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There Is No Pperiphery: Globalising Culture and the Cinematographic Language of Cultural Mediation in Modern European Film

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Sascha Harris

‘There is no periphery’: Globalising Culture and the Cinematographic Language of Cultural Mediation in Modern European Film

“I understand well, that you astronomers gain great pleasure, bringing closer the immense universe... But allow me to state: I have found throughout life in general as well as in the typical, that these means by which we assist our senses do not exert a morally advantageous influence on humanity.” (Goethe 1988, 120f.)

Wilhelm Meister’s cautious response to the perspective gained through the telescope does not only anticipate the unease over a gaze which is created through instrumentalization. In the telescopic gaze, which underlies the Copernican introduction of a heliocentric world view, the issues of the morality of centre and periphery and the decentred, abstract mode of perception of modernity meet. For if we grow to identify the instrumentalized perspective we gain with our natural and culturally mediated experience of the world, we accordingly adopt a form of communication, a language of representation which responds to this acquired, abstract gaze.

The concept of periphery lies at the heart of all European culture. In one form or another, the idea that there was a centre, be it in time or space, in value hierarchy and intellectual discourse, down to the biological or spiritual essence of life, which provides valid norms and perspectives for life, has never left our continent. In the ancient world, the periphery found a strong and virtually autonomous voice and representation in myth. Greek gods epitomized, symbolized and acted out the powers and phenomena which defied human understanding. The almighty God, and later the Christian increasing identification of man and God, not only established an ethical value system which set out to protect man from his seeming helplessness in the face of such unintelligible, and frequently destructive ‘otherness’, but also solidified the idea of a centre. Monotheism relies on the single, all-ordering agent, who pulls together the strands of sensation and experience, reflection and value formation which place seemingly disparate or unrelated phenomena within a meaningful, and therefore less threatening context. The powerful destructiveness of the elements, for example, became signs of a centre at work, expressions of authority, responses to behaviour. Where once there seemed to be only destruction one could now read resurrection, renewal, respond with belief in grace or fatedness. In this sense, religion transported man’s wonder at his environment into the subjective ability to centre, to interpret the world around him, to relate it either first to an increasingly ‘central’ God and later, via God to himself. Science, entirely in the steps of religion, took a different route. It aimed at objectifying the world around us. It found names for what we experienced; it explained what was unknown by using the words and terms it had established as knowns. In essence, this is a process of familiarization, as is all structured knowledge. While science set out to explore and explain the world from seeing its connectedness, that which it describes as causality, it at the same time isolated what it observed. In a literary sense, it alienated what it observed in order to know it. The clinical test or situation is an artifice, which claims to demythify what it examines. It removes it from its natural or normal context, and thereby seemingly reveals its true nature. In this sense, science tries to remove the unknowns, the periphery by artificially creating a ‘centre’ and subjecting that which is unknown to this centre of scientific practice, laws and knowledge. Both, science and religion thrive on the inherent dialectics of centre and periphery. Science established the heliocentric view of the world precisely in this way. That which had been at the margins of our world view, now became a centre of a new view of the world. Yet for most of us, the sun and the concept of the universe remain peripherious phenomena, akin to a clinical experience.

We have learned to be able to perceive of the planet earth as an object, but few will claim that this has made us better subjects of it or that in fact it has made us view ourselves or our immediate environment as less of a centre. In a parallel process, European mapmaking removed the firm belief in an unexplored periphery. That exploration, that naming the unknown, is today acknowledged as the history of colonialism, which maintained the concept of an all-powerful centre against an objectified periphery. This revealed much more of the centre-periphery dialectics. The Greeks had infused their gods with human traits, and in this more or less successfully integrated what was unknown. In Greek drama these peripheral creatures resurface as psychological and cultural functions: they are no longer separate from human existence and subjectivity. Modern colonialism sought a different path: it believes that it can conquer the periphery. It attempted to impose its faith and customs, and it morally evaluated the periphery. Europe's way of dealing with the periphery was to integrate it into its centre by imposing the laws and customs of the centre. While colonialism operated under the guise of religion and science, and the resulting objectification and commodification which we term trade, the proclaimed inclusion of the periphery in the centre, i.e. through Christianization and civilization, did not impinge on the moral centre-periphery dynamics of this process. This seems to indicate that the modern perception and construction of periphery is an *abstract* moral one, as is the essence of prejudice. This, too, relates directly to science in its application of objectifying, universal, clinical laws.

