European Cyberpunk Cinema

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Abstract: *Renaissance* (2006) and *Metropia* (2009) are two illustrative examples of European cyberpunk cinema of the 2000s. This article will consider the films as representative of contemporary trends in European popular filmmaking. As digital animations aimed at adult audiences and co-produced with other European countries, they epitomise a type of European film. In addition, they share a number of narrative premises. Set in the near future, *Renaissance* and *Metropia* depict a dystopian Europe. Recycling motifs from non-European science fiction classics, they share similar concerns with interconnectivity, surveillance, immigration, class, the representation of women, as well as the obsession with beauty and physical perfection. This article will analyse their themes and aesthetics in order to explore how European popular cinema promotes a certain idea of European cultural identity within the limits of an industry whose products are targeted at a global market.

Keywords: European cinema; animation; co-productions; science fiction; cyberpunk; dystopia; *Renaissance*; *Metropia*; 2000s; transnational cinema

1. Introduction

Science fiction has hardly been a prominent genre within the European film industry[1]. Budget constraints have often hindered the production of sci-fi and fantasy films worldwide, as they tend to require substantial investment in special effects and production design in order to achieve a convincing mise-en-scène. The film industries of the USA and Japan have, notably, managed to successfully fund, brand and distribute films of this kind internationally for decades and many of the most popular examples since the 1980s can be classed as 'cyberpunk.' Drawing on the themes and plots of those works of literature categorised under the same subgenre, cyberpunk cinema has significantly flourished in the United States thanks to films like *Blade Runner* (1982), *Total Recall* (1990) and *The Matrix* (1999) and in Japan with anime films such as *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995):

> Inspired by the literary works of Philip K. Dick and William Gibson, filmmakers produced an array of dark, thought-provoking SF films that invoked classic noir themes such as amnesia, doppelgängers, femme fatales, psychopathic criminality, mystery and murder most foul. These films explored the shadow worlds of digital realms where the boundaries between the real and the computer-generated were lost inside a fractal labyrinth of the self and anything was possible. (Meehan 2008, pp. 192–93)

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1   As with any broad generalisation, there are exceptions. The UK is arguably the European country which has distributed the most science fiction movies globally in recent decades—occasionally the result of domestic production (e.g., *Ex Machina* (2014)), but more often than not in co-production with the US (e.g., *Alien* (1979), *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), *Children on Men* (2006), *Gravity* (2013) and *Under the Skin* (2013)). Other national cinemas have contributed strongly to the production of science fiction in certain periods, such as the Italian B movies of the eighties, or Eastern European cinemas under Communism.

From the beginning of the late eighties, an extensive bibliography has grown up around cyberpunk cinema, with scholarly analyses of those films produced in the United States and further afield, in Japan (see for example Sobchack (1987); Kuhn (1990, 1999); Telotte (1999); Rickman (2004); Johnston (2011)). But the cinematic successors of William Gibson's influential novel *Neuromancer* (Gibson 1984) in Europe have for the most part been overlooked. European cyberpunk, like European science fiction films in general, have not yet received the attention they deserve. This is explained in part by the comparative lack of popularity of European science fiction films. Published mostly in the United States or the United Kingdom, few of the critical studies have included European films and where they do appear they are usually limited to US-British co-productions[2]. As a result, they offer a misleading view of European science fiction as being similar to Hollywood productions. The conclusions drawn in the dominant literature on the subject of US, British and Japanese films is typically extrapolated to other national cinemas. In this article, I claim that these assumptions ought to be reviewed and the variety of films within the subgenre explored in more depth.

Although the number of European cyberpunk films is not comparable to the number made in Hollywood, their presence should not be underestimated. A number of movies released in the 1990s and 2000s fit into the cyberpunk category. A few of them, such as *The Lawnmower Man* (Brett Leonard 1992, UK/US/Japan) and *The Thirteenth Floor* (Joseph Rusnak 1999, Germany/UK/US) were co-productions with either the United States or Japan, countries where there has been a robust film industry producing movies within the parameters of science fiction since the 1950s. An intermediate case would be Terry Gilliam's *The Zero Theorem* (Gilliam 2013), which benefited from US financing but would be more accurately defined as a British co-production with Romania, France and Poland. Examples of cyberpunk films with exclusively European funding include *Nirvana* (Gabriele Salvatores 1997, Italy), *Abre los ojos* (Open Your Eyes, Alejandro Amenábar 1997, Spain) and, more recently, *Immortel* (Immortal, Enki Bilal 2004, France/Italy/UK), *Renaissance* (Christian Volckman 2006, France, Luxemburg/UK), *Chrysalis* (Julien Leclercq 2007, France) and *Metropia* (Tarik Saleh 2009, Sweden/Denmark/Norway)[3].

Unfortunately, few of these films have been included in larger discussions about science fiction cinema. Although some scholars have been interested in European science fiction in the past, their scope is often limited to a single film or national cinema[4]. Too often, the possible connections with other contemporary European films with similar themes are missing. Another obstacle is that European cyberpunk has been hampered by two erroneous assumptions. First, the notion that science fiction is predominantly aimed at mainstream audiences. Second, that European films necessarily fall into the category of 'arthouse films'—a perception which clashes with that of science fiction as a popular genre—even when they do not. Popular European films, especially sci-fi films, often go largely unnoticed by critics or are limited to the festival circuit, never reaching their potential target audiences due to being labelled as films for cinephiles. This article challenges that perception and aims to present a broader picture of contemporary science fiction cinema produced in Europe. Though desirable, it is not within the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive survey of European cyberpunk. It cannot be claimed that there is a single 'European' type of cyberpunk, entirely distinct from any American or Japanese counterparts. There is no single model for any of these countries. Many Hollywood cyberpunk movies differ greatly from one another in terms of characters, mise-en-scène and themes; this is also the case with cyberpunk anime. Given that European cyberpunk has been significantly influenced by literary and cinematic works from the aforementioned countries, any attempt to isolate its 'European'

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[2]　For example, the preface to *Liquid Metal* (2004) claims that it covers film production in Europe, the United States and Asia. However, there are only two articles devoted to European films (both US-British co-productions) and only one deals with a Japanese film. Moreover, in the latter article, which concerns *Akira*, the focus is on the influence of *Blade Runner* on Ôtomo's classic. See Redmon (2004, p. xi).

[3]　Another European film that contains cyberpunk themes is *La cité des enfants perdus* (The City of Lost Children, Caro and Jeunet (1995), France/Germany/Spain/Belgium). Kike Maíllo's *Eva* (2011), a more recent Spanish film about a child robot, could also be included within the cyberpunk genre, although the film is closer to being a melodrama.

