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We live in a pop age gone loco for retro and crazy for commemoration. Band re-formations and reunion tours, expanded reissues of classic albums and outtake-crammed box sets, remakes and sequels, tribute albums and mash-ups . . . But what happens when we run out of past? Are we heading toward a sort of culturalecological catastrophe where the archival stream of pop history has been exhausted?

Simon Reynolds, one of the finest music writers of his generation, argues that we have indeed reached a tipping point, and that although earlier eras had their own obsessions with antiquity—the Renaissance with its admiration for Roman and Greek classicism, the Gothic movement's invocations of medievalism—never has there been a society so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of its own immediate past. *Retromania* is the first book to examine the retro industry and ask the question: Is this retromania a death knell for any originality and distinctiveness of our own?

Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past Details

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From Reader Review *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* for online ebook

Wilbert Herzog says

In my youth i was reading Melody Maker, NME, Sounds, Rolling Stone and nearly every book i could get on the topic of Pop/Rock-Music. Sometimes i was reading so much about it that i got to make room for the books and mags; names like Lester Bangs, Greil Marcus, Roy Carr, Ingeborg Schober or Franz Schöler were the writers who brought me to the right albums and artists. But after the 80s it seemed to me that the change of the music and the media in the 90s reduced the importance of the written critic, also the need for good music journalism. Music as a movement of culture (60s/70s/80s) was gone, so why should there be good music papers anymore ?

And now, so many years after, i bought this book - and it made wow,crash, boom, bang. There are still good writers in the music field of today (not here in the region where i live but in UK/US/Canada etc.), and Simon Reynolds is a true great one. He has written the (maybe) best book on the Punk/Wave-Era and now "Retromania". Music was always more to me then easy listening, more than just mere entertainment - i was fascinated by the social components, its influences on and from the world we live in, by the creation of all sounds, by the lyrics and meanings. I guess that my generation was always looking at music as the soundtrack of our lives (a feeling i find now again in Reynolds book).

Oh there are so many questions in this book, some explained well by Reynolds, others still open to discuss. He strives also topics like politics or fashion, he makes much philosophical views on the subject and tries to detect every aspect you could get on popular music. So, i for myself will think about this book maybe many years onwards, for now some conclusions for me are:

Retro can be creative/We are in a loop which always brings us back to the most innovative time popular music had (60s/70s/80s)/Retro can make musicians lazy in achieving own styles and forms of music/ Digital media brought the dominance of superficial listening and choosing to the music listener. And so on....

And my big thanks go to Reynolds because he brought me to insight views on parts of the music history i was not so familiar with (like Northern Soul, House Music, Rave etc). And also the possibilities of making your own music today with software and tools you can get.

M.L. Rio says

This is a rare example of too much information, not enough theory. Reynolds' knowledge is certainly expansive; he takes the reader on a cultural tour of every backward-looking music fad from the 1950s until 2005. It's interesting for about 150 pages, and then it starts to feel like he's just showing off; it's a lot of detail without a lot of direction. He seems principally concerned with cataloging so-called 'Retromania' (which is ironic, considering his disdainful dismissal of pop culture 'curators' and collectors) and only sandwiches an actual hypothesis about why the present's love of the past is so prevalent into the last few pages. Ultimately an interesting but unsatisfying read.

AI says

Though the subtitle of this book refers to "pop culture's addiction to its own past," it's really about 95% about music. Mileage may vary depending on how interested in music the reader is, but I would recommend this without hesitation to anyone with even a general interest in the arts or culture (everyone, probably?). The one caveat would be to skip section two, which essentially catalogs selected musical genres/styles and the various retro tendencies of same, and which was slow going even for me, who has at least a passing familiarity with most of the subjects discussed. Despite the heavy focus on music, the book should appeal to anyone with an interest in our contemporary relation to past and future, and the way that this relationship operates through mass culture.

The few problems I had with this book were mostly issues of consistency. In the end, it was a little unclear to me what constituted real musical "innovation" to Reynolds. For the most part, it seems that he regards Punk as an innovative and transformative phase, but elsewhere he refers to the 70s as a musically stagnant era. Also, as he himself makes clear, Punk as it exploded in 76/77 wasn't all that different from garage rock that began in the 60s. [EDIT: I have to rescind this point. It wasn't punk he was holding up as late 70s innovation, but post-punk (which I agree with). The rest of what I'm trying to say in this paragraph still holds, though.] The difference seems not to be so much of innovation but of popularity and influence, a conflation that I also found a bit problematic in grasping Reynolds' point. It's never really clear whether the movements Reynolds refers to were significant for actual musical innovation, or rather for capturing the imagination of a particular generation/point in time. (I think the argument that we have very few of either anymore, though, is valid regardless of which track you choose to take.) This is picking nits, though, and Reynolds in general valiantly handles a subject that is almost inherently rife with contradiction.

