Konjuring Killjoy E7: The Konjuring

[SFX – ominous open]

“The willful girl has a story to tell” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 194). “Each woman has her own story, but they share what they are asked to endure, patriarchy” (p. 201). “We tell tales, we leave trails. The more we leave behind us, the easier it is to find us. And by us, I mean each other” (Ahmed, 2023, p. 193). “Telling the story is part of the feminist battle” (2017, p. 203). “Sometimes we create a spectacle” (2023, p. 231).

Kamp Krystal Killjoy is that spectacle. Connecting the dots between patriarchy, feminism, and horror/slasher films was a no brainer for me. The “camp” of the genre, the obvious monstrosity of patriarchy, and the necessary monstrosity of feminism to match, and terrify patriarchy.

[SFX – Killjoy Kue]

Killjoy Maxim: Be Monstrous!

Now comes the hard part – how do I make visible both the monsters of patriarchy AND the feminist killjoy within my story; AND how do I create a feminist theory/feminist studies curriculum around each episode? Just a little light lifting for a sabbatical project!!

Luckily, my main source materials – the horror genre, and the eloquent feminist scholar Sara Ahmed – provide me with numerous descriptive and provocative entry points.

Let’s start with the feminist killjoy and the final girl. Both operate towards a seemingly singular goal – survival. According to Ahmed, survival is a protest:

[SFX – Living a Feminist Life Kue]

“When you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action” (2017, p. 237)

Obviously preferred over annihilation, Ahmed also recognizes **survival** as more like a first step, “the start of something” (2017, p. 235), “The [real] point is to transform the very ground on which we build. We want to shatter the foundations” (2017, p. 176)

Having survived, we expand the role of the final girl, anointing her feminist killjoy, and moving her beyond just getting by in the singular. It always annoyed me that the final girl was one, working on her own as a “white savior” of sorts.

[SFX – Killjoy Kue]

Killjoy Equation: White Feminism = Blanking

Our final girl/feminist killjoy embraces survival as “a shared feminist project” (2017, p. 236); they engage other killjoys in “Killing joy [as] a world-making project” (2023, p. 77). As I’ve said, we move from arm, to arms, to army…

While our killjoy’s survival interrupts white supremacist patriarchy, it also does more. The “word *interruption* comes from rupture: to break” (2017, p. 177). Our feminist killjoy survival ***breaks*** white supremacist patriarchy. What we break, we have to re-make by putting in the feminist work.

[SFX – Domestic Kue]

Ahmed considers feminism “homework” because “we have much to work out from not being at home in a world” (2017, p. 7). In fact, Ahmed develops the feminist killjoy through familiar “domestic” metaphors that will be present in the Kamp Krystal Killjoy story.

Tables – Seated at the table we appear part of the group, accepted by the table, invited, yet, we are alienated from them

Doors – Doors appear to open and close; For some, doors appear only as closed; for others, doors are politely held open. we are stopped by them.

[End SFX – Domestic]

[SFX – Killjoy Kue]

Killjoy Truth: Things are fluid if you are going the ways things are flowing (2023, p. 240)

[SFX – Domestic]

Walls – Walls appear solid, delineated, obstacles that block our flow from one place to another. institutions put them up when we try to transform them

[End SFX – Domestic]

[SFX – Killjoy Kue]

Killjoy Truth: The more we challenge structures, the more we come up against them (2023, p. 241)

While feminism has long navigated the border between domestic and public – yes, the famous “the personal is political” – Ahmed goes a step further in embracing what she refers to as “Feminist housework” “[which] aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master’s residence” (2017, p. 7)

Of course, the “master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” so Ahmed provides the killjoy with tools for both breaking, and making. She envisions the killjoy as a cultural critic, a philosopher, a poet, and an activist.

Killing joy refers to “what we show” - The feminist killjoy as cultural critic.

“We look more closely at something because we are not affected [by it] in the ‘right’ way… We begin with a visceral reaction – a no, a questioning, an indignation, a refusal – [then] we learn to explain that reaction” (2023, p. 82).

Killing joy refers to “how we know” - The feminist killjoy as philosopher. Knowledge through experience; embodied knowledge; things that might get written off as “navel gazing” or, just telling stories. But Ahmed clarifies:

“To ground theory in lived experience is about reflecting not on oneself but on the world *as given to us”* (2023, p. 125)

“To be a killjoy philosopher is to turn the questions *out.* We question who is made questionable and who is not.” (2023, p. 132).

Killing joy refers to “what we make” - The feminist killjoy as poet. Yes, sometimes it is actual poetry! But also more generally the act of creating. We create through refusals – to do or be good “women” and “men.” We create by calling out problems we see on a daily basis *by their names* – racism, sexism, homophobia, etc…

We create through the Utopian Performative. “We make something by repurposing what has been used against us. To be a killjoy poet is to plant something, a possibility, a new growth of some kind, to mark the site of violence, to tell us what happened here” (2023, p. 193).

And, of course, killing joy refers to “what we break” - The feminist killjoy as activist. Killjoy activism is about “how we use our bodies and language to disrupt the system by revealing its violence” (2023, p. 209).

We break the “rules” and refuse to make happiness our cause; we break the flow of patriarchy by uniting with other feminist killjoys: “Together, bodies become monstrous. Sometimes the point is to become an obstacle” (2023, p. 227).