[4]　One exception is Mihailova's article "The Mastery Machine: Digital Animation and Fantasies of Control" (Mihailova 2013).

elements would be impracticable. In addition, their characteristics continue to evolve over time. However, there is a noticeable trend in European cyberpunk cinema made in the 2000s of developing cyberpunk aesthetics and conveying a specifically European pessimism in otherwise familiar narrative forms, which along with a number of commercial strategies, deserve to be seen as a variation on what the current literature on science fiction has established as canonical. My aim is to broaden the perspective found within the current literature as to what constitutes the cyberpunk subgenre.

My research focuses in detail on two films with much in common. *Renaissance* (2006) and *Metropia* (2009) have been selected because they are constitutive of a current trend in European filmmaking and have many shared features. They belong to the same subgenre and are both co-productions made in the same decade. It is worth noting how *Renaissance* and *Metropia* adapt many of the characteristics of Hollywood films, their market rivals, in order to survive at a time when the label 'European film' no longer means what it used to[5]. At a time when, in the words of Bergfelder, Europe had "witnessed a reinvigorated championing of auteurism" (Bergfelder 2015, p. 33), these are, on the contrary, films targeted at mainstream audiences that are also representative of current trends in European cinema. Drawing on cultural studies, I will explore their themes and aesthetics within the context of European popular cinema in order to discern the ways in which they promote a certain idea of European cultural identity in the context of an industry that involves competition among similar products made for the global market.

Tarik Salek, the director of *Metropia*, noticed the incongruity in the perception of his film as 'arthouse,' even when the film had benefited from it:

> *Metropia* was incredible in the sense that we opened Critics' Week in Venice. I went to over seventy festivals, it was like that whole art house scene. But I'm very sceptical as a movie lover [. . .] Not everything can be Haneke on one side and then *Transformers* on the other. That's like an extremist world. (Salek quoted in Seikaly 2014)

The contrast Salek draws between Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke and Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers* is revealing. The clash between an American science fiction film and one of the masters of contemporary European cinema is representative of an industry that still associates European cinema with the *politique des auteurs*, while consigning science fiction to the sphere of popular cinema. Salek places his film somewhere in the middle. But more importantly, he disapproves of the artificial polarisation of film audiences and stands for a popular cinema that is able to reach mainstream audiences while offering non-standardised products.

In order to identify the key elements of this European trend in cyberpunk, it is necessary first to define the general characteristics of a cyberpunk film. In general, cyberpunk films depict a world dominated by corporate power in a globalised economy. The stories are typically set in a metropolis, either in the present or near future. Many portray virtual worlds generated by computers and indistinguishable from the real one. Consumer choices allow unlimited body modifications (such as implants) capable of enhancing bodies and optimising their potential, although at a high cost. One main drawback of body modifications and overexposure to virtual technology (another important theme in cyberpunk) is the appearance of all sorts of new illnesses and addictions. That is why dependence on new technologies is customarily accompanied by the sale and use of designer drugs. Biological or technological viruses are a common leitmotif. As a consequence, the protagonist is frequently engaged in a frantic search for a cure.

If virtual technology has the capacity to cause bodily illness, the mind is even more vulnerable. Memory loss and a crisis of personal identity are two prevalent and interrelated themes in cyberpunk. Narratives often connect the loss of memories relating to past events to the loss of personal identity, making the point that a lack of recall threatens any stable notion of what makes us human.

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[5]   As Thomas Elsaesser has observed: What is European cinema? We no longer seem to know. The very idea of it has slipped between the declining relevance of 'national cinemas,' and the emerging importance of 'world cinema' (Elsaesser 2005, p. 485).

Family ties are non-existent and other social organisations (political, religious) are weak. Solidarity is scarce in these individualistic societies, where the majority of the population is struggling to survive. Typical characters in cyberpunk narratives include hackers, drug addicts, tycoons, criminals, strong women, cyborgs, machines with artificial intelligence and pop and media stars.

The European cyberpunk under consideration here shares some of the characteristics identified above, but not all of them. The films borrow stylistic and narrative elements from certain classic films (in particular *Blade Runner*) and genres (science fiction, film noir and thriller). They nevertheless retain an inherently European look while being valuable examples of popular cinema. In the following pages, I will analyse the specific articulations of cyberpunk in a European cinematic context starting with a metatextual analysis of *Renaissance* and *Metropia*, looking at their narrative and stylistic elements and commenting briefly on their reception.

2. Metatextual Analysis of *Renaissance* and *Metropia*

Like many European films produced today, *Renaissance* and *Metropia* were financed through co-productions. *Renaissance* is a French-Luxembourgian production with some involvement of UK capital. The film had a €15million budget, making it an expensive feature by European standards. The Swedish-Danish-Norwegian co-production *Metropia* was by comparison a far more economical film, costing slightly more than €3 million. Like many contemporary European films, it received the support of television—France 2 in the case of *Renaissance* and Sveriges Television and Canal Television with *Metropia.*

The similarities between the two films do not end here. Not only are both films animations; more specifically, they are digital animations. They were created in independent studios recognised for their pioneering use of technology. *Renaissance* was filmed in motion capture and animated in 3D. Special cameras captured the movements of actors and this data was used to animate digital characters (Frenette 2006). The result resembles *Sin City* (2005), although it should be acknowledged that *Renaissance* was in development well before Rodríguez's film had its premiere (Frenette 2006). *Metropia* was developed by Atmo Animation, a company co-founded by director Tarik Saleh. The film follows a Scandinavian model of high-concept/low-budget. Producer Kristina Aberg has stated that, although the film gives the impression of 3D, in reality it was filmed using 2D animation and photographs. The animators at Atmo created images by applying successive layers using Adobe Photoshop and After Effects software—a much cheaper technique than 3D and one which offered unique results (Roxborough 2009). The photo cut out montage process was developed in 2000 by Saleh and art director Martin Hultman and perfected by animator Isak Gjertsen. The fact that directors Christian Volckman and Tarik Saleh worked in independent animation studios suggests that they were freed from the constraints of working for a more established studio. According to Stefan Fjeldmark, head of Zentropa's new Rambuk division, which focuses on animated productions:

> Scandinavian animation doesn't have a single style, like say Pixar does or Japanese anime, which may have made it harder to brand it internationally. But the level of animation here [in Scandinavia] has always been high and it has always been diverse. (Roxborough 2009)

The same assertion applies to Volckman's *Renaissance*. It is evident the two filmmakers were looking for a more personal visual style in keeping with their artistic backgrounds. Not surprisingly, *Metropia*'s director was a graffiti artist before he began his career in film (his 1989 mural Fascinate was the first graffiti to be protected as cultural heritage site in Sweden)[6], while Christian Volckman is also painter and a graphic designer.

