Collective Authorship in Film

Authorship is a problem in film studies that simply will not go away. Despite all sorts of arguments reducing authors to abstract entities such as author-functions, fictional surrogates, and implied authors, and eventually abandoning them under the mantra of “the death of the author,” we have not been able in our critical and historical discourses to shrug off talking about films as if they are the products of real individuals. In this article I explain why I feel that we are right to continue to do so.

Arguments eschewing empirical authors share an anti-intentionalist core that locates meaning at the point of reception. Despite a reasonable level of coherency to these views, they nevertheless cannot satisfy various practical objections. When engaging a text, we aim to understand what someone intended to convey by producing that text in the way that they did and not simply what the text means, either textually or intertextually. There is a fundamental issue of accountability. For instance, I am led to believe that Hitler’s Mein Kampf forwards an anti-Semitic and confrontational thesis. Is this offensive thesis the product of the act of reading or the intention of its author? The former view indemnifies the man behind the text, whereas the latter holds him responsible for the views expressed. Similarly, because the politics of Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934) are troubling, understanding Riefenstahl’s intentions in making the film has motivated historical and critical interest. Neither the death of the author nor any author-surrogate theories will allow us to consider Riefenstahl’s accountability because meaning on these views rests with the reader and is disconnected from her intentions. Others complain that poststructural authorship theories abandoned authors just as they became politically necessary. How can one assert any sort of identity, be this racial, sexual, gendered, political, cultural, or even personal, when it is argued that meaning is to be found between language (or cultural representation in general) and reception?

As many current theories of authorship in film studies stand, they confuse authorship with the marks of authorship identifiable in a text, conflate purpose with meaning, and obscure the analysis of authorship with secondary issues such as aesthetic value, ideology, politics, agency, and interpretation. Certainly these secondary issues are all of primary importance in understanding the way that authorship functions in cultural and aesthetic production, but they are nevertheless secondary theoretical issues that must be sectioned off if we are to understand what it means to be an author. Only by first understanding what authorship is can we then proceed to investigate issues such as artistic authorship or the way that authorship fits within a wider sociocultural framework. Recently, our perspective on authorship has been backward. Authorship is not a concept to be derived from a text but an intentional action of an intending agent that causes a text. The view of authorship I offer here endorses real individuals communicating ideas intentionally and applies not only to the arts, such as literature, film, music, and painting, but everyday events, such as conversation. Looking at authorship across various media allows me to identify general components of authorship and communication without the complications that film introduces. I focus on film in the second half of this article to highlight the problem of collective authorship that, although not foreign to literary authorship, is generally not as common. The properties of a medium will not dictate whether it can have authors, only how authorship can function.
within it. *Identifying* the various practices of authorship in any film will then be a historical and critical exercise, rather than a theoretical one.

Poststructuralist arguments against authorship are not so much against the actions of individuals in producing a work but the presupposition of fidelity between meaning intended and meaning understood. The argument goes, roughly, that currents in language and other cultural representations are greater than the capacity for any given individual to comprehend fully and wield adequately. Thus, there are always an infinite number of possible interpretations available through the unique psychological and cultural matrices of each reader, regardless of the author’s intention. So far, we are on relatively secure grounds. The argument then proceeds: if we cannot know exactly what someone meant by producing a work in the way that he or she did, then there is no point in worrying about his or her authorship. From here it is only a small step to suggest that the textual matrix of reading vanquishes authorial control. We are ill advised to take these last two steps. At the point that we abandon authorship, we abandon concern for the intention behind the production. Without intention behind a work, we have no justification for interpreting it, as we have no distinction between the purposeful activity of text production and a chance occurrence of markings. I demonstrate why shortly.

There is really nothing troublesome in stating that language involves a rich web of internal references and meanings and that the use of language relies on control of the semantic richness of one’s own utterances. The latter point does not imply that an act of uttering rigidly constrains meaning. Productive misunderstandings are a clear example of this. However, regardless of the authority an individual may have on his or her chosen subject, he or she is nevertheless the author of his or her expressions and responsible for them both morally and semantically, not just because of what these statements mean, but because they are the product of an intentional action. Because meanings are expressed intentionally, the utterer conveys certain attitudes that he or she holds. It does not matter whether we are referring to conversation, writing, or film making. The salient issue is the relationship between a human agent and his or her capacity to express, in whatever form, attitudes and meanings. Such a broadly cast and basic conception of authorship may seem to some to miss the point. Although it may be generally acceptable that a person is the author of his or her utterances, some may believe that conversation differs fundamentally from authoring novels and films; however, if we accept the view that novels and films can convey meanings, and to convey a meaning is to communicate, then it seems that the difference between conversing, writing a novel, and making a film is the complexity of the authorial act and not authorship itself.

