
Rather than address the obvious moral dimension of race matching in film fictions, I instead want to explore whether a coherent account can be given of race matching in terms of purely aesthetic considerations, i.e., an account that even without moral considerations can nevertheless coherently and productively answer the following questions:

Can race mismatching ever be an aesthetic defect of a film, and if so, under what conditions, if any could race mismatching constitute a pro tanto aesthetic defect?

I claim that once we have in place a precise account of the nature of race matching, it becomes clear that films for which race mismatching appears to constitute an aesthetic defect are actually films properly engaging with which requires audiences to satisfy inconsistent epistemic

---

¹ Other notable examples are Marlon Brando as Emiliano Zapata Salazar in *Viva Zapata!* (1952) and as Sakini in *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956), Yul Brynner as the King of Siam in *The King and I* (1956) and as Chief Black Eagle in *Kings of the Sun* (1963), Ricardo Montalban as Ironshirt in *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951) and as Little Wolf in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Some contemporary examples are Eddie Murphy as Mr. Wong in *Norbit* (2007), Lynn Collins as Silver Fox in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009), Elijah De Jesus as Pearl Carter Scott in *Pearl* (2009), and Jake Gyllenhaal as Prince Dastan, Gemma Arterton as Princess Tamina, and Alfred Molina as Sheik Amar in *Prince of Persia* (2010).

² Although this paper concerns actor-character matching and mismatching with respect to racial backgrounds, I assume that my analysis can also be employed in discussions of matching and mismatching with respect to ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, gender, and so forth.
conditions, thereby interfering with or outright precluding audience reception of the film’s prescribed uptake. In such cases, I claim, race mismatching constitutes at least a pro tanto aesthetic defect because—in virtue of the inconsistency underwritten by the race mismatching—the film undermines audience reception of the very uptake it prescribes.

However, I also claim that the connection between the race mismatching and the relevant inconsistency not only fails to be an in principle connection but also fails to be even a ceteris paribus connection. I argue that what’s defective about race mismatching aesthetically is predicated on something being defective about race mismatching epistemically, so that, if there is in principle nothing ceteris paribus defective about race mismatching epistemically, then too for race mismatching aesthetically (and perhaps too for race mismatching morally). More precisely, if there is nothing defective about race mismatching all epistemic things considered, then there is nothing defective about race mismatching all aesthetic thing -considered (and perhaps also nothing defective about race mismatching all moral things considered). Though this is consistent with further external considerations being such that race mismatching constitutes a prima facie defect (i.e., there nevertheless might be a prima facie epistemic, aesthetic, or moral reason either for a film fiction to race-match or not to race-mismatch), we nevertheless ought to conclude that normative reasons (epistemic, aesthetic, or moral) stemming merely from race matching/race mismatching itself lack any force.

In the first section, I lay out the basic assumptions that I’ll be making so as to build the strongest possible case for thinking that, absent moral considerations, race mismatching is at least a pro tanto aesthetic defect. In the second section, I claim films that race-mismatch seem to be ceteris paribus aesthetically defective because films that race-mismatch ceteris paribus place inconsistent epistemic demands on their audiences, so that properly engaging with a race-mismatching film fiction ceteris paribus requires audiences to satisfy a prima facie inconsistent set of conditions (e.g., believing that p is true in the fiction and believing that q is true in the fiction, but having it prima facie be the case in the fiction that [p iff ¬q]). In the third section, I suggest that perhaps race mismatching may best be viewed as a species of miscasting. That is, films that mismatch the race of the actor with the race of the character portrayed ceteris paribus are films that cast that actor as that character, and films that cast mismatch are ceteris paribus to that extent aesthetically defective. I then pose a few challenges to the mismatching view of race mismatching, which I take ultimately to show that race mismatching as an aesthetic defect cannot be plausibly defended.

In the end, I argue that there is nothing in principle wrong aesthetically with race mismatching per se, and as such (and for many, perhaps most surprisingly) we ought to conclude that there is nothing in principle wrong morally with race mismatching per se. If nothing is wrong with race mismatching per se, then any normative analysis of its use in film fictions ought to shift the focus toward to which race mismatching appears to be in service (e.g., morally problematic narrative/thematic contents, fostering or perpetuating racial caricatures or stereotypes) and away from facts about race mismatching itself.

1. Motivations & Assumptions

While no doubt many have a prima facie suspicion of, if not outright negative attitude toward, the more extreme examples of race mismatching film fictions (e.g., minstrel-show blackface), I am interested in locating sufficient support for the general intuition that something is amiss with race mismatching itself—the intuition that something just seems bad about race mismatching simpliciter. To help motivate this (as well as to address the potential concern that my project cuts its import from whole cloth), consider the prima facie plausibility of the following claims.

In the film Breakfast at Tiffany’s (1965), the intended comedic character of Mr. Yunioshi fails to be comedic in virtue of being depicted according to an odious and virulently racist stereotype of the Japanese and is to that extent a bad-making feature of the film. This is only further worsened
by the fact that the Japanese Mr. Yunoishi is played by the
decidedly Caucasian actor Mickey Rooney. So the film is
ceteris paribus worse for having race-mismatched.

_Dances with Wolves_ (1990), despite its earnest and admirable
try to avoid the racist (and largely cinematic)
stereotypes of American Indians (e.g., as savages either
bloodthirsty or noble), winds up treating its American
Indian characters as little more than cardboard players in the
decidedly Eurocentric sentimental fantasy of its white
protagonist. To the film’s credit, however, the American
Indian characters are portrayed by actual American Indian
actors. So the film is _ceteris paribus_ better for having race-
matched or at least would _ceteris paribus_ have been worse
for race mismatching.

Presumably, the claims above (or at least the intuitions behind those
claims) seem at least _prima facie_ plausible. That is, while their truth — the
fact that those intuitions track some relevant truth — is by no means
evident, it is at least _prima facie_ plausible that they could be true — that
such intuitions could be tracking some relevant truth. This then sug-
gests that it is likewise _prima facie_ plausible that something’s wrong
with race mismatching itself, such that, race-mismatching film fictions
are _ceteris paribus_ worse off than their race-matching counterparts.

Of course, for the claim that something is wrong with race mis-
matching to be grounded in anything more than loosely held
intuitions — most of which concern only extreme cases — requires
first specifying what exactly, if anything, could be wrong with race
mismatching. More precisely, any responsible and substantive norma-
tive analysis of race mismatching in film fictions must be grounded in
plausible specifications of the sort of bad that race mismatching could
plausibly constitute and the conditions, if any, under which race mis-
matching constitutes a bad sufficient to warrant the claim that film

---

3. For detailed and nuanced discussions of the issue of American Indians in
cinema, see Kilpatrick (1999) and Churchill (2001).

