THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

AND THE PROBLEM OF THE COMMONS

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This paper is the first general sharing from a work in progress at the Michigan State Sociology Department on enhancing the theoretical perspective of human ecology by relating it to elements of critical social theory. As such, it is being presented in a tentative spirit with hopes that it will prove provocative and call forth the suggestions of the readers.

The commons problem in general is understood as any situation in which it is possible for actors to free ride i.e. externalize their costs onto the group. Such situations arise in many contexts and very often need to be resolved because the free riding threatens the benefits of all the actors. An effective commons problem resolution can be called a commons agreement and it requires three things: institutions which ground the benefits and costs of the actors involved (Christy 1982, Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975, Runge 1981, 1984); regulations which govern the actors behaviors (Baden 1977, Hardin 1968, Ostrom 1986); and norms and recognitions of legitimacy which allow the institutions and regulations to function (Bromley and Cernea 1989, Bullock and Baden 1977, Cordell 1973, Oakerson 1986) and to remain flexible, since the parameters of commons problems often shift and require renegotiation (Magrath 1989, McCay 1981, Ostrom 1977). All three of these things are required to some degree if the commons agreement is to work[1].

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[1]. This subject will be dealt with in much more detail in a forthcoming paper. I am using institutions in the institutional economics sense with the main emphasis on the property regimes. Regulations can also be institutions as they constrain choice sets, but here they are less permanent administrative tools.

There are commons problems which may bypass the need for these agreements by being simple enough to be easily rationalizable and by having frequent repetitions of lost general benefits. These commons problems can be adequately understood by simulation models such as in games theory. Althought these types of commons can also be understood using the theory of communicative aciton, resource sociology is mainly concerned with situations which do not fit these characteristics and require studying the communications between the actors in the commons situation to be adequately understood.

Jurgen Habermas, a German social theorist working in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, has called upon insights from many different sources to create the substantial and complex theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984,1987). The purpose of this paper is to introduce this theory to commons researchers who may not be familiar with it, and to describe how it might illuminate the problem of the commons. Since this is meant to be a short introduction, the theory is presented in a very simplified form in hopes of sparking further interest.

The paper begins with an explanation of the theory of the communicative action in four parts:

(A) an explanation the concept of communicative action. This section lays out the particular characteristics of non-distorted communications which have as their goal the negotiation of mutual understanding between actors;

(B) an explanation of the concepts of lifeworld and system.

The lifeworld is the shared communicative resources (words, ideas, etc.) which are available to people so that communication is possible. The social system is understood as the operation of conventions coded into various informational media which allow for the simplification and shortcutting of communication;

(C) Habermas' account of how system and lifeworld relate to one another. This section describes what is lost or gained when the formal social system shortcuts communications. That which is lost, the ability to create mutual understanding, creates basic limits on what the social system is able to accomplish;

and (D) methodological considerations raised by applying the theory to the commons problem. This means that which has to be accomplished in resolving a commons problem which can or cannot be done by shortcutting communications.

The final section offers a "thought experiment" as an example of how the theory of communicative action could contribute to the understanding of a particular commons problem, in this case an overexploited large lake fishery. This is followed by a conclusion which includes several criticisms of the theory which were saved to the end to make the explanation of the theory clearer.

THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

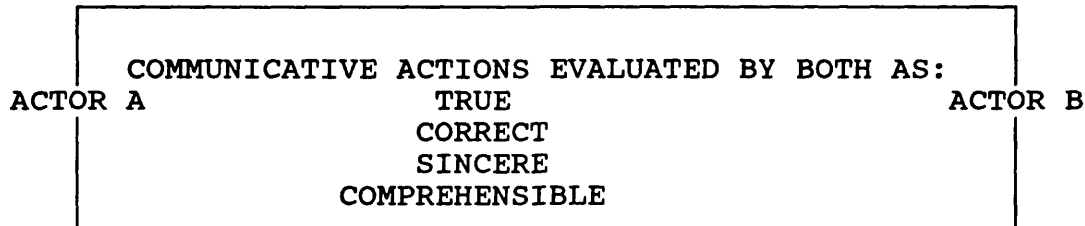### A.- The Concept of communicative action.

