

October 24, 2015 CAGONT Presentation

An analytical framework
to justify the integration of William
Commanda's *Anicinabe* discourse in knowledge
generation on environment, relationships and
related matters within the western academy

Who is William Commanda?

- Late Indigenous Elder William Commanda, Officer of the Order of Canada, is recipient of two **honorary doctorate degrees**
- He is founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, a global eco-community dedicated to advancing both environmental stewardship and racial harmony
- In 2014, Ottawa University named a pavilion after him in recognition of his relevance to **academic knowledge**

- William Commanda is well known for his voice of peace building and reconciliation, grounded in his **Indigenous rootedness on the land**, yet **connected with diverse others**
- These others animate his environmental stewardship and peace building legacy
- His Ojigiway/Squirrel seed planting efforts appear to have sprouted into **multiple still-emergent activities**
- What did he do and how did he do this?

- William Commanda has been influential at a **global** level in some microcosmic fashion since the 1990 UN Pre-Rio Earth Summit deliberations
- He also positioned his approach in many **contemporary debates** – e.g. uranium, water contamination, eels, damming, in the process influencing diverse players

- With respect to environment, my research has led me to conclude that there are significant limitations to popular contemporary approaches to the environment – e.g. environmental ethics , deep ecology, feminist geography
- Acceleration in climate change, and environmental crises of global impact attest to the urgent need for new, innovative approaches

- Despite the rhetoric, very little is understood about Indigenous relationship with environment, and its relevance for contemporary times and global issues
- Many historical and cross cultural barriers impede understanding and sharing – however from the time of Aldo Leopold, the first “environmentalist”, the “Indian” has been the shadow figure in the generation of new approaches

William Commanda and Mother Earth

- **Relationship** with a “Mother” Earth is central to William Commanda’s overall view of life
- This is inclusive of a singular spiritual dimension, integrated with empirical knowledge
 - observational and experiential knowledge
 - ‘communally-analysed and confirmed’ knowledge
 - Knowledge passed down over countless generations
- It is also inclusive of evidence of adaptation to changing environmental conditions

Tangible and intangible

- The overall **discourse and semantics of Indigenous Peoples** does not easily translate into the understandings of western academic researchers
- As a consequence they are often underestimated and considered simplistic
- Better understanding of the semantics can contribute to deeper appreciation of the **complex knowledge base**

Semantics

- A critical issue in the study of the Comanda discourse is the role of **multiple signifiers**, and not only language, in the **generation of meaning**
- The relations between signifiers, like words, phrases, grammar, as well as signs, symbols and actants, are also important

I examine whether and how

- A better understanding of his Indigenous approach to knowledge generation can lead to some level of
 - Formal integration in western academic disciplines; and
 - **Co-creation of new knowledge** critical for these times of massive climate change, environmental and human crises

An integrated approach

- While William Commanda's thinking is grounded in a deeply Indigenous idiom, he was expansive in his animation of the fundamental principles of biodiversity in his creation of the *Circle of All Nations*
- As such, it is more than about the expression of the Indigenous; it is also about its influence on the collective.

Can his approach be integrated?

- I believe this aspiration must be theorized within an integrated framework that draws out critical elements which
 - Permit scrutiny that is **theoretically grounded and viable in the western academy**, and
 - Permit scrutiny that is **empirically grounded and respects Indigenous parameters**

A Proposed Methodology

- My overall framework is *Post Structural*, questioning and deconstructing foundational structures, and exploring the plurality of meaning
- The principal lens is *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis* and its examination of knowledge, *power*, truth and truth effects
- My hypothesis is that forms of discourse can be created and made relevant beyond those determined by power and knowledge embedded in institutional structures of position, authority, hierarchy, and capital

The Focus is both Abstract and Action Oriented

- **Abstract** i.e. it is theoretical and conceptual, dissociated from any specific entity, the specific entity having to be abstracted from concrete existence;
- **Action oriented** , regarding the continued relevance, animation and emergence of the *discourse*
- I suggest **multiple logics of inquiry** can facilitate this analysis

Logics of Inquiry

- **Performance Mapping**: to explore the ideological framework and *Anicinabe* underpinnings of his thoughts/ideas;
- **Historical/Dialectical**: to ground his story, including its inseparability from contemporary history
- **Phenomenological**: to substantiate an interpretative approach to analysis
- **Cybercartographical**: to examine multi-dimensional reporting and emergent elements

