

Introduction: Mia Hansen-Løve, transnational auteur

With the release of *Maya* at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival, Mia Hansen-Løve brought to six the number of feature films she had directed in twelve years, a remarkable achievement for a woman in any film industry. It is one equalled by very few other French women directors,¹ and the mark of a productivity that is even more impressive when we consider that Hansen-Løve is only just forty (she was born in 1981) and that her seventh film is being released as she reaches that birthday. Equally noteworthy is the consistent critical success her films have met with, both domestically and internationally, and the awards they have won, which range from the Prix Louis Delluc for Best First Film in 2007 (shared with Céline Sciamma for *Waterlilies/Naissance des pieuvres*), via the Special Jury prize in the Cannes film festival's Un Certain regard competition in 2009, to the Berlin Silver Bear for Best Director in 2016.

Over just a dozen years, Hansen-Løve has gained a reputation as the director of emotionally rich and insightful dramas that often draw on her life experience but could not be called 'autobiographical'; dramas that possess a characteristic lucidity and an idiosyncratically patient approach to narrative. Her initial route into filmmaking was very much that of an auteur (in the attenuated twenty-first-century sense I discuss in **Becoming an auteur** below), and the authorial 'signature' of her filmmaking seems ripe for consideration at this point in her career. In accordance with this objective, this introduction will first outline

Hansen-Løve's route into cinema and the time she spent as a critic for *Cahiers du cinéma* between 2003 and 2005. It will then explore the kind of director she is turning out to be, and consider how her authorship relates to her gender. It will also suggest that although Hansen-Løve, who started her cinematic career as an actor, is in many ways a true insider of French cinema, she is best viewed as a transnational director entirely open to the traditions, influences and industries of many major film-producing nations inside and outside Europe.

Hansen-Løve as actor and critic

As mentioned above, Hansen-Løve's first exposure to cinema was in front of rather than behind the camera, when as a result of an opportunity offered by the drama teacher at her high school (*lycée*), she participated in auditions for, and was cast in, Olivier Assayas's film *Late August, Early September/Fin août, début septembre* (1998). Mathieu Amalric, Jeanne Balibar, Virginie Ledoyen and other well-known French actors starred in this drama about a group of young adults clustered around the middle-aged writer Adrien (François Cluzet), who is suffering from an illness that will prove fatal. While the film focuses more on the younger adults' relationships than on Adrien's, Hansen-Løve, looking the particularly *gamine* teenager that she then was, plays the important role of the girlfriend whose existence Adrien does not reveal to his friends over the last months of his life. Although this part does not seem to have been especially important to Hansen-Løve, the shoot most certainly was, as she repeatedly describes it in interviews in almost epiphanic terms, as *traumatisante* (traumatic) but in a good sense,² an experience that decided her once and for all on a career in film.³ The senses of involvement and belonging she found during the filming of *Late August, Early September* became feelings she absolutely had to experience again - something she did not do until she came to direct a film of her own some years later.

Two years after *Late August, Early September* Hansen-Løve had a small role in another of Assayas's films, *Les Destinées/Les destinées sentimentales* (2000), a long and beautifully located drama about a Protestant pastor in turn-of-the-century Charente (Charles Berling) who faces scandal for divorcing his over-severe wife (Isabelle Huppert) but then resigns the ministry, remarries to the young and independently minded Pauline (Emmanuelle Béart) and devotes the rest of his life to running the family porcelain company. Hansen-Løve was serious enough about acting at this point to enrol for training at France's Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Arts Dramatiques (CNSAD), but left after two years, in 2003, seemingly because her interest in directing was gaining the upper hand. During this period Hansen-Løve made 'three or four' short films of which she says 'none . . . has had a very distinguished career, with the possible exception of the first one' (Jones 2010: 56), titled *After Much Thought/Après mûre réflexion* (2004). Hansen-Løve's favourite of her shorts, *Isabelle By Herself* (2004), 'was more experimental: a silent, poetic portrait of a woman she knew, which she shot in a park in black-and-white 16mm' (2010: 56).⁴

In the early 2000s France's leading film journal *Cahiers du cinéma* had been through a difficult period during which, after coming under the direct control of the country's leading daily newspaper *Le Monde*, it had attempted a makeover and expanded coverage that did not find favour with its traditional readership. In 2003 the film critic and academic Jean-Michel Frodon was appointed chief editor (which he would remain until 2009), and at this point Hansen-Løve became one of *Cahiers'* regular critics for a period of two years, authoring no fewer than fifty-seven articles between issues 580 (July 2003) and 606 (September 2005). Attempting to comment on too many of these would serve no useful purpose, since Hansen-Løve presumably had limited freedom to choose which titles she would review, so after picking out a couple of individual reviews of well-known or popular films, I shall identify two categories of film (by region and genre respectively) that recur among the fifty-seven articles, then comment in more detail

on some reviews that anticipate the concerns and characteristics of the feature films Hansen-Løve would go on to direct.