Unlike their biggest competitor, Pixar, which has specialised in films either for very specific age groups of children or, on the other hand, suitable for all (e.g., *Toy Story*, *Shrek*, *WALL-E* and *Inside Out*),

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6　　See: https://atmo.se/tarik-saleh/ (accessed on 26 June 2018).

Renaissance and *Metropia* are aimed at more mature audiences. The two films explore adult themes and include instances of nudity and strong sexual references. In *Metropia*, for instance, there is a brief shot in which a passenger in the underground is seen looking at a pornographic magazine. Despite national certification of films varying dramatically among countries (*Renaissance* is considered suitable for all audiences in France but in Ireland and Portugal is certified for viewers above fifteen and sixteen years old respectively)[7], the preference for adult themes narrows the possible audience and also involves certain risks. Not only does it reduce international distribution of the films in those regions where the classification is more restrictive, but as Frenette writes: "At the time, there had been no *Shrek* to prove that an animated feature could appeal to the 15–35 demographic" (Frenette 2006).

Renaissance is set in Paris in 2054. The film tells the story of Karas, a police hostage negotiator[8]. In his latest case, Karas investigates the kidnapping of a young scientist, Ilona Tasuiev, a researcher for the powerful company Avalon, in what it seems to be a case of industrial espionage. Ilona's sister Bislane helps Karas in his endeavour.

Although *Renaissance*'s Canadian producer Jake Eberts enthusiastically exclaimed, "That's *The Matrix* in animation!" after watching the demo of the project (Frenette 2006) the story was built around the idea of a futuristic Paris, a premise which forms the backbone of the film's development. As scriptwriter Alexandre de la Patellière stated during the making of the film: "Much of the story and the narration came up following our desire to work around Paris. That's how the story was born. Paris was a central character from the start"[9]. Along with *Blade Runner*, another point of reference mentioned by the creators—and also a popular reference point for cyberpunk movies in general—is the detective thriller. In particular, *Renaissance* takes many of its visual motifs from the novels of James Ellroy novels, only relocating the action from Los Angeles to Paris[10]. It seems odd that none of those involved in the project has mentioned *Alphaville* (Godard 1965) when discussing the film publicly; especially taking into account the fact that *Alphaville* is a science fiction film and a detective story filmed in black and white and set in a futuristic Paris, where residents are oppressed by the rule of a technocratic power. The omission is even more surprising since both *Renaissance* and *Alphaville* bring to light fears of Nazi tyranny within a disturbing projection of Paris. Concerns towards totalitarianism is a recurrent theme in European science fiction that will be discussed in the relation to cyberpunk films in the section 'Fortress Europe in European Cyberpunk Cinema'[11]. However, the dystopian urbanism of *Renaissance,* we are told, is the result of the influence of comic book authors Jean-Claude Mézières and François Schuiten on director Christian Volckman[12].

Cyberpunk has been an influential genre in Japanese animation and manga for decades. It is therefore easy to find many visual motifs in these films reminiscent of manga and anime, such as the disproportionately big eyes of characters in *Metropia*. Salek's film in particular is quite rich in its references to Japanese anime. If we look at its greyish palette, the way characters are animated and the large heads of characters, they seem influenced by Mamoru Oshii's work in *Tachiguishi Retsuden* (Oshii 2006). These visual motifs do not seem to have any function other than paying homage to the

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7   In the United States, *Renaissance* is classified as 'R' (i.e., minors under seventeen years old require an accompanying parent or adult guardian).

8   The name 'Karas' is perhaps a reference to Kei'ichi Sato, Hiroshi Yamazaki and Akira Takada's 2005 film *Karas: The Prophecy* (Sato et al. 2005).

9   See the making of documentary.

10 See the making of documentary.

11 In his monograph on Alphaville, Chris Darke enumerates the references to Nazi Germany in the film: "the numbers tattooed on the skin of the séductrices; the telling name change of Natasha's father from Nosferatu to von Braun; and the 'SS' on a lift button [...] shot in such emphatic close-up" (Arendt 2006, p. 76). Like Renaissance and Metropia, the antagonist's surname has German resonances. In *Alphaville*, Professor von Braun is played by Swiss actor Howard Vernon, who was often casted as a Nazi officer and a mad doctor (Arendt 2006, p. 17). In addition, the character "carried a name that was full of recent historical resonance. Wernher von Braun was the name of the Nazi scientist who had been involved in developing the massively destructive V2 rockets towards the end of the Second World War" (Arendt 2006, p. 76).

12 Schuiten is a well-known comic artist known for his book *Les Cités Obscures* (Dark Cities, published in 1983) created in collaboration with Benoît Peeters. The film was released in France together alongside a comic book published by Casterman (Frenette 2006).

master of Japanese cinematic cyberpunk and will probably amuse spectators who are able to recognise hints from previous films or comics. In the same film, there are also a number of intertextual references to Japanese popular culture. The couple's bedroom is full of cuddly toys based on well-known Japanese characters. Among them, Yuko Yamaguchi's design Hello Kitty and Pikachu (the latter originally from the Pokémon videogames), both manga and anime creatures in their own right. In addition to this, the protagonist's doppelganger in *Metropia*, Stefan, has a fish pet called Zelda, named after the videogame series first lunched in 1986 and still profitable in 2017, when the last videogame was released. In *Rennaisance,* references to Japanese anime are subtler, but again, Mamoru Oshii, considered the master of cyberpunk anime, stands as the main source of inspiration. Occasional references to Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) are noticeable in the triangles seen on the children's necks and in the sequence in which an invisible hitman kills Dimitri. Mamoru Oshii was also the creator of *Avalon* (2001), a Japanese co-production with Poland. The name is used both for the virtual world in Oshii's film and to the greedy monopoly that rules the lives of Parisians in *Renaissance.* Although this could be just a coincidence[13], directors Oshii and Volckman take a similar approach, filming real actors and then using digital effects to embellish the animation[14]. Finally, another evident source for *Renaissance* is Ôtomo's benchmark in Japanese cyberpunk, *Akira* (Ôtomo 1988) based on his six manga volumes of the same title (1982–1990), obvious in the theme of progeria and the experiments with children.

Metropia won the Future Film Digital Award at the Venice Film Festival and Best Music Award at the Stockholm Film Festival while *Renaissance* won the Annecy International Animated Film Festival and the Grand Prize of European Fantasy Film in Silver at the Fantasporto Film Festival. Despite these accolades the films received mixed reviews and are not well known outside science fiction fan circles. The innovative use of digital animation in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* facilitated the distribution of the movies at international film festivals, where they each received awards. Public reception outside their countries of origin, however, was somewhat disappointing, despite both films being aimed at international audiences. Although, as Elsaesser has observed, the European origin of a film is not essential for its success, the problem is how to "communicate with global/transnational audiences" (Elsaesser 2005, p. 491).

