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> If it was never new, and it never gets old, then it's a folk song.

Intro: The Coens and Their Past(s)

1 Throughout their career the Coen Brothers have been interested in nostalgia—both in filming the past and in the films of the past. In *Blood Simple* (1984) and *Miller's Crossing* (1990), the Coens employ the

stylistic and narrative tropes of hard-boiled fiction and film noir; shortly after arriving in Hollywood, Barton Fink (1991) is asked to work on a boxing film, a now somewhat obscure genre from Depression-era American cinema; with *True Grit* (2010) they remake a classic Western, and in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018) they blow up the genre by pushing its conventions to extremes; and in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) and *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), they return to the Depression-era South and to the Greenwich Village folk scene before Dylan comes to town in order to film the musical past. This tendency is more than mere celebration of the pop culture from the recent past: their films often explore and complicate the work of nostalgia and our understanding of time, the seemingly natural connection between past, present, and future.

2 This tendency is one they share with many other filmmakers of the postmodern, film-school generation. David Lynch, for example, challenges his viewer to triangulate the moment in time when that car, hairstyle, and plot point would have existed outside of fiction in the same space and time. They never did, and the viewer is left feeling unmoored from the conventions of realism and simple assumptions about historical and narrative time.[1] As Fredric Jameson explains, this type of "cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion," creates a cultural reality wherein "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson 1991: 18). The Coen Brothers in *O Brother* engage in a version of this same playfulness with spatial and historical references that evoke a sense of some place somewhere in the South and of some indeterminate past, rather than a specific place and time. Though the film seems to be set in Mississippi in 1937, Menelaus "Pappy" O'Daniel, governor of the film's Mississippi, is based on Wilbert Lee "Pappy" O' Daniel, former governor of Texas, and the flooding of Ulysses Everett McGill's hometown would place that town in Tennessee, not Mississippi. Thus, the film's "Depression-era South," rather than referring to any particular state, town, or year, serves as something like one of Jameson's "texts." Or, as M. Keith Booker explains, the setting of *O Brother* is "not the Depression South, but pop cultural images of the Depression South" (Booker 2007:79). Similarly, as Rick Altman suggests, *O Brother* "projects the audience into a mythicized version of the cultural past" (Altman 1998:

272). Altman refers to this version of the past as an "intermediary space" (271), capturing the distinction between the actual past and a reworking of that past.

3 We can see a version of that reworking in the look of *Inside Llewyn Davis*. The Coens worked to represent our romantic ideas about New York and the folk revival with a markedly old visual style; as the film's cinematographers explain, they adjusted the colors digitally "to be a little romanticized, like a memory" (B 2104: 44) and to create "the feeling of old lenses without coating" and, more generally, an "image [that] has an old, rather strange look" (46). That is, they set out to screen something like what Greil Marcus refers to as "that old, weird America," turning Marcus's constant American countercurrent into visual style.[2] The visual style takes us back to a version of the past, but it also reminds us that the version before us, looking old, looking like a memory, is not the past. It takes us, that is, to the space where we are aware of a reworking, reframing, reimagining of the past.

4 In the same way, old music as it is used by the Coens works to unsettle the past. In *O Brother*, for example, it represents a type of stylistic allusion, the sound of the Depression-era South; but it is also a return to an integrated, Southern sound. The inclusion of Tommy Johnson, a country blues guitar player who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for mastery, as part of the Soggy Bottom Boys, returns us to a scene where we see the segregation of sound—the radio station owner specifically wants "old-timey material," not "negro songs." That the station owner is blind and cannot tell or does not seem to care if the musicians are black or white, comically captures a moment of transition within the history of commercial music when recordings would subsequently be categorized as black or white—"race records" for black sounds and "hillbilly records" for white ones. Before the introduction of commercial, genre categories to market specific recordings to race-based markets, however, traditional American music in the South blended black and white sounds, traditions, and performances.[3] Thus, the film's representation in this scene of an old song, "Man of Constant Sorrow" (first published as "Farewell Song" in 1913 by Dick Burnett and first released as a commercial recording as "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow" by Emry Arthur in 1928), serves to open up what might seem to be settled history, the history of traditional music in America; thus, the film allows us to consider the ra-

cialization of popular music in America, questioning what it might mean to combine race and sound or, perhaps more importantly, what it might mean to reject such combinations. [4]

5 Similarly, the looping narrative structure of *Inside Llewyn Davis* returns us to an unsettled version of the film's own past. From beginning to end, the film's narrative moves in an endless loop, an impossible chronology that begins and ends in the same moment, circling back on itself and repeating with subtle differences the opening three scenes in the final eight scenes. Thus, the past as manifest in *Inside Llewyn Davis* is not "bracketed" off from the present by virtue of random deployment of styles of the past or by any other means. Rather, the past and present fuse in the film's opening and closing sequences, disrupting our confidence in the certain logic of narrative progression and in the natural movement of time forward from a set, stable, and closed past. [5] As Llewyn explains from the stage of the Gaslight, "If it was never new, and it never gets old, then it's a folk song." The music and the narrative share the same temporal paradox: the film always ending where it began, and the song, never having been new and never becoming old.

6 Americana music, the musical format that embodies the Coens' sonic past, also engages a complex idea of the past. [6] The Coen Brothers' exploration of the cinematic and musical past is more, though, than mere style or nostalgia. As Michael Newman argues, the Coens often engage in a type of play that "functions as creative historiography, repurposing the images and ideas of the past in a new context" (Newman 2011:181). The film and the music are engaged in this same type of work, representing, troubling, and reworking our simplistic and linked view of time, the past, and nostalgia. [7] In other words, the musical and cinematic paradox that defines *Inside Llewyn Davis* allows the Coens to scrutinize the structures and discourses inherent in our understanding of our shared, imaginary musical past. One of these structures is class. The discursive past and place evoked by Americana music is impoverished or economically precarious—that is, there is a clear relationship between the past of Americana, the sonic South, [8] and the working class. [9] By drawing out the relationships between our seemingly discrete and commonsense assumptions about time, class, and region, the film represents and explores the disruptive cultural work of the type of nostalgia central to Americana

music. So, more than mere nostalgia, the film's disruption of cinematic time and progress troubles class lines, distinctions, and assumptions, exposing the processes and discourses that make class a structure that seems natural, inevitable.

