Michele Aaron on mainstream American cinema

Michele talks about her research in mainstream American cinema.

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My name's Michelle Aaron. I teach Film Studies within the Department of American and Canadian Studies, which means I specialise I guess in mainstream American film but have a rather, I don't know if scathing is the right word, but certainly a critical perspective on what mainstream American film means.

I've been particularly interested in politicised readings of mainstream cinema. How and why the masses go and watch certain films that are often about what would be seen to be fairly dodgy pleasures or behaviours in the real world. And yet in these films that are increasingly realistic and actually increasingly similar to what goes on in the real world - I'm thinking for example of how we would see representations of the devastations of New York in endless disaster movies from the 30s/40s onwards and especially surging in the pre-millennial period - how that then got recreated in 9/11. Certainly since then we have this idea of how there's that blurring of what is real and what is cinema.

That was certainly the way the money people talked about 9/11 and how it was experienced like a movie.

Yes, I'm interested in how the overlap between difficult images in film and difficult images in reality can benefit from ideas that cross both thoughts about the real world and thoughts about cinema. So, I've always been fascinated by how we understand those difficult images that we love. Images say of suffering or of pain, of disaster. How we make sense of those.

I'm currently finishing a book that's on death and the moving image which has quite a few laughs in it but is about the representation of death and how it works in mainstream cinema to shore up the greatest taboo in many ways, the thing that everyone doesn't want to think about but at the same time is everywhere. Cinema absolutely abounds with images of death and yet we continue to not fully appreciate or be willing to accept death in real terms as something perhaps that's banal and painful, rather than as Hollywood tells us is beautiful, even sexy. Certainly romanticised frequently.

That book looks at representations of death and its philosophical and psychological and even aesthetic underpinnings. I have other interests to offset the interests in more morbid things, but I'm interested in musicals, in queer cinema and queer television and also Jewish cinema and perhaps the overlap between those things. How queer images coincide with the history of Jewish representation as well.

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