

CINEFANTASTIQUE

SCREENING THE IMAGINATION

Week 6: *Alice* (1988), *Society* (1989) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990)

Alice in Wonderland (1966)

- Seems to tap most confidently into the book's sense of the weird.
- What more lacklustre efforts by Tim Burton seem to misunderstand is how madness should overtake any real need to create narrative or linear forms of dialogue or action.
- While Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* offered strange flourishes, it lacked the guts to be full-on surreal or uncanny.
- If we aren't confused when watching a version of *Alice in Wonderland*, then the filmmaker has got something very wrong.
- Miller, with his black and white, distinctly child-unfriendly telling of the story opens the gates of his and our imaginations
- Stripped of colour, yet dripping in a vivid sense of the unreal, it's a daft yet nagging, deeply unsettling nightmare.
- Uninterested in offering us any form of relatable narrative it instead wobbles between the conscious and unconscious. Ravi Shankar's weirdly symptomatic soundtrack seems there only to reaffirm our suspicions that this all might still be a dream.
- Uninterested in offering us any form of relatable narrative it instead wobbles between the conscious and unconscious.
- Ravi Shankar's weirdly symptomatic soundtrack seems there only to reaffirm our suspicions that this all might still be a dream.

Jan Svankmajer

- Making short films since the early 60s
- He gained the confidence to make a full-length feature after he completed short films *Jabberwocky* and *Down to the Cellar*
- He described *Alice in Wonderland* as a book that he had been obsessed with since childhood

“While a fairy tale has got an educational aspect – it works with the moral of the lifted forefinger (good overcomes evil), dream, as an expression of our unconscious, uncompromisingly pursues the realisation of our most secret wishes without considering rational and moral inhibitions, because it is driven by the principle of pleasure. My Alice is a realised dream.”

Jan Svankmajer

Society (1989)

- Though *Society* (1989) presents us with many of the 80s horror tropes we expect, it also provides a blackly comic take on the inequalities of the system and the fallacy of the American Dream
- Privilege, private schools and elite higher education systems are explored and lampooned
- It presents the privileged elite as incestuous, tribal and cannibalistic
- They merge together into an all-consuming monster - an inseparable idea which illicitly pervades all levels of society

Tim Burton

- Born, Burbank, California, 1958
- As a kid, Burton became fascinated with filmmaking
- He began making crude/silent stop-frame animation pieces using a 16mm camera
- One of his first 'movies' was *The Island of Dr. Agor* – inspired by the novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H.G. Wells
- Though not a good pupil, he became immersed in painting, drawing and watching movies
- From a young age, he was inspired by *Frankenstein* (1931), Hammer Horror films, and the writing of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl.
- After graduating high school, Burton attended the California Institute of the Arts
- There, he studied character animation
- While there, he created the short films *Stalk of the Celery Monster* and *King and Octopus*
- *Stalk of the Celery Monster* attracted the attention of Disney and in 1981, he was offered an apprenticeship in the animation dept.
- Initially he worked on several Disney productions
- After *Frankenweenie* (1984), Burton was fired by Disney for reportedly creating work too dark for children, using their budget
- However, Paul Reubens saw *Frankenweenie* and elected that Burton should direct his debut Pee-Wee Herman film

***Edward Scissorhands* (1990)**

Why Scissors?

“There was a long period of time when I just hadn’t been able to connect with anybody or have a relationship. Everybody goes through periods like that – the feeling that you can’t touch, you can’t feel.”

Tim Burton

- Edward represents the 'outsider', 'the other'
- Many can relate to that 'otherness'
- The pale high school geek, the misfit, someone who sits outside of the mainstream
- In many ways, Edward is a metaphor for the way Burton and Depp were both part of an establishment which didn't necessarily understand them

Browning and Burton

- There are many parallels between Tim Burton and Tod Browning
- Both were part and not part of the mainstream
- Both directors were 'outsiders' within the Hollywood system
- Though separated by decades each seemed to exploit a brief window of opportunity where true subversive/aesthetically unconventional were able to work alongside more mainstream output
- Browning, though he had begun his career during the silent era became more notorious during the so-called Pre-Code period
- The box office failure of *Freaks*, coupled with the film's controversy and UK ban did nothing to help Browning's career, and while he would go on to make two more movies it was effectively the beginning of the end
- Burton came to prominence during that sweet spot between late 80s stagnation and more generic 21st century CGI obsessed output.
- However, Burton too fell out of favour, creating tensions with Warner Bros after *Batman Returns* and its more adult content
- Though his career did not end, it can be argued that he has only stayed around by offering up more conformist/generic material

