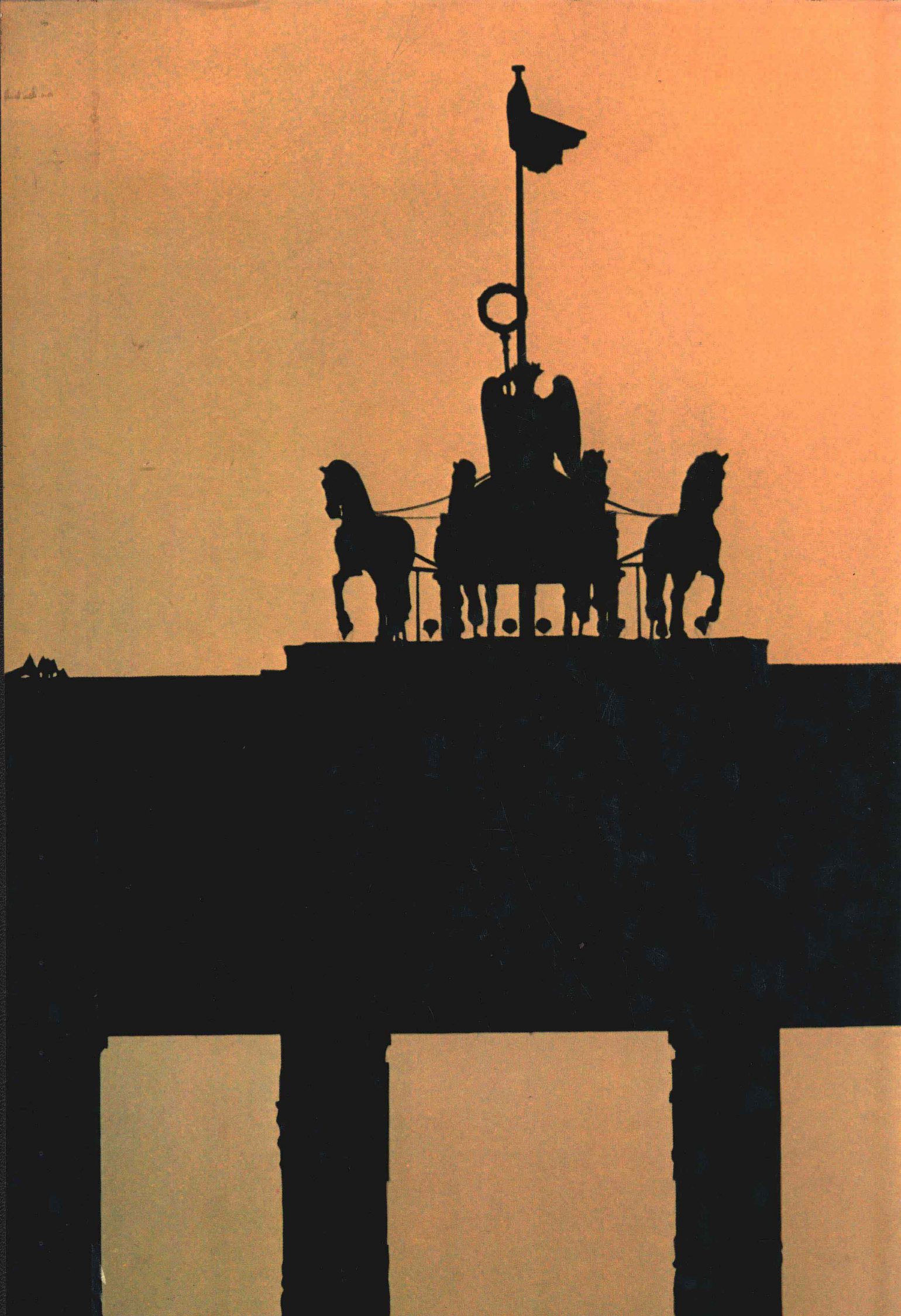


THE GREAT CITIES / **BERLIN**





# BERLIN

By Frederic V. Grunfeld  
and the Editors of Time-Life Books

With photographs by Leonard Freed

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*Cover:* the massive Brandenburg Gate, surmounted by a four-horsed chariot bearing the Goddess of Victory, forms a sombre silhouette against the sky. Built in 1791 by Carl Gotthard Langhans, the gate now stands just inside the Eastern half of Berlin, a nostalgic symbol of past glories.

*Last end paper:* layers of posters plastered on a news and advertising pillar in East Berlin have peeled away over the years to leave a curled and cryptic collage of announcements.

*First end paper:* fine mist softens the formal contours of the Charlottenburg Palace gardens in West Berlin. Designed in the baroque style, the palace and its grounds were started in 1695 for Sophie Charlotte, The Electress of Brandenburg.



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## A Sundered City

With any other city, you might begin by writing about the people, the architecture, the atmosphere. Here in Berlin you have to begin and end with politics. It is a political landscape, as fascinating in its way as anything that Nature has created in the Rockies or the Himalayas. Perhaps nowhere else in the world are political cause and effect quite so visible to the naked eye as in this utterly improbable city that used to be known as “Athens on the River Spree”. Step to the windows of one of the modern office buildings near the old centre of Berlin and you can take in all of the historical contradictions at a single glance.

In the distance, above the treetops of the Tiergarten, gleams the golden figure of an immense Winged Victory, celebrating a series of Prussian military triumphs over the French, the Danes, the Austrians, the Bavarians; the statue’s 200-foot column is ringed with the barrels of French cannon captured during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71.

Near by, at the northern edge of the park, stands the domed, ornate Reichstag building, home of the German parliament until 1933, when the notorious Reichstag fire, widely believed to have been started by the Nazis themselves, gave Hitler the excuse he needed to clamp an iron grip on the whole of Germany. After more than 30 years as a ruin, the burned-out building has been carefully restored to serve as, among other things, a museum for “problems of German history”.

In the foreground looms a red-brick ruin still waiting either to be demolished or reconstructed—the bombed-out shell of the Imperial Museum of Arts and Crafts, its walls adorned with 1890s mosaics depicting the creative genius of mankind. Bushes and small trees have taken root on what little is left of the roof. Not far away is a grey reminder of Hitler’s dismal taste in architecture, the former Ministry of Propaganda, where Dr. Joseph Goebbels ran the world’s most powerful public relations machine. This pompous, oppressively rectilinear building has had its face lifted and is now used for government offices of the German Democratic Republic, or Deutsche Demokratische Republik, known locally as the DDR and more generally as East Germany.

