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: <u>WELCOME TO HAPPY HOUR BAR</u>.*
> *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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