

# Introduction



This book is about the philosophy of the organic and how it interacts with the aesthetics of cinema. Organic is anything relating to a living entity. Organic matter can evolve, but it can also decay. In philosophy, the living aspect of the organic structure has prompted several generations of thinkers to develop approaches able to see various cultural and natural phenomena as dynamic: the organic has often been described as the interplay of evolution and decomposition.

The main purpose here is to develop the idea of “organic cinema.” The essence of the organic will derive from not only cinema theory but also the theory of architecture, where the organic has reached a high level of sophistication. Many organic philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries explored in this book have had an immediate impact on architectural theory. Surprisingly, film theorists have generally been unaware of this body of thought revolving around organic architectural theory or have only tentatively shown interest in it, usually by approaching segments of this tradition via the work of Henri Bergson. Both organic cinema and organic architecture base their activities on the idea that the image character of their medium needs to be overcome and that creativity in their respective arts should be seen as a sculpting of space or time. As a result, techniques, as well as theoretical aspirations, move to the background, while practical aspects of the arts are emphasized.

## Slow Cinema, Contemplative Cinema

Organic cinema is related to “slow cinema” and “contemplative cinema.” However, while the latter two remain, in my opinion, relatively vague terms,<sup>1</sup> organic cinema is supposed to be more precise as a theoretical notion. Unlike slow and contemplative, “organic” is not merely atmospheric. One reason the terms “slow cinema” and “contemplative cinema” have remained relatively vague until recently is because they tend

to be used as “foggy, dark, monotonous, and nostalgic” in order to cover the styles of many film directors. I extract the definition of organic cinema from an analysis of three Béla Tarr films, more precisely, his trilogy of *Damnation* (1988), *Satantango* (1994), and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000). However, Tarr is not the only organic film director. Andrei Tarkovsky, Aki Kaurismäki, Theo Angelopoulos, and Reha Erdem, to name but a few, are similarly organic because they attempt to capture life in a wandering fashion by following its haphazard rhythm and paying as much attention to details as to “cosmic” questions.<sup>2</sup>

However, for some reason, Tarr must receive privileged treatment. First, in terms of slowness, Tarr is arguably more emphatic than anybody else. Second, Tarr says the “rhythm [of his films] is provided not by the story but by the actors, by the play of the actors” (Breteau-Skira 2010: 18). He also says his films “are not action/cut, action/cut” but that he is trying to “understand the temporality without forgetting that this is a life and that it is happening” (22). I find that these claims correspond best to a cinema based on the principles of organic development. The fluid, long takes follow a rhythm inspired by the inherent qualities of the shot footage, not of the editing. This rhythm is precisely how one of the pioneers of organic architecture, the German organicist architect Hugo Häring, defined his architectural method: “Search for shapes rather than impose them, discover forms rather than construct them” (1925: 4).<sup>3</sup> As will be shown, contemplative cinema can learn a lot from the theory and practice of organic architecture, particularly from Gestalt theory, which sees single architectural components as parts of a system of dynamic relationships. The Gestalt evolves as a hybrid of form and being and has self-organizing tendencies.

## Hungary

Generally speaking, our present age is not organic but rather marked by the brutal competition of different universalisms—clashes that seem to be programmed in the near future. According to Islamic extremists, a universal moral order should be obtained by imposing the rules established by God on an Islamic state. This God-based universalism clashes with another universalism: the rationality with which “Western” thought is often identified, whose most famous derivatives are democracy and egalitarianism. Quasi-religious environmentalism represents another universalism. In this world of competing universalisms, organic thought formulates an alternative.

Ambitions to develop an organic vision of the world have become a serious undertaking in a place perhaps few people would expect to find it: Hungary. Film director Béla Tarr, architect Imre Makovecz, and writer László Krasznahorkai have been obsessed with organic forms of expression for decades. Their organic ambitions become manifest in various ways and cover a spectrum reaching from the politically conservative to the progressive and from the religious to the atheist. But all three share a rootedness in Central and Eastern European culture.<sup>4</sup> Equally important is a strong connection with rural culture and tradition, as well as questions about their possible decline/resurrection in a modern and globalized world. Hungary thus becomes a showcase for a certain form of organicism able to define the universal beyond individual/universal paradigms. In organic philosophies, the universal is not spelled out in the form of abstract rules, nor does one cling to individual, communal, national, or private expressions. The search present in the work of these three Hungarians goes for the universal in the sense of “cosmic.”

## Béla Tarr

The three films chosen for demonstrating organic cinema are distinct from Tarr’s earlier ones—with the exception of *Almanac of Fall* (1985)—because they show the director’s pronounced interest in formal experiment. All three films also present elaborately designed, bleak, run-down, and desolate settings that many foreign spectators might spontaneously associate with rural parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Similar Hungarian films existed before, for example, Zoltán Fabri’s *Hungarians* (1978) or *Bálint Fábrián Meets God* (1980), in which an emphasis on poverty, drunkenness, and ignorance portray rural life.

Krasznahorkai’s novel *Satantango* was published in 1985, and Tarr’s eponymous film is from 1994. Thus, the film has roots in the communist world but also stretches into the capitalist era. *Satantango* tells the story of a ruined collective farm whose inhabitants are having affairs with each other, conspiring against each other, and constantly being observed by a drunken doctor (Peter Berling). The charismatic trickster Irimiás (Mihály Vig) manages to cheat most of the villagers out of the little savings they have, though he himself is manipulated by the local government. In the film, he and his companion, Petrina (Putyi Horváth), represent both the former totalitarian state and the new economy.

