

## An Inaudible Melody

Colleen Kocer

My eyes begin to hurt as I realize that the rapid movement of the windshield wipers cannot substitute for my own blinking. Hands clenched around the wheel, I'm sure I look like a mad woman as I make the turn down the Mountlake Cut. Construction workers outside my window are also squinting in an attempt to avoid the murky water that paints their clothing with saturation. I pity them, along with the homeless man on the corner-the same one I see everyday on my way to school. He stands there, soaking wet with long, misshapen curls plastered to his unshaven face, smiling to show the world what few teeth he has left. He rocks to the dilapidated beat of cars clamoring against the metal grating, and dances to the inaudible melody of the city.

Averting my eyes from this unwanted spectacle of enthusiasm, the scowl on my face looks through the fog of my windshield at the neighborhood around me. Fremont exudes the laid-back, eco-friendly, and extreme leftist culture that Seattle is known for. I splash through the soggy streets that in the summer is home to the Fremont Parade - an event where naked cyclists are chased by laughing police officers and bearded drag queens beg you to sign a petition for the legalization of marijuana. In a month or two, these streets will be packed with cars of purple-and-gold painted fans waiting to enter the roar of Husky stadium. But now, the air smells of fish, coffee, and rain. It's a smell that fills me up as I open the car door, slamming it shut with a certain conviction that conveys my slightly less-than-perfect day.

I walk along the gravel walkways that weave between the huge, ugly structures eroded with time and rusted with years of this rain. The hideous, old gas structures once served as a gasification plant for Seattle Gas Light Company in the early 1900s. And with the chemical waste deposits that tainted the soil and turned the grass a toxic brown, it was said nothing would

ever come of this place. With this mass of rusted piping stretching high into the grey air, it is clear that the site was never intended for visitors. It was to be forgotten and not missed.

But the soil was cleaned, the grass replanted, and a truly original park was established. Void of practical application, these massive constructions of metal now serve no other purpose but to draw nostalgic locals and curious foreigners. Nozzles and levers poke from behind conspicuous metal, silenced after years of rest, giving off the same eeriness, I can imagine, as a field of fallen soldiers. Gasworks Park, situated in this hub of quirkiness along Lake Union, is a collision of worlds: the harsh industrial era that put Seattle on the map, the innocence of children in summer who crawl over the orange monsters like monkeys, and the ability of humanity to see beauty in mistake and monstrosity.

Rain is definitely not uncommon to this place, but today the grass is flooded with water, as if it is adamantly refusing to soak it up any longer. I close my eyes, brush off the water from my cold cheeks, and see through closed lids a pair of sailboats gliding gracefully into the shadow of the bridge across the water. I feel a sweeping rush of wind as a kite lands just a few feet away and an elderly couple comes hobbling after it. In the distance I hear laughter from the playground as children discard any notions of growing older. But as I open my eyes, I feel the discomfort of wet jeans. The underbelly of the Fremont Bridge ahead bares shameful obscenities written along rust, abandoned war protest signs, and empty beer cans - testaments to contemporary rebellion and unrest.

Above the bridge and in the distance is a striking juxtaposition of nature and man. On one side of my view is a vision of Mount Rainier, veiled in mysterious gray and green; a clear testament to clean air and cold water. On the other side, I see the odd jungle of sheet metal and red plastic: the Experience Music Project. When it was designed, this museum of music was

supposed to look like a smashed guitar from a bird's-eye view, but was left a forsaken idea in the light of architectural reality. Ranked by Forbes magazine as one of the world's 10 ugliest buildings, the shadow of the Space Needle shamefully hides the unfinished mess.

Quickly closing my eyes again, I think back to the days of soggy childhood soccer practices, when it rained so hard we could barely see our own feet as they sloshed through soaked socks and muddy cleats. We would roll in the mud and laugh until our red noses yielded to shivers. We looked forward to these practices that left us exhausted, soaked, and ill. The rain made us happy.

A Japanese photographer, Masaru Emoto, once conducted a study where he examined the effects of emotion on the molecular structure of water. He taped various Chinese symbols such as “Love,” “Thank you,” and “War” to identical bottles of water. After a day or so, the molecular structures of the water crystals reflected the words they were paired with: under a microscope, the “War” bottle had crystals that looked like misshapen blobs, while the “Love” bottle displayed beautifully intricate designs fit for art. This whole thing makes me wonder. What would the water that dripped from our shin guards and heavy ponytails have looked like? Instead of merely reacting to our circumstance, is it possible that we in fact were responsible for affecting the chemical properties of the water that hit our faces? Maybe we transformed the water from “War” to “Love.” Maybe instead of the rain making us happy, we made the rain happy.

I open my eyes, take off my hood, and allow my curly hair to catch the best of this torrential downpour. The mist rising off the gently rippling glass of the lake makes the abandoned underbelly of the bridge a striking tableau. Like a thought-provoking satire, the image of abandoned fervor and rusted words is also beautiful in its message. It speaks to the efforts of Seattle's youth to better the state of our country - to make a mark against unnecessary violence. It

tells the story of a situation so ugly that the only thing left is to recognize the beauty of the efforts to better it. Drops of rain are dreaded as they fall, but beautifully praised as they join the lake below.

I look around and realize the things that were ugly suddenly are not: gas structures rusty and obnoxious, soil contaminated with naïveté and ignorance, a skyline sored by failed and forgotten dreams, a war without faith or justice, and the thresholds of age that sever belief. For some reason, these things have reached a point of such severe ugliness that they become beautiful-sentimental, even.

Looking again at the brown masses of rust to my left, and then to the painful red blob across the water in front of me, I again think of the homeless man. He nods his head to the rhythm of young giggles rolling through soggy grass; swings his decrepit legs to the offbeat tunes of Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Jimi Hendrix; and taps his wrinkled fingers to the splashes of drops against littered coffee cups. And with that scruffy jaw and toothless mouth, he smiles in the rain.