Woody Allen's *Match Point* (2005), which was screened out of competition at the Cannes film festival of 2005 then released in five European countries later that year and more widely early in 2006, was described by Hansen-Løve in her review as 'the least "jazz" and the most "opera" of Woody Allen's films',⁵ both anticipating and concurring with the critical acclaim the film went on to meet with internationally. She was equally complimentary, however, about the French comedy *Palais Royal!* (2005), directed by Valérie Lemerrier and starring Lemerrier, Lambert Wilson and Catherine Deneuve. One of numerous French comedies produced each year and not released outside Europe (where it did travel to Spain, Portugal and Greece), *Palais Royal!* was praised by Hansen-Løve for its cinematography (Lemerrier's 'pseudo-discreet' technique of drawing attention to the objective importance of her character to the film by making herself 'falsely small' within the frame), for the precision of its dialogue, and for its 'pitiless observation' of character types.⁶

Asia is a region of the world's cinemas covered by a number of Hansen-Løve's *Cahiers* articles. In 'The Mekong seen from the Ticino', a review of a selection of films from Indochina that were screened at the 2005 Locarno film festival, she considers heavily state-controlled Vietnamese historical films directed by Bui Dinh Hac and Dang Nhat Minh, and reports on a number of titles made by His Majesty the King of Cambodia, Norodom Sihanouk, which she describes as 'both worse – if possible – and more appealing than state-controlled Vietnamese cinema'.⁷ During the previous year, 2004, a moment at which China was really only beginning to open up its film culture to the rest of the world, she covered the seventh Shanghai film festival for *Cahiers* and reported on Tian Zhang-zhuang's *Delamu* and Zhu Wen's *South of the Clouds* (two independent films that stood out among a lot of predictable fare) as well as a debate about 'the Chinese phenomenon' (the new generation of Chinese directors) involving Jia Zhangke and Wang Xiao-shuai as well as Zhu Wen, alongside three specialist critics

from the US, Japan and Korea.⁸ In April of 2004 she reviewed Yu Lik-wai's experimental fiction *All Tomorrow's Parties* in an article entitled 'Zone Chine'.⁹

It is hardly surprising that contemporary experimental and avant-garde cinema is one of the modes of film Hansen-Løve wrote about for *Cahiers*. In November 2003, the veteran Lithuanian-American filmmaker Jonas Mekas was invited to the Centre d'art contemporain de Basse-Normandie at Hérrouville Saint-Clair in the outskirts of Caen, in central northern France, for a retrospective of his films included in an event dedicated to Lithuanian art and film. Mekas presented an installation titled 'Dedicated to Fernand Léger . . .' which according to Hansen-Løve was uncharacteristically but pleasingly cacophonous, full of the noise of children (Mekas's own) shouting, phones ringing, fire engine sirens, trumpets, applause and so on.¹⁰ In the February 2004 edition of *Cahiers*, the full interview with Mekas she had carried out in Hérrouville Saint-Clair was published, in which Mekas talked about his entire career and his tastes in popular film (Clint Eastwood, westerns, and action films), as well as the films of Andy Warhol and John Cassavetes.¹¹ A few months later Hansen-Løve wrote about the annual Festival Nemo of experimental film at Paris's Forum des Images, an event featuring video art, 2D/3D animation, motion graphic design, video games, internet art and interactive cinema. Her review notes that the works presented were heavily oriented towards developing technologies, raising questions such as 'Does technological performance have an absolute aesthetic value?' and implying that this festival is progressively reinterpreting 'experimental' in a technological sense.¹² 'Although it would be ridiculous to oppose art to technology', Hansen-Løve remarks, 'it would be just as naïve to marvel at films only remarkable for the perfection of their technique.'¹³

