



IPRPD

International Journal of Arts, Humanities & Social Science

ISSN 2693-2547 (Print), 2693-2555 (Online)

Volume 01; Issue no 04: September 10, 2020

Indigenous Elder William Commanda and the Circle of All Nations Discourse

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Received: 01/07/2020

Accepted for Publication: 21/08/2020

Published: 10/09/2020

Abstract

This paper uses a Foucauldian discourse analysis lens to examine the discourse, cybernetic mapping and spatial and temporal reach of William Commanda and his informal bridge building Circle of All Nations global eco peace community and queries its relevance to academic study of environmental and social justice relational issues during this age of the Anthropocene, and times of climate change, extreme weather, unprecedented extinction of species, systemic and overt racism, violence, global pandemic and social upheaval across the globe. It explores the nature and relevance of his discourse, inclusive of the Seven Fires Prophecy, which anticipated times of unprecedented global crisis embedded in the ancient mnemonic Wampum Belt of the 1400s. William Commanda was born in 1913, on the eve of the First World War; it is ironic that the Isaias hurricane, tornadoes and flooding were unleashed on August 3, 2020, nine years after his death, in a world on fire at multiple levels, and one hurtling on an evolutionary trajectory of unforeseeable change and challenge.

Keywords: Indigenous, Circle of All Nations, Wampum, Discourse, Discursive structures, Truth, Knowledge, Power, Semiotics, Motion, Earth, Social media, Cybernetics, Cybercartography

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, research has focused on the discourse and legacy of late Indigenous elder, William Commanda (1913 – 2011) and the thesis, entitled *Ginawaydaganic and the Circle of All Nations: The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda* (Thumbadoo) addresses “his approach to Mother Earth, environment and relational matters. For forty years, he was the carrier of three Algonquin wampum belts, critically important sacred and historical mnemonic teaching and record keeping devices, and was the longest known guardian of such an iconic Indigenous heritage and responsibility. He was awarded two honorary doctoral degrees, one (doctor of philosophy) by the University of Ottawa in 2006, and the other (doctorate honorifique causa) by l’université du Québec-Outaouais in 2011. He was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada in 2008, this country’s penultimate honour (Desiderantes Meliorem Patriam – for those who desire a better country). Carleton University named the Aboriginal Resources Centre Ojigkwanong

after him in 2013, and the University of Ottawa created the Dr. William Commanda Hall in 2014, in acknowledgment of his contributions to the academic world”ⁱ. He founded the *Circle of All Nations*, an informal global eco peace community which was animated through a range of activities that are still being organized and documented: gatherings, conferences, presentations, blogs, videos, books, on-line communications, advocacy, paddle for peace events etc. Guided by his mantra that *We must all come together with one heart and one mind, one love and one determination, to create a Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*, it prioritizes Indigenous wisdom, environmental stewardship, social justice, racial harmony, peacebuilding and healing.

As articulated in 2017, the Thumbadoo thesis on William Commanda examines the following themes:

1. The interplay of William Commanda Law of Nature/way of life indoctrination. This was informed by his land-based language, culture and heritage, and articulated ideologically and epistemologically through rock art, wampum belt agency, and ceremonial and ritual practices. It was manifested in his absolute adherence to a central principle of interrelatedness and oneness seen within an infinitude of diversity, conceptualized around Ginawaydaganuc (that all, including humans, are related in the geo-cosmic world, and therefore one);

2. His contemporary locatedness in a colonized Europeanized world rendered paradoxically both globally connected and multiply divided. From the time of his birth on the eve of the First World War, his world was dominated by ideologies of duality manifested in a zeitgeist very different from his foundational embeddedness in inter-connection. Yet, ironically, over the course of his own lifetime, it has also become a globalized world, one that is now grappling desperately to come to terms with diversity (and interconnection);

3. His Indigenous understanding and animation of syntropy and negentropy, consistent with the cosmic principles of space/time, movement, causality, energy, life, creation, entropy, retrocausality, emergence and evolution. He consciously, deliberately, and determinedly animated of his own theoretical platform and research project in the creation of his Circle of All Nations global eco-community as a bridging device negotiating between differing worldviews. Here he worked to reconstitute and reconstruct relationships consistent with the laws and intelligence of nature, and with principles of creativity, resuscitation (restoring consciousness) and reciprocity (exchange); and

4. The positioning of his Law of Nature approach to knowledge generation on environment and related matters. He engaged in knowledge creation on multiple platforms, local, regional, continental and global, and utilized traditional and evolving technologies to generate engagement in and further animation of his project, which he considered of critical importance to Mother Earth and all creationⁱⁱ”.

It is argued that his discourse is grounded in these central integrated ideas of Indigenous rootedness in cosmic, post colonial zeitgeist, bridgebuilding and his approach to knowledge generation.

This paper uses select aspects of Foucauldian discourse analysis and semiotics research to disassemble and deconstruct elements in the Commanda/*Circle of All Nations* discourse to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of his deliberated work and legacy. In this context, it is noted that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, Indigenous thinking exists largely outside the current dominant discourse both for a number of historical and political reasons, but also because of the complex semantics and interplay of language, symbols, dream and logic; it is suggested that in contemporary times of global eco crisis, William Commanda engaged in a complex program of bridge-building to both dismantle the colonizing power and knowledge structures dominating his world, as well as to animate the spirit of Ginawaydaganuc and interconnection.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

