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**From "Romantic Gospel" to "Adequate Response": Trading Essentialism for Audience Empowerment in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the Beach Boys' *Smile***

In his book *Inside the Music of Brian Wilson* (2007), City University of New York Music Professor Philip Lambert relies on literary scholar A. D. Van Nostrand's essentialist notion of the "romantic gospel" to explain the abandonment of the Beach Boys' 1967 *Smile* album by composer/producer and band leader, Brian Wilson. According to Van Nostrand, masterworks like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson's *Nature* and others are what he terms "romantic gospels" in that they are intrinsically destined to remain incomplete and under constant revision. The "superform," in his definition, defies completion, and he cites the many revisions of *Leaves* as evidence for Whitman's case. Lambert throws Wilson's masterpiece of pop music, the Beach Boys' *Smile*, into the mix by pointing to its shelving (by Wilson) well into the advanced stages of recording.

This paper will only address the possible essentialist qualities of *Leaves* and *Smile* in passing, in part because evidence for such, with at least *Leaves*, is dubious at best; the basis for Whitman's metaphysical outlook was a religion of secular democracy, after all. More importantly, and contrary to Van Nostrand and Lambert, I focus on the fact that said qualities and subsequent qualification of the works as "romantic gospels" in no way explain the very historically specific reasons behind each of their revisionary histories. In fact, Van Nostrand's creation of and insistence upon a new theoretical frame of reference arguably qualify his point of view as more essentialist than that of either *Leaves* or *Smile*. The former was never intended to be a static artifact, outdated at the moment of publication. Whitman's *Leaves* grew not only with

the poet's own life, but with the life of the young American democracy. As for *Smile*, myriad reasons account for its abandonment by Wilson, chief of which was the intra-band opposition to the avant-garde record, led by vocalist Mike Love. Lack of support from Capitol Records also contributed, as did a pending law suit filed (and ultimately won) by the Beach Boys against the record company for unpaid royalties. Accordingly, essentialist "romantic gospels" or not, unique historical circumstances dictated the paths of *Leaves* and *Smile*. As this paper explains, the two masterworks still arrived at peculiarly similar junctures, particularly as concerns their relations to their audiences.

The revisionary histories of *Leaves* and *Smile* both move closely toward what Whitman scholar Donald Pease terms "adequate response": an active level of participation with the text that blurs the line between writer and audience (154). For Whitman and *Leaves*, this was a deliberate objective that is also intrinsically ongoing, as the audience engages not only the text, but participates in the democratic process of the country itself. For Wilson and *Smile*, "adequate response" was an effect never sought, but inarguably achieved by the audience via their bootlegging appropriation of the literal production of the album itself.

In sum, the extended revisionary histories of *Leaves* and *Smile* emerged not from essentialist roadblocks but from very specific historical circumstances. Their mutual arrival to a juncture of "adequate response," achieved via historically unique pathways, warrants their comparison as suggested by Lambert, albeit for altogether different reasons that he postulates.

In fairness, it should be noted that Lambert's book is undoubtedly the best examination of the technical aspects of Brian Wilson's musical compositions to date, and includes musical precedents for nearly every song. For music theorists, this book is second to none.

Lambert is no "Smileologist," however (to use a phrase made popular by the album's scholars and true believers), and while fascinating, his progressive reliance upon a literarily theoretical contextualization (Van Nostrand) to explain the album's demise is in this case incorrect. Certainly, his error is not in considering the Beach Boys' work (and particularly, Van Dyke Parks' *Smile* lyrics) from a literary perspective; the first book ever published on the band was by California State University English professor Bruce Golden, who literarily contextualized their music as a sort "Southern California pastoral" (18). As I have previously asserted, the mistake is to attribute the ongoing revisionism of *Smile* and *Leaves* to their (I will argue, unsubstantiated) "romantic gospel" essentialism, thereby ignoring the actual historical circumstances surrounding each.

Lambert echoes Van Nostrand in saying, "A romantic gospel is 'never really finished' . . . The 'superform . . . has always been defined in terms of its impossibility'; the concept of 'total expression' leads only to paralysis" (287). By external appearances alone, it is easy to imagine how this explanation might apply to *Leaves* and *Smile*, both large-scale projects that were continuously revised. Van Nostrand's "romantic gospel" is not characterized by its incompleteness alone, however; intrinsic to its make-up is its essentialist qualification as a cosmology.

In Van Nostrand's definition, "A cosmology is a large holistic scheme that either explains or dramatizes a man's relation to his God or gods and therefore to everything else he can perceive. Simple or sophisticated, it is an ancient, elemental expression. Even the most primitive religions have rituals that re-create the world" (3). Again, this description would initially seem to apply to *Leaves*, where in stanza 41 of "Song of Myself," Whitman extracts the most redeeming qualities of the world's religions to create his own "uber-religion." He refers to "Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah / Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and

Hercules his grandson," as he compiles all the "rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself, / bestowing them freely on each man and woman I see" (65). Maria Anita Stefanelli describes such efforts by Whitman as the poet's attempt to "make the history of Religion, which does not depend on 'the churches and creeds' (178). In stanza 25 of the same cluster, Whitman employs what could be termed a poet's "encloser's eye view" (Norbrook 6): "My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach, / With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes / of worlds" (48). Even Whitman's contemporary (and in many ways, mentor) Emerson envisioned and advocated the construction of poetic universes:

Adam called his house, heaven and earth; Caesar called his house,  
Rome; you perhaps call yours, a cobbler's trade; a hundred acres of  
ploughed land; or a scholar's garret. Yet line for line and point for  
point, your dominion is as great as theirs, though without fine  
names. Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform  
your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great  
proportions (157).

