

William E. Jones

He Brought a Swastika  
to the Summer of Love

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# He Brought a Swastika to the Summer of Love

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The Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant





Aleister Crowley as Baphomet



Kenneth Anger's *The Man We Want to Hang* (2002), his return to filmmaking more than twenty years after finishing the compilation *The Magick Lantern Cycle* (1981), documents an exhibition of paintings by Aleister Crowley in London. It stands in for *Thelema Abbey* (1955), a lost film Anger shot in Cefalù, Sicily, at the site of Crowley's failed utopian sex commune, abandoned when its participants were deported from fascist Italy in 1923. He made *Thelema Abbey* in the company of the eminent researcher of human sexuality, Alfred Kinsey, who appreciated Anger's films but dismissed Crowley as "the most prominent fraud who ever lived." Anger took a very different position towards the self-proclaimed Great Beast. He admired Crowley not only for his power as an occult practitioner, but also for his arguably greater power as a provocateur.

After a young man died from the unsanitary conditions at Thelema Abbey, the tabloid *Sunday Express* attacked Crowley with a headline: "The Man We Want to Hang." The words could easily apply to Kenneth Anger. He is the man who tells us what we don't want to hear, and consequently his films, which flirt with what timid souls call evil, have never brought him a mass audience, even though they are as beautiful and technically proficient as anything produced by the motion picture studios. Anger loves popular cinema, but at the same time cultivates an adversarial relationship with a mainstream American culture grounded in cant and pieties, for instance, the belief that only morally upstanding people can produce great art, and that artists' perceived moral failings should be denounced loudly and in public. During a career spanning over seventy years, Anger has never once taken the side of virtue; vice is much more to his liking. In an interview quoted in P. Adams Sitney's book *Visionary Film* (1974), Anger sums up his attitude with the final

line of Crowley's poem "Hymn to Lucifer": "The Key of Joy is disobedience."

6 Born Kenneth Anglemyer in 1927 in Santa Monica, California, Anger grew up in the shadow of Hollywood. He has told stories of having appeared as the Changeling Prince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935), directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle, but this claim has never been confirmed. Encouraged by his grandmother, Bertha Coler, and her lesbian companion, "Miss Diggy," a costume mistress in the film industry, he began making films in the early 1940s, while still an adolescent. He attended screenings of silent movies, and at one of them he met his lifelong friend, colleague, and rival, Curtis Harrington, who went on to direct both experimental films and a number of eccentric and stylish dramatic features. The two studied film production at the University of Southern California in the late 1940s, their time at the school overlapping with that of another student who became a prominent figure of the American avant-garde, Gregory Markopoulos.

Los Angeles of the post-World War II era was nearly as provincial and intolerant as it had been in the 1920s, when real estate speculation boomed and membership in the Ku Klux Klan reached its peak. Aesthetes like Anger, Harrington, and Markopoulos risked being brutalized for transgressing the mores proclaimed by hypocritical and reactionary civic leaders. Fellow USC student Ed Earle knew Anger as a shy and furtive young man who found a leather bar down the street from the Earle family residence, but was too afraid to enter or even loiter outside it. Anger had reason to be circumspect: not long before, he had been entrapped and arrested for lewd conduct at the Camera Obscura in Santa Monica's Palisades Park, an episode that brought opprobrium and humiliation down upon him. Earle told



Anger's biographer Bill Landis that Los Angeles at the time was "a far more particularly exciting world in its own way. We all grew up under the scary death penalty of being arrested or being caught. The vice squad was incredible. That's also why a lot of people like Kenneth were entranced by Nazi society. They all thought of the Los Angeles police as virtually part of the SS troop." Anger and his contemporaries were part of a long history of gay men in Los Angeles alternately despising and worshiping the city's paramilitary police force, whose motto, "To protect and to serve," appears on squad car doors in quotes, as though it's sarcastic.

While at USC, Anger and Harrington organized a German film series based upon Siegfried Kracauer's book *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947). A man who had worked for director Leni Riefenstahl attended many of the screenings and, after watching her film of the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, *Triumph of the Will* (1935), he asked the pair if they would like to see an uncut, eight-hour print of her *Olympia* (1938) that he had smuggled out of Germany. The clandestine all-night screening of this film, the most important episode of Anger's education, fed his fascination with fascist aesthetics, which were strictly taboo in the years immediately after the war.

The relationship between Riefenstahl's films and Anger's is a complex one. In some ways, Anger is the opposite of the woman who inspired him. Unique in film history, Riefenstahl had effectively unlimited budgets at her disposal, and she produced triumphs of logistical and technical prowess with huge crews. The films that resulted were beautiful, after a fashion, but so sanitized and devoid of sex as to look lifeless to modern eyes. And they were of excruciating length. The Museum of Modern Art fixed that problem for American audiences, cutting *Triumph of the Will* down to a forty-five minute "study version" in 1940–41;

this was the film that Anger and Harrington showed at USC. Directing only shorts, Anger had to cope with the slimmest of budgets, worked with few crew members, and produced concise films of tremendous impact, not least because they are permeated with sex. Riefenstahl pursued her career as a director with the steely determination of a true sociopath, and after falling from grace, she engaged in a campaign of lies—always changing to fit the demands of the moment—to clear her name of the taint of well-documented Nazi associations. Anger’s fame also depends to some extent upon incessant lying; he has fabricated compelling stories about virtually every aspect of his life and work, with mixed results. His films are widely recognized as great, but his personal reputation has been clouded by mercurial behavior and mythomania.

