

INSIDE KILLJOY'S KASTLE

**DYKEY GHOSTS, FEMINIST MONSTERS,
AND OTHER LESBIAN HAUNTINGS**

Edited by Allyson Mitchell and Cait McKinney

agYU

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Lesbian Rule: Welcome to the Hell House

CAIT MCKINNEY AND ALLYSON MITCHELL

Are you ready?

Welcome to *Killjoy's Kastle*. I have been selected by a committee of killjoys who confirm that I am qualified to lead this tour.

It is a commonly suggested that feminists (particularly lesbian feminists) are, in fact, killjoys. They just aren't any fun, just won't play the game – revelling in the destruction of good times, they are happiness murderesses.

Let me get this crooked for you – some lesbian feminists are maligned, pushed into corners and intentionally wounded by lesbophobes, misogynists, and the like ... There are other lesbian feminists who are indeed monstrous, ones who would rather stomp their own movement, resting comfortably in race and class privilege, then budge on stale ideas about gender and sex and bodies and ... Let's face it, it can all be very confusing, even if you are an insider like me ... chained to this duty.

Killjoy, who lives in this kastle, tries to find balance – being mean when necessary and nimble as required ...



With these words, the Demented Women's Studies Professor welcomes visitors to *Killjoy's Kastle: A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House*, an artwork by Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue. Our professor already works in another kind of hell house by day. She is broken from contradictions in the conditions of pay and prestige at the university, where all she has is what she needs to keep working and where there is no capacity to thrive, where she

teaches about social justice theories and histories, struggles to decolonize, to make her classrooms “safer” in a context where the paradox is that the very buildings she works in stand on capitalism, white supremacy, misogyny, transphobia, and colonialism, all under the rubric of education, higher learning, intelligence, and diversity. She works as a tour guide, at night, after class is done, because her contract teaching gig doesn’t pay well. She is a combination of precariously employed, hairy-lipped, overcaring, and oversharing, and she sweats in her perimenopausal silk shirt, angry, outdated. She’s passive-aggressive and weak pelvic-floored, despite all the Zumba. She wants to please and is concerned about student evaluations, even though she knows the game is rigged. She’s loose in her culturally appropriative clothing, rocking her academic bling – chunky necklaces. Sex positive, her haircut is timeless, and she’s unapologetically greying. She is snarky, cold-sored, desperate to maintain relevance, confident, migrained, overworked, over being polite, wise, croning, experienced, mesmerizing. She is ready to teach, and she knows that time is running out. She would want us to start with some important details.



Killjoy’s Kastle is a large-scale, multimedia, walk-through installation and performance that evokes all the fright in lesbian-feminist histories so that we might unpack, reject, or critically recover these stories for the queer present. To date, three cities have hosted a version of the kastle: Toronto, in 2013, with the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU); London, in 2014, at the British Film Institute; and Los Angeles, in 2015, with ONE Archives. A fourth installation will occur in Philadelphia in 2019. The project finds its roots in “traditional” carnival haunted houses and lesbian-feminist direct action aesthetics. Most directly, the kastle parodies the evangelical Christian hell house tradition – live-action haunted houses put up by churches near Halloween to scare teenagers stiff with scenes of homosexuality, abortion, and other bodily “sins.”¹ Formally, community-theatre tactics, soundscapes, conversation, lighting design, performance, props, costuming, and public interaction all inform the kastle. Built with creepy but whimsical craft aesthetics, the space stages interactive scenarios through human-scale dioramas, and visitors tour through each of these scenes, guided by their professor, who narrates the trip. These scenes are installed in nontraditional gallery spaces: an old warehouse, a community

centre. They take place outside of institutions but are supported by them.

Altering traditional horror tropes to prey on the public's fears of queer culture, performers in *Killjoy's Kastle* take the form of ghosts, ghouls, monsters, political indoctrinators, and lesbian avengers with names such as the "Lesbian" Zombie Folksingers, the Menstrual Trans Man with Diva Cup, and Da Carpet Muncha. For visitors, the kastle experience begins in the very long lineup to get into the house. Guests are greeted by Undead Pro-choice Activists, Tree-Hugging Anti-logging Defenders, Gender Queer Drag Queens, Rape Revenge Advocates, "Because I Am a Ghoul" Security Supporters, and the ghost of radical feminist Valerie Solanas, each cajoling the audience while they wait to get in. The "house" is constructed with an entrance and exit facade and includes dividing walls, lighting, and a sound system. But what really brings the space to life inside are the various performers and scenes that the visitors encounter:

