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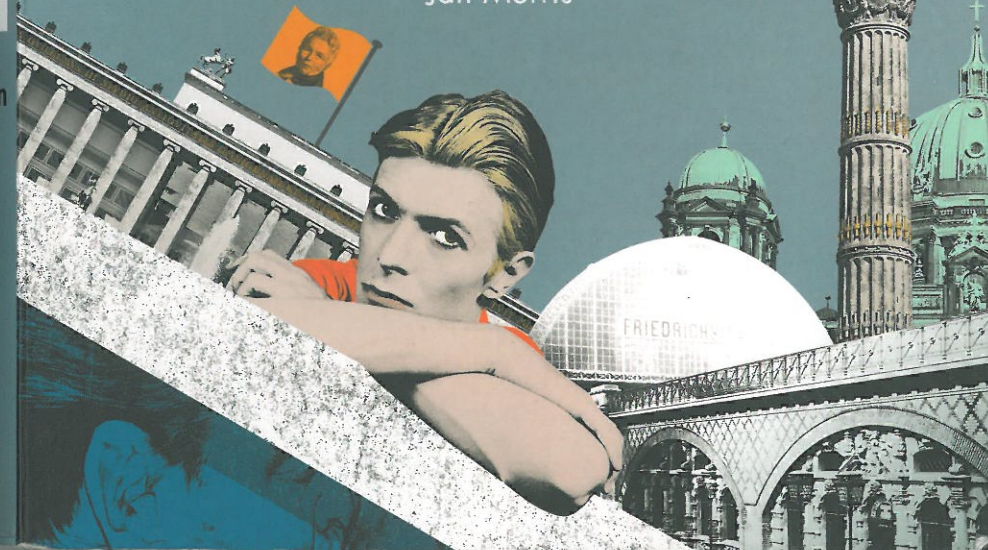
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Rory MacLean BERLIN

**'Recreate[s] through art and imagination
the whole historic presence of a great
capital . . . a wonderful achievement'**

Jan Morris



A W&N PAPERBACK

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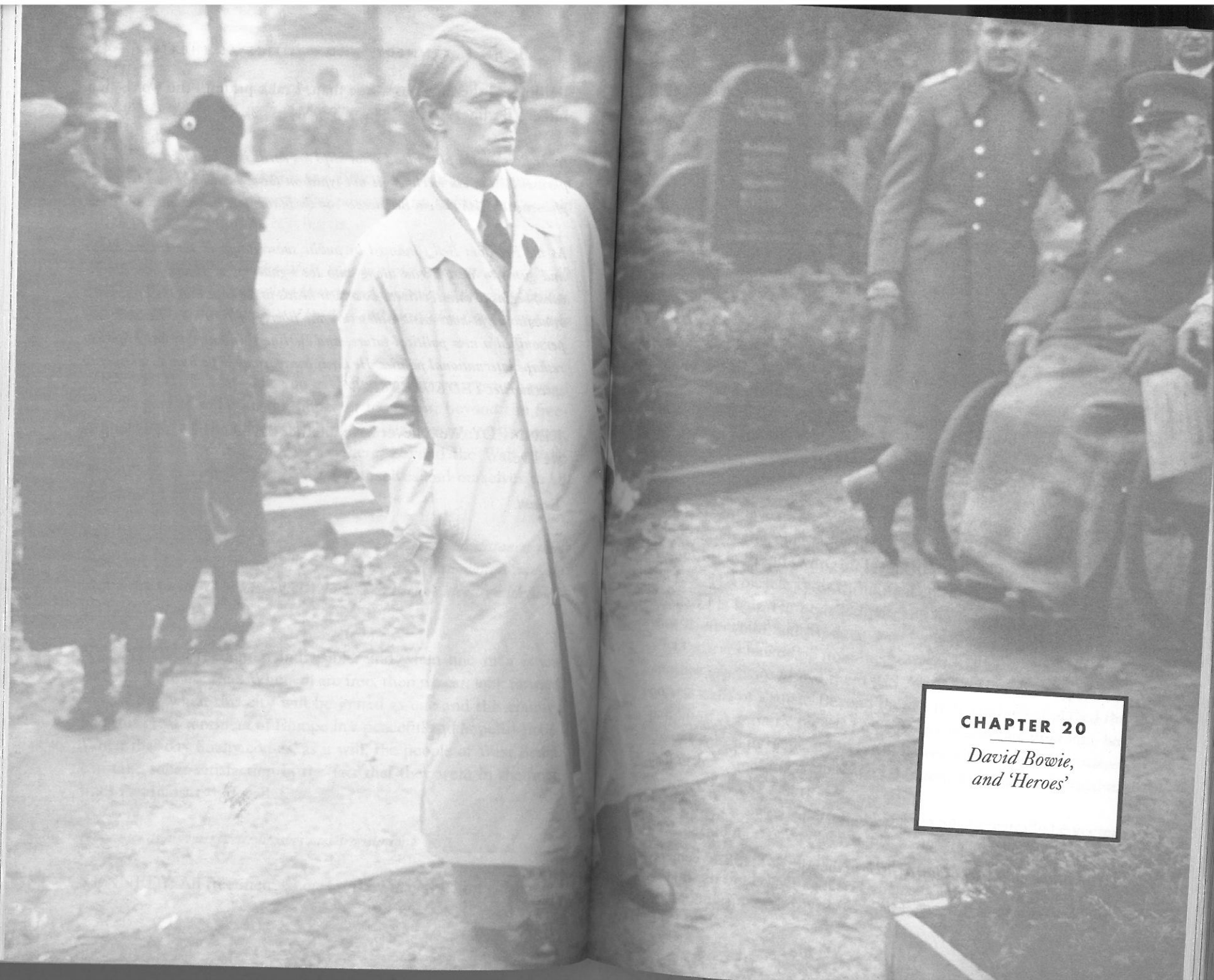
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'The past is never dead, in fact it's not even past.'

