

“Childhood Hymn Through Time” Early Image Research of French Photographer Bernard Foucon

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Abstract: Bernard Foucon's creation process started in 1976 and ended voluntarily in 1995. The theme of his creation is very clear. Childhood is the most infatuated life stage of Foucon. He spent his whole life photographing children's childhood, or recalling or remembering his childhood in children's photography with such themes, which seems to be constructed as a way to fight against the progress of current media technology. Neil Bozeman said "the disappearance of childhood". Neil Bozeman is one of the most important media culture researchers in the world after McLuhan. He initiated the major of media ecology at New York University. He believes that the powerful media can redefine the real world with a hidden but powerful hint power, and even shape the cultural spirit of an era. In fact, people live in the huge metaphorical world created by the media without knowing themselves, so he developed the theory of "media is information".

1. Introduction



Figure 1: Bernard Faucon (b.1950)

The opening exhibition of Chengdu Contemporary Photography Museum, which was launched on April 27, 2019, featured seven high-quality photography exhibitions, including a full range of works of Bernard Faucon (b.1950) (Figure 1), the representative of French composition photography and conceptual photography, in different periods. This exhibition is the first time that Foucon has exhibited on the largest scale in China since the mirror was sealed in 1995. It also includes Le

Cabanon De Bernard (2019), a 1:1 reconstruction of the scene. Foucon personally participated in the arrangement of this small house full of memories and stories (Figure 2). All the objects in the house were transported from his hometown, Provence, southern France, The remains of the Foucon family and many of his personal belongings. Chengdu Contemporary Image Museum will also permanently retain the Fokong Exhibition Hall.

Bernard Foucon's creation process started in 1976 and ended voluntarily in 1995. The theme of his creation is very clear. According to the logical order of creation time, his photography can be divided into seven series: Les Grandes Vacances (1976-1981) series, Evolution Probable du temps (1981-1984), Les Chambres d'Amour (1984-1987) series Les Chambre d'Or (1987-1988) series, Les Idoles et les Sacrifices (1989-1991) series, Les Ecritures (1991-1993) series and La Fin de l'Image (1993-1995) series. This paper discusses the beginning of Bernard Foucon's creative career, the Long Vacation series, and tries to explore Bernard Foucon's "image poetics" that gives life to images through photography.



Figure 2: Le Cabanon De Bernard (2019)

2. Childhood is the Most Infatuated Life Stage of Foucon

Childhood is the most infatuated life stage of Foucon. "There will be few art lovers today who would feel quite unable to share some at least of this reaction." [1] He spent his whole life photographing children's childhood, or recalling or remembering his childhood in children's photography with such themes, which seems to be constructed as a way to fight against the progress of current media technology. Neil Bozeman said "the disappearance of childhood". Neil Bozeman is one of the most important media culture researchers in the world after McLuhan. He initiated the major of media ecology at New York University. He believes that the powerful media can redefine the real world with a hidden but powerful hint power, and even shape the cultural spirit of an era. What he did was "fix the moment of these beautiful things by using light, flame and the action in the picture, young, beautiful and near nihilism." [2] In fact, people live in the huge metaphorical world created by the media without knowing themselves, so he developed the theory of "media is information". "It is not enough to just recognize. This is only at the ideological level. Recognition should take place at the spiritual level." [3]

Neil Bozeman's research focuses on the cognition and criticism of the progress of media technology, implying an ultimate humanistic concern that is particularly important for the current society, that is, to help young people recognize and understand the essence of media technology through research, and to deal with the impact of the changes in media technology on their thinking and lifestyle, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of the continuation and development of human civilization. In Neil Bozeman's view, "childhood" is an invented concept. Before the popularization of printing, children and adults shared basically the same cultural world through oral communication,

so human beings did not have "childhood"; after the popularization of printing, words became dominant. In a world where adults mastered words and knowledge, there was a cultural gap between children and adults, and "childhood" was born.

In the age of television, all information can be shared between adults and children. The boundaries between adults and children are gradually blurred. Almost all children are forced to enter the adult world full of conflict, war, sex and violence early, and "childhood" gradually disappears. The connotation of the concept of childhood is also closely related to media technology. The concept of "childhood" is a social concept and a cultural product. Although it has a biological basis, it can only be realized under the stimulation and cultivation of social environment.

