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Unplanned Coauthorship

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UNPLANNED COAUTHORSHIP

*Shyamkrishna Balganesht**

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INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGICAL individualism—the approach to analyzing and explaining social phenomena through individual behavior—is without doubt the dominant way of understanding copyright law to-

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day.¹ In its origins and early development, Anglo-American copyright law came to revolve around the normative idea of the individual “romantic genius,” whose creative expression was worthy of protection against copying.² Authorship was thus conceived of principally in individualistic and solitary terms.³ As the analysis of copyright law became utilitarian and market driven, the individual author came to be conceptualized as a rational utility-maximizer, who was motivated to produce original expression through copyright’s promise of limited exclusivity.⁴

Despite copyright’s reliance on methodological individualism to understand the author’s motivations and indeed the very concept of authorship, the creative process itself has long known the use of cooperative techniques and processes in the production of creative works.⁵ Principal among such methods of creative collaboration is the institution of coauthorship.⁶ While scholars disagree about the dominance and pervasiveness of coauthorship norms for various types of creative works during pre-copyright times, they nonetheless all agree that the institution existed as a common mechanism of cultural production by the time formal copyright law emerged in the early eighteenth century.⁷ And yet it was

¹ For a general account of methodological individualism in law and legal analysis, see Robert Ahdieh, *Beyond Individualism in Law and Economics*, 91 *B.U. L. Rev.* 43, 48–57 (2011). For general discussions of methodological individualism, see Leon J. Goldstein, *The Inadequacy of the Principle of Methodological Individualism*, 53 *J. Phil.* 801, 801–03 (1956); Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *Meanings of Methodological Individualism*, 14 *J. Econ. Methodology* 211, 211–12 (2007); Lars Udehn, *The Changing Face of Methodological Individualism*, 28 *Ann. Rev. Soc.* 479, 479–80 (2002).

² See Mario Biagioli, *Genius Against Copyright: Revisiting Fichte’s Proof of the Illegality of Reprinting*, 86 *Notre Dame L. Rev.* 1847, 1847 (2011); Peter Jaszi, *Toward a Theory of Copyright: Metamorphosis of “Authorship,”* 1991 *Duke L.J.* 455, 462–63; Martha Woodmansee, *The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the “Author,”* 17 *Eighteenth-Century Stud.* 425, 426 (1984).

³ See Oren Bracha, *The Ideology of Authorship Revisited: Authors, Markets, and Liberal Values in Early American Copyright*, 118 *Yale L.J.* 186, 188–89 (2008).

⁴ See Shyamkrishna Balganes, *Foreseeability and Copyright Incentives*, 122 *Harv. L. Rev.* 1569, 1573 (2009). For an account of copyright’s utilitarian turn as a normative theory, see Shyamkrishna Balganes, *The Normative Structure of Copyright Law*, in *Intellectual Property and the Common Law* 313, 313–15 (Shyamkrishna Balganes ed., 2013).

⁵ See, e.g., Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (2002); Heather Hirschfeld, *Early Modern Collaboration and Theories of Authorship*, 116 *PMLA: Publications Modern Language Ass’n* 609, 610–11, 620 (2001).

⁶ See Hirschfeld, *supra* note 5, at 620.

⁷ See Jeffrey Knapp, *What is a Co-Author?*, 89 *Representations* 1, 1–3, 5 (2005) (critiquing the orthodox historical position, but conceding that coauthorship existed in the seventeenth century).

not until a century and a half later that copyright law, on either side of the Atlantic, first wrestled with the institution of coauthorship and its implications for the working of copyright doctrine.⁸ When presented with a case of coauthorship in 1915, Judge Learned Hand was struck by this anomaly, and observed how he had “been able to find strangely little law” on the subject.⁹ The result was that through much of the twentieth century, it fell entirely to courts to develop copyright’s rules relating to coauthorship in incremental, common-law fashion. In the United States, it was not until the passage of the Copyright Act of 1976 that the copyright statute even dealt with the institution of coauthorship.¹⁰

At its simplest, coauthorship refers to a collective, cooperative process of producing a work of original expression, wherein each contributing member (that is, each coauthor) makes a contribution to the work and is, as a result, accorded the designation of “author.” The designation offers more than just nominal value, since it also results in each coauthor obtaining an ownership interest in the copyright over the creative work, as a joint owner of the work.¹¹ Coauthorship is thus of deep economic

⁸ This was the case of *Levy v. Rutley*, (1871) 6 L.R.P.C. 523 at 523–25 (Eng.). Cases prior to this, and around this period, do mention joint authorship between parties, confirming that the institutional practice was well established by this period. Yet no case appears to have dealt directly with the process through which copyright was to recognize or validate the practice of jointly authoring a work. For cases mentioning joint authorship in the nineteenth century in both the United States and England, see *Silver v. Holt*, 84 F. 809, 810 (C.C.D. Mass. 1895); *Reed v. Holliday*, 19 F. 325, 326 (C.C.W.D. Pa. 1884); *Tompkins v. Rankin*, 24 F. Cas. 39, 39 (C.C.D. Mass. 1876) (No. 14,090); *Shook v. Rankin*, 21 F. Cas. 1337, 1338–39 (C.C.D. Minn. 1875) (No. 12,805); *Ex parte La Mert*, (1863) 122 Eng. Rep. 578 (K.B.) 578; *Hole v. Bradbury*, [1879] 12 Ch.D. 886, 886; see also Laura G. Lape, A Narrow View of Creative Cooperation: The Current State of Joint Work Doctrine, 61 Alb. L. Rev. 43, 45–46 (1997) (“[N]ineteenth-century judicial opinions show that courts assumed that joint authorship could be created, although their opinions did not specify how.”).

⁹ *Maurel v. Smith*, 220 F. 195, 199 (S.D.N.Y. 1915).

¹⁰ Copyright Act of 1976, Pub. L. No. 94-553, § 101, 90 Stat. 2541 (1976) (definition of “joint work”); see 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (definition of “joint work”). The first U.S. copyright statute, the Copyright Act of 1790, might have contemplated the institution of coauthorship. In delineating the rights of authors, it uses the phrase “author or authors” in multiple places. See Copyright Act of 1790, ch. 15, 1 Stat. 124 (1790). Yet, the Act of 1790 made no special allowances for coauthorship, nor did it specify how such coauthorship was to be determined. *Id.* Somewhat ironically, the next U.S. copyright statute, the Copyright Act of 1909, changed the statute’s approach and focused entirely on a singular “author” throughout. Copyright Act of 1909, ch. 320, 35 Stat. 1075 (1909); George D. Carey, Subcomm. on Patents, Trademarks and Copyrights of the S. Comm. on the Judiciary, 86th Cong., 2d Sess., Copyright Law Revision, Study No. 12: Joint Ownership of Copyrights 89 (Comm. Print 1960) [hereinafter Carey, Study No. 12].

¹¹ 17 U.S.C. § 201(a) (2012).

significance, which explains why courts in the twentieth century were increasingly presented with coauthorship disputes, necessitating their creation of a set of rules to deal with the issue.

In developing copyright's rules on coauthorship, courts began by looking to the idea of an "agree[ment]" to collaborate between contributors, and thus inevitably situated their analyses within the framework of contract law.¹² Contributing to the creation of a work in furtherance of an agreement to do so thus emerged as the paradigmatic case of coauthorship. This approach presented courts with few problems, if any, when the parties had explicitly agreed to collaborate and share authorship in advance of making their creative contributions. Problems arose however, in situations where an actual advance agreement between the parties was altogether absent, and yet the parties had gone ahead and collaborated in the creation of the work. To deny one or more contributors the designation of coauthor in such situations, merely because of the absence of a formal *ex ante* agreement, seemed at once unduly harsh and mechanistic.

Thus emerged the idea of what I describe here as *unplanned coauthorship*. Instead of looking for a formal *ex ante* agreement between the parties prior to their collaboration, courts began looking to the very process of collaboration and the parties' behavior therein (as it unfolds during the collaboration) in order to treat the parties as coauthors of the work, based entirely on their actions.¹³ The collaborative creativity here—the coauthorship—is "unplanned" only in the sense that it is not undertaken pursuant to a pre-concerted arrangement between the parties where they agree to their statuses and ownership rights over the final work. The use of the term unplanned is not to suggest that the parties were not consciously aware of their collaborative activity, or that it was motivated by a degree of spontaneity inconsistent with deliberate action. In this sense, unplanned coauthorship unquestionably always remains an intentional activity.

¹² See *Levy*, 6 L.R.P.C. at 529.

¹³ For early cases developing this idea, see *Edward B. Marks Music Corp. v. Jerry Vogel Music Co.*, 140 F.2d 266, 267 (2d Cir. 1944); *Maurel v. Smith*, 220 F. 195, 198 (S.D.N.Y. 1915); see also Therese M. Brady, Note, *Manifest Intent and Copyrightability: The Destiny of Joint Authorship*, 17 *Fordham Urb. L.J.* 257, 258 (1989) (detailing this emphasis on objective intent and arguing for its superiority over subjective intent).

As an analytical matter, unplanned coauthorship initially drew on the common law's objective theory of contract formation for its ideas.¹⁴ Courts relying on the concept thus continued to reiterate that they were merely ascertaining the parties' real "intentions," which they emphasized remained the ultimate basis of coauthorship in this manifestation as well.¹⁵ All the same, it becomes readily apparent that courts developing the idea of unplanned coauthorship were doing much more than just attempting to discern the parties' states of mind. First, in adopting (and preferring¹⁶) an objective evaluation of intention, courts provided few reasons for why the absence of a formal agreement should not simply be treated as disqualifying on the issue (of coauthorship) in much the same way that copyright law treats the absence of certain other formalities as disqualifying.¹⁷ Doing so would have provided the law with an easy-to-follow, bright-line rule that would have made individual authorship the default form of authorship for copyright law and would have required parties to enter into a formal contract when they chose to deviate from it.¹⁸ Second, a close analysis of courts' use of "intent" as their criterion of scrutiny reveals an extensive variation in their conceptions and uses of the term. Variants include a "collaborative intent,"¹⁹

¹⁴ For an overview of the objective theory of contract law, see Larry A. DiMatteo, *Contract Theory: The Evolution of Contractual Intent* 9–13 (1998); Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *The Common Law* 134–38 (Boston, Little Brown & Co. 1881); Joseph M. Perillo, Calamari and Perillo on Contracts § 2.2, at 26–28 (5th ed. 2003); Joseph M. Perillo, *The Origins of the Objective Theory of Contract Formation and Interpretation*, 69 *Fordham L. Rev.* 427, 427–29 (2000).

¹⁵ See, e.g., *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1234 (9th Cir. 2000) (emphasizing that coauthorship under copyright law requires "objective manifestations of a shared intent" among parties); *Erickson v. Trinity Theatre*, 13 F.3d 1061, 1068–69, 1071–72 (7th Cir. 1994) (emphasizing that collaboration without an intention was insufficient to find coauthorship and then attempting to discern this intention objectively); *Childress v. Taylor*, 945 F.2d 500, 508–09 (2d Cir. 1991) (discerning from objective evidence an intention among parties to be regarded as joint authors of the work in question).

¹⁶ See *Aalmuhammed*, 202 F.3d at 1234.

¹⁷ Copyright's rules on transfer of ownership are a good example here. These rules invalidate any purported transfer unless it is "in writing and signed by the owner." See 17 U.S.C. § 204(a) (2012). Oral transfers are thus rendered inoperative.

¹⁸ Indeed, we see courts accepting this logic to cabin the objective determination of intent without considering whether it ought to extend to the very process of objectively determining intent. See, e.g., *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 508 ("Examination of whether the putative co-authors ever shared an intent to be co-authors serves the valuable purpose of appropriately confining the bounds of joint authorship arising by operation of copyright law, while leaving those not in a true joint authorship relationship with an author free to bargain for an arrangement that will be recognized as a matter of both copyright and contract law.").

¹⁹ *Eckert v. Hurley Chi. Co.*, 638 F. Supp. 699, 704 (N.D. Ill. 1986).

“shared . . . intent,”²⁰ “intent to create a joint work,”²¹ “intent to work together,”²² and an “intent to share ownership.”²³ Each conception leads a court to a different outcome and, while premised on the same overall idea, nonetheless entails a fundamentally different emphasis in the analysis. This variation once again suggests that courts are, for the most part, using intent (and the unplanned coauthorship inquiry) as a lens through which to undertake a deeper scrutiny of the cooperative process before characterizing the parties as coauthors.

The search for “intent” as part of the unplanned coauthorship inquiry is thus unquestionably a proxy for various normative considerations, which courts have failed to articulate with any degree of coherence. Indeed, when invited to adopt the idea of “intent” in its interpretation of the coauthorship requirement under U.K. law, the U.K. Court of Appeal openly refused to do so, observing that the intent requirement was a conduit for policy considerations, and that U.K. courts needed to avoid stepping “into the uncertain realms of policy.”²⁴ Courts in the United States, however, find little reason to stay away from policy considerations in copyright disputes, and perhaps for good reason.²⁵ The element of intent in coauthorship is no exception.

In this Article, I will argue that copyright’s rules on unplanned coauthorship serve an altogether different, and so far unappreciated, purpose. The idea of unplanned coauthorship and the rules governing its invocation derive from the recognition that some creative expression is only ever produced through cooperative behavior among individuals. In these instances, the cooperative enterprise is hardly redundant to the creative process (in the sense of merely representing an alternative mechanism of

²⁰ *Aalmuhammed*, 202 F.3d at 1234; *Ulloa v. Universal Music & Video Distribution Corp.*, 303 F. Supp. 2d 409, 418 (S.D.N.Y. 2004).

²¹ *Janky v. Lake Cnty. Convention and Visitors Bureau*, 576 F.3d 356, 362 (7th Cir. 2009); *Weissman v. Freeman*, 868 F.2d 1313, 1327 (2d Cir. 1989) (Pierce, J., concurring); *Papa’s-June Music, Inc. v. McLean*, 921 F. Supp. 1154, 1157 (S.D.N.Y. 1996).

²² *Janky*, 576 F.3d at 362.

²³ *Maxwood Music Ltd. v. Malakian*, 713 F. Supp. 2d 327, 344 (S.D.N.Y. 2010).

²⁴ *Hodgens v. Beckingham*, [2003] EWCA (Civ) 143, [53] (Eng.). For an endorsement of this argument, which seems to accept the idea of legislative supremacy in copyright lawmaking as an immutable rule, see Lior Zemer, *Is Intention to Co-Author an “Uncertain Realm of Policy?”*, 30 Colum. J.L. & Arts 611, 623–24 (2007).

²⁵ For a fuller discussion of the role of courts in U.S. copyright lawmaking, see Shyamkrishna Balganes, *Stewarding the Common Law of Copyright*, 60 J. Copyright Soc’y U.S.A. 103, 108–16 (2013) (describing such judge-made law as the “federal common law of copyright” and providing examples of it).

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production), but is instead integral to the very creation of the work by being directly constitutive of the parties' reasons and motivations for producing it. Situations of unplanned coauthorship represent scenarios where one collaborator's contributions are inextricably tied to those of another and this forms an integral part of each collaborator's incentive to undertake the creative task to begin with. The rules of unplanned coauthorship thus give recognition to the existence of what is best described as the *collaborative impulse*: the motivation to engage in a creative enterprise because of its fundamentally cooperative nature. While this motivation may at times coexist with a creator's other authorial motivations (for example, market-based ones), it is perfectly capable of providing creators with an independent reason to produce the work. It is this collaborative impulse that discussions of intention in the domain of unplanned coauthorship all too readily mask.

An example helps illustrate the working of the collaborative impulse. The practice of songwriting in the music industry is fairly well known as a cooperative enterprise, and usually involves a lyricist, who supplies the lyrics for the song, and a composer, who sets the lyrics to music.²⁶ They often work together as a team and their contributions are usually inextricably linked together to produce a musical work. While the two contributions might in theory be capable of existing independently, it makes little sense to conceptualize them as such. When it is also indeed the case that the lyricist's reasons for contributing to the song originate in the realization that the composer will be setting it to music and vice-versa, providing both parties with an additional, yet independent, motivation for engaging in their creative endeavor, the collective enterprise can be said to emanate—at least in part, even if not in whole—from a collaborative impulse. Thus, the lyricist and composer can be treated as coauthors of the song by copyright law. As should be obvious, it is the last element, the examination of the parties' motivations, that is critical to unplanned coauthorship and lurks under the varied conceptions of "intent."

All of copyright law is thought to emanate from the foundational idea that its promise of limited market exclusivity forms the principal motiva-

²⁶ See Joe Bennett, Constraint, Collaboration, and Creativity in Popular Songwriting Teams, in *The Act of Musical Composition: Studies in the Creative Process* 139, 160 (Dave Collins ed., 2012) (describing this practice as widespread in the industry).

tion for creators to produce original expression.²⁷ Recognizing the existence of a collaborative impulse that provides its own set of motivations for creativity in cooperative settings injects a degree of nuance and qualification into copyright's theory of incentives. Whereas copyright's theory of incentives assumes that utility maximization explains all creative behavior, the possibility that the mere reality of collaboration might provide creators with added reasons for their creative output suggests that forms of non-individualistic influences may indeed be at play in certain domains of creative activity.

Scholars working in the field of philosophy of action have, over the last two decades, developed a series of important insights into understanding the nature of cooperative behavior.²⁸ A central theme in this work has been the effort to understand the unique kind of intention that parties possess when they engage in such cooperation and the nature of motivations that accompany such intention. In addition to being reductive, these understandings also serve to disaggregate and illuminate the precise nature of the various commitments that cooperators (that is, collaborators) hold during their collective actions. Drawing on this body of work, I will unpack the working of the collaborative impulse and the commitments that it connotes, and in so doing will provide a framework through which to understand copyright's rules on unplanned coauthorship. Whereas copyright's economic rationale posits that the incentive to create takes shape entirely from the market for the final creative work being produced, studies of cooperative intention suggest that in cooperative creativity a significant part of the motivation takes shape from the creative process, and is thus means- rather than ends-based. While this means-orientation certainly does not undermine copyright's overall structural focus on the market, it necessitates carving out a domain within this overall focus for additional normative influences on both the creative process and the doctrines analyzing it.

²⁷ *Sony Corp. of Am. v. Universal City Studios*, 464 U.S. 417, 477 (1984) (Blackmun, J., dissenting) (citing *Mazer v. Stein*, 347 U.S. 201, 219 (1954)).

²⁸ For pioneering work in this field, see Michael E. Bratman, *Faces of Intention: Selected Essays on Intention and Agency* 93–161 (1999); *Concepts of Sharedness: Essays on Collective Intentionality* (Hans Bernhard Schmid et al. eds., 2008); Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* 408–44 (1989); John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* 180–96 (1983); John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* 44–58 (2010); John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995); Margaret Gilbert, *Modelling Collective Belief*, 73 *Synthese* 185, 202 (1987).

Unplanned coauthorship is thus best understood as an effort to integrate copyright's utilitarian commitment to exclusivity with the demands that collaboration introduces into creators' motivations. And copyright's primary way of achieving this balance is by examining the precise nature and content of the parties' actions and motivations. The rules of unplanned coauthorship, which involve determining the interconnectedness of each party's contributions and their mutual intent,²⁹ in reality represent an effort to determine the existence and pervasiveness of the collaborative impulse underlying the creation of the work in question. The element of interconnectedness ensures that the parties, from an internal point of view, likely conceived of their project as intrinsically cooperative, while the question of "intention" examines their motivations at a deeper level to validate the existence of a commitment to the process of jointly producing the work rather than just producing it.

Copyright's recognition of the collaborative impulse in its rules of unplanned coauthorship is more than just of relevance to our understanding of coauthorship. It highlights an additional source of normative pluralism within the working of copyright,³⁰ in the process calling into question monistic, foundational accounts of copyright. In doing so, it paves the way forward for a less individualistic conception of creativity and cultural production within copyright law and policy.

