In the fall of 1967, on the heels of the Summer of Love, Stuart Hall turned his attention to American hippies. Ensconced at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964 and soon to become an intellectual hothouse that would cement the field of Cultural Studies in place as a new interdisciplinary endeavor, Hall mapped out his take on who these strange new characters—the hippies—were. His paper, expanded in 1968 and 1969, presaged much of the work to come from the so-called Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Informed by the work of Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Antonio Gramsci, C.L.R. James, C. Wright Mills, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, the French theorists such as Althusser and Lacan, and, of course, Marx himself, Hall and others at the Centre moved away from American social
scientific functionalism to an interest in the interpretation of symbolic action from within subcultures, class positions, emergent feminist attitudes, ethnic and racialized configurations, and the reception rather than the production of the mass-mediated culture industries. While many tend to associate Cultural Studies and the Birmingham School with the 1970s and punk, it might be more accurate to say, as I will argue in this paper, that it was built on a foundation of flower power.

What does it mean, exactly, to make this argument? Today I want to map out how Stuart Hall's essay on hippies not only presaged the Birmingham School approach to Cultural Studies, but also has important things to tell us about the state of popular music studies today. It is this very issue of presaging, of predicting, of offering up futures, of opening up possibilities—this very interest in the preliminariness of alternative or oppositional cultures—that has often informed Cultural Studies and also continues to shape popular music studies. The potential future haunts the past of both cultural and popular music studies. The search for the seeds of a better world in cultural expression at the margins, in the underbelly, at the edges, often inchoate or only partly conscious, and typically floating, phantom-like, across the surfaces of mass cultural production, distribution, and consumption: these have often been at the center of these fields. Hall's hippie work from the past helps us think more carefully about the place of the future in our present moment.
One of Hall's first moves in "The Hippies: An American Moment" is to emphasize perception and experience, or what he rightly calls "phenomenology."

"The method I have adopted," he writes at the start of his paper, "is to attempt, first, a phenomenological and thematic 'reading' of the central aspects of Hippie 'society.' I attempt to catch, describe, and interpret the symbolic modes of life of the Hippies, as far as I can, from 'within'—from the point of view of the subjective meaning this way of life seems to have for its participants." Emphasizing his rejection of the functionalist assumptions of the dominant American sociology of the time, Hall asserts, "I try to view the Hippie style as a project for a certain section of American youth (rather than as a symptom)." The turn to phenomenology, to experience, is one we are more accustomed to now in popular music studies, which demands careful attention to the experiential—and often non-verbal—dimensions of musical expression and reception. For Hall, writing in 1967, and perhaps still, this is a rather fraught endeavor. "I am obliged to tidy up and make explicit and coherent what is, essentially, untidy, incoherent, unorganized," he
admits, because "I am trying to manifest what are, by definition, the latent meanings of a way of life: a way of life which rejects and despises, precisely, the language and act of interpretation." We still see this tension between analysis and experience crop up in popular music studies today.

Hall goes on to map out, descriptively, what he perceives as the main thrusts to the American hippie sensibility: an interest in voluntary poverty; an appropriation of the exoticized Native American (but less so, Hall, argued, in contrast to previous middle-class, white, male bohemian movements, the African Americans); a pastoral arcadianism; a tension between togetherness, on the one hand, and a long-running American obsession with the free individual, on the other; insistence on the existential now pursued through a focus on mysticism and withdrawal as well as the direct experience of concentrating on the Blakean "doors of perception"; and an overarching focus on love and flower power as attitudes that deflected existing political modes of confrontation as well as gender norms into new kinds of cultural politics. Moving through these dimensions of hippie culture, he contended that they, as he put it, "are not the patternless, amorphous muddle and confusion which at first they appear to be," but rather amount to a coherent, if often contradictory, worldview. Here we begin to see the emerging Birmingham School approach blooming. Hall writes: "The symbols, expressive values, beliefs and attitudes, projects and aspirations of a grouping like the Hippies constitute, taken together, a significant, meaningful way of being-in-the-world for them." And then here is the Cultural Studies approach bursting forth: "It is by learning to 'read'
the meanings of these 'signs' that we come to understand the global vision of the world, the weltanschauung, the project, which organizes and makes coherent the many disparate strands." The hippie lifestyle not merely a "deviance" from the functionalist system of society; it is a text waiting to be read. Without explicitly using the language, Hall is already at work here encoding and decoding a highly mediated form of culture. But don't take my word for it. Here is a clip of Hall himself, from John Akomfrah's Stuart Hall Project documentary film, talking just this way about hippie culture.
Popular music turns up throughout the descriptive portion of his paper as a key form through which hippies enter into the phenomenological pursuit of a different culture than the dominant American white, masculinized, straight, middle-class norms of postwar technocratic society. "So-called psychedelic art," Hall writes, "the posters, light-shows, costumes, acid-rock, projected films and moving objects, the action of the stroboscopes...is best understood as a way of reproducing or re-creating through music and the new art forms the multi-media, multi-dimensional experience of the successful 'high.'"