While reading this book, I was occasionally reminded of another I read a couple years ago, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock & Roll*, by Elijah Wald. (<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/60...>) The title is intentionally provocative, as Wald really doesn't get to the Beatles until the last chapter and spends most of the book outlining the state of popular music before the rock boom, but the title was for me evocative of the stagnation on which Reynolds dwells in *Retromania*. The problem with Rock & Roll, which has been the basis for arguably all Western popular music since its creation (the other bases, R&B for instance, were themselves bases of Rock, and as such are just as intertwined with its antecedents), is that the Beatles crammed some two decades (or more) of innovation into their 7 years worth of recorded output. They created the conditions of possibility for nearly everything that would, and even *could* come afterward. It could reasonably be argued that the history of popular music since 1970 has been engaged in unpacking the possibilities the Beatles presented. Take this, I guess, as one possible theory to explain Retromania.

In the book, Reynolds generally stops short of providing an overarching theory/answer to why Retromania, our endless artistic recursion to past styles and general lack of innovation, exists. Instead, he presents more of a series of thought provoking points and questions that lead the reader to investigate his/her own relationship to culture and the past, here and there plumbing possible explanations for our propensity to look backward, but never settling on a definitive answer. As it creates a more engaging and interactive reading experience, this is ultimately a strength, saving the book from the potentials of academic sterility or overwrought manifesto.

This being said, please allow me to mount my own retromaniacal hobby horse in attempting to provide an explanation. My own retromania is wrapped up in the neoliberal turn that crystallized in the early 80s (probably not coincidentally also when I was born). I love the urban griminess that predominates in the cultural products of the period immediately prior. One of my favorite books, Luc Sante's essay collection *Kill All Your Darlings*, begins with essays of the old, weird, dirty, New York he inhabited during this time. My favorite "retro" TV show, *Barney Miller*, is set in the same place. Rather than a sense of hopelessness, the worn out, teetering on the brink of collapse nature of that place and time represent a preponderance of

possibilities. In 1977, you could move to New York and start a band. Of course you'd be living in squalor, but at least it was an affordable squalor.

For me, the elections of Thatcher and Reagan represent a closing off of these kinds of possibilities. I'm aware that the late 70s were far from an idyllic time, they were in fact a period of anxiety and crisis, but they still represented the last point at which different political futures seemed possible. (I'm arguing here from my misplaced nostalgia, not from the political realities of the time, though I do not think my misplaced nostalgia is wholly without truth.) However, with the turn to the neoliberal represented by Thatcher/Reagan, the course of the future was set. This would be a future of wage repression and the general removal of government as a support mechanism for its citizens. Forget innovation in music since 1980; has there been innovation in government since 1980? The neoliberal government is one overrun by Freudian death-drive. Once the political course is set to not create but destroy, any innovation will be inherently destructive rather than creative.

It is no coincidence, then, that Reynolds pinpoints the stagnation of musical innovation to the early 80s. The innovations that occurred after that point were not creative as much as they were reworkings of already extant forms. It is also no coincidence that in this same period, real wages have remained stagnant.

Our cultural stagnation, then, is directly related to the political stagnation engendered by neoliberalism.

First: The individual under neoliberalism is above all a consumer. In our relation to government, our role as consumers supersedes our role as citizens. Likewise, in our relation to art, our role as consumers supersedes our role as creators. Thus, we will still create, but only through the lens of consumption. We will form a band, but we will be more concerned with sounding like our favorite records than creating something wholly new. (In the case of sample-based music, we will create music *using* our favorite records.) In fairness to Reynolds, he discusses this same problem, though doesn't connect it to the political as explicitly as he could.

Second: Neoliberalism infantilizes the individual. While conservatives like to assign similar blame to the welfare state, the depletion of options and security for the future created under neoliberalism is the real infantilizing force. See, for example, the sad irony of the way in which the nuclear family unit that today's conservatives endlessly mourn was in fact made possible by labor reforms and state protected benefits (pensions/social security, child labor laws, the 40 hr work week, vacation and sick leave) their historical counterparts bitterly fought, and which they have fought to scale back and dismantle all the while. (Placing the blame on women in the work force simply serves as an easily digestible distraction from this.) As our condition as wage earners becomes ever more contingent, is it any surprise that young people are afraid to grow up, or are looking back to their childhoods, the last time they knew anything like "security"? Modern adulthood, in the specific meaning of modern, no longer exists as it did mid-century. Today's youth are not unmoored due to some puzzling pathology, but because the possibilities of adulthood that existed for their parents and grandparents just do not exist in the same measure for them. So of course we talk endlessly on the internet of things we remember as children. Of course we name our bands Reading Rainbow and Thundercat and swathe our music in fuzz and reverb until the sound is unclear, as if heard through the walls of the womb. We look to childhood, in some cases, or are nostalgic for an era before our birth, in others, because that's the last time clearly defined roles existed. We know exactly what a child is supposed to do; in the 60s, 70s, 80s, we knew what adulthood was. We don't know so much, anymore.

