

PREFACE

This book forms the third part of a trilogy on European modernism that drew its original impulse from dissatisfaction with Theodor Adorno's reading of cultural modernity. The first book in the trilogy, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno* (1992), set out to show that Adorno's theory of the rationalization of the arts, as demonstrated in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, itself falls victim to the contradictions inherent in the reduction of modern culture to the single logic of enlightenment and its dialectic. The hidden romantic roots of Max Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of enlightenment occlude in turn the antagonistic complementarity of the two imaginaries—enlightenment and romanticism—that define cultural modernism. In the second book, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism* (2004), Peter Murphy and I distance ourselves from enlightened and romantic modernisms and their rival historicisms, from the perspective of a third, classical modernism, which stresses civilizational continuities against the will to remake society in the name of the most advanced techniques or the most potent myths. The recurrent polarity of futurisms and archaisms across the whole epoch of modernism is reflected aesthetically in the idea of the avant-garde, on the one hand, and the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, on the other. The idea of the total work of art thus emerged as the focus of the present investigation, which undertakes a re-vision of modernism in the light of the counterimaginary of aesthetic totalization, as opposed to the more familiar accounts of the avant-garde in terms of aesthetic rationalization.

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THE TOTAL WORK OF ART IN
EUROPEAN MODERNISM