The basic units of the theory are communicative actions which are the fundamental building blocks of social reality. Communicative actions make society possible by negotiating common

definitions of situations.

FIGURE ONE: THE IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION

NO POWER DIFFERENTIAL   NO MANIPULATION

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS EVALUATED BY BOTH AS:      │
ACTOR A                   TRUE                    ACTOR B
│                        CORRECT                        │
│                        SINCERE                        │
│                    COMPREHENSIBLE                      │
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NO MANIPULATION   NO POWER DIFFERENTIAL

    Basic to Habermas' system is what he calls universal
pragamatics. This is what he uses to define the characteristics
of an ideal speech situation (see Figure One) in which
communicative actions bring about mutual understanding, what he
calls non-distorted communications. Two general rules are
required: that there is no manipulation involved in the
communication and that everything communicated is open to
question about its validity (White 1988,56). These rules enable
the communicative actions to be controlled by speech acts that
are evaluated on the basis of better arguments related to four
validity claims: that the statement is true with respect to the
objective world; that the statement is right with respect to the
normative, social world; that the statement is honest in respect
to the speaker's subjective world; and that the statement is
comprehensible (1984,99). The four validity claims are like
"pulleys over which consensus formation and thus the symbolic
reproduction of the lifeworld pass" (1987,231).

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This stipulation of non-manipulative communication raises two fundamental questions about any communicative situation. The first is the need to distinguish between validity and power. When is a speech act effective because of its own validity according to the four claims and when is a speech act effective because of power relationships among actors? If the latter is the case then the speech act is no longer authentically oriented to reaching understanding (White 1988,76). The second question is whether or not the speech act is strategic, i.e. aimed at achieving a particular interest of the speaker rather than mutual understanding.

The tightness of Habermas' rules for authentic communicative action and the pervasiveness of both strategic action and power differentials among actors has led some authors to describe Habermas' theory as utopian (Israel 1990, Turner 1991). I disagree. The question is not how common authentic communicative actions are but rather what kind of communicative action is necessary to achieve the goal of negotiating common definitions of reality. Clearly, if a communicative situation is to leave an actor believing in a changed picture of reality, that actor must have reached an agreement based on his or her own internal conviction, which in turn will be based on the communicative actions meeting the four validity claims in the eyes of the actor. This conviction is out of reach of both power differentials and strategic action at least over the long term, and particularly where the subject is important to the actor. An

example in a commons situation would be the negotiation of a set of norms and recognitions of legitimate demands by the collective on individuals. Beyond this, Habermas argues, authentic communicative action has been institutionalized in some domains of social life and through this institutionalization has become a "systematically relevant learning mechanism" for the society (quoted in MaCarthy 1978,292). Science is an example.

B.- The Concepts of Lifeworld and System

The grand synthesis which Habermas hopes to accomplished based on the notion of communicative action is to bring together social science's two dominant perspectives: society from the micro perspective of an aggregate of actors; and society from the macro perspective as relationships between structural components.

The lifeworld is the background context of communicative action: the words, ideas, etc. which are shared. No communication can take place without a set of shared understandings which allow it to take place. The lifeworld is always already familiar to participants in communication. "Communicative actors can no more take up an extramundane position in relation to their lifeworld than they can in relation to language" (1987,125). The lifeworld is reproduced by communicative action, for example, when an actor draws on a cultural tradition in communication that actor is continuing that tradition. The lifeworld is crucial for securing social identity. "Collectivities maintain their identities only to the extent that the ideas members have of their lifeworld overlap

sufficiently and condense into unproblemattic background
convictions" (1987,136).

The lifeworld has three "core" components: culture, society
and personality. These components are the core because they are
where the lifeworld is reproduced. "The symbolic structures of
the lifeworld are reproduced by way of the continuation of valid
knowledge, stabilization of group solidarity and socialization of
responsible actors" (1987,137). These three methods each
correspond to a core component: valid knowledge with culture;
stabilization of group solidarity with society; and socialization
with the personality.

The social system in Habermas' scheme is also based on
communicative actions. The system is possible because
communications can become generalized. This means that society
develops a set of conventions which simplify communicative
actions of a certain type. For example, the first type of
generalized communications was prestige. Prestige in early
societies made it possible to establish the relative status of
people without having to renegotiate their understandings of
status in every encounter.