The elliptical narrative of *Werckmeister Harmonies*<sup>5</sup> revolves around a traveling exhibition featuring a dead whale accompanied by a mys-

terious, crippled guru called “the Prince,” who is trying to bring social unrest and violence to the village. The Prince’s political strategies are absurd and megalomaniac, and they culminate in random ransacking. The reclusive, elderly musicologist György Eszter (Peter Fitz) and the young mail carrier Janos Valuska (Lars Rudolph) oppose the Prince’s undoing. Eszter’s estranged wife *Tünde* (*Hanna Schygulla*), who is allied with the local police chief, also opposes the Prince, though her purpose is to take command of the village. At the end of the film, troops are stationed on the streets, and the mysterious whale is destroyed. Valuska falls into a vegetative state and is interned in a mental asylum.

In *Damnation*, a provincial cabaret singer (Vali Kerekes), her husband Sebestyén (György Cserhalmi), her former lover Karrer (Miklós B. Székely), and the bartender Willarsky (Gyula Pauer) betray each other in all possible ways. The plot ends with the former lover’s denunciation of the other three characters. The film was released in 1988—one year before the downfall of the Iron Curtain—but it already plays, like *Satan-tango*, on the dual ground of communism and capitalism, one being as decadent as the other. Sebestyén has debts and, according to Karrer, he faces “irrevocable disintegration.” Similar to what Irimiás does in *Satan-tango*, Karrer cunningly suggests “there might be a way to stop the ruin.”

## Organic Cinema?

Roughly speaking, organic architecture has existed since Frank Lloyd Wright, but the concept of the organic can be traced to philosophical sources from romantic thinkers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Despite its historical and contemporary importance in the humanities, the idea of the organic in film theory remains highly underdeveloped. Tarkovsky provided potentially one of the first metaphors destined to define cinema as an organism when writing, “the time that pulsates through the blood vessels of the film, making it alive” (1986: 114). He expresses a similar pattern through his organic intention to create “an entire world reflected as in a drop of water” (110). More recently, Daniel Frampton’s ambition to grasp a cinematic thinking process he calls “film-mind” (filmind), which he believes to be capable of conceptualizing “all film as an organic intelligence” (2006: 7), accounts for another attempt of employing the organic in the service of cinematic aesthetics. Among the more concrete associations of the organic with cinematic structures is James Goodwin’s proposal (made in his book on Sergei Eisenstein) to contrast

an organic cinema with an intellectual cinema: “Where form in intellectual cinema establishes ideological perspective and critical distance, in organic cinema form fuses author, content, and individual spectator” (1993: 176).

A few other attempts at seeing film as an organic phenomenon without naming it as such do exist. In the 1960s, film critic and director Paul Mayersberg claimed: “[Michelangelo] Antonioni and [Jean-Luc] Godard conceive their films in shots. They don’t write a scenario and then think how to do it. A distinction between the event and the treatment is meaningless for *The Eclipse* because the shots are events in themselves” (Perkins et al. 1963: 32). Steven Marchand has picked up Mayersberg’s thread of thoughts in order to sketch the rules of an “event-based” cinema in which “nothing happens apart from the shot itself” (2009: 139). From Antonioni’s “pure events,” which are produced by autonomous camera movements and describe “nothing,” Marchand draws a line to Tarr’s “emphasis on the concrete physicality of the event” (143). Tarr systematically develops the “event cinema,” especially in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, by favoring the sequence shot. Marchand concludes that this way of filming is organic because “what is captured whole is the event in the fullness of its occurrence” and the shot as a whole “is undivided from what happens in it” (147). These ideas overlap more or less with how organic architecture approaches the “materiality” of its elements.

Gilles Deleuze frequently mentions the word organic—it appears 114 times in *Cinema 1* (1986) and 34 times in *Cinema 2* (1989)—without exploring its intrinsic character determined by a specific philosophical tradition. This lack of investigation is surprising given that Deleuze’s own distinction between the movement-image characterized by action, the time-image emerging with neorealism, and the French New Wave characterized by stillness prefigures some points that appear in contemporary discussions of slow cinema. Nevertheless, the organic for Deleuze is simply a sort of unity he deals with in a chapter on montage (1986, chap. 3). The organic input will be relevant mainly for matters of image composition. In “The Laws of Organic Composition,” a section in chapter 9 (“The Action-Image”), Deleuze introduces the action-image as an “organic representation in its entirety” (1986: 151). The meaning of the word organic here is likened to that of “concrete,” especially since Deleuze decides to contrast the organic image with the “crystal-image,” which is more abstract, virtual, and self-contained. However, Deleuze never uses the organic as a critical tool to evaluate the potential formalism of action-images. For him, the organic action-image is simply

“structural because the places and the moments are well defined in their oppositions and their complementarities” (1986: 151). In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze calls montage the “organic composition of movement-images” (1989: 28), which is the source of classical narration. In this sense, Eisenstein is “organic” for Deleuze because his representation “includes spatial and temporal caesuras” (1986: 152).

## Organic Cinema and Organic Architecture

### *Space and Time*

This book’s parallel treatment of film and architecture is justified for several reasons. In general, themes concerning the production and perception of space, surfaces, and light are essential to understanding both film and architecture. Films offer spatial experiences just like buildings do. Furthermore, buildings can be cinematic because people interact in dramatic or nondramatic ways in built spaces. Theoretical terms like aura, representation, narrativity, montage, place, rhythm, and typology concern both film and architecture. Architect Jean Nouvel has said: “architecture exists, like cinema, in the dimension of time and movement. One conceives and reads a building in terms of sequences. To erect a building is to predict and seek effects of contrast and linkage through which one passes” (Rattenbury 1994: 35). Some contemporary architects have even decided to replace the word “site” with “plot” in order to do justice to the particularity of local sites, which is fading more and more. According to the British architects collective Urbanomic, the change from site to plot was necessary because sites “become increasingly assimilated into the capitalist logic of regeneration and value creation” (from the blurb of *When Site Lost the Plot*, Mackay 2015). For the Urbanomic team, a “plot” in the sense of a story line is supposed to make the place more authentic.

