

A black and white photograph of a woman with short, dark hair. Her hair is heavily decorated with numerous white feathers, some of which are sticking out in all directions. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious, somewhat somber expression. She is holding a lit cigarette in her right hand, which is raised towards her face. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, top. The background is dark and out of focus. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face and the texture of the feathers.

The
Lost

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ENGLISH

THE SINGLE WORK, MOVING IMAGES AND HOW TO GET LOST IN ILLUSION

1. Very often, exhibitions are way too large and this situation is getting worse and worse. Every self-respecting community, almost all over the world, has its own biennial or comparable manifestation where one or more curators give their verdict about the developments in contemporary art. And these are a good few, so that various curators can go off on their favourite topic and present work in theme exhibitions that confirm and strengthen their point of view – a practice which sometimes looks suspiciously like a reasoning that proves something by using that what was to be proven and with which the art – despite other qualities – is primarily used as the illustration of an opinion. As a result, art critics very often become exhibition critics, and the attention transfers from a unique work of art to the concept in which it was presented.

I do not claim that these exhibitions cannot be interesting, as they very often are interesting – dependent on the presented work and the curator's qualities – however difficult it is to make a judgement in a time when all kinds of things exist mixed up and next to each other, and quality has increasingly become an immeasurable quantity.

Whatever may be the truth, the sometimes enormous amount of works very often blocks your view on the unique qualities of each separate work, because we have to move on, quickly, to the next room: there is so much we have to see. I think everyone recognizes that hungry feeling when arriving at such an exhibition: the eagerness to see everything, like a child in a candy store – but when children overeat in a store they get sick and throw up everything and something similar also happens to the observer who wants to see everything. He, who wants to see everything, actually does not see anything and will finally become dizzy with the enormous amount of visual information that has filled his head without having been able to really experience anything.

Although thinking in terms of collections stems from the Wunderkammer and is thus an age-old tradition, this wolfing down and just as quickly getting rid of huge pieces of visuals perfectly fits in this time filled with zapping, one-liners, cheap entertainment and lack of reflection.

What does this mean for looking at a work of art, and which work of art will we actually look at?



The first contact with a work of art is physical: it enters via the eyes. If you have a room full of works, everyone first of all tends to scan the whole room, so that a vague idea can be obtained about what is at issue, and after that people usually pick out one work to examine more closely, and after that another one and maybe yet a third one too. But what forms the basis of this choice, and why do we pay less or almost no attention to the rest of the works? I am afraid that this is due to laziness and idleness – sometimes we think that art is entertainment and that no effort is required for it – and the size of an exhibition also plays a part: the less works, the more chance that they all receive attention. The works that first catch the eye, are – just like people – not necessarily the ‘best ones’ or the most interesting, but when other works are missed, nothing can be said with certainty about these: maybe you would have had a better or deeper relationship with some of the works that do not yield up their secrets straight away, than with those that ‘appeal’ directly. The only way to find out is by devoting time to all the works, or, in other words, by doing your best for all the works equally, as dealing with art is two-way traffic and also demands energy from the observer.

Another problem, which partly stems from the above, is the following: when for instance a wall is filled with paintings or drawings, you have to do your level best to concentrate on one of these. Out of the corner of your eye, you keep seeing the previous one, and the next one or maybe both; physiologically it is simply almost impossible to fully concentrate on one work. Moreover, one of the consequences is that this one work obtains an extra function that it was never intended to have, namely a comment on or at least a frame of reference for the other work or works. Thus a situation is created that people like to call a ‘dialogue’, in which various works interact with each other. This can be very significant and fine, I am not the one to judge that, but it also opens up the possibility of manipulation and poor exhibitions during which the ‘conversations’ are completely uninteresting – a good example would be if someone organizes an exhibition or a room as part of an exhibition in which unlike works are connected with each other, because they all have red as a dominant colour. Extreme cases are conceivable – use your own imagination – in which this might even be interesting, but that doesn’t happen very often, actually very rarely and maybe never at all. I have been advocating for decades now to also (so not exclusively) organize exhibitions that consist of only one work, or that at least offer the

possibility to concentrate on one work – I would almost say: in a temporary monogamous way.

The above-mentioned particularly applies to stationary art. An interesting exception is a room-filling installation where the observer has to be present at various spots, in order to be able to completely take note of the installation. In that case the observer has to be physically active, as he cannot observe the work as a whole from only one position. There is a lot more to say on this subject, but that is not within the scope of what we are actually dealing with in this missive.

