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FOUR | Summer of ’64

KEIR KEIGHTLEY

A sociologist might say I am trying to generate a feeling of social superiority.

—Brian Wilson, liner notes to All Summer Long (1964)

BRIAN WILSON’S STATUS as one of the architects of rock has rested on arguments about his superior musical achievements—his compositional innovations, his brilliance as an arranger, his groundbreaking use of the studio, the haunting beauty of his falsetto. This longer-germinating view of Brian has finally—and justly—propelled him to the front ranks of a rock canon. Indeed, this volume itself attests to this consecration as a rock composer. But classifying him as a rock composer poses some historical problems.

There was no rock music culture in 1964. Certainly we can identify many of the elements (sounds, attitudes, values) that would coalesce to form a rock culture by around 1966–67. But like the components of an as-yet-unassembled hi-fi kit—strewn across a suburban basement floor, waiting to be wired together and turned up to “10”—rock was more promise than reality in 1964. Teen pop, on the other hand, was a smoothly humming machine reaching maximum velocity, and Brian Wilson was among those driving its dominance. Circa 1964, the year of the Beach Boys’ first number-one single, first number-one LP, and first million-seller, the work of Brian Wilson was rightly classified as teen pop, as the front cover of their live LP, Beach Boys Concert (recorded August 1964), instructs us: “File Under: Beach Boys • Teen • Best Sellers.”
However, teen pop, especially as it became dominant around 1959–63, the so-called in-between years (Sten 1978) that separated Elvis and the Beatles, occupies a problematic place in rock culture, largely because of the enduring classificatory power of the notorious rock-versus-pop binary. In this essay, I explore Brian Wilson’s implication in this opposition by focusing on his work circa 1964, particularly though not exclusively the album *All Summer Long*. In so doing, I want to revisit his place in the subsequent rise of rock culture as well as interrogate long-standing views of rock history and ideology. This will require recovering and resituating his role in the world of teen pop and its mass-mediated, mainstream, majority culture.

The liner notes for *All Summer Long* attributed to Brian address frequent inquiries about how he comes up with his song “ideas” (figure 4.1). He claims his “inspirations” are the “feelings” associated with common teen experiences (romance, school, “winning and losing in sports”). But he then makes an odd remark: “A sociologist might say I am trying to generate a feeling of social superiority.” This seeming non sequitur is followed immediately by a more straightforward assertion: “I live with my piano and I love to make records that my friends like to hear.” Here Brian’s explicit linkage of “social superiority” and a “love” of creativity in an implicitly Romantic discourse (“feelings,” “inspirations”) points toward key tenets of an emergent rock community (Frith 2007, 31ff.): the amateur (“love”) who lives and breathes music (“I live with my piano”) is inspired by everyday experiences (school, sports) to create sound recordings that are then implicated in the creation and reproduction of group identity (“my friends”)—but implicated also in the creation and reproduction of hierarchy and exclusion, so that some music (rock) may then be classified as “superior” to others (pop). Just as this volume of popular music studies research you are reading makes an implicit claim that Brian Wilson is more worthy than other popular artists who do not receive such scholarly attention, so too was the rise of rock culture driven by assertions about the “superiority” of this music over others. At some point, such distinctions were codified as the “rock-versus-pop binary.” And exactly how and where Brian Wilson’s work was—and is and ought to be—classified therein remain productive questions, particularly if we wish to explore and understand the stakes of a popular music culture
that simultaneously exhibits populist, capitalist, and elitist impulses. Acknowledging these various fault lines running through rock can also tell us something about the broader social, economic, and historical currents of modernity.

A Sociologist Might Say . . .

As I have argued elsewhere, the rock-versus-pop binary is a complex (and at times, contradictory) set of claims about popular musical value that have proven surprisingly resilient and yet historically underexamined (Keightley 2001, 2011). While it is clear that rock music culture was founded on taste distinctions made within mainstream music in the 1960s, precisely how those distinctions were made—and made to stick—remains somewhat obscure. One of the foundational texts of popular music studies from 1950, sociologist David Riesman’s “Listening to Popular Music,” offers some clues and thus merits some exposition. Writing well before the mid-1960s advent of rock culture, and several years prior to the emergence of rock ’n’ roll, Riesman sketches out a sociology of popular music that distinguishes between two kinds of listener: what he calls the “majority listener” and the “minority listener.” Riesman appears more interested in, and perhaps sympathetic to, the latter category, whose features presage those of the rock fan: minority listeners to popular music are “aware” (6), “active listeners” (9), most interested in “arrangement
or technical virtuosity,” insisting upon “rigorous standards of judgment and taste” (10), informed by knowledge gleaned from “trade journals” (9). They prefer “uncommercialized, unadvertised small bands rather than name bands,” and express “a profound resentment of the commercialization of radio and musicians” (10). Minority listeners “resist certain conventional stereotypes” by “making a differential selection from what the adult media already provide” (8). Thus minority listeners constitute for Riesman a sort of politically unconscious “youth movement” (8), characterized by “dissident attitudes” (10) and “rebelliousness” (9) expressed through a taste for “hot jazz.” It is noteworthy that they tend to be “highly articulate” men—according to Riesman, there are “very few hot jazz girls” (12), and moreover, “as the subordinate group with fewer other outlets, girls can less afford even a conventionalized resistance” (9). In Riesman’s classification, majority listeners are uncritical female conformists with “undiscriminating tastes” who are “seldom even interested in the techniques of their exploitation or its extent” (8)—as good a capsule definition of the rock snob’s stereotype of a pop fan as you will find (see also Frith and McRobbie 1978; Coates 1997).

Riesman’s sociology of popular music approaches listeners in terms of binary classifications: “hot jazz” versus “name bands,” marginal artists versus mainstream stars, and, most significantly, college-age men versus teenaged girls. Gender is arguably the primal form of classification, the first social labeling (“It’s a boy!”), and a divide that grows into a lifetime of possibilities and proscriptions. For the sociologist Riesman, minority listeners invest in popular music culture as a forum for acquiring and displaying what songwriter Brian Wilson would later call “social superiority.” Thus the gendering of the minority/majority opposition shows how musical superiority is underpinned by, and contributes to, the maintenance of gendered power structures, despite the disingenuous labeling of the socially more powerful contingent as the “minority.”

There is a further implication in the classification, “majority.” As the reference to “commercialized” “name bands” suggests, mass-media popularity defines majority popular music culture. Riesman’s minority/majority opposition suggests a difference in audience sizes that we might perhaps transcribe as niche/mainstream and map onto an older hierarchy that valued the rare or obscure or expensive over the plentiful or common or cheap. So Brian Wilson’s assertion of interest in “social superiority” on the back of a best-selling teen pop LP implicitly reconfigures these relationships, since he is proposing to “generate” something in a majority context that historically had been an exclusive property of
the minority. The later 1960s rise of rock will involve scalar shifts that jumbled the historical relations between cultural hierarchy and audience size. Rock emerged as a mainstream that saw itself as a margin, a majority that identified with minorities, a dominant culture that felt subcultural. This is why I have called it “subdominant culture” (Keightley 2001), and why Robert Christgau (1970) addressed rock’s paradoxes by classifying it as “semipopular music.”

Returning to 1964, we find the songwriter offering the sociologist’s majority listeners a set of songs that he hopes will “generate a feeling” of superior, minority taste—a historically innovative claim. Here we glimpse a nascent rock ideology as it is taking shape inside the very teen pop mainstream that rock will soon problematize and disavow.

So we might then ask, why did it take so long to fully recognize the groundbreaking aspects of Brian’s work? The answer perhaps lies in what C. Wright Mills once called “the sociological imagination.” For minority listeners, as for rock fans, the social mapping functions of popular music are particularly crucial—popular music, its stars, genres, and values, offer images of the social world, of social groups and social others, as Riesman made clear in 1950:

> When [the teenager] listens to music, even if no one else is around, he listens in the context of imaginary “others”—his listening is indeed often an effort to connect with them. . . . It is the pressure of conformity with the group that invites and compels the individual to have recourse to the media both in order to learn from them what the group expects and to identify with the group by sharing a common focus for attention and talk. (Riesman 1950, 10)

Here yet another historical shift needs to be acknowledged in qualifying Riesman’s important account. As noted above, Riesman understands “the adult media” (8) to be the source of the “exploitation” and “commercialization” of popular music. The rise of rock ’n’ roll, but especially the expansion of “teen music” in the in-between years (1959–63), saw ever-younger professionals entering the music industry during a period popularly understood to witness a growing “generation gap.” Brian Wilson (born in 1942) was nineteen years old when he made his first single, and turned twenty-two during the summer of 1964 (his band at this time contained two teenagers: Dennis, nineteen, and Carl, seventeen). The songs of teen life written and sung by the Beach Boys are undeniably the work of successful media professionals and may contain strong elements
of fantasy, but they are also being created and performed by a group made up of teenagers and other members only a few years removed from adolescence. As lyricist Roger Christian told *Life* magazine in 1964, Brian Wilson’s forte is his “grasp of the teenage mind” (quoted in Alexander 1964, 33). Riesman’s claim for music’s important role in both grasping and shaping social relations reminds us that the “feeling of social superiority” the songwriter hopes to communicate to his listeners likewise involved an admixture of documentary and fantasy elements.