Where religion openly calls for an inclusion of the peripheral, where it calls for the acceptance of the other, be it the Philistine, the beggar, the prostitute, the leper and thereby aims at making the centre-periphery dynamic dysfunctional, effectively cancelling it out, the modern scientific paradigm necessitates this dynamic with all its clinical abstraction, even when it occasionally imports ethical precepts. In this sense, religion seems much more closely related to postmodern concepts, which describes every human as wanting and peripheral, or, by the same token, each human as a centre, aiming at a parity of centres or peripheries respectively. Equally, scientific abstraction and objectification seem to inform the concept of postmodern relativism. The populist scientific paradigm teaches that truth, the centre, is reached by the combination of technology and clinically researched laws of universality. The same belief pattern underlies modern business practices. Abstraction derives from the universalization or generalization of a claim or perception which is deemed to be the 'centre'. It subjects the perceived world to laws and tenets which constitute 'the rule': a demand applicable in all relevant situations. It also further equates the clinical, objectified and established situation, an artifice, with actuality, an actuality with all its unknowns, unexpecteds and peripheries. In doing so, abstraction seeks to remove the presence of the periphery, of the other. In intellectual and philosophical argument this has its place, in psycho-cultural existence it has devastating effects.

Both, the concepts of centre and periphery are abstract. In psychological and cultural terms, however, they are very much experienced in the same way an ancient Greek might have perceived of the floods that destroyed the Colossus of Rhodes: the peripheral breaking into the centre. The Greeks may have invoked their gods or seen them in this process. We react with fear, hostility and denial, because the scientific, abstract manner in which we maintain the centre-periphery-dynamic does not allow for a specific cultural experience of the world and with it, of specific cultural means of either integrating the periphery or allowing for its parity with our 'centre' by avoiding the abstract moral judgment. Modern nationalism thrives on abstract generalizations. Here self-definition comes about through negative identification: "We are not black, we do not speak French, we are not Hindi etc." Put simply, modern, terrestrial-media driven man does not relate to the world through his 'centre' and his

‘periphery’ but through *the* centre and *the* periphery. His experience becomes less and less culturally mediated. Culture as specific, personal communicability is replaced by unrelated abstraction with unanswerable demands of universality.

The key points I then wish to make are that the established concept of periphery, and with it the treatment of otherness are culturally negative because they are established and nurtured by abstraction. This leads to the first relevant, symbiotic parallel. The Anglo-Saxon world, and critics would be correct to already describe this as a false construct, however popularly accepted and propagated, presumes a common ‘centre-periphery-dynamic’ as any other linguistically defined sphere does. However, as English has become a ‘lingua franca’ of sorts, Western popular culture sees an increasing degree of the merging of the ‘us-and-them-dynamic’ inherent in the English-speaking world with that of the spheres which have been, for want of a better word, colonized by this ‘linguistic sphere’. For many cultural critics, this has meant in effect an “Americanization” of the Western world in particular. I claim that the apparent success of the North American ‘centre-periphery-dynamic’, which in North America harbours significantly greater religious functions than in Europe, is in fact a result of the popularization of a moralized, profoundly abstract or acultural ‘centre-periphery-dynamic’. Or, to be more precise, popularization, as well as popularity, is a function and phenomenon of abstraction.

