

# “Come Forth!”: A Report on the Lazarus Project

by Laura Summer, Jordan Walker, and Sampsa Pirtola

The Lazarus Project (Pilot Installation) was the result of the inaugural artist-in-residency at Free Columbia ([www.freecolumbia.org](http://www.freecolumbia.org)). The Lazarus Project exhibition and events took place May 14-21, 2016, at Inky Editions, a 5,000 square foot printmaking studio in Hudson, New York.

The installation was a collaboration between American producer Jordan Walker, painter and Free Columbia co-founder Laura Summer, production designer and multimedia artist Tim Kowlaski, and Finnish multimedia artist Sampsa Pirtola (performing together with the Heartelligence International artist group, mainly on video). The exhibition incorporated elements of painting, video, place-based installation art, and participatory performance.

The Lazarus Project explored two questions: What if we, as a culture and as individuals, have been largely sleeping through life, and one day are called to wake up? What would it look, sound, and feel like to arise from our slumber and “come forth” into the world, awake? Our collaborative exploration of these questions has led through themes as diverse as virtual reality and transhumanism, popular understandings of life-after-death, historical and contemporary initiation, and the role of art in social life. The announcement for the Project described it this way:

Today each of us is asked to weave meaning from a world of complex, increasingly digital information. Imagine if we are the weaver of our own burial shroud

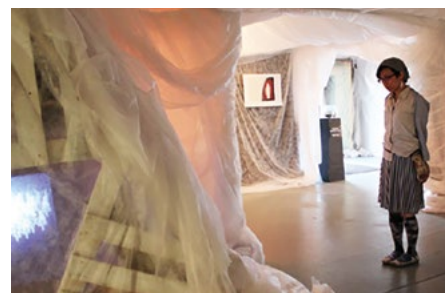
at our deathbed, naked of material possessions. We are all wrapped in this cloth of our own making.

Might we not all be asleep in a sleep that looks like death? Are we not surrounded by the fabric of our own possessions and our beliefs, bound by our desires, obsessions, assumptions?

What if a wise voice, a higher companion, called our name and said, “Come out”? Would we let the things which bind us be unbound? Would we step out of our dark tomb into the light? Are we ready? Are we finally ready?

This installation was done to learn something about the form of collaborative installation and about our subject. After the pilot installation in May 2016 we hope to continue working with the theme of Lazarus in other venues.

The shroud-like environment of the installation shaped by translucent cloth walls included seven series of paintings and seven video segments from the TRASHOLD OPERA, recorded at its recent premier in Berlin, largely shown on four surfaces of a constructed cloth pyramid. All of the paintings and prints in the installation were done



Pyramid: detail with video and viewer amid veils

by Laura Summer, and all of the video installations were by Sampsa Pirtola. Each of the seven painting installations had a relationship to each of the seven videos in terms of form, movement, and the experience of meaning. The Project featured eight successive nights of related performances, lectures, films, videos, conversations, and a dispersal of 96 monoprints. These included a lecture by Nathaniel Williams; two films about “Die Wise” by responsible death advocate Stephen Jenkinson; “Grandmother Earth,” an interactive art project by noted contemporary art critic Linda Weintraub; a Hole Earth performance-art “dig” by Robert Leaver; a variety of musical performances by Jen Zimberg (acoustic guitar singer-songwriter), KAMALOKA (experimental electronic music), multi-instrumentalist Peter Alexanian, and MC Matre (hip-hop speech art with Seth Jordan as DJ); and culminating with a performance of the entire TRASHOLD OPERA on the last evening, a contemporary tale about death, initiation, and the development of the “heartphone.”

The investigation that resulted in the Lazarus Project began with a statement by Orland Bishop to Laura when she was visiting Sampsa in Sweden in July 2015, “I am interested in the image of Lazarus.” We wondered what this could mean. What is death, what is initiation for our time? How does our culture understand these things? How can art help to move things along, open them up? So we started to investigate. Because we are art-



Laura Summer: “Dance” (above); “Face of Lazarus Emerging” (below)



ists, we explored this theme by painting, drawing, poetry, and making collages and videos as well as by more usual research approaches such as reading and online computer searching. We read much that Rudolf Steiner had said about Lazarus, that he became John the Evangelist and, much later, Christian Rosenkreutz.

Many questions guided us through the making of this installation, such as these Laura wrote early on in the process:

What happens in the tomb? In the wrappings? In the cocoon? In the seed? Does material substance become a chaos soup? Without form, so that the intentions of the truth can form you again? Were there moments, or maybe a space, when you, Lazarus, were only the intention of God? When your substance was re-aligned and made whole? Is that why He waited? Does it take time? Or is time not applicable?

