

Film Criticism

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SYNONYMES: NADAV LAPID'S LOOK WITHIN



"My overarching goal was to capture some sort of truth in relation to certain moments" - Nadav Lapid

Nadav Lapid is the much talked about filmmaker of Israel not because of his loyalty but because of his plain speaking truth about Israel caught in many controversies relating to its foreign policies. His fourth feature film *Synonyms*, made on personal anxieties and crisis of identity seems to have ripped open chasm Navan Lapid suffers within. Acknowledging that the film, which explores the tensions between roots and identity, could prove controversial in both Israel and France, he pleaded with audiences to receive it as a “celebration of cinema”. The film is dedicated to her mother Ms.Lapid who in her hospital bed edited it along with the Navad tiil she died. It has a elegiac touch so to say. *Synonyms* won the Golden Bear award at Berlinale in 2019. Conceptually, the brilliantly original *Synonyms* is

an epistemic film, both verbal and physical, and tells the story of a character who is so close to the director himself at 17 years of age. The narrative has it that a young man Yoav, arrives in Paris, weighed down by his past, in order to become French and be buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

The film offers us vibes and hints in the sense that Navad as its director embarks on an existential activity based on an idea that he wants to see through to the end. Strangely, he experiences transformation on a mental, physical and intellectual plane and while walking the streets of Paris muttering synonyms to himself nearly perpetually. It is apparent that Navad picks what fascinates him as a director and he seems to have the film that is also very physical, raw, elegiac and sometimes brutal. It is assumed as a way of ripping up ideas, creating chaos, Navad looks to be avoiding simply ending up with one concept that overlaps another concept.

The film is structured in a manner the protagonist seems to be suffering from some sort of post-traumatic stress; at the same time the trauma is his own identity, not something that is alien to self. However, it's all related to the army, to military service he was involved. But the very life it-self is something that has caused his post-traumatic stress and tension in Paris. Thus his life there of Yoav, as an Israeli, so he tries to break away from his past, renounce Hebrew words and discover new French words...for fresh survival from the point of view of liberation from old conventions found in his home country. Despite his trauma, his Israeli identity is boiling in his body, which is very Israeli in itself. This is why the protagonist tries to wipe out it from the very beginning: first by freezing it, like a symbolic death, then by starving it, and finally, by prostituting it. But his body refuses to disappear and once he has degraded it, strangely, Hebrew words start coming out of his mouth again. It shows how the

protagonist represents a sort of nomadic suffering, and its original roots, stems from the fact that he hates his controversial identity.

In a metaphorical way the going corresponds to Nadav's personal experience 17 years ago. The truth is that almost every scene in the film actually happened. The director told the story of what happened to him personally. One feels, there is something very primitive about this film on a narrative level: often one may think there are not many plot points in the fabric of the film. Seen in its progression, it is the story of a young man who arrives, who lives his life and leaves. The film's complexity lies in the fact that almost every moment and event is intertwined with all sorts of contradictory meanings.

Finally, it is observed that the idea was to try to reach the truth of the moment. In this sense, it's a kind of raw and critical formalism that uses all available means: sound, set design, costumes and the camera. Nadav admits that he is against employing the camera as emotionally objective. He also puts the cinematographer's body in the film, because for him, feelings travel through his body, and through his hand holding the camera, and "we see them on screen, and they are important. That's why there is indeed a kind of visual diversity to the film. And we observe how hard it is to stay alive in diversity.

According to Nadav Lapid: "I think my films contain great criticism and also great attachment to Israel. The main character's anger toward Israel wouldn't be so strong if it weren't a mirror image of a great attachment."

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