In 1948, Anger received an invitation to screen his film *Fireworks* (1947) at the Schindler House, then home of architect Rudolph Schindler’s widow and an important artistic salon in Los Angeles. Anger brought along Harrington, who showed his film *Fragment of Seeking* (1946). The two young men thought they were about to have their big break, but the reaction to their unconventional, homoerotic works, described by Harrington in his autobiography *Nice Guys Don’t Work in Hollywood* (2014) as “a stunned and stony silence,” was not what they had anticipated. After a long, awkward pause, John Cage volunteered to speak to them on behalf of the audience, which had become an angry, albeit very civilized, mob. He told them, “Art has to do with clouds and trees and beautiful things. These films are not art.” Coming from a radically experimental American composer, this judgment was faintly absurd in its conservatism, yet unsurprising. In the groundbreaking recording *Indeterminacy* (1959), Cage told stories about modern music, Southern California, Zen

Buddhism, and mushrooms. He did so in a voice that sounded uncannily like Anger's—thin and unctuous, in a word, effeminate. Cage not only objected to the aesthetics of a filmmaker fifteen years his junior, he also feared that someone too overt would “blow his cover” among a group of potential patrons.

Anger, with his characteristically astute sense of where the action was, soon afterwards entered *Fireworks* in the Festival du Film Maudit (Damned Film Festival), where Jean Cocteau arranged for him to win a prize. Anger then left the United States for an extended stay in Paris. There he worked on several projects that never came to fruition and watched many films at the Cinémathèque Française. In the documentary *Henri Langlois: The Phantom of the Cinémathèque*, Jean-Michel Arnold describes Anger's presence in Paris without mentioning him by name: “We saw [German film scholar Lotte] Eisner take aside a young American homosexual, age fourteen or so, who had made an experimental film. She said, ‘If you kill yourself, first leave everything to the Cinémathèque!’” The anecdote says as much about the condescension of a French cultural bureaucrat, the stereotype of the depressive “twilight man” destined for suicide, and Anger's wish to be taken for a child prodigy as it does about Eisner's devotion to film culture's premier institution. Through people associated with the Cinémathèque, Anger met everyone in France worth meeting, including Jean Genet, whose only film as a director, *Un chant d'amour* (1950), owes quite a bit to *Fireworks*.

The protagonist of *Fireworks* (played by Anger himself) cruises a young bodybuilder, and after some beautifully lit and sensuous play fighting between them, several sailors set upon Anger with chains. They attack him with stylized motions, and when they tear apart his chest, they find an electrical meter



*Fireworks*

where his heart should be. An ejaculation of cream poured over Anger's torso follows, and then there is another ejaculation, a lit Roman candle protruding from the crotch of a sailor's pants, giving the film its title. Ed Earle, who saw *Fireworks* twice in Anger's presence, told Landis that this stunning gesture was a last-minute improvisation; the original scene was to have been a man degrading Anger by pissing on him, but the actor, not wanting to show his penis in a film, demurred.

The action of *Fireworks* plays out in an oneiric space. The public men's room door marked "gents" seems to be in the protagonist's bedroom, and this door gives onto a gay bar that was actually a painted backdrop left over from an old Western. The film's dream scenes dramatize masochistic interactions with rough trade, that is to say, the sort of men who can't bring themselves to have sex with other men unless they beat them up before or after the act. The film is elliptical enough to encourage other, more anodyne interpretations, until its end, when the youth from the bar (Bill Switzer, a teen bodybuilding champion of the time), his

face obscured by a painted starburst pattern, shares a bed with Anger. In his DVD commentary for *Fireworks*, Anger declines to discuss sexuality at length; instead he describes the central conflict of the film as an outsider menaced by a mob.

The theme of the outsider versus the mob reemerges in Anger's book *Hollywood Babylon*. Originally published in France in 1959 and not available in the United States until a "bootleg" appeared in 1965 (followed by an "official" version in 1975), *Hollywood Babylon* has a reputation for being scabrous and sleazy. While this profane anti-hagiography exposing the private vices of the great and good of the film industry does make generous use of shock value, it offers something more than *Schadenfreude*. Unlike the self-righteous biddies who never forgot who their bosses were—syndicated gossip columnists Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, or writers for the scandal rag *Confidential*—Anger always sides with the nonconformists, especially filmmakers: Charlie Chaplin, the great popular artist of the twentieth century, who had a taste for young girls, a reluctance to become an American citizen, and leftist political sympathies; Erich von Stroheim, who spent large sums of money to achieve a painstaking and voluptuous realism, only to have his films butchered by the studios; or F. W. Murnau, the supreme talent of German silent film, whose funeral was shunned by his colleagues because he died while fellating his chauffeur as they sped down Mulholland Drive. Studio executives wanting frightened (and therefore tractable) employees who could be blackmailed or replaced if necessary come in for the harshest criticism, and Will Hays, corrupt ex-Postmaster General cum film industry censor, serves as the book's creepiest antagonist. *Hollywood Babylon* tells a deliciously inverted morality tale of artists who liked prodigious amounts of sex and drugs prevailing

