German Cultural Studies

An Introduction

Edited by Rob Burns

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about the surrounding world, provides an important, though little used, clue to the practices of disremembering that Germans developed in the presence of discussions pertaining to National Socialism, war, and the persecution of Jews.

Améry’s assessment of the literary life is not without appreciation for what writers and critics have accomplished since 1945, given the devastating elimination of the Jewish population, which had contributed so much both to the creation of modern literature and to supporting it as a lively audience. In the frequent comparisons between the first and the second postwar periods, after 1918 and 1945, the difference in the reactions of the audiences has not gone unnoticed. Curt Fohoff, a conservative critic, even asserted that the success of theater in the 1920s was largely the result of the lively response of the audience. Compared with 1924, the public of 1954 appeared not to be less sophisticated or expectant, but it had lost its belief in the catalytic power of literature, according to Hohoff: “The public, looking for warmth and entertainment, for confirmation and fun, feels expelled and asserts that there is no literature.”25 Améry echoes this view when he turns to the problems that postwar writers experience in engaging with reality and points to the lack of a “spiritual space of the nation,” Hofmannsthal’s “geistiger Raum der Nation,” as well as to the lack of a public tuned to the same pitch.26 For the central arguments, Améry draws on Sartre’s observations regarding the importance of the dialogue between author and public. The author should be in command not only of his own language but also of the language of the reader. Améry continues:

However, this was not the case with the German writers after 1945: their language was called “starting anew,” that of the public “restoration.” They knew nothing of their readers and to a certain extent did not want to know. The only ones who had studied their readers’ language were, aside from the Nazi writers, the authors of those magazine reports in which tough soldiers (Landser) and the honorable general were entangled in the worst troubles by stupid and vicious Nazi bigwigs. Serious authors, however, shouted into the wind. Not that they were not read! Thanks to the economic miracle (and to the cheap paperback editions) much new literature was read after the German economy had taken off in the wake of the currency reform. Yet it was, so to speak, a “foreign-language” public to which the authors turned, and when they received favorable annual balances slips from their publishers, it did not mean that they had found genuine resonance.27

Améry’s insight into the cocoon of public acquiescence in West Germany has remained exemplary in its precision. He illuminates the function of the Illustrierten for reading that produces Dabeisein (being present)—in some ways a precursor of watching television. He separates the hard-won public success of writers in the public sphere from a value judgment that concerns their ability to address crucial problems of the moral well-being of society. He distributes the weight fairly between writers and readers when he concludes that the audience he was investigating did not live with its literature:

It read literature, good and less good, partly outstanding, occasionally lousy literature, and it judged its reading more or less professionally. It had, it seems, never the feeling of participating, through the work of reading, together with the author in a process of contemporaneity (einem zeitgeschichtlichen Prozess). . . A dialogue between author and reader did not develop.28 (original emphasis)

While Améry’s diagnosis of 1961 helps grasp the contours of the remedy, which certainly generated its own challenge for writers, it only touched on the common reading traditions, especially with regard to more canonical and conservative works whose home was the family bookshelf and whose public upkeep was handled by the schools. These traditions were first highlighted in 1953 when the French Germanist Robert Minder published a comparison of French and German school textbooks (Lesebücher) and came to the conclusion that if the man in the moon were to read current German Lesebücher, he would think: “This Germany seems to be a mere agrarian country, a land of peasants and burghers who work and putter about in protected domesticity, not having known for centuries what war, revolutions, chaos are.”29 Minder traced this anachronism to strong antisocial, antipolitical, and antimodern traditions among literary and educational elites in Germany, who kept the world of the poetic realists in the nineteenth century as a literary model for the young contemporaries of war, inflation, Hitler, and the Volkswagen. He added, with biting irony: “A Morgenthau Plan of literature, carried through by German writers themselves.”30 It took until the 1960s before the issue was broadly addressed and even longer before pertinent changes were implemented.31

What Minder did not include in his scandalous review was the fact that the National Socialists not only had reinforced this selection but also had made major efforts to propagate the kind of devotional reading that he analyzed as antisocial and antimodern. Even today it is little known that National Socialists undertook an unprecedented drive toward more reading in schools, homes, and communities whereby the practice of reading itself was elevated to a significant contribution to völkisch life.32 In contrast, the propagation of a specific National Socialist literature, which is so often mentioned in literary histories, was a rather inconsistent affair.33 The Nazi Lesebuch itself did contain, particularly during the war years, reading material on war and heroism, race and völkisch thinking that was obviously intended to indoctrinate the youth who had to serve in the war.34 This fact should, however, not distract from the surprisingly comprehensive efforts at various levels between schools, libraries, and official agencies to popularize reading and help books become symbols of common issues in the general population.

Newer studies redirect the attention from the customary search for producers of Nazi ideology in literature—with the usual suspects being Hanns Johst, Hans Friedrich Blunck, Heinrich Anacker, and Eberhard Wolfgang Moeller—to a better understanding of the drive toward a different reception of literature, a reception that would compensate for the lack of great National Socialist authors by empowering the experience of reading with a völkisch mission.35 Changing the reading paradigm from a process of individual cognition to that of a veneration that should best be experienced in a communal effort was not exactly what educated middle-class readers had in mind, especially because they per-
ceived their form of individual reading to be also a confirmation of social status. And yet, as the common issues stressed tended to be such values as nation, Heimat, motherly love, manual work, patriarchal superiority, and not a historical or political awareness, they were dear to middle-class readers before 1933 and after 1945. Reinforcing the habit of respect toward the book— and the author— as carriers of a higher spirit remained a crucial pillar for the rebuilding of the Buchkultur after the fall of National Socialism.

