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FROM THE CASTLE ON THE HILL
Culture and Society Through Tim Burton's Films

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RESUMEN

Tim Burton es considerado todo un icono del cine gracias a su extravagancia y originalidad. Su éxito alcanza un elevado puesto, no solo en el ámbito económico sino también en el cultural. Películas como *Eduardo Manostijeras* y *La novia cadáver* le han catapultado hacia la fama y su figura es hoy un referente en el mundo del cine, especialmente en Hollywood y Disney, y de la cultura popular.

En este ensayo se analizarán los elementos clave que el director utiliza en sus películas, tales como la puesta en escena, sus frecuentes colaboraciones con grandes iconos del cine y la exageración de la psicología y el aspecto de sus personajes como sátira hacia los estereotipos y la sociedad en general. En conexión con estos elementos se elaborará una teoría sobre cómo sus películas han influido en el desarrollo de una sociedad más heterogénea desde los años 80 hasta hoy.

ABSTRACT

Today, Tim Burton is considered an icon in the filmmaking industry thanks to his extravagance and originality. His success extends to the economic and cultural spheres. With films like *Edward Scissorhands* and *Corpse Bride* his fame has lifted and his figure is now a reference in Hollywood and Disney, as well as in popular culture.

The aim of this essay is to analyze the key elements that Burton uses in his films, such as mise-en-scène, his frequent collaborations with celebrated Hollywood stars and the exaggeration of the physics and psychology of his characters as a satire of social stereotypes. In connection with these elements we will develop a theory about the influence his films have exerted upon the development of a more heterogeneous and tolerant society from the 1980s until today.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tim Burton is one of the most acknowledged and acclaimed directors of the last decades of Hollywood. Nominee as Best Director on several occasions, he started his career as an enthusiast cinephile who recorded amateur films with a Super 8 camera with his neighbours at Burbank (Salisbury, 2006: 39). His first productions as a director, such as *Vincent* (1982), were acclaimed by the critics, experts and colleagues and won him several awards, but his popularity among the blockbuster spectatorship did not increase until the release of *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (1985), which was a surprise success. After three years Burton would release one of his most popular films up to date, *Beetlejuice* (1988), which would solidify his career in Hollywood.

His name recalls a certain *brand* which cannot be bestowed on other American filmmakers, with exceptions such as Henry Selick, director of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *Coraline* (2007), or Brad Silberling of *Casper* (1995) and *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004). Stop-motion animation, dark aesthetics and the combination of different genres make his work almost unique, full of distinctive traits that separates him from other authors. Although several of his films stick to a certain genre -which many consider to be the Gothic-, it is difficult to attribute a specific genre to Tim Burton's works in general. Some of them mix comedy and horror, such as *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999); others combine adventure with noir, like *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992); others fuse fantasy with drama, as in *Big Fish* (2003); biography and comedy in *Ed Wood* (1994); and others bring together musical and horror, for instance, the humoristic *Corpse Bride* (2004) and the dramatic *Sweeney Todd* (2007). With such variety it seems difficult to establish a signature element that defines Tim Burton as a director. But a closer look at his

filmography reveals a wide range of icons which appear repeatedly in most of his films. While movies like *Frankenweenie* (1984, 2012) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) seem to have no element in common, we can in fact observe obvious connections: a crowd, an apparently perfect neighbourhood with evident imperfections, death, the creation of life and science experimentation in the style of Frankenstein, frustration, deformity, isolation, persecution of a monster, friendship and genuine, childish love, to name a few. In *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Corpse Bride* (2004) we find two worlds, the one of the living and the one of the dead, the character that connects both worlds, marriage, love, death, the morbidity of the crowd's attraction to the afterlife, etc. These properties are included in Burton's films in such a way that the narrative becomes secondary. It is the power of iconography, staging, and mise-en-scène, which defines Tim Burton as an *author* rather than just a filmmaker. The combination of genre and mise-en-scène establishes the style of Tim Burton, and the audience has come to recognize his films at a quick glance (Fogerson, 2012).

It is positive that a recognizable style and an insurgent thematic variety have made him a celebrated figure, but over time other directors -Selick and Silberling, for instance- have imitated his fashion, yet not surpassing Burton in popularity. My hypothesis is that there must be another element(s) that has made his signature prevail over other similar directors, and this brings us to analyze one of the most used, or intended to use, aspects of filmmaking: empathy. Characters in films are constructed in different ways so that the audience can sympathize, and even identify with one or the other, making the film more attractive. Horror films generally place the focus of sympathy upon a human character who fights the monster and becomes the hero of men and -especially- women. Even in Westerns, where the hero is a misfit who fights against the social code, this pre-determined figure is far different from what Burton's films

offer. Burton goes beyond this stereotype and shows a different variety of personalities that defy the conventionalism and misconceptions of this 'heroic' figure, creating deviant icons that will touch the audience's hearts, at times in the shape of a monster.

