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Transactions with the world: ecocriticism and the environmental sensibility of new Hollywood

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ADAM O'BRIEN

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Ecocriticism and the Environmental Sensibility of New Hollywood

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TRANSACTIONS WITH THE WORLD

ECOCRITICISM AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL SENSIBILITY OF NEW HOLLYWOOD

BY
ADAM O'BRIEN

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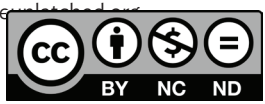

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PROLOGUE

A Typical Love Scene

André Bazin, in a passage celebrating Jean Renoir's *The River* (1951), explains his own definition of expressionism in cinema. According to Bazin, expressionism is the 'explicit imposition of technique on the meaning of the film', a style and a set of assumptions from which, explains Bazin, Renoir distanced himself. To illustrate his point, Bazin invites the reader to imagine a typical love scene:

> *The impression which the director communicates to us has two essentially different elements:*
>
> 1. *The object of the scene itself, which is to say the characters, their behaviour, and their dialogue; in other words, reality in its objective time and space;*
> 2. *The sum of the artifices which the film maker uses to emphasize the meaning of the event, to colour it, to describe its nuances, and to make it harmonize with what precedes and follows it in the story.*
>
> *We can see easily that if it is to be a romantic scene, the set, the lighting, and the framing would not be the same as for a scene of violent sensuality. Then comes montage. The shots will be more numerous and closer for the depiction of sensuality. The romantic scene will demand two-shots at first, and the close-ups at the end will be long ones. (Bazin 1973: 105)*

For Bazin, expressionism is 'any aesthetic which in this situation places more confidence in the artifices of cinematography [...] than in the reality to which they are applied' (1973: 105).

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Bazin's hypothetical scene remains an instantly recognizable specimen, a familiar Hollywood norm (or combination of norms) which has been left relatively untroubled by digital technology, intensified continuity, postmodern aesthetics or any other shift in the design and execution of popular US American cinema. However, Bazin's description is not without its problems, foremost of which is his thumbnail sketch of 'reality in its objective time and space', which is uncharacteristically narrow in its focus. It is unclear whether the reduction of 'reality' to 'characters, their behaviour, and their dialogue' is Bazin's move or an effect of the scene he describes, but he seems at the very least to accept it unconsciously. Either this is Bazin's checklist for reality in cinema, or it is a presumption of the (hypothetical) film which he chooses not to question or problematize. Across literature and the arts, ecocriticism is now encouraging us to look beyond human beings in our interpretations of fiction, and an ecocritical response to Bazin's formulation would no doubt take serious issue with his phrasing.[1] And yet, as a description of a 'typical Hollywood' staging of romantic love, the passage is difficult to fault.

In the following work, I will argue that New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s can be understood as a significant deviation from the default anthropocentrism evoked by Bazin. Films of that period did not radically overhaul the long-standing conventions of narrative film, but they did make room for a reality – an environmental reality – beyond characters, their behaviour and their dialogue. I will go on to discuss generic, technological, ideological and industrial facets of this shift, and will respond to various manifestations of it, in films from within and beyond the canon. But before that, and after having opened with Bazin's love-scene blueprint, I would like to look briefly at three New Hollywood love scenes, and sample some ways in which films of this period departed from classical assumptions regarding the non-human world and its role in meaningful drama.

Harold and Maude (Hal Ashby, 1971)

Harold and Maude tells the story of a brief love affair between Harold (Bud Court), a young man, and Maude (Ruth Gordon), who is approaching eighty. A little over half an hour into the film, as their friendship develops, Harold and Maude go on their first outing together, a development that subtly marks a transition from

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acquaintanceship to courtship. The couple have been talking together in Maude's home; she asks Harold what he likes to do other than attend funerals (the macabre hobby that brought them together initially), and then a cut – comic in its abruptness – takes us to a scrapyard, where Harold and Maude incongruously and defiantly enjoy a picnic. Shortly after there is another abrupt cut, this time to a close-up of Maude; 'I like to watch things grow', she sighs plaintively. We soon learn, through a cut to a long shot, that the couple are now in a large greenhouse. Next, Harold and Maude walk leisurely through a field, discussing what flower they would like to be resurrected as, and finally the sequence ends with an extreme long shot (and zoom out) of them together in a vast cemetery; the seemingly endless rows of identical white headstones, flattened in perspective by the telephoto lens, make for an abstract coda to this series of touching vignettes.

On what terms does *Harold and Maude* invite us to understand, enjoy and sympathize with the relationship of its central characters? Primarily, I would argue, it does so on environmental terms; but not in the sense that Ashby's film prioritizes an environmentalist 'message', regarding issues such as pollution, conservation or energy sustainability. I instead suggest that the non-human world becomes significant and meaningful not simply as a reflection of Harold and Maude, but as an independent context, and one which cannot be reduced to

Figure 0.1 Falling in love: *Harold and Maude* (Paramount Pictures)

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conventional notions of setting. The sequence presents a number of interesting manifestations of this: the couple choose to learn about one another through the places that each likes to dwell in; each environment offers a different permutation of wildness vis-à-vis societal order, and simplistic binaries are carefully avoided; and a person's relationship to his or her environment is posited as being both vital and unstable, open to enrichment and variation. Shot on location in northern California, the film offers a kind of geographical specificity with regard to light, climate, topography and architecture. In an important departure from the love-scene design described by Bazin, *Harold and Maude* refuses to distinguish between physical context and meaningful content.

Mean Streets (Martin Scorsese, 1973)

Charlie (Harvey Keitel) is a young man torn between his involvement in the criminal underworld of Little Italy and his desire to 'make up for his sins'. He has taken under his wing the wayward Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) but has also begun a relationship with Johnny's respectable cousin, Teresa (Amy Robinson). Teresa's influence on Charlie – a restraining, maternal, near-suffocating protectiveness – is a very familiar feature of Hollywood gender politics, but one scene in *Mean Streets* gives it an ironic twist, and one which brings the physical environment to the centre of the drama. The scene comes nearly an hour into the film, much of which has been located in enclosed, cramped and often dark settings. In it, Charlie and Teresa are on a beach; initially they walk, but for most of the scene they stand beneath what appears to be a pier or jetty. Although this is never confirmed, Teresa seems to have chosen the beach as a 'romantic location', to the niggling frustration of Charlie, whose complaints about it are only half in jest. In other words, the characters *and* the director seem here to be self-conscious about the default connotations of lovers on a beach, and the tension which develops between Charlie and Teresa is consistently characterized in environmental terms.

Barely seconds into the scene, which certainly looks romantic from the start (sunlight, a gentle breeze, a languorous stroll etc.), Charlie begins to complain about their location: 'I hate the sun, let's go inside, will ya?'. His tone is knowingly childish, and increasingly so as he begins to list all the other things he hates – the ocean, the beach, the grass, the trees, the heat. But, as is so often

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Figure 0.2 Resisting the setting: *Mean Streets* (Warner Bros.)

the case in Scorsese dialogue, resentment simmers beneath the surface. Teresa, as Charlie sees it, is trying to 'trap' him into a conventional relationship, and part of that strategy involves dictating their surroundings and the conditions within which they live their lives. So, when Charlie claims to like mountains and then flippantly declares that tall buildings (his natural environment) are the same thing, it is actually a sharp defence. Charlie looks down as he says this, anxious to hide his real annoyance. As his exchanges with Teresa become increasingly testy, the sounds of waves and sea birds become more and more prominent on the soundtrack. Most obviously, this underscores Charlie's impatience; we have, after all, learned of his distaste for this kind of setting. But this is also a feature of the scene which draws attention to the act of filming in the pro-filmic world. It is as if Scorsese is conceding the impossibility of fully controlling the environment in which he films, an effect which is echoed in the uncertain and seemingly incomplete zooms towards and away from Charlie's face. To return to Bazin's formulation, not only does the 'reality' of the scene encompass more than the human characters, but it includes a self-awareness on the part of the characters about their relationship to the setting; also, the 'artifices which the film maker uses to emphasize the meaning of the event', to return to Bazin's formulation, themselves seem to be compromised by the physical challenges of filming on a beach.

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Badlands (Terrence Malick, 1973)

Terrence Malick has become known for his rhapsodic celebrations of natural beauty, but although the non-human world plays an important role in *Badlands*, it is here incorporated with an irony which no longer informs the director's work. The film is narrated through the voiceover of Holly (Sissy Spacek), as she recounts her relationship and violent escapades with Kit (Martin Sheen). In the first third of the film especially, a good deal of humour is generated through the mismatching of Holly's romanticized recollection with the visual record of events. For example, shots of Kit, bored, staring at cattle, are accompanied by Holly's storytelling: 'In the stench and slime of the feedlot, he'd remember how I looked the night before, how I ran my hand through his hair and traced the outline of his lips with my fingertip'. Sometimes the chasm separating Holly's and Kit's experience of events is made evident in the action and dialogue. In one short, comic, bittersweet scene, Kit and Holly sit and play cards in the shade of tree, on the bank of a river. It lasts less than thirty seconds, and consists of only four lines of dialogue and one camera set-up, an impersonal medium two shot. But the scene is just as rich as those passages in *Harold and Maude* and *Mean Streets* in its disruption of formulaic love–nature correspondence.

Holly, like Teresa in *Mean Streets*, seems to have chosen the location, or at the very least is more interested in its romantic connotations than is her partner. She looks around: 'What a nice place'. Kit does not look up from his cards, but he dutifully plays along: 'Yeah, the tree makes it nice'. Undeterred by his tone, Holly labours on with the love scene: 'And the flowers... let's not pick them. They're so nice'. But Kit has gone as far as he is willing to go with this role play, and abruptly draws a line under it: 'It's your play'. *Badlands* gently mocks its characters' responses to their natural surroundings, but also leaves us unsure as to which viewpoint we are closer to. Do we choose to share Holly's adolescent dreaminess, or Kit's weary impatience? Holly is a naïve fifteen-year-old girl, and it is hard not to instinctively sympathize with her in these early stages, but is her response to the environment really any more heartfelt than Kit's? Just as he is distracted by cards, she seems to be distracted by the *connotations* of the setting, and in particular the not-to-be-plucked flowers (shortly after, we learn that Holly loses her virginity to Kit at this very spot). It is not the case, then, than one character has humorously misinterpreted this place, or has missed its meaning. The pathos of the scene comes from the fact that each response seems inadequate for the

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Figure 0.3 'The tree makes it nice': *Badlands* (Warner Bros.)

purposes of a romantic scene. The players have become too aware of their surroundings, too self-conscious of the ways in which their story will intertwine with those surroundings.

Badlands, like *Harold and Maude* and *Mean Streets*, does not let its physical environment remain as setting or background. Love cannot be expected to blossom merely because it is set against a picturesque backdrop. Throughout New Hollywood, moments like these abound; flashpoints of uncertainty, of critique, of self-consciousness and of wonderful dramatic imagination, in which we can see the non-human world becoming a more active, and more disruptive, participant in American cinema. The following study sets out to attend to those material presences – of things and animals and people, generic icons and geographical territories, cameras and film crews – which permeate and characterize New Hollywood film.

Note

1. It is important to acknowledge the importance of Bazin's writing to ecocritical film study; Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway describe Bazin as 'a benchmark of sorts for thinking about cinema's commitment to the world' (2013: 2).

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Bazin, A. 1973. *Jean Renoir*, trans. W. Halsey II and W.H. Simon. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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Introduction

Thomas Elsaesser's 'The Pathos of Failure' ([1975] 2004), originally written at the tail end of the New Hollywood era, remains one of the key works on the period. Subtitled 'Notes on the Unmotivated Hero', the article attempts to place contemporary narrative trends in a context of Hollywood convention *and* European influence, and diagnoses a central contradiction in New Hollywood film: the struggle between the motif of the journey and the figure of an apathetic protagonist. One of Elsaesser's great successes here is to position contemporary cinema in relation to Hollywood history and socio-political shifts *without* ignoring particular patterns and variations in individual films. Not many subsequent studies have been as erudite and incisive (or as evocative) as this, but a great number have continued to emphasize the same qualities in New Hollywood cinema as those discussed by Elsaesser: contradiction and incoherence; aimlessness; narcissism; ambivalence and ambiguity; and nostalgia. For those who have watched a considerable number of this period's most celebrated films, 'The Pathos of Failure' certainly strikes a chord, providing both an account of and a reflection on the distinctiveness of New Hollywood.

As the title of the essay suggests, Elsaesser's main focus is on human drama, on how the tone of New Hollywood is largely founded upon the ennui of the central male, and the attempts of directors to mould a narrative and a mise-en-scène around him. And yet, from an ecocritical standpoint, it is fascinating to see Elsaesser turn again and again, in his descriptions of a changing aesthetic, to the material environment. He writes, for example, of 'the palpable physical presence and emotional resonance of setting' ([1975] 2004: 280); of the 'give-and-take between the documentary texture of a location, and the existential allegory it may have to carry' ([1975] 2004: 282); and of 'an image of America that

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becomes palpable not because of the interplay between moral symbolism and an ideological plot structure, but because of its solid specificity, its realized physical presence' ([1975] 2004: 290). These, I believe, can be understood as ecocritical 'threads' which are not followed through by Elsaesser. With his sights set on articulating a new kind of character-narrative dynamic, Elsaesser finds himself acknowledging the material aspects of this phenomenon but sees no reason to really interrogate these, or to make any substantial claims regarding the sustained significance of such features throughout New Hollywood. One could even say that there is a kind of ecocritical unconscious at work in 'The Pathos Failure'; this is writing which *senses* an environmental shift in American cinema, but which – for a variety of reasons – ultimately emphasizes other parts of the story.

In this reading of New Hollywood, I wish to build on Elsaesser's insights and delve more deeply into such ecocritical issues as materiality, environmentality and scale, without losing sight of questions of style, genre, industry and technology. In proposing that New Hollywood was characterized by ecocritical impulses, I am not claiming that this was an entirely coherent trend, or that it had any discernible relation to environmentalism as a political or ethical position. Instead, I argue that certain practices and patterns coalesced at this time, and that the cumulative result was a filmmaking wave whose distinctiveness can be understood ecocritically. These trends, such as the Vietnamization of the western and the rise of location shooting, are not unrelated to existing ideas of New Hollywood, and in Chapter One I will discuss in detail how they constitute a dialogue with popular conceptualizations of the period. However, as I hope to demonstrate, ecocriticism – 'a wide-open movement still sorting out its premises and its powers' (Buell 2005: 28) – can provoke fresh and challenging questions about familiar aspects of New Hollywood, and how we understand its significance.

More specifically, a materialist approach to this period is pursued here. Although each chapter adopts a different set of concerns, they are united by an interest in how New Hollywood films are often weighed down by the presence of a pro-filmic material reality, which Elsaesser describes as 'documentary texture' but which nevertheless contributes to a film's dramatic and aesthetic project. Adrian Ivakhiv boldly begins a chapter of *Ecologies of the Moving Image* with the assertion that 'films create worlds' (2013: 70), and it is around this central idea that Ivakhiv builds his complex and illuminating theory of cinema's ecological activities. I have found that watching cinema ecocritically requires one to see each film not so much as a newly created world, but a newly negotiated

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engagement with the existing world; the following work tends to emphasize cinema's reliance on already existing qualities of the material world, and its poetic re-organizing of those qualities. (Later in the same chapter, Ivakhiv edges closer to this notion when he suggests that 'film *cauterizes* and *reassembles* reality' (2013: 74, emphasis in the original).) I find in New Hollywood film a particularly vivid staging of this contingency, as if this was a time in which cinema's world-*making* capacities became obscured by its world-reliance.

The title of this book, *Transactions with the World*, is taken from Gilberto Perez's essay on Jean Renoir in his book *The Material Ghost* (1998), a passage of writing displaying ecocritical qualities which will be discussed in detail below. Equally significant is what the title does not include, namely any invocation of greenness, nature or wildlife – ideas which, at least until recently, might have been assumed to be the proper remit of ecocriticism. In fact, the very concept of 'nature' has been problematized in ecocriticism in a number of ways, whether through the re-definition of nature writing as a genre (Armbruster and Wallace 2001) or by exposing the complicity of 'nature' with social ills such as patriarchy (Plumwood 1993) and consumerism (Morton 2007). For the purposes of this study, the term 'environment' is generally preferable to 'nature' because of its ability to refer to urban as well as non-urban locations (many of the following case studies have densely populated settings), and 'material environment' has the particular advantage of suggesting something more tangible than an atmosphere or sense of place.

New Hollywood

In his study of New Hollywood, Peter Krämer writes about all popular American cinema produced between 1967 and 1976, and explains that he chooses not to distinguish *within* this output for the sake of clarity (2005: 2). New Hollywood for Krämer includes the likes of *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller, 1970) and *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976) as well as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) and *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970). Robert Phillip Kolker, in contrast, focuses his attention on a 'small group of filmmakers who emerged in the late sixties and early seventies and were able to take brief advantage of the transitional state of the studios, using their talents in critical, self-conscious ways, examining the assumptions and forms of commercial narrative cinema' (1988: 6). These two definitions of New

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Hollywood presuppose very different objects of study (detailed considerations of 'New Hollywood' as a confusing and mutating descriptor can be found in Krämer (1998) and Smith (1998)). In setting the parameters of what constitutes New Hollywood in this book, I propose something of a combination of the two, following Krämer's time frame, but choosing – like Kolker and others – to emphasize the waves of formal and aesthetic experimentation which gathered momentum at this time. The analysis here is not so centred on the role of the director as is Kolker's, but nevertheless focuses on what was sometimes called the 'Hollywood Renaissance', a body of work which has been lamented (Fadiman 1972; Bernardoni 1991) and, increasingly, celebrated (Elsaesser, Howarth and King 2004), sometimes both within the space of the same study (Berliner 2010). Noel King concedes that any idea of New Hollywood will be a 'discursive construction of a particular kind', but nevertheless attempts a capsule definition: 'a brief window of opportunity running from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, when an adventurous new cinema emerged, linking the traditions of classical Hollywood genre filmmaking with the stylistic innovations of European art cinema' (2004: 20). This broadly matches New Hollywood as it is discussed in the following chapters, with two important exceptions: I understand genre to be an important, but not the defining, feature of the classical model from which New Hollywood departed; and I do not believe that New Hollywood's innovations need to be understood as European imports, but that they can in many cases be thought of as distinctly localized.

The pursuit of re-interpreting New Hollywood involves altering its corpus in some way (according to an emerging ecocritical criterion), and the attempt to re-characterize this period sometimes leads here to the inclusion of films, such as *Cockfighter (*Monte Hellman, 1974), which may stretch the validity of 'Hollywood' as a descriptor. (*Cockfighter* was produced by Roger Corman, whose status in relation to Hollywood is a complex and elusive one.) And yet the gradual disintegration of what is assumed and implied by the term Hollywood – a geographical epicentre of film production, a ruthlessly efficient power structure, etc. – is itself an important feature of the 'New' Hollywood in any case. In reaching beyond the mainstream of Hollywood output, however, I do not stretch so far as to incorporate trends in experimental cinema. This unfortunately precludes study of pertinent films such as *Diaries, Notes and Sketches,* a.k.a. *Walden* (Jonas Mekas, 1964–69), but is necessary in order to understand the complicating and enriching role played by the environment with regards to traditions and conventions of the fiction feature film.

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Setting the terms for a study of New Hollywood not only involves determining the criteria for inclusion; it must also involve situating that study amongst the variety of narratives which describe and account for this period's distinctiveness. In Chapter One this approach is set out in detail with the introduction of four 'faces' or versions of New Hollywood as it is often characterized in film-studies scholarship, with a suggestion of how certain debates within ecocriticism have the potential to contribute to and develop each one. The four subsequent chapters then expand on the arguments set out at this early stage. By moving between different conceptions of New Hollywood, I can draw connections between films of this period – such as *Nashville* (Robert Altman, 1975) and *Cockfighter*, or *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969) and *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, 1969) – not normally discussed in the same context. The goal is to recognize the validity of different notions of New Hollywood and to identify new correspondences and commonalities between them; shared affinities which can be understood ecocritically.

Given that this study covers almost a decade of US American film history, the question of coverage becomes a challenge; how, in other words, to do justice to both the range of New Hollywood and the textual complexity of some of its films? While conceding that there is never an entirely satisfactory solution to problems such as this, my approach is an attempt to balance the conflicting impulses of breadth and depth. Firstly, the range of examples is deliberately developed to incorporate films of varying style, genre, subject matter, commercial success and canonical status. This relates not just to the project as a whole, but also to individual chapters. It is hoped that such an approach will challenge the rather rigid sub-categorization that sometimes takes hold of studies of New Hollywood, in which 'youth' films, 'paranoia' films, 'genre' films and 'auteur' films (for example) are understood as separate entities. So, even when examining a small number of primary case studies, I suggest links and comparisons with films from across the New Hollywood spectrum. The materialist emphasis which underscores this study does not take the form of a particular methodological blueprint. Not all films are treated equally, and the argument moves between a range of sources and ideas, from production to reception, through theory and criticism, searching for different 'ways in' to these films' environmentality.

Related to this is the fact that *Transactions with the World* refrains from pursuing two lines of inquiry – the rise of the disaster film and the emergence of modern American environmentalism – that might be expected in an ecocritical study of

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New Hollywood but which would, I believe, prove to be a distraction. The disaster film, which rose to prominence (and profitability) in the early 1970s, appears to demand ecocritical attention. In films such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972), *The Towering Inferno* (John Guilerrmin, 1974) and *Earthquake* (Mark Robson, 1974), mankind is castigated for its hubristic worldview, its lack of humility and its dangerous underestimation of natural forces. Disaster movies, in Nick Roddick's terms, 'are an essentially earthbound form' (1980: 246). And yet, the form (at least in its early-1970s incarnation) is so fundamentally regimented with regard to how natural threats arise and how they are dealt with, that ecocriticism would add little to our understanding of them. In *Earthquake*, repeated close-ups of convulsing earth, cross-cut with shots of fleeing victims, suggest a determined attempt to distinguish the earthquake from its effects; the film cuts from images of death and destruction to 'culprit shots' of the ground, and a pattern develops whereby the earth is clearly coded as an ontologically distinct perpetrator. Nature looms large and is treated with due deference, but it is simultaneously kept in its place by a strict us-and-them, or us-and-it, dichotomy. A related question concerns whether or not to include disaster movies in the New Hollywood category at all; as Peter Krämer observes (2005: 65), many contemporary reviews welcomed the fact that *Airport* (George Seaton, 1970) and its offspring offered a refreshing dose of solid storytelling and conservative values, an antidote to the *Easy Rider*s (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Midnight Cowboy*s (John Schlesinger, 1969) of the period. Disaster movies are characterized at least in part by their avoidance of the New Hollywood features this book sets out to illuminate.

Likewise, to broach the apparently central question of contemporary environmentalism would risk confusing one of my claims, that ecocritical film study need not be directly contextualized by, or rooted in, environmental politics and debate. I do not deny or preclude the possible influence of cultural trends of the 1960s and 1970s – and in fact my discussion highlights some significant intertextual correlations with art and literature – but ecocritical film study as I pursue it is especially valuable as a way of resisting the cultural determinism that informs much writing on New Hollywood. This is not to pretend that my approach is apolitical or unrelated to ecological concerns; on the contrary, I write in the belief that ecocriticism's contribution to arts scholarship is timely and vital. I also believe, however, that its potential progressiveness is best realized when it influences not only the themes we choose to emphasize in films, but also the basic assumptions we bring to film analysis.

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Ecocriticism: Some Literary Pointers

In *The Environmental Imagination*, one of the founding texts of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell offers the following, much-cited checklist for what might constitute an 'environmental text', or a text which can be said to feature 'environmentality' as one of its most important qualities:

- *The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.*
- *The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.*
- *Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.*
- *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (1995: 6–8)*

At a later date, Buell modulated his criteria, believing it to be 'more productive to think inclusively of environmentality as a property of any text – to maintain that all human artefacts bear such traces, and at several stages; in the composition, the embodiment, and the reception' (2005: 25). *Transactions with the World* draws both on Buell's initial ideas about the textual attributes of an environmental work and his later concern for extending the scope of interest to all texts, as well as their extra-textual currents. Hence the decision to incorporate questions of historical context, industrial patterns and film technology, as well as style and aesthetics. Were it not for my interest in materiality, a concept which seems underserved by or peripheral to that of environmentality, I would also have followed Buell's lead in opting for the term 'environmental criticism' over 'ecocriticism'. Another important feature of Buell's approach is his privileging of literary interpretation. Unlike Greg Garrard (2012: 1–17), who outlines his take on ecocriticism (using Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as an exemplary case study) as a kind of meeting point between the study of ecological issues and the study of literature, Buell situates himself predominantly as a student and theorist of literature. This question of ecocriticism's purpose – if it is a means, what is its end? – is directly broached by Robert Kern.

Kern's 'Ecocriticism: What Is it Good for?' offers itself as a kind of instructive demonstration of ecocriticism. The author begins by endorsing Lawrence Buell's

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complaint that representations of nature in literature are invariably read as standing in for something else, and the determination to recognize that nature in art need not always be a reflection or representation of human characteristics is something of a guiding principle for ecocriticism. Kern is also keen to look beyond overtly environmentalist content:

> *Ecocriticism becomes most interesting and useful, it seems to me, when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere. One object of ecocriticism, as I see it, is to read in such a way as to amplify the reality of the environment in or of a text, even if doing so we resist the tendency of the text itself. (2003: 260)*

There are two separate things happening here: the championing of an overarching way of reading (let nature stand for itself) and a desire to seek out texts where such a reading might not seem immediately appropriate. Kern then carries out an ecocritical analysis of two moments in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, simultaneously shedding new light on the passages themselves and offering an example of ecocriticism's potential flexibility and versatility. In the first passage, Jane and Elizabeth Bennet make separate journeys, alone and on foot across rugged terrain, to the Bingley house, and in doing so each veers from culturally accepted norms of womanly behaviour – Jane arrives rain soaked and Elizabeth visibly flustered. Kern contrasts the sharply judgemental language of some characters with that of the narrator, who seems to relish Elizabeth's experience. He also observes the symmetry employed by Austen in her two depictions of exposure to the elements – one sister comes out the worse for wear, the other buoyed and radiant – and proposes that this suggests a regard (on the part of Austen) for nature itself as a balance. In the second passage, Elizabeth visits Darcy's estate in Derbyshire, and marvels at the sensitive and tasteful landscaping. Kern acknowledges that nature here is obviously being manipulated for narrow human purposes (pride and luxury on the part of Bennet and Darcy, characterization on the part of Austen), but argues that rather than admonishing the characters or the author for this, ecocriticism should look to learn from it. He asks what it can reveal to us about the uneasy relationship between art and nature – both in eighteenth century neo-classicism and beyond.

In the first instance, Kern refuses to reduce evocations of the natural world to mere externalizations of characters' inward processes, and in the second instance

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he locates the externalization as being a kind of social phenomenon on display within the diegesis of the text, which he also begins to historicize. In some ways these are quite distinct and separate interpretive paths to follow, but Kern also seems to be arguing for the *compatibility* of the two approaches; nor is he hamstrung by an overriding agenda, a need to prove or disprove anything relating to environmental issues as such. And how ecocriticism is applied seems to be dictated by the particular character of the passages themselves. At first glance, Austen's characters appear to manipulate and luxuriate in nature with a distinctly anthropocentric narcissism. Rather than springing to environmentalist admonishment, however, Kern trains his attention on moments, patterns and surprising points of emphasis in which the natural world does not seem as subservient as the novel's characters – and its readers – might initially assume.

Ecocritical Film Study

Just as Lawrence Buell came to see environmentality as a property of all literary texts, so contemporary ecocritical film study has broadened its scope beyond ostensibly 'green' cinema and the investigation of ecological thematics. Forerunners in the field – including important books by Scott MacDonald (2001), Pat Brereton (2004), David Ingram (2000) and Deborah A. Carmichael (2006) – interrogated in political, ideological and aesthetic terms American cinema's conceptualizations of the natural world. With the exception of Brereton's *Hollywood Utopia* (2004), these studies tended to focus on films which could be confidently understood as texts 'about' or 'of' the environment, from avant-garde pastoralism to spectacular westerns and environmentalist thrillers. The first chapter of Ingram's *Green Screen*, for example, declares that the films under investigation 'draw on and combine a range of different environmentalist discourses' (2000: 13). Taken together, these works can be said to have provided something of a wake-up call for film studies, collectively identifying a surprisingly underexplored facet of American-cinema history. The 2013 publication of *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* can perhaps be seen as the consolidation of a second wave of this growing sub-discipline. If it is at all useful to distinguish the early constellation of studies from more recent work, then the shift can be understood in a number of ways: a reduced emphasis on American cinema; a more pronounced theoretical influence; a growing interest in the ecological characteristics of film's ontology, as

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opposed to (or in conjunction with) the rhetoric of particular texts. In the introduction to *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, the editors – echoing Lawrence Buell, and subtly diverging from Ingram – propose that '*all* films present productive ecocritical exploration' and that 'all cinema is culturally *and* materially embedded' (Rust, Monani and Cubitt 2013: 3, emphasis in the original).

A crucial book in signalling this shift was Sean Cubitt's *Eco Media* (2005), not least because of the way in which it argued, in theoretically adventurous terms, for a conception of ecology in which technology plays an active and creative role. Other second-wave books have ambitiously stretched across different periods and national cinemas in their tracing of ecocritical practices and ideas: Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint* (2012) develops a vivid account of cinema's inescapable material reliance on the material environment; Adrian Ivakhiv's *Ecologies of the Moving Image* (2013), amongst its many triumphs, gives a sense of how any film's ecocritical richness is always a combination of its socio-political context and its poetical, expressive inventiveness, and how exceptional films are always exceptional in part because of how they creatively manage the giddying potential of matter and movement. Another way of characterizing this more recent wave is to suggest that it is less reliant on American cultural, literary and landscape studies and has begun to unearth the ecocritical implications of medium-specific concerns (digital cinematography, Bazinian realism, distribution and exhibition, etc.). As Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway assert in their introduction to *Screening Nature*, another rich collection: 'Film theory and film studies have only recently rediscovered what is surely most visible about film: its entanglement with the world it shoots, edits and projects' (2013: 2). This study of New Hollywood cinema is informed by both of those developments. On the one hand, I share with MacDonald and Brereton an interest in situating American cinema within a context of thinking about American culture more generally. Like them, I find writers such as Leo Marx and Henry David Thoreau inescapably useful in coming to terms with American cinema's particular environmentality. I strive to avoid crude generalizations of the kind that can be dangerously convenient when writing about American culture and its mediated relationship with the material environment; and yet the presence in this book of Philip Roth and Jasper Johns, Flannery O'Connor and Stanley Cavell, not to mention sustained attention to the Vietnam War and the United States flag, means that *Transactions with the World* contributes to an ecocritical conversation specifically about US American cinema that has become somewhat eclipsed in recent years.

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On the other hand, I look to build on the insights of writers such as Cubitt, Ivakhiv and Bozak, and their ecocritical concern with the ontological properties of cinema. Ivakhiv writes of how cinema, regardless of its ostensible subject matter, 'reshapes the world in many directions', and like him I 'wish to focus on films, or film capacities, that move things in the direction of a more fluid, more animate [...] understanding of the world' (2013: 26). For reasons that I hope become clear in the course of the book, I am not so keen as Ivakhiv to assert film's 'world-making' potential, but I share with his approach a belief in cinema's extraordinarily complex arsenal of techniques and affects for disrupting and critiquing conventionalized assumptions about the human–nature dynamic. Another key point of departure for the present discussion is Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint* (2012), which not only offers a vivid account of cinema's primary reliance on natural resources, but stretches beyond a straightforward lament of the industry's staggering levels of consumption and considers the ways in which particular artists – including Warhol, Erice, Vertov, Haneke, Flaherty and Marker – have creatively explored that reliance in their practice. My emphasis is not so much on how New Hollywood filmmakers thematized their own submission to material ingredients, but I do attempt to navigate between the pro-filmic and the filmic in ways not dissimilar to Bozak. As with the films examined in *The Cinematic Footprint*, I find in many New Hollywood features a deeply symbiotic relationship between a film's physical, material production and its affective, philosophical potential. The central claim of *Transactions with the World* is that New Hollywood was a film-historical moment in which this symbiosis was crucial.

Both Bozak and Ivakhiv venture across film history, and while they each gesture towards a historicized understanding of key case studies, their work – like that of many ecocritical film studies – is essentially pan-historical. In this regard, *Transactions with the World* is a relatively unusual work. I know of no other book that takes as its object of study a particular chapter in film history and attempts to understand that period's distinctiveness in ecocritical terms. Describing the timeliness of contemporary ecocritical film study, Ivakhiv writes that 'there are times when relations between a cultural world and the earth that subtends it become fraught and troubled' (2013: 28). The American 1960s can be said to be one of those times, and whilst I have already stated my reluctance to explain the unusual environmentality of New Hollywood cinema by way of rising environmentalist awareness, there is no reason to ignore the fact that this was a period of flux in American environmental culture. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*

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in 1962 and the first Earth Day in 1970 (whose participants were counted in tens of millions) can be seen as markers of an intensified discomfort about the place of nature in American culture. In *Hollywood Utopia* (2004), Pat Brereton explores the crossovers between American cinema and environmental-cultural politics, and the important intersection between 'hippie' rhetoric and environmentalist awareness. From the perspective of the present study, it suffices to say that the New Hollywood period certainly answers to the description of a 'fraught and troubled' time for culture–nature negotiations.

What will be more central to *Transactions with the World* is the fraught and troubled relationship in the 1960s and 1970s between Hollywood cinema and the material world. Sustained attention will not be paid here to the transition from classical to post-classical Hollywood, but implicit in many of the ideas herein is the notion that this transition was at least partly characterized by a rupture in Hollywood's treatment and imagination of the non-human world. At the risk of over-simplifying anything as vastly complex as classical Hollywood's ecological imagination, I find John Alton's *Painting with Light* (1949: 1995) a very telling text in this regard; its chapters on cinematography and natural conditions are full of the kind of confident assertions regarding the mastery and straightforward communicability of environments which one cannot quite imagine from New Hollywood cinematographers such as Haskell Wexler or Nestor Almendros. 'Fortunately,' writes Alton in the introduction to his chapter on outdoor photography, 'to the millions who seldom get a chance to go anywhere, motion pictures can bring beauty of the outdoors in the form of entertainment to be viewed in air-conditioned theatres' ([1949] 1995: 118). Alton's conceptualization of cinema and its harnessing of natural 'views' instinctively feels, from the standpoint of New Hollywood cinema, like the voice of another era. I am not concerned with whether this suggests a progressive development or qualitative advance in terms of ecological ethics, but I am interested in whether something of film-historical interest is at stake here – an underexplored feature of Hollywood's mid-century transformation.

Perez, Renoir and Ecocritical Interpretation

In what is perhaps a telling irony, one of the most incisive pieces of film analysis that pays sustained attention to the natural world is an essay which makes no

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claims to be ecocritical at all: Gilberto Perez's 'Landscape and Fiction' (1998), a long and eloquent appreciation of *Partie de campagne* (Jean Renoir, 1936). Just as Thomas Elsaesser's 'The Pathos of Failure' provides ecocritical insights without focusing solely on films' treatment of the natural environment, Perez's essay conveys a rich sense of a film's environmentality by way of a broad-based critical interpretation. Perez understands Renoir's film to be a response, somewhere between homage and critique, to impressionism, a mode that the author describes as still dominating our understanding of 'the country':

> *Pastoral is always a fiction, a fantasy of the country, but the impressionists, in keeping with their time – and ours – made it a more realistic fiction, not a mythical Arcadia but something they constructed out of actual passing appearances – the impressions – of the world we all know. And theirs was a more democratic fiction, something that relates to the experience of anybody who can get a glimpse of a stretch of water or a piece of greenery once in a while. (1998: 203)*

The essay goes on to weave together broad concepts – such as pastoralism, impressionism and democracy – with the subtle particulars of Renoir's film, including details of narrative, image and production circumstances. Perez's terms, although ostensibly stemming from the theme of landscape, are not quite reducible to it. 'Nature in this film,' he writes at one point, 'though represented with rich vividness, is yet perceived to be always in excess of its representation. Nature is there first and yet not there' (1998: 219). Elsewhere, Perez suggests that Renoir's camera 'meets the world from a position that is always recognizably concrete' (1998: 224) and is 'an autonomous narrative agency that conducts its own transaction with the world' (1998: 220), as if our understanding of *Partie de campagne* should not be confined to the lives of its characters or even the beauty of their environment, but must respond to how the film positions itself in both its filmic and its pro-filmic worlds. (As David Thomson writes of Renoir, 'no one developed a more complete illusion of the rapport between filming and the world it looked at' (2012: 144).) Although Perez does not use the term, his analysis is, I believe, ecocritical. *Partie de campagne*, as understood through Perez, is at its most profound when viewed as the result of his going somewhere and filming something. In its simultaneous attention to film history and film technology, themes and aesthetics, pro-filmic environments and storytelling craft, Perez's essay exemplifies the

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kind of ecocritical approach I aim to bring to this discussion of New Hollywood films.

What, more specifically, does Perez prioritize in his analysis that I deem to be important in ecocritical film study? Four important features may be identified. Firstly, Perez's interpretation allows the material environment to be simultaneously 'other' (not a 'serviceable vehicle for the meanings of fiction' (1998: 223)) and a vital aspect of the film's meaningfulness as fiction. To avoid an anthropocentric reading, in other words, does not necessarily require us to marginalize dramatic narrative. Secondly, Perez is alert to the geographical specificity and particularity at play in the setting of *Partie de campagne*. While not insisting that a film should offer any kind of reliable representation of a 'real place', the author interprets Renoir's film on the understanding that its filming location and its setting (the banks of the Loing rather than the Seine, as he observes (p. 206)) have a strong bearing upon its drama. Third, what is at stake in Renoir's film, as understood by Perez, is not the relationship between mankind and nature so much as the fate of particular people in a particular place – and the importance of place in that fate. Although *Partie de campagne* is shown to be ambitious and profound, it appears to achieve this on a localized, immediate scale; it is a story of '*these* four individuals who all make love on *that* river island *that* summer afternoon' (Perez 1998: 223, emphasis added). And finally, Perez's concern with the presence of an author and film technology in a pro-filmic environment does not run counter to, or qualify his interpretation of, the fiction. Details of production are not cited to 'demystify' the effects of *Partie de campagne*, but to help us understand them more fully. At one point Perez notes Renoir's decision to mount the camera on a motorboat, a stylistic flourish which deliberately jars with the period setting. In this gesture, writes Perez, the camera 'recognizes its own foreignness amid the trees and the river and the rain, its own apartness amongst the things of nature' (1998: 226), a recognition that feeds back into the film's dramatic pathos – as the characters are also doomed to realize the essentially transient nature of their day in the country. Perez demonstrates how an understanding of filming conditions can feed back into the appreciation of the film text; his responses to material context and diegetic qualities become mutually sustaining.

Turning to New Hollywood, and attempting to describe its 'environmental sensibility', Perez's approach presents a fruitful guide, especially in its attention to these four features:

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- Materiality
- Particularity
- Scale
- Filmmaking presence

The challenge of adapting this approach to the following study is considerable, not least because the scope of my argument (encompassing almost a decade of cinema) prevents such sustained focus on a single work. Instead of attempting to match Perez's comprehensive and detailed analysis, I can instead draw on his conceptualization of a film as a fiction which is informed by – but not reducible to – its contexts as well as its aesthetic features. Following Perez, I approach cinema as a confluence of influences, conditions and qualities that can be appreciated as a cultural, industrial and aesthetic phenomenon simultaneously.

Thomas Elsaesser's account of New Hollywood, with which this introduction began, gives a vivid sense of why it might be a particularly rich and fascinating object for this kind of multi-faceted approach. However, 'The Pathos of Failure' is only one of very many attempts to describe and account for the changing nature of American cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and I am keen to stress the extent to which an ecocritical interpretation of New Hollywood can build upon – rather than refute or dismiss – the range of existing accounts. So, in Chapter One, I will sketch out four broad schools of thought on the subject and suggest some ways in which the seeds for a rich ecocritical discussion of New Hollywood have already been sown. For although Elsaesser's hopes for a 'new form of mise-en-scène' and a 'revaluation of physical reality' ([1975] 2004: 292) were dashed by mainstream trends in subsequent decades, studies of New Hollywood are still attempting to grapple with the tricky question of *what changed* back then. Such studies are often (inadvertently) continuing an ecocritical discussion about New Hollywood, and one that I believe should play an important role in our understanding of modern American cinema.

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CHAPTER ONE

Four Faces of New Hollywood

> *What matters most about films of the seventies – what makes people remember them and return to them – is...*
>
> Todd Berliner, *Hollywood Incoherent*

New Hollywood has been well served by film historians, and the explanations offered for the acute distinctiveness of that period are varied and broadly complementary. Summarizing many of these studies, Murray Smith (1998) describes mutations in the use of 'New Hollywood' and related terms, but is able to establish a broad coherence across these. Whether one chooses to emphasize industrial upheaval, the politicization of the American youth market (particularly in terms of Vietnam), the challenge of television's rise and rise, technical innovations (such as zoom lenses and more mobile cameras), feminism, post-hippie disillusionment or the 'academization' of film appreciation and film history, there is little need to refute or challenge any competing explanations. This is because, in many ways, they do not seem to really compete, and in fact even sustain one another. For example, technical innovations were often adopted from television practice (Cook 2000: 361), and the adoption was to some extent a defensive response on the part of an embattled and confused industry (Ray 1985: 269). Looked at from a different but complementary angle, these innovations came to the fore thanks to a new generation of reflexive movie enthusiasts (Kolker 1988: 9–10). In this sense, New Hollywood is complex to the extent that it seems to reward so many explanatory approaches, but quite comprehensible because of the harmonious relationship between these approaches.

The notion that New Hollywood's distinctiveness can be understood in environmental terms is, at this early stage, a somewhat abstract one, so it is

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important to demonstrate how such a hypothesis builds upon existing work in the field. Accordingly, I will in this chapter introduce four different characterizations of New Hollywood – as socio-political rhetoric, as a departure from classicism, as a 'down to earth' aesthetic and as an industrial phenomenon – and suggest how closer attention to questions of environmentality can enhance our understanding of each. In doing so, I will build on the key features I identified in Gilberto Perez's writing on Jean Renoir's *Partie de campagne* – materiality, particularity, scale and filmmaking presence – and sketch out how each of these ecocritical concerns can add a new dimension to our understanding of New Hollywood.

The Socio-Political New Hollywood

The late 1960s and early 1970s could be described as a traumatic time for US nationhood, to such an extent that it would be difficult to fathom the prospect of American cinema *not* reacting in one way or another to the huge social and cultural upheavals of the time. The checklist is a familiar one – Vietnam, Watergate, racial tensions, assassinations – yet still pertinent. According to many writers on New Hollywood, this is its all-important backdrop, and one which to a greater or lesser extent informs the particular character of many of its films.

Peter Lev's *American Films of the Seventies: Conflicting Visions* (2000) encapsulates this approach. At the very beginning of his preface, Lev announces his intention to argue 'that the films of the period constitute a dialogue or debate about the nature and the prospects of American society' (2000: xi). Although the chapters move between broad social themes (such as 'The Hippie Generation' and 'The End of the Sixties') and particular tropes which regularly appear in the films (such as 'Vigilantes and Cops'), there is an underlying assumption that film content was essentially reactive. Thus, the 'Disaster and Conspiracy' chapter moves towards a discussion of *Airport, Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) and *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974) from a consideration of the Vietnam War, the OPEC oil crisis and the Watergate scandal. In *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* (1985), Robert B. Ray presents an image of New Hollywood which is at once both more abstract and more nuanced than Lev's. Ray takes on board broad historiographical debates about the uses and abuses of Turner's 'frontier thesis', the significance of counterculture fashions and styles, the

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impact of television scheduling and the mutations of the Hollywood film star. He covers many 'angles', but ultimately identifies the ruptures and contradictions in America's Left/Right divide as the generative force behind New Hollywood's particular character. He sees the divide as becoming somewhat undermined during the 1960s, as the Left adopted traditional Right motifs (individualism, distrust of the law) and vice versa. Ostensibly polarized but essentially indistinguishable, the muddle of US political ideals could be seen most acutely in variations on the theme of a closing frontier:

> *The counterculture's most visible members imprisoned themselves in the very mythology they attacked. Thus, despite their insistence that the frontier's closing had rendered traditional lifestyles and institutions obsolete, their ideals were blatantly mythical: a passive dropping out that resembled the wandering outlaw life, and the small communal farms that seemed parodies of the yeoman husbandry that Jefferson himself had declared outmoded as a basis for American life. (Ray 1985: 255)*

In these terms, the uncertain atmosphere of a film such as *Five Easy Pieces* is not so much an eloquent articulation of the characters' (or the country's) traumatic self-doubt, but an unhappy compromise; an inevitable result of the American Left's inability to forge a new language and new images through which to register its anger and discontent.

If Lev and Ray understand New Hollywood films as refractions of socio-political issues, William J. Palmer sees them as uncomplicated reflections. In *The Films of the Seventies: A Social History* (1987), Palmer takes on the challenge of arguing for Hollywood's ability to offer relevant commentary on contemporary events. And he sees the 1970s as a perfect example of American cinema's alertness to the cultural and political climate:

> *The events which created the major social issues of the seventies (the Vietnam War, Watergate, etc.) also planted submerged social attitudes within national societies [...] as well as within the film industry itself. These submerged attitudes – guilt for Vietnam, embarrassment over Watergate, helplessness in the face of corporate power, confusion to the very nature of reality – in turn inspired, shaped, even dictated the subject matter of the films being made. (Palmer 1987: 18)*

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Not only does each social issue prompt an easily identifiable 'attitude', but these attitudes are expressed directly in the films. This excerpt perhaps crystallizes what it means to see New Hollywood as a socio-political phenomenon. As an approach to film history in general, it inevitably lends itself to some periods more readily than others, and the early 1970s is possibly an ideal case – after all, political intrigue, assassinations and disastrous warfare are all brimming with themes and images that transfer quite smoothly into popular American cinema. How might ecocriticism respond to or develop this characterization?

Initially, it can do so through its emphasis on a text's strong link to its material referents. Ecocriticism is especially conducive to a kind of textual analysis which resists searching for a metaphorical design and instead prioritizes art's mimetic impulse, its ability (and responsibility?) to represent and point us back to worldly details. Writing about his gradual turn in the 1970s away from literary theory towards matters of ecology, William Rueckert describes his new – ecocritical – sphere of interest as 'the remorseless inevitableness of things' (1996: 113). Sometimes this resistance to abstraction can take the form of a rather simplistic rebuttal of postmodern or poststructuralist discourse, as when Paul Shepard complains that 'Lyotard and his fellows have about them no glimmer of earth, of leaves or soil' (1995: 20). However, Shepard's concerns that 'reality has dissolved in a connoisseurship of structural principles' and that 'a twentieth-century doubt has interposed itself between us and the world' (1995: 20) are not easy to dismiss. Their implicit call for a mode of (eco)criticism which pays due deference to the idea that representations refer to the material world – and not only our ideas and fears about it – reflects not only trends in contemporary ecocriticism, but also the film theory of Siegfried Kracauer. Adapted to New Hollywood, this approach would avoid assuming that its films are meditations on socio-cultural malaise (for example), and strive to understand them as works of and about particular things, people and places. Chapter Two explores such an approach.

