The Sons and Daughters of Los
In the series

Wide Angle Books

*edited by* Erik Barnouw, Ruth Bradley, Scott MacDonald, and Patricia Zimmermann
and Los drew them forth, compelling the harsh Spectre
Into the Furnaces & into the Valleys of the Anvils Death
And into the mountains of the Anvils & of the heavy Hammers
Till he should bring the Sons & Daughters of Jerusalem to be
The Sons and Daughters of Los

—William Blake, Jerusalem
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Introduction:
The Sons and Daughters of Los

In the initial stages of the project whose results are collected in the present volume, we approached popular culture in Los Angeles using as a heuristic the idea of “grassroots cultural organizations.” By this we had in mind the more or less ad hoc instances where people who were marginal to the city’s established cultural institutions came together to share their poetry, painting, dance, and other forms of art, and in so doing created communities that then developed lives and momentums of their own. Conceived in dissatisfaction with both industrial and other publicly sanctioned forms of culture, they generally produced themselves as demotic alternatives to establishments that they perceived to be alienated and compromised. Within the frame of this guiding orientation, the associations we explored were diverse in respect to both their internal organization and their eventual relations with the dominant cultural institutions. Growing from the initial efforts of very small groups, in some cases only one or two people, they were originally independent and autonomous, at least to the degree to which these concepts can presently be meaningful. But as they developed wider constituencies, they inevitably became affiliated in various ways with the kind of organizations with which they had before been in conflict, both public—such as city, state, and federal agencies—and private—such as foundations and corporations. Despite these affiliations, their creativity remained to some degree refractory, still honed on a stone of critical alterity.

With the exception of the Vedanta Center (an earlier and somewhat differently conceived initiative), the associations we examined were formed in the tide of populist social contestations mobilized in the 1960s and were mostly shaped by the ideas in which social and political identity were conceptualized and lived in this period, that is, through struggles for civil rights by ethnic and sexual minorities. The local emergence and self-assertion of these political identity groups were of course part of national movements; and indeed, the remarkable ethnic diversity and other demographic features of Los Angeles ensured that they were also often affected by global issues, especially by population shifts and changing patterns of migration. On the other hand, the