

Art Section

NEWSLETTER

For those active and interested in the Art Section of the School of Spiritual Science

Issue No. 46

Autumn–Winter 2016

“Come Forth!” A Report on the Lazarus Project

by Laura Summer, Sampsa Pirtola, and Jordan Walker

The Lazarus Project appears, to a distanced and after-the-fact viewer like myself who was not in Hudson, to be an impressive, ambitious, innovative, multi-faceted, and slightly disjointed artistic undertaking. It is notable both for its collaboration between many different types of artists who usually work in their own spheres, its great variety of lively approaches to the theme, and its thoughtful, often original treatments of a weighty spiritual content. With its various events and installation extended over eight days, it can seem to be a kind of amalgam of many diverse parts, not all of which appear to be seamlessly integrated. I would think many different individual experiences of the Project were possible.

The live temporal events (lectures, music, films, and performance art) were anchored by the elaborate indoor installation, which consisted of several dimly lit spaces or “rooms,” most shaped by hanging and gathered veil-like, semi-transparent white cloth and deepened by artistically placed, indirect, sometimes colored lighting. Without a map to the spaces but guided

to some extent by the installation design itself, visitors wound their way through the hanging, gauze-like walls and rooms, viewing strange video broadcasts of parts of *THE TRASHOLD OPERA* and hanging paintings with a dark, threshold/after-death quality.

This seemingly somewhat eerie, shroud-like installation appeared to suggest something of the fogginess and “fluid clarity” of dream experience, within which we strive to wake, while artistic images – some moving, some still (yet metamorphic) – urged



viewers onward. Although the display of seven series of paintings by Laura Summer and seven videos mainly by Sampsa Pirtola (both on computer screens and larger projections) were created partially independently by each artist, the attempt was made in Hudson to loosely link them by mounting each painting series in a separate space with a more-or-less corresponding video continually showing nearby. Altogether, there were 3 computers and 4 projectors inside the installation continually showing the videos. Combining paintings and videos was a challenging artistic

task due to the differing lighting requirements of each medium as well as those of the installation “framework.” Most of the spaces had dark, “tomb-like” lighting, although this has been somewhat brightened in most of the photographs shown here, to make them more perceptible.

Several reports and reflections on different aspects of this major event follow, starting with a general review of the project by three of the principals involved. Ed.

The Lazarus Project (Pilot Installation) was

the result of the inaugural artist-in-residency at Free Columbia (www.freecolumbia.org). The Lazarus Project exhibition and events took place May 14-21, 2016, at Inky Editions (www.inkyeditions.com), a 5,000-square-foot printmaking studio at 112 Front St. in Hudson, New York.

The Lazarus Project pilot installation was a collaboration between American producer Jordan Walker, painter and Free Columbia co-founder Laura Summer, production designer and multimedia art-

ist Tim Kowlaski, and Finnish multimedia artist Sampsa Pirtola (performing together with the Heartelligence International artist group, mainly on video). The Project's exhibition incorporated elements of painting, video, place-based installation art, and participatory performance.



Left to right: Katrina Hoven, Sampsa Pirtola, Laura Summer, Tim Kowalski, Jordan Walker.

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, the role of art in social life, and more.

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.

ROLES

First, a listing of the central roles each person played and a website featuring examples of their past work:

Sampsa Pirtola: Video pieces, documenting and editing, and directing *THE TRASHOLD OPERA - The Heartintelligence of Lazarus Performance* – (www.sampsapirtola.net).

Jordan Walker: Coordinated the event series schedule and acted as liaison between the project and the gallery space (www.newformsproject.org).

Laura Summer: All paintings, drawings, and prints. Acted as liaison with Free Columbia, which funded and oversaw the project – (www.laurasummer.com).

Tim Kowalski: Designed and constructed the installation – (www.tymoteuz.com).

Katrina Hoven: Documented the project in photographs and video with some editing – (www.instagram.com/katrinamonika).



DESCRIPTION OF THE PILOT INSTALLATION

In May 2016 *The Lazarus Project* was held at Inky Editions – a printmaking space in Hudson, New York. As you entered the exterior door, you saw a small room draped with translucent cloth, the words “*The Lazarus Project*” and the names of the artists mounted on the wall. There was a printed program or “catalog” with instructions that were to accompany the viewer through the exhibit. The program was filled with

short quotations from the artists and two longer excerpts from essays by Christopher Bamford and Zvi Szir (see later pages to read these). Viewers were instructed to choose one short quotation and carry that in their thoughts as they viewed the installation.



Visitor at entrance to *The Lazarus Project* by catalog stand

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Visitors first came upon a series of pencil drawings lining a long, narrow hall. The drawings depicted a milkweed pod drawn on consecutive days in September through October 2015. During the first 18 drawings the pod remains unchanged, and then in October it begins to open. The long walk of the corridor echoed the long process of waiting for the pod to open. At the end of the hall another process started – that of the seed; here the milkweed seed was drawn and the viewer experienced first the waiting and then the



Milkweed Corridor from The Lazarus Project May 2016

sprouting and development. The hallway was only dimly lit, and the viewers were offered small flashlights to help them see. This slow stepping was experienced again in the “Procession” video from the beginning of the Opera, projected nearby, where the figures appear to be arriving but for six minutes step in place.

These words accompanied this piece, *“The life force in the seed is a known reality, it cannot be doubted. It can be called by different names but it must be there, unseen and effective. So we can begin to transform doubt.”*

When you emerged from the seed corridor, you were met with a cylindrical framework contraction on which were mounted paintings of faces done in black and white and strong colors using oil sticks. Each face was half black, half white or half colored, in many different combinations. The circ-



Viewers in the Milkweed Corridor

lar contraction moved slightly if pushed. This movement of faces was found again in the “Dance” video from the Opera, projected on the nearby “Trash Pyramid.”



Faces Paintings on Cylindrical Structure

Emerging into a larger open space, viewers saw that there were also two painting sequences installed on the walls. Both contained metamorphic series of figure transformations (*Hanging Figures* and *Development of the Heartphone*) with related videos projected within the translucent cloth pyramid nearby, appearing continu-



Constructing the “Trash Pyramid” with “Opera” video projection



View of “Trash Pyramid” in The Lazarus Project installation May 2016

ously on four projection surfaces. On the other faces of the pyramid were projected five video images of THE TRASHOLD OPERA produced in a somewhat different version by Sampsa Pirtola in Berlin in March 2016 (three projections and two played on computer screens). One of the sides was constructed from a dark standing sarcophagus (actually three sarcophagi in one, each fitted with a small frame through which one could see another video shown from a computer from Act 6 of the Opera, where the three sarcophagi are opened to liberate Lazarus).



Inside the "Trash Pyramid" with projection tech

Alternatively, the viewer could choose to enter a different, more enclosed space where paintings done last summer by Laura Summer at the Naput Academy in Bozsok, Hungary, were attached with magnets to the cloth wall. The paintings were of Lazarus as he emerges from the wrappings and images of the interior of a rose blossom. At the beginning of her work with the theme of Lazarus Laura had done contemplations in the rose garden in Järna, Sweden. The relationship of transformation in the enclosed space of the blossom, where the substance has not been seen by human eyes until the blossom opens, to the transformation in the tomb opened many questions for her.

