

WRITING THE NEW BERLIN

The German Capital in Post-Wall Literature



Katharina Gerstenberger

Writing the New Berlin

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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CAMDEN HOUSE
Rochester, New York

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My husband Kavindra Malik was there for me, always. I dedicate this book to my mother, who knows Berlin. Her memories of growing up in

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K. G.
January 2008

Introduction: Newness and Its Discontents: Berlin Literature in the 1990s and Beyond

*Die größte Veränderung, fand er, war, daß
alle meinten, es habe sich so viel verändert.*

*[The biggest change, he found, was that
everyone thought so much had changed.]*

— Jakob Arjouni, *Magic Hoffmann*

EVEN BEFORE THE BERLIN WALL had been fully dismantled, critics began to call for the one comprehensive novel that could explain what was happening to Germany and the Germans. This novel never appeared. Instead, writers created a patchwork body of about three hundred texts about a city whose postwar identity was disintegrating virtually overnight.¹ In many ways, the experience of German unification was too diverse, too ambiguous, and too influenced by global developments to be captured by one novel. Moreover, beginning in the late 1980s, the idea of literature as a source for national identity and the writer as the nation's conscience had come under scrutiny. Not only the call for the quintessential Berlin novel but also its non-arrival marks the reorientation process in German culture and literature that is the topic of this study.

Berlin's history, its symbolism as a site of the Cold War as well as of unification, and the unprecedented building boom of the 1990s turned the city into a laboratory for a changing German identity. The question of how German identity was changing and how to evaluate the transformations triggered considerable debate, but generally this shift has been understood as a desire to transcend the defining power of the Nazi past and to achieve political and cultural normalization.² This study argues for a more nuanced understanding of this process and seeks to accomplish two things: to capture the variety of literary responses to a changing Berlin and to analyze the political and aesthetic stakes in the various depictions. Three intersecting conceptual frameworks and sets of questions form the parameters of this investigation: postmodernity and its attitudes toward history; globalization and its pressures on the nation; and the end of the postwar period and the search for new definitions of what it means to be German. In the 1990s Berlin challenged writers to bear witness to a period of extraordinary transition and to assess the transformations at a time

when the terms of evaluation themselves began to change under the pressures of generational and cultural shifts.

Why Berlin? Berlin was, of course, not the only place in Germany undergoing change, and the intense focus on the city at the expense of other sites and populations was criticized early on. And even within Berlin the attention was selectively lavished on certain neighborhoods and people rather than others. Yet there can be no doubt that Berlin was indeed the city to which Germans and others looked to see, literally, unification unfold and the new capital being built. Berlin, more than any other German city, is historically associated with change, and this history provides the discursive and artistic background for the representation and evaluation of changes in the 1990s, not only for the city itself but for all of Germany.³ Writers, together with other artists and intellectuals, have traditionally been vocal in their embracing and chastising of Berlin, and they assumed this role also after 1989. What is different in the 1990s and beyond as opposed to, say, the Weimar Republic or the early nineteenth century, in addition to unprecedented efforts at marketing the city, is the range of voices that weighed in on the New Berlin and the genres employed in taking a stance. Self-absorbed and cosmopolitan at the same time, for a period of about ten years Berlin focused attention on itself. The exhilaration it sparked resonated well beyond the city limits.

The Changing Status of Literature

Since the eighteenth century literature has played a significant role in Germans' understanding of their culture and national identity. In the postwar period in West Germany, writers assumed the role of the conscience of the nation and were accepted as such even by those who vehemently disagreed with some of the criticisms they expressed. In East Germany, too, literature was linked to the state and its socialist system in a dual role of legitimizing and criticizing the GDR. In both Germanys this role began to wane in the late 1980s. In the GDR, the "bannende Macht der Doktrin" (spellbinding power of doctrine) disappeared.⁴ In the FRG, writers began to distance themselves from the role of moral taskmaster.⁵ Since the fall of the wall, the function of literature in contemporary German society has been subject to intense debates.⁶ Traditional assumptions about a privileged relationship between literature and Germanness still reverberate in these discussions.