What is important to remember, however, is that Whitman's appropriation of religious language throughout *Leaves* is not for the purposes of an essentialist agenda therein, but is rather directed to the poet's own secular objectives.

The institution at stake in Whitman's *Leaves* was not an essentialist cosmology or religion, but rather the new politics of American democracy. While it is true the poet's enthusiasm for this pioneering institution resembled religious zeal, its underlying principles were clearly secular in nature. For instance, Whitman had no qualms about dismantling any aspects of religion he saw as unjust or undemocratic. In stanza 7 of "Song of Myself," for instance, he

essentially reverses the Fall in the Christian Garden of Eden to demonstrate that there is nothing obscene about the procreant urge in humanity, nor anything wrong with bodily delights:

"Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded, / I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no, / And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be /

shaken away" (32). Contemporary pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty explains how

Whitman's logos was grounded not in essentialist religion, but rather in glorious hope for the democracy of his young nation:

Whitman thought there was no need to be curious about God because there is no standard, not even a divine one, against which the decisions of a free people can be measured. Americans, he hoped, would spend the energy that past human societies had spent on discovering God's desires on discovering one another's desires. Americans will be curious about every other American, but not about anything which claims authority over America (16).

Van Nostrand himself described Whitman's rhetoric as a sort of "public evangelism" (21) and Stephen John Mack further illustrates how the core principle behind *Leaves* was not ahistorically essentialist but rather historically political:

Whitman's use of nineteenth-century science serves as an additional argument for reading his democratic mythology in a materialist context. It also resolves the metaphysical paradox of a democratic creator, the 'encloser of things to be,' who is at the same time its own creation, 'an acme of things accomplished.' The 'God' who carried him 'through the lethargic mist' is no more a

governing agent than are the stars who cleared room for him by keeping 'aside in their own rings.' The attribution of intention to God and stars functions merely as an assertion that the material forces of the universe are not (at least) hostile to the processes of democratic life. The true god in this section is the democratic self who stands 'on this spot with my soul,' the lone author of his own destiny' (45).

If Whitman's *Leaves* does not, therefore, accurately fit Van Nostrand's definition of "romantic gospel," then what about Wilson's *Smile*?

There are, apparently, more grounds for considering *Smile* as an essentialist-based endeavor. Wilson is known to have referred to the Beach Boys music as "white spiritual music," and described *Smile* in particular as a "teenage symphony to God." In David Leaf's brilliant documentary on the album, *Beautiful Dreamer*, former Brother Records (the Beach Boys own record label, instituted more than a year before the Beatles' Apple) head and Brian Wilson cohort David Anderle speaks about Wilson's "cosmic" way of thinking about art without boundaries, "like a universe," in the *Smile* period (spring, 1966 to spring, 1967). Also in *Beautiful Dreamer*, former Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham remembers a conversation he had with Wilson at the time: "I sat up when I heard him say, 'One day I will write songs that people will pray to.'" Nevertheless, Wilson seems to have changed his perspective by the summer of 1967 during the Beach Boys recording of the *Smile* replacement album, *Smiley Smile*.

With the *Smile* album officially abandoned, recording was moved to Wilson's home studio in June, 1967 to hastily record new versions of *Smile* tracks (with additional songs) in an intentionally under-produced fashion, with Wilson abdicating production control to the group for

the first time in the band's career. At one point during the recorded studio chatter heard throughout the album, Daniel Harrison notes that Wilson's voice can clearly be heard to say, "Don't think you're God" (56). Undoubtedly sobered in his outlook by the rejection of his masterpiece *Smile* by none other than members of his own band, Wilson seems to have abandoned any essentialist faith (at least in the project) he may have previously held. Either way, whether *Smile* might have qualified (as Lambert asserts) as one of Van Nostrand's essentialist "romantic gospels" remains irrelevant. All the starts, stops, and reworkings in the revisionary lives of *Smile* and *Leaves of Grass* were dictated by their historical circumstances and not literary metaphysics.

In the case of *Leaves*, Thomas Edward Crowley directly poses the question (without conclusively answering it) of whether Whitman envisioned the work, from its very beginnings, as an ongoing document that would undergo periodic revision: "Was the structural pattern of the 1881 *Leaves* the result of an early, preconceived plan in the mind of the poet, or did it gradually evolve and unfold itself finally to be recognized by him as the end toward which he had been moving more or less unconsciously from the start?" (166). Scholars' opinions vary in answer to this question, with Van Nostrand, on one hand, of course steadfast that Whitman's masterpiece was an unrealizable failure due its continuing metamorphosis:

Whitman never did put himself 'freely, fully, and truly on the record' to his own satisfaction. He never did complete his cosmos to suit himself. Later in his life he had the idea of writing a book of chants, one for each day of the year--a definitive book of a sort; but he never got around to it because he never finished *Leaves of Grass*. The ravening, innocent passion to encompass the world

with one's self never could be fulfilled. The doctrinal failure is implicit in the doctrine, but so is the ceaseless attempt to give it form and to communicate it (61).

Christopher Charles Burnham is far less skeptical in quoting Harold Blodgett's view "that the structure of *Leaves of Grass* is a growth, not a pattern, a patient--indeed incessant--reordering that admits of no rigid sequence dictated by schematic relationship. If there is a logic in all this, it is the logic of intuition" (113).