Christa Wolf



CHAPTER 20

*David Bowie,
and 'Heroes'*

David Bowie on the set of *Just a Gigolo* in the Alte St-Matthäus cemetery near to the graves of Victory sculptor Friedrich Drake and the Brothers Grimm, 1978. (Alain Dejean/Sygma/Corbis)

Köthenerstraße, 1977

A dozen doves wheeled overhead, their bellies flashing white in the clear spring sunshine. The cyclist ducked through their weaving circle and swung off Hauptstraße onto the deep, tree-lined streets. His bicycle tyres thrummed on the cobbles. The warm air ruffled his hair. He pedalled past the buildings where Isherwood and Riefenstahl had lived. At a co-op café pale-faced students in PLO scarves looked up from their copy of Kierkegaard and ordered another espresso. Above them 'US Army Go Home' was graffitied on the walls of a squat. Beyond them a Bolivian busker played the panpipes. A geriatric bicyclist rode by in the opposite direction, her cheeks caked in rouge, a black silk flower stitched onto her mauve stalker hat, smoking a cheroot as she pedalled, with a Chihuahua balanced in her basket.

At Brecht's blitzed apartment block on Spichernstraße he veered north, retracing the old playwright's daily stroll to the Romanisches Café. Over coffee and chess – the cyclist had read – Brecht and Grosz had called for a new kind of art, and gifted it to the world.

Some mornings the cyclist turned left rather than right and rode

south to where Ernst Kirchner – one of the fathers of Expressionism – had had his studio. As he coasted along Körnerstraße, he thought of Kirchner's struggle to free himself from older, established forces. Kirchner had built a bridge – *Die Brücke* – between the past and the present, until the Nazis tore it down and destroyed 600 of his paintings, driving him to suicide.

The three-gear Raleigh carried the cyclist past places forever haunted by absence: the vacated bunkers, the demolished Sportpalast where Goebbels had declared Total War, the People's Court where Hitler's would-be assassins had been sentenced to death. Tempelhof's vast arrivals hall and cold stone eagles rose behind him. Ahead of him on Potsdamerstraße, where he paused to catch his breath, Dieter Werner's Children's Crusade had dispersed years before, leaving no trace.

Each ride through the divided city made the cyclist feel more whole, each pedal push carrying him through space, through time, both back to his core and towards his future. In those days Berlin seemed to stand at the centre of everything that had happened, and would happen, in Europe. His bicycle exhilarated him, lifting his heart, at once grounding and freeing him in his adopted, pulsing new home.

'I have really now got the will. I will be and I will work,' he had written in his diary.

At Mies van der Rohe's New National Gallery, built on the abandoned foundations of Speer's Germania, he turned right to follow the canal. Along the bank a stagger of arguing drunks fell into a fist fight. The cyclist swept past them into Köthenerstraße, avoiding the tracks of the trams which no longer ran, and glided towards the Wall. At the edge of no man's land he coasted to a stop, and rolled his bike into the Hansa Sound Studio.