In the early seventies, French researcher Michel Foucaultⁱⁱⁱ introduced the field of discourse analysis to uncover the sets of ideas and communications strategies employed in social relationships over time; his analysis sought to understand the notions of truth, knowledge, power and truth effects embedded in socio-dynamics, which he saw as funneling a momentum towards an emergent reality; here, a reality is manufactured, within which the created knowledge becomes dominant and common sense. As Waitt notes, “According to Foucault, to believe at face value what one hears, reads, or sees as truth would lead to the serious error of overlooking the social circumstances within which particular sets of ideas are produced, circulated, and maintained. Hence, discourse analysis offers insights into how particular knowledge becomes common sense and dominant, while simultaneously silencing different interpretations^{iv}”. The more “true” the contributing factors are interpreted or accepted as being, so they contribute to the creation of the strengths of the discourse. Barrett elaborates that Foucault presented a discursive field characterized by systems of dispersions and he examined the systematic presence of these dispersions within the discursive structures^v. Thus, in his work, Foucault took the conventional linguistic definition of discourse beyond the confines of the writing of speech to an exploration of the creation, production and circulation of knowledge. Cresswell points out that at one level, discourse is the term used to refer to spoken or written text or communication about a particular topic, i.e. a discourse or body of information about something^{vi}. Barrett’s discussion of textuality deepens this consideration; she points to language as the producer of knowledge, with Anglo traditions further subordinating language to the role of silent (written) vehicle for the clearest expression of meaning; this has two implications: text is itself contingent; and the written tradition undercuts the oral, and other performative means of creating meaning in social contexts^{vii}.

Foucault^{viii} also focused on analyzing how power operated, and in this question he moved from the idea of power as an absolute to power in terms of relations; and he saw the operationalization of power in the shifting forms and relationships of production (action), strategies (command) and technology (means, tools).

Waitt points out that in Foucauldian analysis, there are rules and structures underpinning and governing discourse that are unified by a common theme, and these are articulated in statements and texts that have effects on the world of people, places and events; this *knowledge* is constructed and then becomes naturalized; discourse analysis studies these rules and structures within bodies of such knowledge and associated social phenomena. Waitt provides some further insights into the Foucauldian discourse analysis: in a critical synopsis, he refers to the “mediating lens and interpreting approach to study ideas and practices that constitute discourses” that in turn create streams of “reality in particular social and temporal contexts^{ix}”. This underlines the need for researcher rigour and reflexivity in undertaking discourse analysis. Since Foucauldian knowledge is socially constituted, it is critical to be self-aware of ideas that inform the researcher’s understanding; here one needs to look at issues of positionality, location of one’s lived experiences and embodied knowledge, and consider how research processes impact analysis of what is. It is essential to have clear and transparent documentation of the interpretative process, with especial reference to the producers of knowledge as distinct from the researcher’s understanding.

In this sensitive work, Thumbadoo notes an autoethnographic positionality and embeddedness in the knowledge, and in the co-production of much *Circle of All Nations* text with William Commanda: I note our distinct and separate backgrounds, our unique characteristics, our apparent disempowered positions (he Indigenous, me an Indian woman); this is then juxtaposed with the engagement of countless others of tremendously diverse global backgrounds; then there are also complexities with respect to technologies: the introduction of uniquely Indigenous ones (smudging, ceremony, gatherings, events located in world of nature) intermixed with other mainstream technologies (photography, videos, texts, speeches, reports, books as well as cyber tools like websites, digital atlas and Facebook). Indeed, undiminished and scrupulous reflexivity, rigorous reflection, data review and scholarship are key to effective use of Foucauldian analysis for understanding the complex discourse created by this unique Indigenous Elder and his *Circle of All Nations* community, as well as to position his discourse in the academy.

It is important to consider both discourse and the discursive structures within which discourse is suspended. The discourse examined in Foucauldian terms appears to flow from *power* (i.e. people or positions or ideologies of power) to the establishment of *knowledge*, to its acceptance as *truths*, to the creation of *truth-effects*; together, these constitute a persuasiveness that is both underpinned by and that evolves out of the discursive structure. Waite points to the Foucauldian view that discourses are inherently unstable, multiple and contradictory, while discursive structures operate to bring stability, common sense and order, and are not accidental; further, these discursive structures are embedded within social networks that are fragile and constantly ruptured; as such one must be alert to contradictions and ambiguity. Hence it is critical to remember the operative and shifting interplay of power, knowledge, truth, persuasion and effects of truth. It is interesting to note that the word itself in its Latin roots, *discursus*, running to and fro, appears to anticipate Foucault's *in motion*, dynamic presentation of discourse; while it is not the focus of this paper, foundational motional energy is evident in William Commanda's name for himself, Mamiwinini; in the pragmatic and iconic symbol of canoe that he is associated with; and in the orality of his singular discourse.

Thus, in essence, key features of discourse analysis in scholarly language are as follows:

Discourse is a specific series of representations, practices and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks, and legitimized; and discourses are generally seen by scholars to be:

- Heterogeneous: they are not the product of a single author, but travel through different domains and carry multiple meanings and implications;
- Regulated: they have coherence and systematicity, with regimes of "truth" to legitimate inclusion and exclusion;
- Embedded: within institutions and structures and are materially and multiply present in social life, rather than free-floating;
- Situated: within constellations of power and knowledge that are also open to contestation and negotiation;
- Performative: having meaning, force and effect in the constitution of the social and self.

Waite notes that the complexities of this shifting reality have presented challenges for discourse analysis, negotiating between systematic, mechanical and formulaic methodological templates and intuitive approaches aligned with passion and practice, juxtaposed on an ever-shifting matrix^x. Further, discourse analysis is not concerned with the truth or falsities of a discourse but rather with the geographical and historical circumstances that privilege particular discourses in order to create deeper understanding of social phenomena^{xi}

Thus, Foucault, explored something large in discourse, in the process challenging many previously established theoretical frames; his ideas dislodge theories about ideology, social formation and class, etc. and set up discourse analysis as a more reliable means of studying social phenomena.