For this writer, it is most convincing to understand the revisionary history of *Leaves*, as most scholars do, as a living document that simply grew both with its author and his beloved, young nation. As Whitman and America matured, so did *Leaves*: "For Whitman poetry has the power to 'make the nation.' And the recuperation of something like theological authority is integral to theorizing the right relation of particulars to one another and of the whole (the state) to its foundations" (Harris 79). Ed Folsom of the *Whitman Archive* notes of Whitman and *Leaves*, "He always believed that the history of *Leaves* paralleled the history of himself, and that both histories embodied the history of America in the nineteenth century . . ." (28). Perhaps the most resounding confirmation of *Leaves* as an intentionally living document comes from Blodgett and Sculley Bradley in the Introduction to the 2002 Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves*:

It is just as erroneous to argue, as some critics have, that the poet's constant revisions, shiftings, and insertions betray indecisiveness or uncertainty. There is never any doubt of a purpose kept consciously in view, an aim never deviated from; nor is there doubt that Whitman intended and achieved structure. Still, it was a structure that grew as the poet grew, that was adapted to the

necessities he met and molded by the pressures his own life felt-- its materials altered, added to, subtracted from, transposed as time and need required. And so it was alive" (xxxix).

The revisionary history of *Leaves*, then, was about the historical circumstances of its author and his era and his conscious responses therein, not about any fatal limitations of "romantic gospels." As I will now discuss, the same can be said for Brian Wilson's *Smile*.

In Leaf's *Beautiful Dreamer*, Wilson is more candid about the album than at anytime since 1967. He states directly,

I'll tell you from my heart. In 1967, the reasons why I didn't finish *Smile* were: Mike [Love, Beach Boys vocalist] didn't like it, I thought it was too experimental, I thought the 'Fire' tape was too scary, I thought that people wouldn't understand where my head was at at that time. Those are the reasons.

Prior to the experimental stage of the 1966-67 *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* albums, Wilson had never experienced resistance to his leadership of the group, and its presence during *Smile* became unbearable for him. Beach Boys author and *Smile* insider Paul Williams wrote of Wilson in 1967,

"He would go through a tremendous paranoia before he would get into the studio, knowing he was going to have to face an argument. He would come into the studio uptight, he would give a part to one of the fellas or to a group of the fellas, say, 'This is what I would like to have done,' and there would be resistance. And it wouldn't be happening and there would be endless takes, and then he would

just junk it. And then maybe after they left to go out on tour he would come back in and do it himself. All their parts. But it was very taxing, and it was extremely painful to watch. Because it was, uh, a great wall had been put down in front of creativity.

And now, maybe, he just doesn't want to fight any more"

(44-5).

Wilson's considerable distress from such resistance by his band is especially understandable when remembering that two members of the group were his own brothers, another a first cousin, and one of the remaining two Beach Boys a close childhood friend. "When they didn't like it, it really killed me inside," Wilson said (*Beautiful Dreamer*). The Wilson brothers grew up in a household of extreme emotional and physical abuse and constant criticism from their father and sometime manager Murry Wilson, and music and the band had always been Brian's escape.

As Wilson indicates in *Beautiful Dreamer*, Mike Love was the most adamant opponent of *Smile*. Arguably the most brilliant baritone voice in rock music history, he was also the least willing to musically experiment, repeatedly imploring Brian to not mess with the group's proven commercial formula. Love disingenuously (yet revealingly) states of Wilson's marginal withdrawal from the Beach Boys upon the band's rejection of *Smile*, "It was like Brian had given up and become withdrawn from everyone, and then we gained a little more control" (Cunningham 84). Band member Bruce Johnston, albeit his similar status as top-notch vocalist and bassist in the group, was a long-time veteran of the surf/beach music exploitation scene in Los Angeles even before joining the Beach Boys, and was, like Love, very aware of the financial risks of diverting from the established path. The "experimental--and hence commercially dangerous--material" (Harrison 45) of *Smile*, according to him, was a dubious proposition at the

time that perhaps could only be fully embraced artistically from the hindsight comfort of ten years more establishment in the industry. As Leaf quotes Johnston in 1978,

'*Smile* probably would have hurt our careers in terms of working and supporting ourselves . . . I think the *Smile* album would have done worse than *Smiley Smile* [its replacement]. It was really good, but it was a little esoteric. There's a little [commercial] bridge you can cross,' and Bruce thinks that *Smile* would have been that bridge for the Beach Boys. 'I think it was better to squeeze it out rather than put it on one album, which we were going to do. Sometimes, I don't think people are ready for something that heavy, but now, when you look back at what's happened in the ten or eleven years since *Smile*, it's not as heavy; it's kind of a prototype of the idea that people can experiment more, even though it was never one album' (119).

The other Wilson brothers were more forthright at the time of *Smile's* abandonment, acknowledging the lost artistic opportunity of *Smile* for the group. Carl Wilson is known to have described *Smile's* replacement, *Smiley Smile*, as "a bunt instead of a grand slam," and as I will discuss momentarily, Dennis Wilson remained steadfast throughout the project as Brian's strongest advocate in prioritizing art over commerce.

Although Brian Wilson doesn't specifically mention it among his reasons for abandoning *Smile* in the *Beautiful Dreamer* documentary, one must consider the impact of the Beach Boys' tenuous relationship with Capitol Records at the time as a contributing factor. Through 1966, Capitol had seen the Beach Boys as a flash-in-the-pan rock group that would soon fade from

popularity, and with an ethos focused on finance over art, they were determined to milk every dime out of the band that they could. This translated into an outrageous three albums per year (plus singles) release schedule and heavy touring, which exhausted Wilson, who, besides his regular duties in the band, wrote and produced all of the group's material. Unable to keep up the manic pace any longer, Wilson succumbed to a nervous breakdown aboard a flight to Houston for a Beach Boys concert in December of 1964. He would soon withdraw from the touring Beach Boys altogether, and was briefly replaced by Wrecking Crew guitarist Glen Campbell, who also testified to Capitol's mercenary treatment of their pop artists. Songwriter Jimmy Webb relates that his colleague Campbell was "equally frustrated by that regime's short-sighted view of profit in the foreground and artistic achievement and lasting worth on the far horizon" (viii). For Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, their struggle with Capitol would only get worse with their move into the baroque pop "art" music of the *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* albums of 1966.