A filmmaker who might be termed 'experimental' in a more traditional sense and about whom Hansen-Løve wrote twice for *Cahiers* is Jean-Pierre Gorin, Jean-Luc Godard's collaborator in the Dziga Vertov group from 1968 to 1972. Gorin, who emigrated to California in the mid-1970s, returned to directing with 'the

marvellous *Poto and Cabengo*¹⁴ in 1978, one of three of his films featured in the 2004 Viennale (Vienna film festival). Hansen-Løve's article about the festival (she also reviewed *Poto and Cabengo* separately in a later issue¹⁵) marvels at the smoothness of Gorin's transition from French to American film culture revealed in his US-based trilogy, each film in which 'is a way of penetrating further into American space – geographical, linguistic, mental'.¹⁶ Gorin also reproduced the structure of his collaboration with Godard in the US by developing a partnership with Manny Farber, about which little is known in France, an omission that the remainder of Hansen-Løve's article starts to remedy.

It is in two *Cahiers* articles about American directors Michael Mann and Larry Clark that concerns germane to Hansen-Løve's own films can be found – her article on Mann, punningly titled 'Mann's women' [*Femmes de Mann*] considers male-female couples in *Ali* (2001), *Collateral* (2004) and *Heat* (1995), while her review of Clark's *Ken Park* (2002) appears in a dossier of articles that starts with a roundtable discussion of *Ken Park*, Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River* and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*, all films that concerned the lives of American teenagers and were released in France in October 2004. Affirming that Larry Clark's sole artistic project is 'to invent a myth of adolescence'¹⁷, the core of Hansen-Løve's analysis of *Ken Park* runs as follows:

Of all Larry Clark's films, *Ken Park* is the most Oedipal, in its phobias of the father, of a morality made of paternal virility, and of the father's timeworn authority and murky desires. By contrast, teenagers' sexual ideal is a fatherless ideal. But because he has created the myth of their generation – the *kids* – Larry Clark means to take on the role of father himself, a putative father for these self-proclaimed orphans. To take on this role, he offers them a re-appropriation of their image [the character Ken Park], albeit one of a suicide case.¹⁸

She concludes by describing Clark as 'the most serious and perhaps the only emblem of today's American counterculture, in

the sense that he opposes a sub-culture to a society and its mass culture that is both the negative and the product of that society and culture.¹⁹ Clark's on-screen world cannot be recuperated by 'the adult world' and is stuck in something like a Freudian repetition compulsion: all Ken Park's suicide achieves is a shutting-down of 'the ineluctable logic of the reproduction of the same.'²⁰ Of Michael Mann, Hansen-Løve's view is that Mann's reputation as a filmer of confrontations between men does not mean that the women in his films are insignificant: their roles are certainly secondary to the men, but not purely functional, since in her estimation Mann shares Quentin Tarantino's 'acute vision'²¹ [*regard aigu*] of women. Women may be entirely excluded from the action of *Heat*, but Mann achieves an impressive tragic vision of male-female relationships across at least five couples, while in *Ali*, Nona Gaye, Jada Pinkett Smith and Michael Michele play female characters who offer 'remarkable antidotes to Hollywood's Halle Berry types'²² through their mature relationships with Ali (Will Smith). In *Collateral* a woman, Annie (Jada Pinkett Smith) is important to the plot of a Mann film for the first time, and although this might be put down to Mann not having written the film himself, Hansen-Løve still finds his directorial vision in the lengthy early scene that introduces Annie as a character. In Mann's films, 'women stand out because of their discretion and their strength of character'²³, and he does not film young ingénues or make his female characters' intelligence serve only the plot.

The interest in adolescent lives and mature male-female relationships that would emerge in Hansen-Løve's own films is thus already apparent in the articles on independent American directors she wrote for *Cahiers*, and other concerns of her filmmaking can be detected in her reviews of French filmmakers such as Gérard Blain (the father of Paul Blain, who would play Victor in *All Is Forgiven/Tout est pardonné*) and Jacques Doillon. Gérard Blain made just nine films between 1971 and his death in 2000, and it is the third, *A Child in the Crowd/Un enfant dans la foule* (1976) that Hansen-Løve takes as a focus for her discussion of how Blain was influenced by Robert Bresson (a director she herself admires)