One of the final two painting installations was a wall with seven picture-frames through which could be seen brightly lit colors that seemed to be a mirror image of something behind the viewer. But when the viewer turned around to see what was mirrored, there was nothing there. This optical effect was created by six large paintings mounted behind a wall of frames and lit from behind the wall. As the viewer moved, the colors seen through the frames changed. If viewers approached the frames and peered

through them closely, they could see that the large paintings were yet another metamorphic figures series (*Transformation Figures*).



Viewer observing optical frames wall, The Lazarus Project 2016



Laura Summer Lazarus/Rose Blossom Paintings made in Hungary, as installed in The Lazarus Project, Hudson, NY, 2016

The final painting installation was two walls on which 96 mono-prints were pinned in rows with a sign saying :
 "Mono Print Dispersal
 Each evening we will disperse 12 monoprints. This means that you can take one home and keep it for as long as you like. See Laura if you would like one."



Laura Summer Monoprint Dispersal Walls at The Lazarus Project



Wall with Optical Frames (left) and Monoprints Dispersal Wall (rear right)

All of the paintings and prints in the installation were done 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.

EXHIBITION TIMELINE

On Saturday, May 14, the Project opened with a reception. The dispersal of the 96 monoprints began by Laura giving away the first six. Approximately 75 people attended. The mood was warm and socially engaged as a diverse group of friends and supporters, local artists, and interested strangers had their first look at our work. The space was large enough to allow for both the individual and small groups making their way through the installation and for a larger crowd who energetically engaged in conversation in the back presentation space, where bread, cheese, and kombucha cocktails were served.



On Sunday, May 15, a small group gathered for a question/answer session with the artists. Projected onto the wall of the presentation space behind the main installation, a video montage of the making of the project was shown. The artists gave verbal descriptions concerning how the project had come about. Questions from the audience included subjects such as artificial intelligence in relation to after-death experience and what the life experiences of the artists had been while working on the project.

On Monday, May 16, a screening of two short films about “Die Wise” responsible-death-advocate Stephen Jenkinson (<http://orphanwisdom.com>) by Canadian filmmaker Ian Mackenzie helped us ponder the role of death in our culture and consider Jenkinson’s exhortations to take responsibility to “die well.”



Linda Weintraub speaking on “Grandmother Earth,” May 16, 2016

This also opened for a participatory presentation by Linda Weintraub, noted art historian, artist, and author of *Art on the Edge and Over, In the Making*, and *To Life!: Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (<http://lindaweintraub.com>). She presented about her new project, *Grandmother Earth*, an interactive art project exploring the tempo and rhythm of the life cycle (<http://www.chrchprojectspace.org/linda-weintraub/>). Updating the old, outdated name “Mother Earth”



Linda Weintraub *Grandmother Earth*

to “Grandmother Earth” evokes the planet’s current fragility, encouraging us to take responsibility to become her care-givers and care-takers.

This idea led her to a 10’ x 10’ ongoing community sculpture whose surface is completely covered with natural treasures gathered from the woods – seeds, mushrooms, acorns, bark, twigs, bones, shells, moss, clay, and lichens. These materials have been meticulously arranged to disclose the harmony among their forms, textures, and colors in a kind of ornamented altar or throne-like form within a church “project space” in Cottekill, N.Y. About twenty participants took part in an activity in Hudson that she led in which we observed natural and human-made objects and sorted them by a variety of methods – learning to sense and see their qualities as if for the first time.



Participants arrange natural materials in Linda Weintraub’s workshop

On Tuesday, May 17, approximately forty individuals attended Nathaniel Williams’s lecture, “New Ways of Seeing and New Ways of Thinking” (see separate report following).

On Wednesday, May 18, Sampsa Pirtola showed two scenes from THE TRASHOLD OPERA video, recorded at its recent premier in Berlin, and John McManus performed a dramatic reading of the central monologue of the opera (see photo next page).

On Thursday, May 19, a small group gathered for Robert Leaver’s



John McManus giving a dramatic reading of the central monologue from THE TRASHOLD OPERA

Hole Earth “dig” performance and the brief presentation that followed (see separate description and photos following this report)

On Friday, May 20, about forty people attended an evening of musical performance begun by Jen Zimberg (<https://jenzimberg.bandcamp.com/>), a singer-songwriter-guitarist, whose reflec-



Jen Zimberg performing at The Lazarus Project, Hudson, NY, May 20

tive acoustic songs were mostly about facing darkness, inner questioning, and transformation. This was followed by more experimental music from John Snyder (<http://www.johnsnyderperforming.com/>) and Tim Kowalski (<https://timkowalski.wordpress.com/>) in the group KAMALOKA. In front of a light projection of changing white forms, they used various electronic music devices (e.g., loop and drum machines, analogic effect guitar pedals, computers, and feedback from a wireless drill) to experiment with sound in various ways. There was a reception



KAMALOKA performing at The Lazarus Project, Hudson, NY, May 20

with an “Alchemical Kombucha and Tincture Bar.”



The Alchemical Kombucha and Tincture Bar, The Lazarus Project

On Saturday, May 21, multi-instrumentalist Peter Alexanian played hauntingly beautiful music during the Open Gallery. Then



Concert by Peter Alexanian, The Lazarus Project, May 21, 2016

at 7 pm the Closing Reception culminated in a full performance of THE TRASHOLD OPERA - The Heartelligence of Lazarus by Sampsa Pirtola and others (see separate following article). The audience was very appreciative of the impact created through the combined use of live and video performance. Following the performance poetic hip-hop music was offered by spoken-word artist MC Matre (<http://mcmatre.com>), with Seth Jordan as his DJ, and the dance party continued into a “de-installation” party in which many of those gathered helped to take down the elaborate installation.



7 *Concert by MC Matre with Seth Jordan, The Lazarus Project, May 21*



De-installing The Lazarus Project installation

About this, Jordan writes, “Matre’s show was, for me, a very fitting finale . . . and formed a bridge from this largely inner symbolic world that we’d created in the studio to an outside world awaiting our re-entry. [It was] an opportunity to celebrate what we’d been able to accomplish. . . . He manages to make [earnest and high-energy] music that is both profoundly deep and somehow doesn’t take itself too seriously. This accomplishment speaks to the maturity of his skill and to his earnest belief in the transformative power of creativity.”

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

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 artists, we investigated this theme by painting, drawing, and making collages and videos as well as by more usual investigation approaches such as reading and online computer searching. We read much that Rudolf Steiner had said about Lazarus, the rich young man from the heritage of Cain who became John the Evangelist and, much later, Christian Rosenkrenz.

Many questions guided us through the making of this installation, such as these that 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 week-long exhibition with photographs and video (including all photographs for this report, except some video stills).

We opened and closed our working sessions with this poem, “The Last Establishment,” by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (also inscribed on a wall of the installation):

*They always say: “Has gone”, “Has gone away”.
Yet let me add this:
don’t say he or she is not. That’s a lie.
Therefore I cannot endure it. It hurts my soul.
Coming and going
to men are so clearly partitioned
that their language
bears but half a hope.
But I would unite my self to that ocean
where is and is-not,
in all their fullness,
are equipoised.*



Jordan Walker by the R. Tagore poem inscribed on the gallery wall

RESPONSE

What was the response to the pilot project? It was varied. Some people came and entered into the conversation. Some people responded more to one or another aspect of the project but left a bit mystified by it all. Some people said nothing, some people cried. As artists it is risky to bring the subjects of death and initiation into the artworld of today, and we were deeply grateful to our artist colleagues who carry different worldviews for entering into the dialogue with us. Quotes from a few written responses:

Patrick Stolfo: “An ambitious collaboration of artists that transformed the venue space into pockets of exhibition, sound, color, image, tastes, mysterious moods, portals to other dimensions, video vignettes, dissonant perspectives, spoken presentations, dialogue, documentation, film, metaphor, symbolism, and a call to the journey of personal transformation. The participant was compelled to construe a unifying thread, and yet that compulsion may have been the Project’s most effective inner call....”