Three interconnected issues govern the reconfiguration of German literature within German national culture: first, can and should literature continue to function as the conscience of the nation; second, will the visual media make literature irrelevant; and third, is literature losing artistic

autonomy under the onslaught of commercialization. The condemnation of politically involved literature as “*Gesinnungsästhetik*” (aesthetics of opinion) and the endorsement of “*engagierte Literatur*” (engaged literature) are elements in an ongoing debate between conservative critics, most prominently Ulrich Greiner and Karl Heinz Bohrer, and commentators aligned with the political left like Helmut Peitsch.⁷ While conservative critics favor the autonomy of the literary work from both politics and commerce, critics from the left argue for the continued role of the writer as an important voice on issues pertaining to the nation.

Generational change further complicates the situation. As a group, younger writers like Julia Franck, Sven Regener, or Elke Naters, though significantly different from one another, have moved away from the political commitments so important to their predecessors. Or, perhaps more accurately, they address German identity from different, often less absolute, perspectives. They also tend to blur the divide between literature, popular culture, and commercialism by integrating brand names and pop lyrics into their texts and by embracing consumerism.⁸ These writers do not signal any interest in the role of commentator on German politics, but they do not embrace the aesthetic and commercial autonomy of the literary work demanded by conservative critics either. Instead, they erode further the distinction between literature and other forms of cultural expression. The experience of German protagonists in global contexts figures prominently in some of the most successful texts of younger writers, reframing questions of German national identity as well as literature’s contribution to it.⁹

Virtually all scholarly books about German literature after 1989, many of them anthologies and conference proceedings, observe that there is no unified style or theme of post-unification literature.¹⁰ In contrast to the relative homogeneity of literature in the 1970s and 1980s in both East and West Germany, they argue, literature after 1989 mirrors the sense of flux, the generational change, and the paradigm shifts of the 1990s.¹¹ There is also consensus that the aesthetics, the politics and the demographic backgrounds of German writers are more diverse than ever before. Scholars differ in their interpretations of the causes and possible consequences of this diversity.

In the introduction to his *Bestandsaufnahmen* (Stock Takings), Matthias Harder emphasizes that a multitude of forms and authors has replaced the “basic consensus” that presumably characterized the literature of the post-war period. Harder calls for a new approach to the relationship between literature and society when he insists that literary historians must be mindful of an increasingly diverse society and the diverse forms of literary expression it brings about. Any literary history, in turn, must take into consideration literature’s “*Eigensinn*” (obstinacy) and relative independence from socio-historical developments and create its criteria accordingly.¹² Volker

Wehdeking's edited volume *Mentalitätswandel in der deutschen Literatur zur Einheit* (Mentality Change in German Literature about Unification) suggests that in the 1990s a literature of the newly united Germany began to emerge. The essays show this to be an uneven process, with differences between East and West German literature persisting after 1989. In his contributions to the volume, which trace changes within the novelistic genre and in poetry, Wehdeking stresses the importance of form.¹³ Moving from the analysis of aesthetics to the examination of social change as it is reflected in literature, Wehdeking emphasizes literature's own dynamics and developments. Andreas Erb's anthology *Baustelle Gegenwartsliteratur* (Contemporary Literature under Construction), like Harder's volume, takes its point of departure from the unfinished nature of contemporary literature.¹⁴ No longer committed to the "memory work" undertaken by authors of the previous generation, Erb notes, contemporary writers avail themselves of a variety of forms and topics (8). All three emphasize literature's relative autonomy and caution against reducing the literary text to its sociopolitical contents.

Unlike the many journalistic contributions to the literature debates of the 1990s, which frequently critiqued contemporary German literature for its provinciality,¹⁵ its deficient aesthetics,¹⁶ or its lack of sensuality,¹⁷ these scholarly volumes are analytical rather than prescriptive in their assessment of current literature. German literature has changed, perhaps in response to the newspaper debates, but not necessarily along the lines anticipated or demanded by these critics. The focus on the Nazi period as the core of postwar German identity has faded but, significantly, this has not ushered in the return of high-culture aesthetics, nor does this mean that contemporary literature has altogether abandoned political concerns.

