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AN INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN INTENTIONALISM AND MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP  
IN FILM

by

STEVEN HAGER

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry

ABSTRACT

The multiple authorship view for film is the claim that multiple authors exist for almost any given film. This view is a recent development in opposition to the longstanding single authorship view which holds that there is only one author for every film, usually the director. One of the most often-cited reasons in support of the multiple authorship claim is that multiple authorship views more successfully explain the following fact about filmmaking better than single authorship views: filmmakers' intentions sometimes conflict with each other during the production of a film. However, since multiple authorship views cannot adequately explain how a single filmic utterance can result from conflicting intentions, I want to argue that the single authorship view should be reinstated in those special cases where two or more agents are involved in the production of a filmic utterance and where the intentions of those agents are incompatible.

INDEX WORDS: Author, Authorship, Film, Filmic utterance, Intention, Intentionalism, Interpretation, Multiple authorship view, Single authorship view

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IN FILM

by

STEVEN HAGER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University

2009

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IN FILM

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. OBJECTIONS TO SINGLE AUTHORSHIP	7
2. INTENTIONALISM	20
3. WHY MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR CONFLICTING INTENTIONS	38
	48
CONCLUSION	
REFERENCES	53



## INTRODUCTION

The multiple authorship view for film is the claim that multiple authors exist for almost any given film. This view is a recent development in opposition to the longstanding single authorship view which holds that there is only one author of a film, usually the director. One of the most often-cited reasons in support of the multiple authorship claim is that multiple authorship views more successfully explain the following fact about filmmaking better than single authorship views: filmmakers' intentions sometimes conflict with each other during the production of a particular film. However, since multiple authorship views cannot adequately explain how a single, coherent filmic utterance can result from conflicting intentions, I want to argue that the single authorship view should be reinstated in those special cases where two or more agents are involved in the production of a filmic utterance and where the intentions of those agents are incompatible.

There is an ongoing scholarly debate about how to determine the number of people who author a film. There are only three options and they are mutually exclusive. It must be the case that a film is authored by only one person, more than one person, or no persons. The first option is usually referred to as the *single authorship view*, i.e. the view that a film has exactly one author, usually the director. This has been the dominant view about authorship for a long time and for most media. However, there is some recent agreement among philosophers of art in support of the *multiple authorship view*,<sup>1</sup> which is the claim that a film usually has more than

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<sup>1</sup> The multiple authorship view is consistent with the claim that some films are authored by only one person and the claim that some films are authored by no persons. However, there is disagreement among holders of the multiple authorship view about the criteria that a film must fulfill in order to qualify as a singly authored or authorless film. I agree with Sellors (2007) that "where we have an instance of an intentional utterance, no matter how poor, we also have an instance of authorship" (p. 267); as a result, few films, if any, are singularly authored or authorless. A candidate for the former might be something like a personal home video shot only by me and depicting my lone activities in my apartment. I am the only person involved in the production of this sort of film, and therefore I am the only person who could token it as an intentional utterance. Livingston (1997, 2005) argues that many films made by paradigmatic *auteurs* like Bergman or Tarantino are also singly authored because these filmmakers exhibit such a high level of control over their artworks, though I agree with Gaut (1997) that these filmmakers do not exhibit

one author (Gaut 1997; Livingston 1997, 2005; Sellors 2007; Stillinger 1991). According to this claim, candidates for filmic authorship include but are not limited to producers, writers, actors, editors, cinematographers and set designers, in addition to the director.

Before this debate can be resolved, one must know what an author *is*. I start with the following definition of *filmic author* proposed by Sellors (2007) as an improvement upon Livingston's (1997)<sup>2</sup> attempt at defining the term:

Filmic author (IM) = (def) the agent or agents who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance, where 'to token' refers to any action, an intended function of which is to make manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an apparently moving image projected on a screen or other surface and a filmic utterance is the result of the act of tokening in this medium. (Sellors 2007, p. 266)

By (IM), Sellors means that the filmic author's work is both Intentional and Meaningful as a result of the intentions involved. I add two features to this definition. First, I would add to this definition that the means whereby an utterance is manifested should be taken to include the sound or music that often accompanies images in films made since the late 1920s. Second, in light of Gaut's (1997) criticisms of Livingston's original approach, I would expand the intended functions of tokening to include the communication of meanings and the manifestation of artistic

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sufficient control over their films to be considered their films' only authors. Directors like Bergman and Tarantino have collaborators who make intentional utterances, so these collaborators should qualify as authors under Sellors' view, which I accept. (I discuss Gaut's objections to Livingston in Chapter 1.) Sellors gives an example of an authorless film in which a projectionist's apprentice randomly splices together pieces of film to clean up the instructor's workstation. I agree with Sellors that only examples like this are fit to serve as examples of authorless films because there are no intentionally tokened utterances here. Livingston (1997) also gives two putative examples of authorless films, which I discuss in Chapter 2 along with the conditions for being an intentional utterance.

<sup>2</sup> Here is Livingston's (1997) definition of *cinematic author*: "Cinematic author = the agent or agent(s) who intentionally make(s) a cinematic utterance; where cinematic utterance = an action the intended function of which is to make manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an apparently moving image projected on a screen or other surface" (p. 141). Sellors (2007) argues that his definition is superior to Livingston's definition for three reasons. First, Sellors' defines *filmic author* rather than *cinematic author* because "the former evokes the medium of film, whereas the latter suggests the institution of cinema" (p. 270, fn. 11). Second, Sellors argues that "an utterance is not the *action* of intentionally expressing or communicating . . . but the *result* of doing so" (p. 264). Third, Sellors argues that the verb *to token* is more precise than *to make* because the extension of the latter is too broad; it could refer to actions unrelated to authorship and the former "more clearly implies symbolic systems" (p. 265). Despite these relatively minor problems with Livingston's (1997) definition, Sellors believes that it does capture the most important feature that identifies instances of authorship, i.e. the presence of intentional utterances.

properties like “beauty, vibrancy, and aesthetic unity” (Gaut 1997, p. 171, fn. 34) that may not qualify as communicative<sup>3</sup> or expressive. Admittedly, some concepts in this definition need clarification and some implied assumptions need justification. For instance, it is not clear what counts as an *utterance*, and it is not obvious why or how *intentions* are relevant to authorship. Despite these issues, the implications of this definition for debates about the number of authors any given film has are significant. If one or more filmic utterances are intentionally tokened by multiple people within a single film, then the utterances in question will be multiply authored. If one or more filmic utterances are intentionally tokened by only one person within a single film, then the utterances in question will be singularly authored. If a candidate for a filmic utterance is not intentionally tokened at all, then that candidate not only fails to be authored, but fails to be an utterance entirely. This latter point is not vacuous, for it implies that what may seem like an intentionally-manifested attitude or meaning may not actually be so.

Ultimately, I will be arguing in favor of reinstating the single authorship view in cases where two or more agents are involved in the production of a filmic utterance and where the intentions of those agents are contradictory. But in Chapter 1, I rearticulate some of Gaut’s (1997) most cogent objections to the single authorship view understood as a description of all instances

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<sup>3</sup> Gaut (1997) also criticizes Livingston’s (1997) approach as being too narrow on the grounds that “an artist may not intend to communicate, intending the work only for himself” (Gaut 1997, p. 171, fn. 34), but it seems like the appropriate description of such a case is just that the author is intending to communicate some meaning or express some attitude to herself. It is not clear what an author in such a case would be doing if she was not intending to communicate, express, or make manifest some meaning, attitude, or artistic property, even if it is only to herself. Gaut (1997) defines *author* as “the non-accidental producer of a work of art” (p. 171, fn. 34) and believes that definitions like Livingston’s (1997) and Sellors’ (2007) are too narrow. I argue that the precision offered by Livingston’s and Sellors’ definitions are worth whatever sacrifice may be made regarding narrowness in scope. Even if Livingston’s and Sellors’ definitions are too narrow, this problem is much less significant than the problem that results from the vagueness of Gaut’s definition. ‘Non-accidental production’ does not capture the important features of authorship as precisely as ‘intentionally tokening an utterance where the intended function of tokening is to communicate, express, or make manifest some meaning, attitude or artistic property.’ The latter definition is more precise in two important ways. First, *non-accidental* does not mean *intentional*. Natural kinds are often designated by non-accidental properties, but this does not entail that natural kinds are *intended* to have these properties. Second, with the latter definition, Livingston and Sellors successfully explicate in more precise detail what intentional or non-accidental *production* entails.

of filmic authorship. These objections are meant to show that all mainstream or *serially manufactured* filmic utterances are authored by more than one person except, in my view, when those authors have intentions that conflict. In Livingston's (1997) explanation of Bordwell and Thompson's (1993) terminology, the *serial manufacture* of a film "is a process that resembles mass manufacture on an assembly line because it has a similar hierarchical division of labour . . . In this mode of production, specialists with a striking variety of skills and tasks collaborate to create a unique final product" (Livingston 1997, p. 138). The productions of almost<sup>4</sup> all of the films that people watch conform to this sort of process.

I also present Sellors' (2007) objections to Livingston's (1997) cases of authorless films. As a result, I take the view that all filmic utterances made by people are authored. In the face of Sellors' (1997) objections, Livingston's (1997) cases do present valuable insights into the nature of authorship. The first insight is that complete films as final products are not the only filmic utterances worth investigating regarding authorship. *Parts* of films seem deserving of separate authorship descriptions. The second insight is that the intentions of a candidate for authorship are highly relevant to whether that candidate successfully meets the conditions for being an author.

Chapter 2 attempts to clarify and justify the theoretical framework I employ to understand utterances and intentions and how these function regarding the interpretation of films. The idea that intentions are relevant to attributions of authorship remains controversial, especially given what it implies for the interpretation of films. Consider the following example: If an author's intention determines the meaning of an utterance that she tokens and one finds out that the interpreted meaning of this utterance was not intended by the author to be communicated by this

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<sup>4</sup> By *almost*, I mean to reference the rare situations in which a film might be singly authored or not authored at all. See footnote 1.

particular utterance, then it seems as though the interpreter is no longer justified in taking this utterance to mean what she thought it meant. Some who adhere to the idea that interpretations are valuable regardless of whether they accurately reflect authorial intentions might find this sort of implication undesirable.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these adherents might object that because authorial intentions are fundamentally unknowable or because authorial intentions are imperfectly realized and underdetermine meaning, analyses of intentions should not constrain interpretive projects. One might then respond to these objections by arguing that they miss the mark due to an incorrect conception of the relationship between intention and meaning in the first place. It will be important to get as clear as possible about the variety of options available for explaining whether and how authorial intentions determine meanings. I present and explain these options in Chapter 2.

