# Minding Our Words:
## Instrumental reason, communicative action and Inuit voice in a Northern Forum dealing with climate change and healthy communities

**Frank James Tester**
School of Social Work and Family Studies
University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada)
ftester@interchange.ubc.ca

**Abstract**

In this paper I examine the conversation taking place in the context of a forum for northern residents held in August of 2006 as part a larger conference dealing with climate change and its implications for Arctic coastal communities in Canada. In doing so, I first examine the framework established by non-Inuit organizers and introduce the reader to theoretical considerations, drawing principally on the work of social theorist, Jürgen Habermas. I then examine Inuit response to the framework with which they were provided, relating this to theoretical considerations that help identify Inuit communication, not only as resistance, but as discourse grounded in a lifeworld that in western-European culture has been thoroughly inundated by instrumental reason.

**Keywords:** Inuit, Tuktoyaktuk Inuvialuit Settlement Area, Habermas, Communication theory, Climate change, Instrumental reason, Management

The language used by non-Inuit in conceptualizing what became a focus of the 2006 Coastal Zone Canada Conference held in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, August 14-18, 2006, is noteworthy. Coastal Zone Canada is a national association, primarily of professional scientists and managers interested in promoting "coastal zone management goals" in Canada and abroad (COASTAL ZONE CANADA ASSOCIATION 2006). A goal is an objective – something, in this case, to be "promoted" – to be advanced, supported, argued in favour

of – not necessarily held onto in the last instance, as there is a clear difference between promoting a goal and achieving it. The cautionary language can read as strategic, or purposeful, suggesting that there may be set goals lurking in the shadows. The idea of promotion suggests that rhetorical space must be opened for discussion, debate and perhaps dissension. In the political climate of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories of Canada, this choice of language makes pragmatic sense.

These goals are "management goals". Management is the act or practice of managing, and to manage is to direct or control interests; to be able to affect how something operates or what happens. These are 'technical' or 'instrumental interests'. In other words, there are clearly things related to coastal zones that we want to affect, that we wish to control and there are certain ideals (goals) that guide the act of management.

**Language and Action**

This is increasingly the language of western-European culture. It is the language of the workplace – and increasingly the home. "What are your learning objectives going to be this year, dear?": a mother asks of her distracted teenage daughter. "What goals would you like to set for the medium risk foreign bond dimension of your Registered Retirement Savings Plan investment account this year?": enquires the sterling investment manager, paying a home visit to her calculating client. This is the language of Enlightenment logic – 'instrumental' – serving as a means – premised on the conviction that under the auspices of knowledge, science and reason, we can, in fact, manage our lives, the lives of others, and the dynamics of the planet on which we live.

By way of illustration, this discourse compares with something shared with me by Peter Irniq, the former Commissioner of Nunavut, that by way of contrast is symbolic and interactionist discourse. Peter said this: "In my culture, we put a great deal of care into human beings – living people. My father and his fellow Inuit used to say: "*Piqutituninnaruluuagami asitaarumaarmijuq*. It's only a thing, it can eventually be replaced. *Inugliguuq asitaajjaanngittuq*. It's the human being that can never be replaced[1]." But Irniq is not merely talking of "human beings". Any mental move toward reification is undermined by a synonym – we are talking about "living people". The expression is 'grounding' – relational – directed toward how one should be in the world.

In defining the lifeworld and addressing communication arising in the context of the lifeworld, Jürgen Habermas makes reference to three types of validity about which we may speak; all present simultaneously in communicative action, regardless of the validity focus

[1] Email communication with Peter Irniq, Monday, July 10, 2006.

of any given statement. In reference to Peter's claim, these are statements about something in the objective world (things or objects), about something in the social world (the act of replacing something) or something in the subjective world ("*it is the human being that can never be replaced*") (HABERMAS 1989). This inter-subjective discourse takes place in the lifeworld as a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns. Language and culture (and others who are bearers of that culture) are foundational contributors to the lifeworld itself[2]. Goals can only be established in reference to others. While individuals have autonomy, goals are established within cultural norms that rely heavily on consensus. Culture, in the lifeworld, is the source of legitimate communicative action and to the extent that culture is that source, the idea of defining 'goals for oneself' is a strange one indeed.