Between the ruined museum and the reconstructed ministry runs a wall, the likes of which might be seen at modern penitentiaries the world over. Averaging 12 feet in height, this is the neat, efficient-looking concrete barrier known as the “modern Wall” to distinguish it from its sloppy, breeze-block predecessor, hastily built in 1961, remnants of which may still be seen here and there along the frontier between East and West

**In West Berlin’s Tiergarten, a bronze statue of Otto von Bismarck faces the Winged Victory erected to celebrate foreign victories that led in 1871 to the unification of Germany, with Bismarck as its Chancellor and Berlin its capital. Today these symbols of defunct Empire are swarmed over by tourists who come to see the city that is divided by a wall of concrete.**



Berlin. On the eastern side of the modern Wall runs a strip of open ground strewn with tank obstacles—no one is going to crash through this wall with a truck or an armoured car—and beyond that a wire-mesh fence of matching height. At intervals, concrete watch-towers spring from the ground like giant tulips. The two or three men in each tower, dressed in grey uniforms reminiscent of the old *Feldgrau* of the Wehrmacht, are constantly busy surveying the terrain through field glasses, like conscientious lifeguards at a particularly dangerous beach.

But the people, East or West, who work within range of that baleful scrutiny have long since grown indifferent to it. They go about their tasks oblivious of the guards, the guns, the Wall: after all, this is Berlin. Only tourists still come, by the busload, to stare at the sight. They pour out of the buses and clamber on to the wooden platforms that a thoughtful West Berlin government has erected at several points for the benefit of those who want to peer over the Wall. A neatly lettered sign cautions visitors that they do so at their own risk and sends a shiver of apprehension down their spines. Yet nothing happens: the towers and the guards with field glasses are a kind of solemn ritual, the Berlin equivalent of the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace—except that the guns are loaded, and now and then some foolhardy young man is caught trying to climb the inner fence. They rarely get as far as the Wall itself.

The inhabitants of Berlin have had more than 30 years to learn to live with this schizoid state of affairs. It is the only “normalcy” they know. (I use the word advisedly, remembering that it was coined by President Harding for another preposterous era, the Prohibition years of American history.) I think it bespeaks a certain collective genius that the Berliners have not only grown accustomed to the division of their city but have even managed to thrive on it. The average West Berliner has a higher income than the average American, just as the average East Berliner is better off, economically, than any of his neighbours in the Soviet bloc. Both halves, at any rate, can congratulate themselves on having made a successful comeback from the days when the city lay in ruins and there was more rubble in Berlin than in all the other towns of Germany put together.

Not that I propose to measure the city's greatness in terms of marks and pfennigs (or Marx and Engels for that matter). Berlin's golden time was the heroic but threadbare age of *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill; of Josef von Sternberg's film *The Blue Angel*, with Marlene Dietrich, and of the Paul Hindemith-Oskar Kokoschka opera, *Murder, the Hope of Women*. In the Twenties, the whole world camped on its doorstep, to listen to music and watch the theatre, or to argue about art in Kurfürstendamm cafés. Then the Third Reich put an end to all that. When the smoke of war had cleared, the dismal verdict was that “Germany has become a ghetto for Germans”. In recent years the pendulum has been swinging back again. Foreigners are once more flocking to Berlin to live,



In a poignant reminder of what it means to live in a divided city, a woman at an East Berlin railway station holds aloft an umbrella tied with a scarf so that long absent relatives from the West will be sure to recognize her. After tensions between the two Berlins abated in the early 1970s, many West Berliners visited the East for the first time in 10 years or more.



as they did in the days of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, not because their governments have sent them but because they love the life.

One English writer who has lived in Berlin for several years speaks of the “tension in the air that keeps me on my toes”. He loves to see the East-West yin-yang in action, even at home on his television set—Russian and Hungarian movies on the two DDR channels, along with more conventional fare on three or four Western channels. A young, romantically inclined South American composer I know says that he lives here “for the decadence, the absurdity, the music, and the opportunity to meet wonderfully argumentative yet co-operative girls”.

People have tried to sum up the charms of the place with the phrase *Berliner Luft*—the air of Berlin. It is intended as a metaphor, I suppose, although one local scientist insists that Berlin air really does have a heady, champagne-like effect on the human constitution. More sober observers talk about “the quality of life”, by which they mean that you can go to a different play or an opera every night of the week and—equally important—you can always find a parking space if you want to drive there. Berlin, unbelievable as it sounds, has virtually no traffic problem. Thanks to its very isolation deep within East Germany, the Western half of the city still has a humane ratio of cars to people, and in the Eastern half, where many consumer items remain in short supply, the cars are even fewer.

Certainly in West Berlin the *Berliner Luft* is also very much a matter of intangibles, compounded of the way people whistle in the streets, their incessant joke-telling and the charming insults they are always ready to heap on one another’s heads. A prominent member of the American colony here confesses that, like me, he loves *Berlinerisch*—the amazing patois with which the locals murder conventional High German, and which falls on our prejudiced ears with the sound of angels’ tongues. He learned it as a teenager before the war when his father, an American correspondent, sent him to a Berlin school. Afterwards he came back as an emissary of the U.S. government, found himself enamoured of the place and decided to stay on even when his appointment expired, although this meant resigning from the diplomatic service.

My own affection for Berlin is rooted in somewhat more ambivalent circumstances. I am not fond of Berlin beer, and am disinclined to spend much time in the Berlin pubs—*Kneipen*, or *Stampen* in local argot—where the heart of the city is said to beat. Hence I am condemned to remain a hopeless outsider for the rest of my life. Still, I return here with suspicious regularity to find out how the old town is getting on. It must be love.

I have come to Berlin many times from many directions, by train and plane as well as by car. But it was my mother who brought me the first time. I had been conceived in Montreux, on the Lake of Geneva, but she gave birth to me in Berlin, just in time to let me experience something of the city



before it was devastated by Nazi ambition, American bombs and Russian artillery. My pre-war Berlin memories are those of a boy of six, seven, eight, nine—too young, you may think, to remember much about it, and yet not too young to have had the run of the city and to have acquired certain very clear and lasting insights about the place.