Looking closer at specifics of this kind of textual understanding, one encounters methodological impulses that had been developed in the field of Germanistik. The heavy emphasis on reading as Erlebnis, for instance, can easily be traced to the use of Dilthey’s definition of experience (Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, 1905) and its later contortions in academic seminars. So can the definitions of reading as a symbolic operation in which the readers experience themselves by extracting the various levels of deeper meaning. After the current of Geistesgeschichte had privileged more symbolic, universalist, and holistic forms of contextualizing, Germanists narrowed down the paradigm of a “higher” reading to an essentialist pursuit: the preferable form was a poem. This could be used by Nazis and non-Nazis alike. Read as testimonies against the war spirit of the Nazis, poems by Hölderlin and Rilke were never more cherished both by academics and nonacademics than in the last years of the war. The more a poem was able to convey the experience of transcending history, the more it allowed, even encouraged an existentialist stance vis-à-vis the word, as Emil Staiger and Martin Heidegger as well as lesser critics like Johannes Pfeiffer argued in the 1940s and 1950s. While Pfeiffer’s influence extended well beyond the academic audience between the 1930s and 1950s, reassuring the readers of the spiritual, even moral aspect of reading a poem, Staiger upheld a rather challenging form of interpretation that he initially called an “exercise in reading,” before he elevated it to an art form, Die Kunst der Interpretation (1955).

Staiger’s change in terminology that elevated the act of reading to a self-sustaining academic practice was paradigmatic for the field of Germanistik in the 1950s. It is reflected in the distance that academic scholars kept between their engagement with the text in seminars and publications on the one hand and the reading of contemporary texts on the other. Even the word “reading” was moved to the sidelines in favor of the term “interpretation,” or, as the specific term went, “werkimmanente Interpretation”; its undertone of everyday practicality undermined the professional cachet of this activity. Although the vast production of valuable interpretations with which the Germanist Benno von Wiese serviced the academic discipline was based on astute and imaginative reading, the term itself remained in the shadow. It is hardly surprising that there were no studies into the 1960s in which Germanists analyzed either the “real” readers of literary works or the act of reception itself as a catalyst for the understanding of literature. It is even less surprising that Germanists had little input into the ascent of the aesthetics of reception. Hans Robert Jauss and Manfred Naumann were Romanisten, Wolfgang Iser was Anglist.

From the Critical to the Political Reader

In his successful novel of 1957, Sansibar oder der letzte Grund, Alfred Andersch set up a model situation of flight, resistance, and escape from Nazism in a small town on the Baltic Sea. Five characters face decisions about life and death before the Gestapo comes: Judith Levin, a young Jewish woman who tries to flee from Germany; Gregor, a young Communist functionary on the run; Knudsen, an old fisherman who once belonged to the Communist party; a young boy who dreams of Sansibar (Zanzibar); and Pastor Helander, who tries to protect a modern statue that the Gestapo has ordered to be taken from his church. Except for the boy, the characters of the novel, reviewed after forty years, appear more wooden than the statue, which resembles the best and most expressive ones by Ernst Barlach. The statue is called Der lesende Klosterschüler (Young Monk Reading).

When Gregor discovers the statue in the church, he at first does not know why he is taken by it. Then he understands the reason: the young monk is reading as Gregor read at the party school in Moscow, immersed in the texts that were considered important. Or does he read like him? Gregor notices all of a sudden that the monk is different. He is not totally absorbed:

He simply read. He read attentively. He read precisely. He even read in highest concentration. But he read critically. He looked as if he knew every moment what he was reading. His arms were hanging down but they appeared ready every moment to put a finger on the text that would show: this is not true. This I do not believe. He is different, thought Gregor, he is truly different. He is lighter than we were, more like a bird. He looks like someone who can close the book at any time and get up in order to do something else.

As a critical reader, Andersch’s young monk defies the attitude of mere immersion in the text that, as Gregor knows, can easily turn into a loss of freedom, even identity. A few pages later, Gregor, the resistance fighter, finally grasps the attraction fully: “Gregor could understand very well why the others [the Nazis] did not want to let the young man sit and read. Someone who read like him was a danger.” Andersch’s careful description of the threat posed by critical reading goes beyond the particulars of the year 1937. It has been interpreted as representative of critical reading in general. In its function for Gregor’s self-realization and the plot of the novel, it is a strong confirmation of Sartre’s analysis. Andersch was close to Sartre and published him in his literary journal, Texte und Zeichen, which was the best in the 1950s. He also had close contacts with Jean Améry and took him as a model for some of his characters.

The idea that the quality of reading could be more than a literary metaphor and in fact could be used in the fights over the direction of contemporary literature began to emerge in the following years. Even the most aggressive critic of the literary Left in the 1950s, Kurt Ziesel, used it in his polemics against Die Literaturfabrik (1962), as he called the literary opposition in the Federal Republic. He explicitly blamed their writers for considering the reader just a necessary evil instead
of a brother in spirit. He based his observation that something had begun moving against the "cartel of literary production" upon the political awakening of the readers: "Those who count, the readers, among them especially the young ones, have woken up startled and become suspicious."

Such polemics should not be dismissed, particularly in the light of the fact that in the course of the 1960s, readers, especially young readers, became restless indeed. When young people began to express their social and political opposition in terms of emancipating themselves from being devoted readers of literature, however, they took the opposite course of what Ziesel and conservative critics had hoped for. When radical students, in their anti-Springer campaign in 1967, ridiculed the authors at the meeting of Group 47 as politically ineffective Dichter, they played on the demise of the writers' public self-image. Not coincidentally, some of the politically more committed writers—among them Reinhard Lettau, whom Günter Grass criticized for his action—collaborated with the students in drafting a political resolution. The fact that many students in 1968 articulated their frustration with the established society of economic success and moral failure by foreswearing literature indicates the importance of literature as a catalyst of individual and public identity. At the same time it shows the irreversible destruction of a long-preserved cultural practice. As such, it has received much attention in the mythology of the 1968ers, but it also has veiled other, more influential factors in the dissipation of the reading culture that prevailed in the 1950s, in particular the spread of television, the growth of the entertainment industry, and the general shift from a producer to a consumer mentality.

