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Joseph Goebbels, “Around the Gedächtniskirche” (1928)

Like Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, who became *Gauleiter* of Berlin-Brandenburg in November 1926, had a conflicted relationship with the city of Berlin. On the one hand, it was the declared goal of the Nazis to seize political power in the capital of Prussia and the Reich. On the other hand, the political left and the organized labor movement were particularly well-rooted and represented there. Furthermore, Goebbels also objected to the dynamism of the pulsating metropolis, its masses of people, and its cosmopolitanism and cultural openness. He described Berlin unflatteringly as a “pit of iniquity” and a “stone desert.” Goebbels’ discomfort with modernism and his belief in the necessity of a national “rebirth” find clear expression in this article.

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### Around the Gedächtniskirche

Thousands and thousands of electric lights spew illumination into the grey evening, so that brightness covers the Kurfürstendamm, as if by day. The bells on streetcars ring, buses clatter by honking their horns, stuffed full with people and more people; taxis and fancy private automobiles hum over the glassy asphalt. The red, yellow, and green signal lights regulate the stop and go of traffic; in the midst of all the bustle the green one stands high atop its post, releasing the black throng of people to their breakneck passage from one side of the street to the other, Squeals and squeaks so assault the ear that the novices run the constant risk of losing their calm disposition. In front of the huge cinemas the newest hits of the season shine forth in dazzling red: *Killed by Life*, *The Girl from Tauentzien Avenue*, *Just One Night*. The fragrance of heavy perfume floats by. Harlots smile from the artful pastels of fashionable women’s faces; so-called men stroll to and fro, monocles glinting; fake and precious stones sparkle. All the languages of the world fall on the ear; there goes the yellow Indian next to the garrulous Saxon; an Englishman curses as he elbows his way through the crowd, and, resounding above the din, a frozen newspaper boy cries out the evening papers just off the press.

In the middle of this turmoil of the metropolis the Gedächtniskirche stretches its narrow steeples up into the grey evening. It is alien in this noisy life. Like an anachronism left behind, it mourns between the cafés and cabarets, condescends to the automobiles humming around its stony body, and calmly announces the hour to the sin of corruption.

Walking around it are many people who perhaps have never gazed up at its towers. There is the snobby flaneur in a fur coat and patent leather; the worldly lady, *garçon* from head to toe with a

monocle and smoking cigarette, taps on high heels across its walkways and disappears into one of the thousands of abodes of delirium and drugs that cast their screaming lights seductively into the evening air.

That is Berlin West: The heart turned to stone of this city. Here in the niches and corners of cafés, in the cabarets and bars, in the Soviet theaters and mezzanines, the spirit of the asphalt democracy is piled high. Here the politics of sixty-million diligent Germans is conducted. Here one gives and receives the latest market and theater tips. Here one trades in politics, pictures, stocks, love, film, theater, government, and the general welfare. The Gedächtniskirche is never lonely. Day plunges suddenly into night and night becomes day without there having been a moment of silence around it.

The eternal repetition of corruption and decay, of failing ingenuity and genuine creative power, of inner emptiness and despair, with the patina of a *Zeitgeist* sunk to the level of the most repulsive pseudoculture: that is what parades its essence, what does its mischief all around the Gedächtniskirche. One would so gladly believe that it is the national elite stealing day and night from the dear Lord on Tauentzien Avenue. It is only the Israelites.

The German people is alien and superfluous here. To speak in the national language is to be nearly conspicuous. Pan-Europe, the *Internationale*, jazz, France and Piscator—those are the watchwords.

“The *Girlfriend*, back issues only ten cents!” cries a resourceful hawker. It does not occur to a single passer-by that this is out of place. It is not out of place at all. The man knows the milieu.

Berlin West is the abscess on this gigantic city of diligence and industry. What they earn in the North they squander in the West. Four million make their daily bread in this stone desert, and over them sit a hundred-thousand drones who squander their diligence, turning it into sin, vice, and corruption.

The Kurfürstendamm raises a howl if anyone ever steps on the toes of these bloodsuckers; then humanity is in danger. The only one not seen suffering there is the professional. And a whole people is borne to the grave with a smile.

This is not the true Berlin. It is elsewhere waiting, hoping, struggling. It is beginning to recognize the Judas who is selling our people for thirty pieces of silver.

The other Berlin is lurking, ready to pounce. A few thousand are working days and nights on end so that sometime the day will arrive. And this day will demolish the abodes of corruption all around the Gedächtniskirche; it will transform them and give them over to a risen people.

The day of judgment! It will be the day of freedom!

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