

RESEARCH PAPER

Lucifer Over Luxor: Archaeology, Egyptology, and Occultism in Kenneth Anger's Magick Lantern Cycle

Ethan Doyle White*

One of the great figureheads of American experimental cinema, Kenneth Anger (b.1927), is internationally renowned for his pioneering work, recognisable for its blend of homoeroticism, popular and classical music, and dark, symbolist imagery. A follower of Thelema, the religion of infamous British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), Anger's work is imbued with occult themes and undercurrents rarely comprehensible to the non-initiated viewer. In exploring these esoteric ideas, Anger makes use of archaeology and heritage in his short films *Eaux d'Artifice* (1953) and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954–66), as well as in the lost films *The Love That Whirls* (1949) and *Thelema Abbey* (1955), which utilize such disparate elements as Aztec human sacrifice and putative Renaissance Satanism. However, this theme only reaches its apex in *Lucifer Rising* (1980), an exploration of Thelemic theology filmed at such sites as Avebury, Luxor, and Karnak, which reflects and propagates the Thelemic view of the past—an 'alternative archaeology' rooted in Crowley's own fascination with Egyptomania. This paper seeks to explore Anger's use of the past and place it in its proper context of twentieth-century Western esotericism.

Kenneth Anger (b.1927) is one of the foremost figures of American experimental cinema, an artist who produced groundbreaking work in the field over a thirty-three year period from 1947 to 1980. Renowned French film studies scholar Georges Sadoul heralded him as one of the 'two most important names in the development of the New American Cinema' alongside Maya Deren (Rowe 1974: 25), while both Martin Scorsese and David Lynch have cited him as a core influence on their own work (Lachman 2009: 19). Despite this widespread acclamation, Anger is no household name either in his native land or elsewhere. This is perhaps not surprising, for his works have been labelled 'a subversive alternative to mainstream cinema' (Brottman 2002: 5), namely because they deal largely with two themes that were hardly respectable in conventional twentieth-century American culture: male homoeroticism and the occult. Adding to this counter-cultural stance, Anger works solely in short film, with none of his works exceeding half an hour in length or including any dialogue, and instead making heavy use of a pioneering blend of popular culture, classical music, and superimposed montages.

Anger sees his films as magical workings—ceremonies in which light, sound, and imagery are used to induce altered states of consciousness or perception among the audience (Brottman 2002: 5–7). In his own words, 'Making a movie is casting a spell' (Rowe 1974: 26). In this, Anger can be seen as part of a wider 1960s counter-cultural utopian project to revolutionize Western society

through the transformation of individual consciousness via artistic mediums (Hughes 2011: 12). While some of his 1960s films have been labelled 'pure psychedelia' (Hughes 2011: 13), film studies scholar Carel Rowe has argued that his work better fits within the tradition of Symbolism, drawing comparisons between it and the Symbolist poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud (2002: 11). Indeed, Anger's films—nine of which are collectively known as 'The Magick Lantern Cycle'—are rich in symbolism drawn from within the Western esoteric milieu and contemporary Pagan movement and in particular from an esoteric, Pagan, new religious movement known as Thelema.

A scholarly construct rather than a singular, self-defined tradition, 'Western esotericism' constitutes a broad category of beliefs, practices, and worldviews that Hanegraaff (2013: 13) argues represent 'the academy's dustbin of rejected knowledge': those schools of thought that have been rejected by both orthodox religion and scientific rationalism. Other scholars have argued that 'Western esotericism' can be better defined not by its rejection from the mainstream but by its intrinsic emphasis on a cosmos in which all things are interrelated (Favre 1994; Goodrick-Clarke 2008). Although once used as a synonym for 'esotericism', the term 'occultism' is now used to describe those forms of Western esotericism which emerged from the nineteenth century seeking to deal with society's increasingly disenchanting view of the cosmos (Hanegraaff 2006: 887–888). Often intersecting and overlapping with occultism is contemporary Paganism, or Neo-Paganism, a broad array of aesthetic and religious movements which consciously adopt elements from the belief systems of pre-Christian Europe, North Africa, and the Near East (Doyle White 2012: 15–17). Thelema

* University College London, GB
ethan-doyle-white@hotmail.co.uk

was founded in 1904 by the infamous English occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), and was based upon the premise that humanity was entering a new Aeon of Horus in which the species would cast off the old ‘slave religions’ and adopt a new moral code, ‘Do What Thou Wilt’, through which each individual would be guided by their own inner ‘True Will’. Anger’s films have been deeply influenced by this Thelemic philosophy, to the extent that film studies scholar Anna Powell has described them as being both ‘devotional items and potential tools for making new converts’ (2002: 47).

Many new religious movements operating in the twentieth century appropriated aspects of the ancient past and its material culture for their own beliefs and practices, among them the British Israelites (Moshenska 2008), Wiccans (Doyle White 2014), and members of other contemporary Pagan groups (Blain and Wallis 2007; Wallis 2003). Thelema is no exception. Although not attempting to actively revive the religion of ancient Egypt, Crowley was highly influenced by Egyptomania, and as a result ancient Egyptian symbolism obtained from both texts and material culture pervades Thelemic theology and liturgy (Tully 2010). A prominent example is that of the ‘Stele of Revealing’, a wooden stela produced circa 716 BCE for a priest named Ankhefenkhons I; Crowley took the writing on the stele to be a coded Thelemic message as a result of the fact that the artefact carried the museum catalogue number of 666 (Tully 2010: 39–41, 43–44). Moreover, as shall be explored later in this article, Crowley also developed his own classification system for the ancient past which was rooted in Thelemic theology.