Shara K says

Why People Shouldn't Like Things by Simon Reynolds

Tosh says

I think "Retromania" is the best music book of the 21st Century so far. But of course I am not including the great rock n' roll memoirs, but just talking about "music books" as a cultural thing. And this is a very important book to me, with respect to how music fans react to pop in general. If you are like me, a long term fan of pop music and its trends, and you are middle-aged, one thing comes to mind. There is nothing new happening in contemporary music. In fact its a shocking fact. If i get a buzz on something that's out there, more likely it came from the distant past - the 60's or 50's even.

Simon Reynolds doesn't have an answer for all of this, but he is the first writer of my generation to comment on how pop is just plain old. And old is not really bad, but...its still old! Reynolds even goes beyond music and into fashion as well. His knowledge of pop culture is right on the dot, with respect to him focusing on various trends and readings on contemporary culture. I also find his writings on the download culture fascinating. And if you are a music fan, one can imagine that one is busy downloading as fast as they can, but more likely not hearing everything. So therefore we're hoarding music instead of enjoying and thinking about music. And is this a good thing? Most say no, but habits are hard to break.

What i do know is that the shock of the new probably won't happen to me in my life time. I remember certain records giving me that 'wow'. The Yardbirds double A single of "I'm a Man" and "Still I'm Sad." The first Roxy Music album. And the Kinks "Village Green Preservation Society." The first listening of those records put me into the 'now.' And that is what's missing in my listening life right now - the 'now' factor.

Jeroen says

I see rose-tinted glasses on the cover. Presumably, these are meant to convey the effect nostalgia has on us, barring out the bad times, remembering the good, and even remembering the bad as good. But to me, they represent Reynolds himself, a man who - I ultimately think - projects his own jadedness about pop music onto the scene as a whole. He admits as much at the end - that he misses the feeling of newness in music. And while he makes various interesting arguments and analyses, I think the larger frame of his thesis is based on a misconception. A rose-tinted one.

See, I also have a theory. Reynolds is clearly fond of analogies. Here's one. To my mind, there is an interesting analogy between the finite resources stocked up in our earth and the "finite" cultural capital "stocked up" in the various peoples scattered across the world. Of course, we're talking different units of time here: thousands as opposed to millions of years. Nevertheless, it would be easy to forget - and seems largely absent in *Retromania* - that music has been a part of culture from the very start. It evolves slowly - influenced by the weather we live under, the landscapes we inhabit, the food we eat, the work we work, the life we live. It evolves, slowly but certainly, and from generation upon generation.

Then, as with oil drilling on a mass scale, something happens that tips the balance up and over the natural speed of cultural creation. In this case, the technologies for capturing a moment, be it visual (photograph) or aural (phonograph). From this moment on there is simply accumulation towards an inevitable gluttony of sorts. Towards exhaustion.

For me, the major loophole in Reynolds' argument is that he hardly ever enters into the specifics of why post-

punk and rave - his two prime examples for a "modernist" type of innovation in music - are so innovative. Whenever he does do this, he actually dismantles it: he admits that most post-punk was also a recombination of past styles - as seems quite clear to me.

The point, of course, is that it seemed revolutionary to Reynolds at the time. What has primarily changed - as Reynolds accurately points out - is availability. At the end of the book, when Reynolds shrugs off Vampire Weekend's mishmash of older styles as technically impressive but ultimately "retro", he also comes up with a list of things that were futuristic, innovative. Among them is stuff like Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*. What is the difference between the two? In fact, the Talking Heads were also recombining styles; however, like the Oriental influences of the hippies, they were sounds previously largely unavailable in the West. This does not make these older artists more innovative - merely, perhaps, more persistent cultural searchers.

The Sixties - whose innovations were largely combinations of age-old styles like blues, folk, negro work songs and the like, later amplified by other age-old styles like Indian raga - were also (another fortunate analogy!) largely concurrent with the age of globalisation, McLuhan's dream of an interconnected world. In this post-war world, they were the first generation who had a shot at reworking the cultural capital stocked up around the world. And as Reynolds rightly finds, four decades later it has largely been depleted.

