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“You see, my wife’s dad is real well off” – Money Obscured in the Coen Brothers

Sarah Mae Fleming

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

Film 492

I am very interested in money. Not so much in the pursuit of large amounts of it, but more in the study of how money shapes our culture. Money is a crucial component to American identity. How we navigate our economic situation shapes us; it is deeply tied to important questions about race, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship. Particularly, I am drawn to the portrayal of money in film. In cinema, money can seem like it does not exist, such as in comedies or dramas, where characters have fully furnished, chic apartments with no sense of how these items could be afforded. Other times it is the driving force behind all narrative action; in crime or heist films that often center on large sums of money or a valuable artifact. Sometimes money can be tangential, passively recognized; or it can be pivotal yet invisible. Despite its importance to defining identity, questions regarding money and economics have largely been ignored in film criticism. Jonathan Freedman explains: “my problem is simply what is left out of currently canonized idioms...What is left out, quite simply is the economy – or more properly, the complex tangle of experiences that is life in an advanced capitalist economy.”<sup>1</sup> Freedman asks, “What does it *feel* like to live in a market-oriented world? What kinds of emotions, cathexes, rages, desires, fears, complacencies, exaltations, and depressions are elicited by capitalist culture?”<sup>2</sup>

I am most concerned with the depiction of money in American film since the shift in the 1970s to a post-industrial, neoliberal economy. This shift to an informational capitalism places value on immaterial labor, such as a service, knowledge, and communication.<sup>3</sup> Because of this change, industrial careers have vanished, along with the security that once came with them. Material labor has become essentially disposable in the US, due to outsourcing and automation. The American Dream has transformed dramatically; no longer can a typical family support itself with one income. Today, working-class and middle-class finances have become increasingly

more precarious. As the relationship between money and Americans changes, so does its filmic representation. Thus, post-1970s films are particularly interesting places to follow the money.

The films of the Coen brothers are an appropriate place to begin. Most of their films center on money in one way or another, but that money tends to be obfuscated. Three of the Coens' films in particular feature money that is largely invisible yet crucial to the narrative. In *Fargo* (1996), Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy) has a massive debt that he needs to repay, and the audience is never allowed to understand the circumstances surrounding it. The \$1 million he is able to extort from his father-in-law is buried in the snow and never found in the course of the film. *The Big Lebowski* (1998) features a complicated tale of extortion and briefcases supposedly full of money but ultimately revealed to be empty. *No Country for Old Men* (2007) focuses on important coin tosses, as well as a briefcase of money that is hidden and retrieved throughout the film. The fate of the money in *No Country for Old Men* is ultimately unclear. In these three films, money serves an important function in narrative as well as thematic elements; yet money is often invisible, obscured, or lost.

There are several questions I aim to consider in this investigation: How does money function in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men*? What is the relationship between the characters and money? What does the role of money reveal about late twentieth century American capitalism? To what extent do the settings of these films (1987 Minnesota, 1991 Los Angeles, and 1980 Texas) interact with the economics of its time and place? Why is money frequently hidden, lost, or invisible? My investigation will focus on following the money in three Coen Brothers' films to discover how money functions in the films, and what these functions might reveal about American attitudes toward money, economics, and capitalism.

Despite the fact that money is a central concern in the work of the Coen Brothers and in *Fargo*, *Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* in particular, the topic of money is rarely discussed in scholarship involving the Coens. Most critics agree that an auteurist approach is appropriate, but do not agree on the Coens' signature. Allen H. Redmon writes that "The duo's sixteen films to date bear what might be characterized as the Coen brothers' mark, even if the details of that mark have yet to be fully defined."<sup>4</sup> Mark T. Conrad notes that the Coens' films "defy exact categorization, and they always bear the brothers' unmistakable stamp," despite that stamp being largely undefined.<sup>5</sup> R. Barton Palmer believes "An auteurist approach, however, is arguably called for in the case of Joel and Ethan Coen."<sup>6</sup> Americanness is often involved in Coen scholarship. Redmon, for instance points out that their films "trek, seize, and witness nearly every aspect of twentieth-century America."<sup>7</sup> But money is only tangential to the discussion. Palmer picks up on the American themes in the Coens, pointing out that they present a "critique of American society and its national cinema."<sup>8</sup> He then offers a nuanced postmodernist reading of the Coens; he contends their films are "undoubtedly postmodern yet engage in a dialogue with genre and with classic studio films that does not slight the political and the cultural."<sup>9</sup> However, Palmer does not delve into economic readings in his argument.

Jeffrey Adams also expresses a postmodernist reading of the Coens, arguing that "Coen brothers films cannot be said to repeat the past in a regressive, nostalgic mode of recollection. Rather, their mimetic repetition of prior texts and discourses has as its result a progressive renewal, interpretation and reinvigoration of the past."<sup>10</sup> Erica Rowell views the Coens' films as modern American folk tales, writing their films "find the 'little man' going toe-to-toe with powerful fat cats to grab—or steal—a piece of the American Dream pie... The result is a set of quirky morality tales about capitalism, family, and social institutions."<sup>11</sup> Despite connecting their

films to The American Dream and capitalism, Rowell does not mention money. Many critics struggle to find any tangible thread between their films, Clark Buckner arguing, “Absence is so central to their films that, one might say, they are about *nothing*.”<sup>12</sup> Buckner utilizes a psychoanalytic approach to the Coens, focusing on the absence present in their films: “The figures of absence that permeate the Coens’ films are correlates of the irrationality that drives their characters, sustains their plots, and gives the slip in the slapstick of their black comedy.”<sup>13</sup> Yet Bruckner never mentions money. Scholars such as Greg Tuck and Brian J. Snee use the neo-noir genre to analyze the Coens, Snee writing that their films are “highly subjective, self-conscious, and intertextual.”<sup>14</sup> There are no scholars or critics focusing on the importance and elusiveness of money as a thematic element in the Coens’ oeuvre. Money, despite acting as the major motivator for plot and characters in their films, remains obscure in the criticism of the Coens.

Since none of the critical paradigms employed by the many scholars on the Coens offered a concrete method to analyze the use of money in Coen Brothers’ films, I turned to Marxism as a way to begin my investigation into the economic themes of the Coens. Money’s importance to the plot yet its invisibility in the image track led me to Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production*. Macherey, a student of Louis Althusser, is a French post-structuralist Marxist who expands on Althusser’s theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses in literature and criticism. Macherey argues, “what the work *cannot* say is important,” and that to fully understand a text, criticism must address what is unsaid.<sup>15</sup> He writes that a text “circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return.”<sup>16</sup> Essentially, Macherey points the critic to the margins of the work, where the critic can begin to uncover the unconscious of the text.