An observation that Habermas makes about the basis for legitimate communicative action in western-European culture seems absolutely critical when dealing with much of the anguish, frustration, mistrust and misunderstanding that often exists between Inuit and western scientists. Habermas contends that in a world where old class antagonisms have been mediatized, (not disappeared, but papered over by multiple images in multiple forms) and the ethical concerns to which class differences gave rise largely suspended, the leading productive force in western culture – controlled scientific-technical progress – has become *the* basis for legitimation. Western social theory has adopted a purposive-rational or instrumental action model where efficiency in coordinating ends and means is *the* guiding norm of action. This he regards as insufficient, in that it does not take into consideration action from the perspective of behaviour oriented to mutual understanding and agreement. That mutual understanding between Inuit and Qablunaat is often hard to achieve – to play on words – is not hard to understand. The purposive-rational model amounts to a new ideological paradigm, one within which ordinary language (even at the household level) is threatened. "Technocratic discourse, which dominates the practice of science, makes an interest in the maintenance of intersubjectivity secondary to the expansion of our power of technical control" (HABERMAS 1989: 258-59).

The three sub-themes of the Coastal Zone Canada conference spell out more clearly a sequence consistent with this logic: "drivers of change"; "community well-being" and "ocean management and governance[3]". The sequence is important. Something is behind the wheel; drivers that are bringing about change. We want to describe, understand and gain intimate knowledge of these drivers. This is the task of science and of instrumental

[2] Elaborating on this difference, Arlene Stairs (March 1992) refers to this as "ecocentric identity – with "eco" encompassing human, animal, and material."

[3] The full text outlining the goals and objectives of the conference, cited here and later in the text, can be found at: http://czo6.ca/e/program/program.html

and strategic action. Why? The sequence places "community well-being" at the centre. It becomes the object, the 'raison d'être' for a concern with ocean management and governance.

**Enlightenment Logic as a Double Entendre**

What follows in the text framing the conference casts this sequence in a more precise light. A new twist on the Enlightenment project unfolds. The conference theme noted was: "explor(ing) the changing transformations taking place in the Arctic climate and *the possibilities and challenges* faced by government, communities, industry and Arctic researchers for *sustainable development opportunities…*(emphasis added). The energy housed within this sequence is daunting: "possibilities and challenges". The phraseology suggests the excitement of opportunity. A challenge is something to be met, failing to do so being both a personal and collective sign of weakness.

Deterrents – problems, threats to the Enlightenment project – have been recast within the spirit of Enlightenment logic itself. Harvey notes that the Enlightenment project was, "above all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains[4]" (HARVEY 1989: 12). We can now also claim that the act of liberation has created new chains from which we seek liberation; the fact of global warming and threats to community well-being, paramount among them.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey (1989) makes much of a central feature of both modern and postmodern enterprise – creative destruction – that which is essential to erecting new opportunities on landscapes already occupied or, as yet, undiscovered and undeveloped. One of Harvey's most recent works – *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (2003) – has focused on Georges-Eugène Haussmann's hand in the making of Second Empire Paris (1848-1870), as illustrative of creative destruction at work. Not only the laudatory human hand, bringing down that which is, in the name of that which ought to be but, most recently, the vagaries of threatening environmental change set in motion by this very logic, have been harnessed to serve a similar purpose. The destruction of nature, far from restraining human enterprise and challenging its underlying logic, posits new opportunities framed within the same speech.

[4] The project of Enlightenment thinkers, as Habermas (1983) describes it, amounted to an extraordinary intellectual effort to "develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic" (p.9).