A sustained break from any of the band's prior efforts, the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* album received only negligible support from Capitol. As Beach Boys scholar and L.A. rock historian Domenic Priore indicates,

The powers-that-be took it upon themselves to let the Beach Boys fall out of favour gently by not re-stocking *Pet Sounds* in stores that had sold out of it, sending the first hastily assembled *Best of the Beach Boys* package in its place.

This was sabotage, plain and simple. Record-store owners who tried to reorder *Pet Sounds* couldn't get it without making an extra effort, which occasionally involved making a long-distance call to Vine Street, Hollywood. Two shop owners, from Michigan

and Arizona, did exactly that in order to satisfy rabid Beach Boys clientele in their area. Both wrote isolated letters to *The Dumb Angel Gazette* in 1988, telling the same story. Capitol's attitude, in their words, was, 'Why would you want that?' (*The Story* 59)

Famed Beatles producer George Martin is well aware of the conservativeness of record company politics. Alluding to Wilson's difficulties with Capitol and the other Beach Boys' objections over the new direction of *Pet Sounds*, he states:

Record companies never want to take risks. They want to repeat the formula and good artists don't do that. Good artists look for something new every time and try and build on what they had before. So, you don't listen to record companies and you don't listen to frightened members of the band (*Beautiful Dreamer*).

The situation with the band's next album, the even more radical *Smile*, would only get worse.

By the time *Smile* was substantially underway in the fall of 1966, it became clear to all concerned that Brian Wilson was not about to rush the project to meet anyone's deadline but his own. To pressure him into completing the album by the beginning of the new year, Capitol proceeded with manufacturing hundreds of thousands of album jackets with commissioned artwork for *Smile*, without even knowing the playing sequence of songs slated for the record. They also mailed audio advertisements tracked to the "Good Vibrations" single (which Capitol insisted be on the album for commercial purposes, despite Wilson's objections) to shop merchants underlying their economic priority for the album:

*Smile* is the name of the new Beach Boys album which will be released in January, 1967, and with the happy album cover, the

really happy sounds inside, and the happy in-store display piece, you can't miss. We're sure to sell a million units--in January.

All of the above transpired without any confirmation from Wilson that he was anywhere near completion of *Smile*, and he has since stated that part of his reasoning for abandoning the project was that "I knew I needed at least a year more to work on it. I figured no one would give me a year to complete it." Brian's strongest advocate in the Beach Boys, brother/drummer Dennis Wilson said in the fall of 1966,

We've got afraid to put anything out unless it comes up to a certain standard. We're not just putting out singles to sell thousands and earn money. We're not that sort of group. Money's a deadly thing when you're dealing with anything artistic. And we believe that the music we offer to the public must come first. It has to be something we believe in--so we won't be rushed (Webb 43).

Even Capitol Records own primary rock producer at the time, Nick Venet, the man who originally signed the Beach Boys to the company, has since stated, "Brian was the first guy to do it until it was right. A lot of us would get chicken after four hours and say, 'We better get off that tune.' Brian would hang in there for nine hours no matter what the cost. I used to think he was crazy, but he was right" (Webb 37). This comment is particularly striking considering that by the end of 1966, the Beach Boys had additionally sued Capitol Records for unpaid back royalties (a case they would eventually win), which surely further hampered the album's potential release.

In another unique attempt to explain the Wilson's shelving of *Smile*, Michael Duncan, like Lambert, places Wilson in a literary context:

Brian's abandonment of *Smile* can be seen as a result of the psychic fallout D.H. Lawrence finds in the great novels of Hawthorne and Melville. In Lawrence's mystico-psychological vision, indigenous New World demons exact a deadening poetic justice upon any American cultural effort that seeks to combine the 'spiritual' with the 'white' (283).

This interpretation is particularly compelling considering that, as mentioned above, Brian did indeed frequently refer to the Beach Boys sound as a sort of "white spiritual music." Additionally, much of the theme of *Smile* (especially in the single "Heroes and Villains") is concerned with the unjust plight of Native Americans at the hands of white settlers.

The revisionary history of *Smile*, then, is (like Whitman's *Leaves*) not about the essentialist, cosmic limitations of "romantic gospels." Both works are unconventional, but not without structure or plan. Paul William's description of *Smile* as not having a standard "beginning-middle-and-end shape" might qualify for both works, without any necessary negative overtones attached.

Nevertheless, Lambert is not wrong to bring *Leaves* and *Smile* into the same conversation. There are multiple possibilities for legitimately comparing the two masterworks, and the link I will investigate at this juncture looks not inward to the authors or the functions of the texts themselves. Rather, the comparison I make is with the texts' similar historical relations with their audiences, described by Donald Pease as "adequate response" (154).

Admittedly, Van Nostrand's exotic-sounding "romantic gospel" ostensibly would appear much more appropriate for works as rich, full and diverse as *Leaves* and *Smile* than the droll term "adequate response" of Pease. After all, *Leaves* was once known as the New American Bible

and *Smile* has been referred to as an American Gothic. In truth, however, "adequate response," in depicting the fusion of artist and audience into one creative whole, is ultimately far stronger in meaning. It depends on no essentialist cosmology as its foundation, and implies a work that is indeed connecting and reciprocating with its audience.