While generally discourse analysis is deemed useful for projects committed to addressing social and environmental injustice and challenging unequal power relationships, in our paper, we examine the nature, and organic eco-integrity of the *Circle of All Nations* discourse of late Indigenous elder William Commanda, consistent with the themes of the thesis presented in the Introduction, and we probe their relevance for throwing new light on the ideas of truth, knowledge, power and truth effects, in the context of the production and endurance of the discourse, without the customary props (money, political position, formal organizational structure; here, while Indigeneity at large is not the focus of this paper, it goes without saying that the Commanda thinking and approach to knowledge generation is grounded in his Indigeneity, while it is also articulated and animated through his diverse *Circle of All Nations* global eco peace community). It is of course recognized that each of the notions of truth, knowledge and power are domains of extensive academic and philosophical scrutiny; here our intent is only to begin a process of shifting the lens of exploration to an Indigenous one, one that has received scant attention in western paradigms and one grounded in the natural world. Hence this paper explores the nature of the foundational and discursive elements of the Commanda orientation, grounded in the Laws of Nature, the cybernetic motional steering of the *Circle of All Nations* discourse, its apparent simplicity, its incorporation of emergent and contrary dynamics, its resonance, its tangible persistence over time and its evidence of and potential for

invisible underground rhizomatic and fungal/biosporous reach, much as is evidenced in interconnected networks of nature, and its spatial, temporal, motional and relational interface.

Four shifting discourses shaping his story are of particular interest.

- i. Maudit sauvage – Dirty Indian – the historical presentation of the First Peoples of the continent, created by the doctrines of colonization and imperialism, and increasingly challenged;
- ii. Canoe builder respected for what I could do with my hands – here the particular discourse begins in 1981 with the building of a canoe in Roskilde Denmark, and the meeting with Queen Margarethe – and other factors contributing to a new re-presentation of the Indigenous in the Nation’s consciousness, as a force to be addressed;
- iii. Noble Savage – the new age revival of the image of the noble savage, produced in the vein of “othering” (Said, 1978), a romanticized overview delimiting the discourse; and
- iv. William Commanda/Circle of All Nations (2005) discourse: the fourth discourse presents his animation of his own life and work, as one grounded in his relationships with his Mother Earth, and with the ceremonial and spiritual heritage and traditions animating this relationship. He re-presented and re-vitalized many components of that heritage, not just for himself, but also for countless others globally, Indigenous and non-Indigenous and multiply diverse – per race, culture, language, age, occupation, social class; through such means (tools) as (a) a new epistemology in the language of the Sacred Wampum Shell Belts, ancient spiritual artifacts and mnemonic devices reconciling prophecy and history, and offering direction for social intercourse; (b) sharing of his prayer *Ginawaydaganuc: We Are All Related*, shattering entrenched discourses of duality, difference and separation, as well as anthropocentric relations with the natural world; (c) gatherings and relationship-building events with and amongst diverse peoples, privately and publicly, with new technologies of textuality; (d) land-based activities to ignite relationships, respect and responsibility to the natural world; and (e) art and creativity activities, including drumming, singing and dancing, to ignite a legacy of performance (versus material) mapping. The tangibility of the new discourse is to be examined in the context of two key regimes of Foucauldian truths: his informal global eco-community, Circle of All Nations, and his vision for the Asinabka Healing and Peace-Building Centre in the capital city (www.asinabka.com; note the Asinabka project is not examined in this paper). Both the actual discourse and the discursive structures are to be analysed^{xii}.

3. Semiotics Underpinnings, Motion and Communications

An exploration of semiotics, textuality and choric expression can contribute to deeper understanding of the Commanda discourse. Language was one means of communication in his discourse; but he employed many more. The actants in his discursive repertoire that typically accompanied all his public communications reveal an agency of force beyond the acknowledged material world.

Semiotics (from the Greek *semeio*, to mark) is a study of meaning-making, here privileging signs, sign process and non-linguistic sign systems as a significant part of communications. A few key items in the Algonquin semiotic repertoire of the William Commanda heritage include petroglyphs, pictographs, feather, drum, tobacco, wampum and canoe, the latter both a pragmatic and iconic motif. These objects served as metaphoric devices, and the wampum belts, his condor feather, rocks and other iconic and bio-semiotic signs of intelligent nature informed William Commanda’s thinking and played foundational roles in his discourse, as did reference to animals. Further, as per her Personal Journals from 1997 - 2014, Thumbadoo writes *I note in our handwritten notes that these quotations from some unknown source preoccupied us ‘Train your eye to see, and you will cease to read the world’... I came to my knowledge by reading first; and William Commanda by seeing first; then we had to work at aligning our articulation of what resonated as integrative knowledge; in our joint engagement with the public, he*

would often ask me to explain certain things and initially he would make a gesture of winding me up behind my back, my oral style being hesitant; this entertained his audience. Later, as I acquired greater fluidity in his style of communications, he would sit back and smile. Another entity inherent to the multi-directional style of William Commanda's discourse is textuality/inter-textuality. Textuality is inclusive of written and spoken words, maps, photographs, sketches, videos, and, we add, song and dance, talking circles and gatherings, divisible into genres (categories organized by style, form or subject matter); with intertextuality, meaning is produced in relationships between texts^{xiii}. Implicit in the concept of intertextuality is the understanding that meanings are co-created with an active audience, and this in turn discloses and reveals the dimensions of created "naturalness" of constructed categories, subjectivities and particularities. Reflective analysis demands accountability and responsibility. Familiarization with the context of the text, and the social production of the text, paying attention to authorship, technology and intended audience are critical; here, it becomes important to bear in mind the following ideas: discourse is process, with subtle forms of power and control, restricting what can be said and who can speak with authority; research questions are posed from three perspectives: social, technological and content/aesthetic. Interpretation of texts is a socially, spatially, temporally contingent process, further impacted by audience, power dynamics and presentation mediums.