---

*The Aesthetics of Actor-Character Race Matching in Film Fictions*

fictions shouldn’t race-mismatch. Given that my principal interest
concerns the aesthetic implications of race matching absent from any
of its moral implications (whatever those may be), my project then is
to construct and attempt to defend a coherent and plausible account
according to which race mismatching is at least a _pro tanto_ aesthetic
defect; that is, though a race-mismatching film fiction might be overall
aesthetically meritorious, film fictions that race-mismatch are at least
to that extent aesthetically defective film fictions.

A crucial preparatory step in constructing such an account is to
restrict the discussion to cases in which race matching is at least in
principle possible so as to exclude, as cases of mismatching, those
involving no-longer extant races or purely fictional races: e.g., James
Remar as the _homo neanderthalensis_ Creb in _Clan of the Cave Bear_ (1984),
Louis Gosset Jr. as , Jeriba Shigan, the extraterrestrial, reptilian-
looking Drac in _Enemy Mine_ (1985), and Joe Morton as The Brother, an
extraterrestrial who just so happens to look like a terrestrial human
such films are nothing more than trivial, and therefore uninteresting,
cases of race mismatches and so not cases of the relevant sort under
discussion. Given the goal of constructing the strongest possible argu-
ment for taking race mismatching to be an aesthetic defect, I must
take pains to prevent my claims from acquiring their force or scope
only in virtue of trading on some imprecision or other. To this end,
I must layout the operative background assumptions necessary to
establish a precise framework for race matching/mismatching cases
of the relevant sort.

Operative Assumptions for Race matching Cases

Let _F_ be some film fiction, _w_ be the world of 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. Again, I take it that _R_ can be broadly construed, so that my general framework
_mutatis mutandis_ covers issues of matching/mismatching in other relevant ar-
eas such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, and so forth.
(R1) Assume that all characters in F are residents of \( w_r \).

For example, if Lois Lane is a character in the film Superman, then Lois Lane is a resident of the Superman-world (the world of the film fiction Superman). So, if C is a character in F, then C is resident of \( w_r \) (C exists in the world of film fiction F).

(R2) Assume C to be a constitutive character of F.

C’s being a constitutive character of film fiction F entails that any film fiction for which C is absent cannot be film fiction F. This also entails 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 the 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 distinct films — The Warriors (1979) and The Warriors (2005). Likewise, the nearest world to the world of The Warriors in which Gramercy Riff #10 does not exist, nevertheless looks to be The Warriors world. By contrast, I take it that any film in which Mookie is not a character cannot be the film Do the Right Thing (1989) and likewise that any world in which Mookie does not exist cannot be a Do the Right Thing world.

(R3) Assume that if according to F, C is in (a member of, belongs to) R, then C’s being in R is constitutive of C as a character of F: if C is in \( w_r \), then C is in R in \( w_r \).

It follows then that any film fiction in which C is a character but C is not in R necessarily cannot be a film fiction in which C is a character and so necessarily cannot be film fiction F. Likewise, there is no possible world \( w \) such that \( w \) is an F-world but C is not in R in \( w \). For example, any film fiction in which Don Corleone is a character but 5. Of course, there may be reasons to think there to be 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.

Don Corleone is not Italian necessarily cannot be The Godfather (1972). Likewise, there can be no possible world \( w \) such that \( w \) is The Godfather world and Don Corleone exists in \( w \) but is not Italian. Similarly, if Mookie is a constitutive character of Do the Right Thing, then if being black is constitutive of the character Mookie, then Mookie’s being black is constitutive of Do the Right Thing.

Consider that some film fictions for which a character is constitutive specify that character as being of a certain race, but mere specification itself doesn’t entail that being of that race is constitutive of that character. For example, I assume that the film fiction Alien (1979) at least implicitly specifies, via the portrayal by actor Yaphet Kotto, that the constitutive character of Parker is black. However, this needn’t entail that being black is constitutive of the character of Parke: it doesn’t appear to be even remotely incoherent to imagine Parker’s being 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 coherently imagine Ripley’s being black. 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 imagining the latter sort runs entirely orthogonal to issues concerning constitutive elements of the film fiction Alien: there could be some world \( w \) such that (i) \( w \) is an Alien world and (ii) Parker is in \( w \) and is white or (iii) Ripley is in \( w \) and is black (or Korean, Maori, Ainu, Ojibwa, etc.). Again, the sorts of Cs in which I am interested are those both constitutive of an F and for which being in some R is constitutive of those Cs.

Most importantly, I assume that things true in a fiction are those things the fiction invites its audience to imagine. Fictions are invitations to imagine. Fictional worlds comprise what fictions invite us to
imagine: \( p \) is true in \( w_f \), if \( F \) invites audiences to imagine \( p. \)\(^7\) 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, consumers “import” numerous truths about the actual world into the world of the fiction: consumers 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. For instance, it is not legitimate to import the truth that most people have bank accounts or cellular phones into the fictional world of The Lord of the Rings; it is legitimate, however, to import the truth that most people need to eat food, drink water, and breathe air to survive. One can speak of a similarity class \( [S_p] \) of proposition (i.e., the class of propositions for which the aforementioned assumption of similarity is warranted, other things being equal, for a fiction \( F)). \(^9\) From this we can assume at least this much: \( p \) is a member of \( S_p \), \( \neg p \) is a member.

Given the above, we get the following further background assumptions:

(R4) Assume that 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 \( S_p \) and \( p \) is true.

(R5) Assume that propositions about \( R \) are propositions for which the assumption of similarity is warranted.

7. Of course, this leaves open whether the invitations of a fiction are to be (non-figuratively) attributed to the actual author, some postulated author, or to the fiction itself. For the sake of simplicity, I cast much of what follows in terms of the fiction’s inviting its audience to imagine or believe various things.

8. See Lewis (1983), pp. 268–270, Currie (1990), pp. 75–80, and Walton (1990), pp. 144–61. 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. For more on this, see Hazlett and Mag Uidhir (2011).

From this, I take the default assumption in the relevant cases to be 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, in order to maximize precision:

(R6) Assume that if \( C \) is in \( R \) in \( w_f \), then 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 \( R \) in \( w_f \).

For example, unless otherwise indicated, assume that being ethnically Chinese in \( w_f \) is relevantly identical to, congruous with, equivalent to, or relevantly maps onto being ethnically Chinese in the actual world, at least with respect to the identity and individuation conditions for the class in the actual world (e.g., certain salient phenotypical, biological, physiological, linguistic, social, cultural, or historical features of the class or its typical membership).