Witness the following statement laid out in materials for the conference in question. “Arctic shipping, oil and gas exploration, and new fisheries are expected to provide new opportunities while altered contaminant pathways, shoreline erosion, and the deterioration of ice-dependent infrastructure *will require special solutions.*” And furthermore: “The impacts of change on human health, community adaptability, and the capacity and support of coastal communities to *manage* them are important considerations (emphasis added).” What is perhaps the greatest threat to civilization is here seen “to provide new opportunities” – shipping through the Arctic, a more favourable climate for oil and gas development and new fisheries – presumably related to the migration of species and the greater productivity of warmer waters. The possibilities for development are challenged by considerations that require *management* as we *adapt* to the changes. The language suggests that managing and adapting can be seen as both challenging and exciting – that there is ‘newness’ to the enterprise – a parallel to Haussman’s leveling and rebuilding, in the mid-1800s, of Place Saint Germain in central Paris. The work to be done includes re-evaluating “existing planning frameworks and governance models” to assess whether they are sufficient to *cope* with the altered Arctic conditions.

**Inuit Voice at the Northern Forum**

I now turn to the voice of Inuit participating in the Northern Forum, framed as I have noted above. I attended most of the sessions. Translation was provided. My attention was particularly drawn to the manner in which the entire first session was captured in a summary of proceedings (NORTHERN FORUM REPORT 2006). “(Discussions) began as a round table discussion where each of the participants introduced themselves and gave background on their experience and concerns for the north.” The active participants were Inuit: the rest of us, observers. The next line in the text to which I am referring gets on with business. “A number of questions and topics were generated.” But in fact, introductions, noted by this one line, occupied almost the entire first day of the three sessions.

What was said? I think it fair to say that when Qablunaat introduce themselves – at least in Canadian culture – the pattern in a professional audience is to give one’s name, one’s position – to note one’s organization and one’s role within it. The introductions provided by Inuktitut speakers merit attention:

> *Here I am – from Tuktoyaktuk – I hunt and trap there. I am with the hunters and trappers organization in this area. … we deal with some land claims issues – issues that go back to the ‘80s … and we go down south to deal with a lot of issues happening in this area. While we go to these meetings we pass on what our region and communities think about the things that are happening*

> *in this area and we try to get back to our communities – what they think and what they feel and what they are dealing with*[5].
>
> *I am a member of my community government in Baker Lake and the education committee, and a member of the justice committee dealing with young offenders. I was asked to attend this conference and when asked, I agreed to do so and that is why I am here.*
>
> *I am with the Nunavut government and I came to this meeting to be part of the group. Thank you.*
>
> *I deal with wildlife management and wildlife harvesting rights and trying to pass on what the communities are saying about regulations and harvesting and hunting. This has been a main part of my involvement with NTI.*

*"I came to the meeting to be part of the group." "I was asked to attend this conference and when asked, I agreed to do so and that is why I am here." "I deal with … trying to pass on what the communities are saying …"* Others noted to whom they were related, talked about important historical and personal experiences, places they had been, events that had impacted their lives. This referential language, invoking relationships and obligations to others, connections between thinking and feeling, is illustrative of discourse arising in the context of what Habermas calls 'the lifeworld', illustrative of a particular relationship between language and culture. Habermas suggests we conceive of society simultaneously as a lifeworld *and* a system constituted by language and culture. "Natural languages conserve the contents of tradition, which persist only in symbolic forms, for the most part in linguistic embodiment."

Furthermore:

> …the semantic capacity of a language has to be adequate to the complexity of the stored up cultural contents, the patterns of interpretation, valuation, and expression.
> This stock of knowledge supplies members with unproblematic, common, background convictions that are assumed to be guaranteed; it is from these that context for processes of reaching understanding gets shaped, processes in which those involved use tried and true situation definitions or negotiate new ones. Participants find the relations between the objective, social and subjective world already preinterpreted. *When they go beyond the horizon of a given situation, they cannot step into a void; they find themselves right away in another, now actualized, yet preinterpreted domain of what is culturally taken for granted.* (HABERMAS 1989a: 170-71. emphasis added)

[5] Direct quotes (in italics) used in this paper are based on a tape recording made by the author and simultaneous translation taking place at the time.

Dealing with global warming, with circumstances that lie outside the historical and experiential knowledge found within Inuit culture, and conveyed by the lived experience of Elders, is to ask Inuit to "go beyond the horizon of a given situation" and furthermore, to invite, cajole, encourage and sometimes insist that they do so within a linguistic domain – that of an instrumental reason – that is understandably threatening. There are implications for personal, as well as community well-being, the latter being a central concern of conference organizers.