and of 'great films about childhood', of which she sees *A Child in the Crowd* as the last in a series that began with Truffaut's *The 400 Blows/Les quatre cents coups* (1959). The vision of childhood conveyed in *A Child in the Crowd* is by far the bleakest of the series, with a 'stone-hearted'²⁴ mother who incomprehensibly but deeply hates her son Paul, and a father who is indifferent to him and leaves the family. Its fascination with difficult relationships between fathers and sons means that Blain's cinema evinces what Roland Barthes called 'the inverse Oedipus complex'.²⁵ In an article on Doillon's *The Prodigal Daughter/La fille prodigue* (1980), shown at a 2005 retrospective of films starring Jane Birkin, Hansen-Løve's interest in dysfunctional parent-child relationships is even clearer, although this time it is the relationship between a daughter, Anne (Jane Birkin), and her father (Michel Piccoli), and a positive rather than a negative Oedipus complex – in the film, Anne leaves her husband and returns to the parental home, where she gives free rein to an incestuous desire for her father. What is interesting about Hansen-Løve's appraisal of *The Prodigal Daughter* is that despite her awareness of the 'psychoanalytic charge'²⁶ of the film (in which Anne exhausts her father with her possessive jealousy and he eventually collapses onto his back on the floor and 'offers himself as if in sacrifice to his daughter'²⁷), she seems to find Piccoli's performance and physique its most memorable aspects, remarking on 'the carnal beauty of Piccoli's massive body' and on his 'superb fragility' and 'the eroticism of his goodness'.²⁸ In Hansen-Løve's view, the film both bears out Freudian theory and frees itself of it through the personal deliverance that Anne experiences by committing incest with her father: it is Anne's words when this act takes place, 'I have found the man I come from' [*J'ai retrouvé l'homme dont je viens*] that Hansen-Løve uses as the title of her article.

When Hansen-Løve's début feature film *All Is Forgiven/Tout est pardonné*, which she reports writing in the winter of 2003,²⁹ was released in 2007 and selected for competition at Cannes, *Cahiers du cinéma* invited her to present the film in its pages, introducing her as one of its 'former critics' – although she has in

fact continued to publish in it occasionally, and to be interviewed about her films. Hansen-Løve's assessment of this intensive period spent writing criticism is that there was a 'question of principle' at stake: if one wants to practise an art (and she knew she wanted to direct films), it is essential not to be preoccupied only by one's own work and to study other practitioners' work closely.³⁰ Even although she found the conception of cinema that prevailed at *Cahiers* too ideological for her liking, the work of criticism was helpful 'in achieving a certain clarity'. 'Writing helps you focus and makes you get down to the essentials', she comments.³¹

Becoming an auteur

Hansen-Løve's period of full-time employment at *Cahiers du cinéma* may have been relatively short, but it is impossible not to observe how similar it makes her route into feature filmmaking to the early careers of François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and the other young men of France's Nouvelle Vague. What most obviously differentiates her from them, of course, is her gender, but assessing how important this difference is and how it may be colouring her success as a filmmaker is a task beset by several difficulties. First, there is the relatively high proportion of feature films directed by women in France as compared to other European and non-European countries, which commentators are often at a loss to explain, even if it seems to indicate that a positive context exists for women seeking to direct and produce in Francophone territory (that is, in France's overseas departments and collectivities as well as its mainland, though there is little film-making activity in any of the former). Second, there is the non-validity across that territory of the category of 'female authorship', which has become an increasing focus of Anglophone (feminist) film commentary since the late 1980s. Third, there is Hansen-Løve's own ambivalence towards the significance of her gender as a factor in her filmmaking: this is an issue on which she has sometimes commented, but in a distinctly non-committal fashion. In order

to shed some light on Hansen-Løve's status as a contemporary French woman auteur, I shall discuss each of these areas in turn.

Since the 'watershed' decade of the 1970s for women's filmmaking worldwide, when women began to direct in significant numbers for the first time, their share of annual production in France has increased steadily from less than 10% in the 1980s to 13.7% in the 1990s (Tarr with Rollet 2001: 3) and 18.3% in the 2000s (Tarr 2012: 190–1). Against an increased overall level of production, the absolute number of films directed by women more than doubled from an average seventeen films per year in the 1990s to an average of thirty-six in the 2000s (Tarr 2012: 190–1), reaching more than forty per annum in the last four years of the decade. Although 18.3% in the 2000s and a probable proportion of between 20% and 25% in the 2010s³² is nowhere near the parity aimed at by campaigns such as '50:50 by 2020',³³ it is well above the figures achieved in Hollywood and most other national cinemas. Hansen-Løve, who released two feature films in the 2000s and four in the 2010s, is a leading contributor to the steadily increasing share of film production that women are gaining in her native country. Of course, whether the gender of their director is detectably marked in her films, either in their narratives or aesthetically, is a separate question from the gender-political context in which she works, and is a question I shall sometimes touch on in the chapters of this book and shall return to in its conclusion.