It is important to note that nothing so far and nothing in what follows entails, suggests, or depends upon 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 a 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 (though these phenotypical characteristics are in fact non-unique and genetically insignificant). I take my arguments to depend on nothing over and above this reasonable background assumption.\(^10\)

10. I take my arguments to be consistent both with the basic assumptions of racial constructivism (Outlaw 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
Finally, I do not claim that race mismatching cases are cases in which the actor fails to portray or represent that character simpliciter. That is, I assume that at least standardly it is 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. For example, despite its being the case that Luise Rainer is neither Chinese nor of Asian descent, I take it as evident that Luise Rainer nevertheless represents O-Lan in *The Good Earth* (1937) — a role for which she won the Academy Award for Best Actress. Similarly, while donning blackface may be a morally repugnant means of representing a black character, I assume that it is not the case that merely by donning blackface non-black actors fail to represent black characters. I assume all cases in which follows to be cases in which, regardless of actor-character race matching or mismatching, those actors represent those characters. My concern is what reasons we have for thinking such representations, in virtue of being race matches, to be aesthetically defective.

Hopefully, the advantages of establishing the precise framework above should now be clear. That is, from R1–R6, it follows that:

(R7) A film fiction race-matches just in case both A and C are in R and race-mismatches otherwise.

Given this, we can turn to the question of whether race matching film fictions are *ceteris paribus* aesthetically better off than their mismatching counterparts, i.e., whether race mismatching itself is at least a pro tanto aesthetic defect.

### 2. Race mismatching as an Aesthetic Defect

Perhaps race matching/mismatching as an aesthetic virtue/defect of a film can best be viewed in terms of consistency with respect to how film fictions invite audiences to engage with them. The greater the degree of inconsistency, the more difficult it becomes for an audience to properly engage with the film so as to receive its prescribed uptake (e.g., because the film invites the audience to imagine that p

---

metaphysical skepticism or normative eliminativism about race (e.g., Appiah 1996, Zack 2002), my entire project seems little more than a fool’s errand.

---

only to undermine their ability to imagine that p, perhaps even by explicitly inviting them to imagine that ¬p). Matching promotes consistency while mismatching fosters inconsistency, and so a film that race-matches will at least *ceteris paribus* be aesthetically superior to a film that mismatches. Accordingly, though the force of race mismatching *qua* imaginative inconsistency perhaps looks to be substantively greater for cases of historical fiction than for those of pure fiction, race mismatching itself nevertheless must be the same sort of aesthetic defect in either case.

For instance, suppose the characters in a *Superman* movie frequently refer to Superman’s powerful build and sculpted physique. Now suppose that the fictional-world character of Superman is portrayed by an actual-world actor with bony limbs, flabby midsection, and an all-around weak-looking physique. We would reasonably suppose that the audience would have trouble engaging with the film fiction sufficiently for its uptake. That is, we assume that inconsistencies in what we are invited to imagine to be Superman’s appearance in the fictional world and the actual-world actor’s representation of that would reasonably interfere with the audience’s uptake of the story (i.e., a *Superman* film, as a superhero film, or even as a serious action/adventure film). The movie invites the audience to import into the world of the film fiction true propositions about real-world human physiology, musculature, body types and shapes, and what properties these reliably track (e.g., strength, dexterity, stamina, toughness). The movie then invites the audience to imagine that Superman not only has superhuman strength and dexterity but also that he has an extraordinary (super) physique befitting his super abilities.

However, given that the actor portraying superman has a physique that is indicative of nothing but sloth and weakness, suggestive not even in the slightest of strength simpliciter let alone superhuman strength, the audience would quite reasonably find it difficult to engage properly with the film (and so would become resistant to its uptake). A viewer might say, “I simply couldn’t get into the film because I couldn’t get past the fact that Superman had bony arms and a beer gut and
appeared to sweat profusely at even the slightest of physical exertions.” The film fiction invites the audience to import into the fictional world facts about what it is to have a powerful build in the actual world and to imagine not only that Superman has a powerful build but also that the denizens of the fictional world justifiably believe that Superman has a powerful build. However, the actor’s portrayal is unable to sufficiently represent those facts about the fictional world so as to foster proper engagement with the film and full reception of its uptake. To properly engage with the fiction, the audience must imagine to be the case in the world of the film fiction something inconsistent with what they have been asked to import from the actual world into the world of that film fiction (i.e., to import that $p$ and to imagine that $q$ where $q$ entails $\neg p$). Perhaps then race mismatching can best be viewed as a species of this sort of inconsistency.

Consider the race-mismatching film fiction *Running Brave* (1983), starring Caucasian/Jewish actor Robby Benson as Olympic athlete Billy Mills, an Oglala Lakota. Presumably, along with a host of other facts, *Running Brave* invites the audience to import into the world of the film fiction facts about actual-world resident Billy Mills (e.g., that he was a Lakota from the Pine Ridge reservation, that he won the gold medal in the 10000 meter run at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics in a stunning come-from-behind upset, etc.). Part of the similarity class clearly also contains propositions about American Indians, including facts about how American Indians typically look (in particular, Plains Indians like the Lakota), and the fact that Billy Mills was subject to racial discrimination not just because he was American Indian but more precisely because he was an American Indian who looked American Indian. However, Robby Benson neither is an American Indian nor does he look American Indian, and consequently, *Running Brave* depicts Billy Mills as an American Indian who doesn’t look American Indian but instead looks like a slightly swarthy Caucasian. As a result, when other characters in the film react in a racist manner toward Mills, we’re asked to imagine that those characters see something we do not, namely, that Mills looks recognizably American Indian.

Additionally, key to the dramatic uptake of the film is our imagining Mills to be the victim of (and to eventually triumph over) pervasive racism against American Indians, yet interfering with this is our inability to see Mills, as portrayed by Benson, as looking even remotely American Indian. In essence, *Running Brave* invites us to imagine that just as in the actual world, so too in the world of the film fiction, Billy Mills looks American Indian (in virtue of being American Indian). However, via Benson’s portrayal of Billy Mills, *Running Brave* also invites us to imagine that in the world of the film fiction, Billy Mills does not look American Indian: hence the inconsistency and hence the problem properly engaging with the film. A viewer might say, “I couldn’t get into the film because I simply couldn’t believe Robby Benson as an American Indian (and ipso facto as Billy Mills).”

Given the above, together with the fact that *Running Brave* is a historical biopic, it seems to follow that

> Historical film fictions are *ceteris paribus* more realistic for matching and *ceteris paribus* less realistic for mismatching. Being realistic is a *pro tanto* good-making aesthetic feature of historical works, and being unrealistic is a *pro tanto* bad-making aesthetic feature of historical works. At least for historical works, matching is a *pro tanto* good-making aesthetic feature and mismatching is a *pro tanto* bad-making aesthetic feature. So, if *Running Brave* is unrealistic with respect to its portrayal of Mills, then *Running Brave* is to that extent aesthetically defective.\(^\text{11}\)

Notice, however, that the Benson-Mills race mismatch appears to remain an aesthetic defect of *Running Brave* regardless of whether we take the film to be a historical biopic or a work of pure fiction. That is, the problem is not that real-world actor Robby Benson just doesn’t look like real-world Olympian Billy Mills but rather that in the film

\(^{11}\) For more on the way in which fictions can be realistic or unrealistic, as well as the aesthetic implications thereof, see Hazlett and Mag Uidhir (2011).
Running Brave, the character of Billy Mills (as portrayed by Robby Benson) just doesn’t look American Indian.\textsuperscript{12} Not only does Benson’s portrayal of Mills non-negligibly interfere with, if not outright preclude, what Running Brave invites us to imagine (\textit{i.e.}, that in the world of Running Brave, American Indian runner Billy Mills looks American Indian), it would \textit{ceteris paribus} continue to do so even were we to construe Running Brave not as a historical biopic but instead as a fanciful work of pure fiction. This suggests that race mismatching \textit{qua} aesthetic defect doesn’t differentiate between historical fictions and their less historical and more fantastical brethren.