Thelema therefore not only incorporated the imagery of the ancient past into its own structure, but it also developed its own unique understanding of past societies based on its beliefs about the cosmos. In creating this alternative past, one which is at odds with established academic understandings in archaeology and ancient history, Thelema has established its own variant of what are sometimes called ‘pseudo-archaeologies’, ‘cult archaeologies’, or more generously, ‘alternative archaeologies’, although recent suggestions include ‘quasi-archaeologies’ (Derricourt 2012) and ‘creative archaeologies’ (Carver 2012). These terms represent interpretations of the ancient past which differ fundamentally from those accepted within academia. While recognising that the boundaries between alternative and mainstream archaeologies shift over time, Schadla-Hall identified a number of characteristics common to these groups, among them an emphasis on hyperdiffusionism, extremely-advanced ancient societies, extraterrestrial contact, and attempts to prove the literal truth of mythology (2004: 256–58). Academic archaeologists have been divided in their approach to such phenomena, with some advocating tolerance and multivocality (Bender 1998; Wallis 2003; Holtorf 2005) and others opting for a more confrontational, exclusivist approach that firmly differentiates between pseudo and ‘legitimate’ archaeologies (Cole 1980; Feder 2002; Fagan 2006; Feder and Fagan 2006; Levitt 2006).

Cinema is no stranger to these alternative archaeologies. Hiscock (2012: 157) has previously highlighted that ‘the

dominant representation of archaeological research and the development of human culture in mainstream cinema involves supernatural objects and events’. In doing so, he argues, mainstream cinema has presented and propagated pseudo-archaeological visions of the past, resulting in the popularisation of many alternative archaeologies. While Anger’s work is neither an example of mainstream cinema and nor does it depict archaeological research or the past development of human culture, it nevertheless does make use of archaeology and the past and very much involves supernatural objects and events, thereby pushing it into the realms of alternative archaeology. While no study has been made of Thelemic alternative archaeologies, this paper will touch on that issue by exploring how one of the world’s most publicly visible Thelemites has utilized archaeology and alternative archaeology in the formulation of his own films.

Although various examinations of Anger’s work have been made by scholars of film studies (c.f. Pilling and O’Pray 1989; Hunter 2002a; Hutchinson 2011), the role that archaeology and past societies play in his oeuvre has thus far been ignored. At the same time, such film studies scholars have often fundamentally misunderstood Thelema, for instance erroneously referring to Crowley as a Satanist (c.f. Allison 2008), while one study of occultism in cinema (Fry 2009) omits Anger entirely. As a corrective, the purpose of this study is to explore exactly how Anger has used archaeology, heritage, and past societies in his films, with particular focus on his experimental epic, *Lucifer Rising* (1980), for which he filmed at a number of archaeological monuments in Egypt, England, and Germany. In doing so, it will be necessary to provide both an outline of Anger’s life and work and a discussion of Thelema and Crowley with particular reference to academic studies on the subject produced by scholars of film studies and the academic study of Western esotericism. That accomplished, I shall highlight how archaeology and the past have been recurring themes throughout Anger’s oeuvre, playing a significant role in three of his nine publicly available works that make up the ‘Magick Lantern Cycle’, and also heavily influencing the synopsis of two of his lost films. It shall be shown that Anger’s interest in past societies lies largely in an understanding of past esoteric and magico-religious thought, whether that be Aztec human sacrifice or Renaissance Satanism. It shall also be established that Anger’s own comprehension of the past and how it affects both the present and the future are heavily influenced by Crowley and Thelema, and moreover that Anger has actively used archaeological material in propagating this new religious movement through his films.

Kenneth Anger

Anger was born Kenneth Wilbur Angelmeyer on 3 February 1927 in Santa Monica, California, the third and final child of a lower middle-class family of English and German descent (Landis 1995: 5). Growing up not far from Hollywood, he was immersed in film from an early age and would later allege that he himself starred as the Changing Prince in Warner Brothers’ 1935 film adaptation of

A Midsummer Night's Dream, a claim that is disputed by many, who consider it part of Anger's own mythologizing of his past (Landis 1995: 7–13; Lachman 2009: 11). According to his own accounts, he began experimenting with the creation of short films at the age of 10, using film reels left over from his family's home movies (Landis 1995: 13–15). While at high school, Anger—then still Angelmeyer—encountered the writings of Aleister Crowley. As Anger's sole biographer Bill Landis notes, the young Californian would have identified with Crowley's sexual attraction to men and to his preference for dirty japes (1995: 29, 33). Perhaps it was this sense of personal similarity that encouraged the teenager to embrace Crowley's religion of Thelema, although the exact details of his conversion are unknown.