Another way of making architecture organic is to integrate time into the design. Again, by doing so, architecture comes closer to film. The organic Japanese architect Tadao Ando once forced himself to see a building as a garden and to observe “subtle changes taking place from moment to moment, from season to season, and from year to year.... There is life in the parts, and these parts together breathe new life in the whole. When I look at a garden that, like an organism, is never complete but, instead, exists in time, I wonder if I cannot create buildings that live, that is, buildings that are adrift in time” (1991b: 19). Here, architecture becomes a “cinematic” event determined by time and organic development.

## **Materiality**

Another key topic of organic cinema and architecture is “materiality.” Both organic cinema and organic architecture value a contemplative exploration of spatial and temporal experience through a rediscovery of the material. Once again, Tarkovsky is the forerunner, as his long and fluid takes are based, according to Vlada Petric, “on the director’s belief that the camera is capable of unearthing the hidden significance of the material world” (1989: 29).

## ***Organic versus Constructivist in Architecture and Film***

The “nonorganic” approach has often been called the “constructing” approach and remains a pertinent expression in not only architecture but also cinema. Dudley Andrew uses an architectural metaphor, suggesting that, in what I call nonorganic cinema, the shots are simply bricks: “In its realist genres, Hollywood cinema molds and bevels every shot into a brick that can be smoothly attached to neighboring bricks in forming the bridge of the story” (2005: xiv). Organic cinema does not construct with bricks but tries to formulate different relationships between particular expressions, as well as the time/space they are in.

## **Social Critique**

Organic cinema and architecture have yet another point in common. Both run counter to the perspective of mainstream cinema and architecture, which either seek comfort in familiarity and predictability or work with spectacular image-driven effects aimed at impressing the masses. This means organic architects and film directors are distinguished by an anti-capitalist critical potential willing to critique consumerist “fast architecture” and action cinema. In Hungary, the organic has traditionally been used in this political sense, because, according to Judit Frigyesi, the “emphasis on organicism was itself a political statement. It was the declaration of the liberation of art from political propaganda and a clear stance against both artistic conservatism and the emptiness of mass culture” (2000: 92).

Contemplative cinema and slow cinema have been related to “poetic cinema,” with which Tarkovsky is often associated. This is an interesting fact in its own right that deserves further exploration in a separate study. Obviously, thoughts and feelings are more efficiently transmitted in poetry when the performance is slow, allowing contemplation. Po-

etic elements often enter Tarkovsky's films via the metonymy, a figure of speech in which one term is substituted for another. The metonymy does not necessarily help engender an understanding of the item but refers us to something else. Tarkovsky's use of metonymies makes his cinema slow because metonymies make the viewer stand and contemplate. They are not like metaphors, which can be understood and integrated in the overall flow of the narrative. Metonymies interrupt the time flow or make it tenacious and sticky, creating a certain mood or atmosphere. In poetics, metonymies are said to provide profundity.

In contemplative cinema, slowness becomes a virtue, just like the waste of time and space can become virtues in architectural designs that do not follow the rationality or functionality of the grid. Song Hwee Lim points to the explicit link between slow cinema and the Slow Food movement, which attempts to rediscover the flavors and savors of regional cooking: "The Slow movement advocates downsizing to the level of the local and places emphases on organic origins, artisanal processes, and ethical products. These values are anathema to speed" (2014: 3). Both slow cinema and organic architecture represent lifestyle revolutions and are likely to have a liberating function. Forty years ago, Paul Virilio (1977), architect by profession, singled out speed as the primary force shaping civilization. Finally, speed will lead us to "war at the speed of light" (Virilio 2002). If this is true, then slow cinema and organic architecture formulate alternative directions of the development of human civilization.

The idea of "resistance" is very important in many of the works discussed here. The title of Krasznahorkai's book *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1998)—which Tarr adapted into *Werckmeister Harmonies*—suggests a curious fusional concept composed of melancholy and resistance. I will show that the film can also be seen as the key notion for any "revolution through slowness." The theme is indeed proper to Krasznahorkai. In many of his works from the 1980s and 1990s, Krasznahorkai depicts vanity, perfidy, treason, and paranoia by showing how characters act slowly within an absurd universe. Those people are not passively and naïvely submitted to the absurd world they live in but are constantly trying to move forward. Of course, in the end, they do not get anywhere, which makes them melancholic. However, the melancholy has been part and parcel of the special form of resistance from the beginning. A resistance working through melancholy (by thus being a "resistance of melancholy," for that matter) tends to employ slowness in order to create a complex critique of social conditions. For Kraszna-



horkai, this seems to be a matter of lifestyle, as he affirms to having staggered all his life “between the deadly sweetness of sadness and the irresistible desire to revolt” (2001: 86). His characters seem to do the same.