Ultimately, this shows that by race-mismatching, film fictions appear to undermine their own aims, the satisfaction or frustration of which is clearly relevant to the aesthetic value of those works. Presumably, self-undermining ought to be at least a \textit{pro tanto} aesthetic defect of a work, so that \textit{ceteris paribus} any work of film fiction that undermines its own aims is to that extent an aesthetically defective film fiction. So, at least under the precise conditions previously laid out (R1–R7), perhaps we ought to conclude that race mismatching constitutes a \textit{pro tanto} aesthetic defect: works of film fiction that race-mismatch to that extent undermine their own aims, and so, to that extent are aesthetically defective.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Notice that Running Brave does not invite the audience to imagine that Billy Mills looks like actor Robby Benson any more than \textit{Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan} (1982) invites the audience to imagine that Captain James Tiberius Kirk looks just like the actual world actor William Shatner. Of course, some films do invite such imaginings, \textit{e.g.}, \textit{Being John Malkovich} (1999); most, however, do not.

\textsuperscript{13} Again, though race mismatching may constitute a \textit{pro tanto} aesthetic defect, the film may well be overall aesthetically meritorious, or in some cases, an overall aesthetic atrocity to which the race-mismatching defect contributes comparatively little. For example, while a race-mismatching controversy surrounded the 2010 film \textit{The Last Airbender}, reviewer Howard Taylor wrote:

\begin{quote}
Honestly, I believe that [the race mismatching] was the absolute least of this film’s problems. It may well be the greatest societal problem of this film, in that it reflects tastes and attitudes about race that could use some fixing in Hollywood … [T]he only place where it really stands out is when we’re asked to believe that the blue-eyed white folk are actually from the same tiny, icy village as all those beautifully brown, epicanthically folded Inuits. Other than that? I didn’t notice race much. I was distracted by the lame movie (2010).
\end{quote}

Though race mismatching be a \textit{pro tanto} aesthetic defect, and as such, always an aesthetic disvalue, the aesthetic disvalue it contributes to a film could nevertheless be overridden by that film’s aesthetic successes (or as in the case of \textit{The Last Airbender}, could nevertheless be overshadowed by that film’s more conspicuous, numerous, and wide-spread aesthetic failures).
scientically well-informed in general, nitpicky or otherwise) aren’t thereby indicative of any aesthetic defect of those film fictions any more than are engagement difficulties arising for non-French speaking audiences of Alphaville: Une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution (1965) thereby indicative of Alphaville’s being to that extent an aesthetically defective film fiction. Should an audience be the wrong audience for F, then engagement problems experienced by that audience needn’t have as their source some defect in F. So should an audience experience difficulty engaging with a film fiction in virtue of a race-mismatch, before any summary aesthetic judgment can be handed down, we must first inquire as to whether that audience is in fact the right audience.14

Perhaps a more compelling example is the film Memoirs of a Geisha (2005). One major criticism of the film looks to be a race-mismatching criticism, specifically that the principal Geisha characters (Sayuri, Hatsumomo, Mameha), all of whom are ethnically Japanese in the world of the film fiction, are portrayed by ethnically Chinese actresses (Zhang Ziyi, Gong Li, Michelle Yeoh). One might claim that before we can conclude that the mismatching is in fact an aesthetic defect of the film, we must first inquire as to the film’s targeted audience so as to ensure that the mismatching doesn’t in fact pose an engagement difficulty only for non-targeted audiences (namely those able in the main to discriminate between ethnically Chinese and ethnically Japanese). Given this, one might then further claim that the target audience of Memoirs of a Geisha is largely the American public. After all, most of the film was shot in California, its principal release was in the United States as were also most of its theatrical venues, its advertising budget was almost exclusively devoted to stateside promotion directed almost exclusively toward American moviegoers, the film’s dialogue is mostly in English, and its sound editors won an Oscar for their work improving the English pronunciation of its principal cast so as to better suit American ears.

Given that the target audience is the American public and that the American public in the main cannot distinguish between ethnically Chinese and ethnically Japanese, the mismatching unsurprisingly went largely unnoticed by the targeted audience precisely because this target audience took looking broadly Asian (in concert with certain narrative and filmic prompts) to be sufficient for looking Japanese. So while the mismatching may have created an engagement difficulty for Chinese and Japanese audiences precisely because such audiences in the main can discriminate between ethnically Chinese and ethnically Japanese, these audiences are simply the wrong audiences. So it doesn’t follow that mismatching-based engagement difficulties had by the wrong (non-targeted) audience of a film entails, suggests, indicates, or intimates even in the slightest that the film is to that extent an aesthetically defective film. If the film’s mismatching poses no difficulty for the target audience (which we can assume to be the case for the mismatching in Memoirs of a Geisha), then for that film that mismatching constitutes no aesthetic defect.

The Targeting-the-Wrong-Audience Reply

Consider pulp sci-fi action-adventure films. Contrary to the above objection, such films do not in fact rely for their uptake on their audiences’ being ignorant or misinformed about the actual world (e.g., actual-world entomology and geophysics). Rather, the genre convention according to which they operate is such that audiences don’t expect these films to get (or even purport to get) the actual-world science correct — quite the opposite in fact. This genre-generated expectation serves to govern the appropriate similarity class for import, thereby adjusting audience expectations, so that the film’s getting the science correct isn’t taken to be constitutive or even facilitative of the film’s uptake (Hazlett & Mag Uidhir 2011). For instance, it is not the case that geophysicists are excluded from the target audience for The Core. That is, should a nitpicky geophysicist find engaging with

---

14. Nothing in what follows requires understanding targeted audience to be intended audience. For my purposes here, I take the former broadly construed to be itself more than sufficient; whereas given the highly complex and collective nature of film production, the latter threatens to mire the analysis in unrelated issues about the nature of intentions. For a detailed analysis of such issues as they pertain to authorship, see Mag Uidhir (2011).
The Core problematic in virtue of the film’s prodigious use of “movie science”, then the fault lies not with the film fiction but instead with the nitpicky geophysicist for failing to adjust her expectations in light of the numerous relevant cues, conventions, and tell-tale signs indicating that the “science” of The Core (narrowly construed) is nothing more than a MacGuffin (i.e., merely a plot-furthering device) and hence that The Core shouldn’t be taken, even implicitly, to be asserting much of anything about actual-world geophysics.\textsuperscript{15}