What had been expressed in the 1950s in terms of abstractness and aloofness of literature coagulated in the early 1960s into the pet topic of literary conferences and academic seminars: the death of the novel. The Berliner Kritiker-Colloquium 1963, devoted to a discussion of the function of the critic in contemporary writing, developed into a comprehensive debate about the novel, in the course of which a stimulating variety of voices remained completely focused on the author. The reader was hardly seen as part of the issue. In his much discussed speech, "Gegen die Erhaltung des literarischen status quo," Jürgen Becker mentioned, though, that the reader of avant-garde novels had to work with the author and could not be a passive recipient anymore. Generally, however, Becker saw the only remedy in an even more self-reflective performance of the author, for which Uwe Johnson had provided a model when he made the ongoing confession that his description was a defective part of the narrative. Peter Weiss, another positive example for Becker, signaled a way out in his book, Flucht, for which the term novel was inappropriate, by imagining an aesthetic work as a "direct expression for a present situation, for a continuous transformation and reevaluation, and therefore would be only writing a diary... a registering of notes, sketches, visual stages, maybe mixed with improvisations of musical, dramatic nature, but never these brake blocks of a novel, of a completed picture."

Without addressing and activating the "real" reader, the dismantling of the established authorial forms was obviously the only way for writers to regain legitimacy in their representation of the everyday world. Documentary literature that captured the theater at this time became a crucial step toward a new dialogue with the public. It brought a breakthrough in the literary representation of National Socialism and the persecution of the Jews and contributed to the opening of the cocoon of public acquiescence.

This cocoon was, of course, not just a matter of a literary public sphere. To view its dismantling as a literary development and to equate it with the fate of literature has been effective, though misleading. How misleading can be gathered from the broadly assumed notion that Hans Magnus Enzensberger proclaimed the death of literature in his famous 1968 essay, "Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend." In reality, Enzensberger pointed to the "literary metaphor" of the "death of literature" that was currently celebrated. Sympathetic to the students' demands for politically effective writing, though unconvincing of its likelihood after sifting through earlier periods of political upheavals, Enzensberger encouraged his fellow writers not to despair and closed with the recommendation to engage in the "alphabetization" of Germany in an exchange with the "real" readers:

The writer who engages in it all of a sudden experiences a critical interaction, a feedback between reader and author which he did not dream of as a novelist. Instead of stupid reviews in which he is credited with having advanced from the second to the third book in a promising way while the fourth book represents a bitter disappointment, he now experiences corrections, resistance, insults, counter-evidence, in one word: consequences. What he says and what is said to him is applicable, can become practice, even common practice.

The admonition to seek feedback between reader and author as a course of literary action is as telling as the implication that traditional novel writing has little to do with it. Enzensberger articulated the need for writers to break out of the rituals of the publication mill and to address and engage the "real" reader, even if it meant abandoning traditional literary forms. Written in 1968, the essay highlights the political implications of the turn to the reader, something that permeated academic seminars to the point that activist students turned them into tribunals about the relevance of literary works.

It is almost apocalyptic to mention the parallel emergence of the academic concern with reader and reception in what was called reception aesthetics, which was associated with the names of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. In 1967, Jauss gave his important speech "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft," in which he postulated the inclusion of the reception of literature in its interpretation. In the same year, Harald Weinrich published his article "Für eine Literaturgeschichte des Lesers." Later articles by Jauss carried such titles as "Provokation des Lesers im modernen Roman" or "Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur"; Manfred Naumann published "Literatur und Leser" in the East German journal Weimarer Beiträge (1970). The aesthetics of reception, announced by Jauss as a "paradigm shift" in literary criticism, focuses on the historical reader in his cultural predicament, the "horizon of expectation," and on the "implied reader," who, according to Iser, determines the shape and flow of the narrative. Although the relationship with the developments in the
literary marketplace was seldom directly addressed, attentive observers hardly missed the irony that the concern with the reader concealed into a far-reaching theoretical agenda at a moment when the real reader of literature showed signs of restlessness and deflection.

While pointing to the contacts between literary developments and academic theories, one should not overlook a somewhat earlier theoretical endeavor that, while a true catalyst during the student movement, reflected the frustrations of intellectuals concerning the thwarted forms of public debate in the early 1960s. Jürgen Habermas’s first major work, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), in which he defined rational public discourse and broadly based communication as the basis for a functioning democracy, helped create a scholarly language for the new public agenda. Where Habermas expressed hope for a different modus of civic communication—the basis for his later concept of communicative action—writers like Böll, Grass, Hochhuth, Walser, and Enzensberger engaged in a broader public dialogue with a still reluctant audience. Similar to Enzensberger’s essay of 1968, Habermas’s work illuminates the importance of a participatory and dialogue-oriented mindset for a functioning democracy.

**A Communicative Silence**

The reader of this article need not be reminded that there is not just one relationship between an author and his or her readers. Günter Grass, known for his inventive play with the reader’s good will and ill will, interest and suspicion, which changes from one book to the next, would be misjudged if pressed into such a perception. So would Ilse Aichinger, Heinrich Böll, Peter Weiss, and hundreds of other writers. What is hard to define in the individual case is even harder in regard to the writers of a whole historical period. The preceding observations are based on a very thin layer of theoretical assumptions and empirical data. There is not yet enough research on the period to warrant more than preliminary conclusions. Compared, however, with the outpouring of concerns with readers’ reactions, types of reading, and reception and with the fragility of communication based in literature since the late 1960s, the rather sedate attitude toward these issues in the preceding period deserves attention as a common phenomenon. It needs to be reflected within the larger historical context.

