**The presence of the absence**

On "One week and a day"

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The way we observe the world combines what our eyes see and what our mind complements; our perception of reality from the point of view of our self. Attempting to put order in the endless input of our senses, we organize it through a map of symbols, in-between individual symbols and collective or archetypal symbols.

When something does not fit this map, or is too unbearable, we may not see it at all, to become blind to it. On the other hand we may see non-existing things through our imagination. This film alternates between the two states: lack of vision, and replacing it by imagination and play.

"One week and a day" subverts the Israeli genre of exploring the figure of a son killed in his military service – a genre in which the effort to paint an individual portrait often gets clouded by collective images promoted by institutionalized mourning. The son here, Ronnie, died of an illness, with no heroic circumstances. We don't hear much about him, we never see him. He is an empty space, a transparent abyss, around which the story evolves. The struggle not to be sucked into this abyss characterizes the figures, the narrative and the cinematic means. The film is generated by the whirlwind around the absence.

Side by side with this complexity, the film succeeds in maintaining a subtle human dimension characterized by the breadth and delicacy of emotions, in which humor and pain coexist.

In the opening scene we hear the sounds of a ping pong game. This brings to mind the make belief tennis game in Antonioni's "Blow Up", with which "One week and a day" resonates. Eyal, the bereaved father, plays with a boy. He is a grownup who behaves childishly and aggressively, to the amazement of the other children and to our amazement as an audience. Is he a child pretending to be a man? A man inside whom an angry child is hidden? Later on his mother kisses and hugs him warmly, telling the son/father "Bye, sweety". He goes to the courtyard, watches the kittens in the jar, and brings down the shutters attempting to block the neighbors.

Vicky, the mother, goes to the graveyard as is customary at the end of the Shiva. She returns, dyes her hair, receives a message about her dental appointment, and – awkwardly – goes to the school where she works as a teacher, surprised to find there the substitute teacher. She struggles to re-establish her routine, telling Eyal, "we said we will go on".

Eyal behaves as a capricious child, refusing to go to the graveyard. He goes to the hospice to look for a blanket "my son forgot… we forgot…" as he says to the man dying in Ronnie's former bed. This is the first time the son is mentioned. Eyal describes the blanket vividly, it's blue, green, orange, yellow and pink. The ill man gives him instead a package of medical cannabis left in the drawer, "an inheritance".

Both parents, each in a unique way, search their way around the absence and the pain. The kittens which Eyal wants to keep alive and Vicky wishes to get rid of, the blanket, the shutters going up and down creating a partition between the reflection of Vicky – who is imprisoned inside herself – and extroverted Eyal, all acquire symbolic significance. They express the poles of returning to childhood and to a rescue illusion versus the stubborn clinging to mundane reality – in both cases averting one's look from the son's absence.

Vicky asks Eyal to acquire for them the plots adjacent to Ronnie's grave, but he cannot fulfill this mission, just as he cannot visit the grave. As long as he keeps his son's soul within himself, he cannot acknowledge death – the son's death or his own.

Two children accompany the plot. Bar continues Ronnie's life in the hospice, where she wanders as if it was her home. She covers her ill mother with the colorful blanket which may have been Ronnie's transitional object and is now utilized as a transcendental object which could save her mother's life. She seems a happy girl who dissociates her difficult reality.

Zooler, the neighbors' son, once younger Ronnie's friend, is an ageless youngster, childish and wild, much closer to Eyal's present state of mind than to his own parents. He teaches Eyal how to roll marijuana joints, addresses Vicky as "teacher" – erecting a boundary between kids and grownups in this house – and she wants to get rid of him, similarly to the kittens. Eyal warns they shouldn't touch the kittens, as they can be abandoned by their mother – resonating with the danger of parents abandoned by their child. Zooler and Eyal play as two kittens. Eyal's relationship with Zooler serves more to maintain himself as a child than to offer fatherhood to the youngster.

We know very little about Ronnie, gain just a glimpse into his room – a contrabass, an oxygen concentrator, discs, a half-empty disposable glass, as if the room is just temporarily abandoned. Eyal is furious because from his son's room he hears the neighbors "fucking like rabbits". Later on he finds Zooler there, lying in bed with his thumb in his mouth. Eyal lies down next to him, Vicky joins them – a moment of sad unity, maybe recreating a bygone family scene, disrupted by Zooler senior, who comes to avenge his wife who was slapped by Eyal.

The gentle acceptance between Eyal and Vicky – in spite of their divergent behaviors – is contrasted with the hypocritical neighbors, who turned their eyes away when Ronnie fell ill, and arrived at the Shiva after it's over.

The "as if" motive – resonating with "Blow Up" – is expressed in the parents' attempts to deny their mourning, as well as in the wild dance of Zooler recreating his and Ronnie's Air Guitar passion, a make belief rock concert; he proposes to show a video recording of such a joint dance, but showing it within the film would have sabotaged Ronnie's illusory non-presence.

The film reaches its turning point when Eyal and the kids enact an "as if" rescue fantasy, while Vicky seemingly struggles to survive by insisting on her dental treatment.

Eyal and Zooler search for the blanket – as if this could revive Ronnie. Jolly Bar meets Zooler in the hospice yard, playing his imaginary guitar. Zooler tells her: "The fact that you don't see it doesn't mean it does not exist". Understanding vision as an act of the imagination helps her to invent a game. Above her mother's bed, covered with Ronnie's blanket, Bar, Eyal and Zooler perform a pantomime surgery, removing the illness, which Bar later throws into the sea. Reality may exist, may be hallucinatory; life and death are not certain either.

The game is over, reality hits back. The three rush to the graveyard; the adjacent plot is taken, someone is going to be buried in it. "We have to bury people, pal" says the gravedigger, breaking up the illusory mechanism. Eyal – hoping to prevent the burial – finds himself in a ceremony in which a man eulogizes from the depth of his heart his young sister, Meirav, who also died of cancer. The camera follows a very different way of mourning. Through Meirav's conventional funeral Eyal is able to acknowledge his son's death.

Vicky, in the dental clinic, accepts silently Eyal's phone about the failure of the mission to keep the plots in the graveyard. A minute later, while she is imprisoned in her chair, her mouth blocked by the x-ray film, the camera captures her by surrounding her. Vicky's mouth arches in voiceless weeping, tears come out of her eyes. She cannot escape knowing. As in Antonioni's film, the camera plays a role in attempting to captivate reality, so difficult to grasp.

The imaginary surgery and the insistence on the dental treatment bring the diversion methods of both parents to the edge. Now they start to meet the painful reality – and therefore each other. Vicky returns home, bringing back the kittens. Eyal and Zooler bring Bar back to the hospice; she is sad and disillusioned. Eyal tells Zooler to go home; his childish spirit is gone. Zooler gives him the VCR and the remote – it will be possible to see Ronnie, though in a different film.