The often obscured presence of money in the Coens' films calls for an analysis along the lines of Macherey. On the surface, money is connected to greed and ultimately to violence. However, Macherey's theory allows us to dig deeper into the unconscious of the text. Macherey insists criticism ask: what is unsaid? Why is it unsaid? For the Coen brothers' films, money is crucial to the narrative, yet it is rarely seen, often obscured, and sometimes it does not even exist at all. Macherey instructs the critic to gather these instances of repression and draw significance from them: "the work *manifests*, uncovers, what it cannot say...for in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said*."<sup>17</sup> In order to uncover why money is so obscure and why it has been so repressed in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men*, it is imperative to both understand not only what these films are saying about money but what they cannot, or will not say.

My investigation of money in film led me to studies by Jonathan Freedman and Peter Lehman on John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). These scholars are among the few that are looking at analyzing the central role of money and economics in Hollywood film narrative. In "The Affect of the Market: Economic and Racial Exchange in *The Searchers*," Freedman focuses on the character of the shop owner Jerem Futterman (Peter Mamakos) and points out that although the character is not explicitly named as a Jew, "his appearance evokes the iconography of the stereotypical Jew."<sup>18</sup> By recovering Futterman's Jewishness from the repressed margins of the film, Freedman is able to reveal the "conflation of economic and racial affects, precipitated by that classically racialized figure of ambivalence about the market, the Jew" and uncover the link between capitalism, race, and the settling of the American West.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, he concludes that "economic structures" and "a wide variety of racial constructions" create knots in the American frontier myth.<sup>20</sup> For Freedman, Ford's ideal Western community is made

possible only by repressing Futterman and the economics of the frontier capitalism that Futterman represents.

In “How the West Wasn’t Won,” Peter Lehman investigates “the relationship of money and trading to Ford’s representation of the West and American history.”<sup>21</sup> Starting with the bag of money Ethan (John Wayne) throws to his brother Aaron (Walter Coy), Ethan is characterized as indifferent to money, contrasted with Futterman who is defined by his greed. Lehman writes, “Ownership of the land for the purpose of farming is associated with virtue and family values, and trading money with greedy individualism and immortality...such a land/money opposition creates a nostalgic longing for a mythic Western past.”<sup>22</sup> He argues that Ford attempted to portray the ideal Western community as independent from money. We never see that bag of money again in the film and are never explicitly told that Ethan dug it up from the cabin after the massacre. We rarely see Ethan with money. It almost literally disappears. From his investigation, Lehman argues that the film represses money, the true nature of capitalism to stifle the actual economic reasons the West was settled. In the Western frontier myth, the West is settled for freedom, but in reality, the West was an economic opportunity. Lehman’s analysis takes “money and greed” out of “the margins” and reveals that they are “at the center of building the American West.”<sup>23</sup> Lehman and Freedman offer examples of uncovering what is repressed in the film in order to draw larger conclusions about the film’s ideology.

I intend to undertake a similar project: following the money in Coen brothers’ films. I trace money’s function in the plot, characterization, image track, and themes, starting with *Fargo*. In *Fargo*, money is crucial; it is the driving force of all narrative action. Furthermore, the money and the characters associated with money (Jerry, Carl, Gaear, Wade) are connected to criminality, violence, death, and destruction. Then the inverse becomes apparent: the characters



who are portrayed as uninterested in money (Marge, Norm) are associated with intelligence, bravery, and happiness. However, when attention is turned to the margins of the film, we find that money is often a site of obfuscation: Jerry's shady car dealership full of hidden costs and smudged numbers, and Carl's burial of physical money in the vast Midwest snow. The money is rarely witnessed by either characters or the film audience. Why is money hidden? What is being repressed by hiding the money?

*Fargo* follows Minnesota car sales manager Jerry Lundegaard's (William H. Macy) plot to extort \$1 million from his wealthy father-in-law, Wade Gustafson (Harve Presnell). He hires two criminals Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) to safely kidnap his wife in exchange for \$40,000 and a tan Cutlass Ciera. Jerry needs the money because he is in "a bit of trouble," and must pay off enormous debt—the source of which is never clear. The kidnapping goes awry when Gaear murders a state trooper and two witnesses, leading to the involvement of police chief Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand). By the end of the film, Carl, Jerry's wife and Wade are all murdered. However, Marge is able to put the pieces of the crime together, leading to the arrest of Gaear (after murdering Carl) and the apprehension of Jerry.

On the surface of *Fargo*, money motivates the narrative. Upon meeting Carl and Gaear, Jerry is unable to articulate the circumstances surrounding his financial trouble, but the criminals ultimately seem unbothered and agree to the kidnapping. Later, it is revealed that Jerry has borrowed \$320,000 from a loan company, GMAC, by falsifying documents. He expects Wade to lend him \$750,000 for an investment, which Wade denies. Because of the debts incurred, Jerry sets up the "safe" kidnapping and promises Carl and Gaear \$40,000 – half of the \$80,000

ransom. In reality, Jerry tells Wade the ransom is \$1 million. The narrative moves forward and the plot is full of financial windfalls and losses.

Throughout *Fargo*, money is connected to criminality, violence, death, and destruction. Most of the characters associated with money are also criminals or involved in criminal acts. The relentless pursuit of money proves unsuccessful for Jerry, Carl, and Gaear, and adversely affects their loved ones. Jerry's wife Jean Lundegaard (Kristin Rudrud) faces a traumatic violent attack and eventually is murdered due to Jerry's desire for money. Jerry's son Scotty (Tony Denman) loses both of his parents in the ordeal. Wade and Carl are murdered over monetary disputes; both Jerry and Gaear are apprehended at the end of the film. However, Marge who appears disinterested in wealth is successful both in her career and in her relationship. In *Fargo*, money operates as a narrative device that motivates the plot; moreover, it is deeply connected to the violence perpetrated throughout the film. This violence is the cause of the death and destruction of the Lundegaard's, Wade, Carl and Gaear. To emphasize the connection between money and destruction, Marge declares "there's more to life than money," and is ultimately the heroine of *Fargo*.