Notice, however, that this most certainly is not what is going on in race-mismatching films of the relevant sort under discussion: given the parameters previously established, we must assume that for \( F \), \( C \)'s being in \( R \) is not the equivalent of a racial MacGuffin. Recall that for race-mismatching cases, \( C \)'s being in \( R \) in \( w_f \) is constitutive of \( F \). From this it follows that anything interfering with the audience’s imagining that \( C \) is in \( R \) in \( w_f \) thereby interferes with the audience’s engaging with a constitutive element of film fiction \( F \). Presumably, uptake as prescribed by \( F \) requires properly engaging with all constitutive elements of that film fiction, and so anything interfering with the audience’s engaging with a constitutive element of \( F \) \textit{ipso facto} interferes with audience’s reception of the uptake as prescribed by \( F \). By race mismatching, the film fiction undermines its own uptake. Clearly then, the appeal to ignorant or misinformed audiences can be nothing more than appeal to audiences of the sort unable to recognize constitutive elements as being constitutive, and any film fiction targeting such an audience \textit{ipso facto} undermines its own aims.

For instance, it is constitutive of \textit{Memoirs of a Geisha} both that Suriya, Hatsumomo, and Mameha are Japanese and that being Japanese in the world of the film is relevantly similar to being Japanese in the actual world, of which a decidedly relevant feature entails not looking ethnically Chinese. The fact that the supposed target audience cannot discriminate between ethnically Japanese and ethnically Chinese entails that the supposed target audience cannot fully recognize constitutive elements of the film as being constitutive. If being ethnically Japanese is in fact constitutive of the characters constitutive of the film fiction, then audiences ignorant or misinformed as to what it is to be ethnically Japanese are thereby to that extent ignorant or misinformed about the constitutive elements of the film—precisely the sort of audience fitting the description of a wrong audience. For a film to target such an audience just is for that film to undermine its own aims.

To be sure, there are film fictions that not only explicitly target an ignorant or misinformed audience but also have uptake predicated on perpetuating or fostering ignorance or misinformation in that audience, \textit{e.g.}, propaganda films. The point, however, of propaganda film fictions is not for the audience to import false beliefs about the actual world into the world of the fiction so as to receive the prescribed uptake but rather for the audience to export propositions true in the fictional world that reinforce pre-existing (or foster the formation of) false beliefs about the actual world. While there are race mismatching film fictions that are perhaps best viewed as propaganda film fictions, such as D.W. Griffith’s \textit{Birth of a Nation} (1915), notice that in such cases, the race mismatching explicitly serves to facilitate audience export of certain propositions false in the actual world but true in the world of the film fiction (\textit{e.g.}, that blacks are lazy, slow-witted, lascivious thieves).

Lastly, it should strike one as prima facie absurd for a film fiction to count certain elements as constitutive (\textit{e.g.}, \( C \)'s being in \( R \) in \( w_f \)) but to target only those audiences ignorant or misinformed with respect to the identity or individuation conditions for those constitutive elements or to require for its uptake that the audience be ignorant or misinformed as to the identity or individuation conditions for those constitutive elements. So the straightforward conclusion to draw from the fact that a film fiction targets audiences ignorant about \( R \) is simply that \( R \) mustn’t be a constitutive element of that film fiction.

\textsuperscript{15} Such signs would include its being in the sci-fi disaster genre, the numerous playful homages to the Jules Verne novel \textit{Journey to the Center of the Earth}, and most obviously, the repeated reference to the catch-all material as “unobtainium.”
The Imaginative-Denial Objection

Lastly, one could object, at least in the Memoirs of a Geisha case, that my account mistakenly conflates being ethnically Japanese in Memoirs (C’s being in \( R \) in \( w_i \)) with looking ethnically Japanese in Memoirs (C’s looking as if in \( R \) in \( w_i \)). So, while clearly Hatsumomo’s being ethnically Japanese is constitutive of Memoirs, Hatsumomo’s looking ethnically Japanese is not, and so actress Gong Li’s being and looking ethnically Chinese doesn’t interfere with what Memoirs invites the audience to imagine because Memoirs does not invite the audience to imagine that Hatsumomo looks ethnically Japanese, only that Hatsumomo is ethnically Japanese, with which Gong Li’s being and looking ethnically Chinese doesn’t itself interfere; that is, at least for the targeted audience, Gong Li’s being and looking ethnically Chinese is sufficiently facilitative of imagining Hatsumomo as being ethnically Japanese in the Memoirs world. So although there is in fact a race mismatch between Gong Li and Hatsumomo, that mismatch doesn’t constitute an aesthetic defect.

The Incoherence-or-Irrelevance Reply

Objections of the above sort show one of two things to be the case, neither of which is that race mismatching isn’t a \textit{pro tanto} aesthetic defect. Recall that mismatching cases of the relevant sort must satisfy the conditions as specified by the operative background assumptions in the first section (R1–R7). From these, it follows that assuming \textit{Memoirs of a Geisha} to be a race-mismatching film fiction of the relevant sort requires that we also assume that (i) Hatsumomo is a constitutive character of Memoirs, (ii) being ethnically Japanese is constitutive of Hatsumomo, (iii) Hatsumomo’s being Japanese is constitutive of Memoirs, and (iv) being ethnically Japanese in the Memoirs world is relevantly similar to being ethnically Japanese in the actual world. Now for sake of argument assume that in the actual world, looking such-and-such a way (\textit{i.e.,} ethnically Japanese) is constitutive of (a salient characteristic of) the identity/individuation conditions for being ethnically Japanese, so that, \textit{ceteris paribus, if ethnically Japanese, then assume looks ethnically Japanese.}\footnote{A more precise reading might be not merely that ethnically Japanese people typically look a certain way (Japanese) but also that only the ethnically Japanese typically look that way (Japanese).} From this assumption, it follows that \textit{ceteris paribus if ethnically Japanese} in the Memoirs world, then assume looks ethnically Japanese in the Memoirs world.

Notice that nothing in the Memoirs film fiction plausibly constitutes a violation of the \textit{ceteris paribus} clause with respect to Hatsumomo’s being ethnically Japanese. The mere fact that Gong Li, an ethnic Chinese who looks ethnically Chinese, plays Hatsumomo, an ethnic Japanese, cannot merely by itself be plausibly taken as indicative of Hatsumomo’s looking other than ethnically Japanese (let alone looking ethnically Chinese) in the Memoirs world. Were this the case, then by extension the mere fact of John Wayne’s portraying Genghis Khan in The Conqueror ought merely by itself to be sufficient for taking The Conqueror to be inviting us to imagine that in The Conqueror world, Genghis Khan doesn’t look Mongolian, or even Asian, but instead looks distinctly Caucasian, if not also eerily similar to the famous actual-world Hollywood actor John Wayne. This, of course, is absurd.