Having moved to a cheap apartment in the Hollywood Hills, Angelmeyer renamed himself 'Anger' and began to make use of such drugs as cannabis and peyote, much as Crowley himself had done. However, whereas Crowley had embraced poetry as his artistic outlet, Anger pursued filmmaking and in 1947 produced his first major film: *Fireworks*. A pioneering work of homoeroticism, it makes no use of archaeology and heritage (and as such is of little relevance here), but is nevertheless an important milestone in the history of American cinema (Landis 1995: 37–44). The film brought Anger to the attention of renowned sexologist Alfred Kinsey, who became a mentor to the young man as he continued producing further shorts, such as *Puce Moment* (1949), a tribute to the glamour of Hollywood actresses, and the since-destroyed *The Love that Whirls* (Landis 1995: 52–55, 83–87). Relocating to Paris, France, it was here that Anger filmed *Rabbit's Moon*, a tale of a clown and the woman whom he adored, but it would only see release in 1972 (Landis 1995: 59–60). From here he proceeded to Italy, where he produced both *Eaux d'Artifice* (1953) and the documentary *Thelema Abbey* (1955), both of which I will return to later. On his return to Paris, he authored a French-language book discussing the grim gossip surrounding the movie stars he grew up on: *Hollywood Babylone* (Landis 1995: 94–95). In 1961 he returned to the United States, where he created *Scorpio Rising* (1963), a homoerotic work documenting the activities of the growing biker subculture, which helped to solidify his fame on the underground film circuit. This was followed by a further homoerotic short, *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965), and the publication of an English-language *Hollywood Babylon* (Landis 1995: 100–123).

The growing counter-culture of the 1960s proved fertile ground for a revived interest in Anger as well as the work of Crowley. Not only did musicians like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and David Bowie reference Crowley in their music and cover art (Bogdan and Starr 2012: 7), but counter-cultural superstar Timothy Leary, a key proponent of mind-altering drugs, cited Crowley as a core influence on his life (Higgs 2006: 142). Anger shared many of Leary's ideas, releasing a 'Sacred Mushroom Edition' of his 1954 film *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* during which he supplied LSD to the audience (Landis 1995: 131). Moving to San Francisco, a hub of

counter-cultural activity, he began work on a Thelemic film to be called *Lucifer Rising*, although much of the early footage went into an alternate film, *Invocation of my Demon Brother* (1969), which had a soundtrack composed by Mick Jagger and featured such prominent figures as Anton LaVey, Church of Satan founder, and Bobby Beausoleil, a member of Charles Manson's Family (Landis 1995: 141–175). *Lucifer Rising* would only be finished and released in 1980, proving to be the culmination of Anger's 'Magick Lantern Cycle'. His fans would have to wait for another two decades before Anger once again publicly released any new material.

Thelema

To understand Anger's use of archaeology and heritage within his short films, it is imperative to have a basic comprehension of the religious worldview in which he was working, that of Thelema. Although there is as yet no concise academic study of Thelemic belief and praxes available, a grasp of the faith can be attained through consulting the various published practitioner-oriented volumes (c.f. Del Campo 1994; Duquette 2003), which can be supplemented with the multitude of academic studies of Crowley and his personal attitudes and beliefs (i.e. in Bogdan and Starr 2012a; Pasi 2014).

Crowley asserted that in 1904, he and his first wife had been staying in Cairo, Egypt, when he had been contacted by a preternatural intelligence calling itself Aiwass. He claimed that over the course of three days from April 8 to 10, this entity recited a holy text to him, which was known as *Liber AL vel Legis*, or *The Book of the Law* (Booth 2000: 184–88; Sutin 2000: 122–25; Kaczynski 2010: 127–29). This work, which was 'full of distorted Egyptian names and phenomena' (Hornung 2001: 173), pronounced Crowley to be the prophet of a new religion, Thelema, at the heart of which is the idea that 1904 marked the beginning of a new age for humanity, the Aeon of Horus, or Aeon of the Child. According to *The Book of the Law*, this epoch replaces the preceding Aeon of Osiris, the Aeon of the Father, in which humans had lived under the laws and regulations imposed by patriarchal religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. In turn, the Osirian Age was seen to have followed on from the Aeon of Isis, or the Aeon of the Mother, during which humanity had followed matriarchal faiths (Duquette 2003: 14–21).

Although Crowley himself maintained that these ideas were given to him by a preternatural source, this concept of epochs has clear antecedents not only in Crowley's Christian millenarist upbringing, but also in the work of anthropologists like James Frazer, which interested Crowley greatly (Bogdan 2012). The concept of an Aeon of Isis also reflects probable influence from the idea that—prior to the rise of male deities—ancient society had once been devoted to the worship of a Great Goddess. This had been pioneered by Eduard Gerhard in 1849 and had been taken up by a number of French and German Classicists in the coming decades before being prominently adopted by the archaeologist Arthur Evans during his 1901 excavation at Knossos on Crete. It would be furthered in 1903

with the publication of works by the British Medievalist Edmund Chambers and Classicist Jane Ellen Harrison (Hutton 1999: 35–37). Connected to this was the concept that many ancient societies were matriarchal in structure; first promoted by Johann Jakob Backofen in his 1861 work *Das Mutterrecht*, it was subsequently adopted by anthropologists operating within the Victorian framework of cultural evolution, including such significant figures as John Lubbock, Lewis Henry Morgan, E. B. Tylor, and Friedrich Engels, although had been largely abandoned in the mainstream anthropological establishment by the turn of the century (Eller 2000: 31–2). Nonetheless by the mid-nineteenth century, these two ideas—ancient matriarchy and Great Goddess worship—had already come to merge (Hutton 1998: 93), thus creating a fertile anthropological, and to some extent archaeological, framework from within which Crowley's Aeon of Isis and the subsequent Aeon of Osiris could emerge.