Janica Anderzen: “All small (and big!) details showed that a lot of thought and work had been put into planning and building this beautiful exhibition. This collective effort was also nicely



Viewers in The Lazarus Project; threefold sarcophagus with frame on far right

displayed through a documentary screened on a wall. The exhibition was a celebration of all senses! Reading and listening to the texts, looking at and feeling the artwork, and tasting some homemade beverages nourished the mind, body and soul.”

Wendy Conway: “What comes to mind when I think back to the Lazarus Project is its bold size, its sense of journey, and my complicated response to the possibility of taking one of the images [monoprints] home: the welcome meditative time spent before each one and the complex question that arose in me on seeing the empty space where one had been taken . . . sense of wonder, sense of loss, sense of a wide world, sense of need, of sharing, of change.”

Martina Müller: “Upon entering the exhibition space filled with great expectations, it was wonderful to experience the metamorphic sequences of Laura Summer’s paintings and multimedia pieces hung in tunnels created by fabric as though one were in a shroud. The immediate inward turn through this shrouded display let one linger in a particularly intimate way with the art works. Laura has spent many years exploring the idea of metamorphosis through sequences . . . that express the signature of the soul realm: change and metamorphosis. These many years of her scientific/artistic explorations of metamorphosis culminated in the Lazarus Project.



Lazarus Project.

Delicate pencil drawings of observational/gestural studies of the milkweed expressed a Lazarus transformation theme. So did several face and full-body gesture sequences that were deeply moving. The print and multimedia approaches she used gave her introspective exploration numerous expressive possibilities that illuminated the theme from many different angles. This very mature work was wonderful to ponder and to feel the transformation by slowly moving from one piece to the next. Extraordinary.”



What are the practical things we learned as artists working collaboratively with new media? We remain fascinated by the potential relationship of still visual art (painting and drawing) to video and performance. How to work with these together in an effective manner remains an open question. The pilot installation suffered from some technical challenges – for example, that video needs darkness to be seen, while painting needs light. The installation should be at the service of the art, and when creative ideas are flowing it is important to hold on to this. To really make the relationship of the paintings to the videos clear we will need better projection equipment.

But, all in all, the pilot was very successful as a beginning of how to work with deep questions of our time, collaboratively, and with various media. Sampsa and Laura will continue to work with the subject of Lazarus and are open to creating installations in other communities both in the US and Europe. Please contact us if you or your group are interested (laurasummer@fairpoint.net and supersampsa@yahoo.ca).

Lazarus – not just the emerging but the submerging – the becoming separate. This stage of one crying in isolation/ solitude – this essential reality of the artist.



Selections from the Lazarus Project Catalog/Guidebook

by various authors as identified

First the circling in,
Then the waiting,
Then the release. (Laura Summer, hereafter L.S.)

Are we all not asleep in a sleep that looks like death?
Are we not surrounded by the material world of our possessions
and our beliefs? Barricaded into a dark place, bound
by our desires, obsessions,
assumptions?

And what if a wise voice, a
higher companion, called
our name and said, "Come
out." Would we let the
things that bind us be un-
bound?

Would we step out of our
dark, rigid cave into the
light?

Are we ready? Are we
finally ready? (L.S. &
Jordan Walker)

Collaboration:

Can the "audience" be-
come the creator?

Can the artist become the recipient? (L.S.)

Is it death – the fear of death – that keeps us searching for ulti-
mate reality? (L.S.)

As we live, we con-
struct a tapestry
around ourselves, wo-
ven of thoughts and
feelings and actions.

Naked of material
possessions, we are
wrapped in this cloth
at our deathbed. And
this is what comes un-
raveled in front of our
so-called-dead eyes.

We are able then, for
the first time, to see
the individual threads
that make up our lives
– who we think we
are, how we had to
act, what semi-con-
scious feelings drove
us along.

We are able to see it all (our life), strand by strand, as it comes
apart – the "what" is left behind, but the imprint of it remains
and clothes us in the next part of the journey. (Jordan Walker)

Lazarus – not just the emerging but the submerging – the becom-
ing separate. This stage of one crying in isolation/solitude—this
essential reality of the artist. (L.S.)

"The most exciting breakthroughs of the twenty-first century
will not occur because of
technology, but because
of an expanding concept
of what it means to be
human." (John Naisbitt)

"...but the future cannot
be a mere continuation of
the past, no matter how
that past seems so fami-
liar and rational to us. The
future, of necessity, will
appear in the garb of the
'impossible,' and only
people with vision and
deep spiritual creativity
can know this and act
on this. Visionary indi-
viduals are often called
'crazy' by their friends,

and even their loved ones. But, dear friends, the 'impossible,' a
more human future wanting to be born, calls us all to resist and
transform the Empire-Cyborg Matrix." (Nicanor Perlas – Right
Livelihood Award Speech, 2013)



What if we have
been largely sleep-
ing 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? (Jordan
Walker)

"Art alone makes
life possible – this
is how radically I
should like to for-
mulate it." (Joseph
Beuys)

"Only on condition
of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and
activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the
only evolutionary-revolutionary power... [able] to dismantle in

order to build ‘a social organism as a work of art.’”
(Joseph Beuys)

“Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. I try to act in that gap between the two.” (Robert Rauschenberg)

1. Art is not what we think it is.

2. Clearly art is an activity, a doing or making, a production or expression, a *poiesis*, but it is always ambiguous who the maker is or what the made is.

In fact, it is a “mystery.” Thought and language tend to break down (or reach their limit) before the question of who or what makes an artwork. As Gustav Mahler observed, “I don’t compose; I am composed.” Not surprisingly, then, those seeking to answer the question are often reduced to paradoxical formulations such as “it makes” or “art arts,” or something similar. Perhaps, then, we should resist objectifying or reifying work as either seen or made, and focus

rather on how it works – or, how it becomes. The poet Paul Celan in a posthumous fragment speaks of “Anonymous, nameless poetry. The indwelling tendency of poetry for namelessness.” He is thinking of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, for whom as soon as “presence” is named, it is “represented,” and thereby loses its essence, or “beingness,” and with it the distinction between “presencing” and “what is present.” In a passage underlined by Celan, Heidegger writes: “If we are to come once more into the vicinity of Being, we must first learn to exist in namelessness....”

3. The work itself is always contextual and connotative, never denotative. In this sense, there is no objective world – only a living, dynamic, mobile

reality in the process of becoming. The “meaning” of the work emerges only contextually and can be grasped only from within the process of making, in which the “artist” and the viewer, as

well as their worlds, participate equally.

4. All of which is to say that the work’s referent is ambiguous. Indeed, it is unclear indeed whether artworks have any external referent at all – only its own referent, recursively and indefinitely veiling and unveiling, concealing and revealing, implicating and explicating itself through us. Above all: no “objects.”