Americana Music Culture, or Sounding the Past

7 Just as the Soggy Bottom Boys blending blues and bluegrass, black and white, opens up a seemingly settled history according to which the racialization of commercial musical forms is a given and, therefore, invisible, recent neotraditional music offers a return to an unsettled, dynamic, and open version of the past; that is, Americana in general offers another version of the past we thought we knew. This type of openness is not something we would normally associate with musical genres. And, indeed, it is more useful to think of Americana as a musical format than as a genre. Unlike a musical genre, which divides, a format is diverse and inclusive. With genres we draw lines inside which we'll defend the pure sound and culture. Formats work through these lines, finding unity across a range of forms and communities. I am taking the distinction between genre and format from Eric Weisbard's *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music* (see especially Weisbard 2014: 3-12). I should add that genre purists will no doubt take issue with my contention that Americana is sometimes folk, sometimes country, and equal parts jazz or punk. But that is, as Weisbard argues, the nature of formats; and Americana is, to borrow his language, a "format posing as a rebel genre" (3). Though expansive, Americana coheres around a sonic past; its sound is nostalgic. There are the fiddles, guitars, banjos, mandolins, and basses of the traditional southern string band, but there are also, sometimes, steel guitars that evoke country music from the 1950s or Hammond organs that sound back to 1960s Motown. The nostalgia, then, is for the generic sonic past, not a particular past. The traditional sounds that Americana draws from date back to the beginnings of commercial, recorded music. An incomplete list would include hillbilly music such as that Fiddlin' John Carson performed on Atlanta's WSB station or recorded for Okey Records in the 1920s; the blues as recorded by Ma Rainey for Paramount Records in the 1920s

or Robert Johnson for Vocalion Records in the 1930s; as well as the various directions taken by country music from these roots through the Carter Family, Hank Williams, and to more-recent artists ranging from Tyler Childers to Taylor Swift. [10]

8 Even though the commercial influences of Americana reach back to the early twentieth century, as a commercial format it is a relatively recent development. Indeed, it is safe to say that alt-country, child of the 1980s, begat Americana. It generated a roots revival that spanned multiple genres, unlike the genre-based blues collecting of the mid-twentieth century or the sixties folk revival; bringing together a range of fans, musical genres, and communities, alt-country was the beginnings of a commercial format that warrants its own association (the Americana Music Association), Billboard chart (Americana/Folk Albums), distribution companies (Thirty Tigers and Soundly Music), record labels (Bloodshot Records, Rounder, and Yep Roc), as well as a host of online and on-air radio outlets. The Coens began making films in the early 1980s, at the same time alternative country music was taking shape as a commercial form. The Long Ryders formed in the early 1980s, released four albums, and disbanded by 1987. The Cowboy Junkies released the *Trinity Sessions* in 1987. Uncle Tupelo released *No Depression* in 1990, and the electronic mailing list Postcard from Hell was launched "back in the dark days of dialup and baud rates - aka the early 1990s" as "an online meeting place for fans, friends and followers" of Uncle Tupelo (Kutzbach). And by 1999 the Americana Music Association was up and running with the mission "to advocate for the authentic voice of American Roots Music around the world" (Americana Music Association). Perhaps nothing would help advance this mission more than the success of *O Brother*, released a year after the founding of the Americana Music Association. The film received two Academy Award nominations, one for the screenplay and one for cinematography. The soundtrack reached number one on the Billboard Top 200 chart; *Down from the Mountain*, a concert documentary featuring musicians from *O Brother*, reached number ten on the Billboard Top Country Albums chart; and both albums won Grammy Awards.

9 T Bone Burnett, music producer for many of the Coen Brothers' films, produced the music for *O Brother*, the soundtrack album, and the concert film. Additionally, Burnett is credited as music producer on

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs (2018) executive music producer on *Inside Llewyn Davis* and *The Ladykillers* (2004), as well as musical archivist on *The Big Lebowski* (1998).[11] Burnett himself is an important figure in the American roots music world. He played guitar in Bob Dylan's band in the 1970s and served as a producer for Los Lobos and Gillian Welch among others. Additionally, Burnett serves on the Board of Directors of the Americana Music Association Foundation. Again, the music is more than mere style: the Coens and T Bone Burnet are active participants in making and shaping Americana music culture.

10 The Coens' use of and development of the Americana music format is closely tied to their complicated cinematic historiography—the way, that is, they make sense of the past. Americana is very well suited to a type of temporal playfulness, sounding old across decades of musical history and tradition, shaping a sound that corresponds to the images made possible by old, unfiltered lenses. The construction of that sonic allusion to an indeterminate past also engages discourses of class and region, as Americana, the blues, country music, bluegrass, and traditional American music in general are all associated with the South and with the working class. Combining a marginalized region and a marginalized class with the sound of the past, traditional American music is grounded in the sound of cultural distinction. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed" (Bourdieu 1987: 6). Specifically, musical taste across various genres distinguishes between middle- and working-class listeners—the association of country music with the working class partially explains the tendency among college students in the United States to state a musical preference for "anything but country" (Hubbs 2014: 23-4), working, as they are, to graduate into the middle class. Looking back, running counter to progress, traditional music is not the music of the middle class; it is not the music of social mobility. Class, then, does not exist solely as an economic marker of wealth nor as a measure of cultural distinction; it is also a marker of time. The narrative of the American Dream moves along a chronology from rags to riches, upward in class and forward in time. This movement takes us up and away from country music to

any and all other forms of musical culture—anything, that is, but country.

11 Within the American imaginary, this movement might also be seen as taking us away from the South, the source of commercial forms of traditional American music. One of Jameson's bracketed-off texts, "the South" represents both a geographical place and a place in time, defining to some degree the nation's imaginary geotemporal past. As a discursive text, the South evokes poverty, innocence, and traditional cultural forms combined in this textual South if nowhere in any particular South at any specific time.[12] The perceived link between Southern culture, the working class (if not abject poverty), and the rural (traditional or Appalachian) South is especially strong with regard to music. The Southern Highlands, the story went, were a type of culture preserve for white Anglo-Saxon folks and, therefore, folkways: the mountains isolated the settlements of Appalachia from the influences of popular or commercial culture, non-Anglo immigrants and their cultures, and all things modern. For a clear statement of these assumptions, consider the title of an 1899 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* by William Frost, president of Berea College in Kentucky. "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains" captures the belief that sent scores of song catchers exploring the small towns and hamlets of the Appalachian South under the influence, if not direction, of Harvard English professor Francis Child and, after him, British ballad collector Cecil Sharp.[13] In ten parts between 1882 and 1898, Child published his *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*; and building on Child's work, Sharp published *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* in 1917. Sharp, as Benjamin Filene explains, "found a way to revisit the British past he had never known; he created it in America," Filene continues, in "the Appalachian mountaineers' culture" (Filene 2000: 23). For Sharp and others working under the influence of the Child ballad project, the Appalachian region (and its mountaineers) became the contemporary embodiment of an imaginary past.