Generalized communications start to become systems when they
begin to be controlled by steering media. This idea comes from
Talcott Parsons' system theory, which identified many steering
media at work in society. Steering media are symbols which take
over a domain of generalized communications and remove it from
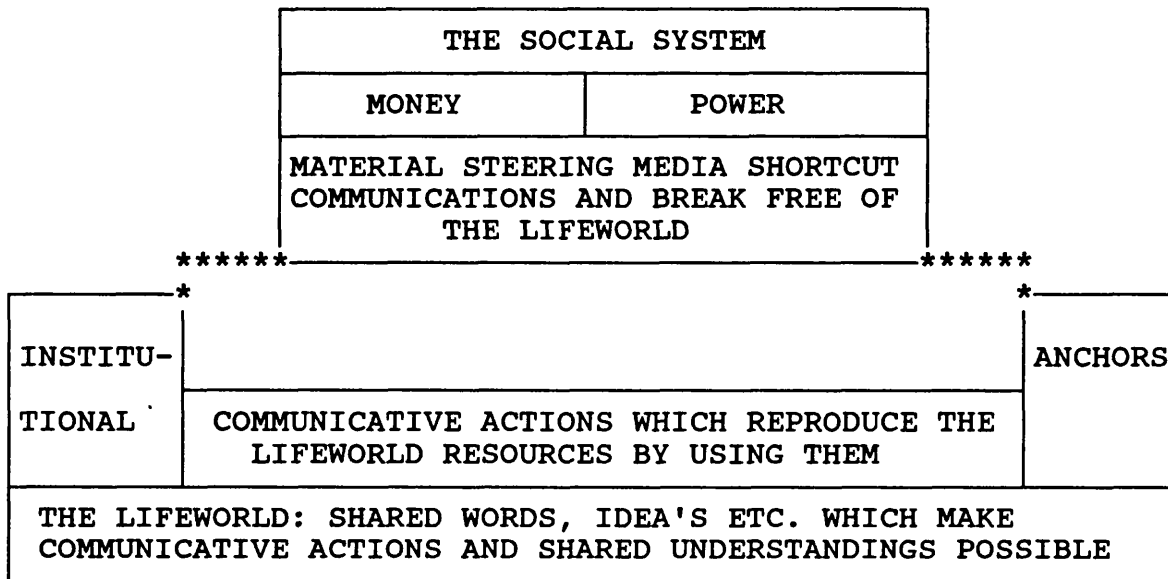its communicative base, making that domain no longer accessible

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to communicative action, with the result that the domain becomes non-normative. The domain is no longer subject to control by social consensus. From the perspective of the lifeworld it becomes technisized, that is, it seems to be governed by technical rules of its own. The system, under the control of the steering media, has broken away from the lifeworld. The paradigmatic steering media is money.

The steering media which make up Habermas' notion of the social system are money and power. He claims, in contrast to Parsons, that only material media (money and power) can remove a domain from the lifeworld and thus take on the characteristics of a system independent of the lifeworld. This is because material media

> "attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but replace it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favor of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action" (1987,183)

Non-material media of generalized communications, such as prestige, cannot do this because they still have to rely the resources of the lifeworld to successfully simplify communicative action.

FIGURE TWO: LIFEWORLD AND SYSTEM
IN GENERAL

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM	
MONEY	POWER
MATERIAL STEERING MEDIA SHORTCUT COMMUNICATIONS AND BREAK FREE OF THE LIFEWORLD	

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  │ INSTITU- │                                │ ANCHORS │
  │          │                                │         │
  │ TIONAL   ├────────────────────────────────┤         │
  │          │ COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS WHICH     │         │
  │          │ REPRODUCE THE LIFEWORLD         │         │
  │          │ RESOURCES BY USING THEM         │         │
  ├──────────┴────────────────────────────────┴─────────┤
  │ THE LIFEWORLD: SHARED WORDS, IDEA'S ETC. WHICH MAKE  │
  │ COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS AND SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS      │
  │ POSSIBLE                                             │
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Money and power by "substituting for language, make possible the differentiation of subsystems of purposive-rational action" (1984,342). Even so, each of these subsystems has to be motivationally and institutionally anchored in the lifeworld (see Figure Two). Clearly, we would not pay it much attention otherwise. Money is institutionalized by bourgeois civil law and power is institutionalized by the political-legal organization of offices. This points up the reason that money is the paradigmatic steering media, although power can be "measured, circulated and deposited" (1987,269) in much the same way that money can, and is thus able to bypass the lifeworld, it still has to legitimate itself in the lifeworld in a way that money does not.