5. Thus the problem of artworks is that, in a certain way, they are not things at all. Perhaps, as James Hillman once proposed,

they are more ways of seeing than things seen: not a “what” but a “how.” Not a sight but a seeing; not a word but a saying. That is: not a fixed meaning, but a pattern, a rhythm, a metamorphosing series of relations opening infinitely into the ocean of relations of an immanent world forever in process. In which case, we must ask whether artworks have a ground or are groundless (or grounded only in themselves). And, if the latter, is it the case that, as Michelangelo

Antonioni suggests: “it is images all the way down”?

6. Then, again, there is the question of who sees whom. As Bishop Berkeley famously proposed: *Esse est percipi*, “to be is to be perceived.” Perhaps, then, to see an artwork in its fullness and reality

requires that we allow the work to see us first. Otherwise we are not even really there. For if what Berkeley suggests is true of the world, it must surely also be true of ourselves, which means, once again, recognizing that we are in the world, chiasmically intertwined with it, and not over against it: that the world is seeing us as much as we are seeing it and true seeing comes about through the intimate collaboration of these two gazes. If a poem is

like a handshake,” as Paul Celan says, then perhaps an artwork is a kind of gaze- (or eye-or ear-) shake; and if eyes and gazes, then surely faces, too; and if faces, then expressions.



7. It was Descartes, of course, who, if not first, then most sequentially, divided the world into subject and object, “*res cogitans*” and “*res extensa*” – a “thinking thing,” thought of as immaterial, and an “extended thing,” thought of as material, mindless, and mechanical – which made it possible for the thinking things, thought of as inside, to develop sophisticated ways of attacking the extended things, thought of as outside, with a view to understanding and modifying them, thus giving license to modern science and technology. Kant sought to mitigate this quandary, but only made it worse. For, as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it: “Kant... drew, as from within, the contours of a net – a strange, opaque net, every mesh of which is made only of mirrors... extendable as nets sometimes are, but closed as a box: the box of representation, within which every subject will throw himself at the walls as at reflections of himself.”

8. In other words, Kant created a closed, finite version of Indra’s Net of Infinite Interpenetration. Instead of infinite openness, he placed us within an ideological cage of habitual representation, shut off from immediacy and intimacy, and cut off from the body and the world. As a result, we find ourselves immured in the finitude of our representations. Where once the world – and image – presented itself as an infinite dynamism of depth – and openness, we find ourselves trapped in a closed world of our own making. The joy, the ecstasy of coursing in infinitude, of endlessly journeying with, into, and through the image, passing from meaning to meaning, sensation to sensation, and transformation to transformation was lost. The question thus arises: How are we to escape the world of and in our heads, the fixed, limited dictionary of our habitual representation: “this magic circle, this box of mirrors, when this circle defines our own limits as knowing subjects”?

9. Didi-Huberman, for his part, recommends that we learn to know what we see, instead of always and already seeing only what we know: that we open to the figuring, rather than the figured.

10. Or, put another way, that we live into and stay with what is emerging rather than confront what has emerged as finished product: in Blake’s phrase, that “we catch the bird in flight and fly with it.” This advice, of course, has wide application. Too many of us only read what we know: to know what one reads is largely a lost art. *Lege, lege, lege, ora, et relege*, the alchemical adage advises. Transposed, we may say: gaze, gaze, gaze, pray, and gaze again.



(Christopher Bamford, from “Raising Lazarus: The Art of Collaboration”)

“Without actually wanting to do it, more because everything was in place and the moment came, Lazarus opened the old Mysteries, made them into a public event, into common knowledge. The three and a half days of Death Sleep were the days of an ancient sacred and secret initiation. A hierophant acted as initiator and guided his student out of the body and back again in a way that the student could remember. This guiding of the new initiate out of life and back again, so he can take in the pure spiritual impulses and carry them into his life work, could have taken place only in the depth of the old holy mysteries. This three and a half days of dying, being reborn as a new human being and renamed accordingly was for a long time part of the practice of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Jewish initiations. But this practice had started to decline. It had become hard for the teacher to bring their students back. Many stayed on the other side, were captured there for too many days, and died. Time was changing, their world was changing.”

“I paused to sip my wine. It tasted like water with vinegar.

“The old initiation was at its end, and what had worked for thousands of years was now killing the ones who sought the Spirit. Lazarus almost died. He would have died, there was no way to come back, all the old ways weren’t functioning any more. There was no way home.” “Are you just making this stuff up – or have you heard it somewhere?” The barman was filling his and Lazarus’s beer. “If I read it or heard it or am making it up now, what will help you to know if it is true? The Story itself is quite clear – Lazarus was

dead. When the teacher from Nazareth arrived, Lazarus was gone and nobody thought that he was coming back. The teacher didn’t do any magic. He just called his friend back, but this calling was pure Love, like a soft command, and the spirit of Lazarus followed. This was the first initiation that was fulfilled through love, not wisdom. Lazarus became the first initiate of love. He took this in and it become his vocation, his calling. His raising also took the most holy secret and placed it out into the open. It became part of a future popular religion. Out in the open for everybody to see if he or she wants to see.”

(Zvi Szir, from “New Wine: Image and True Story”)

THE TRASHOLD OPERA: The Heartelligence of Lazarus

written by Charlotte Böttiger, Hannah Jäkel, and Sampsa Pirtola
(with contributions by Jordan Walker)

Edited Synopsis

ACT ONE: The performance starts with the appearance of Lazarus as a “bicycling Pharaoh” carried by Osiris and Anubis, who have been enslaved by him. It becomes apparent that Osiris and Anubis are lost in time and space, but in the midst of a scene of the pyramids and the sphinx they suddenly find a mysterious representative of Paradise, Inc. He presents to Lazarus the evolution of communication and the development of the telephone from the landline to the heartphone. The Paradise, Inc. representative points out the time when the smartphone was realized to have had a bad influence on people due its effect on extreme individualism, and how it was replaced by the revolutionary artphone. After a while, people realized that the artphone was as bad as the smartphone, as it was just another extreme. Only recently Paradise, Inc. found the best phone for the contemporary human being: the heartphone.



“Trash Pyramid” from Act One, video still

Lazarus has been chosen to be the first one to activate the heartphone and to show human beings that in between the extremes of smart and art, there lies *heart*, the middle path, but that choosing this path is not easy. The only way one can activate the heartphone is through the mythical tricycle. So Lazarus has to give up his bicycle and the old gods that he has enslaved to keep him superior to others. He has to learn to bike on many different surfaces, which, step by step, activates the heartphone. The highest level is to bike on top of water, which means that one has to learn to balance the extremes of the mythical tricycle. After a first person has activated the heartphone, it is freely gifted to everyone who wants to activate it within themselves.

ACT TWO: Lazarus doubts that he can accept this task, but his present life situation is revealed to him through an opera scene, where a woman dressed like him is dramatically singing on top of a pyramid of trash. This woman is Lazarus, and the trash pile is the result of the life that Lazarus is living. Through the horrifying image of not being able to cope with his everyday life, Lazarus realizes that there is no other way than to flee from the situation.

ACT THREE: In the Escapist Land (Ecstasia) Lazarus meets the Psychology Police, who guide him through the Flee Market, where he changes his bicycle to a tricycle.



Lazarus sinking beneath the water toward Hades, video still

ACT FOUR: Lazarus starts the practice of tricycling and thinks that he handles it well immediately. But this exciting feeling of being skilled brings him to ecstasy, and he starts to rise to the sky to bike among the clouds. There he finds himself among the sirens, who do not want to let him go back down to the ground, but want to boost this feeling of being especially good. This first ride ends with a dramatic fall from the sky.

