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## RESEARCH

# Style, Structure and Allusion in *Lucifer Rising*

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*Lucifer Rising* can be understood as the culmination of Kenneth Anger's Magick Lantern Cycle. The power of this film, in part, rests on the way in which Anger alludes to a range of esoteric myths and Gods, without contextualising them in the way a more traditional film would do. This article sets out to reveal the various allusions, and in turn elucidate Anger's unique approach to filmmaking.

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**Keywords:** avant-garde; experimental film; Kenneth Anger; Thelema; occult

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During production, Kenneth Anger considered *Lucifer Rising* to be the culmination of his life's work (Anger, 1970: 16). It is his most elaborate, ambitious and formally sophisticated film. It is also, arguably, his most elusive – densely loaded with esoteric allusions. In *Lessons in Perception: the Avant-Garde Filmmaker as Practical Psychologist*, I suggested that *Lucifer Rising* features a 'veiled narrative' (Taberham, 2018: 33) which is discernible only to those who already possess the relevant specialist knowledge. For most viewers, the various allusions remain obscure, and this is intentional on Anger's part. Instead of experiencing the film as a linear narrative, it would instead be experienced by most viewers as an *enchantment*. As such, Anger never offered an exhaustive key to understanding the elaborate network of allusions in *Lucifer Rising*. This analysis will go beyond my previous discussion of the film, exploring its various esoteric references in more detail with the purpose of illustrating how *Lucifer Rising* may be experienced as a linear story.

A wide range of distinctive stylistic techniques feature in *Lucifer Rising*, making it a highly unique film both in style and form. Staged footage is intermingled with stock footage and documentary sequences, special effects such as fast motion, superimposition and colour treatment are applied. Drawing from filmmaker

Sergei Eisenstein, montage and shock cuts are employed, along with a sparing use of continuity edits. Anger also abstains from the use of sync sound, dialogue and intertitles, opting for a music soundtrack instead.

More relevant to this article, conventional narrative information is withheld. Mythological stories and occult rituals are re-enacted without contextualisation, and the protagonists are mostly mythological figures such as Isis, Osiris, Lilith and Lucifer, who aren't characterised through conventional exposition. In addition, the characters operate as spiritual forces rather than individual agents. Historical sites are filmed on location (without explanation), and other works of art are visually homaged.

Anger's various allusions without making their significance explicit is not intended to simply confuse his audience, but to create a feeling of wonder. Holding back expositional details of the film turns it into an 'invocation' (Rowe, 1974: 26) instead of a conventional story. To the informed viewer who is already acquainted with the mythological and esoteric allusions, the film enacts the transition from the Piscean Age of Christian rule, characterized by self-sacrifice and submission to God, into the Aquarian Age under Lucifer's rule, which is characterized by free-spirit and rebellion. To the uninformed, the film evokes a potent-yet-elusive atmosphere, seemingly fortified with meaning that remains out of reach.

The central thesis for this article, then, is that instead of outright rejecting narrative as a formal system, *Lucifer Rising* offers a radical renegotiation of narrative form by providing ingredients of a story while withholding contextual information. In doing so, the spectator may experience the film as an enchantment, instead of a well-told-tale. By unpacking the narrative elements of *Lucifer Rising*, my goal is to elucidate Anger's unique approach to storytelling in this film, and perhaps inspire others to consider adopting a similar approach.

The analysis will be divided into four parts. The first will discuss the context in which the film was made. It will then be examined in relation to the other films in Anger's *Magick Lantern Cycle*. Next, the mythologies of the characters featured in *Lucifer Rising* will be explained. Finally, the film as a whole will be outlined, detailing the story that is discernible once the various allusions are understood. Ultimately, this article aims to illustrate how Anger's unique renegotiation of cinematic storytelling offers a singular and evocative filmic experience.

## Context of *Lucifer Rising*

Anger cites Georges Méliès and his films such as *The Merry Frolics of Satan* (1906), as one of his key influences (Sitney, 2002: 108). Both filmmakers are magicians of sorts, “making transformations as well as reconstructions of reality,” (Rowe, 1974: 26) with a mutual interest in the diabolical and the artificial. (Hutchinson, 2004: 186) Le Cain comments that Anger’s wordless films “represent the resurgence and development of the uniquely cinematic qualities widely considered retarded or destroyed by the passing of the silent era, especially in the area of editing.” (sensesofcinema.com, 2003)

Anger emerged as a filmmaker in the 1940s while he was in his early 20s. In addition to being influenced by Méliès, he was shaped in spirit by the filmic poems of his artistic predecessors such as Jean Cocteau. Couched in Romanticism throughout his career, Anger’s style may have been considered out of sync with the prevailing ideas in experimental film by the late 1960s when structuralist and materialist filmmaking was in vogue – movements which were in part intended to dispel the era of which Anger, Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren were figurehead exponents. Yet to the current day, Anger remains one of the best known and widely written about avant-garde filmmakers, due in part to his pioneering work in breaking sexual taboos, and in his influence over counter cultural icons of the 1960s.

Ed Lowry describes Anger as an artist defined by his dialectic relationship to the dominant ideological, industrial, cinematic and signifying practices. “Sexually, politically, aesthetically, cosmologically, Anger has cast himself and his work in a position not only outside the mainstream, but as its negative image.” (Lowry, 1983: 41)

Another explanation for his enduring appeal may lie in his unique, ritualised approach to cinema with its own peculiar representational systems. Deborah Allison has commented that while Anger’s films are by no means the first works to fuse esoteric subject matter with artistic expression, “his choice of the cinema as a medium through which to offer his audience an experience structured by occult ritual endows his oeuvre with a startling originality.” (sensesofcinema.com, 2004)

*Lucifer Rising* was the final work in Anger’s *Magick Lantern Cycle*. During the course of the film, we witness mortals invoking deities through ritual, and the gods invoke their power upon the natural elements. Sites of ancient solar religions are visited, and the alignment of the sun takes place during solstice. All of this is done in

preparation of the return of Lucifer, at the dawn of the Aquarian Age. At the climax of the film, Earth is visited by flying saucers (implying that Egyptian deities were space aliens).

Stories about the production of *Lucifer Rising* are as mythic as the film itself, and most of the actors are public figures. Music icons Marianne Faithfull and Jimmy Page appear, and so does Donald Cammell (a film director), Sir Francis Rose (an artist, known eccentric and friend of Aleister Crowley) and Chris Jagger (Mick's brother). The soundtrack is by Bobby Beausoleil, an ex-member of the band Love, who was on death row at the time of the soundtrack's recording due to his association with the Manson family, and his part in the death of Gary Hinman (a hippie renaissance figure and drug dealer).

