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NEGOTIATING CULTURE AND BELONGING IN EASTERN GERMANY

The Case of the *Jugendweihe* - A Secular Coming-of-Age Ritual

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Anselma Gallinat

Submitted for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Anthropology

August 2002



18 DEC 2002

Negotiating Culture and Belonging in Eastern Germany: The Case of the *Jugendweihe* - A Secular Coming-of-Age Ritual

Anselma Gallinat

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the dynamics of the socio-cultural change following the reunification in eastern Germany. It explores questions of continuity/discontinuity using the *Jugendweihe*, a secular coming-of-age ritual, as its pivotal point. This ritual goes back to the nineteenth century but was used as a socialist state ritual during the GDR period, a fact which lends a number of problems to its current practice in eastern Germany.

An exploration of the different identities which the *Jugendweihe* takes on in the public discourse and in the discourse of the institutions organising the ritual shows how it is perceived on these different levels of culture. The results from this exploration are compared to the individual experiences of participants in order to reflect how individual perception differs from institutional master narratives. In order to gain insights into changes in the perception of the ritual which may be related to the loss of the socialist cosmology after 1989, this investigation includes the analysis of both the modern and the GDR *Jugendweihe*. Due to the ritual's nature as an 'educating' rite of transition this study is linked to the notion of the person.

The analysis also takes in account the question of an existence of a particular eastern German identity and culture. Material drawn from life-history interviews is used to illustrate how eastern Germans establish their identity as based on past experience and an attachment to their socio-cultural and physical environment. The study of a particular life-history shows that both the experience of a 'muffled feeling of belonging' and the rhetorical 'East German' identity depend on the dynamics of GDR society, which allowed for the coexistence of a grass-roots culture, containing its own values and practices, and the official ideological discourse. This point leads, finally, to a re-consideration of anthropological concepts of culture.

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List of contents

	Acknowledgements	VI
Chapter One	**Introduction**	1
1.0.	Introduction	1
1.2.	The intentional idea	3
1.3.	'Culture'	4
1.4.	At home?	9
1.4.1.	The place	9
1.4.2.	Making contacts, meeting people	12
1.4.3.	'Anthropology at home'	13
1.5.	The structure of this thesis	16
Chapter Two	**The History of the *Jugendweihe***	18
2.0.	Introduction	18
2.1.	The *Jugendweihe* in its beginnings	19
2.2.	The Third Reich	24
2.3.	The *Jugendweihe* in the GDR	25
2.4.	The *Jugendweihe* and the *Wende*	29
2.5.	Conclusion	34
Chapter Three	**The *Jugendweihe* Contested**	36
3.0.	Introduction	36
3.1.	The '*Jugendweihe*': a metaphor with manifold meanings	40
3.2	And if one does talk about meaning...	52
3.3.	Legitimising a 'meaningless' ritual	55
3.4.	The experts talk...	58
3.4.	Conclusion	66
Chapter Four	**The Voluntary 'Transition' Ritual and The Institutional Discourse about It**	68
4.0.	Introduction	68
4.1.	Literature review	69
4.1.1.	General theories of ritual	69
4.1.2.	Transitional rituals	75
4.1.3.	Secular rituals	78
4.1.4.	Conclusion	79
4.2.	The *Jugendweihe*	81
4.2.0.	Introduction	81
4.2.1.	The transition ritual	83
4.2.1.1.	'A day of joy...'	83
4.2.1.2.	A day of change? – analysis	87

4.2.2.	The notion of the person in the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung	107
4.2.2.0.	Introduction	107
4.2.2.1.	The transition and 'growing into society'	109
4.2.2.2.	Values and norms of behaviour: co-responsibility	112
4.2.2.3.	Interjection: personhood in the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband	116
4.2.2.4.	'Mutual individualism'	118
4.3.	Conclusion	123
Chapter Five	**The *Jugendweihe* as a Socialist State Ritual**	125
5.1.	Literature	125
5.2.	The socialist coming-of-age ritual	131
5.2.0.	Introduction	131
5.2.1.	*Jugendweihe*: a political event	134
5.2.2.	'A day in May'	135
5.2.3.	'A day in May' and possible interpretations	138
5.3.	The 'socialist personality'	149
5.3.0.	Introduction	149
5.3.1.	A public self	150
5.3.2	Collectivity - the person in relation to society	155
5.4.	Conclusion: ambivalence and questions of continuity –	163
Chapter Six	**'The Coming-of-Age Ritual': Private Accounts**	172
6.0.	Introduction	172
6.1.	'What do you remember of your Jugendweihe?'	176
6.1.1.	Nothing happened	177
6.1.2.	'And I remember...' - being on stage	186
6.1.3.	The 'real thing' - family celebration	188
5.1.4.	Depoliticisation	194
6.2.	Young people telling stories	198
6.2.1.	'Nothing great'? - the public ceremony	199
6.2.2.	'I had been so afraid of the stairs, really'... - presenting the self	202
6.2.3.	The family celebration	206
6.2.4.	Coming of age?	208
6.3.	Conclusion	212
Chapter Seven	***'The Eastern Germans'***	217
7.0.	Introduction	217
7.1.	Connecting past and present - a life-story	219
7.1.2.	*Eigen-Sinn* and coherence	229
7.2.	Identity or belonging?	233
7.2.1.	Belonging and home	236
7.2.1.1.	The place of origin as *Heimat*	240
7.2.1.2.	Belonging and the experience of cultural differences	245
7.2.2.	Identity politics in eastern Germany	251
7.3.	Conclusion	256

Chapter Eight Conclusion 261
8.1. The problem 261
8.2. A ritual with manifold meanings and complexities of discourses 262
8.3. Landmarks, schema, metaphors: negotiating culture 269

Bibliography 272

List of tables

Fig. 1 Outside of the restaurant Brauner Hirsch, Schönebeck. 168
Fig. 2 The choir at the *Jugendweihe*, Schönebeck. 168
Fig. 3 Congratulations at the *Jugendweihe*, Schönebeck. 169
Fig. 4 The Burghof-Clan at the *Jugendweihe*, Schönebeck. 169
Fig. 5 After the *Jugendfeier* in Magdeburg. 170
Fig. 6 Buildings along the rail track in Magdeburg. 170
Fig. 7 View from the air of Felgeleben. 171
Fig. 8 View from the air of Schönebeck and the Boerde. 171

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

This thesis addresses the question of socio-cultural change and continuity in post-socialist eastern Germany. 'Socio-cultural change' is a very broad term and certainly needs clarification in light of the case which this thesis explores; other points that need consideration are the identity of the researcher and her personal position in relation to the data and the argument that is outlined in this study. However, before I introduce the reader to this argument and the field research, I want to say something about the way this project came about. This is in keeping with the structure of the thesis, in which the reader is taken through a similar process of discovery to that which the author experienced during the three years of working on this topic.

1.1. Why eastern Germany?

I am from eastern Germany.[1] However, although I lived in the GDR, the German Democratic Republic, with my family I, or rather we, were never really a part of GDR society. Both my parents were Protestant pastors; my father even held an administrative position within the church. The fact that we were Christians excluded us from much 'ordinary GDR life'; the majority of GDR citizens were atheist. More importantly, we excluded ourselves by being overtly critical and aware of our

[1] The phrase 'eastern Germany' will be used to refer to the contemporary eastern part of the united Germany. The phrase 'East Germany' is employed to describe the former German Democratic Republic; it therefore identifies the socialist state and society which existed between 1945-1990. This distinction is made in order to prevent confusion but also in order to be as politically correct with regard to modern Germany as possible (see further chapters). Similar terms are used to describe 'eastern Germans' and of course 'western Germans' and 'western Germany' in contrast to the term 'West Germany' which again refers to the period before 1990.

surroundings. This was certainly the case with regard to the politics and actions of the state or the authorities. My parents would not go to elections, for example; they were constantly aware of the state security police but also critical of what could be called 'ordinary citizens of the GDR', those people who would go to elections, would take up party membership and more or less follow the state's guidelines.

My brothers and I were brought up in an atmosphere where the family was not really inside but also not really outside of GDR society. As the youngest I grew up feeling less concerned by this situation than my brothers. My parents wanted to avoid my getting into similar situations at school as my brothers; situations where they would think one thing but have to say another. I therefore was allowed to join the socialist children's organisation the *Jungpioniere*, Young Pioneers, at the age of seven. Three years later I advanced to a member of the next higher pioneer group, the *Tählmannpioniere*. However, it was clear that I would not have taken the step that followed after this; I would not have become a member of the youth organisation FDJ, free German youth, and I would not have participated in the socialist coming-of-age ritual, the *Jugendweihe,* youth consecration, regardless of the consequences this refusal might have had for my future. However, 'history accelerated', as Hann puts it (1994), and I was never forced to defend this position. Two years after the Fall of the Wall I celebrated my confirmation at home while others were debating whether the ritual *Jugendweihe* would survive in post-socialism. However, this position of myself as an eastern German does not yet explain the reasons for my choosing eastern Germany for my Ph.D. thesis.

What fascinated me about the GDR was the way in which a leading elite constructed a whole apparatus of education in order to teach an ideology that sought to maintain the power of that elite. The coming-of-age rite *Jugendweihe*, youth consecration, was such a means of education and indoctrination in the GDR. It is a secular transition ritual that is celebrated in eastern Germany at the age of fourteen. In the GDR the *Jugendweihe* was a socialist life-cycle ritual that was used to encourage the young people to be loyal to the state and to instruct them in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Although numbers of participation dropped considerably after the Fall of the Wall, from about 170,000 participating teenagers (above 90%) during the 1980s to about 50,000 in 1992 (Gandow 1994:5), the *Jugendweihe* regained popularity in the

mid-1990s and currently encompasses about sixty per cent of the young people in eastern Germany (field work data). This ritual is a good indicator of social change in more general terms because it always served different purposes for different groups; as far back as the nineteenth century. The *Jugendweihe* is highly flexible, as chapter two will show.

However, it also seems plausible that the constant discussions at home about the development of things and their consequences, in the form of political and social processes; discussions, which not only shaped our life in the GDR period but even more so after 1989, strengthened my feeling that certain questions needed to be addressed in depth; possibly in a scholarly fashion.

1.2. The intentional idea

My family maintained its insider-outsider position after the Fall of the Wall. Now the main topics of conversation were criticism of the unsatisfactory management of the past, and the apportioning of guilt and responsibility. Critical attitudes towards former 'ordinary citizens' became even stronger among many Christians and other former oppositional groups. The continued existence of the *Jugendweihe*, for example, was a great annoyance to many, to say the least.

My position, however, was slightly different. Having been brought up less critically aware than my brothers, I felt more sympathetic towards other GDR citizens. I had also lived in western Germany for quite some time and possibly gained some distance to the developments in the eastern part of Germany.

When I started this research project on the ritual *Jugendweihe* and its changes with relation to the Fall of the Wall, two things were clear in my mind. One was that the ritual had been a means of oppression in the GDR which made its further existence problematic; the other was that life in the GDR had necessitated certain compromises and strategies among its citizens, and that these cannot simply be condemned. I wanted to show that although 'seeming' compliance took place, this compliance was part of a life-strategy that enabled people to deal with a totalitarian regime without utterly compromising their self-esteem. I hoped that such a work might contribute to

an understanding between the different fronts that sometimes appear in eastern German society. With regard to anthropology I wanted to show that culture is adaptable and flexible, much more so than is often argued.

1.3. 'Culture'

Eastern Germany is a 'transitional', 'post-socialist' society. It can therefore be considered in the context of the works of Hann (2002), Berdahl (1999; 2000), Verdery (1999) and others. These works, by their very choice of terminology indicate that the dominant feature of post-socialist states is change, or transition. This means ultimately that these works would challenge the traditional, largely restricted view of 'culture' as reified values and concepts. However, this does not always appear to be the case since what is usually discussed is the issue of 'social change' rather than that of 'cultural change'. Although very engaged and thorough, most of these analyses remain focused on one specific issue. That issue can be memory and remembrance work (Bohlman 2000; Ten Dyke 2000) or (ethnic) identity (Berdahl 1999b; Platz 2000; Verdery 1999) and others in a similar vein.[2]

This thesis uses a more holistic approach. I will trace social change on two levels of society or culture over the time of the Fall of the Wall. Using the eastern German coming-of-age ritual, the *Jugendweihe*, as the pivotal point, I will compare the institutional discourse on this ritual to the personal experiences of participants before and after the *Wende*. This exploration will show how and where culture manifests itself: does culture consist of reified concepts in an institutional or public discourse; or is it life-experience practised at the grass roots level of society, or may we possibly find it somewhere between the two poles?

Discourse, in this sense, describes the whole of the texts that the organisations offering the *Jugendweihe* produce, in order to advertise, or justify the practice of the ritual and their other activities. This discourse will be seen to be underpinned by a

[2] Verdery's (1996) and Berdahl's (1999) work are rare exceptions at present. Verdery, however, also concentrates on the public and political sphere and lacks the level of personal experience that will be addressed in the thesis.

cosmology; this cosmology encompasses all ideas, world views, value systems that form the basis for the argument that is visible in the texts. With regard to the texts of the *Zentraler Ausschuss*, central committee, which organised the ritual in the German Democratic Republic (GDR throughout), this cosmology is the Marxist-Leninist ideology, or socialist ideology. I will use the term 'ideology' in this thesis in order to refer to the Marxist-Leninist ideology that was propagated by the GDR state. Ideology will be regarded as a discourse mainly concerned with forms of knowledge, their relation to class structures, class conflict, class interest, modes of production and economical structures (Kress 1985:29).

The question this thesis explores is how the *Jugendweihe* survived and how the process of adaptation to the new social and political system affected the ritual and its different elements. In the case of continuity I will ask why certain elements remained unchanged during a process which resulted in the disappearance of the entire cosmological background of the ritual, the socialist ideology. How can we explain the survival of a cultural attribute which seems to have been deprived of its cosmological anchor? This point leads us back to the question of culture and cultural change.

The concept of culture has long been discussed in Anthropology; with regard to its definition but also, consequently, its very nature. How does culture, taken to mean 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings ..., a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate... and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life', work if we take into account individual creativity and change (Geertz 1973:89)?

In a recent article Carrithers subsumes the different positions in Anthropology that deal with the notion of the person and the relation between the individual and society (Carrithers 2000:356-379). Carrithers identifies two leagues of anthropologists; on the one hand there are those anthropologists who take account of the holistic social whole; these 'hedgehogs' (for example Geertz 1973, Dumont 1966) focus on the great difference between the 'them', the non-western societies, and the 'us', the modern societies. This group is faced by those anthropologists who are concerned with many 'little things' carrying out detailed studies of individuals that

show that cultural norms are not adhered to as generally as the other group often argues (Wikan 1990; Mines 1994).

Using two life stories, one from India and one from eastern Germany, Carrithers argues that culture cannot be reified. He asserts that underneath the well-known hard surface of values and norms there is a much more smooth and fluid base that makes up 'culture' in everyday practice. Carrithers uses the notion of landmarks, which Halbwachs suggested with regard to memory (1992:41-189; especially 175), arguing that cultural values exist as signifiers for behaviour and action but that they do not determine the final action. They are mainly 'known through their use', which is usually rhetorical (Carrithers 2000:371). This notion allows Carrithers to describe the creativity with which Petra, his eastern German informant, encounters the changes of society around her. Her life-story shows how she mixes old and new values and thereby creates a new value system by herself.

This notion of culture as landmarks, or culture as schema, culture as metaphor, has been voiced by many anthropologists during recent decades. The underlying idea is similar for all three concepts. Cultural norms, values etc. appear in a reified form, and in this form they are known and can be reiterated by people. Everyday life and individual behaviour can, however, differ markedly from these norms without causing any distress for people. Culture is therefore much more fluid and flexible than its first appearance suggests.

The idea of the existence of schema, long fashionable in cognitive anthropology, suggests that some form of blueprint for cognition and behaviour exists in culture (D'Andrade 1992:23-44; 1992b:47-58; 1995). These schema are 'cognitive structures through which interpretations of the world are made' (D'Andrade 1992b:52). They are 'internalised' (D'Andrade 1992b:56) and have motivational force (D'Andrade 1992:23-44). Since they are abstractions they are flexible and allow for a range of possibilities: 'different individuals internalize different parts of the same culture in different ways' (D'Andrade 1992:41). This coupled with the fact that schema can also be created out of themselves (D'Andrade 1992b:54) means that different schema exist in culture simultaneously which might contradict one another. A similar concept to this is that of the *habitus* that was developed by Bourdieu (1984; 1977). According to Bourdieu a *habitus* - 'a system of durable transposable dispositions' - is acquired by

experience (Bourdieu 1977:72). Once acquired in early childhood this *habitus*, 'underlies the structuring of school experiences', these experiences then again slightly change the *habitus*, which, in its changed form, underlies then again the structuring of any further life experiences: 'a habitus, understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experience, functions at every moment as *a matrix for perceptions, appreciations, and actions'* (Bourdieu 1977:87;83; emphasis in original).

Another theory that is closer to the field of linguistics than that of cognition is the idea of culture as metaphor. The notion of metaphor has been most strongly argued for by Fernandez (1986; 1991). The idea focuses on the communicative aspect of culture and sees culture as rhetoric that is applied in conversation while every participant of the conversation is aware of the fact that the terms entail much more than the mere vocabulary. It is therefore another way of bridging the gap between reified norms and everyday practice.

Fernandez argues that metaphors are inherently important in 'expressive culture' for a number of different reasons (1986:30-70). Taking account of metaphors would, for example, be of great help in understanding symbolic behaviour since:

> The elementary definition of metaphor (and metonym) from which one should work is the predication of a sign-image upon an inchoate subject. The first mission of metaphor is to provide identity for such subjects. (Fernandez 1986:31)

Metaphors call on certain characteristics of the subject which they describe; this set of characteristics, though it may overlap with it, is not the same as that which describes the subject literally (Fernandez 1986:37). It is by the other associations a metaphor encompasses that it suggests a movement: 'they move them [inchoate subjects] about effectively by adornments and disparagements' (Fernandez 1986:39). The main point of Fernandez' argument is that in 'expressive culture', meaning culture as spoken and performed actions, metaphor is used constantly because it defines otherwise undefined or under-defined subjects by incorporating 'them into a domain of objects and actions whose identity and action requirements we more clearly understand' (Fernandez 1986:45).

I will return to the discussion of culture as landmarks, schema and metaphor in the final conclusion and try to position our findings within the different anthropological concepts. For the moment I will concur with Kondo who points out quite rightly that:

> Culture .... is no reified thing or system but a meaningful way of being in the world, inseparable from the "deepest" aspects of one's "self"- the trope of depth and interior space itself a product of our own culture conventions. These cultural meanings are themselves multiple and contradictory, and though they cannot be understood without reference to historical, political, and economic discourses, the experience of culture cannot be reduced to these nor related to them in any simple isomorphic way. (Kondo 1990:300-301)

Apart from the very important argument Kondo makes here about the relation between culture and experience, she also points out that the anthropologist is intrinsically linked to her fieldwork in a very personal way. This fact, which is commonly known in Anthropology, is turned into a strong argument when the anthropologist works 'at home'. In such a case self-reflexivity becomes even more important than usual (Mac Donald 1987:120-138; Weil 1987: 196-212); this kind of fieldwork has recently even been called 'auto/ethnography' indicating that the researcher writes herself by writing the social. The next section will describe the fieldwork which the author of the thesis carried out and discuss the 'problem' of working 'at home' by attempting something like an 'auto/ethnography': 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context' (Reed-Danahay 1997:9).

1.4. At home?

In October 2000 I went to Schönebeck in Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany (east), in order to carry out twelve months of fieldwork. My plan was to conduct life-history interviews with a number of adults, including a more detailed section about their experiences of the *Jugendweihe*. Furthermore, I was going to conduct interviews with teenagers about their modern *Jugendweihen*. I would also carry out participant observation of everyday life in this part of eastern Germany and I would of course observe the rituals during the coming spring. The rituals themselves were the second branch of my inquiries and necessitated my working with those organisations who currently offer the *Jugendweihe*. These organisations often have their main offices in the main town of the federal country. This was the case in Sachsen-Anhalt, I therefore needed to stay close to Magdeburg. Living in the smaller town of Schönebeck I had a direct train connection to Magdeburg; a journey that lasted about twenty minutes. Situated in a rural area but close to the bigger town that also hosts a university, I was able to observe life in Sachsen-Anhalt in two environments, the rural and the urban.

1.4.1. The place

Schönebeck consists of four different parts: Felgeleben, Salzelmen, Frohse and the city itself. The place where I lived was situated in Felgeleben which is a village that has been absorbeded into the town. The town has about 30,000 inhabitants in total but, like the whole federal country, it faces the loss of many of its young people, who move away to areas that offer greater employment opportunities.

If you take the train from Magdeburg to Schönebeck the first thing you notice are miles of abandoned factories alongside the rail tracks (fig. 6). Most of these belong to Magdeburg but there are just as many around Schönebeck. Once you leave the town, however, the view is that of miles of huge fields, one next to the other without any natural or artificial border to separate them apart from disparate peninsulas of trees in the middle of some fields. The country is so flat that you can see the horizon and you are able to make out streets in the far distance where matchbox

sized cars drive through the country-side. This is how the Magdeburger Boerde looks (figs. 7, 8).

The region Boerde is distinguished by its high quality soil. In the 1950s the Boerde carried the best soil in the whole of Germany, the area was therefore used mainly for agriculture. Like Madgeburg, however, also Schönebeck possessed industry during the GDR period; mainly heavy industry and mechanical engineering. Many of these factories have been closed down and their ruins beside the train tracks are mnemonics materialised in the landscape. There is, however, still industry in both towns, but to a much reduced extent. Unemployment is therefore high; it hovers around the twenty per cent mark.

If you turn your attention away from the window and to the inside of the train you might notice the accent of your fellow passengers. Although the regional dialect is relatively close to high German, it is nevertheless noticeable and noticed. It is a very mellow and melodic accent that turns the stream of words into a smooth and constant flow that seems to disregard sharp consonants. By lengthening certain vowels it creates emphasis and communicates evaluations. It is spoken by most people who grew up in the area to a greater or lesser degree.

If you want to go into Felgeleben you will leave the train one stop before the main station in Schönebeck. I say 'stop' consciously since you cannot really call the patch of green grass along the train lines where you will find yourself a station. A ruin of a small hut that might once have hosted a conductor's office is visible on the opposite side. The signs around you are, however, new and inform you in bright blue letters that this is your destination. From there you will walk down an uneven, cobbled street. Someone on a bike might cycle past you, usually an elderly man or woman; someone might also cross your way walking and will inspect you curiously. People know one another here and strangers are easily recognised.

In the next street on your way, which is newly paved, you might notice the red-brick-schoolhouse with huge, yellow paper flowers in the windows. Depending on the time of day there might be children playing in the courtyard, young children playing football on the street in the afternoon or there might not be anybody, leaving the school and the street calm and quiet. If you asked anyone about the school house they would tell you immediately that it is supposed to be closed down and all young

children will have to attend one of the big schools in nearby Schönebeck; a fact that is considered a great loss. Already now there are only four groups at this school, one for each school year, who are taken care of by four teachers.

After taking a left at the next crossing and walking along a street that lacks a pavement and seems rather dangerous because trucks might go around the corners at considerable speed, you come to another crossing and now you are almost at the place where I lived. It is the big white semi-detached house right on the left hand side.

The landlord of this house is a young man, who lives in the right half of this house with his wife and two children. This part of the house encompassed two more flats which were also occupied by families. The left side was similarly separated into different flats on three floors. Two of these flats were taken by relatives of the landlord, his wife's mother and brother. Right under the roof there was a four room apartment which he had wanted to let to four students. This flat was finally shared by a young Japanese lady who was going to study music in Magdeburg and myself. The house was very social and possessed a communal atmosphere that embraced everyone who lived in it. All inhabitants shared the back garden and if you sat in this garden during the afternoon you could get invited to someone's coffee-table or you would have a conversation with the landlord who was smoking out of his bathroom window. Most importantly, you could always borrow utensils from any of your neighbours.

There is not much more to Felgeleben than this. Along the main road leading into Schönebeck there are more houses, a small shop, a hairdresser and a florist. Some lanes branch off from this road and lead into small housing areas. The city of Schönebeck provides a similar picture of a housing area that lacks basic communal facilities. Although there are huge department stores placed around the city, partly situated in industrial areas, there is no central market place. The former market place in the city-centre looks abandoned and lonely. Many of the houses around the place had to be vacated after 1989; the ownership went under review. There are streets with shops and areas with new houses in Schönebeck and you often find newly renovated

buildings next to damaged and grey houses, which gives some streets a 'patchwork look'. However, on the whole the town has a grey and often desolate appearance.[3]

There I was, in the middle of a village attached to a smallish run-down town, close to the big town of Magdeburg living in a house with people who were helpful and very social. Now I only needed to find 'informants'.

1.4.2. Making contacts, meeting people

Although I was in a village, this was still modern Germany, where people do not hang out together doing their chores in public but either disappear to a distant work place or hide behind closed doors. I was well aware that making contacts was the most important thing to do once I had arrived.

I did this in two different ways. Since I was not only interested in the *Jugendweihe*, but more generally in eastern German identity and all that it entails, I contacted memorial associations in Madgeburg which were concerned with the GDR past. Through these links, however, I gained only a small number of useful informants since most of the people these memorials work with were too old for my research project.

I then, of course, contacted the organisations that provide the *Jugendweihe*. Initially I tried to find interviewees through these organisations. Nobody, however, reacted to the leaflets that described my project and provided contact details and which the employees of the office, which organises the *Jugendweihe* in Schönebeck, handed out for me. In the end, it was the contacts that I was able to establish personally which proved to be the most fruitful.

In order to get to know people and spend time with them I joined three groups. One was a local choir in Schönebeck, the other a volleyball club in Felgeleben and the third a karate club in Magdeburg. The choir practised once per week and consisted of approximately fifty members of nearly all age groups. The upper forties and above nevertheless constituted the majority in this choir. I most easily made friends with

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[3] This is apart from the suburb Salzelmen. This former place of salt production was restored recently and now possesses a 1920s style park, a cure centre and other facilities. This small part of the town differs distinctly from all other parts of Schönebeck.

those members who were in their thirties; they were regarded as the 'young troop' in the group. I spent time with these people not only singing but also at parties and other festivities; and I became close friends with some of them.

The interviewees that are mentioned in later chapters are people I met at the choir, at the karate club and also through the *Jugendweihe* organisations and one parish; two people I met through family contacts. I contacted two or three directly by phone. This might sound like a disadvantage but I found that it made little difference to the conduct of the interview whether I knew someone well or not; how much they would tell me depended to a greater extend on their character. All the interviewees were granted a confidential treatment of any information they would give me. I made clear that their names would not appear in the thesis nor in any following publication. All the names used to identify the different speakers in chapters 6 and 7 are therefore synonyms. The most interesting observations, apart from the everyday participant observation, I nevertheless made in the choir and in the house where I lived. However, some interviews, and also the everyday fieldwork soon became stressful; I will outline in the next section why this was the case.

1.4.3. 'Anthropology at home'

The concept of 'anthropology at home' (Jackson 1987) applied in the most literal sense to my work. Not only do I come from Germany, I actually come from eastern Germany and even more interestingly I grew up in a small village just ten minutes away from Felgeleben. Although my family had moved away after six years of living in this village my father had returned there some years later and was living there while I did my field work.

I anticipated problems settling down in close proximity to family members. People might associate me with my father and therefore have certain expectations. These expectations could regard my work, meaning the kind of work I did, as well as my personality, but also my relation to them. If they were good friends with my father they might expect me to be favourable towards them. The greatest problem I saw was the fact that my father was known as a man of the church. Many people I wanted to talk to, would, however, not be Christians and might actually be very critical of the

church. I knew that many people in eastern Germany took a suspicious stance towards religion.

As it turned out, my initial silence about my family relations was utterly futile. My landlord's mother-in-law only needed a few days to work out 'who' I was and 'where I belonged to'. I was quite upset that my 'secret' had evaporated so quickly, but I also realised that in this way she could put me into a context; I belonged here, I had 'respectable' family relations (she was catholic) and was therefore accepted. This was certainly an advantage. However, when she introduced me to everybody we met that same evening at a community meeting as the 'daughter of Dr. Gallinat, you know?', I felt uncomfortable. After this initial period, however, this fact never was an issue again. Although this lady was able to connect me and to see me in the context of 'being at home', many other people did not.

Despite the fact that I was in the region where I had spent my childhood most people did not see me as the 'insider' I was supposed to be according to anthropology, quite the opposite. Here was a young, attractive woman in a desolate provincial town; a student who did not live in the nearby university town. And the subject she studied was the greatest mystery of all: Social Anthropology did not mean anything to anyone.[4] However, not only was my 'occupation' contested, many people could not connect me to a place either.

Many people I met were initially convinced that I was western German: I did not speak the regional accent but high German; I was not clothed according to local conventions; I was at university. This all pointed to some cultural or intellectual elite which they associated with western Germany. When I told them where I was from I was usually regarded with disbelief or wonder. Especially when people heard further that I had been at a western German university and now studied in Britain, my place of origin did not count any more. I was different, out of the ordinary, out of their horizons, un-locatable. However, this never caused any great problems for my work; most people were friendly and would give me much leeway regarding my opinions and behaviour since I could not know 'the local customs'. At the same time, however,

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[4] I spent nearly half an hour at a disco once with an admittedly rather drunken young man, who was convinced that I either did History or Sociology; Social Anthropology was not part of his concepts. The day I left an elderly friend, to my greatest surprise, wished me the best for my future studies in medicine.

I was not fully included and felt I was standing aside.[5] This is the ambiguous position of the researcher which inevitably results from conducting 'participant observation'. Observation will always restrict all participation. I therefore agree strongly with Cohen and Rapport who write:

> Unless contemplating their own navels , the very nature of their [ethnographers'] enquiry means that anthropologists are never 'at home', for their enquiry consists in asking questions, or in making questionable what those whom they study do not question... (Cohen and Rapport 1995:10)

Fieldwork 'at home' can be even harder than fieldwork abroad when research and family life become indistinguishable, and when the researcher finds herself alienated from her social surroundings while expecting to be 'at home'.[6]

Greater problems, however, occurred on a different front; in interviews with people who were not just ordinary citizens but former supporters of the GDR state. I had wanted to talk to such people to hear about their opinions and I had intended to view them respectfully, even sympathetically. However, when I left houses where people had told me that 'they had had a good life in the GDR, and the educational system was not oppressive apart from sometimes and that they had not liked the Fall of the Wall' I sometimes felt physically sick. Even harder than these interviews proved to be those I carried out with former 'victims' of the GDR state at the memorial in Magdeburg. These interviews were highly challenging and psychologically stressful. Both these situations showed me that I could not just strip off my 'oppositional' family history but that I was still judging people's behaviour according to my own morality. This situation was quite similar to the dilemma Herzfeld describes:

> ... people I liked, I thought, should not hold such unpleasant views, while as an anthropologist I should not feel so repelled by these views - especially in people I liked. (Herzfeld 1997: 170).

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[5] One time at the choir a lady was about to drop a typical eastern German punch-line but stopped when she noticed that I was listening. Since I knew it I finished her sentence smiling brightly to indicate that I did not mind such things. She may have hold back because she identified me as a Christian, or as semi-west German. The joke was about western Germans.

[6] For a discussion of the 'insider/outsider dichotomy' see also Collins (2002:77-95).

Herzfeld overcame this schizophrenic feeling during his fieldwork and so did I (for the most part). I tried to remain aloof and look at the material with the distant eye of the scholar, using secondary literature to challenge my own views. My personal experiences as a child and teenager in the GDR and also as a researcher in Schönebeck have, of course, made their way into this thesis. In particular I developed a sympathy towards many 'ordinary citizens' even though I often disagreed with their views. Some of my friends came to feel my criticism during the period of fieldwork.

In this thesis I attempt to give credit to both; the oppressive nature of the GDR institutions but also the view of the 'people' and their ways of dealing with the situation, which does not always mean compliance, as I will show. This, coupled with my research and my personal position as a marginal member GDR society, shape the argument of this thesis.

1.5. The structure of this thesis

As I pointed out in the beginning, the structure of this thesis is similar to the course of my own research; only chapter four and five are in a different order.

Chapter two will provide a brief overview of the history of the *Jugendweihe*; this is necessary in order to understand some arguments that appear later in the thesis. It will also highlight some of the fundamental aspects and elements of this ritual which mark it clearly as a secular coming of age ritual.

Chapter three will then illustrate the public discourse on the *Jugendweihe*. It will show when and why the ritual comes up in newspapers and public discussion rounds and which issues are connected to its current conduct. These frequent debates were the reason why I originally chose the *Jugendweihe* as the topic of this thesis; by their mere occurrence they prove that the ritual is not only an academic but also a public issue. The question that remains is why this is so. 'Public discourse' refers here to all those (written and conversational) texts that appear in the public domain, that is in the media, in popular and scholarly literature and in publicly advertised discussion rounds, and which deal with the *Jugendweihe* as their main topic.

The *Jugendweihe* itself will then be analysed in chapter four, specifically the modern ceremonies I observed in spring 2001. The chapter will furthermore focus on the notion of the person that is inherent to the institutional discourse of the main provider of *Jugendweihen*. A similar analysis will then be carried out with regard to the ritual in the GDR period, in chapter five; again I include an exploration of the notion of the person in this institutional discourse. The *Jugendweihe* consists of a public ceremony and a private family celebration. In this thesis the term 'ritual' is employed at the beginning to describe the public ceremony. However, as it will appear in chapter six, more correctly the term 'ritual' needs to refer to the whole of the *Jugendweihe* including the family celebration, which is a fundamental part of the coming-of-age rite.

From this 'culturally reified' perspective I will move to personal experiences of the *Jugendweihe* in chapter six. This chapter provides information which I gathered from the interviews that I conducted with adults as well as teenagers during 2001. The chapter will compare this personal view of the ritual to the institutional discourse and explore overlaps and distinct differences. It will furthermore tackle similarities or differences that are apparent between the stories of adults and those of modern teenagers in order to estimate whether change took place on this level of culture.

Since the *Jugendweihe* is distinctly eastern German; a point that is made frequently in the public debate, and since it is regarded as a part of the culture, I will discuss the question of eastern German culture, history and therefore eastern German identity in chapter seven. This will be done primarily via the analysis of a life-story. The central question of this thesis concerns socio-cultural change and the adaptation of cultural attributes. In this respect the 'construction of coherence' in a life-story (Linde 1993) will show how continuity is experienced in a life through times of great socio-cultural change. From this experience of continuity in a life I will come to the question of how identity manifests itself in modern eastern Germany.

These explorations will finally lead to the conclusion in which I will, in the light of what has gone before, return to the different concepts of culture. This should lead us to a notion of culture which accounts for the phenomena of continuity and flexibility/ creativity that this thesis highlights.

Chapter Two

The History of the *Jugendweihe*

2.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the history of the *Jugendweihe* in order to provide a background for the argument of the thesis. With regard to the history of the ritual there are four main phases that need to be considered. There is the initial development of the ritual as a substitute for *Konfirmation* in the nineteenth century. Looking at this period I will briefly consider the factors that lead to the ritual's development and the different purposes which it served. This section will lead up to the era of the Third Reich, which will be dealt with briefly in the following section. The third phase that needs to be considered is the *Jugendweihe* in the GDR. This section will provide an overview of the ritual's reinvention in 1954, and outline the main structures of the *Jugendweihe* organisers. The last phase that will be considered is that which followed the Fall of the Wall, and covers primarily the developments during 1990 and the foundation and structures of the current providers of the *Jugendweihe*.

The literature that is used will therefore consist primarily of secondary accounts on the ritual's history. The most extensive work in this respect is Hallberg's book *Die Jugendweihe* (1979). The information Hallberg provides will be substantiated by other general works on the ritual and by some primary sources.

2.1. The *Jugendweihe* in its Beginnings

Hallberg traces the origins of the *Jugendweihe* back to Enlightenment thought. He argues that although the ritual itself only started to develop much later the theoretical basics were founded at that time (1979:5).

Enlightenment thought, and in particular its propagation of individualism, caused developments in the two main Christian congregations (Protestantism and Catholicism) that finally lead to the creation of the *Jugendweihe*. During the nineteenth century some thinkers within the Catholic and the Protestant churches, for example Johannes Ronge (1813-1887)[1] and Eduard Baltzer (1814-1887)[2], began to advocate a new approach to religion. Starting with the idea that the individual should be free in its development of faith and religiosity they advocated a less dogmatic practice of religion than that of the main congregations at that time. Within both churches movements came into being that took up these ideas and put them into practice.

The Protestant movement, the *Lichtfreunde*, 'friends of the light'[3], for example, put most emphasis on the concept of the Holy Ghost: 'We have a different highest authority. It is the Holy Ghost that lives in us' (Wislicenus, quoted in Hallberg 1979:74). The Holy Ghost was thought to be active in every person, which consequently meant that people were capable of determining their religious lives themselves. We can see how close these idea are to the Enlightenment project, and especially Kant's idea of the 'moral individual' (Lukes 1973:99-106). A quote from Rupp, another Protestant priest, makes the point even more strongly: 'The truth is in the human being, and he [sic] is aware of this and therefore looks for it in himself [sic], as long as he [sic] remains faithful to the laws of nature' (Rupp, quoted in Hallberg 1979:74). A similar argument for religious self-determination is apparent in

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[1] Ronge, J. 1877. *Gebete, Gesänge und Betrachtungen für die Frei-reformierten und Frei-protestantischen Gemeinden*. Darmstadt: Freie Deutsche Nationalkirche. ('prayers, songs and essays for the free-Reformed and free-Protestant parishes')

[2] Baltzer, E. 1850. *Das Verhältnis der Freien Gemeinde zu den alten Religionen besonders zu dem Christenthume*. Nordhausen. ('The relation of the free parish to the old religions, in particular to Christendom')

[3] According to Doehnert this movement was originally called 'Protestant friends' and the term 'light' was added as mockery (2000:18).

the Catholic movement of *Deutschkatholizismus,* 'German Catholicism', as the following quotation illustrates: 'The basis of Christian faith should only be the holy scripture, the interpretation of which is free to the mind that is penetrated and moved by the Christian Idea' (Ronge, quoted in Hallberg 1979:68). These ideas were realised by priests who preached them in their parishes.

These movements could not, of course, be ignored by the main churches. During the 1840s the Catholic and the Protestant church started to ask free-religious priests to take their leave. This often resulted, however, in a split between the whole parish, in which the priest was stationed, and the national congregation. When, for example, Eduard Baltzer was rejected as the new priest of the parish of Nordhausen by the regional church council (*Konsistorium*), the parish council retired from their official posts and founded the free parish of Nordhausen with Eduard Baltzer as their priest (Hallberg 1979:74-75). The first Catholic parish the separated from the mother-church was the parish of Offenbach in 1848 (Hallberg 1979:69).

