – as if I had just been pointed and aligned with something that at once excited me and that I did not understand. Let me be clear ... I had no idea what studying the future meant at that point. I had never heard of futures studies. It was a complete unknown. I wrote it in my journal.

## **Intuition in Futures Studies**

I searched for professors in the field, talking with Jim Dator and Peter Bishop (by phone) about what futures studies was, which confirmed for me that this was a credible field, and what I wanted to do. If journaling during my 20s brought me to futures, my 30s were dedicated to futures studies and related research and inquiry, which brought a uniquely new variety of intuitive teachings and moments.

While living in Taiwan, I sent an email to Peter Bishop asking if there were any people near me that did futures. Peter passed the email on to WFSF President Tony Stevenson, and Tony passed it on to Sohail Inayatullah. Sohail was teaching futures at Tamkang University, just 30 minutes from where I lived in Taipei. I met Sohail at Tamkang university and the first futures method I learned was Causal Layered Analysis.

I began studying futures in the summer intensive program at the University of Houston Clear Lake. One of my teachers was Oliver Markley, futurist and researcher of noetic technologies, futures oriented visualization, guided meditation, and psychodynamic therapeutic processes. I remember a number of processes that he ran, one called ‘virtual time travel’ (Markley, 2008).<sup>1</sup> In that process, sitting quietly with the whole group, I imagined myself on an evolutionary journey through time, experiencing the past and future of life on Earth. The images I received of future Earth, what might be described as Gaia Tech, were so profound that I remember them 15 years later today.

Oliver provided us with a suite of different approaches and techniques. I have regularly used three: Re-visioning a concern, Assessment of ideas and options, and Re-sourcing a concern. The one with the greatest impact in my life and work is the ‘Re-visioning a concern’ guided visualization.<sup>2</sup> In it you are asked to come up with the first image / metaphor that comes to mind that describes a problem or issue. Then you are asked to use the energy of higher consciousness to transform that image. I have consistently had great results using this technique, and the images have consistently provided powerful insights. One of the most interesting aspects of the technique is that it taps into our unconscious through the use of image / metaphor, and that the unconscious, when surfaced and understood, can offer profound self-knowledge, insight and wisdom in helping us. The technique is also quite compatible with Causal Layered Analysis, which also conducts re-visioning of image / metaphor

/ narrative in group setting, but now increasingly personal ones (Inayatullah, 2015).

An important intuitive moment occurred while finishing a Masters degree in Strategic Foresight at Swinburne University in Melbourne. I was in a methods class and students were asked to choose a futures method to review and assess. I remember being in the library looking through books. The forecasting literature depressed me, and I struggled with my direction. Then I got a sense that I needed to look at social change and action oriented methods. As I put key words into the library database like “action” “change” and “futures” “foresight”, literature on Action Research emerged. There was a feeling of trusting some inner sense that was guiding me, however I did not know where it was taking me. At home, reading through Greenwood and Levin’s (1998) “Introduction to Action Research” I experienced joy. I was incredibly excited to have discovered a set of methods / methodologies that linked action and experimentation with inquiry. As I deepened my knowledge of the area, I began to discover exciting synergies and overlaps, that continue to this day.

I was being nurtured by my relationships in the field. Sohail Inayatullah was encouraging and provided inspiration through his and others development of Anticipatory Action Learning (Inayatullah, 2007). Richard Slaughter was also supportive, and agreed to add my paper on Action Research as a Foresight Methodology to the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies (Ramos, 2005). There was a strong feeling at various foresight communities in Australia that we were undertaking methodological renewal. The inner guide, aligned with life purpose, and in a supportive community, increasingly led to a ‘flowing self’ where inner intentions more easily found outer manifestations.

The broader institutional and cultural context is that the two futures schools in Australia, at the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and at Swinburne University in Melbourne, both took a critical futures approach as well as validate/d meditative and intuitive practices. Critical futures supported the ‘inner activist’ that wanted to challenge injustices and address the many planetary challenges I studied in futures studies. Importantly, however, critical futures also pointed toward epistemology and core narrative structures as the foundations for both our challenges and their solutions. Thus a dialectic between two selves emerged. The ‘inner activist’ seeking transformation, but likewise an awareness of our own complicity though our own perspectives – an ‘inner witness’.

Sohail Inayatullah had for years encouraged me to meditate, with openness and without a prescription of what type. He would say “One time a day is good, but twice a day is great”. His engagement with the work of Indian mystic P.R. Sarkar has also influenced me, in particular the readings on the macro-social cycle that encourage us to develop our spiritual and human qualities in the context of transformative social change (Inayatullah, 2002). And at Swinburne, Richard Slaughter used the work of Ken Wilber as an exemplar for the community. While I have had reservations with Wilber and Slaughter’s integral formulation (Ramos, 2010b), Wilber and Slaughter (to their great credit) encouraged people to engage in meditative and self development practices, something uncommon in academic settings. More importantly, the Swinburne program attracted a variety of people who were also engaged in developmental and meditative practices and experiments, and I have learned from many friends that I met there. The dialectic between the ‘inner activist’ and ‘inner witness’, one seeking social change, the other observing

and questioning self identity, led to an openness with regard to my visions for social change, expressed in a paper on dialog (O'Connor, 2008) as well as through my Ph.D. dissertation (Ramos, 2010a), among other things.