The Dead Lesbian Crowd Comptrollers
The Hall of Warning Signs
The Crypt of Dead Lesbian Organizations, Businesses,
and Ideas
The "Lesbian" Zombie Folksingers
The Giant Bearded Clam and Her Familiar
The Paranormal Consciousness Raisers
Da Carpet Muncha
The Terrifying Tunnel of Two Adult Women in Love
The Big Trubs Earth Mother with Menstrual Blood
Apple-Bobbing Fountain
The Dank Cave Monster
The Polyamorous Vampiric Grannies
The Marvelous Emasculator
The Polystyrene Animatronic Man Cave Interrupter
The Salty Tears of Transformation through Chris Crocker
The Ball Bustas
The Gender Studies Professor and Riot Ghoul Dance Party
The Intersectional Activist Wrestles the Crumbling Pillars
of Society [LA only]
The Giant Ambiguous Hairy Hole [LA only]
The Daddy Pen [LA only]
The Multifaced Lesbian Internet Troll [LA only]
The Undead Protest Marshals [LA only]
The Shaft Witches
The Stitch Witches [LA only]

The Menstrual Trans Man with Diva Cup [LA only]
The Lesbian Art Dealer [LA only]
The Straw Feminist Hall of Shame
The Gaybourhood Watch [LA only]
The Real-Life Feminist Killjoys
Ye Olde Lesbian Feminist Gift Shoppee

From the Crypt of Dead Lesbian Organizations, Businesses, and Ideas to the Dank Cave Monster's lair, these scenes are animated by a cast of performers (Mitchell and Logue's collaborators), many of whom contributed to this book. On the other side, after exiting Ye Olde Lesbian Feminist Gift Shoppee, visitors are greeted by a fish taco stand, to satisfy other hungers. This is just a gloss of the experience. Moynan King's essay in this collection provides a detailed tour of the installation, theorized through her background in performance studies. The complete Demented Women's Studies Professor's script is also included in these pages, though she improvised a lot, to be sure.

Like most site-specific works realized with limited resources, *Killjoy's Kastle* expands and contracts to fit its surroundings. Toronto's installation was set up in four thousand square feet of temporary warehouse space. Led by partners Mitchell and Logue, a group of twenty artists worked to create the costumes and props for the space, and Emelie Chhangur at the AGYU curated (see her essay in this volume). Twenty-five people helped to install the work, and forty performers animated the opening night for seven hundred visitors. Between October 17 and 30, the exhibition attracted 4,300 more visitors. Costs were significant, and support from the AGYU was supplemented by Mitchell and Logue's personal savings (and credit cards). With the exception of a few volunteers, queer family friends, and folks working for school credit, all of the artists were paid.

As many of the contributors to this book note, especially Ann Cvetkovich and Kyla Wazana Tompkins, the exhibition was met with controversy: important dialogue among queers about white supremacy and transmisogyny collapsed into name calling on the event's Facebook page. The online discussion began the day after a blog post by a Toronto artist and blogger critiqued representations of whiteness in the space.² Another comment left on the Facebook page queried the transmisogyny of the kastle's Ball Bustas scene. Many commenters weighed in on these intertwined issues and threads with defences, further damnations, and critique. Online debate followed the project to Los Angeles. In both cases, Mitchell and Logue responded with public letters

(see this volume) acknowledging problems, apologizing for harm, outlining how concerns about the work had been addressed, and inviting more dialogue both in the kastle and online. Other critiques came from outside queer communities. In its last few days, Toronto's right-wing media discovered the project, and an undercover "exposé" of the space ran on talk news television. Mitchell and Logue received a barrage of hate letters and threats. All this acrimony is part of the story.

The BFI Flare: London LGBTQ+ Film Festival supported *Killjoy's Kastle's* second iteration in London. Curated by Nazmia Jamal, a slice of the original, including video documentation and slide shows, was represented in a pop-up gallery space. Jamal and her collaborators created a site-specific graveyard of activist organizations, and they focused on the archives of black feminist and lesbian activist histories in London. As Jamal and Catherine Grant outline in their contributions to this volume, these marked graves brought the exhibition's method to a local context and to the particular challenges of archiving black feminist history.

The ONE National Lesbian & Gay Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries hosted *Killjoy's Kastle* in LA, and David Evans Frantz curated (see his essay in this volume). As in Toronto, dozens of artists helped to create, install, and enliven the space. The exhibition was installed in a community centre in the middle of West Hollywood's Plummer Park. Everyone was nervous to perform in such a public place. An arson attack at an LA Planned Parenthood centre had preceded the opening by two weeks, setting performers on edge. One evening during the exhibition, a photographer was escorted from the installation after taking close-up images of performers' naked bodies. The crowds kept everyone motivated despite these issues. Every evening, a lineup snaked through the park, and 5,000 people came through over the project's two-week run.

