

Research Article

Erin K. Hogan*

Don Quixote, Sweded by Michel Gondry in *Be Kind Rewind* (2008)

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Abstract: In the spirit of poetic license from *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), this article argues that Michel Gondry's film "swedes," its playful neologism for ersatz remaking of Hollywood and classic films, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The feature follows the Sanchification of Jerry (Jack Black), Gondry's Don Quixote, and Quixotification of Mike (Mos Def), Gondry's Sancho, as they nostalgically wrong cinematic rights through sweding and try to save their working-class neighbourhood from condemnation and gentrification through community filmmaking. Gondry swedes the *Quixote* through his engagement with major themes and operations in Cervantes's classic, including nostalgia, story-telling, conflicts between reality and fantasy, authorship, the grotesque and carnivalesque, (anti-)heroes, race and gender-bending, genre, and addressees turned addressers. This article discusses *Be Kind Rewind*'s relationship to Hollywoodian and Cervantine classics through the theoretical frameworks of Julio García Espinosa's imperfect cinema and Foucauldian semiotics, respectively. *Be Kind Rewind* uses and abuses Hollywood stereotypes to re-purpose them for a critique of discriminatory practices. Where casting is concerned and where Michel's characters diverge from Miguel's, *Be Kind Rewind* advances that skin colour is not an arbitrary sign and that race has historical and contemporary meaning in intercultural interactions.

Keywords: Cervantes, *Be Kind Rewind*, Michel Gondry, imperfect cinema, race

Introduction

In compliance with independent French filmmaker Michel Gondry's (1965 Versailles, France-) titular request from his 2008 film, let us kindly rewind four centuries to consider its intertextual resonances from Miguel de Cervantes's best-selling novel, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de La Mancha* (1605, 1615). As the editors of this special issue affirm in their call for papers: "Cervantes is . . . credited with inventing the motif of the mismatched and bizarre duo, the delusional knight and Sancho Panza, which has been endlessly replicated in plays, films, stories or sitcoms." The recent four hundredth anniversaries of Cervantes's death (1616) and of parts one (1605) and two (1615) of the *Quixote* have similarly inspired reflections on the early modern author's legacy. Cervantine stepchildren four centuries removed adopt various stances on tragicomedy with their own interpretative grotesque and carnivalesque spins. For instance, Bruce Dern's quixotic Woody Grant, who suffers from dementia on the road with his son, in Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* (2013) and Keith Fulton's and Louis Pepe's 2008 documentary of the "unmaking" of Terry Gilliam's beleaguered *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* (2018) offer decidedly tragic re-imaginings of the misadventures of Cervantes's title character. By contrast, *Be Kind Rewind*'s Jerry (Jack Black) and Mike (Mos Def) delight their viewers in their utopian and charming but ultimately doomed quest to "swede," the film's playful neologism denoting low-budget remaking, Hollywood blockbusters and award-winners. Gondry's script takes a page

*Corresponding author: Erin K. Hogan, University of Maryland Baltimore County; Modern Languages, Linguistics, and Intercultural Communication; Baltimore, Maryland 21250, USA; ekhogan@umbc.edu

from Cervantes in its characterisation of Jerry and Mike, the knights-errant of Passaic, New Jersey. The feature follows the Sanchification of Jerry, Gondry's Don Quixote, and Quixotification of Mike, Gondry's Sancho, as they nostalgically wrong cinematic rights through sweding and try to save their working-class neighbourhood through community filmmaking from condemnation and gentrification.

Sweding and Imperfect Cinema

In the spirit of poetic license from *Be Kind Rewind*, I advance that Gondry's film swedes *Don Quixote*. *Be Kind Rewind* is "quixotic" in the sense that it resembles Cervantes's work in many ways (OED online). However, Gondry busts blockbusters in a different sense from the infamous case of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, who published under this pseudonym the unauthorised sequel to the enormously successful first *Quixote* in 1614 and is taken to task by Cervantes in his part two the following year. Gondry's relationship to the *Quixote* is also dissimilar from that other Frenchman's, the French symbolist writer Pierre Menard whom Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges imagines sets out two centuries later to rewrite the *Quixote* verbatim as if he were Cervantes himself. Michel Gondry swedes the *Quixote* through his engagement with major themes and operations in Cervantes's classic, including nostalgia, story-telling, conflicts between reality and fantasy, authorship, the grotesque and carnivalesque, (anti-) heroes, race and gender-bending, genre, and addressees (readers, spectators) turned addressers. My contribution to this special issue inspired by Cervantes assumes that its readers' familiarity resides with the first modern novel and literary theory rather than Gondry's feature and film theory. Before examining the points of contact of the works in close readings, let us examine Gondry's own definition of his neologism and contextualise it within independent filmmaking beyond Hollywood or, as *The Urban Dictionary* puts it, within Hollywoodn't (Kentoontist).

