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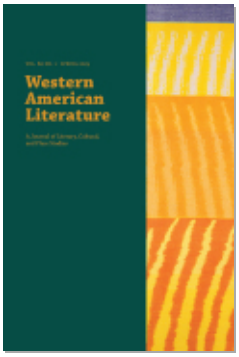
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The Beach Boys' Postwestern Dirge

The Haunting Terminus of the Beach Boys' Aquatic-Asphalt New Western Frontiers

ROBERT BENNETT

We're on safari to stay.
—The Beach Boys, "Surfin' Safari"

In 1962, shortly after Candix Records released the Beach Boys' first, largely forgettable and mostly forgotten, single—A-side, "Surfin"/B-side, "Luau"—Capitol signed the embryonic surf band and quickly produced their first *Billboard* Top 40 hit on their second single, "Surfin' Safari," while scoring another regional success in several western states with its flip B-side, "409." While their debut single can easily be dismissed as mere juvenilia—a lightweight, parochial expression of the local Southern California surf scene—the Capitol release represents something much more significant: an early articulation of a budding, energetic post-WWII Southern Californian youth culture; a bold, anthemic declaration of an emerging western optimism epitomized by Southern California—including both a new way of understanding the American West and a new way of being western within it—and a landmark expression of a nascent regional West Coast Pop modernism. While both records share several defining characteristics—most obviously, a throwback 1950s musical rock and roll aesthetic, neo-Platonic surf idealism, and at times appropriative Pacific Island vibes—it is the slight difference between them that ultimately proved decisive, widening over time into the fault line through which the possibility of the Beach Boys' later work would eventually emerge. From their humble beginnings as armchair anthropologists, the Beach Boys would imagine a much larger artistic project with genuine intellectual gravitas: a broad remapping of the rapidly changing material and cultural geography of the post-WWII

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American West from the perspective of what Krista Comer's *Surfer Girls in the New World Order* describes as "the global implications of the influential California surf scene" and, at least initially, surfing's "rhetoric of optimism about the potential of globalization to advance global goods" (11, 12).

To be certain, the Beach Boys never entirely overcame their initial repetitive, old-school "Bom Bom Dit Di Dit Dip" and "Loop-de-loop Loop Luau" backup harmonies, but the better crafted refrains of their later masterpieces—from "Round, round, get around, / I get around now" to "Good vibrations / oom bop bop"—do demonstrate a sophistication, even grace, sorely lacking in their first attempt. Perennial backsliders, the Beach Boys do periodically regress into the sophomoric provincialism of "Surfer's Rule," the general inanity of "Kokomo," or even the outright racism of "Ten Little Indians," but by and large their work has progressed toward a broader vision that perceptively reconceptualizes the American West in the midst of a post-WWII Sunbelt shift in American demographics, politics, and culture. With precision timing and perfect pitch, the Beach Boys painted a musical portrait, both compelling and enduring, of an ascendant West at perhaps the historical apex and geographic epicenter of the Golden Age of American suburbia in early 1960s Southern California, a world often idealized at the time by white middle-class Americans who after World War II began "flocking to California in pursuit of health, wealth, and happiness" (Aquila 420). As Jim Fusilli explains in *The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds*, "they had this fantastic band, the Beach Boys, and everything that was wonderful about California was in their songs, conveyed through their transcendent harmonies and effervescent smiles" (8). And in this transcendent sound, the Beach Boys both captured and helped produce the cultural logic of an emergent suburban Southern California, reflecting, expressing, articulating, imagining, and championing it in a stark sonic chiaroscuro mixed with the broad, celebratory brushstrokes of Pop Art. Or as Richard Aquila puts it, the Beach Boys "helped to reinforce California's image as a land of paradise" (420).

