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Ariadne Revisited

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John Dilworth

Abstract

My article, "Ariadne at the Movies," provided a detailed, double film counter-example to the claim that films are types. Here I defend my views against various criticisms provided by Aaron Smuts. The defense includes some necessary clarification of the Ariadne article's broader theoretical structure and background, as well as some additional anti-type arguments to further withstand his criticisms.

1. Types and intentions

I am indebted to Aaron Smuts for his stimulating comments on my Ariadne article.^[1] But he oversimplifies my view about types, and hence too easily dismisses a representational account of filmic identity. My view is not that one token cannot be an instance of two types, for of course it can, but instead that it cannot be an instance of two types of *the same general kind*. That qualification makes all the difference.

Here are some more examples to reinforce my original example of dogs and cows being different types of *animal*--the relevant general kind--so that no animal can be both a dog and a cow. In the case of colors, which are types or universals--for which a similar principle holds--then no color token can be both red and green, since both are of the same general kind, i.e. *colors*. Or in a more specific case, no token can be both dark green and light green, because each type is of the same general kind, namely some variety of *green*. Or with manufactured types such as cars, if the type 'Ford car' is genuinely distinct from the type 'GM car', then no particular car can be both a Ford car and a GM car. And similarly, I continue to claim, if artworks were types, then no two types that were of the same general kind 'artwork' could share a single token.

Arguably, the relevant type-token principle is as secure as the foundations of logic, since it is simply a more specialized form of the principle that if an object has property, universal or type Y, then it would be inconsistent to claim that it has some related property Z of the same general kind, whose possession would *entail* that it does not after all possess feature Y. For example, no object can be both light green and dark green, because being dark green entails that an object is not light green, and no object can be both light green and not light green. Thus, in sum, in any case in which two distinct artworks are associated with a single concrete entity or event, such as a length of film or film showing, some other, non-type account must be given of the relevant relations, such as the suggested representational account.

To be sure, this type-rejecting representational account should be distinguished from various other general representational or symbolic theories of art, such as that of Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*, which itself is based--at least for 'allographic' artworks--on an underlying type-token ontology.^[2]

Nevertheless, to the extent that it is correct to view films as being broadly symbolic, Smuts' counter-claim that film identity can be defined independently of intentional criteria becomes suspect, since the understanding of any symbol requires interpretation that necessarily includes assumptions about the intentions of the symbol users or creators.^[3]

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Also, independently of symbolic views of art, Arthur Danto's insistence that interpretation is always required to transmute 'mere real things,' such as film reels or light patterns on a screen, into genuine art also requires an intentionalistic view of artworks. Further independent support for such an intentionalistic view was included in the final section 7 of the Ariadne paper, where I argued that type-based views of film cannot explain the evident fact that films can and need to be *interpreted*--a section that Smuts did not consider in his comments. Also, Noël Carroll's own type-based view of film, as well as of performance arts such as plays, does not prevent him from also being a prominent defender of a variety of 'actual intentionalism' in the arts, including film cases. See, e.g., his paper "Interpretation and Intention: The Debate Between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism,"^[4] which includes arguments for the relevance of authorial intentions in determining film identity in the case of controversial films such as *Stand By Me* (1986).

As for the related issue of 'auteur' theories of film raised by Smuts, we can agree that general theories of film based solely on directorial intentions are oversimplified. But that at least *some* films are best understood as the product of a director's intentions is hardly a controversial claim in film circles--and my anti-type example of distinct films *Greed* and *Sacrifice*, produced by two independent directors Leslie and Steve, is itself such a case.

At this point a further oversimplification in Smuts' description of my view should be noted. Neither I, nor presumably anyone else, wishes to *identify* a film with the intentions of its creator(s), which I assume is what is implied by Smuts' sentence "It is not clear if *Grand Hotel* should be identified with the set designer at MGM, the producer, or with the director," or in his attempted explanation of my view as "The claim seems to mean that Leslie's film is whatever her intentions for it to be are. . . ." My actual view of film identity, as discussed in section 2 of the Ariadne paper, is, in summary form, that it is *successfully realized* intentions plus causal factors that provide the main criteria or necessary conditions for film identity. Thus, to be explicit, on my view mere *unrealized* intentions as such are irrelevant to film identity: it is only successfully realized intentions that are relevant. This point also takes care of Smuts' 'splintering' argument, that if I were right then classical films such as *Gone with the Wind* might splinter into various different films, each associated with the differing intentions of one of the major persons involved in its production.^[5] Such a concern would again conflate the raw, initial intentions of various participants in a film project with the *successfully realized* intentions that provide one necessary condition of film identity on my account. Thus it is only those differences in intentions that somehow manage to survive the actual filmmaking process that are relevant to issues about the identity of the resulting film or films.