*Fargo* connects money with criminality from the start of the film. Jerry is set up with Carl and Gaear, two career criminals, to stage the kidnapping for cash. He meets the criminals at a dark, seedy bar, emphasizing the connection between money and crime. Later, Jerry is filmed at his office at the car dealership, struggling to maintain his scheme. A loan company called GMAC calls Jerry about a large loan he has taken out. Jerry is filmed through the vertical blinds in his office, visually mirroring prison bars. This offers a sense of captivity Jerry struggles with due to his financial problems. Adams notes that "Jerry is typically framed in doorways, car windows, or in his cubicle at work behind slatted blinds, which visually telegraph his feeling of

confinement.”<sup>24</sup> The entire conversation takes place with Jerry filmed “behind bars,” (the vertical blind slats) in his office. Not only does the prison bar lighting create a sense of restriction, this mise-en-scene further cements money’s connection to criminality in *Fargo*.

The film closely ties money to violence. The characters interested in the pursuit of money inevitably become entangled with violence. The first act of violence in the film is the kidnapping of Jerry’s wife, Jean. Carl appears outside of the Lundegaard home dressed in a black ski mask, wielding a crowbar. His menacing, dark figure contrasts against both the bright snow covered background, and Jean’s pale pink clothing – visually amplifying his malevolence. As Carl breaks in one door, Gaear rams through another door, grabbing Jean from behind. She then bites Gaear’s hand and runs upstairs. She hides behind the shower curtain and attempts to escape, by running straight through the curtain, the plastic tangled around her. As she runs, Jean falls down the stairs and is knocked unconscious. The scene is strikingly more intense than the rest of the film; Rudrud’s performance is marked by tremendous panic and fear. Jerry had set the kidnapping up to be both fake and safe, but Jean’s terror is entirely palpable, creating an uneasiness for the viewer. In the abstract, the plan is “real sound,” as Jerry explains, but in reality Jean is experiencing an unimaginable trauma. Jeffrey Adams writes that, “in his desperate pursuit of money and power, Jerry rejects the traditional values of family and community.”<sup>25</sup> Despite its intended comic moments, the scene is remarkably dark and violent; money is the motivating force for Jerry to abandon his duties as a father and husband and subject his wife to immense danger and suffering.

Gaear perpetrates the next violent acts in *Fargo*. Carl and Gaear are driving the new Cierra with Jean tied up in the back when a police officer then pulls them over for not having the correct license plates for the vehicle. Gaear grabs the officer by the hair, slams his head on the

car, then shoots him in the head. Blood erupts from the man, splattering Carl. A vehicle drives by the massacre, and Gaear hunts them down in a high-speed car chase, ultimately murdering the witnesses. The murder of the police officer is marked by its surprising gore – which even surprises Carl as the officer’s blood is sprayed all over him. This bloodshed is one of many scenes in *Fargo* that explicitly ties money to brutal violence. Gaear commits three murders to maintain the kidnapping ploy in order to receive his payout.

Money is even more closely tied to violence in Wade’s death. Wade demands to deliver the ransom money himself, despite Jerry’s objections. Carl arrives, expecting Jerry, and is met with Wade demanding his daughter, repeating “No Jean, no money!” Overwhelmed with frustration, Carl shoots Wade and grabs the suitcase of ransom money, but not before Wade can fire his weapon at Carl’s face. Wade lies dead while wounded Carl makes off with the \$1 million, also killing the parking lot attendant on the way out. This scene entirely surrounding an exchange of money is marked by violence and death.

The final death scene comes to fruition over an argument about splitting the money. Carl returns to Gaear after his meeting with Wade and offers him \$40,000, half of the ransom (that we now know is actually only a small fraction of the ransom) but they argue over who deserves the Cierra. Carl’s face is mutilated and covered in blood as he screams, “I got fuckin’ shot!” For Carl, violent sacrifice privileges him to both the new vehicle and more money. As Carl leaves their hideout, Gaear runs outside and slams a shovel over Carl’s head. Later, as Marge closes in on the hideout, she finds Gaear pushing a leg down into a woodchipper. The snow covered ground is completely splattered in bright, red blood. This scene is defined by both its violence and gore and by Gaear’s downfall. Marge captures Gaear and soon after, Jerry is apprehended violently. The police enter his motel room, dragging Jerry back as he tries to escape out a

window. He screams wildly as the police push his body down to handcuff him; the camera lingers on Jerry's violent wailing. Not only does *Fargo* connect money and violence, but it demonstrates that this kind of vicious pursuit of money is futile. The characters in the film that are associated with chasing money are murdered or captured.

Marge is the sole main character who is not vying for money. She is, consequently, marked safe from violence, death, and destruction. Marge is marked by her logic and her seemingly simple nature; her presence in *Fargo* "amounts to the role of the heroine," according to Scott Lee. Despite not being a typical heroine, Marge remains one of the Coens' most sympathetic characters. What is especially notable is Marge's economic modesty – her detachment from money that defines all of the other major characters in *Fargo*. She lectures Gaear after his capture, "“And all for what? A little bit of money? There's more to life than a little money, ya know.” Marge asks a friend for a restaurant recommendation with the qualifier that it be "reasonable." Most importantly however, is the final scene in *Fargo*. In bed at their home, Marge's husband Norm (John Carroll Lynch) tells Marge that his mallard painting was chosen for the three-cent stamp. "It's terrific!," Marge replies. Norm responds, "It's just the three-cent. Hautman's blue-winged teal got the 29-cent. People don't much use the three-cent." But Marge insists, "Oh, for Pete's sake. Of course they do. Whenever they raise the postage, people need the little stamps." *Fargo* ends on Marge's assertion of the importance of the three-cent stamp. Money is important, as long as it remains modest. Marge is positioned to be the only main character unaffected by the pursuit of money and this allows for her to maintain a happy life. Following the conversation about stamps, Norm places his hand on Marge's pregnant belly and whispers "two more months." The joy associated with their budding family is linked to their economic modesty.

Money is central to *Fargo*, both as a narrative device and a dominant theme connecting money and greed to violence and death. Despite its centrality, the money remains unclear, hidden, and undefined throughout the film. By using Macherey's theory, I am directed to the instances in which money's presence is somehow repressed. Money plays an important role on the surface of the film, so why does it remain hidden and illegible throughout *Fargo*?

Macherey's model pushes me to the margins of the film – to examine these moments and analyze what the film does not say. Jerry's connection to money is obscured in the film – why do we not know the circumstances involving his debt? And how much is that debt? Jerry's occupation as a car salesman allows for him to further obscure money in several ways: through hidden costs on the vehicles he is selling, by using nonexistent vehicles to borrow \$320,000, and by physically distorting numbers to illegibility to secure that loan. The one instance of material cash in the film is brief and ends in Carl burying it in the snow – an instance of literal suppression of money.

