



Big Screen Classics

Calendar

Calendar Kalendern

Director: Atom Egoyan

©: Ego Film Arts,

ZDF - Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

Production Company:

Armenian National Cinematheque

Producer: Atom Egoyan

Co-producer (Armenia): Arsinée Khanjian

Commissioning Editor (ZDF): Doris Hepp

Production Manager (Armenia): Garegin Zakoian

Production Co-ordinator (Armenia): Norayr Kasper

Production Co-ordinator (Toronto): Simone Urdl

Location Director (Armenia): Zaven Sarkissian

Screenplay: Atom Egoyan

Director of Photography: Norayr Kasper

8mm Video Images: Atom Egoyan

Editor (Toronto): Atom Egoyan

Title Design (Armenia): Norair Aslanian

Titles: Film Opticals of Canada

Musicians: Djivan Gasparyan, Eve Egoyan,

Garò Tchaliguan, Hovhanness Tarpinian

Sound Design (Toronto): Steven Munro

Sound Recordist (Armenia): Yuri Hakobian

Sound Recordist (Toronto): Ross Redfern

Sound Re-recordist (Toronto): Daniel Pellerin

[Sound] Effects (Toronto): Steven Munro

Foley (Toronto): Steven Munro

Cast:

Arsinée Khanjian (translator)

Ashot Adamian (driver)

Atom Egoyan (photographer)

Michelle Bellerose, Natalia Jasen, Susan Hamann,

Sveta Kohli, Viva Tsvetnova, Rula Said, Annie

Szamosi, Anna Pappas, Amanda Martinez,

Diane Kofri (guests)

Canada-Germany-Armenia 1993

74 mins

Video

The screening on Tue 12 Aug will include a pre-recorded intro by director Atom Egoyan

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Amongst Atom Egoyan's finest achievements and representative of his interest in mediated memory and loss, *Calendar* finds the director playing a Canadian photographer who, while on an assignment shooting churches in Armenia, finds himself growing increasingly estranged from his wife (Arsinée Khanjian, the director's real-life partner). It's a witty and profound reflection on cultural alienation.

A contemporary review

'In conceiving *Calendar*,' Atom Egoyan says in his Director's Statement, 'I wanted to find a story that would deal with three levels of Armenian consciousness: Nationalist, Diasporan, and Assimilationist. Thus the guide, like Ashot Adamian [who plays him], is an Armenian who was born and raised in Armenia. The translator, like Arsinée Khanjian, is an Armenian raised in a large Armenian community outside of Armenia. And the photographer, like Atom Egoyan, is an Armenian completely assimilated into another culture.'

Remarkably, for his sixth (and perhaps best) feature, Atom Egoyan has managed to extend his obsessions with the technology of imagery and communication well beyond artistic expectations. In *Calendar*, shot on 16mm and video, Egoyan has manoeuvred what to date have often proved to be distancing, and arguably de-humanising devices – the photograph (*The Adjuster*), video tape (*Family Viewing*, *Speaking Parts*, *The Adjuster*), and in *Calendar*, the telephone answering machine – to emphasise a very personalised sense of loss and social isolation.

Despite his above declaration, the predominant defining process in *Calendar* is neither the act of photographing national monuments (always visually resplendent in the background) nor the pithy, nationalist observations of the driver/guide/lover ('I think if you had children you would bring them to grow up here'), but the shift of emotional allegiances which takes place between the photographer and his wife. Egoyan has often been accused of being preoccupied with the aesthetic at the expense of his characters. In *Calendar* there seems to be a deliberate ploy to undermine the photographer's (and by proxy, the director's) need to remain in control. So while he chastises his wife for wasting batteries, or feels unable to participate in any Armenian social intercourse in case he misses the right shade of lighting or contrast, Egoyan's character is constantly drawn into watching and recording seemingly trivial details (the flock of sheep, the wife's careless laughter with the driver or her massaging of her tired limbs), which are clearly intruding into his consciousness but which he finds unable to process. His senses are only engaged via the camera or camcorder, without a concomitant cerebral response.