This, in effect, diminishes the culture as a space and ability to communicate, to integrate the ‘other’, the personal ‘centre’ and the personal ‘periphery’. The economic term for this increasing rule of abstraction and the transportation of a moralized ‘us-them-dynamic’ unaffected by personal and cultural experience is globalization. It allows the individual to move between different cultural spheres without in any way revising his moralized ‘centre-periphery-dynamic’ and declares his own experience universal by insidiously corroborating it in this way. “Ah sure, it’s the same everywhere” is a statement which does not extoll the acceptance of equality and its concomitant ethical precepts of human rights. It is rather an expression of an absolutist demand of universality of experience, and therefore the denial of the parity of peripheries or centres, respectively.

In the area of film, especially of the popular, blockbuster kind, this denial of our personal, experienced, actual ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ is maybe the most obvious. How then, do three significant European films which emphatically focus on the centre-periphery-dynamic construct a perspective and narrative which dismantles a globalized, abstract form of representation? How do these films deconstruct the inherent falseness of a perception anchored in a centre which posits claims of universality of meaning and gaze? These films echo what the philosopher Blumenberg proposes as “nostrocentrism” (Timm, 56-59), a return to the centrality of our personal perception through the realization of the uniqueness and exclusivity of our experience and the experiential fallacy of abstraction and its inherent expectations. The Copernican view of the world in its apparent abstraction serves as a mirror, which ironically allows us to view ourselves again as our own centre. The conscious use of abstraction and instrumentalization lead to a moment of alienation which returns the subject to its own gaze (cf. Žižek, 307).

All three directors are explicit about their civic intentions. They share the view that modern societies are regulated by a semi-fictitious ‘centre’ which is left to operate in direct contravention of the needs and desires of the people who make up this society. And they further share the view that the modern subject on the one hand acts in utter self-interest, placing himself at the centre of events and society while simultaneously, and with some irony, experiences himself as an entirely powerless object of the world around him, a being

isolated, and condemned to the periphery, always engaged in the desperate struggle to become part of the centre (Žižek, 301; Kiesłowski, 145, Tarkovsky, 233).

Pasolini's film was shot on a variety of locations throughout Italy. The costumes, some strange, some half-reminiscent of the Italian middle ages and the Renaissance, are worn by a mostly amateur cast. The viewer, undoubtedly familiar with the narrative, may choose to see the parallels between the historical gospel scenes and this mythical Italy of the past. Pasolini himself speaks of analogies, and Bondanella, avoiding the terms "version" and "adaptation" speaks of Pasolini's mythical films as based on "construction by analogy" (Bondanella, 127). In terms of dialogue, Pasolini's representation is the most faithful of any cinematographic rendering of the passion narrative. While the sequence of Matthew's text is significantly altered, and with it its dramatic chronology, the scripture is quoted verbatim. Pasolini's didactic intention, however, is hardly hidden. The passages selected leave little room for ambiguity as to Christ's political and social beliefs. The entire film hinges on this lack of ambiguity in the quoted scriptures. The visual and musical elements of the film accompany this text-focused representation without becoming subjected to it. At the heart of this interplay lies the 'centre-periphery-dynamic'.

