IDENTITY POLITICS RECO(R)DED: VINYL HUNTERS

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Summary/Abstract: The article is a study into exotic record collecting as a manifestation of memory-based identity politics – a way of reasserting one’s agency in the consumerist society through an expanded consciousness of the complexities of the forgotten cultural past (in the present case, extremely eccentric obscure vinyl records). First, exotic record collecting is linked to the more extensive tradition of utopian exoticism in Western culture – the recycling of cultural memory (thus also an exoticism...
Based on temporal rather than spatial distance) is presented as an extension of the earlier but largely exhausted exoticism which was inspired by alien territories. Next, exotic vinyl hunting is suggested to be the postmodern revival of the cultural project of 'ethnographic surrealism', celebrated by James Clifford as one of the crucial catalysts of modernism. Finally, the connection between exotic record collecting and other reinterpretations of collective cultural memory is indicated, as exemplified by collector Mickey MacGowan's The Unknown Museum, which ventures to expand collective cultural memory of the history of popular culture and thus combat the perennial industrial promotion of the 'new' with more vintage and affective ways of defining oneself through material objects of imagined value.
Fowler is a conspicuous representative of the worldwide community of vinyl collectors—a movement in praise of the vinyl record as an iconic material vehicle of memory in 20th century culture, flourishing in the face of the digital recording revolution of the last decades of the 20th century and expanding in the download ‘noughties’ of the new millennium. This kind of collecting is an especially fascinating field of study with respect to memory as the basis of identity politics. Memory is inseparable from identity, individual or shared. [Identity] politics is not an alternative to class politics; it is class politics, the politics of the left-wing of neoliberalism. It is the expression and active agency of a political order and moral economy in which capitalist market forces are treated as unassailable nature. An integral element of that moral economy is displacement of the critique of the invidious outcomes produced by capitalist class power onto equally naturalized categories of ascriptive identity that sort us into groups supposedly defined by what we essentially are rather than what we do. — Adolph Reed. This subreddit