Discussions in the Northern Forum, over the next two days, were to be directed by a set of questions generated by the Coastal Zone Canada Association, the content of which was entirely consistent with the management concerns, the challenges and possibilities, contained in the preamble previously noted. These were:

1. What are the priority problems government should be addressing?
2. Considering programs (like economic development, research, capacity building, conservation, social programs, etc.), which are the most useful and should be continued as a priority?
3. Regarding Canadian northern institutional structures (such as boards, committees, co-management structures – both formal and informal), are they adequate for dealing with Arctic change? Which structures are the most able to deal with changes caused by climate or economic development? How can their work be better integrated? or improved?
4. What international programs and organizations are the most useful for addressing climate change?
5. Is northern participation sufficient in northern programs mentioned above? If not, how can it be improved?
6. How can a conference like this be useful to northern people and communities?
7. What follow-ups can be taken from this meeting and what is the time-frame? (Northern Forum Report 2006: Appendix II)

These questions put to Inuit participants, while not ignored, were re-framed in the discussion that followed. This re-framing not only moved the discussion away from the instrumental concerns evidenced by the questions, but emerged as resistance to the form of communication implied by the questions themselves. Notes compiled by the Qablunaat recorder, working through an interpreter, suggest the emergence of many themes not bounded by the questions noted above (NORTHERN FORUM REPORT 2006).

What emerged from the discussion can be seen as a struggle in relation to the *idea* – the systemic communicative implications – of western science. What was said conveyed an awareness of the implications of acting within a web of social, cultural and institutional arrangements – the growing technical and social rationality – that in form and content,

pose a threat to Inuit cultural identity. The struggle suggested by the communication around the table was indicative of both anguish and concern about identity (as a mental health construct), in moving from what Morris Berman (1984) called an enchanted world, to one secularized and rationalized; linked, as Habermas puts it "to the institutionalization of science and technical development" (HABERMAS 1989b: 237).

In fact, at one point, the Inuk chair of the session started exploring things to be done in addressing northern health and economic issues that could be initiated without waiting for "science and more studies". This emerged not as a matter of getting on with the job as quickly and expediently as possible, but rather, as a rhetorical question: "Is there some other way we can get on with things?" This suggests the relevance of Marcuse's contention that rationalization realizes not rationality as such, but rather, in its name, a specific form of unacknowledged political domination. Marcuse (1964) draws upon the Weberian idea that rationalization amounts to the extension of the areas of society that are subject to the criteria of rational decisions. Inuit cultural logic and forms can be seen as one of the areas into which rationalization has increasingly being extended. Inuit discussants turned to the content of the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement* and the *Inuvialuit Agreement* as forms of protection in considering what was being asked of them. They tried to establish what was within their jurisdiction in reviewing the questions put to them. As these agreements are texts negotiated with a culture dominated by purposive-rational action, the limited protection they afford signatories sometimes, in such circumstances, becomes painfully obvious.

The speech acts that followed the question as to whether or not there were other ways of doing things can, subsequently, be seen as resistance of four types: (1) attempts to constrain the role of western science by counterfacting it with *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*[6]*;* (2) attempts to be heard, to be proactive, to make people in the south understand northern realities, particularly the importance of self-determination to counter the imposition on Inuit of western science and the social rationality of another culture; (3) reference to land claim agreements as constitutions establishing the power and jurisdiction of Inuit and Inuit institutions; (4) verbal reinforcement of action-oriented worldviews that are the essence of Inuit (and many other non-western) cultures. The latter takes the form of reference back to communities and families as a source of legitimacy for attending, speaking and participating.

Statements illustrating the first three of these are found in Figure 1, the latter having previously been illustrated.

[6] Editors' note: suggested translation "Inuit long-standing knowledge still meaningful today." See "Concerning Inuit Orality, introduction to the Proceedings".