This period of German history was generally shaped by ideas of liberalism and socialism which were strongly called for by fractions of the bourgeoisie. These demands reached their high point in the revolution of 1848/1849. Political ideas were therefore also a part of the free-religious movement and can be regarded as inseparable from the religious cosmology of these movements (Hallberg 1979:73). This resulted in many parishes being restricted in their activities or even dissolved by the German government, as they were thought to encompass revolutionary intentions.[4]

The two main movements of the *Deutschkatholiken* and the *Protestantischen Lichtfreunde* merged in 1859 to found the *Bund Freireligiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands*, the federation of free-religious parishes of Germany. The free-religious movement became increasingly secular during the second half of the century. According to Hallberg their religion was based on rationality and an idea of God that was mainly pantheistic. The handbook of 'the free religion' explains the cosmology in this way: '... our religion does not want to be any more than the compilation of the best thoughts that the human race has developed until today' (quoted in Hallberg

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[4] Compare Neumann (1990:38-41) and Vogtherr (in Isemeyer *et al* 1989:39).

1979:80). These secular and humanistic ideas constitute the backdrop against which the *Jugendweihe* and its development need to be seen.

The *Jugendweihe* came about as a substitute for the religious ceremonies of the main congregations. The new parishes needed to fulfil the need for a ritual canon, which they more or less copied from the conservative Churches during the first years of their existence. The ritual was therefore usually referred to as '*Konfirmation*' (confirmation) 'free-religious *Konfirmation*' and similar in the beginning (Meier 1998:96-97). Only in the 1890s was the term '*Jugendweihe*', youth consecration, generally accepted and applied to the coming-of-age ritual (Hallberg 1979:86). According to Chowanski and Dreier, Baltzer was the first to insist on a new name for the ritual in order to distinguish it from the religious rituals of the main congregations. He proposed the term '*Jugendweihe*' in 1850 (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:12-19; for a discussion see Meier 1998:115-116).

The cosmological ideas mentioned above were, of course, also taught in the preparation course that preceded the ceremony of the *Jugendweihe*. These preparatory courses were used to transmit the parish's cosmology and world view. As the cosmology turned increasingly towards secularism the preparatory lessons grew more and more alienated from their original Christian background. According to Hallberg, the main elements of the youth lectures after the disappearance of the religious catechism were 'universe - the world - mankind' (Hallberg 1979:88). Curiously enough, we will meet these three terms later as constitutive elements of the teachings in the GDR *Jugendweihe*.

However, the exact nature of the preparatory course and the final ceremony depended strongly on the person who organised them; the priest of the parish. The free-religious movement was highly disparate and encompassed many different tendencies. Hallberg identifies three different waves: the atheistic, the ethical and the monistic wave (Hallberg 1979:85). All of these had a different impact on the ritual depending on the priest's personal inclinations. In general it can be said that the free-religious *Jugendweihen* were the greatest event in the parish's ritual calendar (Hallberg 1979:89). They also all encompassed some form of preparatory lessons. Because the *Jugendweihe* was actually a derivative version of the religious ritual of *Konfirmation* its structure was very close to the religious counterpart. Furthermore

and in a similar fashion to *Konfirmation*, it was conducted when the participants were fourteen years old, coinciding with the time the young people were due to finish school and to start working. The *Jugendweihe* was therefore an initiation ritual in two respects. It was firstly an initiation into the parish; secondly, it was a coming-of-age ceremony and therefore an initiation into work-life.

There was another movement active in German society, running parallel to the free-religious movement, called the Free-thinkers. This group also took up ritual practice in order to increase the stronghold on their followers (Hallberg 1979:83; Doehnert 2000:20-31). According to Doehnert, the free-thinkers started to engage in rituals by the third decade of the nineteenth century (2000:28-30).[5] At the turn of the century we also find in the labourers' and workers' movements strong ritual activities, including the conduct of *Jugendweihen*. At that time and even more so during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), the ritual became increasingly connected with political struggles which were reflected in its content. I will briefly consider the proletarian *Jugendweihe* because it constitutes the tradition in which the GDR state later saw its practice of the ritual (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:31-41).

At the turn of the century the labourers' movement had appeared primarily within the free-religious and free-thinking organisations. Some decades later it had developed its own organisations which took over the conduct of rituals. According to Hallberg, in the 1920s the three main organisers of proletarian *Jugendweihen* were the socialist party SPD, the proletarian free-thinkers and the unions (Hallberg 1979:135). For the labourers' movement and other political associations the ritual was useful for three reasons. First, it was a means to recruit young people. Since it included a preparation process it was a means to teach the young people a certain world-view and therefore to motivate them for the call of the movement. For these reasons it was seen as an instrument in the class struggle by the proletarian organisations (Hallberg

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[5] In 1924 the free-religious movement and the Free-thinkers merged and founded the *Volksbund für Geistesfreiheit*. See Doehnert for an overview of the organisations (2000:22).

1979:136).[6] A quotation from a 1927 speech will illustrate the propagandistic quality that the proletarian *Jugendweihe* possessed. It will also show that the ritual is again understood as a coming-of-age ritual that marks the beginning of a life of work; a phase that surely has a special meaning in a proletarian ritual:

> Young comrades, a new phase of life is starting for you today. The circle in which you have spent your life so far included your family, the school, neighbours and maybe youth groups in which you spent your free-time. From tomorrow onwards your are employees and you will stop to be children for society. The circle of your life continues. Different and new people come into it demanding new things from you. You do not face this life like an entirely new country though. Differently from the children of the bourgeoisie, you have not grown up behind fences.[7] (Specht 1929:5)

Looking back at all these different groups that used a similar ritual for their purposes it becomes apparent that during the time of the Weimar Republic the *Jugendweihe* was a place of contestation. It was carried out by the few remaining free-religious parishes; it was a part of the laborer's ritual canon and was used by different parties to recruit young people and propagate their world-view. Sometimes some of these organisations arranged joint ceremonies. This happened for example in Berlin in the year 1929, in Hamburg in 1930 and in Düsseldorf in 1929, according to Doehnert (2000:56). Given the number of different versions of the *Jugendweihe,* the ritual can be regarded as a microcosm that mirrors the greater political situation, which was in considerable disarray; particularly during the period of the Weimar Republic which featured a weak government and a strongly contested political landscape (for example Kolb 1988:34-50; 66-82). Keeping this in mind I will go on to consider the development of the ritual during the Third Reich.

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[6] An article in a proletarian paper argues that such celebrations are times of rest between times of struggle and fight. They are furthermore times in which the individual can consider and think. Furthermore they are the 'joyful experience of our social life' (Kulturwille, quoted in Isemeyer *et al* 1989:5).

[7] All translations of German texts, including interviews, are the author's.

2.2. The Third Reich

Doehnert remarked that it is questionable whether we can actually speak of the *Jugendweihe* with regard to the Third Reich (2000:73) since at least the rituals of the proletarian movement, the free-thinkers, and free-religious parishes were prohibited during this period (Neumann 1990:85-87). There appeared other coming-of-age rites that featured a very similar structure to the *Jugendweihe* but whose terminology is not clear and often contradictory. [8]

There seem to be at least two different contexts in which a ritual similar to the *Jugendweihe* was conducted between 1933 and 1945. There were the rituals of the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, a national-socialist movement that practised and preached a new and allegedly more German religion. In this vein they also developed life-cycle rituals which showed a mix of elements from the free-churches and older Germanic symbols like the flame and hammer (Hallberg 1979:106-112) and used a coming-of-age ritual for recruitment and transmission of their world-view to the young people.

In a second version the *Jugendweihe* appeared as school-leaving ceremonies which were conducted locally and independently by officials of the nationalist-socialist party NSDAP. All these ceremonies differed strongly from one another not only in respect to their structure but also their terminology. Martin Borman, head of the Parteizentrale, council of the national-socialist party, therefore imposed a degree of uniformity in ritual aspects in 1940 (Hallberg 1979:128). This decree restricted the nationalistic coming-of-age rituals to the ceremonial celebration of the entrance into the *Hitler-Jugend*, 'Hitler Youth', and the *Bund Junger Mädel*, 'League of Young Girls'. This ceremony was yet again preceded by a course of extensive preparation. In this case the preparation concerned topics like Adolf Hilter's life, the vow which was part of the later ceremony, work and a work attitude (Hallberg 1979:133).

It is worth noting here that these initiation ceremonies were regarded as applicable to all young people in Germany. They had a clearly formulated universal

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[8] During the early nineteenth century the term '*Jugendweihe*' achieved a very general meaning; it applied to all secular rituals at the age of fourteen while a more specific term was used simultaneously.

claim and were seen as a ritual of 'commitment to the state' (Hallberg 1979:134). Curiously enough it was these two points that were again the main characteristics of the *Jugendweihe* in the GDR which I will turn to in the following section.

2.3. The *Jugendweihe* in the GDR

After 1945 free-thinkers and free-religious parishes started to become active in both parts of Germany. Many of these resumed their practices in the western part of Germany (Hallberg 1979:96-105; Neumann 1990:88-110). The ruling elite of the eastern part, however, soon made its objections to these practices clear. The reason for this was an anticipation of the problems that might arise between the church and the state if the secular ritual was resumed (Doehnert 2000:118; Weinzen 1984:19). The famous newspaper article written by Stephan Heymann in 1950 argues why the government rejects the practice of the *Jugendweihe*. This article could be interpreted as an actual prohibition of the ritual. It points out that the former practice of the *Jugendweihe* belonged to the class struggle, and that the success of the working class in East Germany would render the conduct unnecessary. Furthermore, conducting the ritual would upset the churches and the new post-war situation demanded a new and better relation with them. The *Jugendweihe* had, in another sense, been practised as a transition ritual, and according to Heymann, this purpose could be transferred to school-leaving ceremonies (quoted in Weinzen 1984:20).

In 1954, however, the situation suddenly changed. In March a committee presented a 'report about the activities of the churches' to the government. In its second draft this report includes the statement that the ritual hegemony of the churches with regard to coming-of-age rituals could only be broken by offering an alternative. The report therefore suggests starting the preparation of *Jugendweihen* for the year 1955 (Politbüro, quoted in Döhnert 2000:124). This date marked the introduction of the socialist *Jugendweihe* in the GDR.

At this time other socialist states also started to conduct socialist life-cycle rituals using them as a powerful ideological tools. It was, however, only in the late

1950s and early 1960s that the Soviet Union, for example, established a fixed curricula of life-cycle rites (Binns 1980:171-185). These other socialist rituals will be dealt with in more detail in chapter four.

In a similar fashion to Borman's intentions for the Third Reich, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) also planned to encompass all young German people in the *Jugendweihe*. The state therefore started a widespread campaign to advertise the ritual. It nevertheless took a whole decade until ninety per cent participation was reached (Weinzen 1984:28) since the religious rituals proved to be enduring.

The GDR *Jugendweihe* was organised by the *Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,* Central Committee for *Jugendweihe* in the GDR (Central Committee in the following). This Committee sent its directions to smaller committees on lower levels of the organisation. There were *Bezirksausschüsse*, district committees, and regional, town and suburb committees. All of these consisted of a secretariat and a bureau of commission. On the lowest level, there were local committees and school committees which worked together with the director of the preparatory courses, the youth lectures (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:27). In general, all these committees followed the guidelines that were provided by the SED, the socialist party of the state. A new party resolution would be acknowledged by the Central Committee and would result in guidelines for the conduct of the *Jugendweihe*.

The *Jugendweihe* was closely intertwined with the wider educational system. This meant that on the local level teachers would very often be involved in the organisation and conduct of the *Jugendweihen* which also often took place in the school building. The ritual was furthermore related to the socialist childrens' and youth organisations the *Pioniere*, the Pioneers, and the FDJ, Free German Youth, by the fact that the transition from the Pioneers to the FDJ took place during one of the youth lectures. The reason for this close connection was the role of the *Jugendweihe* in the creation of a new kind of people, 'the socialist personality' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:177). The idea that the ritual would further the state-citizen education of the young people was part of the very first plans for the re-introduction of the ritual (Politbüro, quoted in Döhnert 2000:124); the question of personhood

was added in 1965 with the foundation of the 'Unified Socialist Educational System' of which the *Jugendweihe* was a fundamental part (Fischer 1994:165).[9] This intention of 'shaping socialist people' had significant consequences for the content and structure of the ritual; both of which had to ensure a proper socialist education of the participant. This ideological indoctrination was carried out in three different phases: before the actual ceremony, during the ceremony and afterwards. I will briefly outline in the following section how this was done.

In a similar sense to its predecessors, the *Jugendweihe* of the GDR encompassed a course of preparatory lectures. The number of these changed over the decades, as did their content but the basic idea remained the same. There were about nine or ten lectures which took place over a period of six months, from October to May the following year. During this time the young people were introduced to basic ideas of Marxism-Leninism, the history of the GDR and its economy. During the 1950s questions of history and science were still much stronger than purely ideological questions, which increasingly gained in importance during the 1970s and 1980s.[10] This preparation would finish with the public ceremony of the *Jugendweihe* in May. This ceremony consisted of a number of ritual actions which were bound together in a 'cultural' entertainment program; music, dancing and the recitation of texts. The ritual actions that carried most ideological meaning comprised a speech which could be delivered by any person of some public standing, a vow and the distribution of gifts: a book, flowers and a certificate. The speech and the vow were regarded as most important in the *Jugendweihe* by the organisers. Both elements belonged together, whereby the speech should outline the meaning and purpose of the vow and relate it to the current political situation and the personal experience of the young people (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:141-146).

The vow was at the core of the ritual. It was changed three times over the course of the years. The first vow that accompanied the introduction of the ritual in 1954 was changed four years later because of the further progress of the GDR's

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[9] Rodden agrees that education was foremost a means to shape 'the new socialist human being' (2002:38;130).

[10] See Urban and Weinzen for a good basic account on the development of the different ritual elements (1984:40-97).

ideological self-positioning. After the change it included the phrases 'workers and labourer's state', 'socialism' and mentioned the Soviet Union (quoted in Weinzen 1984:58-59). With the second constitution of the GDR, in which the state established its independence, the vow was changed again in 1969 to its final form which no longer mentioned a united Germany, and which used a strong ideological language, as chapter five will show. These vows were intended to foster the bond between the individual and the state by obliging the young people to be loyal to the socialist society.

The educational process continued beyond the final ceremony in the guise of the keep-sake book which all participants received during the *Jugendweihe*. Like the preparatory youth lectures and the vow the book also underwent many alterations. The Central Committee issued three different books in total. The first book, *Weltall-Erde-Mensch* (first edition 1955), 'The universe - the world - humankind', was revised numerous times and appeared in a number of different editions until it was replaced by *Der Sozialismus-Deine Welt*, 'Socialism - your world', in 1975. This book entailed more ideological teachings including topics like socialism, the state of GDR, with regard to her history and current economy, history according to Marxism-Leninism and also the notion of the person. This tendency towards an ideological textbook for young people increased in the last keep-sake book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens*, 'On the meaning of our Life', from 1983.

The ritual *Jugendweihe* was a highly contested object in the ongoing struggle between the churches and the state in the GDR. This was so not only because of the quality of indoctrination which the ritual obviously possessed but also because of the means the state used in order to ensure a high rate of participation.[11] The Central Committee put strong pressure to participate on children and parents via the schools but also at the work place of the parents. Simultaneously the Central Committee always claimed the *Jugendweihe* would be voluntary. Word of mouth combined with experience nevertheless had it that failure to participate might result in a limitation of the future life-chances of the young person (Griese 2001; Doehnert 2000:133; Gandow 1994:41). By the end of the 1950s the evangelical church therefore refrained

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[11] For the struggle between the churches and the state see Urban and Weinzen (1984) and Fischer (1998).

from open opposition to the *Jugendweihe* and took on a stance of disagreeing acceptance (Fischer 1998:239-243). Young Christians were allowed to do *Jugendweihe* and *Konfirmation* to secure their future prospects. However, this was only accepted by the churches under the presumption that the *Jugendweihe* would merely pay lip service to the state. This resulted many Christians doing the *Jugendweihe* at the age of fourteen and then celebrating *Konfirmation* a year later. They would emphasise the *Konfirmation* with a family celebration.

Despite the resistance of the churches, the *Jugendweihe* became one of the biggest events in GDR society with a participation rate of 95% in the early 1970s (Weinzen 1984:28). Its conduct shaped the life of villages and towns for a whole month. With regard to the families the ritual was followed by a big celebration and in the 1980s the participants were given the following Monday off school (interviews).

2.4. The *Jugendweihe* and the *Wende*

Motivated by the developments in the GDR during 1989 the Central Committee entrusted a colloquium with the revision of the vow, the youth lectures and the keep-sake book. The colloquium took place in October 1989, at a time when many East Germans had already left their country (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:135-136). The head of the committee, Egon Freyer, therefore publicised the Committee's decision to change the ritual (*Jugendweihe* 1989/6:24-25). History, however, moved faster than the Central Committee had foreseen. The first issue of the magazine *Jugendweihe* in the year 1990 was therefore already concerned with the question of whether, and in what form, the ritual could continue to exist. In this issue the Central Committee published a suggestion for a 'Word at the *Jugendweihe*' which should replace the vow. The proposed wording was stripped of all ideological content and kept very neutral. It stated merely that the participants would promise to behave honestly and be respectful to other people, that they would work for peace and protect the environment, learn and work and continue the humanistic and anti-fascist traditions of German culture (*Jugendweihe* 1990/1:2). The same issue of the magazine also

features a number of letters that were written in response to the question of whether the practice of the ritual, the vow and the youth lectures should be maintained (*Jugendweihe* 1/1990:4-11). All these revisions were carried out on the basis that the country was going through a phase of 'democratic renewal of socialism'; the final break down of the GDR was not yet expected.

This was the last issue of the magazine *Jugendweihe*. Although the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe* still officially existed in the spring of 1990 most *Jugendweihen* were conducted by and within the participants' families. The Central Committee was negotiating a possible dissolution or re-organisation at that time (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:147) and not openly engaging in the conduct of the *Jugendweihe*. The organisation of the ceremonies was therefore initiated by the parents of participants. Either they went to those people in town who had organised the ritual so far or they took things over entirely and held it in someone's living room (Meier 1998:8; *Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000:Leserservice). Numbers of participants dropped considerably in the so called *Wende*-years of 1990 and 1991. According to Gandow the numbers fell from 170,000 during the last years of the GDR to about 50,000 in 1992 (1994:5); that is approximately 30 per cent of eastern German teenagers.

In June that year a new association was founded, the *Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe e.V.*, 'association interested in the *Jugendweihe*'. It was renamed as *Interessenvereinigung für humanistische Jugendarbeit und Jugendweihe*, 'association interested in humanistic youth work and *Jugendweihe*', two years later. The association is to a great extent based on the former Central Committee. The Interessenvereinigung therefore showed great continuity in personnel; it was furthermore frequently accused of having inherited money from the former GDR Committee and therefore of a continuity in finances from the GDR to today. [12] In the mid-1990s, however, the association had established itself and was increasingly successful with regard to participation in the *Jugendweihe*. The participation rate

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[12] This resulted in an investigation of the Treuhand, the department that was responsible for the possessions of the former socialist party SPD in 1991. The *Interessenvereinigung* was forced to have their finances administered by the Treuhand for two years. The *Interessenvereinigung* reclaimed their financial independence in 1993 (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:198-206).

slowly moved to about 90,000 teenagers per year and stabilised there (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:259-280).

The *Interessenvereinigung* consists of a national association and regional branches in the different federal countries. These regional sub-associations are financially independent (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:151). The national association issues newsletters and guidelines for the organisation of youth work and the *Jugendweihe*. They also provide fliers, advertisements and publish the keep-sake book and the certificate. The regional branches, and ultimately the local offices, are responsible for the actual conduct of the youth work and the *Jugendweihe*. The rituals therefore vary to a certain extent between the towns and villages where they are organised.

The modern *Jugendweihe* bears the same overall structure as the GDR ritual. The preparatory courses, however, have largely disappeared; they have ceased to be a fundamental part of the educational process. The *Interessenvereinigung* organises youth work projects that are voluntary and open to everyone. The projects range from dancing and make-up courses to computer courses and discussion rounds on drug abuse, sexuality or how to open a bank account (Interessenvereinigung 2001). The *Jugendweihe* ceremony still includes a speech and the reception of gifts. The vow was discarded and not replaced. The gifts the teenagers receive are a keep-sake book, flowers and a certificate, which are designed in accordance with the non-committal cosmology of the association. Since the foundation of the association three different keep-sake books were issued: *Deutschland: So schön ist unser Land* (1993, 1994), 'Germany: so beautiful is our country'; *Europa: Ein Kontinent und seine Staaten* (1995-1997), 'Europe: a continent and its states'; and *Die Welt in der wir leben* (1998-2002); 'The world in which we live'. The content of these books is kept very general. The first two in particular were mainly atlases with maps and short descriptions of countries and regions. The last keep-sake book *Die Welt in der wir leben* (1998) pays some attention to the clientele of young readers; it includes small text boxes that describe a typical day of a boy or girl of that particular country. This seems to have been done in order to establish a connection to the teenage-reader of the book; it is also in accordance with the values this organisation teaches as chapter

four will illustrate. The association is currently negotiating the publication of a new keep-sake book; this book might be similar to a lexicon for young people (Interessenvereinigung 2001:2).

The second main provider of the *Jugendweihe* in modern eastern Germany is the *Humanistischer Verband*, the humanistic association, which was founded in Berlin in 1993.[13] It is not quite clear where the organisations originated that finally merged to create this association.[14] It seems to me that the *Humanistischer Verband* consisted originally of an association of the free-thinkers in western Berlin. This group was joined by an East German league of free-thinkers that was founded in 1989.[15] Another greater part of the league merged with another West German league of freethinkers to found the German League of the Freethinkers that is currently based in Dortmund (www.freidenker.de). This association, however, does not seem to be involved in the organisation of *Jugendweihen* at the moment.[16]

I will briefly outline some main points with regard to the *Humanistischer Verband* and its activities. The national association founded regional branches in some of the federal countries in Germany, for example in Brandenburg, Sachsen and Sachsen-Anhalt. In a similar fashion to the *Interessenvereinigung*, the national association provides leaflets, the keep-sake books and prescribes the main structure of the ritual. The regional branches are, however, responsible for the final organisation and conduct of the rituals. There are quite a few differences between the rituals organised by the Interessenvereinigung and the Humanistischer Verband. The main point of differentiation is the name which they give to the coming-of-age rite. The

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[13] The worker's welfare association (AWO) also organises *Jugendweihen* (field work; Meier 1998:48-52), but on a smaller scale; they are also hardly mentioned in public.
[14] Different accounts are given by Gandow (1994:73-74) and Meier (1998:60).
[15] This league was supposed to re-enliven the ritual culture of the socialist society (Nothnagle 1989/90:46-48).
[16] In 1990 the Free-thinkers seemed to intend to start the organisation of *Jugendweihe* based on the older free-thinking traditions (Rochow 1990:10). At the moment there are conflicting information about this question. Chowanski and Dreier list them amongst the providers of *Jugendweihen* in western Germany (Stuttgart and Munich) (2000:238). The web page of the Free-thinkers does, however, not contain any information on the *Jugendweihe* apart from an article arguing why the league does not organise *Jugendweihen* (www.freidenker.de/jugend/FD-IVJW-.htm).

Humanistischer Verband calls it *Jugendfeier*; youth celebration. This name is supposed to point explicitly to the secular quality of the ritual. In contrast to the word *Weihe*, consecration, the word *Feier*, celebration, does not bear any religious connotations. The association furthermore places itself in the humanistic tradition that reaches back to the nineteenth century and which strongly influences their ceremonies. They therefore stress the importance of their preparatory courses owing to their intention to teach a certain humanistic world view. Finally, the association puts much weight on the youth work which can take precedence over the conduct of the *Jugendfeier* as we will see for the case of Magdeburg in chapter seven.

The result is a ceremony that is carefully considered and heavy with meaning, as chapter four will show. The preparatory courses offered by the Humanistischer Verband show a wider range than those of the *Interessenvereinigung*, they include discussion rounds on German history and the Holocaust and similar topics and also have creative courses like painting and clay modelling. This is at least the case in western Berlin (www.jugendfeier-berlin.de/va.htm). The actual ceremony shows similar features to the *Jugendweihe* (pg.27; 31). There is again an entertainment program that is intersected by ritual actions one of which is a speech and another the reception of a book, flowers and a certificate. However, there is another ritual action in the *Jugendfeier* which does not exist in the *Jugendweihe*. After the speech the participants are called on stage and sit down in front of the so-called 'Golden Book' into which they sign their name (fig. 7). After this act they receive their gifts. This element is practised in all regional branches but not in the rituals in western Berlin as they encompass too many participants by now.

This thesis will primarily be concerned with the rituals of the *Interessenvereinigung*; the *Jugendfeier* will therefore not be considered in great detail. It is, however, worth noting that this ritual stems from a different tradition and is therefore distinct in its conduct but also in the cosmology that underpins it. This should be clear when considering the act of signing the 'Golden Book' which does not exist in the *Interessenvereinigung*.

2.5 Conclusion

Looking at the history of the *Jugendweihe* there are three aspects that seem to be fundamental to the ritual. The *Jugendweihe* is distinctly characterised as a ritual of transition. It marks the change from childhood to adulthood. This only changed during the GDR era when in 1949 school education was extended and the school leaving age consequently raised to sixteen (law on the Democratisation of the German School, quoted in Deuerlein 1966:60-62). As a ritual of transition the *Jugendweihe* also has always encompassed a phase of instruction. This was recognised as a resource and used later in order to recruit and shape young people in accordance with a certain world-view or even political standpoint (labourers' movement for example).

The contemporary *Jugendweihe* is secular. Although the ritual developed within a religious movement, it became exceedingly alienated from its former religious content by the end of the eighteenth century as this chapter has shown. The *Jugendweihe* was, from the very beginning, on the way to secularisation; it was only invented because the free-religious parishes wanted to practise a less dogmatic approach to religiosity. More interesting is the fact, that the *Jugendweihe*, a ritual of transition but also of personhood, developed because a new notion of the person, individualism, came about.

These two points, coupled with the fact that the ritual's structure stems from its religious counterpart of *Konfirmation,* provide the basic fundament of the *Jugendweihe*. They result in a ritual structure that consists of a process of preparation, a ceremony with entertainment, a speech, possibly a vow and congratulations in the form of small tokens. This is the vessel which can carry many different world-views; as illustrated by the sheer multitude of groups conducting the *Jugendweihe* during the Weimar Republic. The main purpose of the ritual is transmission of certain values and the shaping of young people into certain kinds of persons. This purpose remains the same for each organisation conducting the ritual; they underpin it with content depending on their particular cosmology.

It needs to be noted here that the term *Jugendweihe* was used very inconsistently during the last century and still is in the current literature. It is

sometimes applied to any secular German coming-of-age rite. Sometimes it describes a specific ritual that is called by this name. Both, the school-leaving ceremonies and the initiation ritual to the *Hitler-Jugend* that were celebrated during the Third Reich were not necessarily termed *Jugendweihe*. I would therefore not count them as examples of this ritual; other authors, however, do (Meier 1998:160-186; Hallberg 1979:106-134).

In the following chapters I will turn the reader's attention to the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual and a ritual of personhood in its manifold meanings. This exploration concerns the modern *Jugendweihe* and the *Jugendweihe* of the GDR. We will therefore consider the last two manifestations of a ritual that has been highly flexible and remains adaptable to new circumstances. The question of adaptation is the main concern of this thesis: How did the *Jugendweihe* change or not change over the Fall of the Wall?

Chapter Three

The *Jugendweihe* Contested

3.0 Introduction

> A ritual, that had already been called dead seems to have gained new strength. (Gandow 1994:5)

> By satisfying the wish of many East Germans for a modern Jugendweihe and by organising *the* Jugendweihe the 'Humanisten' as well as the 'Interessenvereinigung' reinforce without distinction the East German Schicksalsgemeinschaft [community sharing one fate] in its quite uncritical relation to the GDR. (Meier 1998:83; emphasis in original)

> Deemed not to exist, patronised by the Treuhand, ignored by the churches, being smiled about by politicians, it has been managed to maintain the more than 150 year old development of the Jugendweihe in the new federal countries even in the nineties of the ending century. (Interessenvereinigung 2000c:1)

One of the reasons why I chose the *Jugendweihe* as the topic for this thesis was the fact that it is so heavily debated among the eastern German public. The history of the ritual, which was outlined in the previous chapter, has shown that the rite has always been a contentious issue. It was fought over and challenged by the churches and freethinkers in the nineteenth century, and the ruling elite and workers at the beginning of the twentieth century; it never existed unquestioned or uncriticised. This situation lasted until the *Jugendweihe* was installed by the state itself in 1954. Now that the GDR state, which had not only organised the ritual as an official event but had furthermore shaped the *Jugendweihe* towards its own needs, has vanished, the *Jugendweihe* is probably even more than ever contested.

These contestations are nourished by the traces history has left on the ritual; in particular its use as a means of indoctrination in GDR times. For this reason the *Jugendweihe* seems to be a good indicator of the conflicts in German society. It is not necessarily the actual ritual structure or content that cause the frequent debates but, rather, ideas and conceptions that surround its conduct and are ascribed to it, as this chapter will illustrate.

Many participants in the public discourse seem to talk about different things although all use the same word, *Jugendweihe*. It proved to be a hard task for me to find a way of describing this phenomenon. The *Jugendweihe* may well be called an 'essentially contested concept' (Gallie 1956:167-198). However, it is not only the case that the *Jugendweihe* is contested but furthermore people often seem to use the *Jugendweihe* as a vehicle to voice quite different matters, rather than to talk about the ritual itself. I therefore decided to use 'metaphor' because it implies a rhetorical or conversational dimension. I will apply the concept of metaphor here in a similar way Sontag uses it. Sontag applies metaphor in its literal sense to describe the images illness has become acquainted with (1983). Her starting sentence 'illness is the night-side of life' is a good example of the ambiguity of metaphors (Sontag 1983:7). Most people would not know what Sontag talks about if they only heard the latter part of the sentence: 'the night-side of life'.

A similar phenomenon seems to be at work with regard to the rhetorical use of the *Jugendweihe* in the public discourse. Even misunderstandings are sometimes apparent in debates on the ritual because the metaphor *Jugendweihe* is ambiguous and multivocal. It might therefore evoke a different interpretation in the addressee than had been intended by the addresser. I will therefore use Fernandez' argument that a metaphor can bear different identities, in order to illustrate this point (Fernandez 1986:30-70). In contrast to Fernandez I am, however, not referring to culture in general but rather to a particular case; that is the rethorical use of the *Jugendweihe* in the public discourse in eastern Germany. Just as 'collective identities' are 'multiple, fraught with tension and contradiction, and asserted in specific performative contexts' (Kondo 1990:306), so is the metaphor *Jugendweihe* attributed with different meanings depending on the circumstances and on the understanding of the conversational partners.

The quotations above already show some of the issues that are connected to the *Jugendweihe* and that come up in the debates surrounding the practice of the ritual. There is the criticism of the ritual's continuation from GDR times, criticism of a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* in eastern Germany[1] and criticism of an uncritical view of the GDR on the one hand (see first and second quote). There are feelings of insult and patronisation on the other (see third quote).

The *Jugendweihe* is certainly not the only metaphor that serves as a vehicle for a discussion of the GDR past and its implications for the present. There are many others and all of these have caused similar debates in the public arena. How to treat former informers of the *Stasi* (*Volksstimme* 7th March 2001), Pfeiffer's hypothesis (this chapter; *Volksstimme* 11th January 2001)[2], an attack on a western German family living in eastern Germany on New Years Eve (*Volksstimme* 4th of January 2001) are but a few of the instances that came up in the newspaper *Volksstimme* during the year of field work. The *Jugendweihe* is nevertheless one of the few constant causes of debate because of its regular seasonal appearance. This can be illustrated by just one number: there have been 694 articles in the *Volksstimme* in total on the *Jugendweihe* between 1997 and 2001. Even the German government has thought the *Jugendweihe* to be a topic worth considering. A committee of the ministry of the interior, which was occupied with 'Matters of the German Union', did research into the alleged *problematique* of the *Jugendweihe* (Bundesministerium 1998). The debates caused by the conduct of the *Jugendweihe* centred on issues of eastern German identity and history, which were negotiated and quarrelled about in the public arena.

One of the main tasks of this thesis is an exploration of the socio-cultural change eastern Germany that was initiated with the dissolution of the GDR and the following reunification. A discussion of the public discourse will show what is perceived as change, as continuity or discontinuity; what is believed to have been lost or, thought to have been carried over. I will also explore who takes on which stance

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[1] A *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* -a community depending on the past shared experience of hardship- expresses a sense of desperation and inability to change the circumstances.

[2] Pfeiffer is a western German criminologist, who did research into the increase of right wing radicalism in eastern Germany after 1989. He proposed ten hypotheses to explain the phenomenon; one of which is the argument that the highly authoritarian GDR education had detrimental effects on the children (www.kfn.de/profdrpfeiffer.html).

with regard to these questions, information which will furthermore provide us with an insight into the negotiation of eastern German identity. I will use two different ongoing 'conversations' in this exploration. One of these is the public discourse which includes articles, letters from readers in answer to the first and public discussion rounds. The other 'conversation' is the scholarly literature on the *Jugendweihe*, that has been published in Germany since 1989.

The material that is used in this chapter has been gathered during the author's field research in Sachsen-Anhalt. The newspaper articles which are considered in the following section all appeared in the main daily regional newspaper for northern Sachsen-Anhalt, the *Volksstimme*. The *Volksstimme* is read by most inhabitants of the federal country; it can therefore be regarded as a good indicator of public opinion.[3] This chapter will discuss one main debate that took place in the newspaper during 2000 and two public discussion rounds that took place during 2001.

The fact that I do not consider the *Jugendfeier* of the Humanistischer Verband is due to the predominance of the Interessenvereinigung in the public consciousness. This association was the first to conduct *Jugendweihen* after 1990 and it has the greater participation rate. The dominance of the Interessenvereinigung in the newspaper is reinforced by the widespread assumption that the organisation is the successor of the former GDR committees, which makes them significant with regard to questions of the past.

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[3] There is one other regional daily newspaper, the *Bild*. The *Volksstimme* is, however, regarded as the more traditional and more prestigious paper. The *Volksstimme* appears in 17 local editions and is currently distributed at a number of 259.327 issues in northern Sachsen-Anhalt (www.volksstimme.de/service/ueberuns/volksstimme.asap?column=vs).

3.1. The '*Jugendweihe*': a metaphor with manifold meanings

Not all of the mentioned 694 articles on the *Jugendweihe* feature a major coverage of the ritual. These articles can roughly be divided into three categories. The first are advertisements or short notices either on public youth work or the ceremonies, which are put into the newspaper by the organisers themselves. Secondly and more interestingly there are longer articles, which are concerned with the *Jugendweihe* as a coming-of-age rite. They either discuss the conduct of the ritual, thereby implying that this conduct is not unchallenged or they maintain that the *Jugendweihe* is merely one of several coming-of-age rituals. Such articles will then also include a discussion of *Konfirmation*, the Protestant ritual of confirmation, and *Firmung*, the Catholic rite of confirmation. These articles are written by journalists and usually appear during the season when the rituals are conducted. To this group also belong more neutral articles published in the life-style or advice section of the newspaper, which discuss clothing and menus; anything that needs to be considered when organising the family celebration. The third category consists of the letters of readers written in response to any of the above.

The year 2001 is a good example to give an overview of the presentation of the *Jugendweihe* in the media. On the 7th of May an article on a dance course the Interessenvereinigung held was published; it included pictures. The course was open to everyone but the attendance of *Jugendweihe* participants is in the foreground. On the 12th the newspaper has a portrait of Frau R. who is the head of the local office of the Interessenvereinigung in Schönebeck. A day later there was a big advert of the association in colour, including pictures and a schedule of the upcoming ceremonies. Then there were no more articles until August, when on the 29th the ceremonies of next year were advertised including a prospective schedule.[4] Another article appeared in the Magdeburger issue of the *Volksstimme* in September. The headmaster of a Protestant grammar school in Magdeburg had refused to distribute flyers for the Interessenvereinigung in the school. This article prompted a discussion among

[4] The year 2001 was a quiet year. Frau R. explained to me that she had deliberately reduced the amount of advertisement in the newspaper because she felt that this often only arouses the criticism of the churches. More PR would not be necessary since there were enough participants.

readers; letters of readers appeared in the newspaper for two weeks after the original article (*Volksstimme* 6th September 2001). Many letters criticised the headmaster for his lack of tolerance since a prohibition of the advertisement of the ritual gave, allegedly, the religious ritual *Konfirmation* a monopoly at his school. According to other letters the headmaster was, however, conform with the agreement that schools, as an impartial institution, will not advertise any coming-of-age ritual.

We will now turn our attention to a discussion that took place in the *Volksstimme* in the year 2000. The debate started with an article that was published in the newspaper on the 2nd of February 2000 and had been written by a western German free-lance publisher, Andreas Meier. Meier had already published two articles in theological journals and one book on the *Jugendweihe* before he appeared in the *Volksstimme* (Meier 1998; 1995; 1994). He is introduced as having studied history and holding a Ph.D. in theology; he had also worked for a newspaper and as speaker for a federal ministry.

Meier's article is described as a 'denial of the *Jugendweihe's* purpose' in the title. Meier criticises the conduct of the *Jugendweihe* for a number of reasons to which I will come in the following paragraphs. The newspaper reacted to his article by initiating an opinion poll on whether the *Jugendweihe* is 'useless' or not. Out of 1450 callers 1121 rejected this stance and 319 agreed that the ceremony was out of date. In the following issues of the newspaper up to the 12th of February letters from readers discussing Meier's article appeared daily. On the 12th of February the *Volksstimme* dedicated a whole page to the letters. This was repeated on the 1st of March. By that date the debate had been going for four weeks. Meier had obviously struck a nerve among many readers.

Historian denies purpose of the Jugendweihe

"It can as well be celebrated without the content-lacking coat of the Jugendweihe"[5]

(*Volksstimme* 2nd of February 2000:3)

[5] Historiker bestreitet Sinn der Jugendweihe: „Auch ohne inhaltsleeren Mantel der Jugendweihe kann gefeiert werden".

The article starts with the argument that the *Jugendweihe* does not have a purpose and is unnecessary. The summary at the beginning of the article describes the article as proposing a discussion of the *Jugendweihe* by assuming that such a discussion is necessary and that the status of the ritual itself is debatable. Meier opens his argument by examining possible reasons for the *Jugendweihe*'s existence. The only reason he can see for its existence is that it belongs to the category of coming-of-age rites. These rites initiate youngsters into the community and turn them into fully accepted members, enabling them to marry and inherit property in tribal societies. However, this definition does not hold true for Germany:

> Jugendweihen do only exist in Germany. If it really was an initiation rite of the tribe of the Germans, then we would achieve the right to vote with our Jugendweihe, we would come of age. (*Volksstimme* 2nd of February 2000:3)

The *Jugendweihe* cannot be an initiation rite because modern society leaves 'space for individuals and [different] culture forms' rather than being based on 'an un-debatable tribal tradition'. Furthermore, if the *Jugendweihe* was a transition rite than the life of the participants should change in an observable way. Again this is not the case, according to Meier. However, the *Jugendweihe* had possessed a purpose of initiation in the Third Reich and the GDR, at least in the sense that the ruling elite had propagated the rituals as an initiation rite for every member of society and had hidden the intimidating means used to secure participation. Such an enforcement of attendance is not possible in modern society. However:

> Life-cycle rituals retain a totalitarian after-taste, because, being conducted collectively regardless of the difference between the participants, they suggest to the participants that they experience an 'irretrievable, unique high point' together. (*Volksstimme* 2nd of February 2000:3)

Meier makes two points in this sentence. He claims first of all that the modern *Jugendweihe* has retained a totalitarian tendency because it is conducted collectively rather than individually. He furthermore points out that the ceremony may not be

'unique'. This last point is strengthened by his concluding remark that the families could celebrate more freely amongst themselves, meaning without a public ceremony. In the last sentences Meier mentions that the religious rites of *Konfirmation* and *Firmung* are, on the contrary, legitimate because they initiate participants into a clearly defined community, the parish.

