Between 1915 and 1922, the Ottoman Turkish state committed the first modern genocide of the twentieth century, against the Armenian population in eastern Anatolia (now Turkey). It was an event Adolf Hitler cited, on August 22, 1939, to justify his strategies for the ethnic cleansing of Poland: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Atom Egoyan's Ararat (2002) is the first widely released cinematic representation of the Armenian genocide. However, the film seeks not simply to document the genocide, but to reveal how a ninety-year-old event continues to have disruptive and even traumatic effects on a scattered Armenian population, now known as the Armenian diaspora. In large part, these traumatic effects are exacerbated by the Turkish state's continuous denial of the genocide.

In this essay I will analyze Ararat with an eye toward the concerns that Egoyan's films have grappled with for years, such as "the psychology and politics of denial" (Egoyan 1999, 39–41). After introducing his earlier explorations of ethnicity, violence, and trauma in films ranging from Open House (1982) to Felicia's Journey (1999), I will show how Ararat expands on Egoyan's previous themes by developing and exploring the Armenian diaspora's dilemma of genocide memorialization.

It is notoriously difficult to find a frame in which to discuss the Armenian genocide; one approach has been to describe it as an atrocious,
Armenia, situated in eastern Turkey, had for centuries been one of the conquered nations that made up the subject peoples of the Ottoman empire. In the late nineteenth century, as the Ottoman empire began to collapse (and lost control over its Christian territories of Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia), Ottoman anxiety transformed into Turkish nationalism. The Turkish state began a systematic persecution of its last major group of Christian subjects, the Armenians. Tens of thousands of Armenians were massacred in the 1890s, and then, between 1915 and 1922, "over a million Armenians were killed by mass shootings, massacres, deportations, and induced starvation" (Melson 1992, 145). The Armenian community in Anatolia was destroyed, and by 1923 between one-third and one-half of the world's Armenian population had been annihilated. Survivors crowded refugee camps around the Middle East and in the rest of the world. For nearly seventy years this Armenian diaspora was viewed as "the inheritor of the potential of the Armenian nation..., the repository of that consciousness" (Shirinian 1992, 23).

In contrast to Germany after the Holocaust, Turkey does not admit the existence of—let alone its culpability for—the Armenian genocide. "There was no redemption, no compensation, no contrition," writes historian Richard Hovannisian. "Instead, the world seemed to succumb to prolonged amnesia, compounding the agony of the dispersed survivors" (1992, xvi–xvii). In fact, since the 1920s, the Turkish state has spent huge sums of money revising histories to omit accounts of the Armenian genocide, using all types of media in the process (newspapers, books, magazines, films, Internet bulletin boards). This repetition of denial within the very media that could and should have recorded the genocide, combined with the more generic dilemma of acculturation, makes "forgetting" the genocide deeply disturbing for Armenians. As Roger Smith writes, "to forget the Genocide would be to repudiate one’s people and one’s self" (Smith 1992, 5). Furthermore, remembering the Armenian genocide has an urgency for Armenian survivors and their descendants that actually increases as the original generation of survivors steadily diminishes in number. Turkish denial has meant that survivors are under an inordinate amount of pressure to bear witness to the genocide, often as the only remaining members of large families.

Egoyan's particular diasporic experience can be usefully situated in this context. As he explains in an essay on Ararat, "My grandparents from my father's side were victims of the horrors that befell the Armenian population of Turkey in the years around 1915. My grandfather, whose entire family save his sister was wiped out in the massacres, married my grandmother who was the sole survivor of her family" (2002, vii). Egoyan himself was born in Cairo in 1960 to Armenian parents. The Yeghoyans (later the Egoy-
films over the past two decades deal with the "Armenian issue" and pave the way for Ararat.

Egoyan’s Hal Films

Egoyan’s fourteen-minute first film, Howard in Particular (1979), is a darkly comedic homage to Samuel Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape (a play Egoyan filmed twenty years later for the Beckett on Film project). Egoyan imagines Howard as a Krapp transformed into a dismal retiree, mechanically dismissed by a large corporation. This topic is not particularly Armenian, but Egoyan does include one revealing detail: the title screen displaying his film production company, “An Ego Film Arts Production,” also has an emblem that looks somewhat like the stylized, elongated, and cursive word hi. Egoyan uses this symbol to this day as his film company’s emblem. In English, hi is obviously a term of greeting, but in Armenian, Hai or Hye is in fact the transliterated word for an Armenian person. Haiastan is the name of Armenia, and hai is also the root for the words meaning “father,” “fatherland,” and “countryman” (haiten, hairenik, and hairenagitz). Egoyan’s emblem also looks vaguely like a mountain; as Ararat underscores, the iconic symbol of Armenia is Mount Ararat, even though this mountain is in what is now Turkey. Thus this emblem of Armenianness, hidden in full view for all audience members to see (but not necessarily to interpret correctly), is characteristic of Egoyan’s portrayal of ethnic identity from 1979 to the present.

In some of Egoyan’s earliest films, Armenian ethnicity is a source of cultural contrast: WASPish figures encounter displaced and often traumatized Armenians living in Canada. This theme permits Egoyan to explore the differences between Anglo-Canadian and diasporic Armenian culture and to depict diasporic Armenians struggling with past losses. In the short film Open House (1982), what at first appears to be a customary encounter between a real estate agent trying to sell a decrepit house to a young Anglo couple is eventually revealed to be a ritualistic drama staged and recorded for the agent’s catatonic and possibly paralyzed father, Mr. Odahrian (Housep Yeghoyan). We learn that Mr. Odahrian “hand-built” the house “like a castle,” suggesting that while he now sits silently in a dark room hidden away from the potential buyers and watching slides of his family’s home, he once was a strong and engaged member of his family. Although it is never explicitly stated, it is suggested that a debilitating catastrophe has occurred between the time the house was built and the present, a trauma that may be related to the father’s viewing of old slides, like an internal viewing of memories.