To defend this view, I need to put forward a definition of what being an author entails. Fortunately, Paisley Livingston has already offered a useful platform from which to start. In his essay “Cinematic Authorship,” he outlines the following generic definition:

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\text{author} = (\text{def}) \text{ the agent (or agents) who intentionally make(s) an utterance, where ‘utterance’ refers to any action, an intended function of which is expression or communication.} \]

This definition, as Livingston recognizes, meshes with commonplace views about the utterer’s role in communication. Agents are defined as being able to act, and this action must be motivated by the agent’s meaningful attitudes. Moreover, by referring to ‘utterance’ rather than ‘statement,’ Livingston does not attach his definition to language. Any instance of what Paul Grice calls non-natural meaning, or roughly the intentional use of a sign to convey a meaning, will fit this definition. Finally, Livingston develops this definition as he does because he believes that it will result in a common-sense analysis that splits the difference between the views that (1) films are not authored and (2) an author can be anyone who plays any causal role in producing a given film’s properties. I argue below that the consequences of his definition do not result in precisely the notion of authorship he has in mind. Before addressing this concern, it is worth considering his use of the terms ‘utterance’ and ‘to make.’

An utterance is not the action of intentionally expressing or communicating, as Livingston seems to suggest, but the result of doing so. It is the verb ‘to utter’ that identifies the action and implies the production of an utterance. Accordingly, the definition can be shortened to the following:
author = (def) the agent (or agents) who intentionally utters, where ‘to utter’ refers to any action, an intended function of which is expression or communication.

Although a perfectly good definition, it focuses on the action, making the utterance implicit in the definition. It is important to keep the concept of the utterance central, as the key to analyzing filmic authorship (or generic authorship) will rely on identifying what constitutes a filmic utterance (or a generic utterance). This problem is not a shortcoming of Livingston’s original definition, but of my redefinition. Fortunately, there are other ways to modify his definition to achieve the desired goal. We can reinstate the term ‘utterance’ and look instead for a more appropriate verb.

Livingston’s verb choice, ‘to make,’ is useful, as it identifies a broad range of action. It implies that we need not limit our theory of authorship to speech or literature. At the same time, it seems excessively wide in its scope. ‘To make’ can apply to an infinite number of actions, many of which will not be related to authorship. This is not necessarily a problem, as the notion of “producing an utterance” constrains the verb; however, more precise verbs are available. I instead opt for the verb ‘to token,’ as it more clearly implies symbolic systems. We can now modify Livingston’s definition as follows:

author = the agent (or agents) who intentionally token(s) an utterance, where ‘to token’ refers to any action, an intended function of which is expression or communication and an utterance is the result of the act of tokening within a symbolic system.

This definition, Livingston’s original definition, and the first redefinition all possess a problem, however, as each eliminates a range of activity that is commonly held to be authorship. At the most basic level, authors need not act intentionally or aim to communicate; they simply need to be acting agents, where the agent is the cause of a resultant effect. It is certainly reasonable to state that I am the author of my own demise if I grab a live electrical wire, forgetting that I had not yet turned off the mains supply at the breaker. Even though I may have communicated my absentmindedness, it was not my intention to do so. Nevertheless, we have an action (cause) and a meaningful result (effect), even though neither the action nor the result was intended. Let us call this “author (M)” to indicate that we have both an author, in the most basic sense of causal action, and an action that can be interpreted.