David Bowie was nine years old when he decided to give himself to music. His father had bought a brand new gramophone and a stack of 45s: The Platters, The Moonglows, Fats Domino and Little Richard. When the young Bowie first heard 'Tutti Frutti', his heart nearly burst with joy.

He had been born David Jones in blitzed south London, growing up in a small terraced house in Bromley, scheming of a means to escape cosy suburbia. The wide, wild world came to him through music, in his father's records, in his mother singing along with the wireless, her voice soaring with Ernest Lough's 'O for the Wings of a Dove'.

He first performed on the Isle of Wight with the Bromley Cubs, playing skiffle music. His elder step-brother Terry then thrust him beyond Lonnie Donegan by introducing him to The Beats, thrilling the young teen with tales of Kerouac and Soho jazz cellars. Bowie picked up a guitar, learnt the piano and joined a school band called George and the Dragon. His father helped him to buy an alto sax and, in his bedroom, he set up a simple recording studio with a reel-to-reel tape recorder and cello tape. He formed The Kon-Rads and then The King Bees, morphing from mod to rocker, envisaging himself as an English Little Richard. He had thousands of ideas, recalled early bandmate David Hadfield, 'a new one for every day – that we should change the spelling of our name, or our image, or our clothes . . . he also came up with lots of sketches of potential advertising campaigns for the band'. Bowie painted both his image and music with chameleon-bright colours.

At seventeen while still at school he began touring in an old ambulance. In his search for a stage persona he studied Mick Jagger at the Marquee and Bo Diddley at the Lewisham Odeon. To find a look he collected cast-off clothes from Carnaby Street dustbins. He renamed himself Bowie after the singer Davy Jones joined the TV band The Monkees. He cut his first important single, 'Can't Help Thinking about Me', and hand-delivered it to Paul McCartney's recording studio. When the Beatle didn't respond Bowie climbed onto the roof of his house and, in disappointment, threw away his complete record collection.

As he played Bognor and Bournemouth, building up a loyal local following, Bowie feared not breaking into the mainstream. His frustration honed his desire to understand the public, as well as pushing him to the fringes of the art world and into books. He devoured Brecht, Burroughs, Camus and Kafka. *Metamorphosis*

spooked him, its tale of transformation penned by another questioning, imaginative soul who fabricated alter egos and lived for a time in Berlin.

Bowie toured the UK with the mime artist Lindsay Kemp. Kemp encouraged him to play with identity. On stage, Bowie tested the theories of French theatre director Antonin Artaud. Artaud wanted the audience to be at the heart of a 'spectacle' – his term for the play – so as to be engulfed by it. Through his work, Bowie came to see the theatre as a place where the spectator was exposed rather than protected, and art as a vehicle for risk. He saw how performance could both embody and intensify life, recreating the thrill of experience. He tried his hand at musicals and in an arts lab. He toyed with movies. He jumbled together narrative, mime and vaudeville, drawing new ideas into his music and conjuring up an exuberant personal mythology.

At the age of twenty-one he wrote 'Space Oddity' but couldn't interest a record company in the song. The Beatles' George Martin turned it down. Brooklyn-born Tony Visconti – who in time would produce a dozen Bowie albums – considered it a gimmick track. When the spacey, naive tale of Major Tom – an heroic astronaut and vulnerable, alienated everyman marooned in orbit – was finally released in the year of the moon landing, it became Bowie's breakthrough single.

Over the next five years, in London, New York and then Los Angeles, Bowie rose to become the first, great post-modern pop star. He dyed his hair red and dressed in flamboyant costumes to create androgynous Ziggy Stardust, subsuming his own life into that of his glittering conception.

'Off stage I'm a robot. On stage I achieve emotion,' he declared as he lost himself in the character. 'It's probably why I prefer dressing up as Ziggy to being David.'

Then he discarded the alien rocker for *Aladdin Sane*, traded glam, post-apocalypse *Diamond Dogs* (its tour stage inspired by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*) for plastic-souled *Young Americans* and masked himself behind the Thin White Duke. Self-risk motivated both the changes and his career. Time and again he channelled

the avant-garde into the populist mainstream without compromising its subversive, liberating power. Yet with every transformation he became less and less able to separate himself from his creations, as Isherwood and Dietrich had discovered before him. 'That was when it all started to go sour,' he said, describing his professional life as an act. 'My whole personality was affected. It became very dangerous. I really did have doubts about my sanity.'