Brian Wilson’s assertion of “social superiority” needs also to be considered in light of Paul Williams’s 1968 comment about the role of “class prejudice” in neglect of the Beach Boys’ work. In one of the earliest defenses of the Beach Boys by a rock critic, they are characterized as “a group that class prejudice prevents many of us from appreciating.”

Williams is not simply referring to social class, however. Like Riesman, he is interested in how classifications of music and listeners shape, and are shaped by, our senses of ourselves and of the social world. Writing as one of the founders of rock criticism, Williams had previously sketched out a growing divide within the mainstream music market of the late 1960s, contrasting a teenybop, transistor-AM-radio-listening segment against an older, more serious, rock-LP-listening segment—thereby articulating an emergent rock-versus-pop dichotomy. It’s important to note here that Williams explicitly marks the pop fans in terms of gender and generation (“housewives” and “subteens”; Williams 1967, 23) yet leaves the rock fans unmarked—suggesting that they are white, male, college students like the author himself. But unlike many critics at the time, Williams immediately turns around and problematizes this foundational division, expressing concern about what is being lost as a result of the bifurcation: these classifications may help constitute rock culture, but they also may prevent rock fans from appreciating what he considers to be great music, such as that of Brian Wilson.

So, despite the shifting positions—Wilson’s 1964 “feeling of social superiority” will be in 1968 employed and enjoyed by others who look down on his music—all claim value by making complex links between music and society. The anti–Beach Boys position Williams criticizes is not only a rocker’s knee-jerk disdain for pop, a classificatory “prejudice” that results in a kind of aesthetic deafness. Equally importantly, it is a classification and rejection of imagined social others. Where Riesman’s majority listener experiences a kind of musical belonging to a desired social group, in Williams the distaste for the Beach Boys involves an imaginary distancing from the class of listeners who do indeed enjoy the Beach
Boys’ music—and this distancing from Wilson’s presumed pop serves to reinforce the in-group identity of the rock listener. Again, the categories of “rock” and “pop” are not simply musical descriptions but judgments evaluating the presumed links between musics and audiences. Acts of classification animate all of these discussions, and as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, classification struggles shape much more than aesthetic debate. For Bourdieu, taste is a crucial dimension of social stratification: aesthetic distinctions (this is ugly, this is beautiful) contribute to the complex maintenance and reproduction of social divisions, such as social class (Bourdieu 1984). In Williams’s argument, class-as-classification can simultaneously render one deaf to beauty while working to divide audiences. (This division of the popular music audience is of great concern to the populist Williams.) In the newborn rock culture of 1967–68, the Beach Boys tended to be classified as pop, as old-fashioned, as out of touch, and as thus unworthy of the authentic rock fan’s attention. But whatever shunning they experienced at the hands of rock snobs, this was also tied to the band’s image as representatives of a white, suburban, majority culture that, by 1968, was widely understood to represent more than an aesthetic problem.

The use of music to draw lines of social division is long-standing, seen perhaps most spectacularly in the so-called classical/popular divide of the late nineteenth century, with its ties to the historical struggle between the forces of democracy and plutocracy, between the many and the few (Levine 1988; Van Der Merwe 1992, 18ff.). Sociological accounts approach popular music as involving a series of position-takings in social space, wherein liking (“My friends like to hear . . .”) contributes both to group solidarity and to social division and, thereby, to a potential “feeling of social superiority.” The long-standing and widespread perception of the Beach Boys as privileged, suburban whites who sound like members of a college fraternity is particularly germane here. Recall the band’s origin myth and its nexus of cash, class, and parental permissiveness: they supposedly started their band by renting instruments with grocery money left behind by a vacationing Murry and Audree.8 One of the ways rock asserted its social difference (and cultural superiority) was by affiliating with the musical practices of social inferiors—with marginalized groups whose parents tended not to provide financial support for a fledgling rock band. Rock’s symbolic affiliations—with minorities, outsiders, underdogs, underclasses—here stand in contrast to the Beach Boys’ celebrations of membership in the majority. Indeed, the subtle racial anxiety sometimes provoked by their frat-boy harmonies is, unsurprisingly, tied
to the history of the racial majority’s treatment of racial minorities in the United States. Thus those who hear excessive sonic whiteness in the band’s massive pop success presume the Beach Boys to be antithetical to the interests of minority cultures, real or fantasized—whether to the faux underground of rock or to members of actual economic underclasses. This pushed them beyond the ken of rock cognoscenti in the 1960s, despite ample evidence of their role in the formation of rock culture.

Here we need to consider the relatively rapid transformation of the majority/teen pop mainstream into the rock mainstream in the space of a few years. Rock culture came into existence precisely as majority culture, inside the mainstream, fully mediated, industrialized, and best-selling—even as it questioned or misrecognized or disavowed these aspects, even as it pretended to minority listening protocols in asserting its self-proclaimed superior taste. If we take the Beatles as a definitive rock act, then it says everything that they were always already “mainstream” in the United States. Rock’s later infusions by subcultural or crossover musics should not mislead us into thinking that rock arose in such fashion. Rock was actually a mutation of teen pop. However, this mutation not only refused to acknowledge its most immediate relative—rock aggressively classified teen pop as its antithesis. This negative definition (rock is the opposite of pop) also helped obscure rock’s status as the new majority music by circa 1967–68.9 Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, however, remained marked by their prominence in the earlier majority music, and this contributed to their odd status in a newborn rock culture. In the following sections, I trace out several aspects of Brian Wilson’s deep implication in the majority culture of teen pop. From there I shift to a discussion of some of his groundbreaking work circa 1964 and how it might have “generate[d] a feeling of social superiority,” one appropriate to those in the avant-garde of teen pop just before it becomes rock (and before rock itself becomes the new majority culture).

Superiority

Consider the cover of Shut Down, Volume 2, released in the spring of 1964 and remaining on Billboard’s “Top LPs” chart all summer long: standing next to their custom machines, sporting perfect hair, perfect teeth, perfect harmonies, the band exudes affluence, confidence, solidarity—and perhaps even superiority. In colloquial terms they are “winners”—at racing, at music, at life. They represent the fantasy car club many longed to join, even as such a club necessarily rejected those who couldn’t af-
ford the Stingray or XKE included in the band’s earlier “Our Car Club” (1963)—a club whose stated goals were to “show some class and style” and “wipe out the other clubs.” The matching car-club windbreakers adorning the cover of Shut Down, Volume 2 recall the famous red one worn by fellow hot-rodder James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause (1955). Most commentators emphasize that star’s outsider status and the film’s epoch-making representations of the postwar generation gap that so crucially contributed to the taste politics of rock (cf. Doherty 1988; Keightley 2001). Yet for a teenaged Geoffrey O’Brien (2004, 234), more than anything else Rebel depicted Southern California class privilege, a moving image of the world the Beach Boys would embody musically.

Minimizing the rebellious, conflictual aspects of the film, O’Brien contends it was less generation gap than generational privilege that Rebel Without a Cause celebrated. In O’Brien’s reading, then, Brian Wilson rendered into music the remarkable affluence and freedom of the white, suburban, Los Angeles teenagers portrayed in the film. Rebel’s Cinemascoped teeth and hair and hot rods thus return in recorded form via the early hits of the Beach Boys, in ever-more-perfected and endlessly repeatable vinyl slices of teen utopia. While rock’s countercultural politics of difference may have built on the generation gap of the 1950s, that gap was widely expressed and experienced via mainstream forms of consumption, with leisure commodities such as sound recordings at the forefront. This then means that majority consumer culture played a much more formative role in rock ideology than could be acknowledged at the time. But the Beach Boys more than acknowledged it—they reveled in it.