As one of the first significant noninstrumental surf hits, "Surfin' Safari" literally gave a voice to Southern Californian surf culture, raising its prominence within both the regional and national youth cultures of the early 1960s. More importantly, it profoundly trans-

formed the local surf "scene" and personal surf "life[style]" depicted in "Surfin'" into something much larger—something "getting bigger every day"—by providing surf culture with a dramatic "safari" quest narrative, a vast transnational material and cultural geography that extended from "Huntington and Malibu" to "Hawaii" and "the shores of Peru," and a "mighty wild" ethos and mythos (Beach Boys, "Surfin' Safari"). Both thematically and aesthetically, "Surfin'" was weak, even insipid: a narcissistic celebration of what surfing meant, primarily "for me," played in a passionless, derivative, and poorly aging style. It had a tentative tempo, bland backup harmonies, and even blander drumming—nothing short of anemic—all sung by an apathetic barbershop quartet in a nasally, quasi-chipmunk falsetto. "Surfin' Safari," however, was anthemic, boldly declaring that surf culture was on the move with the Wilson brothers now playing the Pied Piper for a soon-to-be surf-mad generation "heading out singing our song." More important still, "Surfin' Safari" finally rocked—at least for its day—accelerating its rhythm, increasing its volume, infilling its acoustic spaces with more than musical clichés, and punctuating the whole mix with a driving energy that supercharged surf subculture with an energetic new sound. Using more of the surf subculture lingo and better poetic imagery, the kids in "Surfin' Safari" do not even simply surf anymore but instead do more exotic and more exciting things like "shooting the pier," "walking the nose," "anglin'," and "kicking out."

Moreover, the Beach Boys were now presenting all of this without the exclusionary isolationism of a local, insider surf "scene," reaching out instead with an ecumenical inclusiveness that invited "everybody" to "come on," "come along," and go surfing "*with* me" ("Surfin' Safari"; emphasis added). Surf culture had finally come of age, and the Beach Boys were playing its bar mitzvah, establishing surf culture as the epicenter of a larger, more complex, and more momentous Southern California youth culture that included everything from dance crazes, sock hops, and malt shops to amusement parks, juke boxes, rock and roll, radio, drive-ins, cruising, hot rods, and drag racing. Extending this brazen trajectory still further toward some kind of quasi-Hegelian teleological conclusion, their later hit, "Surfin' U.S.A.," would present an anthem so compelling and infectious that surf music would even briefly lay claim to national youth culture at large, proposing a plausible new zeitgeist for "everyone"

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in the "U.S.A.," while belatedly earning a bit of rock street cred in the process. In what is perhaps best understood as the Beach Boys' preemptive atonement for "Be True to Your School"—a song with the dubious distinction of being the most sincere, not to mention inane, expression of school spirit ever put to wax—the Beach Boys finally penned a line to match the rebellious spirit of Chuck Berry's "School Days," playing their defiant "tell the teacher we're surfing" (Surfin' U.S.A.) to call, or even to raise, Berry's "Soon as three o'clock rolls around / you finally lay your burden down. . . . / Up to the corner and 'round the bend / right to the juke joint you go in . . . / Long live rock and roll" ("School Days"). Not yet The Ramones' "Rock and Roll High School," let alone Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, but one does wonder if the Beach Boys might have been better off if they had stolen more, not less, from Berry.

Obviously "Surfin' Safari" is neither the first, nor the finest, expression of post-WWII Southern Californian youth culture, the transforming American West, or Californian regional Pop modernism more broadly. It had already been preceded by numerous landmark texts, ranging from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), Marlon Brando's Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One* (1953), and James Dean's Jim Stark in Nicolas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" and "C'mon Everybody" (1958) and Joe Jones's "California Sun" (1960). In fact, by 1966 both Jan Berry and Cochran had already suffered at the hands of the very cars and speed that the Beach Boys and other Southern Californian Pop modernists would champion, and even the Beach Boys' signature surf sound itself drew from many precedents, developing, even literally stealing at times, its chord progressions from Chuck Berry. They also imitated the instrumental techniques pioneered by Link Wray, Duane Eddy, Dick Dale and the Del-Tones, Johnny and the Hurricanes, The Bel Airs, and The Ventures. What the Beach Boys did, however, was to consolidate surf music into a readily recognizable and widely appreciated genre—one that would be imitated by Jan and Dean, The Rip Chords, and numerous other bands—at the same time that they also transformed that genre itself into what Barney Hoskyns describes as "*the* teen sound of Southern California," an anthemic optimistic celebration of the American West, and a crucial voice within an emergent, alternative, regional California Pop modernism (58; emphasis