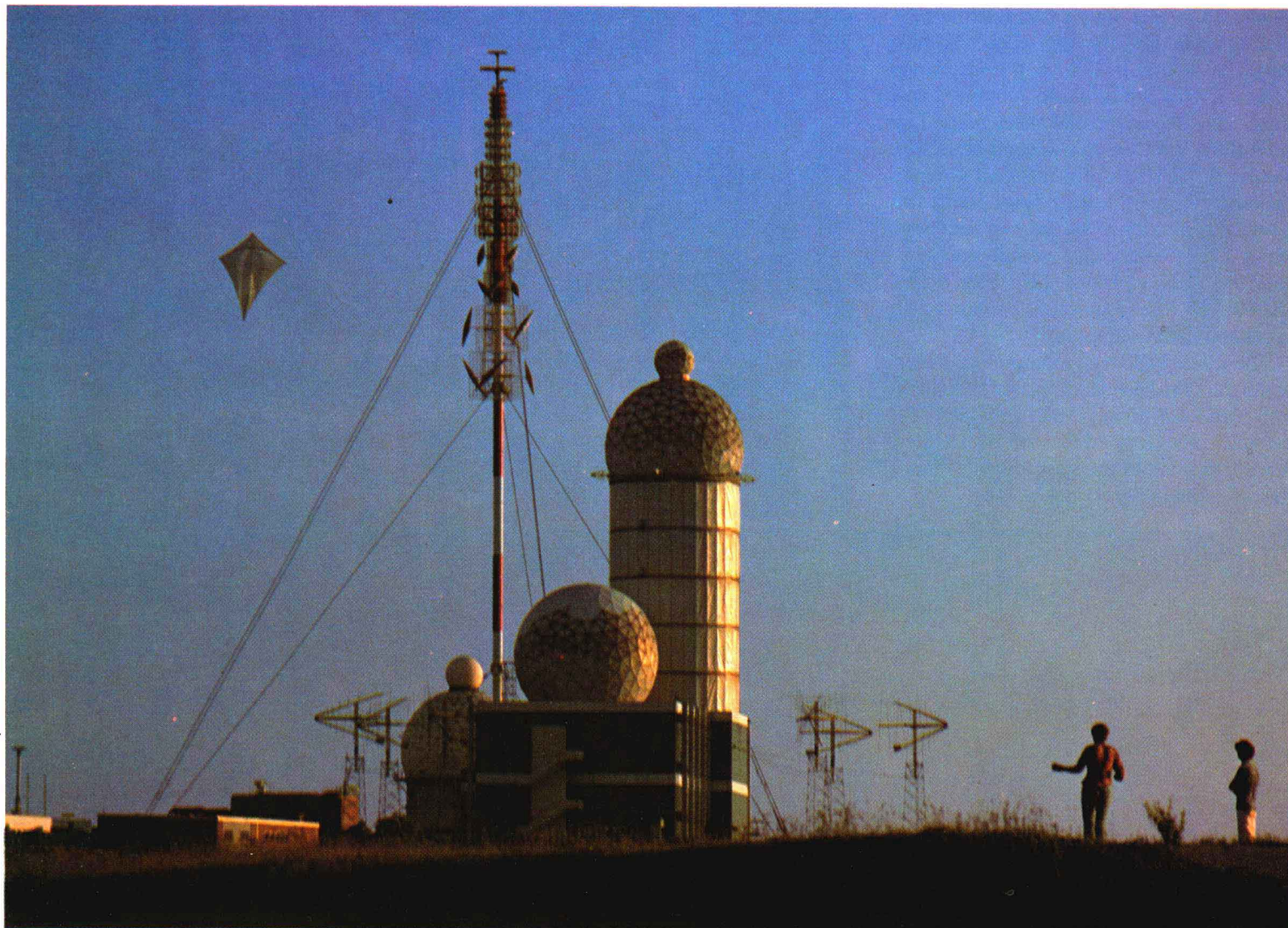
My Berlin was a spacious, dignified, beautiful city in the throes of being taken over by a gang of cut-throat vulgarians. It was perfectly plain to me (especially since I had frequent opportunity to compare their behaviour with that of the Swiss) that these unpleasant people with their brown and black shirts, their pistols and decorative daggers dangling from their belts, were wretched little men who dealt in fear. In pre-war Berlin vast numbers of these bully boys were for ever strutting about the streets trying to look important. They impressed one another with the same terrible zeal for obedience and *Ordnung* that I have since witnessed among the policemen and *Apparatchiks* of East Berlin.

We lived, my two sisters and I, an embarrassingly sheltered life on diplomat's row, in the Tiergartenstrasse, opposite the immense park that had once been a royal game preserve. Our house stood between the Dutch embassy and the Papal Nuncio's residence. I still remember the stern-faced gentlemen in black who used to watch from the windows when we made a noise in the garden: among them was the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli, who had spent nine years in Berlin and was to become better known to history as Pope Pius XII.

In the park across the street there were bridle paths, a small lake full of wild ducks, a meandering stream, and something called the Sieges-Allee—the Victory Mall—that led to the tower of the Winged Victory. Here, in splendid array, stood the marble effigies of Germany's conquering heroes of the past—kings, emperors, princes and generals. A marble bench had been provided with each *Sieger* or victor so that one could sit and gaze to one's heart's content at the plumed helmets and coats of mail that the sculptors had rendered in meticulous detail. The warrior who made the deepest impression on me was *Otto mit dem Pfeil* (Otto with the Arrow), who had been obliged, my governess told me, to live the last years of his life with the point of an arrow embedded in his skull. The sculptor, as I recall, had depicted him holding his helmet under his arm, his poor head swathed in bandages.

