THE ETHNOGRAPHY LAB

The Ethnography Lab is a University of Toronto Anthropology initiative started in September 2014 to promote ethnographic research methods and practice inside and outside the university.

The Lab acts as a resource centre for the university community by providing intellectual and physical space for those exploring ethnography or seeking to deepen its role in their research work. Over time, the Lab will provide knowledge, technical resources and connections to cross-disciplinary ethnographers from the university, the public and private sector, and the community. The Ethnography Lab seeks to develop contacts with interested parties from all backgrounds and institutional contexts.

The Lab explores the craft and impact of ethnography in the contemporary world from a variety of different perspectives. Themes of interest include Applied Ethnography, Public Ethnography, the Ethnography of Infrastructures and the Kensington Market Research Project.

WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

The craft of ethnography has two poles. On the one hand, it is an assemblage of tools used for conducting research in social and cultural settings. These include methods such as participant observation, interviewing, and writing field notes. The emphasis is on collecting high quality data from long-term immersion in a specific cultural setting.

On the other hand, there is the communication of research to various publics through writing, filmmaking, storytelling, photography and so on. The Ethnography Lab provides a home for experimentation, learning, research and inquiry focusing on either or both of these poles.

THE KENSINGTON MARKET PROJECT

The Kensington Market Research Project (KMRP) aims to produce an unprecedented body of rich and detailed knowledge about Toronto’s most celebrated multicultural heritage district. Bordered by China Town and adjacent to the University of Toronto’s downtown campus, Kensington Market boasts the city’s best known enclave of social diversity and counter-culture nestled in a backdrop of Victorian-era row-houses converted to street-level shops. Designated as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2006 for its colourful history of transformation from a 19th century immigrant refuge, to a Jewish market neighbourhood, to its current vibrant tapestry of independently owned shops and residences, Kensington Market is strongly valued both locally and nationally.

This project, the first of its kind, uses ethnography to study in-depth the market in an age of large-scale urban transformation. As downtown Toronto faces the encroachment of big corporate retailers, the impending conversion of public housing into private condominiums, and the expansion of Toronto Western Hospital, the Kensington Market Research Project strives to document the inevitable changes to the market.

Over the course of years to come, the project will provide a publicly accessible archive of rich and detailed data to be used in evidence-based policy decision making, and to make visible the social complexity of this unique Toronto site.

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