Describing the film's production as a 15-year struggle, (Anger, 2011) most of the original footage for *Lucifer Rising* was reportedly stolen and destroyed by Bobby Beausoleil, who performed as Anger's Lucifer in the original version in the late 1960s. *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969) was made from the footage left over from that original project. In 1970, Anger began shooting footage of his new Lucifer, Lesley Huggins, for *Lucifer Rising* with funding received from the German TV station NDR, using his London-based apartment as a studio. Additional funding was received the following year from the National Film Finance Corporation (an English source), which allowed Anger to shoot on location in Egypt (Karnak and Giza) and Germany (Externsteine). Financing from British sources prompted the wrath of The Sunday Telegraph in March 28, 1971, with the sensational headline "Devil Film to get State Aid". (Rayns, 1982)

Anger edited an eight-minute version of the film entitled *Lucifer Rising: Chapter One* (1971), using the London-based footage. This centred on a Magus' ceremony around a magick circle in order to invoke Lucifer, and it ended like an episode of a serial. This initial version of the film was edited and toured, but the film wasn't completed until 1981 while Anger remained busy with other work in the 1970s. He re-edited two of his earlier films, *Rabbit's Moon* and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, made *Senators in Bondage* (1976) (which never became commercially available) and also published the second US edition of *Hollywood Babylon*. Once he finally

secured a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the film was completed and released in its final version in 1981 (Rayns, 1982).

The film was made with the support of film theorist Noël Burch, and the cameraman Michael Cooper (a still photographer best known for his cover photography on The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and the Rolling Stones' Their Satanic Majesties Request). Robert Fraser, the noted London art dealer allowed Anger to film in his apartment for some of the scenes, and Wally Veevers – a special effects artist who worked on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), provided the title credits and the flying saucers at the end of the film. Anger was also assisted by the fellow Thelemite<sup>1</sup> Gerald J Yorke who served as a consultant.

Since the film was originally conceived in the late 1960s, the final product wasn't as timely as it would have been by the time it was released. *Lucifer Rising* was initially imagined as being about the 'holy war' between the outgoing Piscean Age and the incoming Aquarian Age, as manifest in the conflict between teenagers (specifically, hippies) and their parents. As it turned out, Anger came to think of the Haight-Ashbury movement and the summer of love as a "false dawn of optimism" (ratso.net, 2000) as it became poisoned by excessive drug taking and the Manson killings. As such, while the film retains its distinct aesthetic appeal thanks to the striking use of symbolism and lack of traditional exposition, the holy war had all but lost its momentum by the time of *Lucifer Rising's* release.

### **Relation to Other Work**

In a sense, *Lucifer Rising* could be considered the quintessential Kenneth Anger film. Early in the film's development, he claimed that "Everything I've been saying so far has been leading up to this." (Anger, 1970: 16) This is true in reference to his previous allusions to esoteric religion, though it doesn't contain some of the tropes that he is best remembered for, such as the ironic music soundtrack of *Scorpio Rising*, or the overt homosexual references from *Fireworks* and *Kustom Kar Kommandos*.

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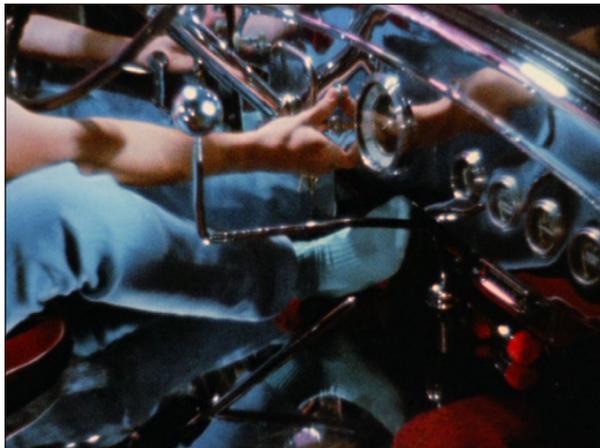
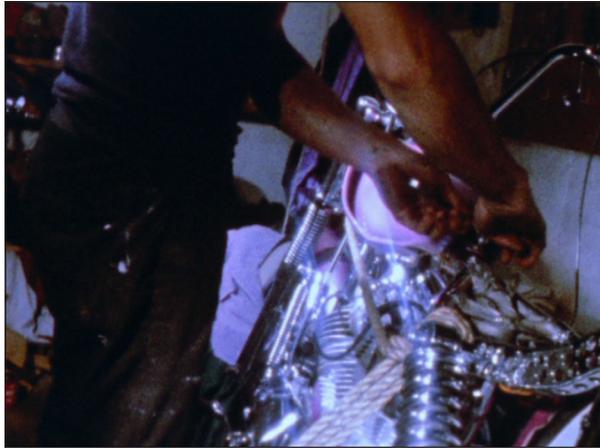
<sup>1</sup> Thelema is the esoteric religion from which *Lucifer Rising* draws most of its allusions. It can broadly be understood as a Pagan revival.

The film might also seem at odds with Anger's 1951 article for *Cahiers du Cinema* entitled 'Modesty and the Art of Film' – a call for small, personal movies instead of Hollywood spectacles. Lasting 28 minutes, it is lengthier than his previous works and the grand scale is also expressed by opening out the more self-contained worlds of his earlier films such as *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), *Kustom Car Commandos* (1965) or the claustrophobic *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969). Carel Rowe comments:

In *Lucifer*, the camera at last liberates its subject matter from its usual medium-close-up iconography through a long-shot/long-take *mise-en-scène*. A series of landscapes, seascapes, skyscapes gain mythical proportions through long-take montage; the long shots establish the vastness of the universe. (Rowe, 1974: 32)

While the development of Anger's *Magick Lantern Cycle* spans 34 years of his life – marking the passage of his early 20s into mature adulthood, one still finds recurring themes throughout his oeuvre. Light is one such running theme throughout the *Magick Lantern Cycle* that culminates with *Lucifer Rising*. Anger's interest in light reflected off sparkling, glistening surfaces runs from the water-soaked gargoyles in *Eaux d'Artifice* to the vehicles in *Scorpio Rising* and *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, and the gleaming ruby in *Lucifer Rising*.





In further reference to light, also consider the moonlit reverie of *Rabbit's Moon*, and the use of Claudine Clark's song "Party Lights" in *Scorpio Rising*. In *Fireworks*, The Dreamer goes out "seeking a light" (a colloquial term for seeking a homosexual encounter) (Anger, 1964: 31) and flames feature at several points in the film.

In *Lucifer Rising*, all of the divine characters are associated with different forms of light. Isis (Myriam Gibril) and Osiris (Donald Cammell) are Solar deities, Lilith (Marianne Faithfull) is a Lunar deity, and Lucifer (Lesley Huggins) is aligned with lightning. We witness a solar eclipse where the sun and the moon intersect, and Lilith greets the alignment of the sun during the solstice.

