

**A HIGHER FORM OF POLITICS:**

*The Rise of a Poetry Scene, Los Angeles, 1950–1990*



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Los Angeles, 1950–1990*

Sophie Rachmuhl

*Translated from the French  
by Mindy Menjou & George Drury Smith*

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*In memoriam, Wanda Coleman (1946–2013),  
for George Drury Smith,  
& for all Los Angeles poets, dead, alive and to be  
& for my mother*





*Untitled L.A. Poem*

The palms flatten  
against chance hot winds  
we bore in  
for the duration  
rigid  
the palms yield  
to our touch  
oh Los Angeles  
we are your spawn  
whim and hope  
our eyes pan  
one another  
for the right side  
the solid profile

Your face  
screens huge  
I cannot reach behind  
for the yes  
the hungry yes  
we need so much  
we cannot even touch  
the palms  
of our hands  
tight fists  
we hold it in  
we hold it in

—LAUREL ANN BOGEN



## INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN MORE THAN 20 YEARS in the making.

First came *Innerscapes, 10 Portraits of L.A. Poets*, an hour-and-a-half documentary I made in 1988 on the Los Angeles poets of the 1980s and which is included with the present book. This came about after I was chosen in 1986 by a jury that Pierre Salinger chaired to receive the Tocqueville Award for a video documentary project—originally conceived to be about the Los Angeles poet Charles Bukowski and the literary underground he was a part of.

After a lot of reading, interviewing and attending poetry readings, with UCLA film student Willie Dawkins I filmed 30 hours of interviews, poets, poetry readings, events and locales, including Los Angeles' poetry center, Beyond Baroque Foundation.

Two years and many hours of editing later, the final documentary I screened at UCLA was not the moving panorama of the scene I had originally envisioned, but rather ten intimate portraits of nine individual poets and one group who, together, conveyed the diversity and energy of the poetry scene. These were Wanda Coleman (1946–2013), Laurel Ann Bogen, Marisela Norte, *Youthless* (a “little magazine” that gathered teenagers Beck and Channing Hansen, Rain Smith and Mario Acosta), Dr. Mongo, Leland Hickman (1934–91), Dave Alvin, Jack Grapes, Kamau Daáood and La Loca—black, brown and white, young and old, publishers, actors, organizers, wanderers or musicians.

Then after another decade that included sifting through the material I had accumulated (local “little magazines,” poetry books, articles, interviews, tape-recordings of events, flyers), reading criticism, and finally writing intensely for four years, I produced a 600-page analysis of the L.A. poetry scene, written in French, with quotes and poems in English, entitled *Los Angeles 1950–1990—The Rise of an Arts Scene and a Poetic Discourse on the*

*City*. This was my doctoral dissertation, directed by Université Paris 7 Professor Geneviève Fabre.

And now, after two sons and two partners and a long period of intellectual burn-out and motherly investment, I have the opportunity to see my book translated and published in the United States, thanks to a publishing partnership originally between Paul Vangelisti, chair of Otis College of Art and Design Graduate Writing program, and Fred Dewey, who was then director of Beyond Baroque Foundation; and on the initiative of Beyond Baroque founder George Drury Smith.

Why did I spend so many years analysing a scene that I am not a part of, studying an art I do not practice, in a city where I lived three years?

Listening to the poetry; looking at the amazingly creative small presses; seeing all the locales, the energy, the people; reading the poetry; talking to the poets who shared their unique perspective on their city with me; crisscrossing Greater Los Angeles going to readings, then later digging the history out in small press literary magazines; forming hypotheses; meeting the challenge of defining the broad scene and establishing some of its history over a period of 40 years, I felt like an explorer and a discoverer, ceaselessly amazed at this bold way of embracing an art form that I thought off-limits.

Being an “outsider” was very useful, too, for it enabled me to write with some kind of neutrality and serenity about a poetry that was both intensely personal and intensely public, yet mostly ignored by the literary establishment (universities and the East Coast literary world) and the entertainment industry that so dominated Los Angeles culture, where fame and power were so significant that they could blind the players to certain aspects of the scene.

I was struck too by the prominence of oral readings, a format virtually unknown at the time in France, and the dynamic network of events and places that developed, allowing people to meet and share.