Habermas' concept of system represents a major step forward for social theory. The specification of communicative actions

working through material steering media as the basis of the social system provides a concept of system which can be understood in terms of general systems theory. It does this without sacrificing our grasp of society as something which human beings have created and, in a final sense, control. By specifying material steering media as the basis of the system, and explaining how and why they work as a non-normative but social construct, Habermas has given us a single paradigm for discussing society as interacting actors and society as a system.

C.- How the system and the lifeworld relate to one another.

As society evolves each level of increasing complexity requires the introduction of a system mechanism that must be institutionalized in the lifeworld. For example, in a tribal society kinship is the institution which reproduces all three components of the lifeworld. The first institutionalization of a subsystem based on power was the creation of generally administered justice. In order for that to happen, increases in communicative rationality must have led to the differentiation of society from culture and personality. From the perspective of the system the lifeworld may appear as just one more set of sub-systems that are derivative of the social system as a whole, as in Parsons. In Habermas' theory, however, the lifeworld is not a sub-systems among other subsystems but the place in which each sub-system in the society must be grounded. It is in the lifeworld that the conditions for the existence of the system must be met.

This process goes on at smaller scales as well. New levels of complexity require new ways to ground the system in the lifeworld. The institutions and regulations needed to deal with a collapsing common pool resource are an example of this.

In the system the lifeworld has given birth to a dangerous child. When steering media are a systems guide they follow a functional logic which pose for the lifeworld the dangers of (1) reification, (2) cultural impoverishment and (3) colonization.

1. Reification is the fallacy of seeing the abstract as concrete. How socially created phenomena, e.g. the economy, becomes reified into "laws of nature" has always been a central preoccupation of the Frankfurt School. It is the fact that steering media are able to bypass communicative action while appearing as a "technisized" reality that is the basis of Habermas' understanding of how reification happens. The system works because communications can be shortcutted and rationalized by technical conventions. It is this very characteristic of the system which can create the illusion that it operates under unchanging laws of nature rather than social conventions. This notion of reification is another way of talking about some the insights contained in several critiques in the commons literature which question the notion of unavoidable 'tragedies of the commons' by nature-like market forces (e.g. Berkes 1985, Berkes et al. 1989, McCay and Acheson 1987).

2. Cultural impoverishment, on the other hand, has a different but related source. As the functional logic of the

system incorporates more and more social domains these domains are taken over by specialists and elites. Art and science are both examples of areas which have become increasingly technisized and so cut off from the lifeworld except for that of a small cadres of experts. This process has led to a fragmentation of consciousness. This should be familiar to commons researchers. In the commons literature can be found many arguments about the superiority of traditional conservation systems over ones controlled by technical sub-cultures (e.g. Berkes 1987, Goodland 1985, Regier et al. 1989). The literature dealing with risk management also has an important focus on how to overcome the problem of communications involving expert sub-cultures (Chess et al. 1988).

3. In internal colonization the system is "colonizing" the lifeworld in the core areas of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization. "The thesis of internal colonization states that the subsystems of the economy and the state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist growth and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld" (1987,365). These areas are precisely the areas, as was argued above, in which the logic of steering media cannot function because of the reliance of these areas on the resources of the lifeworld to bring about authentic mutual understanding. The result of this colonization is social pathologies which arise from the system trying to do what it cannot. As far as the commons literature is concerned, this is

related to the observed breakdowns of traditional conservation

systems in contact with large markets and colonial power (e.g.

Berkes 1987, Bromley 1990, Crowe 1977, Johannes 1978).