One may also tie the running theme of light to the *lantern* in the *Magick Lantern Cycle*. Like the lantern, cinema is explicitly dependent on light, and the patron of light is Lucifer. His name derives from ancient Rome – the Latin words *lucis* (light) and *ferre* (to bring). The light bringer. Thus, Anger conceives of cinema as an inherently *Luciferian* art form.<sup>2</sup>

Another recurring motif that appears in *Lucifer Rising* which has featured since his earliest work is sleep and awakening. The events from *Fireworks* (1947) begin with the central character (known as The Dreamer, played by Anger himself) waking from his dream, only to enter another one. Lord Shiva (Samson de Brier) commences *Inauguration of the Pleasuredome* (1954) by awakening in his chamber. *Rabbit's Moon* (1950/71) opens with Pierrot (André Soubeyran) reclining on the ground as though he has just been roused by the moonlight, and Yvonne Maquis slumbers in *Puce Moment* (1949).



<sup>2</sup> See William Wees' *Light Moving in Time* for further discussion on Anger's use of light.



In *Lucifer Rising*, we are introduced to the Adept (Haydn Coats) when he awakens, suggesting that the preceding events may have been his dream. Lilith (Marianne Faithfull) also first appears awakening inside a stone sarcophagus.



Much has already been said to establish *Scorpio Rising* and *Lucifer Rising* as contrapuntal companion pieces (See: Hutchinson, Sitney). Their mutual use of the word *Rising* is immediately apparent. 'Rising' is an astrological term which also means 'ascendant'. Astrological belief prescribes that the celestial events which take place during a person's birth will bear an influence on their character. Scorpio is the sign of the zodiac that rules the sex organs and machinery – the two are connected

according to astrology, hence the fetishization of motorbikes in *Scorpio*. But while Scorpio is one of the zodiac signs, Lucifer isn't. In the case of *Lucifer*, the 'rise' refers to the rise of Lucifer's rule at the dawn of the Aquarian age.



Hutchinson comments on the dialectical relationship between both films by suggesting that "the thanatic death-wish of *Scorpio* is assuaged by the utopian mythopoeia of *Lucifer Rising*". (Hutchinson, 2004: 189) *Scorpio Rising* functions as a "death mirror held up to American culture" (Cott, 1970), inhabited by bikers who are inexorably magnetized towards their own demise – death is an ever-looming presence.



*Lucifer Rising* by contrast, is a celebration of life, birth and rebirth. Isis (the Goddess of birth) features prominently. We also witness the birth of Sobek (the crocodile God), the re-assembly of Osiris, the dawning of earth into the Aquarian Age, and the invocation of Lucifer – all forms of birth or rebirth.

Another point by which the two films bear comparison is their episodic structure. While *Puce Moment* and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* are fragments of larger projects, and *Fireworks*, *Rabbit's Moon* and *Eaux d'Artifice* track consistent characters across a linear chain of events, *Lucifer Rising* and *Scorpio Rising* employ an episodic form in which the causal connections between scenes are not always immediately clear. In *Scorpio Rising*, the structure of the film is more easily discernible because each episode is edited to a different pop song. In *Lucifer Rising*, the extended score was written after the film was shot and assembled, and the end of each scene isn't always punctuated by a musical change.

A sign that Anger became more confident and sure-handed in the 20-year gap between *Inauguration of the Pleasuredome* and *Lucifer Rising* is that by the time he shot *Lucifer*, he was able to successfully transform the static and impassive statues depicting mythical icons into living flesh. Humans perform as deities in *Inauguration*, but in *Lucifer* the actors were taken to the original temples and monuments of the gods they were portraying, and the pairing feels congruous. Monuments which

would otherwise dwarf the human form now appear to be on equal terms. In a sense, Anger created his own 'mythic cinema' in an era when it may not have felt possible to do so, particularly since the sensual quality of film from Méliès' era, so evocative of a lost age, was long gone.



### **The Aesthetics of Ambiguity and Aleister Crowley**

As stated in the introduction, traditional exposition is discarded in *Lucifer Rising*. Le Cain comments that "In attempting to induce an altered state of consciousness in his viewers, Anger dispenses with traditional narrative devices" (sensesofcinema.com, 2003) Also, Rowe stated in 1974 that "To date, all of his films have been evocations or invocations, attempting to conjure primal forces which, once visually released, are designed to have the effect of 'casting a spell' on the audience. The magick in the film is related to the magick effect of the film on the audience." (Rowe, 1974: 26)

Why would Anger's abandonment of traditional narrative devices serve to "cast a spell", or alter the consciousness of the viewers? Viewers of *Lucifer Rising* encounter a series of events, sacred symbols and allusions to esoteric religion, whose significance are obscure to most, but appear loaded with meaning. Those familiar with Anger's given viewing strategy, to think of the film as an invocation rather than a story, do not need to be acquainted with the relevant mythology.

In order to understand Kenneth Anger's various allusions and creative goals, the principal point of reference is Aleister Crowley (born 1875–died 1947).<sup>3</sup> Crowley was an English occultist and an influential member of occult organizations, including the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis. He is known today for his occult writings, especially *The Book of the Law* – the central sacred text of his own belief system, Thelema.

Based on the dictum, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law", Thelema fused Egyptian, Judaic, Babylonian and Hindu mythology, and they all became one cosmic background for Crowley's 'religion of the will', which Anger has described as a Pagan revival, motivated by a love of the earth, rather than Christian guilt. (Anger, 2011)

Crowley gained notoriety during his lifetime, and was denounced in the popular press of the day as "The wickedest man in the world." Despite the frequent assumption that "Do what thou Wilt" is solely an appeal to hedonism and promiscuity, Thelema as it was developed by Crowley was intended as a path of spiritual development based on seeking and putting into practice one's True Will, rather than the ego's desires (which was considered to be a separate aspect of the self). In her discussion of Anger and Crowley, Deborah Allison comments:

For the Crowleyite, to invoke the force and power of a particular god does not necessarily presuppose a belief in his/her metaphysical or historical existence, nor the religious dogma surrounding that figure. It is simply a way of referencing a particular psychic force. (sensesofcinema.com, 2004)

As such, rituals are to be understood as self-development techniques which could be employed to access aspects of one's inner self. Crowley himself has commented:

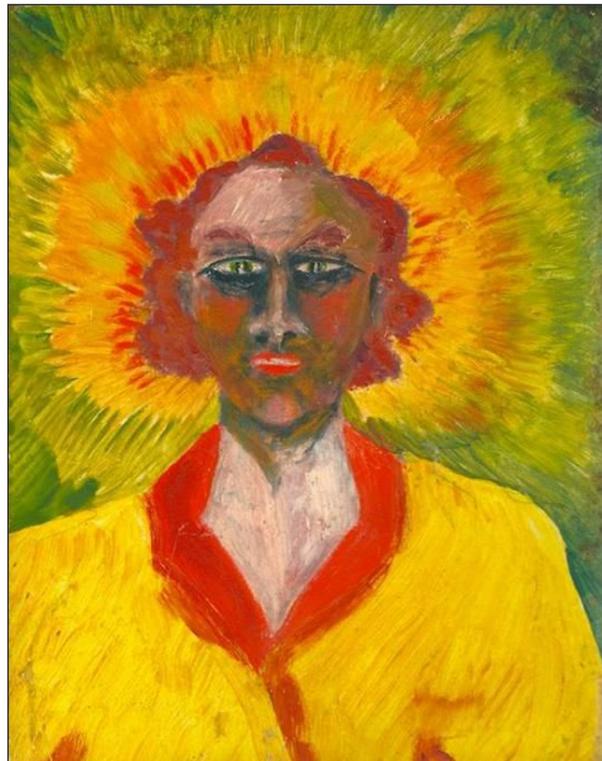
It is immaterial whether [the gods] exist or not. By doing certain things certain results follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them. (Crowley quoted in Cavedish, 1984: 83)

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<sup>3</sup> Virtually every essay and article about Kenneth Anger also discusses Crowley. For this article, I tried to be as concise as possible, and raise points that generally aren't raised elsewhere.

This isn't often explained when Crowley's lifework is contextualised. But it repositions his ethos from a curious, and to some, absurd way of operating into a radical but more pragmatic religious system.

One of Aleister Crowley's self portraits titled "The Sun" (painted in 1920) is homaged in *Lucifer Rising*:



Anger has stated that his lifework isn't filmmaking, but *magick*,<sup>4</sup> with the cinematograph as his 'magical weapon.' As such, spectatorship of films from the *Magick Lantern Cycle* are intended to operate as Thelemic rituals, which cast a spell on viewers as they experience each film. But the reality of the spell is manifest through the feelings that are evoked by the film, rather than anything more ethereal.

Although he died in 1947, Crowley's liberal use of drugs, his attitude towards free love, his use of communes and his independent spirit meant that interest in him was rekindled in the 1960s. His way of life served as a prototype for the love generation. Kenneth Anger played a part in his renewed interest, partially through his friendships with rock icons of the era. During a period with widespread interest in esoteric religion, Anger's friendship with The Rolling Stones provided them with an occult counterpoint to The Beatles' popularisation of Transcendental Meditation, inspiring the song "Sympathy for the Devil."

When Anger was working on the original version of *Lucifer Rising* (fragments of which eventually became *Invocation of my Demon Brother*) he said the following:

The age that ended in 1962 was the Piscean Age... which was the age of Jesus Christ. Where the Piscean Age was ruled by Neptune, the planet of mysticism, the Aquarian Age is ruled by Uranus, the most erratic planet of all... it's the sign of the unexpected, revolution... The last 2000 years were based on renunciation, sacrifice and guilt. The fight for the next generation, the next 25 years, 50 years, is skinning off the shell that's left over from the last era (Anger, 1966: 70)

The final version of *Lucifer Rising* was also about this shift of eras. Crowley foresaw a cultural shift taking place and drew together two different sets of lore: the astrological age of Aquarius, and the Egyptian Aeon of Horus – both of which were due to begin at about the same time.

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<sup>4</sup> Crowley defines magick as "the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will", including both mundane acts of will as well as ritual magic. The 'k' was added to distinguish it from stage magic.

In astrology, each age is approximately 2150 years long, depending on the technique used to calculate the cycles. Astrologers believe the ages correlate to the rise and fall of civilizations and cultural tendencies. Recent cultural changes are considered by some to indicate that we are shifting from the Piscean Age of Christian rule into the Aquarian Age, which is characterised by electricity, computers, flight, democracy, and (most notably for our purposes) nonconformity and rebellion, amongst other things. (Bills, 1993: 362) In addition to the technological developments of the last two centuries, members of the love generation (as non-conformists) took themselves as being indicative of this change – the 1967 musical *Hair* brought the idea of the Aquarian Age to the attention of a wide audience with its opening song, which announces “This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius”.

In Egyptian lore, history is divided into a series of Aeons. According to Aleister Crowley, the last three aeons have been:

The Aeon of Isis: a matriarchal era which was dominated by the Principal of the Mother, characterised by Pagan worship of the Mother and Nature. “Mother Earth” nourished, clothed and housed humankind.

The Aeon of Osiris: the medieval era, dominated by the Paternal Principle. It was characterized by self-sacrifice and submission to the Father God.

The Aeon of Horus: the modern era (due to begin at about the same time as the Aquarian Age), dominated by the Principle of the Child. It is a time of joyful humanism, self-realization, individuality and finding one’s True Will independently of Priests or Gods. According to Crowley, the Aeon of Horus began in 1904, and he thus placed himself as a prophet, heralding the beginning of a new era.

Crowley conflated Horus with Lucifer, identifying them both as manifestations of the same forces, such as light, youth and disobedience. Isis, Osiris and Horus-as-Lucifer all feature in *Lucifer Rising* prominently, with the torch being passed onto the Aeon of Horus/Age of Aquarius under Lucifer’s rule.

## **Character Roll Call**

One of the unique renegotiations Anger makes with cinematic storytelling is the way in which he presents his characters. In *Lucifer Rising*, we are not granted explicit access to the characters’ intentions, their inner thoughts or their moral character (as

is conventional in cinematic storytelling). Anger relies on allusion to characterise the protagonists in *Lucifer Rising*, since we learn little about who they are through their actions. If you have a prior familiarity with the mythological figures, the protagonists are “pre-characterised.” Otherwise, they are characterised via references which uninformed spectators won’t detect. Some of these allusions will be explained.

Anger adopted a technique pioneered by Sergei Eisenstein in which he refrained from naming his characters so that they could become *paradigmatic types*, rather than individuals. In the case of *Scorpio Rising* for instance, it’s not ‘a biker’, but The Biker. (Lai, 2009) In *Lucifer Rising*, Anger frames his characters as both deities and forces of nature, rather than individual agents:

I am trying to get away from identifying with actor or actress as a person. I want to move through nature, and the people are elements of nature also.  
(Anger quoted in Mekas, 1973: 16)

Within Thelema, each deity embodies a different type of force that humans experience and embody (e.g. Isis is life, Osiris is death, Lilith is discontent, Lucifer is youth and disobedience). Powell suggests that by removing audience identification with psychologically rounded characters, Anger “draws us more directly into the forces they represent”. (Powell, 2002: 92)

There is a degree of convergence between the ideas of Eisenstein and Crowley which Anger was able to exploit. Eisenstein coined the concept of “typage,” in which non actors are cast in roles that correspond to their actual lives, e.g. a factory labourer is played by a real factory labourer. As such, they give the film a natural integrity by token of embodying their true-to-life personas (Goodwin, 1993: 70). Similarly, Crowley coined the concept of the “dramatic ritual,” in which you meditate on a god – for example the god of war (Mars), you then *become* war. You feel the god force coming through you, control it and manifest. In *Lucifer Rising*, Anger’s non actors “manifest” and embody their roles by token of their real-life personalities. Osiris, the lord of death for example was portrayed by Donald Cammell who was obsessed with death. Lilith, the broken-hearted would-be bride of Lucifer was played by Marianne

Faithfull, who at the time was shattered following the dissolution of her relationship with Mick Jagger.