Pasolini's film operates very consciously with this dynamic in the movement within the film. Our eye is again and again drawn to span distances; in fact, the narrative cohesion of the film rests with the tension that arises from the mobility of centre and periphery alike. The viewers' eyes are frequently allowed to settle on faces and on sites of nature. This kind of visual centring Pasolini uses in a more anthropocentric manner than later Tarkovsky and Kiesłowski. His prime focus is intellectual, we are, first and foremost, drawn to the speaker, Christ. Pasolini was fascinated by the main actor's combination of evocative eyes and gentle facial features, which at first contrast, then underpin his bellowing, angry exhortations. Even where spoken language fails, such as in the long eye contact between Mary and Joseph, the gentleness of expression succinctly articulates the strong feelings of both. Equally striking and centring is the camera's naturalist, almost random movement amongst the inarticulate, yet curiously expressive faces of the soldiers who arrive to slaughter the infants of Italian Bethlehem. We quickly understand that these men are as much of the periphery as those they have come to inflict pain upon. Yet at that moment, they have become agents of the distant centre. They act not for themselves, they are not their own centre. Pasolini illustrates such moments of alienation, of being off-centre, as it were, either with utter silence or, as it happens as the thorn crown is placed on Christ's head in the context of loud, equally inarticulate violence. We encounter the apostles in a similar manner. They, too, are men of the periphery, gathered on the shore of Lake Tiberias, away from their home and centre. Pasolini's use of intradiegetic gaze differs not from his, the camera's gaze. Each silent gaze fills the viewer with an insecurity: how strong is the faith of his apostles as they follow Christ in silence? What sentiments drive Judas as he watches his leader? What goes through Herod's mind, as [...] daughter asks for the head of John the Baptist? Will they, in their deeds and intentions follow their centre or become their own periphery by acting according to the demands of an external centre? This unease of an ambiguous gaze, set against the unambiguous teachings of Christ, creates an underlying sense of dislocation throughout the film. That the gospel story is in many ways the most powerful narrative basis for our European sense of 'centre-periphery-dynamic' is clearly evident in the scene of Christ's response to temptation in the wilderness. Christ's isolation, and with it, his centredness, is corroborated in the interplay between his moral choice and the sweeping gaze over the vastness of nature. Undoubtedly, this only accentuates Pasolini's open identification with Christ's nature as a wandering, isolated, tempted intellectual. Periphery is a given of man's constitution: he has the choice of a personal centre and an external centre to which he

subjugates himself at the cost of his own integrity and the loss of a centred, life-preserving gaze.

For Pasolini, Christ serves as the prototype of the enlightened man who recognizes his own periphery, and with it the necessity of a personal centredness. Chosen by an all-powerful centre which has necessarily no correspondent agent but himself, his family is sent to Egypt. He will desert his centre, his home, at an early stage, abandoning the centre-validated concept of family, of father and mother, for his own. His life is spent moving in the periphery, restoring centredness to a periphery falsely designated as such by an imposed, external centre. It is in order to free those with a false centredness that he visits towns and cities. These, expressly derided by Christ, are touched upon, passed by. They serve as locations of hypocrisy and inhumanity, and as the camera sweepingly passes over their surface, their skyline, they activate a dormant fear. The city lies forever in the background; its threatening menace is palpable. It forebodes no good. Christ's most vitriolic attacks are those against the falsehood of the 'scribes and pharisees' who are at the heart of a power dynamic he asks the individual to undermine. Cities, made of stone and petrification, locations where the 'centre-periphery-dynamic' is perverted, will fall, he announces.

Konstantarakis aptly speaks of Pasolini's view of the city as determined by "bourgeois immobility", set against the subversive activity, especially the wanderings of the younger on the outskirts of the city (cf. Tarkovsky, 212; . In this film, too, the outskirts are peopled by playing, boisterous children and young men, whose purposeless activity alone denotes their distance to the walled, petrified civilization of the centre. Konstantarakis emphasizes Pasolini's aversion to speed, both as a phenomenon of modern alienation as well as in the enactment of his gaze in his films. Christ and his apostles walk; their journey to the cities is long and arduous. Every time he sets out to preach in a town, we find him departing from untouched nature, heralding the arduous journey to the cities. "Centre and periphery," Konstantarakis says of Pasolini's tenets of visual representation, "are so far apart that the time needed to go from one to the other has to be long and painful": "Slow movement is the guarantee of the alienation of city centre from periphery; speed abolishes the otherness and perverts its significance."¹ The experience of one's own periphery against the imposing gaze of the centre is the basis of establishing one's own centre. That humankind does not engage in this dialectic, which will free it from the imposition of the values of a false centre, is Pasolini's Christ's greatest point of contention. To the extent that the periphery, and Pasolini views every being as being of this periphery, employs not only the language, and with it the modes of communication inherent in it, of the assumed centre, it fails to deal creatively and humanely with its own existence. The gaze which is ordered by an all-powerful, assumed centre knows no disruption: it relies on the compliance of all those who observe it, creating a smooth-running, disciplined machinery, in which humans form abstract agents of compliance and functionality. Pasolini's camera again and again brings the flow of the narrative to a rest. Right on the border of the city, noise and play erupts. This is the free space, the area as yet unconquered by the near centre. These centres are walled off against life and its intrusions; their insides intricate mazes, in which the outsider gets lost. Pasolini's eye does not infuse them with life; life emerges only as those from the outside enter, as if they were provoking the inhabitants out of their cells. The narrative is relayed from the periphery. In staying so close to the biblical text, Pasolini manages to re-emphasize the 'centre-periphery-dynamic' of the gospel. Pasolini's concept of centre versus periphery is of course, more subtle and dynamic than that. The first news of a threat to the centre, represented by Herod, is brought by the three wandering wise men. The centre reacts with immediate violence, namely wishing to remove the threat of an agency which brings to the people of the periphery the experience of themselves as the political as well as their own centre. This is the threat Christ represents.

