



## The Prolonged Death of the Hippie, 1967–1969

International interdisciplinary conference, 12–14 September 2019

### Call for Scholarly and Artistic Contributions

**2019 marks the fiftieth anniversary of a historical period** that arguably came to a close with the deaths at the Altamont Free Concert in 1969. The era of the hippie, or flower-power, or peace-and-love, has shaped our current times like few if any periods of such short duration. If these three years were eradicated from history, it is hard to imagine that women, people of color, or queer people would have the same rights today, *de iure* and *de facto*. In the cultural sphere, popular music, perhaps even avant-garde music, would be something entirely different, and the same goes for film, dance, and literature. In the realm of technology, those three years saw the moon landing, the first ATM, and the early internet.

Yet the peace and love rhetoric and the iconic images of Woodstock and San Francisco, the riots of Paris and Prague, and the beatific faces of young people on LSD and marijuana concealed a much darker reality that was lurking beneath the surface. The years of 1967–1969 also saw numerous race riots, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the murders of the Manson Family, the commodification of the music industry, the rediscovery of youth as a market, the first deaths of iconic rock icons, and a proliferation of heroin and cocaine. A host of influential musicians came from families with military and intelligence backgrounds, toying with satanism and occultism in various forms under the auspices of the military gaze.

From the beginning of the mass-mediated inception of the hippie era, death seemed to be just around the corner, and not just because the millions of military and civilian losses of the War in Vietnam helped to give birth to a peace movement. The Doors' 1967 debut album ends with the dark "The End" and in the same year, the San Francisco Diggers pronounced the death of "Hippie, devoted son of mass media." The figure of the hippie can, in fact, be read as a product of American mass media that was discovered in early 1967 and discarded by the end of 1969. Over the course of the three years under examination, the end of the era was pronounced and prophesied a number of times, the last straw being the Altamont Speedway concert.

From the vantage point of fifty years later, the simple narrative of the hippie needs to be reexamined and problematized. The conference in the city where LSD was discovered asks if and how a death wish or a death drive was always already inscribed in the hippie movement. Are death, failure, and breakage an *inherent vice* of hippie culture (to use the title of Thomas Pynchon's novel that deals with the end of the hippie era)?

The conference focuses on the years 1967–1969 and is not interested in reiterating the laments about the sell-out of the peace-and-love generation. Instead, it attempts to shed light on underexamined dark aspects of hippie culture while paying tribute to and honoring its achievements for a better, more holistic world. **The Hippie is dead. Long live the Hippie!**

Conference website: <https://hippie-conference.unibas.ch>



## Call for Contributions

**The conference welcomes scholarly and artistic contributions** (such as poetry readings, dance or music performances). Contributions should be twenty minutes in length, followed by approximately ten minutes of Q&A. Please indicate if your proposed contribution is shorter or longer.

**Interested in presenting something?** Please submit an abstract of 200–300 words and a biography of 100–200 words by **31 May 2019** to the conference organizer Christian Hänggi, [dead-hippie@unibas.ch](mailto:dead-hippie@unibas.ch)

The conference is held in English but may be open to contributions in German or French too. There is no conference fee although participants may, depending on the state of funding, be asked for a contribution to the conference dinner.

## Topics

Research questions in a wide range of disciplines (history, musicology, literature, technology, media theory, performance arts, etc.) may include those addressed in the above conference description as well as:

**Rock Music and other Arts:** The hippie counterculture is often associated with popular music, and street level arts and crafts. In what way has this focus obscured the relationship between hippie culture and experimental and avant-grade art practices of the time in the visual arts, dance, theatre, and music?

**Perspectives from around the world:** In what way was the countercultural experience different outside the USA? Paris, Prague, Zurich, or Toronto, for instance. The Soviet Union, Germany, or Yugoslavia?

