

Traversing National Borders, Transcending Cinematic Borders: The Sojourner Cinema of Denis Villeneuve

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The latest films of transnational auteur Denis Villeneuve realize the aesthetic and cultural potential of Hollywood to embrace foreign talent. Originally a Québécois arthouse director, Villeneuve has emerged from a minority national cinema to recently stake a claim as a major Hollywood director. On this journey, he has traversed the geographical borders of both Québec and then Canada to transcend national cinematic borders in creating transnational arthouse blockbusters. Villeneuve may have been a household name in Québec for many years, but until his recent successes in Hollywood he was virtually unheard of outside the French-speaking Canadian province. Coming from the small national cinema of Québec to work in Hollywood, Villeneuve is a new breed of transnational filmmaker, one who has intentionally made films in Hollywood but only on a temporary basis, relocating his skill but not his national affiliation. Nevertheless, Villeneuve cannot be categorized as a deterritorialized, diasporic, exilic or immigrant filmmaker. Rather, we argue his Hollywood films present a cinematic in-between space which Jane Mills has termed “sojourner cinema” (152). Mills identifies sojourner cinema as films made by directors who visit a foreign country as a guest to make a film in and about their host nation (152). For Mills, sojourner cinema is not about the faithfulness of one national text to another, it is about the merging, the hybridizing of two national cinemas in a manner that creates aesthetic tensions in a constantly evolving screenscape (161).

This article identifies the ways in which Villeneuve’s Hollywood films collapse borders between arthouse and commercial film, between Québécois cinema and Hollywood blockbusters, moving fluidly between the practices of each. We first consider the concept of national cinema, particularly in relation to that of Québec, and its changing relationship with transnational cinema, identifying how these notions intersect with Mills’ model of sojourner cinema. This article examines Villeneuve as a sojourner director in Hollywood, analyzing the ways in which he wields arthouse and commercial sensibilities, and how his Hollywood films

aesthetically, narratively and thematically manifest sojourner cinema. Aligning Villeneuve and his films with Mills' concept of sojourner cinema, we contend that Villeneuve is a filmmaker who is neither passing traveler nor sightseer, yet is an explorer of new places who links sites and signs (160). In analyzing Villeneuve's Hollywood films through the lens of sojourner cinema, it can be seen that the artistic autonomy of arthouse directors – often attributed to auteurs whose works express personal vision and appeal to national and/or niche audiences – can no longer be recognized as necessarily oppositional to Hollywood commercial cinema. In doing so, this article takes up an important thread in the tapestry of scholarship on transnational cinema, arguing that as a sojourner director, Villeneuve exemplifies the possibilities of a particular mode of transnational filmmaking.

Working in his home nation, Villeneuve directed successful Québécois feature films *August 32nd on Earth* (1998), *Maelström* (2000) and *Polytechnique* (2009). Despite winning numerous awards, these films are unlikely to have had a large audience outside of Québec due to restricted distribution and the fact they are made in Québécois French. Nevertheless, Villeneuve's Québécois film *Incendies* broke through to international markets via exposure at the Toronto Film Festival. With this film Villeneuve gained a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2011 Academy Awards, boosting his international standing and resulting in an invitation to Hollywood. Villeneuve's fifth feature film *Enemy*, made after the success of *Incendies*, is pertinent to Villeneuve's transnational trajectory, as it was his first English language film produced outside the province of Québec but still in the nation of Canada. *Enemy* can thus be seen as a transitional moment in Villeneuve's journey from experimental arthouse auteur to mainstream Hollywood auteur. Once in Hollywood, his access to resources escalated in line with the success of his drama and action films, from *Prisoners* to *Sicario*, which then in turn positioned him to direct the large-scale science fiction film *Arrival* before staking his claim as a blockbuster director with *Blade Runner 2049*.

We take the stance that Villeneuve's Québécois films, which include Québécois themes and Québécois stories, are best categorized as "Villeneuve films", and his Hollywood films, which include US actors and US locations, are still best understood as "Villeneuve films" made in Hollywood with US financing. In approaching Villeneuve and his films in this way, we invoke the tenets of auteur theory, a longstanding methodology within film scholarship that builds from the premise that the director is the creative "author" of a film text (Barber 91). Villeneuve, in common with all auteurs, is a force that unites his films as a canon. In the case of Villeneuve, the transnational aspects of his auteurism must be taken into account and to analyze Villeneuve's Hollywood films we dovetail the auteur approach with Mills' notion of 'sojourner cinema'; as well as being an auteur with an impressive oeuvre, whilst working outside his homeland (in Hollywood) Villeneuve creates 'sojourner cinema'.