Jerry's office at the car dealership serves as a setting for important instances of obfuscation in *Fargo*. Jerry argues with a customer over the addition of a pricey "TruCoat" sealant on a vehicle. The sealant itself is transparent, ironic when revealed how Jerry lied about the actual cost of the TruCoat. The customer yells at Jerry, "You're talking in circles...you're a bald faced liar, a fucking liar!" Later, Reilly from GMAC calls Jerry regarding the \$320,000 loan Jerry had taken out against cars at the dealership. Reilly explains to Jerry that he cannot read the serial numbers for the vehicles that Jerry had faxed over. Reilly tells Jerry that he needs to ensure the "vehicles that you're financing with really exist." Later in *Fargo*, we see a close up of just Jerry's hands furiously scraping a pencil on paper to dull its tip. In a closeup, Jerry writes serial numbers for the vehicles with the dulled pencil, smudging the numbers to make them illegible. Despite the close camera positioning, the numbers are indecipherable to us as viewers. The office

serves as a location that portrays the suppression or obscuring of money perpetuated by Jerry. The cost of the sealant was hidden, the vehicles exist on paper but not in reality, and the serial numbers are smeared to illegibility – all these instances in *Fargo* portray an obfuscation of money. It is not just Jerry who is uncomfortable directly confronting money – the film itself is uncomfortable with it by constantly obscuring money.

The only instance in *Fargo* where money is visually represented occurs when Carl opens the suitcase of ransom money. He is expecting to find \$80,000 – the amount Jerry had told him would be the ransom – but instead \$1 million is in the case. Jerry had attempted to swindle both his father-in-law out of money, but also Carl and Gaear. Carl is alone in the Cierra on a deserted road. His face is bloodied after the gunfight with Wade as he looks into the suitcase. Carl is shown in a medium close up as he mutters, “Jesus Christ.” Several bundles of \$10,000 in the suitcase are revealed in the next medium close up shot, with Carl’s blood-stained hands at the edge of the frame. He rifles through the money, removing the \$80,000 that Gaear believes is the entire ransom. The money remains on camera for only 20 seconds, but the camera does not move away from the money for the entire shot, maintaining a close proximity for the duration. The only sound is diegetic: Carl’s breathing and the sounds of his hands moving through the money. The closeness and quietness emphasizes the importance of this moment: we are to be looking at the money and focusing on little else. Despite its brevity, the 20 seconds of the physical manifestation of money is made to be noticed. Here, the film finally reveals a visual manifestation of money – cold, hard, cash in a suitcase. But quickly after, the money is buried – invisible and intangible again. Carl then walks out of the car, into the snow and buries the suitcase in a vast sea of white. Realizing he would have no way to find the suitcase again, Carl sticks an ice scraper into the snow – mirroring a tombstone marking a grave.

*The Big Lebowski* tells the story of The Dude (Jeff Bridges) and his unwitting involvement in a kidnapping scheme. The Dude, whose real name is Jeffrey Lebowski, is mistaken for a much wealthier Jeffrey Lebowski by some thugs. These thugs, while looking for the other Lebowski, urinate on the Dude's rug. The Dude goes to meet the wealthy Lebowski (David Huddleston) to ask if he'll pay for a new rug, since the soiled rug "really tied the room together." After meeting with Lebowski, Dude is offered a \$20,000 job to courier the ransom of \$1 million to kidnapers, a group of German nihilists, who have taken Lebowski's wife, Bunny (Tara Reid). With the help of his friend and bowling partner Walter (John Goodman), Dude discovers that Bunny had never been kidnapped and Lebowski had embezzled \$1 million from his own charity. The suitcase filled with ransom money given to Dude to exchange for Bunny had only been full of two phonebooks.

Like *Fargo*, the pursuit of money moves the narrative forward in *The Big Lebowski*. "Where's the money?" is the first line of dialogue in *The Big Lebowski* after the opening voice-over monologue. This question remains throughout the film: "where's the money?" is repeated by different characters several times. The search for money pushes the narrative along, similarly to *Fargo*. The money is absent even in suitcase of "full" of money in *The Big Lebowski* because it never existed. Lebowski extorted \$1 million from the "Little Lebowski Urban Achievers" fund anticipating that the Dude would fumble the ransom exchange and lose the money. The action of the film is predicated on a lost suitcase filled with phonebooks. Like most of the characters in the film, the audience is left in the dark – we do not learn about the true contents of the suitcase until the Dude does.

Despite its absence, money still moves the narrative forward in *The Big Lebowski*. More so than a typical MacGuffin, however, money telegraphs economic and social status in the film



and again, as in *Fargo*, is deeply connected to violence and death. Most importantly, the money in *The Big Lebowski* is almost entirely non-existent.

Money is a clear indicator of economic and social strata and the film examines the connection between money and work ethic (or lack thereof), starting with the Dude – a penniless slacker. During the opening voice-over monologue by the cowboy stranger (Sam Elliot), the Dude, dressed in slippers and a shabby robe, walks through a supermarket called Ralph's. As he grabs a carton of half and half to sniff it, the stranger describes the Dude as “a lazy man... quite possibly the laziest in Los Angeles County.” The scene ends with the Dude writing a check for 69 cents to pay for the half and half, with his “Ralph's value club” card placed in the frame. The check for such a small amount paired with a “value” card indicate the Dude's poverty. The dialogue about the Dude's laziness preceding that particular shot directly connects laziness to being poor. The Dude's lack of wealth is commented upon frequently in the film; his car is beat, his clothes are ragged, and his rent payment is often late. ShaunAnne Tangey writes in “The Dream Abides: *The Big Lebowski*, Film Noir, and the American Dream,” that the Dude's apartment evidences “exhaustion and grime.”<sup>26</sup> His housing and clothing clearly code the Dude as poor, and his lack of employment and disinterest in obtaining employment characterize the Dude as lazy. This connection between poverty and purposeful unemployment seem to coincide with American capitalist values: the rich work hard and the poor do not.

The Dude does not pursue money with the same desperation as Jerry in *Fargo*. When the thugs urinate on his rug, the Dude is upset because the rug “really tied the room together.” To the Dude, the rug had aesthetic value that went beyond its (most likely) low monetary value. The Dude is interested enough in money to become involved in the ransom exchange, but he lacks the fervor for money that was apparent in *Fargo's* characters, as well as the group of nihilists

that the Dude encounters. Like Marge, the Dude is mostly disinterested in money – but Marge’s indifference toward money is in line with her intelligence, loyalty, and sense of justice. The Dude, too, is loyal to his friends, but his lack of money is not positioned as if he is morally above it; instead, the Dude is simply too lazy to obtain money.