As singing billboards for a hyperconsumptive life of affluent leisure, the Beach Boys would become unsubtle reminders of an awkward truth: despite its countercultural accoutrements, the so-called rock revolution of the 1960s was a crucial contributor to a much larger consumer revolution, one that ultimately encouraged greater consumer conformity (Buxton 1983). Just as the band had initially wanted to be named after a brand of consumer goods (Pendleton shirts), their early national success purveyed a brand identity built on preexisting consumer-goods marketing (surfboards, hot rods, California produce). Their trademark, “The Beach Boys,” was itself tightly tethered not only to athletics and seaside leisure but to Tin Pan Alley and minstrel predecessors.10 For example, a 1931 radio listing in the Los Angeles Times features broadcasts by no less than five vocal groups called the “— Boys”: the Banjo Boys, the Alabama Boys, the Ranch Boys, Three Boys, and, most intriguingly, the
Canfield Beach Boys (“Radio Pictures Parade Today,” 1931). Ancestors such as these will make it harder for Brian’s band to play the emerging chameleon game of a modernist rock culture, one animated by dreams of antimaterialism and committed to a fantasy of historical rupture with the majority, parent culture. As Stephen Nugent puts it, “An implicit premise [of rock criticism] has been that the genre represents a radical break with its antecedents” (1986, 82). Yet it is clear that even as rock expanded the purview of consumer culture, it did so under a newer brand name, “rebellion.” The Beach Boys, on the other hand, remained anachronistically anchored in the old majority mass culture of Madison Avenue, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley.

A key theme of this majority culture was “success.” As Albert McLean explains in his study of the roots of U.S. mass culture, *American Vaudeville as Ritual*, “success” was the main message of every vaudeville show (McLean 1965; see also Horton and Wohl 1956). This is especially significant given the contrast between the Beach Boys’ portrayal on the cover of *Shut Down, Volume 2* as “winners” and the post-*Smile* representations of Brian Wilson as some sort of “loser.” His image as a disheveled, disoriented, dissolute hermit was crucial to his much later rehabilitation inside a popular music canon. Redemption is a grand narrative, and he first had to be a loser to become a winner. Yet this sad-sack portrait appears preposterous juxtaposed against the 1964 model-year Brian Wilson, the very embodiment of success.

In the summer of ’64, Brian Wilson stood very tall indeed, the golden boy of a Golden State in a golden age of pop singles. At the peak of his power as a hit maker, creating more Top 40 hits than his erstwhile rival Phil Spector, innovating faster and moving farther than the Beatles of that year, Brian Wilson was a tireless industry overachiever. Indeed, his massive success as a creator of “materialistic and happy” anthems (Goldstein 1966, 7) would later contribute to his problematic position in a burgeoning rock canon. If rock privileges the outsider, the nonconformist, the industry rebel, then circa 1964 Brian Wilson was almost an antithesis of rock—he was the ultimate insider, working quickly and effectively, writing and producing hits for his band and for others, and happily contributing to the economic expansion of the teen market. He and the Beach Boys were emblems of “winning” at a moment in American history when winning seemed manifest destiny. So, as *All Summer Long* hit record stores that July, Brian Wilson was driving a superior vehicle that had “never been beat” (“I Get Around”) and thriving at the very center of the majority culture.
Packaging

From the perspective of majority culture, All Summer Long indeed appears as the perfect packaging of a popular brand: a dozen songs retailing summer fun, all wrapped in the high-gloss sheen of state-of-the-art, multitrack recording, and ably advertised in advance by the number-one hit single “I Get Around” (included as track 1 of side 1, in case you might miss it). The album reached as high as number four, remained on the Billboard “Top LPs” chart for forty-nine weeks, and was certified “Gold” by the RIAA. It can thus be characterized as a hit, a commercial success. The album is filled with a variety of songs (seven up-tempo/dance numbers, three slow ballads, one midtempo ballad, one novelty sound collage) expounding experiences of the consumer good life, presumably as lived by affluent California teenagers like the Wilson brothers: car and motorbike racing (“I Get Around,” “Little Honda”), teen romance (“Wendy,” “Hushabye,” “We’ll Run Away”), the consumption of mass-media forms of entertainment (“Drive-In,” “Do You Remember?”). As befitting the brand in question, there are songs about beach life and surfing (“Girls on the Beach,” “Don’t Back Down”) and various other forms of summer fun (“All Summer Long”). The enumerations of the latter, title track (placed on side 1, track 2, immediately following “I Get Around”) thematize the contents of the album as a whole. Quickly listing numerous summer activities, events, and feelings, the lyrics of “All Summer Long” take the form of a verbal collage that in turn serves as a synopsis or miniature version of the entirety of the LP itself. The album is rounded out by a surf guitar instrumental (“Carl’s Big Chance”) and what might be termed an audio novelty (“Our Favorite Recording Sessions”) that consists of studio outtakes, sound effects, and dialogue collaged together via tape editing.

Like the collage structure of the tracks “All Summer Long” and “Our Favorite Recording Sessions,” the cover of the album, with its collection of various photos and colored squares, can also be characterized as a collage. It will be productive to attend to its genealogy in some detail, particularly since the cover art, visually advertising the variety of audio pleasures to be found within, says much about Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys’ position in the majority, mass culture of the time.

The rise of the twelve-inch, 33⅓ rpm long-play record was an economic boon to the postwar U.S. recording industry. Not only did it allow for the collation of multiple songs that could then be sold at a higher price (and higher profit margin) than individual 45 rpm singles—its packag-
ing also created a new medium for marketing music (Keightley 2004). Indeed, LPs were known in trade slang as “packages,” and this had two meanings. The first, as a container that allowed the bundling together of songs, was somewhat metaphorical. The second, however, was more literal, since the cardboard LP sleeve acted as a form of protective packaging that also permitted a new emphasis on the commodity’s decoration with attractive images and text. The LP sleeve can be considered a new medium for marketing popular music. Its twelve-inch square cover offered a kind of minibilboard that could catch the eye of potential customers, an advertising medium that allowed (and indeed encouraged) new images and ideas to be attached to popular music. The design of LP covers became increasingly sophisticated in the mid-1950s, and by the early 1960s constituted an important space for the creation and dissemination of enhanced value and meaning for popular music.

_All Summer Long’s_ packaging draws on well-established traditions of mainstream design that position the band as products of the majority consumer culture relentlessly promoted by Madison Avenue, Tin Pan Alley, and Hollywood. Its basic composition—a series of snapshots of beach fun casually organized around variously colored geometric shapes—draws strongly on the work of Piet Mondrian, a key member of the modernist Establishment (e.g., _Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray, and Blue_, 1921). Mondrian’s bright colors and quirky, yet controlled, geometric compositions contributed one of the dominant design tropes of 1950s mass culture (Hine 1986, 73). It was used for numerous film titles (e.g., Saul Bass’s credit sequence for _The Seven Year Itch_, 1955), the design of furniture (e.g., Charles and Ray Eames), and clothing, posters, and dozens of album covers, such as the Four Lads’ _Breezin’ Along_ (Columbia, 1958). The attraction of commercial artists to the bright colors and right angles of what I will call the Fifties Mondrian style may have been a result of its combination of whimsical collage and geometric precision, its simultaneous connotations of freedom and organization.

While seeming haphazard, Fifties Mondrian offered a precise formula to commercial designers required to work within rationalized spaces; after all, squares and rectangles are the most efficient means of covering rectangular spaces such as magazine pages or movie frames. At a time when the semiscientific claims of Madison Avenue motivational researchers attempted to tap the consumer’s unconscious desires as a means of moving more goods, the seemingly casual, yet grid-like, nature of Fifties Mondrian permitted a subtle reconciliation of industrial rationalization.
Figure 4.2: Detail from the cover of the Beach Boys’ *All Summer Long* LP (1964); note Coke bottles in bottom right panel.
and irrational pleasure. It also allowed graphic designers to carefully construct imaginary filmic montages of products involving some sort of action such as vacationing or drinking. Both are found in a 1963 ad campaign entitled “All Summer Long, Say Seagram’s and Be Sure.” These ads for Seagram’s Canadian whisky were widely circulated in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States. The print ads used a Mondrian-derived composition to portray “a world of pleasure” via a series of images reminiscent of snapshots of pleasant summertime fun, all enabled by the consumption of Seagram’s rye.