Such an extension of the focus necessarily makes the political and moral fallout of National Socialism a crucial issue. Often analyzed as the historical frame of reference for the writers of this period, its treatment might appear in a somewhat different light when seen, as Jean Améry demonstrates, through the relationship between writers and readers instead of the interpretation of literary works alone. What is meant by the cocoon of public acquiescence is nowhere more apparent than in the question of why there were not more literary works about the darkest side of National Socialism, the persecution of the Jews. The topic did not go unmentioned in the 1950s before trials were held. The politics of restitution that Adenauer, Schumacher, and Heuss promoted in a much-debated contract with Israel contributed to an ongoing discussion of the guilt of the Germans within the search for the new, post-Nazi identity. Writers mentioned the persecution of the Jews within the context of past atrocities, but few achieved more than Alfred Andersch. In his *Sanskriib oder der letzte Grund*, Andersch created a character who was a young Jewish woman by the name of Judith fleeing from the Gestapo, but he was unable to create more than a cliché.

This is a difficult question, certainly, and not one to be settled here. Any answer has to begin with the much-debated worry of writers concerning their ability to do justice to the incredibly overpowering events of this period. Writers felt an obligation to convey to the public their view that certain experiences made it more appropriate to be silent than to pretend to be able to find an aesthetic equivalent. Such an assumption is obviously a function of the reigning aesthetic paradigm according to which the reader should be enabled to join in the symbolic evocation of events. When Heinrich Böll, in the novel *Billard um halb zehn* (1958), evokes the complicated history of a family of architects in the course of one crucial day in their life, he resorts to a symbolic pattern of good and evil by having people either be “lambs” or have “partaken in the host of the beasts.” Most of the “lambs” have been killed by those in power or have died in the bombed city; the others, the “buffaloes,” have continued to live, thrive, and exert power in postwar Germany. Historic reality is fully enclosed by this symbolic structure. By guiding the readers through good and evil in every detail, Böll does not leave them an opportunity to sort out the shades in between and the experiences outside of this structure. If an event does not have an aesthetic equivalent, it falls off the literary map.

And rightly so according to Theodor Adorno, whose famous verdict on poetry after Auschwitz reflects the shortcomings, even barbarism, of poetic endeavors vis-à-vis the machine production of death: “To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that eats away also at that insight that explains why it has become impossible to write poetry today.” Such words were meant as a barrier against the search for aesthetic expressions for the totally senseless, but they were not intended to be an impediment against writing and thinking about Auschwitz. Even if Adorno’s pronouncement had become better known in the 1950s—full discussion of it did not take off until after the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials in the 1960s—it would not have redirected the thinking of writers. There was readiness to address German guilt in literary works, but also a conviction that it was inappropriate to seek out the victims through literary representation. The only mode in which the victims appeared was that of suffering, a mode with which the reader was believed to identify. The experience and insignia of “otherness,” which even Max Frisch removed from his play on antisemitism, *Andorra* (1961), were excluded.

There was avoidance. There was lack of compassion for Jews in their persecution in favor of a rhetoric of victimization of the young generation. There were selective memories. And there was also an aesthetic that stressed the “Kunstwerk” in the representation of reality. Readers shared this aesthetic even if their encounter with reality was different. As long as the writer was able to satisfy their need for symbolization of common experiences, the mutual roles were confirmed.
Most important: no experience was more common than suffering. Also very important at this time: no mode of representation was more reassuring than that which showed that suffering had been subdued by a matter-of-fact attitude that tied war and postwar activities together. In a dialogue under the title "Vergangenheit bewältigen," Max Rychner characterized this matter-of-fact attitude (Sachlichkeit) as a reaction of the younger generation against the overemphatic emotions that had reigned earlier. It had indeed become a metaphor in itself that gave authors a means to overcome their self-doubts about the legitimacy of their work. Finally, and most importantly, there was the Cold War, which redirected toward the menace in the East the moral outrage that at times gathered steam against the reemergence of Nazis and Nazi mentalities. The Cold War allowed, though this was an idea rarely addressed, a veiled acceptance, even support for the culture of acquiescence on the part of the Americans, English, and French, the former enemies.

A related set of questions seem to gain even more from consideration of the writer-reader relationship in postwar Germany. How did postwar German writers convey the overwhelming experience of mass death in the bombarded-out cities, on the battlefield, and in the turmoil of flight and expulsion at the end of the war in view of the two countervailing desires: forgetting and exposing the pain? Can their texts be judged according to aesthetic criteria or do they need to be seen as primarily therapeutic? What is the function of reading? What are the criteria of reality and realism, seen from the reader's perspective, in the aftermath of a catastrophe? Is the aesthetic of Dabeisein, which Améry analyzed in the Illustrierten, less ambivalent in a literary context? Did the writers advance an aesthetic notion of trauma that manifested itself in the style of presentation rather than in specific reported events? Did they develop, as participants in the events, an approach to mourning that countered the reigning discourse of self-pity? Whatever the answers, they are not settled with a recounting of plots or titles. While the absence of narratives can be indicative of repressing the truth, it can also indicate a manifestation of the enormity of the events. Unlike Illustrierten, which draw on ready-made language whatever the topic, literary writers approach tender subjects by indicating to the reader the limits of language. The mode of obsessively reducing events to bare-bones descriptions expects the reader to share a knowledge that is beyond the text. The models for this kind of elliptic writing can be found in the letters from the front in which soldiers learned to leave blanks and vacancies in the description where they were not allowed to or decided not to go into emotions and specifics. In these letters, intended to inform the readers at home and soothe their anxieties, soldiers avoided speaking about their innermost feelings.