These numbers are heartening: there is an engaged audience for lesbian-feminist work, but the art world doesn't always want to know about, or serve, them. Coming out to see the show in droves, these queers and their kin made *Killjoy's Kastle* its own wilful subject working against conservatism in the art world and beyond.³ *Killjoy's Kastle* was born in response to the experiences of lesbophobia Mitchell went through with an earlier installation called *Ladies Sasquatch* (2008–10). The installation included six massive beast women and their smaller familiars gathered around a crackling fiberglass bonfire. It toured to four museums in Canada.⁴ At each site, Mitchell had difficult conversations with museum staff, who wanted to place warning signs about "adult"

or “sexual” content at the gallery entrance.⁴ It became obvious that the problem these arts administrators had (or perceived that the public would have) with the work was the relationship between “lesbian” and “feminist.” In other words, sexuality is thought to be most dangerous when it’s read as explicitly political.

At the time of the exhibitions, “same-sex” marriage had just become legal in Canada.⁵ Many skeptical queers questioned the false promise of safety and assimilation. The veneer of “acceptance” that might be extended to a privileged few needed to be revealed, in part, by some lesbian-feminist sasquatches and their alternative kin structures. After this experience, Mitchell was determined to use the “threat” of the label “lesbian feminist” to test the limits of acceptance and decorum within contemporary art spaces. The project began by thinking through what would be scary inside a lesbian haunted house and who would be scared there.

Thinking through these questions within art-world spaces, *Killjoy’s Kastle* takes up the kind of institutional critique popular among feminist artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it does so in a way that is deliberately out of time, a drag on the idea that the queer-feminist artist has arrived and been embraced in their full capacities.⁶ Contributors to *Desire Change*, a recent edited collection on contemporary feminist art in Canada, argue that this kind of enlivenment of institutional critique is vital. Amy Fung, cheyanne turions, and Gina Badger each take different approaches to thinking through the lineages of, and ongoing necessity for, intersectional feminist institutional critique. Holding institutions accountable, but also reflecting on the broader conditions in which feminists find the means to make their work, is particularly salient for projects that seek to decolonize institutions or decentre the white, middle-class subject from feminist art criticism. *Killjoy’s Kastle* takes place within a contemporary art world in which queer-feminist projects appear but are often placed at the margins of major museums and exhibition spaces or other supportive infrastructures.

Some of these institutions have asked for compromises. While Mitchell and Logue were installing the work in London, they were invited to come down off of their rickety ladders, where they were hanging crocheted spiderwebs, to have tea with the festival’s director. It turned out that she didn’t really want tea; she wanted the video in the exhibition edited for public consumption. Two elements were deemed potentially offensive to a larger audience: the moment when the word “cunt” is uttered by the performer playing Valerie Solanas and a very brief

segment where the Paranormal Consciousness Raisers show their, well, cunts. The director offered a choice: edit the cunts out of the video or close the exhibition to visitors under eighteen, check IDs at the door, cloak the entrance behind a curtain, and decrease opening hours. She assured the artists that this was not censorship: the choice was theirs.

If lesbians can scare monolithic institutions, such as mainstream LGBTQ film festivals, it's because they promise to do too much. As Chhangur discusses in her contribution, *Killjoy's Kastle* has worked with institutions but outside their physical spaces in a project of world making that asks different questions of what publics want and need from museums. The project draws on a long list of queer antecedents to ask these questions. It's indebted to the work of artists who engage with bodies through ideas of monstrosity and abjection such as Kara Walker, Jana Sterback, Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Nao Bustamante, and Jess Dobkin, to name a few. And it's indebted to artists working in the horror genre (e.g., Hieronymous Bosch, Mike Kelley, and Paul McCarthy) and artists working in large-scale, domestic installation work (e.g., Judy Chicago, Niki de Saint Phalle, Mary Kelly, Lynn Hershmann, Lynn La Point, Laura Kikauka, and Louise Bourgeois). This lineage expands beyond galleries and museums to artists working across broadly queer participatory frameworks that revel in *multimedia* practice: The Hidden Cameras, Rita McKeough, Kiss and Tell Collective, Ridykeulous, The Polyphonic Spree, and the infamous queer club nights Mitchell and Logue came up in such as Will Munro's Vaseline, in Toronto, and Duckie, in London (founded by Jay Cloth, Chelsea Kelsey, Amy Lam, and Kim Phaggs).

In its indebtedness to other artists, to queer histories, and to the many performers who have brought the project to life, *Killjoy's Kastle* is a collaborative labour of love. As King describes in her contribution to this volume, a range of queer-, trans-, and lesbian-identified artists and activists helped to workshop the project's development, and many went on to become performers on opening night in Toronto. A lot of money, tears, and sweat equity went into making *Killjoy's Kastle* respond to the ongoing marginality faced by queer- and lesbian-feminist art and activism.