The Un-classical New Hollywood

While not necessarily denying the significance of America's turbulent cultural atmosphere in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some writers instead choose to emphasize the peculiar nature of the films' formal execution. For although many New Hollywood films were built on certain predictable tenets of popular

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American cinema (genre, stardom, goal-oriented narratives), they had a tendency to disrupt or frustrate these features, drawing attention to their fragility without wholeheartedly disowning them. This compromise, or contradiction, between (dramatic) radicalism and conservatism is thought by many to have prompted a kind of essential friction or contradiction at the heart of New Hollywood films, manifesting itself as hypocrisy, ambiguity or incoherence – or all three simultaneously. The unity and smoothness which have often been celebrated as hallmarks of classical Hollywood were, so this approach goes, fundamentally compromised, and the manner in which Hollywood 'pitched' its stories changed considerably.

Robin Wood (2003), while clearly sensitive to the political climate ('from Vietnam to Reagan' is not an arbitrary periodization), focuses on narrative incoherence as the quintessential feature of Hollywood cinema during this period. Wood's chapter, 'The Incoherent Text: Narrative in the 70s', may introduce 'the impingement of Vietnam on the national consciousness' (Wood 2003: 49) as a key influencing factor on Hollywood during this time, but his careful textual analyses go well beyond cultural determinism. Instead, after characterizing classical Hollywood as 'the most extraordinary tension between the Classical and the Romantic that can be imagined' (2003: 48), he dissects *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) as a quintessential 1970s film in its failure to master its own contradictory urges. By paying close attention to the diverging instincts of Scorsese and Paul Schrader (the screenwriter), Wood characterizes *Taxi Driver* as a bundle of irresolvable tensions, and – importantly – implies that the film's drama *generates* uncertainty rather than simply reflects it. What is more, by contextualizing *Taxi Driver* in terms of film history, Wood further complicates the notion that New Hollywood's distinctive tone was simply a product or reflection of external social forces. He does this mainly through a revealing comparison with John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), but the following description is also telling:

> *Taxi Driver represents the culmination of the obsession with dirt / cleanliness that recurs throughout the history of the American cinema – together, of course, with its metaphorical derivatives, corruption / purity, animalism / spirituality, sexuality / repression. In the vision of Travis Bickle [...] the filth kept at bay through so many generations of movies by the traditional values of monogamy / family / home has risen up and flooded the entire city. (Wood 2003: 52)*

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The 'keeping at bay' chimes with Wood's other comments in this chapter regarding Hollywood's default (classical) mode of repression. So the 'rising up' evident in *Taxi Driver* is first and foremost a notable feature within the context of American cinema. That it has important correlations with changes in a wider social context is probably beyond question for Wood, but narrative incoherence ultimately comes across as a primarily textual phenomenon.

While Robin Wood attempts to understand New Hollywood's incoherence without passing judgement on it *per se* (he instead critiques or praises particular manifestations of it), other writers on the un-classical New Hollywood have been more sweepingly critical. James Bernardoni's *The New Hollywood: What the Movies Did with the New Freedoms of the Seventies* (1991) posits that filmmakers of the period suffered from a series of 'fallacies'. As the auteur theory planted delusional notions of grandeur in the minds of directors, the happy equilibrium of classical Hollywood was betrayed, and in their desperate attempts to ape television and literature, Hitchcockian formal perfection and Hawksian 'fun', New Hollywood films were led astray from their essential obligation – to create meaningful entertainment. Filmmakers of the time were, according to Bernardoni, torn in too many diverging directions, and this confusion sowed the seeds of artistic failure. A comparison of Howard Hawks and Robert Altman crystallizes this position. The film under scrutiny is *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970), and Altman's comedy is doubly damned for both aspiring to the heights of a Hawksian comedy of camaraderie and refusing to pay heed to the careful craftsmanship which Hawks exemplified. 'Altman's seeming indifference to what he includes in his compositions', writes Bernardoni, 'becomes a major weakness in *M*A*S*H*; for, as Hawks well understood, one of the primary sources of true film comedy is the establishment and exploitation of the tension between the photographic objects, human and inanimate, that are forced to interact within the boundaries of the frame' (1991: 119). *M*A*S*H* wants to continue the glorious tradition of a classic Hollywood genre, but Altman contaminates it with his 'glib-cruel humour' (Bernadoni 1991: 124) and 'his fondness for zoom shots and jump cuts' (ibid.: 126). In Bernardoni's analysis, the film comes across as a grab bag of cynical effects, symptomatic of New Hollywood's inability to define what it wanted to achieve and how it wanted to achieve it.

Bernardoni's study has about it the sense of passionate disappointment. In contrast, Todd Berliner's *Hollywood Incoherent* (2010) is an attempt to grapple with New Hollywood's formal peculiarities through a systematic analysis of

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storytelling strategies. It is an overtly normative study, and although Berliner is keen to stress that his comparisons to the model of classical Hollywood are not value driven and that his use of terms such as 'perverse', 'superfluous' and 'relevant' is not judgemental (2010: 9), New Hollywood is inevitably characterized as a kind of freakish aberration. Films of the period, Berliner argues, were invariably marked by 'narrative perversities' such as 'ideological incongruities, logical and characterlogical inconsistencies, distracting and stylistic ornamentation and discordances, irresolutions, ambiguities and other impediments to straightforwardness in a film's narration' (2010: 10). At some junctures Berliner emphasizes the disruptive influence of European cinema, a point which chimes with Robin Wood's appraisal of Altman: the 'richness of Altman's best films, as well as the meretriciousness of his worst, derives partly from his cultural schizophrenia: obsessed with America and being American, he casts continual longing looks to Europe' (Wood 2003: 29). Berliner is also concerned with genre, and provides a taxonomy of the 'genre benders' and 'genre breakers' which dominated cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In fact, the question of genre is perhaps the clearest encapsulation of what concerns these writers on the un-classical New Hollywood, positing a common and identifiable filmmaking heritage which is then undermined and compromised by new patterns and techniques. Ecocriticism can help train our attention on the particular strategies through which films disrupt and critique genres. 'What undermines generic idealization', write Ryan and Kellner (1990: 78), 'is the reduction of the metaphor to its literal components, the framing of the metaphor so that it ceases to be universal and becomes citable'. Does *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman, 1973) trouble its own generic definition because certain components (the protagonist's unchanging suit, the theme tune) are too incongruously present? Another way of putting this would be to ask whether genre can *cope* with a filmmaking sensibility (or an interpretive mode) that emphasizes the particularity of people and things assembling at particular places, at particular moments? Altman's style ensures that we watch *The Long Goodbye* at least in part as an ethnographic film, registering certain social phenomena (modernist architecture, casual nudity, round-the-clock consumerism) that are traceable to a time and place. Indeed, the anachronistic qualities of the protagonist and his generic characteristics (loyalty, self-destruction, romanticism) pit him against his environment; genre revisionism becomes a question of modifying the relationship between characters and the world within which their stories take on meaning.

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In Chapter Three, this approach will be developed with particular reference to the 'Vietnamized westerns' of the 1960s and 1970s, wherein the conventionally loose metaphors of the genre become strained under the pressure of a direct contemporary corollary – and one in which destruction of the material environment plays a crucial role. I will also take the opportunity to take stock of a genre, the fugitive film, which was consolidated (rather than critiqued) at this time. Unlike film noir and the western, this was not a genre being undermined through its literal components; it warrants attention in other respects, not only because of its centrality to New Hollywood, but because of the curious ways in which it constructs meaningful oppositions between different ways of envisioning, experiencing and engaging with physical surroundings.

The Down-to-Earth New Hollywood

At one point early on in *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1977), an amateur nurse clumsily dislodges a patient's urine bag; Gilbert Adair describes this moment as 'the kind of realistically squalid grace note that wouldn't have been possible before the '70s' (1981: 103), and his aside is symptomatic of broadly held ideas about the 'grittiness' of New Hollywood. American cinema is thought to have lost some of its escapist tendencies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and become suffused by a sort of all-encompassing realism. In *Hollywood Film: 1963–1976* (2011) Drew Casper summarizes some key features of this quality:

> *In stringing scenes together, a casual not contiguous use of space, continuous use of time, and a relaxed view of cause and effect held sway. Spatio/temporal relationships between scenes, as such, allowed gaps. The integrity and immediacy of life as it happens was not as much threatened in this less stylized way of unfolding events than in the classical linear structure with its tightly-knitted time-space, cause–effect continuum that, in a sense, imposed upon reality. (2011: 87)*

There are questionable claims made here about the relative 'stylization' of different narrative types, but as a broad characterization of how New Hollywood modified or departed from 'the classical linear structure', it articulates some important qualities which are often invoked in descriptions of the period. In an interview

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with the cinematographer Harris Savides, on the website of the Museum of the Moving Image, David Schwartz (2010) complains that 'films today, good or bad, high or low budget, feel hermetically sealed, unfolding in sterile and controlled worlds that seem removed from, well, reality. The most evocative movies of the 1970s feel like they were made by crews who took cameras out into the streets, and shot in real locations, using gradations of light as their key special effect'. As Schwartz's language indicates, this quality may have had a good deal to with the rise in location shooting, something which I will discuss at a later stage. But this is not the full extent of the issue; after all, location shooting has become utterly commonplace in contemporary Hollywood, suggesting that Schwartz is describing something more akin to subtleties of tone, drama and scale.

Alexander Howarth, in reference to the qualities of Karen Black and Warren Oates (for him, two central performers of New Hollywood), describes how this down-to-earth New Hollywood manifested itself in performance and stardom, as well as narrative and cinematography:

> *They were content to capture the banality of the everyday that dominates most people's lives. Neither capable nor willing to acquire any kind of glamour, they were still in high demand and moderately successful for a number of years, because during these years – and the same holds for [Jane] Fonda and [Robert] Redford – the reality of America received as much recognition as its phantasms. (2004: 15)*

There are two important points to be made here. Firstly, the realism evoked by Howarth is just that – an evocation. He is not locating New Hollywood within the changing patterns of realism as a dramatic mode (although there is no reason one should not do this, of course), but rather trying to communicate a sense or an impression of New Hollywood's distinctive qualities, whether they be photographic, dramatic or thematic. The second point here is that Howarth hints at, without expanding on, some industrial and film-historical context for this trend; he identifies this moment in Hollywood history as one in which conditions were, for whatever reason, conducive to realist tendencies – even when it came to film stars. The characterization of New Hollywood as distinctively 'down to earth' may be vague and impressionistic, but it does complement and support the broader narrative of post-classical Hollywood, in which the bloated extravaganzas of 1960s musicals are thought to have made way for the gritty New Hollywood,

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before blockbuster adventures rose to dominate post-Vietnam Hollywood. In short, the down-to-earth New Hollywood is an idea that, while seemingly based on something as vague as a 'sense', is by no means unrelated to verifiable currents and trends in Hollywood's history.

Robert Phillip Kolker achieves something of this balancing act in his auteurist study of New Hollywood, *A Cinema of Loneliness* (1988, the second of four editions), which has become one of the key scholarly works on the period. Kolker identifies in his subjects (Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg and Altman – although this roster changes slightly between editions) new ways of envisioning American social and material realities, but he is also keen to locate their innovations in an industrial context, one bereft of the sense of cohesion which characterized Hollywood from the 1920s until the 1950s. This is the loneliness referred to in the title, not – as might be expected – that of Philip Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* or Harry Moseby in *Night Moves* (Arthur Penn, 1975) or countless other New Hollywood protagonists.[1] As Kolker puts it, they 'were without community or security' (1988: 6), and he makes a convincing case that this in turn informed the dramatic texture of the films they made, their treatment of spaces and places. Martin Scorsese's 'characters do not have homes that reflect comfort or security[: …] spaces they inhabit are places of transition, of momentary situation' (1988: 164), and it is 'the purpose' of a film such as *Mean Streets* to observe characters 'in their randomness and as part of an unpredictable flow of events' (1988: 168). This is an American cinema quite different from that of Hawks or Capra or Ford, in which models of American community were crafted with apparent effortlessness. Kolker's New Hollywood is one in which Penn and Scorsese and Altman instead seem to enter a pre-existent reality, and make from it what they can. Leo Braudy strikes a very similar tone: '[Hal] Ashby's *The Last Detail* (1974) summarizes many of the new tendencies of American films, the effort to place older, more limited worlds in a new context; to view the closed film, so long our main definition of what film can be, within the larger world' ([1976] 2002: 102).

In Braudy's description, the down-to-earth New Hollywood has less to do with performance or plot or even style than the difficult question of scale, and a fiction's ability to seem as if it develops in a space and time that stretches beyond the diegesis. As Timothy Clark has argued, the notion of scale is an inherently important one for ecocriticism, and locality in particular has long been held as an important element of a text's environmentality (2011: 130–143). Interpreting films as being of and about particular places is one way of acknowledging their

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openness (to use Braudy's terms), and their position within – rather than aside from – the world. Adrian Ivakhiv suggests that most films 'refer to actually existing places' (2013: 73), but I would once again contend that many films, and in particular many New Hollywood films, sustain a relationship with existing places that is more than referential. Approaching films in this way of course risks reductive and pedantic interpretations, in which texts are awarded points for the abundance and accuracy of vernacular detail. More productive is to recognize the fact that a film may take on new richness and meaning if we properly acknowledge its strain of locality; if we entertain the possibility that *The Parallax View* can be read as a Pacific Northwest film, or that *Panic in Needle Park* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1971) might not only be a New York film, but an Upper West Side film. As discussed above, the temptation to read New Hollywood films as national commentaries is strong. Interpretively placing them somewhere within the world, or within the United States, is one way that ecocriticism can facilitate a different reading, and this is the line of thought that will be pursued in Chapter Four, where regionalism emerges as a hermeneutic frame well suited to New Hollywood's particular brand of realism.

The Industrial New Hollywood

If, as the 'un-classical approach' maintains, New Hollywood was the dismantling of an established and treasured tradition, then some would choose to locate this demise not in the contents of the films themselves, but rather in the working of the industry. As Robert Sklar argues, 'subjects and forms are as likely – or more likely – to be determined by the institutional and cultural dynamics of motion picture production than by the most frenetic of social upheavals' (1994: 322). For while the socio-political issues may have reached a kind of 'fever pitch' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it would be misleading to suggest that they became the main concern of Hollywood films. Scanning a list of some of the main breakaway hits of the period – from *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969) and *Love Story* to *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) and *The Towering Inferno* – one is hardly struck by the commitment to urgent social causes. Instead, what seems to stand out is the sheer diversity of the films as products; can there really have been a coherent filmmaking machine behind all of this? If Bazin famously

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spoke of 'the genius of the system', it is tempting to suppose that the genius went through some sort of identity crisis during this period. And a number of writers describe New Hollywood in terms of its industrial waywardness.

Thomas Schatz identifies New Hollywood as a blockbuster-focused industry model, one which essentially took hold following the phenomenal success of *Jaws*. Here there is a slight problem of definitions, in that Schatz sees the late 1960s and early 1970s – for many, the apex of New Hollywood – as a transitional period characterized by 'sagging fortunes' (1993: 16). For Schatz, 'New Hollywood' is a term best used to describe the post-1975 model, because what came before was not even a model, but the absence of one. Yet we should notice that the chronological bookmarks, 1966–75, are basically consistent with more common conceptions of New Hollywood, and his portrait of this as 'a period of widespread and unprecedented innovation' (1993: 14) is a familiar one. What distinguishes Schatz's approach is the prioritization of the fate of the industry: 'Hollywood's cultivation of the youth market and penchant for innovation in the late 1960s and early 1970s scarcely indicated a favourable market climate. On the contrary, they reflected the studios' uncertainty and growing desperation' (1993: 15). This is a view of Hollywood in which what is at stake is not the venting of societal concerns and frustrations, but the sustainability of a business model. And Schatz presents a very strong case for the late 1960s' being an undeniably difficult period when viewed in those terms. The 'increasingly diversified media marketplace' (1993: 14), the breakdown of the Motion Picture Production Code, the emergence of a new ratings system, the 'stalling' of the blockbuster pattern, tumbling profits, the swallowing up of studios by conglomerates and the rise of made-for-television film production all conspired to generate a singularly difficult environment for Hollywood.

Richard Maltby is likewise concerned with Hollywood as an industry, but one which had developed an important cultural function throughout the first half of the twentieth century that began to break down with New Hollywood. In Maltby's terms, 'by 1968 the cinema had ceased to be the dominant source of its audiences' self-projections' (1983: 305). As television assumed a central position, and the film industry struggled to find its role in a post-Production Code world, American cinema became terminally self-aware. Maltby's approach, despite his interest in the fate of American cinema as an industry, is not characterized by an indifference to the nuances of individual films. What gives his argument particular potency is that he identifies common threads between films and offers a convincing

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industrial explanation for them; economic factors do not replace aesthetic or dramatic issues, but contextualize them. For example, in his brief consideration of the changing role of film stars, Maltby writes of Gene Hackman's 'insecure passage through plots whose significance he could never quite discover' (1983: 310). Yet, crucially, this almost poetic description comes shortly after an industry-based explanation: 'Encouraged by the mechanisms of media celebrity into public postures of narcissistic display, stars assumed ever-greater importance in the packaging and construction of films because they seemed the only stable element in an environment of almost complete commercial unpredictability' (1983: 310). Whether examining narrative, framing or genre revisions, Maltby accepts their particular agency on a film-by-film basis, while ultimately identifying industry-wide upheavals and confusions as the true source of New Hollywood's character.

The basic narrative which underpins these and other reflections on industry upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s is one in which major studios began to lose the power and assurance which had defined them for decades; Peter Krämer (2005: 36) notes that New Hollywood films, even when financially successful, achieved success unpredictably. As the majors wobbled, independent producers and foreign imports accrued an increasing amount of influence and opportunity (Cook 2000: 19–22). This shift in the balance of power of course had an array of implications for filmmaking practice, and one of the most symbolically resonant of these was the shift towards location filming.[2] Michael Storper begins to give a sense of how this economic necessity took on a life of its own:

> *Initially, vertical disintegration encouraged location shooting as a cost-cutting move on the part of independent production companies, and as a product-differentiation strategy [… . L]ike many such practices, it seems to have reinforced itself in circular and cumulative fashion with the result that the studios can no longer control its use. (1994: 210)*

Location shooting can be thought of as both a symbol and a symptom of industrial restructuring.

There is no shortage of examples of New Hollywood films shot on location, but *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) is as good a starting point as any, so concerned as it is with the implications of leaving a physical and metaphorical comfort zone. Perhaps more importantly, the film reminds us that venturing out into the wild for the sake of self-knowledge does not guarantee 'harmony' with nature by any

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stretch of the imagination – it is no accident that the most regularly cited scene in *Deliverance* involves a city slicker being forced to imitate a pig. We are thus faced with a film whose potency depends on the sense of being at the mercy of the great outdoors (here it would be difficult to distinguish between the diegesis and the production), but which simultaneously channels profound anxieties about doing so. And even when New Hollywood film locations were not necessarily manifestations of 'wild nature', their prominence might still constitute a challenge to classical Hollywood's standard formulation of an environment serving the immediate needs of plot and character. The famous moment in *Midnight Cowboy*, when Dustin Hoffman / Ratso Rizzo is almost run over by a taxi, undoubtedly relies for its effect on the ambiguity about whether the altercation we witness is purely fictional, or an exciting by-product of the film's dedication to location shooting. As with *Deliverance*, the film's narrative premise (in which a young Texan man thrusts himself into the otherworldly New York City) is one which allows it to reflect on the experience of negotiating new environments; in this scene, Joe Buck (Jon Voight) observes Rizzo almost as if he were an unfamiliar species, seeing him both as an individual and as an introductory lesson in this new and unfamiliar terrain in which he finds himself. The framing of the sequence – the two main characters are shot with a (newly fashionable) long lens throughout, as they meander slowly towards the camera – enhances this observational impulse. And the fact that there is no punctuation of the car incident through camera movement or reframing seems to belie a mode of filmmaking in which the filmed environment can only be manipulated or pre-empted to a limited extent.

Here is a different kind of materialist approach than the one underpinning this chapter so far; as well as attending to the mimetic potential of a film's material contents, we can find ways in which the material presence of a film's production in the pro-filmic world takes on meaning and significance. The question, then, is not just how objects and people and geographical features warrant attention for their vibrant singularity, but how a film might reflexively acknowledge the fact of its own material participation in the world. This idea forms the basis of Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint*, in which the author argues that

> *an ecological cinema is nothing new. Cinema has always demonstrated an awareness of its industrial self and therefore a connection to the environment, the realm from which it derives its power, raw materials, and, often enough, subject matter. But because this biophysical layer is so inextricably embedded*

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> *within film's basic means of production, distribution and reception, its effects remain as overlooked as they are complex. (2012: 11)*

Bozak selects a number of extraordinary films which have taken to heart this ontological characteristic and describes their imaginative exploration of the medium's 'biophysical layer'. Even if New Hollywood filmmakers cannot be said to have tackled these ideas with the rigour and focus of Andy Warhol, Werner Herzog or Jia Zhangke (some of Bozak's artists of choice), they nevertheless worked at time in Hollywood history when on-location credentials became increasingly pronounced. As will be argued in Chapter Five, this – alongside a wave of popular cinematographic techniques, including the use of zoom and telephoto lenses – made it increasingly difficult to forget that cinema emerges from physically laborious activity in a world that does not always submit to our imaginative ambitions.

Chinatown's Transactions with the World

The discussion has so far moved between Perez's interpretation of *Partie de campagne*, established ideas about New Hollywood cinema and the key ecocritical concepts which will inform the following analysis – but has only fleetingly indicated what an ecocritical reading of a New Hollywood film might actually reveal. As a summary of this chapter's main points, and a launching-off point for this book's main critical project, the following will attend to some ecocritical qualities of *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974), and demonstrate how materiality, particularity, scale and filmmaking presence could guide interpretation of Polanski's film. This is not only a much-celebrated and much-studied work, but also one which promises a relatively straightforward pathway for ecocritical interpretation, by way of its concern with water politics. However, this brings with it a temptation to dwell on the film's unusually direct thematization of a socio-ecological theme; what is really at stake is instead the *variety* of ways in which the film develops a sense of environmentality. The interrogation of hydropolitics in *Chinatown* is fascinating, but is not indicative of New Hollywood. Its generic reflexivity, its materialist focus and its scale are – and they are just as crucial to an ecocritical understanding of the film's workings.

Early on in this chapter, it was suggested that interpretations of New Hollywood often emphasize the films' national-commentary qualities, and that

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ecocriticism can help to focus attention on their mimetic potential. What would *Chinatown* look like through such an interpretive lens? In all that is written about Polanski's film, post-Watergate disillusionment invariably features as one of the film's defining qualities. Philip Novak is wary of this consensus and bemoans the assumption that because *Chinatown* 'effectively distils a cynical '70s zeitgeist', then the film itself 'either espouses or instils a sort of cynicism' (2007: 256). But Novak's attempt to breathe new life into the debate is centred on his proposition that the film refuses to endorse Jake's cynicism; it is a convincing interpretation, but one that does not bring into question the socio-cultural character of *Chinatown*. Novak even goes on to argue that the film's lessons are pertinent at the time of writing, early in the twenty-first century, as 'the United States finds itself lumbering through another devastating and utterly unnecessary war, one grounded, again, in American overconfidence and in American misconceptions of other cultures' (2007: 277). Without necessarily denying the fact that *Chinatown* has a richness and resonance which allows it to operate in a kind of state-of-the-nation register (and allows us to respond to it accordingly), there is still much to be learned by paying more attention to its immediate subject matter: water, not, as I have mentioned, as the theme with which the film concerns itself, but rather as a substance that presents very real obstacles to coherent film narration.

In his monograph *Chinatown* (1997), Michael Eaton situates the film within the detective-story mode and observes how it complicates that genre's 'touching faith in the eventual victory of human rationality' (1997: 40). He also compares *Chinatown*'s deft ability to occlude and reveal knowledge to that of *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959). But surely these concerns over what can and cannot be known become even deeper and more complex when we remember that water is at the heart of the mystery. In *Chinatown*, the mechanisms of plot struggle to cope with the sheer monumentality of water as an issue; it is the solution and the problem, the victim and the culprit, simultaneously a non-negotiable necessity and the ultimate commodity. How can a film communicate the complicated ethics and logistics of water infrastructure? When we see the still pond in the garden of Noah Cross (John Huston), is this the same water which is so glaringly absent from the dam? We are struck not only by the injustice of political machinations performed for the sake of water acquisition, but also by the sense that this story is almost impossible to properly envision. If *Chinatown* does indeed bear traces of something so immaterial as socio-cultural malaise, we must acknowledge that its unsettling qualities are also derived from a particular

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substance and the difficulty of reconciling that substance with the framework of a Hollywood narrative.

Of course, that framework is unmistakably a film-noir framework, and I earlier suggested that ecocriticism can help shed new light on generic revisionism and reflexivity. Thomas Elsaesser refers to *Chinatown* as a 'poker-faced pastiche of the film noir' ([1975] 2004: 285), and many commentators have similarly characterized its generic experiments as a kind of cosmetic tinkering. An ecocritical approach can perhaps develop this and draw attention to the ways in which the film reconsiders film noir by challenging its conventional handling of its material elements. In other words, how can private-eye offices and poorly lit alleys have any dramatic energy if we know that the crimes – and the clues to the crimes – will inevitably lie outside of the city itself? And what good is dry wit or alluring sexuality in the face of natural elements? The classicism of genre integrity is severely compromised, as *Chinatown* is positioned in an environment not beholden to noir's blueprint, placed – as Leo Braudy says of *The Last Detail* (Braudy [1976] 2002: 102) – within a larger, pre-existent world.

At one point in the film, during a tense exchange between Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) and Noah Cross, Gittes hands Cross a small newspaper cutting to read. 'Can you see alright in this light?' asks Gittes with mock consideration; 'I guess I can manage' responds Cross, witheringly, as he reaches for his spectacles. That a character in a film noir sarcastically draws attention to poor lighting suggests the kind of knowingness and cleverness that is often commented on as a feature of New Hollywood, and the ambiguity as to whether this constitutes parody, pastiche, homage or critique might be deemed symptomatic of the apparent confusion throughout the period. But ecocriticism can encourage us to appreciate the fact that film noir is being commented upon through its material conditions, with characters ceasing to take their environments for granted as inevitable backdrops.

Likewise, the 'where' of *Chinatown* becomes richly complex when we ask questions of its scale, or what V.F. Perkins would describe as its 'horizon of events'. Not only does the film deal overtly with specific ecological issues faced by Los Angeles in the early twentieth century (in other words, it goes beyond more broadly applicable ideas about urban life, such as alienation and anonymity), but in doing so it sets up a frame which is both broader than 'the city' and more specific than 'America' or even 'California'. *Chinatown*, which seems to be about the instability and arbitrariness of city limits in the face of the unavoidably material constraints

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imposed by an environment, perhaps asks, in spite of its title, to be watched as a regional film. For Lawrence Buell, 'it comes as no surprise to see "watershed" become the most popular defining gestalt in contemporary bioregionalism' (2003: 246). In addition to water's undoubted centrality to social groupings,

> *the watershed as a defining image of community has the additional advantages of being a quick and easy way of calling attention to the arbitrariness of official borders (country, state, country, town, private property lines), an equally common dependence on shared natural resources, and an appeal to an imagined community defined by 'natural' rather than governmental fiat that promises to feel larger than peoples' habitats or locales, yet still of manageable size. (2003: 246)*

Chinatown is, of course, quite far removed from the keen ecologism of bioregionalism. However, the very fact that it seems to situate itself within an unusual frame for Hollywood cinema, one based to no small extent on the existence and influence of regional resources, is something to which ecocriticism can attend.

For the most part, *Chinatown* has very few of the documentarist grace notes which punctuate many New Hollywood films, and which usually to serve as a reminder of on-location origins. Its status as a period genre film potentially (but not absolutely) runs counter to the kind of immediacy and directness evident in films such as *Deliverance* and *Midnight Cowboy*, in which the camera seems to witness a part of the world, rather than partake in the creation of an alternative reality. Compared to films such as *Easy Rider* and *The Graduate*, *Chinatown* is positively classical in its stylistic restraint. Besides, shooting a film noir on location may not have the critical potential of filming, for example, a musical on location (as was the case with *Nashville* or *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972)), noir being a genre – like the western – with a significant on-location tradition (Shiel 2012: 214–233). And yet the closing scene of *Chinatown* takes this to something of a new level, wherein location is not so much an atmospheric and realistic setting as an experience which informs both the fate of the characters and the film's style. At this famous climax, the carefully controlled mise-en-scène which has characterized Polanski's interiors and exteriors thus far begins to give way to a kind of looming disorder.

The scene stages the failed escape of Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) and her sister-daughter Katherine (Belinda Palmer), an escape which Gittes has planned

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and facilitated. It begins with the arrival of a car in Chinatown, the camera positioned in its back seat, its gaze fixated on the dark streets rolling by, rather than on the driver and passengers, who all remain out of focus. In the drama that follows, important characters (such as the Lieutenant) enter the frame as if from nowhere, their interjection fundamentally altering the meaning and implications of whatever situation they join. Shortly after Gittes has been ordered away by the Lieutenant, for example, Noah Cross looks away off screen, and the film cuts to what appears to be a point-of-view shot, a moving handheld camera rapidly approaching his 'granddaughter', Katherine Cross, before Evelyn Mulwray suddenly moves in from off screen to separate them – another complication for which the camera looks to have been unprepared. The tragic shooting of Evelyn seems to materialize as a direct result of this confusion and chaos, in which the disorienting attempts to record an organically unfolding drama on location are perfectly attuned to Gittes's own situation as a man who is morally, imaginatively and geographically out of his depth. New Hollywood's most famous closing line – 'Forget it Jake, it's Chinatown' – has been interpreted as glib, despondent, too defeatist in its cynicism. Thinking about location and technique as ecocritical concerns, it might alternatively be thought of as a sign of the industrial times, in which Hollywood cinema developed a remarkable willingness to let particular places – and the experience of filming in those places – hold sway over a film's characters, themes, tone and style.

Notes

1. Kolker's choice of title, though, also echoes *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, by Philip Slater. First published in 1970, Slater's book addresses what he sees as chronic failings in contemporary American society and a widespread national unease, 'as if suddenly large numbers of Americans were scrutinizing their own society with the doubtful eyes of a traveller' (1971: xi).
2. In the broader arc of American film history, taking into account filmmaking practices of the silent era, this would constitute a shift 'back' to location shooting. However, New Hollywood location-shooting practice assumes a particular significance because of its departure from an established industrial norm. Writing about the establishment of major studios in Los Angeles, Mark Shiel describes in great detail the extent to which they were developed as insulated spaces, deliberately alienated from Los Angeles and the southern Californian environment (2012: 128–172).

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CHAPTER TWO

Resisting Abstraction

There is nothing false about the materials.

Siegfried Kracauer, reporting on his visit to the UFA film studios in Neubabelsberg

There is a widely accepted notion, outlined in Chapter One, that New Hollywood was often ambitious in its thematic reach, constantly raising Big Questions about US American national identity. This might also be characterized as an emphasis on rhetoric at the expense of mimesis; a prioritization of ideas and their articulation ahead of physical matter and its aesthetic reproduction. What would happen to our idea of the socio-political New Hollywood if we interpreted some of its major films according to mimesis-oriented criteria? To what extent do its films offer up images and patterns which, contrary to widespread interpretations of the films at large, resist symbolic abstraction? Do the weighty allegories of works such as *Nashville* and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) contain the materialist seeds of their own incoherence? 'Mimesis is the inescapable conceptual medium of Western thinking about art, artists and audiences', writes Matthew Potolsky (2006: 158). Ecocriticism has emphasized how the vital importance of mimesis also extends to the environment, precisely because mimesis is predicated on something tangible and influential which precedes textual representation. The term 'Prague Spring', explains Jonathan Bate in the introduction to his seminal *Romantic Ecology*, only has resonance as long as it remains the case that 'every winter will be followed by a spring which will bring warmth and new life' (1991: 2). The struggle for correlation between text and world does not immediately seem to be a concern for cinema in the way that it is for literature, and indeed the medium's apparent guarantee of that correlation has been cited as one of its fundamental

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attributes. The subtitle of Siegfried Kracauer's most famous book speaks of film's ability to redeem physical reality, and Kracauer explains that this quality becomes especially clear when it is mobilized to counter the vague and the unsubstantial – a process this chapter will explore in some depth. Thomas Elsaesser sees something similar at play in New Hollywood, and in particular in the role of objects in the films of Robert Altman: 'instead of providing the elements of first-level verisimilitude and causal logic that guarantee the coherence of the secondary level of meaning, they become mere vehicles of phatic communicative contact, where discrete visual moments are underscored, tableau-like, but voided of any specific moral significance' ([1975] 2004: 290). This disconnect, I will argue, is a characteristic of New Hollywood, evidenced most clearly in national-commentary films and in particular *Nashville* and *The Godfather*, where the abstract rhetoric of US nationalism and the illusory relief offered by pastoral retreat (respectively) are brought into question by way of an emphasis on the material.

This material need not be green to warrant ecocritical attention. As a discipline, ecocriticism has long been uncomfortable with the assumption that 'nature' and 'natural', concepts which come laden with normative ideological baggage, are its objects of study. The work of Jane Bennett offers a provocative insight into what might serve as a better description of its true realm of enquiry: things. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Bennett draws on a range of philosophical traditions to advocate a greater awareness of what she calls 'thing-power' or 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (2010: 6). To assume that agency is a purely human privilege, she argues, is to seriously narrow our environmental, aesthetic and political imaginations; 'to *experience* the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally [...] is to take a step towards a more ecological sensibility' (2010: 10, emphasis in the original). I find in New Hollywood cinema a number of gestures towards such horizontality, and away from symbolic abstraction.

Ecocriticism, Mimesis and Environmentality

Largely (though not wholly) hostile to what they consider to be poststructuralism's insistence on all-pervading textuality, ecocritics have tried to resurrect the vitality of the physical world as something to which most art and literature is still,

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to one degree or another, beholden. 'The signified thus still has a primacy over the signifier (I am relieved to discover)', writes Terry Gifford (2000: 173). It is not surprising, then, that ecocritics have been drawn to the concept of mimesis, defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'the representation or imitation of the real world in (a work of) art, literature, etc.'. The diverging contentions within ecocriticism on the question of mimesis are well represented by a critical exchange between Lawrence Buell and Dana Phillips; the sharp differences between the two not only provide a revealing contrast of approaches but also give a sense of how ecocriticism might have injected a fresh urgency and immediacy into the topic.

The exchange was launched by Phillips's critique of Buell's work, in an article called 'Ecocriticism, Literary Theory and the Truth of Ecology' (1999, and later expanded into the book *The Truth of Ecology*). Described by Greg Garrard as an 'invigoratingly savage attack on crude mimeticism' (2010: 11), Phillips responds to the passages in Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) which argue that we should invest more importance in literature's referential aspect than its allegorical or ideological qualities. Buell proposes that 'the emphasis on disjunction between text and world seems overblown' (1995: 84), and places a good deal of the blame for this on the legacy of structuralism and poststructuralism. 'In contemporary literary theory,' writes Buell, 'the capacity of literary writers to render a faithful mimesis of the object world is reckoned indifferent at best, and their interest in doing so is thought to be a secondary concern' (1995: 84). But Buell does not limit the scope of his arguments to academic trends and fashions; the turn against literary realism is, for him, directly linked to society's 'false assumption that environmental interventions in its planned existence are nothing more than fortuitous occasional events. The notion of art (and other cultural practices) as discursive functions carried on within social "spaces" reinforces this mentality no less efficiently than air-conditioning' (1995: 111). Buell thus raises the stakes to a fully fledged social struggle, and argues that literature's mimetic efforts are far more environmentally progressive than the created worlds found in virtual reality:

> *One of literary realism's advantages, which standard accounts of its ideological agenda occlude, is precisely its comparative impotence: its inability to dominate the physical world that its texts register, and with this an underlying awareness of its own project as the inexhaustible challenge of not mastering*

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> *reality so much as trying quixotically to get nearer to it than the conventions of classical and romantic representation had permitted. (1995: 113)*

For Buell, then, mimesis is not so much a quality that is achieved but an ongoing struggle that is characterized by a degree of humility towards our physical environment. It is a struggle against what he sees as the incessant abstracting impulse of literary theory and society in general, with the ultimate aim (even if this might never be fully attainable) of 'recuperating the factical environment' (1995: 86).

Dana Phillips takes issue with Buell on a number of levels, including his straw-man approach to literary theory and his potentially naïve faith in realism, but the real crux of his opposition rests on the question of to what extent a critical consideration of literature should take into account its mimetic fidelity. For Phillips, Buell in particular and ecocriticism in general have unfortunately embarked on a 'rescue mission' which amounts to little more than a wild goose chase:

> *Buell like other ecocritics falls prey to the false hope that there is some beyond of literature, call it nature or wilderness or ecological community or ecosystem or environment, where deliverance from the constraints of culture, particularly that constraint known as 'theory,' might be found. Do not get me wrong: I think there is a beyond of literature. There is, for example, nature. I just think that nature cannot deliver one from the constraints of culture, any more than culture can deliver one from the constraints of nature. (1999: 585)*

What Buell considers to be mimetic environmental literature unencumbered by social discourse or cultural expectations is actually a form of writing which is socially determined to its core – and that, says Phillips, is fine:

> *There is no doubt that literature can be realistic and even in some limited sense representational: it can point to the world. That is, it can point to some carefully circumscribed aspect of the world which it must describe and locate in more or less detail for a competent reader who understands what it is trying to do. (1999: 597)*

Allegory and ideology, argues Phillips, are not inconvenient intrusions on the purity of literature, but the very stuff of literature. To place absolute importance on literature's referentiality not only obscures this fact, but means that

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ecocriticism 'may be reduced to an umpire's role, squinting to see if a given description of a painted trillium or a live oak tree is itself well-painted and lively' (1999: 586). The (absurd) logical conclusion of this, warns Phillips, would be to favour realistic bird-call impressions over and above Thoreau's *Walden* in a canon of environmental literature.

Not so, according to Buell's sustained response some years later in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*: 'mimetic particularity and referentialism don't tightly correlate' (2005: 37). Buell's main strategy of defence (or rebuttal) is to insist on the flexibility of mimesis, while refusing to lose sight of its centrality. What ecocritics value, he argues, is not a 'one-to-one correspondence between text and world, but rather a certain kind of environmental referentiality' (2005: 32) and 'continued interest in the matching, or non-matching, of wordscape and worldscape that takes quite varied forms' (2005: 39). To use two of Buell's examples, the giant horse-chestnut tree in *Jane Eyre* and the great elm in Thoreau's *Journal* enrich their respective texts because each of these trees had a particular status and knowable image within the environments of England and New England respectively – and not because they are depicted in any great amount of detail, nor because they succeed in achieving some kind of direct representation, or pure mimesis. For Buell, they are obviously not trees, but they are just as obviously far more than generic trees, which is evidenced by the fact that the passages simply make no sense 'without reference to natural history and/or cultural ecology' (2005: 37). As he argues, it is a given that the written word will only ever be 'abstract graphic notation' (2005: 33). 'Yet it is equally clear', he goes on to propose, 'that the subject of a text's representation of its environmental ground *matters* – matters aesthetically, conceptually, ideologically' (2005: 33, emphasis in the original). It is important to note here that Buell does not ignore ideological connotations, but sees them as being partly grounded in the character of a text's environmental referentiality – its environmentality.

It is fair to suggest that this type of critical exchange is characteristic of an earlier period in ecocriticism, when its practitioners were especially anxious to ensure a balance between academic distinctiveness ('let's take representations of nature at face value, because others critics don't') and critical rigour ('let's ensure that we interrogate literature *as* literature'). More recently, 'materiality' has emerged as a crucial issue for ecocritics and other critical thinkers sympathetic to ecological concerns, in such a way that seems to strike something of a balance between Buell and Phillips; the material world still stands as the crucial referent,

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but the material world is not reducible to nature, and neither is 'theory' necessarily a distraction from that world. An important touchstone here is a 2012 issue of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, co-edited by Dana Phillips (with Heather I. Sullivan). It is dedicated to materiality in literature and theory, and it addresses 'the agency of material bodies participating in a broad spectrum of relationships with other forms of agentic matter on many scales. The contributors raise the questions of who or what has agency, when and how does agency make a difference, and what does it mean for human agency that it is surrounded by "vibrant" matter?' (Phillips and Sullivan 2012: 446). In bringing such a perspective to bear on New Hollywood, I do not claim that *Nashville* or *The Godfather* make philosophical statements regarding human agency, but rather that their aesthetic and tonal distinctiveness comes into sharper focus with the help of materialist ecocriticism.

Championing the Referent in Film Theory

Cinematography is so evidently able to offer up images which bear an extraordinary resemblance to their actual source that it is somewhat unclear what the notion of mimesis can bring to a debate about cinema; if the photographic image cannot help but present images which link directly to a real-world original, then surely our attention must move to how filmmakers subsequently organize these images. Yet there is another way of approaching film's mimetic credentials: if lifelikeness is more or less guaranteed, then mimesis becomes less about the medium's own ability than our approach to it – are we alive enough to cinema's unique capabilities? It is the closest art has come to letting us see the world clearly, so this line of thought would go, and it is up to filmmakers and audiences to treat cinema accordingly.

A number of film theorists (and practitioners) in the earlier part of the twentieth century pursued this idea, and although the strongest trends in film theory from the 1960s onwards have tended instead to emphasize other aspects of the medium, this notion of film's responsibility towards 'reality' lives on, most clearly in the persistent interest in the work of André Bazin[1] – regularly described as the most influential theorist in film history. In *Doubting Vision* (2008), Malcolm Turvey identifies this early twentieth-century grouping as 'revelationism', and groups together the work of Jean Epstein, Dziga Vertov, Béla Balázs and Siegfried

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Kracauer under this banner because of their consistent emphasis on cinema's ability to reveal aspects of reality which go unseen by the human eye. According to these four thinkers, 'cinema's most significant property, one which other arts do not possess (or at least do not possess to the same degree), is its ability to uncover features of reality invisible to human vision' (Turvey 2008: 3). Turvey goes on to critique the crude dismissals of human vision which he sees as symptomatic of revelationist writing, but what concerns us here is not so much the persuasiveness of these writers' rhetoric so much as their confidence in cinema's ability to reveal things 'as they are'. Elaborating on the contemporary influences on revelationism, Turvey quotes Hugo Münsterberg: 'Yes, by the miracles of the camera we may trace the life of nature even in forms which no human observation really finds in the outer world' (2008: 5). Whether or not this qualifies as 'mimesis', its resonance with the concerns of ecocriticism is unmistakable.

Despite their common distrust of human vision, Epstein, Vertov, Balázs and Kracauer differ in interesting ways when it comes to explaining cinema's special propensity for revealing reality *vis-à-vis* the weakness of human abilities: Epstein, explains Turvey, appreciates how cinema could capture the 'mobility of reality' and counter our natural tendency to immobilize through perception; Vertov emphasizes social realities as opposed to physical realities and embraces the autonomy of machines in general; Balázs laments the dominance of language over action, and our resultant inability to communicate non-rational concepts; Kracauer critiques modernity's emphasis on abstractions, for which science is the chief culprit, and celebrates cinema's ability to deal in material specifics. Although all of these theorists have ample secondary literature devoted to their work, it is worth staying with Turvey's analysis of them because he offers a particularly useful subcategorization. Epstein and Vertov, according to Turvey, assume certain innate handicaps on the part of the human eye, while Balázs and Kracauer instead identify cultural forces as the cause of our relative blindness. 'Balázs argues that it is, in part, a historical limitation that sight suffers from, a limitation from which it can potentially recover' (2008: 38), and 'for Kracauer it is a historical limitation specific to modernity that vision suffers from' (2008: 41).

At the risk of narrowing or simplifying ecocriticism, it would be fair to suggest that this latter approach is more in keeping with its concerns and its hope that art and literature can sometimes teach us about how we can better understand our environments – rather than achieve this understanding for us. As Scott Russell Sanders puts it, 'any writer who sees the world in ecological perspective faces a

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hard problem: how, despite the perfection of our technological boxes, to make us feel the ache and tug of that organic web passing through us' (1996: 194). One could even say that the work of Balázs and Kracauer shares with mainstream ecocriticism a certain underlying optimism which has left it (like ecocriticism) open to accusations of naiveté. If the revelationist tradition in film theory offers a promising path towards understanding mimesis and environmentality in cinema, then Balázs and Kracauer (whose 'redemption of physical reality' is echoed in Buell's 'recuperating the factical environment' (1995: 86)) emerge as perhaps the most obviously ecocritical of that tradition. And Kracauer – with his particular emphasis on the struggle against abstractions – emerges as especially relevant to New Hollywood.

In *Theory of Film* ([1960] 1997), Kracauer's overall argument functions by defining the essential properties of film as a medium and then identifying particular tropes and techniques which capitalize on these properties most fully; therefore, 'applying Kracauer' risks becoming an exercise in simply spotting those features (or their notable absence) in any given film. Instead, his firm belief in the 'direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality' ([1960] 1997: 296), the most persistent theme in *Theory of Film*, will serve as a kind of guiding motif in the following analyses. Miriam Hansen (1993) has argued persuasively that it is a mistake to reduce *Theory of Film* to a mere relic of naïve realism, and that we should look beyond its surface simplicity and recognize the traces of profound historical trauma which help explain the work's flaws and contextualize its sometimes perverse straightforwardness. Her historicized account of *Theory of Film*'s protracted genesis is hugely valuable, but what Hansen laments, and even seems to apologize for – that under-theorized belief in a pre-eminent material reality – is precisely what chimes with Buell and ecocritical approaches to mimesis. 'If in the book,' writes Hansen,

> *the various ways in which film engages material reality [...] often read like a catalogue of aesthetic motifs or a celebration of the 'marvels of everyday life' [...] in the Marseille notebooks [dating from the 1940s] they still appear under the perspective of phenomena that push the boundaries of individual consciousness. (1993: 457)*

For Hansen, the latter perspective is more interesting or more valuable; for ecocriticism, it is not.

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The theme of material integrity in fact falls into particularly bold relief very late on in *Theory of Film*, in the book's epilogue, when Kracauer briefly examines cinema's ability to debunk (or at least question) myths and prejudices by contradicting them through material reality. It is unfortunate that Kracauer did not expand on this fascinating dynamic more fully. In fact, the one example he describes (when D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) contrasts the sympathetic Chinese protagonist with two unpalatable missionaries) does not seem to quite do justice to Kracauer's ideas, because the generalities of prejudice are merely replaced by the generalities (or abstractness, to invoke Kracauer's supposed nemesis) of racial and cultural tolerance. If cinema *is* able to reveal the invalidity of broad and vague ideas through their confrontation with the material, then it surely follows that the material must not simply act as a springboard for more idealizing. Ideologies must be fundamentally thrown off course by material actuality, rather than redirected by it.

The debate between Buell and Phillips offers us an insight into the vital importance of referentiality and mimesis in ecocritical considerations of art and fiction, and Kracauer's *Theory of Film* suggests some ways in which cinema has a kind of ontological predilection for these qualities. Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010) offers an especially useful model for bringing both sets of concerns to bear (ecocritically) on New Hollywood. Like Buell, she is interested in a non-anthropocentric aesthetics – she wants 'to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it' (2010: 14) – and sees the relative autonomy of material as an important part of this. Her philosophy is overtly ecological (although often critical of environmentalist rhetoric). And yet Bennett is not primarily interested in 'nature' as it is widely understood; she writes about metal, food and electricity as worthy subjects for ecological consideration, and – like Kracauer – characterizes alertness to materiality as an ethical issue. She writes:

> *Vital materialists [...] try to linger in those moments during which they find themselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality that they share with them. This sense of strange and incomplete commonality [...] may induce vital materialists to treat nonhumans – animals, plants, earth, even artefacts and commodities, more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically. (2010: 18)*

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Such an approach draws on a tradition of thought which Bill Brown brings together under the rubric of 'thing theory', in an article where – paraphrasing Adorno – he considers 'the alterity of things as an essentially ethical fact' (2001: 12).[2] Bennett weaves together this ethical imperative with questions of contemporary politics and ecology, in terms which prove very resonant for the study of cinema – ecocritically or otherwise. 'Lingering in moments' in this sense might also be thought of as a rather poetic description of film criticism, whereby we enjoy the pleasure and privilege of attending to fleeting instances and worldly details. And while Kracauer's interpretation of *Broken Blossoms* renders material bodies subservient to the film's theme, Bennett's approach offers more scope for considering to the potential independence of materials, and their significance *in spite of* such themes.