Sampsa and Laura contacted Jordan after several months of dialogue, and he agreed to come aboard as a producer. Two months before opening, Tim Kowlaski was approached to help design and build the installation. Katrina Hoven completed the team when she arrived to document the exhibition with photographs and video.

If you are interested in bringing this work to your community contact Laura Summer at [laurasummer@taconic.net](mailto:laurasummer@taconic.net). A much more extensive report is in the *Art Section Newsletter*; details at the end of the following commentary by David Adams.

# THE TRASHOLD OPERA: The Heartelligence of Lazarus

*Commentary by David Adams*

This combined live and projected-video performance, an “opera without singing,” is a curious imagination—a quirky, contemporary reworking of the events and inner meanings of the story in the Gospel of St. John of the raising/initiation of Lazarus, infused by anthroposophical insights and the unusual creativity of Sampsa Pirtola. Some might even call it a kind of trivialization or too-irreverent treatment of the archetypal first initiation performed by Christ Jesus on the soul of Lazarus/John the Evangelist, but it seems to me to be more of an artistic transformation of the processes of the story to relate to the somewhat different, contemporary struggles of the artist (and all human beings) to spiritually awaken, using a kind of “initiation template.” The poster for it described the opera as a “multimedia performance about death, initiation, and the heartphone.”

The term “opera” was used to indicate the attempt to make a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total, multimedia artwork), but in a different way than a traditional opera. Its somewhat punning, hybrid title makes various references, which the authors want viewers to interpret for themselves. The term “TRASHOLD” could suggest “Threshold” and “Trash Old” (including the idea of discarding or overcoming one’s

own psychological “old trash”)—both with meaningful references to the content presented. “Heartelligence” seems to be a kind of amalgam of “heart intelligence” (the “heart thinking” that Steiner urged us to develop) and “agency.” Sampsa tells me that the Paradise Corporation in the Opera represents a form of “Heart Intelligence Agency.”

The Opera used a combination of contemporary pop imagery (including cell phones and corporate R & D [Research & Development] departments) combined with ancient Egyptian mystery-religion imagery to reflect aspects of a contemporary process of spiritual initiation, as understood by anthroposophy.

I want to add here some further interpretive comments as well as some details from the performance in Hudson, especially from the central monologue at the end of the long first act (or scene) spoken by the representative of Paradise, Inc. who seems to represent a divine presence in our post-Mystery-of-Golgotha era.

Sampsa’s performance-identity/alter ego “Immanuel,” a kind of “Everyman” figure also representing Lazarus here, first emerged at the beginning of the first act/scene while being carried on a bicycle by Osiris and Anubis toward the viewers in a slowly-moving, ritualistic procession advancing through a video-projected, painted, ancient Egyptian landscape of pyramid and sphinx as varying



John McManus as representative of Paradise, Inc.

music sounds. Both Egyptian figures are apparently lost and without spiritual direction in the changed initiation conditions of modern times. The ongoing video action was projected onto the cloth face of the pyramid constructed in the hanging, shroud-like installation. Anubis and Osiris were two of the most prominent ancient Egyptian gods associated with the initiation and after-death processes. Lazarus was dressed as an Egyptian pharaoh.

As Sampsa separately explained to me, “Immanuel is Lazarus,” but “what we mean with Lazarus is *the quality that he goes through*. . . . *The model of what Lazarus went through* is used here to describe the form of process that the Immanuel character goes through. . . . It is not trying to be . . . an exact historical or spiritual description . . . but an artistic and creative image of the qualities involved in this form of initiation process. This experience can also be happening in the future.”

After the lights briefly went out, the scene changed to a white room, and we saw the representative from Paradise, Inc. (played by John McManus), dressed all in white and speaking to Lazarus, who in the Hudson version was present only within a sarcophagus on the ground with a large drawing of him on top of it, see photograph previous page), “Hello, friend. I see you are lost in time and space. It seems that the old gods do not know where to take you anymore. I think I might be able to help.”

The representative then launched into a long monologue starting with a kind of fanciful history and future projection of forms of human communication that explained much of the plot and meaning of the Opera, progressing from the spoken to the printed word, to the telephone, to the “untethered” mobile/cell phone. The representative continued,

This is our current development in communication. This is also where we—Paradise, Inc.—step in. Wireless mobility brought people

to a much bigger realm of networking—the distance between one another felt seemingly smaller. The quantity of communication exploded! When the smartphone was developed, it awakened us to our individuality in new ways. . . . [Paradoxically] while communicating with one another, we could finally be alone!