Although many film scholars agree the term "national cinema" is difficult to define, historically it has been understood to manifest when a nation state explores, questions and constructs a sense of nationhood in their films and in the consciousness of a national viewing audience (Higson 36). Film scholar Bill Marshall's crowning argument in *Québec National Cinema* is that even though Québec is not technically a nation state, it certainly is a nation and most definitely has a national cinema (1). As such, Québécois cinema is often considered as its own entity, separate from English-Canadian cinema, not least because these films are made in the distinct vernacular of Québécois French. A distinguishing language is often

noted as a precursor to a national cinema and Québécois films are usually discussed as belonging to Québec's national cinema (Marshall 1, Pallister 19, Mackenzie 13 and Donohoe 9). A stark contrast can be drawn between Québécois cinema and Hollywood, the world's most economically powerful film industry. Hollywood, the official centre of film production in the US, is home to all the country's major studios and thus, despite its global presence, can be considered the home of US national cinema.

Even so, however, Hollywood has never had to fully rely on its domestic market alone. Stephen Prince maintains that in cinematic history, US cinema moved early, and aggressively, into world markets and has continued its dominant presence since (4). Prince observes that foreign films are distributed in the US, but their numbers are miniscule compared with the pervasiveness and visibility of Hollywood films overseas (4). He also argues that Hollywood needs its global box office, as international markets typically generate much more money than the domestic US and Canadian market combined (Prince 5). While many minority national cinemas, such as that of Québec, remain popular with their home audiences, their products do not generally enjoy the kind of global distribution typical of Hollywood films. Indeed, Hollywood is often seen as the dominant, inviolate force that all other smaller cinemas struggle to compete with for money, audiences, aesthetic freedom and ideas (Mills "Loving and Hating Hollywood" 12). Nevertheless, Villeneuve's oeuvre straddles both these national cinemas – and as a sojourner director he brings them together in transnational fusion.

With film production and consumption becoming increasingly globalized, scholarship across the field of transnational cinema is proliferating. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden define transnationalism as the "global force that can link people or institutions across nations" (3), while Leung Wing-Fai and Leon Hunt link transnationalism with the decay and pillaging of nation states (9). Such is the impact of transnationalism on film industries that contemporary film scholars are now more likely to focus on transnational rather than national cinemas. As Higson notes in *The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema*, it is not useful to think through cultural diversity and cultural specificity in solely national terms given the complexities of the international film industry and the transnational movements of finance capital, which have in turn made it inappropriate to assume that cinema and film culture are bound by the limits of the nation-state (66). Thus, Higson suggests the concept of the transnational rather than the national better captures these cultural and economic formations, which are rarely contained by national boundaries (57). This shift toward the transnational might seem to suggest a transformation of the historical role of a national cinema as a voice for national social criticism and cultural preservation (Ezra & Rowden 1 and Ďurovičová & Newman xi). Considering the changing relationship between national and transnational cinema, Mills' identification and application of the concept of 'sojourner cinema' is particularly pertinent. 'Sojourner cinema' is a mode of transnational cinema that refers to films made by directors who make films in and about a country other than their own (Mills 152). Such films are usually excluded from the category of "world cinema", as this term is generally reserved for non-English films (including Villeneuve's Québécois films) and is often inseparable from the term "foreign film" (Mills 144).

Sojourner filmmakers, such as Villeneuve, may come from a place with a strong national cinema, but the films they create in a host nation are not classified by the

filmmaker's ethnic or cultural origins, revealing a unique relationship between the foreign and the native (Mills 160). This type of filmmaker is invited into another national cinema to make a feature film and willingly chooses to cross national borders to do so, but not to relocate permanently. Rather, they stay as a guest in the host country only while making the film. Mills affirms that within sojourner cinema, the complex relationship between host and guest can be observed, and that the film from a sojourner director may not necessarily have connections with the host nation and that the relationship between the two are not necessarily benign (161). Mills identifies the importance of location in sojourner cinema along with that of an outsider's viewpoint, which is often combined with yet another perspective or voice (146).

This mode of transnational cinema presents how the sojourner filmmaker imagines and frames the foreign other (Mills 142). Villeneuve's *Incendies* – adapted from Lebanese-Canadian's Wajdi Mouawad's 2003 play of the same name – can be seen as a pivotal point in the transnational impetus of his oeuvre, despite it still being technically one of his Québécois films. With this film Villeneuve shifted his focus from Québec to a story set in the Middle East and he travelled to Jordan to shoot much of the film. This film explores other cultures inside and outside Québec. In the film Nawal Marwan (played by Lubna Azabal) has found refuge in Québec but is haunted by her traumatic and violent experiences of civil war in an unnamed Middle Eastern country (understood to be Lebanon). Her dying wish sends her twin adult children on a journey back to their mother's native country in search of their tangled roots.