National-Commentary Rhetoric

New Hollywood offers instances whereby this tendency, a kind of resilient materiality, comes to the fore. It has already been noted how commentators have found New Hollywood to be both politically engaged and rhetorically confused. Although I will not return to their critiques in detail, it is useful to bear in mind that the confrontations between abstractness and materiality described below provide one possible explanation for the films' supposed incoherence. Of course, abstractness is not an easy thing to identify in any work, but New Hollywood offers up a number of films which are almost inarguably attempting to deal with issues of US national identity – an ungrounded generality if ever there was one. These films of national commentary, *The Godfather* and *Nashville* in particular, offer an excellent opportunity to witness in practice what Kracauer proposed in theory: the fascinating dissonance between vague notions and cinema's unrelenting specificity.

Both films are habitually understood allegorically. Raymond Carney, making his case for the way in which the films of John Cassavetes resist 'metaphorical and philosophical expansions' (1985: 11), describes New Hollywood as a series of indulgences in such expansiveness, and specifically cites *The Godfather* and *Nashville* as films which 'have in common their eminently discussable generalizations' (1985: 11). And yet each film places such importance on the evocation of localized details and material environments (the mahogany and leather of Don

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Corleone's office, the kitsch costumes of the Nashville music scene) that a tension emerges between their supposed symbolism and their apparent immediacy. Put another way, they invite extrapolation but also resist it, and ecocriticism's concern with mimetic fidelity illuminates this tension particularly well. Before looking more closely at examples of how these films develop such a tension, it is useful to consider the national-commentary status often awarded to both *The Godfather* and *Nashville*, because it is in the face of this that their mimetic currency seems so curious.

In *America in the Movies* (1989), Michael Wood offers some ideas on the complex relationship between the country as it exists in cinema, and the America 'out there in reality': 'it is a relation of wish, echo, transposition, displacement, inversion, compensation, reinforcement, example, warning – there are virtually as many categories of the relation as you care to dream up' (1989: 15). We could contribute (but not necessarily dream up) the category of 'grand commentary' or 'editorialization', whereby an American film explicitly engages with the United States as a subject. And, bearing in mind that symbiosis is central to Wood's relation, this commentary needs to be digested, reflected upon and solidified in the real world. Take, as a brief example, *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007); there is no denying that its immediate subject matter – oil, territorial invasion, corruption – has a direct relevance to deep-rooted concerns about America (contemporary and historical), its values and its governance. Yet so many films deal with themes that could be plausibly extrapolated into being 'American themes' (self-reliance, violence, capitalism etc.) that this is perhaps not enough; it needs to be echoed and somewhat confirmed by its reception. Anderson's film was greeted with just such a reception:

> *It's 1898, and Plainview is mining for silver. He's the great American entrepreneur, the ambitious loner, pushing farther west and pushing himself to his physical limits. (Mick LaSalle,* San Francisco Chronicle, *Friday 4 January, 2008)*

> There Will Be Blood *is genuinely widescreen, both in its mise-en-scène and concern with American values – God, oil, family – that have hardly receded into the mist. (J. Hoberman,* Village Voice, *Tuesday 18 December, 2007)*

> *Paul Thomas Anderson aspires to the creation of an American epic. (Richard Schickel,* Time, *Monday 24 December, 2007)*

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> *[Eli and Plainview, the main characters,] engage in a wary, tortured dance that's supposed to lead us to an understanding of their similarities, their differences, and the ways in which the pursuit of their respective goals is part of this flawed but remarkable entity we call the American character. (Stephanie Zacharek, Salon.com, Wednesday 26 December, 2007)*

It is important to include here a negative review (Zacharek), if only to distinguish this process of confirmation from one of ringing endorsement. Even when Anderson's lofty ambitions are deemed beyond the reach of the film itself, there is nevertheless recognition of the reach – *There Will Be Blood* was offered and received as a film about America.

Much the same is true of *The Godfather* and *Nashville*. They remain two of the most critically acclaimed films of the period (and beyond), and although vastly different in tone and style, each in its own way tackles certain big ideas of Americanism, from multiculturalism and capitalism in *The Godfather* to populism and pluralism in *Nashville*. Nor should we ignore the more blatant instances where nationalism is invoked, such as the famous 'I believe in America' address to camera which opens *The Godfather*, and the huge United States flag which, in *Nashville*, acts as a backdrop to the climactic assassination. *Nashville*, with its fictional presidential campaign and overt reference to bicentennial celebrations, was more immediately understood as a work of national commentary. John Yates – taking issue with Altman's patronizing take on popular and populist culture – asserted that the film 'is obviously intended as a picture of common society' (1976: 23), and Michael Klein observed at the time how 'critics have been unanimous in their praise of *Nashville* and in viewing it as a satire upon the grotesqueries of "middle America"' (1975: 6).[3] One of those critics was Vincent Canby (1975) who, in the *New York Times*, declared that '*Nashville* is about the quality of a segment of Middle American life'.

Three years earlier, Canby had described *The Godfather* in similar, if more resounding, terms: 'Francis Ford Coppola has made one of the most brutal and moving chronicles of American life ever designed within the limits of popular entertainment' (1972). *The Godfather* is generally more oblique than *Nashville* in its treatment of American nationhood. (The producer, Robert Evans, on hearing that Coppola intended the film to be 'a metaphor for capitalism in America' rather than a gangster picture, responded, 'Fuck him and the horse he rode in on' (Evans 1994: 226).) Declarations such as Canby's were more characteristic

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of later analyses, but this slight lag does not negate the film's rhetorical impact. It may even enhance it, as when Jonathan Rosenbaum saw in *The Godfather* a certain mentality which plagued the administration of George W. Bush, a mentality described by the critic as 'a cowardly form of pathos, and one which Americans have been living with on an intimate basis for the past eight years' (2010: 274). Having identified both films as works which are concerned with broad issues of American nationhood, I will not proceed to evaluate the relative success or failure, originality or predictability, of *Nashville* and *The Godfather* in their treatment of those issues. J. Hoberman has complained, in terms that are wonderfully apt for the present investigation, that *Nashville* indulges in 'themes as boomingly obvious and brilliantly insubstantial as a firework display on the Fourth of July' (2004: 208). That may well be the case, but that very insubstantiality is counterbalanced and confused by a lingering emphasis on materiality.

The Flag as Thing in *Nashville*

Nashville, with its huge cast of characters and plethora of intertwining stories, does not lend itself to a brief synopsis. The film's finale, however, has a relatively simple premise: an outdoor rally is taking place at Nashville's replica Parthenon, for presidential candidate Hal Phillip Walker. The event brings together the musicians, music fans, campaigners and promoters whom the film has followed along various (occasionally connecting) narrative strands. Barbara Jean (Ronee Blakley), the much beloved but very troubled singer, is assassinated, prompting a brief panic which is alleviated almost immediately by a huge communal sing-along.[4] This climactic concert is one of many performances throughout *Nashville* and is presented as being simultaneously the most contrived and the least contrived performance in the film. It is the most contrived inasmuch as John Triplette (Michael Murphy), the organizer on behalf of the presidential campaign, has done nothing but smooth-talk and lie in order to lure headline acts. And yet the conditions of this concert – the weather, the chaos, the huge spaces through which crowds move in and out – seem decidedly out of any person's control or design. This sense of exposure coalesces in a single, striking image, which acts as the concert's 'curtain raiser': a gigantic US flag blowing in the wind. It is no coincidence that this is the site where *Nashville*'s vast array of characters eventually comes together. As they stand before their flag, it is tempting to suggest that the

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Figure 2.1 The flag as thing: *Nashville* (ABC / Paramount Pictures)

gathering is a mirroring, or channelling, of the US nation. This may be so, but it would be a mistake to turn away from the flag and towards the characters too hastily, as *Nashville* is as complicated and ambiguous in its deployment of this as it is in casting the fates of its ensemble.

The flag's presence in the scene brings to mind the often-quoted reaction to the Lumières' early films, and the apparent wonder generated by seeing the ripple of leaves stirred by the wind. Siegfried Kracauer returns to this more than once in *Theory of Film* and specifically quotes Parisian journalist Henri de Parville's description of this revelation as 'nature caught in the act' (Kracauer [1960] 1997: 31). I would like to follow the example of such an interpretation, focusing on the flag and the wind and resisting the temptation to accept the iconicity of the flag too readily. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett describes the experience of coming across a collection of items (both organic and manufactured) in a gutter, and realizing that she had the choice as to whether to see them as human debris or 'existents in excess of their association with human meanings' (2010: 4). To apply this kind of perceptual experiment to the flag in *Nashville* is not, as it might first appear, to wilfully ignore the broader context of the film or scene. Coming after a string of shows in seedy bars and gaudy theatres, what is most striking about the finale is its undercurrent of disorder, even before the calamitous shooting, which is felt through its outsideness – cars roam chaotically around the grounds, the crowd moves at its own pace and leisure and the performers are not automatically the focus of attention. Country music, which the film has persistently characterized as a kind of synecdoche of superficial patriotism, is now removed from its comfort zone and made to fend for itself against the elements.[5] To this extent, the 'stage is set' for power and agency to slip away, and for meticulously controlled

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symbols to become disjointed, their material severed from their intended meaning. *Nashville* is populated with numerous attempts to reveal the hollow cant of patriotic music; the flag fits into such a design perfectly, only here the revelation has a distinctly materialistic emphasis.

Is there anything inherently challenging in the image of a national flag blowing in the wind? One could even argue that a still, stagnant flag – stripped of its connections with expansive adventure, relegated from its lofty home atop a flagpole – has more critical capacity. However, to be playful and subversive with this quintessential American icon does nothing to challenge its iconicity and instead re-establishes its rhetorical force, simply in another guise. A closer look at the scene as a whole suggests why an object-centred analysis, particularly one that focuses on the flag, is appropriate. The scene in question begins with a close-up on a television screen, as a newsreader delivers an editorial on the strange campaign of Hal Phillip Walker. A gradual zoom out reveals the television set to be, rather incongruously, outdoors; the strange effect of political rhetoric being ironically re-formulated by its material medium stands as something of an overture for the scene proper. This begins with numerous long shots of preparatory action at the concert venue, which seem to award us a privileged, backstage perspective. Significantly, the flag at this point is visible though not foregrounded – it seems to exist as a performance prop. The scene's attention then switches to the arrival of the campaign organizer John Triplette, who is greeted by his local subordinate, Delbert (Ned Beatty). Delbert tries to tell an uninterested John about the history of the Parthenon, which was originally built as a plaster-of-Paris replica for centennial celebrations. Soon after, John is drawn into an angry exchange with Barbra Jean's husband and manager, Barnett (Allen Garfield). John has promised him that the concert will feature no prominent political signs. As Barnett gestures angrily towards the backdrop, we assume that he is referring to the Hal Phillip Walker banner which is visible; the curious possibility remains, however, that he is similarly upset by the flag, which looms above, unseen.

Before the camera begins to fix its attention firmly on the flag, these fleeting moments and exchanges sow the seeds for a grounded, utilitarian approach to its role. Political messages are seen as subservient to their material delivery; the flag is introduced as a piece of equipment, a tool for spectacle; the grand stage is itself undermined through insights into its material history; the presence of political banners is debated as matter of petty contractual wrangling. Thus, when the film cuts to a striking, screen-filling close-up of the flag, we have every reason not to

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be (entirely) swayed by its iconicity. The slightly muted colours, whether a consequence of the overcast weather or the textures and dyes of the flag, encourage us to see the object as a specific material incarnation of a design. And the flag is most definitely not fluttering, but billowing; the rhythm of ripples as the wind envelops the flag is a consequence of – and a reminder of – its remarkable size. In this respect, the moment is designed to allow us to see not just a flag, but a sheet of material at the mercy of its environment. Jane Bennett, paraphrasing Adorno, talks of how the thing 'eludes capture by the concept' (2010: 13); *Nashville* establishes the conditions for just such an elusion.

One could argue that this mix of materiality and ideological usefulness is true of all flags in all films. But it is most common for these qualities to seem to be simultaneous, and to be subsumed by the broad ideological connotations of the flag as icon. This is how the flag is introduced in another New Hollywood film, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (Sam Peckinpah, 1970), when Hogue (Jason Robards) humbly accepts it as a gift and deferentially removes his hat. Minutes later he is hastily hoisting the flag in order to impress a woman; Peckinpah, in other words, deliberately has Hogue play free and easy with the flag's 'usefulness'. To take an extreme counter-example, the flag which is raised triumphantly at the end of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford, 1939) is so endowed with ideological power that even when the dialogue refers to its material presence ('Hey soldier, let me take that flag a minute'), it never comes close to being revealed in what Heidegger would deem its 'thingness'. This scene is especially telling because the characters in it have never seen the Stars and Stripes before and are literally being introduced to it. In this sense, *Drums Along the Mohawk* ostensibly presents a much better opportunity than *Nashville* for a flag to be revealed as a thing before it has accumulated overbearing ideological significance. Yet this only further emphasizes the contrasting processes being enacted in each film; while *Drums* heaps meaning on the thing, *Nashville* strives to reveal the thing behind the meaning.

Perhaps the most famous depiction of the United States flag in twentieth-century art is Jasper Johns's 'Flag' (1954–55), which has, ironically, grown into an icon of sorts in its own right. Johns introduced 'Flag' at a time when the mechanisms of McCarthyism meant that questions of Americanism were prevalent and urgent, and in this sense it is almost impossible not to think of the work as an overt intervention in contemporary political debate. But its boldness and directness do not automatically make for a strident rejection of whatever it is the Stars and Stripes 'means' or 'stands for', because the use of unfamiliar materials does not

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disrupt or overpower the ultimate design. 'Something or someone is being played with, caricatured and snubbed,' writes Fred Orton, 'but the flag of the United States remains relatively intact' (1994: 128). The work does remind us that the flag is a contrived icon whose constituent parts are by no means inevitable, and to that extent asks us to acknowledge its profound instability, but this critique is contained and balanced by the resoluteness of the design. As Orton understands it, 'factitiousness is never allowed to disrupt, spoil or break the genuine flagness of the flag' (1994: 112). This idea of a critique being contained by the flag itself is a significant one in that it frames the issues spatially, implying that a genuinely subversive challenge to the flag would need to be launched from outside it – in terms of its environment.

Patton (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1970), a New Hollywood film even more direct in its national-commentary address than *Nashville*, offers a telling counter-example here. The film opens with a huge United States flag, which, it soon transpires, is a backdrop for Patton's (George C. Scott) address to his troops. Here, the frontal angle of the camera and the stillness of the conditions (the only movement is Patton's) conspire to reveal the flag in purely graphic terms. The brief series of close-ups which follow the initial long shot suddenly frame different parts of Patton's uniform against abstractions of pure white or unfocused red, and the flag seems to exist predominantly as blocks of colour. As with Johns, the 'flag-ness' of the flag is rooted in its design, and the strangeness of its presentation (in collage form with Johns; as a mammoth, inert screen in *Patton*) complicates our relationship with its meaning without trying to break down that relationship. But unlike 'Flag', the effect in *Patton* is not entirely contained by the flag's whole, and the peculiarity of the flag itself is partly generated by the environment in which it is placed. The flag sits before an obediently silent gathering of soldiers (whom we do not see), in a presumably huge hall (we hear the echoes of the shuffling chairs), and remains in its eerie stasis because of this protection. Although we do not see the hall, one can imagine that it is similar to the huge gymnasium we see at the climax of *The Parallax View*, when a vast array of empty tables (with red, white and blue tablecloths) are shown in a high-angle long shot, and – as in *Patton* – the graphic tools of nationalist rhetoric are shown as visual constructs. The insistent unnaturalness of these settings is decisively important, but – as Bennett suggests – the ecological interest of a site or a moment depends less on whether its constituent parts are 'natural' than on the potential it provides for letting materials challenge and disrupt anthropocentric intentions.

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Finally, it is important to emphasize that all three films share an interest in the hollowness of spectacle and performance – and how in each instance the mechanics of performance are depicted in such a way as to threaten the ideological design of the performance. In *Nashville,* the audience has been privy to the cynical contrivance of the show throughout most of the film; *Patton* presents the General's performance as possibly delusional; in *The Parallax View*, when the pre-recorded sound falls out of synch with the rehearsal, it is a deeply ominous sign. These moments, which pointedly satirize slick American showmanship and expose the emptiness and artificiality of abstract ideals, recur in a number of New Hollywood films. Other examples include Jessica's (Julia Anne Robinson) Miss America charade in *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Bob Rafelson, 1972), Alice's (Ellen Burstyn) painful barroom show in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (*Martin Scorsese, 1974) and the whole of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They? (*Sydney Pollack, 1969), not to mention later echoes in *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976) and *The King of Comedy (*Martin Scorsese, 1982).

In *Nashville,* the flag does not succeed in its role as a unifying and celebratory focal point. For Bill Brown, such failure is a necessary precondition of our ability to appreciate material otherness: 'we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily' (2001: 4). New Hollywood has within it a number of moments when production, consumption and exhibition become disrupted in this way. The flag in *Nashville*, so spectacular in its intended meaningfulness, is not only the starkest example of this, but an excellent point at which to begin thinking through the ecocritical significance of such a 'relapse' into thingness.

The Car Crash as Assemblage in *Nashville*

Soon after we see the flag in *Nashville*, the singer Barbara Jean is shot, and by this point the film has woven a complex web of associations between claustrophobic spaces and hypocrisy, performance and politics, popular culture and alienation, the cynical romanticism of country music and the failed promises of American culture. It is therefore impossible not to feel the profound symbolic significance of the assassination, although this is simultaneously tempered and confused by

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the scene's resistance to symbolic abstraction. Is the shooting an act of desperation, a strike by the common man against the hollow cant of mainstream US nationalism, or a direct by-product of that nationalism? Is it a gesture of liberation, implosion or revenge, a seminal moment or an inevitable climax? Each makes sense in its own way, but each seems like something of a betrayal of the scene's grim realism, which has worked so hard to convince us of the vivid day-to-dayness of events; Altman's penchant for the wonder (and darkness) of contingency and congruency is surely a struggle, in the spirit of Kracauer, against such a totalizing impulse. In fact, the only wider conclusion that seems proper is that the shooting – which appears to us in extreme long shot – was somehow made possible by the vast openness of the outdoor setting.

This push and pull between symbolic resonance and material matter-of-factness recurs throughout *Nashville*. The flag is possibly the most vivid example of an icon which can be deconstructed in this sense, but others include songs (*Nashville*'s fictional candidate, Hal Phillip Walker, at one point proposes a new national anthem) or even dramatic motifs, such as the road trip, modern America's equivalent of lighting out for the territory. The icon of the road trip cannot be tested through outsideness (because this is already complicit in the icon), but through simultaneity: numerous people trying to 'live the dream' at once. *Nashville* reminds us that one car on the open road is simply one of many cars doing exactly the same thing; as in the flag sequence, everyday logic – a logic determined by the environment – poses a serious challenge to the apparent transcendental status of the icon. The famous traffic-jam scene early on in *Nashville* is when we are first introduced to the full canvas of characters, a coming together which does not happen again until the climactic rally described above; it would be fair to suppose that these ambitiously vast scenes are prime instances of *Nashville* entering into national-commentary mode. The conscious attempt to bring into focus a broad cross section of society is surely when the film veers most closely towards the generalizing impulse – and also when its materializing impulse is most conspicuous, and most challenging.

This sequence also points to another aspect of Jane Bennett's work, namely her interest in 'assemblages'. Bennett borrows the concept of the assemblage from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, conceding that her own notion of thing-power 'tends to overstate the thinginess or fixed stability of materiality' (2010: 20). If the intent is to recalibrate our relationship with things, part of that shift

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requires us to think of things less as inert nodes than as participants. Bennett explains the alternative value of assemblages in the following terms:

> *Assemblages are not governed by any central head; no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. (2010: 24)*

Bennett uses the model (in the loosest sense of the term) of the assemblage to interpret the giant blackout that swept across North America in the summer of 2003 as a happening whose agency was spread across countless points, human and non-human, 'from a quirky electron flow and a spontaneous fire to members of Congress who have a neo-liberal faith in market self-regulation' (2010: 28). There are many moments in *Nashville* (and perhaps throughout Altman's oeuvre) which warrant a similar multi-focal diagnosis, but none more so than the car crash in which all the main characters are caught up – and all respond as if it were an event beyond their power and control. The baffling distribution of cars and people appears as something like an enactment of the absence of traceable causes and effects.

As the cast of characters hop in their cars and race along the motorway, only to collide into one another, the process of demystification operates in two clear ways: through the basic premise, according to which all the participants are travelling from Nashville airport to the city (and so the journey is established as nothing more than a practical chore); and through the matter-of-fact tone of presentation, whereby no tension whatsoever is generated and no pointers are deployed to signpost the significance of the movement.[6] We do not see, for example, individual characters in their cars as they crash, but instead witness the event from a distance. There is no dramatic emphasis on the disjuncture between road-trip romanticism and everyday calamity. The point is not to triumphantly unveil the lie which lurks behind the myth but to scrutinize the myth as it unfolds in something as close as possible to material actuality. Bert Cardullo makes the important distinction between the scene as an ambitious statement and the scene as a simplistic metaphor: 'Altman does not so much advance the highway traffic jam [...] as a

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pure, all-embracing emblem for America as he does ground it subtly in the reality of his *Nashville* to evoke on screen what he perceives to be the dominant quality of American life today' (1987: 225).

When Kracauer turns to motifs, he does so not in order to critique their relative groundlessness in the face of cinema's materializing impulses (as mentioned earlier, this conflict is pursued surprisingly briefly in *Theory of Film*), but rather to insist that 'they are identical with, or grow out of, one or another property of film' ([1960] 1997: 272). One could reasonably suggest that the road trip qualifies comfortably in this respect, incorporating as it does a number of Kracauer's 'general characteristics' of film, including movement, the transient and the familiar. Yet, keeping in mind the pile-up scene in *Nashville*, it is interesting to note that Kracauer identifies one motif as occupying a unique position: 'the flow of life'. Elsewhere in his study, Kracauer explains what he means by this: 'The concept "flow of life" [...] covers the stream of material situations and happenings with all that they intimate in terms of emotions, values, thoughts. The implication is that the flow of life is predominantly a material rather than a mental continuum' ([1960] 1997: 71). And after briefly discussing some choice examples of this later on, Kracauer muses that 'these films feature life, especially everyday life, as a series of contingent events and/or a process of growth; and all of them feature it in such a way that it appears to be an end in itself' ([1960] 1997: 273). Whereas a conventional road-movie structure would be more likely to pursue a 'mental continuum' (physical journeys standing for spiritual quests), *Nashville* realizes this ideal of a motif being ultimately answerable to its material ingredients, a process of growth that is an end in itself.

Nashville pre-empts the temptation to interpret this scene as metaphor through the absurd enthusiasm of Opal, the English journalist (Geraldine Chaplin). 'I need something like this for my documentary!' she exclaims. 'It's America. All those cars smashing into each other'. Yet that is not to say that we cannot draw any wider significance from how the film chooses to emphasize the material. The way in which strangers are suddenly thrust into each other's lives, for example, has definite traces of optimism and communality: the famous singer meets his fans; the political strategists have a relaxed joke together; the English journalist meets the black Americans she thinks she knows all about. It is not all a pretty picture, of course, but there is a certain optimism in the suggestion that people's true characters are now able to come to light, and there is a distinct sense of a fresh start, a blank slate – or rather, a jumble of individual blank slates.

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Ultimately, though, anything resembling a moral, or even a theme, seems incidental at best. Instead, an emergent situation with no ostensible cause or effect has arisen, in which human characters have no more or less agency than the machines with which they collaborate. Efficacy, as Bennett describes, 'becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts' (2010: 23).

Two-Lane Blacktop (Monte Hellman, 1971) could be described as a New Hollywood film which pursues precisely these concerns, reaching similar ends, but through vastly different means. It too attempts to 'boil down' the myth of emancipatory and revelatory travel to its raw material ingredients, but instead of reminding us that no car is an island, it ventures in the opposite direction by emphasizing the crushing loneliness and alienation which inevitably come with a determination to pursue life on the road. In the film, three men who are defined entirely by their devotion to driving (they remain nameless and appear in the credits as 'the driver', 'the mechanic' and 'g.t.o.') prove incapable of honesty, empathy, compassion or communication. 'The girl' (Laurie Bird), half-heartedly seduced by all three, is also constantly on the move, but she is more enamoured of the *idea* of the never-ending road trip than the means which make this possible; 'screwdrivers and wrenches don't make it for me', she complains. And herein lies the peculiar approach of *Two-Lane Blacktop* to its characters' devotion to the open road. The driver and the mechanic, though cold and distant, retain a curious kind of moral authority because they pursue their way of life with consummate devotion to its material necessities. Like *Nashville*, *Two-Lane Blacktop* questions the value of open-road escapism by refusing to let it exist as myth or fable, and insisting it be understood and interrogated as a material experience.

Ecocriticism helps us understand the dynamic of this more fully, shedding light on the role that environmentality might play when a text's ideological themes are complicated by a lingering emphasis on the physical referent: 'guided by film, then, we approach, if at all, ideas no longer on highways leading through the void but on paths that wind through the thicket of things' (Kracauer [1960] 1997: 309). It was noted above how Siegfried Kracauer focuses on movement and inanimate objects as being natural subjects of cinema. These he describes as 'recording functions', but he also proposes certain 'revealing functions', beginning with 'things normally unseen'. Within this category he mainly focuses on the especially small and the especially big, but then puts forward the fascinating subcategory of 'blind spots of the mind'. This critical potential (because revealing

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blind spots of the mind cannot be anything *but* a critical activity) is exhibited especially well in the lingering image of a flag blowing in the wind. National flags surely exemplify Kracauer's notion of objects that, 'because we know them by heart[,] we do not know [...] with the eye. Once integrated into our existence, they cease to be objects of perception' ([1960] 1997: 55). *Nashville*, as discussed above, employs this critique in more than one instance, using the vagueness of nationalist rhetoric as a counterpoint.

A different, but closely related, trend in New Hollywood departs significantly from this image of Kracauer's, even if the ultimate effect is comparable; it is a trend exemplified by *The Godfather*, and one characterized by the dramatic clash, rather than the gradual juxtaposition, of the ideological and the material. While Kracauer speaks of helpful guardianship through 'the thicket of things', *The Godfather* achieves its aims through something more akin to shock therapy.

Challenging the Pastoral in *The Godfather*

If the subject of the following discussion is how *The Godfather* critiques certain vague notions of American national identity by grounding them materially, then it may seem strange to concentrate on the most dreamlike chapter of the film, Michael's (Al Pacino) stay in Sicily. However, it is in the Sicily sequences that the film enacts those notions – a new world of beauty and opportunity, freedom and abundance – which it also simultaneously debunks. Michael's blissful, and borderline unbelievable, experiences in Europe are juxtaposed with scenes of suspicion, greed and paranoia back in the United States. The film offers a vision of the optimistic pastoral narrative so often tapped by American patriotism – fleeing an inhospitable homeland in order to discover liberty and community (not to mention space) across the Atlantic – but knowingly inverts the America/Europe dichotomy. Cutting back and forth between mythical pastoral splendour and grim urban grittiness prompts us to further suspect the pastoral as groundless fabrication. We see a similar frustration at play, a comparable embrace of gritty 'down-to-earthness', in many New Hollywood films, including of course *Nashville*. In *The King of Marvin Gardens*, for example, the Staedler brothers (Jack Nicholson and Bruce Dern) linger in a dreary and seedy Atlantic City, arguing over the allusive dream of relocating to Hawaii – an idyll we never see in the film. But

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it is in *The Godfather* where pastoral reveries are most brutally cut down, and by considering a key sequence from the film according to Leo Marx's ([1964] 1976) influential template of American pastoralism, we can not only appreciate how its juxtaposition of paradise and 'reality' is part of a long American tradition, but that it modifies this template in interesting ways. The cinematographer Gordon Willis explains his approach to these sections in distinctly pastoral terms: 'I maintained that all the scenes in Sicily should be sunny, far off, mythical, a more romantic land' (Cowie 1997: 59). Terry Gifford (1999) has identified three main definitions of 'pastoral', and his second definition – where the term is used relatively loosely, to describe work which broadly celebrates the rural in contrast to the urban – applies here. But so, perhaps, does his first definition, in which the term 'pastoral' operates rather more strictly and according to particular motifs, such as the prominence of shepherds (the first thing we see in the Sicily of *The Godfather*), the subject of love and the 'discourse of retreat' (1999: 46).[7] Gifford's third definition of 'pastoral' refers to its use in the pejorative sense, critiquing an excessively idealized notion of the countryside. *The Godfather* relates most clearly to this definition, not as an argument for more valid depictions of rural life, but rather as resistance to ungrounded idealism.

The most regularly cited investigation into questions of the pastoral in American culture is *The Machine in the Garden* by Leo Marx ([1964] 1976). In trying to understand the Americanization of the pastoral ideal, Marx refers to 'the singular plasticity of the American situation' ([1964] 1976: 119), the belief of American writers that, unlike Europeans, their version of pastoral need not be restricted to abstract fantasy, but could – and should – be thought of in immediate and practical terms. Marx identifies this trend in Jefferson's punctilious list-making in *Notes on the State of Virginia* and a similar attention to mundane details in Thoreau's *Walden*, perhaps the two 'most pastoral' works in the American canon. In the case of *Walden*, this sense of particularity largely stems from the simple fact that Thoreau's book is a record of personal experience, but Marx sees this very fact as significant – particularly American – in itself. *Walden*'s topography, he explains, is 'another embodiment of the American moral geography – a native blend of myth and reality' ([1964] 1976: 45), and a brilliant realization of the fact that because America promised to actualize Old World pastoral fantasies, its own pastoralism had to carry that burden of material truth. According to Marx, America's privileged position as a living pastoral project inevitably gave its writers the opportunity to report back on the lived experience, which is why Thoreau

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celebrated the wonders of nature through the voice of 'a hard-headed empiricist' ([1964] 1976: 243).

This is not a concept which transfers seamlessly onto cinema; as has been discussed in relation to Kracauer, film is automatically particular and ontologically 'tuned in' to material reality. It is not possible therefore to identify any particular ecocritical significance in those films which invoke pastoralism through specifics. Yet the tension which Marx identifies, the disconnect between idealism and pragmatism which he actually believes to be managed and overcome by Jefferson and Thoreau, *can* be thought through via cinema. It is this disconnect which runs throughout Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (released a year later than *The Godfather*), as Holly's romantic and self-consciously literary narration rubs up against the often pitiable reality of what is on screen.[8] It is this disconnect which runs through *Deliverance*, with its assault on romantic preconceptions of rural America. And it is this disconnect which informs Michael's trip to Sicily in *The Godfather*, as images of idyllic new beginnings are constantly interrupted by decidedly less appealing images of the American experience – not in theory, but in practice. The transitions between the three Sicily sequences and 'life back home' are almost didactic in the ethical and evaluative suggestions they make; Michael's romantically honourable wooing of Apollonia (Simonetta Stefanelli) on a sunlit country walk is shortly followed by Sonny's (James Caan) sordid pleasure-seeking in a seedy New York apartment block; from Michael's dreamlike wedding night consummation, we cut to Kay (Diane Keaton) alone in the rain, shut out of the Corleones' lives by a looming iron gate. (In his monograph on the film, Jon Lewis notes how the interiors evoke a 'comfort and safety' which are 'not found in the few scenes shot outdoors' (2010: 22), but his analysis does not take into account the Sicily scenes, where those qualities are exaggerated almost beyond plausibility.) Yet the two worlds are not kept entirely apart, and it is by adapting Leo Marx's central and most famous thesis – that the American pastoral has at its heart the motif of the beautiful and untouched landscape being rudely interrupted by technology – that the relationship between the two can best be understood. In *The Godfather*, Sicily is most definitely 'the garden', while the offending 'machine' is the car.

Marx explains the format of this trope:

> *The setting may be an island, or a hut beside a pond, or a raft floating down a river, or a secluded valley in the mountains, or a clearing between impenetrable*

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> *walls of forest, or the beached skeleton of a whale – but whatever the specific details, certain general features of the pattern recur too often to be fortuitous. Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape. ([1964] 1976: 29)*

This dynamic is, I suggest, adopted and adapted in, amongst other New Hollywood films, *The Godfather*. However, while Marx identifies in his selection of literary examples quite a clear sense of resentment towards the mechanical intrusions, *The Godfather* remains much more ambivalent.

Michael Corleone has taken his first substantial step towards a life of crime and has fled to Sicily, where he is in hiding. Our introduction to Sicily is prefigured by a number of short scenes which make clear the unpleasantness of the world he is leaving; a dying father, quarrelling in-laws and financial strain all take their toll on the gloomy Corleone household. As Don Vito (Marlon Brando) lies in his bed and closes his eyes, the image fades into one of pastoral beauty; the rolling hills of Sicily and the relaxed farmers tending their sheep are unambiguous signposts of a happier, simpler place. But the cross-fade from Don Vito's face also hints at a temporal shift, as if we might possibly be entering a memory of his – after all, the environment of this scene could plausibly be that of his youth, and would we not expect childhood memories to come to an old man lying sick in his bed? We have therefore entered a comprehensively pastoral mode, comprehensive in that it suggests both a better place and a better time, and makes the two almost indistinguishable. But having only just entered the garden, we are almost immediately introduced to the machine – a car pulls up beside Michael, and the driver warns him that it is unsafe to travel on foot. Michael is enjoying the beautiful landscape far too much to pay heed to the warning, and it is as if his trip to the town of Corleone would somehow lose its spiritual significance were it to be taken in a car. However, the distinction between Michael's state of pastoral reverie and the looming threat of cold reality, in the shape of the car, has been established.

Yet again, care must be taken not to talk in terms of symbolism. Judith Vogelsang (1973) has convincingly detailed how cars in *The Godfather* are an important motif detailing the gradual solidification of the Corleones' criminal business, and yet it would be misleading to suggest that in this sequence the car 'symbolizes' the inescapable life of sin which Michael is trying to flee. Instead, it

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acts as a quite literal burden to Michael, physically interrupting his enjoyment of the environment, reminding him of what he wants to forget, spoiling the dream which he is tantalizingly close to making his reality. Thus, when he begins to teach his new wife to drive, it is an ominous development, and as if to emphasize the sense of two disparate worlds cross-contaminating, the driving lesson doubles up as an English lesson. Another car arrives, and Don Tommasino (Michael's guardian in Sicily, played by Corrado Gaipa) gets out bearing the news of Sonny's murder, delivered just as Apollonia honks the horn impatiently – an incongruous sound in this environment at the best of times, and even more ugly and alien at a moment of deep sadness. In the following scene, as Michael is looking for Apollonia in order for them to move to a safer compound, he is told: 'she's going to surprise you. She wants to drive. She'll make a good American wife.' This bittersweet pronouncement is both undermined and confirmed when the car bomb detonates soon after; in taking the wheel of the car, Apollonia asserts her newly found bond with America, but instantly suffers the violence which is apparently intrinsic to such a pact. The pastoral idealism and romantic optimism is exploded and destroyed with such finality that no character in *The Godfather*, Michael included, ever speaks of these events. Here the machine does not accentuate the beautiful innocence of the environment as it does in so many of Marx's examples, but destroys it through the insistence of its materiality.

Figure 2.2 The machine in the garden: *The Godfather* (Paramount Pictures)

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It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that *The Godfather* posits the car bomb as a necessary evil, the jolt that is needed to reassert Michael's true situation. Terry Gifford describes the 'essential paradox of the pastoral' in the following terms: 'a retreat to a place without the anxieties of the town, or the court, or the present [which] actually delivers insights into the culture from which it originates' (1999: 82). *The Godfather* betrays a similar habit of utilizing the environment of the retreat for morally progressive ends, but at the same time refuses to allow 'the retreat' the credibility or power needed to 'deliver insights'. Instead, what we apprehend is the fateful inevitability of materiality in the face of the ideal. My analysis of *The Godfather* thus marks a subtle departure from the arguments of Jane Bennett, who would question the efficacy of situating materiality as an inert opposite to the pastoral. As discussed earlier, Bennett's emphasis is on the *active* potential of matter.

Philip Roth uses a remarkably similar dramatic effect in his novel *American Pastoral* (1998). Although by no means employing a conventional pastoral set-up (the title challenges the reader to find the pastoral within the story and the 'American' within the pastoral), the novel is, like *The Godfather,* interested in the fallout which occurs when abstract promises of opportunity, freedom and abundance fail to materialize. And Roth too introduces a bomb in order to explode the myth in the most tangible of ways. The novel's central character, Seymour Levov, has come as close as possible to embracing and realizing all the tenets of mainstream American idealism (ethnic assimilation, heroic athleticism, wealth through honest toil, a beloved homestead, a beautiful wife, etc.), and has done so assuming that the achievement of these goals should equate to some kind of immunity. Then Levov's daughter, Merry, explodes a bomb in protest against the war in Vietnam (and in protest at Levov's own, and his wife's, incessant success), killing an innocent man. Describing the nature of the chasm that separates Seymour and his wife from Merry, Debra Shostak explains that 'their devotion to a dream of materialism divorced from historical identity comes to seem to her the central empty promise of American culture' (2004: 103). Here materialism is not a state but a value system, and ultimately just as empty as the pastoral in *The Godfather*. Levov's subsequent sadness and incredulity are less about the tragedy itself than the fact that it happened in spite of his life-long effort to subscribe to all those ideals he thought Americans were supposed to subscribe to. Seymour's brother Jerry, frustrated with Seymour's obliviousness to the ugliness and violence of everyday America, announces with cruel triumphalism, 'the reality of this

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place is right up in your kisser now' (Roth 1998: 277). Trying to extract an explanation from Rita, a (possible) accomplice of Merry's, Seymour desperately asks, 'What is the aim of all this talk? Will you tell me?'.

> The aim? Sure. To introduce you to reality. That's the aim.
> And how much ruthlessness is necessary?
> To introduce you to reality? To get you to admire reality? To get you to partake of reality? To get you out there on the frontiers of reality? It ain't gonna be no picnic, jocko. (1998: 143–144)

In this spirit, and much like *The Godfather*, *American Pastoral* suggests that the violent reminder of life outside the dream could and should serve a purpose, alerting the dreamer in question that his delusions are not only susceptible to violence and catastrophe, but possibly culpable for it.

Returning to *The Godfather,* but moving beyond the pastoral, the famous appearance of the decapitated horse's head can be seen as a variation on the process described above; here abstract power is toppled by the horrendous intrusion of blood and flesh. *The Godfather Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) does not, I would argue, operate according to such violent interventions of the material. That is not to say it has abandoned the pastoral tropes exhibited in the first film, but it develops a far murkier relationship between ideals and tangible reality. Sicily, for example, is demoted from its position as paradisiacal dreamland, and violence is now presented as native to, rather than intruding on, its culture. And although Michael's urge to move away and begin afresh has not entirely disappeared, it has mutated into an unhappy compromise; the family has relocated to the apparently new pastures of Nevada, but has only sunk deeper into crime and corruption. The sharp distinctions drawn in the first film – between family and enemies, urban crime and rural innocence, romanticized past and inescapable present – have worn away in the second. In the wedding scene which opens *The Godfather*, Don Corleone is careful to cordon off his own criminal machinations from the joyous celebrations around him, and he deliberately sees to one before enjoying the other. In the equivalent celebrations in *Part II*, Michael's plotting with local politicians is inseparable from the party, as photo opportunities and political endorsements become part of the fabric of the event. Revisiting *The Godfather* in the light of its sequel helps illuminate just how concerned the original film is with borders and barriers, enclosures and demarcations, the establishment of different planes of existence.

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The same becomes apparent when reviewing *The Godfather* in light of Mario Puzo's original novel. To investigate all the fascinating shifts of emphasis from page to screen is not feasible here, but the differing treatment of Michael's trip to Sicily in the book and the film already reveals some important distinctions. Puzo does not, for example, have Michael suddenly appear in an other-worldly haven; we learn about his escape from New York and boat trip to Sicily, where – instead of absolving himself of his New York sins, as the film suggests – Michael learns the history and customs of Mafia culture and ponders the fate of his father's New York enterprise. In the novel, Sicily is less an escape from the New York underworld than an outpost of it, albeit one surrounded by beautiful scenery; we learn of Don Tommasino's criminal credentials and that Michael's shepherds-cum-guardians double up as hitmen – a quintessentially anti-pastoral detail! Perhaps most revealingly, the car bomb in the novel actually serves as the catalyst which allows Michael to return to New York (his enemies assume he died in the explosion); in the film, as described above, the bomb's effect derives from its utter finality. The cumulative picture that can be drawn from these comparisons with *The Godfather*'s two closest intertexts shows a film intent on distinguishing one world from another, and pitting them against each other. As discussed above, the impetus to structure a pastoral setting by way of material intrusion is one mapped out by Leo Marx, but diversions from Marx's formula are just as enlightening as adherence to it. For example, Marx returns again and again to the idea that American authors of the nineteenth century sought a middle landscape between the Edenic beauty of untouched America and the onward march of industrialization; as has been shown, *The Godfather* works against any such notions of compromise.

The impossibility of a middle landscape is perhaps most clearly spelled out in a sequence in *Badlands*, where an experiment in pastoral compromise irredeemably fails. A central scene in the film shows the fugitives, Kit (Martin Sheen) and Holly (Sissy Spacek), attempt to set up home in the woods. The presence of make-up, guns, radios and oil paintings in their sylvan retreat immediately establishes a tension between the couple's supposed desire to escape their previous lifestyle and their reluctance to do away with that lifestyle's materials. The film affirms this incompatibility when Kit fires a gun, prompting an onlooker to report their presence. (Ben McCann (2007: 85) has instead located the collapse of the idyll as the moment when Holly looks into the Stereopticon and wishes she was somewhere else. I would argue that this complicates the pastoralism without

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fundamentally undermining it.) After living happily amongst the trees with a variety of modern trappings, the gun, it seems, is one machine too far. There are obvious reasons why *Badlands* posits the gun as the limit, the point of no return for Kit and Holly's pastoral fantasies; it links back to their original crime of killing Holly's father and it amply fulfils Leo Marx's criteria for the machine as 'a sudden, shocking intruder'. Yet a closer look at the scene in question reveals the gunshot as an even more deliberate move against pastoral fantasy.

It is dusk, and Kit is wading in the river, fishing. We have already seen him fail miserably at this, and he is failing again. In the far distance a white truck drives past, and Kit looks up to follow it. It is more than a glance – he stands erect in order to see the van properly – but it is difficult to ascertain whether he is looking nervously (Kit is wanted for murder) or longingly. After one final attempt to catch a fish he sheepishly brings out his gun; the film cuts briefly to a distant onlooker, back to Kit shooting, and finally once more to the onlooker, who hastily walks away, presumably to report what he has seen. Kit has already displayed his willingness and ability to adapt to the woodland environment in a number of ways, so what prompts him to turn to the gun? Did the passing van remind him of the impossibility of a new start in a new world? After all their effort, he and Holly are barely a stone's throw from the nearest main road. 'Let's not kid ourselves', he could be thinking, 'I might as well just shoot'. This is the first fateful decision made in the scene; the second is on the part of the onlooker, who does nothing until he sees Kit shoot, at which point he decides that this stranger is definitely to be dealt with. It is not clear whether this man knows anything about Kit (or that there is a

Figure 2.3 The 'real' Kit: *Badlands* (Warner Bros.)

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murderer on the run) – from his perspective, the gunshot reveals Kit to be either an insensitive trespasser or a dangerous criminal. Both are accurate, and however much we might sympathize with his impatience, Kit's recourse to shooting is an assertion of his real character in the midst of pastoral delusions. It is this aspect of *Badlands* which establishes its surprising correspondence with *The Godfather*.

Conclusion

However sad the intrusion of the machine may be, in both *The Godfather* and *Badlands* it doubles up as a necessary evil. Ugly, dangerous and unwelcome on a dramatic and aesthetic level, the car and the gun also have about them something of the solid, inevitable and unavoidable: something of the material. The discussion may seem to have departed somewhat from this book's concern with environmentality, as car bombs and litter are being perversely described as carrying more ecocritical potential than the beautiful landscapes they disturb. Yet it is just such a perversion which helps to reveal ecocriticism as a supple and varied critical approach. The ecocritical logic applied to get to this point has been, I hope, clear. Taking as a starting point the enlightening critical exchange between Lawrence Buell and Dana Phillips on questions of mimesis and environmentality in literary depictions of nature, connections were drawn between the work of Siegfried Kracauer and Jane Bennett. Bennett's thoughts on the ecological importance of materiality, in politics as well as in textual representations, have a distinct affinity with Kracauer's film theory, and in particular his belief in cinema's ability to debunk abstract ideological notions in the face of their material contradiction. *Nashville* and *The Godfather* offer surprisingly rich examples of this productive friction. Both can be understood as national-commentary films, but ones complicated by certain materialist tendencies. In *The Godfather*, pastoralism emerges as the abstract ideological notion in question, and Leo Marx's machine-in-the-garden hypothesis helps to illuminate how American films in particular might go about exposing and demystifying it.

Of course there are voices within ecocriticism which would place far more faith in the progressiveness of the pastoral mode (Garrard 1996), and voices – Dana Phillips for example – who do not regard fidelity to the referent as an important ecocritical quality. The intent here has not been to locate the essential values of ecocriticism and apply them to New Hollywood, but to try to better

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understand an apparent conundrum, that many New Hollywood films seem to be at once rhetorically ambitious and determinedly low key. Ecocriticism helps us to appreciate this less as a contradiction than a kind of internal struggle, where a film's tendencies toward symbolism or abstraction are tempered and challenged by a reluctance (or inability) to let go of materiality in all its difficult and obstinate glory.

As with *The Godfather* and *Nashville*, many of the films that will be analysed in this book warrant attention precisely because they resist convenient allegorical interpretations. An intensified emphasis on materiality has, I hope, emerged as a vital characteristic of New Hollywood, at least in the range of films so far discussed. This remains crucial to the analysis in the following chapters, which will also begin to look beyond texts and textual details, and find different ways in which the distinctive environmentality of New Hollywood can be understood in the context of broader events and themes – in American cinema, American culture and the American environment. More so than in this chapter, following chapters will begin to position films within broader industrial, aesthetic and environmental phenomena, but in each case I still strive to offer some sense of how a particular film develops its own peculiar environmentality. To pose this as a question: How can we contextualize moments and passages of vivid materiality without blunting their power and their distinctiveness?

Notes

1. To mention Bazin risks confusing the notion of mimesis with 'realism', which would be misleading; one of the triumphs of Bazin's writing is the way it explores the relationship between these two ideas.
2. Brown has written a book about the role of the material object in American literary culture: *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2001). Unfortunately it does not include any reflections on the American flag, which is considered at length later in the present chapter.
3. The following year, the same publication, *Jump Cut,* published a piece which examined more closely those elements in *Nashville* which allow critics 'to say that Altman is making metaphors for America' (Feuer 1976: 31).
4. The heady mix of entertainment, community and violence has obvious affinities with the real-life events of December 1969 and the Rolling Stones' free concert at Altamont, during which one person was murdered and a further three people died.