Ultimately, I will argue for a *modified hypothetical intentionalist* view, which is the claim that the interpretation of a work's meaning is determined by the best hypothesis about an author's intentions, where the best hypothesis is the one that is most likely to be correct *given all available evidence about authorial intentions*. This claim is importantly modified from Levinson's (1996) view, which tends inappropriately to disvalue – in favor of other contextual factors – the evidential role that direct authorial testimony plays regarding intentions.

In Chapter 3, I present my main argument, which is that the single authorship view ought to be reinstated to describe individual filmic utterances that result from conflicting intentions. Accepting the aforementioned definition of *filmic author* implies that one should not nominate an

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<sup>5</sup> I have in mind here interpretive situations where the goal is to enjoy the work or make the work more interesting. In these situations, the value of an interpretation hinges on how much the interpretation facilitates one's enjoyment of a work or the degree to which the interpretation makes the work more interesting or intellectually satisfying. But the interpretive situation with which I am concerned here has the goal of discovering what determines a work's meaning. In Chapter 2, I argue that authorial intentions do play an important role in determining the meaning of a work, and I discuss the various degrees to which authorial intentions determine a work's meaning.

agent as a candidate for authorship of a filmic utterance that communicates an attitude that the agent does not intend to communicate. The problem is that multiple authorship views entail that multiple agents communicate the same attitude and are therefore authors of the same filmic utterance even when the communication of this attitude is not intended by one or more of the proposed authors. Proponents of multiple authorship views claim that these views help account for certain subtleties and complexities in films, but if intentionalism about authorship is true, these subtleties and complexities should not be attributed to authors who did not intend them.

## CHAPTER 1

## OBJECTIONS TO SINGLE AUTHORSHIP

Although I will claim ultimately that the single authorship view should be reinstated in special cases (i.e., cases in which two or more agents with conflicting intentions are involved in the production of a film), my primary goal in this chapter will be to show that serially manufactured films are not authored by only one person and that in fact the multiple authorship view should be the default for filmic utterances, mainly because no one person can perform the wide variety of production tasks that result in most filmic utterances. I also want to demonstrate that there are “planes of authorship” other than the plane that is used to describe entire films, i.e. we should recognize that particular parts or aspects of films, like costumes or musical scores, deserve their own ascriptions of authorship.

I begin with a rehearsal of Gaut’s (1997) objections to the most promising arguments in favor of the single authorship view. The first argument for the single authorship view that Gaut rejects is referred to as the *restriction strategy*:

1. Authorial control is restricted to the artistically significant features of works.
  2. The director is the only person who controls artistically significant features of works.
- Therefore,
3. The director is the only author of a film. (p. 155)

Take any view of what counts as artistically significant<sup>6</sup> and assume for the sake of argument that the task of identifying the author is accomplished by finding the person responsible for the artistically significant features. The director is surely not the only person who controls these features. This is the case for two main reasons according to Gaut. The first reason is that it is

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 2, I argue that the only artistically significant features of works that are relevant to attributions of authorship are intentional utterances.

difficult to accept that collaborators do not control anything artistically significant. Surely the costume designer exhibits the highest sort of control over the creation of a particular costume. A director may be able to give some guidance regarding the sort of costume that he or she envisions, but this guidance drastically underdetermines the costume designer's actions. A costume in a film is at least potentially artistically significant, so a restriction strategist is forced to acknowledge the costume designer as a collaborative author. The second, and related, reason is that it is difficult to determine what, if any, aspects of a film are controlled by the director *qua* director. One observes on screen the performance of the actress, and one sees the results of the cinematographer's camera techniques, and one hears the screenwriter's dialogue, and one hears the composer's score. If one were asked to point out those features of a film that are controlled by the director alone, it is hard to see to what one would call attention. Any aspect of the acting is a result of collaboration with an actor. Any aspect of the photographic composition is a result of collaboration with a cinematographer. There is no part of a film that is controlled merely by the director as director.

The most sophisticated version of the restriction strategy, presented by Perkins (1972), attempts to avoid these basic objections by restricting authorial control to the control of *synthetic relationships*. By the control of synthetic relationships, Perkins means that it is only the director who understands the relationships between different parts of a film and therefore it is only the director who controls the combination of all the various parts of a film into a cohesive work. Gaut (1997) correctly thinks that his objection to the restriction strategy still holds because there are many artistically significant interrelations that the director does not control. Consider part of Dario Marianelli's score to director Joe Wright's 2007 film *Atonement*, which incorporates typewriter sound effects as a percussive instrument. Presumably, there were relationships



between Marianelli, the person who was recording the sound, the sound engineer, and the musician ‘playing’ the typewriter. Part of this working relationship certainly involved potentially artistically significant decisions regarding which typewriter to use, how the sounds should be recorded, and how those sounds should be digitally manipulated and incorporated into the final score. It is doubtful that director Wright had control over all the aspects of these interrelations. Wright probably provided guidance, gave approvals, and gave disapprovals to Marianelli at various stages of the composition, but certainly there were artistically significant decisions that were made not by Wright but that merely resulted from relationships between Marianelli and the sound department.

The second argument for the single authorship view is referred to as the *sufficient control strategy* (Gaut 1997). Here is a formulation of the strategy as conceived by Perkins (1972) and presented by Gaut (1997):

1. The director does not have complete control of a film (Perkins 1972, p.180).
2. The director is “chiefly responsible for the effect and quality of the completed movie” (p.179).
3. The director controls a film by what he or she allows collaborators to do and “the resulting action[s] ‘belongs’ to the director” (p. 181).

Therefore,

4. The director is the only person who exhibits sufficient control over a film (p. 184).

Therefore,

5. The director is the only author of a film. (Gaut 1997)

The usual line of defense for this argument cites examples (Gaut 1997) from other artistic media where collaboration is allowed but where only one person is credited as being the author. A painter sometimes allows his or her protégé to do some of the actual painting. Sometimes an

editor changes the organization of a novel with the author's approval. An architect does not do *any* of the actual building of a structure that he or she designs. In each of these three cases, the resulting artwork is still attributed to a single author despite collaboration because they give the collaborator permission to work. This power to give permission and authoritative guidance is what constitutes the single author's sufficient control over the project and the single author who has this sufficient control is then ultimately responsible for any problems with the work. Gaut objects to this strategy on two grounds. First, the mere fact that people do commonly label situations like these as cases of single authorship does not provide reason for thinking that these situations should be characterized in such a way. Gaut notes that art historians are starting to realize this by referring to some paintings as being authored, for example, by "Rembrandt and workshop, rather than simply to Rembrandt" (1997, p. 157). So, perhaps we should treat the aforementioned situations as examples of collaborative authorship.

Gaut's second objection to the sufficient control strategy is similar to one of his objections to the restriction strategy, and it is that the director cannot possibly control every aspect of the performance of his or her collaborators. Gaut thinks that this objection is clearly the case when one considers the director-actor relationship:

Directorial instructions cannot in practice be fine grained enough to select just one precise way of saying [one's] lines, with an exactly shaded emotional meaning. Any actor will inevitably bring something of his own personality and training to the way he speaks his lines, inflecting them with the nuances derived from verbal mannerisms and unique vocal tonalities, colouring his performance with the personal memory and felt experience he uses in imaginatively projecting himself into the role. (1997, p. 158)

Because of this indeterminacy between a director's commands or allowances and an actor's performance, the director does not exhibit sufficient control over the actor's performance and therefore the performance does not belong to the director. If such performances are not

sufficiently controlled by and do not belong to the director, then the director is not the only author of these performances.

The third argument for the single authorship view that Gaut discusses is the *construction strategy*. This has been the dominant strategy for defending the single authorship view in literature and this dominance has carried over into film. Sometimes this strategy is called a *fictionalist strategy* because it employs the notion that authors are ‘fictional’ or ‘constructed’ or ‘implied’ or ‘postulated.’ Here it is useful to distinguish between (a) the justifications for constructing authors in the first place and (b) using the construction strategy to support the single authorship view. The justifications for constructing authors descend from the general claim that one need not restrict one’s interpretation of a work so that it merely reflects an actual writer’s or filmmaker’s intentions. One may instead opt to interpret meanings ‘communicated’ by a fictional *persona* who has intentions that may not match those of the actual filmmaker (Gaut 1997). The relationship between interpretation and authorial intentions – both fictional and non-fictional – will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The chief concern here is whether the single authorship view for film can be supported by the strategy of constructing a fictional author, assuming for the sake of argument that ignoring the intentions of actual filmmakers is justifiable in the first place. Here is my formulation of this argument:

1. The intentions of *actual* filmmakers are unnecessary and irrelevant for interpretative purposes, but one is only justified in interpreting a work that was intended to communicate, express, or make manifest some meaning, attitude, or artistic property.
2. If the intentions of actual filmmakers are unnecessary and irrelevant for interpretative purposes and one is only justified in interpreting a work that was intended to communicate, express, or make manifest some meaning, attitude, or artistic property, then one should construct a *single* fictional author to interpret a work.

Therefore,

3. One should construct a *single* fictional author to interpret a work.

I do not want to focus on the act of construction here, but on the specific claim that the constructed author should be singular in number. Justifying the single authorship view using a construction strategy that is defined in a way that involves the construction of only one author per film begs the question. An argument that concludes that every film has only one author because we should construct only one fictional author per film is not an argument at all. Furthermore, the second premise rests on the faulty assumption that if the intentions of actual authors are unnecessary, then most other facts about actual filmmakers should be deemed as mostly irrelevant, including those facts about how many people produce a film. Even if actual intentions are unnecessary and this justifies our fictional construction, this is no reason why we should not construct *multiple* fictional authors:

We should acknowledge a constructed author when we can identify an authorial personality, a persona, which may be distinct from that of the actual writer . . . So, by the criterion of artistic personality to which the constructivist appeals, we should acknowledge such films to involve multiple artists. (Gaut 1997, p. 160)

There is no reason to deny the personae of actors, set designers, editors and other film collaborators (Gaut 1997). There may be insights to be had in considering a camera angle to be ‘intended’ by a fictional cinematographer with the skills and knowledge possessed only by an actual cinematographer, and valuable insights may be lost by positing a single fictional author that somehow controls the agency of other collaborators. Gaut finds the single fictional author-actor relationship most troubling because the actor’s performance ceases to be an action of the actor and instead becomes an action of a single fictional author: “To think of actors in this way is to forfeit our sense of them as agents, and so radically to distort our experience of mainstream cinema” (p. 160). This removal of agency applies not only to actors, but to screenwriters,

cinematographers, composers, editors and others. Gaut's most convincing objection to the *single* constructed author strategy is that there is nothing at all that could be gained "by speculating on the psychology of a kind of super-intelligent octopus, whose tentacles control the myriad machines of cinema and reach into the very souls of actors" (p. 161), because we would not be able to assess whether we are correctly interpreting what this fantastical being's intentions are "given its unknowable psychology" (p. 161).