original). As Hoskyns explains, the Capitol record producer who produced "Surfin' Safari," Nick Venet, was one of the first to understand the Beach Boys in broader terms as representative of the "kind of West Coast Pop Art being produced by Ed Ruscha, Craig Kauffman, Billy Al Bangston [sic] and Larry Bell, artists whose work was like an avant-garde refraction of surf and Hot Rod subculture" (62). "Surfin' Safari" was only the Beach Boys' first step toward articulating this broader artistic vision by transforming the regional genre of surf music and the local surf subculture that it represented, making it relevant, even central, to the broader regional and national youth cultures, allowing American culture as a whole to relax, if only for one brief moment and perched upon a precipice at that, in the warm California sun before the radical 1960s would erupt, arguably even from within an alternative version of California culture itself, into a long, cold winter of discontent.

In short, "Surfin' Safari" used narrative drama, linguistic artistry, and sonic technique to craft a bold regionalist discourse, making two crucial interventions, in particular, that collectively articulated a provocative reinterpretation of the wider American West. Long after Frederick Jackson Turner's idea of the western frontier as a vast open landscape had been radically transformed by everything from resource extraction, military installations, and infrastructural megaprojects to recreational developments and suburban sprawl—as the 1964 Wilderness Act would soon officially recognize—the Beach Boys seemed to embrace John F. Kennedy's concept of new frontiers. As Kennedy argues in his Democratic National Convention acceptance speech, despite America's rapidly changing landscape new American frontiers still remain:

> I stand here tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. . . . Some would say that those struggles are all over, that all the horizons have been explored, that all the battles have been won, that there is no longer an American frontier. But I trust that no one in this assemblage would agree with that sentiment; for the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won; and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier.

Only instead of projecting those new frontiers outward onto the space race or redirecting them back inward onto American cities and

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social issues such as poverty, the Beach Boys would simply keep going further West, first into the glistening waters of the Pacific Ocean itself and then gradually spreading across a vast, emerging, soft, neoimperialist aquatic Pacific Rim geography. Turning away from even the land itself, the Beach Boys journeyed still further westward to an emergent pristine aquaworld with few geographical or geopolitical limits: in other words, as an endless, transnational, liquid frontier available wherever anyone "had an ocean." Essentially, they more or less embraced Kennedy's idea of the new frontier and dressed it up a bit—in "baggies," "huarache sandals," and a "bushy bushy blonde hairdo"—before sticking it on a longboard and pushing it out into the Pacific while still sporting a six-shooter and a Lone Ranger mask ("Surfin' U.S.A."). Still spinning a conventional frontier yarn, they rescripted its characters, props, and scenery, waxing it until it shined like new.

Ultimately, the Beach Boys' surf A-sides collectively articulated a bold attempt to preserve, extend, and even fabricate, if necessary, the open landscape of the western frontier. Baptized by immersion and rechristened surfscapes, the Beach Boys extended Kennedy's new frontier onto an aquatic paradise of vast oceans, wild waves, and endless summers. This move from land to surf in and of itself is already pregnant with significance, but did it signal a bold resurgent confidence in the continued existence and salience of the open spaces of the western frontier, something between Kennedy's new frontier address and the 1964 Wilderness Act? Or was it an act of final desperation, a last-ditch effort to salvage whatever remained of the dying frontier West and apologize for the emerging ersatz Disney West in a delusional saccharine pop ballad? In both their most inspired surf hits—"Surfin' Safari" and "Surfin' U.S.A."—and their most banal—"Luau" and "Kokomo"—the Beach Boys repeatedly and indiscriminately sought to extend surf culture transoceanically across national borders by combining the simplest anthropological primitivism with the brash geopolitical hubris of an American Century. Refocusing their neocolonial sights across the Pacific Rim, they extended their new aqua-frontiers onto exotic locales, finding "island[s] in the sun" everywhere—not only "from Hawaii to the shores of Peru" but also from "Aruba, Jamaica" to "Bermuda, Bahama," effectively reducing world geography to a banal combination of

mellifluous assonance, consonance, and alliteration ("Luau"; "Surfin' Safari"; "Kokomo"). By 1964, perhaps only Walt Disney—with his heterotopic menagerie of Main Streets, Frontierlands, Fantasylands, Tomorrowlands, Adventurelands, and Small Worlds—had a more ebullient utopian vision of Southern California as the epicenter of the brave, new transforming West.