Though Los Angeles poets displayed great diversity, openness, quality and continuity, and many had produced a significant body

of work, I wondered, as did they themselves, why they generally went unrecognized even locally and certainly nationally and internationally.

Was it true, as some poets claimed, that Los Angeles poetry was uniquely isolated from the rest of the country and that the area provided unique conditions for writing?

And why didn't the poetry scene reflect much ethnic diversity?

I decided that the best way to answer these questions would be to do a study of the poetry scene that would:

–look at diverse Los Angeles communities from multiple angles, thus taking stock of its complexity (unless otherwise specified, when I say “Los Angeles” or even “city” I often mean the complex Greater Los Angeles urban area, which includes Los Angeles County and its nearly 90 incorporated cities);

–follow three main threads: the city, the poetry scene and the poetry itself—and their interrelationships;

–intermingle poems; quotations from interviews, “little magazines,” recorded events and other source materials; and social, anthropological, sociological and literary analysis; and

–have one or several theoretical models to organize and give meaning to the profuse multidimensional phenomena on which I had accumulated literally hundreds of pounds of material that I carried around in boxes wherever I moved.

The basic theoretical models and principles of organization I used are to be found in the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which provided me with a way to analyse the politics of poetic production; understand poets as groups and their attitudes and interests; and study the strategies they employed to achieve visibility and legitimacy.

And Mike Davis's stimulating *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* gave me a framework to place these poets within the city's cultural history.

The last step was to define and delineate the subject of my study, i.e., what I meant by “Los Angeles poetry scene,” what it was and what it was not, who belonged to it and who did not. I decided that the “scene” included anyone who, a) created what they themselves called “poetry,” b) made it public, mainly through poetry readings, and c) who was active in the local network of writing, publishing and reading.

Thus I have excluded, for example, “closet poets” who do not make their writings public, as well as academic poets (associated with universities), other well-known poets who were not really involved with the local scene, and finally rappers, who did not say their words were “poems” (though they could be considered to have poetic qualities) and used different production and distribution channels.

This book analyses the Los Angeles poetry scene in four chapters. I start with a description of the national poetry scene and its evolution in order to situate Los Angeles poetry in the national context. I then move on to the local scene from the 1950s and the Venice West Beat scene (Chapter 2); to some of the Watts writers in the 1960s and black poets who later became prominent (Chapter 3); and finally to the larger scene in the 1970s and 1980s, which built on the two earlier phases and truly developed after the creation of L.A.’s own poetry center, Beyond Baroque.

I focused mostly on the ’70s generation of poets, especially poets who were particularly active or representative in the poetry community and who were facilitators between different poet groups. They were the ones who, through a conscious collective effort to build up the local scene, gave it a firm foundation to rise and grow from.

I have considered the poets who were newcomers to the scene in the 1980s as a group, and have not dwelled on important poets from that period individually.

My documentary *Innerscapes*, which features a cross-section of poets from that “generation,” is an essential complement to the written analysis presented here of this period. This is precisely why it has been included with the book.

I must add that my original work included additional chapters—a chapter on Los Angeles history and another on L.A.’s symbolic history, which had a number of poems on the city and its history.

I envision the present book as the second part of a triptych that includes the documentary as well as a projected third part which would be an anthology of poetry by some of the poets I am sorry I had to omit from this English version of the book.

This book is translated from an academic analysis originally written in French academic style, and thus can sound awkward or abstract at times and make for arduous reading, but I hope this approach is rewarding in the end. George Drury Smith and I have certainly worked hard on alleviating the academic jargon and making the English “readable.” I must say I am very pleased with the end result.

I have retained some footnotes from the original French work, which in the original version nearly made up a second, parallel book. Readers can find in these notes complementary material on the Los Angeles poetry scene, as well as contextual information and theoretical explanations and observations.

Many new poets have surged on the Los Angeles scene since I began this journey, and there are many who have disappeared. Some have died, some have stopped writing poetry, others have moved away. But there are many more who have carried on.

Since the period this book covers, the Internet has given poets a new medium in which circulate their works and establish contact.

Many of the older poets have been recognized and the oral character of poetry has been confirmed with the rise of slams and performance poetry.