William Commanda's repertoire was rich and diverse and also multiply constituted by his vast *Circle of All Nations* community. It is suggested that this *Circle of All Nations* community constitutes his cognitive map. Casti notes that with the re-reading of conquest maps, cartography took on the unprecedented role of establishing the arena for a geographical decolonization leading to counter mapping challenging hegemony and asymmetries of power by colonized or subjugated voices. This critical cartography requires reflexivity. Reflexivity offers a set of tools not only to understand the past, but to rethink what we do, and provide suggestions for future improvements^{xiv}. Casti proposes a heuristic approach, "capable of holding together the outcomes of cartographic and of geographical theories, the artistic hybridizations envisaged by historical cartography, and the possibilities offered by digital technology ... (inclusive of a) semiotic perspective ... (of) the communicative potential of maps;"^{xv} she terms this chorographic cartography, and it includes the experiential. These many concepts (and more) are inherent to and complement discourse analysis. They contribute to the understanding of ontological and ontogenetic components of cognitive and material communications and mapping. Indigenous realities are densely communicative at these levels, and it is of critical importance that they are acknowledged and interpreted as accurately and honestly as possible, while their emergent and shape-shifting integrity, inclusive of depth recall, reflexivity, iteration, and immediacy, collapsing past/present/future, is also recognized and legitimized as knowledge generative. Indigenous respect for this has revitalized the use of the term elder globally. Knowledge derived from experience is deemed wisdom in much Indigenous thinking, and thus is most highly valued.

Barrett discusses Foucault's radical questioning of Marxian hierarchical, unilinear determinism; he himself posits a polyphonous play of dependencies – for him, the determinative power of discourse is constituted in practices responsible for how people thought, lived and spoke. Further, with respect to historicity and genealogy, Foucault challenged ideas that postulate original foundations – here he undertakes an interesting examination of German words pertaining to Nietzschean ideas, in particular, of origin (*ursprung*), descent (*herkunft*) and emergence (*entstehung*); in addition, he grapples with the idea of chance as a producer of events^{xvi}. These particular imagistic explorations suggest parallels with some Indigenous words and ideas pertaining to the evolutionary, ancestral, biodiverse and trickster (chance) themes in the production of Indigenous Law of Nature discourse.

As noted, then, "there were multiple dimensions to William Commanda's discursive repertoire. Generally, drum song, reflective of the heartbeat of Mother Earth, alerted visible and invisible beings to the activity on hand, and drew the attention of all to the focal point: the doorway into the moment, place and experience. For William Commanda, after the energetic awakening of the drum, the formal ceremony commenced with a smudging ceremony. Here, one of the four sacred herbs, for him generally sage, was burned in a shell, and his feather used to fan the smoke around a person. This gesture of cleansing, protecting, balancing, healing and focusing was accompanied by words in Algonquin. For podium type meetings, he smudged a group from afar. But he generally

preferred to have people assembled in a circle, and he liked to have them turn around in a full circle, following the direction of the Sun (east to south to west to north: the heliocentric directional spatial measure and not the western northsouth/eastwest dissection and demarcation). He thereby encompassed them in a circle of groundedness that also emanated temporal, cosmic and intangible connection in the smoke fanned into space by the mobility and temporality of the feather. As individuals drew the smoke to their eyes, ears, mouths and limbs, they were reminded to focus their senses on the matter at hand; thus, intangible, physical, mental and cosmic lines of communication were threaded together in this initial energetic threshold into the communications. This resonated for individuals and groups, irrespective of background, attesting to a reach to some common denominator in the psyche; Thumbadoo has witnessed the impact of William Commanda's smudging ceremony thousands of times with multiple diverse audiences. In addition, there was dress, sometimes traditional and iconic, sometimes not, but always, distinctively William Commanda's. In particular we note his use of his headbands, perhaps implying an authority from above or beyond, and rings, perhaps denoting energetic inter-connections^{xvii}.

As noted in his thesis, "When William Commanda spoke formally, he first brushed his lips with his feather, to ensure that only the best words would be spoken and he actually addressed his Creator first. His communications began with his Creator. This Creator was not the Indigenous version of God for him. Rather, Creator appeared to approximate the creative principle of life, and more beyond that. Consistent with his belief that his language evolved with life itself, he frequently noted that it contained no cursing words. He addressed his Creator (the creative force) in his Algonquin language, and then translated himself into English and French. One may ponder what role the feather played in his discourse, as he commenced his speech by brushing a feather across his lips. It has now become common knowledge that Indigenous Peoples consider the eagle a sacred bird, a direct link with Creator. An eagle feather, gifted to a person, found or acquired, is a symbolic statement that its bearer is a person of power, a person with direct link to Creator, or perhaps someone who needs healing or guidance [xviii]". He performance mapped this animation in innumerable ceremonies across the world by brushing the truth-speaking eagle feather to his lips. In his opening remarks at the UNESCO Millennium Conference on Art and Culture, he said, "I am in the earth, wind and waters; I am as the bird flies; and the wind blows and the water flows^{xix}". With his use of his feather, brushed to his lips, he asserted truth and earth-emergent authority in his own iconic way, and in a time-space moment of global inter-connection. More than a decade later, National Archives librarian Gwynneth Evans, a priest's daughter, informed me of his impact on her (personal conversation^{xx}).

Foucault's insights into humanism and sovereignty are also fascinating in their parallel to features in Indigenous thought. For example, in the brilliant phrase, elegant exchange, noted by Barrett^{xxi} he discusses humanism in western civilization as discourse institutionalized via Roman law - this required property owners to submit to laws supporting claim to property while at the same time fixing the right to property as possession of those in power. (William Commanda, for example, questioned the validity of the Royal Proclamation as the authority for Indigenous rights to land in North America, and to make that point in a humorous fashion, in the early seventies, he did the opening at a *Tour de France* event, and was reported in the French papers as planting an Indigenous flag with his blessing! Note, this was reported to us in 2005 by the parents of Maureen Bartholemew, videographer from France for the, *Good Enough for Two* Canoe video; thus the idea released still circulates in France; further, William Commanda's ancestors questioned this type of property rights discourse in the name of *Loup Gareau* - the unspeakable monstrosity - in *Circle of All Nations* archival records^{xxii}).