I am not claiming here that the campaign’s linkage of the catchphrase “all summer long,” photos of the consumer good life, and Mondrian design constitutes some sort of direct “influence” or “source” for the cover of All Summer Long. Instead, it points up just how clearly the Beach Boys’ cover was enmeshed in mainstream commercial design and majority advertising styles, and underlines their parallel promotion of a good life likewise defined by brand-name consumption: the songs of All Summer Long are filled with cars, surfboards, T-shirts, records, movies, popcorn, hot dogs, Coke, Honda scooters, and so forth. The album cover includes that apotheosis of twentieth-century packaging, a Coke bottle (held by Dennis). The product is mentioned in two songs: “Drive-In” (“A big buttered popcorn and an extra large Coke”) and the title track (“’member when you spilled Coke all over your blouse”). “All Summer Long” also mentions Honda scooters (“miniature golf and Hondas in the heat”), a product that is itself the topic of an entire song on the LP (“Little Honda”). In other words, the album cover’s deep imbrication in a world of consumer marketing assists its visualization of the songs’ lyrical allusions to brand-name consumer goods that are in turn evidence of Brian Wilson’s—and his audience’s—deep immersion in the majority mass culture of U.S. consumer society.

Synergy

I will return presently to All Summer Long, but first I would like to identify several minor but revealing contributions of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys to the majority culture of the period. Their work for the Walt Disney Corporation in the summer of 1964 places them in the very belly of Hollywood’s industrial complex. They shared lead vocal duties with Annette Funicello on the title track of her film The Monkey’s Uncle. From one perspective, it is definitely a Disney song (from the pens of Mary Poppins composers the Sherman brothers). But it is also, unmistakably, a

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Beach Boys track, with Brian’s trademark falsetto and a quite enjoyable groove. Indeed, when I was finally able to hear it, after years of searching, I was pleasantly shocked. I had expected a subpar track, something that had been buried out of musical embarrassment. On the contrary, it is close enough to typical Beach Boys work of the period that I would argue its suppression from their acknowledged body of work is as much an index of its perceived ideological awkwardness as of any intellectual property issues (the master was owned by Buena Vista Records, a Disney subsidiary). It is likely its status as a “Disney product” was believed to mark it as a painfully obvious reminder of just how deep into majority culture “America’s Greatest Band” (as the subtitle of Badman’s 2004 catalogue raisonné puts it) were willing to wade.

Less compelling is their recording of the theme song to an NBC sitcom that summer. The Beach Boys’ performance of Jack Marshall and Bob Mosher’s theme to Karen (fall 1964) marks the band as industry insiders complicit in the factory production of mediocre majority culture. The sitcom is about a sixteen-year-old girl living in Southern California. The show’s credit sequence is superimposed over the label of a spinning LP, and its theme opens with a quote from Dick Dale’s recording of “Misirlou” (a fast downward slide and a repeated note on the guitar’s open low E string). It features a lead vocal by Mike, who sings that “at a party she’s a stomper and a rock-and-rollin’ romper.” At best, it sounds like a lazy throwback to the Beach Boys of early 1963 (it was covered by the Surfaris in 1964). The lyrics describe Karen as a “teen” and a “modern girl,” noting sardonically that doing her hair is “her favorite indoor sport / and by the light of television she can even write a book report” (this insulting last line is backed by a musical allusion to Jan and Dean’s “The Little Old Lady from Pasadena,” whose lyricist was frequent Brian Wilson collaborator Roger Christian). Episodes sometimes concluded with a rapprochement between wise father and bubble-brained daughter over the generation gap. Notwithstanding the sexist Othering, “Karen” aligns the Beach Boys with the allegedly feminizing mass culture of television, dismissed at the time as “a vast wasteland” (Minow 1961; see also Keightley 2003). As with their soundtrack recording of the theme to a family-friendly Disney film, the Beach Boys are now as close to the center of majority mass media as is possible, and a review of their July 6 “Summer Safari” tour performance in Arizona hints at the perils of such associations when it characterizes the band as “homogenised” (1964 Tucson Citizen review cited by Badman 2004, 59).

Rock culture would adopt key elements of the modernist critique of
mass culture, in which television was singled out as one of the most intellectually deadening, indeed homogenizing, forces in American society. The rapid expansion of television in the 1950s, its reliance on formula and generic productions, and its domination by Madison Avenue made it an obvious target, even as the rise of television also assisted the development of AM radio formats that favored rock ’n’ roll and teen music. (As radio networks turned their attention to their more profitable television networks, local stations began to have more programming autonomy.) At the same time, as the Disney and NBC examples suggest, the consolidation of Hollywood, television, Tin Pan Alley, and the sound-recording industry in the 1950s encouraged quests for synergy, for teen stars who could profitably cross media boundaries. This enabled media convergences through which television stars could become recording stars, like Rick(y) Nelson of *The Ozzie and Harriet Show*, an acme of the strategy. In 1964, this approach was evident when a minor teen star, Paul Petersen of *The Donna Reed Show*, released a single, “She Rides with Me,” on the Colpix label. Colpix was a recording subsidiary of Columbia Pictures–Screen Gems, the producers of *The Donna Reed Show* (ABC, 1958–66), and they hired one of the top people in the business to write and produce the single—Brian Wilson. The single’s promotion involved the seeking of cross-media synergies, with Petersen plugging it through performances on network television, and DJ spins plugging his TV show on AM radio—just as Brian Wilson was seeking to do with his film and television work. While “She Rides with Me” was not a hit, it is historically noteworthy for its pioneering use of a rotating Leslie speaker to treat the backing vocals—a technique that would become prominent in psychedelia a few years later.

**Things We Did Last Summer**

Other Colpix recordings tied in to the especially wholesome *Donna Reed Show* may offer further insight into Brian’s industrial situation in the period. Shelley Fabares first gained attention via appearances on the show and, like Peterson, played a teenager. Through plugging on the show, Fabares quickly became a recording star as well via her number-one hit, “Johnny Angel” (1962; backing vocals by Darlene Love and the Blossoms). This might be taken to represent the worst of majority culture, of the power of “adult media” and its extensive “techniques of exploitation” to mechanically impose products on audiences. Indeed, for those seeking to assert social superiority via musical taste, the sweet
sound of “Johnny Angel” might be adduced to reinforce claims about
the supposedly too–Tin Pan Alley, too-teenybop, indeed too-girly quality
of the in-between years (Sten 1978). This interpretation would highlight
the song’s powerful promotion via television as clear-cut evidence of the
era’s manufacture, rather than authentic earning, of musical popularity.
The conjoining here of aesthetic elitism, anticommercialism, and misog-
yny is typical of modernist cultural politics more generally, as Huysen
(1986) shows.

In the fall of 1962 Fabares released her second LP, entitled The Things
We Did Last Summer. Its cover art, like All Summer Long’s, features a series
of what might be personal snapshots, seemingly glued haphazardly to
the front of an LP album now reimagined as a photo album. Each has
a “handwritten” caption commenting on the past event, reminding us
that both photographs and phonograph records are forms of prosthetic
memory. While the overall composition itself bears little relationship to
the dominant Fifties Mondrian style, the use of a different color font for
each word of the album title most definitely does, forming as it does a
kind of concrete-poetry version of a Mondrian painting.23 The nostalgic
“things” in question include consumer goods, so two of the four images
of Fabares on the cover of The Things We Did Last Summer feature her
using the ultimate teen consumer good of the period, a sound record-
ing.24 This indexes an expanding “record consciousness” (Gracyk 1996)
among listeners at the time—as I will contend, a phenomenon especially
evident on All Summer Long.25

The music on Fabares’s LP relies on the output of the so-called song
factories of Tin Pan Alley, whether the older Styne-Cahn number, “The
Things We Did Last Summer” (1946), or more recent emanations from
the Alley’s final outpost, the Brill Building (songs by Mann-Weill, Goffin-
King, Sedaka-Greenfield).26 As with “Johnny Angel,” The Things We Did
Last Summer could be criticized as just one more widget spit out by the
pop assembly line, yet another teen pop product of the Madison Avenue
approach that likewise produced the cover design for All Summer Long.
In this context it is noteworthy that the lyrics of “All Summer Long”
themselves owe such a strong debt to “The Things We Did Last Summer.”
The verses of both “The Things We Did Last Summer” and “All Summer
Long” consist of lists of summer activities strung together so as to pro-
duce a sort of montage or collage effect. Both songs twice mention an
important emblem of period romances, “our song.” And the Styne-Cahn
song features the refrain line “All winter long.”

Composed by veteran Tin Pan Alleyites Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn,
“The Things We Did Last Summer” was a hit in the 1940s and widely recorded thereafter (Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, Vaughn Monroe, all 1946; Four Lads, 1956; Helen Merrill, 1957; Dean Martin, 1959; Nancy Wilson and George Shearing, 1961; Shelley Fabares, 1962). Adding to this long list, the Beach Boys themselves cut it in 1963, about eight months before they made “All Summer Long.” Prerecorded for a guest appearance on The Red Skelton Show (NBC, September 24, 1963), it features the Beach Boys doing their best Four Freshmen imitation, heard especially in the scoop on the word “we” in each refrain line. The arrangement features brushes on the snare drum and muted brass and string sections, resulting in a typical “easy listening” sound of the period. Since this was their second song on the evening’s show (the first had been the upbeat “Surfin’ USA”), it is likely that the Tin Pan Alley ballad was chosen to demonstrate their ability to reach television’s mass audience of all ages and tastes. This majority appeal may also begin to explain Brian Wilson’s attraction to Styne and Cahn’s enduring hit as a lyrical model for his new composition.