The main purpose of this essay is, therefore, to find the connection between his films and the audience through the analysis of Burtonian characters. The process will involve, firstly, the study of Burton in relation to his origins and his development from director to author. For this first section I will use Burton's own biographical work, *Burton on Burton*, edited by Mark Salisbury (2006), and will also focus on authorship with the help of sources such as Jim Hillier's "The Triumph of the Director as Auteur" (1985), Robert Stam's *Film Theory: An Introduction* (2000) and an essay written by Başak Göksel Demiray, called "Authorship in Cinema: Author and Reader" (2014). Secondly, I will carry out an analysis of Burton's characters as social labels and their connection with both the director and the audience in order to explain the mentioned sympathy and the defiance that these characters convey. In this part the sources will come from Burton himself, Mick Gidley's *Modern American Culture: An Introduction* (1997), Helena Bassil-Morozow's *Tim Burton: The Monster and the Crowd: A Post-Jungian Perspective* (2014), and online sources like Wordpress.com, Retrowaste.com and Filmreference.com, among others. Finally, I will discuss genre and stereotypes in order to compare with Burton's and conclude the essay. This information will mainly be retrieved from Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* (2000), Gidley and Robert Stam's work.

2. TIM BURTON, DIRECTOR

Timothy Walter Burton was born in 1958 in Burbank, California. He lived his childhood with his parents in a suburban community which he was never considered a part of, neither by himself nor by his neighbours. He usually looked for refuge in horror

movies shown at cinema theatres or TV, and terrorized the neighbourhood's children with his own horror stories. From a very early age, he developed an inclination for drawing and cinema, and a special devotion for Vincent Price, Ray Harryhausen and monster films like *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) and *Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, 1954). As a monster film lover and a stranger in his own neighbourhood, he was well aware of how society was pushing him into the group of the 'others', the ones who are not part of the mainstream. Isolation was thus present in his life as early as his school years (Salisbury, 2006: 33-35).

He was never a good student, either. He would record his own films with a Super 8 camera and use them at school in order to get a high score. Thus, although he did not excel in his studies, his artistic talent started to be noticed soon (39). In 1976, at eighteen, he went to study at the California Institute of Arts, founded by Walt Disney. In the second year he was admitted by Disney Studios where he worked as a concept artist and animator for several years. Some of his works from this period are *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), *Vincent* (1982) and *Frankenweenie* (1984). These two latter films would be the starting point of his iconic style and popularity as a director, and, as he himself celebrates, *Vincent* would also be the catalyst of the long friendship between Burton and Vincent Price. However, even though Disney Studios considered his art exceptional, the style and thematic was too crude and dark for their audience. Despite that, he would obtain the undeniable support of his teammates at the company and it did not take him too much time to leave Disney and start a career of his own (43-61).

From this early period as an individual director and producer we can find his most iconic films, such as *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Batman* (1989), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Batman Returns* (1992), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) -directed by Henry Selick, Burton being the artist and producer of the film-, *Sleepy Hollow* (1999)

and *Corpse Bride* (2004), among many others. All of them obtained the general approval of spectators and critics, and the primacy of aesthetics over story consistence consolidated part of Tim Burton's *auteur* signature.

3. AUTHORSHIP

The term auteur was born within the film context of the France of 1940s, its father being André Bazin. Bazin summarized auteurism as "choosing in the artistic creation the personal factor as a criterion of reference, and then postulating its permanence and even its progress from one work to the next" (Stam and Miller, 2000: 9). The term, literally meaning "author", refers to a film director who is considered an artist at the same times, who controls all aspects of a film and is thus equivalent to the author of a novel or a play. Auteur commonly refers to filmmakers who possess a recognizable style or thematic preoccupation. Bazin began writing his theories about authorship in a journal called *Cahiers du Cinema*, in 1951, a concept that has been used since as a way of distinguishing French New Wave filmmakers from studio system directors that were part of the Hollywood establishment, although nowadays authorship is an extended term in the West (Stam and Miller, 2000: 1-8). It is confirmed, therefore, that authorship is attributed to those filmmakers whose style and personal references are infused into their movies, whether they belong to the Hollywood studios or not.

The period since the 1960s has been a profitable age for authorship, especially in Hollywood: "the earlier, relatively neutral credit, "Directed by Joe Doakes" is now routinely replaced by "A film by Joe Doakes or "A Joe Doakes film" [...] with legal copyright and 'authorship' implications" (Hillier, 1986). The director is now a "brand". Their individual style is their sign, and they infuse each of their works with meaning

and transcendence, elevating them to an almost divine status in filmmaking (Demiray, 2014: 8).