Here, committed groups of people *make things together* with joy and love. This process-driven, behind-the-scenes labour is often hard to document because it's work that happens in the background, before any engagement with the public takes place. But "getting the job done" represents so much of what queer art making and queer activism actually entail.



The history of lesbian-feminist art runs partly on hearsay. When Mitchell and Logue met curator Kathy Rae Huffman in 2014 and the conversation came around to *Killjoy's Kastle*, Kathy Rae remembered another feminist haunted house from decades ago, but the details were foggy. As it turned out, this haunting happened in 1983 as part of an exhibition titled *At Home* at the Long Beach Museum of Art. The exhibition celebrated the ten-year anniversary of *Womanhouse* (1972), a large-scale installation that took place in a run-down, seventeen-room house in Los Angeles.⁷ *At Home* was a weekend party guest-curated by art historian Arlene Raven. There are no detailed accounts of this event within published art historical scholarship (that we could find), but Kathy Rae remembers the event well, even without material remnants to go on: "The event was great fun. I have only memories but no photos or documentation in my possession. I also found no photos in the LBMA archives when I was researching for the *Pacific Standard Time* exhibition, which I curated for the museum in 2011–12. I'll think about who might have any and which artists participated, who you should also contact ... Sisters of Survival, Barbara Smith, Anne Bray, Susanne Lacey ... There were dozens of participants. Someone must have the documentation from that in a shoebox under her bed."⁸

This anecdote describes a familiar situation for lesbian-feminist art. If you missed it, it doesn't exist, either because these works are by women, or lesbians, or queers or because they are so unsustainable in their ambitious scales and modest institutional supports that they only seem to be in the world for brief moments (see Grant's discussion of Ego Ahaïwe Sowinski's work in this book). They come alive in the most urgent ways before crushing forces realize their existence and they have to go underground, or they are forgotten. These performances, site-specific installations, or immersive spaces are financially and politically like grassfire: they ignite without warning and burn themselves out (before they find other fuel and burn down the entire forest). They are too good to be true, and they are too hot to handle. What's left behind is a carbon-rich cleanse, necessary and generative for new growth to happen and to expose and kill off predators.

This is some of what we imagine happened to *At Home* in 1983. What remains is hiding under a bed, or in some lesbian's closet, biding time. Similarly, the costumes, objects, props, and sculptures used to realize *Killjoy's Kastle* live inside a large, expensive storage locker in a small town an hour northeast of

Toronto. This locker has become a crypt, a cave, a casket housing noncommercial art objects that might be shown again (or not). The keeping is a burden. An artist's work generates all of this stuff that is hypervisible and hypermaterial, stuff that is central to the practice and important within lesbian art economies but viewed as heavy, too-tactile garbage within the larger art world. That is why we need this book, so we can find the stories of this haunted house and the ones that came before and pull them out of their storage lockers and shoe boxes. Contributors to this book work to keep the ongoing eventfulness of *Killjoy's Kastle* alive by building a better archive together.⁹

This book emerges from a commitment to documenting queer-feminist art and activism by finding methods for thinking, writing, drawing, and enlivening history together. Artists, art historians, critics, and others who want to remember queer installation and performance find ways to engage imaginatively with their ephemerality, designing alternative kinds of "archives" to do this work. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance studies scholar Diana Taylor frames performance as a different kind of archive attuned to embodied and collective memories.¹⁰ Feminist performance leaves peculiar kinds of "documents" behind, and this is part of its queerness. Thinking through this situation, art historian Amelia Jones argues that the photographs, books, and accounts made of feminist performance works are not poor impressions of the originals but rather significant documents in their own right: not the thing but something else altogether.¹¹

Creating various versions of this "something else," most contributors to this book participated in *Killjoy's Kastle* in some way, whether as artists, curators, or participants who toured the installation. They lend their impressions to a collective account of what this work has meant across multiple sites and audiences, capturing some of what it was like to have been there. At the same time, the multiplicity of voices shows how this experience was different for everyone: being queer, trans, white, a person of colour, a person who is young, or a person who is old and "lived through" these histories each shape the way contributors experienced the kastle and what it revealed to them about queer practices of kinship, accountability, acrimony, and *doing* feminist history.