From Aquatic to Asphalt Frontiers

> Giddyup, giddyup, 409.
> —"409," The Beach Boys

But that isn't the whole story; it isn't even half of it. At the same time, and without the slightest hint of cognitive dissidence, the Beach Boys contradictorily extended their new frontiers in the exact opposite direction not only deep into the West's urbanizing landscape but onto the brave, new streets—the urban asphalt frontiers—of the West's largest megalopolitan behemoth, Los Angeles itself, finding yet more new frontiers at a point when the American West began to be aggressively subdivided and developed. With its cultural homage to the Chevy 409 and its exhortation to be the "fastest," so that "nothing can catch you" and "nothing can touch you," "409" is the flip side of "Surfin' Safari." It was "409" that truly began expanding the Beach Boys' insular parochialism from "Surfin'"—"surfin' is the only life / the only way for me"—to include a wider range of concerns, cars and drag racing foremost among them, but also encompassing everything from teen fashion and new cultural media to changing sexual mores and gender identities. This enlarged perspective, in turn, helped the Beach Boys create a broader dialogue not only with their own regional culture but also with the national culture at large. If surf culture had *not* previously occupied the national stage, rock and roll *had* long celebrated car culture, from Ike Turner's "Rocket 88" (arguably the first rock and roll song ever recorded) and Eddie Cochran's "Somethin' Else" to Chuck Berry's "No Particular Place to Go" and "Maybellene." In many respects the Beach Boys' newfound interest in car culture was only one small part of their widening engagement with both California and national youth culture, but in a more profound sense it was a, if not *the*, defining moment in

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their artistic maturation, an intellectual lynchpin in the broadening of their cultural vision, and a primary catalyst driving their larger transformation from mere local surf anthropologists and apologists into resident cultural philosophers and West Coast Pop prophets. Extending their focus from surf to cars, from beaches to roads, and from nature to technology, the Beach Boys' hot rod songs such as, "Shut Down," "I Get Around," and "Fun, Fun, Fun," would ultimately expand, in the broadest sense, to dramatize the complex interrelationship between the Old Western culture of horses ("giddyup") and a New Western world of accelerated urban asphalt frontiers of speed ("my 409") ("409").

As literally the flip sides of the same single, "Surfin' Safari" and "409" both established and vividly illustrated the two principal—sometimes complementary, often conflicting, and at times outright contradictory—poles running through the Beach Boys classic, pre–*Pet Sounds* oeuvre. Skipping the frontier racism of the band's flop, "Ten Little Indians," the Beach Boys would finish the summer with two more hit singles that followed this exact same formula: B-siding "Surfing U.S.A." with "Shut Down" and "Surfer Girl" with "Little Deuce Coupe." Not only would this bipolar dialectic establish the central cultural logic of the band's signature sound—their primary themes, aesthetic style, and even geopolitics—but it would transform this sound itself into a much broader exploration of the rapidly evolving material and cultural landscapes of the American West. From the artistic DNA contained on the two flip sides of these records, the Beach Boys would ultimately produce a string of hits that would simultaneously celebrate two new western frontiers, extending the American West still further west, pushing it offshore, and miraculously turning it from land into water, even globalizing it—while accelerating its urban frontier, discovering dynamic new asphalt frontiers in seemingly lifeless pavement.