A Conceptual Tool

- Over the past fifteen years, William Commanada's *Circle of All Nations* work has been developed within the **conceptual framework** of a Medicine Wheel
- I position the four *Logics of Inquiry* this framework to illustrate my theoretical approach



Cyber-
cartographical

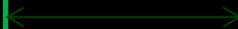


WELCOME

Animated by the passion of Grandfather William Comanda, the Circle of All Nations is a global eco-community unified by the fundamental and unbreakable conviction that we children of Mother Earth, we all belong together, with Nature, irrespective of our individual nation, creed or culture



Phenomeno-
logical



Logics of
Inquiry

Performance
Mapping



Historical
Dialectical



- The Commanda discourse is creative, dynamic, unstructured, unpredictable and **emergent**
- It hold an **internal logic** and is recognizable as an entity unto itself, while engaging a wide range of actors and actants
- The **challenge is to examine its relevance to academic thinking**

Triangulation

- The proper methodological tools can permit the examination of a range of tangible and intangible conceptual approaches, semantics and key elements embedded in the discourse

The tools selected for analysis...

- Geo-Narrative
- Narrative
- Critical reflexivity and auto ethnography
- Cyber-cartographical mapping



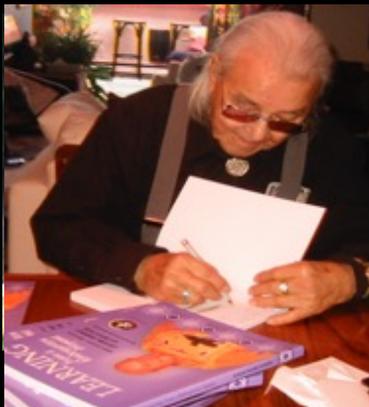
Cyber-
cartographical
mapping



Critical
Reflexivity

Primary
Methods

GeoNarrative



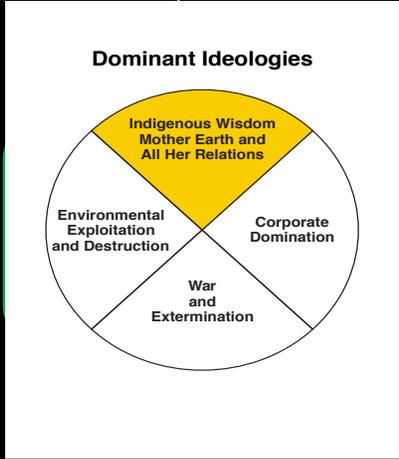
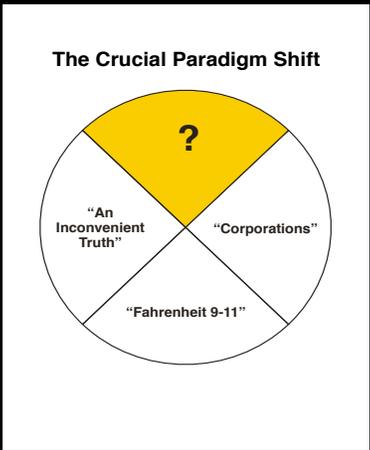
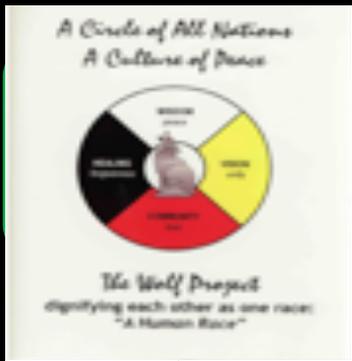
Narrative



WISDOM

HARMONY
BALANCE





- Can an analysis of the work as proposed contribute to a deeper understanding of the discourse William Commanada created and the critical role others play in the germination and manifestation of his projects?
- Can this generate respect for the **Indigenous knowledge generation process** and recognition of its place for **bridging and co-creating** in a world that is both increasingly interconnected and disconnected?

Can a better understanding of William
Commanda's unique bridge-building discourse
within the academy contribute to

Greater integration of approaches to environment
and relationship in a world quite literally "on fire"?