We might accurately use the following description by Pease to define his term "adequate response":

Whitman invented for himself a malleable position within what he called an everchanging 'colloquy' with his readers. Reducible neither to self nor to other and not exactly the equivalent of intersubjectivity, what we might call Whitman's intersubject resulted in a never ending conversation (158).

Furthermore, Pease states that "In declaring 'The United States are themselves the greatest poem,' Whitman associated the cultivation of adequate responsiveness to his poetry with a political education in how to actualize the nation's founding terms" (154). In other words, an "adequate response" by the audience of *Leaves*, from Whitman's perspective, is not only direct participation in his poetry but in the democracy of the United States. Whitman demanded such participation from his readers, as Mary Webber Balázs indicates in her dissertation on the poet and philosopher William James:

The form which Whitman and James chose reflected their concepts of the world and the self. Their work is not inclusive and architectonic. Art and philosophy are 'open-ended' activities, and the reader or listening audience has his part to do. Whitman would

inspirit his audience and demanded that the reader himself 'poetize'  
(764A).

Balázs' above characterization, incidentally, almost single-handedly refutes Van Nostrand's notion of the downfall of *Leaves*, while simultaneously integrating the "adequate response" of the audience element that I highlight in this paper.

Very quickly in *Leaves*, Whitman blurs the line between writer and reader, and Pease thereby refers to "Whitman's unprecedented claim for the timeliness of his poems, which he often described uncannily not merely as his own past taking the place of his readers' present but of his readers' future becoming present during Whitman's activity of writing" (169).

Specifically, Folsom points to the poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," in which "The daily commute suggested the passage from life to death to life again and suggested too the passage from poet to reader to poet via the vehicle of the poem" (3). Raphael C. Allison, also writing about Whitman and James, points to the poem "Song of the Broad-Axe" where

. . . the reader is put into the active position of having to make a syntactical decision. This is an essential part of Whitman's meliorist aesthetic: it inculcates a sense of real participation in the reader and allows him or her to actually enter the poem, refashion the words, and see the language as living and subject to change; it also helps to abolish those 'conventional distinctions,' like that between writer and reader, that James would like to eradicate in the service of community life (22-3).

Despite the heavy demands and expectations of "adequate response" placed on the reader by Whitman, for his part, he was more than ready to reciprocate.

Whitman employed his prior life experiences to inform *Leaves* and to develop a keen sense of audience: "The theater had taught him to understand writing as a performance before an audience learning how to respond. From the printer Whitman had discovered that words on the page should be construed as if as changeable as the readers to whom they were addressed . . ." (Pease 152). Folsom indicates how Whitman's roles ranged from poet, publisher, and distributor, and also reader/consumer. Upon *Leaves* initial publication, in an effort "to control its reception," Whitman falsified sales reports of the first edition, claiming it had sold out when in fact it sold quite poorly (Folsom 12). It is also known that Whitman wrote anonymous newspaper reviews of *Leaves*, some positive and some negative, to increase its notoriety and make it newsworthy.

For Whitman, "adequate response" was a bold expectation of his audience, but one that would be enriched by his reciprocity when accepted. He was the people's poet, and throughout the nine editions of *Leaves* published during his lifetime, "he expected each generation to reinvent him out of its own needs" (Pease 170). It is possible that no author since Samuel Richardson, one hundred years prior to Whitman, had such a strong bond with his audience, as well as revised so incessantly. The fourth edition of his novel *Pamela* (probably the first literary best-seller) came out less than one year after the first, and Richardson cultivated an enthusiastically prolific correspondence with his audience that even affected his novels' literary plots.

If the reciprocal relationship of "adequate response" is what Walt Whitman demanded from the *Leaves of Grass* audience, it is also what Brian Wilson spent thirty-five years trying to avoid with the growing legions of *Smile* fans. Routinely refusing to even discuss the album, Wilson states in *Beautiful Dreamer*, "I felt personally beaten up by it that I didn't complete it. I had a nervous breakdown." In their book *Art & Fear*, David Bayles and Ted Orland state,

Wanting to be understood is a basic need--an affirmation of the humanity you share with everyone around you. The risk is fearsome: in making your real work, you hand the audience the power to deny the understanding you seek; you hand them the power to say, 'you're not like us; you're weird; you're crazy' (39).

Even now that the largest portion of Wilson's demons have since been exorcised (or are at least kept at bay), the bitter memories of *Smile's* initial rejection still sting. On Wilson's 2008 album, *That Lucky Old Sun*, his collaborator Scott Bennett pens lyrics with the former Beach Boy in mind: "When I was 25 I turned out the light 'cos I couldn't handle the glare in my tired eyes." Even after *Smile's* initial abandonment, however, the material was never destined to remain hidden for long.

While a generous portion of *Smile* was remade in drastically altered form for the under-produced *Smiley Smile* album of 1967, actual original *Smile* session tracks would resurface (over Wilson's objections) on two subsequent Beach Boys albums over the next four years (*20/20* in 1969 and *Surf's Up* in 1971) when the band was short of material due to Wilson's semi-withdrawal from the group. Carl Wilson promised to deliver the original *Smile* in 1970 to the band's new record label, Warner Brothers, but Brian refused and the band was fined \$50,000 by the label. Apparently, from the *Smile* composer's point of view, the album's moment had passed, the band had rejected it, and the damage was done. In 1993, the Beach Boys' *Good Vibrations* boxset offered a healthy share of the original *Smile* recordings, but again, vast amounts of material were left in the vaults.