Bowie was driven by a relentless urge to create, as well as a great deal of cocaine. He had little personal self-worth. He thought his work was the only thing of value. He lived in a kind of prolific mania, especially when on tour: reading, talking, listening to the revolutionary electronic band Kraftwerk, writing songs, checking out new acts after his own show. He stayed up late. He hardly ate. His body weight dropped to eighty pounds. He believed his manager had cheated him of millions. He became haunted by the occult, denying himself sleep for seven or eight days at a time, slipping into a bizarre, nihilistic fantasy world of imminent doom and Egyptian mysticism. Some mornings at his rented Doheny Drive house, his assistant Coco Schwab would find him lying like a dead man beside the drained pool, at the bottom of which he had burnt an image of the devil. She held a mirror under his nose to see if he was still alive.

Off stage he was deeply unhappy. He looked – as he himself admitted – as if he'd just stepped out of the grave. He needed to escape both LA celebrity culture and his own theatrical personas. 'I realised that what I had to do was experiment. To discover new forms of writing. To evolve, in fact, a new musical language,' he said, as if responding to the call of Brecht and Grosz. 'That's what I set out to do. That's why I returned to Europe.'

In 1976 rock 'n' roll's blazing star fell to earth in Berlin. Bowie had met Isherwood in California, the smooth old queen and impudent new king talking for an hour after his concert at the Englewood Forum. 'Berlin is a skeleton which aches in the cold; it is my own skeleton aching,' Isherwood had written in *Goodbye to Berlin*. Bowie had read his books, seen *Cabaret* and wanted Isherwood to clothe

the skeleton for him. He asked him to tell him – as one storyteller to another – about its mythical, creative underworld. Six months later, on the edge of physical and mental collapse, he moved to the capital of reinvention.

In the dozen years since Kennedy's visit, Berlin had both changed and remained unchanged. Outside the Wall a quarter of a million Red Army soldiers still surrounded the city. Within it 12,500 American, British and French troops still guarded the island's freedom. But West Berliners had grown used to the barrier, planting clematis and rose bushes alongside it, using it as a 155-kilometre-long canvas for graffiti: Change Your Life, Learn Peace, Death to Mediocrity.

To rebuild their own devastated lives, most German war veterans had overlooked the acquiescence of the Nazi years. A story went the rounds of an Austrian Jew, Jitzhak Ben-Ari, who in 1938 had travelled by train to Dachau where his father was imprisoned. At the station he had asked for directions to the camp and the locals had 'gladly told him where the Jews were being taken'. But after the war when Ben-Ari returned to Germany as Israeli ambassador, and went back to Dachau, the camp had somehow been expunged from people's memories. No one had seemed able to direct him to it.

This vile omission was confronted in the sixties. To the new generation, West Germany's economic miracle – or *Wirtschaftswunder* – had been built not on initiative and hard labour but on a lie. In their minds their parents' unquestioning obedience to Hitler had led to the Holocaust. Slavish Prussian devotion to uniformed authority had almost annihilated the country. As a result young Germans – and especially young Berliners – rejected their elders' leadership for the first time in centuries. They chose to look at history from the perspective of its victims, not its perpetrators.

Since 1946 West Berlin had been kept alive by huge cash subsidies. West Germans who moved to the city had their taxes slashed and removal costs reimbursed. Male residents were exempt from

military service. Hence tens of thousands of young people were drawn to the island, and then promptly rebelled against its authorities. The Nazi legacy – combined with the perceived diminution of the Communist threat and outrage over America's Vietnam War – convinced them that Western capitalism was a reincarnation of the Third Reich. To assuage their inherited guilt, they joined co-ops and sit-ins, protested against the Allied 'occupation', burnt the Stars and Stripes and marched in support of the Vietcong. 'Ho-Ho-Ho-Chi-Minh' not 'Ken-Ne-Dy' was chanted outside Amerika Haus.

In 1967 a visit by the Shah of Iran – who many believed was backed by the CIA – led to violent street battles and the killing of a protester. The death radicalised the Berlin student movement. Demonstrators stormed onto the streets, calling for the overthrow of the government. 'This fascist state is organised to kill us all,' declared a youth leader. 'We must organise resistance. Violence can only be answered with violence. They are the generation of Auschwitz.'