In order not to extend on how a director becomes the author of a film, I will focus on one of the most usual methods they use to imprint their style, one in which Tim Burton especially stands out. Mise-en-scène is the method that gives each element on stage a reason to be there. Burton uses this method in a superb way, usually focusing on aesthetics over narrative in his films. *Auteur* films became worthy of serious study because of their individual style, whether they were Hollywood productions or not. Authorship has been usually related to the personality of the director (Stam and Miller, 2000: 8-9). In Burton's case this statement is accurate, since a significant part of Burton's personality is infused into the characters he creates. As brief examples, Edward Scissorhands' and Victor Frankenstein's houses resemble his childhood house in Burbank. Vincent Malloy is an accurate reflection of him as a child who loved playing Vincent Price and Edgar Allan Poe, experimenting with animals and living his fantasies alone. Part of his signature resides in the relevance of his personal figure, both when his films are autobiographical, like *Vincent*, and when they are not.

Therefore, I agree that mise-en-scène is an important element that defines the cinema of Tim Burton, and I consider sound to be as important, because it brings a certain feeling to the spectator in accordance with the moment of the film they are viewing, and a quick glance at the credits of each Tim Burton's film reveals that several of them have the same music director, Danny Elfman. Their collaboration brings the films another element that makes them recognizable, as well as his cooperation with Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham-Carter does.

Yet another property that defines the cinema of Tim Burton is the playful performance of lighting and shadows, also called *chiaroscuro*, that sometimes lends his

films a similarity with the German Expressionism of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and the classic horror film's aura of *Frankenstein* (1931) (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008: 113).

During the classical Hollywood studio era, mise-en-scène became a formula for each studio or genre, but directors like Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock or Stanley Kubrick completely made their own formula, creating new varieties within the same genre and producing their own signature. If a movie is of a particular genre, then its design should be suited to that genre to a point that mise-en-scène is overlooked by the audience. Tim Burton makes this perfectly, but with the touch of awkwardness and grotesque that is also his signature. For instance, in *Beetlejuice*, the recently dead Maitlands (Alec Baldwin, Geena Davis) enter a different world, the world of the dead. However, there are two sides of this world. One is a mixture of oddly colourful landscapes full with weird monsters, while the other clearly resembles the human living world, with its own bureaucratic office and waiting room. While none of them is real, one calls attention for its absurdity, and the other, for its satirizing hyperrealism, creating in the spectator the sense of unease the Maitlands feel. In fact, this awkwardness and excess of elements in the mise-en-scène is sometimes what makes the spectator recognize a film. Tim Burton's films represent many examples of this. The mise-en-scène in his films usually creates the correct times, places and moods to match Burton's vision. His goal, however, seems to be to make his films as accurate, weird and grotesque as possible. Verisimilitude is something he leaves behind. He makes use of historically accurate costumes and characterization, although he tends to exaggerate them in order to emphasize the satirizing look they portray, but the landscapes and backgrounds are deliberately extravagant, probably as a tribute to classic horror backgrounds: colourless villages, creepy woods, pastel-coloured houses aligned in

perfect neighbourhoods, gothic castles and manors, claustrophobic fields. All of them evoke the gothic and supernatural, frightening, the mysterious. Good examples of this practice are *Sleepy Hollow*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Corpse Bride*.

The divinization of Tim Burton is also part of this dissertation since it is connected with my theory about the audience's attachment to Burton's characters. To explain and develop this topic, I decided to analyze the characters of his films. An important addition to this analysis is the study of film genre and stereotypes, since Burton's characters are not part of the mainstream in the way other films and characters are. A brief approach to genre and stereotypes in Hollywood follows, before the analysis of Burton's characters. This approach is necessary since the characters we have described are not recognizable as belonging to any specific genre.

4. GENRE AND STEREOTYPES

Rick Altman describes genre as a) a formula that shapes the production of a film, b) as a structure that serves as a base for the creation of a film, c) a tag that defines how a film is produced and who it is distributed to and d) a contract between the movie and the audience's expectations. This means that a film of one specific genre *must* clearly exemplify such genre, because the audience expects a film that contains the props of this specific genre, that is, coherence. This is the reason why it is said that films *belong* to a genre (2000: 35-40). Robert Stam calls these expectations *normativism*, a "preconceived *a priori* idea of what a genre film *should* do", and defines genre as *monolithic*, or to clarify, locked, "as if films belonged to one genre" (2000: 128). However, it is certain that a great variety of genre movies are, in fact, examples of not one genre, but of two. A clear sample of this is *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), a space opera film which was, in many ways, considered a Western too. According to Altman, the

hybridity of genres was a subject of film criticism since the early 1950s (2000: 40). Before that, a comedy implied certain elements that made each comedy similar, almost equal, so that the audience could expect that it was indeed a comedy, and not a noir. Burton's films could fall into a category as well if not deeply analyzed. Today, Hollywood tries to save its productions from being labelled into one genre for including certain elements associated to that genre through marketing. Tim Burton's films have become a symbol, not of a genre, but rather, of a cinema specifically associated with him. This way the films not only attract the audience interested in gothic film or a drama, but also those who are fond of Tim Burton as an author, of Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham-Carter as actors, and of Danny Elfman as a composer. They do not rely on generic content to attract the attention of the audience. Instead, they use the opposite: the individual, his own fashion and subjectivity through his characteristic visuality.