This Article will unfold in three parts. Part I will begin with an examination of copyright's rules on unplanned coauthorship by tracing the origins of these rules, the mechanisms employed by courts while creating and developing them incrementally, and the legal implications that flow from being designated as an unplanned coauthor. Part II will set out the idea of the collaborative impulse by drawing on ideas and insights from the philosophy of action. It will examine the ideas of shared agency, collective intentionality, and shared cooperative activity, developed in the work of Professor Michael Bratman, and then unpack the nature of the collaborative impulse as an independent motivation in human behavior. Part III will attempt to reconceptualize the rules of unplanned coauthor-

²⁹ The contours of these rules are, of course, found in Title 17 of the U.S. Code's formal definition of a "joint work" as "a work prepared by two or more authors with the intention that their contributions be merged into inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole." 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012).

³⁰ For previous suggestions that copyright embodies a commitment to normative pluralism, see Shyamkrishna Balganes, *The Normativity of Copying in Copyright Law*, 62 *Duke L.J.* 203, 259–60 (2012); Shyamkrishna Balganes, *The Obligatory Structure of Copyright Law: Unbundling the Wrong of Copying*, 125 *Harv. L. Rev.* 1664, 1689 (2012).

ship through the collaborative impulse and examine the conceptual, normative, and doctrinal payoffs that flow from adopting this framework to understand the law. It will offer a new framework for understanding the idea of mutual intent during claims of unplanned coauthorship, and illustrate the framework's application using one of copyright law's best-known cases on coauthorship.

I. UNPLANNED COAUTHORSHIP: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The practice of coauthorship—or cooperative authorship—pre-dates copyright law by at least a century. Historians of the English Renaissance have noted how it was somewhat common practice among playwrights of the period to collaborate amongst themselves in the writing of new dramatic works.³¹ While some historians characterize coauthorship in this field and era as the “dominant mode” of production, others acknowledge its prevalence but insist that it was nonetheless outnumbered by solitary authorship.³² For our purposes though, it is sufficient to note that coauthorship had emerged as a formal mode of cultural production by the early sixteenth century. Indeed, some recent historical work suggests that a good number of plays originally attributed solely to Shakespeare may have indeed been the products of a coauthorship between him and other contemporary playwrights of the period.³³

Despite this reality, when copyright law first emerged in the early eighteenth century in the Statute of Anne, individual or solitary authorship was taken to be the dominant mode of cultural production.³⁴ Debates about copyright law revolved around the idealized image of the romantic author who was believed to produce original expression through a predominantly individualistic process.³⁵ It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that courts applying copyright law

³¹ See, e.g., Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time: 1590–1642*, at 199 (1971); Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* 14 (1997); Martha Woodmansee, *On the Author Effect: Recovering Collectivity*, in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* 15, 15–28 (Martha Woodmansee & Peter Jaszi eds., 1994).

³² Masten, *supra* note 31 (characterizing it as the “dominant mode”); Knapp, *supra* note 7, at 1 (questioning this characterization).

³³ See Vickers, *supra* note 5, at 137.

³⁴ Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* 2 (1993) (describing how copyright was founded on the idea of individual creativity); see Act for the Encouragement of Learning (Statute of Anne), 8 Ann., c. 19 (1710) (Gr. Brit.).

³⁵ See Andrew Bennett, *The Author* 51–52 (2005); Woodmansee, *supra* note 31, at 23–24.

had to grapple with the institution of coauthorship and apply copyright's nuances to it. And not surprisingly, the first case that a court was presented with involved a dispute between a playwright and his collaborators.³⁶

In *Levy v. Rutley*, the plaintiff operated a theater company and hired a playwright to produce a play for performance at the theater.³⁷ When the playwright finished producing the play, the plaintiff and his colleagues made some alterations to the play, including the introduction of an altogether new scene.³⁸ The modified version was produced commercially for the public. Upon the playwright's death, the plaintiff claimed to be a coauthor of the work and sued the defendant, who produced the play without permission from the plaintiff or the original author. In the absence of an express agreement between the plaintiff and the playwright (about ownership), the court focused its attention on the absence of a "preconcerted joint design"³⁹ to find against coauthorship. One judge thus observed:

[I]f two persons undertake jointly to write a play, agreeing in the general outline and design, and sharing the labour of working it out, each would be contributing to the whole production, and they might be said to be joint authors of it. But, to constitute joint authorship, there must be a *common design*.⁴⁰

"Common design" thus emerged as the benchmark for coauthorship in copyright law. When Congress enacted the Copyright Act of 1909, however, coauthorship found no mention whatsoever in the statute and its various rules.⁴¹ Consequently, it fell entirely to courts to extend copyright's basic rules to situations of coauthorship.⁴² In one early case, Judge Learned Hand, finding *Levy* to be the only case on the question of coauthorship, extended its logic to the question of coauthorship in the Act of 1909.⁴³ On appeal, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Cir-

³⁶ *Levy v. Rutley*, (1871) 6 L.R.P.C. 523 at 523 (Eng.).

³⁷ *Id.* at 523–24.

³⁸ *Id.* at 524.

³⁹ *Id.* at 528 (Byles, J.).

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 529 (Keating, J.) (emphasis added).

⁴¹ See Copyright Act of 1909, Pub. L. No. 60-349, 35 Stat. 1075 (1909) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 17 U.S.C.).

⁴² Carey, Study No. 12, *supra* note 10 ("The evolution of the concept of joint authorship, and the incidents of joint ownership have been entirely of a juridical nature.").

⁴³ *Maurel v. Smith*, 220 F. 195, 199 (S.D.N.Y. 1915).

cuit reiterated the idea, emphasizing the “joint co-operation” between the parties as essential to the issue of coauthorship.⁴⁴ In a notable decision some years later, Judge Hand, this time while on the Second Circuit, extended the idea of a “common design” even further, to situations where the parties did not work in concert and knew nothing of each other.⁴⁵ As long as the parties “mean[t] their contributions to be complementary in the sense that they are to be embodied in a single work,” they were to be treated as coauthors under the common design framework.⁴⁶

Other cases further applied and developed the idea of the common design, such that this judicially developed set of rules came to be closely reviewed during the drafting of the Copyright Act of 1976.⁴⁷ The 1976 Act for the first time defined a “joint work” as “a work prepared by two or more authors with the intention that their contributions be merged into inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole.”⁴⁸ The legislative history accompanying the Act makes clear that Congress intended to continue the common design framework, and intended that a “work is ‘joint’ if the authors collaborated with each other, *or* if each prepared his or her contribution with the knowledge and intention that it would be merged with the contributions of other authors.”⁴⁹ On the face of things, Congress’s use of the disjunctive in its analysis seems to suggest that where the authors were unambiguously collaborating on the production of the work, the question of intent becomes somewhat irrelevant. A collaboration by its very nature clearly evinces a common design between the parties. Yet later cases construed the intention element as applicable to both prongs (that is, as applicable even to a collaboration⁵⁰) in keep-

⁴⁴ *Maurel v. Smith*, 271 F. 211, 215 (2d Cir. 1921).

⁴⁵ *Edward B. Marks Music Corp. v. Jerry Vogel Music Co.*, 140 F.2d 266, 267 (2d Cir. 1944).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ See, e.g., *Szekely v. Eagle Lion Films*, 242 F.2d 266, 267–68 (2d Cir. 1957); *Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. v. Jerry Vogel Music Co.*, 221 F.2d 569, 570 (2d Cir. 1955); *Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. v. Jerry Vogel Music Co.*, 161 F.2d 406, 409–10 (2d Cir. 1946); *Ted Browne Music Co. v. Fowler*, 290 F. 751, 754–55 (2d Cir. 1923); *Donna v. Dodd, Mead & Co.*, 374 F. Supp. 429, 430 (S.D.N.Y. 1974); *Picture Music v. Bourne, Inc.*, 314 F. Supp. 640, 645 (S.D.N.Y. 1970). For a review of the case law on the subject between 1909 and 1960, see Carey, Study No. 12, *supra* note 10, at 90–101.

⁴⁸ 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (definition of “joint work”).

⁴⁹ H.R. Rep. No. 94-1476, at 120 (1976), *reprinted in* 1976 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5659, 5734 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ *Erickson v. Trinity Theatre*, 13 F.3d 1061, 1068–69 (7th Cir. 1994); *Childress v. Taylor*, 945 F.2d 500, 505–06 (2d Cir. 1991). For an affirmation of this position, see 2 William F.

ing with Congress's additional observation that "[t]he touchstone here is the intention, at the time the writing is done, that the parts be absorbed or combined into an integrated unit."⁵¹ As a result, even when collaboration was shown to exist as a factual matter, courts began searching for something else that they might characterize as the parties' intent, in order to satisfy the definition.⁵² Common design thus became encapsulated within a framework of active consent, or intention. While this certainly did not mean that the subjective intent of the parties became the principal standard, it nonetheless meant that courts had to describe their analysis in terms of a search for the parties' *real* intentions.

A. Finding Coauthorship Ex Post

In attempting to give effect to the notion of a common design behind the cooperative exercise, the Act of 1976 made the concept of "intention" the touchstone for a work of joint authorship. Indeed, the legislative history leading up to the passage of the Act reveals that the drafters were initially reluctant to use intention as an idea for the concept of coauthorship, worrying that the search for an elusive state of mind among the parties would distract courts from the real essence of coauthorship (namely, the collaboration).⁵³ Some have argued that in its very genesis, the idea of intention was thus meant to exclude subjective intent and focus entirely on the objective activities of the parties producing the work.⁵⁴

Despite the codification, courts continued to develop the rules of coauthorship on an incremental basis.⁵⁵ In most instances of coauthorship the parties agree with each other in advance, both as to the nature of the collaboration and on their respective ownership claims to the final work,

Patry, *Patry on Copyright* § 5:4 (2014) (suggesting that courts use "or" as illustrative, following the interpretation laid down in *Childress*).

⁵¹ H.R. Rep. No. 94-1476, *supra* note 49.

⁵² See, e.g., *Erickson*, 13 F.3d at 1068–69 (rejecting the "collaboration alone" standard for determining the existence of coauthorship and requiring additional evidence of "intention").

⁵³ For a review of this history, see Brady, *supra* note 13, at 266–67 nn.73–74.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ For some prominent cases developing the law further, see *Gaiman v. McFarlane*, 360 F.3d 644, 652–53 (7th Cir. 2004); *Brod v. General Publishing Group*, 32 F. App'x 231, 234 (9th Cir. 2002); *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1231–32 (9th Cir. 2000); *Thomson v. Larson*, 147 F.3d 195, 196 (2d Cir. 1998); *Erickson*, 13 F.3d at 1068; *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 505; *Andrien v. Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce*, 927 F.2d 132, 134 (3d Cir. 1991); *M.G.B. Homes v. Ameron Homes*, 903 F.2d 1486, 1489–90 (11th Cir. 1990).

necessitating little judicial interpretation (and validation) of the arrangement. The principal instances that actually reach courts and require their intervention are instead those where there exists no formal agreement between the parties, which in turn necessitate courts' interpretations of the parties' actions and behaviors to determine the existence of a common design or the intention to produce a work of joint authorship. The courts' task in such situations is usually further compounded by the parties' fundamental disagreement about their real intentions while undertaking the collaboration. In these instances, the status of coauthorship is determined *ex post* and imputed to parties, much like how the objective theory of contract formation interprets the parties' actions to find the existence of a contract *ex post*.⁵⁶

This *ex post* nature of the determination introduces an important nuance into the process of determining whether the parties ought to be classified as coauthors. The absence of an advance ownership arrangement between the parties invariably forces courts to rely extensively on objective evidence of cooperative behavior, often to the exclusion of evidence relating to subjective intention on the question of coauthorship from the time of the work's creation. In other words, the parties' failure to convert their subjective intentions into an ownership agreement (of the final work) is treated as functionally preclusive of the question of subjective intent at the time of creation and as enabling courts to undertake an in-depth scrutiny of the actual cooperative process to then determine whether the parties ought to be treated as coauthors.

The court's approach in *Strauss v. Hearst Corp.* is a particularly good example of this strong preference for objective evidence.⁵⁷ In that case, the defendant magazine had used the services of the plaintiff, a professional photographer, for a photo shoot relating to one its articles.⁵⁸ During the shoot, the defendant's representative played an active role in positioning the props and selecting the photograph to use, and its editors later retouched the photograph before final publication.⁵⁹ The parties never entered into a formal contractual arrangement specifying their relationship and ownership over the photographs. At trial, the court concluded that the parties were indeed coauthors of the photographs. The court's decision was based entirely on its analysis of the collaboration

⁵⁶ See generally sources cited *supra* note 14.

⁵⁷ No. 85 Civ. 10017 (CSH), 1988 WL 18932, at *6 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 19, 1988).

⁵⁸ *Id.* at *1.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

involved in producing the photograph.⁶⁰ Rather interestingly, the court disallowed any reliance on evidence relating to the parties' subjective state of mind at the time the photographs were taken and before.⁶¹ The plaintiff sought to argue that he never intended to create a work of joint authorship and would not have consented to it had the matter been discussed.⁶² The court found this to be entirely irrelevant to its determination of coauthorship, which it based on objective evidence.⁶³ Indeed, in a later case, the Ninth Circuit made this preference explicit, noting that any reliance on subjective intent "could become an instrument of fraud" by allowing one party to conceal its intent from the other and later on take full credit for the work.⁶⁴

In keeping with this idea, over time courts developed a set of indicia for this objective manifestation of intention in determining coauthorship.⁶⁵ While they continued to reiterate that subjective intent was not altogether irrelevant to the analysis,⁶⁶ hardly any decision on the issue has placed emphasis on parties' subjective states of mind in the determination of coauthorship. The net effect is that parties can be classified as coauthors of a work even in situations where they subjectively intended not to be coauthors if during the cooperative process of producing the work their behavior manifests the characteristics of such coauthorship. It is in this sense then that copyright law allows courts to validate what is best described as "unplanned coauthorship." The consequence of this allowance is that parties wishing to avoid the possibility of a coauthorship claim are now obligated to opt out by entering into an express agreement treating the work as a "work for hire."⁶⁷ Alternatively, the parties could

⁶⁰ Id. at *5–6.

⁶¹ Id. at *6 n.5.

⁶² Id.

⁶³ Id. ("Such self-serving proclamations are unavailing.")

⁶⁴ *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1234 (9th Cir. 2000); see also *Easter Seal Soc'y for Crippled Children & Adults of La., Inc. v. Playboy Enters.*, 815 F.2d 323, 337 (5th Cir. 1987) (finding coauthorship based on objective evidence despite parties' denials of any intent to that effect).

⁶⁵ See *Thomson v. Larson*, 147 F.3d 195, 201–02 (2d Cir. 1998) (distilling such indicia from previous case law); 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, §§ 5:21–:27.

⁶⁶ 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, § 5:28 (discussing cases that relied on subjective intent).

⁶⁷ See 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (defining a "work made for hire" as "a work specially ordered or commissioned . . . if the parties expressly agree in a written instrument signed by them that the work shall be considered a work made for hire"). Once such an agreement is entered into, the commissioning/ordering party comes to be treated by copyright law as both the author of the work and as its sole owner. Id. § 201(b).

simply execute a written transfer of ownership amongst themselves, altering the principal consequence of coauthorship, proportional co-ownership.⁶⁸

While intention forms the purported touchstone of the courts' scrutiny of the cooperative process, a threshold issue that courts often confront before examining the parties' intent relates to the nature of each party's contribution to the final work. The question that emerged was thus whether each party needed to contribute copyrightable expression to the work, or whether it was sufficient if one contributed something even if that something was uncopyrightable as such (for instance, ideas or facts).⁶⁹ The issue divided treatise writers early on.⁷⁰ In due course, though, most courts around the country adopted the position that each coauthor had to make a copyrightable contribution to the work to be entitled to the status of coauthorship.⁷¹ This logic was drawn from the idea that coauthorship was in the end a form of authorship, which in turn necessitated the creation of a work of original expression.⁷² Some courts unfortunately went further than this and insisted that each coauthor's contribution in addition be "independently copyrightable," a position that appears to be fraught with obvious functional difficulties since the very definition of a joint work requires that the contributions be inseparable or interdependent as such.⁷³ Before scrutinizing the cooperative process, courts today begin by satisfying themselves that, to qualify as a coauthor, each party has contributed actual expression to the final work.

⁶⁸ The copyright statute requires such an agreement to be in writing. Id. § 204(a).

⁶⁹ See *Childress v. Taylor*, 945 F.2d 500, 506 (2d Cir. 1991) (adverting to the issue).

⁷⁰ See 1 Paul Goldstein, *Copyright: Principles, Law and Practice* § 4.2.1.2, at 379 (1989) (taking the position that each author's contribution needed to be copyrightable); William F. Patry, *Latman's The Copyright Law* 116 (6th ed. 1986) (same). But cf. 1 Melville B. Nimmer & David Nimmer, *Nimmer on Copyright* § 6.07, at 6-21 to 6-22 (2014) (taking the contrary position).

⁷¹ For a survey of this acceptance, see 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, § 5:14 ("Every court to decide the issue has correctly held that, in order to be a joint author, one must contribute expression.").

⁷² See *id.* (making this argument). But see *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 506 (refuting this logic by noting the concept of author could be used in the ordinary sense of the term).

⁷³ See, e.g., *Janky v. Lake Cnty. Convention and Visitors Bureau*, 576 F.3d 356, 362 (7th Cir. 2009); *Thomson v. Larson*, 147 F.3d 195, 200 (2d Cir. 1998); *Erickson v. Trinity Theatre*, 13 F.3d 1061, 1071 (7th Cir. 1994). For a criticism of this approach, see *Gaiman v. McFarlane*, 360 F.3d 644, 658-59 (7th Cir. 2004); 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, §§ 5:15-16. The Nimmer treatise argues that *Gaiman* vindicates the treatise's original position. See 1 Nimmer, *supra* note 70, § 6.07.

Unplanned coauthorship is thus in essence a process wherein courts determine the parties' statuses as coauthors *ex post*, based on their scrutiny of the cooperative process for objective evidence of such coauthorship. The real puzzle that continues to plague unplanned coauthorship, however, lies in understanding what precisely it is that courts are looking for when they claim to be ascertaining the collaborating parties' *intentions*, an issue to which the next Section turns.

B. The Mystery of Mutual Intent

"The touchstone [of coauthorship] is the *intention*, at the time the writing is done."⁷⁴ This observation, taken from the legislative history accompanying the Copyright Act's definition of a work of joint authorship, has since assumed immense significance in the understanding of unplanned coauthorship. And without question, it has also been responsible for the rather significant muddying of the law. In keeping with this observation (and the definition's emphasis on "knowledge and intention"⁷⁵), courts attempting to construe the 1976 Act's rules on unplanned coauthorship soon came to reiterate that in addition to an expressive contribution that would qualify each contributor as an author, there needed to also be an *intention* among the contributors that their work would merge together and result in the creation of a joint work.⁷⁶

Simple as it may have seemed in theory, when translated into practice the idea proved to be grossly underspecified. While intention certainly entailed a scrutiny of the parties' state of mind—either subjective or objective—the legislative history was silent on the question of what the intention needed to be directed at to meet the definition's requirement. Was it sufficient if the parties evinced an intention to collaborate in the production of the work? Or did they need to additionally carry an intention to become coauthors as a legal matter, by producing a work of joint authorship and recognizing its consequences? Not surprisingly, courts have struggled to answer these questions—despite their continuing emphasis on the idea of intention.

⁷⁴ H.R. Rep. No. 94-1476, at 120 (1976), *reprinted in* 1976 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5659, 5734 (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (defining "joint work").

⁷⁶ See, e.g., *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 201–02; *Erickson*, 13 F.3d at 1066; *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 507–08.