This film distanced the focus on nationalist identity politics of other earlier Québécois films. Its movement away from being an inward-looking Québécois film is made manifest in the fact it largely takes place outside of Québec. The film is only partly in the Québécois vernacular (most is in another language), and it does not reflect the "typical" lives of Québécois people. Mills' concept of sojourner cinema comfortably accommodates and accounts for the transnational nature of *Incendies*. Deborah Shaw's *Deconstructing and Reconstructing 'Transnational Cinema'* alerts us to the multiplying categories the term 'transnational cinema' encompasses and the importance of specifying these precise categories in any discussion of transnational cinema (52). Shaw suggests teasing out these separate strands to better comprehend the ways in which such cinema can be variously determined by the transnational implications of, for example, directors, stars, cultural influences, critical approaches, collaborative networks, and postcolonial politics, to name just a few (52). While there are certainly alignments between Shaw's suggested categories and Villeneuve's filmmaking, Mills' 'sojourner cinema' is arguably an additional and intersecting category that best accounts for Villeneuve's contributions to transnational cinema. *Incendies* manifests as sojourner cinema in a manner different to that of Villeneuve's later Hollywood films. Villeneuve reveals the Middle Eastern country represented in *Incendies* is intentionally unnamed because as a French Canadian he knows little about Arab culture and the experience of war, believing his ignorance to be beneficial to the film's "outsider" narration (qtd. in Jenkins). As Yana Meerzon observes, Villeneuve turns this film into a "travelogue of his cultural learning" (8). Villeneuve affirms his intention was that the film would not explore historical facts, but rather tell a story of peace and breaking the cycle of violence (qtd. in Jenkins). Mills believes the essence of 'sojourner

cinema' is to reveal the relationship between host and guest, presenting a hybridization or fusing of two uniquely different, even opposing, cinemas (144). Indeed, a central strut of the film's narrative is Nawal's twin adult children, who grew up in Québec, travelling back to their mother's native country to unravel their family history, as sojourners themselves.

Incendies presents the adult twins' sojourn as the frame of their mother's narrative, which is told in flashback. In doing so, the film transforms the play's story of Mouawad's own childhood trauma in Lebanon into a fictional narrative told with the distance and perception of an attentive outsider. Indeed, from the first shots of the film, the audience is positioned as a foreign witness. *Incendies* opens with a panoramic and exotic view of the Middle East. Desert palms in the mid-ground rustle in a light breeze, a vast canyon stretches out behind them with dramatic rolling hills beyond. As the camera tracks back, ambient sounds of summer insects and birds singing segue into what could at first be mistaken for an Islamic chanted prayer. In crescendo, it becomes clear the non-diegetic music is actually famous British rock band Radiohead's *You and Whose Army*. The viewer immediately understands this is not a Middle Eastern production. The camera continues to track back, slowly revealing this beautiful landscape exists outside a filthy window riddled with bullet holes and shattered glass. The initially exotic view of "the Middle East" is also shattered and rendered exposed.

Our sense of perspective compromised, we are now inside an orphanage for boys, who are beaten and dirty. Guarded by soldiers with headscarves and rifles, they are shuffled into lines to have their heads shaved. A montage of still shots lingers on the boys' faces, which are stern and resigned, but not without fear. The camera then locks onto the gaze of one young boy as a soldier stands behind him and removes his hair with clippers. The camera slowly tracks towards him, holding him in juxtaposition with the popular but mournful song. His direct address is unnerving but we cannot look away; his pleading eyes and sad yet determined gaze tell us that we are now part of his story. Thus, Villeneuve draws us into his story – but as foreign outsiders. The boy, we find out later through a complex series of flashbacks, is Nawal's firstborn, Nihad. This is a story about the Middle East and Québec from the point of view of a Western filmmaker embarking on a journey of sojourner practice. Thus, sojourner cinema offers a new way of reading particular films which, in turn, indicates that a dichotomy between national and transnational cinema may be redundant (Mills 142). The more important function of this lens, however, is to identify images and voices that represent differing perspectives that may offer alternative attitudes while also exposing universal obligations (Mills 161).