Tim Burton's films seem challenging because they constantly break the paradigms of genre and stereotypes even when these models had already been broken before. His style is partly composed of this hybridity of genres -we have already seen some examples. However, unlike widely known directors such as Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino or Woody Allen, Burton cannot be labelled as a specific genre or hybrid genre director. His hybridity does not concern two or three genres, but most of the existing ones, and although his style is well marked and runs through in his filmography, none of his movies can be labelled into a group called 'Burtonian'. It is true that, as mentioned in the introduction, all his films have certain elements that are related to his peculiar style and distinguish themselves from films by other directors. We can see a recurrent iconography in a line of films such as *Vincent*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Beetlejuice*, *Batman*, *Corpse Bride*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016). Still, we cannot consider any of these

films to be so similar. To put it simply, all Tim Burton's films are connected with each other by frequently used elements like dark aesthetics, hybrid genres and thematic icons, and yet cannot be compressed into one label because they are greatly different from each other at the same time. The term 'unique' can certainly be the most accurate to define Tim Burton and his films.

Regarding the stereotype question, Mick Gidley suggests that from the 70s onwards, Postmodernism and Metafiction have flourished in order to challenge universal truths and beliefs (1997: 88). This tendency was adopted by Hollywood films, again, in order to defy the generic conventions and stereotypes that were settled by society. As a matter of fact, the characters in Tim Burton's films follow real stereotypes, but, as I will address later, their treatment is also a Tim Burton signature.

Nowadays, new paradigms are constantly broken for the sake of renewal and success of cinema and TV. More recently, the 2000s marked a new era with the success of the British series *Misfits* (Howard Overman, 2009-2013). This sensational phenomenon related to youth, crime and minorities, supported the identification of a target audience, in this case, young people, with the protagonists, a group of delinquents who are granted superpowers despite being criminals (George, 2016). Taking *Misfits* as a widely known example of how the audience requires the characters to be representative of certain minority social groups -and not only Western heroes- it is no surprise to find this tendency in Hollywood cinema too. In fact, Tim Burton's films have been following this trend since the 80s (Salisbury, 2006: 54). Their protagonists had a mixture of satire and heart that made the films appealing no matter the target audience and each character could become a figure that certain social groups could identify with. Therefore, I considered it appropriate to discuss the relevance of stereotypes during the analysis of Burton's characters.

Having clarified these matters, let us now proceed to the analysis. The characters will be divided into three main groups: the *deviants,* the *average* characters and the *axial* characters. The analysis of these groups will be carried out by finding their connection with Burton and the social and cultural background of each film.

5. THE THREE TYPES

Today, it is difficult to deny the wide acceptance and applause of Tim Burton's movies, and hard to imagine a time when his themes, style and aesthetics were considered 'unsuitable' for young audiences during his first period as a Disney concept artist and animator. The company considered his character designs worthy of consideration, but when *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie* were presented, Disney would refuse to distribute them because his concepts were too dark and scary for children (Salisbury, 2006: 55). His characters have always been an object of analysis, in many cases because of the psychological complexities that did not match their physical appearance.

On the left, first draft of The Penguin (*Batman Returns*, 1992), a brutally deformed and lonesome character by Tim Burton. On the right, the same character played by Danny DeVito.

For the sake of simplification, the characters will be classified into three main groups, each with a social or cultural figure to represent. The first group will be called

the *deviants*. These characters are generally excluded from the community due to several reasons that will be explained later. The second group is composed of the *average* characters or 'the community', ordinary people who would not understand or accept the first type. The last group is the *axial* or halfway character. These, as their name indicates, are the ones who stand in the middle of both extremes. Although their labels are quite self-explanatory, they need further explanation in order to show how they match common social stereotypes. The exposition of their characteristics will follow a certain order: first, a brief and general description of their figure will be provided, followed by their role in the story; next, an aesthetic approach will connect their physical aspect to the following stages; their psychology is necessary, too, as a basis for the last two sections, which will tackle their connection with both the author and society.

a. The *deviants*

The *deviants* are common to all Tim Burton films and they have a major role in each of them. This group is mainly composed of misfits who never succeed in fitting into the opposite group, that is, the community. This is so due to the strangeness and danger they represent for the average characters. In some of Burton's films these characters are feared, avoided, mocked at, ignored or even persecuted for their condition. Take the examples of The Joker (Jack Nicholson) in *Batman* (1989) and The Penguin (Danny DeVito) in *Batman Returns* (1992), Ichabod Crane (Johnny Depp) in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) or Sparky in *Frankenweenie* (1984, 2012).

