

## Fourteen and One Frog – A reflection

What may appear at first sight to the viewer, to be something like the death dance of Lycian peasants, reveals itself as a complex analysis of the relationship between individuals and society. Song Jing portrays the individual as a frog in her work "She and She and Frog and Frog". In many cultures, the frog is seen almost exclusively as a positive, life-giving animal and as a symbol of female fertility. In some Christian cultures, however, it is also associated with incalculable primal forces of life and is associated with fear and disgust.

Fifteen frogs, prepared for Chinese medicine, are on display. Each in its own frame, the thighs stretched out as if in a jump and the jaws upright. All of them are, on the whole, scarcely distinguishable by the arbitrary gesture of their anterior limbs. They are, therefore, essentially equal in nature, and yet one of them is 'more equal': it represents the prototype and is the only one facing the observer. Its particularity is transmitted aurally to the black-and-white photograph behind it, where its image, as it were, symbolizes this transfer by a ring.

A copy of its image, exactly matched in shape and size, is laid behind the remaining fourteen frogs, suggesting the collectivization of the frogs. The technical reproduction of the image, however, leads to the deterioration of its aura. Does this circumstance degrade the fourteen other frogs into simple embodiments of a copy of the image of the chosen one?

At first, this would seem like an inevitable and linear process - would there be not that ring. In a way, the wearing of the ring ritualizes the transfer of the essence by pointing to the circularity of the process. There is no special feature that separates the one frog from the others, elevating it *per se* to the *primus inter pares*. Each member of the group could have been lucky enough to serve as a model, thus, they enter into a kind of dialogue with each other.

In order to underline this, the group picture of the specimens serves as a final chord, where these fourteen 'subordinate' frogs are presented in a photographic image. Their shadows, to which they are no longer confined, are gathered and frozen in the black and white of the photograph. Their arbitrary arrangement seems to be made for the omen reading Augures, so they can read the future from their accidental positions. In sharp contrast to the static mode of representation in the other fifteen boxes, in this display the perception patterns and association mechanisms of the beholder are overridden, thus creating a *Chokwirkung* (Walter Benjamin) leading to the destruction of their aura.

The arrangement in its entirety is not essayistic, even though the artist enigmatically lures the viewer into changing hypotheses. On the one hand, Song Jing describes poetically the longing for fellowship, even equality, which nevertheless results in the loss of individuality in societies - whether idealistic or materialistic. On the other hand, she foils the linear duality of identity and conformity with the ritual of a circular play of body and soul, of object and aura, and not least of singularity and plurality.

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Translated from the original German Text by Ian Banerjee