over a mob of killjoys—“professional prudes,” as Anger calls them—who destroyed reputations with poisonous first impressions that often proved untrue. (By the time retractions could be printed, the damage had already been done.) It is hardly surprising that Anger’s book has attracted appreciative readers from the era of the Hollywood blacklist all the way up to the age of reckless “calling out” culture.

After a number of years spent mainly in Europe, Anger settled for a while in Brooklyn, where he found the gorgeous lummoxes of *Scorpio Rising* (1963), his best known film. Staying true to his obsession with rough trade, he penetrated the world of working-class motorcycle enthusiasts who would gather every Saturday near the Cyclone roller coaster at Coney Island. Anger shows these men working on their bikes, going for rides, and most memorably, cutting loose at a Halloween party. *Scorpio Rising* is, among other things, a representation of men who were not entirely aware of how they appeared to those who lusted after them, and dramatic irony pervades the film. The effect is heightened by Anger’s use of music, possibly the most influential gesture he has ever made as an artist. Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, and Quentin Tarantino are all in his debt. A soundtrack of songs released between 1961 and 1963—a moment of innocence before the British Invasion, according to Anger as well as many critics, ruined American pop music—provides a running commentary on the action. After seeing *Scorpio Rising*’s juxtapositions of bike boys carousing and appropriated footage of Jesus performing a miracle, accompanied by The Crystals’ song “He’s a Rebel,” it’s impossible to look at a hackneyed Christian religious film with a straight face. Anger disturbs a certain unthinking complacency to give his audience more perverse pleasures.

During the shooting of *Scorpio Rising*’s Halloween party,

the motorcycle club members insisted that their girlfriends sit behind the camera and not be filmed. The result is a scene redolent of homoeroticism, all teasing and posing, with the sinister edge of hazing rituals. A biker thrusts his penis in the face of an immobilized buddy, and Kris Jensen's song "Torture" plays while another hapless biker gets mustard poured over his crotch. Eyeline matches with shots of an actor playing Jesus give the impression that the Lord is watching the action across time and space. A potentially blasphemous question arises: When he wasn't out preaching, what exactly was Jesus doing with the twelve men who loved him? The montage reaches a new level of

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*Scorpio Rising*

complexity as the main character, Scorpio (Bruce Byron), climbs the altar of an abandoned church after we see a brief flash of lash marks on naked buttocks, then a Nazi flag with boots and

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*Scorpio Rising*

other leather gear. A motorcycle race is cross-cut with Scorpio's (unheard) rant from the altar, to the sound of Gene McDaniels's "Point of No Return." Jesus mounts a donkey, the bikers mount their cycles, Scorpio waves a flag emblazoned with a skull and crossbones, and the race begins. Adolf Hitler, seen in photographic reproductions, appears to watch the action by way of more eyeline matches. Scorpio pisses into a helmet and desecrates the altar, and Little Peggy March sings, "I must follow him / Ever since he touched my hand I knew / That near him I always must be / And nothing can keep him from me / He is my destiny." Images of Nazi storm troopers lined up in formation are cut with Scorpio brandishing guns as the rest of the song "I Will Follow Him" plays. Anger describes the men in the film as "politically very naïve. They certainly weren't American Nazis. They just liked the raw power of the symbolism, and also the fact





*Scorpio Rising*

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that people were shocked by the swastika. That made it attractive to them.” He adds that he owned all of the Nazi paraphernalia featured in the film, but someone stole it at the end of shooting, a loss he calls “the price of the production.”

The film reaches a frenzied climax as Scorpio, eyes glazed over and very high on amphetamines, rants in close-up, bikers cruise around Coney Island, and the motorcycle race comes to a fatal conclusion for one of the riders. The Surfari’s “Wipe Out” accompanies the quickest, most exciting montage in the film; then suddenly, it’s all over. A siren blares on the soundtrack, and the flashing lights of cop cars illuminate a prone biker with a tattoo on his forearm reading “Blessed, Blessed Oblivion.” A belt studded with the word “End” unfurls as the final credit of the film, which Anger once described as “Thanatos in chrome and black leather and bursting jeans.”