Colonization of the lifeworld results from an imperative in

the system which is called juridification. This imperative is

central to the argument about system crises developed by Habermas

in The Legitimation Crisis (1975). The social system is subject

to periodic crises in reproducing itself, which includes

reproducing itself by maintaining a steady supply of resources

over the long term. The crises begin in the economic

subsystem[2], but in late capitalism, they get shunted off to the

political subsystem. In attempting to deal with these crises the

system, in the form of the state, invades and tries to control

lifeworld processes with pathological results. The crises become

crises of legitimation and motivation. The main mechanism used

to carry off this invasion is juridification.

Juridification is the process by which the core structures

of the lifeworld come increasingly under legal regulation. The

law acts as a tool for bringing the lifeworld in line with the

functional needs of the steering media controlled system.

Habermas uses the examples of school and family law to illustrate

this. School and family law "means for those concerned an

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[2]. We are currently working on expanding this notion to
include the contradictions between the formal logic of the money
based economic sub-system and the substantive logic of the eco-
system. This is part of a general attempt to reconceptualize
sociological human ecology using Habermas and other critical
theorists.

objectivization and removal from the lifeworld of (now) formally regulated social interaction in family and school" (1987,369). The implications of this for the commons is that regulations alone cannot create and maintain conservation norms and recognitions of the legitimacy of regulations and institutions, and if totally relied upon they may well break down the norms by interfering with their reproduction through communicative actions.

D. Implications for research on commons problems.

Habermas' theory is so broad and has so many parts which are still quite vague that, before we discuss its application to the commons research, some reflection on its methodological implications is warranted.

Habermas himself sees critical theory as a sociological analog to psychoanalysis. In an early work, <u>Knowledge and Human Interests</u> (1971) he sets up a scheme in which he compares the empirical-analytic and historical-hermeneutic sciences and finds both approaches wanting. Habermas is interested in understanding the distortion of communication in society which he compares to the distortion of communication in neuroses. Psychoanalysis, he points out, is neither empirical-analytic nor historical-hermeneutic but a combination in which generalizations drawn from multiple empirical experiences with neurotic patients are used as a conceptual tool in a hermeneutic approach to the patients life history in order to discover and release the distorted communications within the psyche. Critical theory, in his

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imagination, is also an attempt to combine the empirical-analytic
and the historical-hermeneutic approaches to discover the
distorted communications in society.

FIGURE THREE: RESEARCH SCHEME

DATA FROM: DATA FROM:

ECOSYSTEM   SOCIETY
MONEY SUB-SYSTEM   CULTURE
POWER SUB-SYSTEM   PERSONALITY

LEADS TO: LEADS TO:

IDENTIFICATION OF   RECONSTRUCTION OF
CONTRADICTIONS   UNDERSTANDINGS OF VALIDITY

A) ENVIRONMENTAL   A) REIFICATION
   SUSTAINABILITY   B) CULTURAL IMPOVERISHMENT
B) ECONOMIC DISFUNCTIONS   C) COLONIZATION OF THE
C) JURIDIFICATION   LIFEWORLD

Habermas does not offer a set of instructions for
approaching a particular social situation and using the theory of
communicative action as the basis of an analysis. Broadly, he
believes that the social system is a special case of living
systems in general and that empirical-analytic approaches based
on a general systems theory have relevance. From the hermeneutic
side Habermas insists that "the structural patterns of action
systems are not accessible to (purely external) observation; they
have to be gotten at hermeneutically, that is, from the internal
perspective of participants" (1987,151). Because social systems
are anchored in the lifeworld the "structures important for the
maintenance of a (social) system, those with which the identity
of a society stands or falls, are accessible only to a

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reconstructive analysis that begins with the members' intuitive knowledge" (1987,151).

Figure Three is a very tentative schematic of a research effort to understand a generic commons situation.

In the left-hand column the research is on the level of the system. Contradictions on the level of social system-ecosystem interaction, which would show up as an unsustainable resource use or waste deposit, would be identified. Contradictions within money sub-system itself would also be looked at, these could be contradictory relations between classes in the classical political economy sense, inequities in distribution, or stagnations in production. Following the logic in Legitimation Crisis we would expect to see all of these problems being thrown over to the power based, administrative sub-system to be dealt with. They would attempt to deal with these through the propagation of laws that create or support institutions and regulatory bodies.