A key cinematographic moment is the shot of the court of the high priests. The camera remains at a distance. What we see is a group of dignitaries, loosely conglomerating in a semi-circle. We cannot hear their discussions; and even as the voices are raised, the business conducted there reaches us in muffled, confused sounds. Yet we know that this is the centre where the decisions are made. It is left to the periphery to accept this as its centre and to comply with the beckoning of Caiaphas. Pasolini's gaze comes from the periphery, cordoned off from the centre. The centre does not need to articulate; the viewer can but expect the outcome of these semi-secret deliberations and preparations. In short, the periphery engages in a self-subjugating communication with a projected centre. The preparedness of the periphery to accept these deliberations, oblique and cabalistic as they may be, stands in stark contrast to the rejection of the open, unambiguous declarations of Christ, who, while employing the parable because his audience will not understand its own language, is not accepted as the centre. The helplessness, the inability to act against this projected 'centre-periphery-dynamic' which is not required to communicate itself, takes hold of the viewer as much as the apostles who watch Christ's trial. Peter's betrayal is, after all, a symbolic act of succumbing to the ever-present rule of a projected centre.

Pasolini's key concern is that that which is immediately accessible, that which is culturally immediate and indeed self-evident, is not registered by the inhabitant. He does not acknowledge the reality around him; the parabolic and the abstract are, and here Pasolini's open identification with Christ is at its most evident, desperate measures to return the viewer to that which is immediate, to his own centre. The parable, abstraction, are tools of alienation which are to return the gaze to what is culturally immediate, to avail of the culture which allows for communication. For Christ, parable and its inherent abstraction is clearly a didactic tool. He does not employ it in order to establish a canon of abstract regulations which subject a supposed periphery to the laws of an equally abstract centre. Such a canon he denounces in the litany against the 'scribes and Pharisees', which Pasolini has Christ deliver with unmistakable rage.ⁱⁱ In this respect, Pasolini's use of the gospel is unambiguous. Christ is forced to argue with the priests and scribes by means of parable; only in this manner can he engage with the language of the imposed centre, and, as a corollary, prevent his condemnation. To the masses, who watch in passive silence as he preaches, he has to employ that same degree of abstraction. Christ's profound disappointment with his own cultural sphere, the towns and the city of Jerusalem in particular, is expressed in his bitter realization that the prophet is always rejected in his own home. His audience cannot accept that a man who is of their own sphere, who speaks in their own language, can constitute a centre. Accordingly, they cannot accept themselves as a centre: "Whence hath *this* man this wisdom, and *these* mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things? And they were offended in him."ⁱⁱⁱ The masses prefer to put their faith in an abstract centre; that which lies before them and communicates with them in their own language becomes the periphery.

As Christ is crucified, and the expectant viewer waits for his final, desperate appeal to his father, Pasolini interpolates a previous passage from Matthew's gospel. He returns to the key paragraph in chapter 13 where he justifies to his followers why he uses parable. He explains to them that they understand because they see. Christ's emphasis is not primarily on a spiritual observation or consciousness, but, and this emphasizes Pasolini's own beliefs, on the inability of mankind to understand and articulate even their own sensual perception. The passage Pasolini inserts at this key dramatic moment reads in its entirety: "Therefore I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. [...] For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with

their ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”^{iv} The monolithic belief in the presumed universality of the language and laws propagated by a projected centre ends communication and despatches the subject into his own periphery.