Given that Memoirs clearly invites us to imagine that Hatsumomo is ethnically Japanese, it follows that, \textit{ceteris paribus, Memoirs} invites us to imagine that Hatsumomo looks ethnically Japanese. However, if Memoirs does not in fact invite us to imagine that Hatsumomo looks ethnically Japanese, then absent any indication that the \textit{ceteris paribus} clause has been violated, it follows that Memoirs does not in fact invite us to imagine that Hatsumomo is ethnically Japanese. If Memoirs does not invite us to imagine that Hatsumomo is ethnically Japanese, then Hatsumomo’s being ethnically Japanese cannot be constitutive of \textit{Memoirs of a Geisha}. Accordingly, Memoirs can be a race-mismatching case of the relevant sort only by becoming an incoherent film fiction. Solving for this incoherence requires denying as constitutive of the film fiction the very element of that film fiction that we have been assuming to be constitutive all along simply by virtue of assuming Memoirs to be a race-mismatching case of the relevant sort. If C’s being in \( R \) in
\( w_f \) is constitutive of film fiction \( F \), then if \( F \) is a race-mismatching case \((i.e., \, A \text{ is not in } R)\), then \( F \) is to that extent an aesthetically defective film fiction. If \( C \)'s being in \( R \) in \( w_f \) is not constitutive of film fiction \( F \) — or something in \( F \) violates the ceteris paribus clause thereby indicating which, if any, propositions about \( R \) are propositions for which the assumption of similarity is warranted — then even though \( A \) is not in \( R \), \( F \) is not a race-mismatching case of the relevant sort.\(^{17}\) If race mismatching constitutes an aesthetic defect, then the sure-fire way for a film fiction to avoid such a defect is either to avoid race mismatching altogether or to violate the relevant ceteris paribus clause so as to avoid being a race-matching film fiction of the relevant sort.\(^{18}\) For those of the relevant sort, however, there still appears to be a strong case for considering race mismatching to be at least a pro tanto aesthetic defect.

3. Miscasting, Mismatching, and Ersatz Matching
I take the claims made and defended in the preceding section to represent the strongest case that can be plausibly made for race mismatching as an aesthetic defect. I suppose, however, that one may find my analysis sufficiently technical to be wholly lacking in any pre-theoretic force, and so one may prefer instead an account according to which race mismatching cases can be placed into a more intuitively compelling framework. For instance, one might think that race mismatching qua aesthetic defect

\(^{17}\) Therefore ceteris paribus neither the presence nor the absence of the invitation to imagine Hatsumomo's being ethnically Japanese (let alone audience ability to imagine Hatsumomo's being ethnically Japanese) bears any relevance to the film's uptake.

\(^{18}\) Thereby also excluded from being the relevant sort of race mismatching would be those film fictions for which audience reception of their uptake requires not only audience awareness of the actor-character mismatch but awareness of it as being deliberate. Examples of such films range from the art-house film for which the self-aware race mismatching serves some chiefly artistic or intellectual aim \((e.g., \, \text{the thirteen-year old female protagonist of Todd Solondz's film Palindromes (2004) is portrayed by ten different actors of different races, ages, and gender})\) to the decidedly mainstream Hollywood film for which the self-aware race mismatching facilitates some low-brow comedic aim \((e.g., \, \text{Rob Schneider's uncredited, though hardly inconspicuous, portrayal of the Asian minister in the 2007 Adam Sandler vehicle I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry})).

is best viewed in terms of mismatching's being a species of the far more intuitive and conventionally established notion of miscasting. Presumably, such a move would proceed roughly as follows:

A film fiction that race-mismatches with respect to an actual-world actor and a character of that fiction is a film fiction that miscasts that actor as that character. For a film fiction to miscast an actor as a character of that fiction is for that fiction to misrepresent that character, and thereby to misrepresent the world of that film fiction. Film fictions that misrepresent their own worlds are to that extent inconsistent film fictions. An inconsistent fiction is ceteris paribus to that extent a fiction that substantially interferes with the audience's ability to properly engage with it. Film fictions rely on proper audience engagement for their uptake. Inconsistent film fictions substantially interfere with their own uptake. Any interference with uptake is an aesthetic defect. So film fictions that race-mismatch are to that extent aesthetically defective film fictions.

Of course, before the merits of such a move become clear, we must first have a precise account of miscasting.

I take the operative notion of miscasting to be as follows:

For film fiction \( F \) to miscast actor \( A \) as character \( C \) is for facts about \( A \) in the actual world to preclude or substantially interfere with \( A \)'s portraying \( C \) in \( w_f \) as having the minimal specifications set out in \( F \).

For instance, suppose that \( F \) specifies \( C \) as looking in way \( p \) \((e.g., \, \text{darkly sullen})\) but \( A \) naturally comes across in way \( q \) \((e.g., \, \text{sweetly cheerful})\), so that any attempt on the part of \( A \) to portray \( C \) as being so specified in \( F \) strains audience credulity, appearing disingenuous and forced at best. To help illustrate this, consider the following famous and oft-cited examples of miscasting in American cinema: Tony Curtis as the 15th

---

\( w_f \) is constitutive of film fiction \( F \), then if \( F \) is a race-mismatching case \((i.e., \, A \text{ is not in } R)\), then \( F \) is to that extent an aesthetically defective film fiction. If \( C \)'s being in \( R \) in \( w_f \) is not constitutive of film fiction \( F \) — or something in \( F \) violates the ceteris paribus clause thereby indicating which, if any, propositions about \( R \) are propositions for which the assumption of similarity is warranted — then even though \( A \) is not in \( R \), \( F \) is not a race-mismatching case of the relevant sort.\(^{17}\) If race mismatching constitutes an aesthetic defect, then the sure-fire way for a film fiction to avoid such a defect is either to avoid race mismatching altogether or to violate the relevant ceteris paribus clause so as to avoid being a race-matching film fiction of the relevant sort.\(^{18}\) For those of the relevant sort, however, there still appears to be a strong case for considering race mismatching to be at least a pro tanto aesthetic defect.

3. Miscasting, Mismatching, and Ersatz Matching
I take the claims made and defended in the preceding section to represent the strongest case that can be plausibly made for race mismatching as an aesthetic defect. I suppose, however, that one may find my analysis sufficiently technical to be wholly lacking in any pre-theoretic force, and so one may prefer instead an account according to which race mismatching cases can be placed into a more intuitively compelling framework. For instance, one might think that race mismatching qua aesthetic defect

\(^{17}\) Therefore ceteris paribus neither the presence nor the absence of the invitation to imagine Hatsumomo's being ethnically Japanese (let alone audience ability to imagine Hatsumomo's being ethnically Japanese) bears any relevance to the film's uptake.