Ultimately the Beach Boys staked out the extreme optimistic termini of the American West, articulated their cultural logics, championed them, and invented a language to express them by consolidating 1950s rock and roll, infusing it with California sun imagery, and amplifying into a Spectorian Wall of Sound, supercharging the whole thing with anthemic power and rolling it whole into a totalizing vision laced with quasi-Messianic fervor: all in three-minute-

and-fifteen-second pop songs. What is remarkable about the Beach Boys, however, is not simply *that* they advocated for these brave, new western frontiers, but rather *how* they did so by creating a new language and cultural grammar—complete with narratives, imagery, anthems, and shibboleths—that would make at least their slice of white suburban Southern California sizzle with excitement and dazzle in the warm California sun. If the 1950s media presented suburbia statically as *Leave It to Beaver* domestic bliss—a fully domesticated and frontierless fait accompli—the Beach Boys advanced an alternative vision: an accelerated Kennedy-era new frontier optimism on longboards. Supercharged and fuel-injected with "four-speed, dual-quad positraction" ("409"), the Beach Boys saw "new frontiers" everywhere they looked. Whether as surf ditties or drag showdowns, the Beach Boys songs were—almost first to last—mini-Westerns: frontier dramas in four-part harmony either surfing off into some vast aquatic sunset or riding steeds of steel down Sunset Boulevard. It was a vision that lacked any shred of subtlety or complexity, but it was nonetheless powerfully compelling either despite or because of its glaring contradictions. Was this a brave, new sunny future, a possible and viable, terminal westerness, or merely irrational exuberance, naïveté, willful ignorance, and delusion? While the Beach Boys' early music initially embraced this sunny future, as we shall see, their later work would eventually call into question the naïveté of their earlier optimism.

Initially the Beach Boys' central, but largely undifferentiated, dichotomy—or better, synthesis—between surfboards and cars, or between natural and urban frontiers in general, would prove both resonant and enduring, exerting a powerful influence not only narrowly over other surf bands but also broadly over regional West Coast and even national culture at large. In addition to the Beach Boys' own explorations of car culture—"Shut Down," "Little Deuce Coupe," and "Fun, Fun, Fun"—surf bands such as The Surfaris and Ronny and the Daytonas would record "G.T.O." and "Boss Barracuda." The Rip Chords alone released a string of hot rod anthems—"Three Window Coupe," "X.K.E.," "Red Hot Roadster," and "Hey Little Cobra"—even matching the Beach Boys' "Surfing U.S.A." with their own "Hot Rod U.S.A." Meanwhile, Jan and Dean worked the surf-car polarity into a formula, if not a cottage industry, taking a quick pit stop at "Drag

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City" to race Stingrays and XKEs around "Dead Man's Curve" en route to "Rid[ing] the Wild Surf" at "Surf City." By essentially equating the "skill and courage unknown" required to "catch the last wave and ride it in alone" ("Ride the Wild Surf") with the "nerve" required to meet the "challenge" of racing "all the way / to Dead Man's Curve" ("Dead Man's Curve"), Jan and Dean essentially collapsed the difference between the West's natural and urban landscapes, conflating the two into a single, more or less undifferentiated liquid-asphalt frontier. I would say that the Beach Boys couldn't have compressed the surf-car polarity any better themselves, but they did—in fewer songs and with fewer words. With consummate concision, their lyric—"She always turns in the fastest times. / Giddyup, giddyup, 409. / My four-speed dual-quad positraction"—essentially reduces the bipolar tension, even paradox, running through an ever-evolving culture of the American West into a single two-word phrase, "giddyup, 409," that juxtaposes a speeding horse—an unmistakable iconic symbol of the Old West's wild, gun-slinging, frontier past—with the fuel-injected hot rods that were burning rubber across the West's emerging asphalt frontiers. With its half-horse, half-car hybrid imagery, "409" begins to map the new possibilities—the tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes—of the rapidly urbanizing West as a liminal space where the disappearing old western frontier intersects with an emerging new urban frontier. Without attempting to split hairs, surf culture's frequent admonitions—to "ride" the "wild" waves or to "giddyup" in your "409"—all blur the distinctions between riding horses, waves, and cars, seamlessly intertwining old and new frontiers and formulas. It did so, however, with a sleight-of-hand conjuring trick, simultaneously extending the old frontier while revving up the urban one to produce a new suburban synthesis that somehow claimed a middle ground by pushing both extremes. Equating "wild waves" with "dead man's curves," Southern California surf culture seemed to suggest that if you just went far enough offshore you could somehow race home at breakneck speeds and still catch the latest drive-in movie paradoxically before sunset. The logic did not make sense, the math did not add up, but somehow people bought it. Reductively compressed, the Beach Boys were the griots of a West Coast tribe: in this simplified, even simplistic, West where homes on the range were being subdivided into tract homes and pristine wilderness areas

were being desecrated at an alarming rate, their brave, new breed of hot-rodding cowboys and surfing cowgirls simply rode off into the sunset on steeds of steel and fillies of fiberglass.