*Scorpio Rising* met with considerable controversy on its release. Photographer and filmmaker William Klein described French spectators astonished by the combination of fascist aesthetics and rough trade, something only an American relatively untouched by World War II could get away with: “That was *unthinkable* in France—these tough guys with bikes and chains and all that shit and tattoos and stuff. It gave people goose bumps to know that this sort of thing existed. They relished it. French intellectuals didn’t deal with this kind of people.” In the US, outrage provoked legal action. The LAPD couldn’t tolerate such an impious and exciting film. On April 30, 1964, the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Selection of a jury began Wednesday for the trial of Michael A. Getz, 24, theater manager charged with exhibiting a lewd film. . . . Getz was taken into custody



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*Scorpio Rising*

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at the Cinema Theater, 1122 N. Western Ave., by four Hollywood police officers, after they had viewed the motion picture. The arresting officers said the film dealt principally with homosexuality. Getz . . . told officers that the picture was produced by Kenneth Anger, who recently was awarded a \$10,000 grant by the Ford Foundation for the production of a documentary film on automobiles.

The “documentary” mentioned in the *Times* was the luscious and fetishistic *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965), a three-minute film that Anger had hoped to expand to feature length but never did. *KKK*—as Sitney calls it in *Visionary Film*—joined the list of Anger’s legendary unfinished projects: *Puce Moment* (1949), originally conceived as one episode of the unrealized feature *Puce Women*; a film version of Comte de Lautréamont’s *Les chants de Maldoror* (1951–52), of which he shot at least two sequences, now lost; and *Histoire d’O* (1959–61), an adaptation of the sadomasochistic erotic novel by Pauline Réage (Anne Cécile Desclos), of which he shot twenty minutes of a planned ninety, with only stills surviving. Los Angeles’s Cinema Theater had its own legend: the fearless manager risked prosecution and near riots by screening Genet’s *Un chant d’amour* and Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963), among many other films, in the mid-1960s. Getz’s conviction on charges of exhibiting a lewd film, overturned on appeal, inspired Anger’s best joke. He said *Scorpio Rising* was busted in Los Angeles for desecrating the swastika.

Critics of *Scorpio Rising*, while recognizing the film’s power, had little to say on the subject of the Nazi imagery from which respectable people usually shrink in horror. These images—combined with the unreconstructed masculinity of bikers, a gleeful sense of sacrilege, and the visceral emotionalism of pop music

unencumbered by the plangent self-awareness of the singer-songwriter—make for an overwhelming viewing experience, and one not easily reconciled with received ideas about virtue. With manic amorality, *Scorpio Rising* revels in behavior we have come to expect will be condemned, leaving us with a question that does not lend itself to comforting answers: What have we just enjoyed? In the parlance of the early twenty-first century, the content of the film would be enough to get Kenneth Anger “canceled.”

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The excesses of recent moral scolds call to mind a passage of Nicholas von Hoffman’s book *We Are the People Our Parents Warned Us Against* (1968):

It is a current of emotive, affective politics . . . that finds dichotomies damnable and hypocritical, that demands a perfect consistency between private and public life, a politics without distinctions or subtleties—without craft. It is one of the prodigal consequences of the age of affluence when many people are not trained by the necessitous tactics of scarcity to put a check on moral perceptions.

Von Hoffman is not describing a contemporary pseudo-scandal fueled by social media, but 1967’s Summer of Love in Haight-Ashbury. During this period, Anger was at the center of the action: the William Westerfield House, or “Russian Embassy,” on Alamo Square in San Francisco. He lived there with Bobby Beausoleil, at that time a hippy in a top hat known by some as Cupid, and later a murderer in the thrall of Charles Manson. Anger began making a first version of the film *Lucifer Rising* starring Beausoleil, one of many young men in his life who would be called Lucifer (referring to the Christian devil, but to the “bringer of light,” an angel cast out of heaven for being too

pretty). After a few weeks of shooting, the footage went missing. Anger maintains that Beausoleil stole the film, an accusation that Beausoleil has denied. In any event, Anger had only a small amount of material to show for his stay in San Francisco, and he fashioned it into the fragmentary *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969).

Anger calls *Invocation* his Vietnam War film, a theme indicated by repeated stock footage of soldiers leaving a US Army helicopter. Most of the remainder of the film was shot indoors and makes no direct reference to the war. An atmosphere of aggression unsettles stereotypical hippy fantasies of peace and love. This calls to mind the irony of a Manson Family girl telling a BBC interviewer, “We’re totally on the other end of violence. It doesn’t exist in our world. Only peace exists, and they can’t take that. They can’t look at total peace.” *Invocation* was first shown theatrically a few weeks after its star’s arrest for the murder of Gary Hinman and the Tate-LaBianca murders committed shortly thereafter, but months before Charles Manson and his followers were finally arrested and charged with the crimes for which they became infamous. Like thousands of other lost souls, members the Manson Family (including Charlie himself) hung out in the Haight during the summer of 1967, when most of *Invocation* was shot. It is entirely possible that everyone in that place and time knew more about Manson and his followers than they were willing to say—curiously, the Los Angeles prosecutors were uninterested in gathering this testimony—and now, after many decades, the truth is exceedingly difficult to discern. Whatever (or whomever) he knew, Anger captured a violent undercurrent of the era that only became apparent later to a wider public.

