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Unlike most filmmakers identified as avant-garde or experimental, Kenneth Anger never seems to have assumed that his filmmaking would be a marginal enterprise. **Growing up in Hollywood**, Anger was surrounded by the film industry during one of its most halcyon decades and from time to time was part of the excitement: at the age of four, he played the Changeling Prince in the Max Reinhardt - William Dieterle adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935). He was making his **own films by the age of seven**, and ten years later, when it had become clear to Anger that the films he wanted to make would be seen only by American film society audiences, he moved to **Europe, where his work seemed more fully appreciated**: he was introduced to the French film scene by Henri Langlois and worked as Langlois's assistant at the Cinémathèque Française for years. Even in Europe, funding for his projects was difficult to find. Anger worked when he could and supported himself by writing a **legendary history of Hollywood scandal, *Hollywood Babylon*** (published first in a French edition in 1959 and subsequently in English editions, in 1975 and 1981), which was followed in 1984 by *Hollywood Babylon 2*.

Anger's first seven films appear to be lost, but ***Fireworks* (1947)**, his **earliest extant film**, is a landmark in at least two senses. Along with Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and Sidney Peterson's *The Lead Shoes* (1949), it **helped to define** what has come to be known as the **psychodrama**: a film that uses symbolic action and detail to **dramatize a disturbed state of mind, usually the filmmaker's own**. The particular disturbance dramatized in *Fireworks* is Anger's recognition of his powerful



Kenneth Anger in *Fireworks* (1947). Courtesy David E. James.

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sexual desire for other men within a thoroughly heterosexist American society. Indeed, one of the film's most memorable images--of Anger lighting a firecracker phallus sticking out of his pants and achieving an orgasm of sparks--is easily read as Anger's declaration of independence from America's repression of homosexuality and of film history's, and especially Hollywood's, complicity in this repression. *Fireworks* is not just a landmark in what has come to be called Queer cinema; it is, so far as I am aware, the first openly gay American movie. In retrospect what seems especially poignant about the film is its good humor: for Anger, being gay--even "coming out" in *Fireworks*--is less a trauma than a psychosexual inevitability that must be faced with the same high spirits, the same whistling-in-the-dark humor, as other aspects of maturation.

During the nearly sixty years since *Fireworks* was finished, Anger's career has been frustrated by frequent financial setbacks--the projects he envisions are remarkably inexpensive by commercial standards but more expensive than most avant-garde films--but the films he has found ways to complete are distinctive and memorable, often gorgeous and thrilling. And they are consistently evocative of Anger's spiritual quest to use cinema as a means of acknowledging, honoring, and participating in those many spiritual traditions that have been suppressed by the evolution of modern so-

ciety. In the exquisite *Eaux d'artifice* (1953) Anger depicts the gardens of the Villa d'Este, in the Alban Hills east of Rome, particularly the elaborate system of fountains designed by Pirro Ligorio. He not only brings the mythological sculptures spouting water to life but also creates an incarnation of the spirit of the garden: a tiny woman (Carmilla Salvatorelli), who appears from a fountain, inhabits the enchanted space and finally dissolves back into a fountain. In *Rabbit's Moon* (1950), Harlequin uses a magic lantern to create the spirit of Columbine, who as usual frustrates Pierrot, in Anger's homage to the commedia dell'arte.

In *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), still his longest and in some ways most elaborate film, Anger introduces a protagonist, Lord Shiva (Samson De Brier), who reveals within himself a multitude of spiritual entities from various religious traditions—Osiris, Isis, Pan, Astarte, Lilith, the Great Beast, the Scarlet Woman—and even one of the crucial spirits of early film history: Cesare, the Somnabulist, from Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919). For Anger cinema is, and always has been, a form of ritualized experience that offers the opportunity for entering imaginative worlds and for creating new worlds where entities from diverse geographies and histories can commingle and celebrate their spiritual power.

Like *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, *Lucifer Rising* (1980) evokes spirits from several mythological traditions—Egyptian, Celtic, biblical—who communicate with each other across time and space, reminding us that underneath the conventional surface of our lives lie forces that inform our experience, even though we may be unaware of them, and that these forces, like the volcano we see in *Lucifer Rising*, can at any moment burst forth and alter whatever world we thought we were living in. Aleister Crowley and his teachings seem to have been crucial for Anger during much of his career. Crowley is invoked literally by means of a superimposed photograph in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* and implicitly in *Inauguration* and *Lucifer Rising*, both of which were at least partially inspired by Crowley's famous rituals in which people assumed the identities of gods and goddesses.

