

April 2017 - American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting

An analytical framework

For the integration of William Commanda's *Anicinabe Integration* discourse in knowledge generation on environment, relationships and related matters within the Western Academy

Abstract

- Presentation of a pedagogic framework for the case study analysis of the *Circle of All Nations* discourse of late Indigenous Elder, Dr. William Commanda, OC, on environment, relationships and critical social justice and peace issues.
- The focus of the study is both *abstract* (whether and how his *discourse* impacts approaches to environment and related issues); and *action oriented* (regarding the continued relevance, animation and emergence of the *discourse*, including via praxis); and it employs a *medicine wheel* conceptual framework, and four *logics of inquiry* in the study:
- *Performance Mapping*: to explore the ideological framework, Indigenous epistemology and *Anicinabe* underpinnings;
- *Historical/Dialectical*: to ground the analysis in the post structural idiom and examine its inseparability from contemporary colonial history, injustice and inequality;
- *Phenomenological*: to substantiate an interpretative approach to analysis, inclusive of critical reflexivity and reciprocity;
- *Cybercartographic*: to examine multi-dimensional reporting, archival, graphic and emergent elements.
- I explore whether *narrative, geo-narrative, critical reflexivity*; and *cybercartographical digital atlas research* methodological tools can be justified and employed to support knowledge generation on environment, relationships and related matters in contemporary times, and explore how such research and scholarship might impact social change.

Research Flow

- Social Science, Geog Time Space, Case Study, Empirical Grounding, Discourse Analysis Lens, Conceptual Medicine Wheel, Four Lens of Inquiry, Associated Methodologies, and Tools, Analytical Tools of Atlas and Nvivo, Grounded Theory to Conclusions re: WC approach to Environment and Related Matters
- Preliminary findings: prophecy and early warning signals, all is related, earth-connection, ceremony/prayer, movement, orality, storytelling, visuality, to negotiate creativity in the zone of friction
- Can CAN ideology serve as bridge and zone of interface transference and co-creativity mediated by land, indigenous ceremony, performance mapping, movement, emergence to generate new knowledge in the Academy?

My Thesis Research Question

- Can an analysis of the work, thoughts and influence of William Commanda on environment, relationships and related matters contribute, through a case study, to a greater contemporary integration of this *Anicinabe* Indigenous approach to knowledge generation in academic discourse on these issues?

Key Ideas

- My Thesis Research Question
- My Central Argument
- Why the Topic is Important
- The Theory Behind My Approach
- A Circle of All Nations Discourse
- Logics of Inquiry
- My Methodology
- A Discourse Analysis

William Commanda, Hon Phd, OC



THE LEGACY OF ALGONQUIN ELDER
L'HÉRITAGE DE L'AÎNÉ ALGONQUIN

Dr. William Commanda, OC

11.11.1913 - 03.08.2011

*"We must come together
with one heart, one mind, one love,
and one determination to create
A Circle of All Nations
A Culture of Peace."*

*"Nous devons nous unir avec un seul
cœur, une seule âme et une volonté
pour créer un cercle de toutes les
nations et une culture de paix."*



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

www.circleofallnations.ca

www.asinabka.com

Who is William Commanda?

- Late Indigenous Elder William Commanda is founder of the *Circle of All Nations, a global eco-peace-community* dedicated to advancing environmental stewardship and racial harmony
- He is Officer of the Order of Canada and recipient of two **honorary doctorate degrees**
- In 2014, 3 years after his death, University of Ottawa named a hall 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
- Twenty five years after Rio, three things predominate environmental issues
 - the voice and place of the Indigenous and
 - western domination in a “world on fire”
 - global connections

- 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

2004 – Mapping Boston and Beyond



GLOBAL Performance Mapping



William Commanda and Mother Earth

- **Relationship** with a “Mother” Earth is central to his overall *Anicinabe* 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

- He expressed his influential views in the contextual framework of the
 - Law of Nature, energy, motion, connection, “trickster” and evolution
 - Mother Earth as the penultimate provider, and
 - The cosmic world, key elements of fire, earth, water and air, and natural world, including stones, plants and animals as the chief instructors

Why the Topic is Important

- These are times of unprecedented global interconnection on environmental and cultural issues with profound impact across space and time
- Foundational ideas of western approaches to knowledge generation have been questioned and challenged over the past centuries, and particularly so since the seventies, in the post-modern and post-structural eras: in feminist, environmental ethics, post-colonial and post-imperial, Indigenous and critical geographical thought and critique

- I believe that a better understanding of William Commanda's unique bridge-building discourse can contribute to
 - greater integration of approaches in view of the ever accelerating environmental challenges facing a growing human population
 - in a world of climate change, disease, violence and environmental crises increasingly recognized as being created by humans

- Since 1987, William Commanda positioned his approach to the environment in many contemporary **national debates** – e.g. uranium, water contamination, eels, damming, animating discussions with diverse players
- He also pointed to **linkages between environmental, political and social justice issues**
- Can a better understanding of his approach lead to greater integration of Indigenous approaches in western traditions?

