Après le déluge. A pluri-scientific and artistic approach to the Greek crisis

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Rimbaud’s poem Après le déluge from the cycle Illuminations creates space for a variety of approaches to and engagement with the burning social questions: "What kind of a world are we living in?”, "What kind of a world do we want to live in?” and "How can we get there?” Against the background of the massacre of the Communards by the French army with the support of the German troops Rimbaud, in spite of all the destroyed Utopian projects and lost political illusions, calls in his poem for resistance and, with a variety of metaphors and subtle word-play, he diagnoses and interprets the social tragedy of this age and its material and moral misery. The timeless parable encourages us to approach the dramatic crises of our contemporary society in free variations on its great themes, interpretations and prophecies as an object of study to be undertaken together by artists of different genres, social and cultural scientists of various disciplines, committed intellectuals and inspired people of widely differing political orientation.

The project is to be understood as a practical implementation of a public sociology, of a form of sociological commitment to the social hot spots and crises beyond the sterile self-referentiality of academic circles, with the goal of bringing critical social diagnosis based on empirical research to the attention of a wider interested public.

Thanks to its openness and often seemingly enigmatic allusions the horizon unfolded by Rimbaud offers sufficient scope for a broadly based orchestra with the most varied instruments, accompanied by a polyphonic choir, to take up these contemporary questions at a very symbolic place – Athens – and to approach the contemporary social issues and questions in the highly focused, condensed and intensive form presented by the Greek context, applying the various artistic and scientific methods autonomously and nonetheless taking advantage of interdisciplinary knowledge by means of cross-reference and mutual reinforcement.

How can we talk about society? This question was brought up and tested again and again by a doyen of sociology, Howard Becker. Colleagues such as Pierre Bourdieu made use of photography or theatrical realizations of their research, for example in the form of staged interviews, in order to open up the austere

Arthur Rimbaud, Après le déluge (Les Illuminations, 1872-1875)
As soon as the idea of the Flood was finished, a hare halted in the clover and the trembling flower bells, and said its prayer to the rainbow through the spider’s web.

Oh! The precious stones that hid, – the flowers that gazed around them.

In the soiled main street stalls were set,
they hauled the boats down to the sea rising in layers as in the old prints.

Blood flowed, at Blue-beard’s house – in the abattoirs in the circuses where God’s promise whitened the windows. Blood and milk flowed.

The beavers built. The coffee cups steamed in the bars. In the big greenhouse that was still streaming, the children in mourning looked at the marvellous pictures.

A door banged, and, on the village-green,
the child waved his arms, understood by the cocks and weathervanes of belf-towers everywhere, under the bursting shower.

Madame *** installed a piano in the Alps.
The Mass and first communications were celebrated at the hundred thousand altars of the cathedral.

Caravans departed. And the Hotel Splendide was built in the chaos of ice and polar night.

Since then, the Moon’s heard jackals howling among the deserts of thyme – and pastoral poems in wooden shoes grumbling in the orchard. Then, in the burgeoning violet forest, Eucharis told me it was spring.

Rise, pond: – Foam, roll over the bridge and under the trees: – black drapes and organs – thunder and lightning rise and roll: – Waters and sadness rise and raise the Floods again.

Because since they abated – oh, the precious stones burying themselves and the opened flowers! – It’s wearsome!
And the Queen, the Sorceress who lights her fire in the pot of earth, will never tell us what she knows, and what we are ignorant of.

Arthur Rimbaud, *After the flood*  
(Illuminations, 1872-1875)