Meier focuses on the public ceremony in his article. Although he questions the practice of the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual, and therefore addresses the entirety of the ritual, he does not touch on the family celebration. He rather points out that these can continue to exist. Why family celebrations should continue if the *Jugendweihe* does not have a purpose is not made clear. That Meier only refers to the ceremony means that he may actually be more interested in the organisers than in the participants. This becomes clear when he finally addresses the 'supporters' of the ritual directly:

> Why do the supporters of the Jugendweihe decline to talk about the content, necessity and meaning of the Jugendweihen? Do they have doubts about their own arguments for the ceremony? (*Volksstimme* 2nd of February 2000:3)

This last sentence is why Meier's article had been called an 'invitation to a discussion' in the introduction. Meier actively contests the practice of the *Jugendweihe*. He uses different arguments to substantiate this contestation. One is his point that the ritual does not fulfil the purpose of a transition ritual, the second refers to the ritual's past, its role in former totalitarian regimes. By calling the states in which the *Jugendweihe* was practised totalitarian Meier makes a connection to morality. Although this point is not explicit in the text I will show that it is exactly this question of morality that is taken up by the readers of the newspaper.

I have already mentioned the outcome of the opinion poll, which was clearly in favour of the *Jugendweihe*. The letters from readers which were published on the 12th of February in response to Meier's article were also mainly in disagreement with it. This disagreement was expressed quite explicitly, and often in an emotional tone. Later letters appear to be more moderate: they start to pay attention to Meier's actual

argument, which the first letters had mainly neglected. I will now present some examples:

> The East has only been waiting for this. Isn't it possible that we keep one memory without having anybody spoiling it for us? ...
> I can't and don't want to deny that there had been problems for those who didn't want to take part in the Jugendweihe. But the author doesn't seem to realise that he with his version of the life-cycle ritual excludes the participants of the Jugendweihe. [...]
> If Mister Meier, he could also be called Pfeiffer, sees this letter he will believe that Jugendweihen make people aggressive, too.
> Mister Meier I have to disappoint you here. We laughed, partied, danced and flirted at my Jugendweihe, I did not know anything about the relation to the Nazi-Jugendweihe and I wouldn't have cared. The best is - I neither lost my backbone nor did I become a criminal, great is it not? (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000)

This letter expresses quite explicitly that Meier's article is offensive. His offence has three different addressees. There are first of all the current participants of the *Jugendweihe*, whose interests Meier supposedly overlooks. There is secondly the writer of the letter who feels his past to be under attack. And thirdly there is 'The East' which has supposedly been criticised by Meier.

The writer of the letter focuses on Meier's short remarks about the *Jugendweihe* in GDR times and during the Third Reich. This is the only part of Meier's argument that is taken into account. It is understood that Meier attacks the current practice of the *Jugendweihe* because it was a means of oppression implanted by the GDR; which makes any further practice of the ritual immoral and unjustified. The fact that the *Jugendweihe* has a problematic past is not denied; it is however challenged by the personal experiences of the writer, which are positive and pleasant. The 'identity' of the *Jugendweihe* as a state ritual in the Third Reich had not been of any relevance to the person celebrating the ritual. It needs to be remembered here though, that these memories focus on the family celebration of the *Jugendweihe* only, and do not refer to the public GDR ceremony. The writer therefore sees the identity of the *Jugendweihe* as being foremost a family celebration.

The question is how can such a harsh reaction come about? The writer of the letter obviously understands Meier's article to go further than just to question the practice of a ritual. The first sentence of the quotation points out that the GDR past is the problem that underpins this east-west German conversation. The writer says that the East German past is frequently spoiled by others, it is not hard to guess that these others are western Germans. This becomes clear with the reference to the western German criminologist Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer's hypothesis about the detrimental effects of the authoritarian education in the GDR had caused much criticism in eastern Germany. Because GDR education was related to the current problem of violence and right wing activity many people felt personally offended. They had the feeling that their own past, their very childhood memories, and their current persona as honest citizens, were being attacked by an outsider whose authority was not acknowledged. Pfeiffer and his hypothesis have become a metaphor to describe the western German scholar who challenges eastern German identity and past under the disguise of science. This also explains the letter's reference the *Jugendweihe* being a cause for violent behaviour.

> If it wasn't for our sisters and brothers from the West, we wouldn't know who we are.
> There is a West-Pfeiffer who tells us that the children in our crèches and Kindergartens, who collectively sat on their pots, have become criminal and radical and have a tendency to appear as group attackers.
> Now a West-Meier comes and wants to tell us something about the Jugendweihe. It wouldn't be unique and can therefore be abandoned. Only Firmung [catholic confirmation] and Konfirmation [Protestant confirmation] would be genuine, because they initiate into a clearly defined community. I can only agree to that.
> In forty years of GDR I never experienced as much criminality as in ten years of FRG. The greatest criminals and traitors nearly all come from the West. Even former chancellors, former ministers of the interior, party leaders and other traitors, who gloss with criminal energy and embezzle millions.
> All of them are Christians and have done Firmung or Konfirmation. We can see, they initiate into a clearly defined community - that of the better-off. (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000)

This letter similarly focuses on questions of identity and the past and discusses the alleged western German domination over eastern German affairs. It states explicitly that western Germans come and 'tell' the eastern Germans how their past and culture are to be interpreted. This western German interpretation is regarded to be devaluating. The writer challenges the western German hegemony in a very sarcastic way by questioning the righteousness of their figures of authority. He turns the argument around by pointing out how much more criminality exists in the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). This means consequently that the religious initiation rites which are associated with western Germany here have even less justification than the *Jugendweihe*; *Konfirmation* and *Firmung* shape traitors and criminals.[6] However, this letter yet again does not discuss Meier's actual argument. It looks rather like a defensive reaction to an attack. These readers seem to disregard of Meier's argument about the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual; they regard his discussion to be metaphorical and therefore as addressing something else.

If it is not the text that triggers these defence mechanisms, only the author himself, his identity prevails. The only problem about his identity has so far been his western German status. The next examples add another dimension to the problem:

> The last paragraph which is far removed from reality, calls the Jugendweihe 'a content-lacking coat', but Firmung and Konfirmation are described as incomparable and as initiating into a clearly defined community, this paragraph shows the real author of the thought. (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000)

> How lucky that they are still there, the never tiring publishers and theologians, who tell us here in the East, how useless and meaningless the Jugendweihe is. (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000)

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[6] This letter may sound as if it reiterated the former propaganda of the GDR state against capitalist western Germany; i.e. capitalism causes criminality. However, rather than to stem from a former propaganda only, this letter may also have been motivated by recent events: just during that year it had become public that Helmut Kohl, the former chancellor of Germany had embezzled money of his party during his legislate; and this did not remain the only case. Since there is no possibility to ask the writer of the letter about his motivations I will remain with these points of consideration.

Meier is recognised as a theologian and a man of the church. That this identity of Meier contributes to his supposedly 'biased' view of the *Jugendweihe* is an interesting point. There are two reasons as to why this is so. In the widely atheist east of Germany the church is regarded with some suspicion[7], and is associated with the more overtly religious western Germany. If we take this into account then we could say that Meier's identity as a Christian reinforces his identity as a western German; it makes him all the more disliked.

It appears that the debate about the practice of the *Jugendweihe* is shaped by two lines of tensions. One of these lines has been laid out above and regards the east-west German struggle about eastern German past and culture. The other line of tension links the supporters of the *Jugendweihe* and the churches. It is a well-known fact that both main congregations have always criticised the conduct of the *Jugendweihe,* especially so during the *Wende*-years. This is explained by their fear that the secular ritual competes with their own rituals and therefore influences the recruitment of new Christians. Apart from this fact, which concerns the *Jugendweihe* directly, the churches are also known as consisting largely of those eastern Germans who are particularly critical about the GDR past. Since Christians have had many negative experiences in GDR times, they are expected to disregard any romanticising views of the East German past.[8] This makes their position quite similar to that of aforementioned western German scholars. These Christians' arguments are, however, harder to combat since they are fellow eastern Germans; they share the experience of the same system and are therefore eligible to make judgements.

The two lines of tension I have laid out above seem to result in a certain sensitivity on the part of some eastern Germans towards western Germans and Christians. This sensitivity regards any aspect of the eastern German past and culture. Curiously enough these are points on which ethnic identity could be grounded.[9] That means that the *Jugendweihe* triggers debates about eastern German identity.

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[7] See Berdahl for a description of religion and religiosity in eastern Germany after the Wende (1999:96-103).

[8] Author's experience (chapter one, footnote4), there are not yet any studies on this particular question. An opinion poll conducted in 1991 nevertheless shows that hardly any Christians vote for the PDS, Party of Democratic Socialism, which is the successor of the GDR state party SED (Roski 1991:74).

[9] Barth (1969:11); Cohen (1985:99). A more detailed discussion will follow in chapter seven.

An article that appeared in the *Volksstimme* on the 1st of March takes on a whole new dimension if we bear these points in mind. The *Volksstimme* had set aside another page for letters from readers on this issue. On top of the page, however, there appeared a longer article. It was written by Jochen Tschiche, an eastern German theologian and politician, and a former member of the GDR civil rights movement. The article is headed *You got baptised, confirmed and married because it was customary*[10] (*Volksstimme* 1st of March 2000). Tschiche seems to be used by the newspaper as an intermediary between the two rival camps. He combines personal attributes, which make him an acceptable judge in the eyes of western and eastern Germans. In regard to the latter he shares their identity by his place of origin. On the other hand, he had been a critic of the GDR regime and is furthermore a member of the church. These qualities will make him more reliable in the eyes of western Germans. This seems at least to have been the intention of the newspaper. Tschiche's article mirrors his position as mediator quite clearly:

> The Jugendweihe, which is practised in eastern Germany, is obviously fulfilling the needs of the population. To insult the organising association and the participants does not change this fact. We should however not reject a critical look back at the introduction and conduction of the Jugendweihe in the GDR. (*Volksstimme* 1st of March 2000)

Tschiche argues that the *Jugendweihe* has become a custom in eastern Germany. He compares this situation to the position of the church in Germany before 1950. Until then participation in the religious life-cycle rituals occurred for reasons of custom, rather than faith. Tschiche also takes up the feelings of insult that had been aroused in many eastern German readers by Meier's article. He rejects such an offensive tone of voice and pleads for more consideration. However, Tschiche does not defend the practice of the *Jugendweihe* entirely. His reservations regard, as the quotation above shows, the past nature of the ritual. He explains that special circumstances facilitated its establishment in 1954; the Protestant rituals had already been hollowed of their content. However, this 'does not legitimise the extortionist

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[10] Man ließ sich taufen, konfirmieren und trauen, weil es üblich war.

methods of the GDR-leaders' (*Volksstimme* 1st of March 2001). Tschiche criticises strongly the intimidating means implanted by the state to guarantee a high percentage of participants. He also criticises the vow, which amounts to a strong critique of the ideological state itself and to his personal accusation of the *Jugendweihe*:

> Here the *Weltanschauungsstaat* [state of a world-view] was established. It decided whether the attitude of the single person was right or wrong.
> And that was the sin against a democratic community and against the maturing young people and that the Jugendweihe contributed to this is my reproach against it. (*Volksstimme* 1st of March 2000)

It is the former position of the *Jugendweihe* within the repressive system which makes its contemporary use problematic; this is what needs to be faced. The latter point is Tschiche's advice for the Interessenvereinigung; they need to consider the problematic past of the ritual. He points out that this matter is even more pressing since continuity from GDR times is apparent in the ritual and in the organising associations; this regards the name of the rite and the personnel in the Interessenvereinigung. Tschiche takes his argument even further. Not only should the association be aware of the *Jugendweihe*'s history but their individual members should similarly face their personal life-histories:

> Everybody who wants to show this former yesterday [sic] of intolerance and human arrogance to the door should not suppress their traces [traces of intolerance etc.] but face them. (*Volksstimme* 1st of March 2000).

This point could be regarded as a strong accusation against many eastern Germans with regard to their naive and uncritical stance towards their own lives. However, it does not seem to have been understood as such by the readers. Tschiche's article provoked little response, and the matter of the *Jugendweihe* was more or less settled for that year.

Tschiche makes some important points which will recur throughout this thesis. He describes and treats the current practice of the *Jugendweihe* as cultural in nature.

The ritual is attended because it is both customary and a family tradition. He, however, turns the reader's awareness to the problematic past of the ritual. The adaptation of the *Jugendweihe* by a totalitarian system has left a strong imprint on the ritual; an imprint that needs to be addressed by its organisers in some way. In returning to my description of the *Jugendweihe* as a metaphor, one can see that it already takes on two identities in Tschiche's article. One is the identity of the ritual as an element of eastern German culture and tradition. This encompasses the notion of the rite as a coming-of-age ritual, celebrated with a great family party. The second letter quoted in this chapter also included a reference to the *Jugendweihe* as such a 'fun-time'. On the other hand the *Jugendweihe* bears the identity of an oppressive means of indoctrination and intimidation. This identity has been gained by the ritual during GDR times but is now an intrinsic part of it. Tschiche's article is an attempt to merge the two differing identities of the *Jugendweihe* and to arrive at one uniform identification of the ritual. This new identification, which accounts for both sides of the *Jugendweihe*, does not yet seem to have transpired into the discourse on it. However, the whole debate illustrates that by its capacity to carry contrasting identities the *Jugendweihe* can be used within the same discourse for different and even contradictory arguments. I will come to the misunderstandings this fact can cause in the next subsection.

Having pointed out frequently the problematic past and the alleged continuities of and in the *Jugendweihe* I will now briefly consider what exactly is being said about these points. Tschiche mentioned the continuation of the name *Jugendweihe* and a continuation of personnel within the organising association. Since the GDR *Jugendweihe* had been so strongly intertwined with the educational system, many critics are wary of a continuation of the co-operation between schools and *Jugendweihe* organisers:

> It would be important to seriously separate the Jugendweihe from the schools. Teachers should not appear as speakers (unless as private persons), the preparation should not happen at the school, the head teacher should not be involved in the organisation, no school auditorium should be used as the venue and no younger pupils should function as congratulators. (*Volksstimme* 1st March 2000)

This letter deals with the preparation for the ritual. Since a thorough preparation had always been part of the *Jugendweihe* there is a wide expectation that it still is. In this case, however, it is furthermore believed that the socialist ideology may also have continued from GDR times. This idea was quite strong within the churches in the first years after the *Wende*. The contemporary critique of the preparation courses is more their apparent negligibility.[11] The problem of ideological continuation is, however, still inherent in the alleged closeness between the *Jugendweihe* organisers and the socialist party PDS. This party is often considered with suspicion because it is a continuation of the former socialist party SED (Fessen 1995:132-144). Such a co-operation between the two institutions would, in the opinion of critics, therefore serve as powerful evidence of the association's relation to the East German past. Another letter makes this point explicitly:

> During GDR times a party assembly of the SED, now a publicity event for the PDS. They already have the teenagers to do Jugendweihe, now they only need them to join the PDS. (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000)

The material that was provided in this section showed how the *Jugendweihe* is employed as a rhetorical means in a debate about eastern German society and culture; it therefore, inevitably, also addresses the question of an evaluation of the GDR past. The ritual itself, however, its practice or structure, was not actually considered in the public discourse. Rather, the mere appearance of the term triggered a discussion of the issues mentioned above. In order to determine which problems occur if the question of the ritual's meaning is actually addressed I will now consider public forums which dealt with the ritual more closely. These forums are discussion rounds on the purpose of the *Jugendweihe* in modern eastern Germany which took place in 2001.

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[11] For examples see chapter two (31).

3.2 And if one does talk about meaning...

In this section I will explore what is actually discussed when the ritual as such is debated. Meier had questioned the existence of any content in the *Jugendweihe*. Is this view shared by other eastern German critics of the ritual, and what is the position of the organisers? How do they explain the ritual's practice?

Two public discussion rounds on the *Jugendweihe* took place in Magdeburg in 2001. One had been organised by a neutral association called Urania. This group organises different events, discussions, film showings that contribute to education or are socially critical. They had invited members of the Interessenvereinigung, of the churches and advertised the discussion publicly in the newspaper. The second public discussion was organised by the cathedral parish in Magdeburg. It had been advertised in their parish leaflet but many people received personal invitations as well. Whereas only seven people took part at the former discussion, the second event was very well attended and included some quite famous inhabitants of the town. [12]

Both discussion rounds featured similar topics and points of criticism. Out of this range one will be of particular interest to us here. It has been pointed out above that many people believe that the *Jugendweihe* ought to be preceded by a preparation. This belief stems from previous forms of the ritual, which always attributed great importance to such educational preparation courses (chapter two:21-22). The fact that the *Jugendweihe* is furthermore perceived and advertised as the secular counterpart of *Konfirmation* reinforces the idea that a distinct cosmology should be transmitted in preparation for the ritual. The Interessenvereinigung was therefore asked what its preparation entailed and how it was done. For members of the association, however, this question does not arise. The association's youth work is unrelated to the *Jugendweihe* (chapter two). However, the association was initially founded because of the ritual, and the open youth work developed out of the former compulsory preparation classes. The split between youth work and *Jugendweihe* became only necessary when the official status of the association was negotiated in

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[12] A minister of the federal government was invited; other prominent guests were important members of the church in Magdeburg.

the 1990s (later this chapter). In the association's discourse both youth work and *Jugendweihe* are also frequently mixed as if they still were part of the same practice.

Once everyone had understood that there was no compulsory preparation for the *Jugendweihe* any more, this topic became even more pressing. This is due to the fact that with the lack of any preparation the transmission of values which the *Jugendweihe* is supposed to achieve becomes nearly impossible; this is at least the opinion that was brought forward by critics of the ritual. Such a transmission of values is, however, regarded as an important task of this coming-of-age rite. [13] It came up frequently in both discussions.

The cathedral parish in Magdeburg had invited a minister of the federal government, who conducts speeches at *Jugendweihe*n. The attention now turned to him, questioning seriously what results in terms of education he expected from delivering a 'mere' speech. He responded by saying that he was firmly of the opinion that he could transmit messages in his address. Many of those present did not agreed with this. There were questions like, he would only have fifteen minutes, how would he change a person's mind in fifteen minutes? However, he was convinced that he could have some impact on the young people. He pointed out that every now and then either the young people themselves or their families came to him to express their gratitude and to point out what a great impression his words had made on them. The argument nevertheless continued in the sense that he did not know the young people he would shake hands with during the ritual. What if they were *Neonazis*? Then he would sanction their wrong doing with his congratulation.

This discussion shows that with the loss of a compulsory preparation the association has lost touch with the teenagers who will finally attend the *Jugendweihe*. This poses a great problem to the idea of the *Jugendweihe* as an 'educating' coming-of-age rite. [14]

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[13] Gehring argues that the *Jugendweihe* contributes to the establishment of an identity for the young people; this makes the preparation for the ritual very important (2000:102).

[14] At the discussion in the cathedral it was agreed that the task of value transmission needs to be fulfilled by the schools now. This is a widespread idea in the east of Germany; but is usually opposed by the schools who pass the task on to the families (field research).
This debate also had the consequence that some groups started their own secular rituals. The Protestant church discussed this (document EKD); the catholic church introduced a secular coming-of-age rite in some dioceses (www.jugendfeier.de). A group of politicians and theologians in eastern Berlin started to conduct a new non-religious ritual, the *Maiglöckchenfeier* (www.maiglocke.de,

Another important question for many at the discussion rounds was what the modern *Jugendweihe* actually entails. Like Meier they asked what the ritual could now be seen to mean. Being confronted with such a question the head of the Magdeburg office of the Interessenvereinigung was left a little aghast. She kept reiterating that the *Jugendweihe* was the first step towards becoming an adult and that the ceremony met a public demand. The question was, however, much more fundamental than that; it concerned the cosmological justification of the ritual. The need for meaning is based on the notion that the ritual had initially been a socialist life-cycle ritual. The disappearance of socialist ideology should consequently have resulted in a disappearance of the ritual. Since this was not the case this cosmology must have been substituted by something else. The nature of this 'something else' was at the heart of the question.

The members of the association however, have a completely different starting point. They regard the *Jugendweihe* not as a former socialist state ritual. They rather argue and believe that the ritual has always existed as part of the culture. The *Jugendweihe* is treated as a 'natural kind'; it is self-explanatory (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:153). In this vein the ritual's role in the GDR can be subsumed under 'misuse by rulers' and therewith does not concern the modern practice of the rite.

The ongoing misunderstanding between these two parties is obviously based on a 'misrecognition' that is made possible by the fact that the *Jugendweihe* can be seen as different things by different people. Bourdieu has probably outlined the concept of 'misrecognition' most clearly. He argues that all cultural exchange underpins an '*institutionalised and guaranteed misrecognition*' (Bourdieu 1977:171; emphasis in original). Only this misunderstanding of the value of a good makes the existence of symbolic capital possible. This means for this case that the *Jugendweihe* bears a different symbolic capital for the different parties involved in the public discourse.[15] I will nevertheless keep using the terms metaphor and identity since these imply the use of language, which is prominent in this case.

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research notes). This shows how strong the rejection of the *Jugendweihe* and its organisers is amongst these groups.

[15] For misrecognition between the two Germanys see Fessen (1995:132-144).

If the *Jugendweihe* has always encompassed a range of different identities it needs to be considered what these are and what different perceptions of the *Jugendweihe* people hold. I will examine this question in more detail in the next three chapters. I furthermore pointed out that seeing the ritual as an element of an emerging eastern German culture also makes a statement about eastern German identity. In that respect it seems logical that if the *Jugendweihe* can bear conflicting identities then eastern German identity might similarly not be the same for everyone. Chapter seven will explore the question of eastern German culture and identity, and the place of the *Jugendweihe* in it, in order to clarify this question. I will, for the moment, remain with the public discourse and move on to the strategies of legitimisation used by the Interessenvereinigung. In light of Meier's argument that the *Jugendweihe* does not have a purpose how does the organising association explain the necessity to have *Jugendweihen*?

3.3. Legitimising a 'meaningless' ritual

The Interessenvereinigung has developed a fourfold argument of legitimisation, which appears very similar to Weber's categorisation of social action (1968). Following Weber's theory the *Jugendweihe* can be characterised as 'instrumentally rational', 'value-rational', 'affectual' and 'traditional' in the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung (Weber 1968:24-25). I, nevertheless, decided to call this argument an argument of legitimisation because many of the texts that contain explanations of the association's activities bear a very defensive tone.

This tone is best illustrated in the short quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter. This quotation shows clearly that the Interessenvereinigung is aware of the current contestation of the *Jugendweihe* and of the problems connected to the ritual's past. They therefore actively apply arguments of legitimisation, which have become a constituting part of the association's discourse and cosmology with regard to the *Jugendweihe*. All four arguments, which I will outline in the following section, feature regularly in the institution's texts and in discussions with individual members. They do

so, however, with varying frequency and therefore have different weight for the overall justification of the association.

The main argument can be described as a historical legitimisation:

> For more then 150 years has this ceremony been celebrated in Germany. (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:5)

This argument is grounded in the perception of the *Jugendweihe* as a thing with a life of its own. After one hundred and fifty years of existence it has become a 'natural fact', a social institution. This long tradition enables the ritual to bridge the period of 'misuse' by the GDR state. A statement similar to the above occurs in nearly all texts of the organisation (Interessenvereinigung web page; *Volksstimme* 3rd of February 2000). The title of a book that was written by two members of the association shows the same assumption: *The Jugendweihe: a cultural history since 1852* (Chowanski and Dreier 2000.)

The second argument, which is used nearly as frequently as the above could be called 'legitimisation by demand'. A short interview that appeared in the *Volksstimme* in reply to Meier's article is a good example of how this argument works. The interviewee is the head of the federal association of the Interessenvereinigung:

> Concerning Herr Meier I am missing respect for the need for Jugendweihe. 100,000 fourteen-year-olds participate in this celebration this spring in East Germany. (*Volksstimme* 3rd of February 2000)

Numbers are supposed to prove the rightfulness of the association's activity. Since everyone is free to decide whether to participate in the *Jugendweihe* or not the decision to participate is taken as a statement of acceptance of the association. The basic line of the argument is that 100,000 people cannot be wrong. It therefore relates to the perception of the *Jugendweihe* as an element of culture. The participation rate as a justification for activities is mentioned in most written texts the Interessenvereinigung publishes; this includes leaflets, web pages and other printed information (Chowanski and Dreier 2000:154-195; Interessenvereinigung 2000b:1;

Interessenvereinigung 1998b). It also often comes up in conversation with members of the Interessenvereinigung (field research).

The third argument could be called legitimisation by law. The association has been acknowledged as *allgemeinnützig*, 'useful for the public'. This is a special juridical status which is awarded to such associations that contribute to communal welfare. The award usually entails sponsorship from the government and membership in wider associations; in this case in associations for children's and youth work. This status of the Interessenvereinigung depends strongly on the youth work of the association, which was the reason why the status was attributed in the first place. The texts of the Interessenvereinigung will usually include a reference to the 'full establishment of the Interessenvereinigung in Germany', which implies the legal establishment of the association as *allgemeinützig*. Most texts of the Interessenvereinigung include a sentence similar to the one noted above (quotes above; Interessenvereinigung 1996; Interessenvereinigung 2000b). This legitimisation is repeatedly mentioned in debates in newspapers and in conversations.

The last argument is anthropological:

> Every society, every culture of this world has developed its own form of initiating girls and boys into the community of the adults. For more then 150 years the Jugendweihe resembles this custom in Germany. (Interessenvereinigung 1998:5)

The anthropological argument seems to have declined in the association's printed texts during the last years.[16] It nevertheless is still mentioned in many speeches at *Jugendweihen* (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:18-19; speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 am).[17]

All of these arguments imply that the ritual is self-justificatory. It has a long tradition; it is demanded by participants; it is only one out of a universal class of transition rites. Only one argument relates to the organisation itself. It is, however,

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[16] The Humanistischer Verband uses this argument frequently (Block *et al* 2001:26ff; Block *et al* 1999:10; Isemeyer *et al* 1989:157)

[17] Catherine Bell discusses this phenomenon of the use of anthropological theories by ritual inventors (Bell 1997:253-259).

made *post factum*. The organisation is well established now and therefore rightful and legitimate. The apparent pre-occupation with the ritual in the argument of the association, however, seems to imply another interesting point. If so much justification for the organisation of the ritual is necessary then the *Jugendweihe* is not quite as self-explanatory as it is stated to be; it neither has a life of its own but is sustained by the organisation, which offers it. The ritual is therefore, consequently, a commodity. Similarly to the public discourse, all these arguments only relate to the practice of the ritual itself but not to its structure or content.

3.4 The experts talk...

As outlined in the beginning this chapter does not only consider the public debate on the *Jugendweihe* but also scholarly accounts on the matter. These accounts will be examined in this section. In doing so I will move from a consideration of the rhetorical use of the metaphor *Jugendweihe*, via the misunderstandings this use can cause, closer to an analysis of the actual ritual in this subchapter. A discussion of secondary accounts on the *Jugendweihe* will once more illustrate the ritual's capacity to bear different identities and to trigger associations with the GDR past and modern eastern German society.

Wensierski, a sociologist, summarised the different positions that are evident in this scholarly discourse by including a number of different identities that are ascribed to the *Jugendweihe*:

> It is a symbol for the attempt of a successful synthesis of GDR family tradition, regional East German self-assertion and federal German youth leisure and consume industry. (Wensierski 2000:81)

In this quote Wensierski refers to the *Jugendweihe* as a product of a family tradition, as means of self-assertion and as a business. He therefore successfully combines questions of the eastern German past, modern eastern German culture and identity, and the issue of a commodification of the ritual. This is, however, a very

recent text. German scholarly literature had to undergo a certain development to arrive at such an 'objective' point of view. The following section will outline this development by highlighting the main points.

Since the mid-1990s an ever increasing number of academic and popular accounts of the *Jugendweihe* have appeared on the German book market. The arguments in these accounts and the questions they are pre-occupied with have, naturally, changed over the years. Whereas in the beginning the unexpected survival of the *Jugendweihe* was the motivation for works which focused on the content of the modern *Jugendweihe*, the ritual is nowadays used for studies on religiosity (Döhnert 2000; Liepold 2000) or teenagehood (Boltz *et al* 1998; Griese 2000). Most studies so far have been undertaken by theologians. This is not surprising considering the special interest the churches have in the issue. Theologians have already before 1989 furthered research into the socialist ritual (Albertin 1960; Gordon 1985; Rabbow 1965); after the Fall of the Wall they were the first to explore its survival (Gandow 1994; Hartmann 1992; Pietsch 1991). The interest of sociologists in the topic has increased during the last few years (Bolz *et al* 1998; Griese 2000). Only two articles have been published by an anthropologist, as yet (Wolbert 1998; 1995). Meier certainly needs to be mentioned here as well although he is hard to position within a particular discipline (Meier 1998).

The theological works can be divided into two categories. The majority deal with the relation between the GDR state and the church and use *Jugendweihe - Konfirmation* to illustrate this interplay (Diederich *et al* 1998; Laemmermann 1994). Fischer's work (1998) explores the dialectical relationship between the two rites; other examples of such studies from before 1989 are Urban and Weinzen (1984) and Richter (1987). All of these accounts include the question of what consequences the practice of the *Jugendweihe* has for the *Konfirmation* and the work of the churches in general. The second group includes those works that very openly criticise the conduct of the *Jugendweihe* and with it the organising associations. Most of the works that entailed such a suspicious view were published during the early and mid-1990s (Gandow 1994; Hartmann 1992; Pietsch 1991). The title of Hartmann's article, despite its brusque tone, makes the position of some of these authors clear: *A*

perverted ritual continues to exist (1992). These works show the same points of criticism that have been outlined above and that is based on the expectation of a continuation, via *Jugendweihe*, of socialist ideology. Both Gandow and Pietsch address the problem that often the same people that were members of the GDR committees continued their work with the Interessenvereinigung (Pietsch 1991:295; Gandow 1994:67).

> Today's advertiser of the 'new' Jugendweihe claim on one hand that their offer has nothing to do with the earlier state-Jugendweihe. But not only some continuities in personnel and the great financial continuities of the Zentraler Jugendweiheausschuss [committee for *Jugendweihe*] in the 'Interessenvereinigung' speak a clear language, also the argument of custom is faithfully uttered: „...life proved us right, it is still very popular". (Gandow 1994:7; parenthesis in original)

Pietsch makes explicit that he furthermore suspects ideological continuation within the ritual:

> It is hard to believe that here now a sort of 'pure' ceremony of an entirely new type is practised regardless of any historical background and the related different positions which concern the Jugendweihe. (Pietsch 1991:295)

Gandow and Pietsch also criticise the continued co-operation between *Jugendweihe* organisers and schools or teachers (Gandow 1994:52-56; Pietsch 1991:294). Both authors concentrate on the associations, and mainly criticise their ways of organising the ritual. The underlying assumption is that the practice of the *Jugendweihe* is unjust because of the ritual's past.

A slightly different position that was apparent in the scholarly discourse at the same time is illustrated by Hartmann (1992). Despite his very bold title his article is quite considerate. His main argument regards the fact that the modern *Jugendweihe* is actually not anything at all any more: 'The ceremonies have been de-politicised and been freed of any confessions.' The ceremony is entirely 'noncommittal' and so is its preparation. Hartmann is one of the very few theologians able to detach himself from

the ritual's history and trying to see what is actually done during the ceremony via its observation.

However, since the ceremony is 'empty' Hartmann looks for other reasons to explain the continued practice of the *Jugendweihe*. His explanation is yet again grounded in a sense of continuation from GDR times. However, this continuation does not regard the organisations, but rather the willingness of eastern Germans to engage in the former state ritual. He argues that the revitalisation of the *Jugendweihe* is a 'clue to the widespread resignation and lack of meaning in eastern German society' (Hartmann 1992:565).

The difference between Hartmann's and Gandow's arguments mainly regards their different emphasises. Whereas Gandow is preoccupied with the illegitimate conduct of the *Jugendweihe* association, Hartmann argues against the ritual for the simple reason that it lacks meaning. Both authors nevertheless arrive at very similar conclusions; that is the uselessness of the *Jugendweihe*.

Gandow similarly notes a lack of content in the new *Jugendweihe*. However, instead of looking for cultural or social reasons for the practice, Gandow finds an economic explanation more convincing. The interests of the organisers, their institutional sense of survival prevail over the interests of the participants, in his opinion. This leads him once again to a criticism of the organiser's lax stance towards the *Jugendweihe's* role in the GDR system. He nevertheless notes that family tradition would be a main factor with regard to the individual decision on participation. This is so because a critical stance towards the ritual would ultimately lead to questioning the parent's past decision for their own *Jugendweihe* (Gandow 1994:93).

I have noted so far that many of the early publications of the *Jugendweihe* were pre-occupied with the ritual as the continuation of a former means of oppression. On the other hand many of these works note the apparent 'emptiness' of the ritual. Although Meier's book on the *Jugendweihe* (1998) is some years later I will consider it here because he argues there at length what he had already expressed in articles published prior to it (Meier 1994; 1995). This work can therefore be considered to belong to the category of works that are defined by their early appearance and a suspicious stance towards the ritual.

Meier is again concerned with the reasons for the further existence of the ritual. He states that an explanation of these reasons is the aim of this work, which would necessitate a consideration of the history of the *Jugendweihe*. Regardless of this, Meier seems to be preoccupied with eastern German society; the arena in which he believes to find the reasons for the ritual practice. The actual ceremonies are not considered in any analytical way.

Meier already starts with the assumption that the practice of the *Jugendweihe* is based on feelings of nostalgia towards the 'second GDR of social services' (Meier 1998:40).[18] He adds that such customs as the *Jugendweihe* reinforce a *Heimatgefühl*, a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the home country. This effect of the ritual applies especially to the parents of the participants, who find themselves to be part of a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a community that shares one fate, according to Meier (1998:43). Meier therefore believes that eastern Germans do actually feel as one community based on the experience of the same past. He compares the practice of the *Jugendweihe* to other 'eastern German practices', like the continued voting for the PDS, which depend on an uncritical stance towards the oppressive aspects of the GDR system (Meier 1998:54). Meier acknowledges the existence of an eastern German identity and seems to relate the practice of the *Jugendweihe* to this. This identity needs to be based, in Meier's opinion, on the denial of the unjustness of the last regime.

Meier returns to his critical view of the ritual and its organisers in particular in his concluding chapter. He argues that the modern day organisers maintain a sphere of the sacral around the *Jugendweihe*. This sphere stems from the political religion which constituted the basis of the GDR *Jugendweihe*:

> Traits of mystery, of magic still cling to the conduct of this naturally and repetitive Jugendweihe/JugendFEIER, as we saw in the first chapter. Nothing in this mystery deters; the appealing character of the gift-celebration, which the SED attributed to the Jugendweihe, remains undiminished. Will the pressure of the customary allow the Jugendweihe to continue to be cultivated in the united Germany as part of the

[18] The second GDR consists of the social services the state provided, the facilities for child care for example, in contrast to the oppressive system.

> **D**eutschen **D**emokratischen **R**estbestandes in der bunten **R**epublik **D**eutschland's[19] [of the **G**erman **D**ecorative **R**emains in the **F**lowery **R**epublic of **G**ermany], as the title of an exhibition in Waren/Müritz in the summer of 1996 reads? (Meier 1998:240; emphasis in original)

To summarise: Meier argues that the *Jugendweihe* is maintained in eastern Germany as a custom and out of a sense of tradition. This tradition, however, is only made possible by overlooking the negative past of the ritual. This tendency of eastern Germans to view the GDR past in a nostalgic vein is also visible in other practices and seems to be a general feature of life. Despite the many problems of Meier's argument some of his points sound valid and will be considered later in the thesis. This includes, for example, the question of a relation between the practice of the *Jugendweihe* and eastern German identity. However, some other important points seem to be missing.

Neither Meier, nor Gandow or Hartmann have actually considered the ritual itself in detail, nor have they paid attention to the 'insider's' point of view. Due to their view of the *Jugendweihe* as a remains of GDR times they had great difficulties when explaining its current practice and looked for factors outside the ritual. They therefore saw the cause for the *Jugendweihe's* continuity in the allegedly problematic situation of eastern German society. This is for example a need for continuity and security in times of change which was supposed to be felt by many eastern Germans. Before I engage in an exploration of the points these scholars seem to neglect, I will consider some more arguments in this scholarly discourse.

Despite her different approach Wolbert, a German anthropologist, also notes the lack of content in the *Jugendweihe*. She bases her conclusion on a brief analysis of the ritual and on interviews with participants. Wolbert notes that the *Jugendweihe* seems to be empty; the ritual core seems to be missing; a 'consecration', as the name of the ritual indicates, is not actually taking place and 'nothing is done with the symbols' (Wolbert 1998:206; 201). This ritual core should have been the vow; the vow had, however, been discarded. Wolbert comes to two conclusions as to why the *Jugendweihe* is still practised. Using Gerholm's theory of ritual (1988:190-203),

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[19] The bold letters give the abbreviations of the two former Germanys: DDR [GDR] and BRD [FRG].

which emphasises form over content, she argues that the *Jugendweihe* is a case where a cultural practice was maintained as pure form over times of social change.[20] The high standardisation of the form made 'the loss of content go unnoticed' (Wolbert 1998:206). Wolbert sees the special reasons for a maintenance of the practice of the *Jugendweihe* in the fact that rituals 'suggest closeness and a similarity of feelings' (1998:202). She argues that eastern German people longed for the experience of such feelings during the times of social change and 'general uncertainty':

> Without necessitating the attendants to agree on the meaning of the ceremony the Jugendweihe nevertheless strengthens an awareness for the shared background, an awareness which a title of the *Spiegel* recently called "The East-feeling". (Wolbert 1998:203)

Wolbert's reference to a background which eastern Germans would share sounds very similar to Meier's argument of the *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*. She argues that this community that is based on shared experience would be reinforced in the *Jugendweihe*.

Only during the last few years did the scholarly discourse change its emphasis. Sociological and newer theological works have turned their focus from the pure fact of the practice of the ritual to the motivations of the participants.

Bolz *et al* published the findings of a conference on the *Jugendweihe*, which took place in 1997 (1998). The edition tackles the ritual's history but also includes the findings of workshops. These workshops had been concerned with reasons for participating in the *Jugendweihe* and the experience of the *Jugendweihe*. They therefore included interviews and observations of the ritual. The conclusions drawn in this volume mirror many of the themes above. They are however based on more research than had so far been the case. According to Griese and Gehring the *Jugendweihe* was in GDR times and is still held for primarily materialistic reasons rather than for ideological convictions (Gehring and Griese 1998:146; 153). Questions

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[20] Wolbert's reading of Gerholm is not quite clear to me. She seems to overlook Gerholm's argument that the views of the participants should be considered. Quite in contrast to Wolbert's argument he also says that rituals 'are ways of doing things with symbols' (Gerholm 1988:198).

of family tradition and cultural identity contribute furthermore to the popularity of the *Jugendweihe* according to Griese and Gehring. They, however strongly object to the wide-spread view that an ideological nostalgia is part of the motivation for the practice (Gehring and Griese 1998: 31).