Hollywood took notice of Villeneuve after *Incendies* gained a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2011 Academy Awards. In Hollywood, Villeneuve manifested the potential of foreign directors to bring their transnational visions to big budget US productions. Those working in small national cinemas often experience significant funding restrictions, making it difficult to produce genre films that require significant budgets, such as action and science fiction. Indeed, these genre limitations led Villeneuve into the well-funded arms of US film studios (qtd. in Fortin 11). 'Sojourner cinema', which brings together the aesthetic sensibilities of Hollywood cinema and smaller "unique" national cinemas, has been able to flourish, at least in part, because Hollywood often attempts to break free from

“cookie cutter” films. Sojourner directors can bring a fresh perspective to US blockbuster films by offering cultural representations that transcend US borders. An injection of sojourner directors is changing the kinds of stories Hollywood tells and the settings and styles via which they are told.

In addition to the important cultural work of such representations, appeals to multiculturalism are an economic imperative. W. D. Walls and Jordi McKenzie provide empirical evidence that shows Hollywood films need to accommodate global demand as the US domestic market decreases (199). By hosting popular directors of foreign national cinemas, Hollywood is ensuring they are able to speak to international markets. International film revenues – profits generated outside the US – are becoming increasingly important in the global film industry, which in 2012 accounted for more than two-thirds of worldwide box-office revenue (Walls & McKenzie 203). Additionally, Walls and McKenzie’s research reveals that Hollywood films with box-office success in international markets did not correlate with films that had been successful in their US release (215). This weighting has shifted the balance of power to favor international box office success rather than domestic success. Aligning with these economic imperatives, ‘sojourner cinema’ looks beyond local characters and national concerns to speak to global audiences. In some ways, these changes can be seen as a challenge to the traditional Hollywood establishment by giving voice to the foreign. Sojourner directors tell stories from beyond the borders of the US in an increasingly globalized world. In turn, these directors – particularly if they are auteurs – are able to fulfill their artistic visions with Hollywood backing.

Villeneuve’s *Sicario* is a clear manifestation of ‘sojourner cinema’, as it is a big budget Hollywood film that offers the outsider perspective of an auteur from a minority national cinema. *Sicario* is an action thriller about idealistic FBI agent Kate Macer (Emily Blunt), who, after discovering dozens of corpses hidden in-between walls of abandoned houses in Arizona, US, becomes entangled in a secret operation targeting members of a deadly drug cartel located in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The film follows Macer’s point of view and most of the strategic aspects of the mission she accepts remain classified and hidden from her, along with the audience. This includes the identity of two key figures in her joint task force: Matt Graver (Josh Brolin), a US government official, and a shady character from Colombia called Alejandro Gillick (Benicio del Toro).

Mills insists that differing voices and viewpoints are an important aspect of ‘sojourner cinema’ because the status of being a sojourner director allows, even encourages, the director in question to have an alternative perspective and represent more than one voice (159). Indeed, Villeneuve admits he was encouraged to use his “Québécois sensibility” to give an outsider’s view on the US when filming *Sicario* (qtd. in Heinrich 3). This film offers a fresh take on the story of a US intervention in a Mexican drug war, firstly by having a female lead but also in that it forecloses audiences being able to identify “goodies” and “baddies” – the supposedly good characters slowly morph to take on the mindsets and behaviors of the supposedly bad characters so a distinction between the two becomes difficult to draw. Villeneuve asserts that in *Sicario* the US-Mexican border represents the state of the world and the film is an exploration of the US dealing with foreign problems and the ethical issues behind those actions (qtd. in Heinrich 2).

In *Sicario*, the moral complexities of international relations emerge in the lack of clear distinction between whether characters are on the side of the law or are, in fact, criminals. These boundaries are blurred early in the film when Graver and other FBI agents, out of their jurisdiction and surrounded by civilians, shoot down drug cartel members while crossing the Mexico-US border. When Macer addresses the seriousness and dangerous repercussions of their actions, her questioning is simply brushed aside as Graver tells her they are “just doing their job”. *Sicario* – which Villeneuve insists is more about US international policies than about drug cartels – suggests the US believes it has the power and responsibility to solve problems beyond its own borders (qtd. in Heinrich 2). The film was intended to shine light on the collateral damage and the legal and ethical problems that come as a result of the US executing manifest destiny (qtd. in Heinrich 2). *Sicario* looks at how the US reacts towards problems outside of its borders and questions if there is a need to become a monster to fight a monster. Graver and Gillick are members of the US Department of Justice Special Task Force, yet the methods they use to extract information from cartel members lead Macer to question the legality of the team’s activities and she begins to wonder who they really work for and what values they uphold. *Sicario*’s narrative raises questions such as: why would the CIA send a Colombian (Gillick) on a mission to Mexico along with two Americans, and why would the US be involved in a secret war against drug cartels outside their borders? However, the film does not offer any answers to these questions and instead only reveals a fraught and frightening diegesis that highlights atrocities existing on the edge of US borders. The film deals with US idealism and global realities, and the tension between the two. As Gillick says to Macer, “listen, nothing will make sense to your American ears and you will doubt everything that we do, but in the end, you will understand”.