The Beach Boys' Postwestern Dirge

> The ultimate world-historical significance—and oddity—of Los Angeles is that it has come to play the double role of utopia *and* dystopia for advanced capitalism.
>
> —Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*

Ultimately, such a far-reaching vision inevitably required procrustean levels of reductionism, but the Beach Boys' fundamental surf-car dialectic produced an effective shorthand for representing the American West at a moment of transition. The critical crux of the whole matter—its baffling conundrum even—is how the Beach Boys could fuse these two opposing Old and New Western frontiers into such a seamless whole without the slightest trace of cognitive dissonance, without a hint of contradiction, without an ounce of concern. At least in retrospect, the Beach Boys' early music simply seems blithely unaware, curiously incurious, and even willfully ignorant about the potential perils of an emerging world that Mike Davis points out is both a utopia for some and a dystopia for others. They were the proverbial ostriches with their heads stuck in the sand, literally, but they were not alone. They had the overwhelming support of popular opinion on their side, even hordes buying their records as they migrated en masse to sunny Southern California. Sure, the Beach Boys were wearing rose-colored glasses, but many are still wearing those same glasses in Los Angeles today. The Beach Boys may not have been ahead of their time, but they were at least profoundly of it.

Taking this post-WWII Southern California surf-car youth culture at its most utopian zenith as a broader manifestation of the profound changes that were radically transforming the American West—arguably best exemplified by the unprecedented rapid suburbanization of Los Angeles itself—the Beach Boys, perhaps inadvertently, assumed the role of bona fide organic Pop culture intellectuals. Or at least, Richard Aquila argues, the Beach Boys represented the "first serious attempt by rock artists to make use of the images of the mythic American West" (419). Anticipating Mike Davis by almost

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three decades, they essentially threw down a theoretical gauntlet, challenging "late twentieth-century intellectual[s]" to "come to take a peep and render some opinion on" Southern California as a brave, new urban experiment, a sprawling megalopolis with a distinctively new spatial and cultural geography that critics were increasingly recognizing as "a stand-in for capitalism in general" and a site that played the paradoxical "double role of utopia *and* dystopia for advanced capitalism" more specifically (Davis 16, 15). As Davis explains, the "paramount axis of cultural conflict in Los Angeles has always been about the construction/interpretation" of a "*city myth*" organized primarily in terms of a "master dialectic of sunshine and *noir*" that has produced a highly "polarize[d] debate": is Los Angeles a sun-filled neoliberal fantasy daydream, or does it exemplify the brutal gangster "nightmare at the terminus of American history (as depicted in *noir*)" (23, 20; emphasis original)? Given the Beach Boys' initial role as ebullient, high-profile advocates for the sunniest side of this debate, Davis's argument implies that latter-day intellectuals must ultimately pass judgment on the Beach Boys themselves, taking a stand for or against the mythic sun-bleached Los Angeles that they both represented and helped create in their music, if not quite in their lives. As the Beach Boys themselves put it in "California Calling": "If everybody in the U.S.A. / could come with us to Californ-i-a / we could take 'em to a place out west / where the good sun shines every day." While I am not suggesting that the Beach Boys, or their audience, fully understood their work within this larger philosophical and geopolitical framework, the band did forge—drawing largely from the energy and imagery of the warm California sun—a substantial and enduring body of work: a singularly luminous, equally bedazzling and bedazzled, solar vision in sound, that, at least in retrospect, Davis could easily recognize as such. "To be, or not to be, a Beach Boy (or Surfer Girl)?"—a genetic hybrid between Hamlet and Davis might have asked. At the heart of this existential question stood a stark, bipolar surf-car contradiction, a contradiction that struck to the core of a transforming West.

