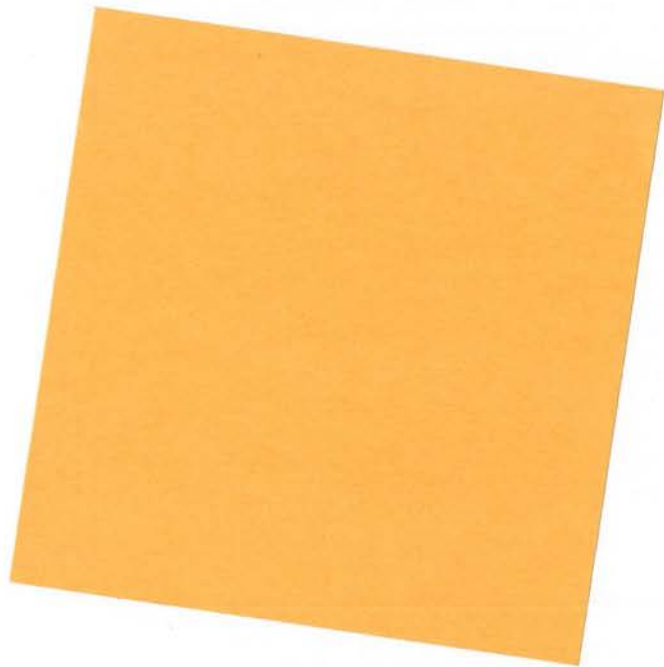


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3 What's So Bad about Blackface?

Christy Mag Uidhir

I assume that most have a prima facie suspicion of, if not outright negative attitude toward, cases of what I call actor-character race-mismatching film fictions—that is, films in which the race of an actor or actress does not match the race of the character he or she portrays.¹ Even the most cursory of glances through the history of cinema reveals the practice of race-mismatching—whether as *cinematic blackface* or one of its racially other-colored cinematic kin (*yellowface*, *redface*, *brownface*)—present not only in cinema's infancy but also through its Golden Age all the way to the contemporary Hollywood era. Here is a brief list of salient examples:

- Walter Long as Gus in *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915).
- Rudolph Valentino as Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan in *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921).
- Peter Lorre as Mr. Moto in *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* (Norman Foster, 1937).
- Katherine Hepburn as Jade in *Dragon Seed* (Jack Conway and Harold S. Becket, 1944).
- Marlon Brando as Emiliano Zapata Salazar in *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan, 1952).
- Charlton Heston as Ramon Miguel Vargas in *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958).
- Mickey Rooney as Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961).
- Chuck Connors as Geronimo in *Geronimo* (Arnold Laven, 1962).
- Telly Savalas as Pancho Villa in *Pancho Villa* (Eugenio Martin, 1972).
- Robbie Benson as Billy Mills in *Running Brave* (D.S. Everett, 1983).
- Fisher Stevens as Ben Jabituya in *Short Circuit* (John Badham, 1986).
- Mizuo Peck as Sacagawea in *Night at the Museum* (Shawn Levy, 2006).

The question then is this: *what (qua film fiction) is so bad about actor-character race-mismatching?* That most of us think that something is prima facie wrong with race-mismatching I take to be obvious. Not so obvious, however, is to what other than intuition and sentiment (and the violations and affronts thereof) we could plausibly appeal to ground our thinking as much.

In what follows, I show the question of the badness of actor-character race-mismatching to extend beyond the domain of the moral to the aesthetic and the epistemic. Building on the framework I have outlined elsewhere (Mag Uidhir 2012) to evaluate race-mismatching *aesthetically*, I claim that determining what, if anything, is in fact wrong with race-mismatching *morally* operatively depends on determining what, if anything, is in fact wrong with race-mismatching *epistemically*, such that, if there is nothing wrong with race-mismatching *all epistemic things considered*, then there is nothing wrong with race-mismatching *all moral things considered*. Of course, even though there may be nothing wrong with race-mismatching per se, we need not look too hard to find a host of standard race-mismatching film fictions in which there looks to be plenty wrong *epistemically*, *aesthetically*, and *morally*.

First, I provide the framework from which to secure a workable and explanatorily robust account of actor-character race-mismatching. I then provide a basis for the normative analysis of race-mismatching according to which such film fictions are best understood as a species of *unrealistic fiction*. I then show how once so understood, a productive and explanatorily unified normative picture emerges. I argue that what is so bad (qua film fiction) about the cinematic practice of race-mismatching, be it the historically infamous and intuitively repugnant practice of blackface or one of its more contemporary relations, is that the extent to which film fictions employ such practices is the extent to which such film fictions *unrealistically* depict their worlds with respect to facts about race. More precisely, I claim that film fictions that race-mismatch (so as to be unrealistic) are prima facie inconsistent fictions with the capacity to mislead their audiences about certain morally relevant actual-world states of affairs and thus, prima facie aesthetically, epistemically, and morally defective.

OPERATIVE ASSUMPTIONS AND FRAMEWORK²

Let me first lay out the operative background assumptions necessary to establish a precise framework for race-mismatching cases of the relevant and philosophically interesting sort.³ In the claims that are to follow, let f be some film fiction, w_f be the world of that film-fiction f , C be some character in f , R be some racial or ethnic class, and A be some actual-world film actor.⁴ The first operative assumption is:

- P1. All characters in f are residents of w_f , such that, if C is a character in f , then C is resident of w_f (C exists in the world of film-fiction f).