During the vast interim between 1971 and 1993, and continuing to the present day, the *Smile* mythology has only grown en masse and contributed to its status as rock music's great lost

masterpiece. Even with the 2004 release of *Brian Wilson Presents Smile*, fans of the original Beach Boys' *Smile* have had to resort to illicit means of obtaining and celebrating the album: "The mid-'70s marked the period when Beach Boys [*Smile*] bootlegs began to appear--which is to say that the fans took matters into their own hands and released what they thought was the better music" (Chidester 41). Domenic Priore's 1995 *Smile* encyclopedia offers the most comprehensive history of *Smile* bootlegs and cites the Vigotone 2-cd *Smile* as being likely the best (274-76), while bootleg scholar Clinton Heylin points to the considerable influence of a 1989 Japanese *Smile* bootleg (336). Temporarily stealing (or rescuing, depending upon one's point of view) and duplicating the *Smile* material for distribution on the bootleg circuit has given renewed life to the album when it has become clear that to do otherwise will only ensure its remaining buried in the Capitol tape vault mausoleum.

With *Smile's* audience thereby not only consuming the music but literally taking over its means of production, it seems safe to say the standard for "adequate response" has been met. Similar to the role exchanges between artist and audience with Whitman's *Leaves*, *Smile* differs only in that the audience and not the artist first instigated its new active role, assuming what Roland Barthes describes as a "writerly" relationship to the text, or in this case, album (Leitch 1459). As Jeremy Glogan states,

Since the time that *Smile* was abandoned in May 1967 it has been re-materialising in myriad forms. The eighty-eight recording sessions that took place between 9 April 1966 and 18 May 1967 have given rise to an abundance of high quality bootlegs which coexist alongside the occasional appearances of *Smile* tracks on subsequent official Beach Boys releases. This, fuelled by

spiralling conjecture over the ensuing decades, has resulted in *Smile's* potential ruins being rebuilt over and over. Many of the constituent parts are on offer, yet there is no precise blueprint, which means that each version is different.

In effect the situation has placed fans in the role of what art theorist Nicolas Bourriard calls 'post-producers' of culture, opposed to passive consumers. A passing comment was as much *Smile* as one of the 400,000 record sleeves, sporting Frank Holmes' 'smile shop' illustration, which were printed up ready for imminent release in December 1966; the way the word SMiLE is illustrated on the cover with lower case 'i' was as much *Smile* as the numerous compilation mixes put together by fans speculating as to how the fragments of songs and lyrics could fit together. DJ 'Mic Luv', one of those who created a bootleg *Smile* compilation, substantiates this notion of infinite possibility: 'Ultimately, Brian's 'failure' to complete *Smile* has saved it. Right now *Smile* is whatever you want it to be . . .' (69).

Still, there remain those who question whether "unofficially" resurrecting *Smile* is the right thing to do.

Larry Starr asks, "Aren't we ultimately usurping the role of the composer if we treat this material with such license? And what happens to the notion of 'authenticity' if we play with the *Smile* music in such a free-ranging and unabashed manner (52)? In answer to his first question, the bootlegging audience of *Smile* is indeed usurping the role of producer (rather than composer)

but if the music is to survive, what is the alternative? As Brian Wilson's own band leader/"musical secretary" (and Wondermint) Darian Sahanaja indicates, "It's great music that deserves to be heard" (Greenwald). As for the "authenticity" issue, Walter Benjamin demonstrates in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that overcoming one's insistence on authenticity can actually lead to a more democratic and enlightening experience of the work for all:

Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.

Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room" (20).

Additionally, music bootlegging is arguably much less insidious than Starr implies.

Bootleg buyers rarely, maybe never, buy boots instead of authorized product. They buy them in addition to the official releases, then they sit around comparing the untouched, un-overdubbed, unofficial release with the wartless wonder handed down from on high, and thank the Lord that someone out there is willing to make the music available in its unadulterated form (Thompson 14).

In fact, many bootleggers today operate strictly via exchange economics, only intended to fill out personal collections and with no money ever changing hands. Far from trying to deprive artists

of their earned financial reward for creating their work, these are the most dedicated and educated fans that study and embrace a work's development and revision, and who comprise the very backbone of the notion of audiences' "adequate response."

In the case of *Smile*, it is highly unlikely the album would have ever again seen the light of day (in any form) had it not been for the passion and tenacity of its audience. Co-lyricist Van Dyke Parks, who has since openly regretted his inability to stand by Wilson during the 1967 collapse of *Smile (Beautiful Dreamer)*, states of the 2004 *Brian Wilson Presents Smile*,

It feels so good to me, because I realized the emergence of *Smile* is because so many people took an interest in it and finally expressed to Brian what his work means to them. I think that that's finally what moved him to come around and embrace it. I think it is due to the effort, understanding, patience and enthusiasm of a lot of people (Beard 9).

For the brilliance of Wilson's own version of the album, it is not the Beach Boys, and this reality makes the efforts of the bootlegging audience of the original *Smile* even more vital.

Lambert clarifies the issues involved in distinguishing between the original Beach Boys *Smile* album and Wilson's solo version 38 years later:

Fans have been understandably eager to embrace this new *Smile* as if it were a long-lost monument, finally unearthed and restored by expert musical archeologists, but let's be clear about what it is. If *Smile* was abandoned in an 'unfinished' state all those years ago, then no amount of restoration is going to give it an artistic wholeness that it didn't originally have. Its newly acquired

completeness can only result from new creative acts and decisions almost forty years later. We can't assume that the *Smile* of 2004 is a representation of the album as it would have sounded if Brian had gone on to finish it in 1967 and 1968. It's the *Smile* that could have been, not the *Smile* that would have been. Let's appreciate it for the craftsmanship that went into the act of completing it, and for the masterful performance of some remarkable music by Brian and his band. Above all, let's seize the opportunity to celebrate the creative mind at the center of it all (286).