### ***Silence and Melancholy***

A supplementary dimension concerning the intrinsic link between slowness and the organic is produced by the particular status of sound. Again, this concerns both cinema and architecture. Lim suggests that slow films privilege “silence and abstinence of sonic elements usually heard on film” (2014: 10). Ira Jaffe also refers to silence as an essential component of slow cinema, especially for Antonioni (2014: 69). In film, silence can represent a form of essential purity, which is why film directors often use it to produce dreamlike impressions (cf. Botz-Bornstein 2007a: 40–43). The same is true for architecture, as Ando highlights: “I prefer for the space to speak and for the walls to produce no sense of their own identities” (1991: 1). For Ando, the silence is inspired by the Buddhist concept of emptiness (see Botz-Bornstein 2015, chap. 6). According to the Hungarian architect Botond Bogner, organic architecture considers that “silent spaces cannot be seen with the eyes; they are felt with the heart” (1982: 19). The silent spaces are here “felt” in a way similar to how time is felt in slow cinema.

A clear link appears between silence and melancholy: silence has something melancholic about it. Silence is not the mere absence of sound, but it can be experienced as a “soundless bass,” to borrow the beautiful words of the Hungarian philosopher Béla Hamvas, whose thoughts on melancholy will be of interest later. Hamvas believed he heard in the melancholic works of older artists the “low, monotonous and almost soundless bass [which is] the only place of Being that is not more intensive than the paradise of logos” (2008: 17). At the beginning of his book on the Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-Liang, Lim reproduces a sentence from Mary Ann Doane about the emergence of time feeling in modernity: “Time was indeed felt—as a weight, as a source of anxiety, and as an acutely pressing problem of representation” (Doane 2002: 4; Lim 2014: 11). Doane still perceives the reverberations of this break today in the instantaneity of modern electronic media. Lim, on the other hand, draws from here a link toward slow cinema because he believes “time itself” is represented in these films, which can best be felt within the periods of slow cinema silence.

When Bogner says “silent spaces are felt with the heart” (1982: 19), he means there is no speech in those spaces except the speech uttered by the empty space or by the walls. Through silence, organic architecture—and organic film—can produce a certain style or atmosphere that will not be expressed by means of rules and principles. The “style” of this architecture simply appears—silently. Ando holds that in his buildings, it is the space that speaks, not the (noisy) concrete elements surrounding or occurring in the space. In other words, the silence creates this architectural form or style. Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose philosophy relates to the mathematical and scientific problems central to *Werckmeister Harmonies* and whose ideas will be discussed accordingly (chapter 7), would say such a style is a quality that “shows itself” in the form of a silent expression. This silence of the space expresses everything that one cannot speak about: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” is the last line of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1921] 1990: 111). In the present discussion on aesthetics, silence turns those architectural and cinematic expressions into self-sufficient entities. Some might find this input “transcendental,” and much of this book discusses whether this word can grasp the essence of both organic cinema and organic architecture.

### ***The Silence of Evolution***

This study on the organic is very much concerned with philosophical questions of nature and evolution. Here, “silence” remains a relevant theme. In the context of organic philosophy of nature, silence represents a moment of standstill in which evolution stops and invites us to a brief instance of contemplation. There are several such moments in Krasznahorkai’s writings:

There was a moment when the world stood still, and during this moment the leaves stopped vibrating, the elastic swinging of the branches stopped, but also the flow inside the veins of the trees and stems and roots, an ant population that had so far been carrying its possessions diagonally across a path, stumbled, a pebble that had just started rolling did not roll further, and the wood worms in the pillars and consoles stopped ... in a word, everything, animal and plant and stone and all secret interior processes, everything was, for one moment, canceled in its existence—for the only purpose that the next moment could come and everything would continue where it had stopped. (2005: 13)

## Contemplation and the Art of Being Disinterested

The main topic of *Werckmeister Harmonies* is the confrontation of science with art or of mathematics/analysis with contemplation. The opposition of analysis and contemplation represents a classic philosophical theme prominent in the history of science since antiquity. One point at issue is that the “perfect” image of a mathematized reality does not necessarily correspond to the reality “out there.” Rather, this reality can be grasped through a contemplative approach. For “the preeminent ancient theorists of the cosmos, Plato and Aristotle, physics was not fully mathematizable because only whatever was perfect could be perfectly mathematical” (Wallace 1987: xxix). These philosophical ideas are at the root of musicologist Eszter’s obsession with music as a phenomenon “being close to an approximation to perfection” (Krasznahorkai 1998: 112–13).

Based on these observations, one can conclude that contemplation and analysis are two different attitudes: psychologically, culturally, and scientifically. It is necessary to examine contemplation as a philosophical concept more closely. Contemplating is different from looking and seeing, as well as from scientific observation. Contemplation provides a cognitive surplus because the contemplation of the present often goes together with reflections about not only what is seen in the present but also what has been in the past and what will be the future. Thus, contemplation often has a stumbling and hesitating quality. While we contemplate, we constantly guess proximate meanings we derive from neighboring sources. This is also why “slowness” becomes such an important feature in contemplation. Obviously, the contemplative approach is different from analysis because the latter should be effectuated in an increasingly “time-efficient” fashion in the modern world.

However, the meaning of the word “contemplation” must be further fine-tuned if it is to function within the present theoretical discussion of the organic. Attention has been drawn to the critical potential that both slow cinema and organic architecture can hold their own against consumerist “fast architecture” and action cinema. In philosophical terms, the word “contemplative” can appear slightly misleading because it does not necessarily make this critical potential obvious. “Contemplative” could mistakenly be related to the idealist tradition attempting to see the world in purely theoretical terms. However, in the type of cinema in question here, contemplation has more concrete and more existential connotations, because by contemplating the world, the con-

templator also contemplates the meaning and—possibly—the organic finiteness of her own existence. In this sense, and despite its faltering and meditating qualities, contemplation is not merely idealist and otherworldly but also (self-)critical. Moreover, the contemplating mind can declare solid and everlasting structures supported by official regimes to be fragile and “merely” organic.