At a length of eleven minutes, *Invocation* consists of a large amount of disparate material in a dense montage that includes

numerous optical tricks and superimpositions. The film begins with close-ups of an albino man whose eyes experience spasms under a bright light; this scene alternates with shots of naked young men, most lounging on a sofa, one holding a knife to his chest. Beausoleil takes a hit of marijuana by sucking it out of a ceramic skull, which he shares with poet Lenore Kandel and Hell's Angel Billy Fritsch. Anton Szandor LaVey, founder

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*Invocation of My Demon Brother*

of the Church of Satan, comes through a door in a satin cape and plastic horns to make an offering. The naked boys seen at the beginning of the film wrestle in a double exposure. (This scene may have been an instance of recycling; Anger produced for private collectors a number of erotic films not intended for theatrical exhibition.) Members of Bobby Beausoleil's band descend the stairs of the Russian Embassy with their instruments. A scene of stop-motion animation depicts a black mammy doll in a turban trailed by puffs of smoke, coming down the same set of stairs as the band and holding a handwritten sign that reads, "Zap / You're pregnant / That's witchcraft." This plays as a joke,



*Invocation of My Demon Brother*

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practically the only moment of intentional humor in the film.

Although Bobby Beausoleil, whose image is transformed by a wide variety of visual effects, has the starring role in *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, the filmmaker is the dominant presence. He is shown in a still photograph with Aleister Crowley's book *Moonchild* (1923) at his feet, an acknowledgment of his literary inspiration. During most of Anger's time on screen, he performs an occult ritual, *The Equinox of the Gods*, which took place at the Straight Theater on Haight Street on September 21, 1967, and commemorated the change of seasons that ended the Summer of Love. A heavily made-up Anger pulls a strange series of faces photographed at varying speeds.

Approximately midway through the film, Anger holds up a poster. This artifact, published on the occasion of the Straight Theater performance (and preserved at the Oakland Museum), reproduces Aleister Crowley's shortest text, *Liber OZ*, which sums up the Great Beast's philosophy in one-syllable words. In his commentary on *Invocation*, Anger calls it a "proto-hippy manifesto." At the top of the poster, the first sentence reads, "The law of the strong: this is our law and the joy of the world," a statement perfectly in keeping with Nazi ideology. Crowley wrote this in 1941, the year of World War II when the Axis powers seemed unstoppable; it implies that he thought Germany might prevail, and that he wanted to be on the winning side. To what extent two irrational cultural phenomena—fascism and modern occult practice—are congruent is a question that Crowley lacked the perspective to answer, but *Liber OZ* leaves us with a tantalizing hint as to their connection.

At the climactic moment of the ritual, Anger holds a large Nazi flag in his right hand, and the *Liber OZ* poster, now burning, in his left. Anger's prominent use of the swastika begs a question:



*Invocation of My Demon Brother*

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What could the original audiences of his performance (and later, his film) have made of him wielding such a taboo symbol? The gesture carries three different, but not mutually exclusive, messages: “America is fascist,” in 1967 waging an imperialist war in Southeast Asia; “You are fascist,” participating in a society unequal in principle and founded on genocide; “I am fascist,” embracing the politics of the extreme right less than twenty-five years after Auschwitz.

Encumbered with immense historical weight, the swastika—an ancient Indian symbol appropriated by the National Socialists in the 1920s—has a way of grabbing attention and preempting the intentions of any artist who uses it. Punk designer Vivienne Westwood discovered this in the 1970s, when she produced the “Destroy” t-shirt emblazoned with a large swastika. Asked decades later whether she regretted the design, she defended herself: “We were just saying to the older generation, ‘We don’t accept your values or your taboos, and you’re all fascists.’” Anger could not avail himself of this justification, since he was forty years old during the Summer of Love, a member of an older generation perceived as the enemy by the young.

The timing of the performance *The Equinox of the Gods* is significant. Less than a month before, on August 25, 1967, George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party, was assassinated. The event, which led to a power struggle that fatally weakened the party, made headlines all over the world. The front page of the *New York Daily News* reading “Sniper Slays Nazi Rockwell, Former Pal Held as Assassin” appears in Andy Warhol’s *Bike Boy* (1967) and is a topic of conversation between Ed Hood and Joe Spencer, who plays the film’s title character. Anyone in the Straight Theater audience who had even a passing familiarity with recent news stories would have

associated Anger's display of the Nazi flag with Rockwell's death.

The swastika Anger brought to the Summer of Love carried another message, most likely unnoticed by anyone in San Francisco at the time, but one that has become increasingly apparent. The predominantly left-wing post-World War II American counterculture, from blacklisted communists and the Beat Generation to their cultural heirs, the New Left and the hippies, opposed a conservative establishment. Over the course of decades, a traditionally leftist counterculture has been supplanted by one that is predominantly right-wing. Any other outcome would have been highly unlikely in a consumer society where hedonistic individualism precludes sustained collective political action. Revolutionary politics require material sacrifice and an abnegation of the individual will completely at odds with the notion of personal freedom expressed through drug trips, sexual experimentation, and buying piles of junk.