Even Sahanaja concedes of the original Beach Boys *Smile* recordings, "Those guys had a very, very special blend, and it was that sibling blend, and it was magic--those guys were magic when they sang together. You can say what you want to about Mike Love, but he sang great in that blend" (Greenwald). Not to be lost in the equation is the excellence of the Wrecking Crew instrumentation on the original album, perhaps not equaled today by the best musicianship pop music has to offer, seen in Wilson's and Paul McCartney's own touring bands.

To be sure, there is still an audience hopeful for a dignified, official release of the original *Smile*, but bootleggers remain steadfast as the album's caretakers in its absence. Priore stated in the early 90s:

It remains extremely important that future generations of kids are able to enjoy the music created for *Smile*. Without common access to the music, the future of pop is denied a vital resource. Attempts by Carl Wilson in 1972, bootlegs in the '80s and the recent indulgent whirl into the archive to produce *Good Vibrations: 30*

*Years of the Beach Boys* (commonly known as 'the box set') continue to tease, prick and frustrate the listener with only glimpses at *Smile's* big picture. This is not good enough; Everybody wants the whole thing! There is no doubt of this music's quality, and its very existence. Yet continual denial has pushed fans, year after year, into a perverse scramble to discover the music (*Look!* 286).

"A perverse scramble" is a good way to describe the illicit, boundary-crossing efforts of *Smile's* audience that have enacted the notion of "adequate response" and then some. While the "common access" to the original *Smile* recordings that Priore describes above will likely never be realized without an official release, the availability of the unofficial bootleg versions is indeed of vital importance, especially since it is highly unlikely any official release will occur at least during Wilson's lifetime.

And in all fairness to Wilson, why should he agree to release it? Especially when considering that the Beach Boys rejected *Smile* when it mattered most, sending Wilson into years of emotional and psychological distress, why should he now agree to release the original to compete with his own solo version? Additionally, there is no guarantee the music industry would, even now, really "get" *Smile*; consider that Wilson's solo version of the most sophisticated vocal record in pop music history was only awarded a Grammy for "Best Instrumental," no less for the song "Mrs. O'Leary's Cow"-- the mythical "Fire" tapes that Wilson himself points to as having been partially responsible for driving him to paranoia in 1966-67 and to initially shelving the album. And in some ways, the "adequate response" audience relationship insisted upon by Whitman and avoided by Wilson (yet nevertheless enacted by *Smile's* fans) has

ensured a sort of direct link from artist to audience that circumvents official channels like academia or the music industry in the first place.

In sum, Lambert's conjoining of Whitman and Wilson is not fundamentally misguided, if only on the principle grounds of their mutually shared realization of their audiences' "adequate response" that I have discussed in this paper. Like comparisons can also be seen in Whitman's organization of *Leaves* in poetic "clusters," similar to Wilson's piece-meal assembling of *Smile's* songs via the recording of individual musical "modules." In each case, the components were revised and repeatedly reorganized until the artists found the arrangements and sequences they desired. Additionally, the core Americana aspect of *Leaves* is just as prevalent in *Smile*, which embraces a nineteenth-century aesthetic principally through Van Dyke Park's lyrical contribution (Wilson, incidentally, also pursued this aesthetic in a spoken word album entitled *A World of Peace Must Come* with poet Stephen Kalinich, recorded from 1965-69 in Wilson's home studio and including such Whitmanesque songs as "America, I Know You" and "Leaves of Grass").

Last, but certainly not least, (as I discuss in my master's degree thesis) both Whitman and Wilson speak to and for the societal outcasts of the world in *Leaves* and *Smile*, respectively. In "Song of Myself," Whitman presents himself as the spokesperson of the democratic multitudes that speak through him as "many long dumb voices" (46), and variously refers to the "dumb beautiful ministers" of nature in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (140) and the poem of the same name (553) to illustrate the central importance of nature in his transcendental, atomistic philosophy. As Pease indicates more holistically, "Whitman's poems do not propose themselves to be images or a precise rendition of emotions but the confluence of 'dumb voices'" (159).

In Wilson's case, the initial title of the *Smile* album was in fact *Dumb Angel*, named after Dennis Wilson (Webb 39), Brian's closest ally in the Beach Boys and himself an outcast not only

in the larger, countercultural sense but also in his own band. Although the switch to *Smile* was made to achieve a happier, more uplifting title, *Dumb Angel* (similarly to Whitman's language) reflects a reaching out to those left outside the established cultural's periphery, and even the new "Smile Shoppe" storefront artwork for *Smile's* album cover (illustrated by artist Frank Holmes) reflects an increasingly commercialized American society where not only art but even emotions are for sale. Furthermore, with knowledge of the turmoil behind the album's history, the smiles on display are especially thinly veiled.

Beyond the reasons I have already given in this paper, Lambert's reliance on Van Nostrand's criticism of the essentialist impossibility of the "romantic gospel" also rings hollow in that the latter's creation of a new sub-genre arguably imbues his perspective as being just as essentialist as the works he accuses. As Rorty indicates,

If, following Latour's and Descombes' suggestions, we were to start writing narratives of overlapping campaigns and careers which were not broken up into chapters with titles like 'The Enlightenment,' 'Romanticism,' 'Literary Modernism,' or 'Late Capitalism,' we would lose dramatic intensity. But we might help immunize ourselves against the passion of the infinite. If we dropped reference to movements, we could settle for telling a story about how the human beings in the neighborhood of the North Atlantic made their futures different from their pasts at a constantly accelerating pace. We could still, like Hegel and Acton, tell this story as a story of increasing freedom. But we could drop, along with any sense of inevitable progress, any sense of immanent

teleology. We could drop any attempt to capitalize History, to view it as something as big and strong as Nature or God (123).