In any case, contemplation is only possible when the contemplated element appears in a detached form, independent of all contingencies and random circumstances to which it was submitted within its original environment. Only then can the contemplated object be understood “as something,” that is, its essence can appear. Hermeneutic philosophy holds that contemplation can provide new insights into an already-known element. I derive those thoughts from the theory of understanding involving anamnesis (recollection) as developed by Plato in the dialogues *Meno* and *Phaedo*.<sup>6</sup> Most important for the present discussion is that contemplation is submitted to a paradox: its critical input is due to not only a potential engagement but also its intrinsic disinterestedness. Paradoxically, just because contemplation is to a considerable extent disinterested, it has often been frowned upon in revolutionary places such as Stalinist Russia. In ethico-aesthetic terms, contemplation describes the approach of the autonomous artist and consumer eager to observe and record reality independently. And they do so by maintaining a critical distance from the world they contemplate. Today, “contemplation” is frowned upon in certain Islamic countries where existentialism or other philosophical exercises advertising themselves more or less explicitly as contemplative are often undesired. To my knowledge, a film program on “Existential Cinema” at the American University of Sharjah was canceled in 2014 because the administration found that such efforts “to contemplate one’s existential conditions” contradict religious belief. The ambition to maintain a critical distance from reality in order to obtain a fresh relationship through contemplation can appear subversive in any system eager to establish the existence of “reality” in an authoritarian fashion (this process probably became clearest in socialist realism), no matter if the regime is communist, capitalist, or religiously oriented.

All of this means that melancholic contemplation leads to resistance, and the “melancholy of resistance” must be understood in this sense. The fusional concept of melancholy and resistance is provocative because it implies a resistance of melancholy implemented by a contemplative approach toward reality. As will be shown, this melancholy is not so much “disinterested” in the sense of a negation of real-

ity. The latter would indeed be pathological along the lines laid down by Sigmund Freud in his *Mourning and Melancholia*. For Freud, melancholy is characterized by the “cessation [*Aufhebung*] of any interest in the outside world” and the “inhibition of all activity” ([1917] 1957: 244). However, the disinterested contemplation sparked by melancholy and its silence—topics of Tarr’s and Krasznahorkai’s works—is not pathologically passive but active: it can lead to resistance.

### ***Contemplating the Stars***

The astronomical theme so heavily exploited in *Werckmeister Harmonies* also bears a close relationship with the idea of contemplation. Tarkovsky once said one should watch his films “as one watches the stars” (1986: 9), and the observation of the nightly sky is perhaps the most original contemplative activity humanity has ever engaged in. Hans Blumenberg writes in *The Genesis of the Copernican World* that the cosmos was seen in antiquity as something whose “contemplation” could be man’s highest fulfillment (1987, sections 5 and 6), and Thomas S. Kuhn begins *The Copernican Revolution* by explaining the contemplation of the sky as, in the first place, a poetic activity:

Seen on a clear night, the sky speaks first to the poetic, not to the scientific, imagination. No one who views the night sky can challenge Shakespeare’s vision of the stars as “night candles” or Milton’s image of the Milky Way as a “broad and ample road, whose dust is gold, and pavement stars.” (1957: 7)

I will show (most lengthily in chapter 7) that *Werckmeister Harmonies* is linked to the discipline of “musical theology” practiced in the seventeenth century, at which the theoretician Andreas Werckmeister was adept. The harmony of the stars was supposed to reflect the harmony of music because God created both the stars and music. In European culture, the idea of the perfect overlap of nature, math, and God has always had a strong tie to astronomy. The search for harmony, especially in the Werckmeisterian musical context, has always had cosmological aspirations.

### ***Contemplating Reality***

How should we see reality? Is the world measurable and fully mathematizable, or does contemplation provide a surplus of information about reality in the same way anamnesis, according to Plato, provides new

insights about elements that are already known? The contemplative approach bears a strong link with philosophical questions concerning the reality character of its medium. What is “reality” for (or in) organic cinema? Once again, the answer can derive from comparisons with organic architecture, which does not imitate nature but rather is meant to *be* nature; similarly, organic cinema does not imitate reality but is an existential reality that organically develops out of certain elements. Accordingly, Marchand describes the “event-based” cinema of Tarr in such existential terms: “Eszter’s house is indivisible from the event it depicts. It is that event” (2009: 147).

Tarr’s and Krasznahorkai’s treatments of the “Werckmeister harmonies” musicological problem reflect the principles of the organic particularly well. In this book, I demonstrate that “natural harmony” in musical theory is called the “organically created space” in architectural theory. Drawing lines in architecture or editing a film in the Eisensteinian manner, on the other hand, represent a sort of Werckmeisterian tuning. Overall, this study shows that contemplation, as opposed to mathematical analysis, locates an organic web in the form of an immanent, self-sufficient, hermeneutically determined, “natural logic” present in the form of neither empirical facts nor of abstract rules. The Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács once brought this constellation to a point when writing in *The Theory of Literature*: “When life quae life finds an immanent meaning in itself, the categories of the organic determine everything: an individual structure and physiognomy is simply the product of a balance between the part and the whole, mutually determining one another” ([1920] 1971: 65). This idea is important in musical theory and architectural theory and should also be discussed in the context of film theory.