Anger's best-known and most widely influential film, *Scorpio Rising* (1963), is a depiction/interpretation of a motorcycle gang, foregrounding the spiritual dimensions of young men's fascination with their bikes and the biker life, as these are revealed in their preparations for a raucous Halloween party and for the final motorcycle race of the year. Anger's inventive use of pop music in conjunction with, and as an ironic comment on, the activities revealed in his visuals have caused *Scorpio Rising* to be understood as one of the progenitors of the music video (along with Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Ray* [1962], which was completed the year before *Scorpio Rising*). While Anger has never finished a film with dialogue, he has always taken his sound tracks very seriously, working inventively and precisely with a wide range of music:

Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* in *Eaux d'artifice*, Janáček's *Glagolithic Mass* in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, American pop songs in *Scorpio Rising* and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965), Mick Jagger's Moog synthesizer track in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), and, in the case of *Lucifer Rising*, a sound track composed in prison by Anger's friend (and for a brief, unfortunate moment, Charles Manson groupie), Bobby Beausolcil.

Although his work since 1980 has received little attention, Anger remains active, presenting earlier films and working on new projects, including the recent *The Man We Want to Hang* (2002), a documentation of a show of Aleister Crowley's artwork in London in 1995; and *Mouse Heaven* (2004), a brilliant, high-spirited rumination on the early Mickey Mouse, using a collection of pre-*Fantasia* (1940) Mickey Mouse toys and memorabilia. *Mouse Heaven* must be numbered among Anger's finest films.

I spoke with Anger in his apartment in Echo Park, Los Angeles, in March 2004 and subsequently by phone.

MacDonald: What do you remember about the LA independent film scene in the forties, and how did you get involved?

Anger: I got involved after I had made some films that I wanted to show in public. I think the first film I showed publicly was *Escape Episode* in 1946, the year before I made *Fireworks*, and then I showed *Fireworks* at the Coronet Film Society at the Coronet Theater--it was a new theater at the time--on La Cienega here in LA. Later I took *Escape Episode* to San Francisco, where there was already a small group of filmmakers--Frank Stauffacher, James Broughton, Jordan Belson--beginning to show independent work at the Art in Cinema Film Society at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

MacDonald: I understand that at some point you and Curtis Harrington had a small distribution effort.

Anger: Yes, it was called Creative Film Associates. It was basically just Curtis and me, though we involved a few other people, like the Whitney brothers and Jordan Belson, who donated prints. We made these prints available for rental and sent out brochures. Creative Film Associates lasted about a year and a half. The prints were rented by colleges and film societies.

MacDonald: Was there a demand? Did it work as a small business?

Anger: On a very small scale, yes. I gave it up when I moved to Europe in 1950, and Curtis didn't express any interest in continuing it on his own.

MacDonald: I've heard that there was even a phantom secretary.

Anger: Yes, Curtis and I thought her up. Her name was Violet Parks. We didn't do any telephone orders, so she didn't need to speak. We bought some violet ink and Curtis signed for her. She was our phantom lady.

MacDonald: You were making films very young, and by the time of *Es-*

cape *Episode* you had a body of work. It's surprising to me that you got so much work done so young.

Anger: Well, they were all short films. The longest, *Escape Episode*, was a half hour, but most of them were five or ten minutes. *Fireworks* was fifteen.

MacDonald: You told Robert Haller that it was no great loss that most of those early films no longer exist.

Anger: I don't remember saying that!

MacDonald: How did those **films get lost?**

Anger: I lived like a gypsy. I've been moving constantly most of my life, and when you're moving constantly, it's very hard to hold on to a lot of things. Sometimes you store things with friends and come back a year later, and they don't know what happened to the stuff. This place [Anger's apartment in the Echo Park area of LA] is basically just where I store my paper archives.

Some things seem to have disappeared even rather recently. I left a box of my material with Anthology Film Archives in New York, including some of my early films, and when I went back, the box had disappeared. They think it may turn up, but the box wasn't kept under lock and key, and I think someone may have appropriated it.

MacDonald: Are your films being preserved?

Anger: At the moment UCLA is graciously allowing me to keep my masters in their cold vault, in the former Technicolor Building.