There is good reason that this most basic level of authorship is not sufficient for a definition of what it is to author things such as films, novels, plays, pieces of music, and so forth. For instance, a monkey in a laboratory randomly presses keys on a computer keyboard and produces something indiscernible from Shakespeare’s Henry V—highly improbable, but possible nevertheless. Is the monkey an author? Under “author (M)” it seems to be. There is an action and an effect that are interpretable. Does it fit the definitions for “author” and “author”? One is inclined at first to say “no,” as the monkey did not intend Henry V. On reflection this does not seem entirely correct. First, it can very easily be argued that the monkey was acting intentionally. Typing away at the computer, it intended to please the scientists to persuade them out of a banana. This fits Livingston’s analysis of communication. “Communication differs from simple expression in that the agent not only intends to make an attitude manifest, but tries to get this attitude, as well as the relevant intentions, recognized by some audience in the right sort of way.” There is, however, a distinction between the intention behind an action and the intention to token a meaningful utterance. It is reasonable to say that the monkey is the author of the utterance “I want a banana,” but not of Henry V. The reason for this is that even though the monkey’s Henry V can be meaningfully read and is indiscernible from Shakespeare’s play, the monkey intended nothing through this specific text tokening. Mere gibberish would have sufficed as far as the monkey was concerned. Furthermore, if it becomes known that a monkey really produced the copy of Henry V on your bookshelf, then the meaning of that object changes. No longer is it a play about a king, nor is it even a play, as the monkey does not possess our concepts of “king” or “play” to communicate. The monkey’s Henry V is instead a curiosity. Even though each of the editions of Henry V appears to be identical, each means different things because they are intended differently. We are justified to read and interpret Shakespeare’s play because we assume that he intended communicating something in text tokening it as he did. With no intention behind the monkey’s Henry V (as opposed
to the act of typing), there is no justification to read it conventionally for its concepts and meaning, as the monkey cannot communicate at that level.

Distinguishing the monkey’s “I want a banana” from Shakespeare’s Henry V is a question of value, not classification. One is reasonably identified as a work of art, whereas the other is merely an intentional communication of a want. Both are nevertheless intentionally tokened utterances. I shall call the agent who intentionally authors utterances an “author (IM)” to indicate that this act of authorship is both intentional and intentionally meaningful. Both Livingston’s “author” and my “author” correspond with “author (IM).” To distinguish between the monkey’s “I want a banana” and Shakespeare’s Henry V, all that we need add is a theory of art to our definition, and we can produce a more refined definition of being an author—“author (IMA)” —where the text-tokened utterance is intentional, meaningful, and a work of art. Proponents of auteurism in film criticism, for instance, may want to pursue this avenue, as it provides a means for at least separating cinematic artists from parents producing conventional family holiday videos. I will not go this far here. In what follows, I am not interested in what we might call significant authorship in film, but cinematic authorship in general, or defining filmic authors (IM).

Film introduces two further questions, both discussed in Paisley Livingston’s and Berys Gaut’s contributions to Richard Allen and Murray Smith’s Film Theory and Philosophy. First, do all films have authors, and second, who counts as any film’s author? With respect to the first question, Livingston argues that not all films have authors necessarily and defers to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s proposal that to be a cinematic author is to be in control of a cinematic utterance. The problem, is that “control” does not appear, implicitly or explicitly, in Livingston’s initial definition, nor does it surface in his definition of cinematic authors derived from his generic account. He defines a cinematic author as follows:

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.

As presented, this definition suffers from the same shortcomings as the generic definition. Accordingly, I offer the following revision:

Filmic author (IM) = 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.

If to be an author (M) is accepted as one form of being an author, then clearly control is not essential to the definition of an author, for in grabbing the live wire I was not in control. When we add intention (author/filmic author [IM]), do we need to import a notion of control? I do not see why we should. Intentions already imply control (they are not things that can be out of control), but actions do not. There remains the option to elaborate the definitions with a control criterion to exclude “out of control” attempts to communicate, but it is not clear how this should be done. First, we lack justification to do so, as it would be imposed just to achieve the desired result, and second, we possess no criterion to evaluate when control has been lost. Identifying this criterion would be crucial, as it would mark the point of failure of authorship. Alternatively, if we construe control as being on a scale, then if someone was only 75% in control it would be the case that he or she was only 75% of an author? The possibility of being “mostly an author” does not appear to fit our definitions. I am not suggesting that a control criterion could not be added to the definition, only that how to do it is unclear and problematic. Below I indicate why I feel this criterion is unnecessary. The main difficulty is that Livingston does not seem to adopt the notion of control to explain authorship as much as defend his intuition that some films are not authored while others are. In fact, in his hypothetical examples of unauthored films, he seems to use the term ‘control’ to segregate films that lack value, rather than utterances, despite denying that authorship should be defined in terms of artistic merit or some other form of valuation. Working through his first two of four authorship case studies will help to identify the problem.