The insurgency commanding attention in recent years—alt-right trolls and racist nationalists, many of them enthusiastically collecting Nazi memorabilia and motivated by politics formerly relegated to the lunatic fringe—has long been present in American society in one form or another and ready to burst forth when circumstances permit. Reactionary tendencies swirled beneath the surface of the ostensibly progressive Summer of Love. For instance, von Hoffman's book is an eyewitness account not only of misfits banding together in youthful idealism, but also of sexual assaults, casual racism, and self-interested rip-offs. Anger was the first avant-garde filmmaker to see the rightward turn of the counterculture and to respond by provoking his audience with fascist symbols—the Nazi memorabilia from his own collection.

After shooting almost all of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, Anger decamped to London, where he filmed the Rolling

Stones' Hyde Park concert honoring Brian Jones, who died in July 1969. His new patrons, Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Keith Richards, and Anita Pallenberg, appear near the end of the film. Anger used his knowledge of the occult as a calling card for this new in-crowd. He went from telling a bunch of stoned San

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*Invocation of My Demon Brother*

Francisco hippies that there was no Santa Claus, i.e., that their counterculture was turning into something very different from what they thought it was (a message that fell on deaf ears), to telling a more receptive audience of English rock stars that Santa Claus really did exist, in the person of Aleister Crowley, whose

best-known philosophical tenet—"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law"—promised them all they desired. Anger showed a rough cut of *Invocation* to Mick Jagger, who agreed to provide the film's music, an improvised rhythm track performed on his recently purchased Moog synthesizer. It's doubtful that Jagger had occult beliefs, but he knew a potentially marketable idea intriguing to young people when he saw one.

For *Lucifer Rising* (1981), a new version of the project begun in San Francisco, Anger had the biggest budget of any of his films, and he shot it in various locations, including the Icelandic volcano Hekla and the Nile Valley of Egypt, where he traveled with his cast: Marianne Faithfull (as Lilith), Donald Cammell (co-director with Nicholas Roeg of the 1970 film *Performance*, playing Osiris), and Cammell's girlfriend Myriam Gibril (as Isis).

Roughly a third of the way through *Lucifer Rising*, Marianne Faithfull lies recumbent in a body-shaped recess, part of a tomb carved from a large rock. She rises from her resting place as though resurrected and begins ascending a stone staircase nearby. A pond and abundant foliage indicate that the scene is set somewhere in Northern Europe. After a brief interlude in Egypt, there is a shot of Stonehenge, the famous site of ancient pagan ritual in England. The scene shifts again, to a lesser-known location—the Externsteine in Germany—which encompasses not only the tomb seen earlier but a group of giant phallic standing stones. *Völkisch* amateur archaeologist Wilhelm Teudt (1860–1942) called the Externsteine “a Germanic Stonehenge.” Popular tradition associates this natural formation with pagan worship, though no archaeological evidence thus far discovered supports this thesis. The history of the area has been appropriated and distorted by those who wish to legitimate the pre-Christian civilization of Germany, and in the Nazi era it became a place of



*Lucifer Rising*

intense interest. According to Anger, it was used for initiation rituals of the Hitler Youth. Faithfull slowly climbs one of the stone columns in daylight, an action shown in parallel with six torch-bearing pagan priests climbing the same stone at night. At the top, she crosses a bridge built by the Nazis to reach what they supposed to be an ancient solar temple on the adjacent stone column. With an insinuating montage that does not draw attention to changes of location, Anger connects the religion of ancient Egypt with the pagan rituals of Northern Europe, and in doing so, he makes reference to an uncredited source: the writings of Savitri Devi.



Externsteine

Devi (née Maximiani Julia Portas, 1905–1982) was a French-British Nazi sympathizer and postwar neo-Nazi who took a Sanskrit pseudonym (roughly translated as “sun goddess”) to publish her idiosyncratic theories written in execrable prose. She believed that Indian Brahmins were descended from the ancient Aryans, as were the “true Germans” who came to power under fascism, and that this race alone was the progenitor of all civilization. A misanthropic animal lover, Devi advocated a program of mass human extermination even more complete than the Nazis’, but she made an exception for the English, because they were kind to their pets. Her religious beliefs were eclectic in the extreme. She wrote about sun worship under the absolute rule of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs, then converted to her own peculiar variety of Hinduism, in which Adolf Hitler had arisen as an avatar of the god Vishnu sent to prepare for the end of the Kali Yuga, the last of the four stages of world history. She regretted never having met the Führer, not acknowledging that a personal interview with Hitler, a haggard, paranoid, and flatulent amphetamine addict, might have dimmed her religious



fervor. Devi was once prominent enough in the fascist movement to attend international gatherings of neo-Nazis, though even this crowd tended to dismiss her utterances as absurd. There was one important exception: George Lincoln Rockwell, who took a liking to Devi and reprinted her self-published books in his magazine *National Socialist World*. Devi fell into obscurity after her death, but her writing has seen something of a revival in recent years. She now has admirers among Hindu nationalists in India, and in the US, alt-right websites pay tribute to her and make digital copies of her books available.