Sweding consists of the low-budget remaking of primarily commercial but also art house classics of a variety of genres that Michael Bourgate emphasises is "an unusual and deliberately grotesque way of shooting remakes" (119). Jerry, Mike, and friends re-make a number of features for rent at Mr Fletcher's (Danny Glover) video store that bears the name of Gondry's film, including *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman 1984) and its intertext *King Kong* (John Guillermin 1976), *Rush Hour 2* (Brett Ratner 2001), *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff 1994), *2010 The Year We Make Contact* (Peter Hyams 1984), *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci 1972), *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (Jacques Demy 1964), *Boyz n the Hood* (John Singleton 1991), *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford 1989), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (Don Taylor 1977), and *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson 1997). Jerry, in typical inventive fashion, explains that the video store's low inventory and hiked prices are due to the lengths, or distance, at which its tapes are acquired: "[t]hese are custom-made, sweded. It's a very rare type of video." One dissatisfied customer retorts: "[l]ike Sweden? That's a country, not a verb!" Michel Gondry affirms that his artistic enterprise is born of a utopian impulse with communist underpinnings (Gondry 11-15). The "*Be Kind Rewind* protocol" is built on the triangle of "community, self-made entertainment, and cheap remakes" (Gondry 15).¹ Gondry's "system" (15) has much in common with Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa's (1926-2016) conception of imperfect cinema, contrasted with its "perfect" counterpart understood as technically and artistically masterful filmmaking.² I will discuss *Be Kind Rewind*'s relationship to Hollywood's and Cervantes's classics through the theoretical frameworks of imperfect cinema and Foucauldian semiotics, respectively.

The philosophies of Gondry and García Espinosa, four decades apart, coincide in their aims and methods of democratising filmmaking. In fact, technological advances since García Espinosa's 1969 article allow us to fast forward to a utopian and dystopian post-VHS future in Gondry's film. That is, what García Espinosa posited comes to fruition in *Be Kind Rewind*:

¹ Gondry opened *L'usine de films amateurs* (The Factory of Amateur Films), a mobile filmmaking workshop and curriculum that has been opened and implemented in many cities around the world and most recently in Montreal, Canada.

² As it so happens, García Espinosa's *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin* (*La aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* 1967) is quixotic in its own right (Taylor et al.).

[w]e know that we are filmmakers because we have been part of a minority which has had the time and the circumstances needed to develop, within itself, an artistic culture; and because the material resources of film technology are limited and therefore available to some, not to all. But what happens if the future holds the universalization of college level instruction, if economic and social development reduce the hours in the work day, if the evolution of film technology (there are already signs in evidence) makes it possible that this technology ceases being the privilege of a small few? What happens if the development of videotape solves the problem of inevitably limited laboratory capacity, if television systems with their potential for “projecting” independently of the central studio renders the ad infinitum construction of movie theaters suddenly superfluous? What happens then is not only an act of social justice—the possibility for everyone to make films—but also a fact of extreme importance for artistic culture: the possibility of recovering, without any kinds of complexes or guilt feelings, the true meaning of artistic activity. (“For an Imperfect Cinema”)

Gondry turns filmgoers into filmmakers with the use of a video camera and re-purposed discarded materials from the local junkyard.³ VHS is already a remnant of the past in *Be Kind Rewind* where Mr Fletcher’s competition stocks only DVDs. The sweding production company is an amateur, do-it-yourself film school open to all the residents of Passaic, New Jersey with its tongue-in-cheek reference to European filmmaking models (“Sweden”) that García Espinosa so vehemently opposes as foreign to the realities of Latin America and therefore inauthentic and even imperialistic.⁴ Gondry takes up the task that García Espinosa sets forth: “to find out if the conditions which will enable spectators to transform themselves into agents—not merely more active spectators, but genuine co-authors—are beginning to exist” (“For an Imperfect Cinema”). They do, in fact, exist in the narrative world of *Be Kind Rewind* and its real-world protocol. Gondry, whose instructions remind that “perfection is the enemy” (62), hired locals as dancers, after being prohibited from hiring non-union actors (17). He acknowledges that:

[t]he group received direct gratification for their efforts. It did not come from compliments or flattery, but rather from the experience of witnessing their own creation. And this wasn’t the same as just a single creator admiring his work; it was a communal effort and a communal admiration. It was as if each participant’s feelings had floated into those of the others, creating something larger. And the key to my system was this: The people who shot the film were the ones who watched it. There was no concentration of power, so each person has the same amount of connection with the film. No hype. No coercive advertising. And no room for idolization. (19)

The film offers, by virtue of its materials, a riposte to García Espinosa’s “economy of waste” (“Meditations” 94) and displays the process of filmmaking by a community who struggles to maintain its institutions (namely, Mr Fletcher’s building and video store). The activities of its characters are about process rather than product. García Espinosa highlights:

imperfect cinema must above all show the process which generates the problems. It is thus the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results, the opposite of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema, the opposite of a cinema which “beautifully illustrates” ideas or concepts which we already possess. (The narcissistic posture has nothing to do with those who struggle.) (“For an Imperfect Cinema”)

When Jerry’s local success goes to his head, whose magnetisation erased the videotapes and necessitated the sweding in the first place, he is García Espinosa’s “pharisee” (“For an Imperfect Cinema”), who demands a star trailer beside the junkyard trailer in which he lives. His abode, in fact, is “on set” and in the costume department of Passaic’s rusty tinsel town since colanders, aluminum foil, cardboard and other refuse from the junkyard are used for costumes and props on the sweded screen as icons and indices of well-known films. *Be Kind Rewind* reveals the sweding (and Hollywood filmmaking) processes during which many errors are made, in particular with respect to the representation of people of colour.