The sentiments and lyrics of “Things” have deep roots in several Tin Pan Alley traditions, whether so-called list songs that enumerate elements of a romance, or seasonal songs both remembered (“In the Good Old Summertime,” 1902, or the Gershwins’ “Summertime,” 1935) and forgotten (Albert Gumble and Harry Williams’s “In the Summertime,” 1911, whose protagonist Tilly likes to “hum a sentimental tune of winter all ev’ning long”), or songs that are themselves about remembering. Indeed, “The Things We Did Last Summer” draws from the sentimental well of nostalgia that was Tin Pan Alley’s stock in trade (and the target of many modernist critics). Much of Brian Wilson’s songwriting likewise could be characterized as sentimental (on All Summer Long alone, “We’ll Run Away” and “Girls on the Beach” easily fit that mold, and arguments could be mounted for “Wendy” and “All Summer Long” as well). This genealogy may partially account for the emotional complexity of “All Summer Long,” a surging song whose surface ebullience seems to mask a deeper sadness or loss. But it also suggests why Brian’s work will fit so uneasily into the harder modernisms of rock culture’s emergent canon.

Selectivity

One index of a song’s sentimental success is its selection by a couple as “our song.” Both “The Things We Did Last Summer” and “All Summer Long” refer to “our song” as a key constituent of the summer experi-
ence. “The Things We Did Last Summer” comments on the enduring, mnemonic power of popular music and the sentimental price it can exact: “I’ve tried so to forget / At times I do and yet / The mem’ry of you lingers like our song / The things we did last summer / I’ll remember all winter long.” This is the song’s second reference to “our song” (the first being happier: “the way we danced and hummed our fav’rite song”). “All Summer Long” repeats the line “Ev’ry now and then we hear our song,” making it the only nonrefrain line sung more than once. The phrase “now and then” returns to consciousness a sense of time passing (“won’t be long ’til summertime is through”) that the song otherwise claims to deny (“but not for us, now!”). It also suggests the couple may be experiencing the private meaning of “their song” through the public mass medium of radio airplay. Selecting a single song out of the mass of popular songs to stand as “our song” helps solidify a romantic union. It points once again to popular music’s deep implication in social identity work, in creating a sense of “us” at a particular time and place (a sense that may then endure, even when forgetting is desired, as in “Things”). As a commodity totem of romantic intimacy, “our song” becomes a secret, yet public, sign of private, yet shared, emotions.

Pop music’s capacity to overwhelm us with nostalgic feelings grows, in part, out of its ability to momentarily saturate the lived environment, whether at a dance, on a car radio, or in a cinema, and thereby to mark a moment in time. Seasonal songs frequently juxtapose summer against autumn or winter in order to highlight the ephemerality of nice weather and young love (likewise teen pop has historically been dismissed as impermanent and disposable). Yet the concept of “our song” resists the trivial or ephemeral by selecting one pop song to carry a deeper, enduring significance. “Our song” involves what Riesman might call a “differential selection” being made out of the mass of popular musical offerings, a choice that then acquires a special, perhaps transcendent, meaning—and it is just such an enduring meaning that makes “our song” so poignant as an object of loss and nostalgia (e.g., “Stardust,” 1929). Popular music offers a commodity that can simultaneously be possessed by a listener (“our song”) and possess the listener (the haunting, uncanny power of a song to return us involuntarily to a time, a place, a feeling). As transient sounds that sometimes last a lifetime, such special songs elevate popular music above the mundane.

It is therefore particularly significant that All Summer Long contains at least three tracks that self-consciously select specific works of popular music and single them out as more worthy than others, distinguish-
ing them perhaps as “superior pop”: “All Summer Long,” “Our Favorite Recording Sessions,” and “Do You Remember?”34 The latter song pays homage to “the guys who gave us rock and roll” (Little Richard, Danny and the Juniors, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Dick Clark, and Chuck Berry) and features a kind of sampling of Wilson’s favorite records and early rock ‘n’ roll styles. (At one point, we hear an imitation of Lewis’s trademark, “goodness gracious, great balls of fire,” at another an allusion to Chuck Berry’s lead-guitar style.) Berry is singled out as “the greatest thing that’s come along” and praised for having written “the all-time greatest song” (which goes unnamed). A similar appraisal is seen in the title of the novelty sound collage of the band working in the studio, “Our Favorite Recording Sessions,” which uses a locution resembling “our song” and echoes the ranking of sound recordings undertaken by all listeners. Most remarkably, this track contains samples of the other two tracks that praise popular music: we hear botched attempts to overdub vocals on both “All Summer Long” and “Do You Remember?” We hear a tape recorder rewinding at one point, we hear engineer Chuck Britz (who is addressed as “Charlie” by Brian at the end of the track) advising the band on the timing of the punch-in or overdub, and Mike Love offers an extremely early reference to “overdub” in the following dialogue: “Let’s overdub a little fingerpoppin’ ... you put a little fingerpoppin’ on that it’s gonna be a million and two seller!”35

Whether or not the 1964 listener understood the precise technical details here, there is an implicitly pedagogical aspect to “Our Favorite Recording Sessions,” an imparting of knowledge that also characterizes the popular music history lesson of “Do You Remember?”36 Moreover, the self-reflexive nature of these tracks, and indeed the abymic quality of “Our Favorite’s” embedding of one track inside another, suggest an unexpectedly modernist sensibility. “Our Favorite Recording Sessions” ends when Brian says, “Wait a minute, I forgot my note” and we hear footsteps as he walks to the piano to remind himself of the pitch.37 The rhythm of the footsteps prefigures the rhythm of the solo kick drum heard at the opening of the next and final track of the LP, “Don’t Back Down” (and thus the kick initially sounds like it is part of “Recording Sessions”). This constitutes a remarkably early linkage of LP tracks, tied to a self-reflexive exploration of the techniques and technology of the recording studio, appearing on a self-produced album addressing the concept of “summer” from multiple angles.

*All Summer Long* is an album named after a song; “All Summer Long” and “Do You Remember?” are songs that refer to other (unnamed)
songs; “Our Favorite Recording Sessions” is a recording that includes other recordings. Such linkages and embeddings (of songs inside songs, recordings inside recordings, performances about performance) prefigure the artistic ambitiousness, the “taking popular music seriously” (Frith 2007), that will shortly constitute rock culture. Returning to the liner notes in this context, it seems that Brian was self-consciously working to generate a new form of “superior pop.” For Gracyk (1996), the rise of rock involved yet another form of consciousness, the widespread awareness of sound recording as a distinct artistic medium that he calls “record consciousness.” If we approach rock as a mass-distributed, populist articulation of modernist art sensibilities, then it is not surprising that various new forms of consciousness (self-, historical, record) achieved widespread dissemination via rock culture; what is perhaps unexpected is to find nascent instances of these on a teen pop commodity.38

Along with record consciousness, the historical recitation of “Do You Remember?” reveals a growing historical consciousness in the teen pop of the period. The lyrics contend that Elvis Presley “paved the way for the rock-and-roll stars,” thereby situating All Summer Long in a very traditional rock-historical lineage. (Fitzgerald 1999 contends that “Wilson should be accorded more credit as the songwriter who was best able to create a logical development of 1950s rock.”) The praise for Chuck Berry does likewise, and this is part of the burgeoning historical consensus about Berry’s significance to the teen pop world of 1964. Appearing with the Beach Boys on The T.A.M.I. Show that year, Berry is singled out as a founding figure by hosts Jan and Dean, who introduce him as “the guy who started it all.” The characterization of Berry as an originator by the hosts of the “Teen Age Music International” is part of teen pop’s growing awareness of its own history.39 The attribution of historical agency to the singer-songwriter Berry also underlines an increasing attention to authorship in claims of popular musical “superiority.” Like his acolyte Brian Wilson, Chuck Berry was a dedicated chronicler of leisure consumption in the United States, and yet, unlike Wilson, Berry’s celebrations of majority pleasures were qualified by his “minority” identities (as African American, his classification as R & B performer, and even his affiliation with an independent, rather than major, label).