Near the end of the film we are shown the front of the house, where the glass of a broken picture window has been replaced by a large piece of cardboard with painted Armenian letters. These letters spell out pats doon—

Howard in Particular: The “Ego Film Arts" logo. (© Ego Film Arts)
diapora might imagine returning to the homeland he or she never actually lived in. As in *Open House*, a traumatic event motivates the rest of the action: the agonizing decision years earlier, when the family was indigent, to give up Bedros. The event has additional symbolic connotations for an Armenian family, as Donald and Lorna Miller describe: during the genocide deportations, mothers were often faced with the moral dilemma of either abandoning their children (to passing Turks or Kurds who might protect them) or struggling on together without food and water.11

Family Viewing (1987) is the first of Egoyan’s films to deal explicitly with the Armenian genocide in some detail, although those details remain almost entirely allegorical.12 Armenian history is alluded to through veiled reference: there is a grandmother named Armen, symbolic of Armenia and the traumatic history of survivors, and a grandson named Van. Van [Aidan Tierney] liberates Armen [Selma Keklikian] from the nursing home to which his Anglo, and presumably non-Armenian, father, Stan [David Hemblen], has had her committed. Van (also the name of the only Armenian town to stage a successful uprising during the genocide) thus finds a way to save Armen, this symbol of Armenian history.13 Meanwhile, Stan records homemade porn over old family videotapes of Van’s Armenian mother and Armen. Thus, while Van represents Armenianess defended—as do, more explicitly, the various representations of the town of Van in *Ararat*—Stan represents the principle of violently deliberate attempted forgetting. Stan—or, as it might be pronounced, Stahn—is a version of modern-day eastern Turkey, a *Haiastan* without the *Hais*. This allegorical representation of Armenian nationalism in the face of genocidal violence is literalized in the film that Saroyan is making in *Ararat*. But *Family Viewing’s* reliance on allegory and on veiled historical reference makes the issue of the Armenian genocide largely inaccessible to most viewers.

As the Soviet Union was collapsing in the early 1990s, the Soviet State of Armenia gained its independence and became, in September 1991, the Republic of Armenia. Suddenly there was a much more accessible notion of homeland for Armenians of the diaspora.14 Calendar, Egoyan’s 1993 film, explores the fantasy of returning to the Armenian homeland. It is Egoyan’s most explicitly Armenian film prior to *Ararat*, but the genocide is only implicitly its focus. Instead, in this film each member of a diasporic couple (played by Egoyan and his wife, Arsinee Khanjian) represents polar positions on diasporic identity because each decides to return to a separate homeland at the end of their trip to Armenia. For the husband—a photographer on assignment in Armenia—home is Canada; for the wife, home gradually becomes Armenia. Thus, while the husband feels assimilated to Canada and returns there, the photographer’s wife leaves her Armenian Canadian husband and remains in Armenia with their native Armenian tour guide. This split in the notion of “home” alludes to the genocide, when Armenians had to leave their homes unwillingly in order to survive and assimilate in a new place. When the photographer’s wife betrays her husband by holding hands with the guide while the husband is mesmerized by videotaping a large herd of sheep, the image of the herd of sheep suggests the rounding up of Armenians on death marches through the desert during the genocide (and, allegorically, the slaughtering of God’s innocents). But the film ends with a critical question: is it more important to live in the present—and thus notice your wife holding another man’s hand—or to live in the diaspora, shackled to symbolic images of the genocide and Armenian ruins?

As if to answer this question, after Calendar the obviously Armenian characters drop out of Egoyan’s films. Exotica, *The Sweet Hereafter*, and *Policia’s Journey* take on contemporary themes and a more universal scope and reference, while the focus on survivor guilt is developed and the consideration of sadism intensifies. *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997), Egoyan’s most well received film, complicates the issue of traumatic remembering introduced in *Open House* and *Next of Kin*. Like *Exotica* (1994), *The Sweet Hereafter* engages with issues of survivor guilt on a broader level, focusing on how we report and represent horrific events to others and ourselves. The film depicts a disastrous school bus accident, which might have happened anywhere, and its psychological and legal after-effects on the people in a small town. Yet this film also invokes issues that resonate in Armenian diaspora communities, such as the effect of violent catastrophes on individuals and communities, the motivation of survivor testimony, and the impact of a regularly evaded or denied issue within the different generations of a family.

Nicole (Sarah Polley), the lone adolescent survivor of the crash, is in a position similar to that of the genocide survivor: she is haunted by guilt for having survived, while paradoxically she finds her singularity empowering. Crippled in the accident, Nicole’s new status as victim entitles her to a large settlement from an insurance company and thus suggests a way she can provide for her family. However, Egoyan is not interested simply in heroizing Nicole, but rather in representing her difficult struggle to integrate conflicting roles, both as a martyred witness to a catastrophe and as an adolescent girl with conflicts unrelated to that catastrophe. We gradually learn that Nicole was trapped in an inappropriately sexual relationship with her father (Tom McManus) before the crash. Her decision at the end of the film to lie about the bus accident—and thus forgo the settlement money that would have assisted her family—becomes a way to punish her father for his past abuse. Instead of representing a catastrophe as “fact,” Egoyan represents the event ripping through a family: he shows how different generations within a single family manipulate one another, with the accident as pretext. Egoyan provides Nicole, the surviving witness, with an intelligible
motivation for lying about an event she witnessed and survived. She pun-
ishes her father by matching his own lie about their father-daughter love with a lie about the bus's speed during the accident.