\(^{18}\) Thereby also excluded from being the relevant sort of race mismatching would be those film fictions for which audience reception of their uptake requires not only audience awareness of the actor-character mismatch but awareness of it as being deliberate. Examples of such films range from the art-house film for which the self-aware race mismatching serves some chiefly artistic or intellectual aim \((e.g., \, \text{the thirteen-year old female protagonist of Todd Solondz's film Palindromes (2004) is portrayed by ten different actors of different races, ages, and gender})\) to the decidedly mainstream Hollywood film for which the self-aware race mismatching facilitates some low-brow comedic aim \((e.g., \, \text{Rob Schneider's uncredited, though hardly inconspicuous, portrayal of the Asian minister in the 2007 Adam Sandler vehicle I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry})).

is best viewed in terms of mismatching's being a species of the far more intuitive and conventionally established notion of miscasting. Presumably, such a move would proceed roughly as follows:

A film fiction that race-mismatches with respect to an actual-world actor and a character of that fiction is a film fiction that miscasts that actor as that character. For a film fiction to miscast an actor as a character of that fiction is for that fiction to misrepresent that character, and thereby to misrepresent the world of that film fiction. Film fictions that misrepresent their own worlds are to that extent inconsistent film fictions. An inconsistent fiction is ceteris paribus to that extent a fiction that substantially interferes with the audience's ability to properly engage with it. Film fictions rely on proper audience engagement for their uptake. Inconsistent film fictions substantially interfere with their own uptake. Any interference with uptake is an aesthetic defect. So film fictions that race-mismatch are to that extent aesthetically defective film fictions.

Of course, before the merits of such a move become clear, we must first have a precise account of miscasting.

I take the operative notion of miscasting to be as follows:

For film fiction \( F \) to miscast actor \( A \) as character \( C \) is for facts about \( A \) in the actual world to preclude or substantially interfere with \( A \)'s portraying \( C \) in \( w_f \) as having the minimal specifications set out in \( F \).

For instance, suppose that \( F \) specifies \( C \) as looking in way \( p \) \((e.g., \, \text{darkly sullen})\) but \( A \) naturally comes across in way \( q \) \((e.g., \, \text{sweetly cheerful})\), so that any attempt on the part of \( A \) to portray \( C \) as being so specified in \( F \) strains audience credulity, appearing disingenuous and forced at best. To help illustrate this, consider the following famous and oft-cited examples of miscasting in American cinema: Tony Curtis as the 15th
At least at first blush, appeal to the more intuitive notion of miscasting seems to gel with the more technical analysis I offered earlier in that 19. For an extended analysis of the miscasting of John Wayne in The Conqueror, see Rawlins (2010).

The obvious worry with the appeal to race mismatching as a species of miscasting is that there appear to be quite a few race-mismatching cases that few, if any, would intuitively consider to be miscasting cases. For example, consider the following:

— Anthony Quinn as Auda ibu Tayi in Lawrence of Arabia (1962)
— Eli Wallach as Tuco Ramirez in The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (1966) and again as Calvera in The Magnificent Seven (1960)
— Marthe Keller as Dahlia Iyad in Black Sunday (1977)
— Al Pacino as Tony Montana in Scarface (1983)
— Marisa Tomei as Dottie Perez in The Perez Family (1995)

Furthermore, there are several cases of radically divergent race mismatches for which there are few if any reasons to think them also miscasting cases — quite the contrary, in fact. For instance, Linda Hunt, a Caucasian

19. For an extended analysis of the miscasting of John Wayne in The Conqueror, see Rawlins (2010).
female, won an Academy Award for her utterly convincing and moving portrayal of Billy Kwan, a male Chinese dwarf, in The Year of Living Dangerously (1982). Most fans of James Cameron’s sci-fi actioner Aliens (1986) are quite shocked to learn that the tough-as-nails Chicana space-marine pfc Vasquez is portrayed by the light-skinned, Jewish actress Jenette Goldstein. I assume that few would argue that The Human Stain (2003) miscasts Anthony Hopkins as Coleman Silk merely in virtue of the fact that Hopkins is not black (nor, as is the case for Sil, black but passing as Jewish).

This I take to suggest that what matters about race matching aesthetically is fundamentally an *epistemic* concern — not a matter of A’s being in R but rather a matter of A’s looking convincingly as if in R. That is, A’s portraying C as minimally specified by F has nothing in principle to do with A’s being in R but instead depends entirely on A’s appearing to be in R to a degree sufficiently facilitative of C’s being imagined by a properly informed audience to be in R in w, as minimally specified by F. So the claim that F race-matches, by itself, says nothing in principle (or even prima facie) interesting about F aesthetically. If there is something wrong with race mismatching in film fiction, as I suspect there is, then it must be predicated on facts wholly external to the film fiction *qua* film fiction (e.g., failure to satisfy general employment or equity-based obligations to race-match: native characters ought *ceteris paribus* to be portrayed by Native actors). To be sure, audience knowledge of certain facts external to the film fiction may interfere with or outright preclude that audience’s properly engaging with that film fiction, but this itself doesn’t constitute an aesthetic defect of the film fiction *qua* film fiction.

For instance, suppose that after having watched Robert Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), I reasonably judge it to be a work of breathtaking beauty and sadness. Further suppose that I learn that the scenes in the film depicting Balthazar’s being beaten were captured by Bresson’s filming an actual beating of the donkey portraying Balthazar. Quite understandably, I may never again be able to watch *Au Hasard Balthazar*, and quite understandably, knowing the facts about its production may preclude me from ever again seeing the film as beautiful. Notice, however, the fact that knowing Bresson to have beaten the actual-world donkey precludes my seeing *Au Hasard Balthazar* as beautiful isn’t itself indicative of any an aesthetic defect in *Au Hasard Balthazar qua* film fiction. To say that *Au Hasard Balthazar* is a less beautiful film for my knowing that Bresson actually beat the actual donkey (and, to that extent, that Bresson’s beating the donkey is an aesthetic defect of the film) ought to be just as absurd as saying that *Au Hasard Balthazar* is a far more poignant film for my knowing that Bresson beat the donkey (and, to that extent, that Bresson’s beating the donkey is an aesthetic virtue of the film). Facts about Bresson’s beating the donkey in the actual world simply aren’t part of the similarity class for the film fiction (at least no more so than would be facts about whether or not Bresson stole his camera equipment, underpaid his crew, or brutally murdered his gaffer mid-shoot). So considerations emanating from such facts are considerations external to the film fiction. So too, then, it seems, for facts about race matching.