Jeffrey Lebowski is initially positioned as the opposite of the Dude: wealthy and hard-working. The Dude pays Mr. Lebowski a visit to see about getting a new rug. Mr. Lebowski’s butler Brandt (Philip Seymour Hoffman) presents all of Mr. Lebowski’s “awards, commendations, citations, honorary degrees, et cetera” as the Dude appears uninterested. The Dude walks down the wall of awards, stopping at a mirror, printed with the “Man of the Year” *Time Magazine* headline. In the corner, it reads “Are you a Lebowski achiever?” The Dude looks into the mirror, seeing his own amused reflection in this faux magazine cover. Mr. Lebowski, in wheelchair and in an expensive suit, appears as a stark contrast to the Dude’s disheveled clothing. Tangey observes this contrast in their homes, writing, “There can be no clearer depiction of the gap between rich and poor in LA than that of the Dude’s apartment and the Big Lebowski’s mansion.”<sup>27</sup> Mr. Lebowski criticizes the Dude. “You are just looking for a hand-out like every other...are you employed, Mr. Lebowski?” He continues to lament the Dude’s laziness and compliments himself, “I didn’t blame anyone for the loss of my legs... I went out and achieved anyway! I cannot solve your problems, only you can.” The film positions Mr. Lebowski to be the mouthpiece of American capitalistic rhetoric that argues hard-work will bring wealth and laziness will bring poverty. Later in *The Big Lebowski*, it is revealed that Mr. Lebowski has no money of his own; his wealth comes entirely from his ex-wife, subverting that American myth. This connects to Jerry’s own failures to provide for his wife and son – his wife’s father is the man with the money, not Jerry.

While the Dude represents an impoverished slacker, and Mr. Lebowski a wealthy “achiever,” Walter Sobchak is positioned somewhere in the middle. Walter is the Dude’s friend and bowling teammate who convinces the Dude to try and take the entire ransom instead of taking his \$20,000 cut. Walter owns a business, “Sobchak Security,” indicating that Walter is more interested in money than the Dude. This is manifested through Walter’s business, more expensive clothing, and his ownership of several guns. At the bowling alley, Walter frequently has outbursts involving people breaking the rules. “Over the line!” Walter shouts at a bowler. He continues, “This is not ‘Nam! This is bowling! There are rules! Am I the only one who cares about the rules?” Walter’s obsession with the rules exists mostly within the 1950s retro-style bowling alley, which Tansey notes is “a stellar example of Googie architecture.” This type of architecture, particularly popular in southern California, features colorful boomerang and starburst shapes, and roofs with upward slopes.<sup>28</sup> Tansey describes Googie architecture as “a poignant signature of an era, a post-World War II moment of utopian ideals fueled by space-age optimism and believed the future was now, and the future was good... a belief otherwise expressed as the American Dream.”<sup>29</sup>

Walter’s fixation on rules within a Googie-style building is revealing within the context of a shifting economic system starting in the 1970s. As financial growth became increasingly precarious, the “rules” of hard-work and financial security began to appear meaningless. Walter (whose business is named Sobchak *Security*) is desperately clinging to some sense of rules, particularly in a building whose architecture reflects a time in American history where the rules of economic progress still applied. The bowling alley positions Walter as representative of the struggling American middle class – not achieving the wealth of Mr. Lebowski, but also not the Dude, the unemployed slacker.

Similarly to *Fargo*, scenes involving money are tied to violence in *The Big Lebowski*. When the Dude is purchasing the half and half at Ralph's, the television is showing a newscast of George H.W. Bush speaking about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, asserting, "This aggression will not stand." Here, the act of purchasing is linked to "aggression." Once the Dude arrives home after his trip to the grocery store, he is attacked by two thugs repeatedly asking him, "where is the money?" During the ransom handoff, Walter takes out an Uzi gun in order to attack the kidnapers and take the money. After the botched handoff, the group of German nihilists, who have not actually kidnapped Bunny but who have said they did, cut off the toe of one of their own to mail to Mr. Lebowski as proof of Bunny's captivity. Later in the film, The Dude and Walter believe that a teen named Larry Sellers (Jesse Flanagan) has stolen the money and purchased a brand new sportscar. As punishment for stealing the money, Walter begins to destroy the car with a crowbar. All of these instances in *The Big Lebowski* tie money to violence.

The sole death scene in *The Big Lebowski* is explicitly connected to money. The Dude, Walter, and their bowling teammate Donny (Steve Buscemi) are leaving the alley at night. The group of German nihilists have set the Dude's car on fire and are demanding the ransom money for Bunny. The Dude explains that he knows Bunny is not kidnapped. Still, the nihilists demand the money that the Dude, Walter, and Donny have on them. The Dude and Donny begin to open their wallets and take money out. The Dude rifles some bills out of his wallet and yells to the nihilists that he has "four dollars, almost five." Donny also has bills in his hand, telling the Dude "I have eighteen dollars." Walter stands defiantly between the Dude and Donny and declares, "what's mine is mine." The leader of the nihilists (Peter Stormare) threatens them, "we fuck you up and take the money!" and Walter challenges him "come and get it." Donny holds up a few bills behind Walter, genuinely offering it to the nihilists. A violent fight ensues, as Walter bites

the ear off of the leader, the Dude fends another man off, still offering the four dollars. Walter and the Dude are able to defeat the nihilists with bowling balls as their weapons, but Donny has collapsed on the ground. Donny's death is preceded by the most visual representations of money in the film; as both the Dude and Donny offer physical bills to the nihilists, Walter's fierce protection over his own money spurs the violence. Donny suffers a heart attack from the trauma involved in a fight over money.

Despite the importance of money to the narrative and themes of *The Big Lebowski*, it is, again, rarely materialized. The Dude writes a check for his half and half; the sixty-nine cents is not actually in the transaction. Instead, he uses a piece of paper to represent the actual money. Right from the start of the film, money is in some way hidden. More importantly, the money that motivates *The Big Lebowski* was never really there. The invisible nature of the money in *The Big Lebowski* points to the difficulty of obtaining it in a post-industrial American economy. More so than *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski* utilizes characters representing different social and economic tiers and their relationships to money. What is consistent with all of the characters is their pursuit of nonexistent cash. Even Mr. Lebowski, who is behind the scheme, is proven to have no actual income of his own. He too is caught up in an illusion of money. *The Big Lebowski* has portrayed money as a hidden, invisible, and repressed entity that is unable to be clearly witnessed or expressed.