Riots spread from Berlin to Paris and Prague. In France students and workers manned the barricades. Idealists proclaimed, 'We will invent a new original world.' But their optimism was perverted by political extremists and the dogma of Sartre and Foucault. When Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Berlin twisted itself in discord and dread. Czech refugees who had escaped the bloody crackdown, who had struggled to pull down the red flag, stared in disbelief as Western radicals tried to raise it. Hundreds knelt and prayed in the soft, soothing blue light of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, waiting in fear for the roar of Soviet tanks on the Kurfürstendamm.

Yet Maoist and Marxist-Leninist groups like Baader-Meinhof, entangled by disgust for their parents' generation, remained blind to the reality of the Soviet threat. In their confusion they raged for random violence against the 'Nazi Federal Republic'. In Moabit Ulrike Meinhof, wearing a wig and carrying a gun in her briefcase, freed her imprisoned conspirator Andreas Baader, killing a bystander in the process. Their Red Army Faction – a deliberate

allusion to both the Soviet Army and the Royal Air Force – bombed department stores, seized hostages and murdered almost three dozen people during the 1970s. The group aimed to goad the state into introducing illiberal measures that would stir public anger and spark civil war. A quarter of young West Germans expressed some sympathy for the movement. After Meinhof had been captured, and hanged herself in prison, 4,000 mourners attended her funeral at Berlin's Mariendorf cemetery.

At this pivotal point, after the horror, belligerence and firestorms, the '68ers – paradoxically with their safety assured by America – broke with the predatory past, freeing themselves from centuries of historical fear, and transformed Germany.

The bicycles sliced through the woods on a sword-straight path, wheels wobbling in the sandy soil. Orderly ranks of trees fanned away in every direction, catching the light beneath their canopy, blocking out the sky. The trail dipped and crested but it didn't deviate from its linear course, stretching away to the west and a verdant vanishing point. Iggy Pop rode a leopard-spotted yellow bike inherited from a departing neighbour. Bowie pulled ahead of him, lost his balance then regained it, stood up on his pedals and whooped. The sense of freedom thrilled him. He felt as if they could ride right off the island, through the Wall, as far as the English Channel.

When he and his friend Pop had first moved to West Berlin in late 1976, they'd fallen back on bad habits. In an open-topped Mercedes which had once belonged to the President of Sierra Leone, they'd cruised around the island city, drinking *KöPi* at Joe's Beer House, stumbling into gutters and transvestite bars, clubbing at the Dschungel and The Unlimited. In their rooms at the Hotel Gehrus they'd snorted coke while watching *Starsky and Hutch* and *Triumph of the Will*, read *Siddhartha* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.

'There's seven days in the week: two for bingeing, two for recovery, and three for any other activity,' Pop had said. Pop, the former Stooges frontman and future godfather of punk rock, had been

derailed by drug abuse. He too wanted to haul himself back from the brink, yet at the same time he seemed ready to throw himself off it.

One night – whether in Berlin or LA, neither of them could remember – Pop had sat in the passenger seat as Bowie rammed their dealer's car again and again, for five crazed minutes. Bowie then drove around the hotel's underground car park, pushing 100 kilometres per hour, screaming above the screech of the tyres that he wanted to end it all by driving into a concrete wall. Until the car ran out of fuel and the friends collapsed in hysterics.

To defeat his demons Bowie needed space and stability. His estranged wife Angie no longer provided it – for much of the time she kept their son Zowie (later Joey then Duncan Jones) away from him in London or Switzerland – so his assistant Coco found him a modest, first-floor apartment in an Art Nouveau building in Schöneberg, a gold-album-throw away from Langenscheidtbrücke where Dietrich had once opened her skirt above puffing steam locomotives. Coco had its walls painted white as a private gallery for Bowie's dark images. She ordered in blank canvases and tubes of oil paint. She picked up his discarded clothes and scattered drawings. She read Nietzsche beside him beneath his fluorescent portrait of the Japanese author Yukio Mishima. Above all she went with him to the Brücke Museum, to gaze at the works of Kirchner, Kollwitz and Erich Heckel whose *Roquairol*, with its stark depiction of lunacy, would become the model for Pop's tortured pose on the cover of *The Idiot*. The Expressionists' rough, bold strokes, and melancholic mood, captured a sense of the ephemeral as well as Bowie's imagination. He was riveted by the strength and recklessness of Grosz's drawings. Egon Schiele's distorted, skeletal portraits entranced him. He stared for almost an hour at Otto Mueller's *Lovers between Garden Walls*, a portrait of a First World War parting, and began to reimagine it for a later, colder war and Wall.

