

A house of one's own

Julie Pfeleiderer's *Das Retirée, or the last house of my father* is a film about a house, but it could also be about a father or about a daughter too. It is about an architect, but also about a filmmaker. It is about a space, a person, a profession that folds or unfolds like a story.

A film and a space – it depends on how you look at it. *Das Retirée* plays with proportions. It scales and rescales. Small things, fragments of things, details: they all come in different sizes. The hand of the daughter (who is also the filmmaker), her fingers going through her hair, lead the viewer towards the first grey hairs that become visible only because of the extreme close-up or the scale of the image. It is a detail, but it counts. It's a direction. The hand of the father (who is twice her age – you see the difference, it's a man's hand because of the hairs on it, it's an old hand because of the colour of its skin) copies his own drawings (you assume, because he is the architect). A hand, a pencil, a piece of paper – small things that stand for a bigger whole. They fill the screen of which the size depends on where you are (behind a computer? in a theatre?). Voices join in and open up the space (does a voice have a size?). One voice is firmer than the other (that too has to do with age: voices – like arguments – tend to become stronger at first, while growing up, but then start to fade while ageing). The voices start a conversation about small things, small gestures, that distance themselves from grand visions. That's how one ends up with a compact house. A house of one's own.

(Actually, it starts with a room. The only room in the house with a door. A tiny room for that matter, with a view on a big plum tree. That is where it begins. That used to be the first image, the first Retirée. A room so small you could only enjoy it on your own. It used to be the room of the daughter before becoming the room of the father and before becoming a house.)

Scales change. They rescale during the planning phase (or the script, the pitch, for the filmmaker) and throughout the making of the film. They grow from, let's say, 1:1000, to, inevitably, 1:1.

One on one: that's real, like when building a house. One to one: that's for real, like when building a conversation. One and one. A house and a conversation. Looking for what is missing (at first) and discovering what is there (when things are filled in). A house and a conversation. Like a scale model: how things, elements, fit in and with each other. Then comes the fear of failure: we all know that when starting something new. But we all deal with it differently. What is there to build on fear? A house and a conversation. That's two times working with the things you have, the things you know. It starts with the everyday, the things around you, nothing special. It is what it is. One on one. One to one. One and one. Tiny things. Small changes. The first grey hairs. Eyebrows that have to be trimmed. The things that are left unspoken, but that are definitely there. The in between things. In between them. In between words and gestures. That's what takes a small film, a small conversation, a small house, (an in between film, conversation, house) to another level – where the personal touches on the universal.

Scales disappear. They vanish when the model becomes a house, when the conversation becomes a film. That is where things open up. Where the outside world comes in: the view through the window (with or without the old plum tree), the film crew (with or without their faces), the words (with or without voices). It is where things get digested. Where they get a flavour and become real. Where they become part of a process and turn into something else.

That's what makes her film his last house.