Making, being in, or writing about *Killjoy's Kastle* can be emotionally demanding because the work deals with lesbian-feminist histories charged with affect, infighting, and the often painful work of being a feminist.¹² *Killjoy's Kastle* takes its name

from feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's figure of the feminist killjoy, introduced in her essay "Feminist Killjoys (and Other Wilful Subjects)," which appeared in *Scholar and the Feminist* in 2010 and is reproduced here. In that essay, and in much of her work since then, Ahmed finds figures throughout feminist history who perform the difficult work of being wilful, getting in the way, and spoiling other people's fun. These are forms of political praxis that make living a feminist life, well, liveable, in Ahmed's terms.¹³ Ahmed's killjoy is an inspiration for many of the contributors to this volume. The ghouls, ghosts, and lezzie monsters one encounters in the kastle turn the experience of being a killjoy into sport so that others might watch with horror, delight, or something in between.

The burden of killing joy, or of watching someone else's joy be killed, is shouldered unevenly within feminist movements. As Ahmed writes, feminists of colour are often called on to do this work, particularly when activist circles marked by whiteness and cisnormativity prove to be unhomey. Antiracist organizing led by feminists of colour past and present provides other models for understanding archives. Historical projects such as the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press continue to be enlivened and made urgent through contemporary engagements with their archives.¹⁴ As Syrus Marcus Ware and Rio Rodriguez have each argued, archival logics and ideas about historical inheritance are fundamentally structured by white supremacy, in part because of the idea that histories must continue to accumulate without interrogating their conditions of (re)production.¹⁵

Over the course of its three iterations, *Killjoy's Kastle* shouldered a tremendous representational burden – how to playfully evoke the tremendous love and also horror in lesbian-feminist history without reproducing racism and transphobia or relying on one monolithic narrative as reference point. The project misstepped, made adjustments, and worked to respond to criticisms from community members, many of which were articulated online or through processing sessions in person with the Real-Life Feminist Killjoys at the kastle's exit. Over the course of its three iterations, scenes in the kastle centred more stories and performances by feminists of colour and trans people within its haunted halls. This work is not over.

We need better methods, different methods, speculative, imaginative, and artful methods for enlivening queer pasts in order to dismantle or build outside of these structures. *Killjoy's Kastle* asks, to what extent might parody, camp, play, and the exaggerated genres of horror provide one of these dismantling

forms of enlivenment? This question builds on a long history of feminist theory that has considered the powers of horror, monstrosity, and the grotesque.¹⁶ Horror is relative – it trades in shared social nightmares – and so monsters change shape throughout history in order to keep up.¹⁷ The feminist killjoy adapts to her time period while maintaining consistent tactics, such as processing bad feelings.

Emphasizing both the horror of feminist infighting and the emotional labour that goes into unending lesbian processing sessions, Ann Cvetkovich's and Kyla Wazana Tompkins' contributions to this volume explore the historical and theoretical underpinnings of feminist conflicts and adaptations. Cvetkovich and Tompkins each performed as Real-Life Feminist Killjoys, helping visitors at the end of their tours unpack the experience in a semiserious send-up of how lesbians talk too much about their feelings. The room where the killjoys sit is a chilly climate before re-entry into the real world. This is where the bubble bursts, where satire and humour fall away and the joke's over. The visitor becomes aware that others in the room have questions or feel discomfort and listens to how interpretations of the same experience may differ. In a loving reproduction of feminist consciousness-raising circles, women's studies classrooms, lesbian relationship dynamics, and activist infighting, this difference gets processed, or talked through, before visitors leave the castle's walls. These difficult conversations are how we can learn about gaps, silences, and absences in lesbian history.

With the Real-Life Feminist Killjoys, visitors made sense of what they had seen and heard, sometimes with frustration or anger at what had or hadn't been critiqued in the space. As concerned as she is for the unresolved, tense, or even acrimonious experiences of the audience members she spoke with, Cvetkovich is equally invested in making sense of how "processing" works. Her essay considers the shared labour of collectively holding and sharing emotions in activist and educational spaces. Similarly, Tompkins sifts through the practical, intellectual, and emotional work that goes into negotiating histories of lesbian-feminist transphobia within an intergenerational milieu – how might we continue to learn from these histories, and the women who made them, rather than pretending that their effects are only always in the past?

We stand to learn the most from one another when we "process" difficult emotions together, but these encounters might just as easily be doomed to fail or to leave people feeling bad, unprocessed. Of course, the castle's processing rooms are

not real group-therapy sessions; this is performance art, a status that does not diminish the project's emotional life but rather makes *Killjoy's Kastle* uniquely suited to working through when, how, and for whom lesbian feminism has been both a site of attachment and a horror show. As King argues in this volume, *Killjoy's Kastle's* ability to queerly reimagine and intervene in lesbian histories was possible because of the performative nature of the space. Critical race and sexuality studies scholar Amber Jamilla Musser and performance studies scholar Jennifer Doyle have each explored the problem of understanding and documenting difficult emotion in performance art.¹⁸ They offer experimental models for writing about the affective, even traumatic, registers of taking in queer, feminist, and antiracist performance work, which can be particularly resistant to documentation in all its felt complexity. Musser's and Doyle's work shares some concerns with lesbian-feminist histories that explore how emotion can enliven historiographical methods. Works such as Victoria Hesford's *Feeling Women's Liberation* (2013) provide a model for thinking about how our present-day, feeling relationships to feminist histories shape those very histories – the past is apparent to us only through our singularly and collectively invested invocations.