That is not to say, of course, that there is no such thing as innovation in music. This innovation, though, is largely driven by technology. Technology, whether it is the electric guitar, the synthesizer, the 4-track, or FruityLoops, creates new possibilities within which to work. But it seems as if culture also runs faster than technology, and all the blank spaces are already filled in before a new technology can come to widen the scope. Hauntology, Reynolds favorite "new" genre to fill the void, is a perfect example. It is based on the improved technology that underlies archives these days. Better accessibility and more and instant availability.

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I do recognise Reynolds' emotions. In a much shorter time (probably due to this acceleration of culture) I went/am going through roughly the same evolution. But crucially, I was genuinely excited about Arcade Fire's *Funeral*, Animal Collective's *Strawberry Jam*, and Natural Snow Buildings' *The Dance of the Moon and the Sun* - no matter how unoriginal they might be. If there's one thing I learned over the years it is that this putative progress or innovation is not the point to music's appeal, nor was it ever. If that puts me squarely down as a post-modernist, as someone who can't even really argue with Reynolds because we speak in different vocabularies, then so be it. I can't help if I've been born too late. I also can't help if I've been told I've been born too late.

Snem says

Extremely well-researched. You can tell this guy knows his stuff. Very knowledgeable particularly about music and a wide variety of bands represented here. The most compelling discussion here was regarding futurism, which is interesting considering the title of this book. Gave me a lot to think about.

I know this book was written in English, but I understood so little of this it might as well not have been. I can't even do a good job of summarizing this book. It's a seemingly endless list of bands and music I've never even heard of.

It's clear to me I missed the point here, it whooshed right over my head. It just wasn't for me, but if you're big into music it might be for you.

Edmole says

It was odd reading a book by Simon Reynolds that wasn't positive and excited, as with *Rip It Up* and *Energy Flash*, but there was still a lot of brain food and enjoyment to be gleaned.

Having been born in '78 and become a music fan/fanatic/know it all in my teens, most contemporary music has always been recombinant and more aware of its past than its future, but Reynolds is right in saying that that mode has become more total and more acceptable in the last decade.

Previously Reynolds' books have sent me off on a frenzy of downloading. This one has confirmed for me that I need to switch down, switch off, listen to and engage with music properly. To get out of the rat-a-tat f5, bulk download, Youtube Facebook link alt-tab skip repeat shuffle habit which makes music little more than a water feature in the mind, a pleasant babbling stream, immaterial and unimportant. Music is meant to stimulate, to make you feel things sharply, sincerely, excitedly. But the kind of cokey/porny/electrode monkey hyperstimulation of rattling around downloads, Spotify, 120 years of history with no pause or mystery, it's time to give it a break.

Kate Sherrod says

I'm not 100% convinced by Reynolds' arguments. He makes the case that pop has been eating itself perfectly well, but he didn't convince me it's bad. This was, however, a great history lesson, and I discovered some new-to-me music, so it gets back one of the stars it would have otherwise lost 8)

Amy Laurens says

Thought provoking and trivia-studded exploration of retro culture from Simon Reynolds, who I'd count as one of the most intelligent and considered music writers. I mean intelligent without descending into the florid, convoluted self-indulgence that makes some music writers borderline unintelligible. Naming no names (PAUL MORLEY cough cough).

Occasionally this was very smart, but it peaked with the prologue and intro and was a bit conflicted thereafter. This End Of Dayz mentality that assumes no-one's creating anything new any more: I call bullshit on this pining for a time gone by when no-one pined for a time gone by. This very book describes loads of examples of retro fascination from the "creative" decades of the 60s and 70s. Nothing is created in a vacuum.

He is right that we're living through a period of mashing styles from different recent decades together, but this is in itself a style, and one which will become passe at some point, as is the fate of all things.

Not as good as *Rip It Up* and *Start Again*.

Jeff Golick says

Or really, 3.5 stars. Reynolds is a very good writer, and a very good thinker on music and popular culture. Here, he tackles the current state of pop music: pop is essentially eating itself, digging into the past and endlessly recycling old tropes rather than coming up with something new. Some don't see a problem with this state of affairs; Reynolds laments it.

The book is knee-deep in examples of this kind of recycling, so much so that it almost becomes simply another cog in the retromanic machinery. Many of the chapters read like isolated essays -- or at least as essays that had independent origins: on recording collecting and reissue fetishization; on various revivals (punk, '50s, Northern Soul); on the end of "The Future" in music. He really hits his stride, though, in a long last chapter that is perhaps a bit heavy of cultural theory, but which ties together many of the (overly) well-made points from earlier sections. In the end, I shared Reynolds' pessimism even as I don't naturally share his longing for Something New.