The right-hand column is on the level of the lifeworld. Under society would be the identification of all the actors related to the commons problem and how they are integrated or fragmented. This would need to be done in categories including, but perhaps not limited to: occupations; ownership statuses; age; gender; and ethnicity and location where there is variance. Under personality would be information regarding the socialization and training of actors. Perhaps the most important thing here would be the identification on the roles of any expert

sub-cultures. However, in many commons situations the way people are socialized to use and understand the commons will be very important.

Under culture is where we get to what I feel is one of the main contributions of this research approach. Here the question is valid knowledge, that is what is it that the actors recognize as valid reasoning in a discussion of the commons. This is where the four validity claims of truth, correctness, sincerity, and comprehensibility come into play. Research questions here might include: the degree to which an actor recognizes "science" as the arbiter of claims to truth and if so what do they mean by "science"; the degree to which traditional understandings of the commons and conservation are the basis of claims to truth; the degree to which they recognize other actors as sincere and believable; the moral values that attach to the commons; and to what extend are they able to understand the communicative actions of other actors. Another useful way to come at this would be to see how the actors judge the validity of various management techniques.

Next, the scheme calls for identifying the effects of the three dangers of the system to the lifeworld. Under reification would be identifying what it is that actors believe is a given about the commons and what they believe is socially created and malleable. Under cultural impoverishment the role of sub-cultures, expert and otherwise, would be examined to get a handle on the fragmentation of consciousness about the commons. The

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work of Gamson and Modigliani (1989) on discourse about nuclear power is an example of how this can be done. They used a concept called "interpretive packages" to identify coherent positions about nuclear power that were neither single arguments nor as broad as ideologies. Finally, under colonization of the lifeworld, the research question would be the extent to which the formal calculus of the market and the formal legality of regulations are undercutting the reproduction of actors traditional norms and understandings about the use of the commons.
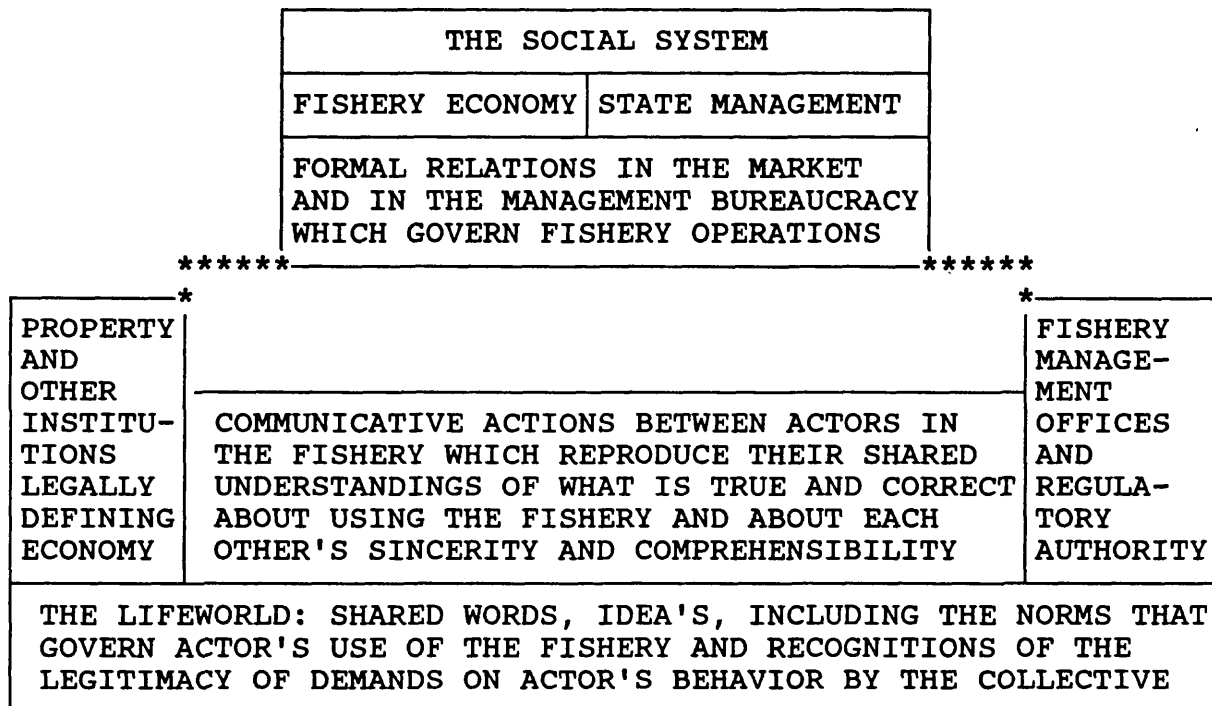
COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND A COMMONS PROBLEM