Design

The self-conscious and historically conscious embeddings and linkages of All Summer Long can be taken as evidence of design—not simply
graphic design or sound design, but of intent, of the deliberate planning and execution of a large-scale project, one that moves beyond conventional practices at the time.\textsuperscript{40} There is contextual evidence that one of Brian Wilson’s intentions was to create an album that would be something more than a container or package of hits. The dominant strategy within the industry at this time was to approach teen pop as primarily a singles market. Teen pop LPs were regularly recorded, released, and promoted, of course, but they were believed to be less likely to be bought in great numbers by teenagers.\textsuperscript{41} Thus teen-oriented LPs became “value-added” or “premium” versions of a hit single or star, rather than free-standing entities conceived as ends in themselves. This encouraged the inclusion of so-called filler tracks to pad out “LP’s created as the result of a hit single” (“WB-Reprise Target: Teen Mart” 1964, 8). The placement of the number-one single “I Get Around” as the LP’s first track on side 1 is evidence of the persistence of this industrial understanding of the teen market as a 45 rpm market. It is significant, then, that the album is not entitled something like “The Beach Boys Sing ‘I Get Around’ and 11 Other Summer Hits.” While “I Get Around” is given the first track, the album still has its theme song, “All Summer Long,” on track 2. Although it was never released as a single in the United States in the 1960s, the very high quality of its writing, arranging, performance, and production point to a degree of design or care—perhaps a level of “love,” to echo again Wilson’s liner notes—that is particularly impressive given the existence of an already-proven quantity (“I Get Around”) that would have sufficed for a “theme” song.\textsuperscript{42}

Unlike many teen pop albums of the period, \textit{All Summer Long} is not stuffed with covers or so-called filler tracks, but again shows evidence of careful design in the inclusion of songs that reveal a high level of consistency in writing, production, and performance.\textsuperscript{43} Several either became hits for others (“Little Honda,” which reached number nine as covered by the Hondells) or are believed to have been hits by many Beach Boys fans (“Wendy,” “Girls on the Beach,” “All Summer Long”), despite never making the Top Forty (and the latter three songs appear repeatedly on “Greatest Hits” compilations). This kind of “superior” quality control is new to teen pop at this time and will be a key factor in the rise of album-oriented rock. (Although it is worth noting that an adult-oriented performer such as Frank Sinatra had, at this point, already been pursuing a similar policy at Capitol and then Reprise for a decade, segregating his hit singles from his “theme” LPs). This consistency also applies to the
ongoing thematic attention to the concept of “summer” across the span of the album.

The design of the LP can be attributed to the increasing creative control Brian Wilson was able to exercise as producer and arranger, and as sole songwriter on seven of the twelve tracks (along with his listing as a collaborator on four of the remaining five). The integration of musical functions (songwriting, arranging, producing, performing) in a single figure contrasts strongly with the dominant division of labor in the U.S. industry at this time. It serves to differentiate Wilson from other teen pop stars and position him as something relatively foreign to teen pop, an “author.” By addressing his creative “ideas” and “inspirations,” the LP liner notes help constitute Brian as the “author” of the record, just as his songwriting tended to be singled out in the few extant interviews from that summer (e.g., Blackburn 1964; see note 13). The back cover of All Summer Long tells listeners that the LP was “Arranged and Produced by Brian Wilson,” potentially contributing to conceptions of Wilson as an auteur (a term adapted from film criticism by early rock critics; see Frith 1983, 53; Frith 2007, 260). An undated Teen Set magazine (likely late 1964) highlights Wilson’s authorship in an article entitled “Brian Births a New Song” that quotes actress Peggy Lipton on how Beatles “Paul and John are infatuated with the Beach Boy sound. . . . They played All Summer Long all night long and asked me many questions about them. Paul and John were fascinated by Brian’s style of composing and arranging” (12). By March 1965, the front cover of The Beach Boys Today! will announce “great new songs written by Brian Wilson.”

While the lyrics of Brian's songs (with and without collaborators) tend to attract less critical attention than the music, the consistency of their thematic attention to the California lifestyle is always noted. This thematic single-mindedness ought to have implications for his status as auteur. Yet because so much autobiographically driven criticism fixates on the artist's inner emotional life, such lyrics (documenting lifestyles, fashions, and language that will become central to rock culture) still tend to be overlooked or undervalued. Whereas the Beatles' lyrics circa 1964 tended to dwell, to the exclusion of almost all other topics, on love and romance, the Beach Boys' lyrics included far more sociological detail about everyday life. Though they had a notoriously “clean-cut” image, their first top-ten single, “Surfin’ USA” (April 1963) had contained a prominent reference to the growing trend of long hair for men, alluding to the male surfers' “Bushy blonde hair-do[s].” Given California's
historical status as an epicenter of countercultural style and thought, it should be unsurprising that their lyrics regularly invoked slang that captured and disseminated this new zeitgeist. Much of it draws from another subculture with a strong California presence, the Beat generation: “cruisin’ ev’ry pad” (“Little St. Nick”, 1963); “her old man” (“Fun, Fun, Fun” 1964); “I’m a real cool head” (“I Get Around”); “a groovy little motor bike” (“Little Honda”); “when you made it with another guy” (“Wendy”—last three songs from All Summer Long). “When I Grow Up to Be a Man,” also from the summer of 1964, is filled with Beat argot as it becomes rockspeak, featuring such turns of phrase as “Will they think their old man’s really a square?,” “Will I dig those sounds?,” and possibly the earliest appearance of the expression “turn on” in the U.S. Top 40: “Will I still like the things that turned me on as a kid?” These pioneering uses of slang in a teen pop context reveal how Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys helped construct the terms of a rock culture that would later classify them as anachronistic or square.

Auteurist aesthetics tend to privilege the individual artist’s expression of a particular worldview. As we know from the liner notes, Brian’s songwriting was inspired by the everyday experiences of a teenaged social cohort (“The feelings you get from going to school, being in love, winning and losing at sports”). If we then read All Summer Long as a kind of amateur sociology of the affluent, white, suburban, California adolescent experience, it can be argued that this makes it an early form of socially conscious pop: it is music that sets out to articulate a set of identity politics and a worldview. While some observers may not like the values animating this particular consumerist/majority world, it still remains an instance of pop music self-consciously chronicling a social reality. Insofar as we, like O’Brien, hear it as sonic sociology, it is thus a form of knowledge—and here we need to return to Bourdieu, for whom knowledge is key to classification struggles. It matters how we classify this music because the stakes are always more than musical—for Bourdieu, all debates about taste are aspects of larger struggles for social power, bids at domination via aesthetic discourse. Recall Riesman’s emphasis on the minority listener’s awareness and articulateness and “rigorous standards of judgment and taste”—all suggesting an ability to wield musical knowledge to gain advantage in social interaction. The expression “I Get Around” means “I know what’s what” (including inside info like “where the kids are hip”), and this superior knowledge, albeit deployed as braggadocio, is part of the pleasure of this track. The “social superiority” po-
tentially generated by *All Summer Long* is an aspect of wider struggles for domination, inspiring not only highly competitive teen pop auteurs like Brian Wilson, but also rock culture’s later claims of superiority to pop—not to forget the efforts of popular music scholars to have their objects of study, and themselves, taken seriously.

O’Brien’s account of the Beach Boys circa 1964 frames their artistic achievement in terms of individual listeners’ knowledge as they navigate the musical mainstream:

> The Beatles, of course, belonged to everyone; that was their peculiarity. The Beach Boys by contrast suggested a more rarefied indulgence. To enter their domain fully involved an initiation. Not that they were hidden; they were rather, at the outset, the very emblem of obviousness. Our journey consisted in finding, in the heart of that obviousness, what was most secret. (O’Brien 2004, 233)

For O’Brien, this paradoxical conception of the Beach Boys as an “obvious secret” continues after 1964 and into the rock era, as dedicated listening to older songs slowly produces new knowledge, a new cognizance of “secret jokes planted in the fade-outs, tiny sub-layerings designed to test if you were paying attention” (O’Brien 2004, 237):

> This archaeology of Brian Wilson provided the strange sensation that at the very time everyone was moving forward, into new identities, new decibel ranges, new scales of Dionysiac self-abandonment, a hidden truth was to be found in what had already been tossed aside, the pop hits of five years ago. Perhaps the secret instructions were: Don’t follow the noise, follow the trail of hidden silences. (O’Brien 2004, 240)

In Riesman’s terms, the art of Brian Wilson involved secreting minority musical pleasures inside majority-appeal packages. The ensuing feeling, long felt by fans of Brian Wilson’s music, is best expressed by O’Brien: “Under a patina of easy prettiness lay a hard beauty” (O’Brien 2004, 242). This music of “social superiority” contributes to a remarkable reconfiguration of minority/majority aesthetic relations that, once upon a time, mapped tightly onto the ancient aristocratic/plebian distinction—a distinction crucially reimagined and rearranged, if never fully overcome, in midcentury music.
Conclusion

So why not simply call Brian Wilson’s 1964 work “rock”? This question brings us back to the implications of Wilson’s canonization as “rock composer.” There is more than a grain of historical truth in rock’s early “class prejudice” against the Beach Boys, but it is misinterpreted if taken to mean that they were somehow insufficiently “rock.” Instead, I would contend that the real point here has been that Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys were a pop band and, a fortiori, that rock has itself been a form of pop all along.