Finally, Felicia's Journey (1999), the last major feature Egoyan produced before Ararat, is perhaps the ideal film to prepare him "to tell a story of hor-
or" (Egoyan 2002, viii). The film takes one of the more common horror gen-
res (the serial-killer movie) and turns it into a meditation on the complica-
ted interaction of cruelty, denial, and self-knowledge. The teenager Felicia (Elaine Cassidy), forced to leave Ireland in order to have an abortion, is preyed upon by serial killer Hilditch (Bob Hoskins) in England. Like The Sweet Hereafter, Felicia's Journey represents violence reverberating in fam-
ilies. Thus, Felicia's father (Gerald McSorley), invoking Ireland's bloody his-
tory with England, curses her after learning that she's "carrying the enemy within" (Johnny, the father of her baby, has secretly left Ireland to join the British army). Felicia, manipulated by Hilditch, aborts Johnny's child.

Hilditch's mother (Arsinée Khanjian) encouraged him to watch an opera dramatization of a severed head from Salome at an early age, and, perhaps in imitation, he murders his "lost girls" after acting for them in the role of surrogate parent.

More indicative of Egoyan's plans for Ararat are his methods of represen-
ting violence. Egoyan is extremely careful with his visual depictions of violence; he often uses indirect allusion and montages instead of graphic imagery. Felicia's abortion is represented in an ethereal, if tragic, light, with the bloody spot on her nightgown its only material manifestation. This is a serial-killer movie without a single representation of a killing. The closest we come to seeing one of Hilditch's murders is seeing his horrified reaction to a fictional murder on a hospital television set—a backhanded, cinematic repre-
sentation of a murder—again, the beheading of John the Baptist in Salome, although in this case, in a Rita Hayworth Hollywood version. Approp-
riately, a hospital sign next to the television underscores the source of his horror: "Blood Blood Blood." This entire scene is clearly meant to refer to the
murs Hilditch commits—which presumably we are not shown because
Hilditch himself denies his murderous acts. But in avoiding visual represen-
tation of the murders, Egoyan also avoids the crimes Hilditch's mother com-
mits when she exposes her son to graphic violence. By subverting the serial-
killer genre, Felicia's Journey explores what it means—for both the creator
and the receiver—to represent violence, and the film considers why we rep-
resent what we do, and to whom.

Ararat explores these same issues by focusing on the horrors of the
Armenian genocide. The film portrays survivors haunted by the memory of
catastrophic events, while specifically focusing on the characters' attempts
to represent the private, cultural, and national catastrophe of the Armenian
genocide both to themselves and to the world. The film consists of several
intertwined plots. A contemporary, fictional Armenian director, Edward
Saroyan (Charles Aznavour), is making a film about the Armenian genocide
by focusing on the Van uprising that Armenian American painter Arshile
Gorky (Garen Boyanjian and Simon Abkarian) witnessed and participated in.
Much of Edward's film is based on his own mother's survivor testimony and
on the autobiography of an American missionary who witnessed the geno-
dice, Dr. Clarence Ussher (Ussher 1917). Edward also consults Ani (Arsinée
Khanjian), an art historian and Gorky expert, who helps her son Raffi (David
Alpay) get a job as an assistant on the set. Raffi, whose late father was an
Armenian "terrorist," struggles with his own relationship to his Armenian
past. He goes to Turkey, ostensibly to shoot background footage for Edward's
film. Attempting to clear customs back in Canada, Raffi is interrogated at
length by a custom's agent (David, played by Christopher Plummer), who has
his own reasons to listen carefully for the truth (it is his last day on the job
before retiring, and Raffi is the last traveller he interrogates).

Just as Family Viewing emphasizes the crucial role that the genocide
survivor (Armen) plays in the contemporary Armenian diaspora (represen-
ted by young Van), so Ararat focuses on a genocide survivor, Arshile Gorky,
who is vital to nearly everyone in the film. He is the film's most direct survivor
of the genocide, and Egoyan represents him at various points in his life. As
a young man, he takes part in the Van uprising that Nouritza Matossian
describes in her recent biography Black Angel (which also serves as Ani's book
in the film), although Edward fictionalizes Gorky's early life freely (Matoss-
ian 1998). As one of the members of the avant-garde art scene in New York
in the 1930s, Gorky is portrayed struggling with his painting The Artist and
His Mother. As Ani describes it, echoing Matossian, the painting is a "hom-
age to his mother," Shushan Adolian, who died of starvation and illness after
the family was forced from their home during the genocide (Matossian 1998,
93–99). Gorky—and more specifically, Gorky's direct relation to the tragedy
of the genocide—is the focus of the film literally from the first scene to the
last.

Most of the Armenian characters in the film's framing narrative are at
least a generation distant from the event itself. Edward Saroyan, the direc-
tor of the film within the film, creates his version of Ararat "based on what
my mother told me." Other characters—Ani, Rouben, the ghost of Raffi's
dead father—are most likely members of second and third generations, Arme-
nians of the diaspora who would have heard about the genocide from par-
ents or grandparents. Each represents the genocide to different audiences.
As an art historian, Ani addresses the academic and art communities who
have overlooked or ignored Gorky's Armenianness, while Rouben (Eric
Bogosian), as the screenwriter of Edward's film, addresses a wide popular
audience. Ani's first husband, Raffi's dead father, had the most treacherous and controversial mission of "representing" the genocide for the Turkish government. Raffi's father was presumably a member of a diasporic "terrorist" organization such as ASALA, and we gradually learn that he was shot years earlier while attempting to assassinate a Turkish diplomat, a symbol of the Turkish government and thus a representative of its national policy of denial.