In short, the answers have to reflect the many forms of Schweigen, of silence, between writers and readers in this period. The German word indicates an activity that the English lacks. Schweigen means not speaking. As a conscious hiatus in speaking or writing, it is itself a part of language. In the cocoon of public acquiescence in which the writers had a substantial share, it represented an important mode of communication. It built on the like-mindedness of readers. Some have called it complicity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN


4. Ibid., 5–6.


17. Ibid., 326.

18. Ibid., 327.


27. Ibid., 187.


30. Ibid., 78.


42. Alfred Andersch, Sindsbar oder der letzte Grund (Zürich: Diogenes, 1970), 40.

43. Ibid., 51.


45. Kurt Siegel, Die Literaturproduktion: Eine polemische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Literaturbetrieb im Deutschland von heute (Wien: Wancura, 1962), 11. This is not a comment on Siegel's political publications in which he pursued a thinly veiled National-Socialist Agenda.


50. Ibid., 698.


52. Ibid., 197.

53. On the historical and literary context of this emergence, see Ferdinand van Ingen, "Die Revolte des Lesers oder Rezeption versus Interpretation," in Gerhard Labroisse, ed., Rezeption-Interpretation: Beiträge zur Methendiskussion, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Neueren Germanistik 3 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1974), 83–147.


Heinrich, Arthur, and Naumann, Klaus (eds.), *Alles Banne! Ausblicke auf das endgültige Deutschland* (Cologne, 1990).

### Chronology of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870–1</td>
<td>Franco-Prussian War</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>Proclamation of the German Empire</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>Charles Darwin, <em>The Descent of Man</em></td>
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<td>1873</td>
<td><em>Kulturkampf</em> legislation introduced in Prussia</td>
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<td>1875</td>
<td>Gotha Programme of the Social Democratic Party (SPD)</td>
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<td>1876</td>
<td>Thomas Mann born</td>
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<td>1876</td>
<td>Opening of the Bayreuth Festival and the first complete performance of <em>The Ring</em></td>
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<td>1878</td>
<td>Invention of the telephone (Bell)</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Anti-socialist legislation passed (and remains in effect until 1890)</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Albert Einstein born</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Henrik Ibsen, <em>A Doll’s House</em></td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Invention of prototype reproduction process (Georg Meisenbach)</td>
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<td>1883</td>
<td>Death of Karl Marx and Richard Wagner</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>August Bebel, <em>Die Frau und der Sozialismus</em></td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>Year of the three Kaisers: Wilhelm I, Friedrich III, and Wilhelm II</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td>Founding of the Second International</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td>Founding of the Freie Bühne in Berlin</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Social security legislation introduced in the German Reich</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Following Reichstag elections the SPD is for the first time the largest party in terms of votes (1.5 million, 20%)</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Dismissal of Bismarck as Reichskanzler</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>SPD adopts a Marxist platform with its Erfurt Programme</td>
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<td>1892</td>
<td>First Munich Secession</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>Invention of the diesel engine</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>Founding of the Alldeutscher Verband</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>Otto Brahm becomes director of the Deutsches Theater</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>Founding of the Worpswede Artists’ Colony</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>First public motion picture performances in Paris and Berlin</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>Discovery of X-rays (Röntgen)</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>Appearance of <em>Jugend</em> and <em>Simplicissimus</em></td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (Civil Code) passed (and takes effect 1 January 1900)</td>
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6th Party Congress at Nuremberg, filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in 
Triumph des Willens

1935 
Reintroduction of conscription and the proclamation of the Nazi 
race laws

German occupation of the Rhineland in defiance of the Ver-
sailles Treaty

Carl von Ossietzky, held in a concentration camp since 1933 
(and dying there in 1938), is awarded the Nobel Peace 
Prize

1936 
Unemployment nil

1937 
Exhibition of Degenerate Art (Entartete Kunst) in Munich

Anschluß of Austria (13 March)

As a result of the ‘Appeasement’ policy the Sudetenland is ceded 
to Germany

Reichskristallnacht (9 November) when the SA vandalizes Jewish 
shops and synagogues

Leni Riefenstahl, Olympia

1939 
German troops march into Prague (15 March)

Hitler–Stalin Pact (23 August)

Wehrmacht invades Poland (1 September); Britain and France 
declare war on Germany (3 September)

Veit Harlan, Jut Stüff

1940 
At the Wannsee Conference Heydrich announces the ‘Final 
Solution of the Jewish Question’ (20 January), which is 
implemented principally at the extermination camps at 
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Sobibor, and 
Chelmno

1943 
Brutal clearance of the ‘Warsaw Ghetto’ (19 April–16 May)

1944 
Von Stauffenberg plot to kill Hitler (20 July) fails

1945 
Yalta Conference where Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill agree 
the division of Germany into four zones of occupation 
(4–11 February)

Hitler commits suicide (30 April)

Capitulation of the Wehrmacht (7–9 May)

1945 
Soviet military administration approves the formation of ‘anti-
fascist’ parties

At the Potsdam Conference (17 July–2 August) the Allies agree 
on the denazification, demilitarization, and decentralization of 
Germany

Creation of the Kulturbund

Establishing of DEFA film company in East Berlin

Founding of SED (Socialist Unity Party) through the merger of 
the KPD and SPD

First edition of Neues Deutschland, the daily paper of the SED 
Central Committee

1947 
All-German Writers’ Congress

1948 
Currency reform (23 June)

Brecht founds the Berliner Ensemble

1949 
Founding of the German Democratic Republic (7 October)

Launching of Sinn und Form

1950 
3rd Party Conference of the SED where the Party Executive is 
changed to the Central Committee; Chairmen of the Party are 
Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl

GDR joins COMECON

1951 
SED campaign against ‘formalist’ and ‘decadence’ in favour of 
’socialist realism’

Consorship apparatus established

165,648 East Germans flee the GDR

Workers’ uprising (17 June) in East Berlin and other towns is 
suppressed by Soviet troops