For example, if Lois Lane is a character in the film *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978), then Lois Lane is a resident of the *Superman* world (e.g., Lois Lane exists in the world of the film-fiction *Superman*). Given this sort of claim, my second operative assumption is:

- P2. C is a constitutive character of f , such that there can be no possible world w such that C does not exist in w and w is an f -world (world of film-fiction f).

For example, suppose that Gramercy Riff #10 is a character in the 1979 theatrical release of Walter Hill's film *The Warriors*. Now, further suppose that the only scene in which Gramercy Riff #10 appears is cut for the 2005 DVD release. Presumably, we do not take the mere absence of Gramercy Riff #10 in the DVD release to be itself an even prima facie reason to think that there are in fact two individual, distinct films—*The Warriors* (1979) and *The Warriors* (2005).⁵ Likewise, the nearest world to the world of *The Warriors* in which Gramercy Riff #10 does not exist, nevertheless looks to be a *Warriors* world. By contrast, any film in which Mookie is not a character cannot be the film *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) and as such, any world in which Mookie does not exist cannot be a *Do the Right Thing* world.

Of course, the race-mismatching film fictions of the relevant and philosophically interesting sort must be those for which the race of at least some of its constitutive characters matters (and ipso facto constitutive of the film itself). Thus my third operative assumption is:

- P3. If according to f , C is in (a member of, belongs to) R , then C being in R is constitutive of C as a character of f —if C is in w_f , then C is in R in w_f and there is no possible world w such that w is an f -world but C is not in R in that w .

For example, if Mookie is a constitutive character of *Do the Right Thing*, then if being black is constitutive of the character Mookie, then Mookie being black is constitutive of *Do the Right Thing*, such that there can be no possible world w such that w is a *Do the Right Thing* world and Mookie exists in that w but is not black.

Some film fictions for which a character is constitutive also specify that character as being of a certain race, but mere specification itself does not entail that being of that race is constitutive of that character.⁶ For example, I assume that *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) at least implicitly specifies, via the portrayal by actor Yaphet Kotto, that the constitutive character of Parker is black. However, this need not entail that being black is constitutive of the character of Parker—we might quite easily and coherently imagine the character of Parker to be white. Similarly, although *Alien* explicitly specifies (as constitutive) that the principal character, Ripley, is a woman, *Alien* at best only implicitly specifies, via actress Sigourney Weaver's portrayal, that Ripley is Caucasian. This, however, should neither entail nor even suggest that being Caucasian is constitutive of the character Ripley—we can quite easily and coherently imagine Ripley to be black.⁷ There could be some world w such that (1) w is an *Alien* world and (2) Parker is in w and is white or (3) Ripley is in w and is black (or Korean, Maori, Ainu, Ojibwa, etc.).

Lastly, I assume that things true in a fiction are those things the fiction invites its audience to imagine. Fictions are invitations to imagine (Walton 1990). Fictional worlds comprise what fictions invite us to imagine— p is true in w_f if f invites audiences to imagine p . Of course, for audiences to determine what is true in a fiction, they must rely on more than just what the fiction explicitly says. In determining the content of a fiction, audiences “import” numerous truths about the actual world into the world of the fiction: audiences assume that p is true in the fiction on the basis of the fact that p is true in the actual world (Lewis 1983; Currie 1990; Walton 1990).⁸ But in what respects? Convention and mutual understanding can limit this similarity assumption to a subset of the propositions comprising the world of a fiction: a *similarity class* $[S_f]$ of propositions comprising all and only those propositions for which the aforementioned assumption of similarity is warranted, other things being equal, for a fiction f . This presumption and its corollary concerning race may be formulated in the following ways:

- P4. Fiction f invites audiences to imagine p (i.e., it is true in w_f that p), other things being equal, if p is a member of S_f and p is true.
 P5. Propositions about R are propositions for which the assumption of similarity is warranted.

So, with respect to race-matching issues, assume that f invites its audience to import facts about R from the actual world into w_f . That is, unless otherwise indicated, assume propositions true of R in the actual world are true of R in w_f . Furthermore, to maximize precision, also assume in all cases that:

- P6. If A is in R in the actual world, then A stands in the same relations to R in the actual world as C stands in to that R in the f -world.⁹

So, unless otherwise indicated, assume that belonging to a racial class in the fictional world is relevantly identical to, congruous with, equivalent to, or relevantly maps onto belonging to that racial class in the actual world at least with respect to the identity and individuation conditions for the class (e.g., certain salient phenotypical, physiological, linguistic, social, cultural, or historical features of the class or its typical membership). For example, unless otherwise indicated, assume that whatever it is for the constitutive character Ben to be black in the world of *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) just is whatever it is for actor Duane Jones to be black in the actual world.

Note that nothing herein should be taken to entail, suggest, or depend on commitment to race as a coherent and productive *biological* category. I assume along with almost all biologists and philosophers that race utterly fails to be such a category (Mallon 2004, 2006, 2007). I do assume, however, that any substantive discussion of the aesthetics of race-mismatching requires at least some commitment to some form of realism about race (e.g.,

as human-dependent construct) and that within this context, racial categories still to some extent are organized, however loosely or in part, around phenotypical characteristics thought to be commonly displayed by members of those categories (although these phenotypical characteristics are in fact nonunique and genetically insignificant). I take my arguments to depend on nothing over and above this reasonable background assumption.¹⁰

From what has so far been assumed (P1–P6), we can arrive at the following definitions:

- RACE-MATCH: Fiction f is a race-matching film fiction just in case both A and C are in R.
 RACE-MISMATCH: Fiction f is a race-mismatching film fiction just in case f is not a race-matching film fiction.