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5. Jan Stuart documents the huge physical and logistical challenges faced by Altman and his crew for this scene in particular, in *The Nashville Chronicles* (2000: 257–272).
6. In July 2000, the magazine *Premiere* invited key members of the film's cast and crew to reunite for a commemorative photo-shoot and group interview. The resulting images, a series of glossy staged tableaux with Altman at the centre, provide a curious counterpoint to the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of the ensemble set-pieces in *Nashville* itself.
7. There is another concrete affinity between *The Godfather* and the details of the pastoral tradition, although it is probably coincidental: Gifford points out that the very origin of the pastoral, the *Idylls* of Theocritus, arose out of the Greek general (who was stationed abroad) writing series of poems based on shepherds' song competitions in his native Sicily (1999: 15).
8. It is significant that, in *The New World* (2005), Malick went on to produce one of the purest expressions of American pastoral rapture in cinema.

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CHAPTER THREE

Rooting in and Lighting out

New Hollywood and Genre

The notion that Vietnam could be lost, a view that haunted presidents from Kennedy to Nixon, suggests a worldview that has not fully considered the distinction between John Ford's Southwest and Ho Chi Minh's Hanoi.

Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History*

The best way to get away from where you are is to root right in.

Prospector (Dean Jagger) in *Vanishing Point*

Even if, as I argued in Chapter Two, *Nashville* includes within it some distinctly materialist challenges to classical models of diegesis and agency, this should not distract us from the film's status as a musical, and the fact that it also operates – knowingly – according to generic coordinates. When Sueleen Gay (Gwen Welles) is forced to resign her ambitions as a singer, in the face of male pressure to perform a striptease, it is hard not to register the parallels with the duress under which Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) is placed towards the end of *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952), when she is forced to sing from behind the curtain. (The crucial difference is, of course, that Sueleen is not triumphantly 'reclaimed' after all.) As Richard Maltby notes disapprovingly, the 1970s 'is the first decade in which film criticism can be said to have had a significant influence on Hollywood production' (1983: 314). The distinction between respectful allusion and parody is, in films of this period, often unclear. David A. Cook suggests that, while 'early Hollywood Renaissance' directors (such as Peckinpah and Kubrick) 'experimented *within* classical genres[, ...] Altman, Bogdanovich and others were interested in revising, "correcting" and/or deconstructing them' (2000: 159, emphasis in the original). Regardless of the motivation behind such

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developments, the move towards a knowing manipulation of genres was prevalent, and for Leo Braudy, such an approach is tantamount to crossing an aesthetic Rubicon; referring in particular to works of the New Hollywood period, he asks, 'what happens to genre films after they attempt to include the theme of their own nature?' ([1976] 2002: 169).

For some, interested in the fate of genre as a social phenomenon, this was part of a broad cultural restructuring. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, for example, describe this intense generic self-awareness as something like a 'fall out' from contemporary ideological ruptures, suggesting that 'the close tie between genre films and social ideology means [...] that genre films are among the most fragile forms, the most vulnerable to effects of social change' (1990: 76). For Thomas Schatz (1983), the opaqueness of New Hollywood genre films dealt a death blow to genre's ritualistic function. Others have dwelt more on the (generally corrosive) effect of generic reflexivity on dramatic and aesthetic designs. In his far-ranging critique of American cinema of the time, Robert B. Ray suggests that, 'while the traditional stories, heroes, and genres persisted, the movies subjected these thematic conventions to increasingly heavy doses of irony, parody and camp' (1985: 256). 'Between 1966 and 1980,' he continues, 'an enormous number of films depended on their audiences' ability to recognize them as overt parodies' (1985: 257), a situation Ray sees as symptomatic of New Hollywood's 'schizophrenic alternation between a developing irony and a reactionary nostalgia' (1985: 261). One of the strengths of Ray's argument is that he offers a convincing media-historical context for these shifts, particularly in terms of the influence of televised Hollywood classics. Noël Carroll (1982), writing more generally about post-classical Hollywood, presents a slightly different historical case, explaining the growing trend of allusion in relation to – amongst other things – the prominence of auteurism and the rise of academically trained directors. Carroll writes: 'The game of allusion could begin; the senders and receivers were in place; the necessary conditions for allusionistic interplay were satisfied' (1982: 55).

From the varying examples and approaches on display here, a composite image of New Hollywood emerges, whereby the notion of genre is at once hugely important and somewhat under threat, as if intense generic reflection prohibited genre from functioning as it 'should'. (It is perhaps important to note how such a narrative paves the way for the re-affirmation of genre in post-*Jaws* Hollywood.) Evidence for this ranges from the theoretically advanced (Jameson 1991: 67) to the cursory and anecdotal (Robert Altman's filmography from the

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early 1970s certainly appears to suggest a sustained and systematic engagement with American film genres). But what can ecocriticism bring to this narrative? Firstly, it can help to identify the environmental and materialist implications of generic revisionism, a phenomenon which might have been assumed to be purely discursive. Secondly, ecocriticism can draw attention to new and emerging genres which perhaps require a heightened attention to environmentality in order to identify their coherence as a body of work.

This calls for two different models of genre study. The first emphasizes a genre's fluid and flexible status: its susceptibility and relation to factors beyond the text. The second prioritizes detailed textual study as a means of identifying the common traits within a particular corpus of films. Firstly, I will discuss the historicized fate of a pre-existing genre, the Vietnamization of the western, and then turn to a group of New Hollywood films whose strong generic relationship to one another – as 'fugitive films' – is yet to be properly recognized. The western's famous unmistakability makes it an excellent case study for generic revisions and transitions, and while Steve Neale (2000: 133) has warned of its potential for distorting our understanding of genres in general, the western's ever-present natural imagery and apparent ideological adaptability (French 1977: 24) make it a vital subject for a study such as this. The fugitive film warrants attention for quite different reasons. Firstly, the genre's lack of substantial prehistory, at least in comparison to the western, is itself an important reminder that New Hollywood filmmakers were not solely focused on the revival of past forms. And more importantly, its centrality to New Hollywood is strangely overlooked. Arthur Penn, Sam Peckinpah, Terrence Malick, Robert Altman, Steven Spielberg and Sidney Lumet all contributed to the cycle, and one might even include *Easy Rider, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* in this group too. Writing about the political implications of cinematic space in New Hollywood, Mark Shiel (2007: 92) argues that *Easy Rider* 'exemplified the assertive countercultural conception of space of the day'. When we consider that, for many commentators, it was *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider* that 'kicked off' or set the tone for New Hollywood, the importance of the fugitive film comes sharply into focus.

There are, then, solid historical and critical reasons for the study of both westerns and fugitive films, but the gulf between the two – especially with regard to genre theory – cannot be overlooked. To analyse, consecutively, the Vietnamized western (or the Vietnamization of the western) and the fugitive film demands a certain degree of flexibility in terms of how we choose to understand genre. On

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the one hand is a historically specific (and academically sanctified) subset of a genre that has been recognized and recycled in the broadest possible terms (as myth and as national narrative), and on the other, a group of films which have tended to be subsumed into other categories (the gangster film, the road movie) but which seem to display a considerable number of common traits. If these differences cannot be successfully reconciled, they can at least be placed in some context.

Different Genres, Different Approaches to Genre

'Vietnamization' was the name given to President Nixon's policy, begun in the late 1960s, of increasing military support for South Vietnamese troops at the same time as reducing US troops. It describes an attempt to yield initiative and responsibility. I use the idea of the 'Vietnamization of the western' to describe the complex influence that this war had on the western genre, a shift which might also have involved – as will be described – a transition of initiative, responsibility and agency. The idea of the Vietnamized western brings with it assumptions of a relatively stable generic structure which has been honed and focused by contemporary events, or even one which has suffered contamination or irreversible transformation. With Vietnamized westerns, then, attention turns towards the nature of such honing and transformation, its textual and contextual features. The fugitive film, on the other hand, is not widely recognized as a genre and so demands more of an attempt to define its core characteristics, in turn raising the difficult question of whether common textual features are enough to constitute a genre. A good place to begin outlining this distinction in a more theoretical sense is with Steve Neale's 'Questions of Genre' (2003), in which the author suggests some differences between his own ideal for genre study and that of Rick Altman, differences which will broadly shape the present chapter. 'Genres do not only consist of films', Neale contends, but also 'specific systems of expectation and hypothesis' (2003: 161) which must be traced to 'industrial and journalistic discourse' (2003: 164). He also argues for a thoroughly historicized appreciation of genre and its 'mutability' (2003: 169): 'For Altman, the role of industrial and journalistic terms is crucial in establishing the presence of generic consistencies but of limited use in defining them' (2003: 164). What Altman sees as an important stepping stone, Neale takes to be the object of study. For Altman, film genres are

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contextualized by important social, historical and industrial discourse, whereas for Neale such factors – what he calls 'intertextual relay' (2003: 167) – *are* genres. But how do these different approaches relate to the task at hand, and what properties of theirs lend themselves to studying the fugitive film and the Vietnamized western?

There would be little point in trying to summarize or condense Steve Neale's substantial body of writing on genre into a succinct synopsis, but certain contentions recur consistently and are especially appropriate to a study of the Vietnamization of the western. The first is the notion of genre as process; not an organic life cycle so much as an ever-shifting set of parameters. As Neale describes, 'the repertoire of generic conventions available at any one point in time is always *in* play rather than simply being *re*-played' (2003: 219, emphasis in the original). Related to this is his critique of genre theory (that of Thomas Schatz in particular) that posits variation and change as little more than 'additional extras, inessential options' (2003: 211). As Neale sees it, for the very reason that there is no original, seminal moment in any genre's history which determines its essential characteristics, change is *anything but* a deviation; it is the very being of genre. This in turn links back to Neale's conception of genres as 'specific systems of expectation and hypothesis' (2000: 31), as phenomena which consist of much more than films. According to this approach, industrial, social, aesthetic and journalistic discourse, or 'intertextual relay', all contribute to (rather than simply contextualize) a genre. And – crucially for any study of the Vietnamization of the western – history is never far away; the 'impact of the "real world" is necessarily continuous', writes Neale. 'Its influence can be detected even where genres themselves are at their most self-consciously self-referential' (2003: 213). As has been discussed, New Hollywood is widely thought to have been just such a time.

Neale urges us to interrogate genres as ever-morphing constellations, and my interpretation of Vietnamized westerns strives to do just that. Almost by definition, it assumes the instability of the western. It also assumes the potential impact of contemporary history on film genres and strives to locate that impact in circulating discourse as well as the films themselves. However, it deviates from Neale's notion of genre in one important respect. Vietnamization, as I understand, was not just another politically inspired 'update' of the western, but a process in which the strong emphasis on material environments posed a fundamental challenge to the genre. This challenge, I argue, cannot be characterized as merely reflexive

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game-playing, but rather a re-examination – stimulated by the war in Vietnam – of some of the western's core environmental preconceptions.

In 'Questions of Genre', Neale asks that a distinction be made 'between those studies of genres conceived as institutionalized classes of texts and systems of expectation and those studies that use critically or theoretically constructed terms as the basis for discussing classes of films' (2003: 167). If my analysis of Vietnamized westerns answers to the former description, then my analysis of the fugitive film answers to the latter – an approach more in keeping with the work of Rick Altman than Neale. Altman's most influential contribution to genre studies is his 'semantic/syntactic' approach, a method of analysis which pays equal (and simultaneous) attention to the building-block details of a genre (such as its iconographic elements) and the structures into which such details are placed. Since Altman introduced this model in 1984, he has built on it, critiqued it and altered it, most significantly by arguing for a third – 'pragmatic' – strand (1999: 207–213). The following analysis of the fugitive film will not attempt to follow the linguistic model developed by Altman (or even attempt to apply his hypothesis of how genres emerge), but will rather follow his lead in examining both the broad strokes and the specific nuances of films in order to ascertain how and why a corpus of works warrants attention as a corpus. Detailing his interest in the importance of industrial discourse as a means rather than an end (referring here specifically to the musical, but as a 'lesson' for genre studies in general), Altman writes: 'Far from seeking to explain the genre or its texts, far from creating a vocabulary appropriate both to systematic and historical analysis, Hollywood's version of the musical serves only to locate the genre, rather than provide a method of dealing with its functioning' (1989: 13).

This study of the fugitive film does not attempt to follow the vast and thorough methodology spelled out by Altman in *The American Film Musical* (1989) but does focus on the shared affinities between a preselected corpus. In this sense, the study has certain methodological similarities with Stanley Cavell's two genre-focused works, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (1996) and *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981). In each, Cavell interrogates the significant correspondences between a relatively small group of films produced in a relatively distinct time period. He explains his understanding of genre not with recourse to the kind of industrial and discursive influences which hold sway in much genre theory – significantly, Cavell classifies a genre's 'fortunes in the rest of the world' as its 'posthistory'

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(1981: 28) – but instead describes an expressive and philosophical framework which crystallizes at a particular place and (especially) time: 'it has no history, only a birth' (1981: 28). There is much in Cavell and Rick Altman which is deeply incompatible, but what distinguishes them both from Neale's work on genre – namely, their ultimate focus on a corpus of films – is what shapes the following discussion of the fugitive film, and my attempt to, in Altman's words, 'deal with its functioning'. The functioning of both genres in question can, it seems to me, be more fully understood by asking of them important ecocritical questions regarding characters' relationships with the world in which they live and how individual films foreground and thematize that relationship.

The Vietnamization of the Western

In his review of *The Wild Bunch* in *The Village Voice*, Andrew Sarris (1971) complained of 'those who choose to mimic [Norman] Mailer's insight as to why we are in Vietnam with every two-bit, two-gun epic that comes out of Hollywood' (1971: 448). There is some ambiguity in Sarris's statement about whether he is referring to those producing films, or those interpreting and reviewing them. This ambiguity begins to suggest the complexity inherent in the Vietnamization of the western; where it comes from, what dictates or defines it and what its implications are for the genre. Chroniclers of the western, as well as historians of New Hollywood, invariably stress the profound effect of the Vietnam War on the fate of the genre, as manifested in films such as *The Wild Bunch, Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (Abraham Polonsky, 1969), *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970), *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970), *Ulzana's Raid* (Robert Aldrich, 1972) and *Bad Company* (Robert Benton, 1972). Even if one accepts that the western has a history of shaping itself according to contemporary social concerns, the repercussions for the genre of the USA's disastrous campaign in southeast Asia were considerable – and, for some, terminal. Before investigating the environmental implications of such repercussions, I will discuss some of the ways in which the war is thought to have affected the western, so often seen as the genre most closely aligned with notions of national character and historical progress.

In *The Crowded Prairie* (1998), Michael Coyne follows the western from 1939 to the late 1970s, tracing the genre's changing interpretations and reflections of US American national identity and concluding that Vietnam effectively terminated

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its life cycle. At times, Coyne seems to conceive of Vietnamization as a transitional process, as when he describes how, in response to escalating US involvement in Asia, westerns in the 1960s moved away from town settings towards frontier situations and cavalry sagas (1998: 126). Towards the book's end, however, it becomes clear that Vietnamization, as far as Coyne is concerned, transformed the western irreversibly. 'Vietnam has killed the western twice', he argues (1998: 191), firstly by bringing into question the value system of the genre, and secondly by replacing one nation-changing historical moment with another. The first of these is what is meant by 'Vietnamization'; the war, according to Coyne, 'made mockery of long-cherished national concepts of invincibility and righteousness, and the Western was a casualty of the accompanying fallout' (1998: 189). Although Coyne cites specific examples of films deliberately (if obliquely) raising the spectre of Vietnam, he is perhaps more interested in the large-scale undermining of a whole mythic formula, or what Gilbert Adair describes as its annexation (1981: 10).

Stanley Corkin instead identifies a 'shift in emphasis' (2004: 206), and suggests that westerns from the early 1960s displayed a move away from 'the triumphalist narrative of nation that had marked the genre since its inception' (2004: 211), thus implying that the genre could accommodate such transmutations. However, in a significant twist, Corkin also characterizes the genre as a contributing factor to the USA's woeful miscalculations in foreign policy, suggesting that 'the very notion of a New Frontier was at the core of Kennedy's and Johnson's ruinous Vietnam policies' (2004: 247). This idea of a two-way relationship between the war and the genre is also discussed by J. Hoberman, in a piece revealingly entitled 'How the Western Was Lost', who describes it as an 'irresistible' metaphor, noting how the western profoundly influenced the language, preconceptions and actions of US soldiers abroad (1998: 88). Hoberman also, in another context, describes films such as *Little Big Man* and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* as 'the equivalent of marching for peace beneath a Viet Cong flag' (2003: 265), emphasizing their deliberate editorializing; in this sense, these westerns were not overshadowed by Vietnam so much as directly mobilized by Vietnam.

Richard Slotkin suggests yet another (subtle) variation on Vietnamization when he observes that a spate of 'Mexico westerns' from 1969, although produced prior to revelations about the My Lai massacre, were 'being assimilated' in American cinemas just as those revelations were surfacing (1992: 591). Rather than describing a loss of credibility on the part of the genre as a whole (like Coyne), focusing on thematic changes within westerns (like Corkin) or even

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giving a direct commentary (like Hoberman), Slotkin here locates Vietnamization as a shift in the arena of reception; audiences coming to terms with US war crimes necessarily interpreted westerns in the light of such injustices. Paul Kerr, in an article called 'The Vietnam Subtext' (1980), warns against exaggerating the ability of contemporary audiences to concoct such interpretations. Focusing on a scene in *The Missouri Breaks* (Arthur Penn, 1976) in which a shack is firebombed, he is doubtful that viewers would draw any direct links with comparable attacks by US forces in Vietnam, partly because television cameramen during the war had so little access to such actions. Kerr suggests that 'one clearly cannot argue against the possibility of unconscious connotation; it remains a possibility though not, I suspect, very high in the connotative lexicons of Brando, Nicholson, Western, Penn or McGuane fans' (1980: 71).

Kerr aside, there is substantial overlap between these positions, but their subtle differences give some sense of the complexity of Vietnamization. The following analysis does not set out to prove or disprove any of these approaches. Instead, it focuses on the specifically environmental implications of Vietnamization, a process which, I will argue, shifted the genre's relationship with, and conception of, the material environment. I will propose two shifts signalled by Vietnamization, transmutations of established western conventions which significantly change what the western 'does' and how it does it: the successful conquest of the environment is no longer predestined; place is no longer mythical or abstract. These are two of potentially many more such shifts, not all of which would offer such immediate ecocritical interest. What I hope to suggest by investigating them is that Vietnamization is a far more substantial process than a contemporary glossing (affecting, in Altman's terms, not just the semantics but the syntax too), and that it affects the genre in more specific ways than is sometimes suggested by references to a loss of innocence or a reigning cynicism. The Vietnamization of the western, I argue, can be understood as an ecocritical effect.

The Successful Conquest of the Environment Is No Longer Predestined

According to most accounts of Vietnamization, those aspects of the war which 'came back to haunt' the western were racial prejudice, delusions of superiority, the folly of invasion and – in the case of My Lai especially – horrific and indiscriminate violence. Without bringing into question the significance and tragedy of these, it is important to remember that this by no means stands as the whole

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picture of US involvement in Vietnam. One missing link, which this chapter takes to be of particular importance, is the topographical and environmental havoc wreaked by the war. (In *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008), a surprisingly bitter satire of the Hollywood Vietnam film, Danny McBride plays Cody, a chauvinistic and testosterone-fuelled special effects coordinator who takes inordinate pleasure in wreaking havoc on the Vietnamese rural countryside. 'I'm trying to put tiger balm on this jungle's nuts', he says before dropping a huge amount of explosives on the location, and engulfing the ground and trees in flames. Cody is ecstatic with the results: 'Mother Nature just pissed her pants', he crows.) Throughout the conflict, vast quantities of herbicides, such as Agent Orange, were sprayed on crops and other plants in an effort to destroy native food supplies and maximize visibility for aerial observation and attack. A 1976 study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Ecological Consequences of the Second Indochina War*, traces in meticulous detail the environmental impact of US tactics in Vietnam (described in the introduction as 'inescapably anti-ecological' (1976: 10)). Much of this was the result of specific policies – such as the use of anti-plant chemicals and mechanized land clearing – while some was the tragic by-product of military actions, referred to in the study as 'the ecology of disturbance' (1976: 63). 'Chemical anti-plant warfare,' it concludes, 'although not an innovation of the Second Indochina War, was during this conflict employed at such a profligate level that its use has become inseparably associated with it' (1976: 40).

Partly in an effort to limit American casualties, the war was waged largely from above, and in the absence of a credible ground-war strategy, an incredible volume of bombs was dropped on rural Vietnam. In *The Eco Wars* (1989), David Day gives a brief glimpse into the mindset of US forces: 'Entire forests came under "suspicion" as wilful collaborators, and were consequently firebombed and pulverized into swamplands. As one American general pointed out with almost unbelievable understatement in the midst of the Vietnam campaign: "Soldiers can't be expected to be conservationists"' (1989: 132). In *Dispatches* (1978), one of the most celebrated of all Vietnam accounts, Michael Herr describes a similar animosity, albeit one prompted by understandable fear and fatigue:

> *Flying over jungle was almost pure pleasure, doing it on foot was nearly all pain. I never belonged in there. Maybe it really was what its people had always called it, Beyond; at the very least it was serious, I gave up things to it I probably never*

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> *got back. ('Aw, jungle's okay. If you know her you can live in her real good, if you don't she'll take you down in an hour. Under.') Once in some thick jungle corner with some grunts standing around, a correspondent said, 'Gee, you must really see some beautiful sunsets in here,' and they almost pissed themselves laughing. (Herr 1978: 10–11)*

The Vietnam War was in no small part an exercise in ecological devastation, and an environmentally traumatic experience, as well as a display of misguided hubris or racial prejudice. (The ironic corollary of ecocidal military tactics is, of course, the acknowledgement of the profound importance of the natural environment to a society.) If the western genre began to shoulder the burden of Vietnam as an inescapable reference point, then its own rich and complicated environmental identity must surely have undergone significant challenge and revision.

The western's environmental character has inevitably attracted ecocritical attention. Deborah A. Carmichael's *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns* (2006) was one of the first collections of ecocritical film studies and brings together a number of approaches to the question of environmentality in the genre, including studies of politically environmentalist films, landscape discourse, auteurs and film technology. In her introduction, Carmichael suggests that because 'the human response to nature sets up the conflicts of this genre [...] landscape and environment establish the parameters of possible exploitation or enjoyment of the American inheritance of land. Turner understood the importance of land and boundaries in national development, and Western films return to these themes' (2006: 4). The Vietnamized western, I believe, disrupts this connection between the western's environmental setting and themes of national development. In such analyses, Turner's 'frontier thesis' is often invoked to legitimize the link, but perhaps Turner's thesis leads down an interpretive cul-de-sac where the natural world, in westerns, always has something of a meta-historical significance, rather than a powerful material agency, or even a contemporary urgency. New Hollywood westerns, whether produced as or interpreted as films about Vietnam, tended towards a geographical specificity not normally associated with the genre, and while this may have dulled their ability to construct elegant national narratives in the tradition of John Ford, it also subjected the genre to a provocative ecocritical interrogation.

There is not sufficient space here to comprehensively describe, even if it were possible, the genre's 'conventional' attitude to the natural environment.

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Carmichael's collection, like Murray and Heumann's more recent *Gunfight at the Eco-Coral* (2012), wisely avoids this by attending to a series of thoroughly historicized case studies. However, despite warnings that one film cannot make up a genre, I will examine some of the environmental values and politics at play in *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953), a film which John Saunders (2001) also uses as a focus for genre analysis; he describes it as a film 'which sets out to distil' the 'elusive essence' of the genre (2001: 13).[1] In this distillation, the genre's celebration of America's rugged vastness retains a prominent role, and – as is so often the case with westerns – the environment is simultaneously a theatrical setting and an active player in the film's narrative; the plot of *Shane* is based upon a conflict between hardworking homesteaders and a ruthless cattle baron. The question, then, is not so much whether the natural environment is significant in *Shane* (or whether the environment is significant in the western, according to *Shane*), but rather, what kind of relationship does *Shane* develop between its story, its characters and their environment?

Murray and Heumann position *Shane* according to an ongoing environmentalist debate in the genre, between free-range and fenced farming; as the authors show, these are not metaphorical concepts, but very 'real' subjects for the western (2012: 39–44). I would instead like to look at the opening scene, in which the film establishes some essential coordinates of its environmental sensibility, before 'environmental issues' enter the film's discourse. Shane (Alan Ladd) has been welcomed into the Starrett household and, following a hearty supper, shows his gratitude by (spontaneously) going outside to chop away at the huge tree stump that Joe Starrett (Van Heflin) was labouring at when Shane arrived. Joe soon joins him, and together they succeed. That the two men solidify their friendship in this manner suggests on the part of *Shane* a quickness to understand the natural world as symbolic, separate and conquerable. The allegorical appropriateness of the stump (a longstanding problem for Joe which Shane willingly helps him overcome) is precise; falling within the carefully delineated boundaries of the well-kept garden, the stump's rugged resilience marks it as alien, other; the overcoming of the stump is both progressive and inevitable. Each of these points is further exemplified by discussions later on in the film, regarding the homesteaders' claims on the land. As Joe delivers the rhetorical set piece of the film ('God didn't make all this country for just one man...'), the right to own land is raised to the level of divine entitlement, and the environment's preciousness is articulated in thoroughly anthropocentric terms. Although the land has an immediate

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Figure 3.1 Symbolically conquering the environment: *Shane* (Paramount Pictures)

and vital importance for the various homesteaders, these are not the grounds on which Joe convinces them to stay. For the homesteaders, for *Shane*, and to no small extent for the western as a genre, the land generates its importance from what it stands for and is meaningful to the extent that it can be overcome. As is exemplified in the stump-chopping episode, this overcoming is in play, but rarely in doubt.

In films such as *Jeremiah Johnson* (Sydney Pollack, 1972), *Ulzana's Raid*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Robert Altman, 1971) and *The Wild Bunch,* such an overcoming is perpetually in doubt. If the western presupposes man's inevitable (and desirable) conquest of his environment, these films cloud the issue with doubt, and no small amount of confusion. They are, at least in part, about the impossibility of any such conquest, and the foolishness of imagining it in the first place – an interpretation which might also double up as a verdict on US involvement in Vietnam. *Jeremiah Johnson* is centred on one man, Johnson (Robert Redford), who is determined to embed himself in the environment of the American West, learning to be self-sufficient, and also learning the perilous cost of ignoring the customs and conventions of local inhabitants. The violence inflicted on him (Johnson's wife and adopted child are murdered) is the direct result of geographical hubris; Johnson reluctantly leads the cavalry through a valley he knows to be held sacred. It is significant that he is forced into such a transgression by

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the insistence of US Cavalry troops, whose insensitivity to, and ignorance of, the region force Johnson's hand (and steer our sympathy away from them). This staging of military presence as an environmental disruption is also at the heart of *Ulzana's Raid*, in which US Army Scout MacIntosh (Burt Lancaster) accompanies a fresh-faced and naïve Lieutenant (Bruce Davison) in pursuit of an Apache war party, a mission on which they are constantly outwitted. Their tactical shortcomings invariably reveal their relative ignorance of the environment, and so automatically bring into question the Army's right to be there. MacIntosh repeatedly criticizes the Lieutenant's moralizing and double standards and his belief in the Army's divine right to control the territory and impose its own, hypocritical moral code. 'Ain't no sense hating the Apaches for killing', argues MacIntosh. 'That would be like hating the desert 'cause there ain't no water on it.'

One of the central texts of ecocriticism, as both a manifesto and an object of textual study, is Aldo Leopold's 'The Land Ethic', which appears in *A Sand County Almanac* ([1949] 1987). In it, Leopold argues for an expanded sense of moral responsibility, one which includes the biotic as well as the human community. It would be something of a stretch to claim that New Hollywood westerns expressed a principled environmentalism along the lines of Leopold, but aspects of his philosophy nevertheless find some sort of reflection in the Vietnamization of the genre. A land ethic, writes Leopold, 'changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community of such' ([1949] 1987: 204). Films contemplating the failure of environmental conquest, and more specifically those films critiquing the very attempt at such a conquest, play out this distinction between conqueror and member, and almost by default endorse a position similar to Leopold's. The much-discussed elegiac quality of New Hollywood westerns, featuring jaded cowboys or servicemen who have seen better days, might thus be reinterpreted as a shift from conquest to membership. It is a painful but progressive shift, embodied by heroes such as Jeremiah Johnson and MacIntosh.

Jeremiah Johnson and *Ulzana's Raid* critique the genre's presumption of (or fascination with) environmental mastery by offering a profoundly sympathetic view of characters who concede the impossibility of such mastery. *The Wild Bunch* – one of the Mexico westerns that Slotkin positions in relation to the My Lai massacre – takes a different tack, presenting few wholly sympathetic people, but blurring the distinctions between 'civilization' and 'wilderness' to such an

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extent that any notion of mastery breaks down completely. In Peckinpah's earlier film, *Ride the High Country* (1962), as two ageing cowboys – Gil (Randolph Scott) and Judd (Joel McCrea) – are riding together, Gil observes that they have arrived at 'a beauty spot of nature'. 'We didn't come here to admire the scenery', replies Judd. This gentle joke would not make much sense in *The Wild Bunch*, where scenery barely seems like a credible concept any more. In *Ride the High Country*, *Shane* and many classical westerns, the civilized home is fundamentally distinct from its surroundings. Windows and thresholds take on considerable significance precisely because they negotiate separate phenomena; whatever exists outside is – almost automatically – a threat. *Shane*, a meticulously framed film, offers countless examples of this, as when Shane first sees Marian (Jean Arthur) through her kitchen window; and in *Ride the High Country*, the villainy of the Hammond gang is demonstrated by their effrontery in occupying the Knudsen homestead and firing from its windows and doors. This is another effective moment which, significantly, would make no sense in *The Wild Bunch*, where wandering and dwelling, wilderness and hearth, invariably blur.

When, for example, Pike's (William Holden) gang visit Angel's (Jaime Sanchez) village in Mexico, the scene begins with a famished dog scrounging amongst what look like ruins; has the gang arrived at a 'place', or are they still traversing the landscape? A dissolve then takes us to the village scene proper, but still the boundaries are barely distinguishable. Women wash and cook, surrounded by children, but they are outside, with kitchen shelves mounted incongruously on an outdoor wall. Pike and the Gorch brothers (Warren Oates and Ben Johnson) are warmly welcomed, but the hospitality is conducted outdoors. If the inevitable convergence of mankind and nature is here at its most idyllic, the film's climax shows that idyll's horrific inverse. Once again, the gang descend on a dwelling whose perimeters are mere gestures, but now hospitality is replaced by, at first, suspicion, then brutal slaughter (Angel's throat is cut), and finally mechanized carnage. By refusing to confine security and violence to their normal generic locations, *The Wild Bunch* makes a mockery of the idea that westerners might ever hope to (or even want to) overcome their surroundings. American soldiers in Vietnam faced the bewildering task of identifying threats and opportunities in an unfamiliar and daunting territory, and the depiction of an environment which bleeds between normally distinguishable spaces should be considered an important, if subtle, feature of the Vietnamization of the western. Conquest is not only unlikely, but inconceivable.

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Figure 3.2 Indeterminate boundaries: *The Wild Bunch* (Warner Bros. / Seven Arts)

Place Is No Longer Mythical or Abstract

In *Geographic Perspectives on America's Past* (1979), David Ward writes of the tradition in American culture for developing a relationship with nature characterized by unhelpful extremes, such as fear and awe, and invariably based upon nationalistic ideology first and topographical realities second. Ward's critique is concerned not so much with environmental ethics as with questions of scale and nuance. He explains:

> *National aspirations or ideologies prevalent at a particular time affect the images or interpretive schemes which express the American identity in terms of large scale perspectives on environment and landscape. These images and schema rarely reveal the ambiguities and conflicts which are also apparent in the American scene, nor do they define environments or localities on a scale appropriate to the evaluation of human responses to new surroundings. (1979: 15)*

Vietnamized westerns were – I will argue, *pace* Ward – relatively alive to the 'ambiguities and conflicts' inherent in navigating a difficult environment, altering their scale by generating a more immediate and localized frame of reference. Because, to adopt Ward's phraseology, the 'ideologies prevalent' in New Hollywood were generally critical of US intervention in Vietnam, they were also critical of the traditionally unambiguous 'images and schema' which underpinned such intervention. In other words, the Vietnamization of the western attempted to correct the environmental and geographical generalizations Ward takes to task. In Andrew

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Sarris's review of *The Wild Bunch*, quoted above, he says of the opening sequence that 'the obvious parallel with Vietnam is clouded by the subtler ambiguities that creep into any violent confrontation' (1971: 450). I will suggest that the Vietnam parallel is not only effective as a like-for-like comparison, dependent on the articulation of a crystal-clear political message, but that it carries a demystifying and particularizing power which seriously destabilizes the western's traditional use of space and place. For, as Andrew Britton explains, the western is not accustomed to particularity and specificity: 'the ideological conflicts and tensions embodied in the genre [...] do not correspond to real historical conflicts, but there is, nevertheless, a nonsymmetrical fit between them such that the development of the one may conduce dangerously to the appearance of certain elements of the other' ([1981] 2008: 88). I understand the Vietnamization of the western to be an example of this potentially destabilizing alignment, and one in which the 'certain elements' (to which Britton alludes) that become too closely correspondent are best understood ecocritically.

'Places in movies', writes Joseph W. Reed, 'are located in our cosmos or in the cosmos of the movie – or else in a blend of the two. For instance, when John Ford moves the cavalry or the stagecoach or the wagon train round and round in Monument Valley it is not moving through Arizona, nor does he want us to think of it there' (1989: 95). As Reed reminds us here, the western has a strange relationship with place. It is both defined by location and reluctant to be restricted to geographic particularities, endlessly fascinated by the dynamics of West–East clashes but largely ambivalent about distinctions *within* the West. Vietnamization, perhaps unsurprisingly, makes this relationship even stranger. On the one hand adding another layer of confusion about the setting of the film, Vietnamization simultaneously has a clarifying, solidifying effect; it urges us to interpret the action as happening in a verifiable place, rather than on a mythological plane. If the traditional western and its locations could be seen as providing metaphors for America at large, what happens when that side of the metaphorical equation is replaced by a specific contemporary circumstance? The particularity of the Vietnam situation doubles back, and westerns are subsequently more particular about their explicit subject matter too. So, when connections are drawn between the massacres depicted in westerns such as *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* and comparable US atrocities in Vietnam, the impact is not one-way. The historical tragedy is particularized: the massacres are instigated and suffered by individual people in historically actual places – the

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western can no longer operate according to the broad historical strokes that were most natural to it.

In January 1970, the *Calgary Herald* ran a piece assessing the political pertinence of *Soldier Blue*. It begins as follows: 'And what has the US Cavalry vs. Indians tale of Joseph E. Levine's presentation of *Soldier Blue* to do with the age of Aquarius? "A helluva lot," says the star of the film, newcomer Peter Strauss, "since it's about youth, love, minorities and un-just war"' ('Star Says Film Still Pertinent', 10 January 1970: 56). Molly Plowright of the *Glasgow Herald* concurred, describing how the film's controversially violent climax 'expresses in an appalling, blood-soaked climax what so many feel about Vietnam' (1971: 8).[2] *Soldier Blue* follows the story of the passionate and worldly-wise Cresta (Candice Bergen) as she educates the naïve and hapless Honus (Peter Strauss). Honus, who begins as a proud and patriotic soldier, is an embodiment of all that is ignorant and simplistic in the western, and he is gradually convinced of the depravity inherent in the code he once swore by. Honus's lesson is at the same time a lesson for the western, and thus a lesson for the audience of the western, addressing their generically grounded assumptions and prejudices. The western, in the guise of Honus, is contained within *Soldier Blue*, and is forced to come to terms with a humbling material reality.

The climax of this process, singled out by Plowright and many other reviewers, takes the form of a massacre that not only strives for graphic reality in its depiction of horrifying violence, but is itself based on an actual historic episode, the infamous Sand Creek massacre of 1864. The whole film is punctuated by moments of chastisement for Honus, as his hopelessly romanticized outlook on the West is systematically undermined. A brief snapshot of these goes some way towards communicating how determined *Soldier Blue* is to ground Honus in a material – as opposed to a mythical and ritualistic – realm. During their first meeting, Cresta shocks Honus by casually taking off her clothes, because 'it's as hot as hell'; Cresta instructs Honus not to hang around the battlefield making elegiac speeches about the fallen, because it is getting dark; Honus foolishly gets trapped by Cheyenne warriors, and only manages to repel them thanks to Cresta's intervention; Cresta, starving, spots a goat, which Honus insists on shooting himself – and misses; Honus seriously endangers himself and Cresta by ritualistically burning a wagon full of stolen rifles, which are destined for use against US cavalry ('What do you want, a medal?' is Cresta's bitter rebuke); following the brutal massacre, Cresta (a dead child in her arms) looks up at Honus accusingly, asking, 'Got a prayer, Soldier Blue? A nice poem?'. It is hard to imagine a more thorough

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refutation of the western's moral code, ranging as it does from the niceties of social etiquette to fundamental tenets of loyalty, faith and duty. And most significantly for this analysis, each instance signals a trust in physical practicalities and actualities over and above the hollowness of prayers, codes and ungrounded values. 'This is happening, here and now' is Cresta's recurrent conviction. If the Vietnamized western had a mantra, perhaps that would be it. At the final massacre, the nature of Honus's tough lesson could not be more aptly expressed; where he once muttered received platitudes, he now vomits.

If the Vietnamized western reacts against the genre's traditionally abstract or mythological characterizations of place, it is a reaction most clearly evident in the closing moments of *Soldier Blue*. As the grossly victorious cavalry leave the battlefield an elaborate crane shot turns away from them and moves downward, before tracking along – at ground level – a makeshift graveyard. We hear the following narration:

> *On November 29 1864, a unit of Colorado cavalry numbering over seven hundred men attacked a peaceful Cheyenne village at Sand Creek, Colorado. The Indians raised an American flag, and a white flag of surrender. Nevertheless the cavalry attacked, massacring five hundred Indians, more than half of whom were women and children. Over one hundred scalps were taken, bodies dismembered, plus numerous reports of rape.*

She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (John Ford, 1949) also features a voice-of-God narrator opening and closing a story about the US Cavalry, and like *Soldier Blue* it makes an historical example of their actions. And yet these superficial similarities only make the differences between the films more telling. Here are the closing words of Ford's film:

> *So here they are, the dog-faced soldiers, the regulars, the fifty-cents-a-day professionals, riding the outposts of the nation. From Fort Reno to Fort Apache, from Sheridan to Stark, they were all the same, men in dirty-shirt blue, and only a cold page in the history books to mark their passing. But wherever they rode, and whatever they fought for, that place became the United States.*

What is particularly important here is not so much the stark distinction between (revisionist) critique and (classical) celebration, but rather the terms that that are

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taken up to argue each point. In *Yellow Ribbon*, we are invited to think less about individual places or actions than about a general sense of historical progress. What we have just seen may not have actually happened anywhere, the film suggests, but its broad spirit permeated a whole period and a vast country. *Soldier Blue*, in arguing that the US military must be held accountable for its physical and tangible actions (historical and contemporary), regardless of the nation's vague ideals, turns to specifics. The final crane shot, moving down from the cavalry towards the graves, also wills the western to remain (or become) accountable to its grounded, literal source.

To return to the evocative language of the *Glasgow Herald* review: 'So it's farewell to John Ford, the greatest cavalry director of them all, his romanticism with its yellow ribbons fading in the West, and down to the severed limbs and spurting blood of actual massacre' (Plowright 1971: 8).

The Fugitive Film

Vincent Canby, writing in *The New York Times* in 1974, drew attention to what he saw as an emerging narrative trend in Hollywood cinema. The article was called 'Fascinated with Young Couples on the Lam', and Canby's description began as follows:

> *Two by two they ravage the landscape, drinking soda pop and chewing enough gum to stick a bull elephant to the sidewalk. Children-on-the-run, aliens in their own lands, bringing out the worst in the prose of the Sunday supplement writers and whipping up the imagination of a restless citizenry. By some odd coincidence the three best American films to open in New York so far this year are about young couples who go beyond the law as easily and heedlessly as people embarking on summer vacations. (1974: 115)*

The affinities between *Badlands*, *Thieves Like Us* (Robert Altman, 1974) and *The Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974), Canby's three examples, amount to far more than an 'odd coincidence' and instead go some way towards constituting a coherent cycle or genre: the fugitive film. The importance of the fugitive film to New Hollywood soon becomes evident when one considers how comprehensively it encompasses many key tropes and themes of the period: intense

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generational conflict, countercultural ideologies, ambivalent depictions of violence and loose and inconclusive narratives. Thomas Elsaesser's New Hollywood diagnosis in 'The Pathos of Failure' ([1975] 2004), although concerned with the 'journey motif' in quite a general sense, posits a number of fugitive films as key representative examples. Approaching this genre ecocritically, I will look at the way the fugitive film has at its centre questions of geography and habitation, which in turn allows us to rethink the much-touted 'rebellious spirit' of New Hollywood and its invocation of hippie sensibilities as something akin to an environmental sensibility.

Relatively little has been written on the fugitive film. An article by Marsha Kinder (1974) in *Film Quarterly* considers some of the wider implications of those same three films discussed by Canby, and offers something of a 'compare and contrast' approach with other contemporary trends and cycles, particularly the cop movie. (The study thus places a significant amount of emphasis on figures of law enforcement and not just the fugitives themselves.) Kinder also stresses the strange brand of nostalgia permeating the films, which are all set in the relatively recent past, and ultimately sees them all as variations on the 'original' of *Bonnie and Clyde* (while still recognizing prior models such as *You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1937)). The clearest generic antecedent of the fugitive film is almost certainly film noir, or at least a subset of noir. Frank Krutnik traces a number of 1940s crime-film cycles, including 'the outlaw-couple film' (1991: 213–226). Although he restricts his study to this decade and emphasizes themes of law and order, Krutnik identifies certain characteristics which point towards the kind of ecocritical study that will be performed here on the New Hollywood incarnation of the fugitive film. For example, discussing *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950) – perhaps the most direct influence on *Bonnie and Clyde* – Krutnik suggests that the central couple are characterized as 'forcefully carnal', observing how other characters within the film regard them as animal-like; elsewhere, he notes how the mise-en-scène of *Shockproof* (Douglas Sirk, 1949) stages a transition 'away from the work and home spaces which had dominated earlier, to location-shot scenes set in transitional spaces' (1991: 219). In the scheme of Krutnik's study, these are little more than asides, but they do offer an important reminder that the fugitive film, although clearly interested in socio-cultural themes of criminality, class, institutional corruption and gender politics – in her study, Kinder concludes that the fugitives' rebellion 'is culturally determined' (1974: 10) – also has a tendency towards questions of naturalness.

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Another aspect of the fugitive film singled out by Krutnik, at least in *Shockproof*, is the instability and erasure of identity, which features more prominently in an essay on the fugitive film by Corey K. Creekmur. In 'On the Road and On the Run: Fame and the Outlaw Couple in American Cinema' (1997), Creekmur argues that the fugitive film has curious but significant parallels with the show musical; they have similar structures which fluctuate between movement and stasis, they both offer the simple pleasure of watching two strong individuals team up and work together, and they display comparable anxieties about public recognition, be it fame or infamy. He goes on to suggest that later fugitive films such as *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch, 1990) and *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994) 'acknowledge and perhaps satirize a society in which fame and infamy are finally indistinguishable' (1997: 101), taking to an extreme an interest in communication technology which was present, if latently, throughout the genre's history. The second part of this chapter will examine something akin to 'technophobia' in New Hollywood fugitive films and argue that this tendency, rather than simple anti-establishment posturing, actually suggests an acute concern with issues of environmental entitlement. Before that, it is necessary to identify a little more clearly what constitutes a fugitive film, and what aspects of the genre call for an ecocritical appraisal.

Fugitive films have at their centre a small team, often a heterosexual couple (*Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) is a significant exception to prove the rule), whose commitment to one another grows stronger and stronger in direct relation to their worsening fate. As circumstances conspire against the couple, the interpersonal relations seem to solidify before our eyes, in conscious defiance of social judgements. Describing what she sees as the dominance of melodrama in Hollywood cinema, Linda Williams identifies one key feature of this mode as the recognition of the hero's 'hidden or misunderstood virtue' (1998: 54). The examples she offers – Andrew Becket (Tom Hanks) revealing his torso to a jury in *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) and Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson) breaking down under the weight of remorse and regret in *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) – both stage that recognition as happening, decisively, *within* the film. Fugitive films offer an interesting variation on this, whereby societal judgement is hedged or fudged; 'normal people' may be won over, but figures of authority invariably are not. (An interesting variation on this is the kidnapped policeman in *The Sugarland Express*, whose physical closeness to the outlaws provides him with a privileged view of their goodness.) The emotional adventures

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traced in *Badlands*, *Thieves Like Us, Bonnie and Clyde*, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) and *The Sugarland Express*, to name but a few, are brought to a close by figures of social authority, the mechanical automization of their behaviour serving to underline the attractive spontaneity and naturalness of the couple.

However, it would be misleading, and unhelpfully simplistic, to suggest that the films endorse crime as romantic and condemn forces of law and order as blandly repressive; after all, it is not in the act of committing a crime that the couple prove themselves worthy of our affection – the crimes are as often as not presented as lapses or freakish transgressions, rather than decisive actions. Instead, it is the physical movement beyond repressive environments that these films endorse and celebrate. The couple's flight (or at least their desire to flee, in *Dog Day Afternoon*) is a recognition on the part of the film that power operates spatially, and it forces the characters to become increasingly aware of and sensitive to their environments as they flee socio-spatial repression. Vivid examples include Kit (Martin Sheen) fishing in *Badlands* or Bowie (Keith Carradine) spending the night hugging up to a dog in *Thieves Like Us*; 'roughing it', as an heroic trajectory, demands a good degree of environmental sensitivity, or at least a realization of its importance. In his ecocritical interpretation of American road movies, Pat Brereton describes *Easy Rider* and its ilk as a genre in which nature is 'portrayed as a utopian space for narcissistic self-fulfilment or, alternatively, a site of paranoia' (2004: 105); in the fugitive film, there is instead an emphasis on 'natural' as a mode of behaviour rather than a location. These are films in which the qualitative differences between different sites are not as meaningful as the manner in which people choose to engage with those sites.