The artistic medium that presents the most significant problem for the multiple authorship view according to Gaut is the play, due to the play's similarity to film and the play's status as a type of literature that is almost always designated as being the product of a single author. I will call this the *play objection* to the multiple authorship view. The argument is that there have been many collaborative performances of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but the play is almost universally attributed to Shakespeare as a single author; therefore, films are also singly authored despite the collaborative nature of their productions.<sup>7</sup> Gaut argues that this objection to the multiple authorship view falters due to ontological differences between film and literature – specifically, regarding their criteria for individuation. Plays are individuated by their texts, which are usually written by a single person. Gaut notes that significantly different films can result from the same screenplay and even the same storyboards via a wide variety of visual and aural techniques, so films are not individuated by their screenplays. Films are individuated by visual and aural properties which are usually the result of work produced by multiple collaborators.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaut overlooks that this problem also applies to collaborative performances of pieces of music, which are usually determined to be singly authored.

The play objection is an argument by analogy; it concludes that films should be conceived as singly authored because (1) plays are commonly thought to be singly authored and (2) films are similar to plays. Here is how the analogy seems to work:

text of play : staged play : : screenplay : screened film

Gaut (1997) focuses his response to the play objection by breaking down the comparison. He argues that this analogy fails because plays are individuated by texts (and not stagings), while films are individuated by the visual and aural properties observed at a screening (and not the screenplay). Gaut (1997) also argues that the text of a play completely determines character in a way that the screenplay does not:

But how Robeson or Olivier characterized Othello does not affect the character himself: that is under Shakespeare's complete control. That the *performance* of a play is collaborative . . . does not undermine the single authorship of the play itself . . . In theatre, actors' performances are external to the play itself, whereas in cinema (recordings of) their performances are internal to the film. So, despite the collaborative nature of performance, the playwright can exercise complete control over the characters of his play. (p. 163)

But Gaut overestimates the degree to which the text of a play determines character. He acknowledges the collaborative nature of plays, but then asserts that Olivier does not affect the character of Othello himself. It is obviously true that Olivier does not collaborate with Shakespeare regarding Othello *in the text*, but surely Olivier does affect the character *on stage*. I imagine that if Shakespeare were to have attended the 1936 Haitian-themed production of *Macbeth* by Harlem's American Negro Theater, directed by Orson Welles, he would probably barely recognize the characters that Gaut says he completely determines. Moreover, Gaut underestimates the degree to which screenplays can determine character. Some characters are established mainly via dialogue rather than virtuosic acting or camerawork, i.e. we seem to remember what certain characters say to each other more than we remember how the actors said

things or how the actors looked on screen. In the opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), for example, Mr. Brown's frank and distasteful analysis of a pop song is what we remember about that character and not Tarantino's<sup>8</sup> minimally adequate acting abilities or the camera techniques being used. Furthermore, screenplays tend to give more explicit guidelines than the texts of plays for how a character should be acted and many screenplays overtly note camera positions or filming techniques. The texts of plays often have less to do with how things appear on stage than screenplays have to do with how things look on screen. Gaut overestimates the degree to which the texts of plays determine character and underestimates the degree to which screenplays determine character; so, the ontological distinction between plays and films should not be based on the degree to which the texts of each medium determine character.

The main point I want to make here is that one should not respond to the play objection to the multiple authorship view by trying to articulate all the differences between films and plays; rather, one should accept the general comparison and argue instead that (i) texts of plays are singly authored, (ii) screenplays are singly authored, (iii) play performances are multiply authored, and (iv) screened films are multiply authored. The similarities between films and plays provide just as much reason to believe that staged performances of plays are multiply authored as they do for believing that screened films are singly authored. Though the texts of plays are more artistically prestigious and garner more intellectual analysis than screenplays, this does not undermine the idea that the texts of plays are meant by their writers to be performed on stage just like screenplays are meant by their writers to be filmed. Both playwrights and screenwriters are

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<sup>8</sup> Tarantino, who is not a great actor, also acts in the film as Mr. Brown, which may provide even more evidence for believing that Tarantino wanted to focus on what the character was saying and was not overly concerned with how the character "appeared" on screen.

fully aware of the collaborative nature of their respective medium.<sup>9</sup> Gaut does not need to argue for ontological differences between literature and film to argue that films are multiply authored. The objectors to whom he is responding are making a mistake by comparing a text of a play to a completed film instead of a performance of a play to a completed film. Those who employ the play objection should understand that both play performances and completed films are almost always multiply authored, unless they think they can successfully investigate the psychology of the sort of omnipotent octopus posited by Gaut.

Despite the preceding rehearsals of Gaut's objections to the most cogent defenses of the single authorship view, there are some films that do seem to qualify as instances of single authorship. The sorts of cases I have in mind are cases in which only one person is involved in a film's production. If I buy a camcorder and editing software and produce a film merely depicting my lone activities in my apartment, it seems appropriate to assert that I am the only author of such a film. Apart from such special cases, however, the single authorship view does not seem to describe appropriately the authorship of most mainstream films.

If a given film is not authored by only one person, then the film in question is either authored by more than one person or by no persons. Consider the possibility that a film may not be authored at all. Livingston (1997) argues for two cases of filmmaking that are authorless. The first case involves a non-professional named KK who has a poor idea for a film. Acting as producer and lead actor, KK invests money and gets other financial backers for a project. KK has complete artistic control of the film. Since KK does not have the appropriate training and

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<sup>9</sup> I do not mean to imply that we should not appreciate the text of a play as an individual artistic utterance that is valuable apart from the role that it plays in a stage production. The texts of most plays are authored by only one person and we should appreciate and interpret these texts as singly authored artistic utterances. But, most screenplays are also authored by only one person and we should be able to appreciate and interpret these texts as singly authored artistic utterances as well. The analogy seems to hold. The texts of plays and screenplays are singly authored most of the time. Performances of plays and screened films are multiply authored.



knowledge, KK encounters problems with the creation of an acceptable script and consequently hires screenwriter after screenwriter to help fix the screenplay. KK begins shooting and the script is changed many more times during shooting. KK quarrels with the first director and fires the person. KK then hires editors to edit the film for screening. The film gets negative reviews, so KK hires more editors to cut the film. The film remains bad, however, so KK is bought out by other backers who recognize KK's incompetence. These backers hire a new director to shoot additional scenes and new editors. The final product is then released. Livingston argues that this film is authorless because, as Bordwell and Thompson (1993) put it, genuine authors exhibit a sufficient level of control over their works and this work "has 'got out of control'" (Livingston 1997, p. 139).

The second case involves Big John, a livestock trader who knows nothing about making films but decides to finance one anyway. Big John stipulates that he must approve all decisions, but he has no preference concerning the decisions that need to be made. When the producer and director come to him with disagreements, Big John secretly flips a coin to make decisions because he does not want to show his incompetence about filmmaking. The film is eventually finished and released. Livingston argues that Big John is not an author of this film because whatever is artistically significant about this film was not *intended* by Big John because his decisions were determined by a random process. Big John was not employing the coin-flipping strategy as an artistic technique. He was flipping a coin to hide his artistic incompetence. Livingston also argues that neither the director nor the producer is an author of this film because their artistic disputes were decided by Big John's coin-flipping. When the director's idea is approved, the producer ceases to be an author and vice versa.

Sellors (2007) objects to Livingston's (1997) conclusions that both cases are instances of authorless films. In KK's case, KK intuitively seems to remain an author to some degree because he did intend to express attitudes and communicate meanings with the parts of the film that he produced:

Even though KK was not responsible for the final filmic utterance, he nevertheless shot his footage with the intention of creating a filmic utterance. That this footage was ultimately subordinated to a different filmic utterance cannot negate KK's authorship of the shots he completed. Not only do we seem to have authorship here, but a couple of planes of authorship in both KK's footage and the finished film. (Sellors 2007, p. 267)

On my view, recognizing these "planes of authorship" is vitally important for a sound approach to the debate about authorship generally. It is important to recognize the distinction between whole film as filmic utterance and part of film as filmic utterance. Focusing analyses of authorship on only complete films seems like a self-serving approach for adherents to the single authorship view who see directors as omnipotent octopi who sufficiently control all aspects of film production. To deny that descriptions of authorship apply to parts of films is to deny that actors, cinematographers, or screenwriters intend to express or communicate anything meaningful, because it is to deny that the role-specific products that result from their individual skill sets really matter. Sellors (2007) argues that Big John's film also fails to be authorless for related reasons:

If the film is incoherent, we have a failure in *competency* in uttering, but not in uttering in general. No matter how bad the result, Big John still had an intention behind commissioning and releasing the film as he did and retains some authorial responsibility for the end product. That the film is both incoherent and poor overall simply means that Big John will not likely be a filmic artist, or filmic author (IMA) (p. 267).

Sellors distinguishes between a 'filmic author (IM)' and a 'filmic author (IMA)'. A filmic author (IMA) is an author who produces works that are Intentionally Meaningful and *works of Art*. I do not find this distinction helpful. Sellors never explains the conditions for being a work of art

besides saying that “all that we need add is a theory of art to our definition [of *filmic author*]” (p. 266), and it seems as though *work of art* merely serves as a complement for artistically competent utterances, which Sellors correctly does not deem as relevant to identifications of filmic authors generally. Although I agree with Sellors’ assessment that neither of the above cases are instances of authorless films, I argue in Chapter 3 that cases like KK’s and Big John’s are not cases of multiple authorship either. Instead, I argue that the single authorship view ought to be reinstated to describe utterances like these – whether they are coherent or incoherent – that result from conflicting intentions. More precisely, a single utterance purported to be multiply authored that results from conflicting intentions should be described as separate incompatible utterances that are authored singly.