³ These scenes, in which characters make something from nothing, are scored with Billy Preston’s “Nothing from Nothing” (1974).

⁴ In Bourgette’s view, rather, sweding emulates Swedish filmmaking: “Les productions cinématographiques de ce pays sont, en effet, plutôt connues pour leur faible implication technique; on retient également qu’il s’agit d’un cinéma austère, brut et social” (124) [The cinematic productions of this country, effectively, are known for their weakness in the technical aspect of filmmaking; we maintain that its meant to be an austere, brute, social cinema] (translation mine).

From Miguel to Michel



Figure 1. Armoured Jerry (Jack Black) “on set” and in costume at the junkyard.

Delightfully far-fetched and nostalgic, *Be Kind Rewind*’s plot tests the limits of verisimilitude, hero worship, genre, and racial cross-casting. Mr Fletcher lives above his *Be Kind Rewind* video store with Mike, possibly his foster son, in a building that Mr Fletcher claims is jazz pianist Fats Waller’s (1904-1943) birthplace. While Mr Fletcher goes out of town for a celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Waller’s death, he leaves Mike in charge of the shop with a warning to keep Jerry out. During his absence, Mr Fletcher meets with the local housing and zoning board who informs him that his building is destined to be converted into new condominiums to be paradoxically named “Olde Passaic Gardens” and begins to strategise about ways to modernise and invigorate his business in order to avoid the building’s demolition. Jerry (Figure 1) is a spoof of the conspiracy-theorist veteran who suffers from a post-traumatic stress disorder and imagines that the government is controlling his mind through microwaves. When Jerry tries to sabotage the power lines he holds responsible for this invasion of privacy, he is zapped like Frankenstein’s monster, becomes magnetised, shows symptoms of radiation poisoning, and erases all of Mr Fletcher’s VHS tapes he touches. Lights, camera, sweding and cue the girl (Alma played by Melonie Díaz). As if fighting for his home is not bad enough, Mr Fletcher’s business is slapped with an order to cease and desist the illegal reproduction of copyrighted material. Mike, Jerry, Alma and Passaic locals mourn the end of their fun and of their hero Fats Waller, whom Mr Fletcher admits was born in Harlem, New York, but regroup to make an original fictional film of the jazz pianist’s Passaic birthplace in an attempt to raise funds to stave off the unkind razing of the property. All participate and, thanks to a store competitor’s loan of a projector, the film is screened on the video store’s front window as the building’s swan song in the eleventh hour of impending demolition (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Miss Falewicz (Mia Farrow) and Mr Fletcher (Danny Glover) exit the store to investigate the commotion. Outside, the neighbourhood’s residents are enjoying Jerry’s (Jack Black) performance in their film, *Fats Waller Was Born Here*.

The shadow of the seventeenth century's *Don Quixote* looms as large as a windmill-giant on the twenty-first century's cinematic games of light and shadow in *Be Kind Rewind*. Peruvian Nobel Prize-winning novelist Mario Vargas Llosa (1936-) summarizes his reflections, in "Una novela para el siglo XXI" [A Novel for the Twenty-first Century] from the anniversary of part one: "The central theme of *Don Quixote de La Mancha* is fiction, its *raison d'être*, and the way it infiltrates life, forming and transforming it" (58). Cervantes's readers will not be surprised, as Mike is, to learn that Fats Waller's Passaic origin story is, in fact, a fiction. Mr Fletcher and the characters of the film understand the transformative power of storytelling; "Well, it started as a bedtime story, I was trying to make this place bearable for you. But then I could never bring myself to tell you the truth. . . . Fats was a happy man. I was trying to make you happy." Similarly, Gondry attests to the summative, positive impact of creative collaboration: "It was as if each participant's feelings had floated into those of the others, creating something larger" (19). Although the characters rely on fiction, which is sadly incapable of rescuing the building, Gondry would again coincide with García Espinosa in privileging the creative process over the creative product. The original film "Fats Waller Was Born Here" and daily life at the video store are the frames that house the characters' serial meta-cinematic story telling. In Cervantes, readers become characters and creators and in Gondry spectators become directors, writers, actors, and producers (Bourgage 121). Passaic is well cast as a location for these amusements; while it was not the birthplace of Fats Waller, its DuMont Laboratories were a home to early television broadcasting and cathode-ray instrument production from the late 1930s to 1940s (Weinstein 14-15, 191; Frey 222-223).