## Organic Practice

The imaginary musicologist György Eszter’s obsession with “natural harmony” directly follows from the above considerations of organic philosophy. Moreover, theories of organic architecture offer close examinations of the “natural” and the “calculated,” as well as of potential conflicts arising between them. However, the discrepancy between the natural and the calculated are also manifest in how organic architecture and cinema proceed in practical terms. Organic architecture often works without a preconceived plan because its forms are supposed to develop on the site. Makovecz, for example, did not “trust architects who

claim the program must be learned as a function,” but instead the design “reveals itself during the planning process” (Gerle 2010: 33). Newly created spaces must be contemplated first; only then can the next step be undertaken (to describe the process as the concept of “contemplative architecture” here would be not at all misleading). Sometimes the drawings are made only to obtain building regulations permissions—and only after the building is accomplished. Likewise, Tarr (2001) affirms to “never use the script. We just write it for the foundations and the producers and we use it when looking for the money. ... We have a story but I think the story is only a little part of the whole movie.” Through this in situ process of detail development, the aesthetics of the organic aims to fully exploit the location.

### ***Construction, Deconstruction, and the Organic***

The junction where the organic model of evolution-decomposition meets postmodern philosophies of “deconstruction” will receive special attention in this book. In Tarr’s films, forms are not merely deconstructed; rather, a sense of (an often uncanny) totality subsists. The Hungarian-American film scholar Yvette Bíró sees in Tarr’s long takes the “imperative to follow through” (2008: 169) because the long takes often convey a feeling of inevitability or even of the power of destiny. The length of the shots is not due to the director’s aesthetic decision in the first place, but instead the shots are experienced as self-determined or perhaps even determined “from above.” This artistic ability to install a totality clearly opposes postmodern ideologies of deconstructive fragmentation. Instead, this artistic ability denotes a modern approach that must be called organic. In this sense, the organic offers an interesting alternative to both modern constructivism and postmodern deconstructionism.

In architecture, the term “organic” in connection with a particular way of using form, space, and material has prospered for more than a century. Organic architecture goes back to Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan but is also linked to other famous architects such as Hugo Häring, Bruce Goff, Antoni Gaudí, and Ödön Lechner (nicknamed “the Hungarian Gaudí”). In this book, I concentrate on Imre Makovecz, the initiator of Hungarian organic architecture (*organikus építészet* or *szerves építészet*) or living architecture (*élőépítészet*). The book might sometimes read like a sociocultural history of Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe, which is not entirely unintended.

## László Krasznahorkai

László Krasznahorkai, whose demanding novels *Satantango* (1985) and (the central part of) *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989) served as the blueprint for Tarr's films *Satantango* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*,<sup>7</sup> manifests a similar obsession with the organic. The analysis of Krasznahorkai's writings will provide valuable input for "organic philosophy" from the field of literature. First, Krasznahorkai's novels are very much about decay, which provides a clearly organic aspect. In *Kegyelmi viszonyok* (Under the conditions of grace) (1986), Krasznahorkai explores death, or, more precisely, absurd and arbitrary death. At the same time, he presents decay as something aesthetically and even spiritually elevating. In the story "Milyen gyönyörű" (How beautiful), Krasznahorkai explains, "We can perceive in a landscape in the profoundest beauty and in the profoundest decay something—something that refers to us" (contained in 2015b: 25). Throughout his work, Krasznahorkai describes in vivid and lengthily detailed language how organic matter is given to decomposition. The "Werckmeister Harmonies" part of *The Melancholy of Resistance* ends with a two-page description of a decaying corpse, rendering technical details from chemistry and concluding that "from the moment of birth every living organism carries within it the seeds of its own destruction" (Krasznahorkai 1998: 314). Similar—often-excessive—descriptions of organic processes appear in the novel *Seiobo There Below* (2013c) (see chapter 2). Krasznahorkai's world is organic up to the point that even nonorganic matter is bound to decay and rot, as described in *Satantango*: "So that, in the unremittingly brief time allowed for the purpose, the walls might crack, the windows shift and the doors be forced from their frames; so that the chimney might lean and collapse, the nails might fall from the crumbling walls, and the mirrors hanging from them might darken" (2012a: 115). This is more or less what really happens in Tarr's last film, *The Turin Horse* (2011).

Passages containing an "organic message" are even more frequent in Krasznahorkai's novel *Északról hegy, Délről tó, Nyugatról utak, Keletről folyó* (From the north by hill, from the south by lake, from the west by roads, from the east by river), where a cypress is presented as an envoy transmitting "a message about its history and its existence that nobody will ever understand because this understanding is not the matter of humans" (2005: 88). The natural tree is meant to contain bits of philosophical information, which is a pantheistic idea sometimes used in organic philosophy. Furthermore, the jet stream—with its billions of particles, including viruses, bacteria, vegetal parts, pollen, and algae colo-



nies—circulating around the earth is described in great scientific detail. The division of cells is described in a similar fashion, which the author believes to be an “unbelievably long and strange story.” An insistence on the literary depiction of cyclical structures also “bring us back to the point where the whole cycle had started, that is, the genesis of spore capsules” (90).

Of course, the description of the world as an organic phenomenon also has metaphorical dimensions, as people and the existing society have been slowly but notably disappearing from rural communities during the slow breakdown of the communist system. The breakdown itself had been a long process of decomposition announced by Emmanuel Todd as early as 1976. In *The Final Fall: Essay on the Decomposition of the Soviet Sphere*, he examines suicide rates, infant mortality, and alcoholism but also absurdities like the delivery of truckloads of shoes for only the right foot. In agreement with the principle of “melancholic resistance,” Krasznahorkai’s agenda is one of decomposition and resisted decomposition. Accordingly, the protagonist of the story “Rozi a trükkös” (Rozi the tricky one), in *Kegyelmi viszonyok*, writes that he attempts “to master the process of deterioration and decomposition in order to obtain a state of total solitude and independence” (2015c: 87).