Tarkovsky’s *Andrei Rublev* centres on that same ‘centre-periphery-dynamic’. He, too, addresses this dynamic in the context of political and social power constellations. He shares Pasolini’s views on the city-country divide, placing the real centre of Russia in its marginalized countryside (Gillespie, 55-56). Like Christ, the young monk Rublev is an outsider travelling in the company of his younger helpers. Deeply convinced of the moral precepts of his faith, a faith in large parts fed by scripture and monastic discipline, he sets out with two of his fellow-monks to bring his artistry as an icon-painter to the churches under the patronage of the two powerful brother princes. As much as the scriptures which he holds to be universally valid, he understands his paintings as a means of conveying this universal validity. Yet as he for the first time encounters the world around him, he painfully realizes the abstraction behind his ethical understanding of Christian faith. It is Kyrill, stronger in faith, but weaker in talent, who sees piety rather than faith in Rublev’s work.

The film opens with an Icarus-scene. A hot-air-balloon departs from a spire and for a few minutes our gaze is that of the overreaching human, our eyes sweeping over the plains of Russia. This experience, both uplifting and unnatural, allows us to sense simultaneously the vastness of what lies beneath and the seeming insignificance of man and animal alike. Tarkovsky leaves us in no doubt as to what he thinks of this abstract perspective: the balloon crashes, killing the passenger. At first this scene seems unrelated to the subsequent narrative. Yet the flowing river, the sweeping rain, the resting horses, and the church spire are images which recur throughout the film. The scene, of course, foreshadows Rublev’s spiritual journey. Tarkovsky has never left any doubt as to the specific Russian nature of his works. And whereas Pasolini uses his ‘construction of analogy’, Tarkovsky, fully aware of the limitations of reenacting historical events, places this film in a clear historical framework. That occasionally we still feel lost in time, called back to a particular moment by the historical dates which begin each chapter of the film, is very much due to his refusal to let a narrative of the centre intervene. Much in the same way as Pasolini, cities are briefly visited, insinuated as the journey’s end. But Rublev does not remain in these cities, and Tarkovsky identifies them just as Pasolini did: cities, be they Novgorod or Vladimir are sites of brutality, of subjection. They become locations that need to be missionized. The location of such a mission is the church, and the icons that raise the visitor’s eyes upwards. Rublev, at first mistakenly believing he is the herald of the centre, realizes his own periphery as he approaches the cities. He realizes how peripherous his beliefs are to this centre. This realization carries further: do not his own paintings lend themselves to the language that these centres speak and dictate? Rublev at first watches with unease the jester who ridicules the centre, the bojars. As a member of the establishment, averse to delectation of this kind and not trained in criticism of prevalent values, this is his first experience of a periphery which communicates itself in the bawdy, folkloristic performance of the jester, himself a wandering outsider. Tarkovsky’s enactment of the brutal punishment of this critic of the centre leaves us in no doubt as to the ‘centre-periphery-split’ of Russia. Rublev’s subsequent encounter with the pagans adds to his realization process. His gaze loses itself in the dusky forest. As the pagans catch him and utterly ridicule his Christian precepts as the laws of a centre that just at that moment holds no sway, he finds himself most palpably in the periphery. Equally confused his gaze settles on the naked woman whose gaze in turn lures him and evokes in him the realization of urges and needs his hitherto held centre condemns. His gaze alone tells us that in his mind he has sinned. Like Pasolini’s Christ, Rublev is followed by a number of

