lands of German liberalism in the southwest, he elucidates variations in general trends and calls attention to the risk of idealizing liberals. And by bringing Alsace back into German history, he also raises provocative issues about the framing of explanations for German peculiarities. In addition, his book is a work of impeccable scholarship, based on immense research in newspapers, archives, and contemporary and scholarly literature that is clearly and cogently presented.

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Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity. By Andreas Killen. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. 2006. Pp. viii + 295. $49.95. ISBN 0-520-24362-5.

"Does modern society drive people mad?" contemporaries asked with rising concern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As industrial societies consolidated on both sides of the Atlantic, few medical conditions commanded as much public attention as the nervous disorders that appeared to afflict unparalleled numbers in Europe and the Unites States. Over the past two decades or so, a wealth of studies has scrutinized the history of nervous illness to learn about both the development of the mental health professions and past ideas about modernity's pathology. Weaving together history of science and technology with cultural and social analysis, *Berlin Electropolis* deserves praise for adding to what has become an exceptionally sophisticated field of interdisciplinary scholarship.

Killen analyzes the rise and fall of neurasthenia as a legitimate disease in Germany between the 1870s and the mid-1920s. Confronted with patients suffering from impaired vision, hallucinations, and excruciating pain for no apparent physical reason, medical doctors sought to attribute these debilitating symptoms to the mounting demands of industrial society. Modern life, the argument ran, overtaxed the individual, often exposing people to nerve-shattering "shocks" from which invalids failed to recover. As neurasthenia emerged as a mysterious, quintessentially modern disease, doctors strove to substantiate their hypothesis through diagnostic experiments that measured electrical currents in the human body in order to uncover the hidden physiological causes of what they viewed as a neurological disorder.

Killen's study recognizes Berlin as the crucial site in which key developments in the history of neurasthenia in Germany played out. It was not only rapid growth and structural transformation that marked out the new imperial

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capital as a large-scale social and cultural laboratory in which new forms of urban life manifested themselves most strikingly; Berlin also was the place in which the bulk of neurological and psychiatric research was conducted, a field in which Jewish medical professionals gained a prominent role in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, Berlin was the seat of the Reich Insurance Office (Reichsversicherungsanstalt) that, after a landmark decision in 1889, devised the guidelines for disability pensions awarded to patients suffering from traumatic neurosis in the context of accident compensation. Had neurasthenia been initially regarded as an affliction that mostly befell middle-class professionals complaining of "overburdening (*Überbürdung*)," the decades after 1890 witnessed growing numbers of manual workers successfully filing for disability for nervous disorders. The changing social composition of claimants as well as their swelling ranks generated a backlash among medical professionals and welfare administrators who began to charge patients with fraudulent "malingering" and "shirking." In a further step, a younger, at times anti-Semitic generation of doctors questioned previous research by Jewish colleagues after the turn of the century and argued that nervous conditions had their origins less in "shocks" than in a patient's weak predisposition. In other words, rather than the pressures and risks of contemporary society, patients themselves were increasingly held responsible for their nervous problems, and the state was seen as under no obligation to offer a pension as compensation. Some of these doctors also assigned altogether new uses to electrical apparatuses. In their offices, electrical equipment served less as a diagnostic than a curative tool. These "cures," which aimed to restore a patient's nervous equilibrium through an electrical charge, could take drastic forms as practitioners administered high voltages which resulted in electrocution on more than one occasion. A number of sufferers complained bitterly against these therapies as cruel torture administered in the purported pursuit of mental health.

Killen charts the contestations over neurasthenia through detailed cases studies about three patient groups: railway workers, soldiers of the First World War, and telephone operators. While the railroad personnel and victims of "shell shock" have commanded scholars' attention previously, this work's strength rests in identifying connections between debates about these groups and their treatment, at times at the price of some repetitions in the text. Killen is most original in his chapter on telephone operators and their problems in the workplace. By the early twentieth century, telephone exchanges provided highly pressurized and altogether novel workplaces for a white-collar female labor force responsible for thousands of connections every day. Frequently seen by contemporaries as the "nerve centers" of urban communication, exchanges periodically descended into chaos—or collective "shock"—not only because of their frenetic work pace but also because many employees were deeply suspicious of a work environment that contained innumerable

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cables conducting a mysterious current. Few books have rendered as palpable the ambivalence with which contemporaries encountered a new technology that has become thoroughly quotidian since. Equally stimulating is Killen's account of the measures taken by the Reich Postal Office to control this workplace in the Twenties through "psychotechnics," a variant of Taylorism that broke down operators' jobs into discrete tasks to ease pressure and increase productivity. Here we gain new and surprising insights into how interwar Germans tried to cope with modernity's ambivalence.

Impressive as it is, the book would have benefited from a more disciplined use of the concept of modernity. "Modernity" takes to the stage in many costumes in *Berlin Electropolis*: as rationalization, urban growth, technological innovation, science, and neurasthenia among others. While all of these can undoubtedly be linked with modernity, this catalog renders it difficult to ascertain Killen's claims that Germany was in some respects more modern than other European nations. He more than once labels Berlin "arguably the most modern" European city (pp. 2, 8) and Siemens the "most modern firm" without offering clear criteria for these statements. One suspects that this is done to justify the selection of Berlin as a focus for this book. This proves unnecessary because the story of how the medical profession identified a nervous disease, failed to develop a cure, and subsequently abandoned its patients is a tale that illuminates the development of a scientific discipline and a host of important cultural issues prominent among public concerns at the time.

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Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture. By Peter Jelavich. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2006. Pp. xvi + 300. $39.95. ISBN 0-520-24363-3.

In Peter Jelavich's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the author weaves together a story we know reasonably well with one we know far less well. The result is a compelling, eminently readable analysis of the death of the artistically innovative and socially critical culture that was the republican period's greatest legacy.

The part we know reasonably well is the outcome of this story. The cultural experimentation of the 1920s was brought to a halt by the emergence of the National Socialist regime. Jelavich's contribution to this story, however, is that the Nazis had a fair amount of the work done for them, years before coming to power. The book's central argument is that "Weimar culture" was dead, at

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