However, not all race-mismatches need be considered equal as such. To explain this possibility, allow me to introduce the idea of “ersatz race-matching.”

ERSATZ RACE-MATCHING

To help illustrate how some race-mismatches may importantly differ from others, consider the following puratively obvious, well known, and particularly egregious examples of race-mismatching film fictions.

- Douglas Fairbanks as Joe in *Martyrs of the Alamo* (Christy Cabanne, 1915).
 Luise Rainer as O-Lan in *The Good Earth* (Sidney Franklin, 1937).
 John Wayne as Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* (Dick Powell, 1956).
 Jon Voight as Red Man in *U-Turn* (Oliver Stone, 1997).

Now compare those preceding to the following examples of race-mismatching films that are little known, largely ignored, and often widely praised as such.

- Anthony Quinn as Auda ibu Tayi in *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962).
 Eli Wallach as Tuco Ramirez in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966).
 Linda Hunt as Billy Kwan in *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Peter Weir, 1982).
 Jenette Goldstein as PFC Vasquez in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986).

Each of the preceding examples constitutes a race-mismatching film fiction of the relevant sort under discussion. However, I strongly suspect that while many would be quick to condemn the race-mismatching cases in the first group, few would so condemn those in the second group, and although

many may quite comfortably all but ignore, if not outright laud, the race-mismatches in the second group, I suspect few would be willing to do the same for those in the first group.

For example, compare Luise Rainer's portrayal of O-Lan in *The Good Earth* with Linda Hunt's portrayal of Billy Kwan in *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Both received an Academy Award—Rainer for Best Actress, Hunt for Best Supporting Actress. Both are race-mismatches—O-Lan is Chinese, Luise Rainer is German; Billy Kwan is a male Chinese dwarf, Linda Hunt is none of those things. Many consider Rainer's O-Lan an aesthetically repugnant instance of early Hollywood yellowface roles such as Peter Lorre's Mr. Moto in *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* and Marlon Brando as Sakini in *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (Daniel Mann, 1956). By contrast, most regard Hunt's portrayal of Billy Kwan to be aesthetically laudatory and not in spite of its being a race-mismatch or for reasons unrelated to it being as such but instead precisely because of the way in which it constituted a race-mismatch. This suggests that the mere presence of race-mismatching *itself* can no more plausibly ground aesthetic condemnation (qua film fiction) of Rainer's obvious yellowface portrayal of O-Lan in *The Good Earth* or Douglas Fairbanks' egregious blackface portrayal of Joe in *Martyrs of the Alamo* than can it so ground aesthetic admiration or aesthetic indifference to Hunt's astonishingly transformative turn as Billy Kwan in *The Year of Living Dangerously* or Jeanette Goldstein's thoroughly convincing PFC Vasquez in *Aliens*.

This reflects, as I have previously concluded (2012), that what matters about race-matching must fundamentally be an *epistemic* concern. That is, A portraying C as minimally specified by *f* has nothing *in principle* to do with A being in R but instead depends entirely on A appearing to be in R to a degree sufficiently facilitative of a properly informed audience (i.e., those with the minimal epistemic background required to recognize the constitutive elements of the film as *constitutive*) imagining C to be in R in w_i as minimally specified by that *f*. Accordingly, although all of the preceding films are race-mismatches of the relevant sort under discussion, the difference between the two groups is that only those from the latter group are what I call *ersatz race-matches*.

ERZATZ RACE-MATCH: Fiction *f* is an *ersatz race-matching* film fiction just in case *f* is a *race-mismatching* film fiction to which an otherwise identical (or relevantly similar) *race-matching* film fiction would be epistemically equivalent.

If *f* is an ersatz race-match, then despite the fact that A is neither in R nor otherwise stands in the same relations to R in the actual world as does C in the *f*-world, this fact fails to manifest itself at the level of the portrayal of C so as to thereby preclude, frustrate, or interfere with a properly informed, cooperative audience's reception of its uptake.¹¹ As a result, if *f*

is an ersatz race-matching film fiction, then for any properly informed, cooperative audience, imaginatively engaging with that *f* (qua film fiction) would be equivalent to imaginatively engaging with an otherwise identical race-matching film fiction.¹² Moreover, given that an ersatz race-match is *ceteris paribus* epistemically equivalent to an otherwise identical actual race-match, it then follows that an ersatz race-match must also be *ceteris paribus* aesthetically equivalent to that otherwise identical actual race-match. However, ersatz race-matches are nevertheless actual *race-mismatches*. So, if an ersatz race-matching film fiction just is an actual race-mismatching film fiction *ceteris paribus* epistemically equivalent to an otherwise identical actual race-matching film fiction, then obviously the fact that a film-fiction race-mismatches *itself* says nothing *in principle* (or perhaps even *prima facie*) about that film fiction with respect to the presence or absence of any defect (qua film fiction), be that defect *epistemic*, *aesthetic*, or *moral*.