Now that we have seen why the four best arguments in favor of single authorship are unsatisfactory, it seems that the multiple authorship view more appropriately describes the authorship of serially manufactured filmic utterances. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate the importance of considering intentions in settling questions of authorship, before moving on in Chapter 3 to show that when we *do* consider intentions, we find that there are some exceptional cases in which the multiple authorship view is unsatisfactory. In those cases where authorial intentions contradict each other, multiple authorship will not obtain.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTENTIONALISM

One of the insights of Livingston's (1997) Big John case is that intentions of candidates for authorship intuitively seem relevant to whether those candidates successfully meet the conditions for being authors. When Big John sided with the director in an artistic dispute, Big John did not *intend* to express any attitude or communicate any meaning. He specifically employed a random decision-making device so that he could avoid intending anything artistically significant. Sellors (2007) argues that Big John does remain an author to some degree because Big John did intend to commission the film and did intend to release it "as he did" (p. 267). However, I argue that Big John is not an author, and for the reason just cited: Big John did intend to commission the film and did intend to release it "as he did," but crucially, he did *not* intend to communicate anything artistically meaningful by doing so. By Sellors' (2007) own analysis, which coincides with worries from both Livingston (1997; 2005) and Gaut (1997), it is undesirable to have a theory of multiple authorship that designates as an author every individual who plays a causal role in the production of a film, no matter how minor that role is; yet this is precisely the sort of role that Big John's mere financial support plays. Big John did not intend to communicate, express, or make manifest any meaning, attitude, or artistic property. To avoid having to attribute authorship to *just anybody* who plays a causal role in the production of a film, we should understand the intent to communicate, express, or make manifest something as a necessary condition for being an author.

Consider a less controversial example that illustrates the intuitive appeal of analyzing authorship in terms of intentions. Sellors (2007) presents the following thought experiment. Imagine a monkey in a laboratory that is rewarded with a banana for typing on a typewriter.

Suppose that one day this monkey accidentally types Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Such an occurrence is obviously not probable, but it is possible. I agree with Sellors that we would not be justified in interpreting anything meaningful on the level of Shakespearean drama in this text because a monkey cannot and did not intend such meanings. As Sellors notes, we would be justified in believing that the monkey intended to communicate "I want a banana," but not *Henry V*. This thought experiment shows that we should not interpret utterances that seem as though they were intended by authors to convey certain meanings when it can be demonstrated or is at least reasonable to suppose that they were not intended to convey those meanings. This thought experiment shows that considerations regarding intentions are highly relevant to our intuitions about interpretation and are therefore also highly relevant to descriptions of authorship. More precisely, we have the intuition that authorial intentions should constrain what we interpret as a work's meaning, i.e. we should consider what an author intended a work to communicate when we try to figure out what a work means.

However, the degree to which or the way in which authorial intentions establish work meaning is not clear. In what follows, I will discuss four attempts to elucidate more precisely the degree to which intentions determine work meaning. The first approach that I will discuss is the *absolute intentionalist* claim that authorial intentions *completely* determine the meaning of a work; this view is sometimes called *extreme intentionalism*. The absolute intentionalist claims that an intention to communicate some meaning is logically equivalent to that meaning's being present in an artwork, and conversely that the presence of a meaning is logically equivalent to that meaning's being intended. As we will see, Livingston (2005) successfully demonstrates why this claim is false; the most obvious reason is that not all authorial intentions are successfully

realized in artworks. I will, then, discuss the three most influential alternatives: *fictionalist intentionalism*, *hypothetical intentionalism*, and *partial actual intentionalism*.<sup>10</sup>

I will reject the fictionalist approach, which is that we should interpret meaning as though it were determined by a fictionally constructed author's intentions. Fictional authors have no causal power, so they cannot produce artworks *at all*, much less intentionally imbue artworks with meaning. The two most plausible alternatives, then, are hypothetical intentionalism and partial actual intentionalism. Hypothetical intentionalism is the claim that interpretations of work meaning should be constrained by the best hypothesis about an author's intentions. Partial actual intentionalism is also a claim that authorial intentions should partially constrain interpretation. The difference between these two views centers about evidentiary considerations for identifying what an author's intentions are. The hypothetical intentionalist maintains that the best hypothesis is formed by considering a host of contextual influences on an author's intentions that include "individual A, with public persona B, at time C, against cultural background D, in light of predecessors E, in the shadow of contemporary events F, in relation to the remainder of A's artistic *oeuvre*, G, and so on" (Levinson 1996, p. 184). If a mountain of contextual evidence goes against an author's direct testimony about her intentions, the hypothetical intentionalist argues that the best hypothesis about the author's intentions may contradict what the author says her intentions actually are. The partial intentionalist then argues that no approach can justifiably ignore an author's stated intentions due to conversational or axiological interests in what an author says she means. We get something wrong in a conversation if we interpret our fellow interlocutor as communicating a meaning that she did not intend; therefore, we justifiably ask her about what she means to say. We ask our conversational partners about what they intend to

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<sup>10</sup> *Partial actual intentionalism* is sometimes called *moderate*, *constrained*, or *modest intentionalism*.

communicate so that the conversation does not fail to accomplish its goals.<sup>11</sup> And, we often ask an author to reveal her intentions because we *value* interpreting a work merely in light of what the author intended to accomplish.

I will not attempt to fully resolve the hypothetical/partial actual intentionalism debate in this chapter, nor do I need to do so. I accept Carroll's (2000) argument that the motivations are the same for both views. Both aim to track actual authorial intentions for the purpose of proper semantic interpretation, and that is all I need here. Ultimately, I aim to argue that the single authorship view should be reinstated to describe utterances that result from contradictory intentions among "collaborators". My argument fails only if intentions are irrelevant to interpreting what an author means. But, as I have shown, no person should want to interpret a work's meaning as though the intentions of its author(s) are irrelevant. In this chapter, my primary aim is to argue that actual authorial intentions should partially constrain interpretation in light of the anti-intentionalist's cogent objection to absolute intentionalism.

Before we analyze the various types of intentionalist claims at greater length, I want to get clearer on two terms that are central to my discussion – *utterance* and *intention*. By *utterance*, I accept Grice's (1969) definition, where an utterance is "any act or performance which is or might be a candidate for nonnatural meaning" (p. 151). Grice (1957) distinguishes between *natural* and *nonnatural* meaning. Natural meaning refers to the sense of statements where *mean* refers to a relationship of causal or logical entailment like "A cup of water means that oxygen is present in the cup" or "Being president for a year means being president for a day." Nonnatural meaning refers to the sense of statements like "The green traffic light means it is safe to drive" or "The presence of the raven means that something bad is going to happen." Grice (1957) says that

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<sup>11</sup> If I ask a friend about when they want to meet for dinner and they answer "after 6 o'clock," I would be foolish not to ask my friend about what she intends to communicate with that answer.

nonnatural meaning occurs when “*x means that p* and *x meant that p* do not entail *p*” (p. 378). I also accept Grice’s (1969) most basic analysis of how intention functions in the act of communicating a certain meaning through uttering:

“*U* meant something by uttering *x*” is true iff, for some audience *A*, *U* uttered *x* intending

- (1) *A* to produce a particular response *r*
- (2) *A* to think (recognize) that *U* intends (1)
- (3) *A* to fulfill (1) on the basis of his fulfillment that (2) (p. 151).

So, Hitchcock *meant* something by filming the shower scene in *Psycho* the way he did if and only if Hitchcock intended American and European adults of 1960 to experience fear on the basis of thinking that Hitchcock intended to induce fear. As Grice notes, it is important for the author *to intend* that the audience use thoughts about the author’s intentions as rational support for the audience’s interpretation. Whether the audience *actually* experiences fear *on the basis* of thinking that Hitchcock intended to induce fear is not the issue. Grice analyzes the *utterer’s intent to mean something* here and not the audience’s actual uptake conditions. On Grice’s analysis, the point here is that an author must *intend* for the audience to experience fear *on this basis* if the author is to intend to mean something. Otherwise, the author is intending to *cause* something and not *mean* something.

By *intention*, I adopt Mele’s (1992) *functionalist* account where intentions are described in terms of the functions that they perform, as opposed to *reductionist* accounts that reduce intentions to mere beliefs or desires. Livingston (2005) describes the functionalist account of intentions as “one in which intention is a matter of an executive attitude towards plans, where this attitude is further characterized in terms of the various functions it performs in our lives as temporally situated, deliberating and striving agents” (p. 14). According to Livingston (2005) and Mele (1992), these functions include initiating, sustaining, and guiding behavior and



practical reasoning. So, Hitchcock meant something by filming the shower scene in *Psycho* the way he did if and only if Hitchcock had an executive attitude toward a plan to have 1960 film audiences experience fear on the basis of thinking that Hitchcock intended to induce fear and this executive attitude functioned in a way that initiated and guided Hitchcock's reasoning and behavior.

Now that I have given an account of how one intentionally means something by uttering, I turn to sorting out the various options available regarding how intentions should constrain interpretation where the interpretive goal is to figure out what the author intended her work to mean. As Livingston (2005) and Gaut (1993) note, this need not be and often is not the only goal of interpretation. Sometimes the goal of interpretation is to find those "meanings" in an artwork that make the artwork most enjoyable and sometimes this involves ignoring authorial intentions. The main concern here is whether or how semantic interpretation is determined by authorial intentions.

The first view I examine is *absolute intentionalism*. Absolute intentionalism is the view that "a work's meaning and the actual author's intentions with regard to the work's meaning are logically equivalent . . . [so] the finished work's meanings are all and only those that were intended" (Livingston 2005, p. 139). Here is a presentation of the main *semantic indeterminacy* argument for this sort of view as dictated by Livingston (2005):

1. The information that linguistic and other expressions carry are necessarily indeterminate.
2. The information that linguistic and other expressions carry can only be determined by the author's intentions.