There are numerous points of contact and departure between the first modern novel and Gondry's film. The nostalgia that Don Quixote feels for the community, abundance, harmony, beauty, and decency of the Golden Age and the middle ages' romances of chivalry are matched in the aptly-named Passaic (Walters) store and its VHS collection, whose heyday in the eighties and nineties had passed, was *passé*.⁵ The lines between reality and fiction blur for Gondry's Quixote in the form of Jerry's technological conspiracy theories and in the guise of persecution delusions, to which Quixote is famously and serially vulnerable. Jerry, however, never believes that he is the characters that he is portraying. Mike's own *desengaño*, or Baroque disillusionment, is learning that Fats was born elsewhere. The concept of authorship, a hot-button issue for Cervantes and his protagonist in the second part (II, prologue; 2, 59-74), is introduced as a conflict over intellectual property in *Be Kind Rewind*, whose injurious VHS tapes are steamrolled rather than burned (I, 6). Despite the fact that *Be Kind Rewind* is a film, literacy appears as a subject of conversation as it was for the unlettered Panzas, Dulcinea, and others (I, 10; 83, I, 31; 286). In a particularly dim-witted moment, Mike feels pity for Mr Fletcher, whom he has mistaken for illiterate. As Mr Fletcher's train departs the station, he barely remembers to warn Mike to ban Jerry from the store and writes this instruction from inside the train on its foggy window. Mike, reading this script backwards from the other side, suspects that the store owner does not know how to spell. This is made absurd by Jerry's follow-up question as to whether Mr Fletcher had parents; however, we will return to this sequence in our discussion of race in the film alongside a consideration of the intertext of *Driving Miss Daisy* and racial cross-casting. Slapstick and grotesque humour, in no short supply in the *Quixote*, are readily available in, to give one example, Mike's good old-fashioned frying pan routine to Jerry's head for demagnetisation purposes. Despite numerous similarities with *Don Quixote*, *Be Kind Rewind* is grounded in one town and therefore has more in common with the buddy film than the road movie. Its knights-errant are not itinerant.

⁵ Don Quixote lauds "ancient" times: "What a happy time and a happy age were those that the ancients called GOLDEN! And not because gold—which in this our Age of Iron is so valued—was gotten in that fortunate time without any trouble, but rather because the people who lived then didn't know the two words YOURS and MINE!" (I, 11; 85-86). This spirit of communal harmony underlies Gondry's protocol and "Fats Waller Was Born Here." By 2008, the VHS was a nostalgic object, having been mostly replaced by the DVD. Joshua M. Greenberg has shown that VCR became the media consumer's technology of choice in the eighties, at which time: "a nationwide closure had been achieved by new institutions that brought coherence to the loose-knit collection of video stores dotting the country, replacing the earlier grass-roots social networks with centralized, top-down structures" (116). Greenberg's history shows that the competition and cooperation between store owners is accurately reflected in *Be Kind Rewind* (Greenberg 117). But then DVD kills the VHS star; Sansón Carrasco finally defeats Don Quixote.

Knights-Errant of Passaic

Jerry is our Sanchified Quixote and Mike our Quixotic Sancho. The role reversals of the two characters in Cervantes (Meacham 73) take the form of a number of flip-flopped characteristics and are accompanied by cross-dressing and racial cross-casting. Jerry comes up with many a half-baked idea in *Be Kind Rewind* but Jack Black's corporality is more in the lines of Sancho's portly build. Although, when Mos Def casts himself in the starring role as the African American Fats Waller, Jerry, accustomed to being the star, opportunistically complains of Mike: "He's not even fat." Jerry also lacks Don Quixote's advanced age, although Mr Fletcher represents this demographic. The film begins with Mike's leadership take-over of his Barataria Island (from "barato," or cheap) (II, 45; 830), the "low-cost" shop with one dollar rentals turned store front for the less affordable street swedes, and he plays Morgan Freeman's illiterate character in the *Driving Miss Daisy* swede. But, Mike is also a dreamer who has believed in Passaic's Fats Waller all his life.

Dulcinea of Toboso takes the guise of a cross-dressed Wilson (Irv Gooch), a junkyard employee and swede actor, and Alma of Passaic, a dry-cleaning employee turned swede actress, producer, and camera operator. Wilson plays the villainess from *Rush Hour*, recalling the less than feminine descriptions of Dulcinea and many of Cervantes's *mujeres varoniles* [manly women] (II, 10; 580-582; Velasco "Marimachos, Hombrunas, Barbudas"; Velasco "Hairy Women on Display").⁶ Jerry's confessed homophobia (he is uncomfortable kissing Wilson) prompts the duo to cast Alma. She is Mike's, rather than Jerry's, love interest. A non-sequitur for viewers unfamiliar with the quixotic intertext likens Alma to Dulcinea and the novel's many bearded ladies (Velasco, "Marimachos, Hombrunas, Barbudas"; "Hairy Women on Display"). Jerry sees a moustache on Alma's upper lip where Mike does not. Is it a moustache or not? Is it a basin, a helmet, or a basin-helmet (I, 21; 170)? For French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, the modernity of *Don Quixote* consists of how it highlights the arbitrariness of the link between sign and referent; a helmet to Don Quixote is a basin to a barber. For Foucault:

Don Quixote is the first modern work of literature because in it we see the cruel reason of identities and differences make endless sport of signs and similitudes; because in it language breaks off its old kinship with things and enters into the lonely sovereignty from which it will reappear in its separated state, only as literature; because it marks the point where resemblance enters an age which is, from the point of view of resemblance, one of madness and imagination. (48-49)

Mike offers to do a blind test, in which he strangely closes his eyes and grazes Alma's upper lip with his face, to make a ruling on the dispute. Like "Don" Sancho Panza, governor of Barataria, Mike resorts to less conventional methods to resolve disputes. This episode speaks more to the film's Cervantine intertext than to the fluidity of gender, as Sherry Velasco studies in the original. In the following close readings of the film, I will discuss certain sweding sequences, of *Ghostbusters* and *Driving Miss Daisy*, in which spectators become creators and I will consider the implications of racial cross-casting in the *Rush Hour 2* and *Boyz n the Hood* swedes.

