Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity.

By Andreas Killen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
Pp. viii+295. $49.95.

JANUARY
2008
VOL. 49

Modernity now seems inseparable from electricity, but in the past these two jolted in unsteady, often renegotiated rhythm. Andreas Killen tracks that rough ride's effect on the bodies and psyches of Germans through the diagnoses and treatments they incurred as well as the insurance systems paying—or not—for their treatment. The capital city of Berlin, crux of electrical and industrial modernization under the German Empire and communication center through the Weimar period, provides Killen's context for researching the evolving attitudes of professionals toward the psychiatric impacts of that newly frenetic life. In turn, changes in those attitudes affected society at large, as exemplified in the cultural bookends to this study: the 1896 International Trade Exhibition at Berlin's Treptower Park and Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis* (a science-fiction classic). While electricity and people consort harmoniously in the trade show's idealized imagery, their fusion has gone deeply awry in the maelstrom of human and electrical breakdown that dooms the seemingly utopian Metropolis.

With modernity came "neurasthenia," an ailment that was considered physical when it first arose in upper-class men and mental when it later arose in the lower classes and in women. Upper-class complaints about "sick nerves" repaid early sufferers with rest in rural sanatoriums and therapeutic electrical treatments to bring the body's electricity into better balance. But the disease—or the claims made on it—spread beyond the bounds of elite society with its personal resources for financing cures. Dealing with accelerating incidence of "nervousness" among the lower classes necessitated less lavish modalities of prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and payment. In the process of adapting to a wider clientele, the professionals reconstructed the import of nervous diseases along different lines. Whereas nineteenth-century sufferers were deemed victims of accidents or other stresses instantiated in their bodies, those who succumbed in the next century were increasingly considered at fault for their condition, either by willful malingering or through degraded heredity. These disease constructs projected a stigma onto ordinary people having psychological hardships, previously considered as hazards of modernity.

While the professionals accomplishing this shift from bodily to psychiatric causes included physicians in high-status posts, its wide implementation came through actions of others vested in publicly sponsored institutions: railways, the military, telephone exchanges. This new class included medical agents and examiners carrying out the health coverage provisions of German social insurance, inaugurated in 1884. As workers became savvy in articulating grounds for compensation, these examiners sought to discredit claims and to expose "simulants" (imposters), sometimes by apply-

ing electrodes while leaving the current switched off. Doctors under the mandate of cutting costs and getting patients back to work—even where this meant sending shell-shocked soldiers back to the front—began describing the social insurance program itself as the root cause of nervous maladies. Berlin telephone girls who broke down, whether from being required to connect 600 calls an hour by hand or from electrical shocks, were labeled as attention-seekers manipulating the system. When a 1926 change in the insurance laws eliminated coverage for accident-induced nervous ailments, it reinforced a new medical consensus. Nervous disorders were now said to be purely psychic, having no somatic dimension. Individuals alone, not modern society, were responsible for rectifying their mental states.

The story Killen develops draws on his extensive groundwork in German sources, including medical publications, hospital and state archives, and electrical industry periodicals, but omits illustrations, artifacts, and nontextual resources. Authoritative tones in the writing of professionals obscure any internal, personal doubts, while patients' voices surface only in doctors' reports, not as independent authors. By contrast, through her 1991 historical fiction work *Regeneration*, Pat Barker explored the inner turmoils of British psychiatrist William Rivers over treating shell-shocked World War I soldiers in order for them to resume duty. Killen, too, suggests that fiction sees into nervous sufferings what fact cannot, by repeatedly quoting Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (German counterpart to James Joyce's *Ulysses*). Döblin, a psychiatrist practicing in working-class Berlin, understood the frustration of patients with doctors who certify as healthy those afflicted with "sick nerves."

Handling nervous disorders as personal fiction ungrounded in factual bodies, German psychiatry established a consensus that excused modern society from upfront rehabilitation costs, stigmatized sufferers, and entrenched divisions between psyche and body that remain today. Perhaps Killen's historical view can assist us all in questioning those practices.

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Nützliche Schädlinge: Angewandte Entomologie, Chemische Industrie, und Landwirtschaftspolitik in der Schweiz, 1874–1952.

By Lukas Straumann. Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2005. Pp 392. €32.

Drawing on work in the social construction of technology, Lukas Straumann poses the question, How and why did chemical methods of pest control become well-established in Switzerland by about 1950? In answering, he focuses on the key interest groups involved (the state, industry, and public-sector research institutions), the effects of both world wars, and the spe-