While there is consensus about the growing diversity of German literature, there is disagreement over what it contributes to questions of national identity. Russell Berman, for instance, believes that the link between literature and the nation is atrophying: literature is no longer the "terrain where national unification could be played out or fought over."¹⁸ Insisting that literature is "less separate and special" than it was in previous periods (xv), Berman also argues for a new definition of German Studies as fundamentally interdisciplinary and no longer limited to the analysis of literature. Klaus-Michael Bogdal agrees with Berman, but he looks at different evidence. Drawing on the sociology of reading in East and West Germany, Bogdal points out that the dominance of popular literature and violent song lyrics addressed to a younger audience undermines contemporary literature's power to provide "kulturelle Orientierung" (cultural orientation), especially as the importance of the public sphere wanes and with it the cultural clout of educated middle-class readers, those who formerly expected literature to guide them.¹⁹

Nonetheless, German literature's role in shaping national identity also after unification has its defenders. Stephen Brockmann, in his *Literature and German Unification* (1999), argues that literature remains central to German self-identity and aids Germans to "locate the place of their nation in history."²⁰ Drawing on a range of works that constitute a literary canon of the 1990s, Brockmann agrees with Martin Walser, one of the foremost writers of the postwar period and an outspoken proponent of Germany's path to normalization, that literature has too important a place in the German mind for its relevance to the definition and redefinition of the nation to be dismissed (198). Brockmann refers to the concept of the *Kultur-nation*, the idea that German cultural identity is stronger than German political identity or national unity, and argues that identification with and through German culture persists today. He may well be right that literature will "sum up the essence of the previous period" (197) also in the future. But the appearance of a "masterpiece" that could perform such a task for the post-wall era might be more than a question of time, as Brockmann suggests. It may also no longer be what writers aim to achieve.

Stuart Taberner, who situates his *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond* by stating that it begins where Brockmann leaves off (xxi), bases his analysis on the importance of normalization for post-wall German society, and he traces how Germany's aspiration to be a "normal" democracy like others is reflected and refracted in literature.²¹ Taberner begins his study with a discussion of Berlin, in particular its new architecture, and its implications for a new German self-understanding. The rebuilding of Berlin as united Germany's capital signals the departure from the postwar period and projects the nation's new confidence. The desire for normalization, according to Taberner, guides Germany, including its writers, in its quest for new ways to deal with the past, to confront globalization, and to define a position between provincialism and global consumerism (28). Taberner surveys an impressively large number of literary texts for their responses to these issues, in the end expressing the hope that "genuinely new forms" of German literature might evolve in and for an age of globalization, forms that avoid nostalgia as much as imitation (231). Organized according to themes such as East German literature, West German literature, and memory of the Nazi period after the wall, Taberner's chapters examine texts by established writers, like Günter Grass and Christoph Hein, as well as those who made their debut in the 1990s, including Tanja Dückers and Thomas Brussig. The book ends with a discussion of Georg Klein's *Libidissi* (1998), a novel about international crime set in a bleak fictive city evocative of the former Soviet Union. For Taberner, who suggests that Klein's novel addresses identity only to dismiss the concept as irrelevant, *Libidissi* is representative of a literature that probes the place of Germany and the Germans in post-national contexts. The ar-

gument that literature must change along with the nation maintains the link between nation and literature but rethinks the characteristics and purpose of this connection.