As knights-errant, Jerry and Mike don their armour of aluminium foil and colander helmets (Figures 1 and 3) for their first quest: *Ghostbusters*. While in the junkyard, Jerry, Mike, Mr Fletcher, and Wilson wear this headgear to protect them from imagined surrounding perils. Jerry dons another armour-plated design from the junkyard's collection to play Robo Cop (Figure 4). In similar fashion, Don Quixote's armour is do-it-yourself:

The first thing he did was to clean some armour that had belonged to his ancestors, and which—now rusted and covered with mold—had lain for ages forgotten in a corner. He cleaned and repaired it as well as he could, but he saw that something was missing—the helmet had no closed front. It was just an artilleryman's open helmet, but his ingenuity solved the problem: He fashioned a kind of closed front out of cardboard, which, when it was attached to the open helmet, gave the appearance of a complete helmet. (I, 1; 23)

⁶ Sherry Velasco argues that: "Don Quijote's unstable reality, which is subject to random mutations ('las cosas ... están sujetas a continua mudanza') (I, 8; 130) proves to be an accurate reflection of the 'fluid' state of gender identity and sex assignment during the early modern period" ("*Marimachos, Hombrunas, Barbudas*" 76).



Figure 3. Mike (Mos Def) and Jerry (Jack Black) bust ghosts at the local public library.



Figure 4. Jerry (Jack Black) as Robo Cop.

But Jerry's materials are of a lesser quality, recalling those of a theatre troupe from *Don Quixote* 1615: "Crowns and scepters of actors [...] never are of real gold but rather of foil and tin" (II, 12; 589). It is apparent, however, that Jerry is able to salvage similarly obsolete and unkempt items for this suit. Cardboard is a particularly accessible material for "ingenious" Don Quixote and imperfect filmmakers in *Be Kind Rewind*.

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, early modern ghostbusters, have altercations with a number of (misidentified) phantoms over the course of the novel. The cinematic ghostbusting duo reiterates theirs and the original film's claim to verisimilitude in their television commercial: "We're ready to believe you!" Quixote sees his function differently, promising to protect his squire: "This, Sancho, doubtless has to be an enormous and very dangerous adventure in which I'll have to show all my courage and strength [...] No matter how many phantoms there might be, I won't allow any one of them to touch a single thread of your clothing" (I, 19; 149). But, Mike and Jerry, who plays Bill Murray's character, are a phantom fighting team, both are outfitted as ghostbusting knights-errant (Figure 3).⁷ Perhaps we can attribute Mike's greater participation, compared to Sancho's, to the film's correspondence to Sancho's government of Barataria.

⁷ Not all of the props are refuse. In this sequence, there is an example of high art by Hieronymus Bosch cast in the role of the ghostly monster. A detail of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which had arrived in Spain by way of the Spanish Duke of Alba, spooks spectators of *Ghostbusters*. The Duke had confiscated it in 1568 from the Dutch William of Orange and later bequeathed it to his son (Belting 84). The painting therefore also represents, in a literal sense, artistic appropriation. The Spanish state purchased the painting for Philip II's El Escorial palace from the Duke's son (Belting 84). It finally joined the Prado Museum's collection thanks to Philip II (Silva).

The first sweded movie offers the first critical intervention of its spectators turned creators. Mike, who directs, films, and acts in the swede, corrects the accuracy of Jerry's rendition of the *Ghostbusters* theme song by Ray Parker Jr. The musical critique couched within a sweded film invites a reflection on the feature's uses of parody. According to Linda Hutcheon, the composition of "parody" refers to that which is counter or beside ("par-") the song ("odia") (32). The parody of *Ghostbusters* registers in many ways that include costume and song. Hutcheon explains: "Parody, then, in its ironic 'trans-contextualization' and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signalled by irony" (32). The distance widens in subsequent cross-castings within the swedes.

In their *Ghostbusters* remake, Mike is the Quixote to Jerry's Maese Pedro (II, 26-27). In Cervantes's novel, parody is signaled through song and puppet theatre, among many other textual elements. Don Quixote calls to puppeteer Maese Pedro's attention the inaccuracies of his show with respect to the Moorish culture it portrays. Quixote takes issue with Pedro's narration style, preferring linear storytelling:

Child, child, follow your story in a straight line and don't lead us down curves or side streets. To establish a truth clearly, many proofs are necessary . . . Boy, stay on track, do what that man says, and that'll be the best thing. Keep to your plainsong and don't use any counterpoint, since it tends to break down from being too subtle. (II, 26; 701-702)

The etymology of parody makes an appearance here; that is, Quixote demands the "odia" and rejects the "parodia." Naturally, he who believes so earnestly in the reality of the romances of chivalry as to see them reproduced before his eyes does not take well to repetition with difference. When directing and co-starring in *Driving Miss Daisy*, Mike tries to keep to the script but Jerry has a different idea: "keep in character!" Alma disagrees that Jessica Tandy's character is as Jerry portrays her. It is Alma's turn to critique *Be Kind Rewind*'s puppet show when she shoots and directs the cartoon feature *The Lion King*. They animate their feature through the use of giant lion cut-outs, which Mike and Jerry move from behind as if puppets. Alma directs: "Jerry, I can see your head. It doesn't look real." But, Jerry, always the heterosexual divo, does not take her direction and, rather, directs her to focus on dubbing the voices. The role of reining in the quixotic Jerry alternates between Mike and Alma as it does in the novel among Don Quixote's niece, Princess Micomicona, Sansón Carrasco, and others.