The row of victors had been sculpted before the First World War (after the Second they were given a decent burial among the rubble). There were no *Sieger* from the First World War, of course, although elsewhere the heroic memory of the losers of 1914-18 was constantly being evoked—in memorials, radio programmes, films, posters, veterans' appeals. My own young feelings in the matter were rather mixed. I knew that my father had enlisted in the Prussian cavalry at the start of the war. We had a photograph of him at the age of 18—a slender youth on a very large horse—





Two West Berliners fly a kite near a U.S. radar installation sited on top of the Teufelsberg, or Devil's Mountain. At 377 feet, the "mountain" is the highest of three giant mounds created from wartime rubble. Its slopes include public gardens as well as two ski jumps and a toboggan run supplied with artificial snow.

setting out for Russia with a spiked helmet and an enormous sabre. (It occurs to me now that Franz Kafka would have looked like that had he been able to pass the physical.)

But after a year and a half at the front it had taken my father two years in military hospitals to recover from assorted fevers. Understandably, he never told us tales of derring-do under shot and shell, such as were to be heard daily on the radio. Instead, if the war was mentioned at all, my mother always brought up the painful subject of her cousin Raymond, on the British side of the family, who had been killed fighting the Germans at Ypres. He had been the only son, and neither his womenfolk nor mine ever recovered from the shock: his four sisters, indeed, had all remained unmarried and taken up Good Works among the London Poor.

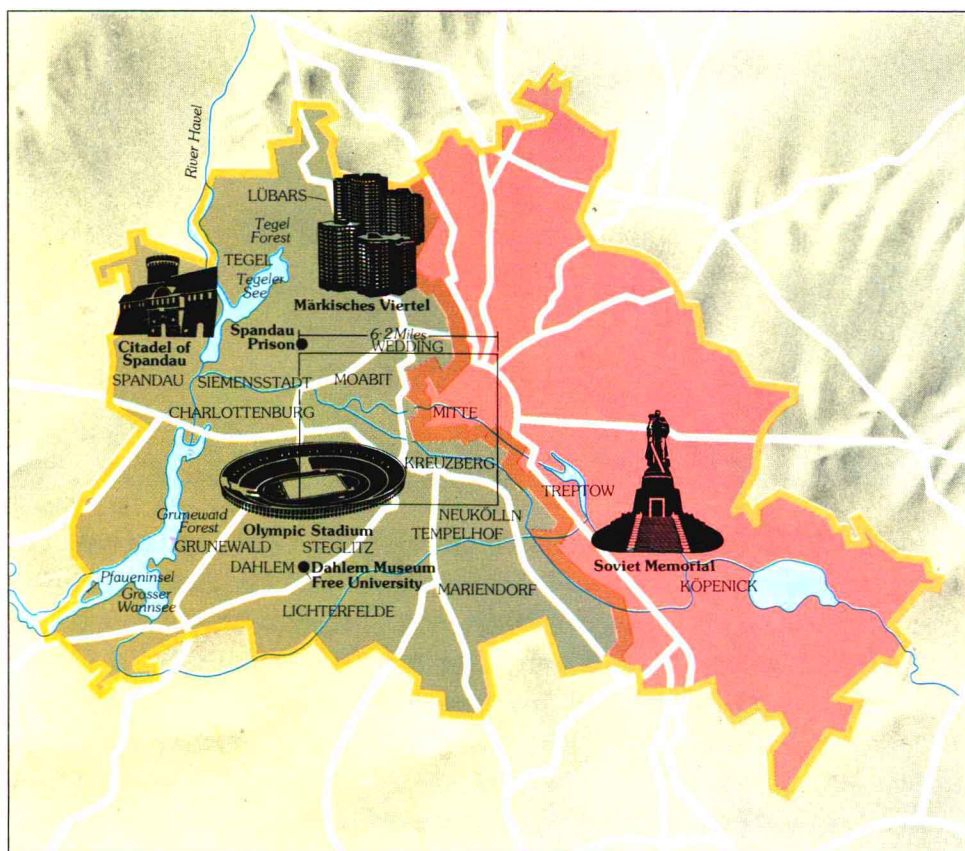
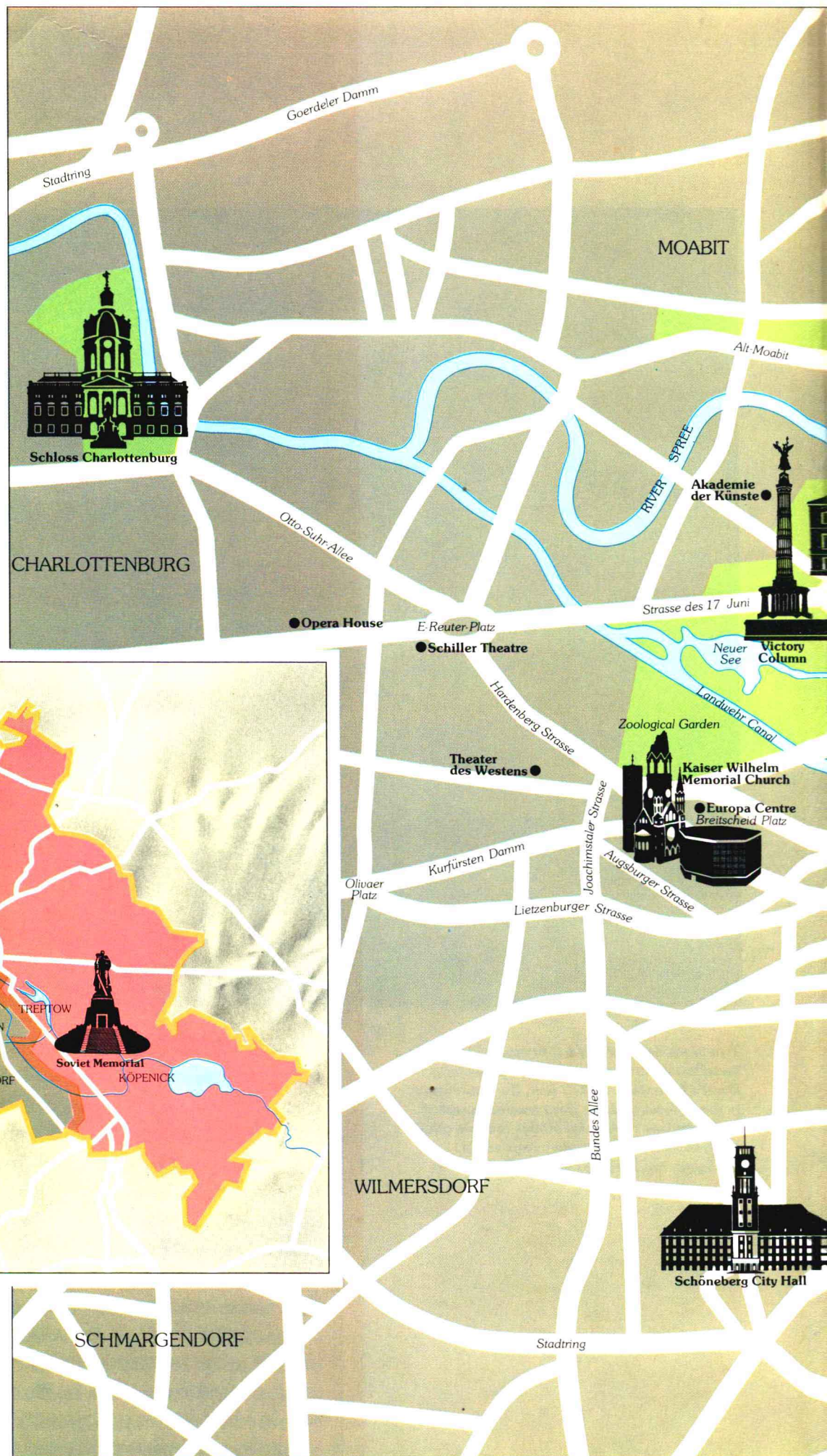
I harboured a secret admiration for the Prussian cavalry, however, because I used to watch the old Field Marshal von Mackensen trotting by on his morning ride through the Tiergarten. He was well over 80 at the