Among the latest contributors to the debate over the direction of German literature are those who propose that German literature must be evaluated in international contexts; their works are often the result of multinational cooperation. Memory of the Nazi era and the Holocaust are central to these efforts but, placed in international and comparative contexts, they form the basis of a European rather than a German identity. Willi Huntemann's 2003 edited volume *Engagierte Literatur in Wendezeiten* (Engaged Literature in Times of Change) is a German-Polish collaboration. Its essays trace the connection between political engagement in literature and change in Eastern Europe, focusing especially on descriptions of the Nazi past written after 1990.²² With the end of the Cold War, the parameters for thinking about the Nazi period have changed. While the topic is dealt with in a less confrontational fashion than during the postwar decades, it continues to be "productive" for contemporary literature both as moral guideline and for the development of new aesthetic forms (41). *Deutschsprachige Erzählprosa seit 1990 im europäischen Kontext* (German-language Narrative Prose since 1990 in a European Context), a volume edited by the German Volker Wehdeking and his French colleague Anne-Marie Corbin, welcomes non-German contributions in particular in response to the "*political-correctness-Diktat*" (political-correctness dictate) which, they argue, stifles rather than furthers Germany's ongoing and necessary engagement with the Nazi past and anti-Semitism today.²³ Here, too, the aim is to move beyond established modes of thinking and to expand the scope of the debate beyond a strictly German context. Wehdeking and Corbin emphasize the common East German and Eastern European experience of totalitarianism and its reflection in literature in order to recuperate and to reconstitute a European literary and cultural identity. Similarly, Ursula Keller and Ilma Rakusa's volume *Writing Europe*, which came out of an international workshop held in Hamburg, offers reflections on European identity by fiction writers born mainly in the 1940s and 1950s.²⁴ With their reflections on the Holocaust and their hopes for cosmopolitanism they envision a European identity mindful of history and beyond national boundaries.

Literature may well have lost — or relinquished — its function as conscience of the nation, but there continues to be a connection between German literature and German national identity. If the overall trend is to probe the meanings of Germanness in larger contexts, be they European or global, literary texts of the 1990s have accompanied and supported this development. Literature scholars, furthermore, in framing their questions and projects, emphasize the emergence of new approaches to politics in

the works of the 1990s rather than an absence of political agendas, and they argue for the importance of aesthetics as an analytical criterion. The remarkable diversity of contemporary writing is perhaps the most important sign of literature's new function in German society.

“Berlin”: A Phenomenon in Search of a Novel

Berlin literature of the 1990s was inspired by the fall of the wall and its aftermath, but cultural agendas and commercial interests played a significant role in shaping and circulating it. Berlin literature did not simply turn up on the shelves and display tables of bookstores, and the dynamics of its creation and promotion are in many ways exemplary of contemporary literature and its changing position in German culture. Critics demanded it,²⁵ institutions such as Literaturhäuser (literature houses) and grant-giving organizations supported it,²⁶ and publishers and book sellers actively marketed it.²⁷ Three paradoxes characterize both Berlin literature and its reception: first, Berlin literature is linked with questions of national identity just at the time when the importance of literature for Germany's self-understanding has come under scrutiny. Second, the critics' calls for a Berlin novel, for one canonical text that could capture and explain the experience of unification, came when the appeal of “master narratives” was waning. Third, Berlin texts are part of the phenomenon they describe and are therefore not neutral observers of the changing city. The desire for a Berlin novel and its dismissal existed side by side, resulting in a tension that could be felt in the literary texts about Berlin as well as in the commentary about them in newspapers and journals. By the late 1990s, complaints about the ubiquity of Berlin novels replaced the earlier demand for the definite *Berlinroman*.²⁸

The much-touted newness of 1990s Berlin notwithstanding, the search for the decisive Berlin text was for a novel rather than for a more contemporary genre such as, say, a film or even a video game about Berlin after the wall.²⁹ The belief that a novel was best suited to capture social developments goes back to nineteenth-century realism and is rooted in traditional assumptions about the explanatory power of literature to reflect and comment on the German national self-understanding. The classical Berlin novels by writers like Theodor Fontane or Wilhelm Raabe chronicle and evaluate a changing society and thus seemed to be an appropriate model for capturing a contemporary city undergoing change.³⁰ In addition to realism, the centrality of Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in German literature in general, and in Berlin literature specifically, plays a role in the search for a *Berlinroman*. The quest for a “new Döblin,” even if the phrase denotes a shorthand for a great new Berlin novel rather than the expectation that there will and should be another high modernist

depiction of the city, invokes the achievements of Weimar Berlin. The search for a Berlin novel is also the expression of the desire to restore Berlin's reputation as a cosmopolitan city of international appeal. The novelistic genre, many believed, possessed the cultural capital to help the city achieve this goal.