That said, I assume that in the main (i.e., typically, traditionally) race-mismatching film fictions fail to be ersatz race-matches: the heretofore history of race-mismatching film fiction is almost exclusively a history of good old-fashioned and straightforwardly obvious *race-mismatches*. In what follows, I target race-mismatching film fictions of this sort (i.e., race-mismatches that do not ersatz race-match).

UNREALISTIC FICTIONS

My aim here is to show that any normative distinction (qua film fiction)—be it aesthetic, epistemic, or moral—between those race-mismatching film fictions that ersatz race-match and those that do not is ultimately nothing more than the distinction between *realistic* and *unrealistic* film fictions. That is, despite being actual race-mismatching film fictions, ersatz race-matches can nevertheless realistically depict the relevant racial facts just as well as would an otherwise identical actual *race-matching* film fiction—the extent to which a race-mismatching film fiction does not constitute an ersatz race-match is the extent to which that film fiction unrealistically depicts its world with respect to race. Consequently, whether or not (and to what extent) there is something bad about race-mismatching (qua film fiction) depends entirely on whether (and to what extent) such film fictions unrealistically depict race in the fictional worlds. Only when understood as a species of unrealistic fiction can an explanatorily tidy and unified normative picture of cinematic race-mismatching begin to emerge.¹³

Recall that in determining the content of a fiction, consumers “import” numerous truths about the actual world into the world of the fiction, specifically those within the *similarity class* [S_f] of propositions comprising all and only those propositions for which the assumption of similarity is warranted, other things being equal, for that fiction.

IMPORT: Fiction f invites audiences to imagine p (i.e., it is true in w_f that p), other things being equal, if p is a member of S_f and p is true.

From the fact that similarity is a symmetric relation together with the import principle being inferred from the fact that, in general, it is conventional to assume that a given fictional world is similar to the actual world—within a specific domain of propositions, name the similarity class for that fiction [S_f —we can also infer a principle of “export” from a fiction:¹⁴

EXPORT: Fiction f invites consumers to believe p , other thing being equal, if (i) p is a member of S_p , (ii) p is true in f .

Fictions therefore invite consumers not only to imagine that various things are the case but also to believe that various things are the case. As Tamar Gendler (2000) writes:

We export things from the story . . . adding them to our stock in the way that we add knowledge gained by testimony. In this way, for instance, we might learn how French women wore their hair during the reign of Louis XIV, what were typical whaling practices of mid-nineteenth-century New England, or how far away a particular village is from London. (76)

Note that for my purposes here, I need claim nothing over and above that fictions can invite consumers to believe various things about the actual world—various things that may or may not actually be true. Whether it’s exporting into belief propositions about nineteenth-century New England whaling practices from the literary fiction of *Moby Dick* or the proposition that Chicago has an elevated train from the film fiction *The Fugitive* (Andrew Davis, 1993), what matters is that fictions can inform us about the actual world.

Of course, if fictions may inform us about the world (via EXPORT), then so too may they *misinform* us about world (via FALSE EXPORT).

FALSE EXPORT: For fiction f to invite false export is for that f to invite consumers to believe p , in virtue of EXPORT, where p is false in the real world.¹⁵

To help illustrate this concept, consider the television show *ER* (1994–2009). Studies suggest that people who watch hospital dramas like *ER* tend to believe, to a much greater extent than people who don’t watch them, that CPR is far more effective than it in fact actually is—a perceived survival rate around 50–75 percent versus an actual survival rate of less than 5 percent. Given that the audience knows *ER* to be a work of fiction—that is, no one thinks *ER* is a hospital documentary—how might such an audience

nevertheless come to be misled as to certain facts about the real world? The explanation is that the misled consumers of *ER* simply accept that fiction’s invitation to believe that CPR is typically successful. That fictions can mislead their consumers should be no more puzzling than the fact that lies can cause people to have false beliefs. Moreover, we can see how some fictions tend to mislead, whereas others tend not to do so. For example, *ER*’s audience comes to the table with little knowledge of the effectiveness of CPR, and so when the show suggests to them that CPR is typically successful, they accept this suggestion. Of course, a relevantly informed audience member would not fall prey to FALSE EXPORT in that any relevant prior knowledge she might have (e.g., that CPR is rarely effective) would presumably trump the testimonial offered by the fiction.

Moreover, given its genre (“realistic” hospital drama rather than science fiction or magical fantasy), audiences have implicit license to import into the *ER* world propositions about real-world medical procedures, in particular the proposition that CPR is effective little more than 5 percent of the time. Furthermore, given its genre, *ER* is precisely the sort of fiction *prima facie* licensing audience export into belief, in particular those propositions about medical procedures in the world of *ER*. However, in virtue of its explicit depictions of CPR (and the fact that the doctors on *ER* are not depicted as having superhuman powers or as being miraculously lucky in their rates of success), *ER* then invites its audience to export propositions inconsistent with those propositions the audience was invited to import, in particular the proposition that CPR is effective more often than not. It is in this sense and to this extent that *ER* can be said to be an “unrealistic” fiction. More precisely,

UNREALISTIC FICTION: A fiction f is unrealistic to the extent that (i) f invites its consumer, via IMPORT, to imagine p , (ii) f invites its consumer, via EXPORT, to believe $\sim p$ (or some proposition that entails $\sim p$), and (iii) p is true.