From about 476 to 1640, there was no concept of childhood, because not all people were able to read and write, and not all people could receive education. People communicated with each other in spoken language. Children and adults lived in the same social environment. The Catholic Church designated the age of 7 as the age to distinguish right from wrong. Once a person reached the age of 7, he would enter the adult world, become an apprentice, and work like an adult. In the face of cruel society, the older people will marry and have children, and support their families like adults.

In the 16th century, Johannes Gutenberg of Germany invented printing. According to different reading abilities, people have a new definition of the concept of adults, that is, adults refer to people with reading ability, while children refer to people without reading ability. With the popularization of printing, the concept of childhood was further formed. Printing has led the society to enter the era of knowledge explosion. The "new law distinguishes psychological, physical and social space." [4] Many knowledge and secrets about the adult world are hidden in books. Children can only master basic knowledge and understand the contracts and contracts of the commercial society through literacy and school reading, so as to successfully enter the adult society.

"It has often been said that the real or dominant subject-matter of twentieth-century art is art itself." [5] In this case, the concept of childhood has gradually been accepted by people, and children and adults have gradually become significantly different in various aspects. Children have their own unique clothing, language, games and social life. By the 1950s, in the whole western world, the enjoyment of childhood had been regarded as the birthright of everyone. Childhood was no longer regarded as a product of culture, but as a necessary stage for human beings. At the same time, Pozman pointed out that in the current "screen era", in the culture where adults and children become television viewers together, politics, business, education, etc. eventually degenerate into a childish and superficial retarded culture, and the cultural spirit of human beings gradually withers. "Behind the opposition between adults and children, he found a more fundamental opposition between life and death." [6] This is also one of the ideological sources of the poetic sadness revealed in Foucon's works.

3. "The Long Vacation" (1975-1993) Series

The Long Vacation series is a series of photographic works created by Foucon in the Luberon mountain area of Provence, southern France, in the early period of his creative career, which interlaces childhood memories and reality. The Long Holiday is an important part of Foucon's photography career, it is the "early stage of blue" around the vibration of light and the change of tone, which directly affects the overall framework of the subsequent creation. In this series, Foucon creatively uses wax figurines with exquisite workmanship to make "phase" ", and make the picture always exist in the balance created by the accurate square picture frame - since the first photographic work with a puppet appeared in 1975. Foucon has been using the Hasselblad camera, the square negative and the Frisson output technology. He believes that the square is the shape of an image, which extends and proliferates from the center to all directions. All energy runs and circulates in it, and can shape reality in it.

Therefore, it was not until the shooting of "The End of Image" in 1993 that Foucon gave up the square composition and turned to the rectangular composition. He regarded the rectangle as the shape of record, and people used it to frame a thought and an idea. From the photography creation of the Long Holiday series, Foucon always regards himself as the image maker and the scene setter of the photography world. The Long Vacation series has established an important theme of Foucon's photography: in the scenery of Provence, the scattered childhood and the clear eyes that overlook the childhood not far away are imbued with philosophy and theology. The persistent infatuation, remembrance and absurd imagination of childhood dreams in Foucon's works endow his photography with a subtle poetic aura.

4. "Model" (1975) Series

"Model" (1975) is the first creation in Foucault's photography works with the participation of dolls. Like many great creations need some accidental elements in inevitability, the appearance of dolls in Foucault's photography started from an accidental opportunity. In the work, two female models are talking like "Eve" in the Garden of Eden. Foucon himself is sitting on the back bench in the middle of the picture, with one hand supporting his head, looking directly at the camera. The work originates from the accidental creation of happy family games: Fokong's mother is responsible for pressing the shutter, and Fokong's father is responsible for shaking off the leaves. "Where people normally see the same image, we call it reading." [7] In his own opinion, "it seems that there is some inspiration coming from the sky", Vercon suddenly realized that he could integrate his collected dolls, the scenery of his hometown Provence and the spiritual fetters of his childhood into photography.



Figure 3: Sailing Boat (1979)

What Foucon shows in photography is not a simple cut out scene, nor a simple memory of childhood, but a slice of the life of the era he grew up in. Reality and illusion, puppets and real people, the past and the present all occupy a place in his works, but they are separated from each other. The work "Sailing Boat" (1979) (Figure 3) is based on the floats parading during the festival. It is a painting that is very similar to the narrative. In the picture, a white sailboat is sailing in the wilderness, and six teenagers are leisurely watching the scenery on the boat. On the grass at the front of the picture, white cloth strips are used to simulate water waves. The image is simple but cute. This is the "simulacrum" world created by Foucon based on childhood memories. He explained: "What I try to

create is not the story to be told, but a moment in the mind of the person listening to the story." He is using sensitive personal experience to create a more general sense of public synaesthesia.