young men. With unease, but also with increasing sympathy he observes their impulsiveness, their pragmatism. His faith is as yet of an intellectual, abstract kind. Rublev's headstrong piety clashes with the world as he realizes how unavoidable sin can be when confronted with a centre-less world. Painfully, he watches as the bojars' men, yet again called by his monk brother Kyrill, arrest a fleeing pagan. He neither helps nor prevents the young woman making her escape across the river, to well aware of how he is caught between the laws of the centre and the periphery. This is the first indicator of Tarkovsky's psychological and spiritual approach to these dynamics: centre and periphery are personal acts of identification. Like Pasolini, Tarkovsky lets the gaze rest; but his gaze is directed at the cultural evocativeness of the landscape and the spiritual evocativeness of art, of the icon. He, too, relates to speed as Pasolini does. Rublev and his helpers walk, their progress is slow, and leads through the thicket of forests, the drenched mud of the plains. They rest, and the gaze is immersed in the flow of the water, the natural signs of decay and life. The two princes, indifferent to their country's and indeed their countrymen's plight, aggressively ride on horses. Where they arrive, they bring death, as do the tatars, who like their princely accomplices, enter cities to devastate them, viewing them as abstract [Beute]. How can people who speak the same language, victims of an unjust centre, murder each other, he enquires of the hardy, cynical Theophanes. Only when he himself kills a Russian to protect the female fool character, he realizes the terrible clash between the abstraction of the centre which upholds the system that creates a periphery and the realities of a periphery which will not allow a centre to grow within. The horrific siege of Wladimir is the most striking illustration of this split: The younger prince, believing he has been sent into the periphery through his brother's predominance, has no concern for what is around him. His language may be Russian, but his objective is abstract power and vengeance. Here power has become entirely culturally decentred, treating everything equally as an object and instrument. Rublev, deeply ashamed neither speaks nor creates any artefacts. Then the parallel story, an analogy yet again, of Boris, the young bell-maker intersects with Rublev's spiritual travels. It is in the confrontation with the earthy craftsmanship of the Russian peasants that Rublev finds his voice again. Following his brother Kyrill's angry exhortations that Rublev must make use of the immediate talents given to him and not abandon them for intellectual, abstract concerns, forego the doubts caused by the reflection on the general state of man and Russia in particular for his own part in cultural creation. He watches in awe as the magnificent bell is raised and soon begins to sound. As the Grand Prince arrives, he immediately removes the centre of power from the kneeling Boris. Boris, who had put aside all doubts and had riskily engaged in the task at hand, symbolizes that centredness which Rublev had doubted in himself. Having achieved his aim, Boris becomes redundant. The outcome of his centredness is hijacked by the centre of power. The camera moves to a full aerial view, distancing itself. Boris, too moves from the centre, comforted by Rublev, who now breaks his vow of silence. He asks Boris to join him, travelling in a periphery they have been assigned by the centre, to engage in the limited form of articulation their own centredness allows: bell-making and icon-painting.

Kieślowski's *A Short Film about Love* (1988) uses no Christian imagery or background. Yet here, too, man is invested with the ability to regain a degree of becoming his own centre under the tenet of New Testament ethics. The centre-periphery-dynamic becomes here as fluid as in the previous films. The hero Tomek lives in a high-rise estate, and there spends much of his spare time secretly observing the older and more experienced Magda. The entire *Decalogue*, much of it set in the same estate, embarks from the experience of periphery. Not only does the estate relate to the city as a satellite, but in Tomek's existence we encounter

another layer of periphery, a periphery within the periphery. It is his artificial, secret gaze which isolates him.