The Book of the Law proclaimed that in keeping with this new Aeon, Thelemites should embrace a new ethical command: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law'. This command has been interpreted in various different ways, even among Crowley and his early followers (Morgan 2011). Thelema also revolves largely around the practice of magic, although Crowley preferred to make use of an archaic spelling of the word: 'magick'. He believed that magic utilized a genuine physical force in the cosmos, describing it as 'the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will' (1986: 31). Indeed, although rooted in Western esoteric thought, Crowley was influenced by scientific naturalism and argued for the necessity of experimentation in magic, subtitled his ongoing journal *The Equinox* as 'The Aim of Religion; the Method of Science' (Pasi 2012).

Thelema had arrived in North America within a decade of the religion's creation, and soon lodges of Crowley's magical order, the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), were operating in both Canada and the United States (Starr 2003). In 1935, the English Thelemite W. T. Smith inaugurated the Agape Lodge No. 1 of the OTO in Hollywood, California (Starr 2003: 227), although it would later move its base of operations to Pasadena, where it came under the increasing influence of prominent rocket scientist Jack Parsons, who famously died under mysterious circumstances in a 1952 chemical explosion (Starr 2003: 271–3; Carter 2004: 177–78; Pendle 2005: 1–6). A notable associate of Parsons and the Lodge was L. Ron Hubbard, who went on to found Scientology during the 1950s (Urban 2012). Although embracing Thelema at around the same time and in the same state as the Agape Lodge was active, Anger never joined the group and throughout much of his life eschewed organized Thelemic groups in favour of solitary practice. Their existence nevertheless reflects the broader Californian milieu within which he was operating.

Archaeology in Anger's Early Work

The use of archaeology and/or heritage is present in four of Anger's early projects. The first of Anger's films to feature clear reference to past societies was one of his many lost works: *The Love That Whirls*. Filmed in Kodachrome

colour in 1949, the film depicted a scene of Aztec human sacrifice and included much nudity, in this way being influenced by the Latin American exoticism of Sergei Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* When Anger sent the sole copy of the film to the Eastman Kodak lab for processing, technicians there deemed it to be so obscene that, according to Anger's own account, they destroyed it (Landis 1995: 55, 124–5; Hunter 2002b: 114). Anger has asserted that the film dealt with the theme of 'symbolic Kingship' and was heavily influenced by the anthropological ideas of James Frazer presented in *The Golden Bough* (Wood 1989: 61). Little is therefore known of the work, although it is clear that its main premise was the sensationalist portrayal of a past society through the depiction of human sacrifice, a religious event. This reflects Anger's interest in the connections between religion and the past, which would recur in his later films. The idea of Aztec human sacrifice had been a recurrent trope in Western society ever since the practice was first recorded by European observers and reflected the Eurocentric fascination with the perceived 'savagery' of non-European peoples.

Several years later, Anger created another film—this time one that survived—that would similarly be given a historical setting. A very simple work, *Eaux d'Artifice* (1953) was filmed in the gardens of the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Central Italy, a palatial Renaissance villa commissioned by Ippolito II d'Este in the mid-sixteenth century that is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A short film of only 13 minutes, the sole character of the work is a mysterious masked figure dressed in the costume of an eighteenth-century woman, played by Carmilla Salvatorelli, an individual whom Anger asserted, perhaps inaccurately, to be a circus dwarf. Throughout, she walks and runs around the garden's famous water features with a nocturnal effect being achieved through the use of a blue filter. The work relies heavily on the manner in which the light plays on the glistening and sparkling water, contrasting strongly with the dark background, while the entire feature is accompanied by a classical soundtrack from Vivaldi (Landis 1995: 63–4; Hunter 2002b: 108–9; British Film Institute 2009, 27).

The film has been interpreted in different ways. Haller describes it as 'a musical development of... [hide and seek], culminating in the assumption of the seeker into the fountains, becoming one with the water' (1986: 243), while Durgnat conversely argued that the feminine character craved 'the animation of masculine stone' (1989: 28). According to Landis, the film represents 'a secretive romp through a private garden, all for the masked figure's and the viewer-voyeur's pleasure' (1995: 64). Such critical analyses fail to highlight that the film is essentially a period piece. It is filmed inside an archaeological site and includes shots which focus on many of the architectural water-features of this early modern monument. This connection with the past is furthered by the inclusion of both eighteenth-century costume and an eighteenth-century soundtrack. The blend of sixteenth and eighteenth-century elements is never explained, but it is nevertheless important in demonstrating Anger's continued interest in the past as a core element of his filmmaking and his

willingness to make use of historic locations as a setting for his work.