Though lacking a strong through-line narrative, I can certainly recommend the book to anyone who wants to delve deeply into the state of current pop (and future pop, and pop past), and moreover to anyone for whom the anxiety of influence, as a phrase, seems perfectly apt when applied to today's musical landscape.

Keith says

Simon Reynolds defines his modernist aesthetic as a "belief that art has some kind of evolutionary destiny, a teleology that manifests itself through genius artists and masterpieces that are monuments to the future." For me, that simultaneously asks too much and too little from pop, but Reynolds' previous books, where he's argued for the importance of that aesthetic in driving post-punk and electronic music forward, have encouraged me to pay attention to music that I may under-appreciate.

Here, though, Reynolds assumes the value of that aesthetic, so that even when I agree with his presentation of the facts, I'm unswayed by his conclusions – sometimes I feel like he's just sad that there are no new genres for him to awkwardly name. What's more, his presentation is bogged down by a grad-student-y weakness for treating mere accidents of language as insights into cultural design. (Worst offender: "The world economy was brought down by derivatives and bad debt; music has been depleted of meaning through derivativeness and indebtedness.")

There's interesting information amidst all the anxiously theorized generalizations. I'm glad I now know the origins of Sha Na Na (a Columbia history major who was unsettled by the sit-ins and had just read *The Outsiders* decided to invent '50s nostalgia as a way of re-unifying the student body). But Reynolds' major assumptions are so far from my own that I don't even feel compelled to argue with him.

And dude should really Ctrl-F "redolent" before submitting his next manuscript.

Antonomasia says

5 stars doesn't mean I agree with everything Reynolds says about retro and the state of contemporary music - instead I agree with Daniel Lopatin (Oneohtrix Point Never) whom he interviews extensively, and who *speculates about music having shifted from 'its Renaissance period of recording' (i.e. the last hundred years)*

and entering a period of 'evaluation' and reprocessing. 'If music is recessing into some kind of archival period, I don't think it's bad. It's just natural.' I think the crucible of innovation, where stupid quantities of great new stuff are produced faster than most people can consume them, has simply passed to other areas of culture: especially information technology - and if many commentators are to be believed, television drama. (I've little desire to watch most of the big US series talked of in that respect, though I have seen *Damages*, a fair few Scandinavian cop series, and wouldn't mind getting round to *Scandal*.) Meanwhile, the younger generation currently shocks its elders not with weird recorded noises, but with different ideas about gender, and internet activity.

Reynolds himself (b.1963) can't quite decide whether the modernist idea of ever-forward movement in music, one which he absorbed as a fan of post-punk in the late 70s, and still retains as a gut feeling, is the "right" one, or if the explosion of innovation in the mid-1960s (the late-60s hippies being the first retreat into retro) is too high a bar against which music from all other times is essentially being measured. Most UK music journalists I grew up reading in the 90s (and the indie stars they interviewed) are Reynolds' age or 5 years either side - the outlook of people born in the 1960s or late 1950s shaped my own, so it's been really interesting to dissect it and understand where my assumptions came from, through them.

I'd been wanting to read *Retromania* ever since it was published, yet I only picked it up after I felt I'd resolved some of its apparent questions to my own satisfaction - in the last couple of months. I had listened to pretty much no music for 3 years, and no new music for a year more, and coming back to music had to accept that it would never again be possible to have "heard of everything" again, unlike in my late teens when, even if I didn't know what every band mentioned in an entire *NME* or *Select* sounded like (you couldn't then, when there was only radio, TV, record shops and the public library), I did know their meaning and affiliations in the world of the British music press. It's not just that I'm into more types of music than I was 20 years ago and so there's more to catch up on; a far greater volume of music is talked about in more places; people's tastes are more fragmented and individual. Even the best-informed people haven't heard of stuff loved by their friends who are avid fans of slightly different genres. One of the nicest bits of getting older is giving even less of a fuck about what people think: if I have to be blinkered to lots of music mentioned online, and concentrate on investigating what interests me most, then that's fine. There's only so much time, and I now care far more about enjoying music than about repeat listening an album everyone's talking about, but which I'd only rate 3-3.5. If said enjoyment meant mostly stuff similar to what I already liked, or familiar acts, that was fine.