2. There are also all sorts of art that are not stationary, but take place in time: performances, sound art, video, film. You cannot always deal with these in the same way as you deal with static art forms. After all, the amount of time spent on doing this, completely depends on the spectator's decision (and the opening hours of the exhibition). If someone would choose to spend a whole day – from opening until closing time – peering at one work of art, that would be possible in principle, but he could also choose to look at it for three minutes or less, if this suits him for whatever reason. However, a work that takes place in time, is a completely different matter.

First of all, nowadays these works are usually shown in separate or separately created, often darkened rooms, following the example of a cinema. Secondly, they all have a specific duration; a video has a beginning and an end, and in between there's a certain amount of time. You can see a painting at a single glance (which is not equal to observing!), which is impossible for a video. In this sense, looking at a video is more similar to listening to music than to looking at a painting, sculpture or installation. The viewing period is just as long as the work, whether it is narrative or not, which is by no means always the case (one could wonder whether this also applies to music; I think it is rather similar – something that takes place in time is not necessarily a narrative by definition, although a sequence of images or sounds do offer obvious possibilities. On the other hand, a stationary work like a painting can just as likely have a narrative character.

Visiting an exhibition takes time. And looking at a video also takes time. There is always the danger of entertainment and consumerism: when a video does not 'appeal' immediately, people very often walk on to the next

work that does appeal or doesn't move. As a result, videos on large screens with apparently spectacular images very quickly attract most of the visitors, who will at least keep on looking until their need for entertainment is satisfied. Or they might unexpectedly become aware of the meaning and depth, and keep on looking seriously interested until the performance has ended. This sort of behaviour, for which one or two moments are enough to judge whether a work is worth observing any longer or not, is not limited to art tourists or the wider audience, but happens just as often amongst connoisseurs, devotees and insiders. Indeed, I would really like to meet someone who has never been guilty of this – I, for instance, certainly have, although I keep on trying not to fall into this trap again. As it is a rather peculiar behaviour; when a video takes twenty minutes, for instance, and you only watch two of those (and not necessarily the first two either, but more about that later on), you cannot claim to have a legitimate opinion on this work: it's like giving a quick glance to the right bottom corner of a painting and no one will seriously claim to have gained enough information to provide a legitimate judgement.

However, is it really enough to see a work only once as a whole, to have a complete experience of the complexity of a work? Maybe sometimes, but most of the time it doesn't. Actually, it is just like a piece of music: hearing it once is usually not enough to really fathom and get to know the piece. In the old days you could count yourself lucky if you were allowed to hear a symphony by Mozart once in your lifetime, and that was all you would get. Although a recording is certainly not the same as a live concert, today it is within almost everyone's reach to hear a certain work as often as he wants, and this makes the experience more profound, the structure of the work more clear and many other things. The CD is a great invention, although in the near future it will probably be replaced by directly downloaded recordings on a hard disc in a 'lossless format'. And we can all have this available in our own homes.

This does not apply to all the video works. Some of them are affordable, but you have to spend a bit more money than for buying an exhibition ticket. Therefore, most of the time we have to make do with the exhibition works, but no one maintains that you cannot observe these works here as often as you can and want.

A peculiar problem arises when a loop is provided; in that case the performance is shown continuously, just like in bygone days in the Cineac, and the

spectator might arrive when the work is halfway and thus miss the previous part. That's not very practical, in particular for a lengthy work, as a work that takes place in time should ideally be observed from beginning to end and then you really must begin at the beginning. There are cases where it doesn't make much difference whether you see everything in the right order, these are usually – but not exclusively – works in which visual abstraction or, on the contrary, visual associations (or both, that's also possible) are predominant.

At some exhibitions this problem is dealt with and the starting times of the video work are announced. Unfortunately, for many works, which will all also have different lengths, it becomes almost unfeasible to create your own chronological scheme in order to look at a few works from beginning to end. Some works overlap each other, so it remains an uphill struggle.

In short: the self-discipline and a priori involvement, which are both opportune when looking at a single stationary work, are not sufficient for moving images that last some time. I don't know how we can create optimal circumstances for this situation, and apparently other people don't know either, as otherwise a model that could be used everywhere would have been invented.

All I can think of is: don't make any large exhibitions, only small ones (there are exceptions, but I cannot enter into that at length at this moment) and when you go to an exhibition, take plenty of your time and forget the idea that you want to see everything. That said, I once saw only a part of an art film that lasted 24 hours in its entirety, as the place of presentation (the 2011 Venice Biennale) did not provide the possibility to observe the complete work: it was not open for 24 hours a day.