Fleeing Sites of Repression

When fugitives flee, they tend to flee a lifestyle of order and control and immerse themselves in something quite different. Jim Thompson gives a sense of this new lifestyle in richly suggestive terms in his novel *The Getaway*, which Sam Peckinpah filmed in 1972:

> *Flight is many things. Something clean and swift, like a bird skimming across the sky. Or something filthy and crawling; a series of crablike movements through figurative and literal slime, a process of creeping ahead, jumping sideways, running backward. It is sleeping in fields and river bottoms. It is bellying for miles*

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> *along an irrigation ditch. It is back roads, spur railroad lines, the tailgate of a wildcat truck, a stolen car and a dead couple in lovers' lane. It is food pilfered from freight cars, garments taken from clotheslines; robbery and murder, sweat and blood. The complex made simple by the alchemy of necessity. ([1958] 2005: 111)*

We are given here a strong sense of the spatial and environmental experience of the fugitive; the escape is not just an exercise in social exile, but a geographical experience also. That the films' characters turn to this is, of course, significant, but it should also alert us to the importance of what they choose to abandon and reject; what, and where, are these people fleeing from, and what does that tell us about their (notoriously vague) desires? When the fugitive films are looked at alongside one another, it soon becomes clear that what I will call the sites of repression are invariably characterized as artificial and physically restrictive – they generate frustration and alienation through a rigid control of space and movement, thereby prompting the fugitives to seek the opposite of this in their subsequent escape/quest/journey. The never-ending lines of identical rubbish bins in the opening scenes of *Badlands* and the prison complex in *The Sugarland Express* are clear examples of this. The geographer David Harvey argues that 'the intersecting command of money, time and space forms a substantial nexus of social power that we cannot afford to ignore' (1990: 226). Fugitive films critique this 'nexus of social power', and this critique has significant ecocritical implications. These films identify the arbitrariness of 'conventional' space–time rules, reminding us that top-down structures need not have the final say on our environmental behaviour. Describing how medieval merchants first discovered the now ubiquitous concept of 'the price of time', Harvey paints a picture which chimes resonantly with the dynamic of the fugitive film: 'Symbolized by clocks and bells that called workers to labour and merchants to market, separated from the "natural" rhythms of agrarian life, and divorced from religious significations, merchants and masters created a new "chronological net" in which daily life was caught' (1990: 228).

Jim Thompson's description of flight, although some way from what might be thought of as 'agrarian life', operates according to a similar distinction. Fittingly, the opening-credit sequence of Sam Peckinpah's adaptation of *The Getaway* (1972) is perhaps the starkest example of how fugitive films depict an initial environment utterly void of such 'natural' instinct. The very first shot is of a deer

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looking into the camera, framed in such a way that we have no idea about the setting or location, other than that the deer is on grass. Then, after successive cuts to more and more deer, the camera reveals fences, walls and an observation tower, culminating in a slow zoom out which allows us to see the vast prison complex in which the animals are caged. The final zoom out is accompanied by a crescendo of harsh, industrial sounds, the origin of which is not revealed until a short while later, and yet the way in which this noise audibly overpowers the animal sounds ensures that we draw connections between the imprisonment we see and the relentless utility we hear. What is perhaps most interesting about this first minute or so is the trouble taken to articulate repression as an anti-natural force, something based on borders and barriers which operate over and against (presumably innocent) creatures. There is nothing exceptional about a prison appearing as a restrictive institution, but there are different ways of envisioning that restriction – sometimes the emphasis might be on sub-cultural norms and rituals, or on the rough discipline handed out by prison officials. Both of these play a part in the development of this sequence in *The Getaway*, but the emphasis on spatial control is unmistakable. One particularly vivid sequence cuts between lines of prisoners being herded through a gate onto a line of trucks, guards mounting horses in order to surround and escort the trucks, and Doc (Steve McQueen) growing ever more frustrated with a game of chess – which he despondently abandons. Its unforgiving grid is presumably not serving its purpose as an enjoyable distraction, but instead reminding him of his predicament.

The equivalent predicament in *Aloha, Bobby and Rose* (Floyd Mutrux, 1975) is nothing like as stark as a prison cell, and is more the accumulation of mundane and irritating frustrations than containment as such, but the overall dynamic is of a piece with *The Getaway*. Bobby (Paul Le Mat) has a soul-destroying job and looming debts, while Rose (Diane Hull) faces the daily challenges of single parenthood. Even less so than most fugitive couples, they are not drawn to the 'rhythms of agrarian life', and yet it is nevertheless significant that while on an errand for his boss, it is a sudden and unexpected downpour of rain which proves the catalyst for Bobby 'finding' Rose, and for their adventure to begin. In comparison to *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Sugarland Express* and other fugitive films, *Aloha* has a curiously defeatist tone, the agony–ecstasy dynamic of the genre tipping very much in favour of agony. This must partly be attributed to the fact that the couple enjoy a sense of physical escape only very briefly. During these scenes, the couple – and the camera – are continually bathed in sunlight, providing a kind

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of visual 'answer' to the pervasive neon lights which dominate the opening (and ending) of the film. In one sequence, the couple's drive is delayed as a flock of sheep crosses the road; no direct problem arises, but Bobby's impatience is ominous. Never an empathetic character, his inability to embrace adventure hinders the buoyant emotional trajectory which is normally a feature of the fugitive film, and it is glimpsed most clearly in these small gestures of annoyance, of unwillingness to adjust to new places and new environments. Bobby was aware enough of the problem, but seems oddly unwilling to embrace the solution.

The establishment of repressiveness in *Bonnie and Clyde* is subtle and succinct, and yet it still holds a good deal of sway over the drama that follows. 'One of the many pleasures of viewing *Bonnie and Clyde*', suggests Matthew Bernstein, 'resides in appreciating how much of the film's density and complexity can be related back to this opening scene' (2000: 101). The short scene begins in Bonnie's bedroom and shows Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) looking for something to distract her; we see a close-up of her putting on lipstick, as if preparing for an adventure of some sort, only to learn that she is in fact naked, and with nowhere to go and nothing to do. She lies on her bed, beating her hand against the bed frame. (The room and the bed look curiously similar to Holly's in *Badlands*.) Factory sounds can be faintly heard, not unlike those that dominate the opening of *The Getaway*, and it is only when Bonnie looks out of the window that she finds any hope of something 'better'. Clyde (Warren Beatty), for his part, has something of the guardian angel about him in the early stages of the film, appearing magically to save Bonnie from boredom, and even bringing with him a rich understanding of what Bonnie wants to escape. With a strange mix of arrogance and tenderness, he diagnoses everything that is wrong with her life, from her monotonous job to her unhappy record with men, summarizing her malaise as a case of spatial frustration. 'So you go on home and you sit in your room and you think "when, and how, am I ever gonna get away from this?" And now you know.'

But much is revealed – physically, environmentally – even before Clyde makes this explicit. In the opening scene, after Bonnie comes to the front of her house to flirtatiously admonish Clyde, they begin to wander along the street, and the film soon cuts to them walking along the town's Main Street. Their movements are at once playful and aimless, full of pauses, diversions and sidesteps, and the suggestion is that Clyde's presence allows Bonnie to view her everyday environment anew. These moments bring to mind Michel de Certeau's observations in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) concerning walking and its implications: 'Walking,

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Figure 3.3 'A mobile organicity': *Bonnie and Clyde* (Warner Bros. / Seven Arts)

which alternately follows a path and has followers, creates a mobile organicity in the environment' (1984: 99). Walking emerges as an environmentally creative activity, even a statement:

> *[I]f it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g. by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g. by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. (1984: 98)*

De Certeau is here referring specifically to urban life, and the potential for pedestrians to creatively resist the repressive spatial strictures of the city. I would argue, however, that a similar pattern of spatial resistance can be seen in the fugitive film, even if cars usually replace feet and the resistant action happens without, as opposed to within, the city. Bonnie and Clyde's meander in this sense becomes a rather poetic prologue – similar ones can be seen in *The Getaway* and *Zabriskie Point* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1970) – setting the tone for their rebellious spatial practices: driving wildly across fields and hiding out in make-shift rural dens. It is not necessary to catalogue all the moments in *Bonnie and*

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Clyde where nature acts as a refuge for these alienated heroes. It is important to point out, in fact, that the film complicates this dynamic by having Bonnie begin to pine for her home and mother as events get out of control (although when she does briefly flee the gang, this takes the form of Bonnie running wildly through a wheat field as Clyde and the gang slowly patrol along the road – a rebellion within a rebellion). However, it can justifiably be suggested that Bonnie is seduced by the thrill of transgressing boundaries which are at once physical and social, and that this liberation is concomitant with a deepening connection with natural environments.

It is not insignificant that the film's bloody climax generates a good deal of its shock from the fact that the offending guns are hidden behind bushes – it is the sight of twitching leaves which prompts the penny to drop for Clyde. Bonnie and Clyde are clearly at ease on this open country road, lovingly sharing an apple, and their betrayal takes on a greater degree of bitterness because of the site of the execution. One imagines that if they had been gunned down on a city street, their fate would not seem quite so cruel. Moments before their death, Bonnie and Clyde look into the sky and smile at the sight of birds flying. There is every reason to interpret this symbolically (not least following the eating of the apple), and yet the moment makes perfect sense with regard to the rest of the film in its most immediate and basic rendering; the sight of birds flying freely in beautiful sunlight makes Bonnie and Clyde happy. This small moment, much more than the (in) famous shooting that immediately follows, offers an important insight into the ambiguous hopes and motivations of not just Bonnie and Clyde, but the many fugitives who would follow them.

New Hollywood fugitive films are of course not unique in playing upon these dialectics of good-nature-versus-bad-urbanization or individual-liberation-versus-social-conformity. If anything, these distinctions seem not only commonplace but also potentially problematic from an ecocritical point of view – the natural world as a source of thrills is hardly a conscientiously ecological premise. However, what is present in these films is not a simple preference for innocent nature over corrupt civilization, but rather a frustration with socially authoritative definitions of space, and a desire to regain some sort of agency – even responsibility – with respect to our surroundings. A brief counter-example will help illustrate the difference between the two. At the climax of *The Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston, 1950), Dix (Sterling Hayden) collapses and dies of gunshot wounds in the incongruous setting of Kentucky farmland, surrounded by horses. Like the

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fugitive heroes, Dix longs for a life away from that which he has known, and he too flees the city in order to find that new start. And yet there are important differences; he seeks nature as a prize, a narcissistic confirmation of his goodness and a nostalgic reclamation of his family's history. It is an end rather than a means; a trophy rather than a process. This is not to condemn *The Asphalt Jungle* for its use of nature motifs, but rather to contrast that very use with what seems to be happening in the fugitive films, which generate a kind of ecological energy from the way nature is sought but never grasped. In this genre, nobody becomes 'at one with nature', like Jeremiah Johnson, but they seem to strive for new environmental experiences. They do so clumsily and unwisely, subconsciously and inadvertently, but the films provide a structure whereby the attempt is clear to see. In fugitive films, the natural world has important qualities which are systematically denied us in industrial capitalism, but those qualities are perhaps not to be won or obtained. *Bonnie and Clyde* and the films that followed show a lifestyle which demands the utmost environmental sensitivity – and we are invited to endorse that lifestyle.

Seeing and Controlling the Environments

Corey K. Creekmur suggests that a fear of the act of naming and identification runs throughout the fugitive film (1997: 97). I would like to develop that slightly, and propose that *the means of identification* are themselves seen as threatening and even morally regressive. Media, aerial transport and surveillance combine to form a kind of unholy trinity, appearing in the fugitive film as predatory, inhumane and fundamentally unnatural.[3] More often than not, these three become almost interchangeable, each one essentially bypassing time and (especially) space in order to exert power over those who journey across the land more directly. Analysing the importance of this trend in the fugitive film, the following will draw on the work of Paul Virilio, especially his interest in the surveillance aesthetic in cinema, as well as a number of theorists concerned with the political implications of landscape aesthetics.[4] Although such approaches help to contextualize some important features of the fugitive film – those relating to environment and entitlement – they tend to assume the complicity of an image or film with optical/environmental subjugation, and perhaps underestimate the potential films have for containing or staging such subjugation and ultimately positioning themselves against it.

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One can see this at work in, for example, *Dirty Mary Crazy Larry* (John Hough, 1974), in which a determined sheriff pursues three criminals on the run. He does not simply chase them, however, and there is great significance in the *manner* of the pursuit; he constantly consults maps in order to plan their entrapment, constantly barks orders (both real and diversionary) through the police radio and eventually takes to the skies in a helicopter. The fugitives themselves are desperately trying to reach a densely forested area in the hope that the trees will provide cover for them. In an interesting twist, after the sheriff has abandoned his aerial pursuit for lack of fuel, he resorts to a more subtle plan: sending out false radio messages to police officers pursuing in cars, the sheriff tricks the fugitives (whom he knows have access to the radio communication) into believing that they are in much greater danger of being caught than they actually are. Mary (Susan George), one of the fugitives, who is acting as their navigator, desperately scans the map in search of a way out, until Deke (Adam Roarke) – the 'brains of the outfit' – realizes that the trap is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. 'You actually seen any of these units?' he asks his companions, and of course they have not. The access to police radio, which the gang thought was such a coup, actually turns out to be a hindrance, and the map a dangerous distraction. This triumph depends entirely upon the fugitives having absolute faith in their own immediate understanding of the environment, a faith which trumps the pernicious trickery employed by the authorities.

One of the most striking images in *Dirty Mary* is that of the sheriff's helicopter flying almost at ground level in an attempt to overpower and intimidate the fugitives in their car. There is something perverse about seeing these two 'species' of transport, these two separate modes of moving within the environment, clash as equals. This odd mismatch is even more stark in *Figures in a Landscape* (Joseph Losey, 1970), whose opening scene involves a helicopter (the pilots are mysterious to us) chasing down two convicts, who are trying to escape on foot. At certain points, the helicopter gets close enough almost to touch its prey, and once again there is something deeply strange and somewhat terrifying about this prospect. And yet, curiously enough, it is in these moments that the helicopter seems most confused, almost redundant; in both films, it flails around, not able to actually carry through its threatened capture. The helicopter is a technology for the control and surveillance of space, rather than engagement with action and place. Paul Virilio, in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* ([1989] 2009), is inevitably drawn to *Figures in a Landscape* as an important example of military aesthetics:

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> *Combat here is a game in which all the instruments take part in the saturation of space. Those who conduct the hunt visually are concerned to annul space, first on board their means of transport, then with their guns. As for the escapees, they use their weapons not so much to destroy as to establish a distance: they live only in what separates them from their pursuers, they can survive only through pure distance, their ultimate protection is the continuity of nature as a whole. (Virilio [1989] 2009: 25)*

Virilio focuses his attention on the importance of the helicopter with regard to the war in Vietnam which was, of course, raging on in 1970. This is a vital and entirely convincing connection (which holds up equally well with *Dirty Mary*), and yet I would suggest that it is important to acknowledge that those films mobilizing this conflict between different spatial philosophies invariably posit themselves on the side of the pursued rather than the pursuer, a nuance which perhaps gets lost in Virilio's efforts to establish the complicity between cinema, spectatorship and militarism. Taking his cue from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Virilio laments the breakdown of a relationship between what is seeable and what is touchable, a bond 'ruined by the banalization of a certain teletopology' (1994: 7). The present study builds on Virilio's interest in the environmental politics of surveillance (but not his damning of the medium per se), and finds comparable concerns in the fugitive film.

Zabriskie Point makes the bold move of temporarily allowing the fugitive to play the game of empowered voyeur, and knowingly brings out the sexual politics of such empowerment. Mark (Mark Frechette), a runaway radical student (who may or may not have shot a police officer) steals a plane and then, for his amusement, harasses a young woman, Daria, by flying dangerously close to her car. The scene consciously invokes the famous sequence from *North by Northwest* in which Roger O. Thornhill (Cary Grant) is pursued and attacked by a plane while isolated in a deserted landscape. I deliberately describe the culprit as 'a plane' because, as far as the scene is in concerned, there is no identifiable person to speak of, and the anonymity of the attack is central to its tension. For Daria in *Zabriskie Point* that same anonymity is temporarily frightening, but it is soon broken. Before too long, Mark drops a T-shirt from the plane as a playful token of affection, resigning his vertical authority, and when Daria picks it up from the desert ground, she smiles and uses it to wave up at Mark. The gesture marks a transition from harassment to flirtation and affection, and significantly does so

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by introducing a physical, tangible item of exchange between the two – exactly what is lacking in the strict subject–object relations exemplified by landscape aesthetics and critiqued in the fugitive film. In the words of Michel Foucault, panoptical discipline has 'the precise role of introducing insuperable asymmetries and excluding reciprocities' (Rabinow 1986: 212). The reciprocity of the shirt is, after all, the means by which Mark manages to communicate to Daria that he is somehow 'on her side', and that his position of topographical power is just a little game; the real him is not so removed, not really complicit in the mechanics of power she suspects and fears. Soon after this exchange, Mark decides to land the plane and join Daria. And soon after that, they arrive (not through design – they are most certainly *not* following a map) at Zabriskie Point. Here, amongst ancient erosional rock formations, they make love. The soft-porn mysticism of this scene invites ridicule, but placed within the context of the scene described above, I would argue that it is actually seeking to offer as direct a possible repudiation of the topographical mastery that Mark fleetingly played with.

The *Zabriskie Point* episode also brings into play questions about the ethics of landscape spectatorship, questions which have generally been associated with political geography and art history and have more recently gained traction in film studies. (Martin Lefebvre's introduction and chapter in his edited collection *Landscape and Film* (2006) are, taken together, an excellent introduction to the subject.) A paradigmatic article here is 'Imperial Landscape' by W.J.T. Mitchell (1994), in which he positions himself within a community of scholars whose sceptical takes on landscape aesthetics can best be understood in opposition to those put forward by the likes of Kenneth Clark. In *Landscape into Art* (1949), Clark endorsed landscape painting as a benevolent expression of man's developing sensitivity to his natural environment. 'Landscape sceptics' are more wont to critique landscape art's pandering to single-point perspective (which they would classify as an essentially hierarchical technique) and expose the power relations which landscape art simultaneously represents and conceals. Mitchell suggests some reasons why landscape painting flourished so particularly in those countries which pursued imperial agendas: 'Empires move forward in space as a way of moving forward in time; the "prospect" that opens up is not just a spatial scene but a projected future of "development" and exploitation' (1994: 17). The police officer in *Dirty Mary* clearly adopts a position of optical privilege which in turn promises, if not exploitation, at least capture and imprisonment.

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And yet, unlike the still images taken to task by Mitchell and others, this film – like other fugitive films – creates a dynamic through which such power can be questioned. The medium of film makes such dynamism possible, allowing critical shifts away from optical authority which were, of course, forever lacking from the conventions of landscape painting. 'Reality was frozen at a specific moment,' explains the geographer Denis E. Cosgrove, 'removed from the flux of time and change, and rendered the property of the observer' (1984: 22). This does not disappear with cinema, but it becomes fundamentally complicated by the possibility of shifting views and various settings. In *Badlands*, for example, we see Holly's father (Warren Oates) painting on a billboard in the desert wilderness a large advertisement depicting a bountiful farm; and later, Kit and Holly pass the time in their woodland hideaway by (respectively) reading *National Geographic* and looking through old stereopticon slides of faraway times and places. In such moments, value-laden landscape images are repositioned in the flux of time and space. If landscape, as Cosgrove laments, is a 'restrictive way of seeing that diminishes alternative modes of experiencing our relations with nature' (1984: 269), then fugitive films emerge as one avenue for the enthusiastic endorsement of such 'alternative modes'.

Elucidating the ways in which New Hollywood fugitive films critique space-conquering technologies, this chapter is focused rather more on surveillance than media because, as I hope to have made clear, it is in these moments that competing ideologies about ways of being in and on the land become central. But it would be a missed opportunity not to reiterate quite how much this emphasis on literal surveillance (helicopters, binoculars, watchtowers etc.) is supplemented by a critique of media communications, with newspapers and radios especially acting as vital catalysts for the tightening net. *Bonnie and Clyde* complicates this dynamic slightly by suggesting that the fugitives themselves are part-architects of their own media circus, but generally speaking mass communication is a stultifying power. In *Thieves Like Us*, the constant presence of radio broadcasts, from news bulletins to the theatrical readings, is an ominous indication of Bowie (Keith Carradine) and Keechie's (Shelley Duvall) failure to move beyond their state of besiegement. They are forever 'within range', one might say. And in one scene in *The Getaway*, Doc enters a shop (to buy, of all things, a radio) only to find his mugshot appear on a number of television screens, as the image of a wanted man. In *Dog Day Afternoon*, much is made of the fact that Sonny (Al Pacino) 'wins over' the public because of his physical proximity to the crowd – the very lack of mediation is celebrated.

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Vanishing Point (Richard C. Sarafian, 1971) may initially seem to be an exception to this rule, featuring as it does a sympathetic radio DJ, Super Soul (Clevon Little), who for most of the film functions as the only supporter of the fugitive Kowalski (Barry Newman). But Super Soul's communication with Kowalski positions the DJ more as a spiritual guardian than anything else, and his knowledge of Kowalski's predicament is in any case based on his own undermining of police-radio technology. Kowalski's other guardian, an old snake-charmer and prospector (Dean Jagger), at one point advises him that 'the best way to get away from where you are is to root right in'. Kowalski is trying to elude helicopter surveillance, and the prospector warns him against running, instead advising him to camouflage his car within desert bushes. *Vanishing Point*, then, is founded upon many of the spatial and ethical dichotomies already discussed; it even ends with a news cameraman bearing down upon Kowalski from within a helicopter.

The advice to 'root right in', to not leave one's situation, might initially seem to contradict the basic ethos of the fugitive film, but perhaps it reveals something more nuanced and brings us closer to what is interesting about this genre's value system from an ecocritical perspective. Contrary to first impressions, actual escape is not what is at stake in the fugitive film (Kowalski is at one point advised that he cannot 'beat the desert'), but rather the characters' methods of relating to an environment. According to the logic of the prospector, engaging more fully and more imaginatively with your current surroundings represents its own kind of rebellious independence. Bonnie and Clyde, Mary and Larry, Doc and Carol,

Figure 3.4 Rooting in: *Vanishing Point* (Cupid Productions / Twentieth Century-Fox)

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Bowie and Keechie and Mark and Daria all seem to realize this at moments, but only fleetingly. To borrow a phrase from Pat Brereton, 'they miss the signs of their coexistence with and in nature' (2004: 110). Their experiences constitute a haphazard education in the inseparability of power and space, and the tragedy of their stories might not be that they (invariably) die young, but that they did not need to flee in the first place.

Conclusion

In his essay on *Electric Glide in Blue* (James William Guercio, 1973), Mark Shiel examines the film's complex deployment of American-West iconography and its channelling of cultural guilt and uncertainty over Vietnam, as well as its interest in the politics of space, and its 'discrediting of the countercultural enterprise of "back-to-the-land"' (2007: 111). To this extent, Shiel seems to inadvertently argue for *Electric Glide* as a New Hollywood film perched between the fugitive film and the Vietnamized western. Shiel's reading of the film, I would suggest, is centred upon allegory, cultural politics and iconography in such a way that runs counter to my own approach in a fundamental regard, but his study nevertheless sheds light on how this chapter may have exaggerated the separateness and distinctiveness of the two genres in question. I will, then, conclude with some remarks on the crossovers between the Vietnamized western and the fugitive film, and their shared concern with environmental experience and responsibility.

Bearing in mind the points raised in the first part of this chapter relating to the ecological character of US warfare in Vietnam, the critique of aerial observation found in the fugitive film links in quite directly with anxieties raised in the Vietnamized western. In *Dirty Mary Crazy Larry*, three young fugitives try to evade a helicopter by heading for a densely wooded area; their motivation is topographical rather than emotional or ideological. Whereas the drama of chase sequences is often heightened by the prospect of encountering a political or national border, here the parameters of danger and safety are defined by ecological conditions. (In *The Wild Bunch*, Tector Gorch (Ben Johnson) scorns the arbitrariness of the U.S.-Mexican border: 'Just looks like more Texas to me'.) The David-and-Goliath contest of the Vietnam War might also be recognized as underpinning the fugitive film, a genre in which proportionality takes on an important role. Having sympathized with the crimes and adventures of fugi-

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tives, mammoth manhunts become, as far as the audience can see, inhumane and unfeeling. In *The Sugarland Express*, this develops a farcical air, as streams of police cars follow the fugitives in comic abundance – but the Vietnam connection is not necessarily lost; as Marsha Kinder suggests, 'the long parade of police cars pursuing the two criminals [...] suggests the kind of overkill that failed in Vietnam' (1974: 5). In his study of US military tactics in Vietnam, James William Gibson uses the grimly evocative term 'bombing as communication' to describe an approach of massive environmental – as well as ethical – inappropriateness (2000: 319). Overkill, a vivid characteristic of the war and the fugitive film, is in both cases carried out at an environmental remove.

If the fugitive film can be thought of in Vietnamized terms, to what extent do New Hollywood westerns harbour the concerns and characteristics of the fugitive film? On a basic level, their narratives often revolve around the exploits of fleeing heroes. *Soldier Blue* is a clear example of this, and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* is even closer to the fugitive film, given that that the young couple flee together after Willie (Robert Blake) has committed an emotionally excusable act of violence. Their pursuer, Sheriff Cooper (Robert Redford), has the kind of sensitivity so pointedly lacking in fugitive-film law enforcers, to the extent that he becomes aligned with the fugitive, a connection made explicit when, towards the climax of the film, he places his own hand in Willie's handprint. Although Cooper continues to pursue the fugitives, the film endorses the way he does it, using as he does a kind of environmental alertness lacking in other members of the hunting posse. *Willie Boy* also indulges Cooper's suspicious resentment of the press and their role in the manhunt. At one point, Cooper is asked by an anxious reporter, evidently clueless about the territory but enthusiastically following 'the story', 'Where's Ruby Mountain?'. 'Where it always was', retorts Cooper.

The historical setting of Vietnamized westerns, even if they tend to veer towards the later end of the genre's time frame, means that helicopters and police radios are of course absent; the pernicious collapsing and mediation of space does not guide the Vietnamized western as it does the fugitive film. But it is not entirely absent. The (lightly comical) triumph of local knowledge over mass-media ignorance in *Willie Boy* is one small example of this. Another comes in an early scene in *Ulzana's Raid*, when one man, MacIntosh (Burt Lancaster) is shown to have intimate knowledge of the surrounding territory, precisely what is lacking in the stuffy bureaucracy of cavalry hierarchy. Throughout the scene, the Major (Douglass Watson) is framed next to a large map of Arizona, and his hesitancy

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about trusting MacIntosh's interpretation of the situation stems from the *way* he knows, or fails to know, his surroundings. The film suggests that place cannot be properly experienced by those who are cooped up in offices and rely upon culturally controlled mediations. The drama *and* the moral high ground are to be found with those determined to trust their senses.

The films that will be explored in Chapter Four do not necessarily share with fugitive films or Vietnamized westerns this overt concern with how characters 'should' engage with their surroundings. If this chapter has explored the dynamics between figures and their landscapes, the following chapter considers the ambiguity of 'where' a film might be said to happen in the first place. Just as the earlier discussion of *Nashville* and *The Godfather* problematized their shared status as national commentaries, so the following interpretation of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) and *Cockfighter* will bring into question their 'framing', namely proposing that they can be productively understood as regional films. Barbara Klinger begins to do this with *Easy Rider*; she explores its engagement with distinctively southwestern US terrain and writes that its 'regionalism acted iconoclastically' (1997: 183), before ultimately concluding that it is first and foremost a film concerned with US nationalism. In the following chapter, it will be argued not only that other films of the period continued *Easy Rider*'s regional emphasis, but also that they did so without reverting to that film's default nationalism. And, crucially, that to do so represents another ecocritical tendency in New Hollywood cinema.

Notes

1. *Shane* is, of course, a particularly reflexive western, and to this extent a poor example of the genre's 'normal' output. However, it is important to remember that revisionist genre films (in this case, Vietnamized westerns) are just as likely to be reacting against a stereotypical or selective version of a genre as they are an historically comprehensive version of one.
2. Incidentally, this response seems to raise still another version of Vietnamization, wherein bloody violence on screen expresses a *feeling about* the war, rather than standing in for the action of US military forces.
3. Perhaps surprisingly, this can be traced right back to *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), one of the key forerunners of the fugitive film, in which the two repressive males travel by plane and helicopter.

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4. For an ecocritical development of Virilio's ideas in a contemporary-film context, see Chapter Two of Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint* (2012).

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CHAPTER FOUR

Regional Frames

> *Forget the maze of state and provincial boundaries, those historical accidents and surveyors' mistakes. The reason no one except the trivia expert can name all fifty of the United States is that they hardly matter.*
>
> Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America*

> *I became stimulated by the idea of worlds within our world. And the world of cockfighters was right there for us in Georgia – we just stepped into the cock pits and started shooting.*
>
> Monte Hellman

Ecocriticism, I have argued, can direct our attention to material matter in cinema, and can in the process help us rethink allegorical interpretations of New Hollywood films. Another way to complicate state-of-the-nation interpretations would be to read films such as these as being, in some way, subnational. So, for example, *The Godfather* would be less about America and Europe, and more about New York and Sicily. And *Nashville* could be about the eponymous city, or Tennessee, or the American South. To some extent, this hermeneutic reframing is quite arbitrary and can be undertaken in response to any fiction. But, for reasons discussed below, it is an important ecocritical manoeuvre, and one that is especially appropriate for a number of New Hollywood films, which take on a new resonance and complexity when understood as regional fictions.

In one of the few attempts to address the question of what role region has played in popular American film, Peter Lev introduces three possible interpretations of regional cinema: the tendency to shoot Hollywood films on location,

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the attempt to create an independent cinema rooted in particular regions, and the notion of region as a critical and interpretive tool (1986: 60).[1] The first of these will form a substantial part of the following chapter; the second has obvious limitations for a project focused on Hollywood; the third best describes how region will be understood, and utilized, in this chapter. And yet my argument also proceeds from the understanding not only that region exists as a socio-political construct or a hermeneutic tool, but that regions are also geographic, material areas. It will be argued in this chapter that these approaches (or positions) are not mutually exclusive, by moving from one to the other, showing how region-oriented interpretation and analysis can reveal ecocritical nuances and details throughout the films in question. I briefly discussed in Chapter One how *Chinatown* – widely acknowledged as a quintessential 'Los Angeles Film' – invites a regional interpretation; I now take the opportunity to develop this idea more fully, beyond *Chinatown*.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre depicts obscene and gruesome violence, and boldly makes the case that such violence is – rather than supernatural or demonic – the product of a particular time and place. *Cockfighter* also includes its fair share of transgressive behaviour, but frames its narrative in such a way that the transgressive becomes almost indistinguishable from the normative. As an interpretive approach, then, regionalism draws out quite different qualities in these two films, and also helps to clarify the ways in which the material environment retains a prominence and significance in both. But what will all this reveal about New Hollywood more broadly? It is fair to suggest that *Cockfighter* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* display many characteristics often associated with American film of the 1960s and 1970s – anti-heroism, cynicism, realism, generic playfulness, anti-authoritarianism, politicized violence, documentarist aesthetics, etc. And yet, unlike totems of 1970s American cinema, such as *Nashville* and *The Godfather,* these films sit somewhere on the periphery of New Hollywood, in terms of both their actual production circumstances (they were not produced by major studios) and their current standing; *Massacre* tends to be discussed mainly in relation to the horror genre, and *Cockfighter* has received almost no critical attention. Prioritizing films marginal to most studies of New Hollywood is, then, also meant as a reminder of regionalism's potential to recalibrate some assumptions about American cinema – in this period and beyond.

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What is Ecocritical about Regionalism?

As part of a larger study examining New Hollywood ecocritically, a chapter proposing to interpret New Hollywood films in terms of regionalism brings with it the implication that regionalism *is* to some extent ecocritical. In many ways, the ecocritical application here is more straightforward than that carried out in the previous two chapters; certain conceptual leaps are required to think of materiality and genre critique as ecocritical, but less so regionalism. It is still necessary, however, to clarify how and why such a link is warranted. Wilbur Zelinsky declares that the existence of regions 'is a large, truly significant fact in the human geography of this nation' and that 'Americans are spontaneously curious about the local peculiarities of their compatriots' (1992: 109). Does the non-human world play an important role in this fact, and subsequently in this curiosity? What, in other words, is ecocritical about regionalism? To the extent that regionalism presupposes the importance of a spatial category broader than the domestic and urban, but narrower than the national, it is an issue of both human geography and artistic representation – and, of course, the study of both. These two strands of regionalism, the geographical and the representational, are closely intertwined, and no doubt mutually sustaining, as when regional myths and stories contribute to the resilience of regional identities. However, for the purposes of outlining what relevance ecocriticism has to regionalism, it helps to examine them separately. What relevance does ecology have to regional cultures; and what relevance does it have to regional aesthetics?

In *Regions and Regionalism in the United States* (1988), Michael Bradshaw examines the region as a complex phenomenon combining economic, political and environmental concerns, but ultimately implies that ecological conditions are the crucial foundation for regional identities. Regional boundaries often correspond with natural features, and even if this perpetuates a false sense of permanence, it provides a kind of earthbound legitimacy not always available to national or even state-focused rhetoric. The distinction between artificial states and other, more 'natural' borders may be spurious; as Bradshaw points out (1988: 28), important environmental policies in the USA are often carried out at state level (in this way naturalizing state boundaries). But the point remains intact; ecological features play a vital role in people's negotiation of a sub-national identity. A slightly different tack is taken by Richard Nostrand and Lawrence Estaville in their edited collection *Homelands* (2001). Introduced as an alternative to the pervasive use of

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Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis' in discussions of American historical geography, the concept of 'homeland' emphasizes the strong influence of specific immigrant cultures. One chapter, for example, details how East Anglian architectural norms were gradually adapted to suit the New England climate during the consolidation of a Yankee homeland (Bowden 2001: 12). From this perspective, the vitality of sub-national identities in the United States is traceable to the encounters between various immigrant groupings and the natural conditions they faced upon arrival. To narrow the frame from national to regional, to move from a theory of broad frontierism to homeland pluralism, requires a heightened sensitivity to individual environments.

Turner's thesis, while responsive to environmental conditions (especially when homing in on particular areas of the country), operates with such broad stokes that their influence is minimized, as when he declares that 'the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe' ([1921] 2008: 4). Wilbur Zelinsky (1992), discussing regional variations in American agriculture and operating within a less 'top-down' model of cultural geography, notes how European farming methods transferred more smoothly onto the environment of northeastern states than that of the American South. Cotton and tobacco plantations, he argues, represented a doomed attempt to perpetuate cultural norms in spite of ecological conditions; into the twentieth century, the southern industry continually suffered the effects of 'a synthetic technology wilfully imposed by men who [were] still not psychologically at home in the region' (1992: 61). Whatever the merits or otherwise of these particular arguments, the focus on sub-national areas and cultures seems to necessitate a degree of environmental interpretation. Regional geography, however political, has vital ecological constituents.

What of regionalism as an expressive, representational, aesthetic consideration? Nina Baym, a specialist in the literature of New England, notes that 'writing about nature has always seemed a particularly national rather than regional undertaking, even though (obviously) nature writing must be local if it does its job of accurately representing natural phenomena' (2004: 300). And, in a logical progression which is particularly significant for the present study, Baym asserts that 'regionalism, insofar as it locates people firmly on the terrain they inhabit, cannot be other than a form of environmental writing' (2004: 300). Of course, ecocriticism is not solely interested in accurate representations of nature, but the gist of Baym's argument is hard to refute; the regional frame, in art as in geography

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and history, lends itself more readily to environmentality than the national. The same argument is made in an influential essay by one of the central authors in the North American regional canon, Mary Austin: 'Art, considered as the expression of any people as a whole, is the response they make in various mediums to the impact that the totality of their experience makes upon them, and there is no sort of experience that works so constantly and subtly upon man as his regional environment' (1932: 97). Critiquing the attempts of writers, especially Sinclair Lewis, to tell stories of broad national applicability, Austin laments what she describes as the 'excursion of the American novelist away from the soil' (1932: 102). The title of one of Mary Austin's most famous books, *The Land of Little Rain*, is telling. 'Land' is deliberately denied its interchangeability with 'country' or 'nation' and is used instead to describe a locale defined by ecological conditions.

Moving towards New Hollywood, it is perhaps important to recall that regionalism in American literature, although normally associated with nineteenth-century writing and the rather reductive notion of 'local colour', continued to exert a strong influence throughout the twentieth century. Willa Cather, William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy all achieved considerable prominence by developing this tradition and the list need not be confined to non-urban settings. Walter Wells (1973) has interpreted Hollywood fiction of the 1930s – novels such as James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), Nathanial West's *Day of the Locust* (1939) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (1941) – from a regional perspective, and the qualities he uses to define the place in question are indeed not reducible to the city of Los Angeles. They include 'a geophysical immensity and an unparalleled variety of landscape; a societal newness and a lack of history save for a relatively recent frontier and agrarian past'; 'a static and languorous subtropical climate'; and 'a sprawling stucco and neon landscape set precariously in a land of drought, flood and earthquake' (Wells 1973: 10). (A number of the novels singled out by Wells were, significantly, adapted into New Hollywood features.) A more direct inheritor of the Mary Austin tradition, albeit with a countercultural twist, was Edward Abbey. His novel of eco-inspired sabotage, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), makes a direct connection between anti-governmental sentiment and regional preservation. The two main members of the eponymous gang (one a disillusioned war veteran) are bitterly angry about the industrial despoilment of their beloved southwest, and the novel's general dynamic of heroic topophilia and intimate local knowledge versus faceless corporate authority shares distinct similarities with the New Hollywood fugitive film – right down to the principled

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distrust of helicopters. *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* published in the twilight of the New Hollywood period, gives a vivid sense of how certain principles and priorities of this generation were conducive to regional thinking.

As I have introduced it here, regionalism – whether regarded in reference to a geographical area or an artistic creation – is bound up with considerations of environment and ecology. Not only does the very use of region as a structuring spatial frame imply (and demand) an intensified awareness of environmental conditions, but America's rich tradition of regional writing is invariably sympathetic to the importance of natural features, and may – as Nina Baym suggests – even be deemed *automatically* environmental. In recent years, this position has received an increasing amount of critical scrutiny. Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) carefully dismantles the grounds upon which localism has been understood as 'more ecological'. Concerned that such an assumption represents a failure to respond to the challenges of modernity, Heise argues that environmentalist discourse should become more self-critical with regard to its 'persistent utopian reinvestment in the local' (2008: 28). Such discourse, the argument goes, represents something of a hangover from 'green' political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and as such is hampered by a confusing and contradictory marriage between faintly Marxist materialist analysis and New Age-inspired spirituality. Heise also makes a convincing case that subsequent debates in anthropology and philosophy (not to mention ecology) have yielded a number of insights which could prove very useful in rectifying this prejudice – Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's writings on (de- and re-)territorialization are a case in point, and Heise also notes Arjun Appadurai's thoughts on the production of locality, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In short, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* mounts a comprehensive critique of the idea, raised early on in this chapter and sustained, implicitly, throughout, that local and regional frames have an inherent and automatic call on our ecocritical attention.

But the regional–natural paradigm, however pervasive it may seem in literary and environmental discourse, has rarely been adapted to discussion of popular American cinema. Ecological progressiveness, Heise's ultimate concern, is a slightly different question, and one which casts the region–ecology interplay in a more problematic light. Timothy Morton is another advocate of this move away from localism and regionalism as default frameworks for ecocriticism, urging instead that 'the best environmental thinking is thinking big – as big as possible, and maybe bigger than that' (2010: 20). In this vein, both Heise and Morton

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make convincing arguments about the exciting ecocritical potential of reclaiming notions of cosmopolitanism and globalism. And yet, looking back to American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s – the very period which Heise identifies as that in which ideas about locality and ecology became so deeply enmeshed – it is important to keep in play the values and assumptions which seem to have informed their vision. In other words, the contention that regionalism's ecological credentials are culturally and historically determined is an important warning for the field of ecocriticism at large, but it need not deter study of those themes and their manifestations in art and literature. That some New Hollywood films operated as regional works is a feature that warrants ecocritical attention, irrespective of concerns about the ecological validity of localism in the twenty-first century.

Region as an Undervalued Notion in American Cinema

'I like to think that a giant vacuum in American film production is slowly being filled [...] The vacuum I refer to is the absence of regionally inspired and regionally produced film work' (Spears 2008: 223). Ross Spears is here referring to the work of the James Agee Film Project, which was established in 1974, and which aimed (in part) to nurture a 'sense of place' in American filmmaking beyond New York and Los Angeles. It is interesting to consider that such a project gained momentum in the early 1970s, and one could reasonably speculate that the vacuum identified by Spears was just as apparent to many other young and ambitious filmmakers, both within and beyond Hollywood. However, the focus here will not so much be on the production circumstances of filmmaking, but rather the challenge of *responding* to films as regional creations as opposed to national or even worldly fictions (as is often the case with American cinema).

When watching films, a crucial part of the interpretative process is to negotiate an idea about where the action, or inaction, is taking place. Immediate locales may be obvious – a school, a tavern, a train, a rowing boat – but to stretch much further beyond this 'zone' is to enter what Deborah Thomas calls a 'sliding scale of generality' (2001: 9). Does *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) take place on the eponymous street, or in Los Angeles County, or in North America? The question is, of course, not unique to cinema; Wallace Stevens begins one of his most famous poems ('Anecdote of the Jar') with the line, 'I placed a jar in Tennessee', and it is a poem which goes on to satirize humankind's (or Americans', or perhaps

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poets') penchant for thinking that geography surrounds and complements our actions. But the question is perhaps especially vexed in cinema, because the content of the text will invariably be intensely localized (even an extreme long shot might only 'cover' one or two acres); we are obliged to develop a sense of wider framing beyond the camera's, a frame without which virtually no narrative cinema would make sense. The critic Manny Farber describes 'the area of experience and geography that a film covers' ([1971] 1998: 3) as 'negative space'; as he explains, 'the command of experience which an artist can set resonating within a film [...] is a sense of terrain created partly by the audience's imagination and partly by camera–actors–director' ([1971] 1998: 9). In film studies, the language used to describe and interpret a film plays an important role in this negotiation, constantly locating the action of films somewhere on Thomas's sliding scale.

Studies of American cinema, I suggest, have generally overlooked region as a possible category of wider framing, and have often reached for other scales of contextualization: the home, for example, or the city, or (especially) America. Some writers (Shiel 2001; Webber and Wilson 2008) have argued for cinema's status as an inherently, almost automatically urban form, and the historical significance of cinema's rise alongside American urbanization is undeniable. Likewise, there is ample reason to sympathize with Leonard Quart and Albert Auster's claim that Hollywood films 'reveal something of the dreams, desires, displacements, and, in some cases, social and political issues confronting American society' (1991: 2). The urban and the national are two of the most exhaustively referenced spatial frames in studies of American cinema. As I argue for the usefulness of a new frame, however, I will instead critique a particular tendency (most visible in aesthetic analyses of classical Hollywood cinema) to opt for 'world' as an appropriate theatre of reference, and will do so for two reasons. Firstly, to collapse the ideas of resonance and world into one another so readily is problematic from an ecocritical perspective; it proceeds from an unambiguously anthropocentric starting point, implying that the world exists to the extent that humans perceive it to. Secondly, to better appreciate the spatial invocations of classical Hollywood can only enhance our understanding of the shift (if any) signalled by the rupturing of that mode, in the shape of New Hollywood.

Possibly the most sustained exposition of the film-fiction-as-world approach is the essay 'Where is the World? The Horizon of Events in Movie Fiction', in which V.F. Perkins sets out 'both to show that the fictional world of a movie is indeed a world, and [...] to sketch some of the ways in which it matters that a

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fictional world is a world' (2005: 17). Perkins argues for a better appreciation of what lies beyond a frame (both spatially and temporally), what he calls a film's 'worldhood', and makes a convincing case for the importance of this appreciation in any comprehensive analysis of narrative and style. What is not clear, however, is why 'world' stands as the most appropriate perimeter of significance. Of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), Perkins writes: 'Of course this is our world. It shares our economy, our technologies, our architecture, and the legal systems and social forms that yield complex phenomena like slum landlords, divorce scandals and fame. Its history is our history of wars and slumps and the rise of mass media' (2005: 19). In an essay generally characterized by acute attention to descriptive precision, this passage contains certain questionable leaps and assumptions, at least from the perspective of this study. Are legal systems and architecture best understood as *worldly* details? Do they not resonate more meaningfully in other frames of reference, such as federal or urban or Christian? It is perhaps disingenuous to interpret Perkins so literally, and ignore the fact that his choice of terminology is used to emphasize as fully as possible the vital importance of attending to the web of implications and inferences which stretch beyond a film's immediate frame. But it is also important to remember that, at one point or another, that web becomes so threadbare as to become unhelpful or even meaningless. 'To be in a world', writes Perkins, 'is to know the partiality of knowledge and the boundedness of vision – to be aware that there is always a bigger picture' (2005: 20). But do all films point to a picture of the same, worldly size?

A number of writers sympathetic to Perkins's mode of analysis adopt a similar approach. James Walters, in *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema* (2008), proceeds from the understanding that 'world' is a vital structuring concept. He explicitly endorses Perkins's essay and its forensic attention to the ways in which a film's on-screen fiction constantly interacts with off-screen, implicit currents. However, like Perkins, he does not entirely explain the particular usefulness of 'world' as a descriptor for this, or its advantage over alternatives. Instead, he selects frames and contexts which are appropriate for his case studies. 'In *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968),' writes Walters, 'it is particularly important that the phone booth scene takes place within the city, where methods and communication and travel are different from those found in a desert, or in a forest' (2008: 23). Like Perkins's comments on *Citizen Kane* (quoted above), Walters's analysis itself concedes the need to sub-categorize, to establish a frame

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which is narrow enough to be meaningful and constructive (a city) but broad enough to give full credit to the drama's resonance (a whole city).

Deborah Thomas, quoted above, deftly juggles a variety of spatial concepts, and – like Perkins and Walters – urges readers to be mindful of the meaningful potential of geographical settings and how viewers are invited to see and know those settings. In her analysis of *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946), Thomas investigates the significance of various geographical markers (the church, the frontier, East and West etc.), generally preferring these to 'world' as useful reading tools. It is perhaps significant that she invokes 'world' most consistently when turning to questions of diegesis and ontology. 'A film's diegesis is the narrative world and all that happens within it' (2001: 97), Thomas explains. Concluding her sub-chapter 'Diegetic and Non-Diegetic' she develops this idea of 'world' as a phenomenon of film spectatorship, rather than (as in Perkins and Walters) narrative richness:

> *Because we are located at the outer layer of the overall structure, physically grounded in the non-diegetic world and looking in, we have a much greater awareness than the characters can ever have, embedded as they are in a world which makes them largely blind to our own world outside it and only occasionally and dimly aware of their fixture in a larger structure. (Thomas 2001: 108)*

This passage closely resembles the concerns of Stanley Cavell, a writer explicitly invoked by both Walters and Thomas, and an acknowledged influence on Perkins too. In his first book about cinema, *The World Viewed* ([1971] 1979), Cavell mounts a philosophical investigation of the medium, and continually reaches for the term 'world' (the book's epigraph is taken from Thoreau: 'Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?'), but essentially with the aim of considering questions of ontology, rather than questions of narrative and setting. 'How do movies reproduce the world magically? Not by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen [...]. The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it' (Cavell [1971] 1979: 40–41). It is a mistake, I believe, to take from these ontological insights the lesson that film narratives are always most fruitfully understood as happening first and foremost in a, or the, world. As a synonym (however imprecise) for a kind of totalized reality, 'world' does help us towards a better understanding of the philosophical and aesthetic strangeness of

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film spectatorship. But approaching film from an ecocritical point of view troubles this key term and obliges us to think especially carefully about its appropriate positioning in discussion of a film's environmentality.