And if any doubt remains about whether these classifications matter, look at the contortions undergone in the symbolic extrication of “Brian Wilson” from “Mike Love’s Beach Boys” as the preferred object of canonical attention—this, despite the fact that all of Wilson’s canonical works are indeed recordings by (t)his band. Segregating “Brian” from “Mike” (or from “the Beach Boys”) relies on and thus reinscribes the classificatory logic of rock versus pop so that the privileging of “Brian Wilson” now becomes an implicit dismissal of pop. In the rock-versus-pop binary, “pop” served as a sort of cesspool for rock, a repository of uncomfortable truths (i.e., that rock is indeed industrialized music, is part of consumer capitalism, is often an engine of hyperindividualism or conformity or patriarchy or sexism or racism, and so forth). Such a view of pop helps “purify” rock, just as having “Mike” encapsulate all that is or was awkward or problematic in their oeuvre serves to “purify” Brian of his majority-culture tendencies. But what is worse, it also utterly mischaracterizes Brian’s real historical specificity. The relatively recent critical rehabilitation of Brian Wilson (in no small part due to this bisection) means that future generations of popular music scholars may mistakenly believe his work was always central to the rock canon—and this would mean that some of his historical significance will be lost. So part of what I have been trying to do here is recover and reconsider aspects that contributed to the early critical ambivalence toward this work while honoring the historical truth of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys as teen pop. And if Brian’s superior pop helped create a new musical culture, then it equally stands as a shiny reminder of the majority status of the music we now classify as “rock.”

Notes for Chapter 4

1. “I Get Around” reached the top of the charts in July, Beach Boys Concert became number one in December, and that album and All Summer Long were
certified Gold the following February. “Million-seller” is Brian Wilson’s own characterization in a late August 1964 television interview in Oklahoma (Blackburn 1964).

2. There are relevant problems with Riesman’s methodology here: while he did ethnographic fieldwork in a Chicago inner-city neighborhood to acquire the “majority” data, his “minority” informants appear mostly to have been his University of Chicago students, thereby likely skewing classed, gendered, and raced distributions.

3. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) distinction, in The Field of Cultural Production, between heteronomy and autonomy as differing principles of taste legitimation might be applied here as well.

4. In this light, we might consider how Pet Sounds’ faster canonization was assisted by its supposed “unpopularity.”

5. I am appropriating Mills’s (1959) turn of phrase to synopsize something Bourdieu (1984, 253) describes more densely: “It would be . . . absurd to exclude from social reality the representation which [social] agents form of that reality. The reality of the social world is in fact partly determined by the struggles between agents over the representation of their position in the social world and, consequently, of that world.”

6. Williams 1968, 6. The essay was written in December 1967 (as noted in its third paragraph) and reevaluates Beach Boys Party! (1965) in light of the emergence of rock culture in general and of Williams’s own evolution as a listener in particular. Williams initially disliked the LP, describing his earlier rejection of it as “a pretty snotty attitude” underpinned by a view of Beach Boys fans as “stupid.” After two years of listening to and thinking about rock, Williams claims to have acquired “an educated response” to an album he now praises alongside Pet Sounds, and he does so after defining rock as “good creative art . . . appreciated by huge numbers of people” (Williams 1968, 6–7).

7. Independent of the Beach Boys question, Robert Levin argued in 1971 for “rock’s superiority over previous popular musical forms” as growing more out of the actions of listeners than of musicians (cited in Frith 1983, 54; emphasis added).

8. I am here repeating the widely circulated, rather than historically accurate, version. As Al Jardine notes, this “is a great story, really sounds great in print” despite the fact that his mother was the more likely source of the start-up money, lending the band $300 she borrowed from the bank (quoted in Murphy 2015, 95–96).

9. See Keightley 2008 on the periodization of midcentury popular musics.

10. The term “beach boy,” describing a young habitué of ocean resorts, has roots in the late nineteenth century, e.g., the “youth” novel by James K. Orton, Beach Boy Joe; or, Among the Life Savers (New York: Street & Smith, 1902). Its postwar connotations include proficiency at swimming and/or surfing, and thus reinforce the band’s association with “winning . . . at sports.” It is symptomatic of rock’s disavowal of majority culture that athleticism has generally been downplayed in rock culture. (One exception is the dissident punk tradition extending from Iggy Pop to Henry Rollins and Anthony Kiedis, but even these figures are less “jocks” than members of a bodybuilding subculture; see Reynolds 1989.) A further, disavowed connotation involves the historical (mis)usage of the classifi-
cation “boy” in acts of symbolic violence supporting a racist hierarchy (e.g., the influential vocal close harmony of the Mills Brothers was sometimes advertised as “Four Boys and A Guitar”).

11. Spector produced twelve Top 40 hits circa 1963–64 (only three in 1964), whereas Brian wrote or produced seventeen Top 40 hits in the same two-year period (including Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Hondells singles).

12. It is against exactly this background that Michael Harrington’s 1962 muckraking exposé of poverty in the United States, *The Other America*, stirred such controversy—how could there be such destitution amid such success?

13. Brian Wilson’s status as a “superior” industry-insider committed to “winning” is evident in an interview he gave to Oklahoma television reporter Ida B. Blackburn in late August 1964 (Blackburn 1964). After a brief discussion of his writing hits for Jan and Dean in which he attempts to disabuse Ms. Blackburn of the notion that he wrote “The Little Old Lady from Pasadena,” she asks him, “When you write a song for yourself, or for your group, what gives you the incentive to write them?” His answer is framed in terms of an ongoing struggle to win a commercial game: “Well, it usually, just the fact that we’re in the industry and there’s a lot of groups competing with us and I feel that competition, you know, and also I just, I love music, and I get very inspired, just generally creative, anyway, you know, it’s, [I] do it all the time [inaudible conclusion].” Brian’s “inspiration” conjoins business and creativity, like the top pop professional he is. When asked how many of his records have been “million sellers,” he provides an actuarial answer: “Well, actually, ‘million sellers,’ we’ve had one million seller and that’s ‘I Get Around.’” Likewise, when asked about the band’s latest release, he corrects himself after momentarily veering into imprecision: “‘When I Grow Up to Be a Man’ and ‘She Knows Me Too Well’ are our latest hit, ah, records.” When asked about lyrics in particular, Brian claims he writes for a specific, teen-aged audience: “We usually like to try to identify and associate with teenagers; we’re, I’m not so far out of my teenage years, I’m only twenty-two . . . usually the lyrics are supposed to be aimed at the everyday lives of kids.” The middle-aged Blackburn keeps returning to a song Wilson did not have a hand in, “The Little Old Lady From Pasadena,” and his “superiority” and “competitiveness” surface again in his subtle annoyance at her ignorance—at one point he looks away from Blackburn, enacting physically a social superiority whose telos is indeed denial of the other’s subjectivity.

14. The geometric style tends to be found on album covers of clean-cut, often college-oriented, male groups and less frequently on packaging of sophisticated torch singers or R & B groups of the period—yet another reminder of the raced nature of such “majority” culture.


16. Cf. Maud Lavin’s (1992) interpretation of geometric forms and grid composition in Weimar graphic design. We might also ponder here rock culture’s own reconciliations of industrial rationalization and irrational pleasure as part of a broader condition of modernity.

18. There is no evidence this was a paid product placement, remunerated endorsement, or commissioned work. A later television performance by the band on *The Andy Williams Show* (circa 1966), however, excised the brand name and replaced it with “Little Cycle,” reminding us of the more explicit political-economic constraints of that advertiser-sponsored medium.

19. Luis Sanchez’s doctoral dissertation, “To Catch a Wave: The Beach Boys and Rock Historiography” (2011), discusses this show and situates the Beach Boys amid a panoply of teen products and teen marketing efforts in Southern California at this time.