MacDonald: ***Fireworks* is the earliest of your films still available.** I teach it almost every year, and my students are always astonished, as am I, not just at the continuing power of the film, but that, in 1947, as a seventeen-year-old, you had the courage to make it.

Anger: Well, everything just fell into place. I didn't think it was particularly courageous; it was just **something I wanted to do, and so I did it.**

Of course, later, when I tried to get *Fireworks* printed, it **almost got confiscated at Consolidated Film Lab** here in Hollywood. At that time there were very few big labs that did negative-positive printing in 16mm. In fact, there are fewer and fewer now; it's almost like 16mm is on the way out. But at that time I went to Consolidated, and it turned out that the head of the lab was a navy veteran, and he looked at the negative and found it had some people in naval uniforms in it. He was considering calling the FBI, as if *Fireworks* were some subversive thing. One of the lab technicians there told me later that he had saved it by telling the head of the lab, "Oh, it's just some little film; it's of no importance -- don't bother with it!"

MacDonald: I think what strikes those of us who see it as courageous is that it's the first film, at least the first I'm aware of, where a man openly, clearly expresses a desire for other men. I grew up in that postwar period -- I'm a little younger than you are, but I remember the era -- and there was so much repression . . .

Anger: As I said, it's just something I wanted to do, and I did it. I suppose in retrospect you can put a badge of courage on it, but I don't necessarily choose to think of it that way—though I suppose it *was* reckless.

MacDonald: It has a great sense of humor, a whistling-in-the-dark kind of humor, which still works wonderfully.

Anger: Yes. Thank you. **If you don't catch the humor of the film, you really miss the point.**

MacDonald: A general question: You're regularly cited, along with Jack Smith and Jean Genet, as one of the fathers of what's now called Queer Cinema. I wonder how you feel about being thought of that way.

Anger: I consider myself an individual artist, and I don't like being put in a cubbyhole. There's nothing I've ever hidden: I've always been very upfront about myself. I can respect what other filmmakers are doing, but I **don't think we need to be put into a category.**

I knew Jack Smith and in fact spent a day in Oakland with him, looking for a prop for one of his movies— I think it was called *Normal Love* [1963]. He wanted a little morning-glory gramophone, the kind with the big tin horn, and we finally found a bent-up one in a junk shop, but it was more than he could afford. Jack always liked to get everything for nothing. So finally, just so it wouldn't be a wasted day, I bought him a rusty Buck Rogers ray gun for a dollar. Later I saw the unfinished footage of *Normal Love*, and the ray gun was in it. Jack left a lot of uncited material; he didn't seem to like to finish things.

But I've never identified either with him—I mean in a group way—or with John Waters or anyone else.

MacDonald: Sitney describes an auditory prologue that was on early versions of *Fireworks*. At what point did you **remove the introduction?**

Anger: I still have a print with it on. It was my voice over a black screen, rather than an introductory main title. It was very short: it says something like, "In *Fireworks* are released all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream. The inflammable desires ignited at night . . ." and so forth—rather purple language. The last sentence is, "These imaginary displays provide a temporary release." I took the introduction off when my films were being released by Canyon; it seemed **more practical to have a copyright title** at the beginning.

MacDonald: You **made *Fireworks* on a single weekend?**

Anger: In seventy-two hours. I had a "window of opportunity," as they say nowadays, to turn my house into a movie studio because my parents were absent, which was rare. They had gone back to Pittsburgh to attend the funeral of an uncle.

MacDonald: What did your parents do? I know very little about your background.

Anger: I was the third child, and there was a lapse of about eight years

between me and my older brother and sister. I was the tail end of the family. The member of the family I was closest to was my maternal grandmother, who had worked in costumes in the silent era. She told me a lot of stories about Valentino and Clara Bow and sparked my interest in the silent period.

She bought me my first 16mm camera, as a birthday present. It was a used Bell & Howell. It had seen some war service; those handheld Bell & Howells were used by cameramen during the war.

MacDonald: Was your family supportive of your filmmaking?

Anger: They didn't know too much about it. My grandmother did see *Fireworks*--it was made with the camera she gave me-- and she had one word to say: "Terrific!" Considering that she was a lady approaching her eighties, I think that was quite remarkable. But my family wasn't particularly supportive of what I was doing. I had to make my own way.