The difference of parody assumes racial and gendered meaning in the cross-casting of roles in *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Boyz n the Hood*, and *Rush Hour 2* swedes. Does *Be Kind Rewind* reproduce Hollywood stereotypes and racist casting as it reproduces Hollywood movies or does it call them out? Hollywood or Hollywoodn't? Mr Fletcher asks Miss Falewicz (Mia Farrow), whom he holds in much esteem and who may also be a foster parent herself, to keep an eye on the store while he is away. She requests *Ghostbusters* and *Driving Miss Daisy*. For the latter, Mike explains his discomfort: "I'd really rather not do this one. I really never got this movie. I thought it was a little condescending." But Miss Falewicz, a Polish American woman in her sixties with some resemblance to Jessica Tandy, brings another set of cultural experiences to bear on her viewing of the film: "It's a lovely movie full of generosity and giving. She teaches him to read. How many movies have that kind of heart?" In Bruce Beresford's film, an ageing Miss Daisy (Jessica Tandy) develops a friendship with her African American driver Hoke Colburn (Morgan Freeman) and teaches him to read. Presumably, Miss Falewicz identifies with Miss Daisy; she does, in fact, watch herself and Mr Fletcher in the co-starring roles when she toasts to the sweded film at home with two female friends of different racial backgrounds. Our African American co-protagonist identifies more closely with Hoke and finds his portrayal paternalistic. This is show business and Mike has to give the client, who is also charged with supervision duties, what she wants. Neither Hollywood nor the greater United States is a post-racial paradise despite the hopeful election of the nation's first African American president in the year *Be Kind Rewind* was released.

Jerry's cross-dressed portrayal of Miss Daisy in the swede invites spectators to reflect on Mike and Jerry as co-protagonists of Gondry's buddy movie. Is the same power dynamic at play? Davi Johnson Thornton's analysis of *Psych* (2006-2014), a television series created by Steve Franks, sheds light on the negotiations of race in Gondry's film. *Psych* is a spoof detective show in which the quixotic, insightful, and goofball Shawn (James Roday) pretends to be psychic to solve crimes in Santa Barbara with his serious and responsible

African American best friend Gus (Dulé Hill). “James Roday,” Thornton fails to discuss, passes for white as Shawn but is played, under this stage name, by Hispanic actor James David Rodríguez. In Thornton’s estimation, comedy in the series does a disservice to the realities of race in the United States. Shawn makes a number of carnivalesque jokes about race ostensibly at his own expense, the “white” character suffering greater discrimination and misunderstanding in the inversion. Thornton convincingly argues: “[t]he show’s rhetoric of comedy directs viewers to enjoy pleasant race-related incongruities, situating laughter as an expression of racial humor, but trains or persuades audiences how to properly ‘make light’ of race” (432). *Be Kind Rewind* most literally “makes light” of race when Jerry, at his suggestion, and Mike Xerox then wear their faces in the negative, rendering Jerry’s black and Mike’s white, for the filming of *Ghostbusters* night scenes. This is lighting’s equivalent to the black face of minstrelsy, with other more and less self-critical examples to follow. Quixotic Jerry gets away with quite a lot. Alma suggests that black and white fingers replace the keys of Fats’ piano, but her suggestion does not make it into the final “Fats” film.

Thornton explores the structures of power that allow for Shawn’s joking: “Shawn’s light references to Gus’s blackness signify both Shawn’s privilege-to-mock as the dominant buddy in the relationship, as well as Shawn’s license to openly acknowledge Gus’s racial identity” (437). In similar terms, I advance that the divo, also played by the bigger Hollywood star of the two, is dominant in *Be Kind Rewind*’s on-screen friendship. Jerry, in full loopiness, says that to suggest Mr Fletcher does not know how to spell and does not have parents would be “racist” (Figure 5). This is humour of incongruity that makes Jerry’s racial protest, and therefore racism in general, a subject of ridicule. The fact that Jerry’s face is camouflaged for his nocturnal covert operation to sabotage the power lines, to “pass” as the dark (k)night behind the chain linked fence, further problematizes the use of humour in this sequence. The blackening of Jerry’s face and his “foolish” reference to racism remit to demeaning portrayals of African Americans by white actors in minstrelsy. Jerry, Miss Faleciewicz, and the diegetic market exert their power over Mike, obligating him to make a film that he “would rather not.” But, *Hollywood*.



Figure 5. Jerry (Jack Black), in camouflaging face paint, shares his conspiracy theories with Mike at the store.