My concern here can be most clearly illustrated in contrast to Adrian Ivakhiv's writing on 'the geomorphology of the visible' in his book *Ecologies of the Moving Image* (2013). As already mentioned, this is a rich and generous book, and perhaps the most far-reaching and abundantly imaginative work on cinema and ecology that has yet been published. Because it is a very carefully structured account of cinema's process-relational capacities, we must hesitate before critiquing its passages out of context. That said, Ivakhiv's chapter on territorialization seems to be broadly summative of his overall approach, which sees cinema as a medium of three simultaneous ecologies (the material, the social and the perceptual); turning to the 'where' of film texts, Ivakhiv is too careful to use terms such as 'setting' or 'backdrop' in an all-encompassing way, and instead describes cinematic geography as 'the *given* against which, or in front of which, actions take place' (2013: 70, emphasis in the original). The rub, as I see it, comes when each film's distinctive relationship to its environment, its physical 'given', is characterized as world-creation – and the attendant implication that the 'weaving together' of images and sounds is enough to constitute a world:

> *Through a perceptual dramatization of space, enacted by action-dramatic relationships such as the shot-reverse shot, the cutaway to something that is being viewed by a character, and other classical film techniques, filmed space takes on a naturalness that feels not fragmented but normal. Film thereby takes pieces of world and fuses them into a synthesis, a newly produced world. (Ivakhiv 2013: 75)*

There is a valuable reminder here that narrative cinema invariably overcomes its inherent discontinuities not simply because certain norms have been industrialized and globalized, but because those norms are of a piece with our strategies for comprehending the real world. But the leap between something 'feeling natural' and qualifying as a 'newly produced world' is a significant and problematic one; it seems to overstate the 'visuality' of the world (filmed space certainly doesn't 'feel real' in terms of touch or smell) and understate the futility that cinema so often invokes. There are crucial features of being in the world, including decisions about movement and attention, that cinema spectatorship cannot grant

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us (Cavell's description of cinema as granting us presence to something that has passed is pertinent here ([1971] 1979: 26)). Recognizing the capacity of film to develop complex and illuminating responses to the world is a project shared by writers across ecocritical film studies; whether to draw an absolute distinction between a 'film world' and *the* world is an ongoing debate, to which it is hoped this discussion of New Hollywood will contribute.

Of course, engaging in this debate by way of a particular historical period changes its terms. In other words, it may be acknowledged that the worldly frame is to some extent embedded in classical Hollywood (the main point of reference for Cavell, Perkins and Thomas) but should not be seen as natural or inevitable throughout Hollywood, and film, history. (Another valuable feature of Ivakhiv's theorizing is his keenness to adapt the model to different film-historical contexts.) From this perspective, it is telling to return to Mary Austin's thoughts on the virtues of region-based art and literature, and note the terms on which she critiques the work of Sinclair Lewis. Novels such as *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922), Austin complains, constitute a 'broad, thin, generalized surface reflection of the American community and American character' and join a trend of 'fiction shallow enough to be common to all regions, so that no special knowledge of other environments than one's own is necessary to appreciation of it' (1932: 99). The all-embracing aesthetic she finds and regrets in Lewis bears more than a passing resemblance to that which so many commentators (and audiences) appreciate in classical Hollywood. The buoyant universalism of Frank Capra is perhaps the most vivid example, but the films of Howard Hawks, William Wyler, Vincente Minnelli, Douglas Sirk and Preston Sturges (for example) are shot through with what Austin describes as the 'deliberate choice of the most usual, the most widely distributed of American story incidents' (1932: 101). If, then, regionalism was somehow anathema to the design and success of classical Hollywood, the question arises: what role did it play in the dissolution or redefinition of that model? Was New Hollywood attuned more to lands of little rain than to main streets?

Nashville and Critical Regionalism

Before turning to this chapter's main case studies, it is perhaps useful to return briefly to a film sequence already discussed in some detail, the final scene of

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Nashville, and suggest some ways in which it can be interpreted as regional. This will act as an important reminder that the premise (and findings) of this discussion are relevant to the broader scope of New Hollywood cinema, and not only the two films analysed in detail here. How, then, would the climax of *Nashville* look in a regionalist reading?

The geographical specificity in the film's title is one clue; often interpreted as a metonym for the nation, Nashville could also be interpreted as a victim of it, as local people become unwitting puppets of a national presidential campaign. We never see candidate Hal Phillip Walker (only his duplicitous assistant, John Triplette), but the film essentially details the ripples of local consequence which arise from his visit. In many ways, the national and the local are antagonists in *Nashville*; when Barnett (Allen Garfield) erupts in anger at the prospect of his wife performing in front of political banners, he is anxious about letting her be used for a broader purpose in which neither he, she nor any of her true fans have a proper stake. Immediately after the shooting, Haven Hamilton (Henry Gibson) addresses the crowd with desperate defiance: 'This ain't Dallas, it's Nashville. You show 'em what we're made of. They can't do this to us here in Nashville'. The reference to the assassination of John F. Kennedy of course invites us to interpret events through a national frame, but it simultaneously challenges us to think beneath the national. Hamilton's instinct is to characterize the shooting *not* as sadly typical of his country (perhaps the most common critical interpretation of *Nashville*), but as an alien phenomenon, more characteristic of a distant community and culture. Altman's film can thus be thought of as performing the role that Stephanie Foote associates with regional writing: 'representing non-normative communities or cultures to a national audience' (2001: 30), Nashville acting not as a symbol or a microcosm, but as a distinctive subset.

An obvious and important objection could be raised at this point: Nashville is a city, not a region. This is certainly true, but *Nashville* bears such little resemblance to conventional depictions of urban space in American cinema that it invites us to bring a different spatial perspective to bear upon it. The almost total absence of the pedestrian experience, for example, precludes the bustle, sensory variety and dynamism we associate with the city in film, from *Sunrise* (F.W. Murnau, 1927) to *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003). The characters arrive by aeroplane and are then dispersed across various spaces whose proximity it is almost impossible to determine. In this respect, the film is in some sense the polar opposite of *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), a quintessentially urban text.

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Numerous scenes, such as the funeral of Martha's aunt and Haven Hamilton's party, take place in settings which appear to be beyond the city, but no reference is made to their whereabouts. In many city-based films, when characters leave their native environment to spend time in suburban or rural surroundings, the shift is pronounced and profound (*Sunrise* again stands as a prime example). Equivalent movements in *Nashville* barely register; if the film's spatial frame is narrower than national, it also appears to be broader than urban.

In suggesting the relevance of regionalism to *Nashville*, I am broadly following the model developed by Douglas Reichert Powell in his book *Critical Regionalism* (2007). An attempt to resist the nostalgic, reactionary and anti-modern lapses to which regionalism is sometimes prone (in politics as well as art and literature), critical regionalism looks to embrace the importance of region as a relational concept: a spatial category which does not bring with it the 'juridical, insulating force' of other divisions (2007: 4). Powell is keen to distinguish regionalism from parochialism and the ahistoricism of shallow localism, and also to counter the idea that 'life outside the cosmopolis is inert, unchanging' (2007: 13). Critical regionalism comes into its own, Powell explains, 'where something unique and isolated seems to be going on, but something else – something complex and interconnected – is also happening' (2007: 18). This is a deliberately basic formulation, and is no doubt applicable in one way or another to any number of accomplished Hollywood films. But I would maintain that it answers to the challenges of *Nashville* especially well, and to the conundrum offered by that film on the question of scale. Critical regionalism encourages us to stay simultaneously aware of local particularity (the intensified significance of country music, say) and broader cultural currents (such as acute generational schisms) – and *Nashville* warrants just such a reading.

Critical Regionalism contains a chapter on cinema, the main element of which is an appraisal of *Fargo* (Joel Coen, 1996) which lauds the film's ability to depict aberrant violence as resulting from complex material and economic conditions, rather than the inherent perverseness of regional cultures. Films such as *Deliverance* and *Cape Fear (*Martin Scorsese, 1991) are, according to Powell, guilty of depicting regional environments as stagnant and uncivilized, threatening because of their terminal disconnectedness from broader flows of exchange. In them, 'travellers enter a timeless space, where the landscape and its inhabitants are seen through the eyes of the travellers and understood in terms of their vocabulary of cultural meanings and interpretations, juxtaposing a cosmopolitan, mobile sensibility with

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its apparent, isolate opposite' (2007: 106). In contrast, *Fargo* 'encourages people to see local problems and priorities enmeshed in broader patterns of history, politics and culture' (2007: 143). The following analysis of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Cockfighter* will draw on two recurrent themes in Powell's argument, each of which relates particularly well to one case study: the ability of some films to locate regional people and communities within broader historical and material conditions, and tropes of illiteracy, silence and muteness as (problematic) signifiers of regional otherness. Neither of these approaches focuses directly on depictions of environmental conditions, but in their scope and frame of reference, they cannot help but lean towards the ecocritical.

A Regional Chain Saw Massacre

To what extent can *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* be considered as a pastoral nightmare? Innocent and naïve young people venture into rural Texas, apparently on little more than a whim, and are brutally murdered by a family of cannibals. (In what is perhaps a vital point of distinction, these youngsters are much less willing than their equivalents in the fugitive film to adapt to new conditions.) Not only does the film's narrative deliberately manipulate certain pastoral conventions – the implicit nostalgia, the romanticization of rural labour – but *Massacre* is also punctuated by beautiful images of the natural environment, in which the blazing sunlight invariably plays its part. However, if pastoralism is often criticized for offering up a saccharine take on non-urban life, drained of historical or political urge, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* does quite the opposite. Here, images and events establish connections and correlations between natural resources, industrial capitalism, violence and landscape – and although the logic of these is never clear enough to constitute anything like a theory or argument, we are nevertheless left in no doubt about the deep interconnectedness of nature, industry and horror. The oblique environmentalism of this film has already attracted study and comment; in particular Carter Soles's 'Sympathy for the Devil' demonstrates how the 'crushing eco-paranoia' (2013: 235) of early-1970s America found a gruesome and affecting expression in the 'New Horror' of Hooper, Romero, Craven and others. As will become clear, my reading of Hooper's film is broadly supportive of, and supported by, Soles's account. But once again I am reluctant interpret a film's environmentality in terms of its rhetoric register; the question most pertinent

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to my exploration of New Hollywood is not whether *Massacre*'s themes cross paths with environmentalist politics, but rather the extent to which its extraordinary effects are somehow dependent on its unusually particularized 'negative space'. To watch *Massacre* as a regional film is to appreciate not only the profound importance of the non-human elements, but that those elements are embedded in the social and political realities of a time and, more specifically, a place.

Critical of the way in which *Deliverance* reduces Appalachian people to extensions of the landscape, Douglas Reichert Powell similarly finds fault with *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) for venturing too far in the other direction; for locating violence in 'a self-contained world with its own internally consistent rules and regulations' (2007: 127). If the riverbanks in *Deliverance* are too determinative, *Pulp Fiction* instead presents an environment which is more or less impotent, offering as it does 'a kind of mythopoetic rendering of Los Angeles with scant connections to any material place' (2007: 129). Part of this rests on the way in which violence is rendered apolitical and ahistorical, and 'supernatural trappings mystify for the viewer the relationship of the film's violence to social conflicts in the places they inhabit, by making violence a cosmological occurrence rather than the local manifestation of broader cultural crises' (2007: 128). At first glance, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* may seem to repeat the sins (as Powell characterizes them) of both films; as in *Deliverance*, terrible violence is inflicted by rural locals on cosmopolitan visitors, and as in *Pulp Fiction*, there is the suggestion of cosmological (or at least astrological) fate. This premise – of a gruesome crime in a deserted rural outpost – is not one which seems to hold out much hope for the kind of nuanced and thoughtful probing of extra-urban places for which Powell argues. But, as I will suggest, there is also much in the film which 'grounds' it both historically and geographically, and in this sense the seemingly inexplicable crimes become, as the film's title suggests, Texan.

Texas, of course, is a political entity, and thus threatens to compromise the notion of region as an ecologically, materially defined area. It is important to point out at this early stage, then, that many of the Texas 'signposts' in the film – the wildlife, the climate, the agriculture, the natural resources – lean more towards the ecological than the cultural and political. (Peter Lev (1986: 60–62) has spelt out his own reasons for interpreting Texas films as regional films.) I will begin by tracing such signposts throughout *Massacre*, arguing that the regional specificity is vital to the film's richness. I will then discuss its historicity, a quality which Powell finds so lacking in *Deliverance* and *Pulp Fiction*, and which stands as an

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important factor in distinguishing *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as a peculiarly insightful, even sensitive, regional film.

The Texan Terrain

Accompanying a close-up on, and gradual zoom out from, a carefully arranged rotting corpse, radio reports provide the film's only real exposition in the opening moments of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*: 'Grave robbing in Texas is this hour's top news story'. Some details are offered up about the scale and strange execution of the crimes, but all that the Sheriff is willing to reveal is that he does 'have evidence linking the crime to elements outside the state'. As in another key horror film from the period, *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968) – throughout which radio and television reports provide updates on the gruesome crime wave enveloping 'the Eastern third of this nation' – the geography matters. The fact that, in *Massacre*, 'area residents' gather at the cemeteries to discover whether their loved ones have been abused only deepens the sense of locality, situating the crime and its aftermath at a communal site. The radio news continues over the opening credits, and although the second story has, unlike the first, no direct bearing on the narrative, neither is it an arbitrary topic: 'Oil storage units continue to burn out of control at the huge Texaco refinery near the Texas–Louisiana border'. If there was any doubt as to the importance of this film's regional setting, the immediate prominence given to oil (just as the film's title appears on screen) dispels it.

In 'The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s' (2003), Robin Wood identifies something of a geographical pattern in American horror films, whereby villains and monsters, traditionally conceived of as foreign (invariably European), begin to be depicted as products of America itself (2003: 77). He suggests that *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) was a crucial turning point in this phenomenon, but – despite the obvious influence of Hitchcock's film on Hooper's – the regional specificity evident in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* seems to represent its own development or intensification, as if the 'home' that horror came back to during this period might not just be thought of in national terms, but as something more localized. Although, in *Psycho*, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) ventures into somewhat unfamiliar territory, her journey provides nothing like the environmental shock experienced by the teenagers traversing rural Texas. Following Wood, Marion's experience of growing tired and bored on a long dual carriageway, and

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her early exchanges in the Bates Motel, could be understood as just the kind of 'American story incidents' which Mary Austin found so wanting from a regional (and proto-ecocritical) perspective. In *Massacre*, we once again see the film's protagonist(s) grow uncomfortable whilst travelling through unfamiliar terrain, but the nature of this discomfort is quite particular. The friends, and especially Franklin, are obviously affected by the stifling heat, and this poses a particular problem when they drive past a slaughterhouse and become physically sick from the stench, forcing them to wind up the van windows.[2] Their squeamishness towards these unfamiliar conditions – local climate and local industry – takes an ironic twist moments later, when they decide to pick up a hitchhiker (despite protests about him smelling like the slaughterhouse) because they worry that he will be suffering in the heat. It is, of course, a fateful decision, and the teenagers' initial revulsion toward the Texan environment has continuing echoes throughout the film, when the awful violence inflicted upon them continues to be intertwined with the specifics of place.

Central to this is the role of both oil and agriculture in the fate of the youngsters; it is their reliance on fuel, for example, which leaves them susceptible to the murderous family, and that family's brutal techniques are explained as being the fruits of their agricultural training. The implications of this (which a number of other commentators have remarked on) will be discussed in slightly more detail below, when situating the film in more of an historical context. At this stage, it is useful to consider how the film's drama is also dependent on quite basic, essential 'qualities' of Texas. The intense heat and bright sunlight, for

Figure 4.1 Revolting surroundings: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Vortex)

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example, surely make the exposed corpses and DIY abattoir *even more* gruesome prospects.[3] There is, also, the famous sparseness of the region; the sense (and fact) of considerable distances between points and centres. *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971) draws on just this aspect of Texas to generate an acute pathos; it is as if in a place as vast as Texas, small towns such as those depicted in the film are liable to be forgotten, and their inhabitants with them. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* performs a comparable manoeuvre, only pathos is replaced with fear and terror.

Nowhere is this clearer than at the film's climax, when Sally (Marilyn Burns), having been imprisoned and tortured for a whole night, eventually manages to scramble to a window and launch herself through it. Writing in *Film Comment* a few years after the film's release, Roger Greenspun described the moment thus:

> *Possibly the most startling image of the movie is the sight of the morning daylight after Sally hurls herself out of the window of the modest dining room that was to have been her death chamber. You had forgotten the dawn, and to rediscover it is again to be confronted, almost against your will, with larger necessities than those governing the madman with his chainsaw. (1977: 16)*

The move from what seemed like terminal darkness to a hazy morning light at first seems to underscore the ecstatic relief of Sally's escape. (It also 'answers' an earlier moment when, taking refuge in the petrol station, Sally stares through the door out towards pitch blackness, and realizes the true extent of her hopelessness.) But this is soon undone by a series of long shots, positioning Sally – now essentially disabled by the abuse she has suffered – as a small and feeble figure with virtually no hope of running to safety, no chance of reaching anywhere out of the range of her tormentors. In the end, of course, she does manage to escape, but the absurd happenstance of her rescue (a man miraculously drives past at just the right moment and bravely battles Leatherface, Sally's tormentor) only confirms quite how desolate her situation was. Sally is saved in spite of, not because of, where she is.

Rick Worland (2007) begins his analysis of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* by considering the richness of its title, noting that exploitation films, in lieu of stars and promotional budget, would have to work particularly hard to invest their titles with drama. He points to the inherent intrigue of a common tool (the chain saw) being commandeered for horrific ends, and to the inescapable Vietnam

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connotations of 'massacre'. But Worland is most interested in the significance of 'Texas':

> *Texas in the American imagination meant the rural South with its tragic dynamics of race and class; but it also symbolized the West itself, with all the accumulated cultural mythology from cattle drives and Indian fighting to the Alamo. Throughout the Vietnam era, many Westerns inverted the genre's prior assumptions with the frontier disappearing under the advance of modernity, and violent struggle often bringing only fruitless carnage rather than a promise of individual and social renewal. It would have been extraordinary indeed if frontier motifs referenced even indirectly in a horror film at this point had done anything other than continue those revisionist trends with still bleaker irony and violence. (2007: 211)*

In many ways, Worland's analysis complements an interpretation of the film as a fiction whose regional basis is hugely significant, and he even establishes connections between this and the distorting impact of the Vietnam war on generic syntax, as has been discussed in Chapter Three. But there are also suggestions in this passage that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* broaches Texas primarily as a symbol or idea (Worland goes on to talk about the cattle business as a 'motif'). It is a convincing analysis, but one that an ecocritical approach is obliged to critique, or at least adjust, concerned as it is with the danger of doing away too quickly with the material referent.

As an example of this revised approach, I will turn to an establishing shot which appears early on in the film, immediately following the prologue described above. It is a close-up of an upturned armadillo, lying dead on a road – presumably the same stretch of road on which the young friends park their van moments later. The shot lasts almost twenty seconds, which, considering the absence of any 'helpful' or orienting information from the soundtrack (instead the barely audible radio reports from the prologue bleed over into this sequence), is a considerable duration. Because of this, although we might initially see the armadillo as a kind of Texas indicator, equivalent to red London buses or Australian koala bears, the opportunity is presented for us to rethink its role or its meaning. As in *Nashville*, where a lingering close-up on the US flag seemed to bolster its material independence and counter its iconographic potential, this moment seems to lead us in a particularizing direction; the time allocated to the shot allows us to

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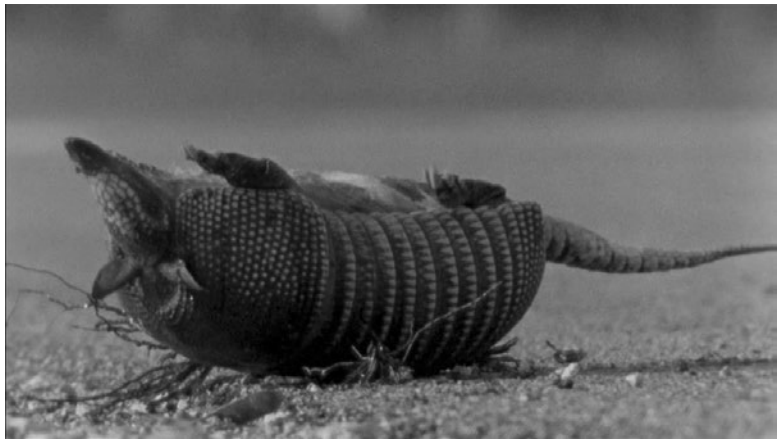

Figure 4.2 More than a Texas indicator: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Vortex)

consider the armadillo as more than a trope. We have, for example, the opportunity to notice that it lies dead, and therefore has presumably been killed, on a busy road; the prolonged stillness of the camera (and the armadillo) makes it possible to notice the movement of small insects feasting on the corpse; the deliberate framing sets the groundwork for a clever graphic match in the following cut, which draws (ominous) parallels between the hard-shelled animal and the metallic van, from which the main characters shortly emerge.

Why do such implications have any bearing on the question of *Massacre* as an ecocritically regional film? Because they spring from an establishing shot which is simultaneously concerned with locating the narrative in a particular environment *and* ensuring that such an environment is far more than a setting. We are prompted to see an armadillo, rather than 'an armadillo'; to ponder the circumstances of its death (presumably traceable to oil-guzzling trucks) and its fate as a corpse – and even to transpose these concerns over to the doomed characters we see soon afterwards. To this extent, it would not be too outlandish to declare this close-up establishing shot as critically regionalist. And it is important to note there are a number of other moments in *Massacre* which operate in similar ways, including lingering shots of the setting sun and a windmill, both of which hover between being signs and material contributors to the environmental conditions of the story. To better appreciate the way in which such moments draw not only on an environment but a *significantly historicized* environment, it helps to locate *Massacre* in some environmental historical context.

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An Unsettling Time

Just a few years after the release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and in the same year as *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977), the poet and farmer Wendell Berry published *The Unsettling of America.* It is a haunting title, but rather than narrate the exploits of crazed cannibals, it details the decline and fall of American agriculture. Berry's central claim is that the industrialization of farming (and the accompanying rise of specialization) has had a profoundly detrimental effect on American society, 'a disaster that is both agricultural and cultural: the generalization of the relationship between people and land' ([1977] 1996: 33). Describing the unhappiness of the average American citizen in the 1970s, Berry talks of how 'from morning to night he does not touch anything that he has produced himself' ([1977] 1996: 20) and ultimately begins to understand locality less as homeland or dwelling place than as backdrop; a separate entity from one's life and livelihood.

Berry's is a familiar critique of industrial capitalism, and one which clearly chimes with *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in which skilled slaughterhouse workers are superseded by technological advances. But is it sensitive enough to the specifics of the film to interpret this, as does Robin Wood, as an attack on capitalism per se (2003: 82–84)? Is this not another form of the generalization against which Berry (not to mention, in another context, Mary Austin) argues? In his appraisal of *Fargo* as a critically regionalist film, Powell observes that the character of Gaear, the uncommunicative kidnapper, is a redundant lumberjack whose skills have been perversely redirected to the (criminal) service economy (2007: 139). The violence he unleashes is not as spectacular as that dealt out by Leatherface, but it springs from the same well. Details such as this perhaps reflect the universally alienating potential of market capitalism, but they also depict its particular ramifications in different corners of the world, where different industries and cultures of expertise will inevitably suffer and react differently. The plight of the cannibals in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is, as Berry's work helps to illuminate, simultaneously a sign of the times and of the place.

It is possible, however, to be more specific than this. As Chuck Jackson has perceptively argued, commentators on *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are too quick to declare the cannibalistic family as redundant and unemployed, whereas in fact they operate a service station (2008: 52). Jackson's article is an attempt to explain, in considerable detail, how 'the film smartly tracks a concentration of geopolitical events that emerged during the early 1970s, including the drying up

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of Texas oil fields; the strengthening of a corporate-controlled, transnational oil economy; oil wars in the global South; and the creation of a more urgent demand for the oil-based products in first-world countries like the United States' (2008: 48). Once again, it is telling to refer back to *Psycho*, and Hitchcock's famous disinterest in what propels Marion Crane to the motel; the $40,000 stolen from her employer is one of the director's most famous 'MacGuffins', and does indeed have quite little purchase on the following drama. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, the friends' lack of oil is much more than a narrative ploy, and the subsequent parallels and exchanges established between blood and meat and oil and capital make for a startling commentary on the environment and culture of the region.

And yet, as Jackson's mention of 'geopolitical events' and the 'transnational oil economy' suggests, such regional specificity is drawn in relation to, rather than in denial of, wider currents and broader fields of circumstance. Again, this attempt to recognize the singularity of a place without constructing it as an hermetically sealed Other chimes with Powell's endorsement of *Fargo* and his critique of *Cape Fear* (and others) for failing to achieve that balance with their characterizations of regional spaces and places (2007: 110–146). Jackson, offering some theoretical context for this counter-balancing of the local and the global, turns to Fredric Jameson and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992). Discussing the perplexing role of conspiracies and assassinations in American film narratives (particularly those of the New Hollywood period, and particularly those in the films of Alan J. Pakula), Jameson worries about how any effective representation of political actions might hope to locate them, given the 'enlargement of the social totality or operative context out into the uniquely distended proportions of the new world system of late capitalism' (1992: 49). Such quandaries fall into the category of what Jameson calls 'the dilemmas of cognitive mapping' (1992: 49). If Pakula's films offer one response to that dilemma, perhaps regional films of the period offer another, in which the priority is not to locate dispersive power struggles, but rather attend to a particular location, and find the political within such a context.

In *Modernity at Large* (1996), Arjun Appadurai raises similar concerns to Jameson's about the rupturing impact of post-industrial capitalism. 'What can locality mean in a world where spatial localization, quotidian interaction and social scale are not always isomorphic?' (1996: 179). This question, which I would suggest relates very revealingly to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, comes at the beginning of a chapter entitled 'The Production of Locality', in which Appadurai

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describes the dangerous (and productive) instability of local and regional identities. This is particularly true from the perspective of the nation state, for which regional subsets 'represent a perennial source of entropy and slippage' (1996: 191). This potentially explosive national/local stand-off is glimpsed in *The Hills Have Eyes*, in which a clan of inbred social outcasts hide amongst desert terrain which is officially designated as property of the U.S. armed forces – they even ambush an airfield in search of food. In line with this dynamic, the awful treatment of the young travellers in *Massacre* might be interpreted as a volatile reaction to the national on behalf of the local. After all, Appadurai explains how localities are often abused as sites for 'nationally appropriated nostalgias, celebrations and commemorations' – as good a description as any of the teenagers' 'use' of rural Texas. In the early stages of the film, after reaching the abandoned house in which Franklin and Sally grew up, Pam (Teri McMinn) and Kirk (William Veil) go off in search of a nearby swimming hole (their directions are based on childhood memories), which turns out to be empty. They then search for the elusive petrol, before being butchered to death in a nearby house shortly after. Whatever ideas these young people had about this territory's familiarity, any assumptions about abundance and acquiescence are undone in the most brutal way. As the couple walk towards a windmill in search of fuel, Kirk's (William Vail) macho confidence in his ability to get what they want – 'I'll give 'em a couple of bucks' – begins to make Pam uneasy, as if she senses the worst. At the very least, Pam seems to suspect, rightly, that a fundamental chasm exists between the world of her friends, waiting a few hundred yards back, and the people she is about to encounter. An eerie travelling shot, navigating through bushes and trees, ensures that we feel closer to Pam's creeping fear than Kirk's cocksure familiarity. Neighbourliness becomes a black joke; a source of horror. As Appadurai has it, 'locality is no longer what it used to be' (1996: 11).

However, while Appadurai's discussion of locality does point to another level of political pertinence in *Massacre*'s regionalism, his approach is in danger of reducing the notion of region to a purely social construct. As Hooper's film demonstrates, some works succeed in depicting and defining region as something in which the ecological and the material are symbiotic with the social and the historical. So, while Appadurai might interpret the swimming hole sequence as something like the unveiling of the region's hollowness and brittleness as an idea and its reliance on myth and sentiment, it would be a mistake to read the violent comeuppance wreaked on nostalgic regionalism as a total rejection, or

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demystification, of regionalism per se. Instead, what this sequence might actually be offering is the playing out of a conflict between the material and the social, in which Pam and Kirk's rose-tinted view of the region (locality as a construct or product) is severely tested by their experiences of its terrain and its political economy – which *Massacre* reminds us are deeply intertwined. It is as if their romantic (and borrowed) nostalgia collapses in the face of the conditions in Texas, a region of depleted resources in a time of agricultural breakdown. If the region is no longer what it used to be, or what some people imagine it used to be, it is no less a region for that.

Cockfighter and Regional Culture

Douglas Reichert Powell's takes issue with films such as *Deliverance* and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), and the way in which they depict regional peoples as extensions of their exotic land. At times, Powell develops this into a more specific criticism, regarding *Apocalypse Now* and the character of Kurtz (Marlon Brando), who is shown to embrace the 'culturally unacceptable hybrid' of literacy and savagery (2007: 107). For Powell, these two extremes are often invoked in (shallowly) regional films, and silence and uncommunicativeness – as distinct from urban, suburban and cosmopolitan fluency – become convenient markers for the regional and regressive Other. This is taken to something of an extreme in *Cape Fear*, in which the savage Cady (Robert De Niro) embarks on a radical mission of self-education which, according to Powell, the film characterizes as a horrific transgression: 'This film says Cady is separated from the society of the Bowdens [the victimized family] by a gulf no amount of literacy can overcome, because their differences are not cultural and constructed, but natural' (2007: 113). He continues: 'Audiences are actively discouraged from entertaining the possibility of multiple literacies [...] but instead urged to see deviation from the cultural norm as just that' (2007: 113–114). Just as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* initially seemed to caricature its region as a realm of other-worldly terror, so *Cockfighter* offers itself as an interesting example of regional cinema *precisely because* it comes so close to invoking those stereotypes of regional illiteracy critiqued by Powell (its main character is, for most of the film, mute), while somehow retaining the prospect that an 'alternative literacy' is viable.

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Frank Mansfield (Warren Oates) is a dedicated and respected cockfighter in the 'Southern Conference'. His devotion to the sport makes for a disjointed and unsettled personal life, which is marked by a troubled long-term relationship and a peripatetic routine on the highways of the American South. *Cockfighter* is something of a modest record of Mansfield's attempt to balance and resolve these features of his life. Until the final scene, he does not speak on screen, although passages of voiceover allow us some access to his thoughts and intentions. This silence does initially seem to align *Cockfighter* with those films Powell accuses of regional reductionism; like the Appalachians in *Deliverance*, the Vietnamese in *Apocalypse Now* and Max Cady (also from 'Deliverance country') in *Cape Fear*, Mansfield is pre-discursively violent. However, his lack of communication is a decision on his part. It is, we learn, an act of penance: an attempt to atone for an escapade in which he drunkenly boasted about his abilities as a trainer, and lost a costly bet as a result. Friends, colleagues and even lovers are unsure whether his silence is a disability or an act of supreme stubbornness – it is simultaneously respected and taken with a pinch of salt.

The way in which *Cockfighter* begins to present Mansfield as an exotic mystery, but then contextualizes and justifies his position, is a subtle but significant feature of its regional scope. 'I discovered that these guys are not inarticulate rednecks' was Monte Hellman's frank assessment of his experience on location in Georgia (Stevens 2003: 105). The film does not deny the possibility of regional and cultural separateness, but neither does this divide remain absolute; indeed, to complicate matters, it is a divide *within* the communities to which Mansfield belongs. To this extent, his peculiar brand of communication – his facial expressions, his quasi-formalized sign language, his assured and sensitive handling of birds – is given credence as something like an 'alternative literacy'. Bearing in mind the connections already drawn between regionalism and ecocriticism, it is of course significant that the qualified otherness generated in *Cockfighter* is characterized in terms of Mansfield's deeply complex relationship with animals. To even begin to invoke the thorny questions of animal ethics in relation to *Cockfighter*, its production and its narrative, is to risk confusing the focus of this study. However, the disorientating mix of exploitation and sincerity which marks Mansfield's treatment of birds is central to the film's difficulty and richness, and – for the purposes of introducing this discussion – brings together questions of regionalism, otherness and the non-human world as deeply interrelated.

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Cockfighter and Cockfighting

In *The Chess Players* (Satyajit Ray, 1977), there is a quasi-documentary sequence early on, during which a narrator introduces viewers to Lucknow, 'India's bastion of Muslim culture'. Accompanying images of birds and kites circling in the sky, the narrator informs us that 'not all their games had the elegance of pigeons or kite flying'. Moments later, the film cuts to images of baying and taunting spectators, who, it transpires, are watching a cockfight. 'That notable culture had its cruel side, too', intones the narrator. This seems to be a common interpretation or deployment of cockfighting, as a practice whose moral transgressiveness qualifies it as a clear indicator of cultural separateness. In one of the most famous treatments of this subject, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', the anthropologist Clifford Geertz notes that the outlawing of this sport in Bali was a result of 'the pretensions to puritanism radical nationalism tends to bring with it' (1973: 414), and so positions cockfighting as an activity in tension with the national.[4] He also goes on to suggest that, just as 'much of America surfaces in a ball park, on a golf links, at a race track, or around a poker table, much of Bali surfaces in a cock ring' (1973: 417). My analysis of *Cockfighter* adheres to Geertz on this point, if only in a roundabout way; while golf, baseball and poker may be revealing of US national characteristics, cockfighting is not so much foreign, but more specifically localized – it is a Southern activity. In *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982), Bertram Wyatt-Brown discusses how the sport developed a significant popularity in the South from the late eighteenth century onwards, and suggests that historians of this region have mistakenly overlooked the importance of cockfighting in favour of more immediately accessible and more easily quantifiable practices, such as churchgoing (1982: 341). There is not the space here to comprehensively establish the regional specificity of cockfighting in America, and neither is that completely necessary for treating *Cockfighter* as a regional film. However, we can nevertheless begin with some assertions to this effect: cockfighting is often understood as a geographically and culturally separate activity; in the United States, that separateness is Southern; therefore, the ways in which this sport is depicted in *Cockfighter* are crucial to the film's regionalism.

Perhaps the first thing to say about cockfighting in *Cockfighter* is that the film barely addresses its cultural-taboo status. *Cockfighter* does not mount a defence of cockfighting, and in fact seems to ignore the prospect that any defence is necessary. (In one scene, a young and inexperienced cockfighter inserts his finger

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into the anus of his prized bird, thinking this to be an acceptable means of energizing it. Frank, the umpire and the crowd are shocked, and their consternation only serves to normalize and legitimize the sport at large, as a principled and ethically safeguarded pursuit.) Frank's long-term girlfriend, Mary Elizabeth (Patricia Pearcy), objects to cockfighting, or at least to Frank's devotion to cockfighting, but she is an isolated exception, and is even satirized by the film for her 'pretensions to puritanism', to borrow Geertz's phrase. Also, while *Cockfighter* is in some senses a story of an obsession (although much less so than the novel on which it is based), the sport is introduced early on as part of a community event, and there is no sense of subcultural transgression. We see the social niceties surrounding the sport – the friendly bartering, the family atmosphere, the pleasant riverside setting – before any fighting takes place. And the fight itself is filmed without any special emphasis or sense of intrigue, mainly in medium shots looking downwards, as if from the perspective of the onlookers. We share the space with, and even occupy the position of, weathered enthusiasts, and there is no equivalent to the normalized visitors seen in, for example, *Deliverance*. In the build-up to this fight, Frank has deliberately cracked the beak of his bird, in the hope of getting improved betting odds. This then has interesting implications for how we are invited to watch the fight. Rather than an exhibitionist display of cockfighting as a curious practice, this first fight is given another dimension, a detail which particularizes it. Much like the armadillo in *Massacre,* which was shown to be more materially specific than an iconic stereotype, the contest here presents not so much 'cockfighting' the phenomenon as a game in which we already have some interest, some stake. Mansfield loses the fight (his trick backfires) and the crowd trundles away, leaving behind them an empty pit.

Such a matter-of-fact presentation of the sport recurs throughout most of *Cockfighter* – the *Variety* review, published 4 June 1975, notes that the film 'supplies lots of technical detail about the weird sport' (19) – but there is one particularly significant exception. A short while after losing this first fight, Frank remembers the episode in which, while drunk in a hotel room, he challenged Burke (Harry Dean Stanton) to a high-stakes hack. In the flashback scene recounting this fight, *Cockfighter* seems to play up to the sport's contraband image. The setting is unambiguously disreputable (a dingy hotel room in the middle of the night) and the contest is prompted by an unpleasant mix of alcohol, egotism and aggression. The filming of the fight itself is also markedly different from the one described above; it is shot from ground level, in close-up and in slow motion, and

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accompanied by a barroom-blues guitar theme. It would be fair to suggest that these techniques combine to present more obviously exploitative conditions, in which the fight is orchestrated solely for the perverse pleasure of the cockfighters (and the audience), and that pleasure is firmly aligned with anti-social behaviour. Animal-on-animal violence exists here as a fetish object, a cultural abnormality. It is therefore hugely significant that this scene appears as a traumatic memory for Frank, a source of shame and embarrassment. When the scene ends, Frank leaves the hotel room and walks out into a pitch black corridor; we then cut to another blackness, a light is switched on, and Frank is stirred from his sleep.

For this 'version' of cockfighting to be characterized as a nightmare, and for Frank to redeem himself by vowing to take cockfighting more seriously, says a great deal about the film's particular cultural scope. Its parameters of normativity position cockfighting as a given; not an offshoot, rebellion or perversion. And if it were suggested that such boundaries have geographical equivalents, they would surely be regional. As Monte Hellman put it, 'the world of cockfighters was right there for us in Georgia' (Stevens 2003: 105). This approach, in turn, allows us to dwell less on the sport's moral status or controversial reputation and instead attend to its material conditions. In his account of *Cockfighter* in *Monte Hellman: His Life and Films* (2003), Brad Stevens details a fascinating contrast between Charles Willeford (who wrote the originating novel and screenplay for *Cockfighter*) and Hellman in their treatment of the story. According to Stevens, Willeford was primarily interested in the idea of obsession, and turned to cockfighting as a way of exploring this theme; but what Hellman does 'is begin with something concrete – a lifestyle, a story, a relationship – and allow the theme to emerge naturally' (2003: 107). Examples of these concrete details include the settings of the hacks, or the confidence and tenderness with which Frank handles his birds, or the physical majesty of the birds themselves, or the hazy and dusty light of small-town Georgia. Not all such details are so pleasant, of course, and there is one scene in which *Cockfighter* thrusts the physical, bodily gruesomeness of the sport to the centre of its emotional drama. But that is a moment which is likely to mean much more if it is arrived at by way of some thoughts on the American South.

Cockfighter and the South

According to Chuck Stephens, in his glowing appraisal of Monte Hellman's career, the packaging for the *Cockfighter* VHS release (under the title *Born to*

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Kill) offered this tagline: 'The woods are scary … the people are worse!' (2000: 63). It is hard to think of a less accurate evocation of the film's treatment of the cultures, communities and landscapes it depicts, and the present analysis has suggested some ways in which *Cockfighter* defiantly avoids just that kind of rural and regional fetishization which the tagline promises. And yet one can sympathize with the confusion facing anyone whose job it was, or is, to position *Cockfighter* as a marketable product. The film, according to Roger Corman's biographer Beverly Gray, 'was to be one of Corman's biggest miscalculations. He arranged for a world premiere screening in Atlanta, then discovered that most Georgians view cockfighting as an embarrassment. Vocal opposition by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to the movie's on-screen treatment of chickens didn't help' (2004: 120). It is telling to compare this local hostility to the jubilation and pride which greeted *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) at its almost-legendary Atlanta premiere. According to one account of the event, 'Hollywood's romantic evocation of the South struck a chord that vibrated strongly throughout the evening. Great waves of nostalgic Southern fervour engulfed the audience. Every reference to the South, every snatch of Southern music in the score, was applauded. When war with the North was announced, the cheers in the audience drowned those on the screen' (Flamini 1975: 330). There is little sense in placing these vastly different films in any kind of evaluative stand-off, but their wildly contrasting fates on 'home territory' can nevertheless stand as some sort of testimony to the notion that *Cockfighter*'s regionalism is an uncomfortable and awkward one. One can hardly be surprised that (low-budget) matter-of-fact depictions of cockfighting failed to ignite regional pride, but it is important to recognize the implicit regional orientation which forms the foundation of such a depiction – as well as the ecocritical insights which emerge from it.

V.S. Naipaul, in his travel book *A Turn in the South* (2003), describes a party to which he was invited – a small gathering in northwest Georgia:

> *The party was 'Southern' in its motifs. A Confederate flag fluttered in the sunlight in the rough field between the woods. A skinned pig, fixed in the posture of a hurdler, had been roasting all day, held on poles a little to one side of slow-burning hardwood logs […]. And a band played bluegrass music from the wooden hut. Flag; pig; music: things from the past. (2003: 34)*

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The South in *Cockfighter* is not nearly so readily accessible, so iconographic. On the face of it, the film seems to be far more interested in cockfighting than in anything along the lines of what might be called Southernness, Southern culture or even 'the myth of the South'. That is partly what makes it so interesting as a regional film, and partly why this analysis did not begin by positioning *Cockfighter* in terms of those broader ideas and themes. But they cannot be overlooked, either. After all, although the introduction to this chapter made reference to the general underestimation of region and regionalism in studies of American cinema, representations of the South have, of course, commanded a good deal of attention. Not only do films such as *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), *Gone with the Wind, Mississippi Burning* (Alan Parker, 1988) and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Joel Coen, 2000) sit comfortably in the historical trajectory of Hollywood cinema, but they are happily seen as films set in and about the South. In other words, it does not seem to require a particularly critical or revisionist approach to understand these films regionally.

Cockfighter sits slightly apart from this tradition (if it can be called that) not by ignoring Southern myths and stereotypes, but by largely eliminating any sense of context or alternatives against which to observe those myths and stereotypes. *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*, by dint of their status as films about the American Civil War, cannot help but posit the South as an idea and a cause whose doomed fate separates it from the normal, normative 'America'. *Mississippi Burning* has at its centre a Northern-cop/Southern-cop pairing, allowing us once again to interpret the South opposed to and against the normalized North. *Wild River* (Elia Kazan, 1960), a film which can hardly be accused of ignoring the South's status as an ecologically and culturally distinct region, nevertheless invites us to 'visit' that region along with Chuck (Montgomery Clift), who is literally an agent of the federal government. In the film's final moments, we leave with him also. Flannery O'Connor – who, incidentally, lived in the town (Miledgeville) where much of *Cockfighter* was filmed, and even raised birds there – writes about this balance between context and separateness with regard to regional fiction. Referring to the tendency of Northern critics to identify in Southern literature an 'anguish' rooted in 'isolation from the rest of the country', O'Connor writes:

> *I feel this would be news to most Southern writers. The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the*

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> *South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out not only of our many sins, but of our few virtues. This may be unholy anguish but it is anguish nevertheless. (1969: 29)*

In Douglas Reichert Powell's appraisal of *Fargo*, he does, it is important to acknowledge, argue that the film should be applauded for situating its regional subjects amongst broader inter-regional and national contexts, rather than segregating it as an enclosed realm of perversity. However, the 'contexts' provided by these films set in the South, I would argue, are quite different. Instead of a web of interconnectedness, they generate a value-laden binary, in which the South is essentially alien.

What, then, sets *Cockfighter* apart as something aside from, and perhaps even in contention with, this tradition? How does it envisage the South in ways which suggest that its frame, and not only its subject matter, is Southern? It is possibly too reductive to suggest that *Cockfighter*'s somewhat sober and considered depiction of cockfighting automatically qualifies it as a regional, Southern film. It may be the clearest indication of how *Cockfighter* seems to view a sub-national culture from the inside out, but this is achieved in a number of other ways, too. Charles Willeford claims to have based the story's plot loosely on *The Odyssey*, and writes of his 'absurd delight' in drawing parallels between the two: 'Frank's struggles on the Southern Conference Cocking Schedule were on such a low level compared to Odysseus's adventures' (1975: 20). This overriding sense of limited scope, of grand ambitions on a reduced canvas, is felt throughout *Cockfighter*, and is the source of much of its black humour – especially during the film's climactic tournament, at which the plushness of a banquet is undercut by the fact that most diners have candidate numbers pinned to their suit jackets. There is a bittersweet tone to this compromised grandeur, something of a big-fish-in-a-small-pond dynamic which is traceable to *Cockfighter*'s regionalism.

The event takes place on the grounds of a Georgian senator's mansion, and the senator (Oliver Coleman), we learn, has the right to bestow the 'Cockfighter of the Year' award on anyone he chooses, regardless of whether they win the tournament or not. 'There's only one rule', he says: 'conduct yourselves as ladies and gentlemen'. It is a telling line for the present discussion; not only does it invoke the famous Southern preoccupation with honour and civilized behaviour,

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but does so (with no apparent irony) in the context of cockfighting, a sport which, in other contexts and cultures, might well stand as the very antithesis of those values. The result of the tournament becomes immaterial, as Frank manages to win revenge against Burke and also be named Cockfighter of the Year. Mary Elizabeth does arrive, late on, but is disgusted by what she sees, and tells Frank as much. His response is to rip the head off his prized bird, and force it into her hand – presumably mocking her squeamishness and her unfamiliarity with the animals with whom she supposedly sympathizes. And Mary Elizabeth's response is, if anything, even stranger; after her initial revulsion, she calmly wraps the head in tissue and places it in her handbag, to spite Frank. As she storms off, Frank is genuinely moved, interpreting this whole exchange as proof of her love for him. The scene, with its mix of sacrifice, ceremony and obscure motivations, seems to call for an anthropological interpretation. Clifford Geertz's reading of the Balinese cockfight (substituting 'Southerner' for 'Balinese') might once again shed light on *Cockfighter*'s scope:

> *Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what the culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolics of a single such text; and – the disquieting part – that the text in which this revelation is accomplished consists of a chicken hacking another mindlessly to bits. (1973: 449)*

It is also a moment in which ecocriticism and critical regionalism, posited in this chapter as mutually sustaining approaches, might appear to reach something of an impasse: brutal exploitation of an animal is followed by its gratuitous decapitation, all carried out for the purposes of satisfying one man's ego – and yet the film's regional scope appears to normalize this behaviour, or at least refrain from condemning it. However, this apparent impasse is rather a vivid example of ecocriticism's interest beyond issues such as conservation and animal ethics. As in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, where the film's environmental urgency had less to do with an environmentalist agenda than a dexterous balancing of the local, the material and the affective, *Cockfighter* here provides a moment where nature *matters*, but not simply as a focus for admiration, sympathy, concern or awe. It is instead woven into the drama of a narrative whose peculiar, regional scope

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Figure 4.3 A sentimental education: *Cockfighter* (New World Pictures)

requires us to think of nature not as in the abstract, but rather as something which is only visible and meaningful in particular manifestations.

Two New Hollywood films and two dead animals; *Massacre* opens with a dead armadillo, *Cockfighter* closes with a dead chicken. Each one signals the film's regional grounding, but each is depicted with enough material detail to ensure that it is not reduced or limited to a signifying role. Both animals are indicators *and* victims of their geographical location, occupying the kind of ambiguous and challenging position which requires, and repays, a critically regionalist approach.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the idea of regionalism as ecocritical interpretation, and New Hollywood cinema as a body of work especially suited to such interpretation. In choosing to argue this connection through detailed discussion of two films, there is a risk of losing sight of regionalism's wider relevance across New Hollywood. The chapter will, therefore, conclude with some observations on another film, *The Last Detail*. Turning to a film in which the natural world appears to have very little prominence, I also hope to emphasize the complexity and dexterity of regionalism as an approach, as well as its inherent aliveness to environmentality. *The Last Detail* begins at a naval base in Norfolk, Virginia, where two officers – Buddusky (Jack Nicholson) and Mulhall (Otis Young) – are assigned the job of escorting a young sailor, Meadows (Randy Quaid), to naval prison in New Hampshire. The film follows this mission, including the sailors'

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diversions along the way, to its conclusion. (It was shot not only on location, but also in sequence (Dawson 2009: 141).) What interests me here is not so much that the ground covered in *The Last Detail* constitutes a specific region, but rather that a frame of roughly regional scale – encompassing the urban, suburban and rural, but lying beneath the national – is a fitting one in which to view the film.