20. For an opposing view that sees television as crucial to the rise of rock, see Coates 2013.

21. Both Petersen and Fabares previously worked as Disney “Mouseketeers” on television, and Fabares had briefly costarred with Annette Funicello in *Walt Disney Presents: Annette*, a segment of Disney’s *The Mickey Mouse Club* (1957–58). One might mount an argument that these attempts during the in-between years to build Disney child television stars into major pop music stars were arrested by the rise of rock, and only later reach fruition with the superstardom of former Disney contract players Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Justin Timberlake in the twenty-first century, in turn marking the end of what we might now call “the rock interregnum.”

22. It is worth noting that Fabares was married to record executive Lou Adler and wrote the liner notes for his protégés Jan and Dean’s soundtrack LP, *Ride the Wild Surf* (Liberty, 1964), a film that starred Fabares and whose title track was cowritten by Brian Wilson. This means Wilson and Fabares moved in somewhat overlapping social/professional circles.

23. The four colored panels of the beach ball held by Fabares are also Mondrianesque.

24. The chorus of Petersen’s Colpix hit single, “She Can’t Find Her Keys” (number nineteen, 1962), lists the innumerable consumer goods his girlfriend carries in her purse, including “Presley records.”

25. I discuss this further in Keightley 2015.

26. It also includes a version of “Johnny Get Angry” by Joanie Sommers, whose 1963 LP, *Sommers’ Seasons* (WB-1504) features a Mondrian-inspired LP cover reminiscent of *All Summer Long*’s. This cover features four asymmetrically placed rectangles depicting the vocalist in each season, including summer. And the cover design of Sommers’s earlier EP, *Sommer's Hot, Sommer's Here* (1959, Warner Bros. Pro 107), includes a stylized, anthropomorphized sun that will reappear on the upper-left-hand corner of *All Summer Long*.

27. The recording was officially released on the *Good Vibrations* compilation (1993), disc 1, track 19. Videos of the television appearance, in which the group lip-synchs along with the studio recording, have been posted on YouTube (e.g., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9JwveKr_Re>).

28. Given the fact that “Little Deuce Coupe” was their current single (albeit as a B-side), still climbing the charts at this moment, the choice of the older hit “Surfin’ USA” (with dance choreography and a beach set) also suggests a longer-term strategy of building mass audience appeal with crowd pleasers rather than going for the immediate plug.
29. While there is little musical similarity, it is interesting that the basic chord change of the A section of “All Summer Long” (I→III♭–ii7–V7♯) might be interpreted as a variation growing out of a long tradition of Tin Pan Alley “turnarounds” (e.g., I→vi–ii7–V7; I→III♭–ii7–V7), of which “The Things We Did Last Summer” partakes in its A section (I→II♭–ii7–V7).

30. These songs pile up seemingly random yet ultimately significant details (e.g., “Thanks for the Memory,” 1938). They can be broadly understood to parallel early twentieth-century innovations like stream-of-consciousness writing, cubist painting, or montage film editing, all influenced by the rise of modern consumer culture and its proliferating lists (catalogs, menus, theater programs, and so forth). “These Foolish Things (Remind Me of You)” (1936) or “Memories of You” (1930), for example, contrast remembered experiences from the past with random events in the present they seem to resemble and thereby recall, whether “A tinkling piano in the next apartment” or “Waking skies at sunrise.” Thus these lyrics propose the quite modern epistemology of considering an experience or object from two perspectives simultaneously: the present (the random object) is made sense of via the past (the memory it triggers), just as the past infects the present (the implication in many of these songs is that the narrator is “carrying a torch” for a lost love).

31. In the mid-1950s, just as Brian Wilson became a teenager, Tin Pan Alley produced yet another cycle of hit songs that collaged fragments of memory and read the present through the past. They may help us understand some of the nuances of the temporally ambivalent “All Summer Long” refrain, “we’ve been having fun all summer long.” “Moments to Remember” (Four Lads, number two, 1955) and “Memories Are Made of This” (Dean Martin, number one, 1956) list actions and events and then comment on how they will be remembered later, in the future. They thus project the present (or very recent past) into an imagined future moment of retrospection, in effect proposing an experience of the present as the past. “Moments to Remember,” for example, approaches nostalgia as a medium for apprehending life as it is lived, perhaps as a way to grasp a complex, ephemeral, and fragmentary present. Likewise, “Graduation Day” (Rover Boys, Four Freshmen; both top twenty, 1956), a song recorded by the Beach Boys in 1964 and often performed in concert, juxtaposes recent fun and future nostalgia: “At the senior prom, we danced ’til three / And then you gave your heart to me / We’ll remember always, always / Graduation Day.” The refrain line conveys a faith in future reminiscences as permanent, indeed endless, memories (“always, always”) whose anticipation intensifies life as it is lived, just as “All Summer Long” celebrates fun in the past perfect tense to further energize its protagonists’ experience of the present.

32. See O’Brien (2004) on the “contradictory emotions” (238) and “paradoxes” (242) of Brian Wilson’s greatest music.

33. These lines are added at the end of Frank Sinatra’s 1946 recording, although they do not appear in other versions (including the Beach Boys’).

34. “Hushabye,” a cover of a 1959 hit and the sole non-Wilson composition on the LP, could be considered a fourth “favorite,” as it is rearranged and performed with great love (see Lambert 2007 on Wilson’s innovative restructuring of the Mystics’ version).
35. Love’s comment appears in the context of band members playing with the effects of the echo chamber on their voices and other sounds, suggesting a conception of the studio as an experimental space that parallels some high-modernist approaches (see Huyssen 1986).

36. We have but a single report of a 1964 listener’s response to this track, and he may be atypical: upon first hearing “Our Favorite Recording Sessions,” Paul McCartney allegedly “whooped and hollered in delight.” He then immediately telephoned the rest of the Beatles to insist they listen to the track, according to “Needling the Wax” (Teen Set, probably Fall 1964, 5–7).

The track may have been inspired by a 1959 Warner LP, Behind Closed Doors at a Recording Session, whose subtitle, Confidential recording secrets revealed for the first time, proposes access to secret knowledge. The educational aspect of the album is reinforced by the inclusion of an elaborate booklet that contains an informative “glossary” of studio technical jargon.

37. “Remembering” is a key theme here; “All Summer Long” begins by asking the listener to “remember when,” and the rewinding tape of “Our Favorite Recording Sessions” reminds us that sound recording is a technology of memory.

38. To what extent a nascent “race consciousness” among white teen listeners might also be at play here is unclear. The summer of 1964 was a “Freedom Summer” of widely publicized civil rights activism that saw government authorities beating and killing U.S. citizens, yet these issues remain below the surface of teen pop at the time.

39. Less than a year later, the debut issue of the new teen pop magazine, Tiger Beat, will run a feature on Berry that cites Paul McCartney’s evaluation of his historical significance (“Without talent like Chuck Berry . . . it’s likely that today’s sound would never exist”) and John Lennon’s endorsement of art over commerce (“Whether he sells the most records or not isn’t important”). “Tiger Salutes Chuck Berry” 1965, 54.

40. As Frith puts it, “Self-consciousness became the measure of a record’s artistic status” by the 1970s (1983, 53); see also pp. 29ff. on the role of a folk-derived self-consciousness in differentiating rock from teen pop. See also Laing 2015, 30, for a discussion of the idea of “design” as it relates to popular musicians.

41. However, “WB-Reprise Target: Teen Mart” (1964) suggests this is changing. See also “Singles Hit Makers Crash LP Charts Often, Fade Fast” (1963) and “Teen-Beat Soars on LP Chart” (1964).

42. “All Summer Long” was released as a B-side (to “Do You Wanna Dance”) in the UK in 1965; neither side charted.

43. Cf. Mark Burford’s (2012) argument about critiques of “filler” on Sam Cooke LPs.

44. Despite Mike Love’s later acquisition via litigation of coauthorship rights on songs like “I Get Around” and “All Summer Long,” the fact that collaborators (including Love himself on “Little Honda”) were indeed listed on this LP in 1964 should give us pause when we read the songwriting credits on post-1994 releases that may seek to rewrite history.

45. And see Kirk Curnutt’s ruminations on similar themes in the first chapter of this book.
46. For a current articulation of this, see the remarkable, spleen-filled review of the Beach Boys’ fiftieth anniversary tour, by a dedicated indie-rock fan who worships Brian, loathes “Mike Love’s Beach Boys,” and yet reserves especial fury for the apparent lack of knowledge in the audience (at one point, he exchanges taunts with them!). The intertwining of musical classification and social othering in the review illustrates almost every point in the sociology of music I have been outlining (Pinto 2012).

47. If we follow Gracyk’s argument about “record consciousness” as a definitive feature of rock, the suspicion arises that overattention to “Brian Wilson” (rather than “Beach Boys records,” say) may be a sly strategy for reinstating a composer-based canon.