

Assignment 5
Rain Will Fall
Anastasi a Rodri guez

the raindrop and...

the roads

A raindrop falls from the sky, the first of a winter flurry. Its target is yet unclear. Falling, it slowly zooms in on the ground below, and features of the surface become less and less muddled. The raindrop sees its target now. It is an "x" straight ahead marked in black and murky blues and greens. As it gets closer, though, the raindrop realizes that there are two layers to this "x". As it perceives the difference in depth, the raindrop can finally judge that the "x" is made of a shorter line, connecting a park to a river, and a longer line, extending out far from the city. By now the raindrop is too close to see the end of these lines, and it focuses on the journey ahead, making final preparations for its landing. The raindrop follows its natural instincts and aims for the lower depth of the "x". This lower layer has two distinct textures. One half is smooth, dark, and seemingly impenetrable. It is the Mass Pike. The other half is seemingly perforated, with many smaller pieces spanning two long elements. This is a major railroad track. One glimpse of the water through the cracks of the track tells the raindrop that this is where his destiny lies. The body of water, the

biggest magnet for any raindrop, awaits the falling speck under the tracks with patience, knowing that somehow, if not immediately, the raindrop would find its way there. A gust of wind alters these plans and blows the raindrop onto the upper layer of the "x", a bridge over the Mass Pike. Feeling stranded on a surface high above the water, the raindrop examines the periphery. All that are visible are the skies above, fast cars zooming by, guarding walls, the curbside, and the flat, dark surface of the road. The river is the raindrop's ultimate destination despite any intermediate obstacles presented by forces of nature or implementations of man and it knows this.

The raindrop landed in the Back Bay of Boston on a bridge that connects Boylston Street in the Back Bay Fens to Storrow Drive, a major road along the Charles Road. The bridge stems off of Boylston Street near the Fens to cross Ipswich Street, the railroad tracks, which stretch from South Station to the countryside, the Mass Pike, Commonwealth Avenue, and Beacon Street. Aside from these roads, the bridge crosses a very important tributary to the Charles River, the Muddy River. This river is one of the few clues as to what this land was like before it was developed into the residential area and transportation corridor it exists as today.

Less than two centuries ago, no rigid demarcations on the land, such as roads and city blocks, could be seen from 10 yards high, much less a mile. This area of the Muddy River was then still part of the Charles River. Dry land was limited to a thin peninsula south of the Charles River connecting Boston, a plot of land composed of three dominant hills and a commons, to the mainland. All around this peninsula were mud flats and a great salt meadow where the Back Bay is now. Water falling



on this same spot would have met only water with no intermediate carnivals of landfill and elevated roadways or multistory homes and hotels.

Back on the bridge, the raindrop ponders how unnatural its position feels. A car passes overhead and its tire squeezes the raindrop towards the curb. Here the raindrop senses the slope of the bridge and begins to move slowly downward. Nature is taking its course. Picking up speed, the raindrop sees the ramp ahead and Commonwealth Avenue down below. It passes a puddle of raindrops dancing with sand and pebbles in a large pothole just before it displaces its own small pebble from the roadbed. Off to the side past the curb, another stream of rain is spouting towards the sidewalk where it leaks through the expansion joint and down a massive concrete column, an effort that slowly exposes more rebar. Staying on the ramp, the raindrop races the cars downhill on the slick pavement until it splashes into a gigantic pool of water at the base of the bridge. But the journey is not over. The pool is not entirely stagnant but flows towards an area where the sidewalk has been washed out. Down a steep dirt bank the raindrop goes, past pebbles and pipes, under the ramp of the bridge, past a pile of trash and a discarded bottle of beer, in between someone's old shoe and dirty blanket, over a stony surface, and finally into the Muddy River. The natural instinct of the water droplet was to find the body of water waiting for it at a lower elevation, and nature deemed it possible with gravity and motion.



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Another raindrop follows, seeing much of the same scenery as the first raindrop on its descent from the clouds. This time no gust of wind changes its course and the raindrop bypasses the elevated roadways. Its target is also instinctively the Muddy River below. Aiming for the water, which is visible through the spaces between the beams of the railroad tracks, the raindrop hits metal instead. The cold steel surface momentarily slows the raindrop. It is wintertime in Boston and while temperatures are not at freezing today, the sun is hiding behind the rain clouds of sparse precipitation, and the steel is in a shadow and cools the raindrop for a few seconds. The raindrop seizes this opportunity to investigate its landing pad. An overwhelming sound of cars speeding past on the adjacent highway is audible from the railroad tracks. On the other side of the tracks, an elegant edifice looks onward, the Hotel Fensgate. It is close enough to the tracks that the raindrop can almost imagine a time when this building had more to do with the railroad tracks as it does now. The adjacency suggests that there was once a more intimate relationship between the railroad and the nearby buildings, when



once more as a dark shadow passes on the
tracks, the commuter train from Needham.