At the Hansa Sound Studio, Bowie mixed 'Always Crashing in the Same Car'. In its bleak verse he despaired of his failure to change, of taking chances yet remaining trapped. He was always crashing in the same car.

In truth he was edging away from cocaine psychosis, finding his way out of his life of excess, remaking himself as an ordinary man – and one of the twentieth century's greatest artists. He dressed in baggy trousers and dowdy shirts and enjoyed the Berliners' disinterest in him. No one bothered him on the street. One night on a whim he climbed onto a cabaret stage to perform a few Sinatra songs. The local audience shrugged and asked him to step down. They had come to see a different act. Away from the limelight he composed, painted and for the first time in years 'felt a joy of life and a great feeling of release and healing'. Berlin was for him 'a city that's so easy to "get lost" in – and to "find" oneself, too'.

Bowie realised that his goal was not simply to find a new way of making music, but rather to reinvent – or to come back to – himself. He no longer needed to adopt characters to sing his songs. He found the courage to throw away the props, costumes and stage sets.

The first Berlin album *Low*, which he had started to record at Château d'Hérouville near Paris, both portrayed the darkness and purged him of it. Bowie linked his scarred emotions with Eastern Europe's uncertainty, depicting a life and location on the edge. 'Art Decade' was West Berlin, cut off from the world, its art and culture dying without hope of retribution. 'Subterraneans' evoked the spirit of the trapped East Berliners, its faint jazz saxophones stirring memories of the past. 'Warszawa' conjured up the capital of Communist Poland, its alien bleakness underlined by his singing in an imaginary Slavic language.

Low was a cathartic work, a collaboration between Bowie, producer Tony Visconti, guitarist Carlos Alomar and English renaissance musician Brian Eno, 'the Einstein of Pop', who once spoke about the need to create music 'that felt like it had a place in the world . . . that felt rooted and properly positioned'.

'All my songs are very personal and I combine this with an exaggeration so the meaning is clearly brought home to the listener,' an artless, younger Bowie had told *Melody Maker* in 1970.

Over the intervening years he had refined his working method. In the recording studio music was laid down first, with three or four musicians racing through the rhythm tracks, working with as much spontaneity as possible. Bowie has always been inspired in his choice of collaborators, selecting artists with a voice and tone that matched his own, or who had a spirit that he required in his work. He gave them creative freedom, willing them – as guitarist Adrian Belew said – 'to add a lot of colours and sounds, to play solos and to be involved in the shape and form of the music itself'.

After the rhythm tracks were finished, Bowie slowed down, replaying them, reflecting on them and building the overdubs. Cocaine sugared these 'sweetening sessions' when a shift of perspective was needed, teasing out a new guitar line, adding saxophone or piano, keeping minds bright and awake until dawn and beyond. The secret was not to stop but to keep working when on a roll. Finally when the music was finished he began to write the lyrics.

'He writes them in the studio now,' John Lennon marvelled in an interview. 'He goes in with about four words and a few guys, and starts laying down all this stuff and he has virtually nothing – he's making it up in the studio.'

Bowie had been inspired by Pop's risky working style. He'd watched Pop come up with the words for 'China Girl' while standing at the microphone. He began to emulate the method, combining it with William S. Burroughs's fragmentation technique, jotting down a line or two and then improvising as the tape rolled. Words never came before music, hence sound never simply echoed their meaning.

Hansa had a darkness about it, said Carlos Alomar, 'not foreboding, just that the air was thick with a darker vibe . . . Germans, Nazis, the Wall, oppression'. In the war the converted concert hall had been used as a ballroom by the Gestapo. Goebbels and Speer had danced in its shadows. Now armed *Grenzpolizei* patrolled no man's land at the end of the street.

In the summer of 1977 Bowie, Eno and Visconti were on a creative

high. Visconti arrived in Studio 2 with his new Eventide Harmonizer, an effects processor which 'fucks with the fabric of time'. Eno brought from the UK his turquoise-keyed, toggle-sticked synthesizer-in-a-briefcase. With four key musicians – Alomar, George Murray, King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp and drummer Dennis Davis – they began to make a new album.

Visconti recorded the rehearsals, which were often strong enough to use as rhythm tracks. Eno tweaked and twisted their sound, then startled the musicians into new thinking by flipping through his *Oblique Strategies* cards: Distort Time, Discover Your Formula then Abandon Them, What is the Simplest Solution? He and Bowie worked in a kind of cyclone of febrile energy, and then like a pair of eccentric professors, addressing each other in the manner of comedians Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, breaking into fits of giggles. Bowie ate almost nothing, sailing home to Hauptstraße with Eno at dawn, breaking a raw egg into his mouth and sleeping a few hours before returning to the studio. Visconti edited down the spontaneous jam sessions, splicing the tape and songs into shape.