Likewise, suppose that the Disney animated film Pocahontas (1995) features American Indian characters that do not look American Indian but instead look only brownly Caucasian. Although I take it that this constitutes a *ceteris paribus* aesthetic defect for that film for precisely the reasons previously mentioned, this clearly cannot be a case of actor-character mismatching. Moreover, I take it that whether or not the American Indian characters were voiced by actual American Indians (they were) isn’t an aesthetically relevant consideration with respect to the work *qua* film fiction (assuming that, for example, Irene Bedard, an Inuit and the speaking voice of Pocahontas, sounds no more American Indian than does Judy Kuhn, a Caucasian and the singing voice of Pocahontas). That is, though I quite readily endorse the claim that failure to have Native actors voice Native characters constitutes a *ceteris paribus* moral defect, I take it that the defect rests not on some fact about the film fiction itself but rather on some fact external to it, namely facts about the film’s production and the studio’s hiring practices. Although there is a temptation to claim that *Pocahontas is ceteris paribus* better
(morally or aesthetically) for having Natives voice Native characters, such claims fail, upon closer scrutiny, to find any plausible purchase, appearing no more plausible than ones claiming that Pocahontas would ceteris paribus have been a morally or aesthetically better film had there been more Native pencillers, inkers, or colorists on the animation staff.

I take all this to show that the mere fact that a film fiction is a race-mismatching film fiction itself says nothing even prima facie interesting about that film fiction with respect to the presence or absence of any defect, be it epistemic, aesthetic, or moral. To be sure, further facts about the film fiction and the manner in which it race-mismatches may reveal that mismatch to constitute some defect. However, it may also reveal that the manner in which the film fiction race-mismatches is such that it constitutes an ersatz race-match (i.e., an actual race-mismatch that is nevertheless equivalent to an actual race-match). More precisely, an ersatz race-matching case is an actual race-mismatching case to which an otherwise identical actual race-matching case would be epistemically equivalent. From this it follows that if a case is both an ersatz matching case and a miscasting case, then an otherwise identical, epistemically equivalent actual matching case would nevertheless be the same miscasting case.

Suppose that film fiction \( F \) is a race-mismatching film fiction (i.e., \( C \) is in \( R \) in \( w_f \) but \( A \) is not in \( R \) in the actual world). Further suppose the race-mismatching case to also be a miscasting case (i.e., facts about \( A \) in the actual world preclude or substantially interfere with \( A \)'s portraying \( C \) in \( w_f \) as having the minimal specifications set out in \( F \)). Now, let’s suppose the race mismatching in film fiction \( F \) to be an ersatz race-matching (i.e., a mismatching case to which an otherwise identical matching case would be epistemically equivalent). It follows that an ersatz race-matching case cannot itself constitute a miscasting, and so, should the race mismatching be an ersatz race-matching, then the miscasting must be predicated on fact about \( A \) in the actual world other than \( A \)'s not being in \( R \). So, if an ersatz race-match is ceteris paribus epistemically equivalent to an otherwise identical actual race-match, then an ersatz race-match must also be ceteris paribus aesthetically equivalent to that otherwise identical actual race-match.

Of course, ersatz race-matches are still actual race-mismatches. So if an ersatz race-matching film fiction is an actual race-mismatching film fiction ceteris paribus aesthetically equivalent to an otherwise identical actual race matching film fiction, then obviously, race mismatching itself cannot constitute an aesthetic defect. To be sure, the failure for an actual race mismatching film fiction to be an ersatz race-matching film fiction may well constitute a pro tanto aesthetic defect, but the failure to race-match itself cannot.

4. Concluding Remarks

Throughout the hundred or so years of American cinema, we can find a host of race-mismatching films, many of which we rightly morally condemn for featuring particularly egregious cases of race mismatching thought to be in service, either intentionally or otherwise, of the fostering or reinforcement of negative racial stereotypes. I think that given the framework I have provided, one can tease out a basic argument showing that the way in which film fictions race-mismatch can be a moral defect.

For example, I take it that for poorly informed or misinformed audiences (with respect to some \( R \), mismatching in film can often intentionally or unintentionally serve to confirm those false beliefs or perpetuate those ignorance.\(^{20}\) If we assume that race matters, then those poorly informed or misinformed as to the identity and individuating conditions for some \( R \) lack the discriminative capacities required to act in a way commensurate with race’s mattering. The race-mismatching film fiction may then perpetuate audience ignorance of (or contribute to audience misinformation about) the salient features of \( R \), so that, if we assume that at least some of those salient features of \( R \) are morally salient features, then race mismatching may serve to perpetuate ignorance of, or contribute to misinformation about, morally salient subject matter. Perpetuating ignorance of, or contributing

\(^{20}\) For a related discussion, see Flory (2005).
to misinformation about, morally salient subject matter is a *pro tanto* moral defect. So race mismatching film fictions of the above sort are at least to that extent *morally* defective film fictions.\(^\text{21}\)

This is all consistent with what I have shown, namely, that any normative analysis of race matching in film fictions can be plausibly motivated only via appeal to facts loosely connected, if not altogether orthogonal, to matching itself. For if what grounds the normative force of race-matching claims 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. Race mismatching isn’t itself an epistemic defect and so is itself neither a moral nor an aesthetic defect. Rather, the most plausible view is one according to which film fictions that *ersatz* race-match are *ceteris paribus* morally and aesthetically equivalent *qua* film fiction to those that actually race-match.

To conclude, recall the original motivating question:

> Can race mismatching ever be an aesthetic defect of a film, and if so, under what conditions, if any, could race mismatching constitute a *pro tanto* aesthetic defect?

To this question, I think that I’ve provided the following plausible and substantively informative answer:

> The conditions under which a race mismatch constitutes an aesthetic defect just are the conditions under which that race mismatch is not an *ersatz* race-match. For a race mismatching to be a *pro tanto* aesthetic defect just is for that race mismatching not to be an *ersatz* race matching, and therefore, being a race mismatch that is not an *ersatz* race-match is itself a *pro tanto* aesthetic defect.

\(^{21}\) And perhaps given certain strains of moralism (e.g., Carroll 1996, Gaut 1998) *ipso facto* aesthetically defective film fictions.

---

The Aesthetics of Actor-Character Race Matching in Film Fictions

The cost of securing the above, of course, is that if race mismatching matters, aesthetically or otherwise, only insofar as it is not *ersatz* race-matching, then race matching itself simply doesn’t matter, aesthetically or otherwise. That is, if something is wrong with race mismatching in film fiction, then race mismatching itself cannot be to blame. Instead, for something to be wrong with race mismatching in film fiction just is for film fiction to race-mismatch in the wrong way.\(^\text{22}\)

References


Kilpatrick, J. (1999), *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, University of Nebraska Press.


\(^{22}\) I want to thank Aaron Smuts, P.D. Magnus, Marcus Rossberg, Darren Bradley, and J. David Velleman for their helpful suggestions and criticisms.
Walton, K. (1990), Mimesis as Make Believe, Harvard University Press.