Thinking about the feminist killjoy as cultural critic, we can play with “what we show” by adopting “the mask” that is so iconic in the horror and slasher genre. The mask adds a degree of terror as it further distorts reality for the victim. The mask works to both increase fear, and as a foil, which is always foiled – that is, the victim should have always been afraid, rather than dismissing the mask as a joke, or, just fooling around.

No fooling around, the imagery of masks is super useful for explaining the monstrosity of patriarchy, which is always concealing itself, and the monstrosity of feminism, which we must nurture into existence.

Patriarchy’s mask consists of the hegemony of the status quo, “just the way things are,” molded to make patriarchy seem human, while it promotes racist systems and usurps reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. Operating through “smoke screen” tactics, patriarchy kicks up dust through diversity and inclusion initiatives.

[SFX – LFL cue]

“Equality and diversity can be used as masks to create the appearance of being transformed” (LFL p. 9) “When you notice movement” (ie: diversity work) “we are not noticing what stays put” (LFL p.137)

These masks affect how we see ourselves in relation to others and how we see ourselves in relation to the twisted systems woven by and through patriarchy. In making us strangers in our own homes, on our streets, and in our worlds, we become “strangerwise” = “wisdom of strangers, those who, in being estranged from worlds, notice them.” (HB, p. 162)

[SFX – Killjoy Cue]

Killjoy Truth: The less we see ourselves reflected, the more we see in a reflection (p. 241)

Masks can go either way. They can be monstrous and oppositional, and can also allow us to “fit in.”

[SFX – Killjoy Cue]

Killjoy Truth: Just because they welcome you, it does not mean they expect you to turn up.

Indeed, there is a whole podcast series called CODE SWITCH, that recognizes that for many of us, we’re required to put on a mask and show up as someone other than our full, authentic self. We bring our model minority selves – we “clean up nicely,” straightening up our queerness, whitening up our Blackness, lowering our laughs and our voices.

[SFX – Killjoy Cue]

Killjoy Equation: Survival of the Fittest = Survival of Those Who Fit (p. 246)

Killjoy Truth: What you are told you need to do to progress farther or faster in a system reproduces the system. (p. 242)

The patriarchy broadcasts a clear warning – choose your mask carefully, or else be uninvited from the table, have a door slammed in your face, and hit an immovable wall. Still, we can disregard the warning and not acquiesce. We can choose a monstrous mask – that of the feminist killjoy – and terrify the patriarchy.

If the final girl – now our killjoy – is obsessed with survival, the slasher is equally obsessed with revenge. By putting on our monstrous mask, we take on the revenge of slasher as our own, using that rage to smash the table, break down the door, demolish the wall that have been used to keep us out. We have always already been considered monstrous for “failing to carry out our [feminine] duties in the right way” (lfl, p. 63). If we embrace our monstrosity we take de-monstrative steps towards completing the work of transformation.

Physical locations at, and the natural environment around a camp, link closely to the metaphors Ahmed uses in developing her feminist killjoy character. That “camp” is a second, or temporary home for kids and kounselors means that much of the “homework” and “feminist housework” Ahmed mentions will be right at home. The personal is political, AND institutional. By being left out, and alienated, especially in places we should feel at home, feminist killjoys are able to see clearly that which is obscured for those with privilege. We hear it in Living a Feminist Life:

[SFX – Living a Feminist Life Kue]

“We begin in the lodge, where we are lodged. We begin with the lodge when we are dislodged” (2017, p. 218).

Dislodged from the lodge – where campers are welcome – our feminist killjoys spill out into the surrounding nature. We are met by trees, the breeze, and a variety of paths – some worn, others overgrown and barely visible – that radiate out into the camp.

According to Ahmed, Feminism is deviating from the paths we are told to follow (2017, p. 15/16)

That well-worn path? We are “told” it is safe, especially if we travel in pairs. But really? Female bodies are never safe – cat calling, unwanted touching – what “they” call “boys being boys” – our feminist killjoys recite like poetry – sexual harassment; sexual assault.

We are told that deviating from the well-trodden path leads to unhappiness. In the slasher films – sudden and brutal death; in the “real world,” alienation, oppression, and other harassment. We are doxed on social media, deemed too ugly and too fat, or whatever.

Still, for the killjoys – being on the path leads to unhappiness. By literally stepping off the path, the killjoy makes clear their commitments:

[SFX – Killjoy Kue]

I am willing to cause unhappiness.

I am willing to get in the way of feminist happiness.

We operate on hope - “Hope is an investment that the paths we follow will get us somewhere” (2017, p. 46).

The more we hope, the more of us step onto the feminist killjoy path – paths become more obvious and easier to traverse the more people who travel it. We are awakened by the breeze that whispers, and suddenly… a branch SNAPs. A Feminist snap.

[SFX – ominous]

“From the shattered pieces, we start again. We pick up the pieces. We take care; we must take care, because history has sharpened their edges; sharpened our edges. We pick up the pieces; we start again. ‘Sometime, somewhere, I am going to snap.’ It is a feminist hope” (2017, p. 211).

References:

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life.*Duke University Press.

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Ahmed, S. (2023). *The feminist killjoy handbook: The radical potential of getting in the way.*Seal Press.