After the fall of the wall, a number of critics saw in Berlin a literary setting that had the potential to move German literature beyond its perceived stagnation. In the often highly polemic debates in newspaper feuilletons and literary magazines, contemporary German literature was accused of being overly academic, incapable of telling a story, and committed to politics rather than aesthetics. A few weeks before the wall's fall, Frank Schirrmacher, an editor of the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and one of Germany's most influential literary critics, argued that German literature was hopelessly provincial, in part because of the lack of a major metropolis that challenged writers with harsh social realities.³¹ With unification, Germany again had a major city that presumably could compete with other international metropolises and the urban texts they inspired.

Fifteen years after the fall of the wall, the writer Sybille Berg returned to the proposed correlation between the significance of the city and the quality of the literature it inspires: "Den Berlin-Roman kann es sich abschminken" (it [Berlin] can forget about the Berlin novel) Berg states somewhat flippantly, because, in her mind, Berlin did not turn out to be the world-class metropolis it had hoped to become. She goes on to suggest that the German capital might be well advised to accept its status as an ordinary city and that young writers are well advised to search for their topic elsewhere.³² Berg reiterates the argument of the urban site as inspiration for literature, only to dismiss this particular city as unsuitable for literary inspiration. Whether Berg is right or not about Berlin's failure to transform itself into a city of international importance, her observation about the end of the Berlin novel is more or less accurate. Only a few Berlin novels have been published since 2003.³³

Günter Grass's controversial novel *Ein weites Feld* (*Too Far Afield*, 1995) is in certain ways exemplary of the debates surrounding the *Berlinroman* and the shifting position of literature in German culture.³⁴ Set in Berlin immediately after the fall of the wall, Grass's work is both a Berlin novel and a *Wenderoman*, a novel about unification. Its protagonist, Theo Wuttke, is a low-level clerk for the Treuhandanstalt, the government organization charged with privatizing East German industry and state-owned property. Wuttke, whom his colleagues call "Fonty," shares significant traits with Theodor Fontane, the nineteenth-century realist and author of several Berlin novels. Grass's reinvention of Theodor Fontane for the post-wall period emphasizes the importance of realism in city writ-

ing. Like Fonty himself, who is a combination of historical facts and fictionalization, Fonty's workplace, the Treuhandanstalt, is both actual site and symbol. The Treuhandanstalt had its headquarters in the aviation ministry built by the Nazis in central Berlin and was used for government offices during the GDR. This allows Grass to conjure up the Nazi period as well as East German history. The fact that Theodor Fontane himself lived not far from the site of the Treuhandanstalt's building adds another dimension of realism and historicity to Grass's project.

Grass had indeed written what critics had called for: a novel of unification set in Berlin. Grass himself had described it as such. But *Ein weites Feld* never emerged as the quintessential Berlin novel. In his work Grass contends that the Nazi crimes morally preclude a united Germany, defends the East German state against its critics, and condemns the privatization of East Germany through the Treuhand. As a result, many reviewers resented Grass's political views; others argued that the treatment of Fontane's life and work was too long and too didactic, especially given the relative brevity of Fontane's own Berlin novels.³⁵ The debates about the book, most of which were directed against the political views expressed, suggest that Grass's positions on the Nazi period, which had significantly shaped West German public opinion, had by the mid-1990s lost their power to convince. To be sure, several critics rose to Grass's defense, but the negative reactions to his novel show that the reading public no longer supported the stark criticism of German history and politics characteristic of the postwar period.³⁶ The novel's political agenda and a style that many perceived as too plodding for the fast-paced 1990s contributed to the critical failure of *Ein weites Feld*. The search for the Berlin novel continued, but the attention shifted increasingly to younger authors and their depictions of the New Berlin. A focus on the present and a waning interest in literature as a vehicle of political engagement shape the definition of the Berlin novel and the search for it.