Amongst other things, William Commanda served as spiritual guide for the Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth in 1995-96, consistent with the Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt that he carried, and this walk is documented in an on-line book by Steven McFadden^{xxiii}. The migration motif of the prophecy resembles and articulates the epic and odesseyan. The prophecy traces the journey of his people over time and space, as charted in the metaphor and physicality, and it also articulates connectivity at multiple levels, including in the diverse group of walkers from both Canada and the United States. This is consistent with Turnbull's argument that "What nearly every culture seems to share, in one form or another, is the recognition and celebration of the hodological or

topokinetic in their mythologies, ontologies or epistemologies, and especially in their stories, songs and maps. This commonality is based in the connectivity of trails – the creation of meaning through marking and linking”^{xxiv}. Wayquay, a musician, captured the essence of the journey in song; two in particular have bearing on this research: “Grandfather sent me on a Walk, to make Medicine out of Pain”, and “Navigate^{xxv}”. They affirm the animative capacity and reach of his geo-cybernetic intent in the element of reciprocity demonstrated by her and countless other across the continent. The Sunbow Five Walk commenced on 23 June, 1995 at First Encounter Beach on the Atlantic Ocean in Massachusetts with the Seven Fires Prophecy Belt, and ended with the Belt being washed in the Pacific Ocean at Santa Barbara seven and a half months later on February 3, 1996. Indigenous language underpinned the journey. William Commanda affirmed the 84 Algonquian speaking nations that spanned the continent and noted that he was able to converse in his mother tongue with the Chumash Peoples in California. McFadden concludes the on-line Sunbow Five narrative with these words: “Evelyn Commanda, representing the Algonquin Nation, held one end of the Seven Fires Wampum Belt, and Liz Dominguez, representing the Chumash Nation, held the other end. Together, slowly and solemnly, they walked the belt out into the Pacific Ocean, where in a sacred manner they washed it with the waves^{xxvi}.”

After the *Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth*, William Commanda used a Condor feather regularly in public events. What was he asserting? Well, he said it directly many times: I did not create the Panama Canal. Neither did he create the division of Canada, the United States and Mexico, nor the separation of Quebec and Ontario. So instead, he performance mapped the geographical integrity of the continent by engaging everywhere himself. By affirming this relationality from the personal position, he dismissed objectification. But he also moved beyond subjectivity, instead invoking an Indigenous collective. In his use of the feather of the Eagle of the South, he asserted seamless interconnection across the Americas, animated within the context of a semiotic landscape also populated by Indigenous prophecy spanning space and time, in pentimento fashion. This was a reference to the prophecy that foretold the coming together of the Eagle and the Condor, the reunification of the people of North and South America. This manifested when Indigenous leaders of the south presented him with the Condor feather during the Sunbow Five Walk. These and other referential points create the unique iconography and deliberated messaging of the William Commanda discourse. The fact that certain elders now seek to assert the same attests to the discursive power of his technology. Effective execution, however, depends on the critical interweaving of authentic visible and invisible energetic elements – and therein lies the reach of the virtuoso shaman^{xxvii}. His unique personal, political and spiritual power established integrity and authenticity. Few others exude this energy, particularly over the long term. While others adopt similar practices, the absence of the critical Ginawaydaganuc inter-relationality at all levels becomes quickly evident in many instances; as noted earlier, it is interesting that this is referenced in the Seven Fires Prophecy as the presence of false prophets, with warnings about this challenge.

While William Commanda was a vibrant and prolific communicator, he became increasingly conscious of ensuring that he reached his diverse audiences with clear messages that they could ponder further. In auto ethnographic style, Thumbadoo shares the following reflections from her personal journals:

When we became acquainted, following his observation of my work hosting a series of Aboriginal Justice conferences, and the development of our relationship, he wanted formal speeches to be incorporated into his addresses. As he got older, these written speeches had to become increasingly succinct, and eventually only occupy one page of large text – perhaps he was preparing us for Facebook! A comparison of his written speech, and the spontaneous convocation address he delivered when he received his honorary doctorate degree from the University of Ottawa, confirms how aligned the ideas were. I note also a poignant moment, towards the end of his life. At this time, he was growing increasingly incapacitated by kidney disease and dialysis treatment, when treatment sometimes impacted the

clarity of his thought and delivery. He was involved in the opening for the revitalized Museum of Nature, and the bright sun prevented him from reading his notes. Nature was a passionate concern for him, so he had a lot he wanted to share, and he did. But this was an outdoors launch with the public at large on the street in the hot sun. Later he worried about not delivering all his key points effectively, despite the smudge and feather, prayer and oral words. This in part illustrates William Commanda's intense focus on his message, audience and relationality.

The reflection also helps us justify this admixture of academic, oral storytelling and contemporary Facebook messaging to bridge across vastly different knowledge bases and starting places in exploring his discourse.

4. Framing the Discourse in Wampum, Indigenous Language and Politics

William Commanda's performance mapping was embedded in and emergent from orality and narrative and a multiplicity of communication mediums. His storytelling mapping intermeshed his wampum heritage grounded in cosmic inclusiveness, his land-based mother tongue, and multi-lingual proficiency, deployment of multiple semiotic signifiers, and a multi-dimensional relationality. In retrospect, one can see how, at national and international levels, he levered Indigenous language into the foreground via wampum agency, and how he used it to assert and map his relationship with the continent of North America.