The Second Circuit's decision in *Childress v. Taylor* is credited with articulating the importance of intention to the question of coauthorship.⁷⁷ The court there emphasized that examining "how the putative joint authors regarded themselves in relation to the work" was critical, an observation that later courts echoed.⁷⁸ Yet, as Judge Calabresi would point out a few years after, *Childress* and the cases reciting its observations provide very little guidance on the "nature of the necessary intent."⁷⁹

Speaking in the abstract, the parties' intentions during the production of a joint work can be understood as relating to (1) the process of producing the work (that is, the cooperative activity—the means); (2) the production of the joint work (the end); or (3) the legal consequences of the merger. Yet in one form or the other, courts across the country have eliminated *all three* options as viable candidates in understanding the nature of the intention required for unplanned coauthorship.

A singular focus on "collaboration" was ruled out as insufficient fairly early on. In one notable decision, the Seventh Circuit categorically rejected what it described as the "collaboration alone" standard, which it associated with the idea of a simple "contemporaneous input" by both parties.⁸⁰ The court's logic was that the statute (and the Constitution) mandated more than this, and required establishing an intention to merge the contributions into a unitary whole.⁸¹ Yet in subsequent cases where the parties had in fact merged their contributions into a final work, and obviously did so intentionally, courts again went on to find that the intention was insufficient to satisfy the Act's requirement.⁸² This time, their logic appears to relate to the question of intention only indirectly. The Second Circuit's decision in *Thomson v. Larson* is illustrative.⁸³

In *Thomson*, a noted playwright had sought the assistance of a dramaturg in the production of a show. For months thereafter they "worked extremely intensively together" on the script.⁸⁴ The playwright made all

⁷⁷ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 508; see also *Erickson*, 13 F.3d at 1067 (describing the addition of intent as a variable in the coauthorship determination as "the *Childress* standard").

⁷⁸ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 508.

⁷⁹ *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 201.

⁸⁰ *Erickson*, 13 F.3d at 1067, 1069.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 1068–69.

⁸² *Papa's-June Music, Inc. v. McLean*, 921 F. Supp. 1154, 1157 (S.D.N.Y. 1996) ("It is not enough that [the parties] intend to merge their contributions into one unitary work." (citing *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 507)).

⁸³ 147 F.3d 195.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 197.

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the changes and failed to credit the dramaturg as an author.⁸⁵ The court eventually concluded that the parties lacked the requisite intent to produce a joint work, citing the playwright's unilateral decision-making authority as a principal factor.⁸⁶ It remains unclear why unilateral decision making is facially incompatible with the idea of an intention to merge contributions into a single final work. The two parties collaborated intensively with the clear objective of producing a single final work, and each certainly contributed expression to that final work, while all the time recognizing that one contributor was to decide what to keep in and what to keep out (owing to that contributor's superior expertise). How is this not evidence of an intention among the parties to collaborate in the production of a unified work? The idea seems to have taken root in an effort to avoid coauthorship claims by a party that merely suggests changes as an outsider to a work, and to prevent the primary creator from being deterred from sharing the work for fear of such claims later on.⁸⁷ Yet this seems to have little to do with the absence of an intention to collaborate in the production of the work in cases where the decision-making author himself/herself evinces an intention to use the contribution in the final work. The net effect is that courts have implicitly ruled out a cooperative intent to produce a unified work as the primary candidate for intention.

This leaves us with the third candidate (namely, that the parties must evince an intention to bear the legal consequences of coauthorship). Once again, some courts have eschewed this standard as well, and this time by explicitly observing that intention "does not require an understanding by the co-authors of the legal consequences of their relationship."⁸⁸ Nonetheless, they routinely add that "some distinguishing characteristic" of the relationship needs to be present, and use this latter observation to find the presence or absence of what is essentially an awareness of those very legal consequences.⁸⁹ Courts thus routinely look to how the parties have billed or credited their roles, and use it to find the absence of an "intent to share ownership."⁹⁰ Ownership and the con-

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 197–98.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 202–04.

⁸⁷ See *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1235 (9th Cir. 2000) ("Progress would be retarded rather than promoted, if an author could not consult with others and adopt their useful suggestions without sacrificing sole ownership of the work.").

⁸⁸ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 508.

⁸⁹ *Id.*; see also *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 201–02.

⁹⁰ *Maxwood Music Ltd. v. Malakian*, 713 F. Supp. 2d 327, 344 (S.D.N.Y. 2010).

nected right to be attributed as owner/author are both legal consequences of coauthorship rather than primary facts that go into the construction of coauthorship, rendering the courts' logic in relying on it somewhat suspect.

It is therefore surprising that despite their insistence that mutual intention remain the "touchstone" of unplanned coauthorship, and their continuing emphasis on discerning parties' intentions whenever presented with claims of unplanned coauthorship, courts have found little common ground in unraveling the precise nature and analytical content of this intention. As operationalized today, the question of intention is relegated to the rote examination of a checklist of "objective indicia"⁹¹ by courts, with little scrutiny of how those factors—either contextually or in the abstract—relate to what the element of intention is trying to achieve. In the end then, claims of unplanned coauthorship, centered as they are on mutual intent, appear to be decided on a largely subjective basis despite courts' recitation of non-dispositive variables during the analysis.

This is hardly to suggest that the question of intention is altogether irrelevant. The key to understanding its role and working lies instead in appreciating how the institution of coauthorship connects to copyright's overall goal of inducing creativity. Indeed, even *Childress* alluded to this, when Judge Newman observed that coauthorship was doing more than just focusing "solely on the objective of copyright law to encourage the production of creative works."⁹² Yet, it remains true that *Childress's* promise has hardly been realized in practice given how courts today approach the question of intention in coauthorship.⁹³ Parts II and III turn to reconstructing unplanned coauthorship through the vehicle of objective intent.

C. Implications: Entitlement and Immunity

Before proceeding to understand how unplanned coauthorship and its emphasis on intent can be meaningfully understood within copyright's overall structural commitment to inducing creativity, it is worth pausing to note that the consequences of classifying a contributor to a work as a

⁹¹ *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 201–02 & n.17.

⁹² *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 506.

⁹³ For a similar criticism, see Peter Jaszi, On the Author Effect: Contemporary Copyright and Collective Creativity, in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* 29, 54–55 (Martha Woodmansee & Peter Jaszi eds., 1994).

coauthor are fairly far-reaching. Once classified as a legal coauthor by copyright law, a contributor becomes a co-owner of the work in question.⁹⁴ Perhaps more importantly though, copyright law pays no attention to the relative contributions of the parties, and as a result recognizes each coauthor to have an equal ownership stake in the work in question.⁹⁵ Thus, a coauthor who makes minimal contributions to the final work is nonetheless accorded equal share with the other author who makes a more significant contribution.⁹⁶ While the parties may alter this contractually in advance,⁹⁷ in most instances of unplanned coauthorship where coauthorship is determined as an objective matter by courts, the parties are treated as having an equal ownership share in the work.

Since the coauthor is an owner of copyright in the work, several additional legal consequences accrue to the coauthor. First, as a co-owner of the work, a coauthor's use of the work can never be an act of infringement.⁹⁸ Since by definition the owner of a work cannot infringe his/her own work, coauthorship operates as a complete bar to infringement. It is for this reason that some courts have described coauthorship as an "affirmative defense" to copyright infringement, analogous to fair use.⁹⁹ This characterization is misleading, since it characterizes coauthorship as more of an immunity than an entitlement. It underplays (and perhaps ignores) the second legal consequence of co-ownership, which is that the coauthor is now entitled to use/exploit the entirety of the work in question, without needing prior permission from the other coauthor.¹⁰⁰ Each

⁹⁴ 17 U.S.C. § 201(a) (2012) ("The authors of a joint work are coowners of copyright in the work.").

⁹⁵ *Erickson v. Trinity Theatre*, 13 F.3d 1061, 1068 (7th Cir. 1994); *Cnty. for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 846 F.2d 1485, 1498 (D.C. Cir. 1988); 1 *Nimmer*, supra note 70, § 6.08. For a criticism of this approach, suggesting that copyright law adopt a "principle of proportionality" where the ownership interest is in proportion to each author's contribution, see Rochelle Cooper Dreyfuss, *Commodifying Collaborative Research*, in *The Commodification of Information* 397, 412 (Niva Elkin-Koren & Neil Weinstock Netanel eds., 2002).

⁹⁶ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 508; 2 *Patry*, supra note 50, § 5:7 ("Thus, two joint authors each own a 50% interest in the whole, even if one author contributed only 10% of the work.").

⁹⁷ 1 *Nimmer*, supra note 70, § 6.08; 2 *Patry*, supra note 50, § 5:7.

⁹⁸ *Kwan v. Schlein*, 634 F.3d 224, 229 (2d Cir. 2011); *Warren Freedendfeld Assocs. v. McTigue*, 531 F.3d 38, 47 (1st Cir. 2008); *Weissmann v. Freeman*, 868 F.2d 1313, 1318 (2d Cir. 1989); 1 *Nimmer*, supra note 70, § 6.10[A][1][a] ("One joint owner cannot be liable for copyright infringement to another joint owner, given the baseline proposition that one cannot infringe his own copyright.").

⁹⁹ See, e.g., *SHL Imaging v. Artisan House, Inc.*, 117 F. Supp. 2d 301, 314 (S.D.N.Y. 2000); 2 *Patry*, supra note 50, § 5:43.50.

¹⁰⁰ 1 *Nimmer*, supra note 70, § 6.10[A].

coauthor can thus license the work to others, commence actions for infringement against third parties, or independently use/transform/adapt the work in any way or form. The only duty imposed on a coauthor is that he/she must subsequently account, to the other coauthors, for any profits earned from the use of the joint work, and share such profits on a proportionate basis.¹⁰¹ Such a claim for accounting is however a matter of state common law rather than copyright law.¹⁰² Except for this duty—which comes into play only after the use or exploitation—the coauthor is at complete liberty to use or exploit the work. This explains why unplanned coauthorship remains an economically lucrative claim, and accounts for why courts refrain from finding such coauthorship to exist in a vast majority of cases.

II. THE COLLABORATIVE IMPULSE

In insisting—at times dogmatically—that “mutual intent” form the touchstone of unplanned coauthorship, courts may have indeed been onto something, though perhaps unwittingly. For quite some time now, philosophers of action have argued and shown that what distinguishes cooperative endeavors such as coauthorship from other joint undertakings is a phenomenon that has come to be described as “collective” or “shared” intentionality.¹⁰³ Drawing on work in the field of action theory (that is, the philosophy of action), this Part argues that collective intentionality does, under certain circumstances, generate a collaborative impulse in actors that can be understood as motivational to the cooperative endeavor being undertaken.

Unpacking and recognizing the salient characteristics of such collective intentionality—when motivational in authors’ participation in the collective endeavor—thus helps identify the presence and influence of the collaborative impulse on the production of the creative work. It is precisely this process at which courts’ elusive quest for mutual intent in cases of unplanned coauthorship can be seen as directed. This in turn has

¹⁰¹ *Id.* § 6.12.

¹⁰² *Gaiman v. McFarlane*, 360 F.3d 644, 652 (7th Cir. 2004); H.R. Rep. No. 94-1476, at 121 (1976), *reprinted in* 1976 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5109, 5736; 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, § 5:9.

¹⁰³ For general but fairly exhaustive overviews of this literature, see Abraham Sesshu Roth, *Shared Agency*, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 1–6 (Edward N. Zalta et al. eds., 2011), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/shared-agency/>; Deborah Tollefson, *Collective Intentionality*, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/coll-int/> (last visited Aug. 19, 2014).

important implications for our understanding of copyright law, which has long been premised on a particularly simplistic conception of creators' motivations.¹⁰⁴ In short then, this Part will make three interconnected claims: (1) that cooperative activities such as coauthorship are characterized by a distinctive collective intentionality; (2) that such intentionality is produced by a core commitment to cooperation among actors; and (3) that this commitment is motivational in actors' participation in the cooperative activity. The collaborative impulse, I will argue here, is but a manifestation of this commitment to cooperate, and acts as an independent reason for action among participants in a cooperative endeavor.

A. Collective Intentionality and Cooperation

Modern discussions of collective intentionality can usually be traced back to a 1990 essay by Professor John Searle on the topic that has since become a classic in the field.¹⁰⁵ In it, Searle sets out to establish that there is indeed a distinctive cognitive phenomenon known as "collective intention," and that it cannot be reduced to the individualized intentions of the participants. Or, as Searle puts it, "Collective intentional behavior is a primitive phenomenon that cannot be analyzed as just the summation of individual intentional behavior."¹⁰⁶

Searle illustrates the working of collective intentionality through an example. Imagine several people sitting in a park on the grass in various places, and all of a sudden it begins to rain. Each individual begins to run toward the nearest shelter, and while each individual has an intention to so run, that intention is independent of the intentions of the others.¹⁰⁷ This is in contrast to a situation where a dance troupe in that same park

¹⁰⁴ See *Harper & Row Publishers v. Nation Enters.*, 471 U.S. 539, 558 (1985) ("By establishing a marketable right to the use of one's expression, copyright supplies the economic incentive to create and disseminate ideas.").

¹⁰⁵ John R. Searle, *Collective Intentions and Actions*, in *Intentions in Communication* 401, 401–02 (Philip R. Cohen et al. eds., 1990). In all fairness, the debate about collective intentionality originated a few years prior to Searle's entry into the field, with the work of Professors Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller. See Raimo Tuomela & Kaarlo Miller, *We-intentions*, 53 *Phil. Stud.* 367, 367–72 (1988). Searle's essay was in large part a refutation of Tuomela and Miller, though Searle's own prior work on intentionality is considered seminal in the field. See, e.g., John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, at vii–x (1983).

¹⁰⁶ Searle, *Collective Intentions and Actions*, *supra* note 105, at 401.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.* at 402–03.

converges on a particular point as part of a choreographed performance.¹⁰⁸ While from an outward perspective the individuals in both instances may *appear* to be behaving in the same way (that is, running toward a shelter or the convergence point), they remain fundamentally different.¹⁰⁹ In the first case (unlike in the second), each individual's intention can be understood and expressed quite independently of similar intentions held by others in the vicinity. Searle thus argues that any individual intention in the second case is in a sense "derivative" from a collective intention held by the individuals, but is hardly the same when understood from an internal perspective.¹¹⁰

Searle's paper argues that what makes such collective intentions (or "we-intentions") distinctive is that they must make reference in their underlying structures to a collective process.¹¹¹ Searle takes this one step further and argues that such collective intentionality is a "primitive" phenomenon in the sense of having biological roots and emanating from the capacity to see others as potential agents for cooperative behavior.¹¹²

In a series of influential papers that represent the leading exposition of the idea in the field, Michael Bratman has sought to provide a distinct analytical framework to understand shared/collective intentions.¹¹³ Unlike Searle's account however, Bratman's is reductive, in the sense of showing that collective (or to use Bratman's term, "shared") intention can be usefully reduced to individual intentions. Bratman's accounts of shared intentions and shared cooperative activity are particularly illuminating in understanding coauthorship and parties' motivations and commitments therein.

According to Bratman, the existence of a "shared intention" requires three interrelated elements. First, each participant must intend to do the joint activity in question.¹¹⁴ Second, each party's intent to so do the joint activity must originate in (that is, be "because of") the other's similar in-

¹⁰⁸ Id. at 403.

¹⁰⁹ Id. ("Externally observed, the two cases are indistinguishable, but they are clearly different internally.").

¹¹⁰ Id.

¹¹¹ Id. at 403–05.

¹¹² Id. at 402.

¹¹³ See Michael Bratman, *Intention and Means-End Reasoning*, 90 *Phil. Rev.* 252, 254–56 (1981); Michael Bratman, *Modest Sociality and the Distinctiveness of Intention*, 144 *Phil. Stud.* 149, 150–51 (2009); Michael Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, 101 *Phil. Rev.* 327, 327–28 (1992); Michael Bratman, *Shared Intention*, 104 *Ethics* 97, 112–13 (1993); Michael Bratman, *Two Faces of Intention*, 93 *Phil. Rev.* 375, 375–76 (1984).

¹¹⁴ Bratman, *Shared Intention*, *supra* note 113, at 103.

tent to do the joint activity and the fact that they have what Bratman describes as “meshing subplans.”¹¹⁵ A “subplan” refers to a further specification of the broader objective contained in the joint activity. Thus, “painting a house” would be a joint activity, and “painting it red” would be a subplan under that activity.¹¹⁶ Bratman’s second condition is that while both parties need not have identical subplans, they nonetheless cannot “intend that the other’s relevant subplans be subverted,” which is the idea that they merely “mesh.”¹¹⁷ This intermeshing of subplans is hardly incidental, and is directly constitutive of each party’s intention to perform the joint activity.¹¹⁸ Each agent’s intention to perform the joint activity derives from—and informs—the other’s intention and subplans underlying that intention that the joint act be so performed. There is thus an indelible reflexivity built into each participant’s intention. Third, Bratman argues that a shared intention requires that each party’s intention (to do the joint activity) and his/her reasons for it be “common knowledge” among all the parties, which is the only way by which it becomes reciprocally motivating to each party’s reasons for action.¹¹⁹

In so setting up the idea of shared intention, Bratman insists that it remains “primarily a psychological—rather than primarily a normative—phenomenon”¹²⁰ in the sense that it does not, on its own, give rise to obligations even of an interpersonal kind among participants. While such an intention *can* give rise to obligations contextually, a shared intention does not always generate obligations on its own.¹²¹ It is important to understand the sense in which Bratman’s view eschews imbuing shared intentionality with a normative dimension. He certainly is not suggesting that shared intentionality cannot be motivational, or that it is incapable of generating normative obligations; he asserts just that it is not constitutively necessary for his reductive understanding of what shared intentionality needs to entail, at a minimum, for its existence.¹²² This narrow understanding of normativity is important to appreciate as we move to using the idea of shared intentionality to understand coauthorship. Bratman is thus hardly suggesting that the intentions underly-

¹¹⁵ Id. at 106.

¹¹⁶ Id. at 105.

¹¹⁷ Id. at 105–06.

¹¹⁸ Id. at 104.

¹¹⁹ Id. at 103–04.

¹²⁰ Id. at 112.

¹²¹ Id. at 110–11.

¹²² Id. (“[S]hared intentions are frequently accompanied by such obligations.”).

ing the phenomenon of shared intentionality cannot provide independent reasons for parties' behavior, in the sense of being motivational in the formation of their own reasons for actions. To the contrary, their motivational nature is central to his theory.

Somewhat more importantly for us though, Bratman builds his theory of shared intentions, which he describes as a certain "attitude" of mind, into a full-blown account of behavior and activity motivated by such intentions. And it is in this account that we see how shared intentions are capable of being motivational in actors' behavior. Using the idea of shared intentions, Bratman identifies an analytically distinct kind of activity that he describes as "shared cooperative activity."¹²³ Three distinct features are taken to be characteristic of such activity. First, the parties performing the activity are "mutually responsive" to each other's intentions and actions.¹²⁴ Second, the parties evince a "commitment" to the joint action in question.¹²⁵ Third, the parties manifest a commitment to mutually supporting each other during the performance of the activity so as to ensure the successful performance of the joint activity.¹²⁶

It is in the second and third of the above conditions that Bratman then draws the useful distinction between a "joint" activity and a "shared cooperative" activity. Without either of them, mutually responsive action could include the behavior of two soldiers on a battlefield who are responding to each other's moves.¹²⁷ It would be odd to characterize their activity as joint, shared, or cooperative in any sense of the term. Adding the second feature to the first introduces the idea that each participant has "an intention in favor of the joint activity."¹²⁸ And for this to make logical sense (and avoid a circularity in definition), the activity in question will need to be understood in a cooperatively neutral way that doesn't presuppose the very element of cooperation.¹²⁹ Thus, the activity of "playing chess together" is cooperatively loaded since it is incapable of being understood in individualized intentional terms, unlike the act of "painting a house," which can be understood in both individualized and shared terms. The commitment to performing the activity jointly thus

¹²³ See Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, supra note 113, at 327–28.

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 328.

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ *Id.* at 328–29.