‘Sojourner cinema’ produced in the US counters Ezra and Rowden’s cynical view of the workings of Hollywood. They claim the US film industry maintains its hegemonic influence over minority national cinemas by systematically dominating other nations’ film cultures and modes of cinematic imagery, production and reception (Ezra & Rowden 2). Relatedly, James Morrison suggested a negative attitude towards Hollywood exists because the films have long been associated with dominant US ideologies, coupling US populism with monopoly capitalism, linear narratives, and stable patterns of identification, ensuring the continued generation of the institution (14). In agreement with Morrison, Ezra and Rowden contend that Hollywood’s fundamental alliance with mass culture threatens to overcome and stifle other national cinemas (2). Similarly, Prince asserts Hollywood exports a model of film that contains an implicit threat to the diversity of international film culture because when films produced in one country dominate box-office charts worldwide, international culture begins to seem less heterogeneous and more the projection of one nation state’s culture industry (4). In Prince’s view, Hollywood feeds off the cinemas of other nations and siphons talent away, including directors, editors, cinematographers and production designers, who find the lure of Hollywood’s resources difficult to resist (6). Prince perceives Hollywood’s ongoing effort to recycle the work of international filmmakers for US audiences as purely profit-driven, which he claims can be seen in such works as *The Birdcage* (Mike Nichols, 1996) and *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001) (6). Echoing these scholars, Peter Morris considers that Québec has lost to Hollywood the talents of many young directors who, after making a name for themselves in Québécois cinema, immigrated to Hollywood for commercial gain (361). However, despite the pervasiveness of pessimistic views regarding Hollywood’s relationship

with minority national cinemas, Mills' concept of 'sojourner cinema' takes a different standpoint to expose the symbiotic possibilities of an auteur from a minority national cinema successfully transitioning to Hollywood.

Furthermore, 'sojourner cinema' realizes the ways in which certain arenas of Hollywood cinema take up opportunities to challenge dominant ideologies and staid aesthetics with diverse stories and distinct stylistic choices. This point speaks to David A Gerstner and Janet Staiger's repositioning of the auteur theory model from a cultural studies perspective. Auteur theory holds that a film has a singular identified author, and Gerstner and Staiger argue this theory has the potential to empower undervalued voices (xii). They assert the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism can result in auteurism playing a prominent part in social action (Gerstner & Staiger xii). Gerstner and Staiger argue the concept of the auteur is an enabling tool that has the capacity to empower film directors, especially those coming from a minority cinema, to represent disempowered groups, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ people, and endorse a multicultural emphasis of identity politics (4). They advocate for the reinstatement of the status of the auteur so that minority filmmakers working on the fringes of dominant filmmaking can constitute a counter-hegemonic practice (Gerstner & Staiger 8). Gerstner and Staiger's view aligns with Mills' argument in that a sojourner director's differing perspective and alternative attitude may have the power to give agency to undervalued and traditionally denied voices.

As an auteur, Villeneuve's Hollywood films achieve their impact by drawing on the distinctive stylistic elements he established with his earlier films. In his Québécois film *Polytechnique*, a story that revolves around Valérie (Karine Vanasse) and her experience of the true story of the December 1989 massacre, in which a gunman murdered fourteen women at a Montréal university that specialised in engineering. The gunman despised women who were studying engineering, a career mostly dominated by men, and blamed them for his social alienation and disillusionment. *Polytechnique* depicts the gunman entering a class at the university, ordering all the men to leave and keeping the women hostage, including Valérie, before shooting and killing all fourteen of them. In this film, Villeneuve shifts between time periods and perspectives to mount tension, a technique that has become one of his stylistic signatures. *Polytechnique* is structured around movements back and forth in time, requiring the audience to consider and process the connection between the different perspectives of the protagonist Valérie, the gunman and Jean-François (Sébastien Huberdeau), a male engineering student who was getting much needed help from Valérie with an assignment. Jean-François is one of the male students forced to leave the class where Valérie, along with all the other females, is ordered to remain.