This sense of perceptual disturbance is heightened by *Calendar*'s refusal to follow the surface formality of the film's time structure. Although punctuated by the arrival (or departure) of each calendar month, the temporal relationships between people and events are constantly being distorted and replayed. Episodes are evoked by memory, sometimes spontaneously, at other times deliberately (the ritualistic dating); tapes are played back at normal and fast-forward speeds; and phone messages, whether banal (the escort bureau) or

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Fri 1 Aug 18:20; Tue 12 Aug 20:45 (+ pre-recorded intro by director Atom Egoyan)

To Die For

Sat 2 Aug 20:40; Wed 13 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme Development Manager); Sat 23 Aug 15:10

The Third Man

Sun 3 Aug 12:20; Thu 21 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by script supervisor Angela Allen); Mon 25 Aug 12:15

Born in Flames

Mon 4 Aug 20:55; Thu 14 Aug 18:30

The American Friend Der Amerikanische Freund

Tue 5 Aug 18:00; Sat 16 Aug 12:15; Wed 27 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences)

Le Mépris Contempt

Wed 6 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by Ruben Traynor, BFI Production Coordinator); Sun 10 Aug 15:00; Tue 26 Aug 20:40; Sun 31 Aug 12:20

The Tango Lesson

Thu 7 Aug 20:45; Mon 18 Aug 18:05

Gridlock'd

Fri 8 Aug 20:50; Sun 17 Aug 18:15; Thu 21 Aug 20:50

The Dirty Dozen

Sat 9 Aug 14:30; Sun 24 Aug 18:00

Close Encounters of the Third Kind

Sat 9 Aug 17:50; Sat 16 Aug 20:20; Wed 20 Aug 17:50 (+ intro by Chantelle Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television)

Beware of a Holy Whore

Warnung Vor Einer Heiligen Nutte
Sat 9 Aug 20:50; Fri 15 Aug 20:45;
Sat 30 Aug 18:10

Cairo Station Bab el-Hadid

Sun 10 Aug 12:40; Sat 16 Aug 18:30;
Fri 29 Aug 20:40

The Hunter Shekarchi

Mon 11 Aug 18:30; Thu 28 Aug 20:35

intensely emotive (the wife's messages from Armenia), are held in limbo until acknowledged by the absent photographer.

Behind the cameras, the photographer remains an ethereal presence, unseen and untouched, whereas in front of the churches, the driver is a physically strong, charismatic spirit, equally at home with a serenading guitar or an anecdote about architectural origins. Only the diasporan wife is able to engage and empathise with this sense of freedom, and all the photographer can do, as he points out, is to passively 'watch whilst the two of you leave me and disappear into a landscape I'm about to photograph.'

However, to share this nationalist freedom, a return to home terrain is not enough. There are several indications in the film that the photographer is absent in spirit in Canada as well. Phone messages constantly apologise for the fact that he's confined to his dark room 'all day'. And it takes more than just the departure of his wife to jolt him back to light. For months he remains on pause, unable to respond to his wife's letters and messages. Denial gives way to sadness and finally rationalisation, via Egoyan's well-worn metaphor for alienation – solitary masturbation in front of the video screen. But in *Calendar*, the ejaculate isn't semen but sentiment. Literally so, because the photographer breaks off a wank to start writing ('Yes, I received all your messages and your calls, and now feel ready to write back').

Intriguingly, as the artist lets down his emotional guard (that is, becomes less concerned with the aesthetic), the assimilationist's self-awareness becomes more obvious. The dirty foreign phone call becomes an incidental prop to the carefully constructed scenarios, dismissed as a delaying irritant by November. And significantly the photographs begin to blend and blur as their sequential progression with calendar months begins to falter. The photographer has been freed from his assimilation assignment, but at what cost? Given the self-referential and revisionist subtext of the film, this open-ended question evokes a sense of genuine anticipatory excitement for Egoyan's next venture.

Farrah Anwar, *Sight and Sound*, February 1994

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