His son, Raffi, is a member of one of the youngest generations of diasporic Armenians; he is not only the Armenian in the film most temporally distant from the genocide, but is also grappling with the trauma of his father's death and reacting to the powerful feelings and ideas that led his father to become, alternately, a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter." Raffi's distance from the experience of the genocide seems to link him to danger and violence in ways of which he himself is not entirely aware. Under the influence of his tormented stepsister, Celia (Marie-Josée Croze)—who not only offers the chilling suggestion that Raffi seek to be possessed by his father's ghost in order to keep the memory of his father alive, but also transfers her anger at Ani into a knife attack on Gorky's painting—Raffi goes to Turkey and, perhaps unintentionally, becomes a heroin smuggler.

As these brief descriptions illustrate, Egoyan not only portrays the genocide, but also investigates how and why various people choose to understand and represent the genocide to themselves and others. Previous Egoyan films have also focused on the way people "use history like a weapon" (as Raffi says of Ani). Calendar and Felicia's Journey, for example, both focus on how the ruins of buildings can be manipulated as a kind of rhetorical, testimonial device. In Calendar, many of the arguments between the photographer and his wife are sparked by the photographer's unwillingness to leave his camera and touch the ruins of churches and fortresses such as Noravank or Ampert. And in Felicia's Journey, Felicia's father repeatedly takes her to walk among Irish ruins while inculcating her with Irish nationalism: "Think of your great-grandmother. Her husband, your blood, was executed by the Brits, May 1916. Sacrifices have been made and they will be honoured. We have a duty to remember these things. Time will not allow us to forget." In each case, a building with national historic significance becomes a dramatic prop for a heated domestic argument.

From the very beginning of Ararat, the key historic object is not a ruined building, but Gorky's painting The Artist and His Mother. The painting becomes a device to consider how experiences not only are perceived by a person but are then transformed into a representation that can be perceived by someone else. Consider the title sequence, which begins with a simple brown button hanging from a thread in Arshile Gorky's New York studio—a sign of the reality of Gorky's mother, as well as of her attention to and care for her son. The camera glides onto the photograph of Gorky and his mother,
Diasporic Histories and the Exile of Meaning

Ararat: Grid of Gorky's painting, in the title sequence. (© Serendipity Point Films/Ego Film Arts)

Ararat: Varnish jars, in the title sequence. (© Serendipity Point Films/Ego Film Arts)

which, we learn at the film's end, connects the button to the moment the picture was taken and to the painting he is working on. Next we see one of Gorky's many drawings of the photograph, this one with a grid that will allow the small drawing to be transformed, that is, blocked onto a large canvas while maintaining its proportions. Superimposed is the film's title, first in Armenian, which then transforms into English. As the camera continues to glide through the studio, picking out objects, moving in and out of focus, we see some of the iconic symbols of Armenian culture and landscape—bright, fresh flowers indigenous to the Van region; a small khachkar in the form of an ornamental stone crucifix. Both objects represent the homeland for a member of the diaspora. Finally, the tools and media used to produce a representation come into view: the pencils, paintbrushes, palette knives, and tubes of paint. Egoyan presents a representation in the middle of its production. Looking closely, one can read "for your protection" on the sides of the lids of varnish jars, warning us that closed jars of varnish pose the least danger. And yet Egoyan is also suggesting that the danger of art is one that needs to be opened up and exposed. Right from the start, the film foregrounds the working through of a representation, in all senses of working through: artistically, linguistically, interpretively, and psychoanalytically. In this title sequence (perhaps more correctly labelled a tableau sequence), we are not only deliberately moving through Gorky's studio to see his attempt

Ararat: Khachkar and flowers, in the title sequence. (© Serendipity Point Films/Ego Film Arts)
to grapple with a moment in history and memory; we are also following a particular path and process of symbolization.

By framing the film with Gorky’s painting and, at various later points, with Ani’s and Celia’s interpretations of it, Egoyan is confronting a particular problem that Armenian artists and writers have grappled with for years as they searched desperately for an appropriate form and medium to give voice to at least the initial catastrophe. Certainly, confronting the genocide in art—as we see Gorky do in his painting—presented a task particularly formidable in unsympathetic or unknowing host cultures. The inexpressibility of the horrors, added to the denial of Turkish governments, often paralyzed Armenian artists and writers attempting to obtain a perspective from which to represent the genocide. As Egoyan himself asks, speaking of the making of this film, “How does an artist speak the unspoken?” (2002, viii). In other words, how can a violent, nation-shattering genocide be understood within the more or less conventional realm of aesthetic representation?

One might argue that the way to convince anyone of the magnitude and evil of this historical event would be simply to let the testimony speak for itself, that is, to depict an eyewitness account visually. Although there have been widely viewed representations of the Holocaust, such as Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List and Roman Polanski’s The Pianist, the Armenian genocide has gone virtually unrepresented in popular visual consciousness. Thus, a straightforward, documentary representation of the genocide is likely to have a powerful effect on its audience. Egoyan portrays this type of representation—that is, a feature film as historical documentary—via the movie within the movie, Edward Saroyan’s Ararat. Saroyan is largely effective at producing a horrified reaction in his audience. Near the end of Egoyan’s Ararat, we see people watching the opening-night screening of Saroyan’s Ararat; the audience is perceptibly disturbed by the images portrayed on their screen and, at moments, on our screen. Some cover their mouths in abhorrence; others shake their heads in disbelief. Some of the early reviews of Egoyan’s Ararat expressed a yearning for this more familiar, cathartic movie experience. Anthony Lane of The New Yorker writes that Egoyan “should have made an exemplary documentary on the subject of the slaughter, and asked Aznavour ... to talk us through it” (2002, 104–105). Lane seems to want more of Saroyan’s Ararat and less of the contemporary story of young Raffi, Ani, and Rouben. In fact, one of the initial questions about Egoyan’s film was the lack of a widely released dramatic movie on the genocide, why didn’t Egoyan simply film Saroyan’s Ararat as his Ararat?

