

“One Hundred and Fifty per Minute,” *Berliner Tageblatt* (September 4, 1928)

Abstract

The *Berliner Tageblatt* was the most influential daily newspaper in Berlin in the 1920s, publishing texts by left-wing authors such as Erich Kästner and Kurt Tucholsky as well as works by photographers such as Alfred Eisenstaedt. Between 1933 and 1939, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels granted the newspaper a certain amount of freedom in order to maintain the appearance of a degree of press freedom. This text from 1928 is from an issue dedicated to Potsdamer Platz.

Source

A quarter of the population passes Potsdamer Platz at a quarter to seven. Herds of cars, yes herds, they are animals that make the fable of the centaur come true; their heads are human and their bodies a racing machine; if the body suffers damage, the head alone does not know what to do.

The buses are different, they hold masses of people together collectively, the top resembles a full centerpiece that is passed around, please, help yourself to people! If you run out of food at the top, oh, it doesn't matter, there's a glass cassette under the top with plenty in reserve. I wonder if the people won't go bad if you press them together like this? They certainly do against each other – the way they jab their elbows into their neighbor's side in a crowded bus and blow smoke into his harmless face on the roof. They certainly don't love him like themselves in such a situation.

What do you do with so many people anyway, who needs so many? How many are enough for each individual – twenty or ten or two; usually one! But across this square alone, one hundred and fifty people move forward at the rate of a minute.

Only the newspapermen stand still; those from the center on the right, those from the right on the left and those from the left in the middle (complicated, but why should everything be simple?), which, when folded up, give almost every pedestrian some intellectual content on the way, namely a political opinion, a certain knowledge of the latest events and a little (albeit somewhat feuilletonistically spoiled) melancholy of the summer evening – in short, for a fee of five to twenty pfennigs, everything a complete person needs in terms of feeling and knowledge for a weekday evening.

What else does he need? A little physical refreshment (in the form of lemon ice cream), a little nervous stimulation (in the form of coffee), both of which are also available in the café's front garden; also a little eroticism – waiter, some eroticism, please, half a portion – the lady at the next table is already crossing her legs, and a girl is climbing up the steep steps of a bus.

So many people and no faces – what kind of mass article have you fallen into, you stand there snowed in, that's the right word. Like a piece of frozen earth, you radiate cold in the midst of so many strangers. You have to wait until you feel the warmth of one or more of those who pass by, you have to feel the breath; the ancients called the breath the soul; in the empty faces you have to look for the place that is different from everything you know: the eyes that open abysses into which you can descend; you have to draw out fate, tragedy or tragicomedy.

For example, is there not actually two people inside that terribly fat man? Would it be very surprising if he suddenly started talking with two voices?

Those who have settled down for a while in the front garden of the café, once they have happily dealt with reading the newspaper and erotic temptations, find another uplifting pastime. They gaze out into the distance, sensually enjoying the view. All the colors of a delightful landscape are resplendent, although some human art seems to have had a hand in it.

What natural wonders take place on the square in the evening? There is the sunset. There is also an evening green and an evening yellow. The glowing red can be explained scientifically by the fact that a large wine merchant has taken out an annual subscription with a company for neon signs. The green and the yellow are similarly caused by a variety theater and a shoe factory. In this red, poets can already experience all the positive qualities of wine; the other colors also strike so strongly at the imagination of some people that everything that could follow this experience, such as a real shoe purchase or a visit to a variety show, appears to them only as a superfluous attenuation. Thus advertising often hurts itself.

The café's front garden is called "front garden" for a reason: there are seven real trees. I wonder what their roots feel like? Are they lying in real, black damp earth, between small stones, snails and earthworms? Do they think that everything is all right, or do they feel the proximity of the canals, the telephone and telegraph lines, the subway that runs beneath them?

In any case, a cable runs right between two roots, at 6:15 o'clock, the stock prices quoted after hours are being phoned through. What do the roots think? They want to crawl deeper into the dark earth, but then they bump into a electric light cable. I hope that doesn't cause a short circuit!

A heavy asphalt ring is placed around the long neck of the trees, the head reaches upwards, out of the asphalt canyon, towards the sky. But, as we all know, the trees are not allowed to grow up there. The sky is inaccessibly high, actually just a sliver visible between two rows of houses, a metropolitan ration, but at least it is evening and pure.

Will the aviators come quickly before nightfall with their smokescreen? At the top, written blue on blue, is the word "summer"; is that the name of a new effervescent powder? Hardly – because the writing at the top is such that few people down there can read it, a bad advertisement. Above is also the wind (known to be the child of the sky), shortly before it visited the Harz Mountains or the Baltic Sea, now it brings some ozone or salty sea air from there, a few small gifts that it will mix into the dreams of those sleeping at night when it climbs through the windows.

In the foreground, he pays a fleeting visit to the trees. Thus, moved by him and against the background of the sky, they look for a moment like real trees, there is even a guaranteed bird singing on a branch, and there is also a large red butterfly, as if straight out of the countryside or a fairy tale – but no, that's just a ticket from a bus.

Source of original German text: „Einhundertfünfzig pro Minute“, *Berliner Tageblatt* (September 4, 1928); reprinted in *Potsdamer Platz, Drehscheibe der Welt*, ed. Günther Bellman. Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 1997, pp. 121-24.

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