*No Country for Old Men* portrays welder Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) as he stumbles upon a massacre from a drug deal gone wrong and finds \$2 million in a suitcase. Llewelyn takes the cash, but hitman Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) begins to track Llewelyn, and Anton will murder almost anyone who stands in between him and the money. Meanwhile, Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) is on the case, trying to both find the suitcase and save Llewelyn. Anton

tracks Llewelyn through Texas, and Llewelyn narrowly escapes several times. Eventually, Llewelyn is able to get the money to a motel in El Paso, Texas, but a group of Mexican cartel members, also after the money, find Llewelyn and murder him. Sheriff Bell returns to the scene of the crime, and finds a vent has been unscrewed by a coin – a signature of Anton’s, indicating that he has taken the money. Anton travels to Llewelyn’s wife, Carla Jean (Kelly Macdonald), and offers her a coin flip for her life. She refuses to play the game, and Anton murders her. Sheriff Bell becomes distraught due to the violence and drugs running rampant in his community, and retires. The ultimate fate of the money is left uncertain—Anton has taken the money but where does it go? The circumstances surrounding Anton’s profession is obscured.

Money is more visible in *No Country for Old Men* than in *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*. Characters actually pay for things, such as Llewelyn’s \$26 stay at a motel and Anton’s \$0.69 peanuts at the Texaco station. Anton’s mercy is offered only through money: a coin flip. The tracker used to find Llewelyn is placed within a bundle of money. The money in *No Country* is manifested visually and appears much more frequently than in *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*. It is not coincidental then, that *No Country* depicts significantly more violence than both *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*. While the two latter films certainly rely on violence in their narratives, *No Country* is defined by more and more violent acts, which is directly connected to money. However, the \$2 million cash does indeed disappear, and while we are led to believe that Anton had stolen it from El Paso, where does it go next? Anton was not searching for the money for himself; he was working for someone else. Ultimately, the money disappears.

Violence propels the narrative in *No Country*, much more than in *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*. The film begins with a voice-over monologue, spoken by Sheriff Bell. He is lamenting the dissolving morality he is witnessing in the world: “You can say it’s my job to fight it but I

don't know what it is anymore. More than that, I don't want to know. A man would have to put his soul at hazard. He would have to say, okay, I'll be part of this world." As his monologue ends, Anton is being handcuffed and placed into a police car. The next scene, at the police station, depicts the film's first act of violence. Anton strangles the arresting officer (Zach Hopkins) with his handcuffs. The only sound is diegetic: the sounds of the officer's choking, his boots squeaking on the tile as he struggles to break free, and a train rumbles by. The camera angle is close, showing details such as the metal of the handcuffs sinking deeper into the officer's neck, and Anton's determined expression as he easily, and efficiently, murders the man; it is evident Anton is quite good at his work. The following scene punctuates the preceding scene with more violence. Anton has stolen a police car, and pulls a driver over on the highway. He shoots the man (Chip Love) in the forehead, asking him to "Hold still." These two homicides are consequences of Anton's hunt for the money. The circumstances involving Anton's initial arrest are unexplained, but his subsequent acts of violence in the film are all in his pursuit of the \$2 million.

Llewelyn enters the narrative through violence and money, by finding several dead bodies and the cash at a drug deal gone wrong in the desert. Llewelyn had been hunting (another violent act) and whispered to himself "hold still," creating a parallel between Llewelyn and Anton. Llewelyn examines the scene and finds a truck bed of heroin, and assumes there was a "last man standing" at the shoot-out. Llewelyn discovers the now-dead man under a tree. A suitcase lies at the man's feet, and Llewelyn opens it to reveal \$2 million in cash. The camera is close to the money, as Llewelyn rifles through it. There are two shots in this scene where the money is visible. When Llewelyn first opens it, the camera is close up on the money for three seconds. In the next shot, Llewelyn looks around, to make sure no one else can see him. Then

there is another three second close up shot of Llewelyn's hands flipping through the stacks of bills. This is not the last of the physical manifestation of money in *No Country*, and it is already more than what was present in *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*. The manifestation of money is directly connected to violence, and in *No Country*, more money means more violence. William C. Siska writes in "*No Country for Old Men and There Will Be Blood: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism*," that the film portrays "a New American West whose values have been decayed by the triumph of capitalistic enterprise. The drug trade is a convenient metaphor for linking capital and decay."<sup>30</sup> Although Llewelyn himself is not involved in the drug deal, he attempts to benefit from the cash and avoid the violence, which is proved impossible in *No Country*.

Llewelyn's motivation to take the money is left unexamined in the film, as if it were the natural reaction. In "*No Country for Old Men: The Coens' Tragic Western*" Richard Gilmore investigates Llewelyn's reasoning for stealing the cash. Gilmore argues that Llewelyn portrays intelligence, compassion, and determination that are underutilized in his profession as a welder and experience as a soldier in Vietnam. He writes, "In many ways he [Llewelyn] seems to be happy and successful, but it is a difficult thing to have powers that you have no opportunities to use. Doing pretty well in America has never been the happiest of options if there is some chance that you could be doing better...when he comes upon the briefcase of cash he barely seems to hesitate before he decided to go for it."<sup>31</sup> Despite Llewelyn's seemingly contented lifestyle, he jumps at the opportunity to experience upward mobility. As he is sending Carla Jean to her mom's, he reassures her that she is now retired. Llewelyn is not desperate for cash like *Fargo's* Jerry. Instead, Llewelyn accepts the risk and the danger for the chance to transcend into an upper class that does not rely on work, and yet he only receives violence and death.



Anton's coin toss serves as an important symbol of money's power in *No Country*. After a tense conversation between Anton and a Texaco station owner (Gene Jones), Anton flips a coin and demands the owner "call it." The owner resists, arguing that he has not put anything up for the toss. Anton responds, "You've been putting it up your whole life, you just didn't know it." The owner wants to know what he stands to win, and Anton tells him, "Everything, you stand to win everything." The owner luckily calls heads, and Anton stresses to the owner that he cannot put the winning coin in his pocket, "or it will get mixed in with the others and be just a coin...which it is." Anton uses a coin toss as a game of chance to decide the fate of two characters in the film, the owner, and later Carla Jean. By using a coin, however, the film insists on money's authority over violent acts in the narrative. The conversation between Anton and the owner suggests the power money has over the lives of Americans. The coin toss means "everything," even though it is "just a coin," emphasizing the powerful influence of money.