Reanimations-Experiment
1. Versuch
am Menschen

3. In the light of the above-mentioned, the monumental film project *The Lost* by Reynold Reynolds is some sort of mixture between film and installation, between static and dynamic elements, which in itself is not new, but does make things even more complicated. Different parts of the film are projected on seven, huge separate screens, and on pedestals and in glass cases objects are shown that are related to the film. In no way whatsoever is this work visible as a whole, not in the room because the work unrolls in fragments on different places in that room, and neither in time because all the seven parts are loops, which – on top of that – all have a different length, so that the events on the screens continuously move in time in relation to each other and the work actually keeps on changing. I have had the privilege to see the whole film in sequence, thanks to which I have been able to observe all the parts completely, but this is not the way that this work should in fact be experienced: it cannot be conceived as one narrative moving through time from A to Z. Without being in the work in a literary sense (which occurs in some other cases), the spectator is really literally surrounded by it, and he cannot see everything at the same moment as he doesn't happen to have eyes at the back of his head and because the screens are arranged to make sure that they don't stand in each other's way. In addition, they are not simultaneously visible in some cases, which evokes the illusion that the observer is looking at seven different films that slowly, from screen to screen, divulge their interconnection. Or, rather, that divulge that there is a connection and make it clear that the seven films form part of a whole. However, the structure of this whole is more associative than analytic-chronological, although narrative moments do pop up every now and then: vaguely a possible chronology, a narrative, is suggested a few times, but that single moment has already disappeared before it has announced itself properly. So this is an outstanding example of a kaleidoscopic work consisting of fragments that few people will try to view completely (and it takes a couple of hours), which complicates the discovery and finding of connections and finally makes it impossible to observe in another way than in fragments and fragments of fragments, of which the interpretation will by definition show a high degree of coincidence and subjectivity – the experience of the observer corresponds to the setting up of the work.

The project does not only fall apart into seven fragments, additionally 'real' objects are shown in the room. Some of these appear in the film (such as

an old typewriter), others are about the film (such as a letter on behalf of Goebbels in old typewriting script on yellowed paper, in which it is forbidden to go on with the film work) or about the film-making process itself (storyboards).

As the history of the development forms part of the fiction that this work eventually is: the story goes that in the thirties a film was made in Germany that has never been finished because the Nazi authorities forbid that. The finished part of the film allegedly disappeared and recently popped up in Siberia, after which it indirectly turned up with the artist who reportedly completed the film after all with many additions, and that is allegedly the product that we are talking about here and now. Due to that, time is one of the film's ingredients concerning content, in various forms and meanings.

The story of and about the film starts in the thirties; this period will later partly be reconstructed in the part of the film that is added in the twenty-first century. At the same time, the film obviously takes place in time, as all films do, and there are some cross-references to some sort of main character, who, at the same time, might be the 'narrator' (insofar as this matter is concerned) and who seems to coincide slightly or at least is inspired by the writer Christopher Isherwood, who wrote a novel and a short story that both take place in the thirties in Berlin. The young man with the typewriter is a fictitious Isherwood, who lives in the decadent world of cafes and cabaret in the Berlin of the thirties – which has been described masterly by the historical Isherwood – and who wants to become a writer (also a process that takes place in yet another manifestation of time). Moreover, all kinds of quotations from Isherwood's literary work flicker through the film.

The appearance of the film changes; in principle it is in black-and-white, but there is one passage in colour; indeed filmmakers started to experiment with colours in the thirties and this passage is obviously not filmed in 'our time'. Conversely, there is also a matter of visual change in style on the moments when the neatly finished 'new pieces of film' are alternated with half-damaged streaky images that clearly originate from the thirties.

Moreover, certain passages are played faster, completely unexpectedly and apparently without any reason concerning content, as if they have been recorded like this because they couldn't do it any better then – in fact a change in style within a change in style, as other fragments prove that they were 'then' perfectly capable of doing so, unlike in the period of for instance