But what is the significance of this "high"? In the second half of his essay, Hall attempts to relate hippie culture to the economic and political dimensions of the 1960s. This presages the Birmingham School approach to culture, particularly subcultures, as responses to the dominant culture systems—one thinks of Paul Willis's work on working-class adolescent boys or Dick Hebdige's work as well as Hazel Carby and Angela McRobbie's feminist critiques of subcultural studies that nonetheless retain a hope for subcultural style as possessing a cultural politics of rebellion. It also points to Hall's own lively sense of what he would come to call historical conjunctures within which different formations and configurations get articulated to each other. Hall does not yet use these terms; in their place, he turns to Jean-Paul Sartre (a less acknowledged influence on the Birmingham School and a figure popular music studies has had little use for so far as I know), to, as Hall put it, "find the proper mediations" for the "motifs" of the Hippies as he has described them. Hall is finding a language here for how style matters to political struggle.
Hall then outlined what he called a set of "structures" in which the hippies had to be located. It included the cultural formations of the Beat Generation and the political struggles of the civil rights, peace, and New Left student movements. It also arose in relation to what Hall himself described as a "dangerously over-determined" vision of American society as, ok, get ready for this, "the image of corporate power and privilege joined with the political and military elites in defense of America's manifest global destiny as the capitalist and industrial powerhouse of the twenty-first century; served by the multi-versities which channeled men of talent into the system, and the mass media, which provided mass distraction on a national scale—a seamless, powerful complex of interlocking bureaucracies which had, become the only history-making agency in the society at home, and was hell bent (even to the point of some ultimate nuclear solution) on becoming the only history-making agency on the face of the globe."

It was into this context, these structures, these mediators, that the hippies took shape. While many at the time assumed that the hippies were withdrawing
from society in reaction to the political confrontations of the New Left, Hall saw things differently. There were four ways he believed that hippies, as he put it, "perhaps in spite of themselves, and certainly without much conscious intention—have made a contribution to the growth of political contestation with the system."

They helped to create a movement style that provided a, in Hall's words, "lived test of authenticity" for the new political movements of the 1960s; moreover, secondly, they helped to make style itself an issue, contributing to what Hall calls the "dramaturgy" of the revolutionary movement (what counted as a protest, as in the public pranks of the Merry Pranksters and Diggers or, later, the zany Yippie protests of the time, such as running a pig for president or throwing money onto the Stock Exchange, were examples Hall invoked); third, they made a sustained effort to live out a set of "counter-values" to straight society; and finally, an attempt to, as Hall put it, "prefigure a new kind of subjectivity," to "catch a glimpse of what it could be like, to sketch out a model of future possibilities."
How did the hippies do these four things? Hall roots their worldview in the historical conjuncture of particular spiritual, economic, technological, and political forces that made the hippies relevant as more than just a movement toward quietism, albeit what would have been a rather noisy, psychedelic form of quietism. Hippies mattered to Hall because theirs was what he called a "tactical withdrawal." "Like the Saints of the seventeenth century or the Bolsheviks after 1905," he wrote, "they have withdrawn into non-sectarian 'sectarian' conspiracy, gone 'underground.' Like the early Fidelistas, they have taken, figuratively, to the 'Sierra Maestre.'" Hall, like many other commentators, worked out a whole eschatology for this. "Hippies and 'flower power,'" he argued, "are a way of carrying on a sort of spiritual politics by 'other means.'" While "drop outs from the political struggle they might be," for Hall, "they are some of the first enlisted troops in a new kind of politics of the post-modern, post-industrial society: the politics of cultural rebellion."