Finally, there was the moment I discovered one of the first new artists I liked when I started looking: this interview with Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith in *Resident Advisor*. A yoga hippie who looked over 40 and made novel ambient music? There was a good chance I'd like this stuff. (I really do.) What was also interesting was the total absence of reference to age (and I suppose the lack of mockery of new ageiness that used to be a staple of the indie press). Techno has always tended to consider older artists more as respected elders than rock, where they're traditionally dinosaurs who should fuck off and retire already, but there now are plenty of 40+ musicians in rock & pop widely agreed still to be producing good stuff, and as long as the music stands up, they're seen as themselves, not their age. For whatever reason (self-interest due to my & my friends ages?) that article caused an epiphanic reframing. Artist-creator led recorded music with shorter tracks is the form of our times as classical was the thing in the nineteenth century and therefore people of all ages practice it. As an individual, perhaps because of my own family background, I value the generational divide and feel that parents and children ought to have boundaries based on the music of their respective times (to the extent that I've thought that if I had had a kid I would stop listening to music with lyrics from after about 2000, in order to help this separation of identities, though I'd still need my newer ambient & minimal techno, as boring to most kids as the plain, easily washable shirt dresses I wear in summer). Yet that model so many people currently alive in the West think of as central to popular music is really just a blip characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century.

This is a wonderfully dense book: Reynolds goes into depth on several different aspects of pop culture, obviously with a focus on music. (Noticing that a few reviewers didn't expect a music book, I wonder if

publishers relied only on Reynolds' name to signal that it was about music, which wouldn't work for readers not already familiar with him.) Its detail and analysis makes it worth ten times its length in shallow web articles on similar topics.

So completely is one plunged into a succession of subcultures that the experience is more like reading linked essays than a single book. Many are the best discussions I've read of the subjects. If I had physical copies I'd want to tear out several chapters and push them on friends who have the relevant interests, knowing they may not be interested in the whole book: especially the ones about record collecting (very discursive, not judgemental as you may think from the title, and with plenty of anecdotes about particular collecting scenes); hauntology, brutalism and British municipal retro, and retro-futurism (which as well as SF and material culture, also takes in innovative electronic classical, Stockhausen, Varese and their fellow-travellers).

In saying I wish I could quote half the book, that's not as much of an exaggeration as it sounds: I ended up with over 30000 words of highlights, not including the bits that label each line with the book title and date. In this post it's going to be impossible to say everything I'd like to.

There are a number of points on which I disagree with Reynolds - I value this book as one I had a great conversation with, rather than because it says everything I'd want to

Just from scanning through a few of the quotes and other notes, the following came up:

- It's now known that experiences of loss and abandonment are at the root of nearly all severe instances of hoarding, although I think the psychological research on this is very recent, from this decade, so perhaps one can't blame Reynolds for not centring on this. Asking questions about cultural loss would have been an additional, interesting way to explore individual collecting (and more relevant IMO than pissing about with French structuralist theory), why certain scenes become highly valued by collectors, and the collective online hoard of culture. (Thanks to which, people like me, who want to regain things without physical clutter can find listings and pictures of terrible old records from their childhoods, and repeat-play songs that were once elusive radio will'o'the wisps.) Personally, I think that because the pace of technological change is almost too much, people want to balance that out by using it to access comforting old content. Very few are nostalgic for, say, old browser versions (though I am, I want them to be the same as a few years ago with only security updates as difference) but many people are for the stuff they read about within the browser.

- There's mention of ways digital music has changed consumption, but not the one I've found most noticeable. Is it just me who feels that digital music has divorced them from tracklistings? I always used to know song names when it was all records, tapes and CDs, but now I've listened to many albums dozens of times without knowing all the track names, because I never stare at the listings. Instrumental albums in particular, I experience as single works, like a classical symphony, and unless some favourite moment (usually a bass drop) makes me check titles, I find it weird to talk about the tracks as individual units.

- He underestimates clothing fashion, assumes it can't be intellectualised and incorrectly sees revivals as divorced from politics and history (several trends were obviously connected to the financial crash). It's possible to be just as geeky about fashion and beauty as about music and film, but this isn't obvious to outsiders because its popular image is vapid, and most fashion magazines (other than *Vogue* and a couple of others that I'm not sure are even still going) write about it in a vapid way. Blogs with more analytical approaches may well post-date this book.

- Another issue of timing: Reynolds is enthusiastic about hypnagogic pop and the revival of 80s synth sounds by young musicians. (One of whom has a theory I like: that they heard 80s music as babies & toddlers, sleeping with radios on in the next room, and the haziness of these records is because the 80s sound subconsciously feels right that way.) I was getting tired of that sound already in 2011-12 and expected it to have gone by now. Rip van Winkle returns in 2016 and finds it's more ubiquitous than ever. I started calling

it landfill dreampop, convinced it's this decade's sound that won't die, like the boring post-ladrock that was landfill indie in the 00s.