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 329 (emphasis omitted).

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 330.

renders the activity a “joint activity” in Bratman’s understanding. This commitment is characterized by the actors’ intentions to perform the activity that is built on the “meshing subplans” of the parties that are in and of themselves reciprocal. The content of these subplans may be developed during the actual performance, but each actor intends to have them mesh and this in turn forms a large part of the intention behind the very performance of the joint activity.¹³⁰ But for the joint intention to transcend its status as a mere attitude and become embodied in an activity, this reciprocal reinforcement of subplans needs to occur not just at the level of intention, but also at the level of action. Participants in a jointly intentional activity therefore have to be mutually responsive to each other’s subplans during the performance of the activity.¹³¹

This still does not introduce the element of cooperation needed to make it a cooperative activity. Such activity in addition requires a commitment to supporting the other participant during the performance of the joint activity. It is thus the introduction of the third feature—the commitment of mutual support—that converts a merely joint activity into a shared cooperative.¹³²

The commitment to mutually supporting each other during the performance of the activity introduces a relatively high bar into the analysis of the activity. Bratman illustrates the idea using the example of two singers who set out to sing a duet jointly. He describes how each of them has a set of beliefs and commitments that satisfies each of the three requirements necessary for simple shared intentionality.¹³³ They may thus be committed to the joint activity (namely, singing the duet together). Yet, he notes, they might in addition intend to be unhelpful to each other—in the sense that if one fails during the performance of the duet, the other does nothing to cover, and lets the other publicly fail—as long as the joint end—singing the duet—is realized.¹³⁴ This, he argues, is anti-

¹³⁰ Id. at 332–34.

¹³¹ Id. at 339. It is important to note here that Bratman describes this within the context of shared cooperative activities, but seems willing to extend it to joint activities as well, with the primary difference being the second commitment (to mutual support). Id. at 337. Other scholars interpreting Bratman have adopted a similar analysis. See Daniel Markovits, *Contract and Collaboration*, 113 *Yale L.J.* 1417, 1452–54 (2004) (describing jointly intentional activities as containing an element of coordination, even if not cooperation, as Bratman suggests).

¹³² Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, *supra* note 113, at 336–37.

¹³³ Id.

¹³⁴ Id.

thetical to the idea of shared cooperative activity, even though it remains a joint activity since both parties have a shared intention and are committed to the joint activity as such.¹³⁵ The joint activity would become a shared cooperative activity only if the singers in addition also manifested a second commitment: a commitment to supporting the other during the activity (of singing) so as to ensure that the activity itself is indeed successfully performed.¹³⁶ The act need not be successfully performed as such; it merely requires that the parties have an intent to support each other to bring about the success. The precise form and nature of this support will of course vary contextually. Yet the minimal idea is that there must be some “cooperatively relevant circumstances” where one participant is willing to help the other in the pursuit of the activity, without some new/independent incentive emerging for such support.¹³⁷ In other words, the commitment must be to the cooperative nature of the endeavor and must transcend a participant’s belief that her doing only her part will suffice. Only when joint activity is thus “minimally cooperatively stable” in embodying cooperatively relevant circumstances where one actor would support the other does it become shared cooperative activity.¹³⁸

It is important to note here that Bratman characterizes both the second and third features of shared cooperative activity in terms of “commitments.” Or put another way, a jointly intended activity contains a commitment to the joint activity, and a cooperative activity embodies commitments to both the joint activity and to mutually supporting the other participant in it. Unpacking Bratman’s idea of commitment is thus central to understanding the working of shared intentions and their broader role in motivating human agency during joint and cooperative activities. Intentions—to Bratman—involve commitments to future action.¹³⁹ Because they play a fundamentally motivational role, by combining with the agent’s prior beliefs to move the agent to act, they embody what he calls “pro-attitudes.”¹⁴⁰ Such intentions thus work to control the agent’s future actions by providing the agent with a reason to perform that action in the future, based on the volitional commitment that the agent un-

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 337.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 337–38.

¹³⁸ *Id.*

¹³⁹ Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* 15 (1987).

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

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dertook when generating it. In addition, the existence of such a future-directed intention and the volitional commitment underlying it have a characteristic stability that causes the agent to resist reconsideration until the completion of the action associated with the intention.¹⁴¹ Now this certainly does not imply the irrevocability of the intention; it just means that absent new reasons, the intention and the commitment work as default reasons of their own to move the agent.

To speak of a commitment to the joint activity is thus to admit that the agents involved in it are motivated to partake in the joint activity, because of each other's participation and mutual similar intention, and as a result come to develop the intermeshing subplans needed to perform the activity because of this conduct controlling commitment. The additional commitment to mutual support seen in a cooperative activity is thus a recognition that the parties are additionally moved to support each other during the performance of the activity in the exact same way that they committed to undertake the activity jointly to begin with (that is, the endeavor provides its own independent reasons for action). In so identifying commitments as central to intentions, and as generating reasons for action that move an agent to behave in a certain way,¹⁴² Bratman's account of jointly intentional and cooperative activities is thus in one important sense normative.

Indeed, this motivational dimension of the shared intention in such joint activities is highlighted by what Bratman describes as their end-providing dimension. In describing the intermeshing subplans and the interdependent nature of the intention, he observes that it is crucial for the intentions to be "interlocking," such that each actor has an intention in favor of the efficacy of the intention of the other.¹⁴³ Thus, he observes, "each agent must treat the relevant intentions of the other as *end-providing* for herself."¹⁴⁴

In summary, collective intentionality denotes a certain attitudinal commitment to joint actions, with joint activity and shared cooperative activity representing categories of activity that harness different features of such intentionality. They both operate through future-oriented volitional commitments that the agent undertakes, which remain stable until the completion of the action and provide the agent with a set of reasons

¹⁴¹ Id. at 16–17.

¹⁴² Id. at 15.

¹⁴³ See Bratman, *supra* note 28, at 102.

¹⁴⁴ Id.

for a course of action. It remains then to be seen what the precise nature of this *commitment* is, and indeed in what sense it might be usefully characterized as motivational in our understanding of coauthorship, questions to which the next Section turns.

B. Commitments as Reasons for Action

Both joint activities and shared cooperative activities originate in the idea of collective or shared intention. Yet, in addition, a hallmark of both kinds of activities is that they characterize individual behavior that originates in a certain kind of *commitment*—to future action. In a joint activity characterized by a shared intention, each actor remains “rationally committed” to realizing the joint end in question by seeking to give effect to the other actors’ intentions.¹⁴⁵ And in a shared cooperative activity, each actor also evinces a commitment to mutually support the other during the performance of the shared activity.¹⁴⁶ Given the centrality of commitment to activities characterized by a shared intention, it is crucial to understand what exactly a commitment is and how it remains rather fundamentally different from incentives and desires that are taken to be the principal motivators of behavior among rational actors.

Perhaps the best known attempt to unpack the nature of a commitment and distinguish it from other kinds of motivations for behavior is that of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen.¹⁴⁷ In an early work criticizing the behavioral foundations of modern economic theory, Sen argues that individual behavior is routinely driven by “commitment[s],”¹⁴⁸ where a person often “choos[es] an act that he believes will yield a lower level of personal welfare to him than an alternative that is also available to him.”¹⁴⁹ A commitment thus often involves a “counter-preferential choice” which can draw a “wedge between personal choice and personal welfare.”¹⁵⁰ Sen uses the idea of commitment to argue that certain kinds of human behavior are motivated by choices and elements

¹⁴⁵ See Bratman, *Shared Intention*, supra note 113, at 109.

¹⁴⁶ See Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, supra note 113, at 336–37.

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g., Amartya Sen, *Goals, Commitment, and Identity*, 1 *J.L. Econ. & Org.* 341, 347–48 (1985); Amartya Sen, *Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory*, 6 *Phil. & Pub. Aff.* 317, 326 (1977) [hereinafter *Sen, Rational Fools*]; Amartya Sen, *Why Exactly is Commitment Important for Rationality*, 21 *Econ. & Phil.* 5, 8 (2005).

¹⁴⁸ Sen, *Rational Fools*, supra note 147, at 326.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.* at 327.

¹⁵⁰ *Id.* at 328–29.

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that do not necessarily correspond to the idea of preference-maximization that economic theory takes as a given. Commitments in this understanding influence individuals to behave in ways that other kinds of “rewards and punishment[s]” cannot.¹⁵¹ Yet this need not suggest that behavior flowing from a commitment is necessarily irrational, since it can routinely satisfy the demands of means-ends coherence and strong consistency.¹⁵²

In further developing the idea of a commitment, Sen makes the somewhat controversial claim that behavior based on commitment can involve a violation of “self-goal choice” (that is, the reality where an individual’s actions are chosen and guided by the pursuit of one’s own goals).¹⁵³ In other words, what Sen is pointing to is the possibility that behavior emanating from a commitment often involves self-imposed constraints that restrict the realization of one’s own goals and preferences.¹⁵⁴ To Sen, the principal source of such constraint is one’s “identity,” a variable heavily influenced by the considerations of community, group membership, and the like.¹⁵⁵

Philosophers of action have given the idea of a commitment more content, and in the process connected it to the concept of intention. To Searle, commitments are independent of an individual’s subjective motivations for action.¹⁵⁶ A commitment is instead a “desire-independent reason for action.” It is, in other words, created independent of the agent’s own set of goals and preferences, and forms its own reason for action.¹⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Bratman relates commitments to his theory of planning and treats them as constitutive of future directed intentions.¹⁵⁸ He further argues that commitments always carry with them a normative dimension, insofar as they guide and inform practical reasoning and planning in relation to future action.¹⁵⁹ Commitments are thus fundamentally constitutive of intentions, and are in addition motivational.

¹⁵¹ Id. at 334.

¹⁵² See Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 109.

¹⁵³ Sen, Goals, Commitment, and Identity, *supra* note 147, at 347.

¹⁵⁴ Id. at 348.

¹⁵⁵ Id.

¹⁵⁶ John R. Searle, *Rationality in Action* 167 (2001).

¹⁵⁷ Id. at 173.

¹⁵⁸ Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 107.

¹⁵⁹ Id. at 109 (“The normative aspect of commitment consists in the norms and standards of rationality associated with these roles.”).

Sen's notion of commitment begins to assume much significance for discussions of collective intentionality—as a mechanism of explaining joint activities—only when one further unpacks his notion of “identity” as a constraint and treats it as an analytical (as opposed to empirical) device through which to understand interactions. The notion of constraining one's goal choices by reference to those of a group/community of which one is a part can be understood through the working of collective intention. Professor Hans Bernhard Schmid adopts this approach and argues that the process of identification that Sen emphasizes is in reality a process of “self-contextualization” where an individual replaces his/her goals not with the goals of another, but instead with the goals of the collective of which the individual is a member.¹⁶⁰ The reason for action then originates in the shared goals—defined through the joint or shared cooperative activity—that each individual contributes to and simultaneously holds, and these goals are prioritized ahead of any individual goals, preferences, and desires that the individual may hold.¹⁶¹ A commitment, in Schmid's account, originates in the very nature of collective intention, since “[a]s normative sources, shared intentions, aims, goals, and projects provide [actors] with reasons for individual action.”¹⁶² Commitments do not originate in subjective motivations, but they instead take shape and color from the collective goals of the shared activity in question. They are instead “intersubjective.”¹⁶³ Returning to our understanding of shared intention and the working of a shared cooperative activity makes clear exactly how it is that commitments operate.

Recall that in situations of a shared intention, it needs to be the case that both parties intend on doing a certain activity jointly.¹⁶⁴ Yet the reason for each of their intents is the other's intent to do the same.¹⁶⁵ Expectations about how one's intentions will influence the other's, and general expectations about the other's intentions and actions, are integral in this

¹⁶⁰ Hans Bernhard Schmid, *Beyond Self-Goal Choice: Amartya Sen's Analysis of the Structure of Commitment and the Role of Shared Desires*, 21 *Econ. & Phil.* 51, 57 (2005).

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at 59–61.

¹⁶² *Id.* at 61 (emphasis omitted).

¹⁶³ *Id.* at 62.

¹⁶⁴ Bratman, *Shared Intention*, *supra* note 113, at 103–04. The explanation here uses Bratman's reductive account of shared intention. The same logic would hold true for non-reductive accounts as well. For a good example explaining the role of participatory commitment in shared intention, but from a non-reductive perspective, see Abraham Sesshu Roth, *Shared Agency and Contralateral Commitments*, 113 *Phil. Rev.* 359 (2009).

¹⁶⁵ Bratman, *Shared Intention*, *supra* note 113, at 104.

formation. As Bratman puts it, actors who have a shared intention “do not see each other’s relevant intention merely as a datum, for each intends that the joint activity go in part by way of the efficacy of the other’s intention.”¹⁶⁶ In so doing, each participant is driven by a commitment to pursuing the means identified, overcoming obstacles, and realizing the joint activity in question.¹⁶⁷ The parties’ collective creation of their shared objective (through the process of reciprocal reinforcement) and the creation of intermeshing subplans produce these commitments, which then provide the parties with sufficient (and independent) reasons for future action to realize the shared goal. Each actor “embrace[s] as her own end the efficacy of the other’s relevant intention.”¹⁶⁸

We now begin to see how, much as Sen argued before, participants in a joint activity with a shared intention are motivated to act not just exclusively by their subjective motivations reflective of their individual preferences or desires, but also by their very adoption of the other party’s intention in conjunction with their own intention—the shared intention—as an independent and sufficient reason for action.¹⁶⁹ Very often it will be the case that an individual’s preferences remain perfectly allied with the shared goal (or intention), which generates the commitment, since the individual is likely to have been motivated to participate in the creation of a shared intention precisely because of such preferences.¹⁷⁰ Yet once brought into existence, this shared intention embodies its own commitment, and becomes an independent reason for action that bears no subjective connection to the original preference. The same logic holds true, perhaps to an even stronger extent, in instances of shared cooperative activity.

Joint activities and shared cooperative ones both generate commitments among actors as to their future behavior. They produce, ipso fac-

¹⁶⁶ Id. at 109.

¹⁶⁷ See id.

¹⁶⁸ Id.

¹⁶⁹ Schmid, *supra* note 160, at 58.

¹⁷⁰ One must take care here to avoid the trap of simply redefining the actor’s motivational set of preferences to now encompass the act of commitment as a preference. In other words, it would be erroneous to simply argue that the actor was behaving in a certain way because of a preference that in turn reflected the commitment. To treat the commitment as embodied within the preference belittles the richness of human motivation, a point that Sen forcefully made in his early work. See Sen, *Rational Fools*, *supra* note 147, at 322 (“It is possible to define a person’s interests in such a way that no matter what he does he can be seen to be furthering his own interests in every isolated act of choice.”).

to, commitments to future action.¹⁷¹ Once produced, they guide the actor's practical reasoning about what to do and how to do it, ensure a strong consistency in the behavior during the subsistence of the commitment, and constrain the introduction and viability of other reasons into the practical reasoning process.¹⁷²

In summary then, a commitment represents (1) a reason for action, (2) that need not be (and is very often not) consequence-driven (that is, preference- or goal-based), and (3) that can on its own provide an actor with an independent motivation for action. Searle defines commitments as "the adoption of a course of action or policy . . . where the nature of the adoption gives one a reason for pursuing the course."¹⁷³ Applied in the context of shared intentionality, we thus see that the very process of generating such an intention produces a set of future-directed commitments among actors. The actors' individual agencies in generating the shared intention are equally responsible for motivating them through their commitments. Searle goes so far as to identify the ability to *commit* oneself in future actions as the "single most remarkable capacity of human rationality."¹⁷⁴

C. The Collaborative Impulse

Having examined the nature and structure of collective intentionality and the commitments that it entails, as well as the structure of commit-

¹⁷¹ Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 106.

¹⁷² See *id.* at 109. It remains a source of deep disagreement among scholars, all of whom readily admit the motivational nature of commitments, as to whether the existence of such commitments also produces interpersonal obligations among the parties generating and sustaining a shared intention. Some, such as Bratman, vehemently deny the existence of any such obligations. Bratman, *supra* note 28, at 131–32. Others, most prominent among them Professor Margaret Gilbert, insist that shared intentions produce associational, as opposed to moral or legal, obligations. See Margaret Gilbert, *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World* 108 (2013). Yet others adopt a midway position and insist that shared intention is a normative phenomenon in the sense of generating some obligations through the process of mutual reliance, which is central to the process by which a shared intention is formed. It is somewhat irrelevant for our purposes whether the commitments that a shared intention produces further transform into obligations as well, since our primary concern is with the motivational aspect of the commitment rather than its enforceability, or the consequences of deviation from it.

¹⁷³ Searle, *supra* note 156, at 174–75.

¹⁷⁴ *Id.* at 167.

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ments more generally, we now proceed to unpack the idea of the ‘collaborative impulse,’ which builds on the central ideas from collective intentionality and the working of commitments.

As generally used today, an impulse refers to behavior that is sudden, or driven by an urge, commonly captured in the phrase “impulsive behavior.” Adopting the understanding of the early philosophy of action, however (dating back to the stoics), an impulse is simply a “psychological event which determines or causes an action.”¹⁷⁵ It is, in other words, the very cause “which makes it possible to ascribe intentionality to human behaviour.”¹⁷⁶ In this understanding, which differs completely from the more common usage of the idea of impulsive behavior, behavior influenced by an impulse is hardly irrational or unthoughtful. It is instead a “call to action” produced by the mind, based on its acceptance of a certain object or goal as desirable.¹⁷⁷ And it is entirely in this sense that the term is being used here: to connote a behavioral motivation produced by the mind that translates a commitment underlying an intention into deliberate action.

An impulse is therefore the internal/motivational dimension of a future-oriented commitment that causes an agent to behave in a way that is compliant with that commitment because the mind sees it as contextually appropriate or “right.” Recall that a characteristic feature of volitional commitments is that they tend to resist reconsideration even though they aren’t irrevocable as such.¹⁷⁸ The resistance to reconsideration readily translates the commitment into action, as the future becomes the present. The impulse is then very simply the attitude that the actor embodies—in the present—when the commitment is converted into action and provides an independent reason for certain behavior in the present.

Understood in this vein, the collaborative impulse refers to the behavioral motivation that is generated at the time of action by an actor’s acceptance and internalization of the commitments that accompany a jointly intentional activity. Although both jointly intentional and shared cooperative activities entail a commitment to jointly realizing the activity, recall that the latter (that is, shared cooperative activity) involves a heightened standard in that it embodies the additional commitment of

¹⁷⁵ Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* 47 (1985).

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* at 47–48.

¹⁷⁷ See Scott Rubarth, *Stoic Philosophy of Mind*, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 4a, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicmind/> (last visited Oct. 27, 2014).

¹⁷⁸ See Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 16–17.

mutual support.¹⁷⁹ A shared cooperative activity is thus always a jointly intentional one, but not vice-versa. Actors in a shared cooperative activity might thus exhibit a *cooperative* impulse, motivating them to assist and support each other during the performance of the activity; yet actors in a jointly intentional activity merely exhibit a *collaborative* impulse that motivates them to realize the goal in question through the joint process.¹⁸⁰ In a jointly intentional activity, each participant intends the joint activity because of the other's reciprocal intention to so perform it jointly and the accompanying intermeshing subplans that allow their intentions to coordinate in the realization of the final goal. Each actor's intention is accompanied by (that is, underwritten by) a commitment that is relatively static over time and by default resists reconsideration. When the time for performance comes, that commitment generates the impulse that in turn motivates the actor to follow through on the original intention and perform the activity as a jointly intentional one.