What are these histories, and how do we agree on them? In her contribution to this volume, Heather Love reflects on *Killjoy's Kastle's* engagement with what she calls “dyke culture.” Love asks how the exhibit might illuminate and amplify the vitality of the term “lesbian,” addressing both its failings and its untapped potential for queer, feminist, and trans cultures across time. For Love, this work “provides a crucial point of reference and an archive for emerging queer, lesbian, and trans scholars navigating the shoals of contemporary identity and activism.” As Ahmed argues in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), we need lesbian feminism's lessons now more than ever because of how they share with transfeminism a deep engagement with imagining a world that is otherwise.¹⁹ While acknowledging that lesbian feminism and transfeminism might seem, in many ways, at odds, Ahmed outlines how both movements use anger to build something hopeful, capacious, and oriented to more liveable futures. Critical reference points to the lesbian past are necessary given the drive to do something forward-looking, and urgent, with this history.

There is tension between the idea of lesbian feminism as marginal to art history, and even to women's archiving projects, and the apparent abundance of lesbian-feminist history making within queer networks, both through community archives and online. Media studies scholar Kate Eichhorn calls this trend the "archival turn in feminism," in which social movements organize how their histories are told by collecting, organizing, interpreting, and archiving documents and ephemera.²⁰ Instagram's queer ephemera-sharing cultures are a case in point, particularly the popular account @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y and their collaboration with the queer clothing manufacturer Otherwild. Their "The Future Is Female" T-shirt comes out of radical lesbian-feminist culture, but its connections to lesbian politics and life worlds are lost when the slogan is taken up in popular women's marches and sold on mugs at Urban Outfitters.²¹

Killjoy's Kastle responds to this tension – lesbian feminism's simultaneous presence and erasure – because even within conditions of abundance, problems in archiving lesbian history persist. As archivist-scholar Mary A. Caldera argues, lesbian archives overemphasize white, middle-class, urban activist histories.²² *Killjoy's Kastle* satirized these structures in lesbian-feminist historiography but didn't always succeed in dismantling them. For example, while *Killjoy's Kastle's* cast of performers was diverse in terms of gender identity, race, and age, many of the performers who animated the space came from cities – Pittsburgh, Berlin, Montreal, Winnipeg, San Francisco, Toronto, and LA – and many benefitted from the class mobilities or educational capital afforded to artists and academics. There is a kind of notoriety and attention that gets paid to these geographies and figures when lesbian feminism is historicized. To what extent is the question "What would be scary inside a lesbian haunted house, and who would be scared there?" the premise for an *inside* joke?²³ How might we invite others to come in or, at least, stand outside and take a look?

Part of our hope for this book is that it will continue to provide opportunities for *Killjoy's Kastle* to do this work as it circulates, is read, and gets taught in feminist classroom spaces where participants want to think about what we might do, or choose not to do, with the histories to which we are proximate. One of the most popular items for purchase in the kastle's Ye Olde Lesbian Feminist Gift Shoppee was Mitchell's "I'm with Problematic" T-shirt, a parody of the frat-humour classic "I'm with Stupid." The joke here is that something, or someone, is always a problem when feminists come together – this is both

the nightmare of feminist collaboration and the engine that keeps a project going.

Killjoy's Kastle reckons with who is made central, or marginal, within lesbian-feminist histories. These are the kinds of questions we must ask when inheriting or refusing histories that are often frustrating, painful, or just plain unrecognizable to many. As S. Trimble's contribution to this volume shows, *Killjoy's Kastle* draws on gothic traditions in a "conjuring and remixing of dated stereotypes" that "propel the installation into a risky engagement with dominant narratives of second-wave feminism as white-centric and transphobic." For Trimble, whose chapter explores *Killjoy's Kastle* within a broader study of how queer, gothic hauntings of domestic spaces can shake up white kinship structures, the house, as a contested structure, is the key to inheriting the past differently. Trimble writes, "The haunted house is the spatial complement of the lesbian feminist, a figure that's always inhabited – possessed, perhaps – by more than just one story." In this house, these houses, who is problematic, when are they problematic, and for whom?