Therefore,

3. Either there is not determinate meaning or meaning is determined by the author's intentions.

4. There is determinate meaning.

Therefore,

5. Meaning is determined by the author's intentions (p. 144).

Livingston notes that the anti-intentionalist, one who adheres to the claim that an artist's intentions are ultimately irrelevant to interpretation, has four basic ways to respond. First, the anti-intentionalist can deny the fourth premise, but this way of objecting ultimately fails due to the fact that charges of semantic indeterminacy rest on statements that must have some sort of determinate meaning in order to serve as rational support: "Advocates of semantic indeterminacy tend to end up speaking of misreadings and interpretative rigour, which hardly makes sense if there are no semantic facts" (p. 144). Second, the anti-intentionalist can deny the second premise by arguing that "other factors, such as linguistic and artistic conventions and contextual factors, can determine a text's meanings, thereby constituting an at least partially determinate meaning in a given text" (p. 145). This is a cogent objection to the *absolute* intentionalist thesis that a work's meaning is *completely* determined by an author's intentions, but it probably will not work against a less extreme version of the intentionalist claim. Third, the anti-intentionalist can argue that we cannot appeal to an author's intentions to determine the meaning of a work, even if authorial intentions actually do determine a work's meaning, because authorial intentions are necessarily unknowable. Many times an audience member does not know an author's intentions upon viewing a work or cannot know an author's intentions for lack of evidence, even upon investigative research. Furthermore, anti-intentionalists might argue that intentions are fundamentally mental phenomena and since one cannot "get inside the head" of another person,

it is impossible to know the exact intentions of an author. However, Hirsch (1967) has a good response to this sort of extreme skepticism:

This obvious fact should not be allowed to sanction the overly hasty conclusion that the author's intended meaning is inaccessible and is therefore a useless object of interpretation. It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding . . . the aim of [a] discipline must be to reach a consensus, on the basis of what is known, that correct understanding has *probably* been achieved. (p. 17)

Discrediting the utility of strong inductive arguments is a response out of all proportion; it would serve to discredit almost any intellectual endeavor. The fourth and most successful objection that the anti-intentionalist can launch against the absolute intentionalist is to posit the following *dilemma argument* that makes use of another important fact about the relationship between an author's intentions and a work's meaning; namely, that in many cases an author's intentions are unsuccessfully realized in his or her work:

1. Either the artist's intentions are successfully realized in the work or the artist's intentions are not successfully realized in the work.
2. If the artist's intentions are successfully realized in the work, then the interpreter need not refer to the artist's intentions.
3. If the artist's intentions are not successfully realized in the work, then reference to the artist's intentions is insufficient to justify a related claim about the work's meaning.

Therefore,

4. Either the interpreter need not refer to the artist's intentions or the artist's intentions are insufficient to justify a related claim about the work's meaning. (Livingston 2005, p 146)

This objection presents a real problem for the absolute intentionalist because it is easily demonstrable that authors' intentions are imperfectly realized in their works. Even the best film artists produce utterances that do not "come off" as intended. Many films are re-edited after initial screenings because the test audiences do not grasp what was intended. If artists' intentions

were always perfectly manifested in their works, then no artist would ever fail. They might fail to have proper intentions, but they would never fail in conveying the intentions that they do indeed have. So it seems as though the absolute intentionalist claim must be abandoned, for this claim is incompatible with the second and third premises in the dilemma argument for anti-intentionalism. The absolute intentionalist by definition cannot accept the position that authorial intentions are redundant and cannot accept the position that authorial intentions are unsuccessfully realized.

There are less extreme options for intentionalists who acknowledge imperfect realizations of authorial intentions, but who nonetheless want to hold onto the idea that intentions are relevant, non-redundant, and even important for interpretation (though not logically equivalent to it). The least tenable of these options is *fictionalist intentionalism*, which is the thesis that one should constrain one's interpretive projects by appealing to the intentions of a constructed, fictional author. Gaut (1997) presents the most obvious objection to this strategy and it is that authors who do not exist have no causal power, so it would be unreasonable to posit an artwork as *the product* of a fictional author.<sup>12</sup> Another option for the intentionalist is *hypothetical intentionalism*. Hypothetical intentionalism is a view “which takes work meaning to be centrally determined by a best hypothesis as to intended authorial meaning on the part of an appropriate or ideal audience or work” (Levinson 2007, p. 302). A member of this “ideal audience” is one who has sufficient background knowledge concerning the production of the work and the artistic, historical, and cultural contexts in which the work was produced. The important distinction here

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<sup>12</sup> Against Gaut's objection, Nehamas (1981) argues that “to interpret a text is to consider it as its author's production . . . [but] the author, unlike the writer, is not a text's efficient cause but, so to speak, its formal cause, manifested in thought not identical with it” (p. 145). But Gaut (1997) replies that if one puts one's head in the sand and denies that a text as product has to have an efficient cause by definition, one no longer has the incentive to construct an author in the first place because the text ceases to be a product.

is that this approach values the *best hypothesized* intentions of an author for interpretive purposes, rather than the author's *actual* intentions, because information about the latter can sometimes prove incompatible with most of the available contextual evidence surrounding the work's production. To illustrate the value of this approach, Levinson (1996) employs an example based on Kafka's story "A Country Doctor" which involves a rural doctor's unsuccessful attempts at curing a boy, one of which attempts involves going to bed with the boy. Levinson argues that a correct interpretation of this story would take into account contextual evidence like the following:

Kafka worked regularly at night, Kafka thought of his writing as 'medicinal,' . . . that Kafka was familiar with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* . . . [and] given that as background, and given the intrinsic matter of the text, one might readily come up with this interpretation: "A Country Doctor" is a stylized dream report. (p. 185)

Levinson then considers a thought experiment where one discovers that Kafka recorded in his diary that his intention in writing the story was to criticize the ignorance of rural medicine.

Levinson argues that the interpretation that would result should be abandoned in light of the other contextual evidence, despite the fact that it is a direct recording of Kafka's stated intentions:

The text could just barely support such a meaning, much as 'my car ran out of gas' can perhaps just manage to be the vehicle of a meaning in mind involving cabooses and clouds of chlorine . . . Our best construction . . . would trump our discovery of what Kafka the person might oddly have been intending to mean. (p. 185)

The issue, then, involves determining on what grounds the contextual evidence trumps direct authorial testimony. Levinson argues that a best hypothesis about an author's intentions meets two main conditions:

[It] is one that is *epistemically* best – that has the most likelihood of being correct, given the total evidence available to one in the position of ideal reader . . . [and one] that makes the work *artistically* better, where there is room for choice, so long as plausibly ascribed to the author given the full context of writing. (p. 179)

This analysis seems wrong because the second condition, the artistic value condition, misses the mark; it misses the mark because it fails to share the same focus as the epistemic condition. With the conjunction of these two conditions, Levinson conflates the goal of enjoying artworks with the goal of figuring out what a work means. The interpretive goal that motivates the hypothetical intentionalist position makes no reference to artistic value. The goal instead is to posit the most evidentially justifiable thesis about an author's intentions, given that authorial intentions are relevant to, but not completely determinate of, meaning. A Freudian interpretation of Kafka's story probably does make the story more interestingly enjoyable and therefore such an interpretation may be valuable if the goal of the interpretive project is to *enjoy the story*. But, enjoyment is not a success condition for a semantic interpretation where the goal is to determine *what the work was intended to mean*. There is a significant distinction between interpretations that reflect authorial intentions and interpretations that are enjoyable.

The first epistemic condition that Levinson mentions, however, is on track. If the goal is to formulate the best hypothesis about what an author intended, one should consider all available evidence that is relevant to determining what an author intended. Levinson is right to consider the contextual evidence for Kafka's intentions that include Kafka's writing habits and views as well as Kafka's reading interests, but Levinson is not clear about why that evidence "trumps" direct testimony from Kafka himself regarding his own authorial intentions. Levinson's lack of clarity is probably due to the difficulties in determining what sort of evidence is relevant to forming hypotheses about authorial intentions and to what extent it is relevant. Carroll (2000) nicely presents the main difficulty here:

Suppose I utter "The fish is on the bank" while standing on the steps of the Citicorp Building with a large trout clearly in view behind me . . . [The hypothetical intentionalist] will interpret the utterance as "The fish is on the financial institution." On the other hand,

if the actual intentionalist learns from me that what I truly intended by my utterance was “The fish is on the shore,” then the actual intentionalist will endorse that as the interpretation of the meaning of my utterance . . . The hypothetical intentionalist maintains that the meaning of the utterance is the one best warranted given the context of utterance without authorial pronouncements, but the actual intentionalist argues that even the hypothesis best warranted on those grounds can be false. (p. 80)

This is precisely the difference between hypothetical intentionalism and partial actual intentionalism. The difference lies in what evidence they consider and the weight they assign to certain types of evidence. A further explanation needs to be given concerning how various authorial facts ought to be weighted in epistemological analyses that seek to identify true authorial intentions.

Levinson does give an argument for how we are to correctly establish the scope of contextual evidence about the author that should be considered when interpreting a work’s meaning. But, I think he approaches the issue from a misguided angle when he distinguishes between *semantic intentions* and *categorial intentions*. Semantic intentions are authorial intentions about what a work is supposed to mean. Categorial intentions are authorial intentions about what type of work a particular work is supposed to be. Kafka’s semantic intention might have been to disparage rural medicine, but his categorial intention was to produce a short story. Levinson prioritizes the role of categorial intentions over semantic intentions because categorial intentions are easier to uncover, are successfully realized much more often, and are epistemologically prior to semantic intentions—i.e. one has to know that Kafka intended to write a short story before one can try to determine what Kafka meant by the short story. Here is Livingston’s (2005) nice summary of Levinson’s (1996) main conclusion regarding this distinction:

Whenever heeding someone’s semantic intentions would make the interpretation less interesting and the work less valuable, we should overrule them in favour of a superior

interpretation that is compatible with the textual and contextual data . . . Levinson's strictures would have us rule out the novelist's inferior semantic intentions while retaining our crucial knowledge of his larger categorial aims. (Livingston 2005, p. 158-159)

If Livingston's rendering here is accurate, and I think it is, Levinson (1996) seems right that categorial intention-based interpretations often prove more valuable than semantic intention-based interpretations, *if* the interpretive goal is an interpretation that is *more interesting* and *more valuable*. But as I argued earlier, this is not the interpretive goal of interest to those of us merely trying to determine what a work means. However, I do not think that the general hypothetical intentionalist position is defeated. I argue that when the interpretive goal is to understand correctly the meanings that an author intended *via* an artwork, one should keep the epistemic condition and do away with the artistic value condition to form good hypotheses about authorial intentions. Figuring out the degree to which different types of evidence about authorial intentions should influence the formulation of best hypotheses would be a difficult project, and I will not focus on it here. But I contend that direct authorial reports regarding authorial intentions ought to be heavily weighted, though they should not be completely determinate of authorial intentions in that analysis. As Carroll (2000) argues, hypothetical intentionalism is designed to track plausible *actual* intentions and not plausible *possible* intentions. The best way to uncover an author's actual intentions is to seek out what an author says his or her intentions are. If I want to figure out what a person intended to mean by tokening an utterance, I ask the person. Of course, this is not a foolproof strategy as the person might answer with a lie or the person might have forgotten what her intentions were originally. If the author's direct testimony is incompatible with her utterance or if I have some other reason to believe that the author's direct testimony falsely describes her actual intentions, *then* I might weigh more heavily contextual



evidence to form the best hypothesis about the author's intentions. In situations like this, contextual evidence would appropriately "trump" direct authorial testimony in the formulation of my hypotheses.