It was like we needed the other to help us to feel ourselves. . . . People could exchange their fantasies and their virtual realities. It brought us to a new kind of identity—it helped to bring a new kind of consciousness into being. The story of transcending our humanness began. Artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and the internet of things were going to make our life better than ever before. But this process required people to be truly detached from their environment. The form took over the content, and the feeling of detachment people were experiencing became the price required for the glory to come. Individuality went over the top and, as the pendulum inevitably swings back the other direction, people felt the need to be collective again.

So today’s smartphone inevitably led to the next step in the evolution of communication: the artphone!

Through the artphone people related to their environment and each other again. Any object could now be used to communicate! . . . Anything you experience through your senses could now become a “phone.” You could send a message with stones, shoes, turtles. . . . This was the expanded concept of the phone!

People expanded their creativity and were finding ever more extraordinary ways to make a call. The artphone tore down the old forms of communication and brought about new forms of community. Society was no longer driven by the old economical ideologies, but by the higher inner potential of each individual.

But the artphone had its problems, too. People began to lose themselves in the constant drive for the social. Unorganized, life became chaotic, as



Above, Laura Sumner, “Heartphone,” image 6 of a series of 7.

Below, video stills; from top, Lazarus cycling with Osiris & Anubis; The Tour de Hades; Anubis and Osiris Free Lazarus from the Coffin.



you never knew where or what the phone was and if you were in the middle of someone's call.

At this point a Paradise, Inc. employee suggested a new type of communication/phone operating with "intuition, inspiration, or imagination" so that "you no longer need to have the physical realm to make a call! All you need to communicate is inner substance! . . ."

Now, after years of development, the heartphone exists! Paradise Incorporated is at the threshold of releasing this revolutionary communication into the world! To complete the product development process, just one step remains: The heartphone must be activated.

This sort of abbreviated history of human communication that the monologue presented also reflected something of the almost addictive contemporary fascination with cell phones and so-called "smart phones." The Opera, and specifically the Paradise, Inc. representative, used technological/mechanical imagery (the bicycle and the telephone) for a future, apparently telepathic, soul-to-soul form of communication that, according to Rudolf Steiner, will only come about by meditative purification and development of the human astral body, specifically of its latent organs known as chakras/lotus flowers; in other words, by initiation.

In an early, later-changed script for the Opera, the Paradise, Inc. representative explains that the problem in society is that it is dualistic ("bipolar"), and the smartphone and the artphone represent the two extremes of this society. The two-wheeled bicycle is the symbol of this, and thus, in order to activate the new heartphone, one needs a specially invented tricycle "to cycle on the three wheels of the culture: Culture, Economy, and Politics." "The heartphone truly connects people through inner listening," the representative said, "and by making the three wheels of the society move to the same direction."

To activate this new heartphone, the representative continued, requires

someone to complete a "simple" training program of more than 5,000 steps: "The main goal is to travel as widely as possible and experience how you and your cycle move through different elements and across different surfaces. Every surface activates a different micro-component of the heartphone . . . When you are able to ride your tricycle on water, you know that your heartphone has been activated!" This moving-on-water image seemed to suggest developing some direct knowledge and capacity with the etheric forces of life.

Finally, the representative made his appeal to Lazarus: "Sir, we think you are the one who has the potential to activate the heartphone! If you can manage it, every human will manage it. . . . Once the heartphone is activated, it is a free gift, available for every human being. . . . You are free to decide for yourself, of course, but if you do not take this task on, this will happen to you."

Thus ended the first act/scene, and immediately the second act began with a doubtful Lazarus confronted with a vision projected onto a wall in the installation, the vision of a huge "trash pyramid." This was explained by the representative as a kind of image of what Lazarus's soul otherwise would become. On top of the trash pyramid was a woman looking similar to Immanuel, but dressed in trash "clothing," and singing softly in the background. Horrified by the potential reality of his life and said to be wondering if he will ever be able to truly love, Lazarus agreed to try to activate the heartphone.

The pleased representative then instructed him on the next steps, "Anubis and Osiris will guide you through the Escapist Land [also known as Ecstasia], where the Psychology Police will help you leave the past and take on the future. At the Flee Market you will be given the tricycle. Farewell for now, I will see you on the other side!"

In the all-video third act/scene Lazarus's transformation began, as conversing with the Psychology Police agent helped him to let go of his inner trash and find his way to his true feelings.



Above, the Trash Pyramid with Anubis and Osiris. Below, The Milkweed Corridor, part of the overall installation.