Aesthetically, the deviants usually represent the opposite, sometimes antagonistic, of the community. Their physical appearance is, roughly speaking, dark. Most deviants in Burton's films wear black or have a moody appearance. Concerning

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aesthetics, Edward Scissorhands (Johnny Depp in *Edward Scissorhands*, 1990) could be taken as the quintessential character in Tim Burton films: dark clothes, slender figure, pale skin, dark circles, scars, messy hair and an atmosphere of abandonment. Their surroundings tend to match their appearance, and music follows their movements, words and mood. The scenes in which they appear may show a chiaroscuro play and dark spaces or geometric patterns. Expressionist films were characterized by extreme stylization in their sets, décor, acting, lighting and camera angles. Tim Burton translates this stylization to his characters and many of his films. This is probably the reason why fellow artists like Ted Mills (2015) claim that several scenes of his films evoke the German Expressionism of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). However, Burton himself denies having taken so much influence from that movement and gives credit to children's writer Dr. Seuss instead (Salisbury, 2006: 62), which could explain the childish aspect of his gloomy characters. As mentioned before, the majority of deviants in Burton's films match the aesthetic conventions determined by Scissorhands. Take the examples of Vincent Malloy in *Vincent* (1982), Jack Skellington in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), Emily in *Corpse Bride* (2004), Sweeney Todd in *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) or Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* (2012).

A look at Edward Scissorhands (left), Jack Skellington (middle), and Emily (right), makes it easier to notice the aesthetic similarity among the deviant characters.

In terms of psychology, however, this group is not that homogeneous. It is true that a great number of deviants have undergone an especially traumatic circumstance in the past, an event that dehumanized them and caused their present situation and behaviour. Nevertheless, not all cases are the same or experience the same consequences: Vincent Malloy does not suffer such a traumatic event, but his real self is forced to be repressed, which accentuates his connection with his inner self; Emily was promised eternal love and was murdered instead, becoming the forever-waiting bride; the peculiars at Peregrine's Island (*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children,* 2016) were bombed at night during the World War II and are supposed to be dead, but instead they experience the very same day, again and again, making them static. Some characters do not even know the human world before being discovered, such as Edward Scissorhands and The Penguin, and when they open to this world, they find it full of lies and prejudice. In most cases, the deviants suffer from isolation, whether chosen or forced, and society's rejection of them usually accentuates their otherness. Some strange cases end up accepting themselves as they are, without bothering how society labels them. For instance, Jack Skellington's failure in becoming Santa Claus leads him to take Halloween with renewed enthusiasm; Ichabod Crane solves the case of the Headless Horseman and keeps on focusing on his career with the company of Katrina (Christina Ricci); Edward Bloom (Ewan McGregor and Albert Finney in *Big Fish*, 2003) would never stop telling fantastic stories until his death. In any case, the opposition between mainstream and deviant is still there.

The appearance and psychology of these characters have, indeed, much to do with their creator. Burton's physical characteristics were -and still are- certainly similar to Victor Malloy's and Edward Scissorhands', to name just two of them. Besides, he is

contemplative, introspective, attracted to gloomy things, and has never felt himself part of the mainstream. As he himself states in his book *Burton on Burton*, all his characters have "a little of me" (2006: 57).

The sympathy the audience feels towards his characters, however, does not come from the resemblance with their creator as such. Unlike *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie*, which did not obtain great popularity among the audience, *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988) coincided with a decade in which horror, comedy and the hybrid born from those two stood over other genres (Phipps, 2013). Therefore, these films would become not only a critical success like previous ones, but also popular blockbusters. Afterwards, Burton's audience expanded and his films became more and more acclaimed. But, again, not all his films were as comic and colourful as *Beetlejuice* or had a main protagonist as charismatic as Pee-Wee Herman (Paul Reubens). Then, what is the reason behind his continued success?

According to Gidley, the 1980s was a decade in which "there [were] a set of challenges to the mainstream of philosophical thinking" in the USA (1993: 88). Moreover, certain social minorities "endeavoured to represent themselves through their own words, images and voices while at the same time struggling to displace the representations of themselves fashioned by others [the mainstream]" (137). Not only that, the homogenization of the market and widespread consumerism led to the homogenization of society, making "human relations become anonymous" (174). These facts have more to do with Burton's films than they would appear. His films absolutely challenge the movie industry -for instance, the Disney studios' aesthetics and generic themes- with his own filmmaking formula. Besides, his films show minority groups who struggle to find a place for them in the mainstream –the *deviants*. Not to mention that the homogenization of society -or at least, of the middle-class- is powerfully

represented in several Burton films, such as *Frankenweenie*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Beetlejuice*.

