



Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity (Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism)

Andreas Killen

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Berlin Electropolis ties the German discourse on nervousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to Berlin's transformation into a capital of the second industrial revolution. Focusing on three key groups—railway personnel, soldiers, and telephone operators—Andreas Killen traces the emergence in the 1880s and then later decline of the belief that modernity caused nervous illness. During this period, Killen explains, Berlin became arguably the most advanced metropolis in Europe. A host of changes, many associated with breakthroughs in technologies of transportation, communication, and leisure, combined to radically alter the shape and tempo of everyday life in Berlin. The resulting consciousness of accelerated social change and the shocks and afflictions that accompanied it found their consummate expression in the discourse about nervousness.

Wonderfully researched and clearly written, this book offers a wealth of new insights into the nature of the modern metropolis, the psychological aftermath of World War I, and the operations of the German welfare state. Killen also explores cultural attitudes toward electricity, the evolution of psychiatric thought and practice, and the status of women workers in Germany's rapidly industrializing economy. Ultimately, he argues that the backlash against the welfare state that occurred during the late Weimar Republic brought about the final decoupling of modernity and nervous illness.

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