ACT FIVE: Lazarus pulls himself together and comes to a seashore. Now he believes that the hard experiences of this ecstasy have been enough of a schooling and that he is ready to bike on the water. Lazarus goes with the tricycle to the water, and for a moment he thinks that he has achieved the level needed to activate the heartphone. But at that moment he starts to sink down in the water. He sinks far below and comes to the realm of Hades, where he partakes of the Tour de Hades race, where numerous dead racers are competing. Lazarus tries to bike with death,

but is doomed to lose and die.

ACT SIX: Lazarus is now dead and is carried in a threefold sarcophagus by Osiris and Anubis, while the woman from the opera scene sings to him. The sarcophagus is opened. After a while the representative of Paradise, Inc. comes and asks Lazarus to rise, and he does.

ACT SEVEN: Lazarus sits on his special tricycle and returns by the water, but this time he is able to ride on the surface, and he realizes that through his death he has finally activated the heartphone.

Personnel (*names in italics were present in Hudson*):

MUSIC Christian Ahrens & Cari Burdett
ACTING *John McManus*, Kyle Dubensky & Klaus Lozek

CREATIVE MOVEMENT *Victoria Sanders & Jordan Walker*

MASKS Warren King

VIDEO & CGI Juba Hansen & *Sampsa Pirtola*

ANIMATION Fabian Scheffold

COSTUME & STAGE DESIGN *Tim*

Kowalski, Merita Miftari, Anne Laubner & Ivana Vukovic

PHOTOGRAPHY Meinert Steensen

GRAPHIC DESIGN Veli Koskinen

ASSISTANCE Jutta Kawaleck & Sakari Laurila

SPOKEN WORD *MC Matre*

PRODUCTION *Jordan Walker & Laura Summer*

A Commentary on THE TRASHOLD OPERA by David Adams

This “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



Flyer announcing THE TRASHOLD OPERA

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. Also, it is interesting that the lower-case “h” divides between 4 and 3 capital letters, a significant occult numerical division that is also used in the structure of the Lord’s Prayer, as Rudolf Steiner has described. “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

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 heart-phone.”



“Trash Pyramid” with Anubis and Osiris, video still

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 – at least somewhat appropriately since our present Fifth Post-Atlantean Epoch is a kind of recapitulation/reflection of the Third Post-Atlantean Epoch, which included the ancient Egyptian civilization.

In addition to the above synopsis of the Opera written by Sampsa (which I have slightly edited for clarity) 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. (seemingly representing a divine presence in our post-Mystery-of-Golgotha era).



Rehearsing the “Procession” scene from Act 1 of THE TRASHOLD OPERA in Hudson

Acting only in the video portions of the opera (a last-minute change in Hudson), 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. Although bearing Lazarus, 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 installation. Anubis and Osiris were two of the most prominent ancient Egyptian gods associated with the initiation and after-death processes. Lazarus is dressed as the “Bicycling Pharaoh” (an alliterative name “*Fahrrad Pharao*” in German), a reference that becomes clearer later.



Immanuel/Lazarus carrying his initial child's tricycle, video still

The procession proceeded to various kinds of music, starting with trumpets playing long, ceremonial tones, then gradually changing several times until it became comical, then more intense. At some point during this act/scene Victoria Sanders and Jordan Walker also accompanied the action with live creative movement activities “creating the qualities of Osiris and Anubis,” as Sampsa put it.



Victoria Sanders practicing creative movement for Act 1 of the Opera

Actually, 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 more an artistic and creative image of the qualities involved in this form of initiation process. This experience can also be happening in the future.”



Osiris removing the pharaoh headgear from Lazarus, video still

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 print/drawing of him on top of it, see photograph), “Hello, friend. I see you are lost in time and space. It seems that the old gods do not know where to take you any more. I think I might be able to help.”

The representative then launched into a long monologue starting with a kind of fanciful history of human communication that explained much of the plot and meaning of the Opera, so I will quote several parts of it here at length: “First there was the word. Then after some time the word was spoken. Slowly the word started to spread around.

“It was the distance that we wanted to overcome – we wanted to send words in the forms of messages, letters, alphabets, signals. We spread words around in various ways. The word became mobile, and as a result, the word became more and more detached from its origin. Now that we could communicate from a distance, we wanted to bring the word and its creator back together – we found the telephone. And then in less than a hundred years the phone itself became mobile. We were untethered and could move while talking. 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 art-phone!

“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 rather 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 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



John McManus as the Paradise, Inc., representative explaining to Lazarus his task

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.”

Activating 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.”



Sampsia Pirtola and John McManus discussing the Paradise, Inc., representative role

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” (see photo p. 14). 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 (Cari Burdett acted this part in the video) 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.

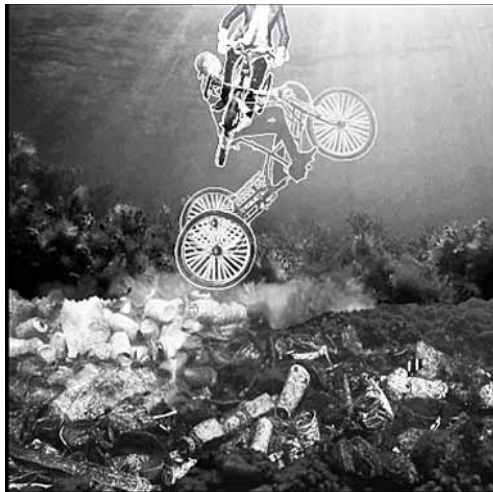


Watching the preview video of Osiris and Anubis in the Escapist Land (Ecstasia) helping Lazarus obtain his special tricycle to pursue his path.

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. Lazarus then needed to flee this, which he did by obtaining his initially child-like 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,



Lazarus departing the trash below on his growing “rickshaw tricycle,” video still



Lazarus soaring through the sky on his special tricycle, video still

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.



Lazarus flies too near the moon, urged on by luciferic sirens and tries to fight his way through a web of lower astrality surrounding the earth.

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. In the Berlin performance a video was shown about the life of a human being from end to the beginning (reflecting the after-death reverse review of one’s past life in kamaloka). This was a threefold sarcophagus with each one inside the other



17 *The “Tour de Hades” cycling competition, video animation still*

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/wake him up, reassuring him of his success in activating the heartphone by saying, “You have it.” Then in the final, seventh act (all-video) Lazarus through his own power is able to freely bike on water, realizing he has activated the heartphone, and also taking Osiris and Anubis with him.



Anubis & Osiris free Lazarus from the first sarcophagus sheath

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 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 development 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. [In 1906, GA 94, Steiner also said that in traditional esotericism water represented soul and air represented the higher self, which fits the Lazarus experience even better.]



Lazarus finally can cycle through the sky, himself moving Osiris and Anubis

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* (GA 194) as well as on a few later occasions, and more recently it has been much further elaborated in books by Ye-

shayahu 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 initial raising/initiation of Lazarus to a higher existence have made this new initiation process (here represented as the “heartphone”) potentially available to all humanity. As Steiner put it already in 1906 (GA94), “The raising of Lazarus may be regarded as a moment of transition from the ancient initiation to the Christian initiation.” While I doubt that this specific conception was consciously in the mind of Sampsa and

his co-authors for THE TRASHOLD OPERA, that is not the way artistic inspiration usually works.