In addition to the previous reasons, Burton's deviants usually come from a pitiful, sometimes dehumanized, background which settles the ground to build sympathy towards them (Bassil-Morozow, 2013: 1). Edward Scissorhands' status as an unfinished being, his attempts to be part of the community, his artistic self, his ability to love like any other human being, and his failure in fitting in despite his efforts, make him a touching figure which certain individuals in society could identify with. The villains in *Batman Begins* are built in such a way that their crimes are not important at all. Burton draws the audience's attention towards the circumstances that have led them to become criminals, instead of focusing on their actual conduct. Alice (Mia Wasikowska in *Alice in Wonderland*, 2003) is also an intrepid heroine in a decade of thriving feminism. Victor Frankenstein (*Frankenweenie*) could be the reflection of many children experiencing the same circumstances.

As a conclusion to this section, it is fair to suggest that Burton's purpose was not only to express his ideas but also to show the world that the existence of these deviants is not fiction; they exist and are being excluded, marginalized and misrepresented - usually as "monsters". The success of his films does not come from the autobiographical factor alone, but from the existence of social groups that match their deviant characters' personality. Not only that, it may also suggest that the deviants are, figuratively, the "monsters" of society, recreations of what the mainstream *is not*. In films like *Freaks!* (Tod Browning, 1932) the representation of minority groups was not made by the minority itself, but by a mainstream director. By contrast, the representation of Burton's character is not a representation provided by the mainstream, but by another misfit.
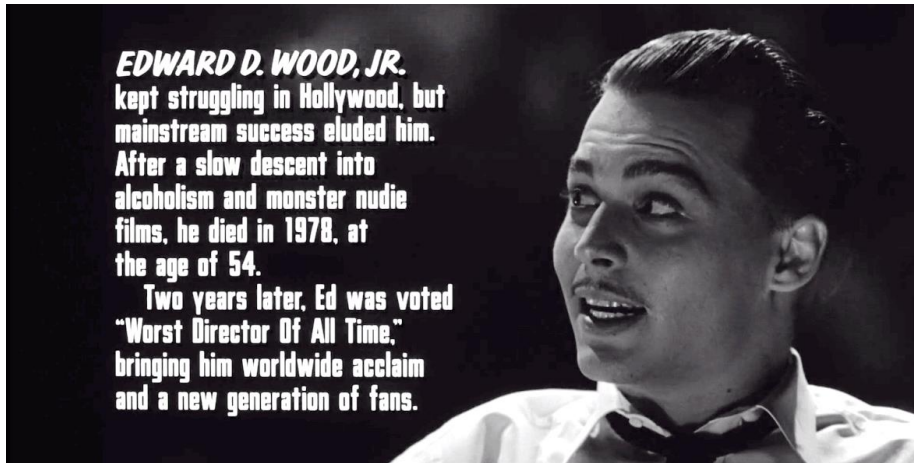
Ed Wood (Johnny Depp) represents the hypocrisy behind the divinization of the auteur figure. The autobiographical element in this film is noteworthy.

b. The *average* character

The second group to analyze is the *average* or mainstream group, also symbolized as 'the community'. In Tim Burton's films, this group usually coincides with common characters from generic movies, but he goes a step further in their representation: he satirizes the community. Bassil-Morozow describes the majority of Tim Burton's *deviants* and *axial* characters as -modified- Western individualists "who fight against the tenet of the bland, unimaginative, provincial or metropolitan middle class-mentality" (2013: 5). Burton's *average* characters are usually part of this boring 'petit bourgeoisie'.

The aesthetic concept of the average characters in Tim Burton's films is peculiar, and at the same time accurate. In *Edward Scissorhands* we can find the most creative representation of Burbank, the suburbs where Burton himself was born. The community consists mainly of nuclear middle-class families living in bright and colourful homes, decorated with fancy gardens. Men leave their homes in the morning, all of them at the same time, and disappear for the rest of the day. Women's clothes are as bright and colourful as houses, and they gather together to gossip about other people every day. Children usually spend the day playing and teenagers go to the city *en masse*.

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Both aesthetically and psychologically, this group follows the stream of the 80s, which in its turn reproduces the aesthetics of the 50s: bright colours, pop music, consumerism and homogenization of society. Although Burton exaggerates these characteristics in order to make the satire obvious, the reference to mainstream culture could not be more accurate. As Paul Phipps has said, in the 1980s "fashion was weird, music was over-digitized and commercialism consumed everyone." He also develops the aesthetic question mentioned above: "In 1983 there was a slight 1950s-style throwback, especially in women's dresses. By the mid-80s, pop music stars like Cyndi Lauper were ushering in an entirely new style" ("The 1980s", 2015). This Cyndi Lauper style is the uniform of the neighbourhood of *Edward Scissorhands,* but the mentality is thrown back to the 50s. This film is only an example of how the mainstream is represented in Burton's movies: their aesthetics reflect their psychology and philosophy. In *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, the community represents adulthood and lack of imagination; in *Beetlejuice*, the thirst for power and money; in *Ed Wood,* hypocrisy and vanity; in *Edward Scissorhands,* consumerism and pop culture. Every Burton film offers a different representation of mainstream culture, but they have several points in common: the *average* characters represent the opposition to the *deviants*, and their negative traits are frequently exaggerated in order to transform them into a satire of society.