Los Angeles has started to take a look at itself, as the development of the “L.A. Studies” field since the 1990s shows. New books and articles on the arts/literature/poetry scene have been published, in particular Julian Murphet’s *Literature and Race in Los Angeles*; and *The Sons and Daughters of Los*, a collection of articles on “Culture and Community in L.A.” The prestigious Cambridge University Press devoted a book of its Companion

to Literature and Classics collection to Los Angeles Literature in 2010. Numerous anthologies have appeared, among which Estelle Gershgoren Novak's *Poets of the Non-Existent City*, a collection of poets from the 1950s literary magazines *California Quarterly* and *Coastlines*; and David L. Ulin's monumental anthology on *Writing Los Angeles*, which includes some poets. Finally, Bill Mohr's *Hold-Outs: The Los Angeles Poetry Renaissance, 1948–1992*, University of Iowa Press, 2011, is an insider's look at the Los Angeles poetry scene over the same period I am studying.

My own analysis—that of a French outsider scholar and poetry lover—should complement Mohr's history of Los Angeles poetry, seen through the eyes of a veteran poet and editor, as well as those of an academic. The (few) poets I chose to focus on are symbolic of something greater than themselves though they cannot be representative of the whole scene. This study does not claim to be comprehensive. In particular, the chapters about community poets treat only a few significant poets and anthologies. I am aware that many poets have been left out. I hope my choices will create no controversies or feelings of exclusion, though I think the work of the scholar as well as that of the director of a documentary is precisely to select. Los Angeles' energy and multiplicity certainly cannot be grasped in one study. This is in the end my personal journey through Los Angeles, some of its poets and their poetry. Despite careful readings from various friends and poets, I am sure some mistakes remain, due to the amount of material, time and space I am covering, as well as lack of written documentation concerning some parts, the wealth of new research since the 1990s, and finally the distance between Bordeaux, France and Los Angeles, USA.

I am still hoping that this will be a worthy contribution to the growing body of critical work on Los Angeles writing and be a base for the poets and future L.A. poetry scholars to build on. All I can say is that it was done with care, love, determination, curiosity, sympathy, and a lot of endurance.

—SOPHIE RACHMUHL,  
*Bordeaux, September 2014*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Los Angeles Scene in the 1970s and 1980s*

#### *Howling Poems of the Beat Generation*

Sometimes I be like Miss bad ass black chick  
above and beyond anything left behind by some white man,  
sometimes honky culture piss me off & wear me out  
'cept when I'm checking out the Beats,  
the bongo drum beats of the old time beatniks  
& their pseudo jazz scene—hey  
truth is, I'm into it  
truth is, them wine-drinking poet types,  
them knapsack-lugging zen-meditating poem-writers  
give me a literary tradition  
a language of resistance & bongos,  
give me hope & spit & joyful ways  
to avoid all the fearful tapdancing  
that assimilation got the hearts of the mainstream.  
The lie-eatin', lie-generatin' lifestyle  
that makes this breathing process deathly boring.

Problem is, we ain't got no name for the scene of this age.  
We not hippies, we not beatniks,  
we got a touch of the punk  
but the heck would give in punk the leadership.  
Punk ain't got the spunk, not the spark  
ain't got the know-withall insight  
to righteously dish out the dirt

to the yuppie bluppy guppie materialist sell-outs  
in this girl's city.

—MICHELLE T. CLINTON

*The Scene in the 1970s—  
Beyond Baroque Foundation*

Beyond Baroque Center was the first institution devoted to poetry writing and publishing in Southern California, and its beginnings in 1968 signaled the development of a more organized regional framework. Thanks to its gradual institutionalization, its longevity and its uniqueness, what was to become known as Beyond Baroque Literary/Arts Center finally provided a stable base and a gathering place for poets, who until then had been largely isolated and scattered. Beyond Baroque played many roles, perhaps most importantly that of an institution of record. Without a record, a movement is condemned to start over again with every generation. But Beyond Baroque made it possible for an independent local poetry scene to develop.<sup>106</sup> All through the 1970s, its members worked to create a poetic community founded on a regional identity. The project succeeded at least in part because Beyond Baroque forged a bond between previous generations—the Beats, the poets of *Coastlines*, certain Watts poets—and new arrivals.

