Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

AMY BECKER

BA (University of Victoria, 2014)

“Mapping the Unmappable in Indigenous Digital Cartographies”

Department of Anthropology

Friday, April 13, 2018
10:00 A.M.
Cornett Building
Room A319

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Brian Thom, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

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Dr. Feng Xu, Department of Political Science, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This thesis draws on a community-engaged digital-mapping project with the Vancouver Island Coast Salish community of the Stz'uminus First Nation. In this paper, I discuss the ways in which conventional cartographic representations of Indigenous peoples are laden with methodological and visual assumptions that position Indigenous peoples’ perspectives, stories, and experiences within test-, proof-, and boundary-driven legal and Eurocentric contexts. In contrast, I frame this project’s methodology and digital mapping tools as an effort to map a depth of place, the emotional, spiritual, experiential, and kin-based cultural context that is routinely glossed over in conventional mapping practices. I argue elders’ place-based stories, when recorded on video and embedded in a digital map, produce a space for the “unmappable,” that which cannot, or will not, be expressed within the constructs of a static two-dimensional map. However, alongside support for this mapping project was a refusal to steep maps too deeply in cultural context for a public audience. I detail the conversations that emerged in response to a set of deeply spiritual, cultural, and personal stories to mark how the presence of Coast Salish law, customs, power structures, varying intra-community perspectives, and refusal came to bear on the production of “blank space” (interpreted colonially and legally as terra nullius) in this project’s cartographic representation. Finally, I conclude that Coast Salish sharing customs are embedded within the networks of Coast Salish customary legal traditions, which fundamentally affects tensions that arise between storytelling and digital mapping technologies, academic and community accountabilities, and collective and individual consent.