The final section is a thought experiment about what it would look like to apply this research scheme to a concrete common pool resource commons problem. Because my own research is currently focused on a large lake fishery I will take a generic lake fishery with an overfishing problem as an example.

The basic logic in applying the lifeworld/system research scheme to a fishery runs like this. In the fishery the institutions, most importantly property regimes, are what allow the steering medium of money to function in the commons and the regulations are what allows the steering medium of power to function in the fishery. The recognition of the corresponding norms by actors in the fishery is what allows the institutions and regulations to function. This is true both because of the direct moderating influence of the norms on actor's behavior and because they control the degree of legitimacy conferred upon the

institutions and regulations. The operative assumption is that

the enforcement of regulations and institutions such as property

rights against the will of a substantial number of users will not

be effective. In the case of a fishery, at least, I believe this

to be a reasonable assumption.

FIGURE FOUR: LIFEWORLD AND SYSTEM
IN A FISHERY

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM	
FISHERY ECONOMY	STATE MANAGEMENT
FORMAL RELATIONS IN THE MARKET AND IN THE MANAGEMENT BUREAUCRACY WHICH GOVERN FISHERY OPERATIONS	

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PROPERTY AND OTHER INSTITU-TIONS LEGALLY DEFINING ECONOMY	COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS BETWEEN ACTORS IN THE FISHERY WHICH REPRODUCE THEIR SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS OF WHAT IS TRUE AND CORRECT ABOUT USING THE FISHERY AND ABOUT EACH OTHER'S SINCERITY AND COMPREHENSIBILITY	FISHERY MANAGE-MENT OFFICES AND REGULA-TORY AUTHORITY
THE LIFEWORLD: SHARED WORDS, IDEA'S, INCLUDING THE NORMS THAT GOVERN ACTOR'S USE OF THE FISHERY AND RECOGNITIONS OF THE LEGITIMACY OF DEMANDS ON ACTOR'S BEHAVIOR BY THE COLLECTIVE		

Therefore, following Habermas, the commons agreement in the

fishery can only reproduce itself in the long run by

communications which approach, in the eyes of the actors, an

ideal speech situation in which actual conviction in attained.

This means that the real problem is in the lifeworld. Users have

to communicate authentically with one another to establish

effective safeguards against overexploitation that a large

majority will recognize as valid and to their advantage and will

be willing to follow. Only this will meet Oakerson's (1986) expectation of reciprocity which he argues is basic to the functioning of a commons. Figure Four is a reproduction of Figure Two showing how the major parts of the theory appear in a fishery.

In our thought experiment we have already identified overfishing as the contradiction to be dealt with and would need to understand its operations in detail. We would need to identify, particularly from the perspective of fisheries economics, the systemic forces which were contributing to the overfishing. Next, we would ask to what extent the administrative system has picked up on and tried to deal with the overfishing through legally changing institutions or promulgating regulations. These laws would have to be analyzed in terms of their theoretical effectiveness from the viewpoint of the economists and biologists, their enforceability, and the effect they have by short-cutting traditional management techniques, both active and passive (McGoodwin 1984).

The actors involved in the fishery would have to be identified. These would include fishers, equipment suppliers, processors and distributors of fish, biologists and managers. Both owners and workers in these industries, people of varying age, and men and women would need to be interviewed. Fishers who use different techniques and go after different species would have to be included as well as people from each part of the lake. Basic demographic data, including education levels would need to

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be gathered in addition to the in-depth interviews, observations and perhaps focus groups that would be used to get at their attitudes, beliefs, and on what they base their validity judgments about the lake and the overfishing problem. Attitudes toward various management techniques would have to be measured.