If female authorship of the kind now frequently discussed in Anglophone film writing poses a problem in the French context, this is for a political reason that is more internationally visible where France's ethnic/racial minorities are concerned, in the wearing of signs of religious adherence like the Muslim veil and the Jewish kippah, which is still outlawed in public arenas such as schools and colleges despite being increasingly contested in recent decades. 'Advertising' religious adherence in this way goes against the notion of citizenship implied in French secular Republicanism, according to which each individual citizen is equal in their neutrality, a kind of 'absolute equality', and the state does not

recognise or interact with communities or groups united by racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity. Identity politics of the kind familiar from the US and UK is referred to as *communautarisme*, and is viewed as a threat to the Republican tradition presently actualised (since 1958) in the Fifth Republic. Women, of course, are not a minority statistically, but because feminism can be viewed as a form of identity politics, it is classified as a type of *communautarisme* at odds with the state's citizenship policies. Resistance to identity politics in France, exacerbated in recent years in debates about gay marriage, which was legalised in 2013, undermines the confidence with which women and minorities can 'advertise' their qualified kind of identity: whatever their individual view about the importance of their femaleness, blackness or religious practice to their occupation (since it is in the public sphere that awareness of *communautarisme* is strongest), drawing attention to it is a less straightforward matter than in many other countries.

The Francophone film world is obviously not immune to the political sensitivities affecting French society as a whole, and it is therefore to be expected that film authorship will be affected by the resistance to identity politics outlined above. In France as elsewhere, the category of the auteur, which fell out of favour in the 1970s and 1980s before making a contested recovery in the globalised 1990s, has survived into twenty-first-century film criticism, but in France it has not 'diversified' along the same lines as in the Anglophone world. Awareness of the femaleness, non-normative sexuality or non-whiteness of the director of a film certainly exists in France, but is not mediated as intensively or accepted as politically significant as easily as in many other places. Whereas Anglophone film writers are now accustomed to employing 'female', 'gay' and 'black' to qualify the authorship of whatever film(s) they are discussing (though they may not agree it is important to do so), this does not occur with any regularity or consistency in French film criticism. How, then, does this climate influence Hansen-Løve's work as a French woman director?

As suggested above, the French Republican model undoubtedly influences women's cultural production in France: it does not

necessarily impede or suppress women's creativity or self-expression, of course, but through being ingrained in the very way women think about their social identity, it affects their willingness to identify as 'feminist' or to qualify their work as gendered, in whatever way. An article entitled 'We Women' [*Nous, les femmes*] that Hansen-Løve wrote for *Cahiers du cinéma* 681, an issue largely given over to a dossier on women directors worldwide, reveals both these tensions and her response to them (Hansen-Løve 2012: 28–9). In the short final paragraph of the article she poses two questions that could be described as summarising the dilemma of women directors working in France, stuck between female specificity and Republican universalism: 'What is a female [*féminin*] vision of the world? What is a vision of the world?' (2012: 29). By stating a preference for the second question, because, she says, it seems to allow her 'to open a window and to breathe' (2012: 29), Hansen-Løve repeats a move made by countless French women directors since the 1970s – a preference for a non-gender-specific directing identity. However, she reaches this conclusion after demonstrating a thoroughgoing awareness of her situation, commenting, for example, that she is 'systematically' asked by Anglophone critics about the *difference* (original emphasis) of women's filmmaking and what comprises it (2012: 28). She makes a distinction between the political and artistic dimensions of gender identity faced by filmmakers, answering a decisive 'yes' to the need to discuss women's difficulties in getting to direct and to helping them do so, but 'no' to approaching film texts in the light of a director's femaleness. She is evidently very aware of *communautarisme*, despite only using the term once, when she is describing the tendency of contemporary societies and film audiences to become increasingly divided into 'sociological groups' (*tranches sociologiques*) or 'communities' (*communautés*) based on gender or ethnic identity (2012: 29). This tendency oppresses her, she reports, producing 'a suffocating feeling' (*sensation d'étouffement*) (2012: 29).