My father was an engineer at Douglas Aircraft. My older brother went into aviation, and I was expected to. I could have gone to Cal Tech, if I had been so inclined; they would have paid for it, but I declined. I wanted to be an artist, and only my grandmother supported me in this. She had made her money in real estate, back in the twenties, and had retired by the time she was part of my life. She was a landscape painter and the president of Women Painters of the West, a plein air school of landscape painting. I used to go with her to various places that she liked to paint, like when the wildflowers were in bloom in the spring. There used to be magnificent stretches of California that were covered with wildflowers for a brief period, and I would go with her and carry her easel; it was very pleasant.

MacDonald: What do you remember about the early screenings of *Fireworks*?

Anger: That first screening at the Coronet Film Society was at midnight, after the regular screenings. To my surprise, there was an audience, including some rather remarkable celebrities who just happened to show up: James Whale, for example, the director of *Frankenstein* [1931] and other wonderful films. Later, we became friends. And Robert Florey, another very interesting maverick Hollywood director, was there. And Dr. Alfred Kinsey came. He was on the West Coast doing interviews. Dr. Kinsey came up and spoke to me afterward and said he'd like to interview me; he offered to buy a print of *Fireworks* for the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University in Bloomington. Now it's called the Kinsey Institute.

MacDonald: How did these guys know to be at this screening?

Anger: Kinsey apparently heard on the grapevine, which he was very good at listening into, that this screening was going to happen and that *Fireworks* was an unusual film that he should see. There had been some publicity for the event. I was very pleased to meet Dr. Kinsey, and later I went downtown to the Biltmore Hotel, where he was staying, to do the famous Kin-

sey interview. My statistics are part of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, which came out in 1948.

MacDonald: Did *Fireworks* have censorship trouble?

Anger: No, because it was shown in so few places, and in a very discreet way. And when it was made available for rental, I had no particular problem: I assumed that the fact that it came back in one piece meant that the showing had gone well, wherever it was shown.

MacDonald: Sitney talks about *Fireworks* as one of the early psychodramas. At what point were you seeing films by other people who were also moving into the mind as an environment to explore?

Anger: Well, Curtis Harrington made a short called *Fragment of Seeking* [1946] at about the same time; it's a kind of psychodrama. Curtis was coming to terms with the homosexual issue in his own way, which was more oblique than mine. And at the same time, Gregory Markopoulos was beginning to make films.

Back in the forties, when there were very few of us working, I was certainly encouraged by the example of Maya Deren: she made her films with very limited means on 16mm, and they were very consciously works of art. I thought it was very daring of her to have her films silent; she wanted them silent. *Meshes of the Afternoon* was conceived as a silent film. Of course, she had a very good collaborator, her husband, Alexander Hammid, who was an excellent photographer, so her films always had a professional polish to them. We never met; we did exchange a couple of letters.

In 1949 I heard there was going to be a festival in Biarritz, called *Le Festival du Films Maudit* (the Festival of Damned Films)--films that had had trouble with censorship or used subject matter that some people might want to condemn. So I wrapped up a print of *Fireworks* and mailed it airmail to the address I had in Biarritz, not knowing if they'd show it or even if I'd ever get the print back. *Fireworks* was awarded the prize for poetic film. The head of the jury was Cocteau, and he sent me a letter, a handwritten letter, with his signature and a hand-drawn pentagram--his way of saying how much he liked it. I decided at that point that I should go to Europe, where I seemed to be appreciated more than I was in the States, and meet Cocteau. And in 1950 I moved to Paris. Fortunately, I was offered a job by Henri Langlois, the head of the Cinémathèque Française.

MacDonald: How did the job come about?

Anger: Henri had a reception for me in Paris and showed *Fireworks*. He had invited Jean Genet and Cocteau. And he decided to hire me to be his assistant at the Cinémathèque Française. "Hire me" should be in quotes, because I wasn't paid but was housed and fed (of course, Langlois loved eating in the best restaurants, so I ate very well--the beginning of a lifetime of affection for French cuisine). I moved in with Mary Meerson (Lazare

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Meerson, her late husband, had been René Clair's set designer in his early films) and Henri; they had a guest room in an apartment overlooking the Parc Monsouris. The apartment had been designed by Lazare Meerson; it was a wonderful Moderne design. I guess you'd call it art deco today. I had a wonderful relationship with Mary Meerson and Henri Langlois that lasted for about twelve years while I was working there. Then I started to travel again.

MacDonald: You mentioned that Genet was at the Parisian screening of *Fireworks*. What was his response?