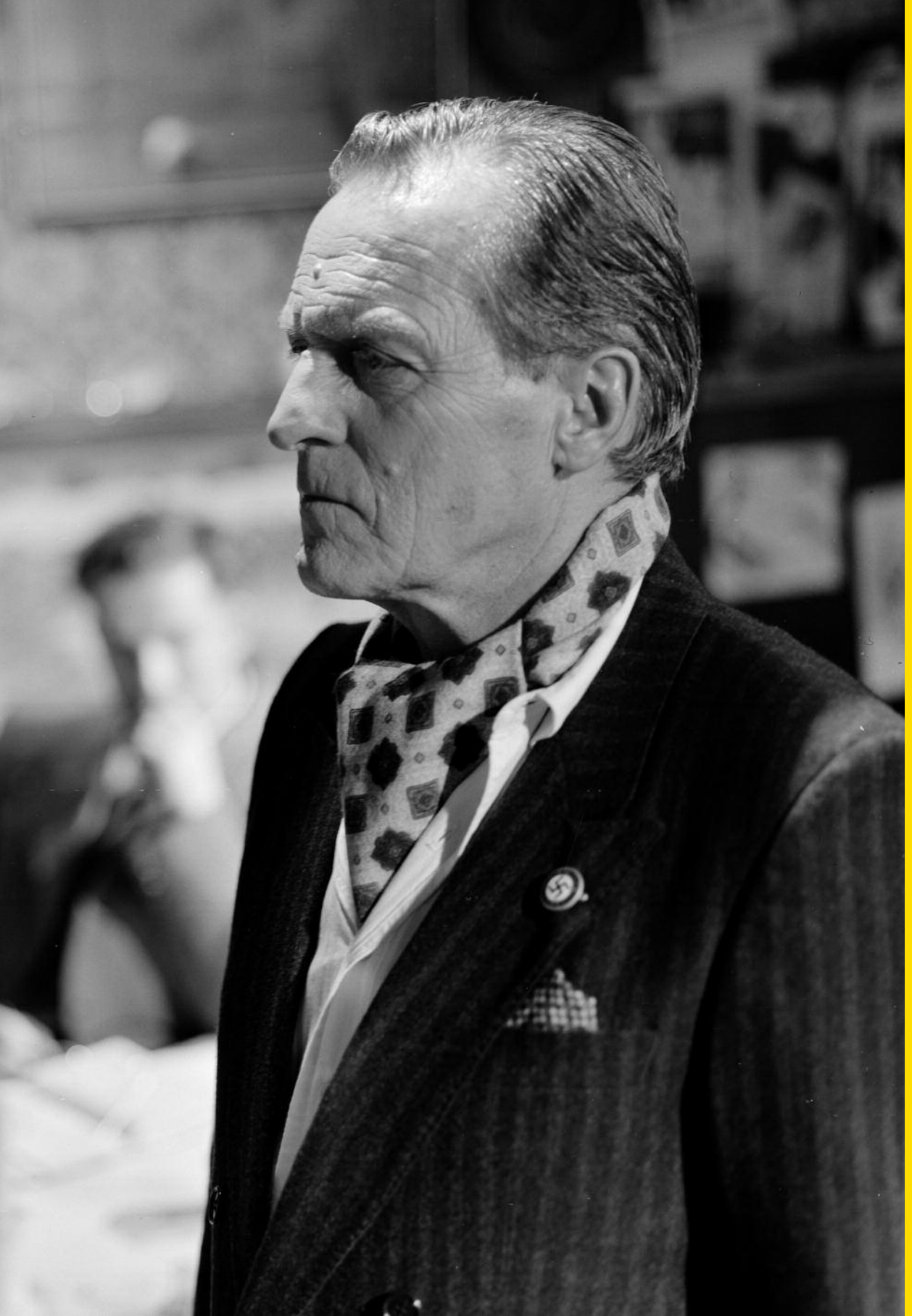
Eisenstein, or, maybe more relevant here, the early Chaplin. In other words, time is, so to speak, cut into two pieces at this point and provided with two paces, an intervention that is almost satirical, as it actually is an intervention, in a film that mainly keeps a 'normal' image tempo – the question comes up whether this intervention is a fictitious 'restoration' of the 'original' or precisely the opposite, all the more confusing because the other parts of what seems to be 'original' have been technically designed in a less 'primitive' way. At this point, different potential versions of the alleged original and the 'seventy years later' adaptation are played off against each other, in a way which makes it obvious that we are dealing with a construction built up from fragments and not with a whole that is somewhat supplemented until the film ultimately becomes one work with one 'image' of itself, one and half a century from date. Due to this sort of playing with time, we are actually confronted with the fact that there is really no film at all, only a collection of moments, a collection of sorts of time, leaps in time and contaminations of time which represent an artificial construct that not only has life in Berlin in the thirties as a theme, but in particular itself as a medium for self-representation, and that means for a fictitious representation of something that has been fictitious right from the start. And a twenty-first century view on the thirties is ultimately fictitious by definition, because it is an image of our own time and the way it looks at and understands the past, as is always the case where history of any kind is concerned. And in this case, an extra fictitious layer is added by interchanging the stylistic devices from the original time and 'our time': thus the past is in fact sort of annexed – maybe even the whole concept of time – precisely because much trouble has been taken to emphasize the 'authenticity' of alleged old images and to build a complete mythology around it. Due to that, a sort of inflation of the concept authentic is created: the whole film, as a work of art by Reynold Reynold is of course authentic – and at the same time and very expressly also a work of fiction in which precisely these sorts of matters (such as authenticity and fictitiousness) are investigated.

