The Cambridge Companion to
Modern German Culture

One of the most intriguing questions of our time is how some of
the masterpieces of modernity originated in a country in which
personal liberty and democracy were slow to emerge. This
Companion provides an authoritative account of modern German
culture since the onset of industrialisation, the rise of mass society
and the nation state. Newly researched and written by experts in
their respective fields, individual chapters trace developments in
German culture – including national identity, class, Jews in
German society, minorities and women, the functions of folk and
mass culture, poetry, drama, theatre, dance, music, art,
architecture, cinema and mass media – from the nineteenth
century to the present. Guidance is given for further reading and
there is a chronology. In its totality the Companion shows how the
political and social processes that shaped modern Germany are
interwoven with cultural genres and their agendas of creative
expression.

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1988) and The Nazification of Art (with Brandon Taylor, 1990).
Cambridge Companions to Culture

Titles in the series

The Cambridge Companion to Modern German Culture
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Abbreviations

ADF  Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein (General Association of German Women)
ADMV Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein (General German Music Association)
AEG  Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (General Electricity Company)
AG  Aktiengesellschaft (Joint Stock Company)
ARD  Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Cooperative of the Public Service Broadcasting Institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany)
BDF  Bund Deutscher Frauenverbände (Federation of German Women’s Associations)
BDM  Bund Deutscher Mädel (Federation of German Girls; Nazi organisation for German girls)
BPRS Band Politisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller (Union of Revolutionary Writers)
BVP  Bayerische Volkspartei (Bavarian People’s Party)
CDU  Christlich-Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
CIAM Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture)
D-Day Day of the Normandy landings by the armies of the Western Allies, 6 June 1944
DDP  Deutsche Demokratische Partei (German Democratic Party)
DEFA Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Production Company)
DNVP Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People’s Party)
DP  Displaced Person
DRP  Deutsche Reichspartei (German Reich Party)
DVP  Deutsche Volkspartei (German People’s Party)
FDP  Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FRG  Federal Republic of Germany
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GDP  Gross Domestic Product
GDR  German Democratic Republic
Gestapo  Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police in Nazi Germany)
ISCM  International Society for Contemporary Music
KPD  Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
LDPD  Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (Liberal Democratic Party of Germany)
NPD  Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
NSDAP  Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers’ Party)
NWDR  Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (Northwest German Radio)
Ossi  Derogatory term for a person whose attitudes and behaviour reflect having been brought up in East Germany
PDS  Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
PhD  Philosophiae Doctor (Doctor of Philosophy)
POW  Prisoner of War
RTL  Luxemburg-based private television consortium
SA  Sturmbteilung (Hitler’s Storm Troopers)
SAT-1  First private German satellite television station
SED  Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party)
SPD  Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party)
SS  Schutzstaffel (literally: ‘Pretorian Platoon’; National Socialist elite formation)
Stasi  Staatssicherheit (State Security, organised as a Ministry in the GDR)
Ufa  Universum-Film AG (Universal Picture Shareholding Company)
USPD  Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)
VDS  Verband Deutscher Studenten (Association of German Students)
VE Day  Victory in Europe Day (8 May 1945)
WDR  Westdeutscher Rundfunk (West German Radio)
Wessi  Derogatory term for a person whose attitudes and behaviour reflect having been brought up in West Germany
ZDF  Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German Television, national public service broadcasting station based in Mainz)
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1789  French Revolution
1817  18–19 October: Wartburg Fest when German students called for liberalisation and national unity
1832  27–30 March: Hambacher Fest, largest public demonstration in support of democratic change and national unity prior to 1848 Revolution
1848  Revolution: attempt by German middle class to introduce constitutional democracy and national unification
1848–1849: Paulskirche Parliament: assembly to prepare constitutional monarchy and national unification; the title of German Emperor was offered to the King of Prussia in 1849. When he refused to accept it from a parliament, the revolution collapsed