Although Anton's coin toss represents money's immense authority in the film, he himself is characterized as ambivalent toward money. Carson Wells (Woody Harrelson) explains to Llewelyn, "You can't make a deal with him [Anton]. Even if you gave him the money back he would still kill you for inconveniencing him. Peculiar man, you might even say he has principles, principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that. Not like you. He's not even like me." Later in the film, Anton has followed Wells to his hotel room, pointing a shotgun at him. Wells pleads with Anton, "You don't have to do this...I could make it worth your while. Take you to an ATM, fourteen grand in it, and everyone just walks away." Anton smirking, mutters, "An ATM," as if it were a joke. Anton is an assassin. He is not after the money for himself; he is merely working for someone else. But Anton has principles, and these principles are more important to him than any cut of money he could receive. Marge's indifference toward money

defined her sense of righteousness and justice. The Dude's lazy work ethic was a direct result of his ambivalence toward money. Anton, however, is characterized as psychotic, violent, and principled – all of which is connected to his indifference of money.

While Anton suggests a more complicated relationship with money, Sheriff Bell appears as a Marge-like figure in *No Country*. Both Bell and Marge are symbols of the law, their righteousness and level-headedness connected to a lack of greed. Bell, like Marge, is confused by the lengths that men will go to for some cash. By the end of *No Country*, Bell has retired, due to his repulsion of the seemingly senseless violence that surrounds him. Bell explains to his cousin, "I feel overmatched." While Marge is triumphant in *Fargo* (she catches the surviving criminal), Bell was unable to save Llewelyn or find Anton. *No Country*, released eleven years after *Fargo*, has a much more pessimistic view of the law conquering greed and crime. Bell does remain unhurt in the film – similarly to Marge, his indifference toward money marks him as safe from violence. While it's safe to assume Marge and Bell receive paychecks, their characters are clearly positioned to value money far less than the other characters in these films. However, the connection between money and violence is heightened from Bell's failure. Righteousness does not win in *No Country*, like it does in *Fargo*.

Ultimately, the money disappears from the film. There are hints throughout *No Country* about who is after the money, but the situation is still unclear. An unnamed man (Stephen Root) in an office building has hired both Anton and Mexican cartel members to find the suitcase of cash. Anton eventually murders the unnamed man, implying that he was not the leader of the operation. The unscrewed vent in the El Paso motel room indicates that Anton had successfully stolen the money. But, where does it go? After murdering Carla Jean, Anton is hurt in a car accident. He pays a young boy \$100 for his shirt to make a sling. Is that \$100 bill from his

payment, or from the suitcase? Anton, severely wounded, limps away from the wreck before an ambulance can arrive. After Wells spots the money in the bushes by the overpass, where Llewelyn had hid it, the film never presents the money again. The ultimate fate of the cash is left unexplained.

The filmic representation of money in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* reveal both the substantial influence of money in American culture and the connection between violence and money through a persistent pattern of linking death and destruction to money. The films go farther, however, and also engage in a critique of capitalism. In the post-1970s American economy, there was a shift from an industrial-based capitalism to neoliberal information-based capitalism. Formerly safe and secure jobs in industry and solid and reliable investments became scarcer for the middle and working classes and financial security became increasingly precarious. Characters in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country* place themselves in very risky and dangerous situations for the chance of a large payout, a chance to raise or retain their position in capitalist society. In these three films, risk for financial gain propels the narrative. Jerry risks his wife's life through the fake kidnapping (although he seems to think it's a safe bet), Walter risks his life, as well as the Dude's, during the ransom handoff, the real Lebowski schemes to retain the wealth he is losing and risks his wife's life to do so, and Llewelyn risks not just Carla Jean, but also his own life. Although *Fargo* represses the reasons for Jerry's desperation, Jerry's actions seem in particular to be about financial insecurity and immense desire for the wealth his father-in-law has. He wants access to the upper echelons of the American capitalist economy and he has no way of getting such money without stealing it.

The Dude does not have the desperation as Jerry, but Walter insists on scheming Jeffrey Lebowski in order to keep the \$1 million for themselves. There is no attempt at clouding any

possible reasons Walter may need the money – Walter just simply wants it. The Dude does not do much to stand in Walter’s way; he also becomes caught up in the pursuit of money. Lebowski too has involved himself in a risky scheme to maintain his level of wealth and power. Llewelyn does not hesitate before he takes the money. Siska writes, “Llewelyn has a passel of money—the big score—but doesn’t have any clue what to do with it other than hold on to it.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike Jerry and Mr. Lebowski, Walter and Llewelyn are not characterized as particularly greedy men. Instead, as emblematic of working class Americans, they embody an impulse to transcend their economic position. Siska points out that *No Country* is part of a canon of American films “where ambitious men willingly freeze and starve, some to death, in order to get rich.”<sup>33</sup> That this enterprise does not succeed in any of the three Coen Brothers’ films does not change the fact that risky and dangerous impulses toward the acquisition of money are left unexplained in these films. By ignoring the circumstances propelling a character’s dangerous desire for money, the films do not challenge the “natural” American capitalist impulse to pursue money, even in the face of great risk. *Fargo* does not occupy itself with its economic setting, despite having immense potential to do so. *The Big Lebowski* and *No Country* do offer some engagement with their economic settings – but ultimately these three films portray an absence of money.

The main characters in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* are depicted through their relationship with money. In her book, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Wendy Brown argues, “Neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measures by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized.”<sup>34</sup> Marge, the Dude, Bell, and Anton are all characterized by their indifference toward money –

with extremely different results— and yet money is still crucial to their narratives. With varying severity, Jerry, Walter, and Llewelyn are desperate for money but the circumstances leading to this desperation are either repressed (Jerry's debt) or entirely absent (the background for Walter and Llewelyn). Despite the frequent absence of money, the characters in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country* are positioned in the realm of the economic.

*Fargo* offers a fascinating example of a character who seems unconcerned with money: the heroine, Marge. Despite Marge's reprimand to Gaear, "And all for what? A little bit of money?" she has been connected to money throughout the entire film through her connection to brands. Marge is the only character in the film that is consistently linked to brand names; Jerry's son Scotty goes to McDonald's and Gaear has the Marlboro man connection, but no other character is visually linked with brands as much as Marge. When Norm brings Marge lunch at the police station she responds, "Ooh, what do we got here? Arby's?" Later, Marge and Norm are in bed watching television and a bag of UTZ potato chips is nestled in between them, like a child. At lunch with Mike Yanagita (Steve Park), Marge audibly orders a Diet Coke. Most strikingly, toward the end of the film, Marge is sitting in her cruiser eating fast food. She is framed to the left side, while a massive Miller Light billboard consumes the right side of the frame. Despite Marge's insistence on minimizing the importance money, she is consistently linked to specific products. The film condemns voracious greed and ties the pursuit of money to violence, yet Marge is frequently portrayed as a consumer of capitalist goods. The brands that she frequently engages with are multi-million corporations. Ultimately, the Coens cannot construct a character outside of capitalism, and Marge's indifference toward money is contradicted by her association with brands.