French Caucasian director Michel Gondry is aware of the complexity of cinematically representing a community to which he does not belong. In *The Be Kind Rewind protocol*, Gondry explains the genesis of the film he wrote, directed, and produced. He was first hired by African American stand-up comedian Dave Chappelle to film his “Block Party” (2005) comedy sketch and music show. Gondry expresses his surprise at the job offer given that he is “a white French guy coming from a white nondescript French suburb” (9). But, he was pleased with the film’s success and overcame his “fear and complex about cultural inadequacy,” citing as admittance to the community a speaking invitation from an African American fraternity at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his hosts’ surprise that he is not African American (13). Gondry assesses the directorial decisions that led to this achievement: “I think that by being careful I avoided the dangers of simplifications, obvious shortcuts, and manipulative imagery associations that can make a

documentary dishonest” (13). This positive experience encouraged Gondry’s next project: *Be Kind Rewind*. I would venture to say that *Be Kind Rewind* re-makes Hollywood films and reproduces their stereotypes in carnivalesque fashion in order to “unmake” them in “Fats Waller Was Born Here.” The original “Fats” film is the culmination of *Be Kind Rewind*’s imperfect cinema expression. Nevertheless, these films are “imperfect” in another sense since they do not accurately reflect the demographics of the Passaic community. According to *Passaic Mosaic*, found in the DVD’s extra material, the city was historically a Native American, then Polish immigrant community, hence Miss Falecwickz. However, according to the 2010 Census, Passaic is majority Hispanic (71%) with more African American (10%) than Asian American (4%) residents (“Passaic city, New Jersey”). The only Latinx character in *Be Kind Rewind*’s Passaic is Alma (and likely her unnamed sister). More African Americans are represented in major (Mike, Mr Fletcher) and minor roles (extras) than Latinx. African American musicians (Fats Waller, Billy Preston), rather than Latin American or Latinx (La Charanga Cubana), make up the greater part of the feature’s soundtrack. Jerry is overrepresented, playing (or wishing to play) starring and co-starring swede roles intended for other races. The film’s knights “err” not in their itinerary but often in their expression of Hollywood swedes.



Figure 6. Jack Black plays Jackie Chan in the sweded *Rush Hour 2* (Brett Ratner 2001).

Jack Black plays Jackie Chan in the sweded *Rush Hour 2*. The “#OscarsSoWhite” boycott of 2016 and more recent controversies involving the casting of white actors in Asian roles (see Chow) give *Be Kind Rewind*’s spectator pause. Robert Townsend’s and Keenan Ivory Wayan’s co-written 1987 film *Hollywood Shuffle* addressed Hollywood’s stereotype casting through parody; the sketch of the spoof commercial for the “Black Acting School” identifies a number of stereotypes that African American television and film actors encounter. Townsend’s metacommunicative film, self-financed on credit cards (Alexander 139), also includes a parodic Siskel and Ebert critics sketch, “Sneakin’ in the Movies,” in which self-identifying “homeboys” Speed (Robert Townsend) and Tyrone (Jimmy Woodard) watch and critique the accessibility and realism of Hollywood spoofs like *Amadeus Meets Salieri* (*Amadeus* Milos Forman 1984), *Chicago Jones and the Temple of Doom* (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [Steven Spielberg 1984]), and *Dirty Larry* (*Dirty Harry* [Don Siegel 1971]). These critics respond favourably to the generic hybrid *Attack of the Street Pimps* although it “was full of stereotypes.” Townsend’s and Wayans’ observations remain relevant. We again ask of *Be Kind Rewind*: Hollywood or Hollywoodn’t? Is this a commentary on Hollywood’s whitewashing casting policies or is it a reproduction? Is it a helmet or a basin?

Park et al.’s reception study of racial stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2* concludes that, although the movie perpetuates stereotypes, spectators interpreted stereotype humour within the communicative frame of the comedy and therefore did not take offense (171). Is Jack Black’s impression of Jackie Chan laughable or offensive? What license does comedy have to test these boundaries? Why did Gondry write-in *Rush Hour* instead of *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner 1987)? Jerry/Jack Black and Mike/Mos Def are better suited to Donner’s film co-starring Mel Gibson and, *Be Kind Rewind*’s own, Danny Glover. As versed as Gondry proves

himself to be in American popular culture, this appears to be an improbable oversight. It is unlikely that difficulty securing permissions for reproduction was a factor in Gondry's selection; New Line Cinema, who produced both *Rush Hour 2* and *Be Kind Rewind*, is under Warner Brothers' label, who produced *Lethal Weapon*. Therefore, it is likely that Gondry is purposefully cross-casting Jack Black in order to foreground and defamiliarise Hollywood's whitewashing. Jerry secures preferential treatment for himself; he has the freedom to embody a stout Quixote but, in Jerry's self-serving opinion, body type does matter for the original movie, and the lankier Mike cannot play Fats Waller. That is, Gondry's parodies offer the critical distance necessary to expose the discriminatory practice. It extends the practice of ersatz substitutions of props and costumes to its actors.

Our primary examples of cross-casting are of course our main characters: African American Mos Def's Sancho and Jewish American Jack Black's Quixote. However, in sheer numbers, white actors more often play non-white characters in the swedes than the other way around. Mike even complains to Alma that all the swedes star her and Jerry. This recurs in the *Boyz n the Hood* swede and almost in the "Fats Waller Was Born Here" original film. In the swede, Jerry and other white characters don Afro wigs, as an index of blackness, to portray the "boyz" of the hood. A wigged white mannequin is used as a cadaver. Attention to racial "passing" is not specific to contemporary Hollywood; Cervantes explores it in a number of episodes from *Don Quixote*. We could look no further than Dorotea-Princess Micomicona from Chapter XXXVII of the first part. Of this character, Barbara Fuchs has observed: "Her ostensible origins and Sancho's unsavoury speculations about her black subjects, whom he will transform into *blancos o amarillos* (314) (white or yellow, i.e., silver or gold) by selling them into slavery, recast Dorotea as the curiously pale ruler of an African realm" (26). Race, gender, and religion prove fluid in the works of Miguel then Michel, but not as fluid as Jerry would have it.