It may not be accurate to interpret the views Hansen-Løve explains in 'We Women' as a refusal to identify as a 'woman

filmmaker', because the question is not put to her in these terms. 'Female authorship' is a contested critical and theoretical concept she is unlikely to be familiar with, precisely because of her working context. And however much her career path resembles those of Truffaut and other filmmaker-critics originally involved in defining what it means to be an auteur, it also has elements in common with many contemporary women directors – her discovery of the desire to direct through acting, for example. Whereas the mode of authorship championed by the Nouvelle Vague's filmmaker-critics emphasised an expansive originality and creativity, Hansen-Løve insists on the importance of studying other filmmakers' work in order to better hone her personal style, which is evidently one she examines critically. Perhaps most importantly, reluctance to identify as a 'woman filmmaker' does not in any way reduce the sense of solidarity she evidently feels with other women, whatever their occupation: 'It's not that I don't feel in solidarity with the problems women face in the world. More than ever, this cause too is mine' (Hansen-Løve 2012: 29). Does such solidarity add up to a kind of feminism? Whether it does or not, Hansen-Løve's expressed readiness to be an ally of women's struggles draws attention to her strong awareness of her femaleness, which she articulates early in 'We Women' as she addresses the question 'Does a women's cinema exist?' 'Certainly, the fact that I am a woman is connected to everything I feel, write and shoot. It is part of me, and, I'm very aware, affects everything I undertake' (2012: 29). This statement is directly followed by a reported one that comparing two women filmmakers is likely to reveal as much in common as between Mahatma Gandhi and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but Hansen-Løve's words are still striking in their force. She may not want to endorse the widely used Anglophone notion of 'women's cinema', employed to politicise the female gender of film directors rather than to refer to any properties shared by films directed by women, but she recognises and accepts that her gender cannot be neutralised, and that this affects her professional as well as her personal identity.

Transnational authorship in contemporary France

The analysis of Hansen-Løve's mode of authorship offered above omits one important dimension of its character during her career to date – the transnational one. Being of partly Danish descent, Hansen-Løve may be more 'European' in her influences and connections than some French filmmakers, but whether this internationalism can be attributed to her family background or not, characters and locations from outside France feature regularly in her films. The first part of *All Is Forgiven* (2007) takes place in Vienna, the home of Austrian Annette (Marie-Christine Friedrich), who remarries another Frenchman after the breakdown of her relationship with Victor (Paul Blain) charted in the film. German (appropriately subtitled) is spoken in several scenes. In *Father of My Children/Le père de mes enfants* (2009), Hansen-Løve's fictional version of the life of film producer Humbert Balsan sees him married to the Italian Sylvia (Chiara Caselli) where in reality his wife was American. A little Italian is spoken in the film, and several important scenes take place in and around ecclesiastical buildings in Ravenna on a family holiday. Although only a few scenes of *Goodbye First Love* (2011) take place outside France, when viewing architectural sites in Denmark and Germany that are important for Camille (Lola Créton)'s training, the teacher of architecture who comes to replace her 'first love' Sullivan, Lorenz, is played by Norwegian actor Magne Håvard-Brekke who also played the role of 'genius' auteur director Stig Larsen in *Father of My Children*, and is understood to be Scandinavian or of Scandinavian descent. *Eden*, the fiction about house and garage music of the 1990s that Hansen-Løve co-wrote with her brother Sven, on whom the character of Paul (Félix de Givry) is based, is probably her most international story to date, because the musicians and DJs featured in the film are as often American as they are French, and going on tour to New York is a key professional achievement for Paul and his DJ-ing partner Stan (Hugo Conzelmann). A lot of English is spoken in the film,

and the serious girlfriend Paul has at its start is the American Julia (Greta Gerwig). In comparison with these first four features, *Things to Come/L'Avenir* is particularly French and France-bound, but with *Maya Hansen-Løve* moves beyond Europe and the West for the first time by setting the great majority of the film in Goa, India.

This catalogue of languages and locations outside Hansen-Løve's native France demonstrates an unquestionable transnationalism on her part: she may have followed a particularly French career path into film, but she is anything but blinkered in her approach to story-writing and casting, and is as open to diverse countries and cultures as one might expect of a 'millennial' born in 1981. Transnationalism also features in the financing and production of Hansen-Løve's films, although here it is just the European Union's MEDIA programme, the German Federal Film Board (*Filmförderungsanstalt* (FFA)) and two other German companies, the Berlin-Brandenburg Media Board and Razor Film Ltd, that have been significant players. (A large number of France-based production companies including Les Films Pelléas, the CNC, and regions such as Ile-de-France, the Limousin and Rhône-Alpes have been majority funders in Hansen-Løve's various film projects.)