- Personal hobbyhorse: Reynolds criticises contemporary futurology as focused on consumer trends but not its greater conceptual laziness. I am sick of futurology which ignores environmental factors (stuff humans only know how to make from petrochemicals; climate change and especially related migration & political instability), and the automisation of jobs and what that may do to mass consumption and tax revenues. History that ignores major macro factors is obviously rubbish, yet everyone apparently puts up with the equivalent in predictions.

- He underestimates the effect on his attitude of having heard so much before: it's inevitable that hardly anything sounds new to an avid music fan of his age. I've mitigated the same effect in myself by a) at the age of around 30, seriously getting into genres I barely knew and b) later taking all that time off from music, which was for other reasons, but in retrospect was really interesting & productive in a lot of ways. (It feels like it was a sort of extended meditation. I am comfortable with silence in a way I never used to be. And I'm now interested in new material by bands whose output I'd ignored for 10+ years). The commentary lacks the awareness gained from personal experiences like when I first really listened to Eno's *Another Green World* and realised, about 20 years after the fact, that Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, a band who seemed really different when I was a teenager, were massively derivative of it. If I'd heard Gorky's only after Eno, of course I would have had a different opinion of them. Younger people are inevitably less jaded because so much more sounds new & fresh to them.

What was the last major popular music movement in the UK? Reynolds feels it was rave (he was there), with only a cursory nod to dubstep (my answer; at the time he was a middle-aged dad in New York). Many my age feel it was Britpop. Libertines fans now 30ish found the band hugely significant. I'd love to see this as a survey question addressed to music fans of different ages & affiliations.

Perhaps it's the effect of my years off, but apart from the landfill dreampop, music in 2016 is sounding newer and more interesting to me than music in 2006, a year when I also started paying close attention to new music after several years of doldrums - albeit at that point mostly NME indie / garage rock revival bands; it would be a while before I found interesting stuff that became favourites, like Battles' *Mirrored*, of Montreal's *Hissing Fauna*, and Norwegian space disco.

These days one's impression of public opinion/ behaviour is inevitably skewed by what one reads (that may be completely different to what someone else is reading - this so badly needs its own term and 'idioculture' which it should be, is apparently taken by something else). But in 2016 I have the sense that serious 20-30 something music fans are more interested in the new than were the indie-folk-Americana-curating hipsters from the late 2000s described in *Retromania*.

This book has already added to my life musically:

- **Apple lossless:** One of those occasional revelations that makes one re-annoyed about a past one thought accepted and settled. In 2008 I ripped and sold hundreds of CDs, whilst living with someone who considered that physical media was dead. (He would, though, have nothing to do with Apple software, like many cool geeks pre-iPhone, so one can hardly blame him for not knowing the plethora of options in iTunes.) Reynolds repeats an anecdote from GQ editor Dylan Jones' 2005 book *iPod, Therefore I Am* in which Jones discovers the ALAC option after ripping all his CDs. But that was only a matter of weeks or months, and he still had the bloody things. I had no idea the option was there all that time ago, so I have a load of crappy 128kbp rips from stuff that went to charity shops (profligate idiot, didn't even sell them) eight years ago. Naturally I've now redone much of the random selection I happened to keep, the ones I listen to, at any rate. And converted a bunch of stuff I'd ripped more recently as unwieldy wavs. I've also got to know iTunes a bit better; a few of weeks ago I thought its sound quality unbelievably terrible, way worse than, say, the Amazon cloud player;

have now improved that a fair bit with settings adjustments, though I remain slightly suspicious of it.