Let me suggest some possible answers to this question. First of all, Egoyan underscores the idea that even a straightforward representation based on an eyewitness account—Ussher’s autobiography, for example—is at least once removed from the event itself, exposing a documentary to the charge of manipulation or falsification. One point of the lengthy interrogation of Raffi by the customs agent is to underscore the difficulty of establishing truth based on a single person’s narrative. The goal of a customs agent is to ask questions that will expose a simple set of facts: Who are you? Where are you traveling to, and why? What are you bringing into our country? But Egoyan reveals that these seemingly straightforward questions are, in fact, existential questions for a member of the Armenian diaspora such as Raffi. Raffi interprets these questions differently than David intends them, hearing instead, Who am I as an Armenian in Canada? Why does a diasporic Armenian travel back to Turkey? What images, ideas, and dangers, such as the symbolic heroin, do I bring back from where I’ve been? Whatever questions David asks and whatever questions Raffi answers, the film suggests that to determine the truth by listening to someone speak is a difficult task. No wonder that before opening the cans of film, David voices his frustration: “What are we going to do? There’s no one I can contact. There’s no way of confirming that a single word of what you’ve told me tonight is true.” Raffi’s response—“Everything I’ve told you is exactly what happened”—is more or less true of the genocide, but not quite so true of what he’s brought back with him inside the cans of film. The point here is that all representations—including the representation Raffi narrates to David about who he is and where he’s been and why—are mediated by some person or thing doing the witnessing or recording. Had David chosen not to listen to all of Raffi’s story and merely employed a drug-sniffing dog, the complicated truth that Raffi told—both the history of the genocide and the history of the film cans—would have been lost to David. By framing Ararat with this customs interrogation, Egoyan foregrounds the act of telling and hearing a personal narrative.

Many of Egoyan’s previous films also contend with the way that media devices, such as Raffi’s video camera, facilitate not just memory but also fantasies of forgetting or altering history. Photographs can be destroyed (The Adjuster) and video can be recorded over (Family Viewing) or used to make false claims (Next of Kin). In addition, witnesses might have substantial personal reasons to testify falsely, as does Nicole in The Sweet Hereafter. Genocide-deniers have distorted these intrinsic qualities of representation in order to reject the truth value of survivor testimony, employing a kind of radical skepticism to argue that because a lie could be told, no truth can ever be told. One of the most infuriating methods of Turkey’s eighty-five years of denial has been to cast suspicion on eyewitness accounts of the genocide by claiming that these testimonies are so detailed, they must be made up. Ignoring all evidence to the contrary, Turkish organizations claim that Armenian nationalist interviewers coached survivors in order to conclude that the testimony must be false propaganda.
Already at the opening night gala of Saroyan’s *Ararat*, we see the character Martin Harcourt (Bruce Greenwood), the actor who plays Clarence Ussher in Saroyan’s film, having to respond to a reporter’s provocation that the genocide might be “all an exaggeration.” Harcourt explains that Saroyan’s film is taken from Ussher’s published eyewitness testimony; but he might also have added that as an American missionary, Ussher confided on his eyewitness account the tint of “Western objectivity” in the eyes of the world. Egoyan’s film is not Saroyan’s film because the distinction enables Egoyan to create a strategy to answer and dismiss within the film itself the charge of falsification. An Armenian making a film about the genocide is going to be accused of propaganda and falsification (as Saroyan is). By having those arguments within the film, particularly with the exchanges between the half-Turkish actor Ali (Elias Koteas), Saroyan, and Raffi (when Ali trots out some of the familiar arguments—for example, that “lots of people died…. It was World War I”), Egoyan effectively responds to Turkish denial on his own terms, undermining the Turkish government’s facade of presenting a “balanced” argument.

Another crucial issue Egoyan is contending with is the fact that violent, graphic representations on the film screen are not only subject to manipulation: they are also potentially manipulative themselves, exploiting the audience’s feelings. Egoyan’s previous work has been deeply suspicious of the potentially manipulative quality of film to absorb us in an event we did not witness at first hand—whether that experience is pleasurable, painful or some combination of the two. A film such as Schindler’s *List* induces cathartic identification in order to draw us into the action and maintain our absorption, but in both *Ararat* and his previous films, Egoyan portrays this type of audience absorption as dangerous passivity. In *The Sweet Hereafter*, sleepiness is associated with an almost hypnotic state of vulnerability: Nicole often looks sleepy in flashback sequences with her father.¹⁷ In *Felicia’s Journey*, Felicia is in most danger from serial killer Hilditch after he drugs her with sleeping pills. In her stupor, she is unable to resist him, but by willing herself to wake up, she manages to escape from his house. In a key discussion in *Ararat*, Raffi and Ali discuss All’s portrayal of Jevdet Bey: “I was raised to feel a lot of hatred to the person you’re playing,” says Raffi. “You really pulled it off.” When Ali points out that Raffi was “kind of prepared to hate” any portrayal of Jevdet Bey, Raffi responds with a reaction that speaks to an essential quality of Egoyan’s filmmaking: “I’m also kind of suspicious of stuff that’s supposed to make me feel anything, you know?… Even though I know you were supposed to make me feel like hating you, I resisted it.” This resistance that Raffi describes marks a crucial distance between Saroyan’s film and Egoyan’s.