So much of the lesbian-feminist history evoked here trades in stereotypes, hearsay, rumour, gossip, and legend. It's not just that the pressures of inheritance are scary but that the relics of this activism are apparitional, like the haunted house of *At Home* that may or may not have existed. As feminist historian Michelle Moravec asks, How might we use different methodologies to unghost these figures, and trace their connections, effects, and legacies?²⁴ In her essay on Jamal's kastle gravestones in London, Grant frames the closings of black feminist organizations and spaces as significant in retrospect because they signal broader processes of transition, gentrification, burnout, forgetting, and remembering.

There are times, though, when something ends because its time has come. Perhaps new generations of queers committed to transfeminist practices no longer see themselves in the work: "This is not my history." Theorizing this problem, feminist film historian Roxanne Samer argues that present-day feminists may not "understand these archives' preservations in the same light that their archivists do or initially did. Their politics are usually not the same, and they often refuse to consider themselves extensions or continuations of the women's movement. However, that need not mean that their interest in past feminisms wanes."²⁵ This book uses *Killjoy's Kastle* to ask what kinds of remainders lesbian feminism leaves when its specific iterations become untimely and then die. How does it haunt, and what do we do

with these old ghosts? What do they do with us, given media studies scholar (and L.A. performer) Alexandra Juhasz's assertion, cited by Samer, that we are not who they imagined us to be?²⁶

Killjoy's Kastle is, in some respects, an experiment in bringing what Love elsewhere has called the unfashionable, "gentle, angry dinosaur" that is the lesbian feminist into the present.²⁷ What if we put her on display, let her go a bit wild? The contributors to this volume, inspired by their encounters with, participation in, or readings of *Killjoy's Kastle*, provide many models for doing something with lesbian feminism. Their approaches, methods, and questions are varied, as are their relationships to the space, and reading across their work, a complex story about this project and what it has meant emerges.

From its inception to execution and archiving, *Killjoy's Kastle* is a powerful collaborative project. Many people worked together as a team to develop the script, make the art, organize the event, and now create this book. *Inside Killjoy's Kastle* introduces the project by pulling in many different voices or parts. One of the strategies that make this multiplicity of voices possible is the inclusion of writing by eleven artists who participated in the haunted house. We asked them to write about their experiences, memories, and reflections. These pieces are meant to supplement the academic essays in the collection with stories of having been there. This book also includes more photographs than a typical scholarly collection in order to provide as much visual context for the reader as possible. Seen through the lenses of several different photographers, this visual perspective on *Killjoy's Kastle* is also multivalent.

The roles of academic, artist, photographer, designer, documentarian, archivist, performer, and editor bleed into one another in the context of a project like this one. Helena Reckitt's deep, interview-based account of how key collaborators worked together to make *Killjoy's Kastle* happen explores and makes visible these accounts and connections. Situated within Reckitt's broader research on collective, caring practices within queer and feminist contemporary art projects, the essay exemplifies how *Killjoy's Kastle* means different things to those who have participated in it and, we imagine, also to those who encounter it here for the first time.

"Collaboration" is too stubby of a term for this endeavour, and "community" is too overused. We are desperate for another word that could be applied to the kind of collectivity that is part collaboration, part community, part movement and created by

a group of people as a force they offer to a wider public. As we know from the conversations about this work that happened on social media, “community” as a term is not specific enough, too thorny. Not everyone feels the same way or shows up for the same reasons. Perhaps a better word would be “spree”: a moment of engulfing exuberance. “Community” and “collaboration” are rigid scholarly terms that become buckets of grant-speak, losing their force. As the documentation of a performance, this book necessarily fixes much of this work under the rubric of “collaboration,” but we want to mark the gaps in that term.²⁸ *Killjoy’s Kastle* is a classroom, an archive, an art exhibition, an insertion.

This lesbian-feminist haunted house received incredible public support from audiences, curators, participants, and funders. It also met with a lot of resistance and continues to occupy a place of uncertainty; that is why it lives in a storage locker in the middle of nowhere and why this book is necessary. Keeping the project’s politics alive means situating the work in the various hostile environments it negotiated, from right-wing media to the conflicts among queers that the project inspired online. Through this book, *Killjoy’s Kastle* can continue to stand firm in its imperfection and its resolve to open up questions about what we might do with the lesbian histories we are asked to remember and even revive. What methods can we find to be “with problematic” in all our anger, joy, critique, love, and good humour. As Ahmed writes, “in order to survive what we come up against, in order to build worlds from shattered pieces, we need a revival of lesbian feminism.”²⁹ In the haunted house, this revival is not quite absolute; zombified – made undead but not quite lively – she has to live in our world but is not exactly *of it*, the perfect position from which to show us other versions of ourselves and the institutions and political imaginaries we desire.