ER is unrealistic because it invites one to form expectations about *ER* states of affairs, based on the *ER*-world and the actual world being linked by a similarity class (which contains propositions about medical procedures). It then violates those expectations by explicitly depicting the *ER*-world as being different, with respect to propositions in that same class, from the actual world. That is, it violates audiences’ warranted expectations, where those expectations are correctly informed by real-world states of affairs.

Suppose fiction f to be an unrealistic fiction in the sense described earlier. Given that unrealistic is a corollary of FALSE EXPORT, it follows that:

- a. Fiction f invites its audience to believe p , in virtue of EXPORT, where p is false.

- b. Since f invites its audience to export p , it follows that p is true in the f -world, and thus, f invites its audience to imagine that p .
- c. Moreover, p must be a member of the similarity class for that f and therefore, so too must be $\sim p$.
- d. Since p is false, $\sim p$ is true, and therefore, by IMPORT, f invites its audience to imagine $\sim p$.
- e. Fiction f is therefore IMPORT-EXPORT inconsistent.
- f. \therefore Therefore, all unrealistic fictions are IMPORT-EXPORT inconsistent.

That is, unrealistic fictions invite consumers to import true propositions about certain real-world states of affairs and then invite them to export propositions inconsistent with those they were asked to import. And all import-export inconsistent fictions are unrealistic, at least by the lights of the properly informed audience.¹⁶ For a fiction that invites someone to export $\sim p$, while inviting her to import p , will therefore be a fiction that invites her to believe something she believes to be false ($\sim p$), as someone who accepts the invitation to import p is a fortiori someone who takes p to be (actually) true.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BLACKFACE (AESTHETICALLY)?

It then follows that unrealistic fictions are inconsistent fictions, and inconsistent fictions are prima facie aesthetically flawed (i.e., inconsistency is an at least prima facie, if not pro tanto, aesthetic defect of fiction). That is, inconsistent fictions are prima facie aesthetically defective for the reason that inconsistent fictions always give incoherent instructions to their consumers: consumers are invited both to imagine p and to imagine something that entails $\sim p$. There is a prima facie reason to think that such incoherence will interfere with the audience's uptake of the fiction in question, that is, interfere with her ability to understand its narrative, to grasp its thematic content, and to have the aesthetic responses it prescribes. A set of coherent instructions is typically (and thus prima facie) easier to follow than a set of incoherent instructions; a consistent (possible) world is typically, and thus prima facie, easier to imagine than an inconsistent (impossible) world. A realistic fiction will therefore typically be able to achieve its aesthetic goals more easily than will an unrealistic fiction. For a fiction, being unrealistic in this sense is a prima facie aesthetic flaw—*all else being equal*, any fiction that frustrates audience reception of its own uptake is to that extent an aesthetically defective fiction.

More importantly, by understanding race-mismatching film fiction as a species of unrealistic fiction, we can secure plausible ground for the claim that race-mismatching is in some sense an aesthetically defective cinematic practice. That is, race-mismatching film fictions—insofar as they are not ersatz race-matches—are to that extent unrealistic fictions. Given that

race-mismatching film fictions are a species of unrealistic fiction, it follows that what is so aesthetically bad about race-mismatching (qua film fiction) is that race-mismatching film fictions, insofar as they are not ersatz race-matches, are unrealistic fictions and thus, prima facie aesthetically defective (qua film fiction).

Of course, given that this inconsistency is specified in terms of an imaginative inconsistency for properly informed audiences, perhaps there need be no imaginative inconsistency insofar as a race-mismatching film fiction has an *improperly* informed audience (i.e., an audience either misinformed or ignorant of the relevant actual facts about the actual world or the world of that fiction). The problem, of course, is that to be an audience of the sort for which there need be no such race-mismatching imaginative inconsistency just is to be an audience of the sort misinformed or ignorant about the relevant facts about the actual world and the world of the film fiction, specifically those about race. However, one of the basic assumptions about the race-mismatching cases of the relevant sort under discussion is that they are not just fictions for which propositions about race are those for which the assumption of similarity is warranted, but that they are film fictions that in nontrivial part are constitutively about race. That is, race-mismatching film fictions, just like their race-matching counterparts, invite audiences to import propositions about race true in the actual world and specify either implicitly or explicitly certain of those as being constitutively true of some fictional character constitutively residing in that fictional world. The problem, of course, is that in virtue of the race-mismatch, the film fiction depicts the fictional world as being in some way inconsistent with that which the audience was invited to imagine via IMPORT.

For example, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005) invites its audience (via IMPORT) to imagine that in the *Memoirs* world, just as in the actual world, the ethnically Japanese—and only the ethnically Japanese—typically look ethnically Japanese.¹⁷ However, in virtue of the race-mismatch between ethnically Chinese actress Gong Li and ethnically Japanese character Hatsumomo, *Memoirs* depicts Hatsumomo as looking other than ethnically Japanese (namely, ethnically Chinese). As a result, *Memoirs* invites its audience to imagine that in the *Memoirs* world Hatsumomo both looks and does not look ethnically Japanese—and all else being equal, that Hatsumomo both is ethnically Japanese and is not ethnically Japanese. The fact that being ethnically Japanese is constitutive of Hatsumomo and ipso facto of *Memoirs* itself means that any audience misinformed or ignorant as to the relevant facts about being ethnically Japanese is to that extent an audience misinformed or ignorant as to a constitutive feature of the fiction which to that extent thereby precludes proper or full reception of the uptake so prescribed by *Memoirs*. By contrast, a properly informed audience encounters imaginative inconsistency precisely because they have the information required to imagine that which the fiction invites them to imagine, and unrealistic fictions generally, and race-mismatching film fictions specifically,

invite their audiences to imagine that p and that $\sim p$. So, whether or not a race-mismatching film fictions is exclusively engaged by (or targets for such exclusive engagement) a relevantly misinformed or ignorant audience rather than one properly informed, the race-mismatching film fiction nevertheless remains an unrealistic fiction and as such, likewise remains an inconsistent fiction and thus, remains *prima facie* aesthetically defective.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BLACKFACE (EPISTEMICALLY)?