## Two Cities in One

Berlin, 110 miles inside East Germany, is divided by the Wall (brown), whose 28½-mile length is plotted in full on the inset map below. It joins the so-called “country” Wall (tan), also shown on the inset map. This runs along West Berlin’s western boundary, sealing the city off from the East German countryside (grey). Luckily West Berlin has plenty of farmland as well as extensive parks and forests (light green) on either side of the River Havel. Like East Berlin, the West is also generously provided with lakes and waterways (blue).

The major buildings, monuments, streets and squares in the inner districts of East (pink) and West (dark green) Berlin are designated on the large map. Most of the historic monuments are in the East, which contains the old capital’s city centre, or *Mitte*.









time, and always wore mufti. But there was no doubting that this was a cavalryman of the old school, silver-haired, straight as a ramrod; a survivor from the age of the *Sieger*.

In the Berlin of those days von Mackensen must have been the only one entitled to a uniform who was not wearing one. After Hitler became German Chancellor in 1933 the city suddenly blossomed out in a wide variety of uniforms: not only the army in grey and the navy in blue but, far more numerous and assorted, the members of Nazi organizations. There were Stormtroopers in brown; SS men in black; the Reichsarbeitsdienst (labour corps) in a sort of ochre; the National Socialist Kraftfahrerkorps (for drivers of cars) in black; the Hitler Youth in shorts, brown shirts and Sam Browne belts; girls of the BDM (League of German Girls) in black skirts and white blouses; even the six-year-old *Pimpfe*, or cub scouts of the Nazi movement, dressed in black as mini-SS men.

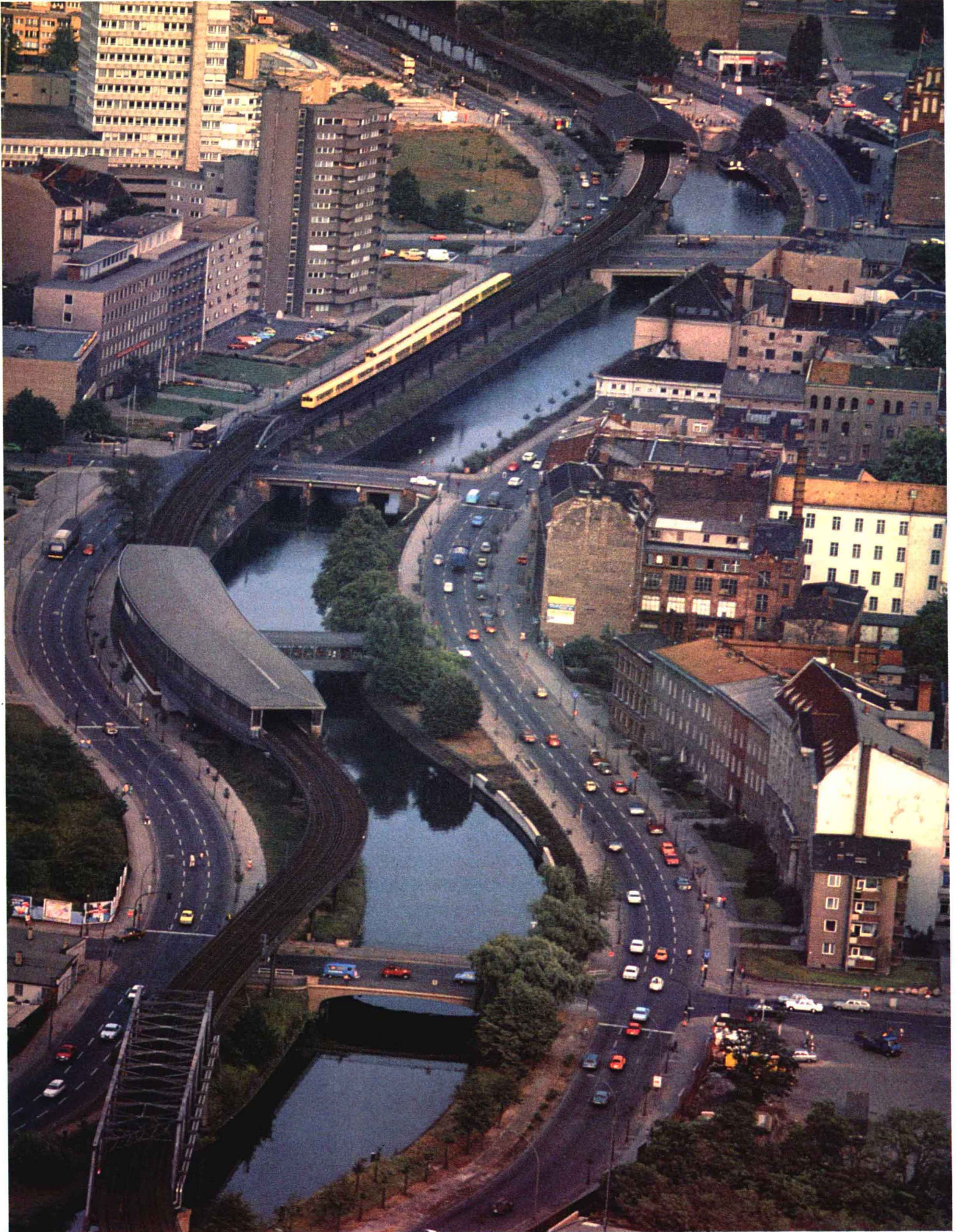
They swelled the cheering crowds that stood in front of the Reich Chancellery chanting, "We want to see our Führer!", the cheering crowds that lined the avenues for the triumphal reception of Benito Mussolini, the cheering crowds that celebrated the "700th birthday of Berlin"—an anniversary that, I learn to my belated surprise, was based on a conveniently fictitious date.