12 Americana's musical past, then, seems to exist in some sort of static always, a musical version of the chronological loop in which Llewyn Davis and we, the witnesses to his circling back, seem to be stuck. And Aaron Fox, writing about O *Brother*, critiques the Coens' musical program in just such terms. Ralph Stanley, a bluegrass innovator

whose career reaches back to the 1940s and 50s, sings "O Death" on the film's soundtrack. According to Fox, Stanley invented a traditional mountain music for "Appalachian migrants working on the shop floors of northern cities"; but as the Coens present him in *O Brother*, Fox writes, Stanley becomes "a living relic, alone on a premodern pedestal, the embodiment of (white) rural, folk purity" (Fox 2005: 185).[14] Writing about the "designation of T-Bone [sic] Burnet as 'musical archivist,'" Jeff Smith, like Fox, contends that the Coens regard old songs as neglected "musical treasures," working to preserve and display "popular culture artifacts" (Smith 2013: 149). Using language that echoes Fox, he claims that "music archivist" "seemingly treats the films as virtual museum pieces and preserves the soundtrack as a space for lost or neglected moments in American musical history" (131). Both Fox and Smith mistakenly dismiss the Coens and Americana music culture from a perspective that assumes that Americana's nostalgia is always and only an attempt to reproduce (and preserve) the past—a "relic" on a "pedestal," a "treasure" or "artifacts" forever displaying a particular and unchanging image of rusticity, poverty, and the past. This view of the Coen's treatment of the musical past is based on what Svelana Boym calls restorative nostalgia. As she explains, restorative nostalgia ignores that the habits and customs of the past are subject to change, that they are organic and dynamic, responding to the changing world around them. Instead, practitioners of restorative nostalgia seek to remake the past; and the traditions we invent as part of this remaking are "characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than the actual . . . customs and conventions after which they [are] patterned" (Boym 2001: 42). Restorative nostalgia, in other words, produces a more tightly controlled, unchanging, and limited version of the past it attempts to evoke. And it presents that past as the one true past, the way it really was, our status quo image and history of us before.

13 Eschewing restorative nostalgia, the Coens' cumulative engagement with the musical past(s) is more complicated than Fox or Smith acknowledges. After all, traditional American music genres such as country have always made room for artists and fans to rework the limits of tradition and the meaning of the past to which the standard middle-class chronologies assigned them. Moreover, it is possible to read *O Brother* as a critique of just the type of appropriation that

concerns Fox. After all, the film captures the moment when traditional, southern sounds became a commercial product and shows how these now commodified, nostalgic sounds are tasked with political work such as racial segregation. To engage in traditional music is to participate in nostalgia, but participating in nostalgia may be a means by which those who are otherwise marginalized can negotiate and rework their relationship to the past and, therefore, the meaning of that past. Americana music culture has from the start been engaged in this strain of resistance, the punk and country influences on Uncle Tupelo both being well suited to capturing the pain and confusion of a world turned inside out by the collapse of the U.S.'s industrial economy. Taking Americana music as the subject of *Inside Llewyn Davis*, the Coens represent in the film's chronology how nostalgia in Americana music culture serves as a disruptive force, undermining the very discourses with which the emplacement of working-class subjects and the distinction between working- and middle-class subjects have been built and maintained.

Filming the Sonic Past in New York

14 Old sounds, then, do not necessarily offer restorative nostalgia. Similarly, the Coens' nostalgia as manifest in *Inside Llewyn Davis* does not offer a simple evocation of a static, "bracketed-off," idealized past. Restorative nostalgia is present in the film, however; but it represents an object of critique. Indeed, the role of restorative nostalgia in the appropriation of Southern, working-class culture is the subject of one of the film's critical scenes, the scene in which Llewyn heckles Elizabeth Hobby from Elinora, Arkansas, during her set at the Gaslight. But to read it through the lens Fox or Smith offer would be to miss the point. We might, though, borrow their language: she is displayed very much as a living relic, alone on stage as though on a premodern pedestal. However, Llewyn dismantles the structure of this display, complicating our understanding of the uses and potential abuses of nostalgia within Americana music culture. The scene is also significant as Llewyn's behavior in this scene precipitates the beating he receives in the film's first and last scenes, putting into perpetual motion, in other words, the film's impossible narrative loop.

15 The scene begins with "Four Irishmen in Aran Island sweaters" on stage at the Gaslight (Coen 2014: 141). Pappi, the owner of the Gaslight, and Llewyn are at the bar. Pappi and Llewyn discuss the Irishmen's sweaters and the difficulty of making enough from a folk music venue to afford rent in Manhattan before Pappi tells Llewyn that he has had sex with Jean in a *quid pro quo* arrangement—"Oh yeah. Ya know. Ya wanna play the Gaslight . . ." (145). Throughout the film, Llewyn's own illicit relationship with Jean serves to represent his inability to maintain a healthy, stable relationship. That is the backstory as one Irish singer thanks the audience and calls for a "great big welcome to Elizabeth Hobby, from Elinora, Arkansas" (145). Elizabeth thanks the audience and explains that this is her first show in New York. Llewyn glances back at Pappi and then shouts toward the stage "How'd ya get the gig, Betty?" Though visibly flustered, Elizabeth continues: "I'm gonna do a song, it's like most of the songs I do, it's a song I grew up with" (146). Llewyn, engaging the rustic spirit of Elizabeth's presentation, spits on the floor, shuffles a few steps away from the bar where he's been talking with Pappi, and shouts at Elizabeth, "Where's your haybale?" (146). Elizabeth continues to sing, and members of the audience turn to shush Llewyn. Nevertheless, he continues: "Where's your corncob pipe?" And then over the escalating protests of the audience, he shouts, "Are ya wearing gingham panties? Huh? C'mon. Show us your panties. Show us your panties, Betty!" (146). Elizabeth stops playing, raises a hand to her face, an attempt to hide her emotions, and shakes her head. Pappi and Florio, the bouncer, toss Llewyn out on the street. But not before Llewyn screams at the audience that he "fucking hate[s] folk music!"