Figure 7. Jerry (Jack Black) in blackface and a failed attempt to play Fats Waller.

Jerry goes too far when he insists on playing Fats Waller (Figure 7). *Be Kind Rewind* indicates that "Fats Waller Was Born Here" will be different from the swedes. The shop's customers become creators alongside the sweding trio. Neighbourhood folks invest themselves with authority; Jerry interviews Miss Faleciewicz and children too young to have met Fats Waller on her porch, Mike and Alma interview and interrupt a local doctor. Everyone participates in the editing process, voicing their preferences for the movie's beginning and even rejecting Jerry's vote to begin at Fats' birth, the linear storytelling that Don Quixote advocates for with Maese Pedro, as "boring." Jerry's entrance in Fats Waller makeup interrupts the montage of creative goodwill and collaborative filmmaking sequences and abruptly stops the music, the film's thematic instrumental rendition of "Nothing from Nothing," after two minutes. Jerry impersonates Fats, singing "Ain't misbehaving, saving all my lovin'...", to looks of shock and disgust on the faces of castmates. He begins to try to explain himself: "Fats is Fat and I'm fat, so I thought I could..." Mr Fletcher, whose dress as a reverend might remind us of number of Civil Rights leaders, intervenes because Jerry is, in fact, misbehaving. The shop

owner corrects: “You thought wrong, but let’s have a conversation about that. Just a brief conversation.” The implicit audience is more familiar with minstrelsy than Jerry, whose conversation with Mr Fletcher the audience does not hear. Robert Nowatzki has noted that “early minstrelsy was characterized not only by racism but also by misogyny, nationalism, cross-racial identification, and working-class hostility toward and mockery of the bourgeoisie, and it helped its immigrant performers to transform themselves from racial Others to ethnic white Americans” (115). If Jerry were familiar with minstrelsy, his conception would likely not be this complex. Mr Fletcher intervenes, dethroning the reigning box office king, to prevent Hollywood from taking over Hollywoodn’t. The interruption of the music and Mr Fletcher’s intercession put an end to the Cervantine “endless sport of signs and similitudes.” The ensemble cast and its horizontal, inclusive filmmaking paint a picture of the low-budget original film as Passaic’s truest imperfect cinema.

“To Play is Human. To Rewind is Divine!”⁸

Michel Gondry is a poet of imperfect cinema who strikes upon the resemblance of *Don Quixote* in the twenty-first century United States: “strain[ing] his ears to catch that ‘other language’, the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance” (Foucault 50). His playful, quixotic feature invites spectators to rewind to identify commonalities with the first modern novel. Where Cervantes’s work, according to his 1605 prologue, is “all a censure of the books of chivalry” (I, prologue; 8), Gondry critiques discriminatory representation of people of colour in Hollywood. *Be Kind Rewind* is an “invective” against pernicious narratives; we would do well to heed the advice of Cervantes’s (imaginary) friend: “so fix your attention on bringing down the illfounded framework of these chivalresque books, despised by many, and praised by many more; for if you can achieve this, you won’t have achieved little” (I, prologue; 9). Gondry would attempt the great feat of bringing down the lauded yet “illfounded framework” of the Hollywood studio system. To do so, his cinematic language draws from Cervantes’s exploration of nostalgia, meta-communication, carnivalesque gender and race passing, and addressees turned addressers.

Gondry understands that the transcendent and transformative power of the arts, if elusive or intangible to the market, can be harnessed for the realisation of subject and community. These are stories of identities, of the self in relation to heroes, and differences, of gender, race, class and community and even urban planning. The silhouette of “Fats Waller was Born Here” on the store’s window (Figure 2) illuminates the point where the low-budget imaginative film becomes something more. As a poet of imperfect cinema, Gondry would fulfil Julio García Espinosa’s prophesy that “[t]he future, without doubt, will be with folk art, but then there will be no need to call it that, because nobody and nothing will any longer be able to again paralyze the creative spirit of the people. Art will not disappear into nothingness; it will disappear into everything” (“For an Imperfect Cinema”). The utopian original film, “Fats Waller,” delivers community cohesion on location in Mike’s Barataria Island, but it does not save Mr Fletcher’s building.

Michel Gondry swedes *Don Quixote*’s critical relationship to texts. Hollywood and Hollywoodn’t. *Be Kind Rewind* is a basin-helmet; it uses and abuses Hollywood stereotypes to re-purpose them as a critique of discriminatory practices. Ultimately, where casting is concerned and where Michel’s characters diverge from Miguel’s, “Fats Waller Was Born Here” and *Be Kind Rewind* argue that skin colour is not an arbitrary sign since race has immediate historical and contemporary significance in contextualised intercultural interactions.

⁸ My conclusion’s title is associated with VHS nostalgia. As many readers will recall, the Blockbuster Video chain adorned their video tapes with parodic phrases, this one modifies English poet Alexander Pope’s “To err is human, to forgive divine,” to encourage customers to rewind them (Bacon).

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