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The Ability to Look

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The Ability to Look

I.

Sometimes

I think of myself as Coetzee's tired magistrate
who is burdened by a historical palimpsest
of Empire.

If you recall, he would frequently sit
And try to identify with old stories and habits of peoples whose land he now
administers.

He would look, and extrapolate,
but there was no object.

The magistrate was an Eichmann who desired
without reciprocity.

The magistrate would say,

"The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts,
new chapters, clean pages;

I struggle with the old story, hoping that before it is finished
it will reveal to me

why it was that I thought it worth the trouble."

But just like in Sartre's fable of the voyeur,
the key-hole gazer *is* merely the object
an implicit being
without the Other looking back.
That is the ability to look.

II.

Demott wrote about his own colonization.

About the hard man who invaded his head,
and a cultivation of a desire, to see a world
mired in violence and lost hopes.

This hard man in his head
is a spectator of pornography,
of bombs raining upon the already-dead,
and nightly news casts of escalating numbers

and progress.

Demott is also an old man of Empire,
a spectator, who can never be seen.

An object.

He *is his acts*,

"His consciousness sticks to his acts"

and it will never be known whether he is watching.

Demott can never be shamed.

That is the ability to look.

III.

I often wonder about the victims of Empire.

About how they scream into the camera,
about dead families, lost children, and gods who look
otherwise.

I used to think that aspect of their struggle was futile,
but now *I* think

otherwise.

Their attempt is to create a social tie

To coalesce desires across mediums.

But that is the bitter irony.

The spectator

positioned far outside their circuits of desire

has no reality at all.