16 Elizabeth's presentation depends on her embodiment of Southern rusticity. Before selecting Nancy Blake to play the role of Elizabeth Hobby, the Coens imagine her to be "an older woman" who sings and plays the autoharp. And, according to the published version of the screenplay, "She has stringy blond hair and a gaunt face and frame, and her smile, though warm, shows that she is missing a tooth or two" (145). They conjure her up in the same spirit as Llewyn's demand to see her corncob pipe, her hay bale, and her gingham panties, blacking out a tooth or two just as an appearance on the Grand Ole Opry might require a change of clothes, acquisition of a few props, and a change in the band's name, Dr. Bate's Band, for example, be-

coming Dr. Humphrey Bate and His Possum Hunters.[15] Elizabeth takes the stage at the Gaslight to sing for the audience a song that, like most of her songs, is a song she "grew up with"; and though it is her first time in New York, she has kept her homespun clothes, simple appearance, and unadorned musical presentation. Her presence on stage offers the audience a sentimental representation of Southern rusticity and poverty; and her performance pits city against country, urban Northeast against rural South, irony and play against authenticity. In fact, that simple song from Elizabeth's childhood presented as an authentic, static artifact from the rural South (and, therefore, from our nation's imaginary past) is what the audience expects, what they demand, and why a crowd has lined up down the sidewalk hoping to get in.

17 Llewyn disrupts the illusion, though. By listing the appropriate props (corncob pipe and hay bales), he is calling out the performative, constructed nature of Elizabeth's show, questioning the folk scene's commodification of the past, its packaging of nostalgia as a static object for the crowd at the Gaslight to purchase, to consume. By calling attention to the performative and cultural features of Betty's show at the Gaslight, Llewyn's behavior undermines the illusion that she embodies the rustic American South, that there is no artifice or affect in her simple stage patter and untaught autoharp playing and that her songs, the songs that she "grew up with," are somehow the natural sounds of her rural Arkansas home, the unmediated sounds of rural poverty in the South. Llewyn challenges the New York folk scene's trade in restorative nostalgia by suggesting that that Elizabeth Hobby from Elinora, Arkansas, could be something other than what she is performing on the stage of the Gaslight, that she might possibly sing anything other than songs she grew up with, that she could wear anything other than gingham panties. The audience desires its illusions, however; and to protect those illusions and his commercial interests, Pappi calls for force.

18 The ability to package up the past as a commodity requires that the past we have in mind remain static, complete, and contained. Thus, it depends on a view of the past as clear, simple, and knowable; this view of the past is integral to restorative nostalgia, which, according to Boym, demands a high "degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization" (Boym 2001: 42). Given this strict scripting, all the compon-

ents of our imaginary past become integral to the positive feelings we have about that particular past. Nothing is accidental; all is substance. The homespun clothes, the unstudied music, the corncob pipe, and the hay bale all spring forth naturally from the same essence; and this essence, embodied in Betty's presence on stage, conflates the imageries of class, region, and time. Betty follows the Irish singers, and both acts work within a set of assumptions about the past and its relationship to the present; each conjures up a version of the primitive past on stage at the Gaslight for a middle-class, urban, sophisticated audience in exchange for a small cover charge.

19 In this scene we also glimpse the relationship between commodification, restorative nostalgia, and class distinction. Restorative nostalgia works at "reestablishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority" (Boym 2001: 42). And reading the scene according to Bourdieu's framework, the cultural display on stage at the Gaslight serves to define social cohesion and class distinction, really, to define social cohesion *as* class distinction. Betty enacts premodern America (her status conflates class, region, and time), putting on display an exotic Other from a time and place far removed from the reality of the urban, middle-class audience assembled to view her. Her performance engages assumptions about class essentialism that inhere within the static images defining the audience's nostalgia, its imaginary past. Further, the display offers the middle-class audience confidence in their class status and their temporal placement at the end of progress. Lit in a manner that increases the distinction between her and the audience, Elizabeth stands alone on a bright stage against the shadowy silhouette of an audience. For the audience, this distinction serves to establish social cohesion, shoring up a shared authoritative middle-class gaze that isolates and renders passive the regional, temporal, and economic Other.[16] Thus, her performance is more than the representation of class, of a class. That is, the scene displays not just her as an image of rusticity and poverty; rather, the scene displays the act of representation as part of the process of making class as a structure, a structure that serves to give meaning to sentimental representations of poverty such as Elizabeth's performance for the Gaslight's privileged, middle-class audience.[17]

20 This scene, then, presents a critique of the commercialization of traditional American music—the same problematic consumption of working-class culture at the core of Fox's critique of a static musical form. Llewyn breaks up a moment in the commercialization of old-timey Southern music, putting an end to Betty's performance before shouting to the audience at the Gaslight, the crowd gathered on the sidewalk outside, and movie's audience that he "hates fucking *folk* music" and that "the show is bullshit. Four micks and Grandma Moses" (Coen 2014: 146-7, emphasis in the original). This disruption also serves as the causal narrative element that sends Llewyn out back in the alley to be beaten in the film's first and last scenes. In short, this scene that presents problematic assumptions about the relationship between nostalgia and traditional American music does so within a structure that is very aware of those problems; as such the scene represents a rejection of the idea that neotraditional music culture should celebrate "a living relic, alone on a premodern pedestal, the embodiment of (white) rural, folk purity" (Fox 2005: 185).[18] That show is bullshit.

Neither New nor Old: Filming an Old Song

21 With Elizabeth's performance, the Coens explore the past in order to question the cultural work we ask the past to do. And around this scene, the film captures a similar movement back in time: moving in an impossible and endless loop. The opening sequence takes Llewyn from a song at the Gaslight, "Hang Me" (scene 1), out to the alley behind the Gaslight where he is beaten up (scene 2), and to the Gorfein's apartment where he awakes the next morning with a cat on his chest, makes breakfast, and listens to a recording of "Fare the Well (Dink's Song)" (scene 3). The movie closes with Llewyn disrupting Elizabeth Hobby's set at the Gaslight, a brief scene with Llewyn in a phone booth looking up the Gorfein's number, a dinner party at the Gorfein's apartment, Llewyn settling in to sleep on the Gorfein's couch later that night, waking in the Gorfein's apartment the next morning with cat on his chest (scene "3"), a short scene as Llewyn walks down city sidewalk and sees a poster for *Incredible Journey*, Llewyn singing "Hang Me" and "Fare Thee Well" at the Gaslight (scene

"1"), and Llewyn being beaten up in the alley behind the Gaslight (scene "2"). Pulling out the extra scenes, we have: (opening sequence) performs at Gaslight (1), is beaten (2), and wakes up with cat (3); and (final sequence) wakes up with cat ("3"), performs at Gaslight ("1"), and is beaten ("2").