With regard to the ritual the research groups note a relative flexibility and openness of structure. They therefore described the ceremonies as 'pluralistic, differentiated social events' (Gehring and Griese 1998:165). They furthermore agree with most other authors that a transition to adulthood is certainly not part of the *Jugendweihe* any more. However, rather than to neglect the possibility of any meaning in the *Jugendweihe*, they look for a new explanation. Gehring and Griese argue that in modern German society two transitions take place during an individual's life-time; one from childhood to teenagehood, the other from teenagehood to adulthood (Gehring and Griese 1998:167). A later edition by Griese (2000) continues on this argument and puts an even stronger emphasis on the relation between the phase of youth-hood or teenagehood and transition rituals in German society.

The scholarly discourse in Germany seems to have arrived at an agreement on some points.[21] The popularity of the ritual is a fact, which necessitated an identification of the reasons of this fact. Wensierski summarises most of the points that have been made frequently by identifying the various motives participants have for their involvement in the *Jugendweihe*. For the families the *Jugendweihe* is part of a family tradition in an eroding social world. The participating teenagers see it as a day where they are treated with respect, the organisations see the ritual as a lucrative deal. Wensierki comes to the conclusion, which I quoted at the beginning of this section, by considering the *Jugendweihe* as a 'successful synthesis' of family tradition, eastern German self-assertion and eastern German industry (Wensierski 2000:81).

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[21]I purposefully omitted any information with regard to the western or eastern German origin of the scholarly authors. There are several reasons for this. When these authors quote each other's view point this question is neglected. Furthermore, although in the beginning mainly western German authors and theologians criticised the ritual this seems to have changed. The more recent literature comes from both parts of Germany and reflects the points that were made above in reference to Wensierski (2000), Griese (2000) and Döhnert (2000) for example.

3.5. Conclusion

The *Jugendweihe* can be seen as a metaphor which possesses a number of identities. Which identity is chosen depends 'on the specific performative contexts' (Kondo 1990:306) and on the background of the speaker or listener. In this vein the metaphor *Jugendweihe* is used rhetorically in a debate about the evaluation of the East German past and culture. However, although any speaker can choose in which way he or she uses the metaphor *Jugendweihe*, this does not mean that the recipient agrees on this identification. Meier's case showed that his identity as a western German and a Christian caused a number of newspaper readers to add another dimension to his argument. Regardless of his discussion of the ritual's alleged purpose as a transition rite, they took his article to be an accusation of the ritual practice. This resulted in a discussion of the East German past which was seen to be under attack by the allegedly hegemonic western German.

It became apparent how this ambiguity of the metaphor causes misunderstandings due to a 'mis-recognition' of the object of the conversation (Bourdieu 1977:171). This was evident in the two public discussion rounds in particular. Whereas one group in this discussion asked for an explanation of the ritual's cosmology - a question that was based on their perception that this cosmology used to be provided by the now missing socialist ideology - the other group regarded the ritual to be a self-explanatory cultural attribute that possesses a history which reaches far beyond the GDR era. This point concerning the naturalness of the *Jugendweihe* was made most strongly in the association's argument of the legitimisation of the ritual.

The different identities were also at work in the German scholarly literature on the ritual, which I considered in the last section of this chapter. This literature was also of particular interest to us for the simple reason that it finally addressed the actual ritual, its structure and the opinion of the participants, which the public discourse seems to avoid. The early studies nevertheless showed clearly their different presumptions about the *Jugendweihe*. Based on the idea that the ritual was foremost defined by its being a socialist coming-of-age rite, which is proven by a number of

continuities in the ritual and in the association, the mostly theological authors argued that the *Jugendweihe* was unnecessary. Only in the late 1990s were authors able to move away from such conceived assumptions and examine the phenomenon in a more detailed fashion. This included the observation of the *Jugendweihe* ceremonies and interviews with participants. A consideration of these points brought a number of scholars (Gerholm and Griese 1998; Wensierski 2000; Wolbert 1998) to the conclusion that family tradition, eastern German identity or community and monetary reasons all come together in the continued practice of the *Jugendweihe*.

Questions of discontinuity and continuity come into play in all these conversations with regard to different aspects of the ritual. I pointed out frequently that the main criticism of the churches in particular is the alleged continuity of socialist ideology and of personnel and finances within the Interessenvereinigung. Meier's (1998) and Wolbert's (1998) struggle to find an explanation for the continued practice of the *Jugendweihe* is, however, based on the perception of discontinuity; a discontinuity that regards the former cosmology but also ritual elements, the vow in particular. The legitimisation of the Interessenvereinigung is, in contrast, based on continuity; a continuity which goes back until the nineteenths century.

It seems to me that further consideration of public discussions is unlikely to increase our understanding of the *Jugendweihe*. There are too many assumptions and underlying perceptions which cannot be determined by looking at the surface of the problem. I will therefore go on to examine the ritual itself in the following chapter.

All other questions, which were raised in this chapter, will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. A consideration of the participant's point of view will also address the question of family tradition (chapter six) and lead us to an examination of the role of the *Jugendweihe* in affirming an eastern German identity (chapter seven). The *Jugendweihe* can certainly not be considered in such a way without addressing its GDR past, which will be done in chapter five. However, after having looked at lengths at various theories about the 'meaning' of the modern *Jugendweihe* we will now look at the ritual in practice.

Chapter Four

The Voluntary 'Transition' Ritual and its Institutional Discourse

> Hence, ritual as a performative medium for social change emphasises human creativity and physicality: ritual doesn't mould people; people fashion rituals that mould their world.
> (Bell 1997:73)

4.0 Introduction

The last chapter explored the debate that surrounds the practice of the *Jugendweihe* in modern day eastern Germany; it indicated how certain groups in the German public perceive the *Jugendweihe*. Members of the churches had, for example, criticised the organisers of the ritual for a continuation of socialist ideology and practices. This view was challenged by the public opinion which regards the ritual as an 'ideology-free' coming-of-age ceremony. The organisers of the ritual supported this view. Furthermore there are scholarly authors who bring their own ideas into this public debate. Many scholarly works maintain that the ritual does not 'do anything'; that it has no content or meaning in modern German society. These conclusions are mainly based on the notion of the 'missing vow'.

Having outlined all this, I will in this chapter make some arguments of my own with regard to the 'content' of the ritual. I will then move on to an analysis of the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung in order to extract the notion of the person from this discourse. One main concern in the public debate with regard to the *Jugendweihe* is the transmission of values. The chapter will therefore also explore what values the Interessenvereinigung is concerned with and what notion of the person underpins these values. A final point of consideration will be the roots of the association's cosmology.

First of all, however, I will review the anthropological literature on ritual analysis in order to form a firm theoretical background for the case study that follows.

4.1. Literature Review

From the great amount of literature on ritual I will consider here only those studies and theories that relate to the argument of this thesis. Two main questions in all literature on rituals concern the meaning of ritual and the possibility for agency; the question whether people fashion rituals, or rituals mould people, as Bell puts it (1997:73). Although these questions are inherent to most works I will look at certain anthropologists here (Bell 1992; Douglas 1970; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Kertzer 1988; Lewis 1980; Rappaport 1999; Staal 1979). The chapter will then take a more specific approach and consider literature on transition rituals and life cycle rituals (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967), and rituals undergoing historical change (Bloch 1986). I will finally discuss two influential studies of secular rituals (Boissevain 1992; Moore and Myerhoff 1977).

4.1.1. General theories of ritual

Mary Douglas starts her analysis in *Natural symbols* with the prerequisite that 'the perception of symbols in general, as well as their interpretation, is socially determined' (Douglas 1970:28). This means that any symbol or ritual has a certain meaning according to the particular culture in which it appears. Douglas uses this postulate as a starting point in order to create a classificatory system of societies with regard to their ritual practices. She presents a diagram in which societies can be ordered according to: a) the relation between individual and group or 'group pressure' and b) the strength of cultural values or 'classifications' as she calls it (Douglas 1970:60). More relevant for our purposes here is, however, her view of rituals, and especially their function and meaning:

> It will help us to understand religious behaviour if we can treat ritual forms, like speech forms, as transmitters of culture, which are generated in social relations and which, by their selection and emphases, exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour. (Douglas 1970:42)

Douglas considers rituals to be the result of existing social structures and a means to re-produce both these social structures and the value system.

A similar function is attributed to rituals by Rappaport who defines them as the basic social act (1999). Ritual, according to Rappaport, is constitutive both for the social order and for the religious order or spiritual experience. In order to fulfil these fundamental functions ritual needs to be regarded as an act of communication (Rappaport 1999:50). Rappaport argues that certain messages are communicated in and by ritual. He distinguishes between two types, self-referential and canonical messages (Rappaport 2000:52); both kinds are interdependent.

Rituals furthermore create a link between the private and the public sphere (Rappaport 1999:97). Both spheres interlink by the fact that ritual transmits information both about social order and about the state of participants:

> The primary function or metafunction of liturgical performances is not to control behaviour directly but to establish conventional understandings, rules and norms in accordance with which everyday behaviour is *supposed* to proceed. (Rappaport 1999:123; emphasis in original)

This quotation makes Rappaport's functionalist approach appear less deterministic. However, Rappaport's argument that ritual establishes rules and norms necessitates consequently a social consensus on these rules, it means furthermore that their transmission in ritual is understood by all participants.

This functionalist and relatively deterministic stance is apparent in many anthropological works and has been criticised in recent years. Lewis is one anthropologist who explains that ritual meaning is not prescribed:

> What is always explicit about ritual, and recognised by those who perform it, is that aspect of it which states who should do what and when. It is practical. It guides action. ... Guidance on what to do is explicit but the reason for doing it, the meaning, motive or interpretations of the action may not be. (Lewis 1980:11)

Lewis argues that the meaning of a ritual can be 'indeterminate, private, various and individual' (1980:19). How meaning is constructed, known or expressed depends on the culture. However, he makes the point that although meaning may not be clearly laid out, the intention of the ritual is always known and understood by everyone. This means that ritual needs to possess a common purpose, a reason for its being conducted. What this purpose and the ritual itself mean to the different participants would then be a different matter according to Lewis. Gerholm extends this argument further by saying that 'any one of them [participants] may even walk away with a false view of the ritual' (1988:195). Gerholm, however, examines a particular and unconventional case; the case of rituals in the 'post-modern world' where attendants do not share or believe in the cosmology that is supposed to give this ritual its meaning.

Lewis' argument is indeed mainly a criticism of the conventional analysis of ritual: 'I would reassert that the anthropologist is not free to assume that everything occurring in ritual aims at mystery and has many meanings' (1980:31). In a similar fashion to Douglas and Rappaport, but in a more practical and immediate sense, Lewis sees that rituals affect society and individuals:

> Ritual is not done solely to be interpreted: it is also done (and from the point of the performers this may be even more important) to resolve, alter or demonstrate a situation. (Lewis 1980:35)

Lewis emphasises strongly the need to understand the insider's point of view and include it in the analysis. Another important point he insists on is to regard ritual as practice, as an action that displays or alters things, that does something; both with regard to the individual participants and to the wider group. Thirdly he draws our attention to the rules which govern ritual conduct (Lewis 1980: 19). The ruling of a

ritual is the only fact about it that is well known, public and clear. An observance of such rules should reveal important insights into the ritual as well as society.

Kertzer is a little harder to position in the debate about ritual function and meaning. In his study *Ritual, politics and power* he is concerned with symbols and ritual as a means of establishing political power (1988). In a similar fashion to functionalism he attributes fundamental meaning to symbols and ritual:

> Rituals give meaning to our world in part by linking the past to the present and the present to the future. This helps us cope with two human problems: building confidence in our sense of self by providing us with a sense of continuity ... and giving us confidence that the world in which we live today is the same world we will have to cope with in the future. (Kertzer 1988:10)

However, Kertzer does not agree that the power of symbolic devices depends on a shared interpretation of them. Symbols rather are condensed, multivocal and most importantly ambiguous (Kertzer 1988:11). That they are functional with regard to maintaining power depends on the fact that 'solidarity is produced by people acting together not people thinking together' (Kertzer 1988:76). Although Kertzer strongly emphasises the ambiguous aspect of symbols, his explanation as to why rituals are effective strikes a different chord:

> Successful ritual just has this structure. It creates an emotional state that makes the message incontestable because it is framed in such a way as to be seen inherent in the way things are. It presents a picture of the world that is so emotionally compelling that it is beyond debate. (Kertzer 1988:100)

Kertzer nevertheless turns our attention towards some important points. First, he stresses the effect that rituals have on the emotions of participants. He also puts much emphasis on ritual as communal action.

To regard ritual as practice and action is a point that has been made frequently in anthropological studies of ritual in recent years. Catherine Bell argued for this change of emphasis from 'ritual' as something static to 'ritualization' as a process or

action (1992). By such a shift of emphasis in the analysis she is able to re-introduce agency, a concept that had been widely excluded before, due to the stress of the prescriptive quality of ritual:

> The goal of ritualization as a strategic way of acting is the ritualization of social agents. Ritualization endows these agents with some degree of ritual mastery. (Bell 1992:141)

Bell uses insights from earlier works on performance and human agency (Burke 1973; Goffman 1959; Turner 1967) and applies them to ritual practice. The importance of a notion of agency in Bell's work becomes even more evident in a later book (1997). Agency is intrinsic to rituals in her opinion as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter proves (Bell 1997:73). She therefore argues that people are not determined by rituals but rather that they actively create their rituals. This interpretation does not exclude the idea that rituals make statements about society, but it changes the perspective slightly: people make statements about society and themselves in rituals. Furthermore, if the meaning of ritual is not prescribed but can differ individually, as Lewis maintains, then individuals will take action during the ritual according to their own interpretation of the ritual. This would mean that they can be agents.

This last point is also asserted in the work of Parkin. He explains that participants create 'tangled states' during the ritual, which they later try to disentangle thereby 're-imposing order on themselves and parts and places that make them up' (Parkin 1992:23-24). The states appear when participants interfere in one another's interpretations of the ritual's 'ruling'. This means also that the interpretation of ritual practice is not determined.

Another important point Parkin makes is his plea to analyse spatial direction within ritual. He regards ritual as consisting primarily of movements between points (Parkin 1992:18). Although spatial direction will not be a pre-dominant concern in the analysis of the *Jugendweihe* in this chapter, it will be treated with some attention because it sheds light on the ritual's meaning or effect.

The idea of 'ritualisation' has been taken further by Humphrey and Laidlaw in their study of the Jain rite *puja* (1994). Humphrey and Laidlaw attempt to explain

how ritual action comes about. They argue that this happens by everyday action becoming transformed into ritualised action thereby changing the relation between action and actor. Actors in ritual commit to a 'ritual stance' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:98). To take on this stance means that actors appear to do things only for the sake of the ritual and not for their own reasons, which is fundamentally different from everyday action. The 'ritual commitment' is then understood to be 'non-intentional, stipulated, archetypal and apprehensible' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:88). Once action has been transformed into ritual action, rituals are maintained because they gain an 'object-like existence'; they are both thought of and treated as 'natural kinds' by people (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:153). According to this argument Humphrey and Laidlaw review the idea of ritual as prescribed action by shifting the emphasis of this concept. It is not the action that is prescribed, they argue, but what that action can be, or can mean.

Though Humphrey and Laidlaw insist that the idea of the 'ritual commitment' does not deprive the participants of agency it seems to limit it considerably. Once individuals committed themselves to the ritual stance they are no longer in command of their actions, for 'the ritual' assumes authority in this respect. It seems though that if a person is involved in a ritual for a personal reason they actually maintain their agency. This even more so if we presume that the meaning of the ritual is neither clear nor obvious. In that case the participants will engage in an action, the meaning of which they have established individually; this seems a little different from Humphrey's and Laidlaw's argument.

Yet again, the main question seems to concern the meaning of ritual, or where the meaning needs to be found. Frits Staal has come to a clear conclusion with regard to this question:

> There is one simple hypothesis that accounts for all these puzzling facts: the hypothesis that ritual has no meaning, goal or aim. (Staal 1979:8)

Staal maintains that ritual should be seen as pure activity, where the rules and not the result govern the conduct. He admits the existence of some effects, but these are mere 'side effects', in his opinion, and not constitutive of ritual practice (Staal

1979:11). Amongst these effects can be: the creation of solidarity, morale and the constitution of a link to the ancestors. The meaninglessness of ritual is what makes the manifold different interpretations possible.

What Staal seems to argue is that ritual has not one basic and clearly formulated, obvious purpose or end. Rather, it has several, all of which are inherent to most rituals; none of these effects is, however, pre-dominant; they are 'side effects'.

4.1.2 Transitional rituals

From this short outline of studies and theories of ritual, mainly concerned with the meaning and aim of the ritual practice, I will move on to consider literature that deals primarily with transition or life-cycle rituals. These rituals seem by their very definition to aim at a certain goal; this goal is the change of status of an individual or of a group of people.

Turner is certainly the most well known authority with regard to transition rites (1969; 1967). His works stand out by their deep and extensive analysis of ritual and symbols. Turner's work is based on an earlier classification of ritual, which had been proposed by Van Gennep (1960). Van Gennep was especially concerned with what he called rites of passage. These are rituals taking place at turning points in a person's life leading the person from one phase in life to another usually altering or re-defining status and membership of groups. The most well known and commonly mentioned rites of passage are birth rites, coming-of-age rites and/or marriage, and funerals. Each of these consist of three different and distinguishable phases: separation, transition and incorporation (Van Gennep 1960:11). Depending on the ritual any one of these can be especially elaborate; the ritual is therefore marked off from other rites by its emphasis.

Turner's main focus lays in the phase of liminality (1969; 1967), which rites of transition encompass according to Van Gennep. Turner labelled this phase a state 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967:93-111). It is a phase and state that people enter when they are in transition from one culturally defined status to another. The most important element for Turner is that this liminal state is utterly undefined; it is therefore open to all possibilities:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner 1969:95)

The only structure at work during the liminal period is constituted by the relations between the neophytes between them and their instructors. While the latter relations are characterised by authority and obedience; the former are based on 'complete equality' (Turner 1967:100). Although it may seem that this quality of unstructuredness may result in relative freedom for the neophytes by turning them into 'outlaws', Turner believes this would be a wrong conclusion. The symbols of monsters and notions of monstrosity that are applied in such rituals are supposed to show the neophytes that behaviour outside the rules and norms of the society is impossible or will result in unimaginable consequences (Turner 1967:106). With regard to symbols Turner engages in an argument similar to that of Douglas (1970) or Rappaport (1999), namely that these 'sacra' are the 'symbolic template of beliefs and values in a given culture, its archetypical paradigm and ultimate measure' (Turner 1967:108). The structure of society is therefore reflected and reinforced in rituals.

Gennep's and Turner's work is still the basis for all investigations into rites of passage. It has been taken up in La Fontaine's more recent work, which deals with initiation rites more generally (1986). La Fontaine discusses certain topics like secret societies and oaths by exploring one or two case examples. She thereby gains insights into some questions that are important for our case, for example, the question of tests, transmission of knowledge, the role of the audience. I will not discuss her book in length here but rather refer to La Fontaine when arriving at the particular point in question.

More recent are the works of Rasmussen and Jamieson on transition rituals (both 2001). Rasmussen describes how ageing is performed in Tuareg rituals and how this performance displays very clearly the relations between generations (Rasmussen 2001:277-303). Jamieson turns the analysis upside down in his very interesting account on coming of age in *Miskitu* society (2001:257-272). This society lacks any transition rituals that would precede marriage. Jamieson argues that this creates great tension between the individual's feelings and the constraints put on them by culturally engrained values and models (Jamieson 2001:257). These tensions, which are

experienced especially strongly by young women, can be expressed in a public display of 'hysteria'; a sickness that is socially accepted in young women. Jamieson interprets this sickness to be furthermore a struggle for recognition of new adult status of young women.

Bloch's work is of some interest to us since he combines a study of transition ritual with a study of its history (1986); it needs to be noted though that Bloch's focus on the politico-economic circumstances depends on his Marxist perspective.

Bloch initially characterises ritual as being positioned 'somewhere between an action and a statement' (Bloch 1986:10), which poses 'a genuine difficulty' to every anthropologist (1986:10). In order to overcome this problem he examines the ritual in the course of history. One insight he reaches by taking this approach is, for example, the fact that the originators of change of the Merina circumcision rite seem to have been conscious of the political implications of their action and 'that this motivated what they did' (1986:162). This means that 'insiders' can consciously initiate change in cultural practices, which points to the possibility of agency. However, regardless of the artificial fashioning of the ritual by some *Merina* rulers, Bloch argues that the ritual appears archetypal: 'The general image created by ritual is, within the ritual, perfectly clear and unchangeable' (1986:175). He believes this to hold true for all religious rituals across the world. This view once again seems to challenge the argument outlined above, that the perception of a ritual might be ambiguous.

Although the *Merina* ritual was changed frequently throughout two hundred years, Bloch also notes the recurrence of ritual elements that had once been dismissed. The reason he gives for this is the power of recollection of participating individuals: 'Thus, in periods when a ritual such as this is undergoing a period of growth, the old will be questioned about what they can remember from the past' (Bloch 1986:166). Although the circumcision ritual 'created the image of timelessness' (1986:185), Bloch argues that rituals are nevertheless not actually time-defying. In order to answer the question of ritual change we need to study those situations and forces that actually lead to change. In *Merina* the changing politico-economic circumstances did not have an impact on the ritual, as Bloch argues. This means then that the ritual would affect how the changed circumstances are seen and 'therefore to a certain extend mould them' (Bloch 1986:194).

4.1.3 Secular rituals

Most theories presented above depend on the presumption that rituals are religious. However, many rituals of modern society are not and the main concern of this thesis, the *Jugendweihe*, is a secular rite. The idea of secular rituals nevertheless re-introduces a problem: the definition of 'ritual'. The question of a definition of secular rites is especially important since without it, any formalised act could be regarded as belonging to this category. I will show how this question influences the different studies.

Moore and Myerhoff edited a collection of papers which deal with purely secular rituals (1977). In the introduction they define ritual as a 'vessel which holds something' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8). This is a very broad definition and only refers to the formal aspects of ritual. The collection of papers in this volume and the examples Moore and Myerhoff give in the introduction show that nearly any formalised action is regarded as belonging to this category. The book includes political rituals, gatherings, birthday celebrations, healing rites, and also legal hearings (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:11). Despite this broad definition Moore and Myerhoff still regard rituals as sharing a number of outcomes: the explicit symbols and meanings, implicit statements, social relationships that are affected, and finally culture vs. chaos (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:16). Implicit statements need to be conveyed by the anthropologist; they usually regard statements about the society or relationships within it. Such relationships can be affected by ritual, which is the third point in their list. Moore and Myerhoff make this point more strongly later in their study. They state that the ultimate function of ritual is to act against chaos in cultures by its pure nature as form, because cultures are 'built on the edge of the abyss' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:16).

Eva Hunt pursues this idea in a discussion of phenomena of ritualisation in the interaction between Indians and Mestizos in Mexico in the same volume. She concludes that ritualism tends to appear when there is opposition or potential conflict between individuals in different positions or between groups of different ethnic origin. Ceremonialism therefore acts as 'a defence mechanism in the psychological sense' and as 'a neutral behaviour frame' (Hunt 1977:144).

Ritual is therefore regarded as a mirror of relationships and especially conflicts in a society. These conflicts are acted out during the ritual in a formalised framework, the emotions are channelled in this process. In this theory ritual seems to act as a sort of punch bag, which absorbs the aggression directed against it without any consequences; in this way it helps to resolve social conflict.

Another major work on secular rituals is Boissevain's edition of essays on European rituals (1992). The edition explores the phenomenon of an increase of revitalised rituals and celebrations in the 1980s in Europe. Boissevain distinguishes between different modes of revival: renanimation, resurrection, retraditionalisation and folklorisation (1992:7). He gives a number of reasons as to why there was such a revival in ritual practice in Europe in the 1980s (Boissevain 1992:10-11). The post-war period had been characterised by industrialisation and accompanying secularisation. After some years, however, the standard of living had increased in many European countries; the states had developed social safety nets. Now awareness of environmental issues came about and facilitated a rediscovery of the once discarded 'rural way of life' (Boissevain 1992:10). This went hand in hand with a reestablishment of festivals and ceremonies. This revitalisation of rituals furthermore went also along with a renegotiation of identity and realignment of boundaries. Boissevain notes that the improvement of living conditions resulted in greater independence but consequently also in greater isolation of individuals (1992:10). If this is regarded as another reason for the renewal of rituals, it means ultimately that rituals are a source for community and feelings of solidarity. The case studies that are examined in Boissevain's edition consequently belong to the class of communal rituals: political rituals, public celebrations, pilgrimage, carnival and a patron saint's festival.

4.1.4 Conclusion

In this limited selection of anthropological literature on ritual certain points recur. Ritual is regarded as formalised and standardised behaviour, which follows certain rules. Furthermore, it is supposed to display or reflect relations within society, social norms and values, and to reproduce these. Apart from these very basic facts there is much disagreement. Exactly how ritual affects the individual and society is debated, as

is the question of whether ritual leaves room for a multitude of meanings or whether it is based on social consensus. The issue of agency is inherent in these questions. Many of the works cited above make similar points; but they seem to be in disagreement because they either use a different vocabulary or put a slightly different emphasis on certain aspects. Staal's argument is probably the one that comes closest to bringing all of the above mentioned points together: ritual itself has no meaning, but it has 'side-effects'. It seems nevertheless that things are a little more complex. It seems that for any ritual there will be one main acknowledged purpose or intention as Lewis says (1980:19) and with regard to this Gerholm remarks that: 'ritual makes a message "heavy" and a pledge "demanding", for it is not only an individual redefinition of a situation but a collective one' (Gerholm 1988:201). This of course especially in respect to transition rites.

The most pressing problem with regard to secular ritual is the question of how to define this category. Since I refer to the *Jugendweihe* as a 'secular transition ritual' it needs to be explained why I have chosen this definition and how it is justified. This is answered as easily as it is asked. The *Jugendweihe* is regarded as a 'coming-of-age rite' by its organisers, the participants and their families, the German public. With regard to the latter group examples have been given in the last chapter. With regard to the organisers' point of view examples will follow in this chapter; the participants' interpretations will be discussed in chapter six. La Fontaine points out that 'the [transition] rites are self-fulfilling in one sense' because 'there is no universal natural definition of adulthood; such definitions are always social' (La Fontaine 1988:185). For the case here this means that since the *Jugendweihe* is defined as a transition ritual by the public, it consequently functions as one. This chapter will show in what respects this is the case. In a similar vein I refer to the *Jugendweihe* as 'secular' because it is explicitly argued by its organisers that the *Jugendweihe* is the alternative ritual to *Konfirmation*; it is non-religious in nature (chapter three). Finally, I will regard the *Jugendweihe* as a ritual because it is again understood to be such in the mind of the German public. Now, although 'our Jain [German] friends' comments helped us to reach our views, we are not involved in the same kind of argument as they are and we are not saying the same thing' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:2). It

will be shown in the following pages that it is also justifiable to call the *Jugendweihe* a 'secular rite of transition' from the anthropological point of view.

Further chapters will show the changes the ritual underwent, some of which have already been pointed out in chapter two and three. The case of the *Jugendweihe* is one in which the ritual did actually change with the changing environment (Bloch 1986:185). At least it seems to be such a case on first sight when one concentrates in the ritual elements (chapter three: 63-64; 67). However, chapter six will illustrate why one might well argue at the same time that the ritual did not change that much after the Fall of the Wall. The discussion in chapter six will also add some points to the question of the extent to which meaning and interpretation of ritual is prescribed. Let us now move on to consider the ritual itself and explore why and how it is a secular rite of transition.

4.2. The *Jugendweihe*

4.2.0 Introduction

After having summarised the secondary literature on the topic of secular transition rituals I will now come to the main object under consideration: the *Jugendweihe*. The two main organisations that offer the *Jugendweihe* today are the Humanistischer Verband and the Interessenvereinigung für humanistische Jugendarbeit und Jugendweihe (chapter two:31-33). Both these associations have only become active in eastern Germany after 1989 and they have very distinct roots. The Humanistischer Verband was a West German association, which only spread into eastern Germany in the early 1990s whereas the Interessenvereinigung developed out of the GDR Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*. The approach to the ritual therefore differs between these two main associations in crucial aspects. However, although this chapter is allegedly concerned with the modern *Jugendweihe* the text will focus on the *Jugendweihe* as it is conducted by the Interessenvereinigung. This solution to the overwhelming amount of material offers itself for a number of reasons. The most

straightforward of these is that the Interessenvereinigung reaches the great majority of the fourteen year olds.[1] Another and more important reason concerns the aim of this thesis which is to examine the continuity and discontinuity of the *Jugendweihe* along with changing notions of the person in post-socialist eastern Germany. It will therefore be more revealing to focus on the Interessenvereinigung. I am well aware, though, that the presence of a former West German association active in eastern Germany and its different mode of practice also says a considerable amount about social change. Information gained from the Humanistischer Verband will therefore be included in this chapter whenever it provides an appropriate means of comparison.

The data used in this chapter has been collected during the author's field research in the towns of Magdeburg and Schönebeck. Five rituals have been observed in total during the spring and summer of 2001. Three of those were conducted by the Interessenvereinigung. The two others had been organised by the Humanistischer Verband. The observation included attendance at and observation of the ritual, the taking of pictures and recording of the speeches. The description below is of one of these rituals; namely that which took place in Schönebeck on the 19th of May at 11.00 a.m. Variations of ritual elements between the different ceremonies will be discussed in the analysis.

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[1] 1,803 teenagers participated in the ceremonies of the Interessenvereinigung Magdeburg in 2001. The Humanistischer Verband in Magdeburg had 215 participants in the same year. There is no office of the Humanistischer Verband in Schönebeck all teenagers interested in the coming-of-age rite will therefore go to the Interessenvereinigung Schönebeck.

4.2.1. The transition ritual

4.2.1.1. 'A day of joy...'

'Whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text.'

(James Clifford 1986:115)

I will take the idea that ethnographies are inescapably texts about experience to its logical consequence in the following account by describing a cultural practice as experienced by the observer. After this narrative of the observer's 'subjective experience' of the ceremony I will engage in an analysis of the ritual and compare some crucial points to other *Jugendweihen*, which were also witnessed. This very subjective way of presentation has been chosen since 'if we are condemned to tell stories we cannot control, may we not, at least, tell stories we believe to be true' (Clifford 1986:121). Bearing this in mind I would now like to take you, patient reader, on a journey with me.

We are going to attend a *Jugendweihe* in the restaurant Brauner Hirsch in Schönebeck. It is a bright morning in the middle of May. We leave the house to meet a taxi since the restaurant where the Interessenvereinigung Schönebeck organises its *Jugendweihen* is a little out of town. The taxi drives us through a town not yet fully awake, which we leave behind on our way to the venue. Just after a bend we suddenly see the place. The street is packed with cars that are trying to find a parking space in the rather small parking lot opposite the restaurant. The driver of our taxi slows down in order not to run into the traffic jam.

Having left the car we are already in the middle of the crowd. Smartly dressed people of all age groups are lingering around in the courtyard of the restaurant (fig.1). It is possible to make out families: parents and children, often with grandparents. Each group also has with them one teenager aged about fourteen. There are also some smaller children and some older teenagers who have obviously come to see the *Jugendweihe* of their sister, brother or cousin. The teenagers leave their families and disappear around the corner of the building. The families then start to move inside. While walking in we take a look around. The hall can accommodate approximately

300 to 400 people. There is a balcony that runs along three sides of the room and a stage at the front. The hall is filled with rows of chairs which are broken up in the middle to leave a gangway leading up to the stage. The whole room is decorated with flowers. They sit in huge bouquets on the stage and hang as garlands from the balcony. Several microphones stick out between the buckets full of flowers on stage, above which there is a poster saying: 'A day of joy, a day of thankfulness, a day of presents, and good words, a day of contemplation, that is the day of the *Jugendweihe*' (fig.2). In the back of the hall a person sits at a table full of technical appliances. He seems to be dealing with the sound system. A photographer is also putting up his equipment just in front of the stage.

Once everybody has come in and found their seats a choir goes on stage. It has eight members, four women and four men of different ages (fig.2). They start singing, it is a piece by Beethoven titled *Welcome*. During this performance we suddenly hear noise in the back of the hall. The people in the audience turn around to look. The noise has been caused by the participants, who are marching into the hall in a procession. Flashlights go off as parents take pictures of their children. The participants are assembled in pairs, a boy and a girl walking next to one another. At the end of the procession follow some pairs of only boys; there was obviously not an equal number of participants of both sexes so that some of the boys had to pair off. They are all in formal clothes. The girls in long wide trousers, according to the fashion and the boys in suits or at least jackets if they wear jeans. The girls' hair has been carefully styled and some also wear make up. Many are in high heels, which is obvious by the awkward way in which they walk. Having processed through the hall, on arriving at the first row of chairs, the pairs split up and the girls sit down in the rows on the right hand side of the room, the boys in those at the left hand side.

The choir continues by singing two more songs *Little grain of hope* and *When I left*.[2] Both songs are essentially concerned with life and meaning in life. After this a member of the ensemble, a young lady, reads a text by Eva Strittmatter. The short poem is again about the meaning of life or more specifically, its values. It says that most things in life are free, like laughter or love. As children we take them for

[2] German: 'Kleines Körnchen Hoffnung'; 'Als ich fortging'

granted, as adults we turn them into goods linked to duties and expectations; this finally leads to disappointment. Another two songs follow, both solos. The first is called *Longing for emotions* and the second *When I was fourteen*.[3] The second song deals with not feeling the right way, being teased, problems at school, and trying to be different by faking a parent's signature on one's school report. It also talks about falling in love with the teacher and not being taken seriously. It is sung by a women and obviously tells the story of a girl. The song is greeted with laughter. The solo after this is sung by a man and the title is *Now you are fourteen*.[4] Both songs seem to belong together. One tells a story of the singer's personal experiences at that age, thereby speaking of the past. The other deals with the problem more from the teenagers' point of view, talking about the present. It mentions things like getting the passport with an awful picture, the magazine *Playboy* getting boring, ordering new clothes via the Internet and says that trusting oneself will be hard. Once this last song is finished a middle aged man goes up to the lectern. The program informs us that he is going to deliver the speech at this *Jugendweihe*. The program only contains the speaker's name. No information is provided regarding his role or link to the association. He starts speaking without any further introduction. The speech lasts about fifteen minutes. It is relatively quiet in the hall during this time, which creates the impression that everyone is listening.

When the speaker has finished a young lady takes his place behind the lectern. She says: 'I would like to ask the first group of the girls to come on stage and to receive their *Jugendweihe*.' The first group of teenagers goes on stage. They line up to face the audience. The young lady at the microphone then introduces the act a second time by saying: 'To do *Jugendweihe* have decided...'; she then reads out the names of the individual participants. The named person makes a step forward. While this happens the speaker and another lady start to walk along the line; they congratulate each of the participants individually. The speaker furthermore hands the teenagers the certificate, which states that they have taken part. These two 'figures of authority' are followed by a young girl and a boy who give out a book. A child of about six years of age finally hands each participant a red rose (fig.3). When all acts

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[3] 'Sehnsucht nach Gefühlen'; 'Als ich vierzehn war'
[4] 'Jetzt bist du vierzehn'

have been accomplished the photographer in front of the stage tries to catch the teenagers' attention and takes a picture of them together. Then the young people leave the stage. They make room for the next group to go up. Since these groups are organised according to the seating plan they consist of either girls or boys. About six to eight participants are on stage together each time. While this happens there is much movement in the audience. The parents get up to take pictures of their children or to video this important event.

The entertainment program continues once the last group has left the stage. The next songs deal with prospects of the future: finishing school, having to leave the familiar environment of the school yard. There is also a modern pop song: *Now I can fly*. Flying might be meant here as a metaphor for the growing independence of the young people. Another song which is titled *Such a man* also addresses the question of future possibilities.[5] Then the second recited text follows. It is called *Toast to one freshly dedicated*.[6] It takes the audience into the middle of a family celebration of the *Jugendweihe*. The father stands up and toasts his son. The text is read out by a member of the choir. It is about the beginning of an independent life, all the prospects of the future and the problem of having to make the right decisions. After this the choir sings the *Unesco song*.

Once the music has finished it is announced that the 'Words of thanks' are to follow. The lady, who congratulated the teenagers earlier on, comes on stage again. She thanks the teenagers for being there and says she hopes they enjoyed 'the show'. She addresses them directly and in an informal fashion. She also thanks the parents, the artists and her helpers. It seems now that she has been organising the ceremony and is therefore connected with the Interessenvereinigung. She then hands a bouquet to the head of the choir and to the speaker. She also gives a red rose to her helpers. After this intermission the choir starts another song: *Conquest of paradise* by Vangelis. The teenagers get up and proceed out of the hall; they are again assembled in pairs. The audience gets up to watch them, some people take pictures. Then some sit down again, others remain standing. After a little while the families start to collect their belongings and follow the participants outside. The young people have pictures

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[5] 'So ein Mann'
[6] 'Toast für einen Frischgeweihten'

taken of them outside. Once they are done they go to find their families and friends. People get into their cars and head off to their private celebrations. The whole ceremony has lasted about an hour.

4.2.1.2. A day of change? - Analysis

The setting of the *Jugendweihe* is very similar to a school assembly. The room is split into two main areas. One is the stage at the front. It overlooks the second and much bigger area: the hall in which the audience is seated. The room is decorated with flowers which creates a festive atmosphere and emphasises the importance of this occasion. However, the decorations alone still do not distinguish the event from any other festivity. Furthermore, the amount of floral decorations apparent in Schönebeck is relatively unusual. The *Jugendweihen* in Magdeburg take place in a much plainer environment. There were not any noticeable decorations in the town hall (AMO) in Magdeburg apart from a lit sign above the stage saying: 'Jugendweihe 2000'. A similar poster is hanging above the stage in Schönebeck. These posters state the day's purpose explicitly, and therewith add the one thread to the event that makes it specifically a *Jugendweihe*; they literally 'label' the event. There are nevertheless more markers which distinguish the *Jugendweihe*. Those markers are contained within the features of the ritual and can only be pinpointed if the observer knows the *Jugendweihe* in advance: the collection of people meeting here, the clothes, the actions of the teenagers, the time of year and day the occasion takes place for example. The time at which the ceremonies take place are Saturdays in April and May. The venues are usually town or community halls and restaurants. They are attended by the fourteen year olds and their families or friends. *Jugendweihen* are both festive and solemn occasions and all participants and guests will be dressed accordingly.

