*THE INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME* (1954)

*The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* is a short experimental film by American filmmaker Kenneth Anger, celebrated for its provocative subject matter, surrealistic editing, and opulent, colourful mise-en-scène. Betraying a modernist fascination with occult themes, the film is dedicated to Aleister Crowley, whose Thelema religion inspired many of its characters. A non-narrative film, it portrays mythological, occult and historical figures engaging in ritualized preparations for a pan-sexual bacchanal, which concludes the film. The cast includes erotica author Anaïs Nin, who plays Astarte. Influenced by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein’s principles of montage as well as American filmmaker Maya Deren’s filmmaking, Anger uses editing and cinematography to explore the emotional impact of colour, movement, and rhythm. The film begins with slow camera movements and cross fades, zeroing in on the sumptuous props, jewelry, and make-up of the characters. As the revellers become more intoxicated, cuts are more frequent and discontinuous, colours more vivid, and superimposition more prevalent. Through the use of these techniques, Anger experimented with film’s capacity to create an altered consciousness in the viewer. A classic of American experimental film, it was remade by Anger four times over several decades, most famously with Leos Janacek’s **Glagolitic Mass as the soundtrack. Anger included it in his compilation of nine films titled the ‘**Magick Lantern Cycle’.

References and Further Reading:

Carroll, N. (1980), ‘Identity and Difference: From Ritual Symbolism to Condensation in Anger's Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome’, in *Interpreting the Moving Image*, Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 214-224.

Hunter, J (ed.) (2002), *Moonchild: The Films of Kenneth Anger,* London: Creation Books.

Hutchinson, A.L. (2011), *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd.

Paratextual Material:

- The BFI film archive contains numerous colour and black and white stills from the film, including this famous portrait of Anais Nin: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6ad0cd03>

- Anthology Film Archives contains two black and white stills from the film: <http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/collections/reference-library/stills/1303>

Contributor – Valerie Uher