The working of the collaborative impulse is best illustrated through an example. Take two professional singers, Joe and Ann, who agree to sing a song together as a duet at a local event. Having performed the song together on multiple occasions in the past, they each know the lines that the other prefers to sing solo and accordingly divide up the song into the parts that they will sing together (in chorus) and the parts that each of them will sing individually. Translated into our discussion of collective intentionality: They each can be said to have an intention to jointly perform the song, an intention that in each emerges because of the other's reciprocal intention to perform the song jointly. In addition, the intention is driven by and made up of their meshing subplans to each perform parts of the song such that the song as a whole is optimally performed to the best of their collective ability. In so generating the intention, each of them is driven by a future-looking volitional commitment that tends to resist reconsideration absent extreme circumstances. Thus, if Joe hears his favorite singer performing the same song solo on the radio the next day, this commitment underwrites the original intention and resists the

¹⁷⁹ Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, supra note 113, at 336–38.

¹⁸⁰ For an analogous but analytically different use of this distinction within the context of contract theory, see Markovits, supra note 131, at 1462. Drawing on the difference between jointly intentional and shared cooperative activities, Markovits distinguishes between what he calls “cooperative communities,” such as marriage, and purely “collaborative communities” characteristic of contracts. He then develops a full-blown moral account of such collaborative communities, noting that they exhibit “forms of respect that arise only unnaturally in connection with cooperation.” *Id.*

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urge to simply abandon the idea of performing the song with Ann in favor of performing it solo. It is worth reiterating that this commitment is not an obligation that Joe owes to Ann, and Ann might well have told Joe that he is “free to change his mind” at any point.¹⁸¹ It is instead, *qua* Bratman, an attitude of mind in each actor that accompanies the intention.¹⁸² Having resisted reconsideration, when the time of the performance arrives, Joe and Ann then each convert this intention into the jointly intentional activity and perform the song together. The same commitment that underwrote the intention and contributed to its stability now generates the motivation in both actors to convert the intention into action—by way of the collaborative impulse.

Much of this will of course seem unexceptional. It might well be thought that Joe’s actions, based on his commitment, map onto his set of preferences when understood to include the reputational harm that abandoning Ann in the last minute might entail or some such similar consequentialist variables. It thus bears emphasis that behavior driven by a collaborative impulse will generally be seen to align itself with utility-maximizing behavior. The real nature of the impulse becomes obvious only when one observes a divergence between an actor’s actual behavior and what might be taken as the actor’s clear utility-maximizing choice. In an overwhelming majority of cases, the impulse and commitment undergirding jointly intentional activity will remain aligned with what appear to be an actor’s immediate preferences, but the reality remains that they *need not* be so aligned. And when they are not aligned, the commitment generates its own reasons for action. Therein lies the working of the commitment and its ability to produce behavior that is not necessarily directly in furtherance of what appears to be the utility-maximizing choice. Going back to our earlier hypothetical, assume that the day before Joe and Ann are to perform the song, Joe is approached by Mark and offered a million dollars to perform the work individually, (that is, as a solo). When he refuses to do so (and turns down the money) because of his commitment to jointly performing the song with Ann, he is clearly choosing an option that is not the obvious utility-maximizing one. Once again, he is not doing so out of an obligation to Ann, but out

¹⁸¹ As noted previously, this is a point of disagreement between Bratman and Gilbert. See *supra* note 172.

¹⁸² Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 17.

of a simple unwillingness to reconsider his commitment, and the conversion of the commitment into an action: the collaborative impulse.

Decades ago, Sen noted the possible convergence of behavior motivated by a commitment and behavior influenced by utility maximization (that is, self-interest), and the difficulty involved in disaggregating an actor's reasons when they overlap.¹⁸³ He thus notes that the "more difficult question arises when a person's choice [driven by a commitment] happens to coincide with the maximization of his anticipated personal welfare, but that is not the *reason* for his choice."¹⁸⁴ The working of the commitment—and its translation into an impulse—thus becomes apparent only when a counterfactual condition actually exists and was abjured by the individual, and this is known to others assessing the behavior externally.

All of this raises an obvious question: Is behavior driven by the collaborative impulse necessarily rational at all times? When Joe turns down Mark's lucrative offer in order to act on the commitment to jointly perform the song with Ann, in what sense is Joe's behavior truly rational? It remains a source of deep and continuing disagreement among philosophers about whether a reason to act that is rationally formed but at the time of performance is seen as irrational comports with the overall idea of agent rationality.¹⁸⁵ The nuances of this debate need not detain us here. All the same, philosophers seeking to provide a defensible reconciliation of the paradox highlight a point that is of importance to us (namely, that the idea of rational self-interested behavior need not be seen as requiring an agent to be motivated exclusively by such self-interest at all decision points).¹⁸⁶

The point is best understood by analogy to the distinction between rule consequentialism and act consequentialism. Both forms of consequentialism agree that the value of an act ought to be measured by its

¹⁸³ See Sen, *Rational Fools*, supra note 147, at 327.

¹⁸⁴ *Id.*

¹⁸⁵ For some of the most prominent work on this question, see Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* 3 (1986); Howard J. Sobel, *Useful Intentions*, in *Taking Chances: Essays on Rational Choice* 237 (1994); Stephen L. Darwall, *Rational Agent, Rational Act*, 14 *Phil. Topics* 33, 33–34 (1986); David Gauthier, *Assure and Threaten*, 104 *Ethics* 690, 694 (1994); Gregory S. Kavka, *The Toxin Puzzle*, 43 *Analysis* 33, 36 (1983); Joe Mintoff, *How Can Intentions Make Actions Rational?*, 32 *Can. J. Phil.* 331 (2002).

¹⁸⁶ See, e.g., David Gauthier, *Commitment and Choice: An Essay on the Rationality of Plans*, in *Ethics, Rationality, and Economic Behaviour* 217, 228–29 (Francisco Farina et al. eds., 1996); Joe Mintoff, *Rule Worship and the Stability of Intention*, 31 *Philosophia* 401, 414–16 (2004).

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consequences. Yet act consequentialism requires that the value of each individual act be measured against the consequences that it produces. Rule consequentialism on the other hand merely requires that the value of an act be measured against a set of predetermined rules or guidelines, which are in turn systemically taken to represent valuable consequences.¹⁸⁷ The rule or guideline mediates (and constrains) the evaluation, obviating the need for an empirical examination of an act's consequences at each individual instance. The philosopher David Gauthier adopts precisely such an approach to defend as rational an agent's actions that are irrational when performed but driven by a commitment that was rational when originally formed.¹⁸⁸ He thus observes:

[S]ometimes my life will go better if I am able to commit myself to an action even though, when or if I perform it, I expect that my life will not thenceforth go as well as it would were I to perform some alternative action. Nevertheless, it is rational to make such a commitment, and to restrict my subsequent deliberation to actions intentionally compatible with it, provided that in so doing I act in a way that I expect will lead to my life going better than I reasonably believe that it would have gone had I not made any commitment.¹⁸⁹

Gauthier's formulation uses the metric of "life going well" as an open-ended consequentialist calculus. His defense of commitment-driven action that is irrational at the time of performance derives from the idea that if it was rational at the time that it was entered into (rational by reference to the metric), it assumes a certain rationality even when actually performed, since the relevant metric is no longer the overall consequentialist idea of "life going well," but rather the reason itself—the commitment—which the agent undertook as furthering the consequentialist idea.¹⁹⁰ The aim (life going well) becomes manifested in the reason (the commitment), and the action then is measured against the reason rather than directly against the aim. The structure thus maps onto the rule consequentialism versus act consequentialism divide.

¹⁸⁷ See Brad Hooker, Rule Consequentialism, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edward N. Zalta et al. eds., 2011), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/consequentialism-rule/>.

¹⁸⁸ See Gauthier, *supra* note 185, at 707.

¹⁸⁹ *Id.*

¹⁹⁰ See Hooker, *supra* note 187.

Bratman adopts a similar line of defense. He defends the rationality of behavior driven by commitment in situations where non-reconsideration (of the commitment) was driven by general habits that were reasonable (that is, rational) for the individual to have when they were first formed.¹⁹¹ Thus, one might posit that if Joe's unwillingness to reconsider was driven by the general habit of avoiding the abandonment of a partner in the last minute (as unethical), and one admits the reasonableness of that habit when developed, its application to the specific instance can indeed be seen as rational. The reasonableness of the general habit overrides its application to the specific instance, rendering the act rational. Once again, the "two-tiered" structure works to mediate the question of rationality.¹⁹²

In acting on the collaborative impulse that is in turn fueled by the commitment to jointly performing an action, the agent can be seen as furthering his/her self-interest only indirectly. The commitment mediates between the action and the self-interest, and as long as the commitment was formed in the pursuit of rational self-interest, actions based on it can be seen as indirectly furthering that self-interest even if, taken in isolation, they seem to be counter-preferential. If one accepts this structure, behavior commenced in and undertaken for self-interest can indeed accommodate individualized, non-self-interested action when a commitment—initially driven by self-interest—intervenes and operates as a reason on its own for such individualized action. The collaborative impulse, in other words, may sit comfortably within a broader instrumentalism motivating an agent's overall behavior, even though on its own the impulse is not driven by such instrumentalism. This nesting of the impulse within a broader utilitarian orientation reveals that an agent's reasons for performing a joint activity may indeed be motivated by a plurality of considerations.

Returning to our hypothetical, Joe may have initially been motivated to perform the song with Ann because of the belief that performing it with her will produce the best outcome and earn them together a large cash prize. His overall orientation to the action is thus unquestionably instrumental/consequentialist. In forming the intention to perform the song jointly, he develops a commitment to so performing the action that is intertemporally stable. Once formed, the commitment operates as its

¹⁹¹ Bratman, *supra* note 139, at 64–70.

¹⁹² *Id.* at 68; Mintoff, *supra* note 185, at 408 (describing Bratman's theory as two-tiered).

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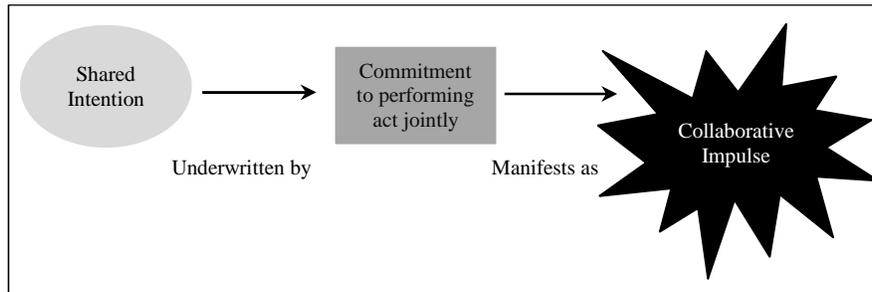
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own reason for action, allowing him to turn down Mark's counteroffer. When the time comes for performance, it generates the collaborative impulse, which causes Joe to actually perform the song jointly with Ann. Now, while the impulse-driven behavior itself is not directly self-interested, especially in the face of Mark's offer, it sits perfectly within Joe's overall consequentialist orientation since it was driven by a commitment undertaken in the pursuit of an instrumental goal. In adhering to it, and in acting on it, Joe is hardly undermining his own consequentialism, if we understand the commitment itself as motivated by such consequentialism and mediating between his aims (consequentialism) and actions.

In short then, the collaborative impulse takes the commitment to jointly perform an activity as a *sufficient* reason for action, generally withstands immediate reconsideration, and motivates an agent's collaborative action in the performance of the activity. As noted before, it works within the interstices of regular utilitarian or consequentialist motivations and is often aligned with them, but its independence and sufficiency as motivations are of central importance.

In a sense, the collaborative impulse can be seen as lying on one end of an analytical—but not necessarily temporal—sequence of attitudes that an agent develops. The agent may thus be motivated by the beneficial consequences of an activity and develop an intention to perform that activity jointly in order to best realize those benefits. In so developing a shared intention and intermeshing subplans, the agents develop a “web of intentions” that ensures a stable commitment to the joint activity. The commitment is a reason for action, and the shared intention in effect is now motivational. When the time comes for actually performing the activity (that is, the intention being converted into action), the commitment to the joint activity produces the collaborative impulse, in turn generating collaborative behavior that is manifested externally. The diagram below captures this analytic sequence.

Diagram: Analytic Sequence

We now turn to examining how this matters for our understanding of unplanned coauthorship and the idea of mutual intent therein.

III. UNPLANNED COAUTHORSHIP THROUGH THE COLLABORATIVE IMPULSE

Having examined unplanned coauthorship, its reliance on the idea of intent, and the collaborative impulse that informs jointly intentional activities, this Part moves to integrating the previous discussions by offering a new way of understanding copyright's rules on unplanned coauthorship. Specifically, it offers an account of unplanned coauthorship that makes sense of courts' overarching focus on intent and situates this focus within copyright's broader goals and objectives.

This Part begins by using the framework of jointly intentional activities described previously to understand coauthorship and the motivations of actors therein (Section III.A). It then attempts to situate the rules of unplanned coauthorship within copyright's overall utilitarian framework, specifically by showing how the idea of process-based motivations that are characteristic of collaborative creativity can work perfectly within copyright's overall structure as a market-based inducement for creative output (Section III.B). Section III.C reconstructs the rules of unplanned coauthorship to focus on the process-based motivations during the creative enterprise, using the device of mutual intent. Section III.D illustrates the working of the reconstructed rules using the facts of a well-known coauthorship decision.

A. Coauthorship as a Jointly Intentional Activity

Bratman's account of shared intentionality lends itself rather well to understanding the phenomenon of collective authorship. As an example, Professor Paisley Livingston, a philosopher of art, has recently attempted to develop an account of coauthorship using the idea of shared intentionality.¹⁹³ Describing himself as a "partial intentionalist,"¹⁹⁴ Livingston develops an account of coauthorship using Bratman's elements:

[I]f two or more persons jointly author an utterance or work, they must intentionally generate or select the text, artefact [sic], performance, or structure that is its publicly observable component; in so doing, they act on meshing sub-plans and exercise shared control and decision-making authority over the results; furthermore, in making the work or utterance, they together take credit for it as a whole¹⁹⁵

Livingston's account, of course, cares very little about the legal framework of coauthorship (that is, its role within the legal institution of copyright law). His account is therefore willing to admit ideas into its conception of authorship and ownership that are legitimately alien to U.S. copyright law.¹⁹⁶ All the same, it reveals to us the fundamental utility of using shared intentionality as a basis for recalibrating mutual intent, the "touchstone" of coauthorship under copyright law.¹⁹⁷

Choosing to make mutual intent the touchstone of coauthorship, as courts did early on, was therefore analytically sound. In so doing, courts were recognizing that the phenomenon of coauthorship is routinely accompanied by a joint (or shared/collective) intentionality. Drawing this connection out further sheds light on how the element of mutual intent

¹⁹³ See Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* 75–89 (2005).

¹⁹⁴ *Id.* at ix.

¹⁹⁵ *Id.* at 83.

¹⁹⁶ For instance, Livingston cares very much about the difference between "first" and later authors, which matters from an attributive standpoint but has no legal implications. *Id.* at 85. In determining authorship, his account also emphasizes the extent to which a creator's "sensitivity and attitudes" are manifested in the work. *Id.*

¹⁹⁷ See also Sondra Bacharach & Deborah Tollefsen, *We Did It: From Mere Contributors to Coauthors*, 68 *J. Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 23, 28–31 (2010) (using Margaret Gilbert's account of collective intentions to understand coauthorship). For non-intentionalist versions of coauthorship, see Berys Gaut, *Film Authorship and Collaboration*, in *Film Theory and Philosophy* 149, 149–72 (Richard Allen & Murray Smith eds., 1997); Paul Sellors, *Collective Authorship in Film*, 65 *J. Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 266, 268–70 (2007).

can be meaningfully connected to copyright's functioning and to its presumptive purpose.

In Bratman's account, described earlier, a joint activity is characterized by a shared intention wherein each participant has an "*intention in favor*" of the activity *being done jointly*.¹⁹⁸ The process of coauthorship can be understood as a joint activity, manifesting all of the characteristics demanded by Bratman's reductive theory. In this sense, the intention guiding the activity is composed of both: (1) the simple intention to author the work (that is, by producing expression) *and* (2) the intention to do so jointly (that is, as a work of coauthorship). This composite intention, which we may call the intention to author the work jointly, is undergirded by equivalent commitments in the parties. The shared intention to produce the work jointly is made up of the intermeshing subplans of the parties, wherein each contributor seeks to be, and in practice is, responsive to the other contributor's subplans and actions, ensuring that they do not conflict but instead reinforce each other.¹⁹⁹ The joint process of authoring the work is motivational rather than merely descriptive. In other words, each party's reason for undertaking the task in question (that is, authoring expression) is driven in some part by the other party's participation in it. Or, to use Bratman's language, each party's intention to perform the joint activity is "*end-providing*" to the other.²⁰⁰

Copyright's generally accepted account of authorial motivation is driven by its theory of incentives, an account that sits well with its overall utilitarian justification.²⁰¹ According to this account, the copyright system works by promising prospective creators (that is, authors of original expression) a set of marketable exclusive rights over their works, once brought into existence.²⁰² The promise of these rights, and the accompanying market space that they carve out for the author, are thought to motivate (or "induce") the very production of creative expression. While scholars have in recent times called this account into question, and questioned its comprehensiveness, copyright law and policy none-

¹⁹⁸ Bratman, Shared Cooperative Activity, *supra* note 113, at 329.

¹⁹⁹ Bratman, Shared Intention, *supra* note 113, at 103–04.

²⁰⁰ Bratman, *supra* note 28, at 102.

²⁰¹ For an overview of copyright's theory of incentives, see Balganes, Foreseeability and Copyright Incentives, *supra* note 4, at 1573; Glynn S. Lunney, Jr., Reexamining Copyright's Incentives-Access Paradigm, 49 Vand. L. Rev. 483, 485 (1996); Stewart E. Sterk, Rhetoric and Reality in Copyright Law, 94 Mich. L. Rev. 1197, 1197 (1996).

²⁰² Lunney, *supra* note 201, at 492–93.

theless continue to accept its basic premises in their working.²⁰³ And not surprisingly, courts too endorse the theory and affirm the idea that copyright law exists as a mechanism of *motivating* authors to create original expression when called upon to interpret copyright doctrine or develop it contextually.²⁰⁴

Accepting copyright's purpose of authorial motivation for our purposes though, what is particularly salient about it is its view of authors/creators as entirely ends-focused in their orientations. Creators are presumed to derive their utility entirely from the market for their works of expression.²⁰⁵ Creativity and authorship are presumed to be meaningful to the creator because of what they result in (namely, the work)—which, in turn, is endowed with market potential as a result of copyright's promise of exclusivity. The presumptive focus of the motivation underlying this account of authorial incentives thus lies in the *product* of the creativity rather than in its *process*. The ends of creativity are taken to be the driver of the process, with little attention paid to the possibility that the means themselves (that is, the process) might provide actors with their own set of motivations. Creativity can, however, be motivated, at least partially, by the very process of creation.

To the extent that scholars of copyright law and creativity question the dominant account of authorial incentives, they base it on the broad distinction between “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” motivations for creativity.²⁰⁶ Extrinsic motivations refer to incentives external to the creative task itself, while intrinsic motivations comprise “any motivation that

²⁰³ For skeptical accounts, see Rebecca Tushnet, *Economies of Desire: Fair Use and Marketplace Assumptions*, 51 *Wm. & Mary L. Rev.* 513, 522 (2009); Diane Leenheer Zimmerman, *Copyrights as Incentives: Did We Just Imagine That?*, 12 *Theoretical Inquiries Law* 29, 30–32 (2011).

²⁰⁴ As an example, consider the Supreme Court's use of the incentives idea in this regard. *Eldred v. Ashcroft*, 537 U.S. 186, 219 (2003) (“[C]opyright's purpose is to *promote* the creation and publication of free expression.”); *Harper & Row Publishers v. Nation Enters.*, 471 U.S. 539, 558 (1985) (“By establishing a marketable right to the use of one's expression, copyright supplies the economic incentive to create and disseminate ideas.”); *Sony Corp. of Am. v. Universal City Studios*, 464 U.S. 417, 429 (1984) (observing how copyright is “intended to motivate the creative activity of authors and inventors by the provision of a special reward”).

