

## Richard Hoffman

### BEST PICTURE

Everyone agreed, it was the greatest movie of the year,  
comprised of footage of thousands of separate events  
run backward, to a sound track of simple birdsong.

World leaders who had stormed out of meeting  
after meeting expertly retraced their steps, backwards  
with a little bounce in contrapuntal rhythm  
to their previous aggressive certainty.

Scene after scene of refugees unloading wagons and trucks  
and moving their furniture into their homes, absolutely  
certain where each piece, each picture, each utensil, belonged.

Offshore, battleship cannons swallowed round after round  
like vacuum tubes debriding an infection. Footsoldiers,  
in a flash, stood upright with their legs back under them  
and, as if in a childrens' game, took three giant steps backward.

And, as if from nothing, from nowhere, smoke, fire,  
metal, cloth, even blood and flesh converged to become  
a busload of people intent on their mundane errands.

Somehow even the scene of the man's sad head  
rejoining his slumped shoulders was shot to suggest  
a humble gratitude, and wasn't in the least grotesque.

And as if the Christians' rapture had arrived,  
from the streets of manhattan, up, up from the sidewalks,  
from the crumpled hoods and roofs of cars,  
through the clearing air, the people rose, straight up, flying.

It was art, a trick, but an opportunity to mourn.  
It was the bravest attempt yet to make art  
triumph over life, over consequence, over history.  
Wherever it was shown the people cheered.

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Until the whole world went to war at once:  
The filmmakers were denounced and reviled  
as traitors and propagandists.

"Why didn't they continue going back"  
demanded aggrieved historians,  
"to when our people suffered?  
What about our earlier injury?"

"And ours!" said others.  
And ours. And ours. And ours.

Whole cities burned. Columns of people  
clogged the roads. The seas were poisoned.  
Each and every god sought vengeance.

## GLASS

S. D. Chrostowska

I took a long bus ride yesterday from V. Stn. As I sat perched on one of the rear seats, which offered a comprehensive view of other passengers, my gaze fell briefly on a man who seemed to me infirm and, as I guessed from the disparity between his eyes, to have an artificial eyeball. For the remainder of the trip I thought no more of it, but as I stood up to leave this seemingly fragile man suddenly leapt forward in a way that reminded me of a hare. Other passengers, however, had already gathered near the door, and he was forced to stand back. In that spare moment before the vehicle came to a halt and its doors finally flung open, I took another, closer look at the man's eyes to confirm my first impression. His left eye, which drooped and which I presumed was natural, was blank and bleary. The eye I took to be glass was, on the contrary, full of expression. In an instant I identified this man's spirit, the vigor of his movement a moment before, with the width, clarity, and glint of that eye, which could not see. Disembarking I wondered, but could not decide, which was more reflective of his soul: the eye he was born with or the one he picked out?

## SONATINA FOR PIANO

S. D. Chrostowska

Once upon a staff, I met the virtuoso Szopen. “There is nothing,” he declared, “left for me to do but stroll along these tracks.” “Tracks?” I asked, too surprised to drive his train of thought with any observation of my own. Here Szopen (I must insist on the Polish spelling of his name) turned his face toward the sun, adjusted his necktie, and yawned nervously. “In principle at least, the rails of fate extend into infinity.”