Any casual viewer who watches the film may easily fail to realise that Anger has imbued the film with esoteric symbolism and associations. That is because such elements can probably not be understood simply from viewing it but can only be appreciated by listening to Anger's own comments on the film and his reasons for setting it in its particular location. Anger's interest in the villa and its gardens arose through its connection to d'Este, a powerful cardinal and statesman who had been appointed Governor of Tivoli at the time of its construction. Anger was fascinated by the cardinal, labelling him 'a sexual pervert' for having sexual relations with goats, and announcing 'I think he was secretly a devil worshiper [sic]. Fucking goats is something associated with Satanism. The goat is like a beast of the devil.' He also believed that d'Este was involved in urolagnia, in that 'He liked being pissed on. By goats, men, women, I don't know—whoever's capable of pissing. So the whole garden is actually a private dirty joke. It has ten thousand fountains and everything is pissing on everything else and it's like inexhaustible piss' (Landis 1995: 63). The accuracy of Anger's claims here are dubious; according to in-depth research into d'Este's life (Hollingsworth 2004), he clearly enjoyed a lavish lifestyle replete with women, gambling, and hunting, repeatedly having to take out loans to cover his extravagant spending, but there is no mention of bestiality or urolagnia. Similarly, while the cardinal was clearly no pious Christian, there is no evidence that he ever turned to the veneration of Satan. Instead, there are many elements in the Villa d'Este which are highly indicative of Renaissance Paganism; the very structure of the garden is inspired by Classical designs with statues of Greco-Roman deities throughout (Godwin 2002: 154–66). While the origins of contemporary Paganism certainly rest within the Renaissance, it is unclear as to whether the cardinal himself should be considered a Pagan, particularly given his involvement with the Catholic Church. Regardless of the ahistoricity of Anger's claims regarding d'Este, what is significant for our purposes here is that the filmmaker clearly chose to focus his attention on an aspect of the past he deemed to be imbued with esoteric symbolism. He believed—or at least promoted the claim—that d'Este had been a Satanist who engaged in all manner of sexual deviancy, and it was for this reason the Villa d'Este captured his attention and became the setting for *Eaux d'Artifice*.

The following year, Anger was to release a further work exhibiting a strong influence from past societies, one that would come to be recognized as one of his stand-out masterpieces: *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954). It would later be revised for the aforementioned 'Sacred Mushroom Edition' in 1966. Once again using classical music as a soundtrack, this time Leos Janáček's 'Galgolitic Mass', Anger turns away from the blue hue that dominated *Eaux d'Artifice* and instead the film is imbued with rich reds, golds, and purples on a dark, black background. The film features a star-studded cast from within the ranks of the Californian avant-garde; Samson de Brier appears variously as Shiva, Osiris, Nero, Cagliostro, and Crowley,

while Jack Parsons' widow Marjorie Cameron appears as the Thelemic Scarlet Woman and Kali. Joan Whitney appears as Aphrodite, Katy Kadell as Isis, Renate Druks as Lilith, Anaïs Nin as Astarte, Paul Mathiesen as Pan, and Peter Looome as Ganymede. Anger himself appears in drag as the goddess Hecate. There is no straightforward narrative, and instead the characters interact in a variety of ways: laughing, smoking joints, and consuming wine (Landis 1995: 74–80; Hunter 2002b: 109–110; British Film Institute 2009, 28). The film has been described as exhibiting Anger's 'most profuse use' of Symbolist imagery (Rowe 2002: 21), although deciphering this complex use of symbolism is not an easy task. Rayns (1989: 12) describes the work as a 'full-scale ritual, to invoke Horus, the Crowned and Conquering Child', while Landis (1995: 80) rightfully recognizes that *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* visualizes 'the deities and practice of Crowley's theology', but even within this broad mythological structure, it remains enigmatic.

Unlike *The Love That Whirls* and *Eaux d'Artifice*, the film is not actually set in any identifiable past society or filmed in a historical setting, instead being situated in a mythical realm where gods and other apparently preternatural entities interact. Nevertheless, it is the film's characters who connect this work so strongly to the past; while some of them are genuine historical figures, others are deities from various pantheons both past and present, including those of ancient Egypt, Classical Greece, and Hindu India. In this way it reflects both Anger's continued interest in heritage and his intention of interpreting these entities in an explicitly modernist, Thelemic fashion; he has taken figures both mythic and historical out of their socio-cultural and historical contexts and instead placed them within a new framework, which is a construct of his own particular religious beliefs. This also appears in *Lucifer Rising*.

The fourth Anger film pertinent to this study is another lost work, *Thelema Abbey* (1955), devoted to the historic Thelemic building of the same name that was located in Cefalu, Sicily, which Anger visited with his close friend Alfred Kinsey, there unveiling many of the Crowleyan murals that had long been whitewashed. Lasting only ten minutes, the film took the form of a brief documentary commissioned by liberal British photojournalistic magazine *Picture Post* (Wood 1989: 61; Landis 1995: 88–90; Hunter 2002b: 117). The Abbey of Thelema itself had existed from 1920 to 1923, the home of a commune led by Crowley where he and a small band of followers lived according to the commandments of their faith. Conditions at the Abbey were often unsanitary, and when one of his followers died from drinking from a polluted stream, the press in Britain had a field day denouncing Crowley, who by this time was already an established media bogeyman. The sensationalist press accounts of life at the Abbey soon reached Italy's Fascist authorities, who promptly expelled Crowley from the country, with the Abbey itself closing shortly after (Booth 2000: 360–396; Sutin 2000: 279–309; Kaczynski 2010: 358–397). From that point onward, the building in which it had been housed fell into disrepair, and Crowley's often sexually-explicit murals were painted over (Cole 2007).