Yet, in spite of the proliferating uniforms and the public hysteria, I recall that there were astonishing numbers of ordinary Berliners who resisted the blandishments of Dr. Goebbels' propaganda. Even on those rare occasions when the Nazis were out of uniform, one could still tell them from the non-Nazis by the way they spoke: the Nazis always barked, as though they were already in a war, giving orders to subordinates. The decent people spoke softly and tended to wear worried expressions—rightly so, as it turned out. "*Kooft euch Kämme*," they used to say to each other. "*Et komm'n lausije Zeiten*." (You'd better stock up on combs; lousy times are coming.)

Berlin then had more outdoor monuments and statues than Rome, just as it had more bridges than Venice (a statistic that still startles visitors). Directly across the street from our house stood a statue of Theodor Fontane, the "German Flaubert" whose novels and essays describe Berlin in its 19th-Century heyday. When we packed up and left, first for England and then the United States, I was just tall enough to reach Fontane's marble boots if I stood on tiptoe. When I returned to Berlin for the first time in the 1950s, I walked over to our old address and found that the entire block had been bombed into rubble during the war. Now there was grass and shrubbery on both sides of the street. Only the statue of Fontane was still standing there, untouched by the bombs, although looking neglected and forlorn in that abandoned corner of the park. And to my surprise he seemed to have shrunk in size; now, without stretching, I was able to touch the marble folds of his frock coat!

Flanked on one side by the U-Bahn, West Berlin's underground railway, and on the other by a road, the Landwehr Canal winds through the city. The canal, now popular with anglers and boatmen, is part of a 114-mile system of waterways that carried much of Berlin's trade during the city's growth in the 19th Century.







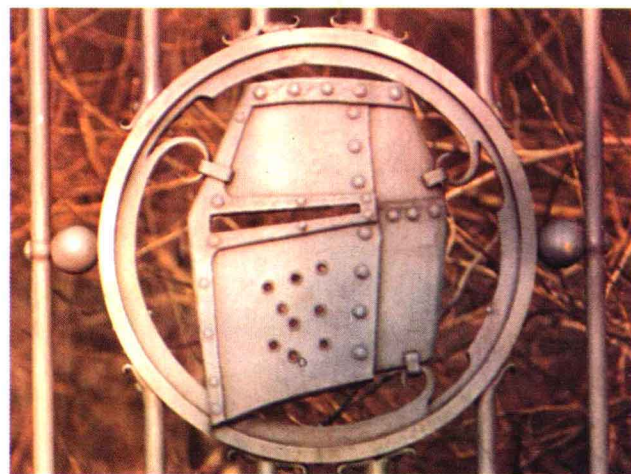
Decorative medallions set into the railings of a bridge leading to the 16th-Century Citadel of Spandau in outer West Berlin constitute a capsule history of German militarism. Each represents the headgear of a particular era, from the face-protecting iron helms of medieval knights to the more familiar profile of the helmet worn by soldiers of the Wehrmacht.

Berlin, meanwhile, had been flattened and had made a new start. Physically the city was in ruins; psychologically it was already well on the way to recovery. People no longer barked at one another; their souls had been scrubbed clean by misery. Even policemen smiled. Next to London and Amsterdam, Berlin had become the most tolerant city in Europe—at least in the Western sectors. In the East it was another story. Most of the DDR policemen and party functionaries with whom I came into contact were busy upholding the best traditions of that German officialdom whose devotion to duty and sense of rectitude have always made life miserable for everybody else. The boots of the Volkspolizei, the so-called People's Police, were not as shiny as I had remembered those of the Nazis, but their tread was as heavy and the atmosphere in that half of the city nearly as oppressive as before.

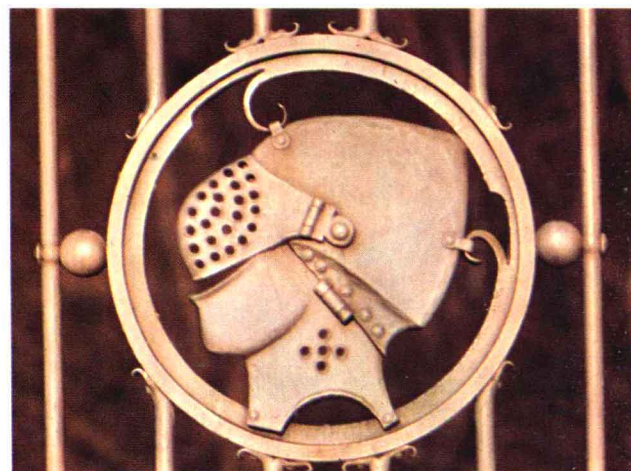
This psychological division of the city into palpably “tense” and visibly “relaxed” halves reflected the convolutions of post-war international politics and Berlin's uncomfortably exposed position on the strategic chessboard. At Yalta in 1945 it had seemed reasonable enough for Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin to agree on a joint military occupation of the city: it was assumed that the Allies would pursue a common policy towards their defeated foe. Instead, differences between East and West soon escalated into the Cold War and the line between their respective armies of occupation in Germany froze into a hostile frontier. The Western half, protected by American military might and sustained economically by the Marshall Plan, became a “Federal Republic” faintly suggestive of a United States of Germany. The Eastern half, under Soviet tutelage, was duly transformed into a “Democratic Republic” along Stalinist lines, with East Berlin as its capital.