Whereas what's bad about race-mismatching *aesthetically* seems to be in terms of the imaginative inconsistencies (via UNREALISTIC FICTION) for a properly informed audience, I take it that what is so bad about race-mismatching *epistemically* to be in terms of the way in which fictions can mislead (via FALSE EXPORT) a relevantly misinformed or ignorant audience. Should a race-mismatching film fiction license a proposition for false export, no properly informed audience of that fiction can accept such export invitations, as such an audience would take these propositions to be false in the actual world (and so, would fail the conditions for EXPORT). Presumably then, for an unrealistic fiction to be *prima facie* epistemically defective (via FALSE EXPORT), then presumably for that fiction there must some audience—sufficient both in number and degree—that is relevantly misinformed or ignorant as to the operative composition of the similarity class of propositions for that fiction. Given such an audience, what is so epistemically bad about (standard) race-mismatching film fictions is that (via FALSE EXPORT) for a relevantly misinformed audience, such fictions typically reinforce/support already held audience false beliefs about race in the actual world, and for the relevantly ignorant audience, such fictions typically impart or facilitate acquisition of altogether new audience false beliefs about race in the actual world.

Of course, this possibility need not be exhausted by the particularly egregious and repugnant sorts of race-mismatching film fictions reinforcing odious racial stereotypes already held by a wildly misinformed audience. For example, *prima facie*, to find Mickey Rooney's portrayal of Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* comical seems to require wholesale racial naiveté or an already-in-place set of largely false, and likely quite racist, beliefs about the ethnically Japanese. At least insofar as its epistemic badness is concerned, there is little distinction between race-mismatching cases of the earlier sort and race-mismatching film fictions that impart to its relevantly ignorant (if not excusably so) audience far less malignant sorts of false beliefs. For example, the fact that many people falsely believe that most American Indians wore some type of headdress or headband can be largely attributed to the widespread race-mismatching practice of *redface* during the Golden Age of Hollywood Western movies. More specifically, in such films, the typically Caucasian actors portraying American Indian characters would often be required to engage in stunt work or some such other vigorous activity, and

so commonly wore headbands to keep their costume wigs securely in place atop their heads. As a result, given basic sorts of cinematic practices and genre conventions, such film fictions—whether intentional or otherwise—implicitly invited their audiences to export into belief certain propositions about American Indians (how they looked, talked, dressed, etc.). These beliefs, of course, were largely false in the actual world, but were nevertheless exported from those fictions by relevant ignorant audiences. That such a false belief has become so widespread I take to be a testament to the power of fictions to mislead their audience.¹⁸

Race-mismatching film fictions, unless otherwise ersatz race-matches, *caeteris paribus* invites audiences to export from the fiction into belief some such proposition(s) about race that is false in the actual world. Any fiction licensing false export actively misleads (misinforms, deceives) a relevantly ignorant (or already relevantly misinformed) audience about the actual world. So, the extent to which a film-fiction race-mismatches (in a manner other than an ersatz race-match) is the extent to which that film fiction, in virtue of unrealistically depicting salient facts about race in the fictional world, has the capacity to misinform relevantly ignorant audiences as to the salient facts about race in the actual world. So, race-mismatching film fictions, at least qua unrealistic fictions, are *prima facie* epistemically defective film fictions. I claim that it is this capacity for false export that provides the principal explanation of what is so bad about race-mismatching *morally*.¹⁹

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BLACKFACE (MORALLY)?

To invite someone to believe p , where p is false, and in particular where you know p to be false, is *prima facie* wrong in at least two senses. First, it violates a rule of conversation: avoid misleading your interlocutors. Fiction-making is in this sense like performing a speech act, and race-mismatching fiction (or at least the making thereof) is like a species of speech act that inherently has the capacity to mislead interlocutors. There is a defeasible rule against speech acts of that kind, thus race-mismatching fictions, as I have defined them, that are inherently like conversationally flawed speech acts. Second, we have (again plausibly defeasible) moral obligations not to mislead people, and thus race-mismatching film fictions, insofar as they fail to be ersatz race-matches, will be all else equal morally problematic.

Moreover, such fictions, in their capacity to mislead their audiences, could well bring about substantial moral harm depending on the propositions falsely exported. For example, consider the potential harm of ER licensing false export that CPR is effective more often than not. Someone so misinformed, in response to cardiac arrest, may thereby become more inclined to administer CPR prior to, or in lieu of, far more actually efficacious options (e.g., defibrillation or simply notifying emergency services), and in so doing, indirectly decrease chance of survival.²⁰

Of course, a plausible explanation of what's morally wrong with race-mismatching film fictions need not be fleshed out in such stark life-and-death terms. Instead, we need but claim the following:

1. Facts about race are morally relevant facts about the actual world.
2. Precluding awareness of or attention to morally relevant facts (*ceteris paribus*) constitutes a moral wrong (bad, harm, defect).
3. Race-mismatching film fictions—when not otherwise an ersatz race-match—license propositions about race for false export into audience belief.²¹
4. So, race-mismatching—when not otherwise ersatz race-matching—is to that extent morally wrong (defective, bad, harmful).