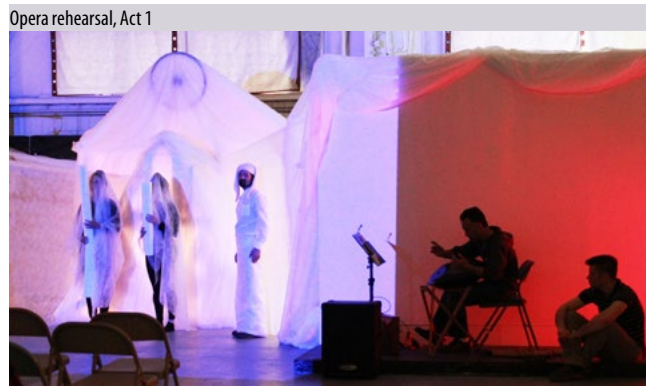


Lazarus then needed to flee this, which he did by obtaining his special tricycle at the “Flee Market” and riding off on it. His excitement at riding the tricycle in this Escapist Land lifted him up into the air, soon biking dangerously toward the moon and sun. He eventually realized the danger, started to fear that he would be trapped or captured in this “Ecstasia” [we could also say “luciferic”] reality, and ended up falling down from the sky.

We could say that the all-video fourth act/scene that sends Lazarus under the ocean to compete in the “Tour de Hades” was a fall in the opposite, ahrimanic direction. It was only in the sixth act, where Osiris and Anubis reappeared on either side of Lazarus inside his dark sarcophagus, that redemption/initiation was achieved. This was a threefold sarcophagus with each one inside the other like Russian dolls (or the threefold lower components of the constitution of the human being). Osiris and Anubis freed Lazarus by “peeling” each sarcophagus away one after the other. The Paradise, Inc. representative then reappeared to call Lazarus back into life, reassuring him of his success in activating the heartphone by saying, “You have it.” Then in the final, seventh act (all-video), Lazarus is able to freely bike on water, realizing he has activated the heartphone, and also taking Osiris and Anubis with him.

I have two final reflections about this artistic transformation of the contemporary “everyman” Lazarus. The gilded tip said to be present at the top of the original ancient Egyptian pyramids could be seen to relate to an “alchemical” understanding of the transformation of Lazarus through his initiation process. There also seems to be a reference to the initiation Midnight Sun experience, reflected by the “sun-disk” placed behind the tip of the Trash Pyramid in the installation in Hudson. Gold is the metal that relates to forces of the sun. Sampsa has also stated that one of his ideas was to work with the qualities of alchemy, an understanding that “Lazarus needs to transform his trash pyramid into spiritual gold.”

Finally, it occurs to me that one could see the de-



Opera rehearsal, Act 1

velopment of Lazarus in the Opera as a kind of partial image or analogue of the initiation process of the new Mysteries of the Will, whereby the light of new understanding and being emerges from the individual’s will achieving a tri-fold, “whole-soul” (i.e., thinking,

feeling, and willing) penetration of the various outwardly sense-perceptible “surfaces” of the world to reach, initially, the etheric (water) and astral (air) realities of “cosmic world thought” that lie behind them—as Lazarus had to ride his tricycle over so many different surfaces.

This “Lazarus initiation,” as it also might be called, involves working with, mastering, and elevating the process by which our will in sense perception (percept) continually “contacts” and is related with our thinking (concept) in a usually unconscious way nearly every second of our lives. Rudolf Steiner first spoke about this modern, Christian “will-initiation,” which he also called a new kind of a “light-breathing” yoga practice, on November 30, 1919, in the sixth lecture of *The Mission of the Archangel Michael* (CW 194), as well as on a few later occasions. It has been much further elaborated in books by Yeshayahu Ben-Aharon, especially *The New Experience of the Supersensible* (1994 and 2007) and *Cognitive Yoga* (2016). Steiner tells us that the resurrected Christ’s union with the earth and his original raising/initiation of Lazarus to a higher existence have made this new initiation process (here represented as the “heartphone”) potentially available to all humanity. ...

For much more information on what Steiner also called a “radical break with previous initiation practices” and the *Temple Legend*, see Steiner’s *Freemasonry and Ritual Work: The Misraim Service* (SteinerBooks, 2007; CW 265), pp. 379-448 and 470-473.

Editor’s note: this commentary was edited for space; the full report is in issue #46 of the *Art Section Newsletter*; to subscribe or see a pdf see [www.northamericanartsection.blogspot.com](http://www.northamericanartsection.blogspot.com).

David Adams ([ctrarcht@nccn.net](mailto:ctrarcht@nccn.net)) has been a frequent contributor to being human.



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