Apart from the posters there is no explicit and direct introduction to the event on the part of any ritual actors or specialists. The only other explicit indicator is a program which every participant and guest receives in advance. Again this program only bears the name of the occasion and then lists the different points of entertainment

and ritual action. It is not until the speech that the name and purpose of the occasions is uttered and explained. The speech nevertheless is not delivered until about half way through the whole occasion. This lack of explanation seems to indicate that the organisers infer the existence of a common consensus with regard to the quality and meaning of the event. A reference to the ritual's purpose being unnecessary is one possible explanation for the silence at the beginning of the ceremony. There is nevertheless a second possible interpretation. It might also be that there is a lack of resources for explanation; a certain emptiness in the discourse of the organisation. The organisation itself is also never mentioned as the organiser of the ritual. The organisers remain in the background, having only provided the facilities for this happening that is to be attributed a life and an explanation of its own. I will return to this lack of explanation and introduction of the event later in this chapter.

During the ceremony in Schönebeck the Interessenvereinigung steps into the foreground twice. It is mentioned once by the speaker as the provider of voluntary youth work, which the young people should make use of. This reference to the association is, however, not related to the ritual itself. Later in the ceremony the head of the office in Schönebeck congratulates the young people and thanks them along with the entertainers. However, this lady is never introduced in her role as head of this office. Unless people know her personally, they will not know for whom she is speaking. Admittedly, many parents will know her since they enrolled their children with her. Many teenagers will also know her having either accompanied their parents in the enrolment procedure or having gone through the rehearsal with her. This lady is however not the only employee at the office, which means that there remains a fair number of people who do not know her. Bearing in mind that she has not been introduced in her role as a member of the Interessenvereinigung her action on stage seems to be disconnected from the association as provider of the ritual. It seems here again that the ritual is regarded as self-explanatory; it has been attributed with 'an object-like existence' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:267). Any organiser of the ritual will therefore remain in the background in order not to disturb this impression. This quality of the *Jugendweihe* as a self-sufficient cultural practice underlies most of the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung and is crucial for the association's legitimisation (chapter three:56-57). It is furthermore linked to the use of the ritual in

the GDR area. To regard the ritual as an institution of the society and culture, enables the organisation to treat its own activities as non-related to the dealings of the GDR state. This stance of the Interessenvereinigung may explain the lack of direct reference to the ritual and the organisation during the ceremony.

After these preliminary remarks let us now turn our attention to the actual ceremony. The ceremony can roughly be divided into three main parts, a phase of separation, liminality and incorporation (Van Gennep 1960:11). Any of these parts is dominated by a certain kind of action. Altogether there are two different kinds of action, yet again carried out by two different groups of ritual actors. The first, the one which starts and finishes the ceremony, is the entertainment program. It is presented and dominated by the choir. The entertainment program is broken up into two main blocks by the ritual core actions. These are lead by 'ritual specialists' and positioned in the middle of the ceremony.

The term 'ritual specialist' needs to be treated with some caution. There do not actually seem to be any 'proper' ritual specialists in the *Jugendweihe*. It is at least impossible to identify one single person as the leader of the events. Different people take the lead at different points and regarding different actions; none of these, however, can be called an actual 'specialist'. It is rather the case that their function at the ceremony turns them into a ritual leader for a short period of time. To this group belong for example the speaker and the young lady from the choir who calls the teenagers on stage. One would expect a 'proper' specialist, who could lead through the ceremony like a moderator, to come from the Interessenvereinigung, the organisation that conducts the ceremonies. Regardless of this, the organisation remains mainly in the background as has been described above. Despite these reservations I will keep referring to the main actors as ritual specialist in order to differentiate them from other people. These other people, the participants or the entertainers, also become active during the ceremony; they, however, do so in a less guiding fashion.

The two groups and classes of actions I defined above, the entertainment and the ritual actions, are not distinct from one another. They overlap with regard to time

and place as well as personnel. Some examples of such overlaps which will make this point more clearly will be illustrated in the following pages.

The ceremony starts with a song from the choir and the procession of the participants into the room. In pairs, boy and girl together, they walk in and move in a straight line along the rows of chairs to the front of the hall. There they sit down in the first rows of the chairs. In the course of sitting down the pairs split into single sex groups, each inhabiting a different half of the room. I will not get involved here in a deep analysis of this action as a symbol of gender differentiation. The way the procession and the seating had been arranged in Schönebeck is unique to this place. Boys and girls were not separated in Magdeburg for example. I will therefore only make a few points about why this distinction is made in the smaller town.

The main problem the organisers of the *Jugendweihe* have to solve is how to get the teenagers onto the stage in such an order that the individualised certificates arrive at the right addressee although the giver does not know the names of the participants. In Magdeburg this was done by simply reading out the participant's name and therewith calling them on stage individually. This will, however, result in the fact that people get up from anywhere, from the middle of the row, someone else from the end of another row; this causes some stir and might spoil the ceremonial atmosphere. To avoid this the organisers in Schönebeck tried to group the participants together so they would, when named, get up together. For this purpose it was handy to arrange the boys and the girls into the two opposite parts of the room. The seating order then again allowed for a procession where a boy and girl would walk next to another as long as there was an equal number of male and female participants. Since this was not the case in Schönebeck the remaining boys formed pairs amongst themselves for the procession. The 'gendered' procession is therefore rather a side effect of the solution to a practical problem; a side effect which nevertheless was welcome. The two sexes are paired in the procession, according to the social convention of heterosexual partnerships. This fact indicates an allowance or expectation to engage in relationships and to find a partner that is proposed to the teenagers in the ritual. If we regard this element to be part of the *Jugendweihe* as a coming-of-age ritual, we could argue that the allowance to find a partner is an aspect of the change of status. However, there

are no further practices or symbols that would substantiate this argument. There is no physical contact between the two people, no holding hands; there is no clothing convention that would mirror or mimic that at weddings. We can therefore say that the social and cultural convention of cross-sex bonding is reflected in this action but we cannot say more than that.

Once the teenagers have taken their seats the choir becomes predominant for the next part of the ceremony. During this time of songs and recitations, the teenagers as well as the audience remain in their seats listening. Although both audience and participants might appear very similar here, they inhabit the same space and are similarly engaged as spectators, they are distinct from one another. The participants are already secluded from the public before the ceremony starts. They remain separate during the whole course of events. It is, however hard to argue in the case of the *Jugendweihe* that the young people are 'secluded' from the whole of society, even only symbolically, as Turner describes it (1967:98). This phase of seclusion is not as elaborate as in most other transition rituals considered by anthropologists (Lewis 1980).[7] However, when the young people walk in by themselves and amongst themselves they constitute a distinct group that does not interact or mingle with the audience in the hall. This audience has become a group of spectators, which regards the processing teenagers with curiosity. The individual families have dissolved into the mass of visitors. This audience now represents the adult community of society into which the participants are going to be initiated; they will have to approve of the teenagers and permit their change of status. This means that the first part of the ceremony can be characterised as 'separation' (Van Gennep 1960:11)

The movement of the procession is directed towards the stage at the front. It is broken up when the participants reach the front rows and sit down. The movement comes to a halt but it does not stop; there remains an anticipation of this movement that is directed towards the stage. This direction takes the teenagers away from the audience, who in contrary fashion are stable and permanently fixed in their place. The 'spatial direction' in the ceremony is therefore an indicator of the liminal state of the participants (Parkin 1992:18). The teenagers sit with the audience, but at the same

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[7] It is worth considering whether ritual seclusion would be possible in complex modern society, the multi-faceted structure of which will make any entire separation from society very hard.

time they expect to move away from them; the action on stage is their final aim. They sit closer to the stage than all other attendants of the ceremony, but they are not yet on it. They are the most important attendants of the ceremony, but they are not yet active. All these points show quite clearly that the participants are 'in between'. Passive, although they should be active, active although they seem to be passive spectators.

For the next half hour the teenagers are addressed, reminded, advised and ultimately taught. This educational aspect is carried out in the entertainment program and reaches its high point with the speech. Let us, however, remain with the entertainment for a moment. This program takes up the ceremony's theme of coming of age and problematises it. The songs and texts featured at this *Jugendweihe* tell stories about life, the meaning of life, and the process of growing up. They are mostly oriented towards the future. Take for example the two songs about finishing school and the one about the future possibilities of a young man. These songs indicate an ending of some sort and with that a new start. It is this start, which point towards the future. This is the future of the participants, the imminent adulthood which opens up new possibilities and creates the necessity for new decisions.

This can be argued neatly for the *Jugendweihe* in Schönebeck, but such a well configured entertainment program is not standard. The entertainment in Magdeburg for example was quite different from the one described here, it entailed classical music but also a teenage ballet and modern pop songs. An analysis of the meaning of this program would be much harder and admittedly might escape us in parts. Nevertheless, the way the entertainment program is set out in Schönebeck proves the cultural notion that the *Jugendweihe's* purpose is transition, and the practice reinforces this notion in return. The main themes that can be derived from this program are the idea of growing up, and related to this the orientation of the ritual towards the future and questions about meaning and values in life. All these issues are raised in the songs; I will point out shortly why they are not entirely answered.

The central point of this teaching process is, as established above, the speech. Still remaining passively seated, the young people are talked to from above. Giving advice seems to be the main purpose of this speech. The speech mirrors the themes that have already occurred in the songs and recitals. Although there are many different

speeches (three or four different speakers alone in Schönebeck) the main themes and the tone of the speech are usually similar. The speeches address the topic of finishing childhood and growing up. They discuss the question of growing independence and usually link it tightly to duties and social norms that should be adhered to. They often criticise modern society and mention the dangers of growing up, including choosing the wrong groups to hang out with, and uncritical adoption of consumerism and materialism. The speeches furthermore propagate a set of values that is based on modesty and an emphasis of interpersonal relationships over individualism (section 2 of this chapter). However, although the speeches talk about growing up and although the ritual is obviously understood to be a coming-of-age rite, they use progressive or even future tense expressions: 'you will get more independent', 'you are growing up', 'you will finish school' (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:18; speech 26th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.). The speaker in Schönebeck points out directly that the teenagers will not be 'adult' tomorrow (speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.). Growing up is perceived as a process; it will take some time. However, if growing up is supposed to be a beginning, something needs to have finished; this is seen as the phase of childhood. The end of childhood is therefore what is actually celebrated in the *Jugendweihe*.

What the participants are supposed to become on this day or what they are already, are *Jugendliche*. *Jugend*, youth-hood or teenager-hood, and *Jugendliche*, young people or teenagers, is a phase in life as well as a distinct age group in German culture.[8] Similarly to the terms 'child' and 'adult', the term '*Jugendlicher*', defines an identity for its bearer, and is accompanied by certain expectations regarding this person's status and behaviour. The beginning of this phase is linked to puberty and therefore defined biologically; its finishing point, however, is not clearly marked.[9] It is linked to occupation or level of maturity in terms of behaviour and complexion, and probably also family status; the phase can last until the mid or even late twenties. This phase of 'teenagehood', as I will call it in the following, is in itself liminal. It is clearly

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[8] German sociologists described the phase of youthood as 'unstructured' or 'dis-structured' (Feige 2000:59-62); the category teenagers (*Jugend*) is also understood to be a 'part-culture', similar to subculture (Feige 2000:62-65; also Gehring 2000:89-93).

[9] La Fontaine remarks that adulthood seems to be defined socially rather than biologically in most societies (La Fontaine 1988:185).

and distinctly understood to be a phase in between childhood and adulthood that lacks certain norms and regulations, which apply to the other phases.[10] Children are relatively free from responsibility; they are entirely under the guidance of their parents and other relatives. Adults are seen as independent and responsible people. The teenagers now are in transition from one state to the other. As a liminal stage the phase of teenagehood is regarded as needing guidance and a framework. These are provided symbolically in the *Jugendweihe*; they are expressed in the songs and the speech. The ceremony is therefore a condensed, intense session of advice, which is given by the older generation to the youngsters. In one hour the teenagers are made familiar with all problems they might encounter in the near future and are advised on how to deal with them. Most of this advice is expressed in the speech which puts those points the songs have introduced in a coherent argument.

The rituals held in Magdeburg contain another element that emphasises the aspect of guidance even more. The young participants there receive a *Geleitspruch*, a guiding proverb. Such *Geleitsprüche* are literally supposed to 'guide' or 'accompany' the young people their way. They are a symbolic device of protection. This practice shows clearly that teenagehood is understood as a liminal phase that needs to be structured.

It is certainly not the older generation that is acting in the ritual and transmitting its values. The *Jugendweihe* is organised by one particular organisation or rather one office, and the ideas of the specific people involved will greatly influence the procedure. However, in this ritual environment the speech is equipped with an aura of general applicability:

> Whereas the use of language or a particular mode of speaking does not appear to be intrinsically necessary to ritual the opposite does hold - namely, that ritualization readily affects the way language is used and the significance is accorded. (Bell 1992:113)

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[10] A more detailed discussion will follow in the next subchapter.

Language gains a special significance when used in the ritual. Furthermore it seems that the appeal and meaning which many elements of the *Jugendweihe* possess depends partly on the lack of an explicit connection between the ceremony and the Interessenvereinigung. It is exactly this silence about the ritual's whereabouts which suggests that it and all its elements are universally applicable and archetypal. In this vein the speaker is not introduced either. At the *Jugendweihe* in Schönebeck and in Magdeburg the program merely mentioned their name. Her or his identity therefore does not seem to play a great role. Such a conclusion, however, would be quite wrong. The speakers are chosen with great care by the Interessenvereinigung. The organisation tries to invite people of a certain public standing and who can function as role models; they should furthermore have experience in delivering speeches.[11] Since the Interessenvereinigung does not make any prescriptions regarding the content of the speech, the choice of trustworthy speakers is their only way to ensure that the speech will meet their intentions. The speeches are therefore the one element in the ritual that is not entirely under the association's domination. This conforms with the organisation's argument and belief that the ritual is an institution of the society, and not of their own make.

There are only two expectations the speakers have to meet, one regards the length of the speech, which should not exceed ten to fifteen minutes; the other regards the fact that party politics are not supposed to enter into the speech. This is an issue because in the majority of the cases the organisation invites politicians. They are believed to fulfil all three of the aforementioned criteria: they are known locally, are regarded as good role models and have experience in delivering speeches. Teachers are another group of people that are invited to give speeches. They personify the aspect of teaching and advising by their very profession. However, one might think that if the listeners are not told who is speaking then the identity of that person would not make a difference to the reception of the speech. This is correct, unless one considers it possible that the capacity of the speaker as a good citizen and a role

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[11] These three criteria were mentioned to me in Magdeburg and in Schönebeck.

model will be inherent in the speech; in the content and in the way the speech is delivered. This seems to be at least the intention of the organisers. [12]

The high point is reached when, after the speech, the teenagers are called on stage to 'receive their Jugendweihe'. This act is conducted by a member of the choir, as pointed out earlier (see also fig.3). This moment therefore constitutes an overlap between the entertainment and the 'ritual actions'. Both kinds of action are brought together by a person who performs as entertainer and ritual specialist. From being a member of the choir, she turns into a ritual specialist introducing and guiding ritual action.

The introduction to this action, which is the simple but direct statement about the reception of the *Jugendweihe*, indicates that the core of the ritual, the transition itself or at least its symbolic counterpart, is to follow. What the participants receive on stage in the forms of hand shakes, certificates and flowers is, however, the acknowledgement of a transition that has already passed. Curiously enough nothing of great significance seems to be happening between the announcement of the ritual action and the acknowledgement of the passing of this action. This 'strange lack' of a core has been observed and described as such by Wolbert:

> The list of names of the announcer, the placement of the teenagers and the sorting of certificates are perfectly co-ordinated, and everything goes so smoothly that any question of where and when and by whom the consecration was received on which is now congratulated is out of question. (Wolbert 1998:201)

There may indeed be a lack of action for those who look for a certain ritual element, which appears not to exist. This would be the vow that has been discarded after the *Wende*. I shall, however, try to think the other way around and start with the

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[12] Two things need to be said about the choice of speakers. On first sight this preference for politicians and teachers seems to be a remains from GDR times. Due to the ideological nature of the *Jugendweihe* before 1989 people in political positions or in education were often chosen to do the speech. However, it is as easy to argue that this practice is due to practicalities since the organisers of the *Jugendweihe* may still have good relations to the former speakers or their offices. There nevertheless remains the curious fact that politicians are regarded to be especially capable in value transmission.

prerequisite that something is happening, and that we just need to focus our eyes in order to see it.

I had stated earlier that the participants interrupted their forward movement, which was directed towards the stage, by sitting down in the audience; I called this the phase of separation. This movement is now taken up and continued when the groups go on stage. Having arrived there the young people turn around and line up parallel to the rows of the chairs in the audience. This is the final point of the forward movement, which comes to a halt on an axis crosscutting the earlier one. The ritual has reached its exclamation point in this moment when the participants stand on stage facing the audience. They are elevated and the attention is focused on them (fig.3). The main ritual actor, the speaker, and another figure of authority, walks along the line congratulating each of the young people individually. In doing this they intersect the line of movement which has been accomplished by the participants. Having their back to the audience they are concerned solely with the participant they are shaking hands with. That these 'figures of authority' have to proceed down the line, while the young people merely expect to be approached, staying where they are, indicates that a reversal of status is taking place during this action. Adults and figures of authority bid their respects to those who are and will be lower in status. This is not a status reversal in the strict sense, as for example Turner describes it (1969). In his *Ritual Process* Turner distinguishes quite clearly between rites of status elevation, which encompasses transition rites and therefore the *Jugendweihe*, and rites of status reversal to which carnivals and other ceremonies which feature a ridicule and humiliation of rulers belong (Turner 1969:166-203). However, I believe that in this situation in the *Jugendweihe*, where elders symbolically lower their status beneath the status of neophytes rather than to show their dominance bears a quality of status reversal. This reversal of the status serves at the same time to increase the deeper meaning of this moment in regard to its transitional capacity. The action of the figures of authority emphasises the fact that the neophytes are changing their status. At the same time it also makes unmistakably clear that these ritual masters will remain higher in status than the teenagers; this situation 'reaffirms the order of structure', as Turner points out (1969:177). A similar situation is apparent at weddings and funerals when the guests of the ceremony proceed past either the couple or the bereaved and voice

their congratulations or condolences. However, in those situations the status of the different people involved is not well defined and does not seem to play a key role. This is different in the *Jugendweihe*, where the youngest, or nearly youngest, are put above everybody else; at least for a moment. Furthermore, at this point where the movement to the stage is concluded and the high point of the ceremony is reached, which is characterised by a status reversal, the phase of liminality starts.

So far I have referred to the participants as a group: they walked in together; they sat down together, but on the stage they do not appear as a group any more. They rather act individually. Although they arrive on stage in groups of about six to eight, they do not form a proper group when they are standing there; they do not interact with one another, they do not seem to have any contact. Rather than a group they are a category, a certain kind of people that are in the same place at the same time. Their names are read out and each of them makes a step forward to show herself or himself. Each teenager individually faces the audience and then the officials; each of them individually receives the certificate, book and flowers. Turner's argument that the relation between the neophytes themselves, and between the neophytes and their instructors, structures the phase of liminality in transition rituals does not apply to the *Jugendweihe* (Turner 1967:100). Admittedly, the teenagers might be members of the same school class or the same year. However, often different school classes participate in the same ceremony. They furthermore have not gone through a preparation for the ritual which would have formed them into a group by the establishment of friendships and the sharing of experience. This means, that with regard to the *Jugendweihe,* the teenagers do not form a close group or 'communitas' as Turner actually calls it (1967:94-130).

Their relation to the instructors or 'ritual specialists' here is equally vague. It is unlikely that the young people know the figures of authority who approach them here. Instruction only takes place with the speech, which is too short an interval to actually create a teacher-pupil bond. A certain relation is surely created between the 'instructor', the speaker, and the neophytes, but it is very weak and of short duration; it only lasts for the time of the ceremony.

What the moment on stage is about is the presentation of the self; the presentation of the self as a single individual, a self-sustaining and self-responsible

entity. This is why the relation between the neophytes is of minor importance here. The individual is at the forefront of this ritual.

The *Jugendweihe* is likely to be the first time in public that the young people wear adult formal clothing, the girls wear make up and all have taken care of their hair style. Sahlins has pointed out that clothes, this includes make up etc., reveal important information about the status of their bearer or rather that 'classes of status are produced via clothing' (Sahlins 1976:178-179). Sahlin's insights are based on Rosenkranz's earlier study C*lothing concepts*, which also considers other means, like hair style, beauty spots, that are employed to enhance one's appearance and to symbolise gender, age or roles (Rosenkranz 1972 *passim*). This function of clothing to mirror a certain status is used consciously in the *Jugendweihe*. It is understood by all that everyone, participants as well as guests, will appear in nice and solemn clothing, similar to the English notion of formal dress. This convention is part of the ritual's 'ruling' (Lewis 1980:19). One occasion in Magdeburg made this 'rule' quite explicit. The inappropriate attire of a young boy, a participant at a *Jugendfeier*, dominated the discourse of members of the Humanistischer Verband for some weeks. The young boy had been wearing jeans, a bright yellow T-shirt and red trainers. It was the combination of bright colours and the obvious casual quality of his clothing which caused the stir. The fact that his clothes had been clean and probably as expensive as some of the more subdued but solemn black trousers and white shirts was not taken into account.

With regard to the guests and parents, formal clothing is an acknowledgement of the uniqueness and importance of this day. With their special clothes they pay respect to their children and their achievement. At the same time they reinforce the solemn atmosphere of the ceremony. The participants similarly make a statement about the weight this occasion has for them. More importantly they also make a statement about their change of status. They already demonstrate the change of status with their bodies that are wrapped in adult clothes when they enter the hall. At the same time and certainly unintentionally their appearance also reveals something about the liminality of their status. Watching them, it is clear that they are unused to this sort of clothing and that some even feel uncomfortable. The girls have trouble walking in the high heeled shoes, the boys do not really know how to move in a suit or where to

put their hands. The clothes seem to be ill-fitting on the not yet fully developed bodies of the lean and lank young people. However, the style of clothing remains a symbol of the change of status from children to young people that the participants have undergone. Secondly, these clothes also reveal important information about the gender of their wearer. The girls will be dressed in a feminine manner in accordance with society's perception of feminine attire; the boys will wear male kinds of clothing.

These special clothes are part of a message, which the teenagers transmit to the audience and to themselves in the course of the ritual and most distinctly while they are on stage (Rappaport 1999:52). This message says that they have changed their status. A message is always directed towards a receiver and expects a reply. In the *Jugendweihe* the teenagers ask for 'recognition', and this recognition is given to each of them individually in a 'dialogical' process and by different parties (Taylor 1994:32-33[13]). What is supposed to be recognised and approved in this case is the individual and self-responsible, independent status of the teenagers. The approval would then sanction their reception into the adult community. They stand on stage on their own, without their family or friends, teachers and other advisors. They are alone facing an awaiting audience; asking for approval of their 'selves'. The question is directed at everyone in the audience and at the ritual specialists. The families are therefore included in this general appeal to acknowledge the teenagers' independent selves. And acknowledgement as well as recognition is granted to them. It is defined by the ritual's ruling and is inescapable. It is granted by the mere passive act of observance since spectators award their object with attention. The figures of authority grant it by congratulating and by handing over the paraphernalia, each of which is in itself another symbol of this act. The act of shaking hands is usually understood to be an acknowledgement of an achievement. The certificate is the validating proof of participation and of all consequences of this participation; this means the transition.

The book *Die Welt in der wir leben* is, according to its introduction, supposed to 'help with the orientation in this world' (Interessenvereinigung 1998:5). The keep-sake book is therefore a lasting embodiment of those guidelines that the organisation tries to establish and transmit in the *Jugendweihe* and which are supposed to regulate

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[13] I am only taking the rather small point about the dialogical nature of recognition from Taylor here. His argument about the politics of recognition is not of importance for the ritual analysis.

the process of growing up. The flowers, which are the last detail in this succession of acknowledging acts, symbolise congratulations. Congratulations are a symbolic act of approval and recognition of an achievement; this is, in this case, related to the change of status.

Apart from their roles as figures of authority the actors on stage also represent certain generations of society, who sanction the change of status. The speaker and the member of the Interessenvereinigung act for the adults of society, receiving the young people into their midst. The second age group active on stage are the young helpers, the boy and the girls, who are only slightly older than the participants themselves. They stand for those teenagers in society that have already done the ritual and who, similarly to the adults, receive the young people amongst their group. Both these groups show their respect to members of an age group that is younger and therefore less experienced and less qualified then they are. Only the last person, who approaches the participants on stage, is even younger than the participants are. The child distributing the flowers represents childhood, the phase in life which the teenagers have just finished. In this movement from the highest to the lowest level of age and authority, the teenagers move in reverse fashion from being congratulated by the most knowledgeable to looking down at the smallest member of society, in the literal sense of the word. To finish with someone who is smaller and younger than they are certainly reinforces their feeling of growing up. Once this process of congratulation is over the change of status is completed. When the participants leave the stage again, the audience clap their hands acknowledging an achievement. This action is the final indicator that the action on stage symbolises a transition.

The second party that is asked to recognise the teenagers' status and to approve of them as individual, self-responsible agents is the audience. Some points have already been made about the audience. This group grants recognition by passively watching the proceedings. They let the happenings take place without stepping in or voicing opinion. The *Jugendweihe* leaves no space nor time for any action on their behalf apart from clapping their hands. The parents are therefore ritually forced to acknowledge the growing independence of their sons and daughters. They are furthermore expected to pay their respects to this change of status by congratulating

their children afterwards, giving them presents and in the ultimate culmination of these actions of acknowledgement, by celebrating with them.[14]

The respect the parents pay to their children by watching the ritual and symbolic passage to adulthood has a further function. The parents are faced with a situation where they have to let their children act individually, self-reliantly; they have no power over their off spring in this ritual environment. This situation is a symbolic separation of the 'dependent child' from the 'patronising parent'. The message the teenagers transmit is not only a question of acceptance by the adult society; it is also a statement about their attainment of independence that is directed at their parents. In this respect the *Jugendweihe* is also about generational conflict. Hunt had pointed out that ritual often occurs in situations of conflict, that it mirrors conflict which exists in society (Hunt 1977:144). In this vein the family celebration can be interpreted as the culmination point of this forced acceptance on the part of the parents of the teenagers' growing independence. However, how great the conflict is and whether it is played upon, solved or merely reflected in the ritual, will depend on the family situation.

The task of the audience to acknowledge the participants' change of status is part of the 'ruling' of the *Jugendweihe*. This rule became obvious twice during the period of fieldwork. An incident at the Humanistischer Verband showed how important it is that the parents accompany the young people to their *Jugendweihe/ Jugendfeier*. One boy had come without any member of his family. That his father, who was expected to attend, did not come caused an outcry amongst the staff of the association. The second incident happened in Schönebeck. A group of teenagers had come along to support their friends who were about to undergo the *Jugendweihe*. The group had assembled on the balcony and rolled down a huge poster saying: 'The Burghof clan[15] congratulates you on your Jugendweihe' (fig. 4). The problem was that they did not only cheer when their friends were on stage but also voiced their disapproval in some other cases. This action was greatly disapproved of by other

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[14] The audience at the *Jugendweihe* may be what La Fontaine calls a 'congregation of initiated members' which 'is essentially a demonstration of the effects of the initiation: that it creates a loyal group, a cohesive force' (La Fontaine 1986:78). This argument is not quite applicable to the *Jugendweihe* which takes place in modern society; a society that often lacks cohesiveness.

[15] The Burghof is an institution for children with behavioural difficulties and orphans, which is situated near Schönebeck.

members of the audience. These two instances show that the *Jugendweihe* is to a great degree about presentation, recognition and acknowledgement. A denial of this acknowledgement is noticed and appears to break the ritual's rules. Let us now turn back to the ritual itself and have a look at some other aspects.

One more point needs to be made about the action on stage. During this time the attention of all attendants of the ceremony is focused on the teenagers that are on stage. Although the participants seem to be very restricted in their activity by the constraints of the ritual they nevertheless dominate the situation. Whatever they do, say or show will be acknowledged immediately by the audience and cause a reaction. That reaction can be expressed in laughter, sighs, crying or any other emotion. The teenagers are full agents who can influence the course of the ritual greatly since the whole success of the ceremony depends on them. If they refuse to go on stage, for example, the ritual will be greatly disturbed or may even not take place. It can therefore be asserted that whereas the ritual specialists dominate and regulate the aspect of teaching in the *Jugendweihe*, the teenagers dominate and regulate the aspect of self-presentation.

The action on stage takes only a few minutes for each set of participants. Once they return to their chairs, they take their place again amongst the audience. Their movement is directed in a reversed fashion from stage to the audience where they sit down settling comfortably amongst the crowd of spectators. They are received as easily, since they are now part of the 'adult' community of society. They are 'integrated' in Van Gennep's sense (1960:11). They have achieved their transition; this is visibly so since they carry their material proofs with them: the book, the flower, the certificate. The entertainment program resumes and again songs are played that express the day's themes of growing up and future prospects. Towards the end the program is interrupted once more. 'The words of thanks' are, according to a tradition that stems from GDR times, spoken by a representative of the participants.

In Magdeburg, for example, the group of participants is informed about this element of the ceremony at a rehearsal and they are asked to choose one from their midst to deliver these 'words'. They are also expected to write the brief talk

themselves. The office offers some guidelines regarding the content, if this is requested.

Let us now imagine something like this had happened during the ritual we witnessed at the beginning of this chapter. A girl who is herself a participant walks up to the lectern: the very place from where the speaker had delivered his advice, the place where the young lady stood announcing the participants' names; standing in this prominent place a participant now dominates and regulates the ritual process; she becomes a ritual specialist. The young girl in Magdeburg briefly thanks their parents, grandparents, teachers and friends, the entertainers and the speaker and the Interessenvereinigung for organising the event. She is finished as soon as she had taken her place and leaves the audience somewhat startled; the spectators had obviously expected a little more. However the audience might feel about this action, there is nothing they can do about it; what happens is entirely up to a representative of the participants.[16] This is the final point of the concluded change of status; the participants are given a voice and therefore practise real agency.

In Schönebeck things are practised differently. A member of the association addresses the participants and their parents. In a very business-like manner she thanks them for having been a customer.[17] She then directs her thanks at those who helped her to arrange the ceremonies. This phenomenon, the change of speakers of the words of thanks, might well be due to practical reasons. Since the teenagers are hard to contact before the ceremony because the Interessenvereinigung does not practise any compulsory preparation courses, it is often very stressful to find a volunteer. In this situation it is much easier if someone from the organisation speaks these words. However, if this person is recognised as a representative of the organisation then the status of this organisation is changed. By thanking for participation the association expresses its status of a business, which consequently reduces the *Jugendweihe's* capacity to appear as natural and unquestionable.

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[16] The 'words of thanks' can also be longer and more elaborate then in this case in Madgeburg. They might be in poetical form (field notes from documents). One example discusses teenagehood saying that the participants although not yet proper adults are at least 'young adults' (Interessenvereinigung 2000:42). The thanks usually address parents, grandparents, teachers, organisers of the ceremony and entertainers.

[17] I noted the quality of the *Jugendweihe* as a commodity in chapter three.

The 'words of thanks' are open to variation; they are not compulsory for the *Jugendweihe*. I noted some other ritual elements, which are also open to variation. It needs, however, to be distinguished between such elements, which are constitutive but open to alteration, and ritual elements which are optional. The words of thanks do not necessarily need to be included in a *Jugendweihe*. Neither is the *Geleitspruch* a compulsory element (chapter four:95). The procession into the room and the seating order of the participants is open to alteration but it is a constitutive part of the ceremony. The way in which the speech is delivered and the action on stage structured seem to be relatively strict; with regard to these elements the *Jugendweihen* have been very similar within the area where the fieldwork was conducted.

Finally, the young people leave the hall, once more proceeding in mixed pairs. While they do so the choir performs the piece *Conquest of Paradise* by Vangelis. This is yet again an overlap of entertainment and ritual action; now with regard to time. The audience stands up to honour the successful participants. And now the situation is reversed again. Whereas at the beginning the participants came in after their families and guests had already taken their places, this time the families follow their sons and daughters, sisters, brothers, nephews, nieces and friends. Outside the parents will congratulate their daughters and sons and by doing so they will recognise and approve of their child's change of status directly.

One aspect of the *Jugendweihe*, which I have not discussed in any detail here is the rather curious fact that words dominate over action during this ritual. The core function of the speech, the quality of the entertainment as a transmitter of messages and the words which are used to announce the ritual act make for a certain weight of language in the *Jugendweihe*.

> Liturgy preserves the conventions it encodes inviolate in defiance of the vagaries of ordinary practice, thereby providing them with existence independent of, and insulated against, the statistical averages which characterize behaviour.' (Rappaport 1999:130)

It is possible to say that despite their ordinary appearance, the words uttered at the *Jugendweihe* are liturgy due to the circumstances in which they are used. They, however, lack the characteristic of being highly coded, which is evident in most other instances of ritual language. Whether this 'uncodedness' of the words results in a more informal approach to the ritual by participants and audience or whether it does not effect the reception of the messages is a question that remains to be asked and which will be discussed to some extent in chapter six. The importance of words in ritual has been noted by a number of anthropologists (Bell 1997; Bloch 1986; Leach 1976; Rappaport 1999). Tambiah maintains that this is due to that fact that language 'enjoys the power to invoke images and comparisons, refer to time past and future, and relate events that can not be represented in action' (Tambiah 1985:53). This might be especially true in the case of the *Jugendweihe*, which distinctly lacks action but features a predominance of words. The importance of words here should, however, not be overemphasised. This is one problem faced by both Wolbert and Meier (Wolbert 1998; Meier 1998). Their expectation to encounter more words of symbolic weight, the 'vow' to be precise, resulted for both in some confusion about the actual meaning of the modern *Jugendweihe*. It should furthermore not be forgotten that the utterance of words is also an act. Apart from this the *Jugendweihe* is full of other important acts, which may appear less dominant but nevertheless bear much meaning. This should have become obvious in the discussion above.

After these few words about language in the *Jugendweihe*, I will now turn to the words and texts which appear in and around the ritual. Although I said much about the presentation of the self, the change of status to teenagehood, and the social expectations linked to this liminal status I have so far avoided saying anything about the actual ideas, the notion of the person, which underlies the practice of the ritual. I will now examine the cosmology of the Interessenvereinigung as it appears in the association's text.

4.2.2 The notion of the person in the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung

> The Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe shapes its work independently of all party politics. Its propagated aim is to ease the process of growing into society for young people. (Interessenvereinigung 2000, emphasis added)

4.2.2.0 Introduction

In the following section I will analyse textual examples from the institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung in order to extract from them the notion of the person. Studies of the notion of the person are not new in anthropology. They are often contained in ethnographies in order to illustrate a group's value system and the relation of the individual to society (Lienhardt 1961; Myers 1986; Strathern 1988). Studies in the field of emotion theory have also paid special attention to the notion of the self (Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1984). These works have, however, been concerned with notions of the person which were regarded as quite different from the western idea of individualism (Lutz 1988:219-225; Strathern 1988:320). Non-modern societies are often described as seeing the self as 'dividual' (Myers 1991:124), as a composite of collective life (Strathern 1988:320), which draws their feelings from social relationships (Lutz 1988:101). The western notion of individualism in its succinct difference from those above has probably been best described by Giddens. He explains that in western societies the single person is regarded to be their own and only reference point concerning decision making and life plans, and experiences outward events only as supporting or preventing self-development (Giddens 1991:75-80).

The institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung will be regarded as comprising all the texts the association produces and makes publicly available to advertise and explain their activities. These texts will be taken as 'real, socially situated and usually complete' (Fowler *et al* 1979:195). The 'processual character' of texts will in this case be neglected (Fairclough 1992:28). However, texts are always dialogical. They are the observable outcomes of communication between two parties; and discourse is similarly so. Although this point is not discussed explicitly here, it is inherent to the argument. The Interessenvereinigung uses its leaflets and web pages in

order to tell prospective customers what they are engaged in, what their ethos is; this way they also legitimise their activities. As Fowler points out quite rightly:

> Communication (thus language) is not just a reflex of social processes and structures. In the expression they are affirmed, and so contribute instrumentally to the consolidation of existing social structures and material conditions. (Fowler *et al* 1979:195-196)

It should, however, not be forgotten that language and consequently communication can also be a powerful means to challenge existing structures. In the case of the *Jugendweihe* the texts are, however, used primarily to advertise the association's work. Quasthoff classifies speech events into groups according to their primary functions. According to her such functions can be reader-oriented, context-oriented or speaker- (or writer-) oriented (Gühlich and Quasthoff 1985:175). Applying her classification, the texts in this chapter can be described as foremost reader-oriented but also context-oriented. They are therefore a good indicator of the cosmology of this association. This cosmology, as I will show, is also concerned with the social structures; it simultaneously reflects them and criticises them.

The second class of texts are those which are handed out or delivered during the ceremonies of the *Jugendweihe*: the speech and the keep-sake book *Die Welt in der wir leben* (Interessenvereinigung 1998). It has frequently been pointed out that these texts gain a certain quality in the special ritual contexts in which they are situated. They appear as containing archetypal rules and conventions. Despite the fact that the speeches are delivered by a non-member of the association, they will be regarded as an important part of the institutional discourse because these speeches are a core element of the *Jugendweihe*, and they have been sanctioned by the Interessenvereinigung.

Following Hymes we should, amongst a whole range of other qualities of the text, pay attention to its context and genre, (Hymes 1972:59-66). However, all of the texts that were mentioned above are part of the discourse of the one association. All of them underpin the same cosmology and the same notion of the person. It will be pointed out briefly in which setting each text appears. With regard to the dialogical

character of texts we would have to consider the reaction of the addressee, the listener or reader. This even more so since, according to Garfinkel, expression in communicative acts is always 'partial, sketchy and incomplete', and the interpretation of a speech act depends strongly on the cultural background of the listener (1972:317). The purpose of this chapter is, however, to illustrate the institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung and its underlying cosmology and to furthermore extract the notion of the person from this. The question of the perspective of the participants and their families, meaning the understanding of the ritual itself and the texts of the association, will be addressed in chapter six.

4.2.2.1. The transition and 'growing into society'

First of all I will clarify what the Interessenvereinigung regards the *Jugendweihe* to be and what it emphasises as crucial in the ceremony. This is certainly related to the strategies of legitimisation, which the organisation uses in the public discourse (chapter three). Most relevant for the enquiry here is what has been called the 'anthropological' argument; the justification of the ritual by its definition as a coming-of-age rite and the assumption that such rites are somehow 'natural'. I have noted the different ritual aspects that relate to the quality of the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual above. Some of these could be called 'landmarks' since the Interessenvereinigung openly expresses them in their brochures and during the ceremony (Halbwachs 1992:41-189). One such example is the strong educational aspect of the rite. This in itself is certainly nothing curious for a transition ritual, coming-of-age rites in particular are often preceded by a certain amount of instruction and can even include trials and tests. In this respect La Fontaine points out that 'tests and ordeals occur in all these rites, although they may be very attenuated' (1986:16). These different modes of education or the testing of certain abilities are based on cultural and social sentiment on the notion of the person. According to La Fontaine many initiation rites have the twofold purpose of establishing membership of a group and transforming children (1986:102). Spindler also sees such rituals as part of education, which in turn is a means of society for recruitment of individuals to the cultural system in general or to specific roles or statuses in particular (1974:303).