391,390 East Germans move to West Germany and West Berlin

Walter Ulbricht elected First Secretary of the SED Central 
Committee

1954 
USSR proclaims the sovereignty of the GDR

1955 
Creation of the Ministry of Culture

‘Thaw’ in Eastern Europe (until 1957)

1956 
Creation of the Nationale Volksarmee (18 January)

Failure of the Hungarian uprising leads to renewed cultural 
repression

Death of Bertolt Brecht

All-German team takes part in the Melbourne Olympic Games

Show trial of the so-called Hexer-Gruppe: Wolfgang Harich, 
editor of the Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, is sentenced to 
ten years

Ulbricht proposes a German Confederation as an interim move 
towards German reunification

Heiner Müller, Der Lohnarbeiter

Abolition of rationing

Bruno Apitz, Nacht unter Wölfen (the film version directed by 
Frank Beyer is released in 1963)

1959 
SED initiates the Bitterfelder Weg (24 April)

Uwe Johnson, Mütter der Über Jakob

1960 
Trading Agreement between GDR and West Germany

1961 
Building of the Berlin Wall (13 August)

1962 
Conscription introduced (24 January)

Peter Huchel removed as editor of Sinn und Form

1963 
SED introduces the ‘New Economic System’ and allows the 
debate of past errors in cultural works

Robert Havemann is dismissed from his university post 
(and two years later is expelled from the Akademie der 
Wissenschaften)

Second Bitterfeld Conference on Culture and Politics

Death of Otto Grotewohl

1965 
Law on Uniform Socialist Education System, applying to all 
levels of education

Eleventh Plenum of SED Central Committee decides on the wide-
spread repression of dissent
Chronology of Events

1966
First nuclear power station comes on stream

1967
Volkskammer passes the Law on Citizenship of the GDR

1968
New constitution of the GDR comes into effect
East German troops take part in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia

1969
Controversy over Christa Wolf’s Nachdenken über Christa T.
Meeting between Willi Stoph (Chairman of the Council of Ministers) and West German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, in Erfurt

1971
Private telephone communication between East and West Germany is restored after 19 years
Erich Honecker succeeds Ulbricht as First Secretary of the SED (3 May)
Honecker promises ‘no taboos’ for committed socialist artists
Transit Agreement between the GDR and the Federal Republic
Cultural liberalization is heralded by the reception of Ulrich Plenzdorf’s novel Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.
Signing of the Basic Treaty between the GDR and the FRG (21 December)

1973
Death of Walter Ulbricht
GDR joins UN
International recognition is achieved when the USA takes up diplomatic relations with the GDR (Britain and France having done so in 1973)

1976
Expatriation of Wolf Biermann leads to prolonged confrontation between intellectuals and the SED leadership

1977
SED functionary Rudolf Bahro publishes Die Alternative in the Federal Republic, a critique of communist government, and is arrested
Maxie Wander, Guten Morgen, du Schöne
Punitive measures are taken against ‘dissident’ intellectuals
Relations between East and West Germany deteriorate after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

1981
First of a series of peace conferences between the cultural intelligentsia from the GDR and the FRG, prompted by the increasing superpower nuclear confrontation
Soviet Union stations SS-21 missiles in the GDR

1982
Peace demonstration by 100,000 in Dresden
Peace campaigner Roland Jahn is expelled from the GDR
West Germany signs a credit agreement (for 1 billion DM) with the GDR
Christa Wolf, Cassandra

1984
Planned visit by Honecker to the Federal Republic is cancelled

1986
GDR and FRG sign an Agreement on Culture covering education, libraries, museums, radio and television, sport, and youth exchanges

1987
Writers’ congress debates the abolition of censorship
A rock concert in front of the Reichstag building in West Berlin leads to fighting between East Germans and the GDR police

1989
Honecker finally makes the first official visit by a GDR head of state to the Federal Republic (7–11 September)
Regular demonstrations outside the Nikolai Church in Leipzig (beginning in August)
Massive demonstration (500,000) in East Berlin demanding reform (4 November)
GDR celebrates its 40th anniversary (7 October), followed by the fall of Honecker (18 October) and the resignation of the Politburo (7 November)
Opening of the Berlin Wall (9 November) and the dissolution of the Stasi

1990
SED renamed the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) under Gregor Gysi
First free democratic elections to the Volkskammer (18 March), with the CDU the largest party (40.8%)
Treuhand Agency set up to dispose of East German industry
Treaty signed in Moscow restoring full sovereignty to Germany (12 September)
GDR joins the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 23 of the Grundgesetz (3 October)

1945
Radio stations established under Allied control in major German cities
Potsdam Conference (17 July–2 August) at which the Allies announce their intention of establishing democracy in Germany
Frankfurter Rundschau founded in the American zone

1946
First edition of Der Ruf
Nuremberg Trials concluded (October)
Licensed press established
Reopening of the universities
British and American zones of occupation are merged (1 January; French Zone joins in April)
First edition of Der Spiegel
Marshall Aid announced

1948
Foundation of Gruppe 47 (10 September)
Regional radio stations founded
Communication Reform in the Western zones (20 June)
Berlin Blockade (June until May 1949)

1949
Proclamation of the Grundgesetz (23 May) and the founding of the Federal Republic, with Bonn as the capital
First elections to the Bundestag (August–September) with Konrad Adenauer (CDU) elected Chancellor and Theodor Heuss (FDP) President