²⁰⁵ See, e.g., *Harper & Row*, 471 U.S. at 558 (describing copyright as “a marketable right to the use of one's expression”); Christopher S. Yoo, *Copyright and Product Differentiation*, 79 *N.Y.U. L. Rev.* 212, 220–21 (2004) (offering a fuller account of copyright's economic theory using the economics of market-based product differentiation).

²⁰⁶ See Teresa M. Amabile, *Creativity in Context* 15–16 (1996); Roberta Rosenthal Kwall, *The Soul of Creativity: Forging a Moral Rights Law for the United States* 11–12 (2010).

arises from the individual's positive reaction to qualities of the task itself."²⁰⁷ The category of intrinsic motivations suffers from an observable degree of incoherence and covers a wide variety of inducements ranging from the spiritual and moral to those originating in reputational consequences, group dynamics, and personal satisfaction (or a "psychic reward").²⁰⁸ In addition, the very term "intrinsic" suggests a fundamentally non-instrumental orientation, when in fact several of the motivations covered by the category are indeed palpably instrumental.

If coauthorship is understood as a jointly intentional activity, characterized in turn by a composite intention wherein the joint nature of the creative enterprise forms some part of a creator's reasons for undertaking the creative activity, the motivational structure must be seen as embodying both ends-based and means-based dimensions. This is hardly to suggest that the means-based dimension must necessarily be non-instrumental all the time (though it may at times), since a means-based (or process-based) instrumentalism remains perfectly rational as a model of instrumental motivation. Instead of characterizing this form of motivation as "intrinsic," we might therefore call it "process-based," in recognition of its means-orientation. This way of understanding coauthorship is also fairly consistent with the findings of various empirical studies involving group creativity.

To take just one prominent example: In a study that has since become fairly well known, Professors Eric von Hippel and Georg von Krogh studied the nature of creator incentives in open source software development, which consists of programmers who "voluntarily collaborate to develop software" and make it "freely available to all" through a mechanism of unrestrictive licensing.²⁰⁹ They conclude that the open source movement represents a "private-collective" innovation model that deviates in significant respects from both a private investment model of creativity and a collective action model, the two dominant theoretical frameworks used to describe creator motivations.²¹⁰ A large component of the participants' motivations, they observe, originates in their very "participat[ion] in the project 'community,'" which causes them to view

²⁰⁷ Amabile, *supra* note 206, at 115.

²⁰⁸ Zimmerman, *supra* note 203, at 44 n.60.

²⁰⁹ Eric von Hippel & Georg von Krogh, *Open Source Software and the "Private-Collective" Innovation Model: Issues for Organization Science*, 14 *Org. Sci.* 209, 209–10 (2003).

²¹⁰ *Id.* at 212–13.

such cooperation, when “intense and sustainable,” as a net benefit on its own.²¹¹ Participating in the process of creating the work in question is thus seen as a benefit in itself, causing participants whose behavior would otherwise be characterized by a traditional prisoner’s dilemma to converge toward a common solution characteristic of a coordination game where the combination of market and non-market (that is, process) benefits produces a plausible equilibrium outcome.²¹² Such cooperation “reflects a transformation of individual psychology so as to include the feeling of solidarity, altruism, fairness, and the like” since participation “becomes a benefit in itself.”²¹³ In short, an actor’s very participation in the process forms an integral part of his/her creative motivation.

Central to coauthorship then, when the institution is understood as a jointly intentional activity, is that true participants in it embody a process-based motivation toward the creative endeavor around which it revolves. This process-based motivation need not operate to the exclusion of a market-based (or ends-based) motivation, yet it certainly qualifies the latter’s role as the *only* reason for an actor’s engagement with the creative endeavor.

To the extent that copyright law and policy purport to model themselves on the actual working of inducements in the production of creative works of expression, the law’s understanding of coauthorship must come to reflect a more nuanced formulation of creator motivations in joint activities. In addition, this is fairly easy to accomplish since it does not undermine copyright’s core utilitarian (and instrumental) orientation in any way or form, an issue to which we next turn.

B. Coauthorship and Copyright’s Purposes

It is almost incontrovertible dogma today that copyright’s main purpose lies in inducing creative expression through a set of marketable exclusive rights.²¹⁴ While many have questioned the theory or sought to qualify it, the core idea that, as rational actors, creators can be motivated to produce an original work of authorship through a promise of exclusive rights in that work, is today the accepted way of thinking about

²¹¹ Id. at 216.

²¹² Id. at 216–17.

²¹³ Id. at 216 (quoting Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* 132 (1986)).

²¹⁴ See *supra* text accompanying notes 200–04.

copyright law and policy.²¹⁵ And as a result, it unquestionably influences the way that courts, scholars, and lawmakers think about copyright law.

A key challenge for coauthorship in copyright law, ever since its emergence as a viable standalone doctrine, has been determining how and why it fits within copyright's overall institutional justification: inducing creativity. Since coauthorship—certainly in its unplanned manifestation—results in dividing up ownership of the work between coauthors, courts and scholars have overwhelmingly tended to view the doctrine in distributive terms and as diluting the dominant model of sole authorship.²¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly though, copyright's core idea of providing actors with incentives for creativity is seen as limited to the institution of sole authorship, with coauthorship then seen as a mechanism that dilutes these incentives. Indeed, some regard it as a variable *against which* copyright's goal of incentivizing creativity needs to be balanced.²¹⁷ What is altogether missed in this approach, which views coauthorship against the baseline of sole authorship rather than no creativity, is the possible role that coauthorship performs in preserving parties' process-based motivations during the creative endeavor, thereby itself contributing to copyright's overall structure as a mechanism of creative inducement.

In committing itself to operating as an inducement for creative output, copyright law says very little about the precise causal dynamics of that inducement. The dominant understanding of creators as ends-based instrumentalists puts all of its focus on protecting the work of expression once produced, and thus on the assumption that creators care only about the marketable product. Nothing, however, either in the Constitution or indeed in copyright's putative basic commitment to utilitarianism, prevents its inducement structure from extending to process-based motivations embedded within copyright's ends-based approach. In other words, to the extent that process-based motivations are in certain domains essential to creative output, working to preserve them comports fully with copyright's commitment to inducing creativity. The coauthorship inquiry might therefore form one of copyright's principal mechanisms for

²¹⁵ Id.

²¹⁶ See, e.g., *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1235 (9th Cir. 2000) ("Progress would be retarded rather than promoted, if an author could not consult with others and adopt their useful suggestions without sacrificing sole ownership of the work.").

²¹⁷ See, e.g., Mary LaFrance, *Authorship, Dominance, and the Captive Collaborator: Preserving the Rights of Joint Authors*, 50 *Emory L.J.* 193, 198 n.24 (2001).

achieving this, by validating and protecting the process-based motivational structure that accompanies collaborative creativity when understood as a jointly intentional activity.

Unplanned coauthorship can fruitfully be seen as a legal mechanism for encouraging forms of creativity that benefit significantly from, or rely entirely on, collaborative activity among two or more creators. It realizes this goal by minimizing strategic free riding during collaboration, thereby effectively preserving the parties' process-based motivations for taking part in the creative process. This idea is best understood using Arrow's information paradox. Arrow's information paradox recognizes that in relation to informational resources that are non-excludable, a resource (that is, an informational good) cannot be evaluated by a buyer until it is disclosed, but upon such disclosure the buyer has no continuing reason to want to buy it since the acquisition has already occurred.²¹⁸ Applied to collaborative creativity, Arrow's information paradox suggests that two (or more) creators might be wary of actively collaborating with one another and integrating their contributions into a unitary work for fear that one of them could lay claim to the work as a sole author and effectively deny the other all benefits.²¹⁹ Unplanned coauthorship claims mitigate these risks to a significant degree, since they signal to the contributors that each of their contributions to the work will be scrutinized objectively ex post to determine whether they obtain a co-ownership stake in the final work. Unplanned coauthorship then effectively undermines the possibility for strategic free riding by detaching the claim from one party's unilateral authority and rendering the determination objective rather than subjective.

Copyright's mechanism of incentives is taken to work through the ex ante signal that the legal regime sends to putative creators. The promise of "authorship" as a legal title, and its economic consequences, are thought to motivate actors to create original works of expression.²²⁰ In this formulation, the authorship signal focuses entirely on the end in

²¹⁸ Kenneth J. Arrow, *Economic Welfare and the Allocation of Resources for Invention*, in *The Rate and Direction of Inventive Activity: Economic and Social Factors* 609, 615 (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research ed., 1962).

²¹⁹ For similar applications in the context of transactions over intellectual property, see Jonathan M. Barnett, *Intellectual Property as a Law of Organization*, 84 *S. Cal. L. Rev.* 785, 794 (2011); Michael J. Burstein, *Exchanging Information Without Intellectual Property*, 91 *Tex. L. Rev.* 227, 227 (2012); Mark A. Lemley, *The Myth of the Sole Inventor*, 110 *Mich. L. Rev.* 709, 748 (2012).

²²⁰ See sources cited supra note 204.

question (namely, the work). Analogously, the rules of coauthorship can be seen to send a specific message to actors motivated to engage in the production of creative works but who are motivated to do so for both ends-based and process-based reasons. The signal that coauthorship sends is that their collaboration in the production of the creative work will both: (1) result in the exact same legal title, authorship and its accompanying consequences and benefits, thereby recognizing that the overall project continues to remain unequivocally instrumental and ends-based (that is, directed in significant part at the production of a creative work); and (2) deter strategic behavior by any one contributor to the collaborative endeavor, which might deter the collaboration, by according him/her *all* of copyright's benefits. Notice that in both instances, the signal is tied to copyright's idea of creator incentives, except that in the latter it creates space for process-based motivations to thrive within the overall ends-based orientation of the project.

For the preceding claim to hold true, the collaboration that the category of coauthorship is seen to preserve must, of course, be seen as valuable and worthy of encouragement within the creative endeavor. It must, in other words, make for better quality works, or indeed a distinct set of works that would not be produced but for such collaboration. Yet this is hardly a major assumption. The copyright statute itself goes to some length to treat works characterized by such collaboration as fundamentally different and afford them protection as an altogether independent category. The Copyright Act's definition of coauthorship demands that the contributions of each party be merged into an "interdependent" or "inseparable" "unitary whole."²²¹ Indeed, the legislative history of the Act indicates that Congress went to some effort to distinguish a joint work from a mere "collective work," with the latter characterized by situations where two or more works of authorship are merely compiled together without any sacrifice of their independent characters.²²² A joint work thus requires contributions that, in a sense, speak to each other. Yet it is not sufficient that the contributions are merely integrated in the end. The Act also distinguishes joint works from mere derivative works, which build on preexisting works and often transform or adapt them.²²³

²²¹ 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (definition of "joint work").

²²² *Id.* (definition of "collective work").

²²³ *Id.* (defining a derivative work as a "work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture

In a derivative work, the derivative contribution (that is, the transformation or adaptation) certainly merges with the original work, and yet derivative works are not the same as joint works under the law. When an author produces a novel and years later it is converted into a movie, the novelist-author and the movie producer are not treated as coauthors, despite the fact that their contributions are now inseparable and/or interdependent in the final work (the movie). What distinguishes the derivative work from a joint work in these situations is the existence of a temporal lag between the contributions and the fact that each contribution was not initially created consciously with the design of being integrated into a whole, but instead as a contribution that could stand alone.²²⁴ Thus, a joint work requires both integration of the contributions and that this come about through the conscious design of the contributors—which, in short, necessitates *actual collaboration* between the parties. Consequently, the copyright system does recognize there to be significant value in the collaborative exercise needed to produce a true work of joint authorship, evidenced in its creation of an analytically separate category for such works.

The institution of unplanned coauthorship thus remains perfectly aligned with copyright's overall purpose of inducing creativity through the instrumentalism of the market. It is worth noting that this alignment is not simply because coauthorship provides creators with an independent incentive to collaborate when they otherwise would not. Such a claim would undermine the idea that coauthorship as a jointly intentional activity is independently motivated at least in part by process-based motivations. Within copyright's overall structure as an inducement for creativity, coauthorship carves out a limited space for these process-based motivations to thrive, unimpeded by strategic behavior that might itself be encouraged by copyright's overall instrumental orientation. Whether the rules of unplanned coauthorship exacerbate the incentive to collaborate (rather than just preserve it) is of course a separate empirical question.

version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted").

²²⁴ See H.R. Rep. No. 94-1476, at 120 (1976), *reprinted in* 1976 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5659, 5734 (noting that even if the pre-existing work were created with an expectation that it would be transformed or adapted into another work, the lack of a "basic intention behind the writing of the work" for it to be integrated renders it a derivative as opposed to joint work).

C. Retaking Mutual Intent

In using the idea of intention to understand works of joint authorship, courts were headed in the right direction. By emphasizing that the touchstone of coauthorship remains the idea of mutual intent, courts were drawing attention to the role of the parties' motivations in creating the work, taken today to be the central premise behind the working of the copyright system. Yet, in employing a set of easy heuristics to decide cases of coauthorship—the “objective indicia”—courts have eventually come to undermine the very reason why copyright law ought to care about parties' intentions as a normative matter. This Section translates these theoretical insights into prescriptions that courts might fruitfully adopt in applying the rules of unplanned coauthorship in order to give the idea of mutual intent meaningful analytical content compatible with copyright's overall utilitarian orientation.

1. The Irrelevance of Objective Indicia

Despite courts' lack of consensus on the nature of intention needed for coauthorship—routinely referred to as “mutual intent”—the idea of intention continues to remain the touchstone of the unplanned coauthorship analysis. Over the years, scholars too have criticized courts' reliance on the notion of mutual intent, with some suggesting that it be cabined in purely contractual terms and others recommending its elimination altogether from the coauthorship inquiry.²²⁵

Understanding mutual intent in purely contractual terms would certainly simplify the concept quite dramatically. All the same, doing so would undermine the very utility of employing mutual intent as an analytical device in copyright law. In the contract law context, mutual intent (determined through objective evidence) enables courts to find the existence of a *consensus ad idem*, or a meeting of the minds, among the contracting parties.²²⁶ As a species of promising, contract law is thought to enable parties to subordinate themselves to each other's wills in the pur-

²²⁵ See, e.g., LaFrance, *supra* note 217, at 255 (arguing for the elimination of mutual intent as the touchstone of coauthorship); Russ VerSteeg, Intent, Originality, Creativity and Joint Authorship, 68 *Brook. L. Rev.* 123, 124 (2002) (arguing that mutual intent should be cabined in contractual terms).

²²⁶ For an overview of this account, see Max Radin, Contract Obligation and the Human Will, 43 *Colum. L. Rev.* 575, 575 (1943).

suit of a common end.²²⁷ The core idea is thus that in so promising, each party subjects himself/herself to the other party rather than the common end in question. This in turn generates an obligation—to the other contracting party—which produces its own set of normative ideals and behavioral motivations. The obligation to the other party—not the final goal—forms contract law’s exclusive concern, which explains why ideas such as “efficient breach” find little recognition as a doctrinal matter.²²⁸ Superimposing contract law’s ideals and obligations over those of copyright law makes little sense then in the absence of an affirmative account aligning contract law’s normative goals with those of copyright law.

Or put another way, recasting mutual intent in terms of parties’ contractual obligations makes little sense unless we deem it normatively desirable to treat their reasons for participating in the creative endeavor the same way we would treat any of their other contractual undertakings and not in purely instrumental terms, as is the case with copyright’s assumptions about creative motivation. To therefore impose the status of coauthors on parties because they are presumed to have contractually agreed to it—as an objective matter—locates the reasons for the imposition on an element of voluntariness associated with consequences rather than on any independent value in the phenomenon of coauthorship or collaborative creativity.

Eliminating mutual intent from the analysis altogether similarly misunderstands the role that it plays. In criticizing the courts’ inconsistent approach to the idea, one scholar thus recommends eliminating the idea of intention in favor of a greater scrutiny of each author’s contribution to the final work to ensure that he/she made a “substantial copyrightable contribution” to the final work.²²⁹ This approach, she argues, will produce a more “efficient allocation of the economic rewards” associated with the copyright system.²³⁰ What this prescription misses altogether, and rather starkly, is the possibility that, in incorporating a reference to intention in discerning coauthorship, copyright law and policy are com-

²²⁷ See Markovits, *supra* note 131, at 1432 (“A promisor therefore intends, within the sphere of the promise, to defer to her promisee and indeed to *subordinate* her ends to her promisee’s will.”).

²²⁸ See, e.g., Daniel Markovits & Alan Schwartz, *The Myth of Efficient Breach: New Defenses of the Expectation Interest*, 97 *Va. L. Rev.* 1939, 1944–45 (2011); Craig S. Warkol, *Resolving the Paradox Between Legal Theory and Legal Fact: The Judicial Rejection of the Theory of Efficient Breach*, 20 *Cardozo L. Rev.* 321, 321–22 (1998).

²²⁹ LaFrance, *supra* note 217, at 255–56.

²³⁰ *Id.* at 263.

mitting themselves to more than just the normative goals of efficient resource allocation, and to recognizing the diverse origins of the motivation to create works of expression, when such creation entails a collaboration among actors.

In a recent paper examining the interface between collaborative creativity and organizational theory, Professors Anthony Casey and Andres Sawicki suggest that copyright's rules on coauthorship should be seen as solving "team-production problems" characteristic of collaborative creativity.²³¹ The problems of observability, verifiability, allocation (of input to output), and uncertainty—that in their analysis accompany collaborative creation—necessitate solutions that "facilitate efficient ownership and control," the hallmark of team-production firms.²³² While they rightly point to the failings of the current objective indicia-based approach, they rather hastily fault the rules of coauthorship for "d[oin]g nothing" to facilitate efficient collaborative creativity.²³³ The fallacy of their argument, however, lies in its complete (and somewhat surprising) neglect of copyright's emphasis on intention and its role in the coauthorship inquiry. Not once do they identify, let alone validate, the emphasis that courts have placed on the question of intent. This leads them to rather simplistically conclude that the coauthorship inquiry should just stick to ensuring that each author makes an inseparable or interdependent contribution to the whole, and that it ought to additionally detach the question of authorship from ownership.²³⁴

In beginning from the premise that copyright law is concerned exclusively with creating an efficient ownership framework for creative products, their paper altogether neglects the possibility that it could harbor other considerations and serve additional purposes that originate in the very nature of collaborative creativity, rather than organizational theory. And the current structure of the coauthorship inquiry, with its focus on intention, can be seen as going quite some distance in realizing this. Indeed, if efficient resource allocation were *all* that copyright law cared about, we might have not only different rules for coauthorship but also a very different basic framework for the institution as a whole.²³⁵ The key

²³¹ See Anthony J. Casey & Andres Sawicki, Copyright in Teams, 80 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1683, 1716 (2013).

²³² *Id.* at 1718, 1720.

²³³ *Id.* at 1718.

²³⁴ *Id.* at 1720–21.

²³⁵ See Balganes, The Normative Structure of Copyright Law, *supra* note 4, at 313.

lies instead in formulating an approach to mutual intent that focuses on the pluralist motivation that is characteristic of collaborative creativity.²³⁶ Before doing so however, it is important to examine how exactly courts' current approach to mutual intent—through the use of objective indicia—fails the coauthorship inquiry.

The fault with mutual intent lies in the way in which courts have operationalized it. In attempting to steer clear of any reliance on subjective motivations, which they rightly recognized as open to manipulation, courts developing the rules of unplanned coauthorship have emphasized their reliance on an objective standard of intention for the concept of mutual intent. As an idea, this move certainly made a lot of sense at the time, especially given the problems with subjective state of mind that have come to be well recognized in other areas of law. Constructing mutual intent as an objective matter then of course necessitated a reliance on circumstantial evidence of the parties' behavior. And to make this process easy, courts came to develop a set of "objective" indicia or proxies, supposedly taken to be indicative of parties' objective state of mind. Therein began the problem.