Some of the characters from *Lucifer Rising* will be contextualised in order to understand their place in the film more clearly, and their characterisation through allusion will also be explained.

### ***Lucifer***

Lucifer was originally the name of the 'morning star' given by the ancient Romans to the planet Venus. They noticed that it would rise before the sun, so they worshipped Venus as the star which heralds the sun – hence the Latin name *Lucis Ferre* (light bringer).

As a deity, Anger has commented that Lucifer is the love of his life (he has the name tattooed across his chest), and he spent the late 1960s and the 1970s trying to capture a succession of volatile non-actors in the role. His first Lucifer was a 5-year-old boy called Godot who killed himself while attempting to fly off a roof. The second, Bobby Beausoleil was convicted of murder. (Hutchinson, 2004: 185) Finally for *Lucifer Rising*, Anger found Lesley Huggins, a young Middlesbrough steel worker. He reportedly "had Lucifer in him", being stubborn by disposition, and like Lucifer, couldn't be persuaded or paid to dependably attend shooting sessions. (Anger, 2007)

In spite of his capricious and rebellious nature, Lucifer is also the angel of light, who represents the spirit of love at the dawn of a new age. Anger commented that Lucifer is the "patron saint of the visual arts. Colour, form, all these are the works of Lucifer." (Anger quoted in Hutchinson, 2004: 174) Carel Rowe comments, "Lucifer's sin lies in out-doing God. He is seen not as a leader but as the totally independent original rebel; the Luciferian spirit manifests itself in the spirit of the artist, not as a Hell's Angel." (Rowe, 1974: 27)

Anger referred to Lucifer as the original rebellious teenager during a screening of *Lucifer Rising: Chapter 1*:

It all began with a child playing with a chemistry set that exploded. An innocent, pure child prodigy, creating for the joy of it, just as Lucifer created his

own light shows in heaven... Eventually he was expelled for playing the stereo too loud.<sup>5</sup>

Restoring Lucifer to his pre-Christian status as “the Bringer of Light” is an implicit part of Thelema. Crowley also imagined Lucifer as a precocious and rebellious teenager – his poem “Hymn to Lucifer” (written in 1919), closes with the line that Lucifer’s message is “The Key of Joy is disobedience.”<sup>6</sup>

The rituals and invocations that take place in *Lucifer Rising* are in preparation for Lucifer’s rule, and the coming of the Aquarian Age.

There are two other mythological figures with whom Lucifer has been conflated. First of all, there is Puck, the spirit of mischief (and the name of Anger’s production company). Also, the aforementioned Egyptian god Horus, who was represented as a falcon, or a falcon-headed man, that was subsumed into Lucifer by Thelemic doctrine. Horus served a variety of functions in the Egyptian pantheon, most notably as being the god of the Sky, the god of War and the god of Protection. A falcon appears briefly in *Lucifer Rising*.



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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Kenneth Anger at a presentation of an early version of *Lucifer Rising*, San Francisco Art Institute, April, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> The complete poem is available at: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/hymn-to-lucifer/>.

Throughout the film *Lucifer* looks directly at the camera, as if he were privy to the audience. Sometimes he is neutral and expressionless, while at other times he smiles.



The first time we encounter Lucifer, his face is tinted green. In her colour analysis of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, Deborah Allison states that of all the colours, green might have the most contradictory set of emotions. Quoting Eisenstein, she comments that green is “directly associated with the symbols of life – young leaf-shoots, foliage and ‘greenery’ itself – just as firmly with the symbols of death and decay – leaf-mould, slime, and the shadows on a dead face” (Allison, 2004). As such, perhaps the film is refraining from disclosing the nature of Lucifer at that point.

Later, adorned in black and white, Lucifer approaches the camera and looks directly at it, again without smiling. A clue to the use of colour symbology in this sequence might come from Hutchinson’s comment that Horus didn’t attempt to defeat evil, but rather he channelled it: “His mission was not to eliminate evil, the negative, but to master it according to the balance of the two polarities bringing harmony to the universe; reuniting disparate elements.” (Hutchinson, 2004: 184) In turn, Horus-as-Lucifer draws opposites together (black and white), without fusing them (grey).

Allison has also commented that during the production of *Invocation of my Demon Brother*, Anger’s conception of Lucifer was still closely tied to Mars (the planet and the god) (Allison, 2004). According to Crowley, forces have sets of correspondences, and Mars corresponds with fire, violence, destruction, iron, the basilisk, the oak, the nettle, the ruby, tobacco, the astrological sign of Scorpio and the colour red. (Crowley, 1991: 303) As such, Lucifer is painted red during his birthday scene. Note that Lucifer (or rather, Satan) is associated with the colour red in popular mythology as well.

While Lucifer is not solely to be understood as evil, he is not to be mistaken as benign either. He is, after all aligned with fire, violence and destruction. After encountering him for the first time, we see a threatening face that resembles a snake superimposed on top of the earth boiling.



In addition to Lucifer being aligned with the falcon (as Horus) he also appears as a snake. The Christian conception of Lucifer is otherwise avoided, but Satan is referred to as the “old serpent” in Revelations (12:9), and it is also a disobedient snake that tempts Eve with the fruit of knowledge from the garden of Eden – a figure that has been conflated with Lucifer. The closing image of *Lucifer Rising* features earth beneath the shadow of Lucifer as a cobra.

### **Isis**

Isis is a part of the Ennead, a group of nine deities who were worshipped in Egyptian mythology. They consisted of the sun god and supreme deity Atum-Ra, his children Shu and Tefnut, their children Geb and Nut, and their children Set, Nephthys, Osiris and Isis.



Worshipped as the Goddess of motherhood, magic and fertility, the first records concerning Isis appear shortly after 2,500 B.C. Her worship spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, continuing until the suppression of Paganism in the Christian era.

Her name translates roughly as “She of the Throne”. Accordingly, Isis’ original headdress was shaped like a throne. After she assimilated many of the roles of Hathor (the goddess who personified the principles of love, motherhood and joy) (Allen, 2005: 432), her headdress was replaced with that of Hathor’s: the horns of a cow on her head, with the solar disk between them (as seen in the film). In *Lucifer Rising*, Isis is dressed authentically to the original images and dons both headdresses.

