

Sol

(Luis López Navarro)

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Sun error

I was born on a rocky, inhospitable planet dominated by a star that looms too close.

My sky is circled by a massive ball of fire that I don't dare look at directly. I have grown accustomed to living with its burning breath on my neck, my head hung down in shame. The only way I can gaze at it safely is to discreetly seek out the shadows it casts on surfaces, its reflection in wells and mirrors. With the right technique and an awareness of cosmic distances you can learn to find your way by triangulation; with caution, with fear.

My star sends me constant radiation, massive and unsolicited. I guess all that energy must be a gift, perhaps well intended but certainly out of all proportion. I don't know what to do with it. If there's a Creator God behind all this, I am at a loss as to his motives or what he expects me to do with this. My body can't stand the heat, my retina isn't adapted to so much light and my brain is unable to process it right.

Here, if you stand still in the sun for a few minutes, your shadow gets printed on the ground like a silk screen. The terrain is covered in markings, the imprints of beings and things that were there at some point and left the traces of their presence, like fossils made from light. As a teenager I would play that game, but by standing still in the open you're exposing yourself to what we call a sun error, a stroke of light to the brain that leaves you disoriented, paralysed, unable to comprehend. Just like a moth, the blinder you become the more you seek the light, only to crash into it pointlessly time and again, unable to break out of the cycle. If the sun error catches you alone, you're likely to die. Either way, even patches of shade are so powerfully irradiated by the light reflecting off other surfaces that you're only ever really safe in the cave.

Something similar happens to clocks and compasses, when they freeze time and space on exposure to direct radiation. I suffered a severe sun error once, when I was very young. My perception was damaged for ever. In addition to my difficulty in seeing, I am unable to understand most of what I see. Every time I step outside I have to learn to see anew, like a child. Sometimes, when something surprises me, I stare at it for too long and the retinal persistence is so strong that I have to run back into the shade and only later, in peace and quiet, can I finish understanding what I saw. They say that all the cells in our body are renewed a few times in the course of our life except for neurones and the retina, which

we have at birth and have to last us a lifetime. Thus, my scorched retina stores layer upon layer of engraved images, a palimpsest of everything I ever saw that impressed me. I have them all there, and when I go down into the cave I look through them in the hope of understanding them later on.

There was a time when this boundless blast of light was quite the attraction and people would come from all over to witness it. Now that's all over: my land is sunbaked, parched, desolate. Now the radiation is so strong it obliterates any life form other than my own. I'm alone in my desert with my light fossils and my star that scorches, sterilises and kills it all.