The audience experience the event and the aftermath from both Jean-François' and Valérie's points of view. These differing perspectives, along with changing temporalities, give insight into the characters while also heightening tension. For example, when the gunman opens fire in the classroom, the scene suddenly cuts to subjective shots from the perspectives of frightened students taking shelter and peering over tables in nearby classrooms. Denied an omniscient point of view, the film's audience is left to imagine for themselves what happened to the female hostages. Continuing this blinkering of the audience, the scene cuts to a tracking shot that follows Jean-François as he approaches and

cautiously opens the door to the classroom. Further refusing the audience the relief of disclosure, Villeneuve then employs analepsis as the audience is jarringly taken back in time to see the gunman in a long, slow sequence of observation as he sits in his car and makes final preparations for his attack. Rushing us forward again in time, the following shot takes us to Jean-François looking into the classroom, standing unmoving at the door. A close-up captures the weight of his trauma before the camera turns slowly to finally, with devastating gratification, allow the audience to observe all the blood-soaked women lying on the floor. In the film's last sequence, the audience discovers, from Valérie's perspective, that she was the sole survivor because she was standing behind other murdered students. With full, harrowing scope of the whole scene, we helplessly watch her comfort her best friend, who dies in her arms, before a close-up draws us into her very personal experience – this time of overwhelming grief and shock.

Villeneuve's unique ability to mount tension and evoke emotion is carried over from his Québécois films into his Hollywood films. *Sicario* exemplifies this continuation in a key narrative event at the US/Mexico border. In this scene, US Marshals, DEA agents and the US Army Delta Force unit join Macer, Graver and Gillick as they cross the US border into Mexico to extradite top cartel members. Before the team departs, Kate (and the audience) is told several times that trouble is most likely to happen at the border crossing. The audience travels in the car with Macer and tension rises as the convoy must divert because of gunshots. Emphasising the significance and danger of the border space ahead, Gillick says to Macer, "nothing will happen here, if they try anything it will be at the border". They arrive at the border as the team identifies a "lone wolf" vehicle tailgating them before hitting a gridlock. Macer is told to prepare and load her weapon and a gun is spotted several cars away.

Villeneuve structures each shot to build tension, never rushing the action. Rather, the level of anxiety increases and decreases at intervals so the audience is not able to anticipate when the climax will occur. The cartel members finally exit the car and one reaches for a gun. The task force agents then proceed to shoot them all dead. After thirteen minutes of rising tension, the climactic shootout is only nine seconds of action and violence. Macer's perspective anchors the scene and the action unfolds for the audience in line with her experiences. After every moment of violence, the camera returns to Macer's reaction in close up. Villeneuve employs the techniques of alluding to violence, rather than facing it front-on, and creating obstacles around which the characters must manoeuvre to choreograph the rise and fall of anxiety. Villeneuve, accustomed to creating small budget arthouse films, eschews the catharsis of expensive blockbuster spectacles, but manipulates emotion and builds tension expertly nonetheless.

Villeneuve's combining of arthouse and commercial cinematic practices as a sojourner director is distinct in his Hollywood film *Arrival*. Despite it being a big budget science fiction film with a mainstream cinematic release, *Arrival* is not a standard science fiction blockbuster in either narrative or form. At the film's beginning, it appears to be about alien spacecrafts landing at random points across the globe. Consistent with Villeneuve's past films, *Arrival* features a strong female protagonist. Louise Banks (Amy Adams), an expert in linguistics, is recruited by the military along with physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner) to determine the purpose of the aliens visiting Earth. Villeneuve offers a fresh perspective on

the genre, avoiding many of the codes and conventions usually attached to science fiction blockbusters without sacrificing the awe-inspiring nature of the genre. *Arrival's* storyline is cerebral rather than action-based. It is about transcending barriers and being immersed in a new culture to understand a foreign race. After Louise is brought to the aliens – named heptapods due to their seven appendages – inside their spacecraft she uses a white-board to try and communicate with them via writing. Colonel Weber (Forest Whitaker), who is in charge of the operation, berates Louise for wanting to teach the aliens basic English vocabulary. Weber is impatient, needing to know why the aliens are there and if they have evil intentions. Louise retorts that language acquisition is not something that can be rushed but requires patience and care. The process takes a lot of time and Weber grows increasingly impatient.

In many Hollywood science fiction blockbusters, such as those of the *Star Wars* franchise, special effects are often used as an aesthetic and economic strategy to help ensure box office success. Villeneuve's *Arrival*, however, does not offer "blow it up" spectacle and instead presents a speculative exploration of interpersonal communication between humans and extraterrestrials. In this way, Villeneuve manages to subvert the usual routine of Hollywood science fiction blockbusters, such as Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) or the *Transformer* film series, such as *The Last Knight* (Michael Bay, 2017). Elyes Benatar suggests that even the title *Arrival* is a strike against science fiction convention because it is not a film about aliens invading but about aliens arriving (1).