Egoyan’s resistance to manipulating his audience might also be a protective gesture here, since one crucial audience for this film is the Armenian diaspora. Egoyan doesn’t need to make a graphic film because Armenians already fill in graphic details for themselves with stories told by their parents and grandparents. Many genocide survivors described their memories of the past in distinctly visual, often specifically cinematic terms, and their stories tend to be brutal. One survivor said, “I think about my past all the time. It comes in front of my eyes like a dream. You don’t want to think of those incidents, but they come to your eyes” (Miller and Miller 1991, 157). A child of a survivor illustrates the hardship of listening to violent narratives of the genocide: “My mother talks about a rape and it’s a disgusting story that her mother told her. When she used to tell me some of these things she had such a vengeance in her voice that I didn’t want her to talk about it. It was frightening” (Phillips 1989, 249). Egoyan, therefore, doesn’t overload the viewer by adding more frightening graphic images, but alludes to scenes that more or less exist in the Armenian diaspora’s collective memory.

Probably the crucial reason why Saroyan’s film is not and should not be Egoyan’s film, however, is that representing the horrors of the historical genocide captures only part of what the horror has become. Egoyan explains in an introductory essay to *Ararat: The Shooting Script* that “from the moment I began to write this script, I was drawn to the idea of what it means to tell a story of horror” (2002, viii). The horror, he explains, is not only the genocide, but also the ramifications of the world’s not being told this specific story of horror. This is the horror of denial as it continues to reverberate. By focusing on “what it means to tell a story of horror,” Egoyan shows how everyone can be drawn into the drama of telling, listening, and denying—not only the most direct victims of the horror but the survivors’ children and grandchildren, perpetrators’ children and grandchildren, and anyone who comes into contact with these descendants. Egoyan continues: “The grammar of the screenplay uses every possible tense available, from the past, present and future, to the subjective and the conditional” (2002, viii). Because all of these horrors are part of the current Armenian diaspora experience, all grammars must be used to tell the story of the ongoing horror of the Armenian genocide, reverberating and possibly creating new horrors.¹⁸

The most striking example of the full range of characters absorbed into this horror-drama is the juxtaposition of two sequences in *Ararat*.¹⁹ First, an enraged Cellia attacks Gorky’s painting; then Ani, distraught at learning of Cellia’s knife attack on Gorky’s painting, strides into the live set of Saroyan’s film. Saroyan is filming a crucial genocide scene of the defence of Van, and Ani’s presence (dressed in contemporary clothing) ruins the mood and the shot, drawing the wrath of Harcourt, who is still caught up in his portrayal.
of Dr. Clarence Ussher: “What is this, God damn it?? We are surrounded by Turks. We’ve run out of supplies, most of us will die. The crowd needs a miracle. This child is bleeding to death. If I can save his life it may give us the spirit to continue. This is his brother. His pregnant sister was raped in front of his eyes, before her stomach was slashed open to stab her unborn child. His father’s eyes were gauged out of his head and stuffed into his mouth and his mother’s breasts were ripped off. She was left to bleed to death. Who the fuck are you?”

As he describes the gruesome abominations the Armenians around him have suffered—abominations historically corroborated by eyewitness testimony but that Egoyan is clearly reluctant to represent visually—it becomes clear that even narrated descriptions of these depraved acts have the power to horrify the narrator. The tirade leaves everyone, including Ani, speechless. Presumably, her concerns cannot compete with those of someone who has witnessed such acts. Egoyan suggests that these narrations are so horrible that they always shatter their representational boundaries. Thus, he also juxtaposes Celia’s rupture of Gorky’s painting with Ani’s rupture of Edward’s shot.

Harcourt/Ussher’s attack on Ani challenges her sense of self-importance and her decision to waste everyone’s time by ruining the take. And yet his final demand—“Who the fuck are you?”—is a question that Egoyan is endeavoring to answer for descendents of Armenian genocide survivors. As with David’s interrogation of Raffi at customs, a seemingly simple query becomes a challenge to one’s identity and motivations.20 The question demands that Ani, as an Armenian genocide descendant, defend her sense of belonging to her historical people: who are you, Ani, in relation to us, victims of the genocide? Ironically, the “us” here includes the self-righteous non-Armenian actor Harcourt, absorbed in his role of Ussher. At this moment, he becomes—or, more accurately, ventriloquizes—the historical voice of Armenian genocide victims demanding precedence over all other concerns, such as Ani’s anxieties about Gorky’s painting.21

In these scenes, Egoyan is not just presenting an imagined dialogue between Armenian generations (a genocide survivor confronting his second- or third-generation descendant); he is also illustrating the implied challenge of “authentic” first-generation testimony to all future representations of the trauma (such as Gorky’s painterly depictions or Ani’s biography of Gorky’s life).22 Earlier films such as Family Viewing and Felicia’s Journey depict generational transmission of traumatic representations ambivalently veiled, but in Ararat, this face-off between different generational representations is starkly pared down to its most basic elements. Ani’s speechlessness illustrates the power of first-generation testimony, for even a non-Armenian (Harcourt/Ussher) can employ testimony to suppress any other concern. But Egoyan’s decision to show us this scene instead of the graphic scenes Harcourt/Ussher describes reveals Egoyan’s representation overcoming the second generation’s speechlessness.