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 Discourse Analysis

- Discourse analysis lens to scrutinize and analyze the Commandaa approach to the environment
- The primary methods/tools to permit focused analysis are
 - Geo-Narrative
 - Narrative
 - Critical reflexivity
 - Cyber-cartographical mapping
 - Complemented by ATLAS and NVIVO data analysis

A Bridging Conceptual Discursive Tool

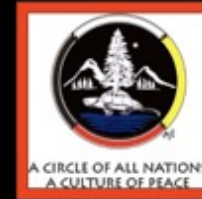
- Over the past fifteen years, William Commanda's *Circle of All Nations* work has been developed within the **conceptual framework** of a Medicine Wheel
- Flowing from East to South to West to North, ideas flow from vision to action to refinement to balance in an **ever emergent spiral**
- I position the four *Logics of Inquiry* this framework to illustrate my theoretical approach, spinning around a **central empirical cog, *Ginawaydaganuc*, Relatedness**

Further,

- Such discourse can also incorporate elements that contravene the discursive elements in conventional discourses
- These alternative discursive elements can present a coherence and integrity that is experienced as a particular discourse at a distance from the very discursive structures within which they are generated
- A preliminary overview of the Commanda discourse reveals that it is creative, dynamic, unstructured, unpredictable and emergent – but it appears to hold an internal logic and is recognizable as an entity unto itself



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



A CIRCLE of ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE of PEACE
 FOUNDED BY
WILLIAM COMMANDA
 a global eco community
 unified by values of

- RESPECT
- RESPONSIBILITY
- FORGIVENESS
- COMPASSION

Focused on advancing

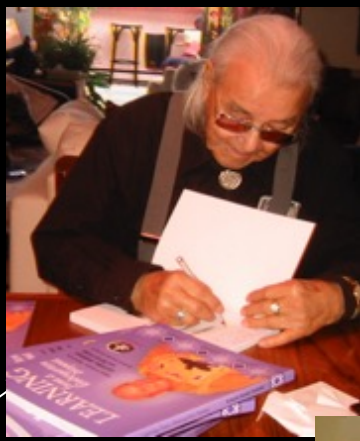
- INDIGENOUS WISDOM
- RESPECT for MOTHER EARTH
- RACIAL HARMONY
- SOCIAL JUSTICE

Recipients of 2nd World's Indigenous Awards
 Can you see the words in action?

ASINABKA
SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE

- Indigenous Centre
- Peace Building
- Eco City Park
- Historic Park

Reconciliation



**An Iteration of
 the
 Commanda
 Discourse**

CANOE
Spirit of MAMTOU
 Where was Manitou before
 he created the Earth?
 'In his Canoes, which was
 floating in the skies'
The Indigenous Canoe
 - the penultimate symbolic
Wonder of Canada

- Integrating the physical & metaphysical
- Integrating Spirit, Art, Craft & Invention with the practical & sustainable

The Metaphor for Navigating
 the Journey of one's Life

HISTORY - ANCIENT HISTORY

well beyond 4000 years

- Billions of years ago, the first ancient rocks emerged here
- + 5000 years ago → meeting place of indigenous peoples of N.A.
- 400 years ago, William's ancestors prayed here as Champlain watched

IN the 1500s, there were plus 100,000,000 peoples in Amer.

DECIMATED BY ORIGINAL GERM WARFARE + near GENOCIDE

IN the 1800's the LAND TRANSFORMATION began →

- FUR TRADE
- LOGGING
- DAMS
- HYDRO
- NUCLEAR ENERGY

ie. RESOURCES OF WILLIAM'S ANCESTORS GAVE BIRTH TO CANADA

PARKS & BOREAL FOREST

- 70% of NATIONAL PARKS WERE CREATED AT THE INSISTENCE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES
- THE BOREAL RENDEZVOUS IS EMBEDDED IN THE PRAYERS OF OUR ELDER

WE ARE LIVING IN TIMES of PROPHECY

ONLY AFTER THEN IS NOW

THE LAST TREE IS CUT LOGGING IN DECLINE

RIVER IS POISONED OTEWA RIVER PARK

LAST FISH CAUGHT ANCIENT EEL DANCE

THEN YOU WILL KNOW AND

MONEY CAN'T BUY A GLOBAL CRISIS

William Commanda is the TIDELESS VOICE OF THE WETLANDS EARTH AND SEA BECAUSE HE WAS THE FIRST TO SAY WE ARE ALL RELATED

WATER FALLS
of the SPIRIT OF WATER

- ONE OF THE FOUR SACRED ELEMENTS
- CONTAMINATED, POLLUTED + DEPLETED EVERYWHERE

WILLIAM COMMANDA SAYS

we believe Mother Earth is a living creature. She has body & soul & spirit + dems. The rivers are her veins. If they are blocked anywhere, cancers, poisons build up, eventually they kill. Dams, motor vehicles, foreign animals, fertilizers, pesticides & sewage are attack on the life blood of Mother Earth. She has to fight back. AS NATURE'S LAW

SPIRIT of the NORTH
WISDOM OF THE OLDER SIBS

Recipient of 1st World's Indigenous Awards
 WILLIAM COMMANDA
 CORONA BOREALIS

FROM the HEART of POLAR BEAR
A MESSAGE

TROPHY they never created!