In 1962 the answer might have been simple, but by 1966 even the Beach Boys themselves would struggle to find some kind of answer, let alone the right one. With the release of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966), the surf evangelists themselves would turn soul-searchers,

self-reflexively exploring the conflicts and contradictions of their own earlier work, rejecting its simplistic reworkings of Kennedy-esque new frontiers and turning instead to a more complicated and critical—as opposed to merely a celebratory—sensibility. *Pet Sounds* per se may not outright repudiate *Beach Boys Party!*, but it does take a decisively introspective, if not melancholic, turn, complicating its sense of new frontiers and catching the first glimpses of the tragic dead man's curves that might lie ahead. In the space of a mere four years, the Beach Boys would not only radically reinvent their own musical vision but they would take their place at the head of the line of Jeremiadic prophets who would turn turncoat against superficially sunny interpretations of Southern California, beating out Mike Nichols's *The Graduate*, Love's *Forever Changes*, and The Doors' "The End" by a year, Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" by a full four, and The Eagles' "Hotel California" by more than a decade.

Belatedly perhaps, but *Pet Sounds* nonetheless garners the Beach Boys a prominent seat at this table of critics, and Jim Fusilli's 33 1/3 book, *The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds*, does an admirable job of laying out the Beach Boys' transformation from Southern Californian apologists to crank prophets. For as Fusilli reminds us, *Pet Sounds* is no simple celebration of surfing and hot rodding. On the contrary, the album's "haunting afterglow" is "in large part a cry of despair": a "tale of trouble and heartache, of anguish and desolation, of a young man at the brink of collapse" (11–14). *Pet Sounds* may not have emerged ex nihilo; its painful disillusionment was in different ways "foreshadow[ed]" by the "melancholy" of "Lonely Sea," the "loneliness and alienation" of "Surfer Girl," the "deeply troubled" undertones of "The Warmth of the Sun," and the "discontent[ment]" of "I Get Around" (21, 23, 30, 33). Side two of *The Beach Boys Today!* alone contains what Fusilli describes as a "melancholy five-song suite"—"I'm So Young," "Please Let Me Wonder," "Kiss Me, Baby," "She Knows Me Too Well," and "In the Back of My Mind"—which starts to expose Brian Wilson's inner "conflict[s]" (49). In many respects, these tracks reveal a transition between the Beach Boys' sunniest early hits and the more somber, even dirgeful, tone of *Pet Sounds*, which would highlight the Beach Boys' changing understanding of sunny California. Or as Fusilli so aptly puts it, with *Pet Sounds* the Beach Boys finally realized that "you could be just as miserable in California as anywhere else,"

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and by extension the Beach Boys' optimistic championing of the New West would take a decisively critical turn (8). With *Pet Sounds*, the Beach Boys no longer promote a simplistic notion of seemingly endless and unproblematic aquatic and asphalt frontiers; instead, they begin to recognize the complexities and limitations of western frontiers as fractured spaces haunted by exhaustion, loneliness, alienation, confusion, meaninglessness, and despair.

This turn is perhaps most evident in songs like "Wouldn't It Be Nice," "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times," and "Caroline, No." The Beach Boys' straining optimism, in particular, can be heard in the rigorously hypothetical lyrics of "Wouldn't It Be Nice." This song is not about a world that is nice or even one that will become nice someday; instead, it conjures up a purely hypothetical world of would'ves, could'ves, should'ves, and ifs, but altogether lacking in any grounding sense of *is* or *are* or even *will* be. And the music reinforces this hypotheticality by starting off with the luscious, happy sounds of a "child's toy, making a statement of innocence, of unbridled happiness," only for Hal Blaine's drums to follow this idyllic dreamscape with a "harsh, ominous sound that echoes like a shut door" (Fusilli 41). Taken together, the lyrics and music suggest a changing tone in the Beach Boys' more mature work as their sunny world of teenage ebullience starts to sour, and their youthful exuberance begins to slip out of their reach.