Figure 4: Sleepers (1980)

In another work, Sleepers (Figure 4), the visual center of the picture is completely occupied by the sleeping children, and the background is a white sheet flying with the wind and a vague figure. "Art history had surrendered all objective standards." [8] This scene is similar to Rousseau's painting *The Sleeping Gypsy* in 1897, which is both a dream and a fable. In later works, there were many scenes of teenagers sleeping soundly. For example, in the *House of Love* series opened in 1981, the pure body of the stage of gender free childhood was presented, and the children in the works exuded divine light. Seminologist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) believed that the photography of Fukong's dolls in the *Long Vacation* series evoked some thinking about *L'Immortel*: "The static state of human dolls was set off in various signs and structures of life surrounding them, and these *infrs corps* were gathered here by artists, as if they were determined that they would eventually revive." [9] (Zoom, 1979). In other words, in his photography, we use "posture to show spiritual characteristics as the most suitable field for human beings." [10]



Figure 5: Banquet (1978)

The work *Banquet* (1978) (Figure 5) is an absurd dinner scene created by Foucon. The picture is close to the magic long tea table in *Alice in Wonderland*. The table is covered with white cloth, red fruits, simple food and red wine. Empty wine bottles and disassembled cartons were scattered on the ground full of withered grass. The woman in white sitting nearby is responsible for baking food, and other children at the dinner party run to the left rear of the picture where a fire is burning, here, "flame", as an important theme in Fo Kong's works, begins to show more clearly. In Fo Kong's family, flame is used to welcome important friends, commemorate the biggest festival and celebrate the important moment of happiness, so fire is a good and charming symbol of life for Fo Kong.

5. "Long Holiday" Series

The work "Burning Snow" (1981) is the end of the "Long Holiday" series, which took five years. The title of the work "Burning Snow" is borrowed from the title of Marie Noel, a French poetess. In 1977, the winning work of Regis Debray at the Fermina Prize was also named "La neige brule". The shock caused by the encounter of such a pair of contradictory words as "flame" and "ice and snow" makes the work have mysterious absurdity and imagination space. In this work of Foucon, the puppet almost exits, and only half of the blurred face appears at the front right of the picture. In the center of the lake is a burning flame, which spreads sporadically to the far distance of the deep picture. The ground in shadow is covered with snow made of "powdered sugar". One third of the left part of the picture is a huge multi-layer white cake placed on the snow pile, which is decorated with two rings of shiny plastic flowers. At the top of the cake stands a puppet in blue.

The whole picture is shrouded in the pink warm sunset, like a silent farewell song. This is indeed a farewell song, not only for the Long Holiday series, but also for the most important family member in Foucon's life, his grandmother Tatiye, who died in this year. At this time, Foucon was 30 years old. The departure of Tatiye made him feel the rudeness and cruelty of time again. This is also the prelude to the next stage of Time of Possible Change.

Fokong always has the vitality of creativity - from the creative use of dolls in photography to the humanistic thinking of directly embedding words in photography. He is constantly broadening the boundaries of photography and exploring new visual possibilities. The reality is like a huge net, which makes people trapped in it. At the end of the documentary *Long Holidays*, which recorded the creation experience of Fou Kong, Fou Kong described a recurring dream, the most common call of her relatives' grandmother Tatier. She called Fou Kong's name, "Fou Kong, Fou Kong!", and Fou Kong answered quickly and loudly, "Yes, I am!"! "Just when he answered loudly, Foucon woke up, the dream ended, and the sadness was instantly diffused. The linear time brought an irresistible" irreversible "sadness.

6. Conclusion

Verkhon always wanders between death and remembrance, and his paranoid attachment is undoubtedly revealed from the very beginning of creation, which seems to prove once again the words that grandmother Tatier believed in and left in Verkhon's heart: "The only really important thing in life is to meet." The long and happy holiday will end, the bright and happy childhood will die, and the loved ones and close friends with deep feelings will also leave one after another, from the joy of meeting to the grief of loss, What taught Vulcan was not passive sadness, but the most sincere and original motivation for his creation, which inspired him to reproduce the scene with the help of the "simulacrum" of the memory by the puppet in a slightly anxious mood. The work blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion, reality and dream, and extends the emotion, expands the dimension of time and space, and reappears the divine light of pure childhood to the audience.

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