In other words, throughout the film Egoyan is most interested not in the original genocide testimony itself, but in the various reactions to and interpretations of this testimony by later generations. He shows, for example, how stories of genocide horror become a kind of fetish object for the Armenian diaspora community, just as genocide paraphernalia becomes a type of fetish object.23 Armenian characters in the film clutch particular symbols of the genocide and of Armenianess. For Gorky, it is the photo of his mother and that coat button. For Saroyan, it is the spiritual image of Mount Ararat and the pomegranate his mother used to sustain her on the death marches, which represented “luck and the power to imagine.” For Ani, it is Gorky’s mournful painting, “a repository of our history.” Raffi is clearly searching for such a symbol during his travels to Turkey, since part of the genocide’s damage has been to leave younger generations without a meaningful symbol of memorialization. He records his despair while in the ruined town of Ani: “When I see these places I realize how much we’ve lost. Not just the land and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it.”

Egoyan’s Ararat, unlike Raffi’s or Edward’s, is an attempt to make a crucial intervention in this proliferation of horror and loss, but not by adding another symbol or fetish to the proliferation of symbols of Armenianess or the Armenian genocide. Instead, Egoyan is considering how these symbols (such as the button, the pomegranate seeds, the Gorky painting) work—and don’t work—in the Armenian diaspora. Thus, in Egoyan’s Ararat, it is the interpretation of and engagement with these symbols that constitutes Egoyan’s representation. Gorky’s private and public trauma, for instance, is manifested at the moment in the middle of the film when he “finishes” his painting of himself and his mother by dropping his tools—the paintbrush and palette—and scoops up flesh-coloured paint with which to massage (or cover up, or blur) the representation of his mother’s hands. He momentarily forgoes mediating the representation from that critical distance of the length of a paintbrush, desiring instead to touch the painting directly. This is a gesture Ani will echo at the end of the film: after giving a lecture on Gorky’s paintings, she reaches up to the projection screen in order to touch the slide image of Gorky’s mother’s hands. Ani is another generation removed from the genocide survivor and the survivor’s image (revealed by the way she “touches” the projected light instead of the actual painting), but her need to grapple with the survivor as a cultural symbol remains powerful.

Through the interplay of various stories of Ararat—both Saroyan’s film Ararat and Raffi’s digital video images of the mountain itself—and by animating characters whose motivations stem from a complex set of circum-
stances. Egoyan's Ararat conscientiously finds a way to represent the genocide that will lead neither to the generation of more horror nor to the generation of more denial. Egoyan is not exactly representing the Armenian genocide throughout his film career, but rather providing thoughtful accounts of the genocide's complicated role in diasporic life. Moreover, he rejects the view of the survivor as a martyred witness. Always considering his directorial role, Egoyan seeks not to transmit a trauma to the viewer, but to represent catastrophe's aftermath—one with a particular, Armenian context. By meditating on the way Armenians handle their symbols, Egoyan suggests another way to interrupt—or at the very least delay—the progressive losses to Armenians and Armenian culture.

Notes
1 For a succinct contextual analysis of this quotation see Dadrian (1995, 401-409).
2 Although the term diaspora originally referred to "Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity [John viii. 35]" (Oxford English Dictionary), the word has evolved to mean any group of people that has emigrated from its homeland and that retains some sense of cultural (and not necessarily religious) identity. Thus, there are an African diaspora, an Irish diaspora, an Indian diaspora, and an Armenian diaspora, among others. Over the past twenty-five years, more and more people have come to understand themselves as members of a diaspora. For additional discussions of this concept, see Tololyan (1991) and Safran (1991).
3 As Ronald Grigor Suny writes, "Allied with the [United States], present-day Turkey refuses to acknowledge the historical experience on which its own territorial hegemony is based. Armenians must be purged from memory, not only in Turkey but internationally as well, and Kurds must be forcibly transformed into "Mountain Turks"" (1995, 115). For an analysis of some of the ways the Turkish government continues to deny the genocide by threatening, impeding, and attempting to manipulate historians, see Smith, Markussen, and Liferon (1995).
5 The Turkish state spends exorbitant sums "on public relations firms to improve its image, lobby public officials, place advertisements in prominent newspapers, and subsidize publications favorable to its point of view" (Smith 1992, 2). Between 1985 and 1990, there were extensive U.S. congressional debates on the commemoration of April 24 as a day of remembrance of "man's inhumanity to man with particular reference to the Armenian genocide" (Hovannisian 1992, xix). The Turkish government successfully deployed its strategic military leverage in order to keep this day of institutionalized remembrance from being placed on the calendar. Crucially, few media have been spared in this revision of history. In the 1930s, the U.S. State Department, "at the insistence of the Turkish government," impeded Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer from producing a film about a group of resistance fighters who survived the genocide, The Forty Days of Musa Dogh (Smith 1992, 11).