Van Nostrand's (and by extension, Lambert's) addition of another frame of reference can accordingly be seen to qualify as more ahistorical and essentialist than otherwise. As one history scholar comments to another in Salman Rushdie's 1999 novel on counterculture and rock music, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, "The only people who see the whole picture . . . Are the ones who step out of the frame" (43). Arguably, the creation of a new frame by Van Nostrand is even more ahistorical and essentialist than the supposed fulfillment of such by *Leaves* that serves as the basis for his criticism of masterwork.

On a more holistic level, Lambert's condemnation of the ongoing revisionary processes and "incompleteness" of *Leaves* and *Smile* seems closed-minded for reasons I have already given. "Incomplete" and "imperfect" are not synonymous, a sentiment perhaps best articulated in the famous da Vinci quote, "Art is never finished, only abandoned." In today's culture of short attention spans and immediate gratification, however, there is less patience than ever for works not tidily uniform and packaged for consumption, and perceived "imperfections" are almost unforgivable. Particularly in the digital age of computer-driven music and photography where the slightest "blemish" can be "corrected," the result is often a very clinical, less interesting artistic product. It wasn't always this way; in the 1960's Beatles camp, their modus operandi was said to celebrate "mistakes" both live and in the recording process. Lennon and Harrison are known to have regularly secretly detuned McCartney's bass before performances, and in the studio, the story has it that oftentimes when a Beatle would flub his vocal part, the other three would die laughing and not only disallow a corrective re-take, but make the "perpetrator" in fact

repeat the error in the doubling process. Even today there remain artists of this refreshing mindset. As R.E.M. vocalist Michael Stipe relates,

The other day we were going over a song at soundcheck and I was like, 'Let me guess, my pitch is a little bit off in the chorus,' and our sound guy is like, 'Yes,' and I'm, 'Well I've hit that wrong note for almost a quarter of a century now. And on a great night . . . It's imperfection is its perfection" (Simmons 64).

For this writer, "imperfections" can actually contribute to a masterpiece's greatness. Too heavy a hand in "photoshopping" "blemishes" isn't addition by subtraction; it is just subtraction that lessens the character of a work and its "human-ness."

In any case, as I have demonstrated, joint consideration of *Leaves* and *Smile* need not depend upon the erroneous and essentialist frame of "romantic gospel." Both works continue to live and grow in similar ways that are best understood in Pease's artist and audience bridging notion of "adequate response." In the Preface to their 1997 book *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, John Covach and Graeme M. Boone illustrate how such a democratic, border-crossing arrangement can not only glorify the work in question, but lead to new works and meanings as well:

In the summer of 1974, the rock critic Lester Bangs was invited to type a review of a J. Geils Band concert onstage as part of the band's show. Jumping at the chance to jam with a favorite band and, at the same time, to storm the ultimate barrier between music and meaning, Bangs set up his typewriter next to the musicians as if it were another instrument. As he typed away in rhythmic and

mental counterpoint to the music, he became more excited and frustrated until, at the song's climax, he smashed the table and finally stomped the typewriter itself in a fit of ecstatic rage (v).

Covach and Boone go on to deconstruct and signify the event:

Is it a violation of his experience that, following his J. Geils bacchanal, he should have sat himself down again, presumably at another typewriter, to write a story, and a parable, of it? It is that second act of writing, not the first, that brought his story into existence for us, the public who knows him only through reading him. His personal rock apocalypse was, after all, only a passing delirium whose darkneses proved compatible with, even essential to, his goals and responsibilities as a critic and a person (vi).

Although this literal fusion of artist and audience at first fell apart, as the authors describe, Bangs went on, in his own mode of expression, to commemorate the artistic experience and to create and contribute to an artistic dialogue. That is the epitomy of the "adequate response" relationship that Whitman demanded of the readers of *Leaves* and that has likewise been enacted by the bootleggers of Wilson, Parks, and the Beach Boys' *Smile*.

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Track 23 On. Leaves of Grass. View Tracklist. Leaves of Grass (To You). Walt Whitman. View All Credits. 1. 2. Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me? And why should I not speak to you? About. Leaves of Grass (1855).  
Leaves of Grass (Miracles). 211. Sparkles from the Wheel. 212. To a Pupil. Leaves of Grass study guide contains a biography of Walt Whitman, literature essays, a complete e-text, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis.  
Whitman recalls a scene in which a child came to him with a handful of grass and asked him what it was. Whitman has no answer for the child. The grass is "the flag of my disposition" and it is the "handkerchief of the Lord". It is also the child or a symbol for all of humanity. Whitman sees the grass sprouting from the chests of young men, the heads of old women, and the beards of old men. He remembers all those that have died and recalls that each sprout of grass is a memorial to those that have come before. Whitman reflects that "to die is different from what any one supposed, and / luckie This paper proposes to argue how Walt Whitman's poetic program i.e. his Leaves of Grass brings the reader and the poet face to face. The argument is built up in the following order:- I : Walt Whitman, the Real Cosmos. II : "Closer Yet I Approach You" : Whitman's Understanding of the Role of the Poet. III : "What Is It Then Between Us?" The Poet-Reader Relationship IV : "We Understand or Do We Not? By intensifying the emphasis on individuality and personality, Whitman overcomes the limitations of his vastness by allowing for intimate contact with a future reader. I shall continue to argue that