In my example I detailed some of the agonizing, draconian procedures that would be necessary in order to ensure that both Steve and Leslie could successfully realize their significantly different film intentions within the same concrete film production project. But in actual rather than hypothetical projects, I have seen no evidence to date that any actual participants in film productions have been willing to go to such extreme lengths to ensure that more than one film resulted from their combined efforts. So Smuts' fears of splintering in classic film productions are groundless.

As for the associated causal factors that also provide necessary conditions of film identity, in tandem with intentional factors, clearly there is a complex and intimate connection between the actions of a director that successfully realize her intentions, and the relevant causal factors in the production process. My claim is that the outcome of that causal process is able to *represent* those film-related intentions of the director that were successfully realized by the process.

This clarification enables a further criticism of the type view to be given. Any parallel intentionalistic type-based account presumably would have to say that the final length of film *instantiates* or exemplifies, rather than *represents*, those successful intentions. But such a view seems metaphysically confused: how could a physical length of film be an actual example or instance of the relevant directorial intentions, and how could those intentions themselves be types rather than tokens? Thus the very coherence of a specifically intentionalist type theory of film, or of any art form for that matter, is in serious doubt.

Returning to causal factors, Smuts is skeptical even of the conceivability, let alone the actual possibility, of qualitatively identical but causally independent lengths of film, and consequently gets bogged down in irrelevant issues of replication or copying. However, here I am doing no more than providing a film 'thought experiment' analogous to Danto's generally accepted point that, e.g., a series of qualitatively identical, independently produced red squares might each have a different artistic status from the others (or no artistic status at all). For example, if we found evidence on Mars of an ancient film-making civilization, including a reel of film qualitatively identical to that of Orson Welles' film *Citizen Kane*, my point is that the Martian reel of film could not be, or could not embody, the film *Citizen Kane*, because of its causal independence from Welles' actual film product. Its finding would be a remarkable coincidence, but it could not provide an identical film. Indeed, in the absence of any evidence of the intentions of the Martian producers of the film-reel, we could not even assume that it involved a film that was an artwork at all.

There is also a dual or inverse issue to consider, that of the possibility that qualitatively *different* film reels might nevertheless embody the *same* film, about which Smuts also expresses puzzlement, such as in my section 2 claim that "Leslie's film-making activities could have produced a numerically distinct template L', but since L' would have still been the causal outcome of Leslie's activities, it would have still counted as embodying Leslie's film *Greed*." Here I was defending the 'modal flexibility' of film-making, that possible minor differences in batches of film, on-set props and so on, would not prevent the result from embodying the same film.

This intuitively compelling modal flexibility point also provides yet another problem for type theories--they cannot explain it, because types as abstract entities could not have been different from what they actually are, and hence their tokens could not have been different either. But with my alternative representational explanation, there is no such problem, since it is a familiar point that different concrete representations could still *represent* the same item.

As for what it means to say that a length of film X 'embodies' or 'involves' a film Y, as also queried by Smuts, this is just a colloquial, more intuitive form of the theoretical claim that X *represents* Y--my alternative to the parallel type-theoretical

claim that X is a *token* of type Y.

2. The possibility of a double film example

Turning now to the general issue of the *possibility* of a double film example such as that of Leslie's film *Greed* and Steve's film *Sacrifice*, let me start, as in the case of types, with a clarification of the theoretical situation. The general idea is that, for those who accept a broadly intentionalistic theory of art, insofar as artistic intentions are not simply physical events, there will inevitably be some *looseness of fit* between a finished artistic artifact, such as a reel of film--along with the causal processes that produced it--and the possibly distinct intentions of those involved in its production. As an initial implication of this point, Danto's example of several qualitatively identical red squares may again be invoked--each being the result of differing artistic (or non-artistic) intentions, which hence result in non-identical artworks (or non-artworks). Thus here we already have the possibility that qualitatively identical physical results, whether paintings, reels of film or whatever, could be associated with distinct artworks--as in the case of the Martian *Citizen Kane* look-alike reel mentioned above.

However, Danto's example by itself is of no immediate help in refuting type theories, since each of the resulting red squares is a numerically distinct physical object, and there is no conclusive theoretical bar to distinct tokens, even of qualitatively identical objects, being of different types of the same general kind. Example: as long as the written tokens of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* are distinct from written tokens of Menard's *Don Quixote*--the latter as envisaged by Borges^[6]--then even though the relevant sets of tokens are qualitatively identical, they might still be tokens of distinct artistic types of the same kind 'artwork.'