In the top image we can see the neighbourhood in *Edward Scissorhands*, where all houses are the same except for the colour, and where families are nuclear and follow the trend of the 50s. The aesthetics mentioned in the analysis is noticeable here.

Despite the comic sense attributed to them in Burton's films, this group is not formed by simplistic figures. Their psychological complexity resides in the influence they exert upon others as part of the mainstream. The way they act may alter the course of the story, set the audience's view of the deviants and even affect the other characters' decisions: in *Beetlejuice*, the Deetz parents condemn the ghosts of the Maitlands to disappear. In *Batman Returns*, the Penguin is marginalized because he is physically different, and his mental disorder has arisen from this isolation; later on, having been deceived by society, he becomes even more destructive. Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman in *Sweeney Todd*) steals Todd's life with his power, which fuels Todd's revengeful resolution. This happens because mainstream society is the creator of the social and, apparently, ethical rules that separate it from the deviants. Burton himself exemplifies this: "Going to high school was one of the most terrifying things. You are put into a category. And once you are deemed a weird person, you are in the weird group. I had a feeling that I was some sort of alien that didn't quite fit" (Burton on Lawrence's "Go Inside the Peculiar World of Tim Burton", 2016). This feeling is inherent to the *deviants* because the *average* characters set the rules that the *deviants* cannot accomplish. The result is that the *deviants* become the 'other', and again, the personification of what the mainstream is *not*.

This encapsulates how the average characters are those who sentence society to follow certain rules in order to fit, leaving those who deviate in isolation even when they live among them.

This scene from *Beetlejuice* shows us the contrast between the average characters and the deviants. In my analysis, I consider Lydia Deetz (Winona Ryder) as an axial character, but she is almost as deviant as the Maitlands, who belong to the world of the dead, and who establish a bond with the girl.

c. The *axial* character

The final group would be that of the *axial* or halfway characters. This group is composed of those characters that stand in between the deviants and the mainstream. They usually come from an ordinary background such as a nuclear middle-class family or the nobility, which they find boring, annoying and repressive -Vincent Malloy, Lydia Deetz and Alice, for instance. In Burton's films, they tend to be the catalysts of the story by finding in the deviants a figure to identify with, to protect from the community or even to love -see the previous examples. Unlike the deviants, these characters have no problem to fit into mainstream culture because they are attached to it. However, they find it fascinating to explore new and strange things, and when they find the deviants they are often attracted to them. Some axial characters have their own eccentricities. Lydia Deetz (Winona Ryder), for instance, is the only member of the Deetz family who can see the ghosts of the Maitlands. When she discovers their existence, she builds a strong bond with them and fights against their menace. Something similar happens in *Corpse Bride*, where Victor Van Dort chooses to leave the world of the living in order to make Emily happy. In this film, however, Victor's first reaction towards Emily is

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panic, as would be the reaction of an average character. In similar cases, incredulity and curiosity rule in the first approach of the axial character towards the deviants, such as in *Sleepy Hollow*, where Katrina Van Tassel's interest for Ichabod Crane gradually develops into love. This happens similarly in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. In any case, their role in the story is that of protagonist, together with the deviant in some cases.

Aesthetically, axial characters tend to be adapted to mainstream fashion. Basically, they *look like* an average character, except for certain cases such as Vincent Malloy or Lydia Deetz, who stand over the community for their appearance and personality as well. But more common axial characters have the tendency to follow mainstream aesthetics. Kim and Peg Boggs (Winona Ryder and Dianne Wiest in *Edward Scissorhands*), for example, adhere to the customary outfits and hairstyles representative of each generation. Victor Van Dort's looks coincide with those of his family's social class. Alice's do so too, and successively.

As a consequence of this, the aspect that differentiates the *axial*, or halfway, characters from the mainstream or average group is their psychology. As their very same name indicates, their personality is not exclusive from those of the extreme groups. They are neither *deviants* nor *average* people. Although the *axials'* background makes them part of the community, their customs and rules are tiresome and depressing to them, and their tendency is to search for new perspectives. When a deviant appears in their life, the axial's interest turns to them immediately. There are cases, like *Beetlejuice, Edward Scissorhands* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas,* in which the axials' reaction is such. Others are interested in their existence from legends or stories they heard in their childhood, as happens in *Big Fish, Alice in Wonderland* and *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. Still, other cases including *Batman Returns*,

Alice in Wonderland, *Sweeney Todd* and *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, include axial characters who join forces with and protect the deviants from the average people, who might stand as a threat to them. In any circumstance, their main psychological trait is their inclination towards the strange and otherness, rather than the mainstream. Their ability to fit in both groups, though, grants them the opportunity to choose one side or the other, in opposition to the deviants, who in most cases cannot choose to be part of them. In their position, they usually create a "bridge" between the two worlds, taking their experience with the deviants back to the mainstream, and *vice versa*.