English as the Lingua Franca of Europe

One curious trait is that, although the films were made in non-English speaking countries, *Renaissance* and *Metropia* were both filmed in English. It is not an uncommon strategy. According to Laëtitia Kulyk, the use of a *lingua franca* normally helps a film's international success (Kulyk 2015, p. 179). Kulyk explains how the use of English is often characteristic of co-productions since they are conceived for the international market. In her distinction between the use of English in major and minor territories, we can identify the different aims of the films studied. In minor territories (e.g., Nordic countries, as in the case of *Metropia*) it is common practice and a matter of survival, as their populations are too small for a film to be profitable if filmed in the native language. In bigger countries such as France (see *Renaissance*) the aim is to reach ever larger audiences. Given that both films under consideration here are animations, they are less constrained by the actors' real voices, as the characters are dubbed.

Before I refer to the convention of filming in English and the consequences of such a decision, it is useful to refer to *Blade Runner* once again. Although Ridley Scott's film has for the last few decades been the predominant influence on cyberpunk and indeed science fiction films in general, there is one element that has not enjoyed much endorsement: the displacement of a recognisable language by a foreign one. In one scene in *Blade Runner*, Harrison Ford's character (Rick Deckhard) is exposed

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13　After all, Avalon is the name of a legendary island where the sword Excalibur was forged. It first appeared in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136).

14　The results, though, are quite different. *Avalon* looks more naturalistic (it was filmed on location) while *Renaissance*'s aesthetics are closer to those of comic books.

to Cityspeak, the language spoken in Los Angeles 2019, at a noodle parlour. Deckhard's voice over describes Cityspeak in pejorative terms:

> That gibberish he talked [his colleague Gaff, played by Edward James Olmos] was Cityspeak, gutter talk, a mishmash of Japanese, Spanish, German, what have you. I didn't really need a translator. I knew the lingo, every good cop did. But I wasn't going to make it easier for him.

Cityspeak suggests confusion and a sense of threat—or, at the very least, the discomfort of feeling displaced. Deckhard is reluctant to speak the new language, a strategy of resistance. It is curious to note that most European cyberpunk films portray multi-ethnic, yet monolingual societies. *Metropia* and *Renaissance* (but also previous European cyberpunk films such as *Nirvana* and *The Thirteenth Floor*) have been customarily filmed in English. The preference for English comes as no surprise. In the last two decades there has been a general increase in the number of English language films produced in non-Anglophone contexts. The reasons are evident:

> If you shoot a movie that is meant to be successful in a lot of territories, one of the rules that you have to understand is that you shoot in English—not to do so rules out two thirds of the market. Also, you have to understand that 50 percent of the market is the US market. (Bernd Eichinger quoted in Finney 2006, p. 104)

However, even when the use of English provides an advantage in terms of exhibition, it involves risks as regards receptivity. As a *Hollywood Reporter* review of *Metropia* said: "The fact that the main characters are voiced by American actors, yet live in Scandinavia, further seems at odds with the story" (Senjanovic 2009, p. 40). In other words, the implausibility of using a non-native language, creating a discrepancy between characters and setting, could hinder a film's popularity in certain territories[15]. But then again, poor subtitling or dubbing could also damage the credibility of the story[16]. In sum, the use of English implies further responsibilities that should be taken into account.

For a start, the selection of actors and actresses whose mother tongue is English has implications of its own. Choosing English over other native languages entails looking for actors abroad. As a consequence, European cyberpunk contradicts the correlation between popular European cinema and national stardom described by Elsaesser, by which popular cinema requires recognised domestic stars who perform in their native language (Elsaesser 2005, p. 485). By contrast, in *Metropia* the main characters have American voices (Vincent Gallo and Juliette Lewis voice Roger and Nina respectively), while secondary roles are played by English and Nordic actors. In *The Europeanness of European Cinema*, Mariana Liz points out that the significant number of US actors in European cinema raises "questions about the relationship between the film industries of Europe and Hollywood" (Liz 2015, p. 76). But the situation is even more complex. Is it the actor's nationality alone that counts? On the one hand we have in these films a mixture of American and European actors, but some of the latter can also be viewed as having been assimilated to Hollywood modes of production. *Renaissance*'s advertising campaign highlighted British actor Daniel Craig as the star, but, as Hedling asks, "Is it more realistic to contemplate these actors as examples in the historical trajectory of British and Irish actors being promoted in the […] integrated Anglo-American film cluster which is arguably best seen as a part of global Hollywood?" (Hedling 2015, p. 120). And, again, rather than taking for granted the transnationality of British actors in American and European cinemas, another scholar argues instead that the differences between American-English and British-English matter:

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[15] Paradoxically, when a Hollywood film is set in a non-English speaking country, no critic seems surprised by the convention according to which everyone speaks English.

[16] "While the language is not going to be the decisive factor in determining the success of a film, the wrong choice of language, or poorly executed subtitling or dubbing, will wreck its chances of international success, no matter how good the product is" (Finney 2006, p. 107).

Key to the process, according to Perry, is the need for a British-English dub, rather than American voices. "This allows the film to be comprehensible but still have a European flavour to it". (quoted by Finney 2006, p. 107)

In *Renaissance,* scientist Ilona is a French national. Her EU identity card is written in French and English, the two official languages of the European Union, yet French is never spoken. Strangely, French is briefly used in a background conversation in *Metropia* when Roger arrives in Paris, whereas we never hear a word of Swedish in Stockholm. The paradox in these dystopian projections of a decentralised but interconnected Europe, where nation-states are almost non-existent entities, is that they remain united by language, with American, British and other European-accented English.

3. Narrative and Stylistic Elements of European Cyberpunk

3.1. Dark European Cities

In narrative and stylistic terms, *Metropia* and *Renaissance* follow many tropes associated with cyberpunk. One almost indispensable trait is that the action takes place in urban settings. The cities in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* are very different and yet share in many of the subgenre's clichés. They offer dark and unwelcoming projections of the future. Sunlight is scarce in cyberpunk. The lack of light is in keeping with the visual schema of film noir and contributes towards a generally gloomy outlook. Cities are dominated by greedy monopolies in a recognisable version of unbridled capitalism. An elite controls harmful technological advancement that consumers willingly embrace thanks to persuasive advertising. The pervasiveness of technology often boosts mass surveillance, endangering civil and political rights but the unsatisfied masses seldom rebel against injustice and conform to the status quo.