Nevertheless, if a way could be found in which distinct artistic intentions could each be expressed within a *single* causal process and result, then the intentionalistic 'looseness of fit' already referred to would result in distinct artworks that could after all be used to refute type theories--which I claim to have done, both in the current film example, and with analogous test cases in other art forms.^[7]

Smuts questions whether my somewhat elaborate double film example is really necessary to make my point, proposing instead "...a single physical film that moves from a blue screen to a black screen to a black screen with a white dot," which length of film is screened under separate titles *Drowning* and *Flight*. To which he adds, "If your intuitions are like mine, you will want to say that *Drowning* and *Flight* are two separate films. What we have is a Danto inspired case of perceptually indiscernible objects that are different." He concludes his alternative case by saying, "Viewers at different screenings or with differently titled tickets would come away with radically different notions of what each phase of the film represented."

Smuts agrees that two distinct films can be associated with a single length of film stock, picks up on the relevance of Danto, makes parallel points to mine about distinct titles, and even talks of "...what each phase of the film represented." If viable, Smuts' example of two distinct films sharing a single token would provide the basis for a parallel but non-intentionalistic anti-type argument, hence extending my result, which is specifically targeted at intentionalistic type theories of art, to type theories of art in general. Nevertheless, Smuts seems not to realize that, in thus defending his own alternative example,

he is thereby undercutting his own pro-type approach to film, and in addition apparently accepting a representational approach in its place.

There are several reasons as to why I chose to present a more developed example. One is a matter of scale: Smuts' example is a toy rather than a full-blown case of distinct films using numerically the same physical resources, which could be dismissed as involving merely two minor film experiments or sketches rather than two distinctive filmic artworks in the full sense. Also, the detailed defenses of my proposal against various objections in sections 3-5 of the Ariadne paper would not be possible without a comprehensive example. Another reason is that issues of intentionality are left in a nascent or unresolved state in Smuts' simplified example.

This is shown by the fact the example faces the following dilemma: Either it does in fact involve two distinct kinds of intentionality, as shown by its maker's decision to title it in two different ways that suggest distinct intentionalistic interpretations of it (i.e., of what I called 'identifying interpretations' in section 7 of the Ariadne paper, that identify two distinct artworks rather than just interpret one or more pre-existing artworks), in which case the example is simply a drastically scaled-down version of an example such as mine.

Or, on the other horn of the dilemma, if Smuts' example genuinely does involve no film intentionality at all, then the showing of the length of film is no more than a physical event of light being projected on a screen in certain configurations, so that it does not qualify as a showing of even one filmic artwork, let alone of two. This interpretation of the example is also suggested by Smuts' emphasis on presentational as opposed to intentional factors: I would explain that interpretation as a case where one or more showings of the length of film are *presented* or *interpreted* as a showing of two distinct films, without its actually being the case that any genuine film is shown. (And in general, objects or events may be used as if they were artworks--i.e., as if they represented artworks on my theory--even if they are not in fact artworks or representations of such). Hence, either the example provides further supporting evidence for my intentionalistic anti-type argument, or it fails to provide a relevant example at all.

Thus in conclusion, I would claim to have further reinforced, in the face of Smuts' spirited opposition, the anti-type arguments of the Ariadne paper. The intentionality of artistic activities and products cannot consistently, and perhaps not even coherently, be explained within a type-theoretic framework, so attention should now shift to alternatives such as the suggested representational account.

Endnotes

[1] "Ariadne at the Movies," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 1 (2003), online at

<http://www.contempaesthetics.org/pages/article.php?articleID=203>.

[2] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968). For further type-related flaws in such a view, see my paper "A Refutation of Goodman's Type-Token Theory of Notation," forthcoming in *Dialectica* (2003), which demonstrates that Goodman's type-based theory cannot work even for simple notational symbols such as letters and words, let alone for more complex artistic cases.

[3] On which see the related points made by Merrilee Salmon in her discussion of Goodman's views in "Representation and Intention in Art," *The Philosophical Forum* 5 (1974), pp. 365-374.

[4] Noël Carroll, *Metaphilosophy*, 31 (2000), pp. 75-95.

[5] Smuts adds that such a view "...is certainly counter to most intuitions about what counts as a film." But that claim of counter-intuitiveness is irrelevant or question-begging, because I explicitly presented my counter-example to type theories as one "...which. . . has not previously been envisaged or investigated by others," so that my aim from the start was to challenge common intuitions or assumptions about what counts as a film.

[6] Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in J. L. Borges, *Labyrinths* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1985).

[7] See note 3 of the Ariadne paper. An additional case is provided in "A Counter-Example to Theatrical Type Theories," forthcoming in *Philosophia*, 31, 3-4 (2003). (Draft versions of these papers are available online at my website; see also my forthcoming book, *The Double Content of Art*, for a more comprehensive account.)

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