In Livingston’s first case, KK, with the help of financial backers, puts his money into his own film project and proceeds with utter incompetence and
lack of control to make a film. The backers, seeing their investment evaporate, intercede. They buy out KK and hire a new director who finishes the film. Livingston concludes that this film has many makers, but no author. Given that he defines an author in terms of “making an utterance” in his two definitions, this division between makers and authors seems very artificial. Livingston further presumes that KK’s lack of overall control equates to a lack of an utterance; however, a replacement director was brought in to make the film as coherent as possible. It would certainly seem via the definition that this latter individual has some claim to being a filmic author, although not solely. The fact that the utterance is of a poor quality does not mean that it is not an utterance. Authorship of a film needs not identify only one individual. As Livingston is himself aware, authoring can be a collective action. The finished film appears in a way as a collection of new and previously shot footage completed and presented by at least the final director and perhaps the financial backers. 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 lack of an utterance; however, a replacement director was brought in to make the film as coherent as possible. It would certainly seem via the definition that this latter individual has some claim to being a filmic author, although not solely. The fact that the utterance is of a poor quality does not mean that it is not an utterance. Authorship of a film needs not identify only one individual.

As Livingston is himself aware, authoring can be a collective action. The finished film appears in a way as a collection of new and previously shot footage completed and presented by at least the final director and perhaps the financial backers. 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. If we can claim that Duchamp authored *Fountain* and Shub *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, then we should have no barriers to authorship in KK’s rescued project.

His next case involves Big John, a wealthy live-stock trader who wants to make a fortune in commercial cinema. He hires staff and tells them to make a film. Out of his depth, Big John flips a coin to make decisions. This coin flipping will not necessarily bar Big John and his employees from being authors. Many works of art have employed randomness and chance as intended methodologies. Livingston recognizes this and rightly draws a distinction between the assertion of chance as a methodology and as a pragmatic way out of indecision. Again, as with KK’s film, we have both authored contributions to the film and a finished product. It really makes little difference whether it is coherent. 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).

I will set aside Livingston’s final two cases, as one involves partial authorship, much like I am suggesting KK’s contribution could be, and the other indicates the possibility of singular filmic authorship, in the case of Ingmar Bergman’s cinema. This is not to say that Livingston takes Bergman to be the only contributor to the utterance in a film such as *Winter Light* (1962), but that his high degree of control and autonomy “depicts him as the ultimate author of the work as a whole.” By challenging Livingston’s examples, I am not proposing that every film will necessarily have an author or authors, but that where we have an instance of an intentional utterance, no matter how poor, we also have an instance of authorship. Off the top of my head I can conceive of one hypothetical example of an unauthored film. Consider a collection of random frames of film cluttering a projection booth. The projectionist asks his apprentice to clean up the mess, and thus, the apprentice, keen to impress, splices the pieces at random onto a reel, routinely adds leader, and then absentmindedly places the reel on top of the reels of film to be threaded into the projector. Note, though, that if the projectionist enjoys the result and decides to present the reel again, we seem to be edging back into the realm of authorship.

This hypothetical case, however, takes us far from our normal film practices. Livingston’s definitions, with slight alterations, are correct I believe, although incomplete, as he acknowledges. We still require a clear analysis of what constitutes a filmic utterance. Nevertheless, as the definitions stand, they allow us to talk about what authors are, even if we have no clear way to identify one yet. The problems in his essay arise from (1) inconsistencies between his definitions and examples, especially regarding value, and (2) a lack of discussion about collective authorship. Berys Gaut, in “Film Authorship and Collaboration,” addresses the latter issue. Gaut argues that the single controlling auteurial entity is in most cases unrealized in film and that authorship should be “multiply classified: by actors, cameramen, editors, composers, and so on.” Indeed, it is here where so many theorists have been unresponsive to work being done by film historians. But this is
only one side of the question. While films have many authored components, they also possess, in most cases, some degree of coherency. Poststructuralists have argued that this perceived coherency is a product of reception and frequently look to mentally constructed surrogates such as author-functions and ideal filmmakers to account for it.19 Auteurists have tried to explain a film’s coherency by overvaluing the authorial control and artistic aptitude of an individual. Gaut, instead, looks at the function of a collective to get from individual contributions to a completed text. For instance, his example of a conflict between Spike Lee and Danny Aiello over how Sal should be portrayed in Do the Right Thing (1989) clearly indicates how his collaboration, even if at times strained, added complexity and subtlety to the film. Examining this as an instance of collective authorship, Gaut maintains, is a more historically responsive position than the single authorship theory that attributes the final version of a film solely to directors like Lee. What is missing from Gaut’s account is a detailed analysis of how action and intention function in collectives. If, as I have argued above, authorship should be analyzed in terms of intentional action, then we should be able to move forward on collective authorship through theories of collective intentional action.