As film scholar Gemma King comments in her recent book *Decentering France*, transnational cinema studies has achieved a great deal in a short period of time where accounting for the complex structures of today's global film industries is concerned. It may only have taken off in the twenty-first century, but by offering 'a means through which to discuss films marked by international aspects, without ignoring the concept of the national' (King 2017: 12), transnational film studies can elucidate bodies of work such as that of Hansen-Løve as well as the constantly shifting character of the 'French' film industry. The particular focus of *Decentering France* is multilingual cinema, which King defines not simply as films employing more than one language occasionally or casually,³⁴ a common practice throughout the twentieth century as well as in the twenty-first, but films in which multiple language

use equates to the exercise of power, through practices such as code-switching – films that ‘uncover the many possible fields of social power at play in multilingual scenes’ (2017: 4). Despite the regular occurrence of languages other than French (German, Italian, English) in Hansen-Løve’s cinema to date, her films do not in my view belong in the same category as the multilingual French films discussed in *Decentering France*, which ‘resist monopolistic centrings of authority and situate multiple language use within correspondingly polycentric French and global spaces’ (2017: 4). Hansen-Løve’s films can be described as multilingual, since they – like their director – are culturally polyglot, but social power relations are not at stake in their use of languages other than French, even in *Maya* where Indian languages are spoken alongside the British English in which all educated Indians are fluent. It is noteworthy that the languages spoken in addition to French in Hansen-Løve’s films are mainly European languages and American and British English, rather than the tongues of France’s postcolonial subjects (Arabic, Berber) or of migrants from other regions of the globe.

If the non-French languages and nationalities that feature in Hansen-Løve’s films do not connote power relations, this may disqualify her from any status as a political director (which, as became evident in the previous section, she does not aspire to anyway). It does, however, place her in an ever-growing category of globally literate French directors identified by Alice Burgin, Andrew McGregor and Colin Nettelbeck as ‘a transnational auteur cinema emerging from France that extends the traditional concept of cultural diversity beyond French/European borders, incorporating transcultural narratives and promoting various forms of *cinémas du monde*’ (Burgin, McGregor and Nettelbeck 2014: 397, quoted in King 2017: 9). A large part of the value of transnational film studies has been to dismantle rather than take an axe to the older paradigm of ‘monolithic’ national cinemas, ‘acknowledging instead the diverse cultural exchanges which occur in film narratives and cinematic production practices’ (King 2017: 9). Although the paradigm of national cinemas now

appears outdated, it has not been entirely displaced and is certainly not worthless: it is still meaningful to speak of ‘French cinema’ – and describe a filmmaker such as Hansen-Løve as ‘a French director’ – in the early 2020s. As King writes to conclude the ‘French cinema’ section of her introduction to *Decentering France*: ‘To speak of a French cinema is not to box French films into a narrow, monocultural definition, but to acknowledge the plurality of voices, identities and modes of production that characterise the cinema of twenty-first century France’ (2017: 15).

The book

The discussions of Hansen-Løve’s films that follow are structured into six chapters, on the family (Chapter 1, *Fracture familiale*); on vulnerability or vulnerabilisation (Chapter 2, Vulnerable people); on the marked work ethic demonstrated by all the films’ leading protagonists which, following Catherine Wheatley (Wheatley 2019) I see as post-secular (Chapter 3, Adversity and resilience: the post-secular ethic of vocation); on the importance of a certain ‘spirituality’ and experiences of transcendence to the films (Chapter 4, Candid camera, or an aesthetic of transcendence); on music (Chapter 5, Lost in music); and finally, on time (Chapter 6, The rivers of time). The criticism of other Anglophone commentators on Hansen-Løve’s cinema such as Wheatley, Emma Wilson and Fiona Handyside has been vital to the approach I have developed to Hansen-Løve’s work, which is to see her as an ethical filmmaker – or more precisely, as a filmmaker possessed of an ethical vision that emerges through the themes (many of them ‘moral’ qualities such as vulnerability, resilience and candour) around which the book is organised. I introduce ethics towards the end of Chapter 1, focus on it in Chapters 2 and 3, then concentrate on the films’ aesthetics in Chapters 4 and 5, before returning to ethics in relation to time and temporality in Chapter 6. A conclusion then draws together the explorations undertaken in the six chapters.

