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# The Northern Dawn

## Flavio Gisler

«And the city lingers in it, savoring its touch, the caress of the infinity whence it came. An object, after all, is what makes infinity private.» (1)

– Joseph Brodsky

8 minutes and 20 seconds. That is how long it takes for sunlight to reach the earth.

This is the time delay between day and the upcoming night when the earth already has turned its other cheek towards the luminary but the sun is still in sight. Yet, in most nights, sometimes in complete form of a round shining white, the object most seen in all human history reflects this solar light. It is a trace that is left above while the place we are at is on the dark side of the path but this night this trace for the first time in my life shall be two.

It is one o'clock as a notification pops up on my screen and makes me expect something I have never seen. I put on my clothes. I rush outside into the night; it is super cold, it is the beginning of March in Stockholm.

It all started 18 hours before in the sun's core.

It is there where under enormous pressure hydrogen atoms are squeezed into helium and energy in form of light is released. An electrically charged gas travels towards the outside of the sun; Plasma. This time the magnetic field it generates stretches beyond the surface.

A solar storm is born.

Parts of it break free, a solar wind that 18 hours later reaches the magnetic field of earth. At first, it passes by our pale blue dot and from the leeward side its electrons are pulled back towards the poles. There they interact with the gases in our atmosphere and a greenish play of light starts to appear; a northern light. (2)

Its speed feels like a fog, rolling itself over a mountain top.

It is like a cloud veil that passes you by from one side to the other in a constantly glowing and fading green and as if someone were sometimes to drop even more glowing ink from far above that slows down the closer it gets to the ground.

It is two o'clock, a freezing night.

In 1991 Joseph Brodsky talks about the winter light of Venice where he writes «[...] after its long passage through the cosmos. And you sense this light's fatigue as it rests in Zaccaria's marble shells [...] This is the winter light at its purest. It carries no warmth or energy, having shed them and left them behind somewhere in the universe, or in the nearby cumulus. Its particles' only ambition is to reach an object and make it, big or small, visible.» (3)

Here, in the Venice of the north, despite the very bright yellow light of the day, the northern dawn, the aurora borealis as it is called, is that winter light at its purest. It is a different light, yet originates at the same and only star we sense during the day 147 million kilometres away; the sun.