Another plausible option for the intentionalist trying to avoid the absolute intentionalist dilemma is *partial actual intentionalism*. The partial intentionalist claim is purposefully vague: actual authorial intentions are "a key determinant" (Livingston 2005, p. 150) of the meaning of an artwork but are by no means exhaustive of meaning. When trying to uncover authorial intentions, the partial intentionalist takes into account mostly the same evidence that the hypothetical intentionalist considers, except the former sees direct authorial testimony about intentions as highly relevant while the latter does not.

One of the advantages of this position and the hypothetical position over an anti-intentionalist line of thought is that both are able to account for *implicit* meaning (Livingston 2005). The anti-intentionalist has no way to account for situations where "the speaker or writer says that *p* in order to express *not-p*" (Livingston 2005, p. 149).<sup>13</sup> Situations like this occur quite often in film. One recurring example usually takes the form of a villain's justification for morally abominable actions. The authors of these sorts of situations usually do not intend actually to justify the villain's immorality.

The partial intentionalist position is advanced *via* two main arguments. The first argument, advanced by Carroll (1992) and Iseminger (1996), is usually referred to as the *conversational argument* for partial intentionalism:

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<sup>13</sup> Carroll (2000) notes that ascriptions of authorial intentions should be compatible with the text or with the artwork. For example, we would not want to interpret "The grass is green" as "The computer is heavy" just because the author says that he or she intended "The grass is green" to mean "The computer is heavy." However, it seems that we do want to appeal to authorial intentions to justify our interpretation of implicit or ironic meanings; so, there is a problem here about when we are justified in interpreting an utterance in a way that is incompatible or contradictory with purely textual evidence. I do not aim to solve such a problem here.

1. Whatever your theory of linguistic meaning may be, it is correct to assume that one key goal in conversational exchanges is that the speaker's words be interpreted along the intended lines, and this is through the recognition of the speaker's intentions.

2. The interpretation of art falls within the framework of conversation.

Therefore,

3. The meaning of a work of art is partially determined by the speaker's intended meaning. (Livingston 2005, p. 151)

This approach fails for a variety of fairly straightforward reasons. Audiences cannot literally converse with deceased authors (Livingston 2005). Deceased authors of dated works probably did not intend their works as conversations with contemporary audiences (Livingston 2005). Deceased artists probably did intend their artworks to be viewed and interpreted by future generations, but they could not have intended to converse with these future audiences in any literal sense. We have no conversational interests in interpreting artworks by deceased authors with whom we cannot literally converse. In fact, Levinson (2007) argues that the conversational argument will not even work regarding living authors:

First, the parties are not mutually present . . . Second, engagement is primarily with the artwork . . . rather than primarily with a person . . . Third, there is no scope for back-and-forth exchanges. . . Fourth, there is a glaring asymmetry in role, the artist in effect proposing or offering and the audience in effect disposing or receiving, and fifth, unlike literal conversation, artistic activity does not always have the goal of communication . . . [and] it is accordingly unreasonable to think that the interpretive norms of real conversation are robustly in place when it comes to our interaction with the products of art. (p. 304)

Since this approach seems clearly to fail, Livingston (2005) puts forward an *axiological argument* for partial intentionalism. In this argument, intentions are a key determinant of meaning because

on many occasions, what we are after is an understanding of the work that focuses on the author's intentional activities and accomplishments, and the success of such interpretive

projects requires uptake of both successful and unsuccessful intentions, and of their relation to the utterance's meaning. (Livingston 2005, p. 152)

Intentions are a key determinant of meaning when one's goal or the object of one's value is an interpretation that accurately reflects authorial intentions.

Hypothetical intentionalism and partial intentionalism are the two most plausible types of intentionalist claims. The debate between the two continues to rage (Carroll 2000; Hirsch 1992; Iseminger 1996; Levinson 1996, 2007; Livingston 2005; Tolhurst 1979)<sup>14</sup> and I do not mean to fully resolve it here. In what follows, I will simply adopt a hypothetical intentionalist claim, though one that is importantly modified from Levinson's (1996) view which tends inappropriately to disvalue direct authorial testimony regarding intentions in favor of other contextual factors. This modified claim is not incompatible with partial intentionalism but is much less vague. Thus, my *modified hypothetical intentionalist* view is the claim that the interpretation of a work's meaning is determined by the best hypothesis about an author's intentions, where the best hypothesis is the one that is most likely to be correct given all available evidence about authorial intentions, including importantly an author's direct testimony (e.g., in the form of a personal notebook, diary, correspondence, etc.).

The main reason I adopt such a view is that it more precisely reflects what we as interpreters actually do (Levinson 1996) when we interpret artworks on the basis of authorial intentions, while still recognizing epistemological worries about authorial intentions and the fact that authorial intentions are imperfectly realized in works. When we interpret works, we gather as much evidence about the production of an artwork as possible, including evidence about artistic, historical and cultural contexts, and we form a hypothesis about what the author's

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<sup>14</sup> Levinson is the primary contemporary defender of hypothetical intentionalism and he credits his view as being inspired by Tolhurst. The others mentioned should be categorized as partial actual intentionalists.

intentions probably were. This approach is especially useful when trying to determine the authorial intentions behind old, even ancient works. There is not much evidence about what Aeschylus' intentions were regarding his production of the *Oresteia*, but it is still a common task in classical studies to interpret his works on the basis of the best hypothesis about his authorial intentions, where this hypothesis is appropriately formed on the basis of information we do have about him, his other works and the artistic, historical, and cultural contexts in which he was writing. And, we can always change our hypotheses and our interpretations in light of more evidence that becomes available.

In the end, it does not matter much which view one accepts as long as one understands the importance of actual authorial intentions in interpretation. The distinction between hypothetical intentionalism and partial actual intentionalism seems minor on further analysis. As Carroll (2000) argues, both views are designed to seek out actual authorial intentions in order to interpret artworks successfully:

The interpretive considerations that the hypothetical intentionalist recommends are roughly the same as those the modest actual intentionalist recommends: attention to the text, to the author's *oeuvre*, to the culture context, to the author's publicly available biography, and so on.

Why are these the desiderata that the modest actual intentionalist emphasizes? Because they are the sorts of things that provide reliable indication of the author's actual intentions . . . Thus, the very methodology of hypothetical intentionalism seems predicated upon tracking actual authorial intention. Indeed, why else would it select precisely the desiderata it does?

. . . As already observed, the desiderata the hypothetical intentionalist respects are all designed to deliver our best approximation of the author's actual intention. Thus, if we establish the author's intention by means unavailable to the hypothetical intentionalist – perhaps through the discovery of the author's notebook – isn't that the result that we should care about? Otherwise, we appear to be fetishizing our method over what the method is designed to secure.

I submit that we respect the interpretive protocols the hypothetical intentionalist cherishes because they are reliable indicators of actual intentions. The hypothetical intentionalist provides no other reasons for our acceptance of just the sorts of information he emphasizes. It is true that the hypothetical intentionalist's protocols yield hypotheses

about authorial intentions, but they are plausible hypotheses about actual intentions, not hypotheses about plausible possible intentions. (Carroll 2000, p. 83)

The only difference between the two views is that the hypothetical intentionalist rules out, or at least disvalues, direct authorial testimony as evidence to support their hypotheses, while the partial actual intentionalist includes direct authorial testimony as evidence. What is important is that both views recognize that the most reliable indicator about an author's actual intentions should partially constrain our interpretation of work meaning, and consequently our attributions of authorship, regardless of which method we use.

### CHAPTER 3

#### WHY MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR CONFLICTING INTENTIONS

Now that we have seen, in Chapter 1, that the single authorship view will not suffice as a global description of serially manufactured films, and now, in Chapter 2, that I have defended the usefulness of considering authorial intentions in the interpretation of work meaning and we have settled on the two most defensible accounts of intentionalism, we can now return to the case of film. Our goal here will be to establish that in cases of filmic utterances that result from conflicting intentions, the single authorship view should be reinstated, i.e. we should not attribute multiple authorship to utterances that were not intended by their purported “collaborative” authors to communicate the same meaning, express the same attitude, or make manifest the same artistic property.

Consider *Do the Right Thing* (1989) written, directed, and co-produced by Spike Lee, who also stars as the protagonist Mookie (or as the antagonist, depending upon whether Mookie does in fact do the right thing). Mookie works at an Italian pizzeria in the largely African-American neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. The owner of this pizzeria is Sal, played by Danny Aiello. On a blazingly hot day, a young African-American character named Buggin’ Out enters Sal’s pizzeria and complains to Sal about the Wall of Fame. On this wall in the pizzeria, there are pictures of famous Italian-American actors, athletes, and musicians; all the celebrities in the photos are white. Buggin’ Out is insulted and disturbed by the complete absence of famous African-Americans on the Wall of Fame, especially considering almost all of Sal’s customers are African-American. Buggin’ Out requests that Sal put some famous African-Americans on the wall, but Sal refuses, citing that the pizzeria is an Italian restaurant. Buggin’

Out proceeds to organize a boycott of Sal's, but nobody pays him much mind, since Sal's has been a valued fixture in the neighborhood for over 25 years. Eventually, another young African-American character Radio Raheem joins Buggin' Out's boycott. Radio Raheem has a habit of constantly playing Public Enemy's rap song *Fight the Power* at full volume on a boom box, annoying many of the residents in Bedford-Stuyvesant, including Sal. After being warned about playing the boom box in the pizzeria, Buggin' Out and Radio Raheem stage a sit-in at Sal's where Radio Raheem continues to blast loud rap music. Sal proceeds to destroy Radio Raheem's boom box in a fit of anger while uttering racial slurs, which causes a fight to erupt between Sal and Radio Raheem. The fight escalates into chaos. The police come and a policeman unjustifiably kills Radio Raheem. Mookie then incites a riot, which results in the destruction of Sal's pizzeria.

Despite Sal's discriminatory Wall of Fame policies and his occasional use of racial slurs, Sal is largely portrayed as a compassionate character, especially in contrast to his oldest son Pino. Pino is a blatant and unapologetic racist who insults African-American characters throughout the entire film. Sal clearly disapproves of his son's racist behavior, though he never explicitly chastises him for it. At one point, Pino tries to convince Sal to move the pizzeria to an Italian-American neighborhood, but Sal refuses, citing his fondness for the kids who have "grown up" on his pizza. Sal also likes Mookie, who "always has a place" at Sal's. Aiello plays Sal as a genuinely kind, likeable fellow for most of the film, but in the scenes where Sal feels slighted, he also plays Sal as viciously angry and hostile. Aiello is even able to play Sal as both furious and apologetic when Mookie confronts him in the final scene after Mookie incites the destruction of Sal's pizzeria and Radio Raheem has been murdered.