1950
Nation-wide demonstrations against rearmament

1951
First post-war Wagner Festival at Bayreuth
Death of Arnold Schönberg

1952
Signing of the German Treaty and the suspension of the Statute of Occupation
First edition of Bild-Zeitung
1954 West Germany wins the World Cup at football
1955 Following the proclamation of (limited) sovereignty the Federal
Republic enters NATO (9 May—formation of Warsaw Pact
including the GDR, 14 May)
First Documenta exhibition in Kassel
Death of Thomas Mann
1956 Founding of the Bundeswehr (followed by the introduction of
conscription)
Death of Gottfried Benn and Bertolt Brecht
German Communist Party banned
1957 In the federal elections the CDU/CSU gain an absolute majority
(for the only time in the history of the Federal Republic)
1958 Kampf dem Atomtod begins its campaign against nuclear weapons
Gleichberechtigungsge setz (Law on Equality between the Sexes)
comes into force
1959 Günter Grass, Die Blechtrommel
SPD agrees the Godesberg Programme (13 November)
1960 Adolf Eichmann is kidnapped by Israeli agents (tried in 1961 and
executed in 1962)
1961 Erection of the Berlin Wall (13 August)
1962 Beginning of the Spiegel Affair with the arrest of its editor, Rudolf
Augstein
Oberhausen Manifesto of the Young German Cinema
First nuclear reactor comes on stream
1963 ZDF begins broadcasting
President Kennedy visits the Federal Republic and West
Berlin
Adenauer resigns as Chancellor (15 October) to be replaced by
Ludwig Erhard
1964 Herbert Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man appears in the USA (and
in Germany in 1967)
1965 Peter Weiss, Die Ermittlung
First edition of Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s Kurbuch
1966 Congress ‘Crisis of Democracy’ held in Frankfurt (with speakers
including Bloch, Habermas, and Enzensberger)
Grand Coalition formed between CDU/CSU and SPD (1
December)
1967 Death of Konrad Adenauer
Demonstration against the Shah of Persia’s visit to Berlin, with
the student Benno Ohnesorg killed by the police
Bundestag passes Filmförderungsgesetz establishing subsidies for
the cinema
1968 Assassination attempt on the SDS leader Rudi Dutschke
Bundestag passes Emergency Laws (30 May)
Action Committee for the Liberation of Women founded in West
Berlin
1969 Federal elections lead to the first SPD/FDP coalition, led by Willy
Brandt

1970 Founding of Verband deutscher Schriftsteller, the writers’ union
Death of Karl Jaspers and Theodor Adorno
Baader–Meinhof terrorist group founded (renamed Rote Armee
Fraktion in 1971)
Federal Republic signs the Warsaw Treaty recognizing the Oder–
Neiße Line
1971 Stern publishes a declaration by 374 women admitting to illegal
abortions
Fifteen film-makers (including Wenders and Fassbinder) found
the Filmverlag der Autoren
Willy Brandt is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his Ospolitik
Radikalenerlaß (Decree on Extremists) is agreed by Brandt and
the Länder
Leading members of the Rote Armee Fraktion are arrested
Heinrich Böll is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature
Olympic Games are held in Munich, with a team from the GDR
allowed to compete
Signing of the Basic Treaty between the FRG and the GDR (21
December)
1973 End of the Vietnam War
Federal Republic joins UN
1974 Brandt resigns as Chancellor, to be replaced by Helmut Schmidt
Heinrich Böll, Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum (the film ver-

dition by Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta is re-

leased in 1975)
1975 Baader–Meinhof trial begins
1976 Bundestag passes legislation allowing for abortion under certain
conditions
1977 First edition of Emma
Industrialists’ leader Hanns-Martin Schleyer is kidnapped (and
later killed) and Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl
Raspe are found dead in their cells
1978 Kluge, Schlöndorff, Fassbinder, Reitz, and others make Deutschland
im Herbst
1979 NATO ‘dual track’ decision on the modernization of its nuclear
weaponry
American TV series Holocaust is broadcast in West Germany
1980 Founding of the Greens as a federal party
1981 Wave of squatting hits West Berlin and other cities
1982 Easter Marches are resumed for the first time since 1968
Death of Rainer Werner Fassbinder
End of social–liberal coalition; Helmut Kohl (CDU) becomes
Chancellor
1983 In the federal elections the Greens enter the Bundestag
Peace movement holds the biggest rally in its history with over
300,000 in Bonn
1984 Official survey reveals that 50 per cent of trees in West Germany
are damaged
Edgar Reitz, Heimat
1985
Death of Heinrich Böll and Axel Springer
Günter Wallraf, Ganz unten

1986
Nuclear reactor disaster at Chernobyl
Death of Joseph Beuys

1987
Brandt resigns after 23 years as Chairman of the SPD
Berlin celebrates its 750th anniversary
Reagan and Gorbachev sign INF agreement removing medium-range missiles from Europe

1988
Death of Franz Josef Strauß (CSU)

1989
Opening of the Berlin Wall (9 November)

1990
German Monetary Union (1 July)
German unification in accordance with Article 23 of the Grundgesetz (3 October)
First all-German elections (2 December) with Kohl re-elected Chancellor