Once the music was recorded, cut and sweetened, Bowie turned his attention to the words. One of the first songs recorded that summer remained an instrumental track until the very end of production. Alone at the piano Bowie began to sketch out its lyrics, making it the title track, calling it 'Heroes'.

Visconti rigged up three microphones with electronic 'gates'. The first mike was twenty centimetres from Bowie, the second six metres away, the third fifteen metres away across the vast, dark hall. The gates were set to open when Bowie sang above a certain volume, forcing him to lift his voice from whisper to shout, using the room's natural echo. As Visconti adjusted the levels, Bowie wrote the lyrics. His bursts of inspiration were followed by periods of contemplation. Halfway through the song he asked to be left alone with his thoughts and piano. Visconti slipped out of the building, walked along Köthenerstraße and met backing vocalist Antonia Maaß. Maaß was Visconti's lover. From the studio control room Bowie saw them kiss, by the Wall.

Two hours later the final lyric was recorded. Bowie and Visconti added the backing vocals. 'Heroes' – with its reference to border guards shooting above the heads of a young couple – became Berlin's rock anthem, a droning, courageous wall of sound, fired with deep emotion, hammered by a clanging, metallic rhythm – produced in part by Visconti hitting a studio ashtray. Bowie called 'Heroes' – and his three Berlin albums – his DNA. Time and again it would be named as one of pop music's greatest and most original singles. The song may even have helped to bring down the Wall.

Many come to Berlin on a search, often for themselves. Bowie found himself in Berlin. He pulled away from addiction and shed his false personas, unlike many of his predecessors who remained trapped in their self-generated myths.

'I was David Jones from Brixton who wanted to do something artistically worthwhile,' he said at the end of his Berlin days, his voice rich and warm, his weight back at 130 pounds. 'But I hadn't the courage to face the audience as myself. It takes tremendous courage to face up to the adulation, the pressure, without cracking.'

The city changed him. Instead of an outlandish, alien superstar, he appeared to be himself: a defiant and gifted mortal searching for a saner future.

Berlin had also taught him to write about important things. He had grown up in the shadow of the Second World War, in blitzed Brixton and Bromley. His father had fought against Rommel in North Africa. His mother had survived the Luftwaffe's bombs. Like most of his generation he was fascinated by the Nazis. Their ideology hadn't moved him, in spite of a few ill-considered comments, but rather their theatricality. He had watched Riefenstahl's films and studied Goebbels' manufactured mythology. He had sketched out a musical based on the Propaganda Minister's life and lit the stage for the Thin White Duke tour with columns of light reminiscent of Speer's Cathedral of Light. At first there was a naivety in his fascination. Yet in time, surrounded by both victims and

perpetrators of Nazi evil, he evolved a coherent vision for himself and a new age. He captured and defined its quintessence, speaking for a confused generation which had lost hope in ideals and dreams.

One Sunday afternoon in 1977, five months after he'd recorded 'Heroes', I watched Bowie create a new song at Hansa. In the 'Great Hall by the Wall' he sat down at the piano with only the inkling of an idea and – in less than an hour – had enchanted a tune out of the air as if by magic.

I'd heard the gossip about him before we met of course, the stories of a paranoid, egotistical thin white duke who flirted with fascism and the occult. But over the months that we worked together I saw only a gentle, articulate, warm and affable man, filled with self-effacing good humour, and on the cusp of finding his own true self. In his Hauptstraße home he played records for me and others, explaining how musicians and groups come together then break up in the pursuit of creative goals, likening the process to *Die Brücke* artists earlier in the century: the Beatles and Lennon, Roxy Music and Brian Eno, *Der Blaue Reiter* and Kandinsky. Early one morning, after film director David Hemmings and I had spent a night reworking some of *Just a Gigolo*'s dialogue, I knocked on his trailer door and delivered new lines for him to memorise. Bowie scanned the pink pages, smiled weakly and said, 'Now melody I can handle ...'

We spent Christmas together: Bowie, Hemmings, partners and children plus add-ons like me. At a secluded restaurant in the Grunewald, we ate and drank too much and Bowie gave me a copy of Fritz Lang's biography. At the end of the happy evening I followed him downstairs to the huge, ceramic-tiled bathroom where – as we peed – we sang Buddy Holly songs together (or, at least, a line and a half from 'Good Golly Miss Molly').