New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo are three of a selected group of metropoles in which cyberpunk narratives are typically set. The fact that *Renaissance* and *Metropia* depart from these familiar American and Japanese locations, in favour of European capitals, is a factor that modifies the narratives. This is arguably more evident in *Renaissance* than in *Metropia*. "*Renaissance* has the French touch" (Frenette 2006), it is a film which has also been described by one critic as being "Like *Blade Runner* with a baguette under its arm" (Arendt 2006). But neither of these reviewers explains what makes *Renaissance* distinctive.

Despite the admiration for *Blade Runner* and repeated mention of Scott's film as a defining source of inspiration, the choice of Paris significantly shaped the look of the city. First of all, *Renaissance* reflects an unreserved fascination with the city's striking architecture. Although most of the action occurs at night, the daytime sequences show Paris' recognisable rooftops and ancient monuments (e.g., Notre-Dame, Sacré-Cœur Basilic). Wide avenues are depicted from a birds-eye view or, perhaps more accurately, from a drone's point of view, as the camera movements are fluid, much faster and precise. A number of aerial shots feature open spaces and sharply defined architecture in contrast to the midst that blurs buildings in *Blade Runner* and many other cyberpunk films. As Arendt said of *Renaissance*:

While it borrows from any number of science-fiction classics, *Renaissance* has a look and feel all of its own. This is a film noir in the most literal sense, defined entirely by jet-black shadows [. . .]. It's a pleasure to watch and the architectural vistas of Paris in 2054, with its glass-covered Metro stations and vertiginous stacks of decaying tenements, are very beautiful. (Arendt 2006)

With its magnificent urban spaces, monumental architecture and elegant black and white contrasts, *Renaissance* departs from previous cyberpunk settings. In one of the few day sequences, set in the Avalon Vice President's office, the camera movement reveals that the walls and floor are made of glass, allowing the all-powerful Avalon CEO to look down on the inhabitants. His privileged workplace at the company's headquarters modifies the public space. The A-shaped office building matches Avalon's logo. At the ground level, the spaces are not built to human scale but are closer to a Versailles-style

urbanism of grandiose avenues. The futuristic elements, though, are not imposing and coexist with the ancient architecture, even embellishing the French capital. A postmodern sensitivity guided the projection of Paris in the year 2054, a respectful reinterpretation of one of the most beautiful capitals in Europe. There are no apparent slums or no-go areas and the sight of poverty is anecdotal, an absence that contradicts one of the main premises of cyberpunk.

Unlike the stylish Paris recreated in *Renaissance*, *Metropia* offers a much bleaker representation of the future, one that seems to envision the collapse of the Swedish welfare state. Following a financial crisis deepened by the scarcity of natural resources, a company named Trexx has built up a vast underground system which connects Europe's main cities. The protagonist Roger is an apathetic call centre worker who has recently started hearing voices in his head. He meets an elegant woman called Nina in the underground. Everything in Roger's surroundings looks dreadful. The area between the ramshackle apartment building where Roger lives and his workplace is a post-industrial wasteland of barren fields, abandoned cars and factories and brutalist architecture. Roads are empty, the skies perpetually clouded and most of the concrete structures are in ruins. The animators use a palette of grey tones to reinforce Roger's gloomy existence[17]. In contrast to American or Japanese films, European cities in cyberpunk do not appear overcrowded. However, *Metropia* and *Renaissance* depict societies whose inhabitants feel equally isolated and deprived of a network of friends, relatives or co-workers.

In *Renaissance*, Paris is presented as a relatively lively environment where people can at least go for a walk. The Stockholm suburbs seen in *Metropia*, on the contrary, are home to a population dissuaded from making use of public spaces—unless they use Trexx facilities and pay exorbitant tariffs for the privilege of going to work. Salek used photographs of real underground stations in an attempt to make them look familiar to European viewers[18]. The tube is the only means of transport and a tool to control the population across the continent, as the Trexx Group influences consumers' choices by placing ubiquitous adverts in the underground while suppressing musicians and other outsiders. The fact that actual stations have been used in the film suggests to the viewer that today we are not so far from a similar kind of future.

3.2. Canons of Beauty, a European Obsession

Renaissance and *Metropia* share a concern with the imposition of a canon of beauty, a motif also central in other European cyberpunk productions such as Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* (1997). The film which introduced this subject to science fiction cinema was Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (Gilliam 1985). Loosely based on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the original ways in which it departs from George Orwell's novel is by including two female characters, Ida (the protagonist's mother) and her friend, who are obsessed with undergoing drastic beauty treatments. In Gilliam's film, the obsession with retaining a youthful appearance is ridiculed as a distraction reserved for wealthy, idle, old women. In *Renaissance* (2006) and *Metropia* (2009), on the other hand, the beauty industry has imposed its standards on the lives of every citizen. More importantly, its products are designed to control the population. Inhabitants of these fictions unwittingly succumb to the promises of advertising, which turns them into consumers complicit in their own subjugation. For instance, in *Metropia*, the gel Dangst is a biochemical tool used to inoculate thoughts and sell Trexx products to gullible buyers. Roger's inner voice persuades him to distrust his wife so that he is tempted to buy one of the widely advertised Hello Kitty dolls that hides a built-in spy camera, to control her. Roger's sibylline inner voice whispers:

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[17]　Roger's disproportionately big head and body have been compared to Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (Sharkey 2010).
[18]　Salek used pictures and 2D animation and "built the images up, layer by layer, in Photoshop and After Effects" (Roxborough 2009).

> People we thought we knew. People we thought we could trust. But things turned out to be different. Unless you get one of those Kitty Dolls. Cameras from 'See Cure.' Eighty Euros for the truth. And if we found out that she hasn't done anything . . . How great! Perfect.

Unlike previous narratives in which an authoritarian state imposes its will by force or intimidation, in this case an evil monopoly uses technology to manipulate consumer choices. From the beginning, there is a specific interest in both films in showing the presence of cosmetics adverts everywhere. After the opening sequence, *Renaissance* focuses on an animated street billboard that recalls *Blade Runner*'s famous geisha standing out amidst the overwhelming Los Angeles cityscape. The Parisian model in *Renaissance* is also a woman, but here, the atmosphere is apparently less oppressive. In this capital of fashion and luxurious cosmetics, the ad stands alone overlooking its surroundings—the familiar rooftops of eternal Paris with some futuristic additions. The wrinkles of an old woman gradually disappear as she promotes the virtues of Avalon's products:

> I like being beautiful. I like to stay fit. That's why I like Avalon. With Avalon, I know I'm beautiful. And I am going to stay that way. Health. Beauty. Longevity. Avalon. We're on your side[19]

It is interesting to note that a relatively old-fashioned form of advertising such as placing billboards in prominent locations, seems central in both films. Along with advertisements on public transport the product placement becomes essentially omnipresent, proving the strength of private companies to impose their presence in public spaces. Not even the Eiffel Tower is spared, as the iconic monument is turned into the spot for a neon ad in *Metropia*, announcing the leading Trexx product: the radioactive-blue looking gel Dangst. Television, another traditional medium of communication is also used to endlessly publicise products in *Metropia*.