1871–1918: Imperial Germany, first unified ‘nation state’ in Europe
1871  18 January: Official foundation of the second German Reich (Imperial Germany) in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, after the defeat of France in the 1870–1871 war
1871–1890: Otto von Bismarck in office as Chancellor of the Reich (Bismarck era)
1878  Kulturkampf: anti-Catholic campaign, orchestrated by Bismarck
1878–1890: Sozialistengesetze: anti-Socialist laws to block the development of the Social Democratic Party as a political force in Germany
1878  Schutzätze: tariffs levied on imports of grain in order to protect East Elbian grain producers
1880  Sozialversicherung: introduction of a social security system, with provisions for old age pensions and sickness pay, laying the foundations of the modern welfare state
1896  Kyffhäuser memorial in the Harz mountains, remembering Barbarossa (Frederick II) and the dominance of Germany under him.
1913 Völkerschlachtdenkmal: memorial near Leipzig commemorating the centenary of Prussia’s victory over Napoleon as the onset of national unification
1914–1918: First World War. The term ‘Great War’ is not used in Germany
1914 1 August: Outbreak of the First World War
1916 Control of war economy and politics by General Paul von Hindenburg, establishing a de facto military government. ‘Law to Support the Fatherland’ – Vaterländisches Hilfsdienstgesetz – places labour market and labour recruitment on a war footing
1917 Peace note by the German Reichstag, envisaging for the first time a peace without annexations
1917 onwards: Various strikes due to anti-war sentiments and extensive food shortages
1918 28 October: Introduction of parliamentary democracy with Prince Max von Baden as head of government. Retention of monarchy (Wilhelm II)
1918 11 November: Unconditional surrender of the German High Command and end of the war
1918 November: Revolutionary movement in Germany, establishment of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils in various German cities
1918 9 November: Proclamation of a Republic by Philipp Scheidemann from the Balcony of the Reichstag in Berlin. End of monarchy in Germany
1918 20 December: Provisional government by Council of People’s Representatives, consisting of SPD and USPD

1919–1933: Weimar Republic
1919 20 January: Election to the Nationalversammlung, i.e. an elected assembly to prepare a new (democratic) constitution. First election in which all men and women aged 20 and over had full voting rights
1919 January: Failed communist uprising in Berlin led by a group called Spartakus
1919 January–March: Soviet republic in Bavaria and other left-wing/communist protests defeated with the help of para-military combat units known as Freikorps which later formed a core of right-extremist and National Socialist support
1919–1924: Friedrich Ebert (SPD), First President of the Weimar Republic
1925 (re-elected 1932): Paul von Hindenberg (DNVP), Second President of the Weimar Republic
1923 Escalation of post-war inflation to hyper-inflation and a complete collapse of the German currency
Chronology

1924 Currency reform and stabilisation of the Reichsmark
1927 Introduction of unemployment insurance
1929 World economic crisis, onset of mass unemployment in Germany which rose to approx. 6 million by 1933
1930–1933 (30 January): Government without parliamentary majority and based on article 48 of the Weimar Constitution which permitted non-parliamentary government

1933–1945: National Socialism (‘Third Reich’)
1933 30 January: Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor
1933 February: Burning of the Reichstag in Berlin, leading to ‘Law for the Protection of People and State’ which marks the end of Weimar democracy and parliamentary government
1933 18 March: Elections under Nazi control, resulting in a 40% vote for the NSDAP
1933 March: Enabling Act abolishing parliamentary democracy and instituting Nazi control of the political process in Germany
1933 1 April: Boycott of Jewish business; first nationally coordinated anti-Jewish campaign under the auspices of the SA
1933 April: Concentration camps established. Arrest and incarceration of 30,000 political opponents of the Nazi regime
1933 1 May: Occupation of trade union and SPD buildings, preceding a formal ban of trade unions and political parties other than the NSDAP
1933 10 May: Burning of the Books by Association of German Students (VDS)
1934 30 June: Night of the Long Knives: murder of the head of the SA, Ernst Röhm, and clamp-down on SA in order to curb radicalisation and win the confidence of the German army and its established elite
1934 2 August: Death of Paul von Hindenburg, President of the Reich. Hitler makes himself President of the Reich in addition to Chancellor and gives himself the title ‘Führer’
1935 Nuremberg ‘race’ laws declaring Jews second-class citizens and banning marriages and sexual contacts between Germans and Jews
1935 Introduction of conscription for German males above the age of 18
1938 March, Anschluss i.e. incorporation of Austria into Nazi Germany
1938 9–10 November: Destruction of synagogues and ransacking of Jewish homes, a pogrom called Reichskristallnacht by the Nazis
1939 1 September: Nazi occupation of Poland. Outbreak of the Second World War
1942 20 January: Wannsee conference to implement the so-called ‘Final Solution’, i.e. the murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe and
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Germany in death camps (Auschwitz, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka). The Holocaust claimed 6 million Jewish victims
1945 30 April: Hitler commits suicide in the Berlin Bunker
1945 8 May: Unconditional surrender of German High Command; end of Second World War