Anger: Well, I believe I understood him to say that he found it "fascinante."

I arrived in France speaking French, and I couldn't have gotten along as well otherwise. I went to Beverly Hills High School and took French. I was motivated and got As. I'm sure I had an American accent, but I knew my basic grammar, and I could speak French and I certainly could hear it. At the time, we had a theater here in LA, called the Esquire, which specialized in foreign films with subtitles. There was always an audience for European film in Hollywood, especially French films. I would go to these French films, which included Cocteau—as I remember, they had *Blood of a Poet* [1930] and films made in France during the occupation and afterward, like *The Eternal Return* [1943, directed by Jean Delannoy] and *Un Carnet de bal* [1937], a beautiful film by Julien Duvivier, which was very popular.

I would go more than once to these films, or I would stay and see them again and again (in those days you would pay your admission, and you could stay and see a movie twice or three times if you wanted to). The first time, I would watch a film the usual way; the second time, I would just listen to it: so I had some very famous French actors, like Arletty and Jean-Louis Barrault, teaching me French pronunciation. By the time I arrived in France in 1950, I'd already seen things like *Children of Paradise* [1946, directed by Marcel Carné] and all those films, felt familiar with them, and could talk about them.

MacDonald: What kinds of projects did you do at the Cinémathèque?

Anger: Langlois was having a festival in the town of Antibes on the Riviera, and he invited me to take the various films that had been made from Eisenstein's aborted Mexican project, *Que Viva Mexico!*, and recut them more in the order specified in Eisenstein's script. So I reassembled the material in *Thunder over Mexico*, *Death Day in Mexico*, plus a couple of travelogues that had been made from *Que Viva Mexico!* after Eisenstein was removed from the project by the producer, Upton Sinclair. It was fascinating to work with Eisenstein's material and to see how certain ideas that were in the script were not reflected in any of the films. For example, he had a sequence that began on *Death Day* starting before dawn; dawn slowly comes, and the scenes get brighter and brighter, and then when it's full light you

have this fiesta on the graves, which is a Mexican tradition: they eat candy skulls and things like that. That was a fascinating project.

MacDonald: What filmmaking were you doing?

Anger: It was through the Cinémathèque that I was able to make *Rabbit's Moon*—in French, *La lune des lapins*.

MacDonald: I've never understood the title.

Anger: It refers to a Japanese legend. The Japanese see in the full moon the silhouette of a rabbit. See, the odd thing about the moon is that when you're in the latitude of the Orient, you're seeing the moon at a different angle. We see a kind of face, two vague eyes and a smile—the "Man in the Moon." But the Japanese don't see that: they see the body of a rabbit with two ears sticking up. If you use your imagination, you can see the rabbit by tipping your head to the side. The Japanese have developed a whole mythology about this benign lunar spirit, and every full moon they leave out rice cakes and sake for the Rabbit in the Moon. The next morning the children note that the sake cup is empty and the rice cakes have disappeared, and they think that the spirit came down and helped itself, and is happy with them.

I combined that Japanese mythology of the Rabbit in the Moon with the European commedia dell'arte tradition of mime theater, which involved basically three characters. There's Pierrot, the white clown—a lunar spirit who dates back to the Middle Ages—who is unhappy, but it's OK to make fun of him. He's quite a poetic figure, and he has two passions: he has a longing for the moon—the phrase "reaching for the moon" refers to something you want but can never have—and he's infatuated with Columbine, who's a tease. His rival is Harlequin, who is a devil figure—the devil in his form of the prankster. Just with variations on this simple combination of three characters the Commedia dell'Arte made any number of little plays that were popular across Europe. It started in Italy, then went to France, and was very popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The best representation of Pierrot in commercial film is in *The Children of Paradise*, where he's played by Jean-Louis Barrault.

MacDonald: I see *Rabbit's Moon* as a film about you as a filmmaker. You're a combination of both Pierrot and Harlequin: you're always reaching for the moon, longing for the light; and at the same time you're playing tricks on the audience who are also longing for something they hope you can give them.

Anger: The magic lantern I used in the film was a real one, from the eighteenth century. It was part of the Cinémathèque's collection of magic lanterns. They loaned it to me. In the film I show that Columbine is a projection of the magic lantern, which is controlled by Harlequin, who is a Lucifer figure.

