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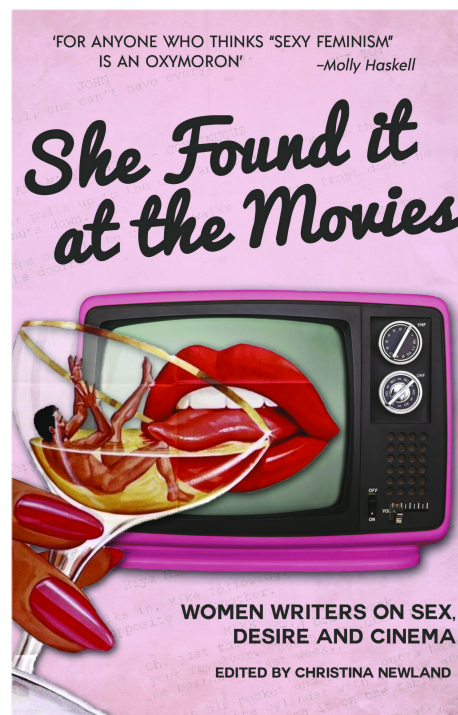
***She Found it at the Movies: Women Writers
on Sex, Desire and Cinema*** (Preview)

Edited by Christina Newland. Wareham, U.K.:
Red Press, 2020. 208 pp. Paperback: \$15.99
and Kindle: \$8.99.

Reviewed by Catherine Russell

Anyone still wondering what Pauline Kael lost at the movies need not wonder anymore. It has been found. Christina Newland claims that Kael found more at the movies than she lost, something “sexy and uncomfortably tender, something it was safe to carry around on repeat in the real estate of your head.” The refreshing voices collected in *She Found it at the Movies* constitute an unorthodox, and much needed, critical perspective on women, LGBTQ+, and people of color as spectators looking at and to the movies for spaces to insert themselves. The contributors to Newland’s collection of essays have moved well beyond metaphor to find themselves at the movies, or in the case of some queer, black, and trans writers, to challenge how they find themselves at the movies.

At times, while reading this collection, I began to wonder if films and TV shows were responsible to viewers, as if their reason for being was to construct identities. Certainly this is the way that cinema is apprehended by certain factions of (dare I say) the millennials who have come to constitute our student bodies, and for this reason alone it is an important text for teachers of media who may feel stranded in the third decade of the century.



These writers do not treat movies as mirrors, but recognize the complexities of representation and narrative. The book is a delightful read, and provides valuable insight into those spectators whose bodies are not invisible, but very much part of the viewing experience. Newland refers to Laura Mulvey as “our patron saint” in her introduction and frames the collection as meeting Mulvey’s challenge to “conceive a new language of desire.” She and her collaborators come up with a language of visceral, active desires, jettisoning the abstractions of psychoanalytic theory in favor of life experiences and the infiltration of cinema into the ways they have come to know themselves.

The writers Newland has assembled to meet the challenge of articulating their own languages of desire—most of whom are journalists, programmers, and film critics of various stripes—are clever wordsmiths. Most refer directly or indirectly to feminist film theory and what they have learned from it, but the emphasis is more on personal narratives, confessions, and sexualities. For the most part, they talk about Euro-American feature films, from *Rear Window* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, to *In the Cut*, *Trouble Every Day*, *Grease*, and *Dirty Dancing*. Some writers detour into more unfamiliar territory (to me) such as teenage TV shows and music videos and films such as *High School Musical* and *Set it Off*, an all-Black female bank heist drama, which according to Corrina Antrobus “tore down and rebuilt what sexy looked like” when it comes to Black women’s bodies on screen.



Claire Denis's Trouble Every Day.

A predictable, yet long overdue theme throughout the book is the writers' attraction to beautiful men. James Dean's name comes up quite a bit, along with Channing Tatum, Steve McQueen, Malcolm McDowell, and Zac Efron. Two essayists address the hysteria of young women around male icons, living and dead. For Pamela Hutchinson, the shared pathos over the deaths of stars from Valentino to River Phoenix creates valuable links between generations of women. The critical establishment tends to belittle the excessive displays of mourning, and yet these are valuable places where female fans' voices "rise to the surface of film discourse." Sheila O'Malley's excellent essay on what teenage girls know and we don't argues that young female fans' passionate

embrace of male heartthrobs threatens the male status quo; but at the same time, they tend to point fairly accurately to “the next best thing,” including the careers of budding stars. Teenage girls are the weathervanes of popular culture, as they vocally let off the steam of a repressive society, although their passion is commonly dismissed as trivial and superficial. We ignore their perceived childishness at our peril.

Two of the essays on men as object of the female gaze stand out. Anna Bogutskaya’s piece “Dance Boy Dance” is a passionate tribute to Gene Kelly and all those who have subsequently aspired to his unique blend of brutish masculinity and featherweight charm. She describes his indescribable intensity as BDE, or “Big Dick Energy.” Patrick Swayze, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gregory Hines in *White Nights*, and Channing Tatum likewise stimulate the viewer to imagine what they might be like in bed. Indeed, this book is not for the faint of heart in its frank declarations of desire and fantasy. The inversions of misogynist culture are deliberately crude expressions of desire. Catherine Bray points out that social media has enabled women and men to take responsibility for crafting their own public images, and men are now included within the glamour industry. Timothée Chalamet, who has become an LGBTQ+ icon, “is a beautiful boy for the Instagram era.” Chalamet knows he is beautiful and owns it...

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