22 Ido Lewit's structural analysis of the parallel sequences at the start and end of *Inside Llewyn Davis* offers a useful language to describe the film's confusing narrative timeline. Relying on David Bordwell's work as well as the narrative categories developed by the Russian Formalists, Lewit distinguishes between the film's *fabula* and its *syuzhet*.[19] In brief, the *fabula* is the story as a simple and direct series of chronological events related by cause and effect—first this happens, and that leads us to that. This series of events is not necessarily represented on film; rather, the spectators piece together the events as represented on film to construct for themselves the series of events forming the story or the *fabula*. The *syuzhet* is the narrative as we encounter it on screen as a series shots, scenes, and sequences. And we understand that a flashback, for example, offers us narrative information late in the *syuzhet* that belongs early in the *fabula*, the story as we come to understand it. A film at its conclusion might circle back to its opening scenes within the *syuzhet* or within the *fabula*. We might revisit the same scene with a better sense of how these things came to be or with a clearer sense of what the once enigmatic opening images really mean. Both are well established cinematic structures; and confronted with a text that seems to circle back on its beginning, a spectator is likely to call up other versions of this pattern to help make sense of the new instance—that is, our experience with other texts offers up schemata (Lewit 2016: 270).

23 Neither schema, however, explains the circular narrative of *Inside Llewyn Davis*. But we try: the second scene in which Llewyn wakes up with the cat on his chest signals to us that we have entered a narrative loop, and the precise details carried over from the first to the second iteration lead the film's spectators to assume that they are watching the same events. However, several clear distinctions between scenes and changes to the order of scenes frustrate these initial assumptions. The first scene which has Llewyn waking up in the Gorfein's apartment ends with the cat escaping and the door locking behind Llewyn, while the second iteration of that scene has

Llewyn managing to block the cat's escape with a quick foot save. And in his second and somehow same Gaslight performance as his first, Llewyn sings "Fare Thee Well" after he finishes "Hang Me." Moreover, the chronology of events at the end of the film does not match that of the beginning. In the early sequence we go from the Gaslight to a beating in the alley out back to the next scene in the Gorfein's apartment, while in the final sequence we start in the Gorfein's apartment before proceeding to the Gaslight where he sings two songs before heading out to the alley where he's beaten. It's a confusing narrative knot; and the result, as Ido Lewit suggests, is that the viewer is faced with "the impossibility of constructing a coherent diegesis" (Lewit 2016: 269). What we see, the *syuzhet*, defies any and all attempts to construct a coherent *fabula*.

24 Making sense of the film's temporal loop requires that we accept that the second version of all the "repeated" scenes are new iterations of those scenes, not flashbacks to a more-complete version of the scenes. The cat's thwarted attempt at escape is a change from the previous version of the same scene, not a new detail; similarly, the second song is a new development in the same scene, not a detail withheld from previous, abridged version of the scene.[20] The Coens' published version of the screenplay includes at least one other clue pointing in the direction of just this type of upward spiral. When he gathers his pocket detritus before leaving the Gorfeins' apartment early in the film, he has "some change and three subway tokens" in addition to a wallet that "contains three dollars" (Coen 2014: 13). Later in the film before he settles onto the Gorfeins' couch, he empties his pockets onto the end table: "[c]oins and tokens from one pocket. His wallet from another. He pokes trough the bill compartment: six dollars" (150). This additional cash is not missing information; rather, it is a clear change and a change, however slight, for the better.[21]

Not All Nostalgias Are the Same; Or, Why Can't We Be Nostalgic like We Used To?

25 Considering the temporal loop defining the narrative structure of *Inside Llewyn Davis*, it's possible to read other "additions" as improve-

ments rather than information formerly missing and newly supplied. Looping back and through the past has returned Llewyn to a better present, on a path toward a better future. This process is similar to what Boym calls reflective nostalgia. Whereas restorative nostalgia has as its aim a closed sense of the past that is useful for making, say, America great again as it was back when it was never great in the way we want to pretend it was, reflective nostalgia fosters creativity, play, and change; it "is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary," opening "up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historical development" (Boym 2001: 50). Fredric Jameson was perhaps the first to argue on behalf of nostalgia's progressive potential, suggesting that "if nostalgia as a political motivation is most frequently associated with fascism, there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plentitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other . . ." (Jameson 1969: 68). That type of nostalgia resembles the Coens' musical historiography and explains Llewyn's adding an old song from his musical and personal past to his new-same set at the Gaslight. "Fare Thee Well (Dink's Song)" is linked throughout the film to his late partner, Mike. It is about the need to connect—"Life ain't worth living without the one you love." It is the song Llewyn plays on the Gorfein's stereo the morning he wakes up there for the first time, and the music continues after Llewyn exits the apartment, with cat, and out into the city and down into the subway—the single instance of extra-diegetic music in the film. It is also the song Llewyn is singing at the Gorfein's dinner party when he becomes upset that Lillian Gorfein joins in taking Mike's part —Llewyn stops singing, puts his guitar down, and tells her "Don't' do that" (Coen 2014: 82). Thus, the song represents Llewyn's struggle to come to terms with Mike's suicide, his musical identity after Mike, and his inability to connect with those around him. And returning to that song offers Llewyn a new way forward from a moment in the past before he entered his current state of circular failure; it represents, then, a type of musical nostalgia offering escape forward toward new potentialities, not escape back to a static past.