Such abilities will therefore be tested and such skills trained as are necessary in that particular society and are conform to the society's cosmology. An exploration of the discourse about the *Jugendweihe* should show what expectations about the development of the teenagers and what sentiments on the person and society underlie the organisation's teachings and activities. So what is it then that the Interessenvereinigung does and offers according to their advertisements?

> During the time of transition from child to teenager she [the Interessenvereinigung] wants to be an adviser and companion especially for the thirteen to fourteen year old girls and boys via a manifold and attractive offer of public youth work.
> The Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe relates to the desire of many families to celebrate important occasions of the shared life in a dignified fashion. With the voluntary participation at a ceremony the start of a new phase in life will be celebrated publicly and within the family solemnly. (Interessenvereinigung 2000)

I will start with the second paragraph of the quote. The quotation shows clearly that the *Jugendweihe* is regarded as a coming-of-age ritual. This is also expressed clearly in most speeches:

> They tell the adults and the environment: Look we are not children any more. We are teenagers and we are growing up and we want to be treated as equal partners. (speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.)

The *Jugendweihe* is used to celebrate the beginning of a 'new phase in life'. Furthermore the ritual is aimed especially at families. It does not address the individual participants nor solely the parents but aims at the family. The *Jugendweihe* is therefore regarded as a transition rite that is celebrated within the family. The first paragraph now establishes that the association regards the teenagers as going through a phase of transition; the transition from child to teenager. The Interessenvereinigung offers its services as a helper and supporter during this time of transition. Now, this paragraph mentions the youth work but does not say anything about the *Jugendweihe*. The critical reader might feel obliged to point out that this paragraph may not be

concerned with the ritual at all. It has been stated in chapter two that the Interessenvereinigung offers public youth work as well as the *Jugendweihe*. However, although both offers are supposed to be unrelated they are intermingled frequently in the discourse of the organisation and in the public discourse (chapter three:52-53). However, both the public youth work and the ritual aim at the same age group, and they are shaped according to the same discourse. This means that the notion of the person inherent in statements about the public youth work and the ritual will be the same. The paragraph above states explicitly that the youth work is aimed especially at the thirteen to fourteen year olds, which is also the age group doing the *Jugendweihe*. It therefore seems to be the case that this age, thirteen to fourteen, is regarded as the crucial age of transition.

That this time of transition is seen as one that could be improved by help and advice indicates that it is understood as liminal, unstructured and probably even dangerous. The quotation right at the beginning of this chapter stated that the youth work is geared to ease 'the process of growing into society' for the teenagers. It is understandable that the young people are not yet seen as full members of society if we regard the *Jugendweihe* to be the initiation ceremony into the adult community of society. The idea 'of growing into society', however, implies a few more things then a simple transition. It is about finding 'one's' place in a structured environment, and this place goes along with certain tasks or functions. 'Growing into society' also implies that it is necessary to find a certain defined place in a network of places, which interrelate and are interdependent. Going back to liminality this concept might also include the idea that the young people could get lost in the process of entering society. They might be misled or otherwise choose the wrong way, which would result in a marginal position or even an exclusion from society. A statement that points this out was made in one speech: 'The adults have the duty to support you in your efforts and to make sure that you don't loose orientation' (speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.).

I have gathered here a few different points, which will need testing by drawing on more examples from the discourse of the organisation. Let us recapitulate first. The young people are seen as going through a liminal phase of transition. This phase

needs structuring and framing, which the organisation offers to provide via its open youth work. The goal of the transitional phase is a successful integration into society. Thinking about this last point in more detail it might seem that this idea of the 'growing into society' differs from the western notion of individual beings, who are more or less self-reliant and self-sustaining. The idea that the single person has a certain task or function for and in society is not part of the western notion of an *Ellenbogenmentalität*, an individualism expressing an elbow-mentality, according to which the single members of society are primarily concerned with their personal goals and aims. I will consider a few more textual examples from the Interessenvereinigung and then compare some of my findings to the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband in order to see where important differences lie.

4.2.2.2. Values and norms of behaviour: co-responsibility

> The purpose of the public youth work is to make young people a manifold offer, which matches their interests, which is shaped by them and enables them to practice self-determination and co-responsibility for society as well as social engagement. (Interessenvereinigung web page, emphasis added)

The quotation above explains the purpose of the open youth work once more, though stating more clearly what the aims with regard to the personal development of the teenagers are. These aims, including self-determination, co-responsibility for society and social engagement, show a curious mix of individual attributes and character traits that have a communal tendency. The young people are supposed to be self-determining; this means independently acting agents. At the same time they should feel responsible for society and should therefore be socially engaged. The sentence goes even further than that. It is not mere responsibility for one's surroundings, which is referred to, but co-responsibility, *'Mit-Verantwortlichkeit'*. This concept entails the notion that all members of society are responsible for society as a whole. In sharing this task they consequently depend on one another's engagement for the good of the greater whole.

The youth program itself is supposed to be geared towards the young peoples' interests and it should also be shaped by them, according to the quote. This notion of the existence of differing interests amongst the teenagers as well as the character trait of self-determination show an individualistic notion of the person. This individual is nevertheless supposed to feel obliged to take care of the society and therefore her or his fellow human beings. Before I try to explain this mix of character traits with their different tendencies, I will consider one more example from the sphere of institutional discourse. The web page of the Interessenvereinigung contains a list of all those 'humanistic-ethic values and ideas of life' which a young person should develop with the help of the organisation:

> democracy and participation, social justice, solidarity, ability to live with others [*Gemeinschaftsfähigkeit*], standing up for peace and anti-fascism, tolerance and acceptance of foreigners, disabled people, people who think and love [live?] differently, becoming active for the protection of the nature, taking over of responsibility. (Interessenvereinigung web page)

This compilation of values, which are regarded as worth pursuing, is entirely shaped towards the community. All these values and 'ideas about life' are virtues that subordinate the individual to the communal. They regulate living together in a strongly interdependent community.[18] These values indicate a notion of the person where the single person feels obliged to take care of her or his fellow human beings, to make the living together harmonious; and ultimately to be 'co-responsible' for society as a whole. However, the features of the youth work which are listed in a book introducing the different youth work projects show quite a different tendency:

- discover new things
- chat about interesting questions

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[18] The notion that growing up is a liminal process that needs guidance and the value of tolerance both seem to play together in the design of the current keep-sake book *Die Welt in der wir leben* (Interessenvereinigung 1998). In this atlas the different countries are introduced to the teenagers via examples of young people living in these countries. In this way role models are provided and the young people are supposed to become more open to foreign countries and foreigners within Germany.

•try yourself out

•go on trips

•get to know new people and more.

(Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:5)

To 'discover new things' and to 'try oneself' are both closely linked to an individualistic notion of the person. The main feature of this compilation is the notion of discovery and learning; the teenagers are encouraged to broaden their horizons. These are actions that can only be done by the single persons themselves in a progressive process which is partly self-reflexive. The need for self-reflexivity is made most explicit in the third bullet point. 'To try yourself out' implies that the single, yet unfinished young person should try themselves in different circumstances, with regard to different abilities and skills. This idea also implies a going to extremes in order to discover one's own limits. This notion is therefore strongly individual since such a process can only take place in a self-reflexive fashion. This idea seems to stem from a notion of the person, which is very similar to 'ethical individualism' that was apparent in German thought in the nineteenth and twentieth century, according to Lukes (1973:99-106). 'Ethical individualism' is the doctrine where 'the *source* of morality, of moral values and principles, the creator of the very criteria for moral evaluation, is the individual' (Lukes 1973:101; emphasis in original). The ideas of the individual as inherently ethical goes back to Kierkegaard, Kant and Nietzsche. According to this tradition of thought, which goes further back to the Enlightenment and especially Descarte and Leibniz, the individual is regarded as a self-reflexive project; it contains within itself a true self, or as Leibniz has it 'principles of various notions and doctrines' (Leibniz, quoted in Morris 1991:30). These need to be discovered and given space for development and in such a process the person would find its own morality. In this strong emphasis on discovering and finding out about new things, which is apparent in the compilation above, the association's notion of the person seems to be very similar to Enlightenment thought. However, thinking back to what I had stated above with regard to earlier quotes, this concept of the individual is inherent in the same discourse that so strongly emphasises communal attributes. The

question that needs to be asked is: how do these quite different elements of the notion of the person cohere?

It has to be admitted here that I am comparing two different texts. The web page, which I quoted above in regard to the ethical values, is publicly accessible on the Internet. It introduces the work of the Interessenvereinigung generally and provides details for contact. The book *Life* (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001), from which I cited above, is handed out to the participants when they are enrolled for the *Jugendweihe*. It also introduces the work of the association but is supposed to provide mainly information on the public youth work and the *Jugendweihe*. This book explicitly addresses the young participants themselves. Both texts, the leaflet (Interessenvereinigung 2000) and the book *Life* (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001) are texts that advertise and explain the activities of the association. Both are publicly accessible. They are only distinguishable in so far as one of them obviously addresses the young people (*Life*) whereas the other is made for a wider audience (leaflet). The language of the book *Life* is explicitly casual (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001). It addresses the teenagers directly and uses the second person pronoun plural. It contains a good deal of coloured print, pictures, and little cartoon figures. It is obvious that it is supposed to appeal to the taste of the teenagers. Nevertheless, this book is not using an entirely different argument than web page or leaflet. It features a similar mix of individual as well as communal attributes.

This mix of character attributes with very different tendencies is apparent in all texts the Interessenvereinigung produces. It is a feature of the institutional discourse and an important aspect of the association's cosmology. A speech that was held at a *Jugendweihe* and is printed in the book *Life* expresses exactly the points made above:

> Our society provides possibilities but it also maintains borderlines. Of course everyone tries to test these limits. But once they have been tested they need to be accepted. It is important to acknowledge positive values such as social togetherness, solidarity, respect and tolerance and to make them to a guideline of one's own actions. (Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:19)

This quotation shows very clearly the notion of an individual self that is nevertheless supposed to feel an obligation for the greater whole. The quotation also mentions boundaries. The boundaries that have been referred to before, those which the individual is supposed to try out, are to be found within the individual. The boundaries addressed above are, however, limits that are constructed by society and which are used to confine its members. The notion that is expressed here is therefore quite different from the aforementioned self-reflexive process of discovering personal limits. The values that are mentioned here are again values of community and living together. It seems that the notion of the person as an individual that is capable of acting independently increases the need to influence the person's actions. This is accomplished by insisting that the person makes the communal values, which regulate and ensure a harmonic living together of all individuals, their own. The next section will show how these ideas compare to the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband.

4.2.2.3. Interjection: personhood in the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband

It has been pointed out repeatedly that the notion of the person as it is expressed in the texts of the Interessenvereinigung differs from the western notion of the individual self; especially with regard to its communal tendency. I will briefly consider some examples from the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband to see how their notion of the person compares to the one above.

The leaflets and hand-outs of the Humanistischer Verband introduce youth work in the same sense as the *Jugendfeier* as an offer of the association. The youth work is described as follows:

> ... think about life, to look for and find own ideals together with people of the same age. During these weeks and months it is important to discover many new things and to look for new shores. You will get a taste of what it means to be an adult, but you will also see that it is good to take a few things with you from childhood into future. For example the ability to wonder a bit about our universe. (Humanistischer Verband 2000: emphasis as red letters in the text)

The main feature of the preparatory courses, which is mentioned here, is the idea of discovery. This point was apparent, also, in the texts of the Interessenvereinigung. The emphasis on thinking, looking and finding in the development of the self clearly show the individualistic notion of the person inherent in this discourse. It is actually stated explicitly that the teenagers should develop their own ideals. This idea is now very different from the argument of the Interessenvereinigung. The texts of the Interessenvereinigung propagate openly ideals and values that should be adhered to. On the contrary only one is advice given in the quotation above. It is pointed out that some things might be taken from childhood into the future. However, no obligation or expectation to care for the community is mentioned nor referred to anywhere in the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband. Another quotation will make this point clearer:

> The Jungen Humanisten argue that children and teenagers need space for their development. Space in which they can think about themselves and about meaning and value norms free from supernatural explanations and dogmatic prescriptions, and are able to develop their own life plans and to take their life into their hands. (Humanistischer Verband web page)

This is indeed a philosophy that mirrors the Enlightenment project very well. Regardless of the humanistic thread in these ideas, it is obvious that the human being is seen as singular and individual; the self is supposed to contain all material necessary for the development of a personal morality within itself. The self only needs room that is free from any domination or restriction to develop a sense of morality. This space would also have to be free from any pressure to serve the communality and to take care of the self's surroundings. The development of morality is deeply and solely self-reflexive. This notion of persons as self-reflexive and individual subjects who dominate and regulate all their life themselves is comparable to Gidden's description of the self as its own and only reference point (Giddens 1991:75-80). My argument might now sound as if the self was free from any responsibility towards others. This would be a wrong conclusion. The self is certainly responsible for its actions; a point which is also made in the texts of the Humanistischer Verband:

But bear in mind that with this step into self-determination you also take over responsibility [*Selbst-Verantwortung*] for everything you do. For every nice word, for every insult, for all the happiness you give to someone else, for every injustice and pain you make someone suffer. You can't hide behind anyone or anything any more. Also for the harmony in your inner world only you yourself are now responsible. (speech 12th of May 2001, 11.15 a.m.)

The ultimate consequence of the humanistic concept of the self as a self-reflexive project is that the individual accounts for its actions only to itself. Whatever 'mistake' one has made, one will account to oneself for it. This is not regarded as a problem since, if the self-reflexive process of development was successful, the self would be equipped with a strong sense of morality and actually avoid any unjust behaviour while also remaining able to feel guilt and shame.[19]

4.2.2.4. 'Mutual Individualism'

This brief outline of the notion of the person as part of the cosmology of the Humanistischer Verband should have shown the distinct difference from the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung quite clearly. There are, however, some similarities.

Both associations see the self first of all as an individual. From there, however, they head into opposite directions. Whereas the Interessenvereinigung tries to confine the individual by demanding a sense of responsibility for the greater community, the Humanistischer Verband relies on the individual subject to find its own way to morality. The Interessenvereinigung tries much more strongly to guide and frame the

[19] The association's notion of the person is made most explicit in a poem that is printed onto the certificates which participants of the *Jugendfeier* receive:

'As well as others you are bright. Some people might
tell you what to think.
You should listen because they might be right.
But they might be wrong.
You have to decide for yourself what is right and what is wrong.
You are not in a hurry.
You can do it in your own ways.
Only you yourself will know how to **think for yourself**.'
(Certificate; emphasis in original)

process of the growing up by insisting on a certain canon of values. They regard individuality to be expressed in and via a network of social relations. This notion is quite similar to the Romantic idea of individuality going back to Simmel and Troeltsch, which regards the individual person and society to form 'an organic unity' (Lukes 1973:22; Dumont 1994:40). It also appears to be similar to Elias' understanding of the human being in the 'civilising process in the West':

> For Elias, humans can never be considered as separate from the figuration of social relations they form between themselves. [...] We are always locked into figurational relations with others, so that the actions we undertake and the personalities we develop, are dependent on the processes within those figurations. (Burkit 1991:163)

The notion of the person expressed by the Humanistischer Verband in contrast is based on a separation of private and public virtues. Such a distinction between private and public virtues is a main feature of western German society, according to Dahrendorf: 'Public virtues focus on "the general intercourse between men", they rely on fairness and accentuate "getting along with one another" (Dahrendorf 1969 as summarised by Hahn 1995:59). Whereas 'private virtues "provide the individual with standards of his [sic] own perfection"' (Hahn 1995:59). Dahrendorf points out furthermore that private virtues are pre-dominant. In this vein the Humanistischer Verband focuses entirely on this second set of virtues, the private virtues. This is possible since the public and private sphere are separated and the *Jugendfeier* is regarded as being concerned with the development of the single person and therefore with private virtues. The Interessenvereinigung, however, merges public and private virtues in its discourse, and sometimes even tends towards a prioritisation of the public self.

There are two reasons for these different notions of the person and different approaches to the liminal phase of teenagehood; while one association attempts to frame the process of growing up the other only provides space for the self-development of the adolescents. Both discourses stem from different traditions. The discourse of the Interessenvereinigung has been generated by eastern Germans who

spent most of their lives in the GDR. This means that the association's discourse bears traces of the preceding cosmology. The Humanistischer Verband has been founded in West Germany. Although it was mixed with an eastern German organisation[20] the texts at least seem to be dominated by the humanistic cosmology of the West German founders. The other possible reason, that is rather a consequence of this difference with regard to the history of the discourses than a reason of its own, will be explained below. The attempt to guide and structure the process of growing up; the idea that the young people might get lost on their way to adulthood reveals something profound about the notion of society. In order to see a little better what is meant here I will look at some more quotations. The quotations in the following are drawn from speeches, which were held at *Jugendweihen* in the year 2001. The following one explains why the young people should be so strongly engaged for the benefit of the wider society:

> Dear girls and boys, we are living in difficult times. Placements and jobs are rare. There are great problems in the social environment and connected to this tensions in the families. To solve these problems is the task of the grown ups, especially of politicians. But you shouldn't be waiting that everything will be done for you. Get involved already, be engaged. (speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.)

And another example:

> But you will also find it more difficult to find your place in the society. There won't be anyone to point you to that place. You will have to fight for yourself. [...]
> [...] it is good that you are courageous enough to take over responsibility. You will need the courage. The times won't get easier despite the evaluations of specialists who say that good years lie in front of us with regard to economy. Do not trust the state alone. It already can't cope any more and won't be able to offer much support for you in the future in case you fail. Add your own initiative to what school gives you. [...] We need you urgently to make this planet more humane. Nothing will be given for free to you in

[20] The Free-thinkers (chapter two:32).

> your job. [...] Prepare yourselves for stormy times, take life into your own hands and leave Germany if necessary. (speech 26th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.)

These two quotations both talk about society, and more precisely they talk about the 'new society': post-1989 modern Germany. The use of vocabulary, the terms 'problems', 'tensions', 'difficulties', 'to fight', 'stormy times', indicates a rather negative view of this modern Germany. It is not regarded as a familiar and safe place, but is displayed more like a battlefield in which support is needed but may not be offered. The young people are therefore told that they will have to 'fight' for their rights and place by themselves. This negative evaluation of society is completely absent from the discourse of the Humanistischer Verband. It seems to be unique to the eastern German context.

Eastern German society has gone through a major transformation politically, economically and ultimately socially in a very brief period of time. Such a transformation can be expected to result in a change of values as well. However, this change did not mean for the eastern Germans that they took on the West German value system. It rather seems to be the case that the old value system has been transferred into the new economic context. It was merged with some western German values, which took on a new meaning in the differing eastern German context (see also Carrithers 2000:356-379; Humphrey 1995:43-68). Eastern German values similarly changed against the backdrop of a market economy and a *Leistungsgesellschaft*. However, such a transformation does not come to pass without tensions. It is these tensions which have resulted in a feeling of insecurity towards the new system and which shape the two quotations above. The older generation of eastern Germans, adults of forty and older, have spent most of their life in East Germany. They grew up with a system of values, a notion of the person and cultural norms of behaviour, that were adapted to the GDR context. These cultural norms for behaviour equipped them with the means that were necessary to cope in East German socialist society. Now that the context has changed, it has become apparent that these old values do not work any longer, some of them seem to actually contradict the new western values. However, the structures of the new society, its cosmology and the models for behaviour, are not known and have not yet been fully comprehended

(Maaz 1991; 1990).[21] In order to structure life in the new context and in order to maintain an understandable social structure this generation propagates a distinctively eastern German value system. By doing so they feature a notion of the person, which I called 'mutual individualism[22]':

> Dear girls and boys, the worth of a person is not dictated by the brand name of his/her jacket or shoes; neither by material possessions nor by the membership to a certain group but rather by reliability and the ability for empathy concerning others' joy or sadness. If I am allowed to give you one advice today it will be the following: Make yourself friends. Friends you will be there for and who will be there for you. In these days we are calling the whole world by mobile phones or surf the Net and at the same time the conversation with friends or family disappears. A Pokemon can't replace a friend. (speech 19th of May 2001, 11.00 a.m.; also Interessenvereinigung 2000/2001:19)

'Mutual individualism' is a notion that sees the person as an individualistic being who is caught up in a network of face-to-face relationships in which everyone is responsible for the other. These networks exist against the backdrop of a society that is regarded with much suspicion; suspicion that is constantly reinforced by the experience of formerly unknown economic hardship (chapter seven; footnote14; 15). Looking at this notion of the person and the slightly negative references to modern society it is apparent that especially the 'figurational relations with others' are perceived to be under threat (Burkit 1992:163). Hence the emphasis on the importance of friendship and hence the stress on the importance of and the frequent reference to the family and hence the idea that elders need to train the youngsters, that elders give and need to give advice. This discourse depicts eastern German society as a place where people are strongly interlinked and depend on one another for support and advice. It expresses at least the wish of the older generation to maintain society

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[21] Giddens points out features of high modernity, which very clearly differ from the structuration of life in the GDR: the lack of determinant authorities, the 'open possibilities of action' (Giddens 1991:194; 28). The sudden change to a system that is 'multi' in all respects must result in some confusion and ultimately insecurity.
[22] I owe this concept to Michael Carrithers (personal conversation).

in such a fashion (Gehring 2000:86-87). The *Jugendweihe* can then be seen as the attempt of the older generation to transmit this old and new value system to the young people. This conclusion conforms to Douglas' argument about rituals as 'transmitters of culture, which ... exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour' (Douglas 1970:42). Here Douglas compares ritual forms to speech forms. If we follow her in this respect then we can say that many points we made about the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung can be made similarly, and have been made, about the ritual conducted by the association. Both texts and practice are governed by the same set of ideas and apprehensions, by the same cosmology.

4.3 Conclusion

Having said all this there remains a lingering 'however'. The last sentences seem to be quite tidy and conclusive as if the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung was that easy to understand. Thinking back to the beginning of the last section the reader will remember that it certainly was not. Whereas it took a couple of sentences to illustrate the notion of the person as it is expressed by the Humanistischer Verband, I had to go to some lengths to get a grip on the rather incoherent argument of the Interessenvereinigung. Furthermore, I pointed to the curious lack of introduction and explanation of the *Jugendweihe* and its purpose and meaning during the ceremony itself. The scholarly discourse also relied quite obviously on the perception of a lack of ritual elements, a lack of content (chapter three:63-64), which can only be examined by considering the forebear of the modern *Jugendweihe*.

> According to Fairclough 'the co-occurance of contradictory or inconsistent elements' in texts is an indicator of social change (Fairclough 1992:97). It seems that with the Interessenvereinigung we have discovered such a fragmented discourse, one that even extends into the association's practices.

> What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess

> indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality. (MacIntyre 1981:2)

Indeed - - and if we believe this argument of MacIntyre to bear some merit we will now have to turn our attention back to the roots of this discourse; a discourse, which I was not able to explain fully. The incoherent character of the institutional discourse is, however, not the only reason to engage in an examination of the history of the *Jugendweihe* and the texts it generates. I argued furthermore that the apparent differences in the discourse between the two organisations might be due to the different roots of these discourses. Although I took a detour from there in order to have a glimpse at the description of society I have arrived at the same conclusion; the necessity of examining the socialist state ritual and the cosmology that lends the ritual argument and purpose. This examination will follow in the next chapter, which will also shed more light on the ritual itself and furthermore give greater substance to the issues of debate in modern Germany which were previously outlined in chapter three.

Chapter 5

The *Jugendweihe* as a Socialist State Ritual

5.1. Literature

This chapter deals with the *Jugendweihe* as a socialist state ritual. Before I look at the ritual as it was staged by the GDR state I will consider the anthropological literature on socialist rituals. There are some accounts that examine the Soviet ritual system (Binns 1979/1980; Lane 1981; Powell 1975). A smaller amount of works deals with rituals and ceremonials in other socialist states, like Hungary (Kürty 1990) or Bulgaria (Roth 1990). Kertzer, one of whose works I already discussed in the preceding chapter, looked at the struggle for domination over a ritual in Italy (1980).

The first part of Binns' article describes in a detailed fashion how the Soviet ceremonial system came into being (1979:585-606). The second part is concerned with the ritual system as it was finally established in the Stalinist era (1980:170-187). Binns explains that during the 1920s the party leaders of the Soviet Union had understood that, in contrast to the ideology, the majority of the population would not understand the truth of Marxism simply via education. This was largely due to strong influence of the religions, meaning Orthodoxy and Islam (Binns 1979:588). In order to fight Tsarist movements as well as Orthodoxy and establish their own identity, the ruling elite introduced a range of political symbols (flags and banners, town and street names). As part of this process they also founded calendrical and life-cycle rituals. The next years saw a rise in the range of ceremonies which mostly took on the form of parades and which were concerned with historical events. According to Binns it was Trotsky who proposed the creation of life-cycle rituals in 1923. Trotsky's suggestion was motivated by reports about people who had spontaneously drawn up secular rituals to celebrate important turning points in the life cycle (Binns 1979:594). In October the same year the party circulated a memo that recommended 'the holding

of secular ceremonies for funerals, requiems, marriages, name-givings and "admissions to citizenship" as well as secular "Spring Sowing" and "Harvest" festivals' (Binns 1979:595). Weddings and name-giving ceremonies were introduced very shortly. Binns describes the general lay out of these ceremonies:

> There were speeches of congratulation and advice, the latter often in the form of a written and signed "injunction" (*nakaz*) to the couple and / or the child; often the couple would swear an oath to live together and to bring up their child in the spirit of communism. (Binns 1979:595)

With the death of Lenin and the change of government the ceremonials and rituals underwent a period of 'routinisation and impoverishment', as Binns calls it (Binns 1979:598). However, the secular ceremonies experienced another period of growth and were firmly established during the anti-religious campaign initiated by Stalin.

In the second part of the article Binns explores in more detail the ceremonial system in the post-Stalin era. In a similar fashion to Germany, many rituals for adolescent young people originated there as substitutes for the religious rite of confirmation. However, according to Binns this development only started around 1957, three years after the GDR had introduced the socialist *Jugendweihe*. Other features of the Soviet ritual are different from the German case as well, for example the age of the participants, which in the Soviet coming-of-age rite is eighteen. The ritual structure then again is reminiscent of the *Jugendweihe*:

> There is an initial period of instruction (in the rights and responsibilities of maturity) - in Estonia held in "liminally separated summer camps", followed by a rite d'aggregation in early July at which the initiates, dressed in traditional dark suits or white dresses and carrying flowers, are congratulated and advised by local komsomol and party notables and presented with gift and certificates in the presence of family and friends. (Binns 1980:174)

However, apart from this 'coming-of-age festival' several other instances that marked the achievement of maturity were also ceremonialised. Examples of these were the achievement of a passport and the departure for military service. The merit of these ceremonies centred, according to Binns, around the issue of structuring society by allocating each individual a certain role and rank in the various stages of life and recruiting the young into this system. However, Binns' conclusion is quite different from the intentions of the ruling elite that he identified:

> My interpretation of the post-Stalin ceremonial inventions has been that their main features are centrifugal rather than centri-petal; that is, whatever the regime's intentions of extending its ideological control into family life and leisure, the actual conduct of these ceremonies has given expression to, and thereby encouraged pluralism, individualism and consumerism, which undermine a centralist ideology. (Binns 1980:183)

This argument is based on Binns' observation that people value non-political aspects of the ceremonies (meeting friends, festivity and colour) much more than the ideological content. The latter element is entirely absent from the replies he gathered, and 'it appears to be virtually ignored' (Binns 1980:183). Furthermore these ceremonies very soon developed regional characteristics with regard to symbolism, decorations etc. The Soviet Union was such a vast country that a homogeneous conduct of the ceremonies was not possible.[1] Binns nevertheless remains aware of the fact that the Soviet ceremonial system 'presents the face of power, but it is a more human face, and one that has been humanised from below' (1980:184). The question of whether the propagated ideology was taken at face-value by people or whether the *Jugendweihe* could actually be understood as something else will be a main concern of the following chapters. For now, I will, however, remain with the secondary literature.

Powell explored the range of anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union. In that respect he also paid some attention to the ritual system (1975:66-84). Similarly to Binns, Powell identifies the intentions of the state with regard to the establishment of

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[1] See Humphrey for an account on the dynamics between the traditional Buryat and the new Soviet rituals in Siberia (1983:373-432).

a ceremonial system as both educational and anti-religious but also as the fulfilment of 'basic human needs for beauty' and 'entertainment' (Powell 1975:67). However, Powell questions the success of these rituals. Due to a variety of reasons, the ritual's lack of emotional appeal being one of the more important issues, the ceremonial system did not have the impact it was supposed to have (Powell 1975:79-80). It therefore needed to be supplemented with other means in order to function as a successful weapon against religion. However:

> The new rites emphasise the partnership between the individual and the state; it is hoped that citizens will identify their personal joys and sorrows with the Party's purposes. At the same time, they provide numerous opportunities to propagandise the achievements of the regime, thereby stimulating and reinforcing the political values, symbols, and notions that the party advocates. (Powell 1975:83)

Powell focuses on the functionalist nature of the system and the intentions of the state because he is mainly interested in the anti-religious strategies of the state. Lane takes this stance even further and argues that the communist ideology developed into a substitutional world view that shares many characteristics with religion (1981). According to Lane ideology is in fact a 'political religion' (1981:35). Similarly to Powell, Lane makes the point that the rituals were adopted by the state in order to solve conflicts that arise between the ideology and the individual:

> They are therefore about the unequal distribution of material, social and cultural values as well as of power. (Lane 1981:32)

Lane is mainly concerned, however, with the transcendental qualities of the ideology. She argues that not even in accordance with an exclusive definition of religion could it be stated that the Soviet rituals are wholly secular. This is so, because any ritual actions refer to transcendental principles. She regards the socialist rituals as sharing secular and religious qualities, wherein the 'secular orientation has become sacralised' (Lane 1981:36):

> There is a notable tendency in the new ritual to create its own holy scripture, traditions, ritual attributes, saints and its holy places of pilgrimage. They are holy or sacred in the sense that they are given a timeless importance and are considered part of an unalterable order of things. (Lane 1981:36)

Lane takes this argument further and applies it to the whole of communist ideology. She states that the communist ideology is a political religion since it combines attributes of both politics and religion (Lane 1981:38-44). The religious components, which Lane finds in the rituals are evident in the way that the rituals address and seek to explain anomalous events; the experience of suffering or the problem of evil. Her evaluation of the ideology as a religion is based on the definition of religion that has been put forward by Geertz (1968:90). This definition, however, can be criticised as being too broad; it is rather a definition of culture than of a religious system.

Lane concludes that there is a fundamental difference between rituals and civic religion in modern Western societies and socialist societies. Only in the latter environment can ideology take on the characteristics and purposes of conventional religion. The purpose of ritual in these circumstances is to 'close the gap between the political elite's aspiration for total value consensus and the actual extent of belief in this political religion' (Lane 1981:280). Lane is aware of the fact that the scope of her study is limited. She points this out herself, admitting that she has focused solely on the 'utilization of ideology and ritual to maintain and perpetuate power relations between political elites and the masses' (Lane 1981:284).

Her approach, and even more so her conclusions, nevertheless sound very functionalist. It seems to me that Binns' reservations with regard to the actual functioning of the ritual system need to be considered more thoroughly. Bearing those two points in mind I will attribute one chapter to an analysis of the *Jugendweihe* in the manner of Lane, by concentrating on formal aspects and the intentions of the state. The following chapter will then follow Binns' line of argument, exploring what participants think of the *Jugendweihe*. This two-fold approach will enable us to make an ample comparison between official ideology and actual experience. However, Lane's argument that the socialist ideology can be regarded as a political ideology will

not be included in the analysis since it is based on a definition of religion that is too broad to be helpful. It is nevertheless clear that the socialist ideology is crucial to the analysis here since it provides the cosmology underlying the symbolism and conduct of the ritual.

Kertzer explores the Italian festival of 'festa' in order to make statements about the struggle for power between the socialist party and the church. He does so in the same functionalist way he also shows in his later work on political rituals (1988). Kertzer regards ritual as a platform on which power relations are displayed and through which hegemony is reinforced. In the case of the 'festa', the socialist party as well as Orthodoxy try to achieve or maintain domination over the ceremony. Both parties conduct the ceremony and try to outdo one another with even grander festivals. Curiously enough the struggle between party and church for ritual hegemony is limited to popular celebrations in Italy, as Kertzer observes. The party was not able to counter the monopoly of the Church in life-cycle rites (Kertzer 1980:168). Kertzer regards the lasting religious domination of life-cycle rites as the reason for the continued influence of the Church. He is, however, unable to give a satisfying answer as to why rites of passage prove to be more conservative than communal celebrations.

Roth also focuses on life-cycle rituals. He explains that socialist rituals were introduced in Bulgaria in the seventies in order to support a 'unified socialist Bulgarian culture' in a country that should be 'ethnically homogeneous' (Roth 1990:8-10). The government therefore initiated the production of official handbooks for the conduct of rituals in order to counteract any regional variations in these ceremonies. These rituals were also supposed to be substitutes for the religious ritual cycle. Roth also includes an analysis of the different stances that are taken towards the ritual by the population. He distinguishes four different attitudes. 'A partial rejection' means the rejection of certain elements of the ritual. 'Adaptive acceptance' describes a type of behaviour where the registrars accept some suggestions from participants and leave others open for further consideration. To this list also belongs 'eager over-acceptance', which includes the adding of further ritual elements to the ceremony. The last point is more interesting and is similar to Binns' observation: 'The change or reduction of meaning of the ritual by concentration on private feasting with a crowd of guests' (Roth 1990:10).

After having heard about rituals, their purpose and the consequences of their conduct in some other socialist countries, I will now turn to the *Jugendweihe* in the GDR. Many of the points that have been touched on above will recur in this and the following chapter.

5.2. The socialist coming-of-age ritual

5.2.0 Introduction

As was mentioned in chapters two and three the *Jugendweihe* in the GDR was a means for the state to gain influence over the education of young people and to contest the ritual hegemony of the church. The state intended to attain the complete participation of all fourteen year olds. This goal was achieved via forceful propaganda in schools, aimed at both the children and their parents (chapter two).

The *Jugendweihe* did become a popular cultural practice in the GDR. A participation rate of over 95% was reached in the early seventies and did not decline until the Fall of the Wall (Urban and Weinzen 1984:28). Since the socialist ritual had un-mistakenly become one of the biggest celebrations in GDR society it is necessary to ask what its interpretation had been, and what people had seen in the ritual. However, in this chapter I will examine what the *Jugendweihe* represented for the official institutions of the state, what intentions they had and what cosmology underpinned the conduct of the ritual.

The state propagated the *Jugendweihe* as an 'institution of the society' (direction for the work of the Committees for Jugendweihe 1973, quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:177-178); this meant the ritual was regarded as an independent element of the culture. This notion, coupled with the state's ideology which argued for the shared responsibility of all members of society for every matter, resulted in the *Jugendweihe* being propagated as an 'issue' or a 'task of the whole society' (Arnold 1961:37; Helbig 1987:3; Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:17-25). It was with this concept in

mind, that the Central Committee established close co-operation with many different departments in the ministries and with the mass organisations. There existed, for example, agreements between the central Committee and the unions, the youth organisations *Thaelmannpioniere* [Pioneers of Thaelmann] and FDJ, the committee of anti-fascist resistance fighters and the society for German-Soviet friendship (documents in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:199-208). Furthermore the state had also issued guidelines for the gastronomic economy advising it to facilitate the celebrations (quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:198-199). This network of co-operation for the organisation and conduct of the *Jugendweihe* was dominated by the educational institutions; the schools and youth organisations. The second law for young people from 1974 shows that the only way state and the Central Committee could regard the ritual was within the educational setting:

> The organs of the state, the headmasters of the schools, the leaders and committees support the Committees for Jugendweihe and the FDJ basic organisations in the schools in the realisation of the youth lecture program and the dignified performance of the Jugendweihe ceremonies (quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986; also Urban and Weinzen 1984:30).

This pre-eminence of organisations and institutions of education is due to the *Jugendweihe's* main purpose of 'the education and formation of the children to thoroughly developed socialist personalities', *allseitig entwickelte sozialistische Persönlichkeiten* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:177). In practicality this meant, for example, that the parent's council was expected to support the work of the Central Committee. This was enforced by the regulation for parent's councils at comprehensive schools from 1966 (quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:26; 195). The head teachers very often organised the youth lectures or did the speech at the *Jugendweihe*. This deep involvement of the teachers was not actually prescribed, but since they already possessed the necessary background, the teachers had been trained in pedagogics as well as ideology, it often became reality. The *Handbuch*, handbook, accounts for this fact: although any member of society can be the head of the youth lectures, 'annually tens of thousands of pedagogues fulfil the task of a youth lecturer

with great engagement and ambition' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:80). The children and youth organisations *Thälmannpioniere* and FDJ of course also worked closely with the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*. This was again officially regulated via decisions made by the committees of the youth's organisations regarding their support of the ritual (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:202).

Because of this high aim to educate the young people according to the ideology nearly all features and aspects of the ritual were prescribed by the Central Committee. The *Handbücher* (last edition 1986), which were produced for 'co-employees and friends of the *Jugendweihe'* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:9) gave guidelines, instructions, as well as ideological background and explanations for the preparation of the *Jugendweihejahr*, the opening ceremony, the youth lectures, the vow and the ceremonies themselves. The Central Committee also published a journal called *Jugendweihe* which contained information on the *Jugendweihe*, recent decisions of the Central Committee and served as a means of sharing experiences concerning all aspects connected to the ritual's organisation. Roth notes a similar strong prescription of life-cycle rituals in socialist Bulgaria (1990:8-10). In the Bulgarian case, however, the motivations seems to be the prevention of deviation or alteration of the rituals, so that their purpose to present a uniform culture was preserved (Roth 1990:9). A similar predominance of education or at least instruction has also been noted by other authors with regard to socialist life-cycle-rituals (Binns 1980:174; Powell 1975:83). Although Lane only calls the school entry and leaving ceremonies 'educational rituals' her account of the Soviet coming-of-age rituals similarly stresses the aspect of instruction (Lane 1981:94-99; 102-105).

5.2.1 *Jugendweihe*: A political event

The ceremony *Jugendweihe* that took place in May was the ceremonial culmination of a longer process of education, which consisted mainly of a preceding series of lectures. These lectures formed 'a unit' with the vow, as the official *Handbuch* for *Jugendweihe* states (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:71), because they were supposed to prepare for it:

> The preparation of the participants for the vow is done according to the program of lectures that has been agreed upon by the Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe and which is binding for all committees. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:16)

The youth lectures started with an 'opening celebration' in October of the year before the rituals were going to take place. This time of preparation from October to the following spring and the final *Jugendweihe* was called the '*Jugendweihejahr*' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:60).

The shape and content of the lectures, the vow and the keep-sake book that was handed out during the ritual changed several times between the introduction of the ritual in 1954 and the Fall of the Wall (chapter two). The final change of the vow in 1968 and the youth lectures in 1982 reflect the self-establishment of the GDR as an independent state. No longer is a future unification with Western Germany mentioned; the issues of defence and the fight for socialist goals have reached a self-confident high point (compare Weinzen and Urban 1984:57). This, together with the final juridical establishment of the *Jugendweihe* in 1974 (the law for young people), results in the coherent picture that the *Jugendweihe* gives in the 1980s with regard to ideology. It is this picture that I will examine below, thereby paying attention to the ideological explanations and the notion of the person inherent in the socialist cosmology. I will first of all turn to the ritual itself and from there advance to the notion of the person as it is expressed in the texts issued by the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*.