Isis is portrayed in *Lucifer Rising* by Myriam Gibril, an Ethiopian Princess who was the real-life lover of Donald Cammell, who plays Osiris.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gibril and Cammell also worked together on *The Argument*, which was filmed and directed by Cammell in '71 and edited posthumously in '99. The film invited comparisons with *Lucifer Rising*, since in both, Gibril appears in the desert as an earth-mother.

### ***Osiris***

Both husband and brother to Isis and father of Horus, Osiris was the god of death and resurrection. Despite being the lord of the dead, Osiris was considered a kindly and merciful judge in the afterlife.

His green skin symbolizes re-birth. Osiris is represented in his most developed form of iconography wearing the Atef crown and carrying a flail and crook, signposting him as a shepherd god. Just as Anger's Lucifers were mischievous and difficult to control in real life, Cammell was obsessed with death – notably, his own. He openly contemplated suicide numerous times and eventually did so in 1996. There is nothing within the film to tell us that Cammell was obsessed with death, so Anger's use of typage operates on the faith that Cammell's obsession with death would be inscribed in his performance, even without spoken dialogue. His death-obsessed soul shines forth.



### ***Lilith***

*Lucifer Rising* has been described as a film about love – but the violence of love as well as the tenderness. (Anger, 1970: 16) As such, the joyful union of Isis and Osiris is counterbalanced by Lilith, the rejected and heartbroken would-be consort to Lucifer. Lilith wanted to take Lucifer's power, but facing repudiation, she spends eternity encircling the earth like a 'satellite of misfortune' (Anger, 2011). Unlike the Pagan figures of Isis and Osiris, Lilith originally featured in Babylonian mythology

and Jewish folklore. She is the spirit of discontent in female form, powerful but unhappy.

Her name translates roughly into “female night demon,” and she is a bearer of storms, disease, and death. In *Lucifer Rising*, Lilith’s tragedy and catastrophic powers feature, she leaves a trail of destruction behind her when she is introduced, and her tears invoke a storm towards the end of the film.

Using typage again, Anger gave the role of Lilith to Marianne Faithfull. Marianne holds a scarf stained with her own blood following an attempted suicide after a painful breakup with Mick Jagger.<sup>8</sup> Using her state of mind at the time for the purposes of the film as a heartbroken spirit of discontent is dubious, but consistent with his method of using typage. Marianne’s misery would have reminded Anger of Lilith.



She is seen in two different guises in *Lucifer Rising*. In some scenes, Lilith appears in ordinary clothes. In other scenes, she is dressed and powdered grey. According to Crowley’s colour symbolism, grey is associated with night, fog and discontent (Anger, 2011). Unlike Isis and Osiris, there is no universally agreed appearance to Lilith.

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<sup>8</sup> Originally, Anger invited Mick Jagger to play the role of Lucifer. Employing typage, Jagger would have been ideal since he was an idolised counter-cultural figure in the late 1960s who rejected Faithfull. But he declined from being involved in the project.



In *Lucifer Rising*, we see Lilith worship the earth, greet the solstice at an ancient solar temple and finally, face rejection from Lucifer.

Lilith's name derives from the Hebrew root L-Y-L meaning "Night," thus her name translates roughly to "nocturnal female night being", hence her awakening under the moonlight.



Employing allusion again, Lilith is immediately established as a lunar (and in turn, feminine) goddess, counterpointing the Adept's greeting of the sun. According to Thelema, the sun is considered to be aligned with the masculine and the moon is aligned with the feminine. Thelema is a solar religion, and in turn a masculine religion (although women are free to join). Wicca, by contrast is a lunar and feminine religion.

Signposting her as an apocalyptic and destructive deity, Lilith's walk through the black forest is intercut with images of a forest fire, a tornado, and falling rocks. The forces of nature that Lilith commands are not localised to a specific place – rather, the path of destruction serves as visual rhetoric, telling us that “Lilith is trouble.”



Lilith is also characterised as being sexually predatory, leading men astray – hence the relief of her holding back a group of men. In the same pose with outstretched arms, Lilith teleports to Egypt in a slow dissolve, in the following shot. Anger ties Lilith back to classical cinema, commenting that she operates as a precursor to Bette Davis and other femme fatales. (Anger, 2007)



### ***The Adept***

Haydn Couts, a Canadian biker whom Anger commented had an appealing “fatalistic quality” (Anger, 2011) plays the Adept in *Lucifer Rising*, a figure who serves as an intermediary between the mortals and the deities.



The Adept helps bring forth the rise of Lucifer for the Aquarian Age/Aeon of Horus. We see him greet the sunrise, bless a statue of Horus with a wand, perform a human sacrifice, conduct the 'blood ruby,' take a ritual bath, worship at Stonehenge, connect with his Holy Guardian Angel, and summon forth the new world at Avebury (another English Henge alongside Stonehenge).

The Adept is alluded to as being a powerful figure in his opening scene. First of all, he is surrounded by a coloured aura as he sleeps. Once he gets up from bed, we see that he has been lying on a unicursal hexagram. Such an insignia is used to express a high level of self-confidence, a belief that one can achieve the highest of goals, and the conviction that one can even become an intermediary between mortals and the divine.





### **Unearthing the Hidden Narrative**

Now that the film has been contextualized and the lead characters outlined, the underlying narrative embedded in *Lucifer Rising* can be outlined (through informed speculation) with the following scenes:

#### **SCENE 1: The Earth is Alive**

We begin with the primal forces of nature, reminding us that while the earth is billions of years old, it is still very much alive.



SCENE 2: The Birth of Sobek

Isis smiles benignly as we witness the birth of Sobek – the crocodile god.



SCENE 3: Isis and Osiris Signal Each Other Across Town

Isis takes an *Ankh* from a stone carving, an Egyptian hieroglyphic character that reads “eternal life”. She uses it to signal to Osiris by channelling the forces of nature, and he replies in turn. Anger has stated that the scene represents the communication between life and death, both of which are dependent on the other. Where Christianity tends to deny these cosmic balances and simplifies religion into good and evil, Anger

comments, the ancient Pagan religion offers a more nuanced outlook. In life and death, we face “a ying-yang situation”. Both must be faced, and life is probably more difficult than death. (Anger, 2011)



#### SCENE 4: The Adept

The Adept wakes up at dawn and conducts the *Liber Resh vel Helios* (drawing spiritual energy from the sun). He blesses a statue of Horus with a wand, conducts a human sacrifice, spills his own blood in the *blood ruby* ritual and takes a bath.