Consider the following insight, from a review of the film, as evidence of both Lee's and Aiello's intentions concerning the character of Sal:

St. Clair Bourne's documentary record of the location shoot, *Making Do the Right Thing* (1989), offers an intriguing glimpse into the way an actor can overwhelm an auteur. In a discussion about Sal's character, Lee declares flatly that he thinks Sal is a racist. Aiello disagrees – and on the screen if not in the screenplay his portrayal wins the argument. (Doherty 1989-1990, p. 38)

Gaut (1997) sees this as evidence for thinking that Sal's character was multiply authored:

Here again the multiple authorship version shows its superiority. *Do the Right Thing*, perhaps Spike Lee's finest film, has in Sal a character who is surprisingly sympathetic, despite his complicity in a racial tragedy culminating in a horrifying murder. Sal is an important element in the film's richness and complexity, and some have hailed him as marking the subtlety of character creation of which Lee is capable. (p. 165-166)

Gaut (1997) and Sellors (2007) attribute Sal's "subtlety," "richness" and "complexity" to his having been multiply authored by both Lee and Aiello. And crucially, Lee's and Aiello's conflicting intentions are used as evidence for this claim.

Here is how the argument seems to go: According to Sellors' (2007) objection to Livingston's (1997) analysis of the case of KK, there are multiple "planes of authorship" (Sellors 2007, p. 267), which is basically a way of saying that there are many utterances in a film (besides the completed film itself) that can be ascribed authors. The particular utterance of concern here is the character Sal.<sup>15</sup> Lee, by writing and filming Sal's character the way he does, intends for Sal to be interpreted as a racist. Aiello, by acting Sal's character the way he does, intends for Sal not to be interpreted as a racist. So on the view advanced by Gaut (1997) and Sellors (2007), the interpretation must be that Sal is both racist and not racist; in spite of its being a contradiction, this interpretation is justified because Lee intended Sal to be racist and Aiello intended Sal not to

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<sup>15</sup> On Grice's analysis of *utterance*, which I accept, Lee *means* something (that Sal is a racist character perhaps) by writing and filming Sal the way he does (the utterance) if and only if Lee intends American adults to interpret Sal as a racist on the basis of thinking that Lee intended Sal to be racist.



be racist. Gaut (1997) and Sellors (2007) want to view Sal as being multiply authored by both Lee and Aiello because of Lee's and Aiello's contradictory intentions. That is to say: Lee and Aiello had contradictory intentions about what they wanted Sal to be like; Sal is a contradictory character; and Sal, as an utterance, is authored by *both* Lee and Aiello.

I argue that this argumentative strategy does not work. The character Sal is not authored by *both* Lee and Aiello, because Sal has one characteristic one of those two did not intend (Lee did not intend Sal to be nonracist) and another characteristic the other did not intend (Aiello did not intend Sal to be racist). Nor did either of them intend Sal to be *a contradiction*. Therefore, Sal was not multiply authored by Lee and Aiello. Here is a general formulation of the argumentative strategy to which I take Gaut and Sellors to be committed:

1. A filmic author(s) is (are) the agent or agents who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance, where 'to token' refers to any action, an intended function of which is to make manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an apparently moving image projected on a screen or other surface and a filmic utterance is the result of the act of tokening in this medium. (Sellors 2007, p. 266)

2. Utterer *A* intends to communicate meaning '*a*' by intentionally tokening utterance *u*.

3. Utterer *B* intends to communicate meaning '*not a*' by intentionally tokening utterance *u*.

Therefore,

4. Both *A* and *B* intend to communicate meaning '*both a and not a*' by intentionally tokening utterance *u*.

Therefore,

5. Both *A* and *B* are authors of contradictory utterance *u*.

Premises (2) and (3) are incompatible in light of Grice's (1969) analysis of utterance adopted in Chapter 2. According to that analysis, an utterance is an act that is intended to communicate a certain meaning; so *u* cannot communicate '*both a and not a*' unless both utterers *A* and *B*

intended  $u$  to do so. Not only is it the case that neither  $A$  nor  $B$  intended to communicate ‘both  $a$  and *not*  $a$ ’, but also, neither  $A$  nor  $B$  tokened utterance  $u$  at all according to the definition of an utterance.

There are three ways of objecting to my evaluation of the argument that I attribute to Gaut and Sellors. The first method is to dispute the hypotheses about Lee’s and Aiello’s intentions. Thus, perhaps my hypotheses are not the best ones because they rest on shaky epistemic grounds; after all, in the above review, Lee and Aiello are merely answering one interview question. I am forced to concede to this objection in virtue of my having accepted the hypothetical intentionalist view of intentionalist interpretation. If evidence from Lee or Aiello, or evidence about artistic, historical, or cultural contexts, justifies different hypotheses about Lee’s or Aiello’s authorial intentions, then multiple authorship might obtain. Also, my hypotheses about Lee’s and Aiello’s intentions may indeed be epistemically unjustified, but that is not the main issue at hand. The main issue is about whether *Sal* would be multiply authored by both Lee and Aiello *if* Lee’s and Aiello’s intentions contradicted each other. If their intentions conflicted – and there is some anecdotal evidence for thinking that they did – then they could not serve as multiple authors of an utterance that communicates a contradiction! The more general formulation offered still reflects a problem even if the particular cinematic example is inappropriate: if one person intends  $x$  to mean that  $p$  and another person intends  $x$  to mean that *not*  $p$ , neither of them should be interpreted as communicating a contradiction because neither of them *intended* to communicate a contradiction. And, if neither of them intended to communicate a contradiction, then neither of them authors the utterance that supposedly communicates that contradiction on the intentionalist analysis of authorship offered here. We do not want to say that a person is an author of something that they did not intend to author.

The second way of objecting to my evaluation of the conflicting intention argument for multiple authorship is to argue that there is a negative implication of my evaluation, namely that it precludes viewers from interpreting Sal as a contradictory character. The objection that my evaluation would preclude viewers from interpreting Sal as a contradictory character fails because we do not want to understand Sal as a contradictory character in the first place, i.e. as ‘racist and non-racist.’ On my view, Sal is ‘racist *qua* written character’ and ‘not-racist *qua* acted character’; and this formulation has an additional virtue in that it forms the basis of an account of the concept of ‘complexity’ as applied to literary or filmic characters that does not generate logical contradictions.<sup>16</sup> Not only do we want to avoid attributing contradictions to authors that did not intend to communicate them; ideally, we do not want to embrace interpretive theories that generate contradictions at all. The need to avoid contradictions should not preclude art lovers from viewing utterances as complex. *Complex* and *contradictory* are not synonymous. We need to view complex utterances like the character Sal as consisting of various parts or layers instead of viewing Sal as a single, unified, monolithic utterance. Sal is written a certain way and Sal is acted a certain way and these are two separate utterances that result from two contradictory intentions of two different people, and that is why we interpret Sal as a complex character. Sal has many parts.

Ultimately, we just need to reinstate the single authorship view in cases like this. It is not the case that Sal is a single, monolithic character who is racist and not racist by virtue of his embodying Aiello’s and Lee’s contradictory intentions. Aiello is the author of Sal as an acted character who is not racist and Lee is the author of Sal as a written character who is racist. These are two separate utterances that are authored by two separate people. We can preserve the

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<sup>16</sup> Jessica Berry helped tremendously with drawing out these implications.

complexity of Sal while avoiding (1) attributing authorship of utterances to people that did not intend to author those utterances and (2) interpreting contradictions by adopting the following approach:

1. A filmic author(s) is (are) the agent or agents who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance, where 'to token' refers to any action, an intended function of which is to make manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an apparently moving image projected on a screen or other surface and a filmic utterance is the result of the act of tokening in this medium. (Sellors 2007, p. 266)
2. Utterer *A* intends to communicate meaning '*a*' by intentionally tokening utterance *p*.
3. Utterer *B* intends to communicate meaning '*not a*' by intentionally tokening utterance *q*.

Therefore,

4. Utterer *A* authors utterance *p* and utterer *B* authors utterance *q*.

Sal as a single utterance expressing 'both *a* and *not a*' does not exist as an object of interpretation. Instead, two separate, singly authored utterances expressing conflicting meanings are the objects of interpretation. The issue then concerns how utterances *p* and *q* should be characterized. I argue that descriptions of *p* and *q* should appropriately reflect how the utterances were tokened by their respective authors fulfilling their respective roles. Utterance *p* might be described as 'Sal as written in the screenplay by Lee' and utterance *q* might be described as 'Sal as acted by Aiello.' Essentially, we see Sal as two separate utterances authored by Lee and Aiello individually.

The third objection to my evaluation of the conflicting intention argument for multiple authorship is that Lee and Aiello almost certainly share at least some intentions, perhaps even some about Sal himself; therefore, the multiple authorship view may still be appropriate despite Lee and Aiello's disagreement. Consider the probable case that Lee and Aiello share some

intentions about the way Sal should be portrayed. This case does point out a flaw with the way I originally described the utterance in question, since it suggests that some aspects of Sal are multiply authored and some aspects of Sal are singly authored. For instance, Lee and Aiello probably do share the intention of portraying Sal with a frank, opinionated, and sometimes rude Brooklyn-style personality. If so, then it seems as though Lee and Aiello multiply author the utterance of ‘Sal as Brooklynite’. But this says nothing about the authorship of ‘Sal as racist’ and ‘Sal as nonracist’.

The more difficult case for my reinstatement of the single authorship view is that Lee and Aiello probably share intentions about utterances that are broader in scope than but still “entail” ‘Sal as racist’ and ‘Sal as nonracist.’ For example, both Lee and Aiello intend to produce a certain type of mainstream feature film about racial relations in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The argument then proceeds in the following fashion. The completed film-as-utterance “entails” the character of Sal-as-utterance. The completed film-as-utterance is multiply authored; therefore, Sal is multiply authored. One way to respond to this is to deny that *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is a single filmic utterance. Perhaps it is an amalgamation of singly authored and multiply authored filmic utterances. However, I do not think that this is a useful strategy, because it forces us to take the position that almost no films exist as single filmic utterances; we would be left in a position where we could no longer talk of *Citizen Kane* (1941) or *The Graduate* (1967) as a single entity. It is unrealistic to expect that all the multifarious parties involved in the production of a film share all the same intentions. Thus, the best way to respond to this objection is to challenge the notion of “entailment” employed in one of the premises. I argue that the intention to produce a certain type of completed film is like agreeing to follow a certain set of rules. Two honest attorneys arguing different sides of a case intend to bring about justice by following

certain rules of civil procedure, but this intention certainly does not entail that the two attorneys intend to make the same legal arguments. The two arguments conflict with each other in their specific intents and are therefore singly authored, but the attorneys via their singly authored arguments still intend to bring about justice by following rules of civil procedure. Here I think Levinson's (1996) distinction between categorial and semantic intentions is quite useful. Two or more authors can multiply author a film, despite their singly authoring utterances tokened on the basis of semantic intentions, as long as their categorial intentions are the same, i.e. as long as they are in agreement about what they have "produced and what it [the film] is for, on a rather basic level; they [categorial intentions] govern not what a work is to mean but how it is to be fundamentally conceived or approached" (Levinson 1996, p. 188). So, Lee and Aiello can multiply author *Do the Right Thing* (1989) as a certain type of film in virtue of sharing categorial intentions, while they singly author different aspects of Sal's character as separate filmic utterances in virtue of having conflicting semantic intentions.