In *Arrival* Villeneuve prefers a slower editing pace and close-ups to capture character expression and emotion, instead of the fast-paced editing and the frequent spectacular extreme long shots associated with action-based science fiction films. For example, when Louise first enters the alien spacecraft to work as a translator, the scene unfolds slowly, shifting in tone from mysterious to tense. Louise is visibly uncomfortable, indicated by her heavy breathing inside her full-body protective suit. Loud exhalation from inside a spacesuit is a familiar trope of science fiction, yet Louise's journey to the aliens is unhurried and measured as she moves, very slowly, upwards into the alien spacecraft. Sweat appearing on her brow, Louise's face is captured in close-up, indicating that entering the alien spacecraft for the first time is emotional rather than exhilarating. During the scenes with the heptapods, Villeneuve continues to utilize a slower pace, conveying that communication and translation can be complex and onerous. Furthermore, the electric blue and green lighting so often a feature of science fiction films is not found in *Arrival*, not even in relation to the aliens' spacecraft. Instead, the palette lends itself to naturalistic lighting and cool, dark colors.

In fact, Villeneuve chose Bradford Young as cinematographer because he had no previous experience in science fiction, but had an ability to create atmosphere by using natural light effectively. The landscape around the spacecraft is monochromatic, symbolizing Louise's subdued reservations about the situation. Sets are minimalistic and sparse yet striking, such as the room inside the spacecraft where the human-heptapod communication takes place. It is a shadowy and cavernous room, bare except for a whiteboard and a

transparent wall behind which the silhouetted heptapods lurk in swirling mists. The technology the humans use is not futuristic but familiar and it transpires the aliens' "secret weapon" is their language and the ability it gives them to manipulate time. What *Arrival* lacks in explosions and gunfights in outer space, it makes up for by asking provocative questions about language, time and knowledge.

Like *Polytechnique* and *Sicario*, *Arrival* plays with the audience's experience of time, encouraging them to adopt differing perspectives; yet because *Arrival* is science fiction, these perspectives are able to be literally out of this world, offering Louise and the film's audiences an alternative conception of existence. Louise learns that the heptapods' language endows them with a circular experience of time and is a "weapon" they wish to gift humans. Louise's patience and tenacity in communicating with the aliens is rewarded with an ability to see into the future. The heptapods have come to Earth to help humans because they know in many thousands of years they will need humans to help them. The aliens are putting in place circumstances they know will be needed to enact the future. This causal loop, or predestination paradox, is a narrative device common in time-travel science fiction. Villeneuve makes this genre convention his own by employing it in conjunction with his signature stylistic manipulation of temporality to express an alternative understanding of time and being. Villeneuve presses the importance of the sciences and humanities collaborating to decipher the heptapods' language and thus solve the worldwide crisis caused by aliens landing on Earth. Louise uses her newly-gained command of time to change events in the future that prevent a military strike against the aliens and save crumbling international relations, notably by bringing together China and the US.

Despite it being distinct from other Hollywood science fiction films, *Arrival* certainly does the work of conventional science fiction in that it uses futuristic scenarios to critique present day society. Zachary Lee contends that given the current reality of polarization and division across racial, social and economic boundaries in the US, *Arrival* carries a timely message and calls for a revival of unity (4). Lee posits that Villeneuve's message in *Arrival* is that humanity today must be willing to open their minds and hearts to difference (5). The challenge for Villeneuve was to effectively represent the otherness of the alien visitors as well as that of the humans, which he did by portraying "otherness" in language and cognition. With *Arrival*, Villeneuve takes the sojourner filmmaker's exploration of a complex relationship between foreign and native, host and guest, to an analogous extreme. As a sojourner director, a foreigner to the US with a background in the French language, Villeneuve is perceptive to the complexities and difficulties when communicating across languages and cultures.

Arrival's success consolidated Villeneuve's own success as a sojourner director and confirmed his ability to take on even larger science fiction projects, notably *Blade Runner 2049*. Villeneuve's sequel to Ridley Scott's much loved 1982 blockbuster *Blade Runner*, is another big budget science fiction film that one critic has called "a bold arthouse blockbuster" (Johnson 2). Set in Los Angeles in a dystopian future, the film follows K (Ryan Gosling), a bioengineered human, as he becomes a reluctant hero in a world where the parameters of what it means to be human are becoming increasingly blurred. Despite the many obligations Villeneuve had to fulfill in making this anticipated film, he still infused it with his personal style and the essence of Québec. Villeneuve re-animated the futuristic Los

Angeles of the original *Blade Runner* but with Québécois inflection. Villeneuve's vision of the climate is far harsher, as Villeneuve – who grew up in Montréal – brought the snow-filled, silvery grey skies of Québec to *Blade Runner's* Los Angeles. Early in the film we observe K in his apartment from outside his window, our vision obscured by snow and ice, indicating the cold, isolated and brutal nature of the world in which he exists. Villeneuve admits he purposefully brought the Québécois chill to a Hollywood postmodern classic, believing he had to bring something from home to the *Blade Runner* universe (qtd. in Johnson 2). Villeneuve even had his cinematographer, Roger Deakins, come and stay with him in Montréal to understand the winter and the winter lights from November to December to be able to mimic the atmosphere (Johnson 2).