Robert Gernhardt's poem "Couplet vom Hauptstadtroman" (Couplet about the Capital City Novel) is an ironic response to the search for a Berlin novel ten years after the fall of the wall, turning the quest itself into a subject of literature:

Berliner! Es steht ein Problem im Raum.
Die Hauptstadt ist da. Der Roman bleibt ein Traum,
wenn der Zufall Regie führt und nicht ein Plan:
Wer schreibt ihn denn nun, diesen Hauptstadtroman?³⁷

[Berliners! We have a predicament.
The capital is here. The novel absent,
if coincidence reigns and not a plan:
who will write, after all, this tale of Berlin?]

In ten stanzas, the poem describes how the tenth anniversary of the wall's fall, the city's new architecture, and even an ordinary piece of pizza are painfully deficient without a Berlin novel. Rich ladies in the Western suburbs and teenagers at Alexanderplatz are equally dismayed over the missing novel. Uniting Berliners across age, class, and gender, the search has taken on a life of its own. Perhaps mindful of the perceived failure of Grass's 700-page work, the couplet ends with the promise of a Berlin poem. Gernhardt's poem pokes fun at the exaggerated importance attributed to the Berlin novel by a range of people who otherwise have little in common. Yet the irony aside, his reflections on the relationship between lived reality and its representation in literature illustrate the significance people attached to a novel that could validate and complete their experience of the city.

The Berlin Novel's Non-Appearance

As mentioned, no single novel has emerged as the canonical text of 1990s Berlin — even though quite a few have been advertised as “der große Berlinroman.”³⁸ But there is in fact a core group of Berlin novels that has come to define the genre. Most of these came out toward the end of the decade and were written by authors born after 1965. Among these are Tanja Dückers's quasi-anthropological study *Spielzone* (Play Zone), about young people in post-wall Berlin,³⁹ Thomas Hettche's *Nox* (Night), a sadomasochist fantasy of the night of 9 November 1989,⁴⁰ Tim Staffell's violent dystopia *Terrordrom* (Terrordrom),⁴¹ and Ingo Schramm's linguistic experimentation *Fitchers Blau* (Fitcher's Blue),⁴² as well as Inka Parei's story of female resilience, *Die Schattenboxerin* (The Shadow Boxer).⁴³ All of these present versions of the New Berlin. Among Berlin novels by writers active in the 1968 student movement, Peter Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr* (*Eduard's Homecoming*) and Uwe Timm's *Johannisnacht* (*Midsummer Night*) have drawn considerable attention. Both probe the validity of leftist politics for the 1990s. Their visions of Berlin as a multicultural metropolis reflect a commitment to social equality, including gender and ethnic equality.⁴⁴

The novel was not the only genre in which writers told their stories about Berlin, and literary critics were not the only ones to promote writing about Berlin. Literary institutions in the city actively supported the creation of literary texts set in Berlin, and publishers fostered the trend with collections of Berlin narratives. The emphasis in many of these anthologies is on young writers, short texts, and fresh perspectives on contemporary Berlin. The focus on the writer's age, rather than gender, national origin, or race, suggests that the identity politics of the 1980s are no longer relevant. An example of the sponsorship of such literature is the