I had to work very fast on *Rabbit's Moon*; I had to make the costumes, build the set, and do the filming within four weeks. Pierre Braunberger had lent me his little studio, the Cinema Panthéon, just a single soundstage near the Panthéon on the Left Bank. The idea was that I'd be out of there, and the place would be restored to the way it was, when he came back from vacation. Everyone in France goes on vacation in August.

MacDonald: *Rabbit's Moon* was shot in 35mm. Where did the money come from?

Anger: It wasn't a matter of the money. The 35mm raw stock came from Russian friends of the Cinémathèque who had come to Paris to do a film on UNESCO - the children's division of the United Nations. They had a couple of thousand feet of 35mm, something like six cans of unexposed raw stock, left over. It was the same emulsion, they told me, that Eisenstein used to make *Ivan the Terrible* [part 1, 1943; part 2, 1946]: a very fine-grain, beautiful stock. It wasn't fast; you needed quite a lot of light, compared to modern emulsions. I figured those six cans were just enough, if I just shot one take of everything, to make this little fantasy on the theme of the commedia dell'arte and end up with a short film.

I was also lucky enough to have a professional cameraman working on the film: Tourjansky, the son of the famous Russian émigré silent director in Russia and France.

MacDonald: There have been multiple versions of *Rabbit's Moon*. I don't know if I've seen the longer version.

Anger: The longer version is printed in blue and has cut-ins in rose or pink: shots of woodcuts of the moon. That version is twenty minutes long.

MacDonald: It still exists?

Anger: Yes, it'll be on my DVD, which is due to come out later this year.

Rabbit's Moon uses a lot of repeats and deliberately unmatched shots. Pierrot will make a gesture like reaching up to the moon, and then he'll make the same gesture in another shot, but it isn't like the usual tight cutting on movement you see in most commercial films. I knew all those conventional techniques. I had been absorbing movie techniques since I was a little boy growing up in Hollywood around people who were working in the industry - so I knew when I could break the rules. I wasn't just fooling around. From the beginning I had a film language to work from.

At any rate, I had this unique opportunity to have a professional studio with professional lights. My set was an artificial forest scene. I repainted some cut-down tree branches in black and silver, and they were built in perspective, so they got smaller as they went away from the camera - I didn't have much depth to work with in what was a fairly small room. Doing *Rabbit's Moon*, I was inspired by Méliès, and by his flat depth of field. And I was fortunate to have actors from the Parisian mime school (later it became the

well known sale/length

Marcel Marceau School), who were trained in pantomime and were happy to work with me.

MacDonald: You mentioned that you only had stock for a limited number of takes. But the film looks very carefully choreographed. Did you spend a lot of time rehearsing?

Anger: They were professionals, thoroughly schooled in what they were doing. I explained that I wanted an imaginary tightrope walk, imaginary juggling; they had done things like that, so they knew what to do. And, of course, they were familiar with the characters of Pierrot, Harlequin, and Columbine. I was working with people who were in a sense already rehearsed. They were a very nice small cast to work with.

MacDonald: It's easy to think of *Rabbit's Moon* as an expression of your happiness at being in Europe.

Anger: It was. That can also be said of *Eaux d'artifice*.

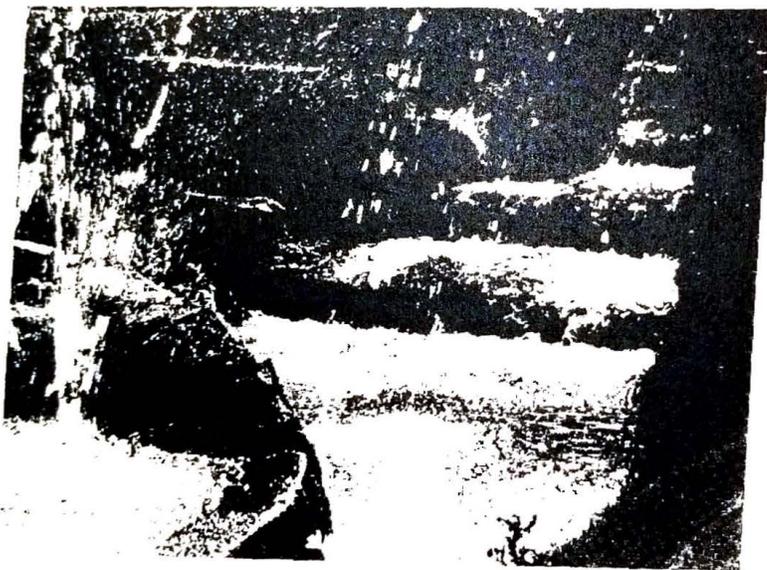
MacDonald: In my book *The Garden in the Machine*, I conjectured about the relationship between *Eaux d'artifice* and *Fireworks*. *Fireworks is about the repression of your gay desire in America and how that desire finds ways to express itself, even to explode, when it's repressed. When you got to Europe, you were able to express this desire without the resistance you had experienced here, and, as a result, Eaux d'artifice suggests an explosion of pleasure and freedom, and of freedom of expression. Is that a fair reading?*