It was in this context, during my Ph.D. research, that I was introduced to Vipassana meditation in 2008 by my late friend Ken Fernandes. Vipassana is a branch of Buddhism, with a particular emphasis on disciplined meditation practice. Rather than focus on the philosophy, in a Vipassana course (as taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin), one will sit in meditation for 10 hours per day, followed by a 30-40 minute teacher's discourse. Vipassana meditation might be seen as an inductive process, where dedicated observation of personal experience leads to the gradual stilling of the egoic heart-mind, which creates space for insight and intuition. In Vipassana meditation one learns to observe experience rather than react to experience. In this expanded space between the experience and one's reaction to the experience, deeper insight and creativity become possible. From the vantage point of my scholar-activism, Vipassana helped me to experience the personal cost of the anger I carried as an activist, and to let go of this anger. More broadly meditation deepened my experience of the 'aware ego', which the Stone's (1989) describe as the awareness of our ecology of selves, in the process helping me to listen to and trust the 'inner guide' while simultaneously listening to the many other selves that need attention.

### **Putting intuition in context**

To complete this short essay on my experience of intuition in futures studies, I would like to draw from Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury-Huang, who in their *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason, 2001) proposed the distinction between First Person, Second Person and Third Person research, as a way of contextualizing the experiential basis of research knowledge. Their distinctions provide value in situating the role of intuition in futures studies, and also provide a particular perspective on research triangulation in futures studies.

First Person describes the personal and subjective world of the practitioner / researcher. This involves an individual's experiences, perceptions, assumptions, biases, values, ideas, feelings. First person work engages in forms of critical-subjectivity and self-questioning. Practices can include journaling, dialogue work, reflection, meditation and art.

Second Person describes inter-personal interactions, where other people's knowledge, experience, ideas and perceptions matter. This is the domain most associated with social science fieldwork, connected with methodologies such as Ethnography, Actor Network Theory, Grounded Theory, Futures Workshops and the vast array of social research techniques.

Third Person describes the impersonal domain of a-proximate knowledge, the domain of the various public medias, embedded in documents, books, journals, archives, video and increasingly, social media, but also concerned with political, social and historical events, which may not be spatially or temporally proximate. Here, discourses can be discerned as patterned social conversations that have emerged over time, evolving and developing schools, traditions and a body of research and ideas.

The distinctions provided by Bradbury-Huang and Reason capture three primary

pathways to knowledge: knowledge through personal experience / cognition, knowledge through the experience of inquiring with others, and knowledge through the experience of literature review and a-proximate media. More importantly, accompanying these distinctions is their assertion that good research needs to incorporate, if not integrate, all three. Each of the three distinctions has the power to challenge and transform the nature of one's inquiry.

### Triangulating futures research with the first person perspective

We can apply these three categories to futures studies. While Jim Dator's "Laws of the Future" are meant as polemical provocation, they point toward a strong epistemological assertion from the constructivist / social constructionist perspective (Dator, Date Unknown). As he wrote: "'The future' cannot be 'predicted' because 'the future' does not exist". This is to say that, as Slaughter similarly wrote, "the future is a principle of present action" (Slaughter, 2004, p.186). To put this another way, the future or futures is an experience in the present.

Table 1. *Levels of experience and their artifacts*

Level	Form of Experience	Artifact of Experience
1 <sup>st</sup> Person	Experience is personal and direct. It is how a subject senses, perceives and experiences the world of the research.	Journaling, personal story telling, notes, blog, painting, song
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	Experience is through relationships with people, the stories we hear, the questions we ask people, the answers we get from people, the debates we are engaged in. Experience is shared with people we know.	Interview transcript, focus group recording, Delphi, workshop butcher paper notes, online survey, conference call recording
3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	Experience is the experience of a world that does not or cannot 'talk back' to you. It can be observed as experience shared by people we don't know.	Reports, statistical analysis of trends, journal articles, public discourse (TV, radio, web), events

From this perspective, the future is experienced through three modes. The third person futures dimension is what the literature is saying about a particular subject on the future. The second person futures dimension is what interviewees / focus groups (etc.) are saying about a particular subject on the future. The first person dimension, importantly, is what an individual researcher / practitioner is assuming, thinking, feeling, imagining and intuiting about a particular subject on the future.