Literarisches Colloquium Berlin (LCB), which, supported by Berlin's Senate, in 1997 invited young writers to take up residency in its villa in southwest Berlin and work on city texts.⁴⁵ The resulting collection, *Die Stadt nach der Mauer* (The City after the Wall), edited by Jürgen Jakob Becker and Ulrich Janetzki, was one of several anthologies of works on contemporary Berlin.⁴⁶ Stressing the youth of the contributing authors, the editors in their introduction underscore the idea that Berlin literature ushers in a generational shift among writers. At the same time, they emphasize the stylistic and philosophical heterogeneity of the works and thus suggest that German literature of the post-wall period promises more breadth and perhaps less dogma than its predecessor from the postwar era. Finally, they mention the importance of an institution like the LCB for the creation of literature, hinting at new forms of literary production. The texts, indeed diverse in genre and style, emphasize the tough urbanity that makes Berlin attractive to social outsiders. Other anthologies, including *Dokumente aus Babel* (Documents from Babel) and *Sehnsucht Berlin* (Longing Berlin) similarly highlight youth and urban grit.⁴⁷ The cover of *Dokumente aus Babel* bears a photograph of bleak Berlin apartment buildings seen through an S-Bahn window on which graffiti have been scratched; the protagonists in the texts, poetry as well as prose, try to make it in Berlin as newcomers and outsiders. *Sehnsucht Berlin*, with its compilation of images and texts, is indebted to a postmodern aesthetics of fragmentation. Many of the contributions present Berlin as a place suspended in the present, their youthful protagonists reacting to the moment without regard for the past or the future. Anthologies like these emphasize the emergence of new forms of Berlin literature by means of generational change; snapshot impressions, rather than large-scale interpretations like Grass's "master narrative" *Ein weites Feld*, and indifference to political frames of reference are characteristic of these short Berlin texts.

The debates about Berlin literature move between opposites: is Berlin worth writing about, or is it a mere fad? Is the topic still new, or has it run its course? Do writers have enough distance, or will it take time for the definitive novel to appear? The oft-repeated question of whether each successive book is the hoped-for Berlin novel always implies that a better work could yet appear. The search for a Berlin novel, supported by institutional and commercial sponsorship and prolonged by feuilleton reflections about the failure to find one, reveals the close connections between literature and the debates that surround it, the growing impact of institutional support on the production of literature, and the allure of Berlin as a literary subject in the first decade and a half after the wall.

Generation Berlin

The designation of a generation is more than a biological occurrence. It is an ideological construct that marks endings and new beginnings. Toward the end of the 1990s, a number of such new designations emerged to demarcate the conclusion of the postwar period. The term “Generation Berlin” (the Berlin generation), coined by the sociologist Heinz Bude in the context of the 1998 federal elections, quickly gained currency, although it is controversial and will probably not endure in the long run.⁴⁸ Bude defined “Generation Berlin” in contrast to the student movement and the so-called “Flakhelfergeneration” (generation of anti-aircraft gunners) whose members were born around 1930 and were recruited for the war effort during the last months of the Second World War. The Berlin generation differs from its predecessors in two significant ways: its self-definition vis-à-vis the Nazi period and its attitudes toward economics and social difference. First, both the “generation of anti-aircraft gunners,” which claimed to bear no responsibility for Nazi crimes because of its youth, and the generation of the student movement, which sought to pressure the “Nazi fathers” into acknowledging their guilt, derive much of their individual and collective identity from their rejection of Nazism and those associated with it. For the Berlin generation, Bude argues, the need to dissociate from the Nazis and their crimes has lost the urgency it had for its predecessors. Second, the Berlin generation also places less importance on social boundaries than the generation of 1968 did, and more on economic motivation. Class divisions, including the distinction between the artist and the entrepreneur, are no longer crucial, as they were for the generation of 1968, nor are they the springboard for social critique. Bude explicitly includes artists in his definition of the Berlin generation, suggesting that they too benefit from the eroding ideological divide between those involved in the economy and those engaged in the creation of art. The term “Generation Berlin” was, however, not uncontested. As Margit Sinka shows in her comprehensive essay “Heinz Bude’s *Generation Berlin*,” critics denounced it as trendy and, more important, charged that its members lacked the creativity to which they laid claim.⁴⁹ In a 2002 newspaper editorial Heinz Bude lamented that, after the international crisis of 11 September 2001, the “Generation Berlin” turned into a “Generation des Bruchs” (generation of the rupture), whose 1990s spirit of innovation had to yield to the economic and cultural conservatism of those who had come of age during the Second World War.⁵⁰

Whereas these criticisms, as well as Bude’s renaming, address entrepreneurial and cultural aspects of the term “Generation Berlin,” literary scholar Sigrid Weigel shifts attention to the ideological implications of generational constructs in general.⁵¹ Drawing her examples from postwar