**Communes and Communal Living:** How did communal living resonate with earlier experiments of which the hippies were cognizant? To what degree was there an evolution from intentional communes to chaotic environments where anyone could crash? In what way were some communes organized around group sex and communal exploration of drugs? What was the role of gurus such as Charles Manson?

**Religion, Occultism, Spirituality:** What does it mean that the main strands of Eastern philosophy and spirituality that was rediscovered was already viewed through the prism of Western occultism and theosophy? What role did occultism proper play, with Tarot and Ouija boards, but also figures such as Aleister Crowley or Jack Parsons? What was the influence of Christianity through Jesus freaks?

**Native Americans as Models:** How did the – real or imagined – traditions of native Americans influence hippie culture and how were they appropriated by it? For instance, tribalism as models for communal living; spirituality and nature; the spectre of the massacred native Americans; California as the endpoint of western expansion reached when the native Americans have all been slaughtered.

**Sexual Politics:** A history that has yet to be written is about the sexual exploitation of young teens (12–15 years of age) by older (20-something) hippies, a subject on which Charles Manson, resident in the Haight at the time, has a lot to teach. To what degree did hippie culture, with its rejection of work and consumerism, function as a barter economy where the principle currencies were drugs and the sexual use of young and inexperienced bodies?



**Drugs:** The counterculture scene that existed in the Haight/Ashbury district before the influx of sex- and drug-seeking teens was well acquainted with the old bad drugs. Why was this continuum neglected or downplayed? To what extent was hippie culture brought about by the use of LSD and mescaline in CIA's MK Ultra program? How did Latin-American traditions of communicating with and honoring the dead, particularly the Mexican ones, influence hippie culture through Americans heading south to experiment with mescaline, peyote, and ayahuasca (as evidenced, for instance by the Grateful Dead's iconography)? Why are filmic representations of LSD trips always horror trips? In what way do the psychedelic experiences follow Timothy Leary's manual? Are there other unrecognized, occult, or occluded sources of explication?

**Cinema:** It has been theorized that the films of the so-called new Hollywood can be divided into a left wing (valorizing the outlaw and rebellion against social norms) and a right wing (valorizing vigilante violence against the criminal and resenting the disintegration of law and order). Take *Easy Rider*: Only the first verse of Steppenwolf's "The Pusher" is heard; the subsequent verses could easily fit with the values of the right, and Dennis Hopper later bragged that he had voted a Republican ticket for thirty years. Could it be argued that hippie values cannot so easily be equated with left political positions?

**Computer and Network Technology:** To what extent was the internet, then ARPANET, "conceived in sin, the worst possible. As it kept growing, it never stopped carrying in its heart a bitter-cold death wish for the planet" (Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*)? How innocent was the *Whole Earth Catalog*, published by Stewart Brand (who coined the term personal computer), a catalog which Steve Jobs likened to Google in paperback?

**Racial tensions and Nazi symbolism:** A lacuna in the examination of hippie culture appears to be the circulation of the swastika and other Nazi- and far-right symbols. How were they able to enter this particular counterculture? What is the relationship between the white youngsters celebrating their Summer of Love while the black communities in other cities were going through the race riots of the Long, Hot Summer of 1967 with more than 85 deaths? Why was California a focal point of hippie culture considering the state's (particularly L.A.'s) obsession with Aryan culture, from the early 1900s through surf music and up to Charles Manson?

**Entertainment:** How much TV were hippies watching and what was it? Is there an underexamined relationship between the TV programming of the day and hippie values and aesthetics? Consider for example Star Trek.

## Conference Fee

There is no conference or admission fee. The conference is open to the public.

## Financial Assistance

The conference has limited funds available for travel and accommodation of independent scholars and artists and those who cannot secure funding from their home institution. If you are in need of such financial assistance, please explain your case when you submit your abstract.



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## More Information

Please see our website <https://hippie-conference.unibas.ch> or write to [dead-hippie@unibas.ch](mailto:dead-hippie@unibas.ch) if you have any unanswered questions.