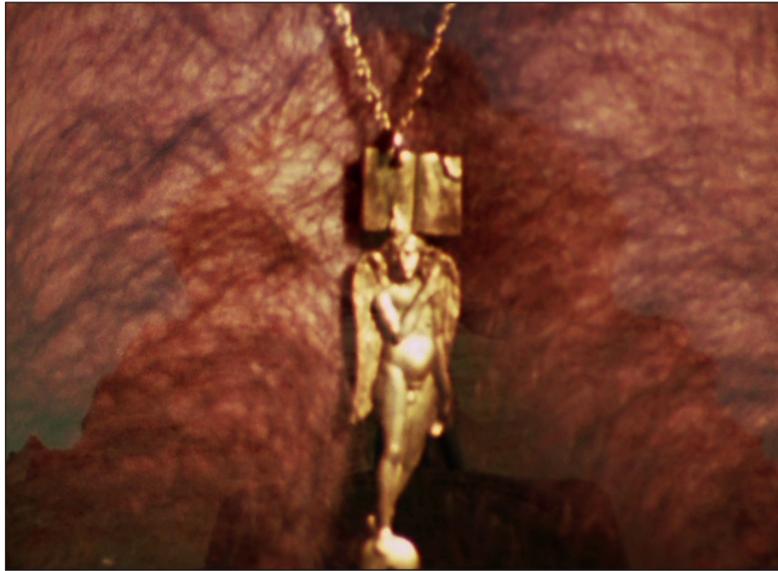
#### SCENE 5: Lilith Awakens

Counterpointing the Adept, Lilith wakes at night. She walks through the Black Forest (a mountain range in Germany), leaving a trail of destruction behind her. She then teleports to the pyramids of Giza, stands at the foot of the sphinx and worships the sun, moon and the universe, asking to be loved in return.



SCENE 6: Knowledge and Conversation at Stonehenge

Worshipping naked at Stonehenge, the Adept connects with his Holy Guardian Angel and becomes fully aware of his own true will, in a ritual known as “Knowledge and Conversation.” This is a graduation ceremony, of sorts. The Angel that the Adept wears on his chest symbolizes his Holy Guardian Angel.



SCENE 7: Lilith Ascends Externsteine

During the day, Lilith journeys up the ancient solar temple, Externsteine. At night, a group of six druids make the same voyage.



SCENE 8: Alignment of the Sun

At the top of Externsteine, sunlight from the summer solstice shines onto the altar, and Atum-Ra (the sun God) appears in between Isis and Osiris.



### SCENE 9: Chaos is Cast Out

The establishing shot of this scene features three items. Shiva, Bast and the Stele of Revealing. Shiva is the Hindu God, who represents destruction. He is, however, considered a positive force (the destroyer of evil), since creation follows from destruction. The cat at the foot of Shiva is Bast, an Egyptian solar deity who is a protector and avenger. The Stele of Revealing also features, an ancient Egyptian commemorative stone slab which Aleister Crowley believed predicted his religion of Thelema.



Prior to the invocation of Lucifer, a Magus (played by Anger himself) clears the way by casting out the force of Chaos (played by Sir Francis Rose), with the use of a magic circle.

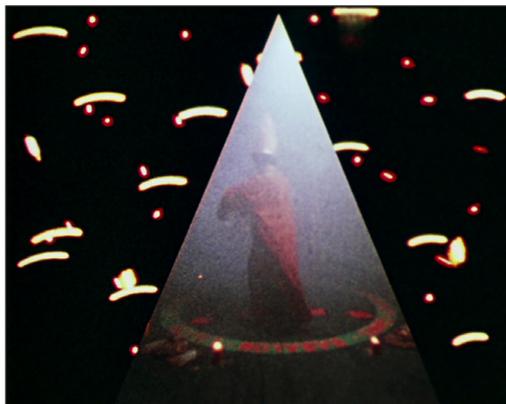




SCENE 10: Lucifer is Invoked

With Chaos gone, the Magus is free to summon Lucifer. In an Eisensteinian montage edit, we see a tiger swimming in the water. This is a reminder that summoning Lucifer through ritual is a highly demanding and intensive process. Even the very fierce can be easily swept away by the forces of nature.

Cosmic energies intensify, and Lucifer arrives.





SCENE 11: Tarot Room

Perhaps the most enigmatic sequence in the film, three incarnations of Lucifer shuffle cards without looking at them, and then they are thrown into the air. This may be interpreted as Lucifer throwing fate into disarray.



SCENE 12: Aleister Crowley Memorial Library

A commemoration scene for Aleister Crowley. His picture is framed inside a wreath, the Adept studies his book, and we see a goat – the animal to which Crowley felt most affinity. Jimmy Page (the guitarist of Led Zeppelin, and an admirer of Aleister Crowley) also appears, holding the Stele of Revealing.



### SCENE 13: Lucifer's Birthday Party

Lucifer appears in three different forms, showing different aspects of his nature. The first time, he is in red and white (symbolizing his rebirth). The second time, he appears alongside the Adept, painted in black and white (symbolizing his use of both good and evil). Finally, he appears a third time with the Adept holding a birthday cake that turns out to contain a hidden bomb, demonstrating his nature as a trickster. On exploding, cinema (dependent on light) is revealed, Lucifer's dubious gift to humanity. The explosive energy of Bast is harnessed.



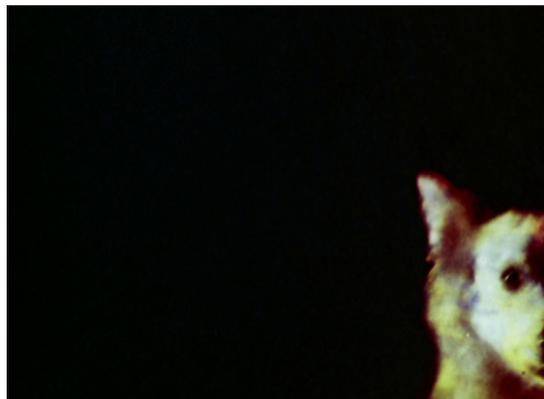
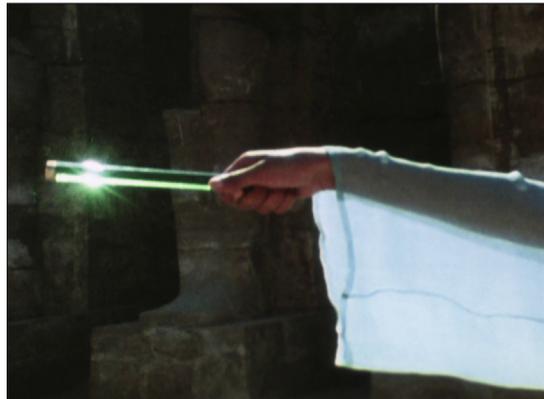
SCENE 14: Lilith Faces Rejection

Lilith appears in a vandalized room following a destructive rampage. She weeps into her blood-stained scarf, whispering “memories” as her tears invoke storms and lightning. She then gives her love away to Lucifer (symbolized by violets), and continues to weep. This leads into a flashback in Egypt, where she is turned away by a Luciferian Adept and turns to an opium plant to ease her pain.



