

“Francisco Ruiz de Infante”, Vtape Curatorial Incubator, November 20, 2002

Les Choses Simple, Francisco Ruiz de Infante, 1993, 17 minutes

"I was born a long way from here. With this strange language, I can only construct simple sentences. I can only say that the sky is blue, that the sea is blue, that the sun heats the earth, that my house was white, that my land was fertile; that the scars on my hands were worth the trouble. However, I know very well that experiences are gained haphazardly, that growing old makes me forget certain things: that the trees have grown too quickly, and that their branches prevent me from seeing the blue of the sky as described in books." (Francisco Ruiz de Infante)

Francisco Ruiz de Infante

Born in 1966 in Vitoria-Gasteiz, in the Basque region of Spain, Francisco Ruiz de Infante lives and works in Paris. He has a Bachelor's degree from Bilbao University, Spain (1986-1991), and a Master's degree from the Beaux-arts de Paris (1991-1992). As a multidisciplinary artist, he has explored sculpture, Super 8 film, sound installations, as well as video and video installations.

It must be difficult to develop a symbolic order when the world itself is undergoing considerable disorder. Whether it is war or family troubles, these *adult things* creep into a child's utopia like nightmares. These disruptions flicker across the development of childhood understanding, complicating the already difficult attempts to comprehend the patterns and logic of this world. The child tries to adapt his own language into a descriptive tool for this world, even as the tensions on the exterior of his garden world disrupt his notions of beauty and peace.

In *Les Choses Simples*, everything is shot in close-up. These close-ups resemble the way a child delineates his world by ordering the surrounding objects, by creating, naming and observing the habits of adults. However, the rumble of the soundtrack reveals that this intense concentration on things is also a way to distract oneself. The attentiveness to things up-close is a child's way of dealing with menace. The examinations of the leaves, the trees, the fruits help to forget the nightmares. The creation of a new language erases the strange language of gunfire and sirens that burst beyond the garden wall.

Francisco Ruiz de Infante explores the violence of adulthood through an iconography of nature. In order to comprehend the dangers that surround, he puts us in a garden. Archetypes teach us that the only gardens that exist are fallen. Still, there is a trust in nature as a constant even with the knowledge of its destruction. Through Ruiz's visual overlaying, the apple that burns becomes a seed for a tree, which is then chipped away at for its sap. This apple, the ultimate symbol of a fallen world, also contains the superimposed image of a home. It is this cycle of destruction and life in which we are ourselves embedded.

For Ruiz, it is apparent that the larger disorders of the adult world also manifest an ecological dimension. Even while nature as a garden offers protection from the ravages of the outside world, it is itself subjected to the direct effects of human intervention. Either it is damaged like the foliage that is uprooted in the first image of the video, or its energy is harnessed by human means as in the image of the showerhead, which stands in for the child's understanding of rain. Through the eyes of the child, the video explores the complexity of our role in shaping the world around us.

Images of hands visually represent the presence of humans throughout the video. As the child narrator points out, "the hand is an object of great precision." However, the child's constant positioning of himself as a stranger reveals the difficulty in assessing whether his hands are as active as he thinks. The hands in the video are those of outsiders, only rearranging simple things in a manageable order while the larger chaotic environment continues unaffected. The young narrator initially asserts that, "the scars on my hands were worth the trouble", but this statement is complicated by being spoken by a child, who is potentially the most innocent and most powerless agent of change. Even with age, however, it is never quite clear whether those scars are a result of hard manual labour or wounds received in self-defense.

For it is not just the imagined utopia of childhood that is disrupted by the changing conditions of life. The child's actions are not so different from how we ourselves deal with war and other major challenges--the cocoons that we weave, the small gardens that we tear up and replant. The impotency that the child feels and covers by distraction is a common impotency and a common ignorance. The child is able to recognise certain things about the world quite clearly, but he also develops a very early sense of limits. Those limits carry on into adulthood.

Perhaps the most evocative image in *Les Choses Simples* is the final image of the marathon runners. It both illustrates the difficulty of navigating a challenging world and contains the possible remedy to this vulnerability. The image begins with a small group of runners who are visually doubled and tripled until the screen fills with a large ghostly mass of people. The narration that accompanies the image resonates with the question of how much we influence the world and how much we are captured by it. The child narrator lists a few recent discoveries he has made about the adult world. After summarising these observations, he declares his final discovery, "that pain is a complicated feeling and that solitude exists." The repetition of this phrase like a mantra over the image of the athletes reveals that solitude exists even in the multitude--perhaps it is even defined by the multitude. The revelation that this awkward sense of isolation is central to our feelings of impotency may lead to a greater understanding of the importance of challenging our social isolationism. The limits we discover as children are often limits that separate us from the multitude and cause us to burrow in our gardens, trying to make sense of it all, rather than recognising the common confusion just over the garden wall.

-Chris Kennedy
November 2002

Chris Kennedy is a Toronto-based writer and programmer. He shoots super 8 when so inspired and serves on the Pleasure Dome programming collective.