Again, we see Anger exploring the history of esotericism through the use of a real historic building—this time one with particular relevance to his own personal faith. Although hardly fitting within the realms of academic or professional archaeology, the act of peeling away layers of whitewash to reveal the older artworks below has symbolic connections with the work of the archaeologist. Unfortunately, the lack of any surviving copies of the short documentary prevent us from further discussing the historical dimensions of this particular film.

What we see in these four films is the recurring use of heritage and the past as a core theme. In each instance, Anger's interest in the past focuses squarely on non-Christian religious or spiritual activities; the human sacrifice of *The Love That Whirls*, the associations of Satanism and Renaissance Paganism in *Eaux d'Artifice*, the inclusion of deities assembled from various past societies in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, and the actual Abbey of Thelema in *Thelema Abbey*. Clearly, Anger has little obvious curiosity regarding the economics, politics, or class dynamics of the past—the sort of questions that pre-occupied many archaeologists at the time—for instead he is focusing intently on past conceptions of spirituality. What remains unclear however is whether his interest is in a historically or archaeologically accurate (or at least academically sanctioned) depiction of past spirituality or not. *The Love That Whirls* was intended to depict an actual historical event, but the fact that this work is lost makes it impossible for us to understand quite how he was going to accomplish that. We face similar problems with *Thelema Abbey* and *Eaux d'Artifice*; it remains unclear as to when the events depicted are supposedly taking place. Only with *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* can we be clear that Anger is not actually trying to depict a genuine historical setting. It is also noteworthy that while there is nothing explicitly Thelemic evident with *The Love That Whirls* and *Eaux d'Artifice*, the latter two films are undeniably Thelemic in content, thus indicating that by the 1950s Anger was increasingly interested in depicting and exploring his own religious beliefs on film. In these two works, he is looking at past spirituality very much through the Thelemic lens, and this was pursued to an even greater extent with a work often seen as his *magnum opus*: *Lucifer Rising* (1980).

Archaeology in *Lucifer Rising*

Undoubtedly the most archaeological of Anger's works, *Lucifer Rising* opens with images of volcanic activity, perhaps symbolic of the social upheaval believed to mark the onset of the Aeon of the Horus. From this we head to the Egyptian desert, where we encounter Isis (Miriam Gibril) and then Osiris (Donald Cammell), the embodiment of the two Thelemic ages proceeding that of Horus, standing upon the ruins of some unidentified ancient building. There, we switch to the activities of a ceremonial magician (Hayden Couts) in his own temple before returning to Egypt, where we witness Lilith (Marianne Faithfull) awakening on the banks of the Nile and surveying the Sphinx and the Great Pyramids at Giza. From Egypt, we are transported to Britain to be presented by the magician arriving

at the Neolithic/Bronze Age monument of Stonehenge in Wiltshire. Next, we are taken to the unique geological formation of Externsteine in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, which has long been associated (rightly or wrongly) with pre-Christian rites; here, Lilith ascends the stairs to the top of the peak and views the rising sun. Back in the occultist's temple, where images of Crowley and the Stele of Revealing appear, we encounter Lord Chaos (Sir Francis Rose) in the centre of a magic circle. Once more in Egypt, there are scenes of Lilith approaching an ancient temple while Isis and Osiris walk through the pillars of Karnak. There are scenes at the British site of Avebury, where the magician views the coming storm, before we return, finally, to Egypt, where a luminescent orange unidentified flying object (UFO) flies above a statue of Rameses II at Luxor.

Lucifer Rising is a religious film. Its main theme is the arrival of the Aeon of Horus, watched over by Isis and Osiris. This coming era is marked by storm clouds and Lilith, symbolising the chaos that Crowley believed would accompany the birth of the new Aeon. Here, Lucifer is not the malevolent fallen angel of Christian mythology, but an embodiment of the Aeon of Horus, the Crowned and Conquering Child; this reflects Crowley and Anger's willingness to utilize Christian belief, but not to actually accept its objective reality as a framework for explaining the cosmos. The film is an artistic depiction of one of the core beliefs of the Thelemic religion and thus could feasibly be understood as a work of proselytization designed to encourage conversion among the audience. Ironically perhaps for a film that lasts only 30 minutes in length, it would take Anger 14 years from developing the idea of *Lucifer Rising* to actually releasing it (Haller 1986: 244). In 1971, he obtained £15,000 of financial aid from the UK's National Film Finance Corporation, much to the dismay of *The Telegraph*, allowing him to fly his cast out to both Germany and Egypt for the filming (Landis 1995: 182). Anger also employed fellow Crowley-enthusiast Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin to score the movie's soundtrack, but after their friendship ended acrimoniously, Anger turned to old friend Bobby Beausoleil to produce the soundtrack from within California's Tracy Prison, where he had been imprisoned for his role in the Manson Family murders (Landis 1995: 183–84, 208).