For audiences already largely ignorant or misinformed as to the salient (phenotypical, physiological, linguistic, social, cultural, or historical) features constitutive of some racial class or its typical membership, race-mismatching in film can often intentionally or unintentionally facilitate both the acquisition of false beliefs as well as the confirmation of certain previously held false beliefs.²² So, if we assume race a morally relevant matter, then those poorly informed or misinformed as to the salient features constitutive of some racial class or its typical membership thereby lack the epistemic background minimally required to act in such a way properly commensurate with race so mattering. So, insofar as at least some salient racial facts are themselves *morally relevant* facts, race-mismatching—in its capacity for false export—contributes to moral agents being misinformed about matters of moral relevance.²³

Just as facilitating the acquisition of false beliefs is *prima facie* defective epistemically (i.e., a *prima facie* epistemic wrong/bad/harm), facilitating the acquisition of false beliefs about morally relevant matters looks to be *prima facie* defective *morally* (i.e., *prima facie* morally wrong/bad/harmful). Even supposing film fictions (qua film fictions) not coherently morally evaluable in the standard sense, they nevertheless appear to be coherently morally evaluable in some comparative or an instrumental sense, that is, with respect to the capacity to facilitate (foster, support) or frustrate (undermine, subvert) the acquisition of (warranted, justified) true moral belief. This I take to provide sufficient ground for claiming that race-mismatching film fictions, when not otherwise ersatz race-matching, are to that extent *morally* defective film fictions.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, if what grounds the normative force of claims about race-mismatching per se is fundamentally an epistemic problem, then solving for the epistemic problem needn't involve anything at the level of actual (rather than *ersatz*) race-matching or mismatching—film fictions that *ersatz*

race-match are epistemically equivalent to otherwise identical race-matching film fictions and thus, *ceteris paribus* aesthetically and morally equivalent (qua film fiction) to those that *actually race-match*. So, as I have elsewhere concluded (2012), insofar as nothing is wrong *epistemically* race-mismatching (qua film fiction), there can be nothing wrong with race-mismatching either *aesthetically* or *morally*. That said, the point here has been that we need not and should not assume this to hold for *standard* cases of race-mismatching film fictions (i.e., those race-mismatching film fictions otherwise failing to ersatz race-match).

What is *aesthetically* wrong with standard race-mismatching film fictions is they are unrealistic film fictions for which the race-mismatch constitutes (for a properly informed audience) a source of imaginative inconsistency, thereby frustrating or outright precluding reception of the fiction's own prescribed uptake. As such, standard race-mismatching film fictions are self-undermining fictions and thus, to that extent, are aesthetically defective. What's *epistemically* wrong with standard race-mismatching film fictions is that they are unrealistic film fictions for which the race-mismatching constitutes (for a relevantly ignorant or misinformed audience) an invitation to export into belief propositions about race that, although true in the fictional world, are nevertheless false in the actual world. As such, standard race-mismatching film fictions either reinforce false beliefs already held or impart altogether new false beliefs, and thus, to that extent, are epistemically defective. What's *morally* wrong with standard race-mismatching film fictions is that they are unrealistic fictions for which the race-mismatch licenses (for any relevantly ignorant or misinformed audience) the false export of a moral proposition into belief. As such, standard race-mismatching film fictions mislead audiences about the moral facts and thus, to that extent, are morally defective.

So, what is wrong with actor-character race-mismatching film fictions? The answer it turns out is rather simple and intuitive: unless otherwise successful ersatz race-matches, *race-mismatching film fictions are unrealistic fictions*.

NOTES

1. Although this chapter concerns actor-character mismatching with respect to racial backgrounds, I assume my analysis can also be employed in discussions of matching and mismatching with respect to ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, gender, and so forth.
2. Much of the following section I borrow from my previous work (Mag Uidhir 2012). However, that work focuses exclusively on the question of whether a plausible account might be had according to which *ceteris paribus* race-mismatching is itself aesthetically defective (qua film fiction); whereas here I focus more on a broad normative analysis of standard cases of race-mismatching film fictions. As such, this chapter is a continuation, rather than mere reformulation, of my previous work on the subject.
3. Obviously excluded are cases of race-mismatching that involve no-longer extant races or purely fictional races: e.g., James Remar as the *Homo*