**Figure 1**

*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* as Counterfact

*Sovereignty within the northern context refers to self determination and the devolution of decision making power in terms of community health and wellbeing, community based-management, environmental education, community health and well-being and the consideration of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit alongside of western science knowledge.*

*There should be serious consideration of immediate changes caused by global warming. Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit should be a apriority in discussing these issues and included in all decisions.*

*Regarding the wildlife and hunting wildlife, governments must be made to recognize Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. Though IQ will always be passed on through immediate families, IQ and ATK should also be included in all land and marine related decisions and only Inuit should be overseeing this issue.*

*Within the Government of Nunavut there are IQ committees consisting of knowledgeable elders who advise the cabinet on land and marine issues. Within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region there are those in government with the expertise and they are advised by those on the land.*

Pro-active Communication with Southerners

*…the agenda* (for a regional Arctic working group of the Coastal Zone Canada Association) *would be formed and perhaps controlled by those who lived in the south and were not aware of the intricacies and interrelationships of life in the north. We are concerned that the decisions of southern experts, whose knowledge may be notable by southern standards, but limited and spotty within the context of the north, would be used to inform policies imposed on Inuit people and communities.*

*(There is a need) for greater communication between the north and south, to increase understanding so that the south would understand why issues of self determination in terms of the devolution of decision making power, community-based management, etc., are so important.*

Land Claim Agreements and Nunavut Government as Points of Reference for the Protection of Inuit Interests

*…some of the issues raised in the proposed conference statement might be the responsibility of the land claim corporations. Therefore, further discussion should take place to see if there are overlaps in these areas and how to proceed.*

> *Much of the proposed conference statement has to do with health and education "…investing in coastal communities through education, health, etc." Nunavut already has health and education committees to deal with these things and does not want the south to be setting health and educational agendas without consultation and the approval of appropriate Government of Nunavut committees.*
>
> *The scope of the Ocean's Action Plan and how well the general principles of Ocean's strategy would integrate with the Land Claim agreements is of concern.*
>
> *It is important to pay attention to the differences between the Inuvialuit and Nunavut Agreements in relation to royalties, penalties and damages. But it is also the responsibility of the land claim organizations to negotiate what they want to see in any new legislation.*

Finally, the struggle to ensure an Inuit voice in addressing issues of climate change and the contradiction between operating within an Inuit lifeworld while confronting other forms of practice is perhaps captured best by the following observation. "*In the past, Inuit have not been very active documenting their ideas and plans but now the process is to put everything on paper so everyone can read it and make changes when necessary. If it is not written there is no record.*" Knowledge, to be credible, must be 'booked'.

**Talk about Inuit and Community Well-being**

An examination of the systems logic underlying Habermas's theory of communicative action reveals that his approach is far from idealist. He notes that what characterizes the passage from societies grounded in their own culturally and cosmologically appropriate ways of making sense to western-European culture and logic is the development of productive forces that make permanent the extension of subsystems of purposive-rational action.

What has changed significantly in Western culture since the 1970s is the nature and content of productive forces. We are no longer talking about the introduction to the Arctic of the relations to production characteristic of whaling, the fur trade, or even mining or crafts production. These relations to production and the technical and rational language of western capitalism that articulated them remained largely on the outside of the lifeworld central to Inuit culture at the time. In tents, igloos and on the land, life went on as usual. This lifeworld and its linguistic norms have been eroded in different ways and in varying degrees with the consolidation of settlement, through non-Inuit controlled education systems and, most importantly, anything that has altered Inuit as a predominantly hunting culture. With the increasing rationalization of Inuit society – the layering of Inuit culture with the Nunavut and Inuvialuit Agreements, the *Nunavut Government Act* and modern bureaucratic administration – the text with its purposive-rational action has replaced the leg-hold trap as, arguably, the most important focus for understanding relations of

production (the purposive-rational language of scientific instrumentalism) that have come to disturb, in different ways and in different modern contexts, the linguistic logic of Inuit culture.