Scholars of film studies have read various different meanings and themes in the film, which proved to be Anger's final major work. Rowe suggested that in welcoming the Aeon of Horus, it represents a 'happy ending' that broke with the earlier nihilism of the Magick Lantern Cycle (1974: 33; 2002: 46). According to Rowe, the film 'attempts to transcend the passive-active dialectics of power and the sexual preoccupations of adolescence', in which the 'cult of arrested adolescence is re-placed by the fulfilment of its longing: reaffirmation of identity through spiritual communion between man, gods and nature' (1974: 31). Brottman thought that *Lucifer Rising* was 'intended to function like a spell, invoking feelings of anxiety and trauma in the film's audience through a free-form exercise in dream imagery' (2002: 8), while Haller described it as 'a celebration, and an invocation, of the

power of Magick to summon forth the forces of nature' (1986: 248).

In utilising ancient Egypt throughout the film, Anger was working within a current of thought that had a long pedigree in Western esotericism. Among the first academics to discuss this approach was Hornung (2001: 3), who described it as 'Egyptosophy', a term which he defined as 'the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore'. Picknett and Prince instead termed this esoteric interest in Khemet 'alternative Egyptology' (2003: 175), while Jordan has characterised the object of its fascination quite succinctly as 'Esoteric Egypt' (2006: 109). In Late Classical Greece, Neo-Platonic philosophers had begun to muse on the idea that ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs were not a simple alphabet but were instead mystical symbols of esoteric importance, an idea later adopted by esotericists during the Renaissance (Jordan 2006: 113). In subsequent centuries, various esoteric orders adopted elements of Egyptology into their symbolism and mythos: among them the Rosicrucians, Freemasons, and Theosophists (Hornung 2001). Being a keen exponent of such esoteric thought, it was little surprise that Crowley pulled Egypt into his Thelemic worldview. Tully argued that Crowley chose Egypt as the location of his Thelemic foundation tale because he was 'working in a structure that privileged Egypt as a source of Hermetic authority' (2010: 23). In 1898, Crowley had been initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a ceremonial magic group based in London, and would subsequently rise to prominence within its ranks during a major schism the following year (Booth 2000: 93–123; Sutin 2000: 54–79; Kaczynski 2010: 60–80). The Golden Dawn had been influenced by occult interpretations of ancient Egypt, making use of excerpts of translated ancient Egyptian texts like *The Book of the Dead* within its rituals, and wearing costumes often influenced by pharaonic dress (Tully 2010: 28–30). Although much of this pre-dates Anger's work by decades and even centuries, it reflects the broader intellectual movement within which he had been working, and which was a clear influence on his work; *Lucifer Rising* is, in effect, a mid-twentieth-century manifestation of Egyptosophy or alternative Egyptology.

The monuments that appear in the film are clearly depicted in their contemporary state, as damaged, archaeological remnants of past societies, and Anger has made no attempt to recreate them as they had once looked (or how he imagined that they might have looked). This might have been an intentional decision, because he wished to stress that the events taking place were happening in the emerging Aeon of Horus, although at the same time financial considerations may have played a part. It would have been incredibly expensive to build such a set, and Anger rarely had access to large funds. It is also of note that the film universalizes the meaning of the monuments; the megalithic monuments of Stonehenge and Avebury are juxtaposed alongside the geological Externsteine and the temples of ancient Egypt. Although there is no clear statement made that all of these monuments were created by the same people or for the same purpose, they are all

used to depict a prophetic oncoming of the new Aeon, which certainly carries with it the implicit idea that these monuments might have been originally constructed to prophesy such events. This bears a certain similarity with some of the pseudo-archaeological ideas of Pyramidology, which have argued that the pyramids served a prophetic purpose (Jordan 2006: 119–124; Moshenska 2008: 8). It should be clarified that mainstream, academic archaeology has never revealed any links between the architecture of ancient Egypt and megalithic Europe, although nevertheless this is an idea that has gained widespread support among alternative archaeologies and Western esotericism; for instance, one of Crowley's acquaintances, the 'Father of Wicca' Gerald Gardner, suggested that Stonehenge had been constructed by Egyptian Masons 'to British ideas, for British gods' (Gardner 1971: 55).