## The Whole and the Part: Hermeneutics

The organic in Krasznahorkai’s work (as well as in Tarr’s) is also presented as an aesthetic device closely related to hermeneutic discourses on the relationship between the part and the whole. Krasznahorkai in particular is very much aware of this philosophical theme’s importance. He notes, for example, about the photos of cameraman and photographer Gábor Medvigy, that “the whole we are seeking is not simply an accumulation of individual elements” and that “those to whom it is obvious that it is impossible to make a whole out of all these billions of available images ... instinctively look away from the billions of fragments” (2013a: 12).

In *Seiobo* and *Északról hegy*, such organic statements often relate to explorations into Eastern philosophy, affirming that “everything is though nothing is” (Krasznahorkai 2005: 21) and that an ancient thought beyond definition becomes alive when we gain the sudden insight that “there is only the whole and no parts” (22). In *Északról hegy*, the hermeneutic whole/part relation is even expressed through detained descriptions of organic architecture. The protagonist first finds the extraordinary complexity of the monastery “inaccessibly monumental” because the “ar-

rangement of the main buildings, the condo and the lecture hall, the dorms, the office, the cells, the dining hall, the reception rooms and the abbot's residence as well as the sophisticated placement of the kitchen, of the guest rooms, the bath and the laundry" (27–28) follow a system normal eyes cannot grasp. Only much later the protagonist realizes that this complexity enables the relationship between the whole and the parts. Still, the feeling he will never be able to produce a mental image of the entire map persists. The spatial organic metaphor in this passage is valid for human life in general. The particularly human individual and the godly universal can never match, though all human culture and civilization strives toward the unification of both dimensions. Accordingly, Krasznahorkai writes in *A Théseus-általános* (The universal theseus) that the human spirit is detached from this world "in order to turn toward a mysterious, splendor, toward an inscrutable undecipherable greatness that he names universe or god of the universe. Of course he cannot succeed (which is sad but I have to say it) because the object of his quest does not exceed his own small person" (2001: 61).

## The Cultural Context

A large part of this study compares the aesthetic principles of Imre Makovecz (the most famous Hungarian organic architect) and the films of Béla Tarr. Naturally, a question that must be seriously addressed is whether Tarr and Makovecz can be compared at all, particularly in a Hungarian context. My Hungarian friends were often bewildered when hearing of my project. They hastened to explain to me that Tarr and Makovecz represent "two different worlds" and that the conservative and the progressive, the religious and the atheist, the symbolic and the unsymbolic can simply not be dealt with in the same study. How can a highly ideological and deeply mythological architectural style be compared to a fundamentally nonmythological, unsymbolic cinematic form with entirely different ideological convictions behind it? There are three answers to this question. First, Makovecz is not conservative and religious in the same sense understood in postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe today, a region that has most recently witnessed the surge of right-wing nationalist politics and religious revival. Makovecz's religiosity is not sectarian but rather spiritual and generally pantheist and therefore opposed to all dogmatism. Nor is his interest in local culture determined by traditional humanism or by nationalism. Makovecz is similar to Béla Bartók, who incorporated folk music into his compo-

sitions but whose compositional achievement, according to Theodor Adorno, depended “on its power to suppress his nationalist instinct” ([1925] 1981: 128). Second, and more importantly, Makovecz’s and Tarr’s styles have a common source: the modern cult of natural organicity. It is often forgotten that a part of modernism is deeply rooted in the idea of essential naturalness, which founded the ornamental branch of modern styles. This development can encompass very different aesthetic approaches, as the comparison of Makovecz and Tarr demonstrates. Third, the common “modernism” theme is, in both cases, based on a rejection of postmodernism. True, the cult of naturalness, most manifest in Art Nouveau, did also engender a postmodern, eclectic, ornamental branch, but Makovecz, Tarr, and Krasznahorkai do not follow this path. Instead, all three twist modernity in a very personal way by staying away from (at least most of the time) postmodern approaches that favor the ironical play with extant forms of historical or commercial culture or their mere quotation. It is on this deeper level (not on the level of politics) that I see similarities between Makovecz, Tarr, and Krasznahorkai.

A problem is, of course, that all the above patterns cannot be revealed by means of purely empirical studies, that is, by merely looking at shapes and images or at political convictions. The challenge of this study is therefore to reveal parallels through an ethico-aesthetic “conceptual” analysis to show that Makovecz and Tarr/Krasznahorkai do not opposed each other along the lines of a traditionalist versus modern dichotomy. Organic architecture (including Makovecz) is modern and even has futurist tendencies. References to the past and to tradition are no indicators of premodern, antimodern, or postmodern approaches: what matters is *how* images and symbols of the past are used.