- neanderthalensis*, Creb, in *Clan of the Cave Bear* (Michael Chapman, 1984), Louis Gosset Jr. as the extraterrestrial, reptilian-looking Drac, Jeriba Shigan, in *Enemy Mine* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1985), and Joe Morton, as The Brother, an extraterrestrial who just so happens to look like a terrestrial human of African descent in *The Brother from Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1984). Clearly such films are nothing more than trivial, and therefore uninteresting, cases of race-mismatches and so not cases of the relevant sort under discussion.
4. Again, I take it that R can be broadly construed, such that my general framework *mutatis mutandis* covers issues of matching/mismatching in other relevant areas such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, and so forth.
 5. Of course, there may be other reasons to think there are two individual, distinct films, but the claim here is that the mere presence or absence of Gramercy Riff #10 itself won't be a plausible joint at which to carve the *Warriors* worlds from the non-*Warriors* worlds.
 6. Aaron Smuts (2009) makes a similar argument about Tony Soprano's weight in the HBO television series *The Sopranos* (1999–2007).
 7. Of course, one should be careful not to conflate imagining *Ripley as black* (or Parker as white) with imagining *Sigourney Weaver as black* (or Yaphet Kotto as white). Any difficulty with imaginings of the latter sort runs entirely orthogonal to issues concerning constitutive elements of the film fiction *Alien*.
 8. Anyone wary of the notion of import, I suspect would nevertheless endorse the following maxim: Assume that what you know about the real world is true in the world of the fiction unless you have reason to think otherwise. This should suffice for my purposes here.
 9. I take race-mismatching cases not to be cases in which the actor *fails* to portray or represent that character *simpliciter*. That is, I assume that it is at least standardly *not* the case that if C is in R in *w*, then A can represent C *only if* A is in R in the actual world (e.g., it is *not* the case that merely by donning *blackface*, non-black actors *ipso facto* fail to represent black characters).
 10. I take my arguments to be consistent both with the basic assumptions of racial constructivism (Ourlaw 1996; Mills 1998; Taylor 2000; Mallon 2006) as well as those of what Mallon (2004) refers to as racial population naturalism (Andreasen 2000; Kitcher 1999). Of course, for those advocating wholesale metaphysical skepticism or normative eliminativism about race (e.g., Appiah 1996; Zack 2002), my entire project seems little more than a fool's errand.
 11. This could be the result of anything from digital or special effects, make-up, costuming, speech coaching, acting skills, etc.
 12. That is, an otherwise identical film fiction in which A is both in R in the actual world as well as stands in every relation to that R in the actual world that C stands to that R in the *f*-world.
 13. The forgoing analysis of unrealistic fictions takes crucial points from my work with Allan Hazlett on that very subject (Hazlett and Mag Uidhir 2011). Any philosophical mistakes, errors, or oversights herein are mine and mine alone.
 14. For an in-depth account of export and its implications, see Hazlett and Mag Uidhir (2011). For a parallel analysis of the emotional engagement with narrative film fictions, see (Friend 2010).
 15. FALSE EXPORT does not require that *p* be known by the consumer, just that it be true.
 16. I take the notion of a proper informed audience for a fiction to be that of an audience with the epistemic background minimally required for fully/properly engaging with that fiction—that is, the way in which an audience for a fiction must be relevantly informed so as to (coherently) attend to salient features constitutive of that fiction and, all else being equal, receive its uptake (or at least to be so able). As such, the extent to which an audience lacks that background is the extent to which that audience cannot fully/properly engage with that fiction—a relevantly misinformed or ignorant audience is one that cannot coherently attend to the appropriate constitutive features of that fiction and so, an audience that, all else being equal, cannot receive its uptake (or at least cannot do so in the manner that fiction prescribes).
 17. That is, that there are certain salient phenotypical facial structures characteristic typical of membership in the class *ethnically Japanese* such that *ceteris paribus*, if *ethnically Japanese*, then assume *looks ethnically Japanese*.
 18. And also a testament to the poor epistemic background of film audiences with respect to facts about race in the actual world.
 19. I take there to be a straightforward and obvious sense in which one might think there is something *morally* wrong with race-mismatching film fictions: (1) race-mismatching (either per se or at least when not an ersatz race-match) is at least prima facie morally offensive, (2) causing or giving offense itself constitutes a prima facie (minor) moral harm, (3) so, race-mismatching constitutes a prima facie (minor) moral harm, such that, film fictions that race-mismatch are *ceteris paribus* morally worse than their race-matching counterparts. Regardless of its truth or plausibility (especially when considered evaluatively qua film fiction), the appeal to moral offense looks grounded in nothing more than the contingencies of social taboo and so strikes me as the least interesting and most explanatorily shallow, if not ultimately misguided (qua film fiction), answer to the titular question. For a similar analysis of racial slurs and the nature of offense, see Anderson and Lepore (forthcoming). For a more general analysis of language and race, see Anderson et al. (2012).
 20. Also, people might perform CPR and quite likely fail to revive the victim, but in virtue of being so misinformed about the efficacy of CPR, come to falsely self-attribute that failure and likely thereby accrue a crippling sense of guilt (e.g., believing that the death was caused by their having performed CPR incorrectly).
 21. Such as: that looking broadly Asian is sufficient for looking ethnically Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, etc.; that looking swarthy Caucasian is sufficient for looking Arabic, Asian Indian, Slavic, Persian, Hispanic, etc.; that all American Indians look the same or have the same culture, social customs, dress, religion, language, and so forth—usually in terms of stereotypes of nineteenth-century Plains Indians, themselves a product of the classic (and standardly race-mismatching) Hollywood western.
 22. For a related discussion, see Flory (2005).
 23. Flory (2011) argues that Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) uses *in-film* race-mismatching (specifically, that of blackface—both of the cinematic and the minstrel show variety) not just to challenge or outrage but also to thereby bring about positive epistemic, cognitive, and moral effects on its audience.

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Part II

Aesthetics