One particularly interesting element of the film is the juxtaposition of the statue of Rameses II with the arrival of the glowing, orange UFO. Although the UFO was apparently symbolic of the arrival of Lucifer and the Aeon of the Child, at the time of the film's production and release, many viewers would have been aware of the connection between ancient monuments and UFOs as the interstellar craft of an alien race. Erich von Däniken's best-seller, *Chariots of the Gods*, had seen publication in 1969, propagating the idea that an extraterrestrial species had been involved in creating early modern humans; moreover, he argued that humans had venerated these aliens as gods and that evidence of their existence was left on ancient monuments, including the pyramids of Egypt (Däniken 1969: 90). Although von Däniken was by far the best known advocate of the 'ancient astronaut' idea, it was in fact much older and can be dated to Garret P. Serviss's 1898 novel *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, in which Egypt's Pyramids are depicted as the creation of Martians, although would only be put forward as a serious possibility by Charles Fort in his 1919 work, *The Book of the Damned* (Richter 2012: 223–24). These concepts had already filtered into other areas of film and television by the mid-twentieth century, for instance appearing in the BBC's *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958–59), which featured archaeologists discovering evidence of ancient Martian involvement on Earth. Although Anger's *Lucifer Rising* was not specifically advocating the ancient astronaut theory, the juxtaposition of the UFO alongside the monuments of ancient Egypt would certainly have evoked this idea during the 1970s and early 1980s, and Anger would most likely have been aware of this connection when making the film. Perhaps he was trying to suggest that many of the UFOs being spotted in the twentieth-century were psychic phenomenon or something of that nature which marked the coming Aeon of Horus. Certainly, such ideas were being mooted within the Thelemic community of the time; notable English Thelemite Kenneth Grant published the idea that the flying saucer phenomenon arose from Jack Parsons' magical rites, commenting 'Parsons opened a door and something flew in' (Grant 1980: 51).

Lucifer Rising is in no way alone in being a cinematic work heavily influenced by Egyptomania, with a large number of mainstream films also having adopted the

visual trappings of ancient Egypt, from 1932 supernatural horror *The Mummy* to 1994 sci-fi blockbuster *Stargate* (Hall 2004: 161). Although as a piece of experimental cinema, it belongs to a fundamentally different artistic tradition than mainstream cinema, with a different purpose, financial background, and intended audience, there are nevertheless interesting parallels that can be drawn. Many mainstream cinematic depictions of ancient Egypt are rooted in a Eurocentric attitude of cultural imperialism in that they depict a Euro-American protagonist, often an archaeologist, discovering and encountering the mysteries of an exotic Egypt. By far the best-known example is the first Indiana Jones film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which came out in 1981 (Hall 2004: 161–62), the year after Anger finally released *Lucifer Rising*. While *Lucifer Rising* lacks a core protagonist, it nevertheless reflects a Eurocentric perspective on ancient Egypt; not only is it interpreting ancient Egyptian sites and deities within a religious structure developed by a wealthy, privileged, white, British male, but it also features obviously Caucasian actors in the roles of ancient Near Eastern deities Osiris and Lilith. Furthermore, the magical practitioners who are depicted as foreseeing and welcoming the coming Aeon are similarly Caucasian in ethnicity; this could be seen as a parallel to the idea of the Western explorer who encounters and overcomes the mysteries and threats posed by ancient Egypt in mainstream cinema.

In *Lucifer Rising*, Anger uses archaeological monuments not only as settings in which events of mythological proportions can unfold, but also as prophetic signposts of the three-age system that forms the basis of Thelema's own alternative archaeology. These ancient and crumbling monuments—symbols of the beliefs found in the Ages of Isis and Osiris—are now bearing witness to the coming Age of Horus, a message that is not made explicit to the viewer but which can be deciphered using sufficient understanding of Thelemic belief. Many of these are themes that Anger has played with in his former works; the use of archaeological monuments as settings had before appeared in *Eaux d'Artifice*, while the appearance of mythological beings from Earth's past had been used in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. But it is only here that they are all pulled together, making this work by far the most past-conscious of Anger's publicly available oeuvre.

Conclusions

What remains clear from Anger's corpus of work is that he has long had an interest in past societies—be they those of Mesoamerica or Renaissance Italy—and has sought to incorporate elements and ideas from these societies into his films. Of the nine publicly available works collected together as the 'Magick Lantern Cycle', three of them contain strong heritage-based themes, meaning that while this is certainly not a major motif that pervades his entire oeuvre, it is a persistent minor theme previously ignored by scholars of film studies. His interest in the past is however thematically restricted; in Anger's films, elements of bygone ages are used to explore magic, esotericism, and religion. In *Eaux d'Artifice*, *Thelema Abbey*, and *Lucifer Rising*, he makes use of historical and/or

archaeological settings in order to explore the esoteric (and in the two latter cases, explicitly Thelemic) connections that exist with them. This brings us on to the recognition that Anger's understanding of the past is filtered through his Thelemic worldview and the belief in the subdivision of human history into the Thelemic three age system, itself greatly influenced by nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropological and archaeological ideas about the development of human society. This is particularly evident in *Lucifer Rising*, a film which has the primary purpose of advocating Thelema through the use of archaeological monuments and an alternative archaeological framework that owes much to alternative Egyptologies.

Although various scholars have discussed the role of archaeology within mainstream, popular cinema (Day 1997; Hall 2004; Hiscock 2012), it is hoped this article might inspire further research into the use of archaeology in its avant-garde counterpart and in particular into those experimental films that carry with them strong occult and Pagan themes. Many other underground filmmakers who have made use of Western esotericism and occultism have produced works that are influenced by the past and archaeology—among them Maya Deren, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Derek Jarman, and E. Elias Merhige—and it would be intriguing to see analyses of their work and how it compares and contrasts with that of Anger. It is also hoped that this article goes some small way to reflecting how pervasive and important the influence of archaeology has actually been in all aspects of Western culture, from the mainstream to the esoteric, avant-garde, and counter-cultural.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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