To elaborate a bit further from Rudolf Steiner, who gave us many details about this process: In his previous incarnation Lazarus, the rich young man, was Hiram Abiff, who built the temple of Solomon (an initiate of wisdom). Unlike the ancient “wisdom initiation” stream of his brother Abel, governed by the Moon god Jehovah who bestowed spiritual wisdom on initiates during the three-day “temple sleep,” Cain’s stream, to which belonged Hiram Abiff, had to struggle for achievement and wisdom out of their own individual will efforts. In Hiram’s case (told as part of the Temple Legend), such efforts ultimately involved plunging into the dark depths of the earth to receive from Cain himself the Word and the Golden Triangle of Manas, Buddhi, and Atma. However, Hiram had to submerge this triangle down a well and wait for initiation proper in his next incarnation as Lazarus, when the time

was right for Christ Jesus himself, the incarnated Sun-Spirit, to make the transition from the old wisdom initiation to the new will-initiation. As a key part of this transition process, a carefully prepared Lazarus for yet one more time in human history had to enter a three-and-a-half-day, comatose “death-sleep” before being awoken/initiated by Christ Himself, and thus was equipped to soon after follow intimately the “initiation of the crucifixion,” as Steiner once put it. This death-sleep is no longer required for initiation since the

Mystery of Golgotha and has been replaced by active inner development relying on the force proceeding from the Christ in his union with the earth, which now “can take place in the heart of every human being.” (GA 112) 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* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2007; GA 265), pp. 379-448 and 470-473.

See brief bits from Opera videos on a trailer for *The Lazarus Project* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muDjMJs0qwQ>.

On The Lazarus Project Paintings by Laura Summer

by David Adams

The following is a closer examination of the seven series of paintings that Laura Summer created for the Lazarus Project, based on answers she sent to my email questions over several weeks. These paintings were first shown to a group of local artists as an installation in her yurt to help gauge reactions. They loosely relate to various parts of THE TRASHOLD OPERA, but not precisely to each of its seven acts. Laura wrote me, "I should be clear that the paintings were not painted to match the video pieces, nor were the videos made to match the paintings. When Sampsa got here [New York] and we were looking over all the paintings and the video pieces from the opera, he realized that the paintings were connected to the videos. Although we had been passing things back and forth via the internet, neither of us were trying to echo the other person's work; we were just each working with the questions. But it turned out that they do have a strong connection. If we get to install this again somewhere, we will make that connection more available to the audience."



L. Summer Milkweed Series, detail, drawings

The first series one encountered in the Lazarus installation was the *Milkweed Series* hung along the long, enclosed "Milkweed Corridor."



Laura Summer, Faces 2016 oil crayon



Laura Summer The Development of the Heartphone 7 paintings on woodblocks

There were 22 images of the milkweed pod as it opened, and then, beginning on March 29, there were 15 more images of the milkweed seed sprouting. Laura added to these latter drawings each day of the Lazarus Project.

Laura's various paintings of the *Faces Series*,

begun already before she left for Sweden, were done in black-and-white and strong colors using oil crayons, so that these faces had a certain sense of movement or transformation, being half black, half white or half colored, in many different combinations. Laura says, "They were for me very much an experience of a face *arising*. I did not plan what any of them would look like but I did let each one respond to its partner as I worked on it. Once the Lazarus project began, they became for me an experience of the interactive collaboration that Sampsa and I engaged in. A question arises, it is passed to the other, worked with, and a new question arises; it is passed back and so forth. I also thought a lot about the face of Lazarus as he emerged, how that face is all of ours, as we are all transforming. I am you and you are me, we are not so separate as it seems." Originally they were meant to hang as a sort of curtain, but Tim constructed the cylindrical contraption on which to hang them on in the installation, which would move slightly if pushed. This movement of faces could be found in the nearby "dance" video from the first act of the opera.

Her series of seven on *The Development of the Heartphone* most clearly related to the content of THE TRASHOLD OPERA. These were watercolor, ink, acrylic, and paper on wood blocks. The wood blocks were 4.5" x 11" x 2"(deep) so they stood out from the wall on which they were mounted. One can see the rectangular

"cell-phone" shapes in this series as a kind of abstracted reference to the standing human figure with the focus on the heart. This series was about the transformation of the heart "until it becomes transparent and immaterial but now spiritual and effective," as Laura puts it. This becomes especially clear with the final, seventh block painting, where there is a hole that she drilled in the same area as the "heart" in the other blocks. The inside of this hole is painted metallic gold, but you would only see that if you looked very closely at the piece itself.

Laura's larger, seven pieces of the *Hanging Figures* series, like her paintings from Hungary and most of the monoprints, have about them a strong threshold, Mysteries, after-death mood that helped create the deeply somber and moving, but also transformative "atmosphere" of the Lazarus installation. This was the first figure-transformation series she did for the Project, and they were originally intended to hang as unstretched canvases from the ceiling along a horizontal "V"-shaped path. Thus, viewers



Laura Summer Hanging Figures seven paintings on unstretched canvas 2016 The Lazarus Project installation

would walk by the first three darker paintings toward the pivotal fourth one (the vaguely defined crouching figure) at the point of the “V.” The paintings would be mounted so that viewers then had to make a turn to “exit” or come out of the “V,” where they would meet the last three paintings



suggesting a brighter, resurrecting figure hung in the opposite direction to be directly facing the viewer. She wrote that “for me the experience of walking into darkness and then turning to realize that the darkness is really light, . . . just empty of any reflecting elements, is an integral experience of a spiritual path.” However, the installation at Hudson didn’t include a suitable “V” space or turn, so this plan couldn’t be realized. The photographs here show these canvases hanging from the ceiling in her studio.

The six paintings of the “Transformation Figure/Abstract” series were the ones inside the “frames wall” in the installation. When

viewers stood back, they could only see colors inside the frames; but when they peered through the frames up-close, they could see all six paintings behind the seven frames mounted in the wall – the three “abstract” ones on top and the three figurative ones on bottom. But Laura says she would not choose to display them again that way, since the viewer really could not properly see the paintings.

The series of ninety-six monoprints mounted on two connected walls in the installation were created in great variety, both to re-search the Lazarus theme questions and to be offered to visitors who wanted one in the *Monoprint Dispersal*. Those that featured blue-red-blue and red-blue or blue-red rectangles in combination may have seemed completely non-objective. Laura says she



Laura dispersing a monoprint at The Lazarus Project



Laura Summer Transformation Figure/Abstract Series seven paintings for inside of the “frames” 2016 The Lazarus Project installation



wanted to see if she could work with Lazarus emerging from the tomb without imagery. She worked with color perspective, red (“Lazarus”) coming toward the viewer out of the blue (the two sides of the “tomb”). Then she also realized that she could see the blue shape as a receptive Lazarus and the red shape as the active Christ, so she tried some that just paired the red and blue. Some monoprints are more figurative, with various versions of an almost cosmic face or else a simply outlined “Lazarus” (seemingly wrapped in bandages or within a sarcophagus but sometimes more of a “resurrection” figure with halo and flowing radiant force-lines) and others elaborate or refer to this idea with various linear patterns and screens. On some of the monoprints (especially those with a blue background) she overprinted some of these images

The six paintings of the “*Hungary Series*” were mainly executed at the Naput painting camp in Hungary, where Laura went after spending some hours in the rose garden in Järna contemplating the transformations that occur “in secret, silent, darkness” both in the rose and the Lazarus experience. Her first two paintings there were the abstract-looking one of the “rose interior” and the “reaching-out Lazarus” image. Then came the reddish-blue face of Lazarus starting to emerge behind the veils. She shared her questions on this theme with painters Zoltan Dobrontei and Zsolt Simon, having “a number of conversations somehow between English and Hungarian about the relationship of the Lazarus transformation and the development of the rose.” Zoltan suggested she look at the traditional depictions of the raising of



with one or more irregular impressions/overprints of seemingly “hovering” gold or rust-red, water-soluble, block-printing ink. Although Laura told me the gold suggested to her the “quality of the call” to Lazarus, one perhaps can find a relationship between this use of gold and Sampsá’s conception in the Opera that the transformation/resurrection of Lazarus is like an alchemical purification of his inner “trash” into gold.