3.3. Fantasy Girls and Working-Class Women

In both films the individual who embodies the ideal of beauty is a woman; more precisely, a white woman. Despite the fact that both films portray a multicultural society, it seems that the standards of beauty in the future will remain white: light skin, big eyes with long lashes, a slim nose and silky straight or wavy hair. In contrast, ordinary women do not necessarily fit this standard of beauty. In *Metropia*, Roger's wife, Anna, is an attractive black woman. She is characterised as being opposed to normative ideals of beauty and gives the impression of paying little attention to her appearance. At home, she wears a plain, white T-shirt, does not use any makeup and her left arm is fully covered with a tattoo. Furthermore, the spots on her forehead contrast with the perfect skin of her rival, Nina. Class also plays an important part in her characterisation. Anna is a working-class woman living in a tiny, decrepit apartment where she spends most of her time watching reality shows and worrying about her marriage. No mention is made of her profession. Whether Anna is unemployed or not, the fact that her job seems entirely irrelevant to the plot is significant because without the responsibilities of motherhood or a job to fulfil her aspirations, her only function as a young woman is to remain a (replaceable) object of desire. The mysterious Nina, on the other hand, is depicted as the glamorous, prototypical blonde *femme fatale.* She shows no physical imperfections and wears an elegant two-piece designer suit over fancy lingerie. Her meticulous spiral bun, inspired by the character of Madeleine Elster played by Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, reinforces the idea of a fantasy girl with a hidden agenda. She works as a model and is the face of one of the products sold by her father's company. Roger describes Nina as the 'girl of his dreams' and follows her in the underground despite being late for work. Nina, therefore, signifies the danger and excitement of an extramarital affair, while Anna is associated in the film with the routine of marital life: sex scheduled around Roger's job

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[19]　Later on, the audience will learn that the cosmetics firm Avalon is responsible for the death of children used as guinea-pigs in the company's attempts to reverse the aging process.

exhausting timetable and frequent arguments ignited by her husband's unfounded jealousy. Anna is tender and emotional and has been to a certain extent infantilised, as evidenced by the Hello Kitty dolls and her drawings. In addition, she is associated with affection and fidelity, as opposed to the ambition and coldness of Nina. The opposition of female characters is typical of cyberpunk narratives and reminiscent of previous films in which a black woman represents the real world, ordinary problems and routine, while a white woman is associated with a dangerous romantic obsession, as seen, for instance, in Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995).

A similar juxtaposition is found in *Renaissance* between the main female characters, sisters Ilona and Bislane Tasuiev. Once again, they are both beautiful but Ilona, a scientist working on an ambitious research project for Avalon, is blonde-haired and fair with light blue eyes. Her older sister also works for Avalon but in a more modest role in the records section. Bislane looks completely different to her sister. She has black hair and dark, narrow eyes that give her an East Asian look. Her haircut and outfit are similar to those of Trinity from *The Matrix*. In addition, her friends are petty delinquents, while her more successful younger sister Ilona is always surrounded by older scientists. In narrative terms, the 'happy endings' in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* are in keeping with the plot resolutions found in many cyberpunk films, such as *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995). In both films the hero consolidates his relationship with the working-class girl, an ending that Michelle Chilcoat describes as "deeply conservative in its anxious reassertion of 'obligatory heterosexuality'" (Chilcoat 2004, p. 157).

3.4. The Panopticon as A New Metaphor for Digital Surveillance

Computers, a defining element of cyberpunk, are scarce in *Metropia* and *Renaissance*. Most of the screens in the films are connected to surveillance cameras, sometimes hidden from the general public but in other instances exposed in spaces like the underground. While earlier European cyberpunk films explored virtual reality (e.g., *Nirvana, Abre los ojos*, *The Thirteenth Floor*), it barely figures in *Metropia* and *Renaissance*. The universally popular image of the hero figure traversing different layers of virtual reality faded from view in the 2000s. As a substitute, the classic concerns of science fiction, such as the theme of state surveillance, reappeared. Vital in the 1960s and 1970s, when many films showed technology being used to monitor the population's movements, in these films state control is replaced by the corporate might of Trexx and Avalon. Saleh defined *Metropia* as "a reflection of the time and a warning about what can happen if we allow the surveillance society and companies free license—beyond all morals, laws and rules" (Salek, quoted by Kim Grönqvist 2010, p. 31)[20].

Despite the lack of computers, cyberspace is not entirely absent in *Metropia*. Saleh's script was actually inspired by Amazon's dashboard product suggestions and social media platforms. Writing on his blog, co-screenwriter of *Metropia*, Fredrik Edin, has lamented the amount of information internet users voluntarily reveal on social media because it facilitates obscure corporate interests that are likely to use the information against the individual:

> When we began to work on *Metropia* in 2003 [. . .] some online stores, such as Amazon, had started mapping their customers. Based on previous purchases, clicked links and so on, they tailored the prices so that different customers received different price tags for one and the same product. Meanwhile, Mark Zuckerberg and his friends sat at Harvard, outlining the social network that would later be Facebook and have over 300 million users. As some of us opened accounts on Facebook, the decision is made to let Roger use Dangst shampoo. Even though he lacks hair. If it seems unreasonable, it is nevertheless an objection to the bizarre fact that I and millions of other people voluntarily disclose our political views,

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20 Regarding the impact of social media and the origins of *Metropia* Salek says: "I get annoyed by our generation's way of voting for the Pirate Party on the one hand and making privacy on the Internet the most important issue, bigger than the scrapping of labour laws or the building of a wall around Europe. Then, on the other hand, exposing everything about themselves on blogs, Facebook and Twitter pages. I think it's hypocrisy and it's partly also what the movie is about" (quoted by Kim Grönqvist 2010, p. 31).

religious views and sexual orientations. What I'm doing right now. Who my friends are. Who I'm living with. Which of my friends know each other [. . .] If Amazon can figure out what I'm willing to pay for a particular book, what do you think anyone could figure out by mapping my activity on Facebook?. (Edin 2009)

In his post, Edin links social media to social control. Hence the capitalisation of private data via technological devices has replaced the dangers of virtual worlds, updating the notion of the panopticon. Michel Foucault's concerns regarding Bentham's disciplinary model of the panopticon are formulated in his 1975 essay *Discipline and Punish.* This conception is transformed in *Metropia*, with the idea of the panopticon being manifested as a system of control, by which consumers are willing to share their private data unaware of the consequences. The panopticon serves as a metaphor for a society under the latest type of surveillance, self-inflicted and enabled by advances in digital technology. It comes as no surprise that the key panopticon-like structures in these movies are the headquarters of Trexx and Avalon. The design is not exclusive to these films and can be found in Terry Gilliam's *The Zero Theorem* (Gilliam 2013), where it is also associated with corporate power.

