Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University of Victoria, 2013)
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“Rambunctious Geographies: Intimate Encounters, Algorhythmics, and Making the Blockchain Real”

Department of Geography

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3:00 P.M.
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Department of Geography, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Simon Springer, Department of Geography, UVic (Member)
Dr. Pamela Moss, Human and Social Development, UVic (Outside Member)

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Abstract

Blockchains, like many “disruptive” digital media, continue to garner significant academic and popular attention about what they are. Recent critical provocations in geography and cognate disciplines shift lines of enquiry to interrogate the material realities of digital technologies, emphasizing instead how they are lived. Inspired by critical and feminist thinking, the primary task of this dissertation is to follow the latter mode of analysis and present a critical cartography of blockchains, loosely defined. The critical cartography presented in this study sketches a conceptual and methodological map of context-specific and intimate blockchains practices I participated in and experienced from 2013-2020, and in a mostly Canadian context. I construct this cartography by using a variety of autobiographical and ethnographic methods that are sometimes buttressed by more conventional qualitative methods. Research reveals that blockchains have the capacity to become economic in a diversity of ways, enacting multiple rowdy characteristics of capitalism, a phenomenon I term rambunctious capitalism. Rambunctious economic flows actualizing through blockchains rely on different situations of power to enact nomadic subject/ivities in a variety of spatial, temporal, and material contexts. Specifically, the blockchain practices addressed in this dissertation highlight the embodiment of joyful moments for a pregnant body working in Toronto’s crypto-economy, the algorhythmic impacts of blockchain hard fork events, where code participates in the instantiation of diverse temporalities that produce uneven geographies, and the materialization of Canadian policy discourses about blockchains that position and, in some cases, implement these media as smart solutions to civic service delivery. Findings presented throughout this study contribute to feminist and digital geographies by offering autobiographical, ethnographic, and intimate accounts of blockchains, and how they are practiced as lived and multiple realities. In addition, this dissertation also adds ethnographic research to the now expansive multi-disciplinary scholarship on blockchains and cryptocurrencies to understand how these media operate in specific contexts.

Keywords: blockchains; critical cartography; economization; digital geographies; feminist geographies