He presented wampum as language formally in a critically important historical and political moment. This was on the first day of the March 1987 final First Ministers' Conference on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters, convened by then Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney documented in the audio-visual medium of a National Film Board documentary^{xxviii}. In her research, de Lotbiniere notes that "amidst the power and privilege displayed so conspicuously by the government, there was something in the presence of the Keeper (of the Wampum) which demanded attention. It was unsettling, full of contradictions^{xxix}". His different approach "raised questions about the ways people from different cultures go about documenting history^{xxx}". Discussing frameworks within which to consider the language, style and content of such non-Western forms of historical discourse, she noted that "Price (1983) ... included the textual translations of historical narratives elicited in conversation with Saramaka elders. His book has the appearance of a collage: Saramaka narratives are interspersed with the ethnographer's own commentaries, which provide a Western style perspective on historical events described by the elders. Rather than considering the Indigenous form as representative of a 'primitive mentality', a mentality without a sense of history, such forms of analysis suggest that there are alternative ways of representing history which are of no less validity than the Western historical tradition. ... Analysis of the Keeper's narrative will show that the concept of self-government, as it was discussed at the constitutional round table, is linked in the Algonquin oral tradition to the people's sense of their relationship to the land; and that the wampum belts consecrate that relationship, through their association with historic treaties,^{xxxi}", intermeshing the 1700 Welcoming Three Figure Wampum Belt and the later Royal Proclamation of 1763 which acknowledge the sovereignty of the First Peoples of North America. This affirms why, as the Keeper had stated, "It (wampum) had to be brought out and it had to be told". With respect to land mapping, he informed the researcher that "We used to live at Quebec City itself. Then we came up through the St. Lawrence, and – first Sillery – we came to the fork of the Ottawa River and St. Lawrence ... some of these belts were made in that part ... one particular belt ... it took three years to make the belt, and it took three years to negotiate the boundaries between the United States and Great Britain^{xxxii}". De Lotbiniere observes that "The significance of this Jay Treaty is that it recognizes the status of Aboriginal peoples respecting their relationship with the British Crown: and in particular enshrines in European law respect for aboriginal rights. It was this relationship which the Keeper saw as being threatened by the move to repatriate the Constitution^{xxxiii}".

De Lotbiniere notes that, “without explicitly contesting the meanings given the wampum belt tradition by historians and anthropologists, Commanda acknowledged the literature – much of which he had obtained for his own collection – and, in the same breath, moved on to record the oral tradition. We suggest that in a sense, it was a process of re-appropriating the power of the word, and specifically the power to interpret and to give meaning to local practices requiring audiences to confront their own partial location, and to decenter the power to represent cultural others. He grounds this as indisputable: with respect to ceremony, “*head shaman, would come into a trance when they’re doing the ceremonies. But their words, when they’re talking, the Creator will be talking through them. What they say they don’t even remember when they wake up*”^{xxxiv}”.

In a similar enigmatic way, in 2011, when Canada’s Official Languages Commissioner visited him to “find out more about these (Indigenous) languages and get his opinion on how to better support their preservation”^{xxxv} William Commanda took charge of the agenda. It is noted in the related article entitled *The beginnings of a dialogue*, that he chose to talk to them about wampum, and the conclusion of the article states that, “By the end of our interview, we hadn’t really had the chance to learn Elder Commanda’s opinion on Aboriginal languages and their future. Rather, we let ourselves be guided by his stories, fascinated to discover a whole new perspective. His statements showed a profound desire to teach us the history, vision and culture of his people. The Commissioner was subsequently invited to meet with the teachers and Language Committee of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, a group that represents several Algonquin communities and whose members are passionate about reclaiming, protecting and revitalizing the language of their territory”^{xxxvi}”. This is illustrative of the precise cybernetic steering elements entrenched in the William Commanda discourse. With respect to the global dimension and Indigeneity and language, in 1993, William Commanda delivered the opening Indigenous presentation at the First United Nations Conference of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, *Cry of the Earth*; he spoke in Algonquin, delivered the messages of the Wampum Belts, had his assistant translate him and delivered a strong statement about the critical need to protect Indigenous languages^{xxxvii}. He himself was fluent in Algonquin, French and English. It is interesting to note that the United Nations has declared 2019 the Year for Indigenous Languages, and *Circle of All Nations* traces his influence on this action.

5. The Contemporary Cyber Discourse: Social Media, Cybernetics and Cybercartography

While cyber is a word associated with a new phenomenon, the internet, it is actually derived of the ancient Greek roots of I steer, drive, guide, act as a pilot, implying being good at steering, being a good pilot, linked with notion of governing that Plato introduced in his discussions of the art of science and rearticulated in the 1830s with the French *cybernétique* as the art of governing. We suggest that this cyber approach informed the Commanda discursive strategy. The issues of Indigenous wisdom, environmental stewardship, social justice and racial harmony and peace-building were formally identified as the critical priorities of the Circle of All Nations over two decades ago, and they continue to inform and guide what is now defined as the legacy work. The following ideas were presented in the Thumbadoo thesis in 2017: this cyber domain permits a new means to scrutinize the ongoing relevance of the Commanda approach to art and creativity, the spiritual dimension, environment, peace and related social justice matters, and his teaching and knowledge sharing and knowledge generating capacity through exploration of:

- a) land based language and symbolic imagery (petroglyphs, pictographs, canoe motifs, as well as contemporary contributions of his Circle of All Nations community);
- b) William Commanda’s use of the Circle of All Nations as a zone of encounter and permeability to address incommensurability and facilitate respectful dialogue on challenging matters of contemporary importance;

- c) photographic reflection on the intangible yet compelling voice of space and place, giving Laws of Nature their esoteric presence in academic study; and
- d) animated and constant contemporary social media engagement with William Commanda and his ideas^{xxxviii}.

In addition to his own organization of conferences and events to share his messages from the mid-fifties, William Commanda travelled globally extensively throughout his life, and with growing urgency towards the end of his life, to register his concerns and warnings about the looming environmental, Indigenous and human crises. Social media was used extensively to animate the Commanda discourse. From the time of the creation of his first website in 2000 and the *Circle of All Nations* on-line blog posts, he has been known as the dot.com techno elder, and from 2009, he was part of the emerging Facebook world. Since his death, *Circle of All Nations* has maintained several Facebook pages to inform the public of his environmental and peace building passions. It has hosted regular events aligned with cosmic cycles of the solstices and equinoxes, and other priorities. Activities are designed to reach a diversity of people, attract new people, profile co-created efforts, and articulate the relational priorities and potential of the *Circle of All Nations*.