3.5. Fortress Europe in European Cyberpunk Cinema

Given that American cyberpunk cinema generally depicts ethnically diverse societies, it is worth noticing the way in which ethnicity has been represented in Europe[21]. In the 2000s both American and European cyberpunk films customarily represented ethnically diverse populations, a novelty in the case of European productions. Indeed, European cyberpunk of the 1990s can hardly be described as ethnically diverse, with very few examples of non-white characters[22]. Hollywood films of the same period featured a greater diversity, even if non-white characters were reserved for secondary roles. During the 2000s the supremacy of white characters endured on both sides of the Atlantic but ethnic hierarchies in European cyberpunk present some particularities that deserve further comment. For instance, unlike in Hollywood movies, the nationality of white characters is of great importance. Yosefa Loshitzky has studied the portrayal of the ethnically 'other' in European cinema. In her introduction to *Screening Strangers*, Loshitzky uses the term 'fortress Europe' to contextualise the cinematic representation of migrants, exiles and refugees on the continent. Coined during the Second World War to refer to the territories under the Third Reich, it has become a widely used expression to sum up the current climate of hostility towards mass immigration within the European Union:

European countries have tended to view migration as challenging and threatening to their territory, identity or ways of imagining themselves and others. [. . .] Fortress Europe increasingly erects racial, ethnic and religious boundaries. At the same time that Europe is encouraging the expansion of the EU, it is also defining and closing its borders to the 'others'. (Loshitzky 2010, p. 2)

The expression 'fortress Europe,' then, is very useful for explaining the importance of ethnicity and national identity, arising from a double meaning of the term. Analysis of the films under consideration here will demonstrate this. *Metropia* is especially interesting in this regard. Born in Stockholm to Egyptian parents, *Metropia*'s director Tarik Saleh openly criticises Europe's attitude towards refugees and, in particular, the exploitation of their circumstances by the media. In one of the early sequences of the film, he uses parody to denounce Europe's uneasiness with asylum seekers, showing a teaser for a TV programme entitled Asylum, in which contestants compete to stay in Europe legally. With the

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[21] Novels like Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (Stephenson 1992) paved the way for a more balanced representation of ethnicity in American cyberpunk. In Hollywood, characters like J-Bone (played by rapper Ice-T) and Takahashi (Takeshi Kitano) in *Johnny Mnemonic*; Mace (Angela Basset) and Jeriko One (Glenn Plummer) in *Strange Days*; and Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) in *The Matrix*, reflect a concern (however insufficient) for diversity.

[22] One of the very few exceptions was the detective Larry McBain (played by actor and producer Dennis Haysbert) in *The Thirteenth Floor*, a co-production with the USA.

telegraphic wording and the fast editing characteristic of this format, the voice over announces: "Tonight. Four contestants. Thirty questions. Only one can stay in Europe. The others have to fly." The last part is meant literally, as contestants are tied to a special machine and catapulted into the void when they fail to answer a question correctly. *Metropia* illustrates the anxieties of those with conservative attitudes towards the ethnically other and it does this by using a literal 'dumping process' that echoes Loshitzky's general description of the attitudes seen in European cinema:

> the process of screening practised by the 'host' society (which very often is more hostile than hospitable) is to screen the 'good migrant' and expel the 'bad' to the literal and metaphorical 'dumping grounds' of the rest of the world. Both the penalty system and the state and supra-state apparatuses built to solve the problem of 'human waste' are driven by the desire to screen the 'good migrant,' to separate her/him from the 'bad/undesired stranger'. ([Loshitzky 2010](), p. 2)

The fact that Asylum, "Europe's favourite quiz show," is broadcast from Copenhagen and not Stockholm, where most of the story takes place, implies not only that there is an immense transport system that has been constructed by Trexx but also a TV network that links Europeans who share similar pastimes that actively disseminate xenophobia. Despite the intra-European connections facilitated by the infrastructure provided by Trexx, borders still exist. These have now simply been redrawn to exclude non-European citizens.

In the same scene, a close-up shot of the terrified eyes of a contestant is edited so that they meet the vacant eyes of Anna, who is watching the programme in the comfort of her home. Later on (26 min) the audience will be made aware of the connection between Asylum and the sinister company Trexx, when the underground hosts the quiz show's finale. An intimidating TV hostess approaches one of the contestants with her microphone and demands a prompt answer from him: "In thirty words, explain why Europe is the place of your dreams." Against the clock, the anxious man improvises his response as his seat prepares to launch him miles away towards a river. "In or out" (as Asylum's trailer announces) are the only choices given to non-EU citizens. Finally, in one of the final sequences, Roger meets the successful contestant who has been granted leave to remain. The encounter takes place in the underground (the domain of Trexx) and the former asylum seeker is carrying a bottle of Dangst, a symbol that confirms his new status as a consumer in his adopted country, subject to the same level of surveillance as any other national.

Metropia makes explicit the rejection of the ethnically 'other,' mainly identified as first-generation immigrants. Class is also a relevant factor. In the same film, the characters of the ruling magnates are based on national stereotypes: a German entrepreneur, an ignorant American from Texas, a quiet Japanese man and two grotesque Saudis. The working classes are Swedish, Finnish and, at a lower level on the social scale, Iranian security guards. Similarly, in *Renaissance* the scientists are German and Japanese while the main character is of Maghrebi descent (a French national "born in the Kasbah") and his superior in the police force is a black woman. Social mobility is therefore limited and codified according to ethnic stereotypes.