In terms of the film's overall structure or design, it is interesting to note that no single situation acts as a status quo which is disrupted, and there is no significant place in relation to which the characters define themselves; instead, locations such as the naval base (where the film begins) seem more like nodes in a life of constant movement. It is not that the officers are adventurers or wandering men in any romantic sense – the film is careful to mock such a suggestion – but rather that movement between different places, relatively local, is an inevitable necessity, their most comfortable mode. This tempered rootlessness, I would suggest, is a sensibility which governs *The Last Detail*, countering the spiritual and revelatory aspects so often at play in films of movement (the 'descent' into the city, the regenerative power of the country), and dampening the contrast between different spaces. Another way to describe this would be to say that, while the officers are never at home in *The Last Detail*, they are never quite outsiders, either. A trip from Norfolk up to Portsmouth is a journey of sorts, but not to uncharted territory – Buddusky even claims it qualifies as a trip to his 'old stomping grounds'. There is no centre in *The Last Detail*, neither in the form of a domestic sanctuary nor a governing geographical crux, and while this no doubt goes some way towards explaining the film's somewhat bleak fatalism, it also means that there is no periphery either; for all the travelling that goes on, nowhere is really foreign. In this regard, *The Last Detail* stands as a fascinating and revealing counterpoint to *Apocalypse Now*. Both films are structured around an internal military mission to bring a deviant comrade to justice, but they could hardly be more different in their plotting of that mission; Willard (Martin Sheen), in *Apocalypse Now*, travels into environments which seem to embody the very idea of otherness, while Buddusky and Mulhall retread ground with which they are reasonably familiar.

The main characters in *The Last Detail* are neither aliens in, nor natives of, the cities in which they spend time, and linked to this is the fact that they are developed with only an oblique sense of geographical determinacy. Put more simply, region plays its part in the identity of the sailors, but not in any overwhelming or reductive sense. Mulhall, we learn early on, is from Louisiana, and the fact that he is a black man from the South gives us some insight into why he might be more

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hesitant than Buddusky to risk upsetting his superiors and putting his hard-won career prospects in jeopardy. Likewise, Buddusky's fast talking and his impatient yearning for instant gratification might be interpreted as signs of an urban sensibility, but he would hardly blend seamlessly into Los Angeles or San Francisco in the way he seems to in New York and Boston. Neither character is anything like an embodiment or stereotype of his geographical roots (unlike, say, the fish-out-of-water Joe Buck (Jon Voight) in *Midnight Cowboy*), but each is developed in such a way that their horizons and perspectives seem neither cosmopolitan nor intensely localized. In films such as *All I Desire* (Douglas Sirk, 1953) and *Shadow of a Doubt* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1943), the chasm separating small-town cultures and exotic, worldly-wise visitors is the crux of the drama; such stories are premised on a cultural geography of extremes (and, in the case of Hitchcock's film, those extremes are channelled through the actions of the characters). *The Last Detail* offers no such binaries, but rather a group of characters hovering between the parochial and the worldly.

In contrast to the above analyses of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Cockfighter*, the discussion here of *The Last Detail* is veering some way away from the conventional concerns of ecocriticism. If all three films seem to operate according to a regional frame, in which ecological, narrative and thematic elements become almost inseparable, *The Last Detail* draws on the natural world in the most oblique or remote way. There are no lingering close-ups of animals or setting suns, and there is no obvious conflict or communion between the human and the non-human. Instead, the film's (critical) regionalism seems to be based on the governing uncertainty about centres and peripheries, and the implications of this for the film's characters. As a final reminder about the ecocritical foundation of this interpretation, a reiteration of the deeply embedded links between regional narratives and material environments, we can turn to a scene towards the end of the film, in which the three sailors while away their last few hours before Meadows is due at the prison by attempting to have a barbecue.

A slow panning shot glides leftwards across the snowy, deserted park, to finally rest on the three sailors, each sitting on a separate bench. Buddusky, in the foreground, thinks aloud about Meadows's experiences and poses a rhetorical question, which the film leaves hanging: 'He's come a long way, hasn't he?' It would be unwise to ignore the deliberate invocation of a spiritual journey here, but its poignancy is surely based on the fact that the comment has a degree of literal significance, too. Likewise, the bitterly cold conditions, in a scene of profound

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sadness and pessimism, might at first appear to be a simple case of pathetic fallacy. But it is important to recognize that coldness has featured throughout the sailors' journey; it has ushered them into bars and diners, kept them in waiting rooms, obliged them to find a hotel. In other words, it has been a governing factor from start to finish: an important contributor to their camaraderie as well as their impatience. For it *still* to feature at the end is a reminder that they, and we, have not really travelled that far – even if it has been a life-changing experience for Meadows, the odyssey has been a relatively localized one, contained within and determined by certain non-negotiable conditions. Here, what Thomas Elsaesser describes as 'the cancellation of the melodramatic impulse' is achieved in a distinctly regional manner ([1975] 2004: 292).

In her 1974 Cannes Film Festival report for *Sight and Sound*, Penelope Houston suggested that *The Last Detail* 'knows exactly where it's at [...], preserving its sense of balance, scale and detail' (1974: 143). In a piece a few years later (quoted above), Roger Greenspun used a noticeably similar description in reference to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, arguing that 'it almost always understands what it's looking at' (1977: 16). These reviews seem to be responding to quite allusive qualities of scale and scope that this chapter has interpreted ecocritically. The environmental sensibility of New Hollywood is a quality which is traceable not only to its films' presentation of spaces and places and materials, but also to the geographical range of its dramas. George Kouvaros's study of the films of John Cassavetes is called *Where Does it Happen?* (2004),

Figure 4.4 'He's come a long way': *The Last Detail* (Acrobat / Columbia Pictures)

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a question Kouvaros wants to bring to the director's oeuvre in the belief that it raises important and overlooked issues about his unique approach to form, performance and fiction. Such a question can also alert us to the ways in which New Hollywood films seem to award their environments an unusual degree of prominence and complexity.

In the following and final chapter, attention turns to the issue of a film's presence in the pro-filmic world. Cinema of this period not only developed narratives which operate on a relatively reduced scale, but also asserted the medium's reliance on, and submission to, real-world conditions. In many ways, this will be a continuation of important ideas raised in this chapter, and in particular the sense one gets, watching New Hollywood films, of their action emerging in a given environment. But whereas I have so far emphasized the hermeneutic shift involved in watching Hollywood cinema as 'scaled down', I will go on to explore the means by which texts themselves assert the significance of location shooting, a production practice which is often acknowledged as crucial to the period, but whose conceptual complexity requires further study.

Notes

1. Lev's conclusion is optimistic about the continuing and growing interest in the question of regions in American cinema, but his call for 'a more articulated theoretical framework' (1986: 64) seems to have been largely unfulfilled.
2. In the 2003 remake, directed by Marcus Nispel, the regional setting is communicated quite differently, as the van's speakers blast out Lynyrd Skynyrd's pop-Confederate anthem 'Sweet Home Alabama'.
3. It did, unsurprisingly, have its effect on filming conditions too. According to Edwin Neal, who played the hitchhiker, 'the thing that helped us a great deal was the 115 degree Texas weather. By the time your clothes hadn't been washed in six weeks it got easier and easier and easier, as we took on the environmental aspects of the family, to *become* the family' (quoted in Jaworzyn 2004: 53, emphasis in the original).
4. We glimpse this in the novel, through one of Frank's droll asides and a rather desperate attempt to legitimize cockfighting in the eyes of his partner: 'I had told Mary Elizabeth once that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton had both been cockfighters during the colonial period, but she had been unimpressed' (Willeford [1962] 2005: 114).

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conditions, Technologies and Presence

You've got people you're watching – why get them out in some strange place? I don't believe in that. Not if you've got a good story – just stay where it is. Now, if you've got a bad one – that's the time to find a place to go.

Howard Hawks, in conversation with Peter Bogdanovich

Do not believe any idea that was not born in the open air and of free movement.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

In Chapter Four I made numerous references to *Deliverance* as a film whose invocation of regionalism is problematic, characterized as it is by a kind of patronizing exoticism. Three white heterosexual males, the film's normative points of identification, are traumatized by their experiences in an environmentally threatening and culturally regressive place, beyond the safety and familiarity of urban America. This should not, however, suggest that *Deliverance* fails some sort of ecocritical test, or that it becomes unimportant in a consideration of New Hollywood's environmentality. Indeed, any film whose opening section begins with images of an artificially flooded valley before dissolving into images of industrial landscaping (and all the while accompanied by a soundtrack in which the main character adopts an explicit ethical position on the flooding) must surely make an automatic claim on the interest of such a study. But perhaps a more subtle aspect of this film's ecocritical richness is its status as a 'location film', and all that that suggests and implies. Shot on location in difficult conditions in Georgia, *Deliverance* is at once the *result* of challenging circumstances and *about* the excitement and perils of testing oneself against an environment. A full-page advertisement in a

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1971 edition of *Movies Now* draws together the film's production efforts and its adventure story as one:

> *Doing battle with fate, the stars enter the largely never-before-photographed North Georgia wilderness along the often treacherous white water of the Cahulawassee River. Cast and crew, over fifty strong, were based in Clayton, Georgia. Setting out six days a week to remote sites in the rugged terrain, they came equipped with specially built, light-weight cameras, plenty of extra dry clothing, rubber rafts, plenty of rope, first-aid-kits and compasses – the latter at the insistence of author [James] Dickey who knows how deceiving his own neck of the woods can be. (Anon. 1971: 1)*

How can production details such as these, and their prominence in film promotion, develop our understanding of New Hollywood cinema as a body of work characterized by an environmental sensibility? And how can they be shown to do this in the framework of a study which has placed at its methodological centre textual analysis, and not production or reception? The following chapter is a response to that challenge, and will – through an intentionally diverse discussion of production methods, technology, form and style, film theory and film criticism – demonstrate how ecocriticism can problematize distinctions between what happens 'before', 'behind' and 'during' a film.

The historical change in filming conditions is one of the key constituents of the New Hollywood narrative – enhanced in no small part by the use of the term 'studio' to designate a crumbling, outmoded model – of which the bourgeoning trend of location shooting is perhaps the clearest example. The ecocritical significance of such a shift in practice is perhaps quite obvious; the emphasis on 'going out there and experiencing the elements', however crude, does raise a number of interesting questions about how the relationship between filmmaker, film and world might be imagined. Running alongside the idea that New Hollywood signalled a shift in filming conditions is the notion that New Hollywood rode a wave of rapid and significant technological advances, during which both audio and visual equipment changed in ways which had an immediate and discernible impact on filmmaking trends. There is, as is indicated in the *Deliverance* advertisement, a clear connection between these two trends; technological advances often took the form of increased portability, which in turn made location shooting a much more viable option. Describing his experiences shooting *Across 110th*

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Street (1972, Barry Shear) with a newly developed Arriflex camera, in an article announcing that 95 per cent of the film was shot on location in Harlem, the cinematographer Jack Priestly says: 'It's as quiet as a church mouse and it has great flexibility, especially since it weighs only 21 pounds. I don't know what I would have done in a lot of spots without it' (Loring 1972: 876).

But, in the scope of an ecocritical study, new cinema technologies are not only interesting to the extent that they facilitate more geographically adventurous productions. As will be argued in the second part of this chapter, the use of specific technologies can have considerable implications for how a film develops a relationship with the material environment – whether we think of that environment as pro-filmic, filmic or both simultaneously. In discussing New Hollywood film technologies, the main consideration here will be the zoom, partly because it is often regarded as an icon or signifier of broader trends in American cinema at the time. Contemporary technological developments, however, were by no means confined to camera equipment, and the period was also marked by experiments in the realm of sound recording. 'These new microphones are like nothing I've ever used before', gushes Gene Hackman's surveillance engineer in *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974). 'I almost didn't believe it myself. We were almost 200 yards away and it was totally readable [...]. It was a beautiful thing to see, really beautiful.' Among the most famous of 1960s audio innovations was the Nagra III tape recorder, which came into use early on in the decade and offered filmmakers considerable advantages in terms of fidelity and portability.[1]

Another important technological development of 1960s Hollywood, although one whose relationship to aesthetics is very difficult to tease out, is the Cinemobile. Developed in the mid-1960s by a young Egyptian cinematographer, Fouad Said, who was then working on the television series *I-Spy*, the Cinemobile was essentially a bus tailored to house large amounts of filmmaking equipment with maximum efficiency – ultimately allowing for a flexible and travel-friendly production. Said developed his first model in 1964, and for some years worked primarily with low-budget television productions. By the end of the decade, however, he finally managed to break into the (initially very reluctant) major studios, becoming – according to *Aramco World*, a magazine celebrating Arab-Western cultural exchanges – 'an irresistible force that almost literally is turning the Hollywood studios inside out' (Sheridan 1971: 16). A feature on the Cinemobile in a 1970 issue of *International Cinematographer* neatly summarizes the appeal of this new tool:

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> *Said had engineered the Cinemobile so that everything meshed perfectly for the optimum picture and sound. Hardly any of the thousands of parts tucked into the Cinemobile were made of steel, everything was magnesium or aluminium. Lightweight Arri's [sic] tied into sophisticated Nagra recorders and power for all the lights came from two cables off the hidden generator nestled in the centre of the Cinemobile frame [...]. The Cinemobile could make five, six, seven, eight different locations in one day [...]. The mobility gave the directors more time to work with their actors, the atmosphere was more relaxed, and the result was high quality. (Treisault 1970: 11)*

In 1967, as New Hollywood was emerging, there was only one Cinemobile, and yet its reputation grew rapidly in an industry which was increasingly open to new methods; it went on to be used on films such as *Little Big Man*, *The Godfather*, *Jeremiah Johnson*, *American Graffiti*, *Badlands*, *Serpico* (Sidney Lumet, 1973) and *Thieves Like Us*.

Richard T. Jameson's chapter about the faltering careers of 'old Hollywood' directors in the New Hollywood era is called 'Dinosaurs in the Age of the Cinemobile' (2004). Curiously, Jameson only refers to the Cinemobile once, and does not argue anything about its significance or influence, and yet the title nevertheless seems apt; as Jameson chronicles the failures of George Cukor, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock to position themselves in the emerging zeitgeist, he refers not only to their stories and themes, but also to their production methods: 'One old master who never lost the security of a studio home and rarely left it, even for "location" sequences', was Hitchcock (2004: 158). And yet this security is suggested by Jameson to have cut the director off from current trends and contributed to his later films' claustrophobic atmosphere – in stark contrast to the spatial expansiveness made possible by emerging technologies such as the Cinemobile.

The following discussion is concerned with the filmmaking conditions and filmmaking technologies of New Hollywood, and in particular location shooting and the zoom lens. Although they will be approached one after the other, the symbiotic relationship between the two is an important feature of my argument. Location shooting in some senses emerges as the context in which the zoom could achieve the kinds of meanings and resonance described below, and yet equally the zoom could be said to generate an aesthetic which prompts location to produce these meanings and resonance. In short, I intend to consider zoom-

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lens cinematography and location shooting as important contributing factors to a quality of presence which permeates New Hollywood – a sense of filmmaking as happening somewhere in the world, and in turn initiating responses to that part of the world: responses which are technological, thematic and dramatic. As Jean-Louis Comolli writes in relation to the films of Miklós Jancsó, there is in New Hollywood a quality of directness which is 'characterized by the mutual modification of the cinema and the world', a 'contemporaneousness of the film with itself, of the film as event and the film as recording' (1980: 237–238). But while Comolli equates this with the dissolution or irrelevance of the 'pre-filmic world' (1980: 238), I argue that, in the case of New Hollywood, it implies quite the opposite. I will end this chapter by looking at a moment in *Medium Cool* in which location shooting and zoom aesthetics generate a rich and complex dialogue with one another.

The Question of Location

Considering how widespread the term 'location shooting' is in film discourse, from scholarly history to popular criticism, it has received surprisingly little sustained attention in film studies. It warrants no entry in the index of Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* (2010), *How to Read a Film* by James Monaco (2009), *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* by Susan Hayward (2006) or the Routledge *Introduction to Film Studies*, edited by Jill Nelmes (2007). David Thomson's first book, *Movie Man* (1967), includes a chapter called 'Place and Location', whose opening paragraph offers an astute distinction between these two concepts: 'A place will always exist, susceptible to infinite interpretation; but a location exists only for a short time during which other energies are concentrated on it [...] so that it may contribute as an item to an effect or to meaning' (1967: 78). And yet from here on in, Thomson devotes all his critical energy to place rather than location. More recently, the collection *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011) includes rich and imaginative studies of particular locations, but is positioned as a series of independently fascinating examples of cinema's entanglement with geography, in which the question of what actually constitutes 'filming on location' does not really come to the fore. Somewhat surprisingly, the increased interest in cinematic space, place and geography over recent decades has not prompted any comprehensive attempt to grapple with the concept of location itself.

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Roger Maier's *Location Scouting Management Handbook* (1994) is a practical guide for filmmakers and photographers, and includes guidance on logistics, organization and aesthetic considerations. It is a good place to begin thinking through the concerns of this chapter, precisely because it is a book which makes every attempt to explain and clarify the issue of location in simple and accessible terms – and its inability to do so is telling. Its first chapter offers an engaging potted history of location shooting in American cinema; from the 1930s until the 1960s, writes Maier, the 'sound stage's doors were locked, and filmmakers became virtual prisoners of the microphone and of the factory mentality of Hollywood's studio moguls' (1994: 3). Shortly after, Maier then attempts to answer his own question: 'What is a location? A location is a real place. It is a specific structure, an area, or a setting where action and/or dialogue occurs in a script. As differentiated from a "set," a location is a place where a production must go in order to have the right background to tell its story' (1994: 7). The many contradictions here are both disorienting and revealing. Firstly, Maier's use of 'setting' as a sub-category of 'real place' suggests that, even in the attempt to describe a stable pro-filmic reality, narrative and aesthetic associations are already present. And as if to further complicate this issue, Maier proposes that these real places are where a character's action 'occurs in a script'. This brings with it a confusing temporal complication; do locations pre-exist a script, and what is the relationship between a suggested location in a script and a filmed location in the film itself? Finally, the relative status of narrative and environment is curiously contradictory; a production 'must go', is impelled to go, to a particular site, but that site then becomes relegated to mere background, permanently at the service of story.

These three points of confusion – the relative reality of a location, the chronology of location (is it a pro-filmic or filmic constituent?) and the relationship between narrative and location – seem to call for a critical or theoretical contribution to reflect on, and sort through, that confusion. As I have already mentioned, this has not been taken up in any comprehensive sense, but Dai Vaughan's short 'Sketch for a Lecture' (1999: 148–154) is a tentative step in that direction. It begins with a remark made by Federico Fellini, in which the director (talking about his experiences of studio photography with *La Dolce Vita* (1960)) claimed that he would 'rather reconstruct reality than compete with it'. Vaughan takes Fellini's comment as an example of the director's break from neorealism, a movement in which, as Vaughan describes it, 'it was felt that the actuality of the places where the events might have occurred, and of the people to whom they might

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have occurred, has, as it were, its own rights to which respect was due, and that only that conditional "might have" stood – flimsily, as it were – between fiction and the world' (1999: 152). The contrasts with Maier's definition are profound; here, ethical considerations loom large, and the independent agency of actors and environments renders any question of background irrelevant, or at least inappropriate. And yet those same confusions recur. Vaughan's knowing use of 'might have' draws attention to, but does not really confront, the question of whether a location is independent of a film's action; chronology is once again very confusing, as places become significant after story and character have developed, but in such a way that can somehow predate that story (as when Vaughan refers to their 'rights'); and finally, while fiction seems to be subservient to a pro-filmic reality, that reality is significant *to the extent that* the story 'might have' happened there.

Another, more anecdotal perspective on location shooting is offered by Barry Gremillion, a location manager who worked in American film and television in the late 1980s and 1990s, and whose autobiography – *I Killed Charles Bronson's Cat* (2000) – opens with a whirlwind introduction to his profession: 'When a film crew ventures out into the real world to create a make-believe world, sometimes these two worlds clash' (2000: 1). Considering the location manager's responsibilities, it is unsurprising that Gremillion is quite straightforward in his characterization of location as a real place (or 'unsuspecting world' (2000: 1)) on which a production team then encroaches. His personal take on the temporality of location is also slightly different from those discussed above, not least in the way he emphasizes the constantly mutating priorities and designs throughout the pre-production process, when the specifications for a location can fall prey to the whim of actors, designers, directors or even 'the producer's girlfriend' (2000: 2)! 'Suddenly this location is not just a location, it's become a story point, an extension of the character. It's a high priority' (2000: 2). The location, Gremillion implies, becomes a question of narrative during the scouting process, when creative (or at least powerful) stakeholders are forced to reconcile their imaginations with available realities. And his description of this process is telling:

> *It changes the way you look at architecture and geographical patterns. It sharpens your eye. Not just for photographic composition, but for the way the world moves. It causes you to drag friends, lovers and family members to obscure, out-of-the-way places they don't really want to visit, but more often than not are glad they went along anyway. There are so many shapes and contours out*

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> *there in the world. A Location Manager has to pay attention to all of them. (2000: 1–2)*

Gremillion's description here relates exclusively to his experiences working outside of the film, often before any camera would even have begun to shoot. I will argue, though, that such pro-filmic experiences need not always be understood only as phenomena separate from the text, and that a number of New Hollywood films can be considered, in this sense, porous – simultaneously determined by, and to some extent 'about', the experience of location filming. Ecocriticism, with its theoretical interest in art's indebtedness to the natural environment, both as an influence and as an active player in a work's meaning, is especially well placed to consider this porousness.

New Hollywood on Location

It is common for discussions of New Hollywood to refer to the growing trend for location shooting throughout the 1960s, although these claims are rarely, if ever, corroborated with actual figures. David A. Cook refers to 'a steady increase in location shooting' during the 1970s (2000: 395), but provides no more detail than this. In his book about northern Arizona and film, Joe McNeill asserts that location shooting in American cinema 'accounted for nearly 80 per cent of all production by the start of the 1970s', but cites no supporting evidence (2010: 616). The absence (or obscurity) of hard data may derive at least in part from the difficulty of defining 'location' in the first place, as discussed above. Nevertheless, even if the general decline in studio-based production is a subject which requires more detailed analysis of statistics and terminology, the significance of the general pattern should not be ignored. On a basic level, it seems to be borne out (perhaps trivially) in responses to, and judgements of, films from the period (see Alexander Howarth's evocation of New Hollywood 'grittiness', quoted in Chapter One). To watch *Barefoot in the Park* (Gene Saks, 1967), for example, and see two leading stars who would come to be associated with New Hollywood (Robert Redford and Jane Fonda) play out a domestic comedy, filmed in a mock-up New York apartment, is a slightly uncanny experience. The same could even be said of productions later on in the 1970s, as when we see Robert De Niro move through the exuberant artificiality of *New York, New York* (Martin Scorsese, 1977). A 1982 article in *American Film*, 'The Brave New World

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of Production Design', argued that 'films that linger longest in our minds these days take place in enclosed worlds that are carefully designed right down to the last mote of dust' (Mills 1982: 40). The article proposes a subtle but profound epochal shift, signalled by the studio-shot successes of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas (as well as the on-location industrial disaster that was *Heaven's Gate* (Michael Cimino, 1980)), which retrospectively casts the late 1960s and early 1970s as a distinctively real-world phase in American cinema. In the words of one production manager, active in early-1980s Hollywood, who was interviewed for the article: 'Reality isn't all that wonderful [...]. You go to a place, look for the local postcard shop, and you find what the good local views are. What else is there?' (quoted in Mills 1982: 42).

Of course, not all New Hollywood films were shot entirely away from the studio, but there is a correlation which is hard to ignore between the broad aesthetic and tonal changes which New Hollywood is thought to have ushered in and the bourgeoning of location shooting. This correlation is also supported by studies of the important industrial changes in the 1960s, such as vertical disintegration. Michael Storper convincingly argues that the decline of the Hollywood oligopoly and the rise of location shooting were inextricable:

> *Location shooting, which is a type of change in production technique, began as a direct consequence of vertical disintegration; like many such practices, it seems to have reinforced itself in circular and cumulative fashion [...]. By the 1970s most of the studios had, in effect, ended their roles as physical movie factories. Even though disintegration had begun with the limited objectives of cost-cutting and product differentiation, in the end specialized firms and non-studio locations proved superior [...]. The studios could no longer compete against the independent production companies and specialized contractors they had helped to create, in the very market segments they had hoped to retain. (1994: 210, emphasis in the original)*

Elsewhere, Storper (in an article co-written with S. Christopherson) offers another interesting take on the spatial ramifications of vertical disintegration, noting that, as the major studios faced significant losses at the dawn of the 1970s, many responded by selling off studio property, a move which 'necessitated that a majority of the output of the industry be produced with vertically disintegrated production methods' (Christopherson and Storper 1986: 310).

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If such broad economic conditions seem somewhat removed from the consideration of particular films, Mark Harris's *Pictures at a Revolution* (2008) gives a vivid insight into how the physical filmmaking practices of the 'old Hollywood', lingering on in the late 1960s, were inextricably bound up with the critical, commercial and creative failure of films such as *Doctor Dolittle* (Richard Fleischer, 1967) and *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969). Tracing the production histories of the five Best Picture nominees for the 1968 Academy Awards, Harris's book continually contrasts the antiquated *Doctor Dolittle* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) with the trail-blazing *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate*, and amongst the most fascinating points of comparison is the way in which the different productions progressed physically and geographically. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, for example, typified

> *a production style that, in most ways, owed more to 1947 than to 1967. The large hilltop home of Matt and Christina Drayton, the affluent couple Tracy and Hepburn were playing, was built entirely on the Columbia lot, including a veranda with a not particularly convincing painted backdrop of the San Francisco Bay into which was screwed a small flashing red bulb that was intended to indicate a ship in the distance. (Harris 2008: 296–297)*

In contrast, writes Harris, Robert Benton and David Newman (co-writers on *Bonnie and Clyde*) flew down to East Texas, where 'they spent time visiting the sites of Parker and Barrow's crimes and getting a feel for the dusty, remarkably unaltered landscape [...]. Benton and Newman often talked about the trip as a turning point – a journey during which they fell deeper into the world of Bonnie and Clyde' (2008: 60). Two years later, the *Doctor Dolittle* production moved to rural England with 'Barnumesque brio' (2008: 199), only to lose the confidence of the local population when the construction team decided to 'dam the local trout stream and fill it with artificial seaweed and rubber fish' (2008: 199). After numerous fiascos, including bad weather and the forced quarantine of hundreds of trained animals, Twentieth Century-Fox cut its losses and returned to a Los Angeles sound stage. In Harris's account, the changing of the Hollywood guard was as much a case of filming conditions as it was one of stars or screenplays.

Some accounts of New Hollywood location shooting give a sense of how environmental conditions can modulate a film's thematic or aesthetic direction. Speaking of her time spent scouting locations with Peter Bogdanovich for

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his 1971 film *The Last Picture Show*, Polly Platt talks of the town in west Texas where they would eventually film: 'We were very shocked by how barren the land looked. There's a weed called mesquite that grows there, as big as a tree [... .] I began to think that this part of Texas had such a harsh atmosphere and that the people began to look gnarled like their environment [...]. It's just a bitter, bitter, hard life, and that's why those young people are so precious, because they had beauty and youth' (Lobrutto 1992: 159). Platt's growing awareness of the environmentally determined fate of the story's characters is, of course, significant, but perhaps just as significant is the way in which this modifies her understanding of the story before filming has even begun; *The Last Picture Show*, ostensibly a character-driven coming-of-age story, thus becomes more about characters in a particular place, whose stories make a particular kind of sense in those conditions.

For Platt, her experience of a place may not have affected any specific details of the story, but rather its overall inflection. Alan J. Pakula, on the other hand, on a scouting trip to Spain for his *Love, Pain and the Whole Damn Thing* (1973), was especially struck by the inappropriateness of one element of the planned film – his characters' scripted journey. In his notebook, he writes:

> *Architecture, much lighter in South. Gray, heavy and stony – much more massive and colder in the North. Maybe Lila and Walter should go North to South –*

Figure 5.1 A telling location: *The Last Picture Show* (Columbia Pictures / BBS Productions)

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> *heaviness to lightness – rather than vice versa. And from grey light to warm light. It would also allow you to start shooting in the North in continuity and avoid some of the worst of the summer heat. (Alan J. Pakula Papers:* file 286*)*

Pakula, then, rather than using the scouting trip merely as an opportunity to identify particularly appropriate sites, takes on board broader geographical phenomena, and – like Platt and Bogdanovich – seems to modulate the planned narrative as one in which the characters should now develop in some sort of relation with their environment. Pakula, as can be glimpsed in this small excerpt, and throughout the thoughtful use of locations in *The Parallax View*, took a particularly keen interest in the expressive potential of built and natural environments being played off against one another, and of drama developing as if somehow determined by the places in which it was staged. Here, in his notes from a scouting trip to New Mexico, Pakula's observations seem to hover fascinatingly between environmental observation and narrative considerations:

> *SPACE, SPACE, SPACE.*
> *EVERYTHING SHARPLY ETCHED.*
> *SURREALIST.*
> *NO PLACE TO HIDE.*
> *SIGN: WELCOME TO HAPPY HOUR BAR.*
> *LEVI STRAUSS PLANT.*
> *CEMENT PLANT ALMOST RUNS ITSELF BY COMPUTERS.*
> *LOMAS STREET – ENDLESS DRIVE-INS AND GAS STATIONS, "SAN FERNANDO RAMSHACKLE" AGAINST MOUNTAINS AND SKY.*
> *SUBDIVISION TRACT LAND NESTLED AGAINST HUGE MOUNTAINS.*
> *MODERN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN OLD ADOBE STYLE. FULL OF CONTRAST OF CHEAP EXPLOITATION BY MAN, CHEAP. MATERIALISM AGAINST NATURAL GRANDEUR OF ORIGINAL PIONEER DREAM.*
> *CAMPING AREAS WITH FAKE TENTS.*
> *FAKE, FAKE, FAKE.*
> *MOUNTAIN WHERE ATOMIC BOMB IS STORED.*
> *CEMENT FACTORY STAIRCASE – MOVING MACHINERY – CONTRAST TO MOUNTAINS OUTSIDE – A GREAT DUST WORLD.*

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ON WEEKENDS IT IS RUN BY THREE MEN AND A ROOM FULL OF COMPUTERS.
EMPTY, ALONE AND THAT HELLISH SOUND. AND THE GREY DUST CAMOUFLAGING THE MEN SO THEY SEEM LIKE GREY PHANTOMS (EXAGGERATING).

(*Alan J. Pakula Papers*: file 351)

Such freeform observation, it is fair to assume, would tend to be a feature early on, if at all, in pre-production, before attention has to turn to day-to-day logistical challenges and compromises. But the later stage of the filmmaking process can bring forth different interventions or contributions on the part of the environment.

These examples characterize location work as an interaction with unfamiliar conditions, and it is in such instances that the implicit environmentality of location shooting is perhaps clearest. But a filmmaker might engage with a familiar environment in equally significant ways. Sam Peckinpah, in pre-production for *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid* (1973), came into conflict with Metro Goldwyn Mayer over the studio's choice for a Mexican location, Durango. As Peckinpah's biographer David Weddle tells it, 'Sam knew from past experience that the fine silicone sand of the Durango desert could wreak havoc on camera equipment and cause lengthy and costly delays' (2001: 464). Peckinpah was proud of his credentials as a man of the land, as somebody who came to the western with a good sense of the genre's material as well as its historical and ideological elements – and this stretched beyond his attention to location details. For example, Peckinpah took considerable umbrage when colleagues and members of the public objected to his on-set treatment of animals. One response, in a letter dated 7 May 1974, bristles: 'I'd wager I have adopted more stray dogs, cats and kids than you have ever seen'. As if determined to prove his environmental honour, Peckinpah then added a curious postscript: 'What were your efforts against defoliation in Viet Nam?' (*Sam Peckinpah Papers*).

To discuss Peckinpah in the context of location shooting inevitably shifts the emphasis from pre-production to the experience of production itself, so extreme and gruelling are his on-location methods said to have been. The story of Peckinpah as a hell-raising taskmaster is partly the story of a paranoid alcoholic who seems to have worked most fruitfully in a state of conflict, but it also hints at the possibility that Peckinpah was an artist who believed in, and encouraged, the physical endurance of filmmaking as a creative contribution to a film. Even

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editors were not exempt; Lou Lombardo recalls being forced to join Peckinpah on location for *The Wild Bunch* just to share in the physical wretchedness of it all; 'come out here and sweat with me' were Peckinpah's orders (Fine 1991: 139). The actor James Coburn found *The Wild Bunch* a similarly tough test, not least when forced to film in a river: 'The river was a foot deep and the water was red and hot. Along the shore, you couldn't walk through the layer of flies [...]. You had to be on the set every day, whether you were working or not. You'd sit for weeks with nothing to do. Then you'd do the work great because you were seething in this atmosphere' (quoted in Fine 1991: 87). Peckinpah's New Hollywood films are about hot and tired people in hot and tiring places, in such a way that must at least be partly traceable to his imposed conditions. *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, in this respect, whose plot is premised on the miraculous discovery of water in an arid desert, places at its centre something which underpins other Peckinpah films – the effort that can be required simply to *be* somewhere. Is the white suit of Bennie (Warren Oates) in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974) not the perfect surface on which to record the mud, blood and sweat Peckinpah demanded from his characters and his collaborators?

The shift to location shooting in New Hollywood demanded of filmmakers an especially strong sense of how their practice, as technicians and as storytellers, involved encounters with and concessions to a material environment. What interests me in particular is how such encounters could 'tip over' and become qualities of the films' themes and narratives. In this regard, my interest in film location is somewhat different to that of the editors of *Taking Place*, who describe their approach as a 'stubborn insistence on place' (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011: xii), as if in resistance to the narrative and affective currents of the films they encounter. I find in New Hollywood something more like a continuity between meaningful drama and locational emphasis.

Negotiating with the World: Nature Writing and New Hollywood

There is a telling link between location shooting, as it is described here, and the rhetoric surrounding nature writing, in which the real-world actions of an author and the content of that author's work are often confused, or even knowingly collapsed into one another. Writing about the huge and complex influence of Henry David Thoreau on American culture, Lawrence Buell notes that 'the best known feature of *Walden* is that Thoreau built a cabin in the woods and dwelt there as an

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economic and spiritual experiment' (1995: 145). The assertion is hard to dispute, but it is not as straightforward as it appears. After all, is Thoreau's excursion to the woods a 'feature' of *Walden*, or rather a subject of it, or a precondition? The book's famous opening paragraph establishes an uncertainty on this count which remains throughout:

> *When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbour, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labour of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again. (Thoreau [1854] 2004: 1)*

Walden, then, begins with Thoreau *having gone* to build his cabin, and it charts his dwelling rather than his going, so to speak. In fact, even if the book began with a chapter detailing the narrator's decisive movement from 'civilized life' to the woods, Buell's claim would remain somewhat problematic, not taking into account the distinctions between Thoreau the historical person, Thoreau the author of *Walden* and Thoreau the narrator of *Walden*.

If *Walden* is widely known and remembered as a record of one man's experimental venture, then American nature writing beyond *Walden* is likewise characterized as records of writers' experiences beyond the text, in the real world and in real time. But authors such as Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez and Wendell Berry also write in such a way as to refute the suggestion that they offer *mere* records; the pronounced literariness of their work, the creative use of language and the constant psychological reflection (especially in Annie Dillard's work) make for a complex situation with regard to the texts' diegesis. It matters that the *narrator* has gone somewhere and dwelt somewhere, and it matters too that they process their thoughts and observations into literary expression, but it also seems to matter just as much that the *author* has done these things – and the temporal relationships between these facets are difficult to untangle. In *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, Scott Slovic quotes Wendell Berry's own thoughts on the matter: 'The only condition is your being there and being watchful' (1992: 12). Who is being watchful, and when they are being so, is a trickier notion than Berry lets on. Taken at face value, the validity of Buell's claim – that Thoreau's exploits are a feature of *Walden* – is not really in question. But its potential complexity is

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nevertheless of interest, raising as it does a question central to interpretations of nature writing, and one which I will look to ask of New Hollywood: at what point, and in what way, can the extra-textual become a feature of the text?

Firstly, this process might be encouraged by the promotional rhetoric surrounding a film. To promote *Harry and Tonto* (Paul Mazursky, 1974), the publicity department at Twentieth Century-Fox sent out a ready-written article about the logistical challenge, and triumph, of the film, focusing on its production manager, Art Levinson. The article is called 'He Kept the Movie Moving in a Cross-Country Odyssey', and it emphasizes the tremendous effort on the part of the crew, the aesthetic importance of this method and the need for sustaining good relations with local communities when shooting (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1974). It is a particularly clear and coherent example of an interesting trend in New Hollywood promotion, in which aspects of on-location experience are called upon to attest to a film's worth. In a press release for *Jeremiah Johnson*, attention is drawn to the spectacle offered by the wilderness locations and also the dedication involved in filming there, complemented by a hint of conservationist rhetoric:

> *Sharing every scene with Robert Redford in Warner Bros.' outdoor epic, "Jeremiah Johnson," is Redford's adopted state of Utah, one of the last areas of the United States which still abounds with thousands of acres of virginal territory, breathtaking in its dizzying heights and seemingly endless expanse. One hundred different Utah locations, some as distant as 600 miles apart, were used to tell the story of a man who turns his back on civilization. (Warner Brothers,* Jeremiah Johnson*)*

Here, location is a beautiful attraction on a par with Robert Redford, but it is also a sign of commitment and integrity; its value straddles the aesthetic and the moral.

If these two considerations, aesthetic appeal and moral integrity, always play a dual role in the foregrounding of location, then the promotion of different films will tend to emphasize one or the other. Take, for example, three films from 1971: *The French Connection* (William Friedkin), *Panic in Needle Park* and *Billy Jack* (Tom Laughlin). *The French Connection,* based on true events, unsurprisingly emphasizes its credentials with regard to realistic depiction (and the lengths gone to achieve this), its promotional notes revealing that eighty-six 'separate locations throughout the city were utilized, covering Fun City scenically as it has rarely been before in a feature film'. According to the producer Philip D'Antoni, because the

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actual events occurred in winter, '"there was never any question" that the film would be shot in winter too, even if it led to hugely uncomfortable filming conditions' (Twentieth Century-Fox, *The French Connection*). Similar claims are made on behalf of *Panic in Needle Park*, although the realism here is not one predicated on the recreation of events, but rather on the investigation of social problems, based as it is on a screenplay by two celebrated New Journalists, Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne:

> *As New York's West Side enjoys a period of uplifting physical change, one sight remains; the depressing spectacle of desperate addicts clinging to "Needle Park." This barren triangle of concrete and wooden benches symbolizes the depths of a contemporary problem that has spread to even the most affluent suburbs of our society – heroin addiction [...]. Director Jerry Schatzberg and cinematographer Adam Holander filmed "The Panic in Needle Park" 100% on location and West Side environs. (Twentieth Century-Fox,* The Panic in Needle Park)

Both of these New York productions claim to offer a kind of street-level grittiness which grows out of their production circumstances and complements their themes. With the example of *Billy Jack*, the claims reach something like a fever pitch of righteousness, as the promotional memo quoted here indicates:

> *The thing that marks "Billy Jack" most of all is the honesty and integrity of the film [...]. And this quality of integrity and honesty was no accident, but a design by all concerned with making "Billy Jack," both behind and before the camera [...]. Of course, in keeping with the general plan, the film was shot completely on location. The towns, Prescott, Arizona and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and many of the townspeople were involved in key sequences. The Indian reservation, the snake ceremony, the box canyon, the Indian dwellings were all actual locales and, once again, underlined the basic validity of the action of the film. (Warner Brothers, 'About Billy Jack')*

This final claim, as well as providing a warning as to the strange moral and evaluative logic which can arise from investing so much importance in the practice of location shooting as an isolated phenomenon, brings the discussion back to the problem of defining *how* or *when* location relates to a film. It is described as both a production method and an anchor to the film's moral content and validity. Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* (1971) offers a fascinating example of this complexity,

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Figure 5.2 A film present in the world: *The Last Movie* (Alta-Light)

partly because the film's very narrative is propelled by the activity of location shooting, and partly because the ethics of location shooting are brought into question, and kept perpetually in play. Ara Osterweil has already written an excellent study of this film's geographical politics and philosophy (and even, as part of this, performs a regional reading of it); while I recognize the deep contradictions Osterweil identifies in Hopper's project, 'between movie-made fantasies of space and the real-world practices of place' (2011: 184), an ecocritical approach seems to reveal something a little different. What is striking in Hopper's film is not so much its political incoherence, and the galling chasm which separates its rhetoric from its production circumstances, but rather the way in which it is continually drawn to depictions of filmmaking as a fundamentally located, bodily activity. It seems wonderfully evocative of its time, not for its disillusioned commentary on countercultural ideals, but for its sense that Hollywood filmmaking has now to be imagined as a presence in some sort of territory.

The Last Movie *and Location*

No New Hollywood film, and possibly no American film whatsoever, is so bold and determined in its interrogation of location shooting, and what that entails and implies, as *The Last Movie*. Based on a relatively simple premise – an American stuntman, on location in Peru, decides to stay behind after shooting has ended – the film is a complex and disorientating essay on, amongst other things, narrative, Catholicism and capitalism. These themes, however, are all mediated through the prism of location; the presence of a Hollywood production in (and departure

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from) an unfamiliar environment is, in *The Last Movie*, a question of profound cultural, political, aesthetic and ecological significance. Keith Richards's claim that it is one of 'numerous films that have merely plundered their location as colourful and exotic context' (2006: 60) seems to betray an unfair disregard for the film's clearly ambitious, if not always coherent, consideration of film and place.

Richards's approach is postcolonialist, and his displeasure with 'Hopper's wilful myopia towards the indigenous other' (2006: 61) is difficult to argue with in the scope of such an approach, other than to say that *The Last Movie* at least tries to foreground the conditions in which such myopia can arise. But while a postcolonialist interpretation will find much to criticize in the film's cultural politics, an ecocritical reading will find a great richness in *The Last Movie*'s consideration of location shooting as a materially invigorating *and* ecologically destructive enterprise. At one point in the film, Kansas (Dennis Hopper) and Maria (Stella Garcia) retreat to an idyllic waterfall, where they make love; the sequence, introduced by a short series of unpeopled 'nature' shots, and accompanied by a romantic ballad, is almost a parody of pastoralism. Afterwards, the lovers sit by the waterfall and talk. 'Boy, this is the life,' muses Kansas, 'nice and simple. Just give me a little adobe, right up there on those rocks somewhere. I'll be a very happy man.' Before long, however, his thoughts have progressed, and Kansas now talks about buying the mountain, installing a hotel and cable car, and even establishing a ski slope – until Maria reminds him that the climate provides no snow. This mini satire on Americanization and environmental insensitivity is not especially subtle, but within the context of a film about location shooting, it does challenge us to consider at what point the approach of Kansas becomes problematic; are his plans a betrayal of, or an extension of, the awe with which he seems to regard the environment? Do they signal the contamination emanating from American film production, of which Kansas is a part? And if so, is our witnessing of this very scene part of that problem?

The Last Movie makes loose associations between location shooting (in the form of Kansas, who is a struggling location manager as well as a former stuntman) and various destructive acts, including sexual exploitation, physical violence and environmental despoliation. Such a synopsis, however, would give the misleading impression that *The Last Movie* is a tirade against the evils of location shooting, or what Keith Richards describes as the 'invasive quality of film' (2006: 55). A more nuanced response might suggest that the film, which depicts the shooting of a conventional western on location as a morally complex carnival, urges at the very least (as ecocritics often do) that we resist the temptation of reducing location

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to setting, and setting to backdrop. Noel King (2010: 116) speculates that Dennis Hopper would have appreciated the artist Ed Ruscha's notion (used as the title of a series of images) that 'Hollywood is a Verb', and *The Last Movie* never settles on whether this is the source of Hollywood's wonder, or its original sin. There is a subplot in which a close (American) friend of Kansas, Neville (Don Gordon), struggles to make good on his dream of developing a gold mine in the surrounding country. His doomed fantasy of excavating wealth and happiness from the land is largely presented as a kind of foolhardy colonialism, and is obviously intended to parallel Kansas's own narcissistic 'use' of the environment.

And yet *The Last Movie* does not disregard his ambition entirely. One remarkable sequence, immediately after Kansas has promised to fund Neville's project, shows the two men (accompanied by, presumably, some native guides) traversing the beautiful landscape, as they venture out on a 'recce' to find the plot. Shot in such a way that invites us to marvel at the stunning grandeur of the Peruvian mountains, with barely any audible sound, the sequence poses a subtle challenge: to what extent is this very aesthetic comparable to Neville's actions? Does the sheer beauty here, which has been captured for our benefit as spectators, represent its own kind of manipulative extraction? Or does it perhaps contextualize Neville's plans, and help us sympathize with his yearnings? The following scene is in a cramped and starkly lit office, where Neville's potential financiers struggle to convince him that the gold mine is simply unworkable; the irritations and power struggles on display bring to mind a frustrated filmmaker, desperate to go somewhere and realize his dream project, only to find that 'the suits' are unwilling to support it. And this correspondence between literal mining and filmic exploration is made most overt in the film's penultimate scene, in which a despondent Neville admits to Kansas that his only knowledge of digging for gold comes from *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston, 1948). Despondent and clueless, the only solution Neville and Kansas can agree upon is to head westwards.

The film, then, ends with two gringos stranded in Peru, using quintessentially US American clichés in the hope of navigating unfamiliar territory. *The Last Movie* satirizes these two men bitterly, and although Hopper could be criticized for himself failing to discover or present his own alternatives to their ideas, the way in which his film imagines almost endless ripples of significance from a film production's presence in the world is remarkable. It was also, of course, a notorious location shoot in its own right, as chronicled most vividly in *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (Biskind 1998). I have not dwelt on this aspect of *The Last Movie*, partly because

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it is constantly in danger of overshadowing the final film, or at least cancelling out its achievements. Nick Heffernan, who argues that the film 'stands as a remarkably rigorous and entirely coherent critique of imperialism' (2006: 18), nevertheless regrets that its production 'was rife with the kinds of attitudes the film itself so brilliantly condemns' (2006: 19). At the risk of condoning or celebrating Hopper's (and others') marathon of indulgence and excess, it is important to consider that this contradiction could be utterly central to our understanding of *The Last Movie*; a film that set out to critique Hollywood hubris by locating itself and its action in stimulating alternative environments itself perpetuates that hubris in the profilmic world, only to make more bittersweet and tragic its own critical ambitions on screen. The film's hypocrisy is almost a question of ontology. At the end of the fictional production in *The Last Movie*, Sam Fuller (presumably playing himself) thanks the cast and crew: 'I enjoyed making this picture, and I know it was difficult in this damn rugged location. God bless all of you, and I'll see you back in Hollywood.' Fuller's presence and his call to return to Hollywood only emphasize the generational and film-historical impetus of *The Last Movie*, reminding us that Kansas's and Hopper's decision to stay on location, however disastrous, was (and is) a quintessentially New Hollywood act.