The central role of linguistic expression and production in the modern Inuit economy – the role of science, the texts of management and the entire range of linguistic means associated with co-management boards, conferences, scientific studies – is relevant to this consideration. Inuit culture is increasingly set upon by a progressive rationalization of society linked to the institutionalization of scientific and technical development that gives rise to many acts of resistance, some of which, as manners of speech, I have noted. If knowledge, as Foucault has perhaps overemphasized, is power, then speech – in verbal (as in 'around the table') or textual (as in 'booked wisdom') – and movement away from communicative action within the lifeworld of Inuit culture are of increasing concern to the health and well-being of Inuit communities. These new speech forms call into question the traditional forms of the legitimation of power (elders, families, communities) which obey the logic of interactive contexts (HABERMAS 1989a). The resistant speech of Inuit participating in the Northern Form of the Coastal Zone Canada Conference is made particularly intelligible, paradoxically, by reference to a central concern of the conference itself, "community well-being".

An examination of Habermas's portrayal of the reproductive processes that maintain the structural components of the lifeworld reveals what it is that is lost in the shift from communicative action arising from the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld to the purposive-rational or instrumental action model of western culture. What is lost is twofold: the means for achieving mutual understanding and agreement, especially across cultures. Secondly, the capacity of Inuit to negotiate and participate is undermined by the cultural, social and personal mental health implications of linguistically mediated disturbances in the domains of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization.

Habermas argues that western social theory has adopted a purposive-rational or instrumental action model where efficiency, in coordinating ends and means, is the guiding norm of action. This he regards as insufficient to achieving consensus and agreement in that it does not take into consideration action from the perspective of behaviour oriented to mutual understanding and agreement. And meaningful and intelligible behaviour can only arise in the context of a lifeworld consisting of culture, society and the person and the reproduction of these components in relation to each other (Figure 2).

"The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the semantic dimension: it secures a continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge sufficient for daily practice" (HABERMAS

1989: 176). Similarly, social integration takes care of coordinating actions by way of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations giving rise to a measure of social solidarity. At a personal level, the acquisition, by language, of competencies for action ensure that individual life histories are in harmony with collective forms of life: that individuals assume responsibilities (acquire an identity) grounded in valid knowledge and interpersonal relations contained, in Inuit culture, within an oral tradition. Attempts to alter these reproductive forms involve the introduction of 'booked' wisdom that seriously challenged the 'worked out relations' of Inuit culture. Zacharius Kunuk's film '*The Journals of Knud Rasumssen*' illustrates this disturbing of cultural reproduction processes (and using booked wisdom to do so).

Figure 2 portrays the outcome, particularly along the fault line where the reproduction of culture, social integration within society, and socialization of the individual are disturbed. Loss of meaning (existential crisis), anomie (following Durkheim, a reference to normlessness) and psychopathologies (behavioural and personality disturbances) are common results. All of these are present in Inuit culture and, lest we forget, can also be articulated as the most notable current crises of western civilization.