Ironically, the current global Coronavirus 19 crises has extended the cyber capacity, potential and reach of the Commanda/*Circle of All Nations* discourse tremendously in both dynamic and archival ways, and new outreach involving agency and deliberated outreach includes an informal but focused educational component. *Circle of All Nations* had hosted several globally public online events, with grassroots and academic presenters, power point presentations and archival video to advance transformational Indigenous/grassroots/organizational and academic learning and knowledge generation integration. The cybernetic steering elements of the Commanda discourse and legacy are visible here and the initial reach to well over 5000 people during the months of June and July 2020 is indicative of the continued interest in the work and the vitality of the discourse; availability of the live videos (on <https://www.facebook.com/circleofallnations/>) extend the discourse into the foreseeable future and potentially to new audiences; in fact, already, new players are expressing interest this discourse; future research will focus on innovations in the underlining and evolving discursive platform. In Flyvbjerg's discussion of Foucauldian ideas of power, knowledge and discourse, he points out that one ought not view the universe as divided into accepted and excluded discourse, dominant and dominated discourses, but rather, one must note that all societies have their regimes of *truth*; thus, one must also note the multiplicity of discursive elements put into operation in various strategies – it is the distribution of this multiplicity of discursive elements that must be reconstructed in the study of power, noting what is articulated and what is invisible and what relations are inherent in the field^{xxxix}. Drawing on Waitt's reference to a mediating lens mentioned earlier, and the need for dynamic and responsive (versus mechanistic) reflexivity, the image we associate with the study of discourse analysis is a kaleidoscope with a particular range of color chips reflected and refracted by the constantly shifting environmental context (light, movement, people and actants) such that elements are constantly shifting and emergent; this may be likened to the Foucauldian dispersion; further, new discourse may also be evolving within multiple emergent combinations.

While Cybernetics permits a temporal/spatial examination of the Commanda discourse, particularly in digital social media, Cybercartography opens doors to the creation of a living archive in an innovative digital atlas platform. Taylor introduced the term Cybercartography at the 1997 International Cartographic Conference in Stockholm, to describe the transformative innovations taking place in the field, stating “Cybercartography will see cartography applied to a much wider range of topics than has traditionally been the case [...] It will also utilize an increasing range of emerging media forms and telecommunications networks such as the Internet and the World Wide Web. It will be multidimensional cartography using multimedia formats and is more likely to be an integral part of an information package than a stand-alone product. Cybercartography will also be highly interactive and engage the user in new ways. In organizational terms, it will see new partnerships being created between national mapping organizations, the private sector and educational institutions and the products of Cybercartography are likely to be compiled by individuals from very different disciplines and professional perspectives working together^{xl}”. By 2003, Taylor

had articulated Cybercartography as “the organization, presentation, analysis and communication of spatially referenced information on a wide range of topics of interest and use to society in an interactive, dynamic, multimedia, multi-sensory format, with the use of multimedia and multimodal interface^{xli}”.

Under Taylor’s leadership, the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre (GCRC <https://gcr.ccarleton.ca>) at Carleton University has been working in partnership with Indigenous communities, national and international organizations, academic institutions and governments to create cybercartographic atlases. The cybercartographic atlas is quite different from a traditional atlas. It uses location as an integrating mechanism for all kinds of information in multimedia formats, using the innovative Nunaliit (“community” in Inuktitut) open source software framework (<https://nunaliit.org>), developed by the GCRC team in cooperation with its partners. In 2019, Cybercartography was redefined as “... a complex, holistic, user centered process which applies location-based technologies to the analysis of topics of interest to society and the presentation of the results in innovative ways through cybercartographic atlases. A cybercartographic atlas is a metaphor for a range of qualitative and quantitative information linked by location and displayed in innovative, interactive multimodal and multisensory format^{xlii}. The process of creating these atlases is as important, if not more so, than the product. This processual feature is an important addition to Cybercartography and is a direct result of working with many Indigenous groups in the creation of community-based atlases; digital atlas creation integrates strong process oriented elements in mapping, and these in turn strengthen the conceptual foundation of Cybercartography. Over the course of two decades, Cybercartography has evolved as an innovative scholastic domain integrating theory, practice and technological development in the creation of digital atlases that meet a wide range of research and communication needs.

Work is now well underway to create the *Commanda Circle of All Nations Atlas* to serve as a repository of the discourse and key discursive elements of his thinking, knowledge, work, history and legacy in the academy.

Conclusion

We suggest that in his creation of the Circle of All Nations as a bridge between Indigenous thinking and diverse other societies with their regimes of truth, William Commanda animated a new type of discourse; because his truth was grounded in the Laws of Nature and relationality with Mother Earth, it spoke with an authenticity that reverberated with a diverse range of people; as such, he appears to have introduced a new dimension to notions of truth, knowledge, power and truth effects. He advanced new ideas and thinking on Indigenous environmental stewardship through articulation of a vital relationship with a living and powerful Mother Earth, ideas now deemed increasingly relevant by many in a world of climate change, extreme weather, unprecedented extinction of species, violence and global pandemic.

William Commanda located his discourse in Law of Nature semantics, around a conceptual Circle of All Nations version of a medicine wheel, presented graphically to the public at large since 2000; comprehensive records of his work are held in the Circle of All Nations and Asinabka website archives (www.circleofallnations.ca; www.asinabka.com), and have been on-line since 2000. William Commanda and his Circle of All Nations work have also been a vibrant presence on Facebook social media since 2009 in the several Facebook pages^{xliii}. His presence also tangible on the web at large, as input by countless diverse others. As such, many elements of his knowledge and thinking have already been integrated in the thinking of an inestimable number of people at large to date. In an age of global environmental crisis that is also awakening to the Indigenous voice, there appears to be both tremendous potential and genuine and urgent need for the inclusion of William Commanda’s discursive thinking, knowledge and knowledge generation approaches in academic studies on the environment and relational issues.

End Notes

ⁱ R. V. Thumbadoo and D. R. F. Taylor, "Indigenous Elder William Commanda, Cognitive Cartography and Cybercartography", In *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Science* (IJAHSS) ISSN: 2693-2547 (Print), 2693-2555 (Online)

ⁱⁱ R. V. Thumbadoo, *2017 Doctoral Thesis. Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations. The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William* (<https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fcd77b06>):21, 22.