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Savitri Devi

Savitri Devi's *Pilgrimage* (1958) describes an itinerary consisting of the same locations where Anger would later shoot *Lucifer Rising*: Hekla, Egypt, the Externsteine. In the last, she experiences "first death, and then, resurrection; first the cold grave in the heart of the rock, and then the greeting of the Sun from the high place." After lying in the tomb silently playing dead, she rises and climbs the stone stairs to reach the alleged pagan temple of the sun at the top of one of the Externsteine's columns. According to Martin Langebach and Michael Sturm in

their book *Erinnerungsorte der extremen Rechten* (Memorials of the Extreme Right, 2015), “*Lucifer Rising* . . . seems to have been written, down to the last detail (colors depicted, references to the ancient Egyptian religion, walking pace of the protagonist), to trace Devi’s path at the Externsteine.” *Lucifer Rising* visualizes the connection she made between the authoritarian religion of the Egyptian pharaohs and the mass rituals that the Nazis imposed upon the Germans. Whether Anger drew upon Devi’s work during the preparation of the film is impossible to prove beyond doubt, but her writing was available to him. It appeared in *National Socialist World* shortly before he directed the first version of *Lucifer Rising* in San Francisco. Any evidence that Anger’s shooting script might have contained is lost, since he burned it at the Colossi of Memnon near Luxor, a ritual shown in a wide shot of long duration at the end of the film.

Although the bulk of *Lucifer Rising* had been shot in 1972, Anger did not finish it until eight years later. By that time, a film about the interaction of deities, hierophants, and mythological figures had a slightly out-of-date air, like a reminder of a hippy past that few wanted to relive. Intellectual fashion had changed, and as film theorist Ed Lowry noted in 1983, “Anger’s work . . . suffered from needless neglect by modern, materialist criticism, due partly to his penchant for employing certain ‘conventional’ filmic techniques, and partly as a result of the mystical content of his films.” *Lucifer Rising* certainly mystified many spectators, and serious writing about it has been scant in comparison to his other films. Anger’s response—“It’s simple if you’re initiated”—suggests occult origins for the material. His work is indeed occult in the very specific sense of deriving from hidden knowledge. As Anger lives into his nineties, contemporaries and witnesses have died off, and fewer people around him are curious about his

preoccupations or have a proper context for understanding them. His knowledge remains hidden.

Kenneth Anger's crowning achievement, *The Magick Lantern Cycle*, a collection of all his extant early films in a definitive form, did not reach audiences until the 1980s, when Nazi iconography looked less like an outrageous provocation than a reference to current political realities. An avatar of fascism had appeared with the election of President Ronald Reagan, who first wrecked California as governor (1967–75), then turned his attention to the whole United States.

In interviews and published statements, Anger is extraordinarily careful when talking about the Nazi images appearing in his films, never suggesting that they are a reflection of his own political beliefs. Interpretations of them have changed over time. At first, his films seemed to suggest that fascism was a matter of weird rough trade—attractive men who knew how to groom themselves but who were never taught how to think—or crackpots with writings demented enough to be considered camp if they weren't so horrifying. In the twenty-first century, Anger's films have come to look like a return of the repressed. The repression of fascist impulses allows what politicians are wont to call a civil society to flourish, but political events of recent years have shattered that illusion and unleashed something truly morbid and ugly. Right-wing death cults assail democratic institutions and flood the media with counterfactual noise. At this dire moment, Anger can be considered a visionary, his prescient films celebrating America's death drive. Spectators find uncomplicated pleasure in them as long as no one looks too closely at their details, but as fascism advances at home and abroad, their iconography has become unavoidable. Calling attention to the swastika Anger brought to the Summer of Love is not necessarily

a prelude to denouncing him as standing on the wrong side of history, but a way of emphasizing his relevance for today. Seen in this light, Kenneth Anger is not the artist who fulfills our most pious wishes, but the artist America deserves.

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All illustrations are the author's frame grabs of films by Kenneth Anger with these exceptions: "Aleister Crowley as Baphomet X° O.T.O.," photo by Arnold Genthe, published in *The Equinox* (Detroit: Universal Publishing Company, 1919); "Portrait of Savitri Devi," by an unknown photographer, c. 1937; and "Externsteine—Panoramio," photo by Michael aus Halle, 2012, courtesy Wikimedia, Creative Commons.