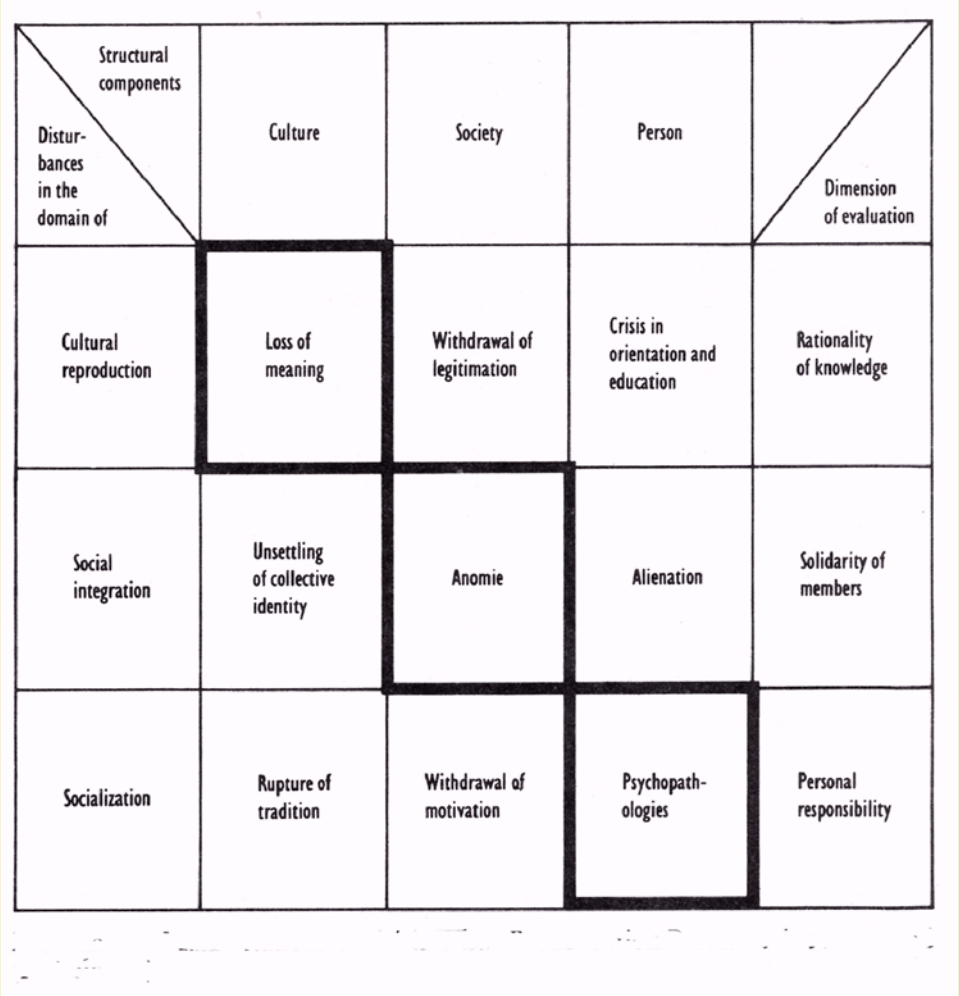


**Figure 2**
Manifestations of Crisis When Reproductive Processes are Disturbed (Pathologies)

Source: Jürgen Habermas (1989). "The Concept of the Lifeworld," *in* Steven Seidman (ed.), *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics.* Boston, Beacon Press: 178.

## Conclusion

I noted earlier the strange paradox that the destruction of nature, far from restraining human enterprise and challenging its underlying logic, now posits new opportunities framed within the same linguistically transmitted logic that gives rise to the destruction of nature. This does suggest the critical nature of a different project, not one that, as Herbert Marcuse intimated, is merely a different *attitude* to nature, but to a different structure of action – to what Habermas calls communicative or symbolic interaction in distinction to purposive-rational action (HABERMAS 1989). This discourse may in fact rise on the winds of failure as the logic bound up in instrumental reason comes crashing down upon our over-exposed heads. This being the case, there is much to be learned from the communicative action of Inuit language and culture.

It is perfectly understandable why the language of science – the linguistic logic of many who want to address problems like global warming and the well-being of Arctic communities – is cast within the purposive-rational action model. This model is illustrated in reference to a forum created expressly for the purpose of communication about these concerns. But the many struggles of co-management committees mandated under the Nunavut and Inuvialuit Land Claims Agreements and the resistance of Inuit to forms of communication that are clearly not of their making, let alone our own 'crisis of logic', calls for something different.

I have seldom seen Qablunaat participants at any gathering such as the Northern Forum, start the conversation by locating themselves in a lifeworld of relations that explain, not only presence, but cultural, social and personal embeddedness. The objectivity and logical positivism dominating western science largely prohibits such speech acts – foils communicative action – within increasingly rationalized and managerialized professions. 'We no longer care who you are. We are interested in your capacity; what you can do with the problem at hand and how quickly and efficiently you can do it.' When conflicts and problems arise we are left without cultural means for their resolution. We appeal to fiat and the technical language of law and administration to see us through the working day.

What is needed, if Inuit and Qablunaat are to work together, is action imbedded in interactive and subjective content. That content – as demonstrated by Inuit who spent the first of three sessions of a Northern Forum introducing themselves with respect to personal histories, families, communities, relationships and beliefs – is essential to establishing and, most importantly, raising questions about who we are (collectively as well as individually). This is where western scientists might chose to begin if claims are to be negotiated, differences resolved, and if two cultures, confronted with what some believe to be the most significant logical and ecological challenges in human history, are to work well together.

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