SCENE 15: Rearranging Osiris

Referencing a myth in which Osiris is chopped to pieces by his wicked brother Set, Isis reassembles Osiris with the use of a magic wand. She is helped by Anubis, the jackal-headed deity who appears in a flash-cut for only 12 frames (a half-second). Osiris then casts six funerary talismans known as *ushabti* into the Nile.



SCENE 16: The New Overlord

Acolytes perform a diabolical dance for Lucifer, their new overlord. This sequence is made using a clip from *Just Imagine!* (1930) a camp sci-fi with a musical dance routine.



SCENE 17: A New World

Now at the height of his powers, the Adept harnesses forces of nature, summoning the new world at Avebury Henge. Storms and eruptions signal the approach of the new aeon, and rocks burst from the ground.



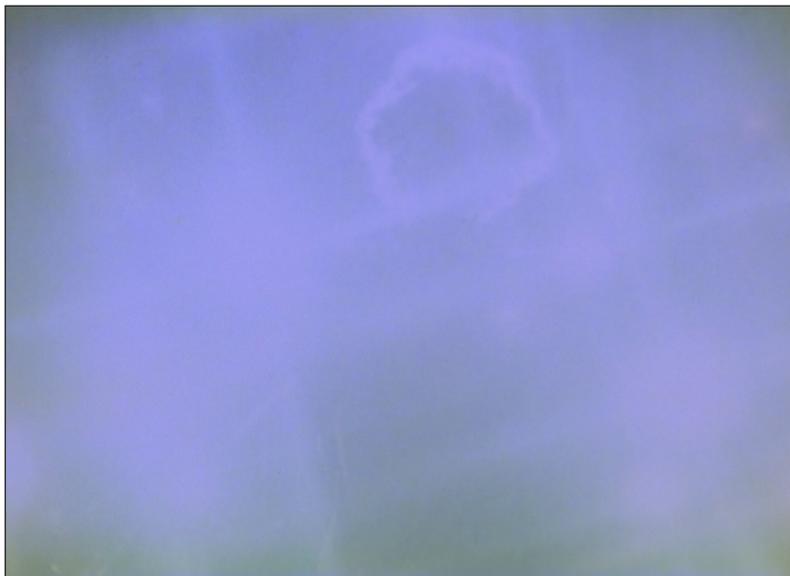
SCENE 18: Alien Visitors

Isis greets an approaching flying saucer which glides over giant pillars and the statue of Ramses from the Luxor temple, implying that the gods are alien visitors. Note the similarity between the flying saucer and the solar disc on Isis' headdress.



SCENE 19: Lucifer Risen

A coil appears, symbolizing completion and perfection in a new aeon (referencing 'The Universe' tarot card from the Major Arcana series). We also see Lucifer once more, the angel of light slowly raising his arms as a shimmering silhouette, dazzling and luminant. Our new god for the age of Aquarius in his true form.



**SCENE 20: Burning the Document of Oz**

Smoke rises in the distance between the two Colossi of Memnon – two massive and heavily weathered statues of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, built around 1350 B.C. In the distance, Anger is burning 'The Sacred Document of Oz,' his script/plans for *Lucifer Rising*. As well as finalising the story, Anger also tells us and himself that the artwork is now complete.

**Conclusion**

For some, the appeal of *Lucifer Rising* derives from abandoning the need to know all the information and contextualisation which transforms it into a narrative film. For others, the absence of such information only serves to alienate. Commenting on audience ambivalence, Bill Landis says:

The specifically Thelemic associations can make *Lucifer Rising* initially cold and inaccessible to viewers not versed in such matters, and, admittedly, the narrative is more internalized than any film Anger has made. Yet everyone can appreciate the film as a beautiful work of art in a purely visceral sense. (Landis, 1995: 235)

Although *Lucifer Rising* is intended to be interpreted as a religious film, it takes a different path to the grandiose approach of Cecil B DeMille, or the spartan and ascetic films of Carl Dreyer and Robert Bresson, all of whom can be considered to have made 'religious films.' This isn't necessarily a matter of Christianity evoking a different aesthetic to Thelema. *Lucifer Rising*, and the *Magic Lantern Cycle* more broadly need not be thought of as the most natural form or style to which Thelema should be treated. Rather, his style emerges from a combination of Thelemic imagery, the influence of other filmmakers, and Anger's own peculiar set of aesthetic values.

The length of time it took to make *Lucifer Rising* perhaps speaks of its density as well. For all the costumes, set designs, places visited, he was notably unscrupulous in his editing, using only 28 minutes from an alleged 17 hours of footage (Hutchinson, 2004: 185). Several costumes and props made for the film only appear very briefly.

Anger himself may be the only person who could provide a completely exhaustive explanation of the film. Nonetheless, specialist terms have been introduced here which the reader can research further such as the ankh, the unicursal hexagram, and the ushabti. Occult rituals conducted by the Adept, the Liber Resh Vel Helios, the Blood Ruby, Knowledge and Conversation can also be further explored, and so can the historical sites Externsteine, Stonehenge, Avebury Henge, and the Colossi of Memnon.

*Lucifer Rising's* connection to John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (published in 1667) is another possible line of research. Like Milton and Crowley, Anger draws together multiple eras, mythologies and cultures. Milton incorporates Paganism, classical Greek references and Christianity into his poem. Isis, Osiris and Horus feature in both *Paradise Lost* and *Lucifer Rising*. Milton also personifies abstract phenomena into living beings such as Grace, Liberty, Night, Chance, Discord, and most notably Chaos, who also features in *Lucifer Rising*. Like *Paradise Lost*, nature, the mortal and the divine intercut seamlessly in *Lucifer Rising*, along with fantasy and reality (Rowe, 1974: 31). A detail from one of John Martin's illustrations for a 19<sup>th</sup> century edition of *Paradise Lost* titled "Satan Presiding at the Infernal Council" is homaged in *Lucifer Rising*.



It should be understood that *Lucifer Rising* is still evocative and resonant without contextualising the various references therein. For some, explaining every allusion may drain away the film's poetic character while for others it will enrich one's experience. Appreciating *Lucifer Rising* without understanding the allusions makes it resonate in a broad and un-specific way, but getting to grips with the points of reference makes the film less fluid, more linear, and more cohesive. In turn, we may better understand the nature of Anger's unique contribution to cinematic language, and how others may follow the distinctive path he has forged.

## Competing Interests

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