- **Bob Stanley compilations:** As a couple of friends have always been big Saint Etienne fans, I was vaguely aware of the Saint Etienne Present[s]... compilation series before, but never really felt the urge to investigate. For whatever reason, the material in *Retromania* about collectors who make compilations of rarities from the 50s and 60s, and Stanley in particular (perhaps because most of the others mentioned were Americans) caught my imagination and I've been slightly obsessed with these compilations since a couple of days after starting the book. I've now listened to almost all of them that are available on Tidal (free trial), and heard bits of several others by finding individual tracks. (Most of his recent comps from the last couple of years are on Stanley's Croydon Municipal label.) I like the idea of lounge compilations but in the past have usually found too many slow / miserable songs on them. I was surprised that I enjoyed a lot of tracks on Stanley's selections generally, and found several my favourite whole compilations. Soho Continental is allegedly the kind of music that would have been played in the Colony Room in the late 50s and early 60s, but that wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't enjoyed the music itself. So summery too. Songs for Swinging Ghosts is comedy-horror themed rock 'n' roll, and also made me realise that I'd probably like Max Bygraves' songs, and that I ignored him for too long due to music journo jokes, despite being unafraid to like similarly infradig stuff. It's a Scandal! Songs for Soho Blondes is wonderfully camp. The one I've played most of all is Such a Much! RnB Girls of the 50s and 60s. I don't enjoy 60s girl-group compilations quite as much as everyone else does, too much saccharine and high voices - though I find girl groups easier listening when I know the singer also didn't have the kind of impossible idealised happy-ever-after mentioned in the lyrics, e.g. the Ronettes. This compilation isn't that sort of sound: it's full of assertive altos: like almost-famous versions of Aretha Franklin's Think, and sounds that are more rock 'n' roll or upbeat developments of 30s jazz. I don't enjoy contemporary RnB, but on the basis of this, I could do with getting into early RnB more. (Recommendations welcome from people who know their stuff).

- **Hauntology:** I know and like Demdike Stare (dark ambient hauntology, from a scene which has used several witty titles referencing to dark bits of northern English history, as here, the Pendle witch trials) - but was reminded here that I'd never systematically listened to enough other hauntology, although I love the idea of it. *Running through a lot of the music, as well as the artwork and conceptual framing of the project, are ideas of a lost utopianism: the post-welfare-state era of benevolent state planning and social engineering.... With the UK school of hauntology – the Ghost Box groups, Mordant Music, Moon Wiring Club – this sense of loss is culturally specific. What matters here is not so much the fact of sampling (and the way it foregrounds and intensifies the supernatural subtext of recording) but the specific material being used and the associations that it carries. The immediately noticeable thing about all these artists is that they use exclusively British voices: often creaky thespians and plummy poets from spoken-word LPs, or dialogue snippets from vintage mystery and horror programmes.*

Retromania has greatly increased my respect for Lopatin. He's not only an inventive musician (some of whose work I enjoy, some of which is too noisy for my ageing ears), he has many of the best insights in the book:

- *the emergence of the Internet as a landscape of the sublime, occupying a roughly equivalent place to Nature in the imagination of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composer, and to the city for the twentieth-century composer.*

- *With individuals and businesses throwing out info-tech every two or three years, obsolete computers are a huge environmental problem. 'I'm super into formats, into junk, into outmoded technology,' says Lopatin. 'I'm super into the idea that the rapid-fire pace of capitalism is destroying our relationships to objects.*

- *He argues that the idea of 'progress' itself is driven by the economic requirements of capitalism as much as by science or human creativity. In a 2009 manifesto-like article, he decried the fixation on linear progress, proposing instead the opening up of 'spaces for ecstatic regression ... We homage the past to mourn, to celebrate, and to time travel.'*

This review can't be bothered to have a conclusion, and was, by no particular design, brought to you by an antisocial number of repeat plays of the doubly retro 'Heard it through the Grapevine' by The Slits (which I only discovered today, having never been into the original).

James says

With some editing, this would easily have been a five-star book. The subtitle is a little inaccurate. It's really about pop music. Other aspects of popular culture are introduced, but only by way of making points about the relentless recycling of ideas in current vernacular music. Reynolds is an astute thinker with astonishing rock and roll erudition and a terrific prose style - he manages a tone that successfully combines academic respectability and hipster elan. I told a friend I was reading *Retromania* and he asked me who wrote it. "Simon Reynolds?," Tom said, "He's my favorite rock writer!" I can totally see why. At its best (the chapters about YouTube, record collecting, hipster curators and 'turning Japanese'), this book was positively thrilling, even if there were moments of squirming self-recognition. "I can't be the only person," Reynolds writes, "who ferociously covets these box sets yet finds them strangely repellent once they've got them. With its packaging resemblance to a coffin or a tombstone, the box set is where an old enthusiasm goes to die: a band or genre you loved frozen into an indigestible chunk." I lost a little enthusiasm in the "Tomorrow" segment of the book, partly because Reynolds was writing about genres of music, e.g. 'hauntology' and 'hypnogogic,' I had never even heard of, let alone heard, but mostly because he was beginning to repeat himself. I also started to feel that Reynolds accepts the Romantic 'cult of originality' a little too uncritically. Nevertheless, *Retromania* was a fantastic book - with a little more discipline it would have been near-perfect.

Dinu Gu?u says

cartea nu e rea, da n-ai nevoie de 450 de pagini cu multe argumente sterile si in aer ca sa zici doua idei despre pop. fata de Energy flash e slaba. 2,5 stelute din partea noastra.