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Just down the road and up the Muddy River, a third raindrop plummets to a footbridge in the Fens. A man and his dog run by as an old couple stroll across in the opposite direction. The setting is calm and quiet, with only a distant rumbling of vehicles muted by the sound of water trickling through rocks below the footbridge. In the spring time, the sound of laughter and cheering echoes from the sports fields nearby along with quacking of ducks and honking of geese. Basketball players hoop it up in the sun while studious college students lounge in the sun on the grass. This is the Fens, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 1800s as part of a string of parks called the Emerald Necklace through the city of Boston. The area around the Muddy River experienced problems with flooding and unsanitary conditions before Olmsted's improvement plan for the health and sanitation of Boston was implemented. The focus of improving the Fens and the Muddy River was to increase water capacity in the event of a flood. The Muddy River would be the intended destination for rainfall throughout the area. This raindrop is sitting in the actual flood basin for the Back Bays, which is masked



as a park and green space in the middle of a densely developed city. Looking around, the raindrop senses a slope upward in every direction up to the roads and houses. It can feel that the river is close and continues its quest in that direction. Instinct and gravity bring the raindrop down the footbridge and into a pile of leaves. Now on the bank, it sees a straight shot into the Muddy River and takes that path, but passes some unnatural objects along the way. Dirty candy wrappers, rusted coke cans, and old pieces of paper napkins are scattered along the bank, traces of a picnic. Some of the wrappers appear to also be moving down the banks, pushed by streams of water on their way to the Muddy River. Once in the river, the raindrop is dismayed to encounter other bits of litter and junk floating along or sinking to the murky bottom. Nonetheless, the raindrop floats its way down the river, enjoying the ride as best as it can.

After passing under a few small footbridges, the raindrop feels the river slow down near a larger bridge, Boylston Street. There seems to be a traffic jam downstream with shopping carts, tree branches, more litter, and beer bottles. The holdup is a large, neon-orange net. The river has become dumping grounds for trash and loose foliage. The loose foliage is floating in the river partly due to the efforts to improve the landscape and maintain the trees along the banks. Looking underwater to the bottom of the riverbed, the raindrop sees large, unnatural gouges in the mud, a sign of digging. The digging does not seem to be the only unnatural aspect to this riverbed. The banks are covered with large stones and the profile of the river is very symmetrical. It was deeper when the Muddy River was first rerouted through here, but over time the riverbed rose with



buildup of mud and sediment washed into the Muddy River by water movement like rainfall. Recent dredging has been countering that force and trying to restore the original depth of the Muddy River before natural forces changed its shape.

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The Muddy River and the Fens serve one purpose, and that is to hold water. Every aspect of this part of the landscape is somehow related to the collecting and proper managing of water. Rainfall is the main contributor to keeping the Muddy River alive. By the same token, all of the water that falls near the Muddy River must then work its way somehow to the river. The dynamic of the nature here ties into the purpose of it being a flood basin in an urban environment. Water is visible on the site even when it is dry through traces and artifacts. Dirt banks have been scarred with channels where water washes into the river. Concrete columns have been worn away, exposing the rebar. Rubble and trash from streets, sidewalks, and parks float down the river partly because they are washed into the river during rains. The forces of nature cannot be stopped. Water can not be prevented from affecting the land around the Muddy River and the Back Bay Fens. As long as rain falls and snow melts, it will forever flow down to lower ground, always seeking to return to a body of water. As this process will continue, the forces of nature will never cease to operate.



The sun finally peeks out from behind the rain and the clouds begin to fade. Rays of warm light penetrate the atmosphere and tickle the roads below. A raindrop still loitering atop the bridge to Storror Drive begins to change physical state into water vapor. Now it is rising into the sky, twirling in the wind on its ascent. The road falls away and more land comes into view. The "x" is once again visible, and the colors begin to blur. From the clouds not much is differentiable but the water from the land. As the raindrop reaches the clouds, it wonders where next it will impact the land below. Which pebble will it displace? Which pile of trash will it disturb? Which plot of soil will it disturb? The inevitability of change is comforting because the raindrop knows that like the Fens and the Muddy River, there is a place and a reason for the forces of nature and the force of water.



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