As Tim Burton has said, he never considered himself different from the other children in Burbank. He liked to watch movies, to play, to draw like any other child. However, in these childhood games he went a step further. He was introverted and used to dwell into the essence of plain things. He always thought that monsters were much more than mere beasts, and that common people failed to understand them. Perhaps that is the reason why he developed this rebellious attitude against "the Puritanism and classicism of the nuclear families of the 50s" (Salisbury, 2006: 37). Rather, he would open different windows to interpret the psychology and the background of these deviants. And, of course, he would embrace the idea of "destroy[ing] society as we know it" (41).

Coincidentally or not, the first Burton films, *The Island of Doctor Agor* (1971), *The Stalk of the Celery Monster* (1979) and *Vincent* (1982), practically lack an axial character that creates a bridge between the two extremes. These films concur with a period of Burton's life in which he was considered a deviant. Before *Vincent*, his concepts were taken as extreme and dark to be children films, and until then he would not find any partner who could understand and encourage his art (55). Afterwards he

would consolidate as an acclaimed film director, and his movies would spread to a wider audience. After *Beetlejuice*, the presence of the axial character turned noticeable, just at the time when the audience started to see Burton's films as not only mature, but also "warm and empathic" (Bassil-Morozow, 2013: 174). To simplify, Burton stopped being a deviant in favour of becoming an axial figure himself, building a bridge between the world of misfits and outcasts, and the mainstream world. He was acclaimed by the community, and still he was not eager to be part of it, but he obliterated the Hollywood custom of using stereotypes as protagonists in films. The audience started looking deeper into the monsters' psychology, like Burton does, and apparently they liked it. This turn of events could also be related to the aforementioned change of 1980s American society towards the challenging of mainstream currents and universal truths. Burton was a man of feelings and defied the intellectual interpretations of things. His peculiar and heterogeneous perspective is, most probably, the catalyst for his wide success in a society tired of watching the same character once and again.

In this scene from *Alice in Wonderland* we can see another example of the homogeneous group of middle-class society where Alice belongs, and how she, despite her average appearance, stands out among them. Alice can be considered the archetype of the *Burtonian* axial character.

To sum up this section, it is certain that Burton's characters represent these social stereotypes in order to show how society labels each group and condemns minorities to find their own way in isolation. Nevertheless, even as representatives of a social group, each character is presented in such a way that they keep their individuality, which makes them, and the film, unique. In society, an individual can react one way or another depending on their background, personality and influences, and this is superbly portrayed in Burton's characters. Not to mention that this is also one of the traits that defines his authorship. Even when all of his films show specific aesthetics and elements, none of them is comparable to another, and 'unique', again, is the most effective word to describe his works. And indeed, this heterogeneity resembles reality.

6. CONCLUSION

Having clarified the notions of genre, stereotypes, Burton's influence in his films and the connection established with the audience and society in general, there are still questions to be answered. While it is only a theory, I find it possible that the increasing influence of Burton's films during the 1990s and 2000s has a connection with the changes that US society has experienced since. Perhaps his success has encouraged other deviants, filmmakers or not, to show themselves to the world and add up their own point of view and sell themselves to society and culture, making them richer. Burton's films were not always accepted, either by producers, sponsors and critics, or by the audience. Some of them touched people's feelings and some others made them feel upset -in this case, it is oneself who has to find examples. However, his reputation has increased significantly since his beginnings and now his characters and films are nearly iconic. Are times changing or are his films part of a movement that is changing the times? Are all those who watch Burton's films deviants too, are they mainstream or

the axial type? Perhaps his films and characters cleared some of the paths that have led to the society of today, where the mainstream seems to have some space for the peculiar. In fact, we are reaching a point where abnormality exists no more in a cultural background. Deviant is no deviant anymore. Nowadays, it is fairly common to find groups of people from different ethnic, class, gender, style and ideological origin together. Today there are still certain sectors of the audience who disapprove of Burton's films, but he is generally accepted as one of the most prominent figures of the film industry and an idol for a great number of viewers and critics. This has happened with his characters as well, so his purpose has been accomplished: with his formula, he has contributed to building a new society in which the peculiar and strange are part of daily life.

Some pictures of fans cosplaying popular Tim Burton characters, as examples of how this cult movement has developed to the present. All the images have been retrieved from Pinterest.com.

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