The Last Movie is exceptional in terms of the determination and rhetorical radicalism with which it probes the idea of location. If this concern is understood to be a common one across New Hollywood, then, Hopper's film should be looked at alongside other films whose treatment of location may not feature quite so prominently, but nevertheless function as an integrated theme or convention. *Deliverance* and *The Wild Bunch* have already been mentioned in this sense; *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975), with its bleak portrayal of confined institutional monotony and its celebration of experimental escape, might also be understood in these terms. *The Landlord* (Hal Ashby, 1970) and *The King of Marvin Gardens* both draw a considerable amount of humour and pathos from the disparity between a naïve creator's imagination and his immediate conditions.

McCabe & Mrs. Miller warrants particular attention here, partly because it links back to questions raised in previous chapters about genre and materiality, and partly because it has a number of interesting crossovers with, and distinctions from, *The Last Movie*. Like Hopper's film, *McCabe* tells the story of a man who tries to set up a new life in an unfamiliar environment, only to discover that he has underestimated his foreignness to that environment. In both films, the protagonist's actions are compared and contrasted with that of mining,[2] and although

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McCabe is far less overt than *The Last Movie* in its reflections on the physical activity of film production, some set-piece scenes early on – such as when John McCabe (Warren Beatty) directs a crew to speed up their construction work, because the glamorous 'stars' (prostitutes) are about to arrive – certainly invite that kind of reading. McCabe's venture is not a metaphor for filmmaking, but rather a story in which physical effort is significant, and this effort is all the more tangible because of Altman's shooting methods. Throughout *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, the town of Presbyterian Church invariably resembles a building site, strung together by rickety bridges and constantly in a state of flux. At some points in the film, a small lake freezes over to the point where people can move across it, thus creating another space for disorientated viewers to contend with. Altman, as if responding to that quality of impermanence – rather than controlling it or anticipating it – never presents us with anything like an orienting establishing shot, or an angle that is returned to reliably. This might be compared with a western such as *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1959), in which the town's layout is unerringly simple, precise and clear from start to finish. As Robin Wood observes, the action of *Rio Bravo* 'is played out against a backdrop with nothing to distract the individual from working out his essential relationship to life' (1981: 39). *McCabe* is instead rife with confusing distractions that seem to pose challenges for the characters and the film's own perspective, unable as it seems to be to impose or deduce a comprehensive plan of the environment.

This is especially true in the film's climactic (if somewhat languid) chase, during which McCabe is hunted by hitmen. At one point, he tries to grant himself an advantageous perspective by climbing up the church tower, only to be forced out for desecrating the church, and so has to improvise a strategy as he haphazardly navigates the deserted town and the deep snow. As viewers and followers of McCabe, we too are denied anything like a comprehensive or orienting view of the terrain. *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* has at its centre a man struggling to make sense of his conditions, and it is hard not to imagine that Altman's production faced similar challenges. The tone is one of effort, compromise and a slight sense of futility. One vital feature of this effect is the zoom, and I will go on to discuss in detail why the zoom can be said to have made an important ecocritical contribution to New Hollywood. *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* provides a fitting segue into such a discussion, because its refusal to grant a privileged perspective and its depiction of an environment beyond the whim of the characters (and, implicitly, the filmmaker) are important qualities of the New Hollywood zoom.

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Figure 5.3 Hopeless orientation: *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (David Foster Productions / Warner Bros.)

The Zoom as Compromise

The zoom has a longer history that many people may imagine. Zoom shots are visible in, for example, *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932). However, it is a technique which has come to be associated, in American cinema at least, with films of the 1960s and 1970s. Sam Peckinpah and Robert Altman, two of the most renowned New Hollywood auteurs, are considered amongst the most creative of zoom practitioners, while individual films such as *The Graduate*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Medium Cool* generate a tone and aesthetic which is hard to imagine without the use of the zoom. Along with desaturated colours and improbable leading males, the zoom played a significant role in developing 'the look' of New Hollywood; if one were to direct a spoof of, or homage to, this period, it is hard to imagine not using this lens, described by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith as 'a marker of the period, like flared jeans or sideburns' (2008: 99). This strong connection between the zoom and New Hollywood can be understood in two key ways: as an historical congruence and an aesthetic trend.

Although zoom lenses were available for decades previous to the 1960s, it was the development of the Angenieux 10:1 lens – described by Paul Monaco as 'the first truly practical zoom' (2001: 70) – which really presented itself as a viable option for Hollywood filmmakers in the 1960s. Monaco also notes the simultaneous development of reflex-camera technology, allowing directors and camera operators to view shots through the lens itself, as opposed to a viewfinder; this had particular advantages when it came to the zoom, as a shot could be followed through various focal lengths. Like Monaco, Richard Maltby characterizes the rise of the zoom lens as the result of technological advances, but emphasizes the

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role of television in this process: 'Although zooms existed prior to television, it provided the spur to their sophistication and improvement' (1983: 334). The conditions of studio broadcasts and the significant bulk of television cameras meant that a great premium was placed on the ability to re-adjust and reframe shots easily. Ironically, although the particularities of television studios would act as a catalyst for the rise of the zoom, New Hollywood deployed this lens as a quintessential location aide. David Bordwell writes: 'As filmmakers began to shoot on location more frequently, the zoom proved very handy. By setting the lens at the extreme telephoto range, cinematographers could shoot from a great distance, allowing actors to mingle with crowds while still keeping attention on the main figure' (1997: 246).

Such practical considerations go some way towards explaining the importance of the zoom to New Hollywood, but they need to be understood alongside (less verifiable) aesthetic factors. For example, discussing the methods of Robert Altman, Barry Salt suggests that logistical considerations were eventually replaced by more wilful decision making: 'At first, in *M*A*S*H*, the result was to keep the actors roughly the same size in the frame while they traced out a complex path on the set, but by *The Long Goodbye* some of the zooming in and out was being applied in a random way to nearly stationary actors' ([1983] 1992: 281). If this implies, perhaps unconvincingly, a linear progression from practical necessity towards aesthetic experimentation, it is nevertheless a useful reminder of the way in which an investigation into the zoom's expressive possibilities became a New Hollywood work in progress. For some commentators, this trend is further evidence of that period's artistic aimlessness. Richard Maltby describes a veritable pollution of Hollywood aesthetics by television aesthetics, of which the zoom was one of the most visible symptoms; it was part and parcel of the 'new waste space', a trend in which the 'provisional nature of the frame reduces the narrative role of spatial articulation' (1983: 338). David Bordwell, perhaps because he places this trend in an international context (featuring directors such as Miklós Jancsó and Roberto Rossellini) is more alive to the creative potential of the 'searching and revealing' approach made possible by the zoom (1997: 249). Indeed, the 'foreignness' of the zoom offers an interesting counterpoint to Maltby's emphasis on its televisual heritage; Paul Monaco (2001) describes the zoom as a European import (citing John Schlesinger's *Darling* (1965) as a key turning point), implying that it may have had a kind of aesthetically aspirational quality for the up-and-coming cinephilic filmmakers of New Hollywood.

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Contemporary debates from the period about 'uses and abuses' of the zoom offer a vivid insight into the confusion surrounding its aesthetic status. It is interesting to compare an article published in *American Cinematographer* in 1957 ('Use and Abuse of the Zoom Lens') with one published eight years later in the same journal ('New Uses for Zoom Lenses'). In the first, Joseph V. Mascelli offers a qualified endorsement of the technology, advising that it should be used, when time and money are lacking, to imitate dolly or tracking shots: 'Restraint must be employed so that zooming is utilized only when the action calls for camera movement' (1957: 653). In the later article, Richard Moore (1965) is similarly enthusiastic about the logistical benefits of shooting with a zoom lens, but he also refers to 'the zoom effect' as an end in itself, rather than an imitation of camera movement. Although he ultimately emphasizes the lens's use for reframing *between* shots, Moore's tone, in contrast to Mascelli's, indicates a general movement towards embracing the zoom's optical peculiarities. 'Using the Zoom Lens Creatively' by Robert Kerns, published in the same journal in 1971, returns to the question of how to ape moving-camera effects but presents this as an option, rather than the *raison d'être* of the zoom. By this point, critical and academic treatments of the zoom had begun to take seriously its creative – even its philosophical – potential. In 'The Aesthetics of the Zoom Lens', published in 1970, Paul Joannides argues that the zoom's role in feature films is qualitatively and substantially different from its role in news and sports broadcasting, where it 'is a function, not a form' (1970: 41). In cinema, the zoom can allow 'a good deal of intellectually and visually fascinating material, extraneous in conventional terms, to be incorporated in the overall structure' (1970: 42). Writing in *Filmmakers Newsletter* in 1972 (and in partial response to Joannides), Stuart M. Kaminsky instead emphasizes the zoom's cinéma vérité connotations, as well as its ability to emphasize distance between points.

It is fair to say that the utilization of the zoom in Hollywood cinema is itself part of the New Hollywood story. Not only did debates about the lens develop throughout the period, but the accusations made against, and endorsements of, the zoom bear a striking resemblance to opinions expressed about American cinema at this time more generally: too self-conscious, too amateurish, refreshingly challenging, visually unpalatable, ambiguous, incoherent. Andrew Sarris correlates the technique with the historical period when he describes the zoom as one of 'the most characteristic mannerisms of movies in the sixties' (1978: 188): the harbinger of a trend toward documentary, 'toward the freezing of reality into

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satiric patterns, and toward a derisive diminution of the story film' (1978: 189). And when, for example, Stanley Cavell expresses concern about 'all the shakings and turnings and zoomings' in American cinema of this period ([1971] 1979: 128), he does so in the context of a wider argument about the growing trend in Hollywood films of emphasizing the camera's presence, which in turn chimes with the criticisms of many commentators' complaints about the brashness and narcissism evident throughout New Hollywood filmmaking. On the other hand, when Paul D. McGlynn (1973: 190) suggests that as 'a device of point of view, the zoom shot is analogous to learning', his observation complements the claims of those who value the tentativeness and ambiguity of New Hollywood cinema, and its challenge to classical Hollywood's clear and presentational system. (McGlynn actually proposes a twin model, whereby zooming in corresponds to comprehension and zooming out corresponds to insight.) Across a range of evaluative approaches to the use of the zoom in this period, broader concerns about Hollywood cinema are often at play. Before turning to some examples of the New Hollywood zoom in action, however, I will outline some critical and theoretical responses to the zoom, in an effort to establish how and why the technique's potential for embedding film drama within a material environment has been overlooked.

Critical Theories of the Zoom

Some of the observations about the zoom quoted so far begin to hint at why ecocriticism might find it an interesting phenomenon to investigate. Richard Maltby's account of the zoom's emergence as a technological response to the demands and restraints of television-studio space emphasizes the guiding importance of pro-filmic physical conditions in the use of the zoom. Paul Joannides's idea that the zoom encourages filmmakers to incorporate materials that would previously have been deemed extraneous conjures up images of a less anthropocentric visual aesthetic. Indeed, he goes on to suggest that such lenses only contribute to drama 'when drama is dependent on space' (1970: 41). In an attempt to develop an ecocritical study of the zoom, the following will draw on implications such as these, and look in some detail at an article by Vivian Sobchack, 'The Active Eye: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Vision' (1990). Although considerations of the zoom only form a relatively small portion of Sobchack's study, the essay's theoretical richness offers a great deal to engage with, particularly from an ecocritical standpoint. Sobchack's attempt to position the zoom within a broader typology

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of 'cinematic vision' helps to clarify the technique's distinguishing features; in the process, Sobchack (along with a number of other commentators) comes to associate the zoom with consciousness, vision and attention rather than with physicality and presence. It is this particular contention to which I hope to provide an alternative, by explaining how and why the zoom may play a major role in a film's environmentality – namely allowing us to consider a pro-filmic ground which may not inevitably submit to a filmmaker's or a camera's intentions. I use the words 'ground' and 'terrain' (as opposed to, for example, 'space' and 'environment') because they better communicate the physical practicalities that the zoom is capable of pointing towards; however, as will become clear in the case of *The Conversation*, aerial distance instead of earthly territory might just as easily represent this type of obstacle.

'The Active Eye' is an exploration of how four different types of cinematic movement invoke the essential phenomenological fact of vision's 'inherent reversibility of perception and expression' (1990: 21), a state of flux that Sobchack describes throughout the article as the interplay between the visual and the visible. Both human and cinematic vision, explains Sobchack, 'are dependent upon material embodiment for their realization in existence, and both manifest visual competence in the visible performance of vision they inscribe in existential and intentional movement' (1990: 21). This 'visual performance of vision' is what interests Sobchack about cinematic movement. The four variations of movement outlined in the article, each of which gives a different phenomenological inflection to a film, are as follows: the fundamental movement inherent in cinema generally; optical movement (such as the zoom and shifts in focus), in which a film's 'viewing view' rather than its 'body' changes address; the movement of animate and inanimate beings (objects); and the movement of the camera (subject). According to Sobchack, each of these articulates vision *as* movement.

Optical movement, which Sobchack aligns primarily with the zoom, 'makes us visibly aware of the intentionality or consciousness of the cinema's "viewing view"' and this view 'traverses worldly space without materially inhabiting the distance between itself and the object which compels its attention' (1990: 25). Citing the famous track-zoom in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) as a prime example of the zoom's lack of grounded presence, Sobchack describes how, in this shot, we can see mind and body, vision and camera, at odds: 'Looking down from a stairwell, the protagonist's attention transcends the intervening space and locates itself at the stairwell's bottom – but his body, aware of the fatal fall through space this attention

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implicates, rebels and intends itself in opposition to the transcendence of attention' (1990: 26). Developing these insights in relation to the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack (echoing Paul D. McGlynn) suggests that the 'attention' made visible in the zoom is analogous to learning, as an 'active and constitutive' state (1990: 27), rather than a benign status quo. Optical movement, then, performs attention, and performs it as a process. Rethinking the zoom, I would like to propose two related amendments to Sobchack's description of it. Firstly, the zoom's failure (or inability, or reluctance) to occupy ground need not necessarily suggest a disengagement with ground altogether. And secondly, rather than move inexorably towards an object, the zoom can just as easily be used to undermine the notion of assured, object-oriented vision.

One cannot really dispute the claims made by Sobchack about the fact that the zoom does not signify (or perform) physical movement through space in the way that a tracking or dolly shot does. It does not follow, however, that the zoom renders terrain insignificant. While Sobchack suggests that the zoom 'collapses or transcends the *bodily* meaning of distance' (1990: 26, emphasis in the original), one could also argue that it defers to that distance, and concedes the camera's (or perhaps the film's) inability to travel across the ground in question. Interpreted in this way, the zoom can act as a visible compromise, expressing not consciousness or attention so much as a desire to be closer to something which has been rendered inaccessible by non-negotiable conditions. A recurrent motif in commentaries on the zoom, and a particularly prominent feature of Kaminsky's 'The Use and Abuse of the Zoom Lens', is the idea that it is misguided and unimaginative to utilize the zoom as a mere replacement for moving cameras. And yet the very notion of replacement is perhaps richer and more complex than these objections suggest. Dai Vaughan (1999), whose reflections on location shooting were discussed earlier in the chapter, veers towards the ecocritical import of this question in his essay on the zoom, which at one point attempts to make sense of a 'strange' zoom shot in Robert Aldrich's *Apache* (1954). It is 'a film replete with tracking shots, often over pretty uncompromising terrain; and there is no practical reason – as far as one can see – why the shot in question should not have been done with a track' (Vaughan 1999: 140–141). Although Vaughan rules out the likelihood of environmental challenges to Aldrich, his consideration of the possibility, accompanied by his attention to terrain throughout the rest of the film, is significant in and of itself, perhaps more so than any decisive conclusions about individual production decisions may be. Put another way, even if the priorities at

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play in choosing the zoom over another technique seem relatively straightforward (because it is cheaper, for example, or because it makes the job of reframing an actor much easier), to make such priorities visible is to point towards the effort that has gone into creating a fiction somewhere. This, I believe, has a significant effect on some quite far-reaching ecocritical and ontological issues. What are the implications for questions regarding world creation, for example? If cinema *creates* worlds, why does it need to compromise? And, more pressingly from the perspective of the current discussion; might the zoom's concession of powerlessness even equate to some kind of environmental humility?

It would be a mistake to move so quickly to such far-reaching considerations, but it is fair to suggest that Sobchack's account of the zoom does not do justice to its potential for pointing, however indirectly, to the material constraints of filming. This might partly be explained by the way in which 'The Active Eye' asserts an absolute inter-reliance of 'object' and 'subject'. On the face of it, such ideas have strong affinities with ecological and ecocritical principles; Monika Langer has gone so far as to suggest that environmentalism and phenomenology are almost the same thing, or at the very least that ecological discourse has much to offer phenomenology, not least by critiquing its a-historicism (2003: 118). In some senses, my argument for the ecocritical significance of the New Hollywood zoom, as understood in conjunction with contemporary filming practices, is an attempt at just this kind of modification. And yet, in the case of the zoom, to constantly refer to an 'object' risks underestimating the ambiguity of its effects. When, for example, Sobchack suggests that 'the "zooming" gaze locates itself in its object, and literally *transcends* the space between the film's situation as an embodied viewing subject and the situation of the viewed object' (1990: 25, emphasis in the original), the argument presupposes a single and distinct object, which is by no means always the case with the zoom. Describing the shot in *Vertigo*, Sobchack posits the bottom of the stairwell as the object of the zoom (26), but this is far from clear; the intervening space is, arguably, what concerns Scottie (James Stewart) most at that moment. Sobchack is not alone in characterizing the zoom as a move towards or away from a discernible object; according to Paul Joannides, the zoom 'has an emphatic quality, demonstrating points in a context rather than combining these points in a new whole' (1970: 40). And yet, as can be seen in so-called searching zooms, in which the camera operates as if unsure of its object, the zoom can just as easily be used to disrupt our assumptions about points of interest.

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Three Zooms: *Easy Rider, The Conversation* and *Jaws*

The following section will discuss three short sequences from three films; they are not directed by filmmakers widely associated with the zoom (such as Peckinpah, Altman or Frankenheimer), and because of this they can elucidate some of the technique's importance beyond it being an auteurist signature. The zoom in *Easy Rider* helps to illustrate my argument about the zoom's potential for denying us – rather than thrusting us towards – objects of interest; it also seems to respond to necessities imposed by the filming conditions of the location. The opening zoom of *The Conversation* again illustrates both these facets, but with greater complexity, and in a way which resonates with the film's broader concerns. In *Jaws*, the zoom in question is certainly a point-of-view shot, and yet it still manages to communicate the meaningfulness of its perspective in distinctly physical and spatial terms.

A little over four minutes into *Easy Rider*, immediately after Wyatt (Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper) have sold their batch of cocaine in Los Angeles (a sale which makes possible their journey across the southwestern landscape), we cut to a shot of a truck travelling along a motorway, towards the camera. The camera follows its movement by panning gradually leftward and zooming out slightly to reframe the truck, keeping more of it visible for longer. The pan stops, however, when the camera reaches a ninety-degree angle with the road; at this point the camera abandons its tracing of the truck's movement, and instead begins a relatively fast, but apparently aimless, zoom. Across the road from the camera is, as we might expect, a stretch of quasi-desert, hot and dry and populated by featureless (as far as the viewer can make out) green growth. In other words, there is no ostensible 'object' which the camera would transcend space in order to reach, no visible destination. Were the camera to move into this space, the space which it looks towards, we know that it would have to navigate first a road and then rough ground. Not only does it resist doing so, but it zooms without a discernible conclusion, as if looking into space, rather than towards an object. Writing (not in 'The Active Eye') about Chris Marker's *La jetée* (1962), Vivian Sobchack describes the point at which the film breaks with its reliance on still photographs and includes a moment in which a woman suddenly blinks: 'The space between the camera's (and the spectator's) gaze and the woman becomes suddenly habitable, informed with the real possibility of bodily movement' (2004: 146). The zoom shot in *Easy Rider* in some ways achieves the opposite effect,

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making space seem uninhabitable, but not unimportant for that; tangible but challenging. And while Sobchack's description is based on the premise of two clear points (the camera and the woman), *Easy Rider*'s zoom visibly lacks a second point. It is hard to imagine a more apt introduction to the journey of Wyatt and Billy.

The opening shot of *The Conversation*, also a zoom, instead looks towards a crowded urban space and the film's main character, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman). In some senses it is more conventionally motivated than the *Easy Rider* example, introducing as it does the film's main setting (Union Square in San Francisco) and character with relative clarity, and also offering a sense of the film's themes, namely surveillance and isolation. This zoom, taken from a high angle and extreme length, looking down towards the square, is less likely to encourage consideration of the ground per se, but it is just as implicated in the physical conditions of filming as Hopper's zoom in *Easy Rider*. It begins as an establishing shot, but a very gradual zoom guides us closer to the ground and leftwards, in such a way that the camera seems to be following the action of a lively mime artist – one of many obvious debts to *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966). When the mime begins to interact with Caul, the zoom stops, although the camera continues to pan and tilt, and now it follows Caul instead. Thus, to describe this shot as a performance of focused attention, one would have to contend with the fact that the attention seems most steady and conscious once the zoom actually stops, and is replaced by other types of movement. The slight aimlessness of the zoom section, in which more than one figure could lay claim to being the object, is replaced by a more determined-seeming combination of panning and tilting, during which Caul is the unambiguous object of the gaze. This zoom, then, does not transcend space in order to arrive at another point, or object, so much as negotiate an object in spite of its distance. After some three minutes, we cut to a long shot of a surveillance operative on a roof, in what may or may not be the conclusion of a point-of-view construction. Assuming we have been sharing this man's view, it is interesting that the 'reveal' tells us nothing about his personal reaction, and instead emphasizes his physical situation, atop a roof and hiding beneath (somewhat ironically) a neon sign. In short, the zoom here – along with its accompanying movements and subsequent shot – communicates little about anything other than the conditions under which a 'viewing view' was made possible; conditions which relate to the location of the fiction and the location of the production simultaneously.

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Figure 5.4 A zoom in search of an object: *The Conversation* (American Zoetrope / Paramount Pictures)

Jaws is a film whose very premise is bound up with filmmaking challenges: a huge shark; underwater point-of-view shots; night scenes on boats; numerous crowd scenes. As in the examples of *Easy Rider* and *The Conversation*, such practicalities at certain moments become meaningful constituents of the film's fictional fabric. This is especially the case in the first half of *Jaws*, when much of the drama is of a logistical nature (how can a busy beach be policed by a man unwilling to go in the water?), and Spielberg strives to establish the beach as a barrier whilst also allowing us privileged glimpses of the shark's movements. The most famous zoom in *Jaws* is almost certainly the track-zoom into the face of a panicked Chief Brody (Roy Scheider), repeating the technique Hitchcock used in *Vertigo*. It is an effective punctuation, and Spielberg has been given too little credit for his significant variation on Hitchcock's effect (the two moments achieve quite different results). However, there is another zoom which appears later in *Jaws*, and which is at once more conventional and more mysterious.

Brody and Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) have failed to convince the town's mayor, Vaughan (Murray Hamilton), to close the beach. The holiday season has arrived, the beach is full of families, and after some initial trepidation, people have begun to swim in the sea. Brody, though, has serious concerns, and so has asked his own son and their friends to take their boat elsewhere, to a separate estuary known as 'the pond'. A brief panic on the main beach subsides after it is revealed

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that two young boys with a wooden fin had fooled everyone, and so when a woman calls 'Shark!' from beside the pond, Brody is unconcerned. But we see the shark attack and kill a man whose boat is next to the boys', and finally the seriousness of *this* situation becomes clear to Brody and the crowd. Brody's son, unconscious from shock, is brought safely to land. Brody stands, and looks resolutely out of the frame; a subsequent point-of-view shot confirms that he is looking out to sea. Initially this shot includes wooden bridge-support pillars, effectively framing Brody's view of the ocean beyond. A zoom then magnifies the centre of the image, eliminating the wooden structure and 'moving' us out towards the open sea. And yet it is of course it is the *lack* of movement which really counts here, or rather the tension between a frustrating inertia (the camera/Brody cannot follow the shark) and a desire to give chase. Sobchack would no doubt contend, with absolute justification, that Brody's desire, communicated in the zoom, is a psychological state. But the zoom closes a scene in which huge physical barriers have been constantly emphasized (those separating the beach from the water, the beach from the pond, Brody on the bridge from his son in the water, etc.), and in which the shark's promiscuous mobility has come to the fore, in terms of both narrative and cinematography (in the form of mobile point-of-view shots). As with the example from *Easy Rider*, the conclusion of this zoom is arbitrary – there is simply more sea. The crucial difference in *Jaws* is that we and Brody know that something lurks beneath this surface, something to which the zoom cannot grant us access.

The Zoom beyond New Hollywood (and back again)

In arguing that the zoom need not be an entirely ungrounded, a-physical technique, I have engaged primarily with Vivian Sobchack, although it is important to point out the wider trend her approach represents. Sobchack's contention that the zoom transcends space is a recurring feature throughout many commentaries on the subject. In the aforementioned article by Paul Joannides, for example, the author claims at various points that the zoom denies and annihilates space. And in his introduction to an in-depth study of the zoom, John Belton, paraphrasing Jean-Luc Godard, offers a model almost identical to Sobchack's: 'if every tracking shot makes a moral statement, probing the physicality of man's relationship to the space around him, then every zoom makes an epistemological statement, contemplating man's relationship not with the world itself but with his

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idea of consciousness of it' (1980: 21). Daniel Frampton worries that Sobchack's language is in danger of obscuring a film's poetics, but he sympathizes with her basic position: 'we can see what Sobchack is indicating: the image changes, distance is collapsed and the body is transcended' (2006: 45). Frampton's writing, in keeping with his broader 'filmosophical' project, even exaggerates the psychological independence of the zoom beyond Sobchack's model, describing how it is a 'very expressive thought, sometimes searching and finding, sometimes receding and denying, sometimes questioning and inquisitive' (2006: 45). Here the zoom does not even imply or signify thought: it *is* thought. Sobchack's conception of the zoom as a performance of consciousness and a denial of embodiment, then, crystallizes some common ideas about its role in cinema. However, not only is her articulation of this point especially rich and challenging, but the fact that Sobchack writes from a phenomenological perspective, and yet still disassociates the zoom's optical effects from any consideration of the camera's physical presence, is particularly revealing.

Almost any action on behalf of the camera, including the basic act of recording, has the potential to draw attention to the pro-filmic presence of filmmaking technology. What makes the zoom a particularly interesting case for ecocritical study is its ability to emphasize, or at least suggest, the *limitations* of the camera in our world. Timothy Morton has identified a comparable phenomenon in the realm of nature writing, particularly evident in the 'as-I-write-this' motif, which he terms 'ecomimesis' (2007). Ecomimetic writers strive (futilely, as Morton sees it) to insist on both their presence in our world and their authorial subservience to it. To argue for a direct correspondence of this in the New Hollywood zoom would require a sustained and thorough justification for the applicability and relevance of Morton's linguistic theory, which cannot be carried out here; however, there is evidence of a potential connection between these two in some remarks made by Stanley Cavell, in which he critiques the zoom for needlessly confessing to the act of filming, which (as Cavell sees it) is a condition of the art in any case. He describes the delusion of a camera's candidness in terms which Morton would surely recognize; for the camera to picture itself, writes Cavell, 'gets it no further into itself than I get into my subject by saying "I'm speaking these words now"' [1971] 1979: 127).

Whether or not we consider a present camera as a constituent of a film's text is, as I have developed it here, an ecocritical concern, although it is not, of course, an exclusively ecocritical concern; the question of camera presence is a

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rich and complex one that bridges many areas of film studies, from narratology and phenomenology to ethics and aesthetics. Edward Branigan brings together a number of these varying approaches in *Projecting a Camera* (2006), in which he interrogates the inconsistencies and imaginative leaps at play whenever we employ the term 'camera' in our interpretation of films. Branigan's study must offer pause to any discussion of cinema which – like the present one – attempts to take seriously the issue of whether we should ever consider a camera as being present in a film text. It poses a number of difficult questions. Do we, for example, imagine the actual, or a generalized, camera? How many types of camera exist in a film? Does the camera occupy space anthropomorphically? What constitutes camera movement? Although it is not possible here to respond to so many complex challenges, Branigan's key contention that the use of the term 'camera' constitutes a 'reading hypothesis' (2006: 88) is instructive, suggesting as it does that there are subtle but vital links between one's placement (or not) of the camera, and one's fundamental ideas about how to respond to a film text. If, as Branigan writes, 'the camera's status fluctuates in the twilight area between material object and interpretive subject' (2006: 96), then an argument such as the present one, examining New Hollywood films and their ability to thematize their physical presence in the world, has many reasons to emphasize the material object, and the opportunities and limitations that implies. And so, when Branigan suggests at a later point that knowing 'that some camera operated in the past to shoot the film [...] is quite different from knowing how a camera functions in a film fictionally and narratively' (2006: 167), ecocriticism is bound to ask why. Is it *entirely* different? Or at the very least, does it not depend on the fiction?

To pose this final question is to move the goalposts slightly and transpose the issue of camera presence from one based on ontological terms, as found in Branigan, to one based on appropriateness, which brings the discussion back to American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst arguing that the zoom in New Hollywood cinema can draw attention to the material terrain of a film's production and its fiction, I do not wish to argue for this as a widely applicable theory of the zoom. Instead, the New Hollywood zoom achieves such effects in conjunction with other important factors, in particular the significance of location shooting as discussed earlier in this chapter. Returning to Cavell's *The World Viewed* helps to clarify this. Writing in the early 1970s, Cavell expresses some disappointment and impatience with contemporary trends in Hollywood, and

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most particularly the insistent emphasis on camera presence, or what he calls the 'narcissistic honesty of self-reference' ([1971] 1979: 133). From the standpoint of Cavell's core arguments about film's ontology – 'the camera is outside its subject as I am outside my language' ([1971] 1979: 127) – he regrets the 'loss of conviction in film's capacity to carry the world's presence' ([1971] 1979: 131). Isn't the projected image, asks Cavell, acknowledgement enough of the camera's role? My interpretation of the zoom likewise finds in such techniques traces of confession and concession, but what Cavell characterizes as an abandonment of cinema's contract with its audience, or perhaps with itself, I would sooner describe as part of an historicized trend in New Hollywood, where the 'world' created by a film does not stand entirely outside of our own.

'If the presence of the camera is to be made known it has to be acknowledged in the work it does' (Cavell [1971] 1979: 128). In New Hollywood, that 'work' was not only a question of recording (as Cavell implies), but of recording *somewhere*, under certain conditions. The zoom can, as has been described here, express or make visible that fact. In *The Production of Presence*, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht proposes a number of types of 'world appropriation' (2004: 86), two of which are presence-oriented (eating and penetration), and one of which (interpretation/communication) is meaning-oriented. The zoom, even if its penetration is compromised or frustrated, seems to speak of presence. According to Gumbrecht, 'contemporary communication technologies have doubtlessly come close to fulfilling the dream of omnipresence, which is the dream of making lived experience independent of locations that our bodies occupy in space' (2004: 139). The modern media 'has alienated us from the things of the world and their present – but, at the same time, it has the potential for bringing back some of the things of the world to us' (2004: 140).

If the zoom in New Hollywood achieved anything like what Gumbrecht describes, it did not do so independently or in a vacuum, but rather in conjunction with other trends and practices. Put another way, if the zoom always has the potential to imply physical conditions, that potential is most likely to be fulfilled when films are *in other respects* concerned with the pro-filmic world – in their themes and narratives, their aesthetics, their modes of production and even their promotion. In the case of New Hollywood, location shooting can be said to have been a vital and unifying characteristic across those other factors, essentially allowing the zoom to imply – or even mean – what has been described here. In order to better illustrate this essential inter-reliance between

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the two strands of this chapter, I will conclude by looking closely at a short scene from *Medium Cool*, a film as concerned with its locational immediacy as it is with the ethical and practical concerns of taking a camera somewhere and filming something.

Conclusion

While *The Last Movie* takes as its subject a location shoot in a far-off, essentially anonymous environment, *Medium Cool* places itself not only in a specific and close-to-home (from the perspective of Hollywood) city, Chicago, but in a particular contemporary event. One might say that while *The Last Movie* creates drama out of the presence of a production, *Medium Cool* worms its way into an already dramatic and controversial happening – the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago – and tries to communicate its presence there. Also, while *The Last Movie* speculates about the possibility of 'filming' with bamboo-constructed totemic cameras, the action of *Medium Cool* abounds with technological mediation, from portable sound recorders and handheld cameras to magnifying glasses, mixing desks and dark rooms. This is a film which worries about the moral responsibilities of mediators; about the dangers of getting too close and staying too far removed. It is ostensibly about television, but in its concern over the implications and opportunities stemming from new technologies, and how such technologies raise new and difficult questions about presence and representation, it is acutely pertinent to this chapter's concerns.

One particularly apt sequence comes early on in the film, shortly after we have seen the main character, John (Robert Forster), interview young people on the pavement about their thoughts on Robert Kennedy. The camera, which has up until now generally shared John's perspective on the interviewees, abruptly tilts up, and instead focuses on an 'El' train passing by above and behind his head. At this point, there is a slight zoom, suggesting – as Sobchack and others would claim – a sense of heightened attention towards the train. However, this zoom is almost immediately interrupted by a cut, dramatically 'moving us' from one space to another with barely any discernible motivation, and indicating the limited opportunities of a camera vis-à-vis the geographical mastery offered by editing. From the train, two young boys alight onto a platform, the elder one, Harold (Harold Blankenship), carrying a small basket. Moments later, still on the

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platform, Harold releases a pigeon from the basket, and the camera zooms in, struggling to follow the bird's path as it flies away. As with the *Easy Rider* example discussed earlier, the terrain here appears to necessitate a zoom; the camera is positioned on a train platform, beyond which is a track, beyond which seems to be a sheer drop. The zoom's concession of its own limits is, however, here given a poignant twist, as it is held in counterpoint to the liberated bird, towards which it looks but definitely does not travel. Harold's love of birds in *Medium Cool* sometimes veers towards a rather obvious kind of pathos, but here it is deftly interwoven into the film's interest in the physical phenomenon of recording. In a film which in so many ways positions itself in the here and now of contemporary Chicago, it is striking here how both Harold and the camera seem to yearn to escape and be with the bird – and yet the 'failure' of both is vital to the beauty and significance of its flight.

To what extent is the Chicago of *Medium Cool* an 'environment'? The emphasis placed in the film on how a cameraman enters into and occupies spaces is an important ecocritical feature in this regard. In an essay called 'American Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism' (1996), the ecocritic David Mazel raises a number of issues pertinent to this discussion of location shooting. It begins with some thoughts on the location choices informing a television adaptation of Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain*, and Mazel's uncomfortable realization that an area with which he is familiar is being made to perform as another place. Instead of dwelling on questions of authenticity and fidelity, however, Mazel takes an interesting detour through the etymology of 'environment', a word whose suffix points to a quality of action, the action of environing, which tends to get lost in common usage. (In contrast, 'government' tends to exist in both its static and its active sense.) Mazel asks: 'If, as the dictionary suggests, environment originates in action, just who is the actor, and what is the nature of the action?' (1996: 39). Our surroundings may surround us, but not actively; the action is ours. He continues: 'Environment-as-noun points to and is logically inseparable from an earlier and originary environment-as-action, which in turn points to acts of entry and occupation; all these together account for our being environed, and hence of "having" an environment that we can speak of as a noun' (1996: 39).

Mazel goes on to suggest that, in a twist on the norms of sexual discourse, much environmental discourse emphasizes the penetrated, defining that as environment, and thus deflecting attention away from the originating act of

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penetration. New Hollywood location shooting, as it has been discussed here, can be said to have kept both of these notions in play, invariably drawing attention to a production's pro-filmic occupation as well as incorporating the environment (in the commonly used sense of the word) as a vital thematic and narrative constituent. I have referred to three different theorists of nature writing (David Mazel, Timothy Morton and Scott Slovic), and although each offers a distinctive ecocritical interpretation of nature-writing rhetoric, they share a common contention; namely that the urge to conjure the spectre of a reality which exists above, below, before and after the text is a strong one and is intimately bound up with major questions concerning the ethics and aesthetics of environmental representation. Whether one chooses to emphasize pre-production and production trends, film promotion or thematic developments, New Hollywood can be said to have joined that same conversation.

The technical manner in which it did so is also of significance, and in this chapter the zoom has been discussed as a cinematographic technique with surprising environmental resonance. That these two practices, each with ecocritical potential, should come to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s is of great significance for my overall argument concerning the environmental sensibility of New Hollywood, and the examples discussed in this chapter have built upon – if not always explicitly – arguments developed in previous chapters. My characterization of *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, for example, describes the kind of unconquerable and volatile environment that was seen as a feature of the Vietnamized western. It is important for me to emphasize the interdependency and congruency here, because the ecocritical significance of the technologies and conditions described in this chapter is historically contingent; in other words, neither the zoom nor location shooting could be deemed *inherently* significant from an ecocritical perspective. Location shooting has by now been so fully subsumed into Hollywood production that its critical agency has been all but blunted, and the rise in digital cinematography must significantly alter our understanding of techniques such as the zoom (see, for example, Barker 2009). And yet, while the ecocritical significance of filmmaking practices may ebb and flow according to any number of cultural and historical contexts, cinema's special ability to weave together pre-textual and textual phenomena, and to make drama and philosophy out of a narrative's presence in the world, will ensure that questions of environmentality will often resurface, in whatever shape or form, with new voices, waves and movements in film art.

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Notes

1. However, it would be remiss to ignore Paul Monaco's suggestion that many new sound technologies in the 1960s actually came into conflict with location-shooting practices (2001: 104).
2. Murray and Heumann (2010) have argued that this film's concern with mining is an unusually progressive one from an ecological point of view, and in fact amounts to an endorsement of sustainable development.

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CONCLUSION

Coming to Terms with Mr Meek

It is an exciting time to be engaging in debates about cinema and the material world. Not only has the critical and theoretical literature relating to the ethics and aesthetics of environmental representation been expanding hugely in recent years, but also film-theory debates about the medium's 'special relationship' with material firstness have been complicated and reinvigorated by digital cinematography. (Dudley Andrew's 2010 'manifesto', *What Cinema Is!*, is a particularly fascinating contribution to this discussion.) Over the last decade, Hollywood blockbusters have struggled to incorporate or thematize global environmental awareness, and the much-discussed 'slow cinema' aesthetic of Lisandro Alonso, Jia Zhangke and Carlos Reygadas, for example, has taken centre stage in world cinema (however problematic an image that may be). So much activity in cinema today seems to invite or require ecocritical exploration, but there is an understandable, and perhaps even vital, reluctance on the part of writers in the field to settle on anything like a stable ecocinema canon or methodology. David Ingram's chapter, 'The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-Film Criticism' (2013) is instructive in this regard; aptly placed early on in an edited collection, it asks what we, as ecocritical film scholars, *want from* the films we watch and write about. 'What', Ingram wonders, 'are the implications for the activist ambitions and aesthetic tastes of eco-film criticism if "bad" art inspires people just as much, if not more than, the "good"?' (2013: 53).

If there is an anxiety about quite how and where to apply and explore ecocritical theories of cinema, it has manifested itself in the study of a dizzying range of films, themes, national cinemas and genres, often within the space of a single book, or even essay. In many respects this is to be welcomed; ecocritical film studies has certainly been 'opened out', and there can be few remaining doubts

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about its potentially vast contribution to film studies as a discipline. But have we been too quick to build ideas and arguments out of vivid and stimulating snapshots, in lieu of something more sustained? In *Transactions with the World*, I have deliberately – and sometimes counterintuitively – narrowed my focus, and lingered with a particular body of work, in an attempt to its explore its own variety of ecocritical complexities. Yes, New Hollywood is already large and diverse, but it has (I think) a unity of sorts, and one which I hope has provided the opportunity for the building of a multi-faceted but coherent portrait. At a number of points, I have been tempted to carry questions and ideas beyond New Hollywood, and ask them of other films and periods, in and beyond American cinema. Does locational presence have a different ecocritical currency in the films of Dogme 95? Does *Pierrot le fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965), and its take on the fugitive film, develop a substantially different type of environmental liberation? And if so, does this tell us anything more broadly about the environmental imagination of the French New Wave, or perhaps even European modernist cinema in general? Do silent comedy films shot in a fledgling Los Angeles and its environs warrant attention as regional texts? How do propaganda films (attempt to) contain the potential of material singularity and vibrancy, in their lurches toward abstraction and generalization? I reluctantly put these ideas aside for the present time, concerned that they would only muddy my discussion of a particular film-historical moment.

One key question that arises from this study, then, is: If there is such a thing as an ecocritically coherent body of work, to what extent does it make sense to draw dividing lines along national and historical parameters? Is ecocriticism not teaching us to study cinema, its categories and its theories, according to new points of reference? Wondering about the merits and integrity of my own approach, I take a good deal of confidence from watching and re-watching *Meek's Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2010), a film which seems to establish a firm continuity with, and crucial variation from, the environmental sensibility of New Hollywood as it has been described in this book. Its subject and aesthetics are most meaningful in relation to American filmmaking traditions, in such a way that does not limit – but instead sharpens and deepens – its ecocritical insights. The film is one of many contemporary works to display an obvious debt to New Hollywood, but of those it is perhaps most clearly linked with the particular strain of vividly localized, materially vibrant work examined in this study. As a western, its concern with the bodily experiences of its characters in their environment places it in the company of *The Wild Bunch* and *Jeremiah Johnson*; its interest in silences and failures of human

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communication suggests the influence of Monte Hellman; its periodic shots of gushing rivers and quivering plants immediately bring to mind Terrence Malick. But it can also be read as a subtle admonishment of this period's environmental imagination.

Meek's Cutoff chronicles the efforts of a small group of settlers as they journey across the punishing terrain of eastern Oregon, and many of the internal struggles which emerge are directly traceable to environmental conditions and the search for water. As with the Vietnamized westerns discussed in Chapter Three, there is in *Meek's Cutoff* an evident desire to communicate the material challenges encountered by the characters: long takes detail the effort involved in crossing rivers and valleys; sounds of rickety wagons and laboured breathing are often as audible as dialogue and music; characters are developed and revealed according to their behaviour within a testing environment. However, these broad correspondences may distract from the significant departures of *Meek's Cutoff* from a number of its New Hollywood forebears. This shift takes its most arresting form in the character of Stephen Meek (Bruce Greenwood), the bombastic guide whose authority gradually subsides through the course of the film. A crude and conceited man, proud of his violent exploits, though bringing with him knowledge, charm and a degree of self-awareness, Meek would not be out of place in a Peckinpah western. His constant reference to an old order (implicitly or explicitly an order of clear race and gender hierarchies) may also recall the nostalgia that pervades much of Peckinpah's work. Crucially, though, and distinctly unlike Peckinpah's films, *Meek's Cutoff* holds its central male at a distance, observing the man-versus-wilderness premise as a kind of pathetic farce. The rigorous and deliberate style of Reichardt's film denies us the sense of environmental immersion which I described in Peckinpah's work – that filmic embodiment of physical toil. But what we witness instead is a precise deconstruction of masculinized environmental adventure.

This could feasibly be described as a political 'stance' adopted by the film as a whole, but it crystallizes with particular clarity and deliberateness in a specific scene, approximately one-third into the film. In it, five characters gather under a basic tent: Stephen Meek, Jimmy (a young boy, played by Tommy Nelson) and the three wives of the travelling party – Milley Gately (Zoe Kazan), Glory White (Shirley Henderson) and Emily Tetherow (Michelle Williams). Emily, with her steely self-assurance and resistance to Meek's authority, anchors the film's point of view. The scene in question moves from a short dialogue between Meek and Jimmy towards a barbed exchange between Meek and Emily, all of which is

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closely observed by Milley and Glory (Jimmy's mother). Looking out towards a range of mountains in the distance, Jimmy asks Meek whether they are 'our mountains' – the ones towards which the group is headed. Meek, with some tenderness, explains that they are not, but that perhaps they could be christened 'Jimmy's mountains'; he even suggests informing cartographers of the new name. Despite the basically harmless nature of this banter on its own terms, the context within which it emerges demands that we regard it with some caution or hesitancy. After all, Meek has taken it upon himself to casually conquer a range of mountains, at a distance, in the midst of a disastrous path-finding mission for which he is currently responsible. That he can treat his surroundings with such cocksureness, in the presence of women and children who are suffering from hunger and thirst, is more than a little galling. The staging of the scene, in which two seated women (Glory and Emily) face the two males, encourages us to see this talk of conquering mountains as a kind of display of masculinity (that a third woman, Milley, kneels beside Meek only reinforces this effect). All three women are crocheting. As if to emphasize the gender divide, at the end of Meek's mountain-conqueror performance, and after Jimmy has shyly walked away, Glory delicately asks Meek, 'You never womaned, Mr. Meek?'.

Of the three women, Emily is the most visibly scornful of Meek's yarn spinning, and he challenges her directly, asking whether or not she likes him. 'I don't like where we are', replies Emily. Meek goes on to scoff at the notion that the group is lost; 'We're not lost, we're just finding our way'. Under the circumstances, Meek's reassurance sounds as pathetic to us as it does to those in his presence. And there is also a subtle but unmistakable countercultural whimsy in his tone. He brings with him, in other words, an attitude which recurs again and again in New Hollywood male protagonists; one can almost hear Dennis Hopper or Warren Oates deliver the line. As Meek goes on to pronounce his half-baked theories of sexual identity, our scepticism is surely at one with Emily's. The audience and the three women gathered in the tent (whose reactions the camera dwells upon) have seen before them a man with an exaggerated sense of social and spatial entitlement wander in his verbal ramblings between topological conquest and sexual politics. *Meek's Cutoff* is not only a feminist reworking of the western; it utilizes a female perspective as a means of interrogating the genre's environmental blind spots. It seems to take inspiration from important achievements of New Hollywood while simultaneously undoing some of its patriarchal, narcissistic and romanticizing indulgences.

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In exploring the ecocritical questions raised by New Hollywood films, it has sometimes proved difficult to come to terms with the solipsism that underpins many of them. Might we say that New Hollywood was a time in which American film lost some of its ambition to explore and interrogate modern men and women with the philosophical tenacity and wit Stanley Cavell so values in his writings on Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s? Cavell characterizes the conversation of such films as *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941), *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940) and *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937) as

> *[O]f a sort that leads to acknowledgement; to the reconciliation of a genuine forgiveness; a reconciliation so profound as to require the metamorphosis of death and revival, the achievement of a new perspective on existence; a perspective that presents itself as a place, one removed from the city of confusion and divorce. (Cavell, 1981: 19)*

In contrast, there are relatively few searching or stimulating conversations in New Hollywood cinema. *The Parallax View*, *Ride in the Whirlwind* (Monte Hellman, 1966) and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* offer profound explorations of *something*, but not people, at least not 'people' in the sense we find in the films of Preston Sturges and Howard Hawks, or even Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock – people whose conversations might plausibly lead to, in Cavell's terms, 'a new perspective on existence'. Other critics have lamented this relative banality, but perhaps it can instead be understood as a shift in emphasis, away from people's thoughts and actions and towards a more horizontally constituted series of materials, events and imaginings. In the richest and most stimulating films of the period, the absence of a complex or nuanced humanism became somehow (ecologically?) creative, and critical. This is not to blithely gloss over some serious shortcomings in the representational politics of New Hollywood, but rather to remember that characters are not the only subject worth exploring.

Meek's Cutoff seems able to look back towards New Hollywood and extract from it both inspirational and lamentable legacies. It offers an ideal endpoint from which to reflect on that period's environmental sensibility, and the usefulness of understanding it as a period per se. Reichardt's film reminds us of the challenging ways in which American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s reconfigured the dynamic relationship between Hollywood and the material environment, but also warns us that such reconfiguration did not equal any kind of comfortable environmentalist

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reconciliation between narrative cinema and the world. Not that such a thing could ever exist.

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