Created almost by accident, Beyond Baroque reflected the openness and flexibility of late 1960s Los Angeles. Its development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an example of the way non-profit cultural centers have evolved since the 1970s, and its contradictions embodied those of the scene as a whole.

IN THE BEGINNING, *beyond baroque* was a literary review. George Drury Smith, a Santa Monica high school teacher at the time, had dreamed of becoming involved in the local literary community since 1964. When he could not find the “scene,” he decided to draw writers to him by publishing a magazine. But it was

four years before he had the funds (thanks to an inheritance) to publish the first issue of *beyond baroque*, *Quarterly Anthology Reflecting Nascent Literary Trends*, in December 1968. Its stated mission was to promote a national, even international, and avant-garde experimental poetry, the prelude to a literary, artistic and human renaissance—a conviction displayed at the beginning or end of each issue of the magazine until the early 1980s:

If you believe in an imminent literary flowering...

If you believe that man's re-conception of the universe in terms of space-time extends to the arts...

If you believe that the survival of writing as an art implies a re-evaluation (not a devaluation) of language per se, and of its use, significance, vision...

If you believe that man stands on the threshold of new sensibilities and modes of thinking, new relationships and new apparitions even within old structures and forms, new relevance and changed proportions in all things.....

If you believe these things, and if these, your beliefs are reflected in your life-style...

THEN beyond baroque IS FOR YOU!

This profession of faith, with its utopian accents and New Age flavor, recalled the mystic humanism, grandiloquence and hope for a new era of the Beats and hippies. Like them, it suggested a need to revolutionize the senses and the arts and to shatter the barriers between art and life. These aspirations, combined with a concern for language and form, placed the magazine within the avant-garde. It "was considered one of five or six avant-garde literary magazines in the United States," Smith said in a 1987 interview.

Smith acquired a building to provide an office for the magazine and "Roneo" (mimeograph-like) equipment to print the magazine starting with the second issue. Others joined forces with him, including Jim Krusoe, Lynn Shoemaker, John Harris and Joseph Hansen. Vacant space in the building was soon filled with regular literary activities—a writing workshop and poetry

readings. Bayrock Press was founded to finance the magazine and support Smith. An art gallery/performance space was opened for exhibits, concerts, dance performances, theater, performance art and even films that could not be seen elsewhere. Beyond Baroque became a true cultural center, with ever more diverse activities, but it always focused on literature, and particularly poetry.

In 1972 Beyond Baroque Enterprises was incorporated as a tax-exempt educational organization, Beyond Baroque Foundation. The Foundation could now receive federal, state and city grants, often on the understanding that they would obtain matching funds from other sources. Thanks to this increased financial stability, Beyond Baroque was able to continue its expansion and extend its educational work, instituting programs for school children or hosting readings by poets of national repute.

The same year, Alexandra Garrett, who had worked for *Trace* and *Coastlines*, joined Smith's team; she was to organize a public library. The Beyond Baroque Library of Small Press Literary Publications opened in April 1974, with an initial catalogue of 3,000 volumes (by 1978 it held 15,000 volumes). It became what *Poets & Writers Newsletter* called "the largest American independent [poetry] library to date" (Poets & Writers, Inc. 1977, 15). The collection has continued to grow, thanks to grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Garrett acted as the Foundation's librarian, fundraiser, treasurer, administrator, editor and even custodian at various times until her death on December 31, 1991.

Also in 1972, a second magazine, *NeWLetterS*, began to appear. It was less experimental and more local, devoted to the "writers West of the Rockies [whom we called] 'the Cismontane' writers," Smith recalled in the interview. Alongside poems and prose fiction, it published "commentary and news of the Western literary and cultural community (workshops, writers programs, grants, publishing, community arts)." *NeWLetterS* had its origin in notices sent to the few early subscribers of *beyond baroque*, to let them know that their magazine would be late and advise them of activities taking place at the new literary center. The weekly programs of poetry readings organized by Beyond

Baroque's co-director and associate editor Jim Krusoe were also listed and soon a few poems were added to the notice. The note-turned-*NeWLetterS* was much more successful than the original magazine; under the name *NEW Magazine* its circulation rose as high as 18,000. At the event "Forty Years of L.A. Small Presses," which took place during the 1990 L.A. Poetry Festival, Krusoe recounted:

