Getting Out in The Field, Asking New Questions

By Helena Krobath

It's mid-afternoon and I'm standing in the woods at Rolley Lake, holding my portable field recorder. Every bump of my hand will be recorded as a loud creak, so I stand as still as possible. I hear a birdcall I don't recognize, reverberating through wet leaves. The Scouts troop starts yapping like coyotes. Another group across the lake howls back, creating a tangle of lovely echoes. A squirrel skitters out of the shrubbery. Planes drone above. A metal garbage lid slams shut.

From beside the creek, my young nephew tells another kid that we are "having sound." That's a delicious way to put it—just like having dinner. We use headphones with recorders to amplify noises, so we can hear further. Focusing this way brings the environment to life with shapes we didn't notice before.

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I research Mission's recreational forests and how they relate to my identity, local community, history, and politics. This research means long reading sessions, but luckily it also means outdoor fieldwork. In forest parks like Rolley and Hayward, I gather information using my senses—ears, eyes, nose, hands—and various recording devices, such as microphones, cameras, and sketchpads.

Later, I rework my field recordings to make multimedia art that asks questions about nature management and local space. Questioning the placement of a road or fence, the origin of a stream, or changes in a map can introduce new knowledge about ecology, development, colonial history, and how people think about land.

Doing sensory fieldwork doesn't require much equipment or money. I just need access to a place I want to observe and a way to take down impressions. It also takes patience to let sounds and sights of an environment build up in my senses over time, revealing new details and dynamics.

Deep listening and other sensory exercises can be useful for opening new perspectives. I also incorporate art-making (on and off-site) to help me think differently about my experiences and find research leads. Other multimedia field practices can include site mapping, citizen science and data collection, and historical documentation.

If you're interested in forming a field study project of your own, many soundscape graphs, ecological observation sheets, opensource GPS maps (including sound maps), and eco-art projects are available online to use as models.

Streams at Rolley Lake, Mission BC

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What you observe might lead you to examine infrastructure (like water pipes or garbage removal) or to follow a passing shipment across the world. It might take you into the past (asking where a boundary or structure came from) or into the future (researching a new public project).

I've found that by observing surroundings deeply and investigating them, I can freshly notice factors that create the world and produce public projects. This is powerful knowledge. It shapes how we understand our experience as local inhabitants, our role in choosing which ideas are useful, and where to put our energy as we get involved in land and resource management. ◊

Did you know? Aluminum can be recycled continuously, as in forever. Recycling 1 aluminum can save enough energy to run our TVs for at least 3 hours. (www.theworldcounts.ca)

Microbeads and Our Environment

By Brianne Armstrong

Microbeads are small, synthetic, polymer particles which can be used in personal care products such as scrubs, bath products, facial cleansers and toothpastes. They are also found in products such as cleaners and printer toner. They can be used as abrasive media for plastic blasting, for oil and gas exploration, for textile printing, for automotive moulding, as well as for anti slip products and for various medical applications.

Many microbeads are released into the water systems, even after wastewater treatment, due to their small size and the amount of time they take to break down. Even microbeads from personal care products make their way into waste water treatment facilities because they are merely washed off and sent down the drain.

Studies have shown that microbeads are found both in the environment as well as in birds, mammals and aquatic species. Microbeads have been found in the ice cores in the Atlantic Ocean as well as the sediment cores of Lake Ontario, and throughout our oceans. Microbeads have been found in the digestive system of a variety of bird species as well as in the digestion system of seals, whales and sharks. These animals are also ingesting microbeads through

Products That Can Cause Microplastic Pollution

Exfoliating facial scrubs

Blackhead "eraser" scrubs

Exfoliating body washes

Some foot scrubs

Soaps

Toothpastes

Over-the-counter drugs

Anti-aging creams

Sunscreen