Had Berlin been located on the frontier between these two rivals, some sort of condominium might have been arranged. But the city lies deep within the DDR, only some 40 miles from the Polish border. The American, French and British sectors, with roughly two million of the city's three million people, form an enclave without a corridor; the nearest West German point on the autobahn lies at Helmstedt, more than 100 miles away, a circumstance from which most of Berlin's post-war troubles stem. As a consequence, truncated Berlin is not only a capital without a real country but also an industrial centre without free and direct access to a hinterland in which to sell its produce and recruit its workers.

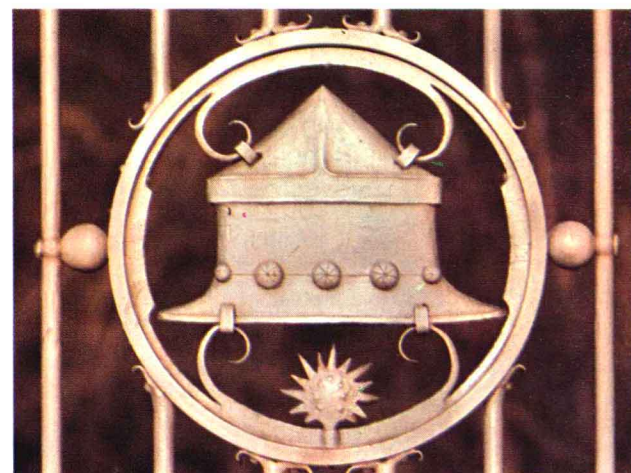
In 1948 the Soviets put the viability of this enclave to the test by cutting its surface links to the West and turning off the electricity. A hastily improvised U.S. and British airlift proved what no one had suspected until then—that a city of more than two million can be supplied entirely by air if necessary. Moreover, 11 months of siege and psychological warfare stiffened the backbone of the West Berliners. The Western Allies had shown their