5.2.2 'A day in May'[2]

For a descriptive account of the GDR *Jugendweihe* I have to rely principally on the text of the *Handbuch* (1986) and the journal *Jugendweihe* and on some video material (Paeschke 1988; Rentzsch *et al* 1979). The guidelines given in the *Handbuch* and the journal, although they are detailed, may have differed from the actual practice. They will nevertheless help to illustrate the intentions of the organisers of the *Jugendweihe* and their interpretation of the ritual. The films are closer to the actual practice but do not show the whole ceremony. The first is a fictional GDR film based on a radio play showing the relation between a GDR family and their West German guests who have been invited for the son's *Jugendweihe* (Rentzsch *et al* 1979). The second *Jeans and Jugendweihe,* is a documentary that was filmed by a West German team in 1988 (Paeschke 1988). It focuses on youth culture in the East German town of Zwickau. Since both films give a very similar picture of the ceremonies they will be used for description. Information obtained from the written texts (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986; *Jugendweihe*) will be included to substantiate the illustration. The description below is a composition of the mentioned material. Similarly to the approach used in the preceding chapter the *Jugendweihe* will be presented here in 'a story we believe to be true' (Clifford 1986:121).

On the morning of the ceremony we have to imagine a very similar situation to the one described in chapter four. The families move together towards the town hall on a nice day in spring. They are in their best garments, and some people carry bouquets. They talk excitedly. The son of a family runs off to meet his friend; he has to squeeze through the crowd. The parents and guests of the families stay aside for a little while and then slowly walk into the hall. Some minutes later the participants are gathered in a room beside the hall. They are told to line up and be more quiet because some of them are chatting loudly. Others are still sorting their dresses. In the background we can see some Young Pioneers putting flowers into a basket. Then the doors to the main hall open, the talking stops, the audience stands up and the teenagers walk in. In the background we hear classical music. The participants walk in

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[2] Title of an article in the magazine *Jugendweihe* (1981/3: 16).

pairs, usually members of the same sex next to one another. They move to the front rows. Once they are all assembled the national anthem is played. After this everyone sits down.

The room is decorated with some flower bouquets. The main element on the stage is a big poster dangling from the ceiling. It reads 'Socialism- our world'. A little on the side next to the stage a picture of Erich Honecker, the head of the *Zentralkomitee* (central committee) of the SED, hangs on the wall. The lectern on the stage is decorated with the ear wreath symbol of the socialist state (Rentzsch *et al* 1979). The general lay out of the room suggests again a school assembly, or a concert.

The entertainment program starts. The first song sung by a mixed choir is called *Our life*. The song is followed by a recitation of a poem: *Song at the Jugendweihe*.[3] The final piece before the speech is a classical piece of instrumental music played by a quartet of flautists. When the last notes have been played the speaker comes up to the lectern. It is a lieutenant of the regional police office. In the speech he combines political material with the work of famous poets. He cites for example from Goethe's *Osterspaziergang* [Easter walk]: 'This is men's true heaven, happily shouts tall and small, here I'm man, here I can'.[4] This quote is linked to the argument that it is known to the whole world that the communists of the GDR have created a sensible order and that they do not need to be afraid of the future: 'We don't have to and nor do you and neither the generation whose parents you are going to be' (*Jugendweihe* 1981/3:17). He also cites a text that was written by one of the participants. It is called 'Thanks to you *Genossen'* and pays tribute to the work of the elders.[5] It promises that this work will be continued by the generation of the participants (*Jugendweihe* 1981/3:17).

After the speech the participants swear their vow. For this every one in the room stands up. The participants stand by their chairs and face the person who is now on stage. In this case it is the head teacher of the school who will read out the vow. He stands in the middle of the stage and faces the participants; speaking loudly he

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[3] German: 'Unser Leben'; 'Lied bei der Jugendweihe'
[4] Translation by the author.
[5] 'Dank Euch Genossen'

starts the vow. After each verse the participants reply in unison: 'So, we swear'.[6] Everything is quiet during this procedure. There is no music.

After the last verse everybody sits down again. The choir sings *You have an aim in front of you*.[7] When they have finished a member of the FDJ reads out the names of ten participants at a time and asks them to come on stage. There they receive congratulations and their tokens. The speaker and the head teacher shake hands with them and hand over the certificates and the book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983). When this succession of congratulators has come to an end, Young Pioneers, who are about eight years old, line up in front of the participants and hand each of them a red rose.

When all participants are once more in their seats a piece of German classical music is played (Mozart or Bach for example). A member of the FDJ reads a poem by Prießler and finally the choir sings the *Song of life*. Then one representative of the participants speaks the 'Thanks' to the organisers. It is a young girl. She stands behind the lectern for her brief speech. She says that getting to know the regularities of life helped the young people to mature politically and morally. Now they are well prepared and want to thank everyone who helped them in this enterprise (*Jugendweihe* 1981/3:18). The participants had also prepared bouquets, which they now give to the speaker, their head teacher and a lady from the regional office for *Jugendweihe*. Finally the quartet of flautists plays one more piece of classical music to conclude the ceremony. When this is done the participants get up and march out again while the audience remains standing.

The young people are then joined outside by their families. The parents congratulate their sons and daughters, getting quite emotional, and make remarks about the positive development their daughters/sons have made in the last year. The antagonist of Rentzsch's play (1979) is told that such an improvement at school is necessary if he wants to become a lithographer like his father and his grandfather. This is not appreciated by the young man who wants to join the Navy but has not yet told his parents (Rentzsch 1979). The families head off to a nice restaurant. They will later

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[6] 'Ja, das geloben wir'
[7] 'Du hast ja ein Ziel vor Augen'

be joined by more guests and the lucky participants will be honoured with presents and money.

5.2.3 'A day in May' and possible interpretations

We encounter the same 'school-assembly' situation as in the modern rituals. The room is divided into the two common parts of seating area and stage. The program can also again be divided into three main parts during which two different kinds of action dominate. One is the entertainment and the other is the ritual action, which comprises the core elements that are set in the middle of the ritual: speech, vow and reception of gifts. Before and after those elements the entertainment dominates the scene. Similarly to the modern *Jugendweihe* there is no evidence of a moderator or a ritual specialist who guides through the program. Only during the congratulations does there seem to be someone who announces the procedure. By this lack of ritual mastery the ceremony appears not to be dominated by any specific group but, rather, to be happening naturally. In a similar fashion to the modern ritual, this might be due to the fact that the GDR authorities propagated the ritual as an element of culture that is older then the GDR state; according to the Central Committee, it goes back to the labourer's movement (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:31-41).

The ritual, with its preparation and the school assembly-like final ceremony seems at first sight similar to the Soviet ritual of maturity as Lane and Binns describe it. Both authors mention a compulsory preparation or induction program which culminates in the festivities of the 'day of maturity' (Binns 1980:174; Lane 1981:104). Lane describes the final ceremonies as being held on a 'mass scale in a town or district centre that is decorated with flowers and banners' (Lane 1981:104). Similarly to the GDR *Jugendweihe* the ceremonies are opened with the anthem; a political figure gives the speech; and the young people receive an album of photographs and a congratulatory letter from a committee of the *Komsomol*. The ceremony is concluded by a representative of the young people giving a speech in which that person thanks the government, the party, teachers, parents etc. for the education that has been received (Binns 1980:174; Lane 1981:104).

However, the *Jugendweihe* contains other elements apart from this general structure, which are unique to it. The ritual is actually structured around these core elements which are, according to the *Handbuch*, the speech, the vow, the handing over of the certificate, book and flowers, and the thanks of the participants. The first two are regarded to be most important. The speech is important because it 'contributes decisively to the impact of the ceremony', and the vow as the 'symbolic reception of the young people in the community of the working people' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:146). It also includes the national anthem. The ceremony is built around these elements in such a way that the vow would follow immediately after the speech (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:145; 157). Those two, however, speech and vow, could be put either at the beginning of the ceremony or right at its end. It would usually be set at the beginning of the last third (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:157). The ceremony could start with the national anthem or end with it, or it could be played after the vow. The handing over of books and certificates would happen at the end of the ceremony as a final exclamation point. This would be followed by the thanks of the young people, probably intersected by one or two pieces of entertainment, and the ceremony would end with another one or two pieces of music or recitation (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:157).

The *Handbuch* also suggests that each organiser decides on an overall theme for the ceremony and chooses the songs and texts according to this theme (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:148). It is very likely that the banners hanging over the stage, as the movies (Rentzsch *et al* 1979; Paeschke 1988) and pictures in the journal *Jugendweihe* (1981/3:16) illustrate, state the day's theme. Concerning entertainment, instrumental music, songs, texts could be chosen from a wide selection of classical, folklore and/or socialist works. The *Handbuch* makes several suggestions as to what would be appropriate, and so do articles in the journal *Jugendweihe* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:149-158; *Jugendweihe* 1981/3:17; 1981/5:16; 1984/5:24-25). All of these attributes are means to enhance the solemn atmosphere according to the *Handbuch*. Music in particular should be used because it 'leads towards the vow by an emotionally heightened psychological activity and enhances the atmosphere of the whole ceremony' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:150).

The parents' main task in this ritual is again the acknowledgement of the transition of their sons and daughters. They do so in several ways but also with and via their clothing. The carefully chosen attire signals their agreement on the importance of this day. By using their body as a means of display the parents do not only underline the significance of the *Jugendweihe* but also contribute to the solemn atmosphere.[8] In this way they actively shape this ceremony. Furthermore they acknowledge the coming of age of their offspring by standing up when the participants process in and out of the ceremony. Their very presence during this ritual, their role as an 'audience', as spectators, is only understandable if we regard it as the paying of respect to the participants and an acknowledgement of the expected coming of age. This reaches a high point with the family celebration and the presents they give. I already argued similarly with regard to the modern *Jugendweihen*. In the GDR ritual the parents are also ritually forced to let go of their children and entrust them with independence and self-responsibility. The difference between the pre- and the post 1989 rituals is that the GDR *Jugendweihe* was supposed to feature initiation into a different group, that of workers and peasants. The parents were expected to value the coming of age with regard to this ideological initiation.

The participants 'transmit' a slightly different 'message' (Rappaport 2000:52). They wear clothing which anticipates their soon to be achieved adulthood. The GDR *Jugendweihe* therefore also uses clothes in order to signal the status of the young people (Sahlins 1976:178-179). The clothes certainly also mirror and reinforce the solemn and serious atmosphere of the ritual. The girls are in feminine dresses or skirts according to the fashion of the time and also according to the availability of clothing in the shops. The protagonist in Rentzsch's film (1979) wears a suit. The contradictory combination of adult, and therefore sometimes ill-fitting clothes and obviously young bodies, faces and voices is, however, also an illustration of the teenager's transitional status. Transition is of course also and probably even especially apparent at the GDR *Jugendweihe*. This is not only evident in the bodies of the participants and their in-between-placement in the hall but also made explicit in the intentions of the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*:

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[8] See Bell on the 'ritual body' (1992:94-117).

The Jugendweihe has the task to thoroughly prepare with the help of the working people of the GDR the transition from child to young person, this very important decisive point in the life of young people and to receive the fourteen year olds of the GDR solemnly and publicly in the rows of the working people. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:11)

The vow is the crucial ritual symbol of this reception and therefore concludes the transition. This transition was, as has been pointed out above, prepared during the nine youth lectures preceding the ceremony.

Yet again it is possible to trace the issue of transition in the spatial directions during the ritual (Parkin 1992:18). Before I do so it should be noted that the participants were secluded from the public for a short time before the ceremony. When walking into the hall the participants move towards the stage, they break this movement up by sitting down in the front rows, a place not really in the audience but also not excluded from it. Not really on stage but nearly so; they are 'betwixt and between' in Turner's sense (Turner 1967:93-111). They later move on stage, finalising their forward direction and cutting across the line of the forward movement by standing next to one another, facing the audience in a row parallel to the rows in the room below. They receive paraphernalia and congratulations and go back to their seats. By this movement towards the audience they create a new situation when they sit down again; since now they are really included in this group. The crucial point when following this line of argument of the tripartite structure of transition rituals (Van Gennep 1960), lies in the speaking of the vow, during which the teenagers remain in the area of the audience rather than moving onto the stage. Though the participants remain in their transitional position by standing within the audience, seemingly merged with it but being the only group that replies to the requests of the vow, this situation bears an odd flavour. One cannot escape the feeling that they should be on stage, which would separate them more clearly from the other attendants of the ritual. That they do not go on stage may for once be a matter of practicality. It would be very problematic to put the whole group on stage because of lack of space. Secondly they are addressed by the speaker and should therefore face him when

answering. There is evidence that the authorities regarded the situation as problematic. Dahler argues precisely that during this important action the participants should be on stage so that their families can watch them:

> During the Jugendweihe though the main actors, the participants sit in the audience. And during the vow, when parents and relatives crane their necks to catch the reaction of their children in this important moment all they can see if anything are the backs of the children's heads. (Dahler 1983:26)

He requests that if the facilities exist the participants should be on stage during this part of the ceremony. All of them must, however, be on stage together because the collective aspect needs to be preserved in this moment according to Dahler.

The ritual is supposed to be dominated by an atmosphere of collectivity since 'Jugendweihe ceremonies are collective, social events' as the *Handbuch* puts it (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:139). This presumption is once more derived from socialist ideology which emphasises the primacy of collective over individual structures. I have already pointed out that the whole society was supposed to be engaged in the *Jugendweihe* ceremonies. Similarly, during the *Jugendweihe* all people present have a distinct role and task according to the official interpretation:

> The collectivitiy has its origins in the correspondence of interests of everyone regarding this ceremony. Such statements in the vow like: "we have heard your vow... solemnly we receive you in society..." are an expression of collectivitiy and underline it.
>
> The parents and other guests of the young people - by now about ten guests on one participant take part in the Jugendweihe - represent the community of the working people, into which the young people are initiated. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:139)

The 'audience' behind the teenagers is, according to the *Handbuch*, supposed to represent the community into which they are now initiated. It is therefore also the community requesting them to swear. If this view was taken to its logical conclusion then the families would have to join into the requesting part of the vow, which is at

the moment only spoken by one person. However, they obviously do not; the families remain spectators who 'crane their necks' as Dahler has it (1983:26). It remains therefore to be asked whether they really do represent the workers and peasants. There are no further symbols indicating that they are representatives of the worker and peasant society. All guests who have been invited to the ceremony have come in their private attire. To some they might 'just' represent the community of adults, especially if this person regards the *Jugendweihe* to be an initiation into adulthood rather than into socialist society. I will leave this thought, however, aside for the moment. If the ritual is supposed to be a collective event then the participants certainly form a special 'collective group'. As the quote above states, this fact is made explicit during the vow when the participants answer the requests in unison. They do so by using the first pronoun plural 'we' rather than the singular 'I'. The requests are similarly made in the second pronoun plural making the speaker of the vow appear as to speak for all the 'working people' of GDR society.[9]

The collective aspect is broken significantly once during the ritual. When the teenagers move on stage the connotation of the activity changes towards individuality. According to Dahler the collective aspect is undermined consciously: 'otherwise we also want to have the single participants at the centre of attention' (Dahler 1983:26). This might, however, have consequences not foreseen by the Central Committee and quite in contrast with the ideology. The teenagers are addressed individually on stage, where they, as they do nowadays, present themselves to an audience and act individually. The self they put forward here for approval is an individual and private self. It is represented through clothing and manners, mimic and gesture. This up-grown self is acknowledged by their parents in a dialogical process of recognition (Taylor 1994:32-33). By merely being spectators the parents agree to accept what is put forward to them. They will show more signs of acknowledgement after the ceremony. The teenagers furthermore ask for approval from the authoritative figures that are active in the ritual.

These authorities are, according to the official literature, pre-dominantly defined by their political identities. I showed that the same is true for the role of the parents,

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[9] The passport ceremony in the Soviet Union also includes an 'Oath to the motherland' (Binns 1979: 175).

which was officially interpreted as an ideological role. The speaker and the head-teacher, or any other actor on stage, are supposed to be members of the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*, a member of the party or of one of the mass organisations. They might wear emblems of their membership on their clothes; a small badge for example, or even a uniform. Other actors, like the members of the FDJ and the Young Pioneers, are in their uniforms. All of these official actors are in contrast to the participants who are in private attire. At this point on stage there occurs a confusing mix of conflicting and/or merging roles, identities and the interpretations of such. Once again: the participants come as their private selves and they ask for acknowledgement of this self, with all its ambitions and flaws, by the authorities in the ritual. These people, however, come as members of political groups and organisations or at least of socialist society. It is only the swearing of the vow which these authorities can use as an assurance that they now congratulate a young citizen of the GDR, a patriot and defender of socialism (compare vow) and not just a young adult. The latter case might for example hold true for the parents. They could very well focus on the coming of age of their daughter or son rather than on the achievement of political maturity.[10]

In a similar fashion to this, the participants decide for themselves whether they are congratulated by a member of the party and the head of the regional organisation of German-Soviet friendship or by their teacher, whom they might admire for different qualities. The whole situation on stage bears traces of this ambivalence; its meaning is private and individual (Lewis 1980:19). Dahler points out for example that the FDJ should play a role during the congratulations because they represent the group the participants are members of themselves (1985:26). Regardless of the uniform, however, these FDJ members are also peers of the participants; they are of the same age group and they are former participants of the *Jugendweihe*. The adults on stage are dignified members of the workers-and-peasant state but they also belong to the adult community, into which a coming-of-age rite would initiate. The Pioneers finally belong to the youth organisation the participants belonged to some years ago and they are children. The participants are, at this juncture, just finishing childhood. The only

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[10] Binns also argues that the socialist rituals in the Soviet Union were used by the people for their private ends (1979:183).

indisputable elements in this moment are the symbols that are displayed in the room: there is the poster above the stage that bears the day's theme; this is usually an ideological slogan. The one I quoted above read: 'socialism- our world'. Another one is 'to do everything possible for the welfare of the people, that is the meaning of socialism' (*Jugendweihe* 1981/5:18). There is the symbol of the GDR state on the lectern and the picture of Honecker, the head of the socialist party, on the wall (Rentzsch *et al* 1979). However, these symbols are always in the town hall and they also surround the teenagers at school; only the poster is there especially for the *Jugendweihe*. The roles and identities of the authorities and therefore their relationships to the teenagers however, are ambiguous and multivocal at the moment of congratulations. The private and the public or political sphere crosscut and mingle. However, it should be noted here that according to GDR ideology the public and private spheres are not separate; they are merged in one sphere of life which is inherently public and political by the primacy of collectivity. I will come to this in more detail later. It needs to be remembered though that we are discussing an ideology here. Much writing on the GDR states that everyday life differed considerably from the socialist ideal of a complete merging of politics and private (Engeler 2000:168-169; Gauss 1981:27; Wolle 1999:221). This contradiction between ideology and actual practice also becomes quite clear in the *Jugendweihe*.

Not only is the interpretation of the scene on stage up to the individual participant or observer but so is the whole ritual. Although the state and the Central Committee regarded the vow and the speech which accompanied it as being of the highest importance in this ritual the families might have a different opinion:

> It [the vow] is the core of every ceremony. It is the symbol for the socially important action of the initiation of the young people into the community of the working people. Next we will pay attention to the speech, which is connected closely to the vow and which mainly influences the effect of the ceremony. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:146)

During the distribution of books and certificates, however, the participants are the centre of attention and they are obviously the most important persons in this ritual.

As Dahler puts it: 'Since despite all collectivity it is his [sic] day, his [sic] Jugendweihe' (Dahler 1983:26).

Which of the two, the vow and speech or the acting on stage, is regarded as the more important, and therefore also whether collectivity or individuality, privacy or politics pre-dominate depends on the interpretation of the individual. This will depend on experiences and background, which shape perception. Bourdieu's theory of the *habitus* presents a similar argument (1977; 1984). A habitus is acquired by experience and shapes the perceptions and actions of an individual (Bourdieu 1977:83). Bourdieu's argument often sounds deterministic in the sense that people are inescapably caught in an ascribed social position or class and that even their perception is shaped by their position in the social and economical system. Bourdieu takes the stance that everyone acquires a distinct class *habitus* which creates certain traits of behaviour and perception which result in a reproduction of the same class *habitus* (1984 *passim*). His theory therefore seems to lack the possibility of socio-cultural change or diversity. However, the idea that perception itself depends on earlier experiences, which underlies Bourdieu's argument, is helpful for the case here.

Under this presumption it seems rather logical that the interpretation of not only ritual action but any action and symbols varies individually and depends significantly on experience and life-history. This is equally true for the entertainment program surrounding the ritual actions of the *Jugendweihe*. Though some texts or songs might be socialist others can be classical or folklore. The songs *Our life* and *Song of Life* in the ritual described above are folklore. *You have an aim in front of* you is a popular FDJ song propagating socialism. Other pieces of music are classical. The national anthem is certainly the most straight forward part of the whole program with regard to its political meaning. And so is the poem *Song at the Jugendweihe*. In a similar fashion to the ambiguity of the roles on stage, classical and folk music or texts can be interpreted as important proof of the righteousness of socialism, as it would be ideologically correct or, in contrast, as proof of the achievements of the German nation, which would contradict the official stance.[11]

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[11] Nothnagle notes that amongst other means classical music had been used for propaganda but also stabilisation by the state (1999:70-77).

However, the participants are acknowledged and shown respect by congratulations and flowers, and their achievement is validated by the certificate. They are also handed a book containing all the information they should have learned during the youth lectures (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983). This book provides some proof that the authorities are not quite convinced about the completion that the fourteen-year olds should have achieved with regard to their character and personality. Whether the officials remain doubtful or not, they have approved the change of status with their congratulations. The final ritual action, the 'words of thanks', are consequently a proof of and claim to independence and self-responsibility. The 'words of thanks' are given by one teenage representative. The teenager speaks from the same place on stage as the ritual authorities earlier during the ceremony. The speaker therefore appears as equal to the authorities; she or he is furthermore heightened above the audience, which is yet again a situation of status reversal.[12] The element of independence and self-responsibility which is inherent in this action is also highlighted by the fact that the text, which the young person reads out, is composed by the teenagers themselves (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:138). This moment is the culminating point of their change of status. The initiates show that they are self-confident independent adults, or citizens, members of the workers-and-peasant state.

The last point that needs consideration is the educational aspect of the GDR *Jugendweihe*. I have already touched on the dominating collective aspect and its ambivalent practical side. It is obvious that education also plays an important role in the ritual symbols since the purpose of the entirety of the *Jugendweihe* and the preceding youth lectures is education 'of young citizens of the German Democratic Republic who are aware of the state' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:11). This aim is mirrored in the ritual by what I called the 'school-assembly-atmosphere'.

We see in the *Jugendweihe* that the participants remain mostly impassive while they are entertained and addressed. The speech is finally the real exclamation point of the educational process intertwined with the *Jugendweihe*. It is the final lesson:

> The speech has the task to make the young people and the guests aware of the content of the vow, to apply it to their experiences.

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[12] For a discussion of 'status reversal' see chapter four.

> The speaker will base it on personal live- and fight-experiences and link these to the experiences of the listeners, especially the teenagers. Current political affairs and the regional situation should be included meaningfully. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:141)[13]

The speeches were mostly political and ideological in their content and supposed to be closely linked to the vow.[14] Although the speakers were supposed to know the participants and to relate the speech to their situation (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:142), ideological teaching usually prevailed. Due to their content the speeches at GDR *Jugendweihen* might have been closer to the anthropological understanding of ritual language as 'liturgy' than the modern version of the ritual (Rappaport 1999:130). These 'ideological speeches' may, at the same time, have been harder to comprehend for the listeners, a well-known feature of liturgical texts (Staal 1968:33-64). In the latter case the aspect of education might of course be restricted with regard to its success.

The entertainment in the GDR *Jugendweihe* also needs to be seen as part of the educational aspect. It is attributed important functions during the ritual, reaching from a 'heightening of the atmosphere' to the 'expression of socialist feeling for life' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:150). Folklore and classical music had, along with other elements of German culture, been re-discovered as an appropriate means to strengthen national identity and legitimate the ruling elite's status by the socialist party in the 1980s (Nothnagle 1999:39-92). It is therefore not surprising to find classical music or references to Goethe at *Jugendweihen*, these parts of the ritual were consciously selected for effect as the quotes above prove.

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[13] The speeches had a similar key role in other socialist rituals (Binns 1979:174; Lane 1981:104)
[14] Titles of some speeches: 'to live culturally', the main theme of this speech is art; which is linked to the development of socially useful skills; 'friendship to the Soviet Union'; 'the times, we live in' is on scientific progress and connected to it the success of socialism (*Jugendweihe* 1981/2:11; also *Jugendweihe* 1981/3:17; 1983/1:25).

5.3. The 'socialist personality'

5.3.0 Introduction

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter the GDR *Jugendweihe* was geared to shape the young people's character towards a 'socialist personality'. Since this idea that the process of growing up needs to be guided by the state (or society) seems to have been carried over the Fall of the Wall I will examine which notions and concepts underlie the conduct of the GDR *Jugendweihe*. For this purpose I will re-examine the texts the Central Committee produced with regard to the notion of the person.

I will analyse the cosmology using three different texts as main sources. This cosmology builds on the Marxist-Leninist ideology which was the official world-view in the socialist state. It will therefore be referred to as socialist ideology in the following pages. The notion of the person inherent in this ideology will be extracted using the same methods of discourse analysis that were applied in the preceding chapter. The texts will be regarded as 'real, socially situated and usually complete' (Fowler *et al* 1979:195). The 'processual character' of these texts is minimised, since they depend even less on the feedback of reader or listener than the texts in chapter four (Fairclough 1992:28), which is a result of their prescriptive nature and their being dominated by the party elite. As regards Quasthoff's classification these texts can be described once more as primarily reader-oriented and context-oriented (Gühlich and Quasthoff 1985:175).

One main source is the *Handbuch* from 1986. As noted above this book includes information on the ideological concepts underlying the *Jugendweihe*, which consequently includes information about the Central Committee's notion of the person (chapter five:133). I will go on to consider the book that was given out as a present at the ritual, *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (1983). Thirdly I will analyse the vow the young people had to swear (1969). The third program of youth lectures (1970, quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:84-85; Urban and Weinzen 1984:53) and articles from the journal *Jugendweihe* will be included to give a full picture of the state's notion of the person and the proposed educational aims.

Secondary literature on this topic is still rare. The 'socialist personality' has been treated with some attention by the 'Enquete commission for the *Aufarbeitung* [management of the past] of the history and consequences of the SED dictatorship in Germany' (1995). The articles in this publication deal primarily with education in the GDR and mention the socialist concept of the person as part of the educational system (Fischer 1995:853-875; Margedant 1995:1489-1529).

The concept of the 'socialist personality' goes back to the SED's aim to create a 'new human being' in socialism (Hanke 1976:492-515). This idea had already been mentioned in the late 1940s but was not incorporated into the party program until the late 1950s. At the fifth party assembly in 1958 Ulbricht publicised the 'ten commandments of socialist morality' (Arnold 1961:11). These were closely intertwined with the idea of the arrival of a new kind of people, who would show character traits suitable for the new socialist order of society. Powell lists the following with regard to Soviet ideology, which had similarly used the ritual system to 'develop the qualities of the new Soviet Man': collectivism, patriotism, proletarian internationalism, and love of labour (Powell 1975:83). In the GDR context the exact expectations put forward to the apprentices changed a few times but arrived at a full and coherent argument by the 1980s. This argument was shaped in content and structure by state ideology as well as knowledge about psychological development and human nature.

5.3.1. A public self

Questions of the self and its relation to and place in socialist society are addressed in the last chapter of the book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983). The chapter is divided into four parts, each dealing with a different topic: 'what does it mean to be a personality?', 'you have an aim', 'to shape life meaningfully' and 'we are united by the same will and courage' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:209-260). The youth lecture program from 1982 addresses questions of the self in three of the nine sessions. Once under the heading 'your work is needed', secondly in the lecture on 'the other one next to you' and thirdly under the theme 'your right, your duty in socialism' (quoted in Urban and Weinzen 1984:55). I will mainly rely here on the

book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (1983) to illustrate not only the state's notion of the person but also how this notion, or rather the concept of the 'socialist personality' was explained to the maturing teenagers.

> We understand thoroughly developed socialist personalities to be educated, politically aware, to be human beings strengthened in morals and character, who are able and willing to fulfil the manifold demands that are asked for in social life, in work, in learning, and in political activities, as well as in spare time and family life. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:214)

The first obvious point is that the concept does not just encompass socialist personalities but 'thoroughly developed socialist personalities' (emphasis added). Two implications are inherent in this terminology. There is first of all an idea of completeness regarding the development of the person. People conforming to this concept are finalised, harmonious, and stable personalities. Secondly it includes the idea that this finalisation of development has been reached in all areas, it is '*allseitig*', meaning it encompasses all possible aspects. The term itself does not explain what these aspects or areas are. This definition is given later when it is stated that such people should have gained a sufficient education, they should also be familiar with politics and possess morals and a strong character. The concept furthermore includes the idea that the person is willing to put their abilities at the service of society. This is expressed as 'demands' which will be brought forward to the person. It is said that these demands will pervade all spheres of life: society, work, education, politics, leisure time and the family.

To summarise: the socialist personality is a concept in which the single person owns a stable personality that is developed in all aspects but who is willing to adhere to demands from outside. This seems to make the person rather passive, less of an agent. The person ought to show in contrast a tendency to a communal or public self. The demands, which the person will adhere to, pervade all spheres of life as the quote

above illustrates. They can be put forward any time and concern any issue. This means that the self has no privacy, it is public.[15]

To better explain how this notion relates to practice the next subchapter in *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* deals with 'individual abilities, talent and creativity'. Two quotes will illustrate the tenor of this section:

> Personalities are people who distinguish themselves by individual attributes and creative abilities. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:211)
>
> To develop to a socialistic personality includes the firm conviction to be capable in a certain field, to be creatively active, to create something new or to explore it. All this for the good of the whole society and the own good. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:219)

This text accounts for the individuality of people. This individuality, however, is confined and regulated by the demands of society. This means that the development of personality is achieved individually by each person themselves but it is carried out already in the anticipation of a communal purpose. Those talents that have the potential to contribute to society's well-being should be developed. The notion of the person is therefore individual with regard to the person as a psychic being but with regard to the person as an actor it is communal, since all activity should be geared towards the good of society. Community must therefore give life its purpose and meaning. Or:

> Could not the single person have aims and choose ideals by himself? He certainly can. Especially socialism enables him to unfold his individuality. ... But with the right knowledge goes something else, something fundamental: The ideals need to be realistic. There need to be such circumstances in society that make the realisation of these ideals possible. ... The only possible solution is finally the success over capitalism. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:220)

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[15] The all pervading character of politics has been noted by several authors; Hille for example illustrates the fully structured timetable of members of the FDJ (1995:1275-1313; also Engeler 2000:277; Wolle 1999:136-137).

Once again any decision on the part of the single person needs to be informed by the ideology and it needs to conform with society.[16] But this quote takes things even further. The last sentence seems to imply that the creation of necessary circumstances will actually need to precede all free individual action. This could mean that the single person is first of all confined in their individuality by the need to create the right environment for personal development. On the other hand these circumstances do already exist in the GDR to a certain extent. This is stated in the law of young people:

> The circumstances necessary for every young person to unfold his talents and abilities independently and creatively, to develop himself as a personality and to lead a happy life are given according to the humanistic principles, which are prescribed in the socialist constitution of the GDR. To do everything for the security of peace, for the welfare of man, for the good of the people, for the interests of the working class and all working people - that is the purpose and the meaning of the life of young people. (Jugendgesetz quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:222)

Apart from the curious fact that the meaning of life needs to be noted in a juridical regulation this makes quite clear that the GDR was seen as the best place for an 'unfolding' of the self. The idea of 'unfolding' nevertheless implies Enlightenment thought. The idea that an individual person possesses inner properties, which must be given space to unfold -an unfolding which will finally result in the development of humanistic values- seems to stem from the Enlightenment (Lukes 1973:67-72). This tradition of thought underpins the socialist notion of the person, the only difference being that the humanistic principles which will be developed are socialist. The humanistic principles that are developed by the individual person will then lead this person to the realisation that meaning in life can ultimately only be found in social service and collectivity. This realisation will lead the person to make decisions according to the demands of society:

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[16] In Marxist-Leninist ideology not the individual but rather class-collectives or society are the places where aims of action originate (Weber and Lange 1995:2042). Also the 'political consciousness', which, people were supposed to possess was supposed to rely entirely on the ideology of the working class (Margedant 1995:1501).

> The one who lets himself be guided by the ideals of socialism will see the way that includes personal happiness, career and well being at the same time, he [sic] will continue the work of our forefathers responsibly and will be courageous and bravely discover new lands on the way of socialism and communism in our country, for him [sic] personal goals and goals of the society will be a harmonious whole. The socialist ideals give everyone the right orientation for thinking and acting. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:223).

This rather long quotation brings the important points nicely together. The 'developed personality', which has adequate knowledge of the ideology, will realise the meaning of life and the way to achieve happiness in social service.[17] Socialist ideology, however, not only gives life its meaning as 'useful work for the good of society is the centre of a meaningful arrangement of life' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:233); it furthermore transcends human life by linking the actions and decisions of one person to the historical processes affecting society. The young people are made well aware of these processes and their role in them by the Central Committee for *Jugendweihe*: 'Measured in historical dimensions human life is not very long. This establishes the rule to use it sensibly' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:245). This last point makes very clear how strongly individual and collective goals are intertwined in socialist ideology. They are actually indistinguishable since the single person will desire the progress of society and contribute to it, because it will make the person happy in return: 'It [happiness] is tied to social duties and to the knowledge to have achieved something valuable for the good of society and the personal good' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:255f.). The emphasis, nevertheless, seems to be on collectivity, this is what the socialist ideology is based on and what the texts keep reiterating.

However, through the knowledge of 'objective regularities', 'which do not only govern the lives of people in a society but the whole historical process' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:228) freedom can be acquired as well. The ideological interpretation of freedom is first of all the possibility that the person can take up whichever job she

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[17] Fischer argues that the ruling elite used education to make a pool of individuals available who would fulfil the needs of society, which the ruling elite defined (1995:854). Engeler makes a similar point (2000:279).

or he chooses.[18] This is the example that is used in the book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:227-228). This freedom is guaranteed in the GDR whereas western countries restrict it due to shortages of jobs. However, the choice of profession should once again be made by the socialist person in consideration of the economical situation of their country. By choosing the profession that is needed the person again contributes to the progress of society and therefore makes this choice happily. All the points that have been made so far need now to be set against the backdrop of the collective structures of GDR society so that we can understand better how these principles were supposed to work on the level of face-to-face relationships.

5.3.2 Collectivity - the person in relation to society

If persons are perceived as individual beings, thinking and acting for themselves, but gearing their action towards the needs of society, the question arises how all these single entities come to work together. GDR society was structured by the principle of collectivity. Collectives of some sort could be found on all levels of organisation. From work teams in factories called *Brigaden* down to Pioneer and even class councils in schools. These *Brigaden* and *Klassenräte* were expected to work on a democratic basis where decisions are made by all members together. It is obvious that disagreements must have been common in such a structure. We will see how the single person was perceived in this setting:

> Unison in fundamental shared interests does not exclude the possibility of disagreement and conflicts, it can be linked to tensions and even the clash of contradictory opinions, every now and then it can even include arguments and hassle. The solution of upcoming contradictions requires to subordinate under a collective aim. This is necessary for the development of real socialist collectivity. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:247-248.)

After the primacy of society over the individual we descend to the next level and

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[18] W. Ulbricht explains that freedom means the independent management of means of production and resources by the people, freedom from suppression by the monopoly capitalism (constitution 1968, quoted in Kleßmann 1997:564).

encounter the primacy of collective interests over those of the individual. It is worth noting that the authors of the book are well aware of the practical problems of collective decision making. They do not try to gloss over the potential for conflicts inherent in collective structures. Nevertheless, the main communal standpoint should prevail, in their view. This conforms to the ideology, which regards collectively made decisions as nearly infallible. The reasoning behind this is that if all members of the collective are informed well enough about ideology and the current political situation then their decision, which is based on the input of everyone, should be right (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:246). This is the principle on which socialist society was based. However, there might be exceptional situations; situations when 'the collective does not have to be right' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:248). In such a case the individual is asked to speak up and argue for their opinion, if this is their strong conviction. The authors argue that, nevertheless, in a right collective where an 'atmosphere of openness and sincerity predominates' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:248), faults due to dishonesty and exaggeration should not occur. This means that in a proper collective the right decisions will be made based on the unison of interests of all members. These decisions will then again be positive for the individuals themselves:

> A collective, that is worthy to bear this name, distinguishes itself because it makes its acting and thinking depend on socially important aims, the fulfilment of which is useful for everyone, the society, the collective and each single person. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:248)

However much the text emphasises the necessity to acknowledge society's interests in everyday life this society is nevertheless experienced in face-to-face encounters, in interaction with other people. These relationships, friendships, family ties were regarded as basic to a socialist life style. They were also the practical side of collectivity. Young people, for example, were expected to look for advice from elders when they make their decisions (compare Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:228; 248). The character traits, which are listed in *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* because they are regarded as especially valuable, also show clearly a communal tendency due to the notion that the way people interact with one another 'characterises important

characteristics of the moral maturity of a human being' (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:257). These values are care and respect for older people, politeness, honesty and love of truth (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:258-260). As has been argued above, such values are fundamental in collectively structured groups, where decisions should be made in unison. At the same time such values stress the pre-eminence of communality over individuality in GDR society. The authors of *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* regard the ability to form interpersonal relationships as a virtue:

> The ability to establish relationships with friends and colleagues, to shape them in such a way, that they become productive for everyone and make the others enjoy life and community also belong to it [to character traits of socialist personalities]. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:213)

This view of interpersonal relationships is the culmination of the ideological primacy of collectivity. This notion prevalent in the socialist ideology of a community oriented self underlies individuality but the expression and acting out of individualism is only possible within and through a life-style in which interpersonal relationships pre-dominate. If the notion of people as individuals did not form the basis of the argument the argument itself would become unnecessary. The individual is asked to put community before her or his own interests, or more precisely to identify her or his own interests with those of society. The ideology, however, makes this demand for community so strong that it actually states that the expression of individualism can only happen through relationships and collectivity, meaning within confinements that are defined by the ideology.

Since all these relationships work on the principle of mutual interests, which are informed by ideology and history, and aim at the progress of society, they are inevitably also political. This means that finally the interests of the state and that of individuals are the same and that politics permeates all spheres of life. The idea of mutual interests and the obligation of all members of society for society can again be illustrated by the mere fact that the *Jugendweihe* is supposed to be of concern for the whole society, as has been stated earlier. This also helps to understand better the role attributed to families in this setting:

In the Jugendweihe the interests of society merge in a special way with the interests and needs of the parents. The parents see the Jugendweihe as an institution of society, which helps to shape their children to healthy, happy, industrious and consciously acting humans, who will stand their ground in life. The demands and aims content in the vow are agreed on by the mothers and fathers, because they can base the education in the family on them as well. (Helbig 1987:4; Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:24)

Family and state education are seen as complementing one another under this doctrine of shared interests. The family celebrations are understood, agreed upon and incorporated into the ideological interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* on the grounds of mutual interests. The primacy of collectivity over singularity is then logically also applied to the family celebrations. The *Handbuch* and Helbig's advice book on how to celebrate suggest that several families combine to organise communal celebrations (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:159; Helbig 1987:28-32).