We continued running out of money so we were delaying and delaying the production of the next issue for our 15 subscribers.<sup>58</sup> So we started sending out notes explaining why their issue was delayed. We had extra space on the note, so we threw in an extra poem or two. Then about that time we also started the reading series.... Then we started putting the schedule of the reading series onto this apologetic note that was explaining why their magazine hadn't arrived yet. It turned out that the circulation for our notes, and we started putting in other readings going on, was far more successful than the actual magazine [*beyond baroque*] ever was. So we got to the point where we had maybe 500 or a 1000 subscribers to our explanatory notes to the original 15 (Forty Years of L.A. Small Presses, 1990).

*NeWLetterS* answered a real need. Smith said its success was due to "the inability of the foundation and other groups to get consistent coverage of literary events in local newspapers and magazines." *NeWLetterS* reserved more and more space for the schedules of poetry readings in the region. And it started the idea of a publication with modest costs (using a cheap glue-bound newsprint format), large circulation and free subscriptions. This was the trademark of *Beyond Baroque* publications into the 1980s. Krusoe continued:

Eventually we stopped doing the magazine in the limited traditional form and decided... to go for a high circulation, not charge any money whatsoever, give the magazine away but print on newsprint. And in those days it cost us 8 cents or a

dime to print each issue and we printed poems, short stories; we listed readings and we'd leave them around movie theaters and places like that. And that's in fact the height of it all.

In 1976, the Foundation started sending books to anyone wanting them free of charge, as well. The men and women of Beyond Baroque wanted to assume responsibility for the literary scene, and this encouraged them to emphasize accessibility—both geographic and financial—above all else. Smith recalled in his 1987 interview:

We sometimes had a hundred people who came to events and we had seating for only 50 or 60 at most.... We often put loudspeakers outside so people who couldn't get in could hear the poetry readings. Just all sorts of things were done to try to accommodate more people.... Sometimes people came from 35, 100, 200 miles away for poetry readings.

CONTRADICTIONARY ASPIRATIONS presided over the birth of Beyond Baroque. Smith had an avant-garde understanding of art and poetry.<sup>59</sup> He hoped that poetry could be renewed by an encounter with other art forms:

My original hope was that I'd see some sort of a renaissance in poetry and the first thing that I saw was that the really exciting writing was being done in fiction as far as I was concerned, not poetry. And frankly, I don't think that my expectations were met as far as seeing some resurgence in creative writing and poetry. I had the hope to see some fascinating experimental poetry and I think that what I saw was a lot of good poetry, but nothing that I felt was really great.... I originally had the notion that at Beyond Baroque there would be some sort of interplay between the various arts, a synesthetic sort of thing where art and poetry and music would come together in different kinds of forms, and I didn't see it at all. That didn't seem to be happening. Even though we had activities in most of the arts. The poets would come and lean their greasy heads against

the paintings, and they wouldn't come to the music. And the artists who tried to dabble in literature usually failed miserably. So that thing simply didn't seem to be happening.

Smith's ambitions could seem detached from his local context. He saw literature as a private and individual art form. Los Angeles literature could not be distinguished from that of other cities except through the assertion of the poets themselves. Smith sought to publish quality writing that was aware of its history and its consequences. "I hoped to find works written by literate writers who love language and write well," he said. But his modernism conflicted with some earlier Los Angeles writers, who attached more importance to autodidacticism and freedom from formal constraints than they did to high art traditions. The mid-1970s version of *beyond baroque's* credo nonetheless concludes with "the belief that the role of High Art is to seek Truth, reach towards Cosmic Consciousness, and find ways of transmitting the highest levels of emotional and spiritual experience through Works of Beauty."<sup>60</sup> The explicit reference to art's ethical, aesthetic and spiritual role, and the suggestion that art should elevate subjective experience into something universal, suggest an allegiance to academic, rather than independent, poetry—a sign of the growing institutionalization of the Foundation.