For me, music is wonder-work. The charming of a tune, the hatching of rhythm, the whimsical concoction of lyrics are akin to a miracle. More than any other art, music is mysterious and unfixed, hanging in the air for a heartbeat, its every performance changed

by mood, instruments, even weather. I understand how Schinkel reshaped his Italian studies into the Altes Museum, how Kollwitz transformed her husband's weeping patients into haunting engravings. I can imagine Wim Wenders devising his cinematic angels, willing them to speak from another world, and see Hermann Hesse shaping the words to propel Goldmund on a quest to embrace all that perishes in this life. But how could Beethoven have heard the 'Ode to Joy' or Little Richard written 'Tutti Frutti'?

'The Revolutionary Song' which Bowie recorded at Hansa that Sunday in November was neither finished nor officially released. Yet its creation remained so special that I played it again and again, with shivers running up and down my spine, as the cassette tape stretched and that clear, beautiful voice grew as muffled as a lost dream.

I last saw Bowie in New York. He was on Broadway, playing the lead in a stage adaptation of *The Elephant Man*, and I had arranged to meet him after the show. I was staying on West 72nd Street with friends. The evening before I was reading in their basement apartment, and heard what sounded like a car backfiring, three, four, maybe five times. I kept on reading until I sensed something was wrong. I went outside. Across the road a crowd had already gathered at The Dakota. The police had started to put up barriers. John Lennon had been shot dead.

But the music didn't die that night, as Don McLean might have had it, for artists live on in their work if not the flesh, in their songs, on their canvases. The next evening, as the cold December air crackled with emotion, Bowie went on stage wearing a loincloth and no mask, and gifted the audience with one of the most intense performances of his career. He took a single, swift curtain call. Afterwards I knew he wouldn't want to see me, or anyone except Coco. I asked for her at the backstage door. She looked as if she hadn't slept. I gave her a white rose for Bowie, and asked her to send him my love. As I turned to go I paused and said, 'And please say thank you. Tell him, thank you for the gift.'

Ten years after his departure from Berlin, seven years after *The Elephant Man*, Bowie returned to the divided city. In June 1987 his driver drove him past the old Hauptstraße apartment, by the Brücke Museum and Hansa, to a stage in front of the Reichstag. As night fell he performed to a crowd of 70,000 fans, their sparklers and candles glittering around the Platz der Republik. Towards the end of the show he read aloud a message in German. 'We send our best wishes to all our friends who are on the other side of the Wall.' Then he sang 'Heroes'.

On the other side of the hateful divide, hundreds of young East Berliners strained to hear echoes of the concert. They caught sight of stage lights flashing off blank, bullet-marked walls. They heard Bowie greet them. They listened to his song. Their song. Berlin's song.

'We can be heroes, just for one day,' he sang in a daring, ironic elegy to both the divided world and his past life. Everyone can be a hero, be their own hero, and love can prevail, if only for one day, if only in a myth.

As 'Heroes' reached its climax some of the East German crowd pushed towards the Brandenburg Gate, whistling and chanting, 'Down with the Wall'. They threw insults and bottles at the *Volks-polizei*, rising together against the Party's thugs in a rare moment of protest. On stage Bowie heard the cheers from the other side. He was in tears.

'It was one of the most emotional performances I've ever done,' he said later. 'It was breaking my heart. I'd never done anything like that in my life, and I guess I never will again . . . That's the town where it was written, and that's the particular situation that it was written about. It was just extraordinary.'

So it is that the creative spirit transforms the world, flowing forth from the mouths and pens of poets, painters and songwriters. A gift of talent is bestowed on an artist and he or she labours in its service. The fruit of their toil is then offered to us all, and it in turn can awaken our individual gift or dream. Through wonder-works like 'Five Years', 'Ashes to Ashes' and 'Sag mir, wo die Blumen sind', artists give themselves to us in the same way that we are given all

that is truly precious in life: hoar frost, the taste of apples, a lover's laughter, favourite melodies.

In Berlin, Schinkel fought to realise his vision, Kollwitz struggled to shape her fears, Isherwood – living on a tutor's stipend – reworked reality, and Bowie made his journey from addiction to independence, from celebrity paranoia to radical, unmasked messenger who told us, all the fat-skinny people, all the nobody people who had dreamt of a new world of equals, that we were beautiful, that we could be ourselves.