Lazarus in icon paintings, and it was after doing this that she painted the next two in the series (see illustrations). The small Lazarus painting on canvas that seemed to be hung alone in its own room in the installation (left) was the final one of the Hungary series, although technically Laura did not paint it in Hungary but directly after she returned home, where, she says, “it sort of painted itself.”



The “Hole Earth Dig” at The Lazarus Project

by Robert Leaver

On Thursday, May 19, Robert Leaver performed a “Hole Earth” dig in Hudson with a brief presentation afterward. Leaver completed a Waldorf teacher training at Sunbridge College in Chestnut Ridge, New York. His singer-songwriter music was released on a CD under the name Birdthrower (<http://birdthrower.bandcamp.com/album/birdthrower>). He has dug and climbed into his “Hole Earth” holes worldwide, from Italy to Germany to Ireland to Manhattan to Montana, penetrating the earthly surface and nestling like an infant within our “Mother (Grandmother?) Earth.” Before digging holes, he crawled from various locations in Manhattan, wearing the same suit and tie (“Crawling Home” – 20 crawl performances from October 2013 [age 46] to July 2014; see <http://icrawlhome.com>).



At the time when he switched his performance-art actions from crawling to digging, he wrote, “I want to go further back, before crawling, back towards birth and before birth.” Inside his round holes (both womb-like and grave-like) he curls up like a fetal ball. At the time of his fourth hole in The Bronx in April 2015 he wrote, “Protest, memorial, ritual, rite. I haven’t figured it out yet . . . I am asking questions with a shovel.” At another place he mentions as motivation “the dread and anxiety I experience around the state of the earth.” After his tenth dig he concludes: “In the end this is just between the earth and me.”



Leaver has always followed up his performance actions with re-

flexive blogs about them. The following is edited from his blog (www.holeearth.net) about Hole Earth #11 in Hudson as part of The Lazarus Project:

Lazarus got me back in a hole. . . . I need to wake up. Rise again. I like the sound of “come forth.”

But I haven’t dug a hole in nearly a year. I thought maybe I was finished. Seemed like maybe I’d hung up my shovel and suit for good. But sometimes all it takes is an invitation. I say yes.

I decide to beef up my presentation. I make a five-minute slide show, photos of holes and of me digging in various places with some music in the background. The slideshow can run on a loop on the wall in the gallery space. The gallery is by the railroad tracks near the train station in Hudson. My hole is to be dug across the parking lot, a stone’s throw from the tracks in a scraggly vacant lot spiked with weeds and a few scrawny cedar trees.

I start digging at around 4:00 in the afternoon. I’m set to give a short talk with a Q&A at 7:00. Within minutes of digging I sense that this dig will be long and painful. It seems as if someone dumped a wet gravel and concrete mix here long ago. It has hardened into stubborn chunks along with various other hard-to-dig waste. I am out of practice and my attitude sucks. Must adjust.



Jordan moves around, takes pictures and engages me in a conversation about my relationship with “recognition.” He means in relation to my “art.” . . . I say things like, “I think the act of creating is a kind of recognition, in that it is the recognizing of self, the creating of self through the work,” etc. I basically declare that I don’t need recognition and each hole is its own reward.

He probes deeper on the recognition subject, trying to find out how much it matters, or helps, or hurts. He’s making me think. The earth here is starting to smell bad. I must be near a septic situation. I am sweating freely, body at work. I look up from the dig and see that there is one other person here with us, a man with strong arms folded across his chest, watching me with a grave expression. We nod at each other. After a while he leaves, and then someone else arrives, an intern with the Lazarus Project. She takes some pictures. I forgot gloves so my hands are blistering. . . .



Observers of the Dig: Jordan and the man with strong arms

The hole is not inviting. It does not want to exist. This neutral-looking location is some sort of abandoned toxic dumping ground. I am digging in a dead zone. I am disturbing the peace. Someone has found small knit gloves for me to wear and I pull them on over torn blisters.

I finally get to the bottom, to the depth I need, and I fling my shovel down with a clang. I'm feeling toxic too. I look up at the glorious late afternoon sky. The sky. The constant masterpiece. The ultimate witness. But I'm going the other way. "I'm getting in now," I announce to Jordan. . . .

Curled up in a ball, I curse myself for wanting an audience, for desiring recognition. Then I start to curse the polluters of this earth and the man, me, in the earth and the whole ridiculous situation. I vow to never do this again. Never! I shut my eyes and count to five hundred while the sun slips down and shadows stretch across the ground.



. . . The hole is squeezing me, trying to get me to admit that I want some sort of recognition. It is silent up above. For all I know I am completely alone. . . .

I count one more time to one hundred and then I get up and fill the hole back in. The hole reeks and now I reek too. I ache from the contortion and lack of circulation in my extremities. I am dizzy and feeling broken as I walk unsteadily across the parking lot into the raw space warehouse gallery. I politely refuse an offer to wash up.

Soothing Lazarus-related art is everywhere on the walls, but I can't see it now. I'm too pissed off, self absorbed, and disoriented. . . . Maybe a dozen people are assembled and ready for my "talk." They take seats and I stand before them. . . .

"Hello." I say and raise one bloodied hand. "I was just wondering – how many people here saw what just happened outside? Raise your hand if you saw me in the hole." Two people raise their hands and the rest look at each other sort of confused and sheepish.

"Right. Well. . . I just dug for two and a half hours and got inside a hole and. . . it was worth a look. . . but we have the slideshow pictures, right? And I can tell you about it. I don't want you to feel bad. I don't. . . .



"I bring this up because our host Jordan and I had conversation as I was digging. . . about Recognition," I say. "I think I said that it doesn't really matter to me. But now I think it does. I realized when I was out there in that hole that I wanted you to see me. Not *me* exactly, but *The Thing*. I wanted to show you a man in a suit in a hole. It is sort of embarrassing to admit, but it's true. Like a kid. "Look what I made!" We all want or need to be seen. . . right? At least once in a while. . . . Recognition. . . is real.

I'm groping for my next point, scratching my head. Some dirt and gravel spill out of my hair onto my shoulder and down to the floor. People laugh a little, nervously. . . .

I sit down and do my reading of selected Hole writings. Afterward the Q&A brings out a lot of questions and conversation about how I got into this and about physical work and art and ritual and the value and meaning of recognition. People seem sparked and eager to share their thoughts and questions.

For my final offering I take out a guitar and sing my song "Dig" about digging a hole. The song ends and people clap and stand up to leave. . . . Then I am facing the serious looking man whose arms were folded over his chest as he watched me dig my hole. He shakes my hand firmly like a farmer and lasers me with his eyes. "Thank you," he says. "We need more of this. Especially now – with what's going on. . . ."