But eventually the Foundation moved away from its founder's original plan, and became a regional poetry center. It "developed its own roots right in the area [and became] a base where [poets] could teach and converse as artists" (Cardona-Hine 1979, 148). Although he never abandoned his high aesthetic standards, Smith's desire for literary community, his generosity (he spent his entire inheritance on *Beyond Baroque*), and his sense of humor (some thought many of *Beyond Baroque's* programs and activities bore "New" in their title in homage to Smith's cat, which was called NewCat) made him an ideal leader. He knew how to work with a team of people, and the relaxed atmosphere of *Beyond Baroque* attests to this spirit of tolerance. Those who were involved, like Alexandra Garrett, remember it with a certain nostalgia:

When I first walked in Beyond Baroque, there was George, sitting at his desk, which was piled three feet high with the most incredible pile of mail and God knows what, and I saw this odd thing hanging from a string in a shoe-box top. It was strung from the ceiling and it turned out to be the telephone! ...In my estimation, things were a great deal funkier in those days.... People walked in off the street and there was a great deal of charm, something that I don't like to see lost and in fact I think that still exists here where people feel free to walk in off the street. That's really nice and George and Jim [Krusoe] and the original people really created that and the whole idea of putting [loud]speakers outside—I mean people pressing their noses against the glass—is something that won't happen again I don't think, but it set the tone for what's still going on at Beyond Baroque.<sup>61</sup>

The progressive transformation of Beyond Baroque Foundation into an institution distanced it from bohemianism. The Foundation, in “settling down” and in “federating” the city's scattered poets, came to be the guardian of the past. For example, it enabled the few remaining Venice Beats to perform their work for younger writers, which established continuity between generations for the first time.

Which is not to say that there were no changes at the Foundation itself. *beyond baroque* became *beyond baroque/newforms*, continuing into 1980. *NeWLetterS* became *NEW Magazine* in 1976, then *NEW Magazine: Arts & Letters*, and finally *NEW*. Then, starting in 1980, these were all replaced by *Beyond Baroque Obras* (which had several issues, edited by Manazar (Manuel Gamboa [1934–2000])), and in 1981 *Magazine* and *Poetry News* (both edited by Jocelyn Fisher). The *NewBooks* series published six titles in 1976 and 1977. The NewComp Graphics Center, equipped with “modern phototypesetting equipment...for the use of non-commercial literary publishers and arts groups,” assisted and trained many local publishers.

A local and regional orientation now marked most of Beyond Baroque's activities. The State of California recognized Beyond



Baroque as a “conduit organization,” which could oversee grants to organizations that lacked official “non-profit” status; the Foundation even lobbied elected officials and representatives to influence the state’s arts policy.

This commitment to the region became ever stronger over time. The January/February 1975 mission statement spoke of serving the literary community “West of the Rockies.” An editorial from February 1976 narrowed the focus still further:

We believe the West Coast has begun to receive some of the literary recognition and attention it deserves, and we believe the wide circulation of *NeWLetterS* helped. Beyond Baroque Publications will now focus its attention more specifically on an area that still desperately needs focus—Southern California.

Much of Beyond Baroque’s activity was governed by the unique nature of Los Angeles, as *beyond baroque* 752 *Newforms* suggested in 1976:

[The Center] believes few, if any, areas in the nation have as much creativity per capita as Los Angeles. Yet the city has great difficulty in maintaining a cultural identity that reflects this creativity.

The very diversity of talent and the enormous geographic space of Los Angeles pose special problems which do not exist in compact areas such as New York or San Francisco. For over seven years Beyond Baroque has offered a unique and ever expanding set of solutions to some of these problems.

Finally, the 1978 version of the credo (in *beyond baroque* 783) was aimed very precisely at “the entire greater Los Angeles community.” The city may be huge and its artists dispersed, but the development of better communication could help create a unified community: at “the base of [Beyond Baroque’s] program is a commitment to communication and to the importance of regional centers for the creative arts within the metropolitan area.”

Beyond Baroque was pushed by local artists toward local writing, rather than modernist universalism. These writers, and the institutions they formed, helped to create an extensive, active network of literary production and distribution.