Index

3sat 267
40te Deutschland 303–4

Abgrenzung 192
abortion laws 58–9, 82, 292, 333
Abel, deutlicher Pfeil 304
Abschied von gestern 226
abstract art 153, 180, 201, 288
Abusch, Alexander 153, 165
Abwärts 282
Academie of the Arts (GDR) 152, 156, 164, 170, 172
Achterbahn, Herbert:
Auf verlorenen Posten 344
Action Committee for the Liberation of Women 251, 252, 295
Activism 63, 64
Adenauer, Konrad 155, 156, 212, 213, 216, 217, 218, 221, 225, 226, 232, 233, 236, 237, 238, 239, 257
Adlon, Percy 314
Adorno, Theodor W. 2, 8, 12, 28, 49, 53, 55, 94, 96, 141, 142, 143, 147, 242, 273, 274, 276, 291, 321, 346
Dialektik der Aufklärung 2–8, 12–13, 49–50, 94, 242, 273, 274, 276, 291, 321
advertising 5, 76, 89, 91, 95, 517
sexestization of politics 102, 120, 133–4
agtprop 82, 242, 245
Aichinger, Ilse 224, 229
Air Transport Ministry 337
Akerman, Chantal:
Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles 303
Albertz, Heinrich 311
Albertz, Jürgen:
Die zwei Leben der Maria Behrens 280
Alemann, Claudia 293
Alice in den Straßen 315
Alfert de Lange (publisher) 129
allgemeinbildende polytechnische Schule 154
Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst (ADN) 153
Aldenbourgh, Gerhard 180
Athenloß, Emile:
Zur Soziologie des Kinos 48
alterity 303
alternative culture/scene 201, 264, 265, 271, 313, 340
Amann, Max 114
Americanization 6, 36, 48, 61, 133, 310–12, 314–17, 319, 346
amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen 155, 157, 158
Amt Wissenschaft 120
Anders als die Anderen 88
Andersch, Alfred 211, 223, 231, 233
‘Arbeit 33’ 280
Anderson, Lindsay 160
Anderson, Sascha 340
Anges essen Zeile auf 303
Annan, Noël 103
anti-fascism 150, 152, 175
see also resistance in the Third Reich
anti-militarism 150
see also peace movement
anti-modernism 19–21, 47, 62, 68–70, 104–10, 129, 132
see also postmodernism
anti-Semitism 20, 106, 117, 133, 136, 248, 308
Antoine, André 15, 19
Apitr, Bruno:
Nacht unter Wölben 165–6, 173
Appia, Adolphe 21
Aragon, Louis 156
Ararat (publisher) 109
Arbeiterfilm 269
Arbeiter-illustrirte-Zeitung 87, 89, 92, 129
ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) 176, 221, 222, 267, 268, 332
Arendt, Hannah 107
Ariola 269
army 10, 13, 44, 59, 63, 227, 232, 234
art academies 31, 111, 125, 127, 152, 156, 164, 170, 172, 265
art unions 31, 33, 37
Artists’ Union (GDR) 180
Artmann, H. C. 247
Ash, Timothy Garton 319
Association of Women Film-Workers 293
Asatre, Fred 139
asylum seekers 308, 343
Aztecs 313
Aufbau 151, 201
Aufbau Verlag 150, 155, 162, 164, 201, 330
Augsburg, Rudolf 237, 272, 276
Aurora-Verlag 229
Auschwitz 172, 236, 238, 319, 341
Auschwitz Trials 235
Autoren Edition 251
avant-garde 13, 24, 32, 36, 41, 42, 72, 209, 271, 288
Avenarius, Ferdinand 42
1898  |  Death of Otto von Bismarck
        | Bertolt Brecht born
        | Beginning of the construction of the German fleet
        | Discovery of radium (Marie Curie)
1899  |  Boer War (until 1902)
1900  |  Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*
        | Death of Friedrich Nietzsche
        | Beginnings of the Wanderweg movement
        | Development of quantum theory (Max Planck) and the Zeppelin airship
1901  |  Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*
1903  |  Founding of the Ford motor factory
        | First motorized flight
1905  |  Max Reinhardt becomes director of the Deutsches Theater
        | Artists' colony *Die Brücke* founded in Dresden by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
1910  |  Theory of relativity developed by Einstein
1911  |  Appearance of Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm*
1912  |  Artists' colony *Der blaue Reiter* founded in Munich by Wassily Kandinsky
1913  |  SPD becomes the largest party in the Reichstag (110 deputies out of 397)
1914  |  Sinking of the Titanic
1918  |  Death of August Bebel, co-founder and Chairman of the SPD
        | Walden's 'First German Autumn Salon' in Berlin
        | Stellan Rye, *Der Student von Prag*
1922  |  Assassination of Walther Rathenau, Minister for Foreign Affairs
        | Thomas Mann's *Von deutscher Republik* given as a speech in Berlin
1923  |  Occupation of the Ruhr by French troops
        | Formation of a new government under Gustav Stresemann
        | Hitler/Ludendorff *putsch* in Munich fails (9 November)
        | Raging inflation: $1 = 4.2 billion marks by the end of December
1924  |  Dawes Plan regulating reparations payments
1925  |  Following Ebert's death Hindenburg is elected President
1926  |  Plebiscite on the expropriation of the aristocracy (rejected)
1927  |  KPD sets up a central organization for agitprop and demands a 'red front' for cultural struggle
        | Collapse of the Berlin stock exchange
1928  |  Following elections a grand coalition is formed under Hermann Müller (SPD)
        | League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers (BPRS) established
        | Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*
1929  |  Signing of the Young Plan on reparations, repeatedly attacked by the right
        | Death of Gustav Stresemann
        | Wall Street Crash, causing the withdrawal of foreign capital (25 October)
1930  |  Brüning forms a cabinet without parliamentary support, thus marking the end of parliamentary rule and the beginning of government by Presidential decree
        | Unemployment reaches 3 million
        | In elections the NSDAP wins 107 seats to become the second largest party in the Reichstag (14 September)
        | Josef von Sternberg, *Der blaue Engel*
1931  |  Hindenburg re-elected President
        | In the national elections the Nazis become the largest party with 38% (31 July)
        | Slatan Dudow/Bertolt Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*
1933  |  Hitler becomes Chancellor (30 January)
        | Reichstag fire (27 February)
        | Passage of the 'Enabling Law' (23 March) and *de facto* cancellation of the Weimar constitution
        | In the March elections, with unemployment at 6 million, the NSDAP wins 17.3 million votes (43.9%)
1934  |  Burning of the books (10 May)
        | One-party state proclaimed (14 July)
        | Creation of the Reich Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer)
        | 'Night of the Long Knives', the purge of the SA (30 June)
        | With the death of Hindenburg Hitler becomes Führer und Reichskanzler (2 August)

The Weimar Republic

The Third Reich

Chronology of Events