NOTES

- 1 In 2016, a Chicago church planned (and then cancelled) a hell house that was to depict the Pulse nightclub and Charleston Massacre as well as the old favourite, the botched abortion room. These biblically informed horror scenes were to take place in an elementary school. See Jenny Noyes, “Chicago School Cancels ‘Christian’ Haunted House That Depicted Pulse Nightclub Massacre for Halloween,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 2016.
- 2 The post and website have been taken down by the author, so we have chosen not to cite the blog directly.
- 3 Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

- 4 Specifically, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, director Stephen Borys was upset by the installation and demanded that one of the sculptures be shifted so that the stylized vulva of one she-beast would not be the first thing audiences saw when they entered the space. With the installation shoved into a small gallery space beside a large display of the gallery's collection of domestic silver, it was as though the museum was surprised and repulsed by the work and did not know what to do with it.
- 5 Canada's Civil Marriages Act was finalized in 2005.
- 6 This idea of temporal drag is borrowed from Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 7 *Womanhouse* was produced by Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and students in CalArts' Feminist Art Program.
- 8 Personal correspondence with Allyson Mitchell, August 15, 2017.
- 9 The concept of feminist eventfulness as a temporal mode for doing feminist historiography is explored in Samantha Thrift, "Feminist Eventfulness: Boredom and the 1984 Canadian Leadership Debate on Women's Issues," *Feminist Media Studies* 13, 3 (2011): 406–21.
- 10 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 11 Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, 4 (1997): 11–18.
- 12 Here, we are thinking not only of Ahmed's body of work on feminist activism and affect but also of Bobby Noble's work on acrimony and inheritance in *Sons of the Movement: FtMs Risking Incoherence on a Post-queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), Clare Hemmings's *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), and more popular accounts such as Roxane Gay's *Bad Feminist* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014).
- 13 See Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 14 See Cassius Adair and Lisa Nakamura, "The Digital Afterlives of *This Bridge Called My Back*: Women of Color Feminism, Digital Labor, and Networked Pedagogy," *American Literature* 89, 2 (2017): 255–78.
- 15 Syrus Marcus Ware, "All Power to All People: Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, 2 (2017): 170–80, and Rio Rodriguez, "Mapping QTBIPOC Toronto" (master's thesis, York University, 2016).
- 16 See, for example, Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1993]), and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
- 17 Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- 18 Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), and Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 19 On imagining otherwise, characteristic of queer of colour critique, see Ashon Crawley's work, for example, "Otherwise Movements," *New Inquiry*, January 19, 2015.
- 20 Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

- 21 The slogan is specifically from a Labyris Books T-shirt worn by Alix Dobkin and photographed by Liza Cowan in 1975. See <https://otherwild.com/products/the-future-is-female-t-shirt?variant=5122173569>.
- 22 Mary A. Caldera, "The Lesbian in the Archives: An Overview of the History," in *Perspectives on Women's Archives*, ed. Tanya Zanish-Belcher with Anke Voss (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013), 231.
- 23 A further illustration of this is that when the right-wing Sun TV News discovered the haunted house towards the end of its Toronto run, its "newscaster," Michael Coren, read directly from the artists' statement, as if it were his own op-ed that he was using to describe the project because its inside joke was so seemingly illegible to him.
- 24 Michelle Moravec, "Unghosting Apparitional (Lesbian) Histories," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 5 (2014), <https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec/>.
- 25 Roxanne Samer, "Revising 'Re-vision': Documenting 1970s Feminisms and the Queer Potentiality of Digital Feminist Archives," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 5 (2014), <https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-samer/>.
- 26 Alexandra Juhasz, "A Process Archive: The Grand Circularity of Woman's Building Video," in *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, ed. Meg Linton, Sue Maberry, and Elizabeth Pulsinelli (Los Angeles: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2012), 109.
- 27 Heather Love, "Review: A Gentle Angry People," *Transition* 84 (2000): 98–113.
- 28 It is important in the context of this discussion of collaboration to provide a clarification for some of the essays and short pieces in the book, which at times slip between the authorship of Allyson Mitchell as sole primary artist and of *Killjoy's Kastle* as a co-authored artwork by Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue. This has to do with many factors, including the inclusion of Logue as coauthor in London and Los Angeles and, in retrospect, in Toronto. The artists acknowledge that this do-over is messy but make no apologies for the untidiness that this switch makes for undoing simple narratives of a very complicated art piece and questions of authorship in general. When you make something on this scale and in such an intimate and all-encompassing manner it defies, confuses, and improves the typical authorship protocols found in contemporary art.
- 29 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 213.

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