HARRY NORTHUP recalls the importance of Beyond Baroque's Wednesday Night Poetry Workshop:

In February of 1969, the free Wednesday night poetry workshop began; I was one of its original members. That was where many of us here in L.A. got together. There was Leland Hickman, whom I had known from New York City, Bill Mohr, Wanda Coleman, Kate Braverman, Krusoe, all those people in the late '60s, early '70s. It was a gathering place.<sup>62</sup>

Jack Grapes described the scene:

We used to go to Beyond Baroque on Wednesday nights and there were 20 of us sitting around a room. And that was it! We were the scene. And we were part of it and we believed in it... We thought then and still think that some of the best poetry being written in the country is being written here, in Southern California. We wanted exposure and a wider audience for ourselves and for our fellow poets (Forty Years of L.A. Small Presses, 1990).

The workshop was initially co-directed by the poet and novelist Joseph Hansen (who died in 2004), and John Harris, who later ran Papa Bach Bookstore. It moved from the psychedelic shop The Bridge to Beyond Baroque in early 1969, where the co-directors played a valuable critical and pedagogical role, which became the basis of the workshop's success, as Hansen observed:

At first, there were Wednesday nights when Harris and I had no one else to talk to or listen to. Some of those who did stray in out of the night became angry with us. We were after unity and brevity, directness, coherence, objectivity. We were after

craftsmanship. This implied self-discipline and in 1969 discipline was a dirty word.... However fed up he got, Harris stuck with the Workshop and so did I. And soon we were averaging a dozen poets a night, and after a few months had passed, two dozen. Sometimes, as many as forty packed the little room (Hansen, 1977-78, 136).

Drury Smith encouraged the workshop, and suggested splitting it into two: one for those whose goal was to share their poems with a kindly audience, the other for those who were looking for more critical discussions. Hansen thought Smith's tastes were "a far cry from what the Workshop was aiming at," but nonetheless several issues of *beyond baroque* were devoted to workshop members' work. These anthologies gave form to an emerging group of Los Angeles poets.

The Wednesday Workshop was important because, unlike earlier workshops, it brought together writers from different areas of the city. Hansen recalled:

Poetry workshops had existed in Southern California long before ours started in Venice.... But these pockets were mostly unaware of each other. Los Angeles sprawls. They could have remained out of touch forever. But Venice Poetry Workshop—tough and demanding as it was—drew crowds, and from all over, Watts to San Fernando Valley, Hermosa Beach to San Gabriel, people of all ages and backgrounds, willing to take bruises in order to learn to write. And slowly they began to shape a community of poets in Los Angeles (Hansen 1977-78, 139).

This new generation of Los Angeles poets went through the stages of artistic maturation—apprenticeship, writing, publication, recognition—at the same time and in the same place, and were able to encourage later generations as well. Wanda Coleman described it in these terms:

Between the years '68 and '73-'74, I used to go [to Beyond Baroque] pretty regularly. That's when I came across people

that I feel like I more or less grew up with poetically in a sense, or I regard them as my peer group. And that would be Eloise Klein Healy, Holly Prado, Bill Mohr, Kate Braverman, Leland Hickman, Jim Krusoe, Jack Grapes – gosh, there’s more – Greeny [Bob Greenfield], Bob Flanagan, people who were in the workshop that I came across. And Harry Northup also. So the workshop people, these became people that I regarded as my peers. And I kept running into them over the years as I went to read and do readings, and they were poets and we sort of all evolved in this miasma, this sort of cultural thing that was taking place. So those are more or less the people that I regard as the true basis of what’s become [the L.A. poetry scene].

As Coleman noted, quite a few people connected with Beyond Baroque were originally from Los Angeles, and most of those who were not had settled there permanently. This put an end to the constant comings and goings that had characterized earlier movements in the city:

What was L.A. hadn’t yet come into being. Because these people [the older poets] were not really committed to it, for whatever reasons, or they were going in and out of it, like Wakowski spent most of her growth in New York. Eshleman came from the Midwest. I don’t know where John Thomas came from, he was just here (laugh). William Pillin came from Chicago. So these were people who came from other places. Dennis Phillips is another one who I regard as a sibling more or less, and actually Dennis Cooper. Those are two people who were born in Southern California.

### *Publishing Activity Around Beyond Baroque*

The small presses and literary magazines that are essential to the emergence and expansion of a poetic scene were created around this time. Some attempted to “document what was seen as an emerging poetry movement,” as, for instance, Jack Grapes’