Tomek's life is in many ways governed by Magda whom he posits as the centre, while quite ignorant of himself as a centre of perception. His alarm-clock is set to Magda's time of returning home in the evenings. He suffers and laughs with Magda like a helpless cinema goer. Kieślowski remarks how films frequently identify with the lover's perspective, not with the loved one's (Kieślowski, 166-169). In this case it is clearly misleading to identify Tomek's gaze with the gaze of Tomek as centre. Only in the later confrontation with Magda's view is there a refraction of Tomek's centre. His isolation, his own subjection to the person or image of a person he posits becomes clear as he apologizes to Magda, having made an anonymous phone call. He wishes to see her react, and in this reaction sees a form of contact. Yet these forms of contact are achieved through instruments: the telephone, the money order forms slipped into her letter-box, and most significantly, through the telescope. Tomek's contact with Magda is through glass. The windows of the estate act like artificial eyes staring at each other across the deserted footpaths between the high-rises. Magda's window contains a magnifying plate, which yet again highlights the artificiality of Tomek's observations. Even when Magda appears at the post office, Tomek encounters her from the privacy and the protection through the safety glass. It is his honesty, as opposed to the secrecy of peeping into Magda's privacy, which unravels the plot. Kieślowski leaves us in little doubt that however unacceptable Tomek's behaviour is, his personal involvement has gone beyond that of a consuming spectator. He takes no interest in the crass 'Miss World' competition on the television to which his friend's mother invites him. With disbelief Magda listens to his declarations of love and especially his insistence that he wants nothing from her. Having been punished by one of Magda's boyfriends for his peeping, he does ask her to meet. It is after this moment, when Tomek for the first time openly declares himself and makes immediate contact, that Kieślowski lets us see the overjoyed Tomek becoming his own centre as he centrifugally turns the milk cart around him. At the very same moment, we meet the anonymous man with his suitcases, symbolizing not only the anonymity of the estate but also the fluidity of the centre-periphery-dynamic. Modern mobility, which is generally a euphemism for having to go 'where the money (and therefore the centre) is' reveals itself as a process of being thrown out of one's own centre into the periphery. Accordingly, as Magda reduces Tomek's naïve love to her to sexual intimacy, declaring: "That's all there is to love," Tomek rushes home and leaves the suitcase-carrying, nameless man to wander the deserted footpaths once again. Tomek's attempted suicide is an ambiguous act in the context of the centre-periphery-dynamic. On the one hand it symbolizes a complete de-centring of himself, on the other the collision of his abstract expectations and the reality of Magda's response. Yet as Magda awaits his return from the hospital, she, too, realizes her removal from her own centre. It is the absence of involved observation which she notices in her past boyfriends, the curious pleasure of having become a centre for someone else, and having become such, sensing herself both as a centre of observation and realizing the futility of a self-interest which does not engage with the other, Kieślowski's key concern throughout the Decalogue. It is painful to watch how Magda cannot even establish Tomek's surname; the letter-boxes are numbered, not named. Tomek spends much time learning foreign languages; yet in his own he fails to make contact. He seeks contact, a place in his own world by acquiring extraneous language and tools such as the telescope and Magda's letters. The post office is a soulless bureaucracy governed by harsh laws, not a centre of communication. The irony of the film lies, of course, with the realization that Tomek as much as the viewer breaks out of his perceptual isolation, his decentredness by means of instruments and artifice: the telescope, the camera lens, entering a foreign, alien life. Yet he gains himself as a centre only by abandoning them, by recognizing the validity of the original impulse to make contact and to

be part of their own immediate environment. As in Pasolini's film, abstraction, parable and artifice appear as possible correctives, illustrating ultimately how redundant and in fact destructive they are. Integrity of perception rests with the culturally mediated, personal experience.

In all three films, even in Tarkovsky's iconographic representation of a centre, the self remains not only the key agent in positing a centre, but becomes the only ethically valid centre. The discovery of this self as centre grows out of the confrontation between abstract, universalist or extraneous demands and the personal, always culturally mediated experience of the immediate environment. This creates an identity, to quote Hall, which "is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history" (Ang, 28). This dictum explicitly informed all three directors (Siciliano, 266; Kieślowski 143-145; Tarkovsky 193) To the extent that the centre becomes the point of reference and informs the gaze, the subjective perception itself, cultural globalisation and abstraction is an authoritarian process. It invests a perceptual codex, which is not subject to democratic, less alone critical or creative control with an absolutist demand of validity. "His time is everyone's time," Jakob Wassermann says of one of his most authoritarian characters who replaces his own perspective with that of an abstract law and thereby simultaneously abandons his own experience, emotions and values.

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ⁱ Konstantarakis, 116

ⁱⁱ St. Matthew, 23.

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Matthew, 13:54-58.

^{iv} St. Matthew, 13:13-15.