Of course, not all cases of authorship are like the one illustrated by Sal. Sometimes collaborative authors share roughly the same intention about what they want an utterance to mean. This does not present a problem as long as the result is not a contradiction. We could easily imagine an interview where both Lee and Aiello say that they intend Sal to be both racist and non-racist. If two authors share the intention to communicate a contradiction via a single utterance, then the problem is theirs. On a more precise analysis of the authorial tasks that Lee and Aiello might perform in this imagined scenario, the contradiction can be dissolved:

1. Lee intends to communicate that 'Sal is a racist' by giving Sal lines that include racial slurs in the screenplay.
2. Aiello intends to communicate that 'Sal is a racist' by uttering racial slurs while acting in front of the camera.

3. Lee intends to communicate that ‘Sal is not a racist’ by having Sal chastise his blatantly racist son Pino in the screenplay.

4. Aiello intends to communicate that ‘Sal is not a racist’ by chastising Pino while acting in front of the camera.

There are no contradictions here in intending utterance *p* to mean *a* and intending utterance *q* to mean *not a*. Contradictions arise when an author(s) intends utterance *p* to mean ‘both *a* and *not a*’. Whether the single or multiple authorship view applies to these scenarios depends upon the utterance with which we are concerned or the “plane of authorship” of interest. Lee is not the author of Aiello’s acting and Aiello is not the author of Lee’s screenplay; so, if Lee’s screenplay is the utterance of interest, then Lee is the only author of his screenplay. However, both Lee and Aiello in this imagined scenario would be multiple authors of a more broadly described filmic utterance. For instance, both Lee and Aiello might intend to communicate that ‘Sal is a racist’ by producing utterance ‘scene *x*’ in which Sal utters racial slurs. In this situation, both Lee and Aiello have the intention to communicate the same meaning via the same utterance; therefore, Lee and Aiello would both author this utterance.

## CONCLUSION

Recently, some philosophers (Carroll 1992, 2000; Hirsch 1992; Iseminger 1996; Levinson 1996, 2007; Livingston 1997, 2005; Sellors 2007; Tolhurst 1979) have come out in favor of the basic intentionalist claim about interpretation that authorial intentions should constrain our interpretations of artwork meaning. Livingston (1997, 2005) and Sellors (2007) then argue that our definition of *filmic author* should cohere with this basic intentionalist claim:

Filmic author (IM) = (def) the agent or agents who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance, where ‘to token’ refers to any action, an intended function of which is to make manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an apparently moving image projected on a screen or other surface and a filmic utterance is the result of the act of tokening in this medium. (Sellors 2007, p. 266)

If this definition is good, and I believe that it is, then more than one person can author the same filmic utterance as long as they intend the utterance to communicate, express, or make manifest the same meaning, attitude, or artistic property.

Sometimes, however, two purported collaborative authors have contradictory intentions about what they want a filmic utterance to accomplish. In the example of *Do the Right Thing*, writer/director/co-producer Spike Lee intends the character Sal to be racist while actor Danny Aiello, who plays Sal, intends Sal to be non-racist. Gaut (1997) and Sellors (2007) believe that the single authorship view cannot account for situations like this. According to Gaut and Sellors, the multiple authorship view does a better job at explaining how the authorship of such an utterance works, i.e. Lee intends Sal to be racist and Aiello intends Sal to be non-racist therefore both Lee and Aiello author Sal as a racist and non-racist character. They argue that attributing “racist and non-racist Sal” solely to Lee as director is not “a historically responsive position” (Sellors 2007, p. 268). They are right about this fact, but neither is the multiple authorship explanation *historically responsive*, for Lee did not intend Sal to be non-racist and Aiello did not



intend Sal to be racist. Ultimately, Gaut and Sellors neglect the different “planes of authorship” in Sal and do not realize the versatility of the single authorship position. The single authorship view should be used to describe different aspects of Sal as separate filmic utterances with their individual authors. There is the racist Sal as written by Lee and there is the non-racist Sal as acted by Aiello. Lee is the only author of Sal *qua* written character and Aiello is the only author of Sal *qua* acted character. Using the single authorship approach in this way is more historically responsive, avoids interpretations as logical contradictions, and helps us account for why we view Sal as a complex character with multiple parts that are singly authored.

In Chapter 1, I presented Gaut’s (1997) cogent objections to using the single authorship view to describe serially manufactured films, and his objections also apply to any serially manufactured filmic utterances. Gaut is mostly concerned with objecting to the notion that a single person can sufficiently control the multitude of processes that result in the production of a completed film, because in order for a single person to do so, they must be some sort of omniscient, multi-tentacled octopus that controls musical compositions, costume creations, and actor agency. Such a being could not be a person at all and we would not be able to investigate the psychology of such a being. Ultimately, I present Gaut’s objections to prevent us from attributing utterances like Sal solely to Lee, for doing so would prevent us from acknowledging Aiello’s agency as an actor. Gaut’s objections help us acknowledge that there are authors on film production teams other than just the director.

At the end of Chapter 1 and the beginning of Chapter 2, I follow Sellors (2007) in objecting to Livingston’s (1997) examples of authorless films – the case of KK and the case of Big John – to demonstrate that there are multiple “planes of authorship” within films and to demonstrate, along with Sellors’ (2007) monkey example, that intentions should constrain

interpretation and consequently attributions of authorship. In addition, I needed to explain why intentions constrain attributions of authorship in order to accept the definition of *filmic author* that I do.

My main goal in Chapter 2 was to get clearer on how and to what extent intentions are relevant to our interpretations and attributions of authorship. I accepted a functionalist account of intentions (Mele 1992) and Grice's (1957, 1969) analysis of how utterances are intended to communicate non-natural meanings. I then showed that absolute intentionalism does not appropriately describe the relationship between authorial intentions and interpretations of work meaning; nor do the two most plausible alternatives – hypothetical intentionalism (Levinson 1996, 2007) and partial actual intentionalism (Carroll 1992, 2000; Iseminger 1996; Livingston 2005). Sidestepping the ongoing debate over which of these latter two positions is better, I adopted a version of the hypothetical approach, modified to include all evidence about intentions (including direct authorial testimony), for it more precisely describes what our interpretive practices are actually like. For my overall project, I needed to argue only that our interpretations of work meaning should partially reflect authorial intentions and consequently that our attributions of authorship should also conform to intentionalist considerations.

In Chapter 3, I presented my main argument that the single authorship view should be reinstated to describe utterances that, at first glance, seem to be the product of contradictory intentions. As we saw, attempting to describe the authorship of these sorts of utterances using the multiple authorship view had two negative implications. First, it had us interpreting utterances as communicating meanings that they were not intended to convey, and consequently we ended up designating people as authors wrongly because these people did not intend to convey the meanings that we interpreted. Using the example of Sal, we wrongly interpret a

contradiction that was not intended and we wrongly attribute authorship of this contradiction to both Lee and Aiello when they did not intend to communicate this contradiction. Second, it had us generating interpretations that are logical contradictions. We do not want to interpret Sal as a single, monolithic utterance that is both racist and non-racist at the same time. Instead, we should acknowledge that there are multiple ‘planes of authorship’ within Sal. There is the utterance of Sal as written by Lee and there is the utterance of Sal as acted by Aiello. As a result of this acknowledgement, we then should reinstate the single authorship view to describe these multiple ‘planes of authorship’. The racist Sal written by Lee is only authored by Lee (and not Aiello). The non-racist Sal acted by Aiello is only authored by Aiello (and not Lee). This forms the basis of an account for the complexity of utterances while avoiding interpretations in the form of contradictions.

Ultimately, I argue that sometimes the single authorship view is the best way to describe the authorship of a filmic utterance and sometimes the multiple authorship view is the most appropriate. Some might object that this result is inelegant or unnecessarily complex and that we should accept one imperfect theory as opposed to accepting two theories that cover all the cases. I agree that we should adopt a single theory over multiple theories *if* the single theory sufficiently explains all the cases, but as we have seen, neither the single authorship view nor the multiple authorship view sufficiently describes the authorship of all filmic utterances. One person cannot sufficiently control the agency of her collaborators, but surely one person does control one’s own agency. When considering those filmic utterances in which only one person is involved in their production, the single authorship view is fitting. Sometimes two or more people share the same intention about what they want an utterance to communicate, express, or make manifest. In those cases, the multiple authorship view is appropriate for we want to acknowledge genuine

collaboration. When we want to determine who authors a filmic utterance of interest, we check to see who was involved in the production of the utterance and then we figure out who intended to communicate, express, or make manifest the meaning, attitude, or property that is of interest to us. If only one person was involved in the production of the utterance and that person intended to communicate the meaning that we interpreted, then only that person is the author of the utterance. The multiple authorship view cannot account for this type of situation. If two or more persons were involved in the production and they all intended to communicate the meaning that we interpreted, then multiple people authored the utterance. The single authorship view might be able to account for this type of situation as long as we avoid positing Gaut's octopus and resort to describing many individual instances of single authorship. But, this approach *does* seem unnecessarily complex<sup>17</sup> and it is counterintuitive to the idea that genuine collaboration does seem to occur quite often. Then, there are the cases in which people attribute the authorship of an utterance to multiple people that did not or could not have intended to communicate the meaning that we interpret. In those special cases, we need to look for more fine-grained planes of authorship and use the single authorship view.

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<sup>17</sup> Following Searle (1991), Sellors (2007) argues that "if we intend to perform a symphony, I will act to bring about the group intention *by means of* playing my part. My *individual intention* to play my part is an unnecessary intention because my action is already accounted for under the we-intention" (p. 268).

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