The worst option would be to describe the differences between Tarr and Makovecz along historically established political lines, perhaps even by attributing the positions to Budapest’s divided geography. In that case, Makovecz would be located in Buda and Tarr in Pest, separated by the Danube.<sup>8</sup> The division corresponds to old geographical and cultural distinctions. Traditionally, “populist” politics celebrating folk virtues and *Kultur* were settled in the hills of Buda, while cosmopolitan urbanist (often Jewish) intellectuals looking for *Zivilisation* lived in Pest. Timothy Garton Ash has described these conflicting worldviews that have continued to make sense for centuries: the Pest people “have looked outward to Vienna and the West rather than inward to the Transylvanian strongholds of agrarian Hungarianness. They have been drawn to sociology rather than to ethnography, and to socialism rather than to nationalism” (1985: 6). Even postcommunist politics maintained those fault lines

(though not necessarily geographically) in the form of the opposition of the center right-wing Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance and the Socialist Party. If we follow this pattern, Makovecz’s fascination with myths can indeed make him look more “right wing,” the more so because, as Boris Groys argues, “myth is the opposite of revolution” (1992: 116). Groys understands revolution as an activity able to “make the world,” while myths are seen as static and authoritarian patterns coming from the past and contradicting dynamism. To support his claim, Groys (1992: 166) quotes Roland Barthes (1987: 147) from his *Mythologies*: “Wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image ... myth is impossible.” However, Makovecz’s peculiar approach shows that myth is possible, even in situations where we aim at a transformation of reality. The conclusion: myth is not necessarily conservative. The present comparison of Tarr/Krasznahorkai and Makovecz aims to overcome Barthes’s conceptual distinctions by describing the organism—as well as the myth—as not a static but rather a dynamic phenomenon. Two centuries of organic philosophy support this view. Thus, instead of contrasting rightist and leftist intellectual attitudes by referring to right-wing populism and socialism, respectively, I prefer to trace the differences between Tarr/Krasznahorkai and Makovecz to another opposition that has left its mark in Central and Eastern European intellectual history: the confrontation of Russian left-wing intellectuals with the more right-wing Eurasianist philosophies of the 1920s, the former supporting the revolution and the latter working on “Turanic” elements evaluating the importance of a spontaneous folk principle and the Orthodox Church. Here, both the left and the right were modern (as opposed to antimodern), and neither side was ready to foster traditional humanism. The suggested change of perspective will eventually lead to a reevaluation of the entire body of “leftist” poststructuralist thought and of the allegedly more “rightist” organic thought in an international context. In the end, the organic model of evolution-decomposition does not necessarily overlap with postmodern philosophies of deconstruction.

Another echo from the past is audible in the opposition of the revolutionary/leftist/deconstructionist versus the conservative/organic/religious. I am referring to the case of nobody other than André Bazin, whose work is very important here. Bazin developed his highly personal philosophy in a Catholic intellectual environment. He would quickly be denounced by his “progressive” contemporaries as a bourgeois idealist steeped in Christian theology and possibly an opiate addict (see Gray 2005: 10). The revolutionary spirit eager to deconstruct existing structures and Bazin’s more conservative organic spirit searching for dy-

namic, holistic perspectives were bound to clash. Hugh Gray's defense of Bazin in his introduction to *What Is Cinema?* is highly relevant in this context because it points to the origins of the most organic thought Western philosophy has to offer. And those are also, at least indirectly, the sources this book draws on:

Have they never heard of the philosopher Xenophanes who, gazing up at the heavens, proclaimed "the all is one"? Or of Parmenides who saw this whole as a continuum? Indeed if there had been cinema in those days one could imagine a similar argument to the present one going on between the schools of Parmenides and Heraclitus. It was these philosophers who first saw the cosmos or "reality" as a whole. (2005: 12)

Hungary has produced a cosmic director, a cosmic writer, and a cosmic architect. The precise meaning of "cosmic" will be explained by drawing on several philosophical sources, but a preliminary understanding can be provided by looking at its contrary: the "acosmy" (*acosmie*), a neologism invented by the French geographer Augustin Berque (2015). Acosmy designates a worldview engendered by the nonorganic abstraction of the modern cogito: when the vision and experience of the world is based on an "I think" instead of an "I dwell within a cosmos," either individual or universal perspectives are the only options. However, both the individual and the universal are abstractions. Therefore, in the history of philosophy, a whole string of organic thinkers has elaborated on the meaning of the more concrete, cosmic perspective.

## Notes

1. Two recent books, Song Hwee Lim's *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (2014) and Ira Jaffe's *Slow Movies: Countering a Cinema of Action* (2014), have helped clarify the subject. However, given the large number of "slow films" that have recently appeared, as well as the large interest this phenomenon has received online, it is surprising that more books have not been published on this topic. While Lim's book has very much contributed to a general clarification of slow cinema, Jaffe's *Slow Movies* does not entirely eliminate the vagueness of the terms. I deal with both books here and in the first chapter. On contemplative cinema, see also a forthcoming book on Plotinus and film studies (Botz-Bornstein and Stamatellos 2017).
2. Lim has made a list of twenty directors he considers representative of slow cinema, but only contemporary directors are included (Tarkovsky and Yasujirō Ozu thus do not appear). The top five are Tsai Ming-liang, Béla Tarr, Alexander Sokurov, Lisandro Alonso, and Theo Angelopoulos (Lim 2014: 14).

3. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
4. The legitimacy of the terms “Eastern Europe” or “Central Europe” is a controversial subject. Geographically, Hungary fits into both areas. For many people, “Eastern Europe” has negative connotations of backwardness. For some, it simply “stretches too far to the East” because it can also include Ukraine and Georgia, whereas “Central Europe” can also include major European cultures/countries such as Austria and Germany. In order to avoid all controversies, I use here most of the time the term “Central and Eastern Europe,” which designates the region between the German-speaking countries and Russia.
5. The film *Werckmeister Harmonies* is based on the 220-page central section of Krasznahorkai’s novel *The Melancholy of Resistance* entitled “The Werckmeister Harmonies: Negotiations.”
6. See Gadamer 1989 (esp. p. 11) for more details.
7. Krasznahorkai also cowrote the script for *Damnation* with Tarr, though *Damnation* is not his novel.
8. “Budapest” is the combination of the city names Buda and Pest, which were united into a single city in 1873.