26 Moreover, the second scene in which Llewyn performs at the Gaslight, just before he is beaten up in the alley (again), has a style that stands in marked contrast with the earlier (and "same") scene. In the

first version, he is shot primarily in a way that isolates him from the crowd. The shots from the audience's perspective are from a slightly low angle, serving to position him above the audience which appears as a shadowy silhouette below a brightly lit and, therefore, isolated Llewyn on stage; and close ups and medium shots of Llewyn from the stage have the audience obscured in darkness, mere suggestions of an audience. But the final performance at the Gaslight has Llewyn shot from behind the audience at a higher angle (closer to neutral), putting him almost on the same level as the audience; furthermore, the lighting makes the audience more visible and clear than in the first version of this scene. There are also fewer cuts between close ups of Llewyn and shots of the audience—smoking, thinking, being at a table in a folk club. Instead, there are several shots from the stage that take in Llewyn and clearly visible members of the audience. Cinematically, Llewyn is now connecting with his audience. [22]

27 Similarly, we might read the various stylistic differences that Lewit notices between the first and second alley beatings as representative of change, of development. As Lewit explains the difference between the two scenes, the opening scene is "mostly focalized internally by Llewyn," and he "is presented mostly in close-up and medium-shot"; in the closing scene the focus is external, "from an objective perspective," and "Llewyn is presented mostly in long-shot" (Lewit 2016: 272). If we concede that Llewyn's struggle is to get more outside of Llewyn Davis, escaping the torture of introspection and private grief (similar to his need to connect with his audience), then we can see this shift as a positive development as well. Finally, the closing scene concludes with Llewyn having moved himself out of the alley to the street where he watches his assailant drive off in a cab; Llewyn bids him "*au revoir*," closing the scene on his terms. This action is in sharp contrast to the ending of the first scene which fades up quickly from the darkness of the alley and Llewyn crumpled on the ground to the bright whites of the Gorfein's entryway, moving back and along in time but not ahead. At the end of the film, Llewyn takes some control and closes the temporal and narrative loop. And just as six dollars in your wallet is a little bit better than three, Llewyn is better at the end of the film, equally beaten, but better.

28 Reading the film this way requires that we discard many of our normal assumptions about time. The past may not really be over, con-

tained back there, and safely removed from the here and now. The scenes that complete the loop are violent just as they are disruptive, a violence that matches their significance in the film's aggressively confusing narrative structure. But in that way they are also full of potential, cracks in our normal assumptions about time and nostalgia that invite us to consider very different ways of using and imagining the past. The film narrative develops between two versions of the present, making the narrative in between these two scenes both the constant present as we experience it and the past as soon as we've walked back out into the alley for the second time. Instantly, the film becomes a sort of flashback that explains how we got to this the first and the final scene—we now know, for example, that Llewyn's heckling Betty has led to her husband meeting Llewyn here in the alley and his subsequent beating. But this is not a flashback to a moment earlier in the narrative's *fabula* that we witness after the fact; rather, the narrative clearly unfolds from that first scene and moves seamlessly to the final sequence without any gaps, jumps, or disruptions. We revisit the past, a past that is still evolving, developing, becoming, not simply to see how we got to this point; rather, we travel there to see how things could be different, to perhaps bring about a different present.

29 It is perhaps of some note that the violence of the scenes in which Llewyn is beaten is captured more through aural than visual representations.[23] As Elizabeth's husband strikes Llewyn, the camera is somewhat indifferent, no close-ups, no change in speed, no representation of the impact—as we see, for example, in *Raging Bull*. There is the sound of impact, though; and at the sound of something like a brick hitting gravel, loud, quick, crunchy. That sound is unsettling, and our response takes us out of the film and into our own bodies. We flinch, turn from the violent sound. In that way, it is a disruptive sound.[24] This sonic disruption magnifies the temporal confusion of the narrative moving at once to and from these paired scenes of violence. The cumulative effect is one of distance, escape, and freedom.

30 Similarly, Americana's version of nostalgia opens up space for inquiry, exploration, questioning, and dissent. It offers a space in which we might ask what we should be, where we might discover potentialities rather than certainties. What the Coens have done, then, is filmed the process of reflective nostalgia, the nostalgia of Americana. The nar-

rative is, as Llewyn explains on stage during his set(s) at the Gaslight, a folk song, which "was never new, and it never gets old" (Coen 2014: 9 and 152).[25] No, the past never gets old; it just keeps offering up new possibilities. We just have to revisit it, escape the loop of restorative nostalgia, and listen to that never new and never old song again. And again, anew.

Outro: Or, Notes toward a Critical Class Studies

31 Up to this point, I have neglected Llewyn's working-class roots; and I would now like to consider the role those roots play in the film and in relation to the film's exploration of nostalgia and music. Llewyn's membership in the working class is well established throughout the film. When he struggles to make ends meet as a folk singer, he explores the option of returning to work as a merchant marine, the same work that his father did before him, and work for which Llewyn is licensed, though he is behind on his union dues. And with his guitar and his voice, he remains a worker, insisting that making music is labor: "I do this for a *living*, you know? I'm a musician. I sing for a living" (Coen 2014: 82, emphasis in the original). However, his attempts to make a living on dry land with a guitar and his voice place him in a world very much unlike the one he's left behind. As his sister stresses, she is "not one a'ya Greenwich Village friends" (50), her Borough-of-Queens dialect enforcing her point. Similarly, Jean isolates Llewyn between social strata, pointing out: "I don't hang out with the Gorfeins" (70). As further evidence of his isolation, Llewyn cannot comprehend Jean's version of the future. When she asks if he ever thinks about the future, he responds: "The future? You mean like, flying cars? Hotels on the moon? Tang?" (68). Of course he's kidding, and he continues, outlining her future as he sees it: "Trying to blueprint the future. Move to the suburbs. With Jim. Have kids." That's bad, Llewyn continues, "[i]f that's what music is, for you, a way to get to that place. . . . And a little sad" (68). In her response Jean makes direct reference to Llewyn's chronological loop: "*You're* the one who's not getting anywhere! You don't even *want* to get anywhere . . . and that's why all the same shit is going to keep happening to you." (69). Here Jean expresses the normative, middle-class view of class and time:

progress is a class-based timeline, and Llewyn's inability to move along that timeline, to even want to move ahead in that direction is a clear sign of failure.

32 Though music in the film is used both for class displays that serve to reinforce social stratification (Elizabeth's performance) and as a means to move us along the temporal path of progress (Jean's middle-class dream of marriage, children, and a house in the suburbs), for Llewyn it is a means to explore the past. Accordingly, nostalgia is and has been integral to Llewyn's engagement with music from the start. At one point his sister presents him with a box of items from his past; in it she's saved his seaman's papers and a record he made as a child for his parents. The song on the record is "Shoals of Herring," the same song that he sings for his father at the retirement home. Though not a Welsh song, it taps into the British sailing heritage of Llewyn's family. But, then again, nostalgia is not simply about the past —a folk song is "never new, and it never gets old." And Llewyn's father responds to his attempt at sentimental nostalgia by soiling himself. Llewyn fails to connect with his audience; but his audience of one is, well, moved. The performance at the retirement home is an attempt at simple restorative nostalgia; it is trapped in a static version of the past, a past that can no longer mean anything to his father. And, it seems, the performance evoking that type of past is simply shitty. Aaron Fox is right in that regard: nostalgia as a form of stasis is bad, just as bad as moving in the wrong direction.