In "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times," the Beach Boys' implicit conflicts are made explicit with the lyrics lamenting how "Each time things start to happen again, / I think I got something good going for myself," something always goes "wrong." Here Kennedy's new frontier, in the Beach Boys' West Coast articulation of it, has reached its ambiguous terminus. The Wilson brothers, and especially Brian, have become alienated from their surroundings and altogether run out of new frontiers to explore, as their previously sunnier-than-sunniest California itself has turned into a frustrating dead end.

With its lyrics—"Where did your long hair go? / Where is the girl I used to know? / How could you lose that happy glow? / Oh, Caroline, no!," "Caroline, No" even more resoundingly affirms how the Beach Boys' lackadaisical days in the sun have suddenly disappeared. Their idealized surfer girl has cut her hair, slipped into the realm of the unknowable, and lost her glow. And in the midst of this rapidly im-

pending despair, one cannot help but wonder if the Beach Boys' once idealized vision might not have ever really existed at all. Maybe the Beach Boys are not so much nostalgizing the way things once were as much as they are lamenting the way they never were, but they have only belatedly realized this. Perhaps their idealized surfer girl and seemingly never-ending aquatic and asphalt frontier fantasies have never been anything more than a hypothetical illusion when looked at through more mature eyes. But *Pet Sounds*' coup de grace is its concluding forty seconds, which—utterly remarkably for a pop song in 1966—records a train whistling past a railroad crossing as a lonely dog barks in the distance. In this brief section of ambient or aleatory sound, the Beach Boys conclude *Pet Sounds* with a haunting sense of loneliness and alienation, putting a full stop, or inverted exclamation point, on their earlier work, and opening up a brand-new Pandora's box of troubling possibilities: a less exuberant, less confident, and more lonely vision not of an emerging, but of a dying, West. More dirge than pop song, the conclusion to "Caroline, No" leaves the listener in an uncomfortable space of vanishing dreams (of trains missed) and present loneliness (the echo of a barking dog) devoid of any redemption or sunny new frontiers.

No longer mere West Coast boosters and surf apologists, with *Pet Sounds* the Beach Boys begin to articulate a more complex and nuanced, paradoxical and multifaceted, critical and discerning West Coast sensibility, with the lonely barking dog and whistling train that conclude "Caroline, No" taking their place alongside a litany of texts that explore the complexities and contradictions of an emerging American West in transition. They hold court alongside the dreary isolation that follows Sal Paradise's desert reveries (as experienced from the interstate) in *On the Road*, the rioting and Jimmy's death that conclude the reckless joyriding in *The Wild One*, the tragic game of chicken in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Jan and Dean's exhilarating drag races that you "don't come back from," and Benjamin Braddock's loveless affair and endless drifting in the family pool in *The Graduate*.

With the brilliant forty-second postwestern dirge that concludes their magnum opus, *Pet Sounds*, the Beach Boys finally shed their sunny "adolescent exuberance, naïveté, devotion, simplicity. You know, those things that vanish as you get older, after experience has taught you to protect your heart" (Fusilli 108). In its place they

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offer instead a more mature, ambiguous, and complicated West literally stuck at a railroad crossing with a mongrel mutt nipping at its heels. But where is that train headed, why did we miss it, how have we been left behind, what inhuman cry can be heard in the dog's echoing bark, and what relation might this bark bear to the inhuman machine whistling as it flies by? Home from their safaris to stay, and now more shut down than shutting down, the ominous echoing sounds that reverberate at the conclusion of *Pet Sounds* offer one of the most chilling sonic embodiments of the complexities and contradictions that define the core cultural logic of the emerging Postwest. As Jacques Attali explains, music "provides a rough sketch of the society under construction" because "it is prophetic. It has always been in its essence a herald of times to come" by making "mutations audible" (5, 4). Ultimately, *Pet Sounds* demonstrates how we can "hear the crisis of society in the crisis of music" (11). The literal noises—the train and the dog—that conclude *Pet Sounds* present, in embryonic form, the complex emergent sounds of a critical perspective on an evolving American West in a manner that finally ceases to look backward toward aquatic and asphalt frontier fantasies but instead looks forward to grapple with a newly emerging equal part utopian and dystopian Southern California with more questions and fewer answers, bigger congested cities and fewer open frontiers, more crises and less certainty—all expressed in nothing short of an avant-garde form of pop music.

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