At the ending of the original *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), *Tears in the Rain* (composed by Vangelis) plays while Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), after saving Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), slumps, with rain falling upon his dying body. In *Blade Runner 2049*, after bringing Deckard to his daughter, K also slumps to the ground as *Tears in the Rain* (reworked by Hans Zimmer) plays – however in this scene, it is not rain falling upon K's dying body but snow, aligning the two films yet with a distinct Villeneuve and Québécois difference. Indeed, it is the nature of sojourner cinema to present a hybridization of styles and national cinemas (Mills 161). The final cost of the film, between US \$150 million to US \$180 million, along with its "A list" cast suggest Villeneuve's move to Hollywood has proven successful; yet, importantly, this success has not stripped him of his regional Québécois character, stylistic flair and arthouse quirkiness that originally made him stand out in his national cinema (Johnson 1). Rather, Villeneuve's Québécois vision and his Hollywood vision have reconciled. As one of the film's producers said to Villeneuve after seeing the final cut: "we love your director's cut, we just produced the most expensive arthouse movie ever made" (qtd. in Johnson 2).

At this juncture in transnational filmmaking, Villeneuve is not alone in his pursuits, as there is an increasing number of auteurs of note who are successfully making sojourner cinema in the US. Take, for instance, Joachim Trier, who after making a name for himself with films such as *Reprise* (2006) and *Oslo, August 31st* (2011) in his native Oslo, made *Louder than Bombs* (2015) based in New York before going back home to Norway to make *Thelma* (2017). Similarly to Villeneuve's Hollywood films, Trier's Hollywood film has a US setting but a multinational cast and crew and a foreign director. Even in popular and formulaic Hollywood genres such as that of the super hero – which must appeal to a broad international audience to ensure box office success – filmmakers from national or regional cinemas can offer alternative styles to the typical Hollywood product to offer characters and settings that are unique. Indeed, Marvel studios put New Zealand auteur Taika Waititi at the helm of US\$180 million superhero blockbuster *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) in an attempt to break the "cookie cutter" mold and add a fresh gleam to the genre. Waititi rose to fame for his whimsical and zany filmmaking style in New Zealand with comedies such as *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014) and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (2016). In a genre saturated with unoriginal franchises, Waititi's audacious style managed to inject a unique type of humor into a superhero blockbuster, with the inclusion of the ridiculous and comical rock monster Korg, who has a heavy New Zealand accent and is voiced by Waititi himself. Waititi's sojourner cinema embraces the absurdity of a popular genre without undermining it and instead adding flair to it. Along with Villeneuve, these directors from small national cinemas,

who are creating a new class of Hollywood film, are best explained through the lens of sojourner cinema. Identifying sojourner directors in Hollywood reveals consistencies in their ability to possess a critical grasp of both commercial and arthouse/auteur sensibilities.

Villeneuve's films, no matter where they are made, persistently offer dark themes, a mood of grumbling anticipation, and recurring stylistic traits. Villeneuve is an auteur who first developed his own cinematic style whilst embedded in the space and cinema of Québec, creating films such as *Polytechnique* before beginning to cross transnational boundaries with *Incendies*. Once he moved to Hollywood, he became something more than an auteur from a minority national cinema, as he also became a creator of 'sojourner cinema'. His Hollywood films, including *Sicario*, *Arrival* and *Blade Runner 2049*, merge differing perspectives and fuse his distinctive style and preoccupations with Hollywood frameworks, inflecting his now big budget films with transnational insight. Villeneuve's presence and success in Hollywood is breaking tired moulds and enabling him to extend his capacity as an auteur. Hollywood has given him greater access to resources and, therefore, genres such as science fiction, allowing his work to reach wider audiences while maintaining artistic integrity. At the same time, his Hollywood sojourns have facilitated the emergence of new cultural forms. As Mills states is the function of sojourner cinema, Villeneuve's Hollywood films hold in tension multiple perspectives, fractured temporalities, two national cinemas, and, sometimes, the skies of Québec above a dystopian Los Angeles.

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