Later I am crossing the Hudson River alone in my car. My body is sore all over, hands raw on the wheel. I need a hot shower and some food. I have come forth once again. I suppose tonight I am some sort of Lazarus, in my filthy tattered suit, driving west through the darkness. . . . I am bound for another hole.

Ways of Thinking and Seeing

Lecture Report by David Adams, from lecture text by Nathaniel Williams

At *The Lazarus Project* Nathaniel Williams's lecture, "Ways of Thinking and Seeing: Aesthetic Images and Knowledge Practices," presented a complementary reflection about "waking up" through art. Nathaniel began by comparing the child's intensely vivid sense perception, which develops into imagination, with aesthetic experiences in art and nature (also "childlike"), which he also called "lived perception." Today "the screens and surfaces of drawings and paintings do not receive the same attention as the new screens, screens that move and glow." While children's early experiences of films and screens may be strong and powerful, with maturation screens gradually lose this power, becoming a more subdued experience.

Trying to understand the cultural significance of our new mechanized, electronic screens, Nathaniel quoted philosopher Jean Baudrillard from *The Conspiracy of Art*: "As this technology, this cinematographic efficiency grew, illusion withdrew. Cinema today knows neither allusion nor illusion; it links everything on a hypertechnical, hyperefficient, hypervisible level. No blanks, no gaps, no ellipses, no silence. . . . We are moving ever closer to high definition, in other words to the useless perfection of images." Comparing this with an experience of an artistic illusion created "live" in an opera, Baudrillard adds, "because we are no longer capable of confronting the symbolic mastery of absence, we are now plunged in the opposite illusion, the disenchanting illusion of profusion, the modern illusion of the proliferation of screens and images." Nathaniel noted that, curiously, "with the perfection of illusion, all meaning in illusion evaporates."

This view is contrasted with that of postmodern philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who in turn was influenced by philosopher Henri Bergson to practice a particular method. Bergson noted that our temporal, intensive, intuitive experience of a whole and undivided movement cannot be grasped as a whole when we break down and analyze its parts nor can it be reconstituted from those divided parts. This experience of a lived, aesthetic, moving whole Bergson called *duration*, which, unlike the analyzing intellect that dissociates us from life, was a key to understanding the evolution of life.

In his book *Creative Evolution* Bergson spoke of developing a new faculty for the investigation of *life*, of the living, which he called *intuition*. He also spoke of aesthetic and artistic experiences "as germinal points within the psyche that could be developed into knowledge practices" – even suggesting that "we can conceive an inquiry turned into the same direction as art, which would take life in general for its object. . . ."



Nathaniel Williams lecturing in Hudson

Returning briefly to Deleuze, Nathaniel noted that Deleuze's view of film as "a full, visceral and real field of experience" contrasted both with Bergson's feeling that cinema expressed "a negative ambition of the intellect to gain movement from sections" and with Baudrillard's view that "the perfection of cinema images is an impoverishment to experience." Nathaniel notes the irony that "the individual Deleuze has in large part been inspired by – namely Bergson – foresaw that an intensive study of life forms and the living would be the new frontier of philosophy – and that Deleuze, the philosopher who puts Bergson's *intuition* into practice and carried Bergson's intentions into the following generation, then directs this intuition upon a highly mechanized practice of visual art" (i.e., film).

Quoting author Giorgio Agamben, Nathaniel continued by noting that, despite the opposite popular view, "modern science has its origins in an unprecedented mistrust of experience as it was traditionally understood." Rather, it strives to displace experience onto instruments and exact quantification and, through this, has discovered "stunning correspondences" and "uncanny correlations with events in the lived world."



Like Bergson and Agamben, Rudolf Steiner recognized the "death element" in modern science, which retreats "from the immediate, lived aesthetic moment into an abstracted and distanced mental process," revealing not the mysteries of life or morality but only "patterns in the field of the lifeless." By contrast, Steiner tried to develop a path of knowledge that involved both the mathematic transparency and intensive concentration admired by the scientific method.

Steiner's approach was to further develop our mental picturing capacity, inwardly imagining lived sense-experiences with qualitative, not quantitative, images. In this working to develop what

he called the Imaginative consciousness, a person has to learn to navigate the inner world of free-floating “hallucinations, visions, and illusions.” In achieving this, Nathaniel noted the development of “a kind of math of qualities,” whereby discoveries due to Imagination such as that of the threefold human constitution and social organization could be a kind of “proof” validating this method of knowledge, through which “one could . . . concretely grasp a stream of qualitative images.”

Steiner’s practice led to “a more intimate knowledge of life and experience” involving “more participation in the immediate, qualitative stream of time.” Our very perception of “facts” changes if we cultivate different knowledge practices. The modern western scientific method is more closely connected to mechanics, the spatial world, and a dualistic worldview. While successful in these realms, it also has “narrowed our field of experience.” Practicing the arts and contemplative inquiry is part of the quest of a contemporary Lazarus to expand this experience, to “wake up.” As Nathaniel concluded, “these are the directions of practice that must be cultivated if we are not to make of our world of ‘facts’ an an-aesthetic mechanism, something very far away from the full, vital, and concrete imagination we know from childhood, and the fullness of human potential that our heritage belies.”



Anna Sokolina Recognized for Her Architectural History Work

An essay by Anna Sokolina titled “Biology in Architecture: the Goetheanum Case Study” has been published in *The Routledge Companion to Biology in Art and Architecture* by Charissa N. Terranova, and Meredith Tromble; New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.

Links:

- <https://books.google.com/books?id=kIPUDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT144&dq=onepage#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Routledge: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Biology-in-Art-and-Architecture/Terranova-Tromble/p/book/9781138919341>
- Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Routledge-Companion-Biology-Art-Architecture/dp/1138919349>
- Her chapter on GoogleBooks: <https://books.google.com/books?id=kIPUDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT144&dq=onepage#v=onepage>

The “abstract” for her article:

“The approach to anthroposophical architecture is considered through the lens of ecology: the restoration and preservation of the natural balance of the environment by creative design and construction. I evaluate architecture as a culturally structured, socially rooted matter of philosophical and spiritual experience. From this perspective, anthroposophical architecture is aimed at the advancement of technologies in the service of holistic living and toward fundamental knowledge of the architect and the sense of internal logistics of structural models as natural shells for growth and transformation, rather than mimicry of forms or the programming of decorative styles.”

“An anthroposophical teaching on architecture was not abstract, but read in the material practice of architectural design and the anatomy of the human body. From this perspective, Steiner developed an idea of inhabitable spatial *shells* as places for living. He considered architecture to be a planetary, earthly matter and an integral part of the living organism. It was to serve as the natural “third skin” by providing harmonious environments for communities, functioning like a sheath that protects the human body. For Steiner, architecture was a living integument. Therefore, his buildings did not slavishly imitate natural forms, but exhibited the organic processes of living nature itself while at the same time mirroring nature as the human body does the macrocosmic universe.”

In June Anna also was named the first-ever Milka Bliznakov Scholar, with a 2-year stipend at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (home of the International Archive of Women in Architecture, or IAWA) in support of her research proposal, “Life to Architecture: Milka Bliznakov Academic Papers and Records of Russian Women Architects at the IAWA.” See: www.shera-art.org/news/post.php?s=2016-07-23-ann-anna-p-sokolina-named-first-milka-bliznakov-scholar



Scene from The Lazarus Project, Hudson, New York May 2016

