

***The Year's Work in the Oddball Archive.* Jonathan P. Eburne and Judith Roof, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 448 pp.\***

Reviewed by Craig A. Campbell

*The Year's Work in the Oddball Archive* is conceptualized as a peculiar archival collection. Of course, all edited volumes are collections, though they do not usually draw attention to themselves through ludic framing as *The Oddball Archive* tries to do. This collection features a forward (presumably written by the editors, Eburne and Roof), twelve essays, and an afterword.

*The Oddball Archive* is part of a series titled *The Year's Work: Studies in Fan Culture and Cultural Theory*. It is a curious fit, though, as that series' focus is more legitimately on Zombies, Punk, or Lewbowski studies. While one might conceptualize a fan culture of collecting or archivist and librarian "slash" fiction, this collection of essays is only tangentially related to fans or fan culture. It is nonetheless a fine group of essays if you are interested in collections, archives, and archival theory. Inviting only academics to contribute has, however, produced a very academic volume. Thus for all the posturing and play, we have a conventional collection of humanities scholars sharing their works that relate with varying degrees of commitment to the central theme of the oddball archive and the status of unreason in the archive's enlightenment project.

One enthusiastic reviewer writes on the back cover: "An unruly—and much-needed—model for how to do the archive differently." It is effusive praise; the book is not particularly unruly, not so innovative that it is essential, and not a particularly unique model for doing the archive differently. A broader disciplinary representation might have helped to achieve this or an actual break with norms of academic writing through experimental forms. Nonetheless, the essays in this collection are—for the most part—conventional and well-written works of cultural critique. If anything is essential here for those interested in archives and collections, it is the introduction and afterword.

It was a pleasure to read through this collection, and I suspect some of the essays, if not the entire book, will find itself on the syllabus for my Archive and Ephemera graduate course. The playful materiality of the concept of an oddball archive is arranged within four "boxes" (sections), and each box contains three objects: individually authored essays. The twelve essays constitute a diversity of trajectories and fascinations articulated principally within the conventions of cultural theory. On the whole, I would say that the essays are uniformly good and fit together relatively well under their respective box titles: "I. Saving America: Archival Proliferations," "II. Collective Figures," "III. Untimely Archives," and "IV. Archives Acting Out."

The oddball in the title is taken as a motivating factor through the entirety of this collection. While the editors turn it into a verb (as in *oddballing*) some of the other authors play with it in a variety of contextual frames. The most compelling treatment of the idea actually comes at the

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end in the afterword: David L. Martin's excellent "To Prophecy Post Hoc: The curious afterlives of oddball archives." Martin recognizes in this project a powerful resonance with his own work (specifically his book *Curious Visions of Modernity: Enchantment, Magic, and the Sacred*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). The overarching project is to put the relation between reason and unreason in tension. In the "History of the Collection" (the introduction), we are treated to a compelling argument for the validity of studying the oddball (the strange, ill-fit, and peculiar)—this line of argument in particular (especially as it is made in Martin's afterword) will be helpful to anyone fighting a sense that their research does not matter. It is precisely the politics of mattering that forms the strongest thread connecting these disparate essays. That said, there are connections (at times explicit attempts to connect the writing to the overarching theme). For example, Robin Blyn uses "oddball" to describe Herbert Marcuse's optimism for socialist becoming in an excellent essay that engages directly with elements of Marcuse's project that seem unincorporable in contemporary left politics. The status of the irrational here becomes an essential and critically troubling element. Difficult to handle elements are treated by the others in this section as well, when Slavoj Žižek and David Lynch's peculiarities and eccentricities are shown to function as performatives of the ineffable, resistant to theoretical domestication.

The first box presents three very good studies on collecting, from the media assemblage of reality television's treatment of pawning, picking, storing, and hoarding to the cultural history of the Dixie Cup. Beth A. McCoy's "The Archive of the Archive of the Archive: The FEMA Signs of Post-Katrina New Orleans and the Vévés of Vodoun" explores disaster notification signs used by FEMA along side anti-black sacrifice and magic. Its acrobatic theorization presents a compelling, if at times baroque, argument. The other boxes offer a similarly divergent set of investigations tethered together by figure of oddball: the ill-fitting and productively disturbing element in a more or less heterogeneous group.

The introduction and afterword to the collection are excellent and required reading. The essays within are generally very good and will appeal to readers largely based on their personal interests. The design and layout of the book are commendable. My review copy is cloth bound and printed on high quality paper with good typography—in this era of ebooks and pdfs, it is a pleasure to hold and read. The paper allows for the easy production of marginalia, which I'm happy to say it is saturated with.

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