33 Elsewhere music enables Llewyn to move freely across class lines, sending him up, away, and forward from his working-class family and roots, into a somewhat free movement among his middle-class professional friends (the Gorfeins) as well as his middle-class, aspirant folkie friends (Jean and Jim). To understand class according to cultural tropes is to miss the point, though. Similarly, we'd err to celebrate Llewyn's working-class identity, its relationship to the authentic, real, pure, or innocent music he makes as an expression of his class-based identity, his essence.[26] To do so is to romanticize and to essentialize poverty and want. As Eric Schocket writes, class is not to be understood as "the objects in the frame," the noble workers, their culture, the objects associated with their work and their lives, their values, and so on; rather, class "refers to the act of framing, to a set of social relations and ideological processes through with these objects

come into significance in the first place" (Schocket 2006: 11). By exploring class as a process of representation, the Coens open up the consideration of class as more than cultural tropes and classed assumptions or values; and they get at the real potential of class studies, to expose what Schocket refers to as "the imbricated relationship between class processes and textual representations" (17).

34 Significantly, Llewyn moves across class lines; but he rejects the standard narrative of American class mobility, forward and up—Jean's plan, for example. Instead, he moves backwards before finding a new line forward. Similarly, by confounding our basic assumptions about narrative chronology, the Coens disrupt the temporal process and discourses that make class a structure that seems natural, inevitable. Instead, social mobility as a form of progress, for example, starts to seem confusing, "even sad," as Llewyn tells Jean. In other words, our movement through time in the film defies our assumptions about narrative cinema; and this confusion opens up space to consider new possibilities, futures, for example, free from the norms dictated by our current understanding of the past. In the wake of this disruption, perhaps we can stop seeing class as "what has already happened," to borrow Schocket's phrasing (17); and class studies can move beyond commenting on cultural representations as simple reflections of inevitable class structures. This type of scholarship would not simply characterize Llewyn as "working class" or celebrate his authentic working-class music, his values, or his class-based reality; instead, it would disrupt the performance of class to make clear the processes working to make and remake class, the scholarly equivalent of Llewyn's disrupting Betty's performance, Llewyn's behavior like our work, serving to draw attention to the structure in which the objects of class (haybales, autoharps, gingham panties, Southern string music) come to make sense, the structure in which class is made and remade. In other words, we might ask how class comes about and how representations work in concert with class structures. Or, with the Coens, we might ask how a film and its confusing narrative chronology might allow us to reconsider the structure we seem to be stuck in, a structure that fosters hierarchy, division, and inequality.

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1 For example, Timothy Corrigan characterizes *Blue Velvet* as "a pastiche of too many distinctive generational images (from the fifties through the eighties) made oddly familiar by the rapidity with which the distinctions decay and meld together in this temporary place" (Corrigan 1991: 71).

2 The direct reference is to Marcus's The Old Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes. I would also suggest his introduction to A New Literary History of America.

3 For more on the history of the segregation imposed on southern string-band music, the division between white "Hillbilly" records and black "Race" records, as well as the precommercial history of an integrated Southern sound, see Diane Pecknold's *Hidden in the Mix* and Charles Hughes's *Country Soul*.

4 Writing about the Coens' tendency to recycle film styles, forms, and conventions, R. Barton Palmer explains, "is no merely playful recycling of established forms"; rather, they repurpose "the 'already said" to say something new" (Palmer 2001: 46-7). Though Palmer is writing specifically about film noir, the tendency to revisit the past to make it again, to make it new extends beyond that single form.

5 As Joseph Natoli explains, in a comment that predates *Inside Llewyn Davis* but that seems to describe its plot, the Coens' postmodern tendencies include an affinity for a plot that takes their viewers on an "unraveling, deconstructive journey . . . that has no clear beginning or end" (Natoli 2002: 88).

6 I should add here that my focus on Americana might seem to be at odds with the perception that *Inside Llewyn Davis* is based on the life of David Van Ronk, the American folk musician who was an influential member of the 1960s Greenwich Village scene. No reading of Van Ronk's memoir, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, however, can support any claim that the film is based on his life story. The Coens shape their film for their purposes. And, I argue, the purpose of music in the film is more than to capture the sounds of any one musician and the sounds of any single genre or scene. The superficial similarities suggest a type of fakelore much like the opening of *Fargo*: "THIS IS A TRUE STORY."

7 For a complete study of how time works across a range of discourses, see Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias's *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, a collection of keyword essays on various structures we use to organize and understand time. the spatiotemporal construction of the South as a place in the past.

8 For a discussion of "The Southern Thesis," the argument that country music is a regional musical culture, see Malone's *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* as well as the special "Country Music" issue of *The Journal of American Folklore* (vol. 127.5, Spring 2014) which features a restatement of the Southern Thesis by Malone (Malone 2014: 226-9) as well as a reconsideration by Erika Brady (Brady 2014: 230-2).

9 In addition to the scholars who address the relationship between country music and the American South, for a discussion of the relationship between class and traditional American music, see Bill Malone's *Don't Get above Your Raisin'* and *Country Music, U.S.A*, Barbara Ching's *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (especially 8-25),

and Nadine Hubbs's *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* as well as her keynote address to IAPMS-US in 2017.

10 As an example of the diversity under the Americana umbrella, consider the artists brought together for the *Inside Llewyn Davis* concert album, *Another Day Another Time: Celebrating the Music of Llewyn Davis*. While it features revivalist artists such as Gillian Welch and Rhiannon Giddens, it also makes room for Elvis Costello, Conor Oberst, Colin Meloy, Jack White, the Punch Brothers, Joan Baez, the Avett Brothers, and Lake Street Dive, representing genres from pop, indie, bluegrass, folk, alt-country, rock, jazz, and rhythm and blues. But to some extent they all have an old sound, a sound that was never new and that never gets old.

11 It's fair to say that the "Coen Brothers" refers to more than the two brothers, Ethan and Joel. The Brothers as a film-making collective includes, among others, a recurring group of actors (Frances McDormand, John Goodman, and Steve Buscemi, for example), sound designer Skip Lievasy, composer Carter Burwell, who has scored almost every Coen film (but not, notably, *Inside Llewyn Davis*), and T Bone Burnett. For an analysis of Burwell's role as a Coen, see Julie Assouly's "Carter Burwell's Contribution to 'the Coen Touch.'" For an overview of Burnett's role as a member of the Coen Brothers' team, see "Coen Brother" in Lloyd Sachs' *T Bone Burnett: A Life in Pursuit* (Sachs 2022: 124-34).