If there is one substantial point in the critique of romantic notions of authorship, it is that authorship is not an instance of solitary genius but, like most other human activities, a social practice. In order to determine how intention functions in individual and collective authorship, we therefore require some understanding of how intention relates to social environments and activities. In the definitions above, intention was treated without much philosophical reflection. So far, I have argued that to do something intentionally is to have a purpose behind that action. This does not imply that in doing something intentionally I will be wholly cognizant of my purpose for that action, nor are all the effects of my actions explainable by my intentions. If I knock over my coffee cup while moving my arm intentionally, it does not necessarily follow that by moving my arm I purposefully spilled my coffee. Actions need neither correspond with intentions nor result from them. I could intend to go shopping but be impeded by circumstances. This understanding of intention results in a perspective on authorship proposing that texts are authored because they are intended (they are produced purposefully) but that the intended meaning of the intentional action need not be readable from the resultant text.

Issues become more complicated when we consider collective authorship. The problem rests in understanding where intention resides and how collective intention functions. Whereas individual intention rests in an individual mind, there is no equivalent in a collective, for there is no such thing as a collective mind or “superagent.”20 Inventing such collective agents, in the same way that authorship theories have previously looked to manufactured entities such as implied authors and author-functions, will not do because mental constructions are not things that can have intentions. Rather, the task is to understand how individual and collective intentions relate.

There are basically three issues to consider. First, are there such things as collective intentions? Second, are collective intentions aggregates of individual intentions, or are they primitive and therefore not analyzable in terms of individual intentions? Third, what counts as membership of a collective? Asserting that there are collective intentions, as John Searle contends, is an intuition that seems obviously true. A sports team executing a play and an orchestra performing a concert are both instances of collective intention and action.21 Without collective intention, we have no obvious explanation for coordinated action. The second question poses greater difficulties. For instance, is the performance of a symphony simply an aggregate of individual performances motivated by the belief that by intentionally performing part of a score one is contributing to the performance of the piece, or does each individual performance directly correspond to the collective intention “we will perform this symphony”? The first position may seem initially more straightforward and desirable, as it has a clear means of avoiding introducing superagents, whereas the latter does not. Despite the appeal of analyzing collective intention in terms of individual intention, Searle demonstrates that the arguments suffer from counterexamples and circularity.22 Instead, viewing “we-intentions” as primitive sufficiently explains an individual’s action in a group action. For instance, if we intend to perform a symphony, I will act to bring about this 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. Otherwise,
I would need to say “we intend to perform the symphony, so I intend to play my part in the symphony and will therefore play my part.” The we-intention already justifies my action, leaving nothing for the individual intention to do.23 This view relies on the presupposition that we are fundamentally social beings capable of social attitudes.

Clearly, however, there are times when a we-intention may come about because of an individual intention. Imagine an actor wanting to improve his professional prospects by whatever means possible. Offered a role by a casting director working for a prestigious film director, the actor agrees to participate in the production of a film. Although the actor develops the we-intention to make the film, he also has the individual, overriding intention to advance his career. We can see why the collectives intentions can be characterized. He has the individual intention to do.23 This view relies on the presupposition that we are fundamentally social beings capable of social attitudes.

Collective intentionality presupposes a Background sense of the other as a candidate for cooperative agency; that is, it presupposes a sense of others as more than mere conscious agents, indeed as actual or potential members of a cooperative activity.25

Although it is certainly true that a caterer is involved in a cooperative activity, he or she is not involved in the cooperative activity of producing an utterance. We will not, however, be able to distinguish the membership of collective authorship by job titles. Is the sound recordist a member of a film’s collective authorship? This is not so simple to determine. Some sound recordists will count as authors under a notion of collective filmic authorship while others will not. It will depend on the recordist’s contribution to the filmic utterance. There will be a big difference, for instance, between a sound recordist recording dialogue well in an effort to meet professional standards and another intentionally making poor sounding recordings that will intentionally enhance the film’s meaning. In order to know whether the sound recordist counts among a film’s collective authors, we need to understand this person’s role in producing not just the material film, but also its utterance. We must equally be careful to consider the consequences the complex nature of film has for the planes of authorship that can occur in film production. An actor, for instance, is largely the author of her or his performance, perhaps with the guidance of the director and suggestions from fellow cast members, whereas the director is frequently, but certainly not always, the most significant contributing member of the overall film. We need to consider therefore not only how many members of a production count as members of the film’s authorial body, but also the
number of authored components that contribute to the overall film and how each of these contributions relate to one another.