Anger: Well, I wouldn't characterize my American period as repression, because it really wasn't. I was able to make films, short as they were.

I've always had parallel projects going on at any one time, for a very simple reason: I was never able to make anything approaching feature-length because that always involved more money than I could round up. At the time that I was doing the early films, there just wasn't a network of foundations backing films. I had to come up with my own ways of financing things.

I went to Italy and lived in Rome to make *Eaux d'artifice*, which was filmed in Tivoli, a town about thirty miles from Rome, in the Alban Hills. The gardens in the film are part of the estate of the d'Este family. In those days, the eldest son of a wealthy family would go into the military, and the next son would go into the church, whether he was suited for it or not. And that's what happened to the fellow who became the cardinal d'Este when he was only sixteen. He supervised the design of that garden on that hill; it was his place to have a good time. The garden is an amazing use of water as an element of architecture; hydraulics, just natural gravity, makes all the fountains work.

The most surprising thing was that I was given permission by the Department of Antiquities in Italy to make my film. Those gardens are a tourist attraction, and I couldn't just go in there with a camera and start filming. I had to block off certain sections of the garden so that I wouldn't have tour



Water from fountains in the gardens of the Villa d'Este in Kenneth Anger's *Eaux d'artifice* (1953). Courtesy Anthology Film Archives.



guides and groups of tourists coming into my picture. I don't know if a young American would be given that privilege today. They told me with good humor, "Don't break any old statuary," which I didn't; I was respectful of everything. Sometimes an American Express guide behind my barrier would be shouting, "Hurry up! We have to get in because we have to go on to see Hadrian's Villa!" But I was able to get the film shot.

MacDonald: How did Carmello Salvatorelli get into the project?

Anger: Ah, yes, she was a little midget I had met socially through Fellini in Rome, and of course . . .

MacDonald: You said "she": it's a "he," right?

Anger: No, it's a lady.

MacDonald: It's not a man in drag?

Anger: Absolutely no. *No, no, no.* Why would you think that?

MacDonald: It's spelled "Carmello" in the program note P. Adams Sitney reproduces in *Visionary Film* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, 2002], and in the filmography of *Moonchild*, edited by Jack Hunter [New York: Creation Books, 2002]. I saw the spelling and assumed it was a man.

Anger: No, it's Carmilla, as in J. Sheridan LeFanu's short story "Carmilla."

MacDonald: I need to rethink my interpretation of the film! [In *The Garden in the Machine* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), I use my misreading of Salvatorelli's gender in arguing that in Europe Anger was able to release his feminine side.]

Anger: Carmilla was a wonderful little lady who was patiently willing to work with me through a whole summer. The difficult thing about that project was that not only was I working in a place where I couldn't simply do whatever I wanted, but also I had to work in certain areas of the garden at certain times of day. I was filming on 16mm reversal Ferrania film using a deep red filter for the night effect, which means I was using natural light as if it were artificial light. Because there were a lot of tall cypresses in the garden, the light would sometimes be right in a certain area *only* for ten or fifteen minutes. The light would come through, and then it'd be gone for the rest of the day. So I needed to figure out in advance when the light that I needed, the backlighting particularly, would be coming through the trees, and get specific areas blocked off at just the right moment. Once I figured out where the light would be in a certain place, I had my actor get into position and my two cameramen, Charles and Thad Lovett, go to work.

Charles and Thad were Americans living in Rome--as a matter of fact, I was living *with* them in Rome. They had a camera that I wished I could have owned: a 16mm Éclair with a mirrored viewfinder, so you could look through the lens and see what you were shooting. Charles and Thad were very enthusiastic about working with me, so as with *La lune des lapins*, I had skilled cameramen helping me. I was very grateful for that.