12 The South, as Edward Ayers argues at the outset of *The Promise of the New South*, his sweeping history of the American South after Reconstruction, has been of interest to historians because of its "deep poverty and institutionalized injustice." Summing up that historian assumed and taught about the South, he continues: "Southerners lived with stunted economic growth, narrow political alternatives, poisoned race relations, confined roles for women, and shallow intellectual life." Thus, he concludes, "The people of the New South have become synonymous with the problems they faced. Southerners of both races have become reduced to objects of pity, scorn, romance, or condescension" (Ayers 1992: viii-xi).

13 For a thorough history of the Child ballad-collection project, see Benjamin Filene 9-27.

14 Writing about the "designation of T-Bone [sic] Burnet as 'musical archivist,'" Jeff Smith, like Fox, sees the Coens are treating old songs as neglected "musical treasures," working to preserve and display "popular culture artifacts" (Smith 2013: 149). Using lannguage that echoes Fox, he claims that "music archivist" "seemingly treats the films as virtual museum pieces and

preserves the soundtrack as a space for lost or neglected moments in American musical history" (131). He, as I will argue regarding Fox, fails to account for the dynamic nature of Americana music culture and the Coen's use of it.

15 For a history of faked authenticity in the long history of country music, see Nadine Hubbs on "Jed-face" (Hubbs 2014: 25-8), Pamela Fox's *Natural Acts* on performing rusticity, and Richard A. Peterson's *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*.

16 Americana music is often perceived as dismissive irony. As Josh Friedberg, in an article in *PopMatters* argues, "Alt.country music, or alternative country, can get a bad rap. It's full of appropriation, hipster irony, and the pretense that upper-middle-class liberal arts majors can determine what 'real' country music is." Scholars have largely held to this same line: see Aaron Fox's "Alternative to What," Diane Pecknold's "Selling Out or Buying In?," Pamela Fox's "Time as 'Revelator,'" and Barbara Ching and Pamela Fox's "Introduction" to *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt.Country Music*.

17 For a more complete discussion of this dynamic, see Eric Shocket's *Vanishing Moments: Class and American Literature*.

18 I should add here that it is impossible to ignore the role of sexism in the presentation of Betty as an object of the audience's gaze and in the nature of Llewyn's objectionable behavior. These elements of patriarchal power are the very types of things that tend to be exaggerated in the forms and rituals of restorative nostalgia.

19 In addition to Lewit, see Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film*.

20 Lewit misreads in a significant way the addition of new details during the film's closing sequence. Though he recognizes that the opening and closing sequences are not simply the same (the cat escapes, and the cat does not escape), when faced with an additional song in Llewyn's Gaslight set, he suggests that it is a piece "of information missing in the first scene" (Lewit 2016: 273).

21 Though this detail is not evident in the final film, its presence in the published script is suggestive.

22 After Llewyn plays for Bud Grossman in Chicago at the Gate of Horn, Grossman remarks that Llewyn does not have what, say, Troy Nelson has: "Yeah, he connects with people" (Coen 2014: 125).

23 The foregrounding of sound in the service of storytelling is a common strategy throughout the Coen Brothers' films. See Randall Barnes's work for a detailed study of how the Coens rely on this technique in *Barton Fink*. Similarly, Stefano Baschiera considers *Inside Llewyn Davis* to represent "an overlap between the categories of 'sound films' and 'tracked,' with the diegetic folk songs as the only trace of music in a film otherwise surprisingly silent," a silence, that he explains, leaves "more room for noises and natural sounds," foregrounding, for example, the sounds of physical violence (Baschiera 2017: 144).

24 In this instance the disruption is of cinematic suture, the technical effects of classical Hollywood cinema that result in the spectator's experience of becoming part of the movie, of, for example, identifying with the perspective of a character in the film more than the perspective of the spectator looking at the film. For an introduction to the concept of suture see Bordwell, Butte, Mulvey, and Silverman.

25 This phrase echoes the motto of Hudsucker Industries, "The Future is Now," and *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) represents an earlier instance of the Coens' playing with temporal distortion in a film's plot.

26 Llewyn's complex class identity recalls Barton Fink, the working-class writer who cannot relate to the working class.

English

The Coen Brothers' exploration of the cinematic and musical past is more than mere nostalgia. The looping narrative structure of *Inside Llewyn Davis* defies simple assumptions about chronology, moving simultaneously back in time and forward to a different version of the present. Similarly, Americana music points back to a dynamic past that can be the source of various potential futures. The temporal paradox that defines *Inside Llewyn Davis* allows the Coens to scrutinize the structures and discourses inherent in our understanding of our shared, imaginary musical past. One of these structures is class. By untangling the relationships between the past, class, and the South, the film represents and explores the disruptive cultural work of the type of nostalgia central to Americana music. Thus, the film's disruption of cinematic time serves to trouble class lines, distinctions, and assumptions, exposing the processes and discourses that make class a structure that seems natural, inevitable.

Français

L'exploration que font les frères Coen du passé cinématique et musical dépasse la simple nostalgie. La structure narrative circulaire de *Inside Llewyn Davis* va à l'encontre de la chronologie classique, puisqu'elle remonte le temps en même temps qu'elle avance vers une version différente du présent. De même, la musique dite « américana » rappelle un passé dynamique qui peut déboucher sur différents avenirs potentiels. Le paradoxe temporel qui définit *Inside Llewyn Davis* permet aux Coen de scruter les structures et les discours inscrits dans l'idée que nous nous faisons de notre passé musical imaginaire partagé. L'une de ces structures est la classe sociale. En démêlant l'écheveau des relations entre passé, classe, et le Sud, ce filme représente et explore le travail de déstabilisation culturelle opéré par le type de nostalgie qui caractérise l'« américana ». Ainsi, dans ce film, la perturbation du temps cinématographique sert à rendre poreux les frontières, les distinctions et les préjugés de classe, et à révéler les processus et les discours qui confèrent un caractère naturel et inévitable à la structure qu'est la classe sociale.

Mots-clés

musique traditionnelle américaine, Américana, Coen (Frères), Inside Llewyn Davis, nostalgie, Sud américain, classe

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