This may seem like an unacceptable escalation of authors. Livingston developed his analysis with the objective of avoiding such an account, fearing that we will have to call an author “anyone who plays any sort of causal role in endowing a film with any of its properties” resulting in “the authors of any given film becoming as numerous as the figures in a medieval master’s picture of the Last Judgment.”26 Throughout this article I have aimed to demonstrate that there is a difference between the properties of a film and the properties of a filmic utterance. This difference should guard us from being able to identify authors of a work in numbers approaching the number of figures in The Last Judgment, but not The Last Supper. This seems about right. In a collaborative medium, we should expect to find not only authored components, but also varying degrees of joint authorship in the finished work. Through existing studies of stars, cinematographers, scriptwriters, composers, choreographers, producers, directors, and so forth, film scholars have already made progress in this search.

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1. I would like here to anticipate an objection. Some may suspect that I am espousing a romantic notion of authorship that asserts the author as the sole authority over a text. This is not the case. Although authors have intentions when they produce their works, these intentions do not imply a singular meaning. E. D. Hirsch explains why clearly. He contends that the plurality of linguistic codes is too flexible to determine meaning in texts. In production, they require the presence of a human agent to choose between the several subcodes possible. This does not deny plurality in interpretation, but instead insists on intention in authorship and a relative competency with language. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr. “On Justifying Interpretive Norms,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 43 (1984): 89–91.


3. Richard Shusterman sketches out many of these debates in “Interpretation, Intention, and Truth,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 46 (1988): 399–411. He then argues that (1) authors intentionally create works of literature and (2) numerous views can be held about these works without postulating that each interpretation constitutes a different text.

4. The definition of utterance that I have in mind differs somewhat from what film scholars are accustomed to. John Caughie, in the introduction to the third section of Theories of Authorship (London: Routledge, 1981), states that the term ‘utterance,’ inflected by discourse theory, has come to mean something like the meaning of a statement not as given, but “in process at the moment of projection.” An utterance is an “enunciating practice” that differs from a statement in the way that a product differs from a “producing activity” (pp. 201–202). Instead, in this article, I have in mind Paul Grice’s notion of utterance from his “Utterer’s Meaning and Intentions,” The Philosophical Review 78 (1969): 147–177. For Grice, an utterance is an intentional (purposeful), meaningful expression.


7. Livingston’s definition seems to exhibit similarities to Paul Grice’s analysis of an utterer’s meaning. Grice’s basic model of communication stipulates that “I” meant something by uttering x is true if, 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 of (2) (Grice, “Utterer’s Meaning and Intentions,” p. 151). This version of Grice’s definition is his most basic with further, more complicated redefinitions being added to account for troublesome examples. Livingston’s definition asserts Grice’s premise, and his ensuing discussion echoes Grice’s conditions closely. One of Grice’s redefinitions aims to account for the lack of an audience at the production of the utterance. This is clearly an issue that needs to be examined closely at a later time but is beyond the scope and ambitions of this paper. For Grice’s arguments, see his “Utterer’s Meaning and Intentions” as well as his “Meaning,” The Philosophical Review 66 (1957): 377–388.


11. I prefer “filmic author” to “cinematic author” because the former evokes the medium of film, whereas the latter suggests the institution of cinema. Furthermore, I have included “(IM)” here to indicate that I am excluding the very basic “author (M)” from my analysis. Throughout the remainder of the article I will omit (IM) for filmic authors, although it will remain implied. Finally, I retain Livingston’s alteration to his analysis of the action of authorship because it brings “attitudes” directly into the definition.


14. Unless coherency is a requirement for an utterance. On Grice’s analysis, the intentional action and not the successful realization of an act of communication is the key...
concern. I recognize that this is a somewhat contentious analysis. In order to settle the issue, at least for film, we need to develop the debate on what constitutes a filmic utterance.

17. Gaut, “Film, Authorship and Collaboration.”
19. We may not necessarily want to abandon this practice, only to recognize that it is limited to a theory of interpretation and has nothing to say about authors.

22. I will not rehearse Searle’s arguments here. For his counterexamples and explanation of circularity, see his “Collective Intentions and Actions.”