The spiritual thus connected to economic and technological forces for Hall. He located hippies as emerging precisely from the sector of the middle class being trained for the knowledge work and mental labor that was becoming ever more central for the functioning of postindustrial, technocratic society. This made them important as exemplars of the growing importance of culture and superstructure to struggles for revolution. "Hippies have tended," he wrote "in their non-ideological way, to 'stand Marx on his head'." For Hall, "they give primacy in praxis to the place and role of 'consciousness' in restructuring the environment." Drawing upon
the Hippie interest in Marshall McLuhan, Hall noted that "Hippies seem to believe that though power in civil society now rests with the Gutenberg modes of consciousness, these are actually passing away, losing their relevance in the post-industrial world. They have become vacant shells, the husks and forms of a previous era. It is those people who, by one means or another, seek to liberate their minds from the tyranny of these obsolete structures who are actually moving with the tide of history." In other words, for Hall, hippies were politically significant because they struggled for imaginative breakthrough precisely at the moment when the superstructural dimensions of imagination, ideas, ideology, culture, were becoming the very productive base of value and labor in a postindustrial setting.

At the forefront of these structural transformations that privileged cultural rebellion, the hippies, for Hall, became "voyagers, explorers, adventurers of the undersoul, the subterranean caverns, the unconscious sub-life of the revolutionary moment." He contended that "while the more active, committed militants define the line of conflict within the system and seek frontal contestation to challenge, and
if possible, transcend the existing socio-economic structures, the less-committed, withdrawn disaffiliates—a among hippies—"begin to explore, live through, and act out in fragmented, broken forms the outer limits/inner spaces of revolutionary and post-revolutionary praxis." They are, as the phrase of the time went, "living the revolution." And they did so, for Hall, because, he wrote, "when the hippies retreat to the West Coast and other enclaves, or disappear temporarily into an electronic environment of acid-rock or the dream-life of LSD, they bear into this wilderness of the mind the scars and marks, metaphorically, of a hundred sit-ins, demonstrations, and confrontations." Here the political structures of the historical moment came into play for Hall. The hippie cultural style could not exist, he believed, without the framework of the more confrontational dimensions of New Left struggle. These efforts at direct action, with their inclusion of expression, experience, and putting your body on the line, in the way of oppressive and unjust power, informed the Hippie emphasis on pursuing existential truths through seemingly detached, apolitical cultural means that were, in their way, deeply engaged with putting your self to the test and your body on the line.

In "The Hippies: An American Moment," Stuart Hall was very optimistic about the prefigurative politics he observed. In reaction to the dismissal of hippie culture as a retreat from politics, he argued that it offered a new kind of politics in which culture hinted "in vivo" at the revolutionized society to come. Here, his essay about signs of things to come was itself a sign of things to come. In Cultural Studies, and in certain strains of popular music studies too, there is still much
reliance on treating music and culture as harbingers of better worlds, as assertions of alternative futurities, as dreamworlds of potentiality. This is because they can be just those things. But has the prefiguration trope sometimes dominated too much? Do we still rely too much on discerning the dream in cultural and musical texts when it comes to searching for a radical politics? What would it mean to address how music and sound *figure* in to the moment—and also carry figures from the past along—as much as they *prefigure* a future beyond the now? Hall saw the hippies attempting to, as he put it, "sketch," "suggest," and "anticipate" tomorrow's post-revolutionary utopia, but is it time to focus on how the cultural politics of something such as popular music also might accommodate and respond to the present—or even the past?

As Hall himself emphasized repeatedly, "Every new configuration contains masses of the old." At what point do we reposition ourselves from the precipice of transformation to a different kind of positionality within time, within history? The poised but urgent need to think carefully about our sense of temporality hovers in Hall's hippie essay too, and it remains with us, nagging at us, the clock ticking, to this day.