



lightend & then thondre / snowed & rayne



While I have written this sentence the cloud has again dissolved itself, like a nasty solution in a bottle, with miraculous and unnatural rapidity, and the hills are in sight again Ruskin writes in his notebook in 1879, as part of his gathering conspiratorial file on the storm-cloud – or more accurately plague-cloud, for it is not always stormy, a miasmatic vapo he claims is new to the eighth decade of years in the nineteenth century and is driven by not just a wind of darkness but worse, a malignant quality of wind. Tremulous, intermittent, and unconnected with any one quarter of the compass, it blows indifferently from all, attaching its own bitterness and malice to the worst characters of the proper winds of each quarter. So this tremulous and intermittent plague-wind cannot be contained or sighted in any one instant. How to prove that it is real? In a different media moment, Ruskin would have filled memory cards and cloud storage to capacity with terabytes of shaky sky. But in his time, he marks its bilious vagary through the act and duration of description itself: *While I have been writing these sentences, the white clouds above specified have increased to twice the size they had when I began to write.* All his concatenating descriptions, all the venomous blight and fretful flutter runs counter to this other, plainer practice, where writing becomes a device to let anonymous clouds gather and balloon in the mind at the speed of a phrase, to bracket the space and pace of what can't be described other than in passing.

Today, when I am writing, it is snowing, a full-bore blizzard late in the game of an inconstant winter where everything has been unseasonable, as though a tectonic shock dislocated that tenuous bond between calendar and world, and it can't be put right again. Spring arrived early, or appeared to enough to fool bodies and flowers, so elsewhere, in the city, they blinked in sandals and held wrists open to a cloudless sky, and meanwhile, on the National Phenology Network's map of the start of spring anomaly 2017, as estimated through an index of early leafing plants, the untimeliness of foliage coming too early showed as crimson blooming across the South like typhus and fire. But today it is a blizzard, wrathful and blunt, as if none of that happened, like the dream from a few weeks back where we step out the door to find that the order of the seasons has come undone, and winter is starting all over again, without having passed through spring and summer, cheated of rivers and sweat. And so the snow falls, and like too much else this past year, the terrain transforms before our eyes both in leaps and crawls, at once event and drift. The bitter crack of the branches that drop brittle to the ground. The creeping silence of how they vanish beneath a white too fine to see accumulate while it does, only ever after the fact, and soon the road is gone, and the wind wants in bad.

This complicity and torsion between time and weather was vital for Aldo Rossi, so much that he put it central to his entire endeavor of worrying away at the edge and heart of architecture. For him, the double meaning of the Italian word tempo, which signifies both atmosphere and chronology, is a principle that presides over every construction. He tells it as a founding moment, a self-myth, where standing in

Sant'Andrea at Mantua[...] I saw the fog enter the basilica, as I often love to watch it penetrate the Galleria in Milan; it is the unforeseen element that modifies and alters, like light and shadow, like stones worn smooth by the feet and hands of generations of men. The tempo of the built and lived is therefore dual: framed as a construction, an advance or retreat in the history of form, but weathered at every moment. Only monuments to empire and capital dream of being Teflon, of resisting the unforeseen no matter how many birds shit acid on the statue shoulders of overthrown colonizers. Rossi thought monuments differently, diametrically. Anything might become monumental and gain permanence for how it constitutes a city around it, for how memory piles up in its hollows. In this way, that entering fog is neither a metaphor nor a factor to be warded off by good design. It is one of those analogies which intersect all of our actions and slip between instances, a prospect of the spontaneous association between things and situations. Like out to the Po Valley, to its infamous fog and recurrent flooding, as in 1951, where the arable land was ruined by feet of sand and turned into a barren beach, and so the fog of Mantua arcs the gap into Rossi's San Cataldo cemetery in Modena, via the analogical transfer to the great mists of the Po valley and to the deserted houses of the river bank, abandoned for years in the wake of the great floods, those villages where the river appears with the continuity of death, leaving only signs, signals, fragments. Analogy greases the links, but for Rossi, it doesn't make them from scratch. It doesn't draft the elevation, just opens the door for the wind to bear the fog that binds. It enables this in inverse proportion to how much we can see and plan, because analogy is a structure of relation where we can know only the results, not its hidden mechanism of transfer and decay, like how John Evelyn squinted to see in the smog of seventeenth-century London how a great quantity of volatile salts, which being very sharp and dissipated by the Smoake, doth infect the Aer, and so incorporate with it, that, though the very Bodies of those corrosive particles escape our perception, yet we soon find their effects, by the destruction which they induce upon all things that they do but touch.

How to enable this sight of circulation's time, to not leave it entirely to chance in a system that works to deny such links and pardon any disaster as fluke, any sick wind as happenstance? A single image doesn't suffice to put dye in the engine of the air. This analogy of fog, of current and currency, of pollution and doubt and friction and dread, only takes shape through what it connects across time, in how its corrosive bite becomes part of the daily. One option is to make it theatrical: to plan a cloud, to atomize black bile, to ape its effects. Rossi, castigating himself, describes his earlier projects as just such an impossible attempt to recreate an atmosphere, via a purist passage through architectural typology. Others played looser and literal in their pulpy shimmer, like in the fifteenth-century Hesdin chateau where William Caxton witnessed a room where paintings depicting Jason and the Argonauts got the showy meteorological boost they deserved and so in remembrance of Medea and of her connyng & science [the Duke] had do make in the sayde chamber by subtil egyn that when we wolde it shud seme that it lightend &

then thondre / snowed & rayne. In the end, which never is reached, Rossi will opt for a colder strategy, closer to how Ruskin marks the plague-wind by the velocity of prose. He will seek to make projects that do not stage the atmospheric but hope to achieve a silence, not for purism's sake but to become vehicles for events. In this conception, all the particular details of design, all its dimensions and angles, fittings and pivots, will matter tremendously, not, as the functionalists thought, because they carry out a determined function, but because they permit other functions, because they permit everything that is unforeseeable in life. This becomes a labor of architecture: to become the instrument which permits the unfolding of a thing and so to give the unforeseeable its space to move and constitute us. In this way, an image does cohere after all, however fleeting. In the brief silence between columns and memory, we see analogy at a standstill. We watch the stain of the fog that, in obscuring the stone it slowly wets and wears, also links the far-flung but inseparable, rewinding from the soot in the nostril blown out at the end of the day to the tankers entering the port at dawn with liquid to be turned into fire and its remainder. In medieval mystery plays, canvas clouds at once depicted the ineffable and hid the literal machinery needed to yank Jesus skywards to glory. So too the fog and its haze of infinitesimal points of refracted light, that blinding formless shine: it marks both the limits of a system of seeing and the mechanisms that veil themselves in that blur, be it to marvel, abscond, revolt, or profit.

Here, the snow clouds have rendered most machines moot. The power is out, and so too all the phone networks, so time feels sticky and open. The day gets later, and I'm writing by the light of the snow and the screen. Outside, nothing can be distinguished amongst that sea of white, no signal to cut through and articulate the space, and I can't help but think of the lighthouses on the Atlantic coast where I was born. Of how Rossi's analogical roaming found its way there and how he fixated on those towers. Manfredo Tafuri picked up on this and noted that they matter specifically because a lighthouse is *made for observing but also for being observed*, and it's true, the blazing Fresnel lens in the lantern room draws a two-way path between observers in times of danger, and while I have written this sentence the snow has gathered imperceptibly, the dimming of day countered by the reflection of a million mirrors.

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Giles Round, *They bow. Curtain. No applause.*, Spike Island

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