The analysis of all this would have to include how the occupations and other social and demographic variables were related to the attitudinal variables. Hermeneutic analysis would include: who are the various "uses" and "thems"; how natural and inevitable the actors see the institutions on the lake being; the creation of interpretive packages which show how and to what extent attitudes about the lake hang together conceptually, and the degree to which formal economic and bureaucratic structures and regulations are interfering with the actors abilities to communicate with one another.

Clearly, this sort of research would be a very big job even on a relatively small lake. To start it from scratch would require a multi-disciplinary team of biological scientists and economists to understand the system aspects and anthropologists and sociologists to get at the lifeworld aspects. In fisheries where there has been ongoing management the system aspects may be fairly well understood and a team concentrating on the lifeworld aspects would be all that is required. Even so there are many methodological problems, particularly in the measurement of attitudes toward validity, that have to be worked out. It will require a substantial amount of time and energy before this type

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of research can become part of the resource management kit bag.

The final product would be a comprehensive list of who the groups involved in the fishery are, how their attitudes and interests are reflected in both the systemic forces causing overfishing and possible remedies. More importantly, information would be collated on the relative ability of the groups of actors to participate in creating new regulations and institutions and on how their voices may or may not be being listened to and understood.

This product would be a baseline description of what an ideal speech situation would look like among the actors. This would indicate in turn what the blocks to this "ideal" speech situation are in the particular situation. It is in <u>no way</u> meant to be a model of the <u>process</u> by which institutions and regulations are created. That process is through negotiations and the functioning of relative power. This is a tool which can be used by managers to help predict the general acceptability, fairness in operation, communicability, and enforceability of the institutions and regulations.

CONCLUSION

The theory of communicative action could make a real contribution to our understanding of the commons problem and how to go about do research in a particular commons. It is interesting to note that the approach outlined above, while it may be in unfamiliar language and form, reflects several current ideas in the literature.

In the spirit of introducing a complex theoretical scheme to a new application I have tried to simplify as much as possible without distortion. I have also intentionally discussed Habermas' scheme in a very uncritical manner. This does not mean that the theory of communicative action is not in need of much criticism, clarification, and improvement.

First of all the focus on communications between actors, rather than on the actors themselves, while not making the analysis of interests external to the scheme, certainly undervalues it in comparison with other theoretical schemes. The fact that I could logically mention "contradictions in the classical political-economic sense" and "stagnation of production" as examples of the same research question reveals the weakness of the theory for making important distinctions at that level.

The use of both hermeneutic-historic and empirical-analytic methods in the same theory is one of the main sources of its strength, but we should not underestimate the differences here. Making coherent statements involving both approaches in this scheme relies on the claim of an unavoidable system requirement for motivation and legitimation. In the commons problem this relationship is carried by the claim that a commons agreement must have a normative, legitimating component requiring some degree of conviction on the part of the actors on the commons. While this is certainly true in an absolute sense, it is not easy to draw a line between where an actors behavior is a result of

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his or her own beliefs and where it is a result of fear of coercion. Coercion is a system function which does not require any conviction on the coerced actor's part. Perhaps the less easy it is to use coercion to deal with a particular commons problem the more practical benefit will be derived from the application of this theory.

The third major weakness is the fact that there is no way in any given situation to precisely distinguish strategic communications from communications oriented to mutual understanding. In fact, while this distinction has been presented here as a dichotomous one it is actually a continuum. Actual communicative actions are almost always neither wholly strategic nor wholly an authentic attempt to convince using honest appeals to validity claims. This includes information given to a researcher about an actors attitudes toward a commons situation. While this difficulty points up the great challenge involved in the investigation and interpretation of actor's attitudes called for here, it does not reduce its importance.

In the last analysis however, commons, and fisheries in particular, require at least an approximation of authentic communications if the boundary problems between the social system and ecosystem are to be resolved in the long term. The commons is a place where standard economic and other systems based models have real limitations and where critical approaches which bring the lifeworld to the front of the analysis may be particularly applicable.

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