As mentioned before, the concept of 'fortress Europe' describes the current unwillingness throughout the European continent to accommodate a growing number of immigrants and refugees, but it also expresses fears of German dominance. It is hardly a coincidence that the villains in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* have German surnames and are both CEOs of their respective companies. For instance, German actor Udo Kier voices Ivan Bahn in *Metropia*. His surname also has associations with the construction of a reliable transport system, an area in which Germans are traditionally believed to excel ('Bahn' means train in German). The construction of a massive underground system across Europe is supported by an economic establishment at every level, as is evident in the sequence where Roger's boss pressures him into taking the underground—Roger prefers to cycle to work. In addition, the Nazi past haunts the film, in the images of a network of trains that extends across Europe, initiated by Germans. Indeed, both films convey an undeniable degree of apprehension towards German authority. Technological innovations are used by Trexx and Avalon to infringe personal freedoms: spying on

people without consent and even instilling malicious thoughts within them. Although they allude to the existence of a supranational structure (explicit in *Renaissance,* in which Ilona Tasuiev's ID card confirms her identity as a citizen of the European Union), it is not difficult to perceive anxieties directed towards a centralised monopoly ruled by German chief executives. In keeping with familiar cyberpunk concerns, political authority is secondary to, or actively conspires with economic power. But fears about the establishment of an authoritarian society are also connected with a classical theme of European science fiction that has reappeared in recent years. Even though dystopias have always been a popular setting for science fiction, European audiences saw a significantly higher number of post-apocalyptic films during the eighties that Hollywood audiences did. Films such as *The Falls* (1980), *Les années lumière* (Light Years Away, Tanner 1981), *Kamikaze 1989* (Gremm 1982), *Le dernier combat* (The Last Battle/Kamikaze 1999; Besson 1983), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Radford 1984) and *Brazil* (Gilliam 1985) explored post-war hardship and totalitarian threats. Although their storylines imagined the future, the mise-en-scène often reminded viewers of the Second World War and its aftermath, as if to indicate that Europeans will never be safe from authoritarianism. Current cyberpunk films are reviving similar concerns but this time, the country blamed for the conflict is disclosed. The only substantial difference is that the former political menace is now camouflaged by economic power.

4. Conclusions

European cyberpunk cinema made in the 2000s is not dramatically different from its American or Japanese counterparts. Although the films discussed offer a distinctive look that has been praised by critics worldwide, the genre maintains many of the motifs seen in previous decades in terms of plot (in particular, those revolving around industrial espionage), urban settings inspired by film noir and overlap in terms of certain character archetypes. The representation of strong women in a male-dominated narrative and greedy moguls and media stars depicted in a world controlled by corporations, offer no major variations.

Notwithstanding these similarities, other fundamental aspects of European cyberpunk offer an alternative take on the genre. One of the most striking distinctions in European cyberpunk is the extreme level of technophobia. Despite being cautionary tales about the use of technology, films like *Total Recall, Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Matrix* make a point of exhibiting the wonders of the virtual world. Consider Arnold Schwarzenegger's 'ego-trip'—or virtual adventure—in *Total Recall,* or the scene in which the character of Morpheus 'teaches' Neo several martial arts by downloading applications into his brain in *The Matrix*. By contrast, European cyberpunk shows only the negative effects of technological advances. According to Mihailova, digital animation is "inherently technophilic by virtue of its production process" ([Mihailova 2013](#), p. 132) but all technical and scientific innovations in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* are harmful, or used to enslave the population, in contradiction to the medium employed to convey the same technophobic message. Even when the initial aim of a new technology is constructive, the consequences are terrifying[23].

The lack of faith in technology explains the comparatively modest number of virtual reality narratives. Stories dealing with computers, fantasy worlds, cyborgs and body modifications are few and far between. There is no hope that technology can improve human life. Therefore, narratives about an ill (or addicted) male hero seeking a cure have disappeared. In its place, European cyberpunk is fixated with the idea of dystopia, one of the classic themes of science fiction cinema, but more prevalent in European science fiction in recent years. Connected with this pessimistic conceptualisation of the future is the idea of the panopticon (both architectural and digital) as a new metaphor for digital surveillance. It originates in the workplace but expands into the most intimate spaces—homes and even minds—in order to monitor and manipulate people's life choices. This trend in European

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[23] In *Renaissance*, Avalon supports a research project aiming to increase the average human lifespan, but the experiment breaks ethical research protocols and results in the death of a group of children.

cyberpunk in the 2000s is not an altogether new invention, rather it updates previous visions of dystopia, bringing repressed fears about past authoritarian societies to light.

Another significant contribution of *Metropia* and *Renaissance* to cyberpunk has to do with the fact that their stories are set in European cities. Even when they are not consciously offering an alternative to either US or Japanese cyberpunk, they reveal a European point of view. In spite of the dystopian nature of cyberpunk films, Paris in both films stands as an alluring metropolis seen, if not as the political centre of Europe (as in other cyberpunk films, the companies are global conglomerates that in reality rule the world), at least as an abstract ideal of what a European city represents. The French capital is portrayed as a stylish location, hardly in keeping with the hostile environment of conventional cyberpunk scenarios. In addition, although many of the anxieties represented could be extrapolated to non-European countries, they constitute an identifiable trait of European cyberpunk. The obsession with beauty depicted in these futures and, above all, the complicity of citizen-consumers—who fall under the spell of authoritarian monopolies, allowing them to erode the most fundamental individual rights—is a recurrent motif. Furthermore, both films represent multicultural societies that rank citizens according to their ethnic origin. It is significant that in the context of a declining Europe where new global powers have emerged in recent decades, they are absent from these films. The result is a quite Eurocentric notion of international power relations, where Europe remains crucial alongside its longstanding allies. More importantly, the futures portrayed in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* consolidate the 'fortress Europe' project. Despite the stress in these films on the interconnectivity among continental regions, the apprehension concerning non-EU members has grown. Xenophobic attitudes are agitated and exploited by evil monopolies which rule the world in the hope that they will enhance the strength of European borders. In the new millennium, nation states might have been eliminated within Europe but the fears of German supremacy have not disappeared, an indication that the scars of the Second World War are still present in European science fiction cinema. German dominance is feared due to its association with an erosion of individual freedoms. There is some novelty here, however, in that the menace is not political or territorial but economic and therefore will be more difficult to oppose.

Released in a decade when European popular cinema flourished[24], *Renaissance* and *Metropia* promoted a certain idea of European cultural identity within the limits of an industry whose products are aimed at a global market. As a result, they are not free from incongruities triggered by conventions such as the use of English in everyday life by Parisians and Swedes. Any film that aims to appeal to audiences beyond national borders is often confronted with similar choices in order to make the production profitable. *Renaissance* and *Metropia* are examples of popular cinema intended to attract mainstream audiences while at the same time attempting to offer a product that deviates from audience expectations and the familiar look of cyberpunk films. Hence the need for an independent animation studio and the decision to set the stories in European cities, with the historical and cultural implications that this relocation to the old continent entails. Although many of the transnational elements prevail, it is useful to identify the specific traits that have made them distinct in order to enrich the debate about what constitutes the cyberpunk genre. The films highlighted in this paper demonstrate that a new trend in cyberpunk cinema emerged during the 2000s, one that adapted transnational cyberpunk in order to respond to specific European horrors of the past.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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[24] "European popular cinema over the past decade has in fact thrived [...]. it continues to play a fundamental part in consolidating national film cultures in Europe and indeed in fostering a transnational film culture through co-productions and exports" (Bergfelder 2015, p. 45).

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