ⁱⁱⁱ M. Foucault, The order of discourse. In Young, R. (ed.) *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader*. (London: Routledge, 1981: 48 – 79.

^{iv} G. Waitt, "Doing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis – Revealing Social Identities," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (3rd ed.), ed. Iain Hay. (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010): 216.

^v M. Barrett, *The Politics of Truth From Marx to Foucault*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991): 128.

^{vi} T. Cresswell, "Discourse". *2009 International encyclopaedia of human geography*. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009): 211 – 214.

^{vii} M. Barrett, *The Politics of Truth From Marx to Foucault*. Stanford, California. (Stanford University Press, 1991): 124, 125.

^{viii} M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by C. Gordon. (Pantheon, 1980).

^{ix} G. Waitt, "Doing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis – Revealing Social Identities," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (3rd ed.), ed. Iain Hay. (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010): 216.

^x G. Waitt, "Doing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis – Revealing Social Identities," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (3rd ed.), ed. Iain Hay. (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010).

^{xi} T. Cresswell, "Discourse". *2009 International encyclopaedia of human geography*. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009): 213.

^{xii} R. V. Thumbadoo, *2017 Doctoral Thesis. Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations. The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William* (<https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fcd77b06>): 54.

^{xiii} G. Waitt, "Doing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis – Revealing Social Identities," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (3rd ed.), ed. Iain Hay. (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010).

^{xiv} E. Casti and D. R. F. Taylor, series ed., *Reflexive Cartography: A New Perspective on Mapping* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015).

^{xv} E. Casti and D. R. F. Taylor, series ed., *Reflexive Cartography: A New Perspective on Mapping* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), xiv.

^{xvi} M. Barrett, *The Politics of Truth From Marx to Foucault*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991): 130 – 133.

^{xvii} R. V. Thumbadoo, *Learning From a Kindergarten Dropout* (Ottawa, Ontario: Circle of all Nations, 2005), 91- 92.

^{xviii} R. V. Thumbadoo, "Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations: The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda" (PhD thesis, Carleton University, 2017), 92, <https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fcd77b06>.

^{xix} R. V. Thumbadoo, *Learning From a Kindergarten Dropout* (Ottawa, Ontario: Circle of all Nations, 2005), 35.

^{xx} Evans, Personal Conversation (2012).

^{xxi} M. Barrett, *The Politics of Truth From Marx to Foucault*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991): 147.

^{xxii} www.circleofallnations.ca – accessed July 2020.

^{xxiii} Steven McFadden, "Author's note - Odyssey of the 8th Fire," last modified 2007, <https://8thfire.net/authors.html>.

^{xxiv} David Turnbull, "Maps Narratives and Trails: Performativity, Hodology and Distributed Knowledges in Complex Adaptive Systems – an Approach to Emergent Mapping," *Geographical Research* v. 45, no. 2 (2007): 140 - 149.

^{xxv} Wayquay *Tribal Grind*. (Hard Soul Recording Studio, New York 1997) <https://www.allmusic.com/album/tribal-grind-mw0000030271>.

^{xxvi} Steven McFadden, "Author's note - Odyssey of the 8th Fire," last modified 2007, <https://8thfire.net/authors.html>.

^{xxvii} R. V. Thumbadoo, "Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations: The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda" (PhD thesis, Carleton University, 2017), 92 - 93, <https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fcd77b06>.

^{xxviii} National Film Board of Canada (1987): *Archives (on video) of the Fourth Constitutional Conference, Ottawa, March 26 – 27, 1987*.

^{xxix} P. Joly de Lotbiniere, "Of Wampum and Little People: Historical Narratives Regarding the Algonquin Wampum Record," in *The Algonquins*, ed. Daniel Clement. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996), 92 - 93.

^{xxx} P. Joly de Lotbiniere, "Of Wampum and Little People: Historical Narratives Regarding the Algonquin Wampum Record," in *The Algonquins*, ed. Daniel Clement. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996), 94.

^{xxxi} P. Joly de Lotbiniere, "Of Wampum and Little People: Historical Narratives Regarding the Algonquin Wampum Record," in *The Algonquins*, ed. Daniel Clement. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996), 95-96.

^{xxxii} W. Commanda (April 1989), quoted in Pauline Joly de Lotbiniere, "Of Wampum and Little People: Historical Narratives Regarding the Algonquin Wampum Record," in *The Algonquins*, ed. Daniel Clement. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996), 101.

^{xxxiii} P. Joly de Lotbiniere, "Of Wampum and Little People: Historical Narratives Regarding the Algonquin Wampum Record," in *The Algonquins*, ed. Daniel Clement (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996), 101.

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^{xxxv} "The beginnings of a dialogue," Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, accessed June 2019, https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/cyberbulletin_newsletter/2011/may-24

^{xxxvi} “The beginnings of a dialogue,” Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, accessed June 2019, https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/cyberbulletin_newsletter/2011/may-24

^{xxxvii} William Commanda, “Cry of the Earth,” Betsy Stang, January 3, 2013, video, 1:13:24, accessed June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxdR4ZyOWPA&feature=youtu.be>.

^{xxxviii} R. V. Thumbadoo, 2017 *Doctoral Thesis. Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations. The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda* (<https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fd77b06>): 56, 57.

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^{xxxix} B. Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter* (New York, USA, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

^{xl} Taylor, D. R. F., “Maps and Mapping in the Information Era. In: Proceedings of the 18th ICA International Cartographic Conference” ICC 97 Stockholm Sweden Vol. 1 Ottoson, L. (Ed.), Gavle, (Swedish Cartographic Society, 1997): 3-10.

^{xli} D. R. F. Taylor, "The Concept of Cybercartography," in *Maps and the Internet*, ed. M.P. Peterson. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2003): 404

^{xlii} D. R. F. Taylor, “Cybercartography Revisited” In: Taylor, D. R. F., Anonby, E. and Murasugi, K. *Further Developments in the Theory and Practice of Cybercartography*. (San Diego, Elsevier, 2019): 4.

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