Notes

All translations, unless otherwise stated, are the author's own.

- 1 According to a report produced by the CNC in 2017, only three women (Hansen-Løve, Julie Delpy and Anne Fontaine) had directed more than four films in the decade between 2006 and 2015, although thirty-five had directed at least three, with some of these only releasing their first film in 2009. See 'La place des femmes dans l'industrie cinématographique et audiovisuelle' on the CNC website at <https://www.cnc.fr/cinema/etudes-et-rapports/etudes-prospectives/la-place-des-femmes-dans-lindustrie-cinematographique-et-audiovisuelle_300828>.
- 2 *Hors Champs* of 20 May 2010, broadcast on France Culture.
- 3 Hansen-Løve's love of cinema began with the encounter with Assayas that this shoot offered her, she initially explains to Laure Adler in the same radio interview.
- 4 This film is on YouTube at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wz93DIP2Sc>> (last accessed 18 August 2019), where it seems to have been titled *A Pure Mind/ Un pur esprit* by YouTube despite actually being called *Isabelle par elle-même*. It is not silent, as sounds and noise are heard throughout, but has no dialogue or speech; the few words spoken by Isabelle are inaudible.
- 5 'Echec et smash', *Cahiers du cinéma* 605 (July 2005), 28–9. The title of the review, which translates literally as 'Defeat and smash', puns on the French for 'checkmate', 'échec et mat'.
- 6 'Offensive sur les bords', *Cahiers du cinéma* 606 (August 2005), 29–30.
- 7 'Le Mékong vu du Tessin', *Cahiers du cinéma* 593 (September 2004), p. 52.
- 8 'Shanghai s'entrouvre aux cinéastes indépendants', *Cahiers du cinéma* 592 (July-August 2004), p. 64.
- 9 'Zone Chine', *Cahiers du cinéma* 589 (April 2004), 23–6.
- 10 'Jonas Mekas et le son retrouvé', *Cahiers du cinéma* 586 (January 2004), p. 71.
- 11 'Nous avons besoin d'action', Interview with Jonas Mekas, *Cahiers du cinéma* 587 (February 2004), 74–7.
- 12 'Exploration aux frontières', *Cahiers du cinéma* 589 (April 2004), 48–9.
- 13 *Ibid.* p. 48.
- 14 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'Des jumelles et des jumeaux', *Cahiers du cinéma* 596 (December 2004), 51–2.
- 15 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'Cabengo', *Cahiers du cinéma* 598 (February 2005), 76–7.
- 16 'Des jumelles et des jumeaux', p. 51.
- 17 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'Portraits crachés' (review of *Ken Park*), *Cahiers du cinéma* 583 (October 2003), 23–4.

- 18 'Portraits crachés', p. 23.
- 19 Ibid. p. 24.
- 20 Ibid. p. 24.
- 21 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'Femmes de Mann', *Cahiers du cinéma* 597 (January 2005), 80–1 (p. 80).
- 22 Ibid. p. 80.
- 23 Ibid. p. 80.
- 24 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'Les passants et les passeurs', *Cahiers du cinéma* 604 (September 2005), 89–90 (p. 90).
- 25 Ibid. p. 90.
- 26 Mia Hansen-Løve, 'J'ai retrouvé l'homme dont je viens', *Cahiers du cinéma* 607 (December 2005), p. 34
- 27 Ibid. p. 34.
- 28 Ibid. p. 34.
- 29 *Cahiers du cinéma* 623 (May 2007), p. 22.
- 30 Axel Zeppenfeld, 'Entretien avec Mia Hansen-Løve', *Cahiers du cinéma* 627 (October 2007), p. 21.
- 31 Richard Porton, 'A Death in the Family: an Interview with Mia Hansen-Løve', *Cineaste* 35: 3 (Summer 2010), 10–14 (p. 14).
- 32 According to Charlotte Pudlowski in an article about the complete absence of films directed by women from the main competition at Cannes in 2012, 52 such films – a massive 25 per cent of the total – were released in 2011 (Pudlowski 2012).
- 33 See <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5050x2020>> and #5050x2020 on social media.
- 34 King attributes the pinpointing of 'minor or superficial instances of multilingualism in cinema' to Chris Wahl, who calls it 'postcarding' in 'Discovering a Genre: the Polyglot Film', *Cinemascope* 1: 1 (2005), 1–8 (King 2017: 6).