As courts began to rely on the objective indicia to find the presence or absence of mutual intent, in due course the indicia came to assume a life of their own. Courts deciding cases of unplanned coauthorship began to apply the criteria mechanistically and formulaically, with little regard for the principal purposes underlying their very use. Consequently, in innumerable cases, courts' rote invocation of the indicia seems palpably counterintuitive to the coauthorship inquiry and makes very little analytical sense, a reality that other scholars have noted as well.

Consider the best-known objective indicium that courts use today: the parties' relative "decision-making authority" during the creation of the work in question.²³⁷ In general, when one party (the dominant party) retains most or all such control, courts are reluctant to find the work to have been coauthored despite the magnitude or centrality of the other's contributions.²³⁸ In one well-known case, the Ninth Circuit treated this

²³⁶ For a less extreme critique of the intent requirement in coauthorship, see Zemer, *supra* note 24, at 623 (describing the problems of unfettered discretion that enter under the rubric of intention, but arguing that it remains an element in the analysis, even if not the *sine qua non* of coauthorship).

²³⁷ *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1234 (9th Cir. 2000); *Thomson v. Larson*, 147 F.3d 195, 202–03 (2d Cir. 1998); *Erickson v. Trinity Theatre*, 13 F.3d 1061, 1071–72 (7th Cir. 1994).

²³⁸ *Aalmuhammed*, 202 F.3d at 1235–36; *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 202–05.

element as dispositive of the question, declining to find coauthorship because the dominant author was “not bound” to accept any of the other contributor’s recommendations and such “absence of control [wa]s strong evidence of the absence of coauthorship.”²³⁹ As a preliminary matter, it is not clear what the connection is between the distribution of decision-making authority and the question of coauthorship. Two or more authors can certainly produce a joint work even when one of them is given a complete veto in determining what goes into the final work. Such a veto may merely reflect their relative competence or experience. Indeed, this is fairly well accepted as a norm in the scientific community, where the lead scientist who heads a research laboratory presumably controls the direction of the experiment and the final writing of the publication, but nonetheless shares authorship with others in the facility who contribute to the experiment and participate in the writing of the paper. The default of “distributed control” for coauthorship thus seems blatantly unrealistic, especially when used as an evidentiary matter. Indeed, a close examination of the origins of this indicator reveal that it emerged from courts’ scrutiny of parties’ relative contributions to the work, under the (independently faulty) reasoning that a party contributing peripheral or non-important expression was unlikely to have been seen by the other as a coauthor.²⁴⁰ The idea of relative contribution gave rise to the use of relative “control” as a proxy for such contribution, which in due course assumed a life of its own.

The same can be said of “the way in which the parties bill or credit themselves,” another well-known indicator that courts use in the determination.²⁴¹ In situations where one party is credited on the final work as anything but an author when the work is finalized, courts impute an affirmative intent to the other author to be treated as the sole author, thereby negating a finding of the requisite mutual intent. Once again, this presents multiple problems. First, merely because a contributor is listed as something other than an author is hardly reflective of the fact that the party consciously intended that contributor *not to* have the *legal* status of a coauthor. The dominant author’s decision to list himself as “author,” “composer,” or “director,” and the other contributor as “dramaturg,” “consultant,” or mere “contributor” is no more than an indication of an

²³⁹ *Aalmuhammed*, 202 F.3d at 1235.

²⁴⁰ See LaFrance, *supra* note 217, at 229–30.

²⁴¹ *Thomson*, 147 F.3d at 203 (citing *Childress v. Taylor*, 945 F.2d 500, 508 (2d Cir. 1991)).

intended lack of parity among the parties. Yet this has little to do with their *legal* statuses as such, which may not have been in contemplation at all. Second, in many situations, such billing and crediting takes place at the end of the entire process, after both parties have made their contributions. The dominant author is thus in a position to deny the other contributor the status of coauthorship as a formal (titular) matter, without risking the latter's contribution to the project. Using actual billing and crediting as a variable in the inquiry thus does little to alleviate this situation and is susceptible to the same kinds of strategic posturing that courts worry about in the context of using subjective intent, specifically that *ex post* (that is, during trial), each party has an incentive to reconstruct its past intent in its own favor. Once again, the origins of this variable lie in courts' attempts to discern the parties' relative contributions to the work to determine coauthorship, for which they came to use the parties' self-designated statuses as a proxy. In due course, the determination of these statuses came to be treated as worthwhile on its own, even though as a logical matter it bears little direct connection to the question of coauthorship.

In short then, while the turn to objective evidence in lieu of subjective motivation may have had obvious benefits, courts' further use of specific indicators or "indicia" as shortcuts for the process has resulted in the inquiry routinely bearing no direct connection to the underlying question of coauthorship, except in a very attenuated sense. As a result, the inquiry—as undertaken by courts today—does little justice to the way in which the institution of coauthorship, as a collaborative enterprise, actually works, and the interface between ends and means that it invariably produces and requires actors to navigate. What the mutual intent inquiry needs, in place of the formulaic objective indicia, is a process that allows courts to grapple directly with the conflicting demands and motivations that collaborators encounter when producing a putative work of joint authorship.

2. Mutual Intent as the Search for a Collaborative Impulse

The suggestion that courts eliminate their reliance on objective indicia for the unplanned coauthorship analysis certainly does not imply that they should simultaneously avoid all reliance on mutual intent as well. To the contrary, that would be throwing the baby out with the bath water. The insistence that it is contributors' intentions that provide works of joint authorship (that is, joint works) with their distinctiveness recogniz-

es that these works are accompanied by a shared intentionality during their creation. And as discussed previously, this intentionality consists of a motivation to participate in the creative collaboration in part because of the collaborative nature of the process. We identified this as a process-based motivation that is capable of subsisting within an overall motivation in favor of the final end in question (namely the production of the work itself). Mutual intent should thus remain the touchstone of the unplanned coauthorship inquiry and should come to be used by courts to look for the presence of the process-based motivation previously identified. It should, in other words, be a conduit for courts to inquire whether the parties in question were motivated to produce the work by the collaborative nature of the undertaking.

Recall that the intention to participate in the production of a work because of its joint nature (that is, the joint intention) is underwritten by a commitment to the joint nature of the activity, which in turn produces—at the time of action—a collaborative impulse.²⁴² The collaborative impulse, in other words, represents the translation of the motivation or intention (which is a state of mind) into action, which then results in a particular result: the creative work. As the external manifestation of the motivation, the collaborative impulse forms a viable probative target for assessing whether the production of the creative work was in fact accompanied by the process-based motivation that distinguishes coauthorship as a joint activity. In effect, this converts the search for a mutual intent into the search for a shared intention accompanying the creative process, the hallmark of a joint activity. Recasting mutual intent along these lines makes courts' reliance on it as the *sine qua non* of coauthorship both justifiable and analytically meaningful.

The justification for connecting mutual intent to the collaborative impulse originates in large part from the Copyright Act's own rationale in distinguishing "joint work[s]" from both collective works and derivative works by insisting that a particular *kind* of collaboration be present for works in the first category, as we noted earlier.²⁴³ Yet, the Act and the accompanying legislative history say very little about what exactly it is that the scrutiny of the kind of collaboration is geared toward. Each actor's contribution is required to relate to the other's such that they together form an integrated whole, and in addition, such integration must

²⁴² See *supra* Part II.

²⁴³ See *supra* text accompanying notes 74–93.

have been consciously designed—both in order to preserve the distinct category of joint works. But why? *Qua* works, joint works are treated no differently from other works. They obtain the same set of protections and are subject to the same limitations and exceptions as non-joint works. *Qua* author, each coauthor also obtains the same rights and privileges as regular authors. Why go to such lengths and impose additional adjudicative costs on courts in order to carve out an independent category?

The reason seems to lie in the way copyright law divides ownership between the contributing authors. The law in effect imposes a regime of governance between the authors *inter se* owing to the collaborative process through which the work was produced. Imposing this governance regime on creators makes sense only if the distinct form of collaboration that it is premised on itself contributes to the output of creativity, copyright's primary goal. Indeed, absent such a reality, coauthorship might legitimately be seen as a countervailing consideration to copyright's overall purpose, an issue adverted to previously. Consequently, using mutual intent to test whether the collaborative process itself contributed to the creative work (that is, whether the creative process evidenced a collaborative impulse) seems both analytically and instrumentally defensible. In short, a court's search for mutual intent must involve asking whether the collaborative impulse played any meaningful role in the production of the work.

How then might courts go about looking for the collaborative impulse and determining its role in the creative process? The obvious first step is to more closely scrutinize the actual process of collaboration through which the work is created. While courts certainly do take notice of the creative process under the current standard (that is, the objective indicia), they do so primarily to make sure that each party contributed actual expression to the work, rather than mere ideas or other unprotectable material.²⁴⁴ The scrutiny never extends to discerning or inferring parties' motivations for creativity during the process, and their connection to the parties' relationship. Courts' current form of scrutiny is further muddied

²⁴⁴ A good illustration of this phenomenon is *Childress*, where the court provides us with an elaborate overview of the collaboration between the parties. *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 502–04. Yet, the court uses this overview largely to answer the question of copyrightable contributions. *Id.* at 504–07. The use of this factual information in the analysis of mutual intent is fairly limited. *Id.* at 509.

by their overreliance on the objective indicia as ends in themselves rather than as devices through which they understand the collaboration.

The analysis would be best served by a direct examination of parties' incentives during the collaboration, based of course on objective evidence of the creative process. Courts should be looking for evidence of considerations having entered parties' creative behavior, which suggests that the collaboration was providing creators with an impulse of its own for their endeavor.

a. Intermeshing Subplans

Jointly intentional activities are characterized by each actor undertaking the project at least in part because of the other's involvement and possession of a reciprocally equivalent reason.²⁴⁵ This is described as an intention held by each actor to perform the activity jointly, where the joint nature of the activity is motivational to the performance rather than merely descriptive. These reciprocal (or mutual) intentions in turn work by generating intermeshing subplans, where each actor's steps are in some minimal sense responsive to the other's.²⁴⁶ In this formulation, the intermeshing subplans are a direct manifestation of the shared intention, or evidence of the process-based reasons for the actor's involvement. The search for the collaborative impulse as part of the mutual intent examination should thus look for evidence of intermeshing subplans during the collaboration between the putative coauthors.

These intermeshing subplans can take a wide variety of shapes and forms during the collaboration to produce the copyrightable work of expression. The intermesh can range from the two authors working closely to modify each of their own contributions in light of the other's, to two authors working together to co-produce original expression. When two people set out to write a work of fiction and chain together a series of events in the form of a chain novel, each of their contributions is responsive to the other's, at least insofar as it does not directly contradict the other's contribution. Another example of such intermesh is the traditional collaboration between a lyricist and a composer in the production of a musical work, such as the collaboration between George and Ira Gershwin. The composer's music is responsive to the lyrics chosen by the lyricist, which are in turn driven at least in some part by the composer's

²⁴⁵ Bratman, *Shared Cooperative Activity*, *supra* note 113, at 329.

²⁴⁶ Bratman, *Shared Intention*, *supra* note 113, at 103–04.

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choice of melody, tempo, and rhythm.²⁴⁷ In both situations, each party's contribution to the work is responsive to the other's and is modified reciprocally in an effort to produce an integrated whole. The collaboration thus presumptively generates an additional reason for the creative output.

Very importantly, the intermeshing subplans do not have to be at the level of expressive content. In other words, it should be sufficient to establish—in relation to the search for reciprocal motivations—that one author's contributions at the expressive level were influenced and motivated by mere ideas provided by the other, unprotectable under copyright law on their own. While it is certainly true that copyright law and policy care very little about incentivizing mere ideas (or factual collection) through the provision of exclusive rights,²⁴⁸ ensuring that each author contributes some expression to the joint work already takes place at the first step of the coauthorship inquiry.²⁴⁹ To bootstrap that requirement into the element of mutual intent would ensure a level of redundancy that ought to be avoided. Additionally, the theory of jointly intentional activities itself does not demand such a circumscribed analysis, and recognizes the possibility that subplans can manifest themselves at varying levels of abstraction, in relation to outputs. All that matters is that both actors show some meaningful reciprocal motivation, for which intermeshing subplans provide the best evidence.

As an illustration, consider two writers—Jack and Mary—who embark on the project of writing a novel together, which they decide will contain eight chapters. Jack begins by writing the first five chapters of the novel. Mary then reads Jack's chapters and before she begins writing her own chapters, gives Jack some thoughts on where she intends to take the story and develop the characters in it. Based on this feedback, Jack then decides to rewrite significant portions of his five chapters while Mary is working on her three chapters, such that when Jack is finished

²⁴⁷ For a comprehensive account of collaboration in the songwriting process, including a detailed taxonomy of the forms that this might take, see Joe Bennett, Collaborative Songwriting: The Ontology of Negotiated Creativity in Popular Music Studio Practice, *J. on Art Rec. Production*, Issue 5 (July 2011), <http://arpjournal.com/875/collaborative-songwriting-the-ontology-of-negotiated-creativity-in-popular-music-studio-practice/>. For a specific study of the collaboration between the Gershwins, see Deena R. Rosenberg, *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (1997).

²⁴⁸ See 17 U.S.C. § 102(b) (2012); *Mazer v. Stein*, 347 U.S. 201, 207 n.5 (1954); 1 Nimmer, *supra* note 70, § 2.03[D].

²⁴⁹ See *supra* text accompanying notes 68–73.

with his rewrite and Mary with her chapters (assume that Jack has no comments on Mary's chapters), the novel is essentially done. Unpacking the collaboration in terms of copyright's rules on coauthorship, we see that both Jack and Mary contributed expressive content to the work. Moving to the element of mutual intent, we can also legitimately infer that both Jack and Mary were reciprocally motivated in the project by the other's involvement and contributions. Jack's reciprocal motivation is evidenced in the extensive rewrite that he engaged in, and Mary's in the reality that her contributions were based on Jack's own contributions and integrated into it. It is also true that the evidence of Jack's reciprocal motivation shows that it originated not from Mary's expressive contributions as such, since at the time of his rewrite Mary was yet to produce any actual expression; but they were principally driven by Mary's ideas and suggestions communicated at a more abstract level. This ought to matter little, since it remains clear that both parties were reciprocally motivated by the collaboration and developed intermeshing subplans during the production of the work.

Locating intermeshing subplans to discern a collaborative impulse among actors necessitates probing through the creative process in great detail. An obvious question for the jury,²⁵⁰ parties should be required to present as much information as is available about the collaboration in question: various versions of their contributions (illustrating possible reciprocal modification), correspondence between them (revealing the intermesh), evidence of actual assistance rendered to each other during the production of the work, and any additional evidence indicating that they had chosen to work together on the project because of the belief that their interaction would produce a better result (that is, that the final product would be more than just the sum of their individual contributions to it).

b. Intermesh Versus Integration

The search for intermeshing subplans will not be satisfied by the mere integration of the parties' respective contributions into a unitary work. Indeed, such an interpretation would be palpably tautological by collapsing the mutual intent inquiry into a mere examination of whether the

²⁵⁰ See *Sutton Imp.-Exp. Corp. v. Starcrest of Cal.*, 762 F. Supp. 68, 70 (S.D.N.Y. 1991) (finding that the question of joint authorship is a question of fact). This is not to suggest that the matter may not be decided on a motion for summary judgment.

contributions were “inseparable” or “interdependent.”²⁵¹ In addition, the intermesh must involve the basic question of substantiality, since its role is to provide evidence of the fact that one party was motivated to contribute to the work in some meaningful part by the other’s reciprocal intention and contribution. If one party makes a fairly minimal contribution, measured in both quantitative and qualitative terms, which does indeed find its way into the final work, it would be accurate to say that the parties’ contributions were interdependent and integrated into a unitary whole. Yet it would be inaccurate to say that they had intermeshing subplans that amount to evidence of a collaborative impulse motivating both parties’ actions; since the party contributing most of the expression cannot be said—based on such evidence alone—to have been motivated in some meaningful part by the other’s minimal contributions. Recall that intermeshing subplans entails actors coordinating their behavior in a way that does not just produce the common goal in question, but that in addition seeks to realize that goal jointly.²⁵² Thus when one party contributes minimally to the final work, the mere fact that his/her contribution was integrated into the work does not reflect the level of coordination needed to rise to the level of intermeshing subplans.

The extensiveness and significance of the parties’ collaboration are thus as important as the very existence of such collaboration, in searching for the collaborative impulse. The search for intermeshing subplans must internalize this reality. This is also not simply the isolated question of finding a substantial (or more than *de minimis*) contribution, since that alone need not suggest intermeshing subplans.²⁵³ Two parties can produce their contributions completely independently, and following such production choose to merge them into a unified whole at the end. In this situation again, while the contributions are certainly substantial and interdependent, they are hardly reciprocally motivated by the collaborative impulse (that is, neither party’s contribution was meaningfully driven in part by the other’s contribution). For an intermesh to thus exist and serve as evidence of the collaborative impulse, there must therefore be a

²⁵¹ 17 U.S.C. § 101 (2012) (definition of “joint work”).

²⁵² See *supra* text accompanying notes 115–19.

²⁵³ Some courts have treated a “substantial and significant contribution” as an independent requirement of the coauthorship analysis. This approach originated in cases decided under the pre-1976 law. See, e.g., *Childress v. Taylor*, No. 87 Civ. 6924, 1990 WL 196013, at *5 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 28, 1990) (quoting *Picture Music v. Bourne, Inc.*, 314 F. Supp. 640, 647 (S.D.N.Y. 1970)).

collaborative process through which the final work was produced and in which the contributions are integrated; *and* the parties' contributions within that process must be substantial and meaningful so as to be plausibly motivational.

Measuring the substantiality of the subplans is not the same as measuring the substantiality of each party's contribution, though the two might often overlap and seem similar. In the latter, the question is simply an examination of what one party produced measured against the final whole, with an eye toward comparing it against the other party's contributions, in an effort to ensure a measure of equity between them. The former, however, entails examining what each party contributed during the collaboration, not simply to compare it to the other's but instead to assess whether it might have been valuable enough so as to have had an influence on the other party's own contribution. The difference is thus subtle but important, and lies in the purpose behind the inquiry.

Measuring the substantiality of the subplans might seem overly subjective, and perhaps contrary to copyright's basic ideal of "neutrality."²⁵⁴ Yet it must be remembered that courts routinely undertake precisely such an inquiry as part of the "substantial similarity" analysis, where they examine whether the defendant's copying was quantitatively and qualitatively significant enough to be wrongful before making a finding of infringement.²⁵⁵ In a largely similar vein, the question here should thus be whether each party's contribution during the collaboration was quantitatively and qualitatively significant enough so as to be plausibly constitutive of the other's reasons for producing his/her contributions.

Introducing the idea that the intermesh involves an element of substantiality serves, in addition, to alleviate a major concern that seems to have influenced courts in their analysis of the coauthorship question (namely that one coauthor might obtain an ownership stake in the work that is disproportionate to his/her contribution to the work).²⁵⁶ Such "overreaching contributors,"²⁵⁷ who provide insignificant expression during the collaboration, would under this formulation be unable to es-

²⁵⁴ See, e.g., Keith Aoki, *Contradiction and Context in American Copyright Law*, 9 *Cardozo Arts & Ent. L.J.* 303, 304–07 (1991); Alfred C. Yen, *Copyright Opinions and Aesthetic Theory*, 71 *S. Cal. L. Rev.* 247, 300 (1998).

²⁵⁵ *Newton v. Diamond*, 388 F.3d 1189, 1194–95 (9th Cir. 2004); *Twin Peaks Prods. v. Publ'ns Int'l*, 996 F.2d 1366, 1376–77 (2d Cir. 1993).

²⁵⁶ See, e.g., *Aalmuhammed v. Lee*, 202 F.3d 1227, 1235–36 (9th Cir. 2000).

²⁵⁷ *Id.* at 1235 (quoting *Thomson v. Larson*, 147 F.3d 195, 200 (2d Cir. 1998)).