Corresponding to these modes of experience are the 'artifacts' of these experiences, the evidence that is left after the experience. Second person artifacts of experience are second nature to the social scientist, they are the interview transcripts, workshop notes, on-line survey files, and audio-visual recordings of the engagement. Rigorous management of second person artifacts of experience is an important part of rigor in social science research. Third person artifacts of experience are

even more second nature to nearly all domains of inquiry – for thousands of years we have relied on books, scrolls, tablets and other written methods of accounting for and recording social experience, but now commonly embedded via internet. Less common and less orthodox, however, is the idea of the first person artifact of experience. Simply put, this is any personal testimonial, journal, story, poem, song (etc.) that records or expresses the inner domain of a person’s experience.

In order to triangulate futures research across these three categories of experience and their artifacts, we need to examine correspondences across them. This entails observing and noting patterns, connections, synergies, contradictions, and whatever else emerges.

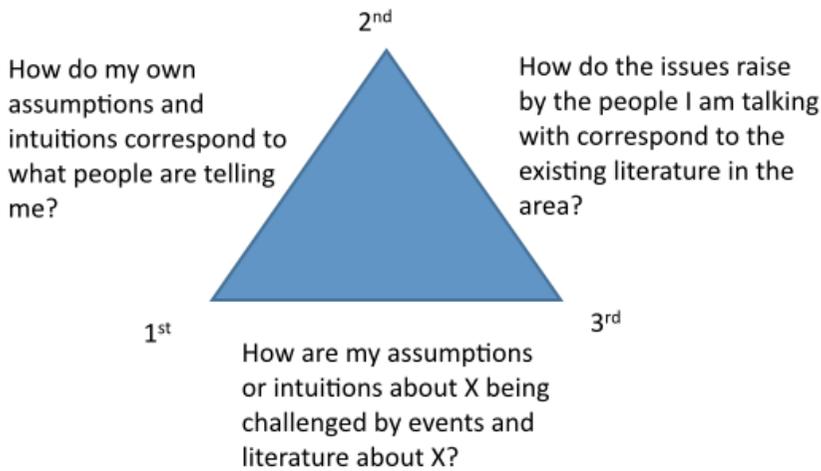


Diagram 1. Corresponding three categories of experience

Integrating the first person perspective requires an ecology of selves, as well as an awareness of what selves are needed in what situations. The ‘open-minded self’, which is a pre-requisite to learning anything new, can also be a liability in research, where we need a high degree of skepticism and discernment. At minimum we need a strong inner critic that can critique one’s own assumptions (critical-subjectivity) as well as a skeptical posture toward second person (e.g. ‘is what people are telling me accurate / true?’), and a critically / discursively informed posture toward third person / literature (e.g. ‘who are the winners and losers in a discourse / view?’). The inner visionary can be powerful and motivating, but may need the critic to stay grounded. This may give rise to a critical imagination, the ability to critique and dream in tandem (as in CLA re-visioning). The intuitive ‘inner guide’, as described in this essay, is an important aspect of the first person, which may be a weak or strong feeling or thought, pointing the researcher / practitioner in particular new directions.

## Conclusion

There is an important role for intuition in futures research. Indeed, a person’s / practitioner’s intuition and ‘inner guide’ may be the generative element in a research project. As other practitioners have asserted in this special issue (Markley, 2015; Hubbard, 2015), however, it is intuition coupled with testing and refinement that works best. Intuition needs to be tested in the proximate world of relations

(conversation / interviews with people) and tested in the a-proximate world of literature that relates to the subject (reports, research articles) and the research community. In addition, it is not enough for someone to look for second and third person support for their intuitions, ideas and assumptions, by ignoring contradictory empirical or testimonial evidence. Rigorous use of intuition should engage a critical subjectivity and self-questioning, and look for how second and third person dimensions may contradict our first person assumptions, imaginings and intuitions, not just support them. This type of research then allows each of the three dimensions to transform the other. Second and third person modes can challenge the inner narrative / assumptions / image of the future of the researcher. First and third person modes can challenge our engagements with others, what questions we ask, what processes we run, and how we interpret what others are saying about the future. First and second person modes can challenge our engagement with the literature on the future, and help guide us in new directions, or to address gaps in the literature.

I may have had an intuition about futures studies which was journaled (First person), but I still needed to have some conversations about futures studies with people I considered credible (Peter Bishop and Jim Dator – Second person), and I still needed to have a look at what the literature said about the domain, program descriptions, scholars (Third person). To bring me into and to guide me through futures studies, the ‘inner guide’ has been critical, but not enough in itself. I have needed to learn to test my intuition across other domains of experience, looking for deeper insights at the intersection of my inner world, my relations and the cosmos.

## Notes

1. Preprint available at: <http://www.inwardboundvisioning.com/Docs/MentalTimeTravel.htm>
2. The online description of this process is available at <http://www.inwardboundvisioning.com/Docs/TransformativeReVisioningCS.htm>.

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