The settings of these films reveal potential for an analysis of a neoliberal economic crisis, but the films do not acknowledge much that is specific to their economic time and place. *Fargo*, released in 1996, takes place in 1987 Minnesota. The characters appear to be completely apolitical. The narrative centers on Jerry, a powerless middle-class man, attempting to transcend his class designation to achieve more power. President Ronald Reagan's Reaganomics is famous for its "trickle-down theory" of economics which posits that stimulating economic growth for the wealthy and business will in turn stimulate economic growth for the middle and lower classes. Clearly, *Fargo* portrays something else: a middle class American risking his wife for a payout. *The Big Lebowski*, set in 1991 LA, uses President George H.W. Bush's "this aggression will not stand" as a refrain throughout the film, but does not engage in any sort of economic criticism involving the Bush presidency. *The Big Lebowski* uses Los Angeles as a setting to explore consumerism, using the wealthy Lebowski, and to some extent the artist Maude Lebowski (Julianne Moore). Walter references Vietnam as a turning point in American society where the rules begin to disintegrate. Economics, however, are left out of the film's ideological investigation.

*No Country*'s 1980 Texas setting does more to engage with a capitalism than *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*'s settings. Texas is utilized to position *No Country* as a Western. Siska discusses the film's color palette, writing "*No Country for Old Men*'s cinematography places an emphasis on brown and tan hues, muted landscapes reflecting a poverty of soul in the characters as well as the land."<sup>35</sup> Here, the desert setting creates a "New West," where "money is power," Siska argues.<sup>36</sup> In the New West, money is not repressed like in *The Searchers*. Instead, money and capitalism is explicit and violent. Siska also points out the connection between the film and its 1980 setting: "It's no accident that *No Country for Old Men* is set in 1980, the advent of the

reigns of Reagan and Thatcher, which historian Tony Judt in his penultimate book, *Ill Fares the Land*, marks as the birth of Western culture's malignant obsession with money."<sup>37</sup> *No Country* more explicitly engages with its economic conditions, violence and its connection to money. As Deputy Wendell (Garret Dillahunt) and Sheriff Bell examine the drug deal crime scene, Wendell suggests perhaps there was no money at all, but Bell does not believe that. The film is positioning the money as something that will be revealed, that it will not be repressed, and in many ways, this is true. However, the fate of the \$2 million is hidden. Despite the insistence on portraying overt violence, visual manifestations of money, and specifically engaging with time and place, the money is ultimately repressed.

The absence of money in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* reveals an apprehension on the part of the Coens to fully critique American capitalism. Despite the narratives as having everything to do with money, *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* insist on its absence. Macherey argues that "it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it."<sup>38</sup> That path leads to the Coens as filmmakers. American filmmakers in Hollywood work in an immense capitalist industry, that relies on massive sums of capital in the form of money from investors. The Coen Brothers have a reputation of being independent filmmakers within Hollywood, but is this possible? The Coens have shown an interest in criticizing greed, demonstrating, often graphically, the negative consequences of pursuing money, and even critiquing capitalism itself. But the money always disappears. In *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*, the money is hard to find in the first place, as it is rarely seen. *No Country* offers much more visuals of money, and yet the money still manages to vanish.

Why do the Coens exhibit such discomfort around engaging with money directly? The Coens, as Hollywood filmmakers, are unable to explicitly represent and fully critique American capitalism because they exist entirely within it. Instead, it is greed that is critiqued, while money is hidden, absent and repressed. While the Coens are interested in an examination of the negative consequences of greed, the pursuit of money, and even capitalism, they do not seem to be entirely aware of their own involvement in the system. The repression of money, perhaps, allows the Coens to sustain the illusion that they are somehow above the Hollywood system because they criticize it. The function of money in *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men* is what originally led me to a study of the Coen brothers. But its persistent absence led me to the contradiction at the heart of the Coens' position as "independent" Hollywood filmmakers, caught between their intended criticism of capitalism and the capitalist-intensive industry in which they are implicated and from which they benefit.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Freedman, "The Affect of the Market: Economic and Racial Exchange in *The Searchers*," *American Literary History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 585-586.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 290.

<sup>4</sup> Allen H. Redmon, *Constructing the Coens: From Blood Simple to Inside Llewyn Davis* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): ix.

<sup>5</sup> Mark T. Conrad, *The Philosophy of the Coen Brother*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Barton R. Palmer, *Joel and Ethan Coen* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 1.



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<sup>7</sup> Allen H. Redmon, *Constructing the Coens: From Blood Simple to Inside Llewyn Davis*.

(Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): x.

<sup>8</sup> Barton R. Palmer, *Joel and Ethan Coen* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Adams, *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): 6.

<sup>11</sup> Erica Rowell, *The Brothers Grim: The Films of Ethan and Joel Coen* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2007): xi.

<sup>12</sup> Clark Buckner, *Apropos of Nothing: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Coen Brothers* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2014): 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Brian J. Snee, "Soft-Boiled Cinema: Joel and Ethan Coens' Neo-Classical Neo-Noirs," *Literature Film Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2009): 217.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge, 1966): 87.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Freedman, "The Affect of the Market: Economic and Racial Exchange in *The Searchers*," *American Literary History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 591.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Lehman, "How the West Wasn't Won: The Repression of Capitalism in John Ford's Westerns," in *John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era*, ed. Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001): 133.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 139-140.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Adams, *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): 111.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ShaunAnne Tangey, "The Dream Abides: *The Big Lebowski*, Film Noir, and the American Dream," *Rocky Mountain Review* 66, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 184.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>30</sup> William A. Siska, "No Country for Old Men and *There Will Be Blood*: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism," in *Contemporary Westerns*, ed. Andrew Nelson (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 2013): 99.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Gilmore, "No Country for Old Men: The Coens' Tragic Western," in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. Mark T. Conrad (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012): 62.

<sup>32</sup> William A. Siska, "No Country for Old Men and *There Will Be Blood*: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism," in *Contemporary Westerns*, ed. Andrew Nelson (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 2013): 94.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015): 10.

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<sup>35</sup> William A. Siska, “*No Country for Old Men and There Will Be Blood: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism*,” in *Contemporary Westerns*, ed. Andrew Nelson (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow, 2013): 97.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge, 1966): 94.

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