1945–1990: Post-war era: division and unification of Germany
1945–1949: Military government and division into four zones of occupation (American, British, French, Soviet)
from June 1945: Licensing of political parties
1946–1948: Elections at regional level in all Länder. Beginnings of parliamentary democracy in western zones of occupation and of socialist one-party dominance in Soviet Zone
1947 1 January: Creation of Bi-zone from American and British zones
1948 20 June: Currency reform and introduction of the Deutschemark in the Western Zones of occupation and in West Berlin; Soviet blockade of access to Berlin; supply of Berlin by air
1948 June: Introduction of the Ostmark in the Soviet zone of occupation
1948 Parliamentary Council of representatives from the Land parliaments. Drafting of the Basic Law, the provisional constitution for a west German state incorporating the three western zones of occupation
1949 23 May: Ratification of the Basic Law by a majority of the Land parliaments (all except Bavaria); creation of the Federal Republic of Germany
1949 7 October: Proclamation of the GDR by the ‘People’s Council’ in Berlin
1949–1963: Konrad Adenauer, CDU, first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
1949–1971: Walter Ulbricht First Secretary of the SED and head of the GDR government
1952 Legislation in West Germany for restitution payments to Jewish Holocaust survivors and the families of Holocaust victims
1953 17 June: Uprising of building construction workers in Berlin and other East German cities, quelled with the aid of Soviet military. Wave of arrests in East Germany; in West Germany, 17 June declared Day of German Unity and national holiday
1957 Reform of West German pension legislation; pension payments from then on index-linked.
1961 13 August: Berlin Wall erected by GDR government to separate western sectors of Berlin from East with secure (guarded) border to quell defections of East Germans
1963–1966: Ludwig Erhard (CDU), first West German Minister of Economic Affairs and father of the ‘economic miracle’, became the second federal
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Chancellor. Forced to resign in 1966 during the first post-war recession

1966–1969: Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (CDU), heading a Grand Coalition government of CDU/CSU and SPD

1969 *Machtwechsel*. The SPD ‘wins’ the elections and is able to clinch a narrow majority for an SPD/FDP coalition government. Beginning of SPD/FDP period of coalitions until 1982

1969–1974: Willy Brandt (SPD) is federal Chancellor and masterminds Ostpolitik

1971–1989: Erich Honecker succeeds Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the SED and head of the GDR government

1972 Basic Treaty (Grundlagenvertrag) with the German Democratic Republic. Its key concept is that Germany consists of two states and one nation (*Zwei Staaten, eine Nation*)

1974–1982: Helmut Schmidt (SPD) federal Chancellor

1982 October to date: chancellorship of Helmut Kohl after FDP sided with the CDU in a ‘constructive vote of no-confidence’, i.e. voting a chancellor out of office by securing a parliamentary majority for a successor. Since 1982, CDU/CSU and FDP coalition government at national level

1989 Exodus of East Germans via Hungary and other routes to the West; mass demonstrations against East German socialist system leads to resignation of Erich Honecker

1989 9 October and until early 1990: Monday demonstrations in Leipzig. Early slogan ‘we are the people’ changes to ‘we are one people’. Demands for a better GDR change to demands for abolition of GDR and unification

1989 9 November: Opening of the Berlin Wall, free movement between west and east Berlin. End of sealed GDR borders

1989, October–1990, March: Attempts by SED to reform itself and retain government position under Erich Krenz (formerly deputy leader of the SED) and Hans Modrow (formerly Mayor of Dresden). Coalition government, including member groups of the Round Table (citizens’ movements)

1990 18 March: First free elections in GDR resulting in all-party coalition government headed by Lothar de Maizière (CDU)

1990 1 July: Currency union and introduction of Deutschmark in the GDR

1990 3 October: Re-constituted East German Länder formally apply to join the Federal Republic under article 23 of the Basic Law. Official date of German unification

1990 14 October: Elections in the five new Länder, Brandenburg,
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Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia

1990  2 December: First all-German elections (won by CDU/CSU and FDP coalition) and first elections in unified Berlin complete the political unification of Germany
Map 1  Germany and Austria around 1871
Map 2  Germany after the Second World War