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establish any shared intentionality during the production of the work and thus fail to satisfy the requirements of coauthorship.

c. Contractualization

In addition, courts should also consider evidence of factors that might have the effect of either diluting or strengthening the working of the collaborative impulse as an independent motivation among the parties. One such factor is the contractualization of the parties' collaborative relationship through the market. It is very often the case involving two collaborators that one of them is being compensated or was hired or commissioned by the other for his/her participation in the creative endeavor. In various contexts, scholars and empiricists have shown that the introduction of market-based motivations into an actor's reasons for action can have the effect of either diminishing (that is, "crowding out") other pre-existing non-market motives, or alternatively of strengthening (that is, "crowding in") their influence.²⁵⁸ This phenomenon is referred to as the "motivation crowding effect."²⁵⁹ It thus need not be the case that simply because parties structure their collaboration in contractual terms, they cannot evince a collaborative impulse during their actions. Determining whether the contractualization diminishes or exacerbates the collaborative impulse requires a closer scrutiny of how exactly the parties reacted to the contractual arrangement during their actual collaboration. In some instances, the hired creator may view the contract as delegating the creative endeavor as a whole to her, and requiring her to produce a creative output that is entirely (or for the most part) hers, with any input from the other actor being suggestive at best.²⁶⁰ In these situations, the contractualization effectively crowds out the collaborative impulse as a motiva-

²⁵⁸ For early work identifying this idea, see Richard M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* 223 (1970). Economists and psychologists have since empirically investigated Titmuss's initial theory. For a sample of this work, see Edward L. Deci & Joseph Porac, *Cognitive Evaluation Theory and the Study of Human Motivation*, in *The Hidden Costs of Reward: New Perspectives on the Psychology of Human Motivation*, 149, 155–57 (Mark R. Lepper & David Greene, eds., 1978); Edward L. Deci et al., *A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation*, 125 *Psychol. Bull.* 627, 632 (1999); Edward L. Deci, *Effects of Externally Mediated Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation*, 18 *J. Personality & Soc. Psychol.* 105, 114 (1971). For a recent survey of these studies, see Bruno S. Frey & Reto Jegen, *Motivation Crowding Theory*, 15 *J. Econ. Surveys* 589, 606 (2001).

²⁵⁹ Frey & Jegen, *supra* note 258, at 589–90.

²⁶⁰ As an example, consider the case of *Childress v. Taylor*, No. 87 Civ. 6924, 1990 WL 196013, at *2–3 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 28, 1990), discussed *infra* Section III.D.

tion and replaces it with its own set of (new) reasons. Yet in other situations the contract between the parties may recede into the background once the relationship is brought into existence, after which the creative process takes on a genuinely non-contractual flavor where neither party is seen to be motivated to generate a creative output as a purely contractual obligation. Here, the contract is in effect crowding in and stimulating the collaborative impulse. Consequently, the mere existence of a contract between the parties is hardly probative on its own, but ought to be scrutinized within the context of overall collaboration that ensues from it.

In speaking of the motivation crowding effect here, care must be taken to avoid the trap of equating the contractualization of the collaboration with the presumptively market-driven nature of the task that the parties are engaged in (namely, the production of a marketable creative output). The effect being considered is simply of exogenous variables influencing the process-based structure of the collaborative impulse, which to be sure is embedded into an overall instrumentalist (and market-based) orientation.

From an evidentiary standpoint, the most obvious puzzle in discerning the presence of a collaborative impulse arises in situations where the parties have agreed in advance contractually, about the nature of their statuses. Two or more collaborators may thus agree contractually that they should be treated as coauthors, or instead that one of them will be the sole author of the work. In these situations, should courts treat the agreement as dispositive of the question of coauthorship? From a purely objective standpoint, an agreement between the parties on the question of authorship should have little say on their legal statuses, which depend entirely on their actions, behavior, and motivations during the collaboration.²⁶¹ Thus, two creators cannot simply combine their preexisting works to create what is in effect a collective work, and then create an agreement claiming to be coauthors of a joint work. Such an agreement,

²⁶¹ Some courts seem to take the position, erroneously, that the question of coauthorship does not require an objective determination at all if the parties enter into a contract to that effect. *Aalmuhammed*, 202 F.3d at 1234 (“[S]everal factors suggest themselves as among the criteria for joint authorship, in the absence of contract.”). This position implicitly assumes that a valid contract altogether vitiates the need for a specific kind of intention accompanying the collaboration, or indeed that it is dispositive of the question of intention, both of which are clearly not contemplated by the definition of a joint work. Indeed, the absence of the phrase “in the absence of contract” in that definition is indicative. See LaFrance, *supra* note 217, at 247–48 n.228 (describing the *Aalmuhammed* court’s observation as “troubling”).

simply put, cannot confer or deny a status that depends entirely on the law and its accompanying legal standard. Yet functionally the agreement nonetheless remains important.

While authorship and coauthorship do carry important attributive benefits with them, recall that their primary consequence—at least insofar as copyright law is concerned—relates to the ownership/co-ownership interest that they confer. Consequently, while the agreement cannot confer a legal status on parties without an independently determined objective basis for the status, it can nonetheless affect a transfer of ownership between the parties, as long as it is in writing.²⁶² To see how this might work, consider two creators whose collaboration does not meet the law's requirements for coauthorship, but who enter into an agreement wherein they agree to treat each other as coauthors and share ownership of the work. While they may not qualify as coauthors at first, and it would have been the case that one was the sole author of the work, the agreement nonetheless has the legal effect of transferring part ownership of the work to the other creator—in effect producing a relationship of co-ownership. Similarly, two creators whose collaboration and behavior would qualify them objectively for the status of coauthors (and the work as a joint work) might agree that one of them is to be treated as the sole author of the work and retain all ownership rights over it. Here too, the agreement does not simply negate the status of coauthorship that the law recognizes, but as a functional matter, it has the effect of transferring one coauthor's share to the other, creating a situation of sole ownership.

The only situations where the Act contemplates a contractual arrangement *altering* or *conferring* the status of author on a party relates to works made for hire. These are works specially ordered or commissioned by one party as a contribution to another work or collective work in various contexts.²⁶³ The Act, however, insists that in addition to having such agreements in writing, the parties must agree “that the work shall be considered a work made for hire” for the status to attach.²⁶⁴ Once these formalities are complied with, the commissioning or ordering party comes to be treated by the law as both the “author” and owner

²⁶² 17 U.S.C. § 204(a) (2012) (requiring transfers of copyright ownership to be in writing).

²⁶³ See id. § 101 (2012) (definition of “work made for hire”).

²⁶⁴ See id.

of the work commissioned or created.²⁶⁵ Very few simple collaboration agreements or contracts would satisfy this high bar and explicitly identify the work as a work made for hire.²⁶⁶ Consequently, ordinary agreements cannot have the same effect.

In this sense, an agreement between authors or coauthors is not dispositive of their statuses in the abstract; yet functionally, it can indeed be important on the question of ownership, which is the principal consequence of their statuses. Perhaps most importantly though, in situations where an express agreement does exist between the parties, the likelihood of a court being called upon to determine coauthorship remains fairly minimal. Consequently, unplanned coauthorship as a doctrine is almost always invoked in situations where no agreement on authorship and ownership exists between the parties in question.

In summary, courts applying the rules of unplanned coauthorship and searching for the requisite mutual intent should focus the inquiry around an examination of whether and to what extent the parties were motivated to create the work by the collaborative impulse. This will obviously entail a fine-toothed investigation of the actual creative process in order to discern the parties' motivations therein, and the possibility of intermeshing subplans having influenced the final production of the protected work. Yet, the key lies in examining the collaboration on its own terms, detached and unmoored from the simplistic allure of the objective indicia, which bear no direct connection to the analytical and normative foundations of the institution of coauthorship. As it turns out, the courts that did develop the objective indicia were sitting in appeal, and thus had little ability to further elicit information about the creative process. Their impetus to apply the simplifying indicia seems to have been borne out of an urge to avoid grappling with the complexities of collaborative creativity and parties' motivations therein, an impetus that has resulted in the rules of unplanned coauthorship being viewed in copyright jurisprudence as a distinct anomaly.

²⁶⁵ See *id.* § 201(b) (2012) (discussing ownership of copyright for a work made for hire); see also LaFrance, *supra* note 217, at 247–48 n.228 (discussing the work for hire interpretation of such contracts).

²⁶⁶ See 2 Patry, *supra* note 50, § 5:76 (“An agreement that doesn’t *expressly* state that it shall be [a] work for hire is insufficient.”); see also 1 Nimmer, *supra* note 70, § 6.07[D] (discussing the relationship between joint works and the work made for hire doctrine).

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D. Childress v. Taylor and the Collaborative Impulse

Having examined the theory behind the collaborative impulse and the ways in which it might be translated into insights for copyright's rules on unplanned coauthorship, this Section moves to illustrating the working of the collaborative impulse using the facts of *Childress v. Taylor*, the seminal case on coauthorship where the Second Circuit developed the current formulation of mutual intent.²⁶⁷ While the Second Circuit today receives much of the credit for its ruling, the district court's factual record on the collaborative process is rich in detail, allowing for a nuanced application of some of the principles illustrated in the previous sections.²⁶⁸

The work in question was a play about Jackie "Moms" Mabley, a well-known African American performer.²⁶⁹ The defendant, Taylor, was an actress who had portrayed Mabley in different plays previously, and had developed an interest in producing a play specifically about Mabley and her life.²⁷⁰ She approached the plaintiff, Childress, who was a noted playwright, with her idea.²⁷¹ Childress at first turned down the idea, since she was busy with other projects. But she later changed her mind and agreed to work on the play and to have the project completed in under six weeks.²⁷² While the parties did not have any "firm" contractual agreement in place, Taylor nonetheless paid Childress \$2500 before the play was actually produced.²⁷³ The parties at the time did not sign an agreement, nor did they specify the work as a work made for hire.

During the creation of the play, Taylor supplied Childress with an extensive amount of research that she had done about Mabley, her life, and connected ideas, all of which she had diligently collected from multiple sources.²⁷⁴ This research "consisted of phonograph recordings of performances by Mabley, magazine articles, and tapes of interviews Taylor conducted of Mabley's stepson and brother."²⁷⁵ Childress however was

²⁶⁷ 945 F.2d 500, 507 (2d Cir. 1991).

²⁶⁸ *Childress v. Taylor*, No. 87 Civ. 6924, 1990 WL 196013, at *2-4 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 28, 1990).

²⁶⁹ *Id.* at *2.

²⁷⁰ *Id.*

²⁷¹ *Id.*

²⁷² *Id.*

²⁷³ *Childress v. Taylor*, 945 F.2d 500, 503 (2d Cir. 1991).

²⁷⁴ *Childress*, 1990 WL 196013, at *2.

²⁷⁵ *Id.* at *3.

the only one who actually wrote the script for the play.²⁷⁶ In writing the script, Taylor did however make suggestions to the script:

[S]he suggested a particular scene in the Play, taking place in Harlem; the inclusion of a card game involving the three characters; descriptions of several of Mabley's personal characteristics; jokes used in a scene describing activities in a bar; and a suggestion that a scene be included of Moms performing in blackface.²⁷⁷

Nonetheless, during discovery the actual markups of the play as used during the first production were produced before the court, and it was revealed that Taylor had only contributed "one line of script" to the play.²⁷⁸

Following the creation of the work, Taylor attempted to enter into a contract with Childress, which would have treated them as co-owners of the play.²⁷⁹ Childress refused this arrangement and their relationship deteriorated.²⁸⁰ When Taylor produced another version of the play using another scriptwriter eventually, Childress commenced an action for copyright infringement, during which Taylor claimed to be a coauthor of the work.

As a threshold issue, the facts suggested that Taylor did indeed contribute some minimal amount of expression to the work. As the Second Circuit, interpreting the record, noted, Taylor's assistance involved "furnishing the results of research concerning the life of 'Moms' Mabley [She] also made some incidental suggestions, contributing ideas about the presentation of the play's subject and possibly *some minor bits of expression*."²⁸¹ The principal issue was thus mutual intent. Recasting mutual intent in terms of the search for a collaborative impulse, we might thus begin by asking whether Childress and Taylor were each motivated to contribute to the work at least in part because of the other's reciprocal contribution—such that we might say that they were both committed to producing the work jointly.

From the very beginning, Taylor insisted that her research formed the basis of Childress's writing. As the district court pointed out, the parties

²⁷⁶ Id. at *2–3.

²⁷⁷ Id. at *3.

²⁷⁸ Id.

²⁷⁹ Id.

²⁸⁰ Id.

²⁸¹ Childress v. Taylor, 945 F.2d 500, 509 (2d Cir. 1991) (emphasis added).

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“were in frequent telephone communication during” the writing of the script, with the process best summarized as one where Taylor researched “while” Childress wrote.²⁸² It is clear that the parties did not form intermeshing subplans at the level of expression, a reality borne out by the fact that Taylor does not appear to have contributed adequate original expression to the final work as such. Yet, as we noted earlier, such intermeshing subplans can develop when one party is motivated to produce expression based on another’s ideas or research, assuming that each party did at some point make an expressive contribution to the work. The question thus becomes (1) whether Childress was motivated to write the script in any meaningful part by Taylor’s research, suggestions, and ideas, and (2) reciprocally, whether Taylor’s own contributions were driven in some part by Childress’s writing.

The factual record certainly reveals that Childress integrated many of Taylor’s contributions into the final script during her writing. As discussed previously though, the mere integration of another’s contribution into the final work does not ipso facto evidence the existence of intermeshing subplans that are meant to be motivational to parties’ behavior. It is only when the subplans underlying the collaboration are substantial enough from both a quantitative and qualitative standpoint that they can be said to genuinely intermesh rather than just integrate. The factual record and both courts’ descriptions of the parties’ testimony in the case suggest that the subplans, to the extent that they did exist, were neither extensive nor significant in qualitative and quantitative terms. Indeed, the district court went so far as to observe that Taylor’s “creative suggestions” did indeed “fall far short” of what was needed.²⁸³ Her contributions were thus found to be insubstantial, which weighed on the court, even though it lacked a legal basis for this fact to matter. Even though the Second Circuit did not address the question directly, its opinion leaves little doubt that it engaged in a direct evaluation of Taylor’s contributions to the final work, which it described variously as “incidental,”²⁸⁴ “minor,”²⁸⁵ and as mere “helpful advice.”²⁸⁶ All of this suggests that while the parties may have indeed developed subplans of some kind, these subplans were never substantial enough to rise to the level of

²⁸² *Childress*, 1990 WL 196013, at *2.

²⁸³ *Id.* at *5.

²⁸⁴ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 509.

²⁸⁵ *Id.*

²⁸⁶ *Id.*

an actual intermesh that could presumptively be motivational in their actions. The insubstantiality of the subplans underlying the collaboration is also borne out in the evidence suggesting that Taylor's particular research direction, approach, and data were not directly influenced or informed by Childress's actual writing of the play. In other words, Taylor seems to have done this research out of an interest in producing a play about a historical character and a desire that the play exhibit fidelity to that character's life, but not at the behest of, or in furtherance of, Childress's own contributions—once again, diminishing the plausibility of a meaningful intermesh.

In addition, the absence of a collaborative impulse is buttressed by the contractualized way in which the parties approached their collaboration. The parties seem to have conceptualized their arrangement in purely contractual terms, with Taylor offering Childress an upfront payment for scriptwriting.²⁸⁷ While this does not automatically negate the presence of a collaborative impulse,²⁸⁸ it merits a closer examination of the effects of the formalized relationship on the parties' behavior and motivations. Taylor treated the parties' arrangement as one where she was commissioning a specific work for compensation. Childress, for her part, produced the expressive component of the work almost entirely in isolation, and seems to have seen her involvement in the process as deriving from an obligation to generate an actual output (with a deadline determined by the other party). Both parties might have certainly been motivated by copyright to create the work, and it certainly appears that Childress was, given that she registered the work immediately upon its creation.²⁸⁹ Coupled with the absence of any affirmative evidence of a collaborative impulse, the arm's length nature of the parties' contractual interaction further suggests that neither party was motivated to create the work in any part because of the collaboration in question.

While the district court (and later the Second Circuit) had sufficient evidence to focus on the parties' possible motivations, it placed its attention elsewhere. Focusing on the collaborative impulse would have thus required no additional evidence to be presented, nor would it have imposed added adjudicative costs on the court and parties. If anything, it

²⁸⁷ *Id.* at 503.

²⁸⁸ See *supra* text accompanying notes 259–61.

²⁸⁹ *Childress*, 945 F.2d at 502.

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would have given the court an analytical metric through which to scrutinize the evidence that was presented.

CONCLUSION

Hidden within copyright's principal focus on the individual creator, unplanned coauthorship attempts to carve out analytical space for collaborative creativity as a distinct mode of cultural production. It remains premised on the idea that the collaborative production of creative expression is more than just the sum of each author's individual contribution, and that the creative works that result from such collaboration—joint works—are worthy of being produced and protected as an altogether separate category. Despite this reality, copyright's rules on unplanned coauthorship have thus far received little systematic scrutiny for their compatibility with copyright's goals and purposes, and as introducing an altogether different set of values into the working of the system. Indeed, courts have long considered them to represent something of an anomaly within copyright's utilitarianism landscape and its dominant theory of creator incentives.

Perhaps the biggest source of confusion with unplanned coauthorship originates in courts' focus on "intention" as the touchstone of the inquiry. Yet, in failing to specify what exactly the search for intent is meant to achieve normatively, in adopting a multitude of conflicting definitions for such intent, and in utilizing a variety of simplistic shortcuts while searching for intent, courts have allowed this focus to come across as largely misguided in approach and mechanistic in application. This has in turn forced some to argue that unplanned coauthorship ought to abandon its emphasis on intention altogether.

In this Article, I have shown that *intentionality* is indeed central to coauthorship as a collective activity, drawing on insights from the philosophy of action. Indeed, theories of collective activity and group activity there have long argued that it is a specific kind of intention, referred to as "shared intentionality," that renders such activities distinctive by imbuing actors with an independent motivation to participate in the activity because of its collective/joint nature. Further, such intentions work by providing actors with their own reasons for action—referred to as commitments—that are distinct from ordinary desires, beliefs, and preferences, even though they may often overlap descriptively.

If courts' emphasis on intention during the unplanned coauthorship inquiry is recast in terms of the search for a shared intention among the

putative coauthors, the inquiry begins to assume both analytical and normative significance. Unplanned coauthorship comes to be seen as a mechanism for protecting process-based motivations that are endogenous to the collaboration itself, and which influence creative behavior. The search for mutual intent is in effect an examination of the parties' motives during the collaborative endeavor, to ensure that it evinces a commitment to producing creative expression jointly, a hallmark of jointly intentional activities characterized by a shared intention. This reformulation of the inquiry is fully compatible with copyright's utilitarian orientation. It operates as a form of means-oriented instrumentalism that introduces process-based considerations into copyright's framework for inducing creativity.

While scholars are right to criticize current copyright thinking for its single-minded focus on market incentives and rational utility-maximization, the possibility of using unplanned coauthorship as a mechanism for introducing process-based considerations into the system should serve as an important point of introspection for copyright debates. Perhaps the real problem is not copyright's simplistic market focus or its purported commitment to an empirically unproven theory of incentives, but rather the copyright lawmaking community's failure to meaningfully integrate new normative considerations and motivational realities into copyright's existing doctrinal framework through a process of accretive growth within the system. Understanding unplanned coauthorship through the collaborative impulse represents a modest effort in one important area of copyright law where this might occur. Until such time as the "next great copyright act"²⁹⁰ changes our very understanding of copyright law and its purposes, thinking creatively and pragmatically about copyright's existing concepts and analytical devices in this vein will remain essential.

²⁹⁰ See generally Maria A. Pallante, *The Next Great Copyright Act*, 36 *Colum. J.L. & Arts* 315, 344 (2013) (articulating a framework for a new copyright act and suggesting that "[t]he next great copyright act is as possible as it is exciting").