In this context, a narrative element that occurs at a certain moment is also remarkable: one of the seven loops starts with a train journey from the Netherlands to Berlin (we might, in analogy with the 'real' history, imagine that the young Isherwood-like character is on that train) and ends with a train journey in the opposite direction – the way back, as it were 'after the

film', of which he exactly forms part himself; an impossible paradox. An additional fact is that these train journeys are shown by filming a miniature railway (toy trains) with accompanying landscape: some people's hobby, among which a remarkable number of adults who evidently want to have more track of and grip on reality and, formulated in extremis, can give free rein to their megalomania on a childish small version of the world that they have put together themselves and in which they can decide for themselves what will happen and have everything under control. I think that this is a key scene (I should really say one of many) in this film, as it postulates power and powerlessness – omnipotence and impotence – of both the artist and the observer in the year 2013. The whole world is imaginary, a question of silent aesthetic engagements between artist, material and (adopted) audience.

At the same time, the whole film project can also very pleasingly be looked at as a spectacle which unfolds mainly in cafés and cabarets which are – in accordance with Isherwood's books – presented as an erotic, voluptuous universe in which performers of German songs in cabaret style from that period are being alternated by an impressive opera singer – who is performing in a café almost without an audience which indeed appears to be bored – after which the scene changes again into Dadaistic absurdist performances and other 'experimental' forms of theatre and similar expression. It is not without reason that music by Schreker, one of the composers of the forbidden *entartete Musik* can be heard in one of the loops. The transitions of the scenes are often somewhat abrupt, so that the observer stays alert and is woken up again and again, just in case he thought for a mere moment only about 'entertainment'; at those moments it is made all the more clear that we are looking at a construction, a work of fiction, which refers to – and pretends to be taking place in – in the 1930s, when people in Berlin were dancing to an increasing extent desperately and frantically on the volcano which could erupt any moment, and did just that, but at the same time it is also an undeniable metaphor for 'our' time in which again a volcano – or perhaps even more than one – is about to erupt while people seek their escapist salvation in entertainment, superficial internet contacts, consumerism and large-scale sex. *Slapstick* and impending doom alternate in the film – or rather, they have been knotted together as in a rhizomatic structure. And there are more of this type of twin concepts which in their turn play through these structures,







such as homosexual-heterosexual, life-death, sexy women-Frankenstein's monsters, 'realistic' moments-spiritualistic séances, in short: everything brings along its opposite which is all spelled out, mixed and interwoven into a complex whole of overwhelming and often irresistible images.

Moreover, amazingly often photographs are taken in this film: so an image within an image, which records itself in an almost completely fluid environment, like a type of invisible veil between the thirties and the year 2013, invisible because we do not get to see the results: the photographs themselves.

In the end the observer is situated in the midst of a cascade of images with massive dimensions (seven screens of eight by six meter which are orientated from all sides, even from above, towards the space in which the observer finds himself as well as the tangible relics of the film) that just keep on going and thus, during that process, undermine every certainty and even every hypothesis about (the possibility of) a univocal presentation of place and time, alleged reality and complete fiction. The observer stays behind somewhat dizzy with the feeling that everything is moving, that everything is completely fluid and every recorded idea or image is no more than an illusion. What appears to be solid, falls apart, the glue gives way.

Finally, from its own ashes, the Phoenix of the movie is born, not as an illusion of reality (indeed that has been rigorously put behind), but as a representation of the reality of the illusion – everything is fiction and at the same time we are not only invited, but we have indeed no other choice than to live in and with that: the Phoenix as Chimaera, not a bad metaphor for our time.

Lastly there is still the title, *The Lost*. Firstly, the title refers of course to what I call just for a moment, 'the outer layer' of the work, the myth of the lost movie. In addition, it can refer to whole groups of people, as in *The Lost Generation*, which evokes the parallel between the 1930s and our time. Looked at from an even broader viewpoint, the title may comprise the whole culture, as in *The Lost Civilization*. Or, yet even broader and connecting nicely in a mythical way: *The Lost Paradise*, which is under Milton's title *Paradise Lost* one of the key works in the British history of literature that has remained unabridged and relevant to our times.

Finally, the title can, very apocalyptically, refer to the final downfall, twilight

of the gods, end of the world, or however people want to formulate that emotion (or future 'reality'). Because these days it seems as if the entire human-kind on the planet is lost, and the question in this dystopian age is whether there is a way out which can prevent the Apocalypse from happening and which can find back the lost paradise (*Paradise Regained* might become the title of an art project to be made at that 'time').

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Reynold Reynolds

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