6 In Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide (1993), Donald E. Miller and Lorna Toureyan Miller observe that "after approximately fifty years of relatively low-level political demands for recognition of the genocide, the pursuit of justice by survivors" in the 1970s and 1980s suddenly became increasingly violent; a number of grandchildren of Armenian genocide survivors took retribution in their own hands, assassinating diplomats and political officials (167). For a comprehensive examination of the cultural factors working here, see Tololyan (1987) and Miller and Miller (1991).
7 As Egoyan himself points out, Mount Ararat is "the most fetishized symbol" of Armenia (Egoyan 1997, 219).
8 Of course, a similar self-consciousness about his Armenianess is suggested in Egoyan's play on his name: Ego Film Arts's films are, in various ways, films about his own ego.
9 The film is also playing on the stereotype of Armenians as greedy businessmen, trying to sell anything to anyone. In this case, the Armenians are creating a ruse so as not to sell.
10 A similar ambivalence on the part of Armenians toward home is seen in The Adjuster (1991). The film's contemporary narrative involves an insurance adjuster and his family, but the family clearly originates from another place. Seta's, Simone's, and Hera's Armenianess is never explicitly stated or remarked upon in this film, but they speak Armenian to each other as a hushed backdrop to the action. Along with the samplings of the duduk, an Armenian wind instrument, one can glimpse an Armenian shop sign from a photograph of Seta's old Beirut neighborhood—before she burns the photo. When one of the non-Armenian characters in the film asks why Seta persists in destroying these photographs, Hera replies casually, "She doesn't like to keep things." This is a darkly comedic portrayal of reactions to a series of traumatic events—the catastrophic elimination and displacement of Armenians from their homeland. In The Adjuster, Seta, Hera, and Simone move from their home in Beirut to the shell of a home in Canada, from one part of the diaspora to another.
11 Miller and Miller discuss this issue using numerous eyewitness accounts from survivors (Miller and Miller 1991, 97-102).
12 For a more complete analysis of this film, see Siraganian (1997).
13 The history of Van has taken on legendary status in Armenian history; it resembles the Jewish Warsaw ghetto, but its uprising succeeded. In mid-1915, the Turkish governor of Van, Jevdet Bey (portrayed in Ararat), ordered four thousand Armenians to report to be drafted into the Ottoman army; following the pattern of genocide extermination since 1914, these men were certain to be massacred. Armenian draftees declined to report as ordered, and by April 19, Jevdet issued a general order that "the Armenians must be exterminated. If any Muslim protect a Christian, first, his house shall be burnt; then the Christian killed before his eyes, then his [the Muslim's] family and himself" (Walker 1980, 206-207). However, during that week the Van Armenians prepared for a Turkish onslaught, building extra walls to protect the old city of Van and the new suburb of Aikesdan. From April 20 to May 16, 1915, Van held up under siege by the Turkish army until the Turks retreated in defeat and "the advance guard of the Russian army, consisting of Armenian volunteers, arrived" (Walker 1980, 205-208). In keeping with this historical account of Van, in Family Viewing the door of Van's room is covered with a vintage movie poster displaying the prominent (and apropos) title "THE TANKS ARE COMING."
However, the issue is complicated because many of the descendents of genocide survivors came from western Armenia (eastern Turkey); there is considerable regional division between eastern and western Armenia, including substantial differences in dialect.

The scholar-poet Leonardo Alishan details the conundrum as follows: "Without art there was madness. But with this madness what art could there be? What genre could comprehend this catastrophe? What genre could possibly hope to give formal shape to this statistic insanity?" (1992, 349). Many writers never found a suitable medium and consequently avoided the subject of "this statistic insanity." The only possible response imaginable was Zvap Esayan’s almost solipsistic sublimation: "I feel that I should let out the scream of the nation suffering for centuries under the yoke of oppression and slavery. I ought to let out the scream of liberation with my personal talent and my intrinsic power" (qtd. in Peresimon 1992, 240). As Esayan’s conditional rhetoric portrays ("I should..."), the inexpressibility of the horrors, added to the denial of Turkish governments, paralyzed Armenian artists and writers from obtaining the necessary distance with which they "should have" approached the genocide.

Miller and Miller provide a thoughtful analysis of the issues involving the authenticity of survivor testimony in Survivors (1991, 9-31).

Egoyan is suggesting that any type of art—film, painting, music—that is not being actively, consciously grappled with is potentially harmful. Consider the frame-story in The Sweet Hereafter: the Pied Piper who leads Hamelin’s children away from their families and to their dubious future (perhaps death, perhaps displacement to Transylvania) does so by mesmerizing the children with the “sweet/ Soft notes” of his music. Nicole narrates precisely this part of Browning’s Pied Piper poem as we watch her surrender to her father’s incestuous advances, with seductively placed candles and a guitar in the background.

The creation of terrorist organizations (such as the one that Raffi’s father belonged to and gave his life for), as well as Raffi’s unwitting smuggling of heroin from Turkey, are two examples of new horrors that emerge from old ones.

There is actually one additional scene between the two mentioned: David and Raffi discuss Celia’s knitting of the painting.

Similar inquisitions occur in various other Egoyan films, such as the inquisition of the exotic animal smuggler in Exotica, and that of Felicia entering England in Felicia’s Journey. In both cases, the person being questioned is, in fact, smuggling in another, developing being (the smuggler’s eggs, Felicia’s fetus). Although Raffi is not exactly smuggling in another being, he is smuggling in the heroin, and he is also “smuggling in” his newly developed consciousness of who he is as an Armenian.

In a certain sense, Harcourt, as Usher, is serving a very similar role as Peter in Next of Kin. Peter, disgusted by his WASP family, “pretends to be a historical figure (the family’s long-lost son, Bedros) in order to align himself with a family of distraught, displaced Armenians.

The original screenplay has Gorky and Ani speaking to one another directly (Egoyan 2002, 75).

Jenny Phillips observes that there is a fetishism of Armenian genocide paraphernalia: “At a recent annual gathering to commemorate the Armenian genocide, an Armenian priest held up an old torn pair of trousers which had been removed from the body of a child, killed during the genocide. The priest said that when he handles the child’s trousers he feels as though he is touching the robe of the Lord” (1989, 2-3).

Works Cited