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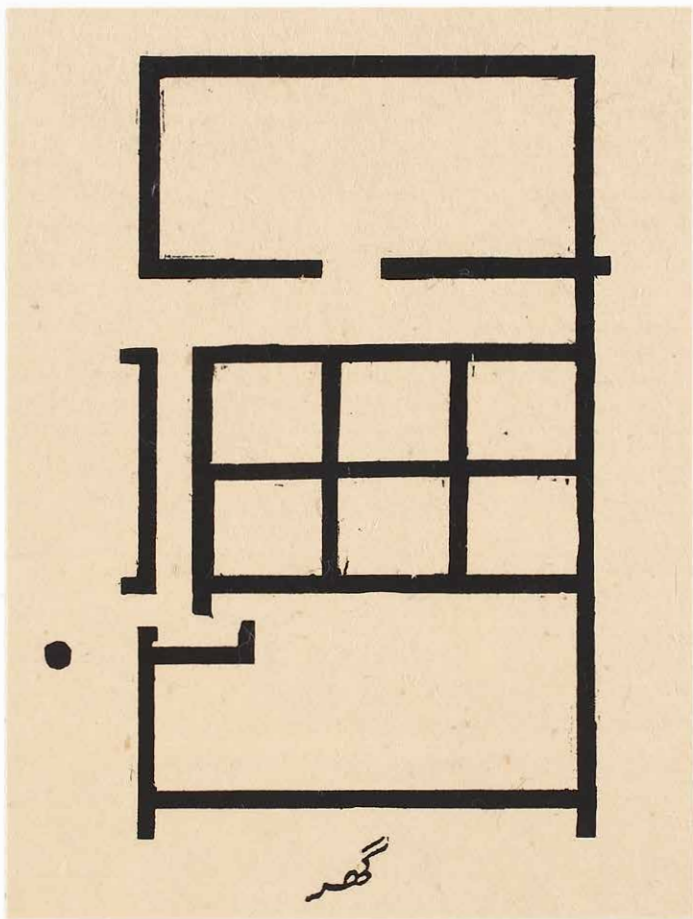
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William E. Jones is an artist, filmmaker, and writer. He has made two feature-length experimental films, *Massillon* (1991) and *Finished* (1997); the documentary *Is It Really So Strange?* (2004); and videos including *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* (1998), *Psychic Driving* (2014), and *Fall into Ruin* (2017). His work has been the subject of retrospectives at Tate Modern, London (2005); Anthology Film Archives, New York (2010); and the Austrian Film Museum, Vienna (2011). He is the author of the nonfiction books *Killed: Rejected Images of the Farm Security Administration* (2010), *Halsted Plays Himself* (2011), *Imitation of Christ* (2013), and *True Homosexual Experiences: Boyd McDonald and Straight to Hell* (2016), as well as the novels *I'm Open to Anything* (2019) and *I Should Have Known Better* (2021). He lives in Los Angeles.



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Home

Zarina 99

Front cover: Zarina, *Home*

from the portfolio *Home is a Foreign Place*, 1999

Portfolio of 36 woodcuts with Urdu text printed in black on

Kozo paper and mounted on Somerset paper

Edition of 25 and 5 Roman Numeral sets

Image size: 8 x 6 inches (20.32 x 15.24 cm)

Sheet size: 16 x 13 inches (40.46 x 33.02 cm)

© Zarina; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Photo: Farzad Owrang

*Cookie Jar*, a pamphlet series of the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, gathers five new pieces of writing by grantees that take on home as the unruly site of inheritance, memory, and imagination. In “Ejecta,” Ari Larissa Heinrich reflects on artist Jes Fan’s melanin sculptures and the geology of metaphoric language. Tan Lin’s “The Fern Rose Bibliography” is a meditation on the loss of his parents through an olfactory exploration of his family’s books. M. Neelika Jayawardane’s “This is not the correct history” questions the evidentiary nature of documentary photography foregrounding the slippery ethics of reading images of the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka. In “He Brought a Swastika to the Summer of Love,” William E. Jones closely reads the fascist iconography in the films of Kenneth Anger for their prescient, unnerving connections to our contemporary political moment. In “Racial Chain of Being,” Shaka McGlotten updates the chart of representations that was Donna Haraway’s provocation in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in the process forging connections between familial legacy, Black radicalism, and the classroom.

In her masterwork *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999)—from which we borrow the title for this volume and cover image for this volume—artist Zarina wrote, “The titles of my work always come to me before the image. Language ties my work together. Urdu is home.” Titled *Home*, this is the first of thirty-six woodblock prints that recall the artist’s childhood residence in Aligarh, India. Even a partial list of Zarina’s titles—*Threshold*, *Courtyard*, *Shadows*, *Fragrance*, *Despair*—reveal how the viewer is invited into the sensorium of Zarina’s elusive idea of home. The essays in this first volume of *Cookie Jar*, varied in scope and approach, illuminate the interior landscapes associated with home. Collectively, they demonstrate the fearlessness—and the tenderness—with which writing may yet encounter art.

—Pradeep Dalal and Shiv Kotecha



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Andy Warhol spent his weekends scouring flea markets, thrift stores, and estate sales for specific items like Navajo blankets, watches, and cookie jars. He collected 175 unique cookie jars in his lifetime, which depicted homes and animals, bodies and faces. When Claude Picasso asked Warhol in 1972 about his fascination with cookie jars, Warhol responded, “They’re time pieces.”

[cookiejar.artswriters.org](http://cookiejar.artswriters.org)

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