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

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

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)*

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

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)*

The 'keeping at bay' chimes with Wood's other comments in this chapter regard-ing 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 con-text 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 particu-lar 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 tel-evision and literature, Hitchcockian formal perfection and Hawksian 'fun', New Hollywood films were led astray from their essential obligation – to create mean-ingful 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 grap-ple with New Hollywood's formal peculiarities through a systematic analysis of

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.

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

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,

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

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

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

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

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*

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

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

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

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

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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