SNOW SHOES

- IN THE OLD DAYS WILLIAM WALKED 50 MILES A DAY ON HIS SNOW SHOES. AND ALL THE COMMANDA'S WERE HEALTHY + FIT

- 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**

The tools selected for analysis...

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



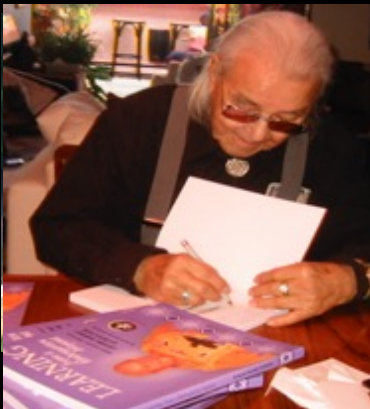
Cyber-
cartographical
mapping



Critical
Reflexivity

Primary
Methods

GeoNarrative



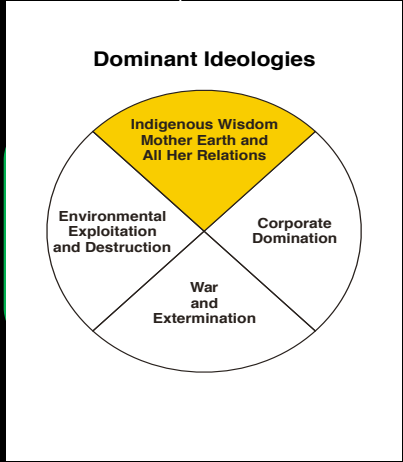
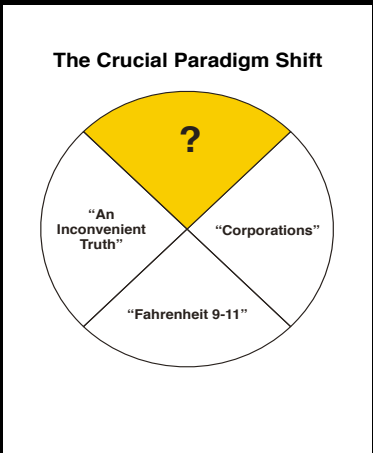
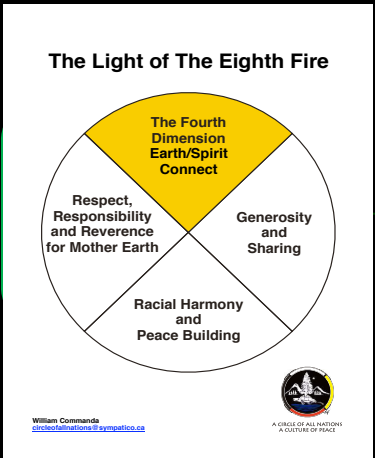
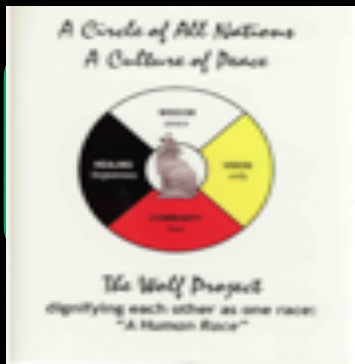
Narrative



WISDOM

HARMONY
BALANCE





Problems anticipated and addressing them

- There are three particular challenges with this work:
- i. I propose to find a place for the knowledge of an Indigenous “kindergarten dropout” in the graduate level of the western academy; this requires me:
 - - to understand western academic thinking and academic approaches to knowledge creation;
 - to deepen my understanding of William Commanada’s indigenous approach to knowledge; and
 - to articulate his approach to environment and related matters such that it is comprehensible and can spark new thinking within the academy

- ii. I myself am new to the academy and the study of geography and cartography, and I am not Indigenous; I therefore have to
 - remain focused on the academic prerequisites to executing this work effectively
 - remain focused on my commitment to William Commanda to generate a space for the serious engagement with his way of thinking, and
 - not create misunderstanding that my exposé of his *Anicinabe* thinking implies any expertise with respect to other expressions of Indigenous knowledge

- iii. William Commanda created a particular discourse in conjunction with a diversity of players
 - the research requires meticulous analysis of this informal but complex phenomena, in its past expressions, and in any emergent forms
 - players are dispersed across space and occupy a range of positions in the social/cultural framework
 - The relevance of actants, chance and *trickster* in the discourse requires critical attention

- The work occupies uncharted global space and time
- The challenge is to tell a coherent story given the interplay of the vast range of actors and actants in this particular *Commanda* zone of time and space, and
- Articulate its relevance to academic thinking

- 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"?