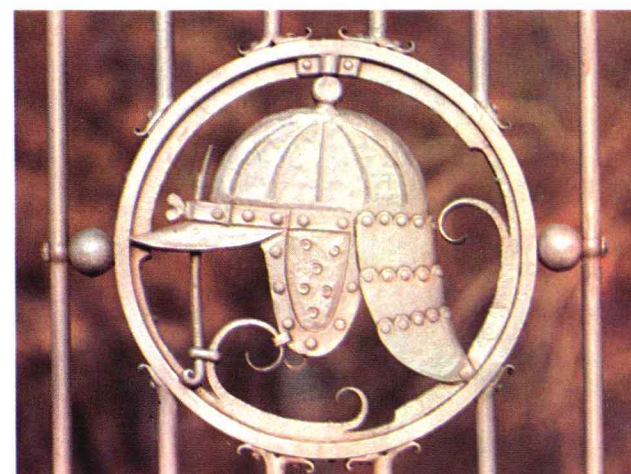
Helm, late 13th Century



Armet, c. 1440

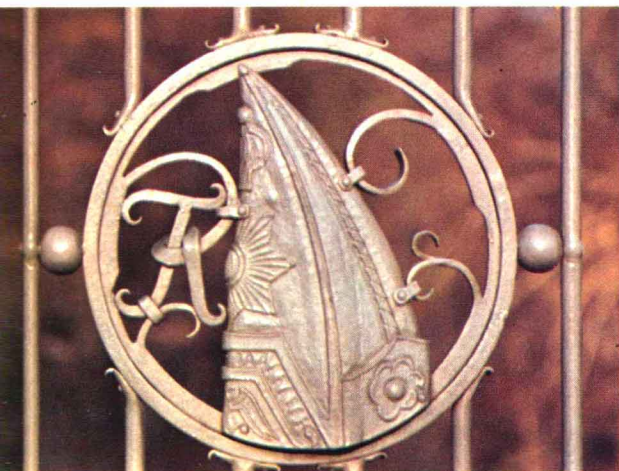


Kettle hat, c. 1450

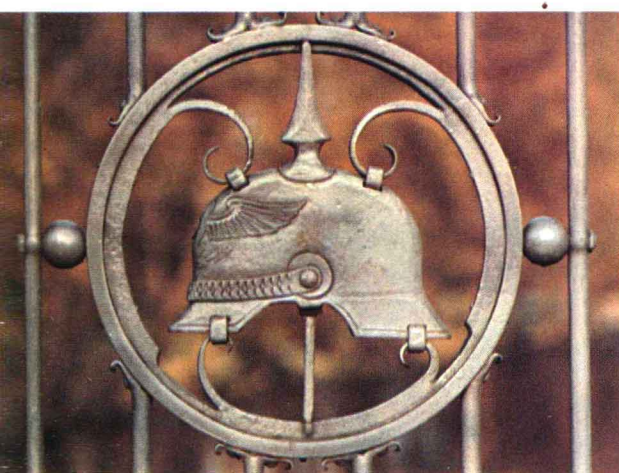


Cavalry helmet, mid-17th Century

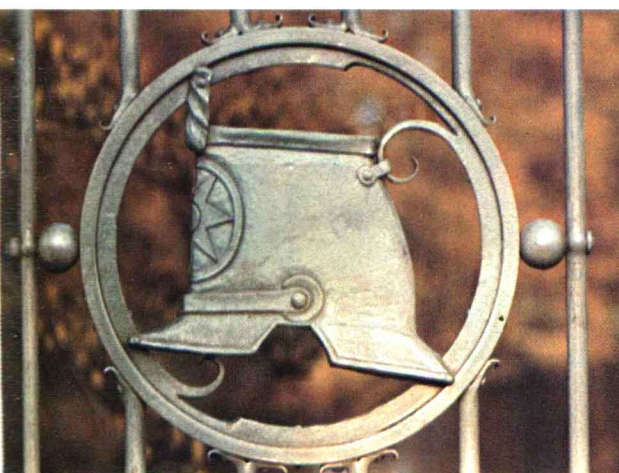




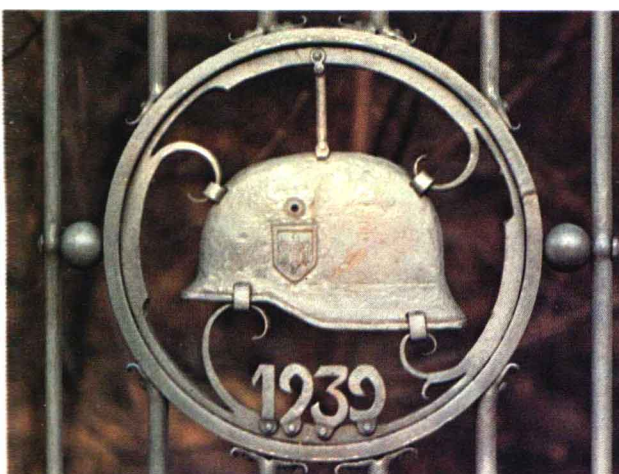
Grenadier's cap, c. 1800



Pickelhaube, c. 1880



Shako, c. 1890



Wehrmacht steel helmet

determination to defend their occupation rights in the city. Perhaps more importantly, the West Berliners themselves had demonstrated their willingness and ability to exist as an anomaly, an island-state in the middle of a continent. Henceforth they called themselves, with justifiable pride, *Die Insulaner*, The Islanders.

A city of more conventional size and aspect might well have succumbed to the blockade. But here a historical accident served to tip the scales. The town planners who drew the city limits of modern Berlin in 1920 were unusually generous and included not only the existing suburbs but also many of the outlying farm communities. With 346 square miles, Berlin was intended to rival London as the most widespread city in Europe. Even after it was divided, with eight Eastern districts going to the Soviet sector, the remaining 12 districts (with 54 per cent of the land) still covered twice as much ground as either Frankfurt or Stuttgart.

If Paris were to be cut in half and isolated the same way, people in the enclave *arrondissements* would soon be climbing up the walls with claustrophobia. West Berlin, with its 25,000 acres of canals, rivers, lakes, farmland, parks, and forests—the Grunewald, with its 15½ square miles of pine and deciduous trees, is the largest forest within city limits anywhere in the world—had sufficient breathing space, not to say *Lebensraum*, to withstand the psychological pressures of a long siege.

In recent years, thanks to the agreements reached in 1971 between the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain and France, it has been much easier for West Berliners to visit relatives in the East or to take an occasional holiday in the DDR. Yet at no time has either side been happy with the division. The DDR authorities, understandably, have always regarded West Berlin as a thorn in their side. No other country in the world has to put up with a foreign enclave in its capital city: Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Monaco, Liechtenstein and Andorra are all on the periphery of the countries from which they have been carved. Could one imagine a London in which an area from Mayfair to Kensington belongs to Albania? No wonder Berlin suffers from a peculiar form of siege mentality in which both sides feel beleaguered—the East ideologically, the West territorially.

During the 1960s, as cultural correspondent for a U.S. magazine, I returned often to Berlin—East and West—to cover the post-war theatrical and operatic resurgence. At the time, the Western half was undergoing an identity crisis, searching for a role to play in the post-war world. Economically it was back on its feet. New buildings were springing up everywhere, factories were humming, people who had been content merely to have got off alive suddenly found themselves more prosperous than ever before. Even the political situation had been stabilized, after a fashion, when in 1961 the East Germans erected the Wall and put an end to the wholesale exodus of their labour force. The West Berliners, however, wanted some-



thing more for their city than just a carbon copy of the general West German “economic miracle”—the celebrated *Wirtschaftswunder*. Berlin had once been the capital of an empire; if now it could not be the capital of a country, it ought at least to function as a cultural centre.

Perhaps I should explain that *Kultur* in Germany is not the haphazard and largely private affair it tends to be in Paris, London or New York. The arts have always been taken very seriously by German governments, whether monarchist or republican. The tradition of state-sponsored culture—of *Kulturpolitik* (a very German concept, this)—goes back to the days when Germany was a patchwork of independent duchies and principalities, and every court worthy of the name supported its own theatre and opera house, as well as a household staff of musicians, poets and painters. J. S. Bach held a series of state appointments; Goethe served as minister to a duke; Richard Wagner nearly bankrupted the King of Bavaria; even 20th-Century mavericks like Paul Klee and Bertolt Brecht drew government pay cheques in one capacity or another.

Berlin’s cultural renaissance, therefore, was deemed to be essentially a government affair. If New York wants to build a Lincoln Center, its sponsors are obliged to go hat in hand to the city’s millionaire art patrons; in Germany, theatres and opera houses are built with public funds and kept going by generous annual subsidies. No one objects if the theatre loses money with every ticket sold; culture is not expected to be self-supporting—but then, neither are armies. Moreover, an employee of a state theatre is not, as on Broadway or in London’s West End, a freelance artist who must expect to live from season to season and hand to mouth; he is a civil servant who enjoys that greatest of desiderata, *eine gesicherte Stellung*, a permanent position, as secure as a job in the post office.

There has always been room here and there, of course, for a poet starving in a garret or a painter without a professorship. But traditionally it is the public institutions that have set the pace, especially in the city that wanted to rival Athens, and had built its theatres and museums to look just like Greek temples. Berlin, indeed, has long been known by the symphony orchestra, the art galleries and the opera company it keeps.

As the *Wunder* gathered momentum and the government subsidies began to pour in, West Berlin became a hotbed of cultural activity. The inauguration of the new West Berlin Opera House in 1961 marked, in the words of the then mayor, Willy Brandt, “a big step towards making Berlin the centre of Germany”. It was followed by a splendid Philharmonic Hall with an auditorium in the shape of a figure-eight, a new Academy of Arts, a new National Library and a new National Gallery designed by the exiled Berlin architect Mies van der Rohe, whose best-known buildings stand in New York and Chicago. The theatre also proceeded to flourish mightily in both halves of the city. On any given night of the season you could have your choice of performances in more than a dozen theatres in the West



This sketch of an entwined couple on a dance floor provides an example of the earthy humour in the works of Heinrich Zille (1858-1929). His cartoons of Berlin working-class life are still immensely popular and nowadays are found hanging in galleries and public places such as the restaurant at right in West Berlin.