Assembling all these different aspects we arrive at a notion of the person, which regards individuality as a quality of the self but links the individual tightly to a close network of interpersonal relationships. This notion is not unlike the anthropological idea of 'dividuality', which is used to describe 'non-Western' notions of the person that see individuals as 'composites of collective life' (Strathern 1988; also Myers 1991; for the dependence of emotions on social networks see Lutz 1982). The notion of 'dividuality' can be contrasted to Gidden's analysis of the self in modernity, which regards the person as their own and only reference point concerning decision making and life plans (Giddens 1991:75-80; chapter four:107). The socialist notion of the person differs furthermore in crucial aspects from the description Lukes provides of the individual in Western thought. Lukes calls on sources from French, German, English and American Philosophy to identify the basic ideas that underpin individualism (1973). He lists the ideas of dignity, autonomy, privacy and self-development amongst these crucial aspects of the notion of individuality (Lukes 1973:35-72). Freedom also belongs to this list, in so far that the individual should make choices and decisions as a free agent, independent from external forces (Lukes

1973:125-145).[19] However, there is another tradition of thought in Germany which acknowledges the individual as part of a greater whole. I mentioned Romantic Thought in the last chapter. It needs to be added here that Marx also argued for a notion of the person where membership in a community is a prerequisite to the development of the individual person (Lukes 1973:71). Morris explains that Marx saw 'the individual personality as a psychosomatic unity' that was 'essentially social', and institutions in society as supposed to 'facilitate "the full and free development of every individual"' (Morris 1991:214).

The socialist ideology as it is outlined in the final chapter of *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (1983) regards interpersonal relationships as taking precedence over the individual in a society based on collective structures. Interpersonal relationships are the smallest structures on which collectives are built, which again make up society. The primacy of community results in an emphasis of values regulating interaction and relationships. Life is given meaning and direction by the needs and demands of the socialist society that is caught in a historical process of development. These necessities reflect back on the communal structure by uniting all people under the same goal. This ideological belief furthermore transcends individual life by giving it meaning in the higher process of the historical progress of society towards communism. I have not yet discussed in detail the consequences of this last point. This will be done shortly though because it is a pre-eminent concern of the vow. For the moment I will let the Central Committee summarise all this in their very own way of argumentation:

> As a young citizen of the German Democratic Republic to distinguish oneself according to the vow of the Jugendweihe. To develop oneself in all areas as a socialistic personality that is a high expectation, a valuable aim in life. This is the possibility, this is the way to give life a higher meaning, to become active for personal happiness and the happiness of everyone. Carpe Diem! - Seize the day. (Zentraler Ausschuss 1983:260)

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[19] German Romantic Thought has a slightly different emphasis that sees the will of the community as more important than the arbitrary will of an individual (Lukes 1973:22; chapter four).

I will finally move on to the vow to show how it compares to the findings above and to some idea of the Western notion of individualism.

Dear young friends,

Are you as young citizens of the German Democratic Republic willing to fight for the great and honourable aim of socialism and to honour the revolutionary legacy of the people together with us and according to the constitution, so reply:

Yes, so we swear.

Are you as faithful daughters and sons of our labourer and peasant state willing to strive for high education and culture, to become masters in your subject, to learn incessantly and to invest all your knowledge and abilities in the realisation of our great human ideals, so reply:

Yes, so we swear.

Are you as worthy members of the socialist community willing to always act in comradely co-operation, in mutual respect and helpfulness and to always unite your way to personal happiness with the fight for the good of the people, so reply:

Yes, so we swear.

Are you as true patriots willing to further deepen the friendship with the Soviet Union, to strengthen the brother-bond with the socialist countries, to fight in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, to protect peace and to defend socialism against every imperialist attack, so reply:

Yes, so we swear.

We have heard your vow. You have set yourself a high and valuable aim. We receive you in the great community of the working people, the community which erects the socialist society in the German Democratic Republic under the leadership of the working class and its revolutionary party united in will and action.

We give you great responsibility. We will at any time help you with advice and action to creatively shape the socialist future. (quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:14; Kleßmann 1998:573-574)

The vow defines the identity that the participants will bear after their transition in four respects. First of all, they are characterised as citizens of the state. This establishes a juridical bond between them and the GDR and goes along with prescribed rights and duties. The civil rights and duties addressed here encompass apart from the right to carry a passport, the right to vote and the duty to abide by the law also certain ideological duties. Citizenship features the obligation to fight for and defend socialism, this ideological concept is again grounded in the law since it is constitutional. The 'revolutionary legacy', which the participants promise to honour, provides a session of its own in the youth lecture course. This session often involves meetings with members of the committee of anti-fascist resistance fighters or a visit to one of the concentration camps (*Jugendweihe* 1983/7:11; Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:103).[20] The concept of the 'revolutionary legacy' proves the righteousness of socialist ideology by grounding it in historical events and tradition.

The second verse defines the participants as daughters and sons of the workers-and-peasant state. This creates a family bond between them and the state rather than just a juridical one. The notion is reinforced by the word 'faithful', implying a daughter's or son's duty to carry on their parents' work. In contrast to the first verse the teenagers are here seen again as young persons who are still developing. The aims and goals of this development are laid out and it is expressed that the purpose should be found in the collective interests of society. This request and its more practical illustration in youth lectures is usually related to work (*Jugendweihe* 1983/7:11; Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:99). The Central Committee tried to show that the young people would contribute to society's progress via a future profession or job. Two lectures are occupied with this issue. The obvious one is 'your work is needed', but 'scientific-technological process' transmits the same message that through work and achievements in work the single person can actively support socialism's process. This focus on work is catalysed by socialist ideology understanding the state as a workers-and-peasant state. Margedant explains that according to the Marxist-Leninist ideology new character traits would develop in the process of working, and even more so in

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[20] Nothnagle sees anti-fascism and 'the myth of the great socialist Soviet Union' as part of the 'mythological' foundation of the GDR state (1999:93-142; 143-198).

class struggle. Class struggle in the GDR was perceived as the fight against imperialism (Margedant 1995:1501) and is mentioned in the last verse.

The third verse addresses the teenagers as members of collectives. It explains the primacy of interpersonal relationships with its culmination in the merging of personal happiness with that of society. We have already considered this at length. In the youth lectures it is supposed to be addressed under the heading 'the other one next to you'. Neither of the texts contained more detailed information as to how this youth lecture was carried out. It is possible that aid programs for African countries might have been introduced in this youth lecture or that helpfulness in general would be discussed.[21]

The participants are finally defined as patriots. They are asked to actively support the socialist ideology and their state by strengthening the ties to other socialist countries and by defending the socialist world view against opponents. The focus here is usually in the relation to the Soviet Union. The organisation of German-Soviet friendship, of which every participant becomes a member, often organised the youth lecture on the topic (agreement between organisation of German-Soviet friendship and Central Committee for *Jugendweihe* from 1984, quoted in Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:207-208). The question of patriotism is very close to the content of the first verse. Fight, defence, activity and revolution are basic themes of socialist ideology. The demand carried forward to the single person to support the progress of society does not end with ordinary everyday life; it always carries the connotation of active fight. There are many ways, however, in which one may join this struggle, even by 'merely' fulfilling the plans at work. It is nevertheless worth noting that the notion of the person that is promoted paints a picture of a very active agent; this agency, however, is only possible within those confinements determined by ideology. The socialist ideology gives reason, direction and meaning for all a person's actions.

The last verse makes clear that this ritual is meant to be a ceremonious hand over of responsibility for society from the older to the younger generation. This passing down of obligation should enable the elders to draw back although they

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[21] To help other people and practise your social skills was an important part of teaching in GDR schools. During my school years it was always expected that better students would help out students who had trouble with their marks.

remain in the background for advice and help. It is now the turn of the young people to 'shape the socialist future'.

5.4. Conclusion: ambivalence and questions of continuity

This chapter illustrated the background against which the modern *Jugendweihe* needs to be seen. This should enable us to draw a conclusion with regard to the question of continuity and discontinuity from the GDR ritual to the modern rite.

Considering the ceremony, the general structure is the same in both the pre- and post-1990 ritual. Some core elements from GDR times: the vow, the anthem, and the preparatory lessons have been removed. The speech still exists as an element but under the prescription that no party politics are allowed to be uttered. Consequently, with the disappearance or at least strong reduction of the preparatory lessons, the function of the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual has suffered very much in the public opinion (chapter three: 52-53).

The GDR *Jugendweihe* is a public staging of the socialist notion of the person; it is at least supposed to be such. The collective atmosphere which dominates the ritual is broken for an important part of the ceremony and suddenly allows individuality to take over. In the notion of the person it is individuality that underlies collective behaviour and individuality that should be put into the service and under the hegemony of collectivity. However, as the analysis of the ritual showed, this official view of the person does not necessarily mirror the beliefs of the citizens. The vow and the distribution of books and certificates are the core actions of the *Jugendweihe*. Both emphasise a different side of the self; one the collective and the other the individual. The vow is spoken by all participants together as a group. The tokens are handed to each participant individually while this participant is on stage. Although he or she is not alone on stage, the actions are nevertheless directed at each participant individually. It is now a question of interpretation which of those two actions and therefore which aspect of the notion of the person, individual or collective, is regarded as more important. The interpretation might then differ between the official discourse,

the ideology and the perception of individuals, may they be participants or observers. Gerholm is one of the few authors who has made this point clearly:

> But this [ritual as a tool of ideological domination] does not automatically guarantee that the participants or the observers will actually experience the ritual as such legitimation. The individual's possibility to take his [sic] distance from the official interpretation if often made too little of in analyses treating ritual as ideology in action. (Gerholm 1988:200)

Other anthropologists have also pointed out, though in a less strong fashion, pointed out, that interpretation cannot be prescribed (Bell 1997:73; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:96). Bloch also argues that studies of rituals should attempt to arrive at an understanding of what the ritual means to the participants (1986). This is, however, a task that 'has no end' (Bloch 1986:11). He therefore suggests to look at a ritual in the course of history; this way combining the 'knowledge of what the experience of ideology is' and 'the knowledge of history' in order to gain a greater understanding of the nature and meaning of ritual (Bloch 1986:11).

In particular those elements of the GDR ritual which are ambivalent and multi-vocal in their interpretation seem to have been carried over into the modern *Jugendweihe*. One is the ritual's property as an individual coming-of-age rite. This is acted out in the GDR rite as well as in its modern successor by the act of self-representation on behalf of the teenagers on stage. The fact that they do not wear uniforms but rather formal, private attire makes it possible to conclude that on the individual and family level the whole ceremony is seen as and actively turned into an individual transition rite; coming back to Bell it could be claimed that it 'is fashioned by the people [in order to] mould their world' (1997:73). The coming on stage takes place after the collective utterance of the vow, which results in a stronger emphasis on this action; the vow seems to lead up to it. In both eras the words of thanks are the aftermath of the successful transition showing one representative of the teenagers as a full and self-responsible actor on stage. The role of the families and the authorities congratulating on stage can again be interpreted in two different ways as has been shown above. According to the GDR ideology and the interpretation of the Central

Committee they represent their political memberships of either the workers' and peasants' society or the youth organisations. I could, however, also rightfully argue that they represent their generation. The interpretation depends on the perception of the individual in the ritual. Admitting that both versions are possible or furthermore that they might have been blurred I argue that there is continuity in respect of the second and private set of these ritual roles from the GDR ritual to the modern *Jugendweihe*. It is clear though, that the perception of these roles is inseparably linked to the structure of the ritual; the structure which has been maintained as well. Wolbert has also noted the continuity of the formal structure of the ceremony (1998:195-207). However, Wolbert overlooks those other continuities that become only visible when attention is pained to the ambiguity of ritual and away from the 'ideologically prescribed' interpretation of the *Jugendweihe*. The actions of the family are the most obvious instances of continuity in the ritual. Their roles before and after the ceremony have not been altered during the process of social change. I have already discussed the possible double-role they play during the ritual. Whether or not this is the crucial point for the analysis of the *Jugendweihe* will be explored in the next chapter.

Parts of these more banal interpretations have been known and acknowledged by the Central Committee. If they are mentioned in the writings of the Central Committee they are nevertheless always awarded ideological meaning and purpose. The families for example are attributed great importance in the *Handbuch*. It is stated more than once that the family celebrations are of high importance for the *Jugendweihe*. This, however, depends on the fact that the families agree to the state's interests and therefore celebrate the development of their daughters and sons in unison with the state's purposes (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986: 17; 24-26;159; Helbig 1987:4) rather than just for their own private reasons. This conforms to the state's view of the family as 'the smallest cell of society'; according to Marxist-Leninist ideology the family was the 'most basic collective' and was following a similar development as the socialist society (Bornemann 1992:199; 83). It should therefore also teach the same values as the educational institutions.[22]

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[22] Compare Law on the Unified Socialist Educational System 1965 parag. 7(1,4) (quoted in Deuerlein 1966:268-273).

Concerning the notion of the person it has become quite clear that the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, which in socialist ideology is a prerogative for the functioning of the collective structure of society, is the main feature that is still prevalent in the new eastern Germany. Though the structure of society has gone amiss the older generation tries to retain some order by strongly emphasising family and friendship bonds. I showed in chapter four that apart from the new value of tolerance similar values as in GDR ideology are regarded as desirable. Yet again much literature on the reality of socialist education argues that the high aims of the state were never reached. Müller shows that surveys done in the seventies clearly indicate that officially emphasised values in life and values the young people regarded important were not the same (Müller 1991: 125; Fischer and Schmidt 1991:27-36). It is therefore to be expected that, similarly to the *Jugendweihe,* components of the educational system were re-interpreted by the people engaged in it and used for their own and certainly more profane reasons. Hille for example admits that although the FDJ dominated the timetable of the young people it might have been used by the young people as a space for social and cultural activities (1995:1296). Binns argues exactly this, the use of socialist rituals for private ends:

> I shall argue alter that it is entirely possible to ignore the ideological barrage as a necessary evil and to derive from such events simply pleasure at being the centre of attention in a colorful gathering and at sensing the perfectly genuine human kindness and community concern displayed, Young people are able to distinguish between genuine feelings and calculated show. (Binns 1980:176).

On the other hand there are also many aspects that suggest discontinuity. The strong educational aspect with its political and ideological thread has been smoothed out to an idea of being a 'companion during the time of transition' (Interessenvereinigung 2000). All political roles and symbols have been abolished and the collective atmosphere is no longer propagated. Collectivity does not seem to be apparent any more. It was most strongly celebrated during the vow, now discarded. The individual aspect has taken over and the action of congratulation on stage is uncontested with regard to its domination during the ritual.

It therefore remains to be asked, with Gerholm and Binns, whether the citizens of the GDR actually ever had the same views as the official institutions of the ritual and of the person. The difference between both interpretations, the ideological and the personal, is an important one. Its analysis will tell us much about the relation between dominant official discourse and a possibly existing counter-discourse at the grass-root level. It will also shed more light on the question of continuity and discontinuity with regard to the families, whose importance I noted earlier.



fig.1 The families gathering for the *Jugendweihe* in front of the restaurant Brauner Hirsch in Schönebeck.



fig.2 The choir at the *Jugendweihe* in Schönebeck. The picture is taken from the balcony.



fig.3 A group of young men as they receive their flowers. The young lady on the left announced their names.



fig.4 Young people from the Burghof who came along to witness the *Jugendweihe* of one of their friends. Close to them stands a father who records the ceremony with a video camera.



fig.5 After the *Jugendfeier* in Magdeburg which took place in a former church. Employees of the Humanistischer Verband inspect the Golden Book lying on the front table.



fig.6 Run down factories and GDR style concrete buildings along the rail track in Magdeburg



fig.7 Felgeleben and the home of the anthropologist (white house at centre) from above.



fig.8 Schönebeck, the river Elbe, and the surrounding fields of the Magdeburger Boerde.

Chapter Six

'The Coming-of-Age Ritual': Private Accounts

> At the present time we must follow the opinion of the majority of psychologists in dismissing the theory of the group mind as unnecessary, and therefore regard all the thinking and feeling which occurs in a culture as done by individuals. Thus when we attribute a system of thought or a scale of values to a culture, we must mean that the culture in some way affects the psychology of the individuals, causing whole groups of individuals to think and feel alike. (Bateson 1985:113)

6.0 Introduction

The last two chapters were concerned with the practice of the *Jugendweihe*, its ritual structure, and the cosmology or ideology from which the ritual derives its meaning. This exploration together with a comparison of the socialist and the modern *Jugendweihe* made clear that the current institutional discourse can only be understood when set against the background of the GDR cosmology. It would, however, be too simplistic to conclude that continuities between the GDR *Jugendweihe* and the modern ritual exist because of the seeming recurrence of socialist values in the texts of the Interessenvereinigung. To come to a convincing conclusion regarding the dynamics of social change that affected the value system and the notion of the person in eastern Germany we need to pay attention to another level of society, the people themselves. Similar to Bateson in the quote above, Gerholm notes that 'the individual's possibility to take his [sic] distance from the official interpretation is often made too little of in analyses treating ritual as ideology in action' (1988:200). Data collected by the GDR state itself also indicates that there are discrepancies between those values favoured by the young people and those that were officially propagated (Müller 1991:124). If we agree with Gerholm and Bateson and if

we want to take the idea that individuals can dissociate themselves from an ideology to its logical consequence we need to consider how individuals think and feel about the *Jugendweihe*. This is even more important if we remember the multivocality of symbolic actions in the GDR *Jugendweihe*. Another reason for further study is that in exploring continuity it is only logical to ask who is responsible for this continuity and what reasons there are for the selection of particular cultural elements and the discarding of others.

This chapter will therefore explore the same questions of the *Jugendweihe's* meaning and purpose as in the previous chapters, but concentrate on personal narratives. This will be done by considering the narratives of the parental generation and those of modern teenagers. I will explore similarities and differences between these two kinds of stories to see whether any differences are apparent and to what changes of ritual elements these might point. I will then return to the institutional discourse and make a second comparison to see how the official or institutional discourse differs from the personal evaluation of the ritual.

Narratives have been used frequently by anthropologists for different purposes. Watson, for example, edited a volume that concerns *Memory, history and opposition under state socialism* (1994). The contributions to this volume include investigations into how public and personal memory and commemoration supplement one another (Schwarcz 1994:45-64) or are contradictory as in the case of rural China (Pickowicz 1994:127-147). A similar and earlier volume is that edited by Passerini on *Memory and totalitarianism* (1992). More recent work concerns memory in post-socialist eastern Germany, that includes for example De Soto's and Ten Dyke's articles (De Soto 2000:96-113; Ten Dyke 2000:139-157). These, however, concern mainly public memory in the form of museums and remembrance practices. The studies do not include narratives. Halbwachs brought to our attention the fact that memories change over the course of time; 'because memories are repetitions ... they have lost the form they once had' (Halbwachs 1992:47). Although this is quite right and plausible some authors have been able to show that individual memories can be quite accurate. Ben-Ze'ev for example illustrates that personal memories of occurrences in a village during the 1948 war in Palestine are very similar to the army documents of the time; both sets of data complement one another (Ben-Ze'ev 2002:13-30). The only major

difference he found is the „spirit“ shown in both narratives. The oral narratives revolve around certain individuals whereas the army documents usually lack information regarding certain people and their characteristics. Ben-Ze'ev's findings prove an argument of Thorne *et al* who say that 'findings have usually indicated that events that are highly emotional and surprising generally show significant cross-time stability with regard to the construction of the central features of the event' (Thorne *et al* 1998:239). This is similar to Lass's argument that 'facts, which lie outside the individual's immediate experience' are more likely 'to slip the mind' (Lass 1994:97).

Using the premise that events which appeal to the emotions of a person have a much higher likelihood of being remembered than events that did not appeal to the self as a starting point, I will engage in this chapter in an exploration of narratives which recall the personal experience of the *Jugendweihe*. With regard to analysis I will call on Ochs and Capps who identify certain remembrance terms that are used to validate experience since 'although remembering itself is an unobservable and therefore unverifiable mental state, a thought cast as a memory is presented as true' (Ochs and Capps 1997:87). Ochs and Capps list emotion terms and narrated direct speech as common means for the authentication of the memory of past events (1997:83-89). The retelling of an event that was important for the individual at the time might also result in a certain engaged manner of narration. Indicators of such emotional engagement are the choice of words, speed of narration and the complexity of syntax. I will also pay attention to terms that are used to evaluate a past experience. Oliviera argues with Labov and Waletzki that phrases of evaluation which are used in story telling serve as a means of self-aggrandisement on behalf of the story teller (Oliviera 1999:25-47; Labov and Waletzki 1967:12-44). Oliviera points out that such evaluations are used in order to establish the rightfulness of the actions but also the experience of the event by the narrator. I will, however, not go as far as that. It seems plausible nevertheless that such evaluations serve to relate the individual self to the events by making an explicit statement about the effect these happenings had on the self. They therefore indicate that the event had an impact on the self which resulted in the creation of a vivid memory.

The interviews which provide the data used in this chapter are life-history interviews. I will discuss the literature on life-stories in more detail in the following

chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to acknowledge Linde's arguments regarding the purpose of life-stories: 'in order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story' (1993:3). A life story furthermore provides information regarding identity or a certain sense of self, it is used as a means to communicate this sense of self and as a tool to 'claim or negotiate group membership' (Linde 1993:3).

The interviews presented here were collected during my field research in Sachsen-Anhalt in 2001. The adults interviewed were between 33 and 40 years old, they participated in the *Jugendweihe* during the years 1974 and 1981. During that decade the Committees were handing out the keep-sake book *Der Sozialismus-Deine Welt* (1975), the program of youth lectures had been changed for the third time (a last revision would occur in 1982), and the vow had arrived at its final version. The narration of the *Jugendweihe* was embedded in a longer life-history interview. The interviewees were asked to narrate their biography and to position their experience of the *Jugendweihe* within it. If important points with regard to the ritual seemed to be missing the interviewer asked about them. This approach had the advantage of showing the family background of the interviewees. The family background, especially their religiosity, might effect the interviewees attitude towards the ritual.[1]

The teenagers who were approached for interviews were between 15 and 17 years old. I chose young people whose *Jugendweihe* was about two years in the past because it was important to hear what they remembered of their ceremony and how they evaluated it after some time. In this way the two sets of interviews could be compared more easily. Within these age sets I interviewed both parents and children. The resulting family interviews were complemented by a number of individual interviews. Family interviews enabled me to see how feelings of the parents towards modern Germany were reflected in the feelings of their children. This question was important for another focus point of the interview; the question of ideas about and attitudes towards the new German state and society, which is dealt with at length in the next chapter.

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[1] Christians who did the ritual although it contradicts their believes would certainly experience it much differently than people from an atheistic background.

6.1. 'What do you remember of your Jugendweihe?'

Knowing about all the issues that were connected to the practice of the *Jugendweihe* in GDR times: its purpose as a means of education and recruitment, as a means in the struggle against the churches, its oppressive character, and bearing in mind the pre-eminence of these issues in the public discourse (chapter three) one might expect that these issues will come up in the narratives. We will nevertheless see that this is not the case in the majority of the stories. Furthermore, in keeping with the way I have treated the *Jugendweihe* so far in this thesis, putting most emphasis on the public ceremony, one would expect this to be a major focus point in the narratives. However, this is not so. It will become evident that the family celebrations, which I have neglected as yet, are a constitutive part of the whole of the *Jugendweihe* rite. Let us therefore turn to the narratives:

A: What do you remember of your Jugendweihe?

Helmut: Nothing, shopping for clothes. The stress one might remember. The rehearsal, this [official] ceremony. The rest? That was like any other [socialist] ceremony.

Nadine: Don't you remember the youth lectures? They belonged to it.

Helmut: Sure. That happened at school. But that was all theatre, no one took that seriously. The ceremony itself. I don't have much memories of it. That was much *bambule* [fussing about, theatre] and that was it.

A: But family celebration?

Helmut: Yes. Afterwards there was the family celebration. Yes. That belonged to it. (...) [his wife laughs] The details don't belong on the tape, I don't think.[2]

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[2] The transcription of the stories focuses on their content. All sentences typed in italic are questions or remarks by the interviewer. Terms in square brackets are transcriptional suggestions, explanations or information regarding happenings that do not appear in the speech (laughter, crying etc.). A question mark in ordinary brackets marks an inaudible phrase. Three dots indicate unfinished sentences and the following pause. Three dots in square brackets mark omissions. If more than one person is interviewed initials or names indicate who is speaking.

The excerpt shows some initial themes that are apparent in most narratives of the personal experience of the *Jugendweihe*. Helmut starts by stating that he does not remember anything. Does that mean that literally nothing happened? His perspective changes when the interview switches to the private family celebration. Regarding this topic there are certainly memories, which he, however, does not want to reveal to a wider audience. This seems to suggest that his initial statement 'nothing happened' refers to the public ceremony. This public ceremony does not seem to have made a lasting impression on Helmut, it was like 'any other ceremony', nothing special, as he says. Regarding the ideological aspects of the *Jugendweihe,* Helmut mentions only the youth lectures. He, however, only refers to them when his wife reminds him of them. This seems to show that although he knows that the youth lectures took place, he did not regard them as worth mentioning.

This very brief account of a *Jugendweihe* has already revealed some important points which need testing in order to determine whether they are general features of *Jugendweihe* narratives or whether they are unique to Helmut's account. The points that became apparent are: in comparison to the family celebration the public ceremony plays a lesser role; and the ritual elements that were prominent in the ideological discourse are of much less importance in the private accounts.

6.1.1. Nothing happened

Most interviewees initially showed great difficulty in remembering their *Jugendweihe*. The memory did come back to them after a while but their story then often lacked details of the official celebration and the youth lectures. Another interviewee, Siglinde, for example starts her narrative by pointing out that the ceremony had been unimpressive:

> It rather was an average function. Like an average political... Yes, like the average political function in a way.

When asked whether it had been important she denies this:

No. No, because the ceremony also hadn't been the way that you would have said... And I didn't feel it was something special.

Siglinde describes, in a similar fashion to Helmut, the public ceremony as an ordinary part of the curriculum of political events. In her opinion the *Jugendweihe* did not stand out, it was rather a common thing. Let us consider the longer narrative from Nadine to identify some more features of the personal accounts:

Hmm, Jugendweihe. I can recall only one youth lecture, when we heard a talk in our local heritage museum about the small concentration camp which had existed here in Boitzenburg during the Second World War, which nobody knew and we all were quite shocked: 'We had that too... oh dear, oh dear.' And that is what I remember quite strongly because that was so interesting because nobody had anticipated that. 'Here... at ours...' All knew Weimar etc. but such a small concentration camp on a hill, where you didn't have access in GDR times because it was border area. That may have been... [Nadine lived in a town within the already restricted border area in the West of the GDR.]

Well... apart from that... youth lectures... I don't know. We had some readings too or so, I remember. What about? I don't... Forgotten. Hmm, Jugendweihe? Apart from the fact that I had to wear a really awful dress which I hated but there wasn't anything else available. I had two dresses to choose from that I could wear, either this or that. And then my mother said: 'I am not going out with you a second time. Make your mind up now.' [laughing] And then I had to wear one -that was in the shops. A blue dress with coloured dots. Very nice. I hated it. And blue suede leather shoes with heals. I will never forget that. And then we were the first group to have *Jugendweihe* on the 28th of March and it was freezing cold. And then I had to put on a winter coat my mother had got second hand and which was equally ugly.

G: That had a flower pattern, didn't it?

Nadine: No it had squares [all laughing]. Well, faintly, you hardly saw it. But it was made of really heavy material, with a warm lining. It was soo heavy. It pressed me to the ground. And it had plaits from the waist down. And [was] really tight down there. And a huge collar was attached to it. And then on that day it was really warm luckily enough. And I only had to wear it in the morning on the way there. And at lunch time

when we were finished it had been so warm that I didn't need to wear it any more. Because my super-nice dress had long sleeves too. And then I know there had been presents. I got a camera, I know. And then money which I had been especially looking forward to since I had never got any pocket money. I had never had money and I really wanted to buy something for me. And then guests at the family celebration got worked up about the fact that I was writing down what I got from whom. That account was being taken. So that I wouldn't lose control [laughing]. So they worked themselves up. And the men drank a lot I remember. And I was allowed to have my first glass of cherry liqueur. And then I went to the youth club with a friend of mine. In the youth club somebody from my class was celebrating with his [sic] family. And we had another shot there. Then I got into trouble with my father when I came home. [laughing] Yes, that was my Jugendweihe.

Nadine hardly refers to the public ceremony at all in her account. She does however recall one of the ideological elements, the youth lectures, which her husband, Helmut had needed to be reminded about. When Nadine talks about the youth lecture she states explicitly that she can only remember one. The memory of this youth lecture is, however, frequently emphasised by her via means of authentication (Ochs and Camps 1997:83-89). The phrase 'I remember' is used repeatedly by Nadine to underline the fact that her ability to recollect is unusual. Most people do not remember the youth lectures; her husband did not remember them; she, however, does. Nadine explains why this is so by referring to the content of this youth lecture. What she and her classmates had learned in this youth lecture had been so unexpected, so astonishing, 'because nobody had anticipated that...', that it stuck in her mind. This proves Thorne's argument that emotional and surprising events in particular will be remembered (1998:239). It is easy to appreciate that the serious and sad topic of concentration camps and the Holocaust in general would resonate strongly with the especially sensitive young people. This topic, which is already overloaded with emotion, moves suddenly and unexpectedly into close proximity during a youth lecture. Nadine uses direct speech: 'We had that too...' to illustrate what the group of young people had experienced, thereby validating her argument about the emotional power of the youth lecture. The young people were left aghast and greatly impressed,

or 'quite shocked' as Nadine says. Her story makes clear that this event had been important to her. However, the explanation she gives as to why this youth lecture had been so important does not conform entirely with the state's intention on what should be achieved in these lectures. The struggle of the classes and the revolutionary legacy of the GDR should have been illustrated in such a youth lecture in memorials (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986:103-108). I will come back to this point shortly.

In a reverse fashion Nadine also uses the opposite of Ochs' and Camps' signifier of authenticity (1997:83-89); she says clearly that she has forgotten all other youth lectures, therefore emphasising the contrasting unimportance of these events. Nadine's recollection of one youth lecture, which is linked to a certain emotional appeal it had at the time, means two things. It seems that if ritual elements lack this emotional appeal they are usually forgotten. It also indicates that the majority of youth lectures hardly had any emotional appeal. This conclusion is validated by another account that similarly mentions only one youth lecture.

Phillip, however, did not retell this lecture for any ideological reasons. He remembers this occasion, rather, because a figure of authority got very angry with him. Phillip had burst out laughing when the group was watching a film about a May parade. In his opinion the state officials, who were wearing long leather coats with the collars turned up, looked strikingly similar to members of the *Gestapo*[3]. The director of the institution the class was visiting took this incident very seriously since he had a long-felt antipathy to Phillip's family. It is not surprising that such an occasion would result in vivid memories. It is nevertheless the feeling of humiliation and anxiety that caused this to be turned into vivid memory; not because Phillip learned much about the communist revolutionary legacy in this youth lecture.

These two examples and the fact that most interviewees did not mention any youth lecture suggests that they only left an impression on individual participants if something extra-ordinary happened, something that had direct consequences for the individual, or if the youth lecture appealed to the emotions of the individual for another reason. The ordinary youth lectures (see chapter five:161-162), did not make a strong enough impression on the young people to leave a significant trace in their

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[3] Military police in the Third Reich.

memories. Nevertheless, the fact that Nadine or any of the other interviewees do not explicitly relate her or his experience to the ideological issues (the revolutionary legacy for example and the fight against imperialism) does not mean that those issues did not appeal to the young people at the time. It might be the case that they suppress associations with the now devalued ideological aspect of the experience in the attempt to establish 'the moral value of [their]self' (Linde 1993:122). Demonstrating faith in socialism would certainly not contribute to any eastern German's self-conscious image as a moral person in modern society. It has, however, to be admitted that some eastern Germans do not much mind showing their preferences for political or ideological aspects of the GDR today (fieldwork experience). I will put this concern aside for the moment and return to it at a later point in this chapter.

From the youth lectures I will now turn to the public ceremony. In a similar fashion to the lectures, the public ceremony is often only mentioned in passing in the narratives. Nadine's narrative centres on the story of her dress. The story about this dreaded item of clothing is told with passion; Nadine is engaged in it and laughs frequently. It seems that her dress was of considerable importance for her; it overshadows everything else. Her engagement in the story becomes visible in the higher complexity of the syntax; the use of evaluative terms like: 'I hated it' for example. Even stronger is her exclamation: 'I will never forget that'. The account is furthermore very detailed which shows how vivid the memories she draws on are. Nadine not only recalls the material of the clothes and the patterns in it, she also makes statements about the weather on the day. She furthermore uses direct speech: 'my mother said:...', and irony: 'my super-nice dress', to illustrate and reinforce her position. Irony is again a powerful means of evaluating experience and indicating the strong effect the event had on the self. What this long and detailed accounted seems to be missing, however, is any information regarding the ceremony itself.

Nadine introduced her story by asking: 'Hmm... *Jugendweihe*?' This rhetorical question is answered by her with the story of her dress; which is introduced by the sentence 'apart from the fact'. Taken literally, this phrase means that Nadine does not remember anything apart from her dress with regard to the official ceremony. She does not note the procession, the speech, the vow or any other element that was so strongly emphasised by the Committees for *Jugendweihe*. This fact suggests quite

strongly that for Nadine the ritual elements of the public ceremony did not matter very much. The question of her appearance seems to have dominated the experience of the *Jugendweihe* for Nadine.

We already heard that Siglinde also did not attribute much importance to the official ceremony; she compared it to the 'average political function'. When she was asked whether there had still been anything important during that ceremony she replies:

> No. [...] Everyone was afraid of walking up on stage and stumbling, I guess. And us, with our long skirts, were in danger of that. So... and you were looking forward to what would come afterwards. Celebrating with the family. That was nice... But the ceremony left so few impressions that I would have to...

Siglinde does not mention the political elements of the ritual. Instead she focuses, in a similar fashion to Nadine, on aspects of clothing and the appearance of the self. It is in this respect that she mentions the action on stage. Emotional involvement seems to come into play in this case because of a fear of embarrassment; Siglinde says that the girls might have been afraid of stumbling on stage. It seems plausible that Nadine's preoccupation with her appearance is nourished by a fear of embarrassment. I will come back to this point shortly. Siglinde finishes her rather short description by admitting that she does not remember anything else stating explicitly that this is due to the fact that the ceremony left so few impressions. Siglinde's case does not seem to be singular. Thomas even recounts a negative experience of the public ceremony:

> Jugendweihe. I remember this extremely political speech and a very cold atmosphere. On the other hand you felt proud to be accepted in this circle [of adults].

He refers to a 'political speech' and a cold atmosphere in the room. This sounds quite similar to Siglinde's description of the ceremony as an 'average function'. Although Thomas remembers one of the important political aspects, the speech, he

does not recount the ideological meaning of it. He rather mentions it in relation to his unpleasant experience.

I still have not provided any narrative that recounts some more of the ritual elements. The following, however, does and I will illustrate how these elements are narrated:

> Frank: Well, I can remember that we had a rehearsal before and were told exactly who had to stand up when. You went on stage in groups of six and you had to do a vow. The *'Ich gelobe'* became *'Ich jlobe'* in the end. That was fun then. That was, when you were up there a picture was taken and at the marching in and the head master headed the group and then you sat down. It took place in the communal hall [*Kreiskulturhaus*] and afterwards another picture was taken at the side by the staircase. That was it.

This narrative is the most inclusive account with regard to the ritual elements. Frank includes the rehearsal, the vow, the action on stage, taking of pictures and the procession in his account. However, rather than telling a story in an engaged fashion Frank seems to merely list the different elements. Some of these elements are also put into the wrong order. The action on stage is for example confused with the vow with regard to chronology. The sequence of ritual elements does not seem to be important for Frank. There is furthermore no evaluation of them. They are listed in a fashion that makes the self appear detached from the events, and unconcerned about them. The only thing he remembers in greater detail is the speaking of the vow. This element is also evaluated; it is regarded to have been 'fun'. He closes the story by stating: 'That was it'. Taking this coda to its logical conclusion, we would have to say that there was nothing more to the public ceremony than a chronological series of happenings distanced from the self. Only the act of ridicule of the vow is evaluated and therewith linked to the personal experience of the narrator.

The experience of the vow had been enjoyed; it was memorised because it appealed to the individual. The books of the Committees for *Jugendweihe*, however, do not state anywhere that the vow should be fun, they rather suggest that it is a solemn and serious affair (chapter five: for example 141). Indeed, Frank's enjoyment of the vow is not only unconnected to its ideological meaning but it even contradicts

it. Frank and his friends ridicule the vow in such a way that the meaning of the sentences changes. They pronounce the words '*Ich gelobe*', 'I swear', according to an exaggerated version of the regional dialect *Sächsisch*. This results in an alteration of the meaning of the words; '*ich jlobe*' can be understood to mean 'I believe' rather than the original 'I swear'. For Frank this is not only a practical joke of young boys.

Frank's life-story reveals a Christian family background, which leant his participation a certain cynicism. He only did the *Jugendweihe* in order to secure future job prospects; not out of any conviction. Because of his problematic position he was not able to take on the non-committal stance most other participants displayed; Frank remained critically aware of the happenings and judged them accordingly. The incident of the vow was therefore his opportunity to regain agency during a strongly prescribed ritual that is governed by state authorities. He escaped the ritual confinements and broke its solemn atmosphere. His critical stance towards the ritual might furthermore be the reason why he can recall so many more details about the ceremony than most other interviewees. Frank is, however, a special case in particular circumstances. Despite his account it can be noted here that no interview has included an actual narration of those ritual elements regarded as crucially important by the GDR authorities.

There are several possible reasons that might account for this fact. One reason why the speech for example made so little impression on the participants might be due to the style in which it was delivered. Ideological, and therefore also all political texts, in the GDR were done in a special vocabulary so removed from everyday language that some scholars have called it a second language (Deuerlein 1966:23; Nothnagle 1999:26-31). This might have made the speeches largely incomprehensible to the young listeners. Another possible reason brings us back to Siglinde's earlier description of the *Jugendweihe* as 'the average political function'. It seems quite plausible that the ideological and political education attempted within the *Jugendweihe* had blended to such a degree with all other processes of teaching and indoctrination that the different occasions became indistinguishable from one another

for the young people.[4] The teachings lost their appeal the more often they were reiterated:

> [Jan retells the *Jugendweihe* as a story of his family celebration]
> *A: That means the political background had remained in the background?*
> Jan: It belonged to everyday life any way back then... Whether I had to go to school in a blue shirt[5] each Monday or I had to say... Every day or every second day we had citizenship-studies[6] at school, where it was said: "Socialism succeeds". You could write complete rubbish as long as you put "Socialism will succeed" into the last line. You got a grade four [D] for content but because of the ideological attitude it was alright. And it was the same with these youth lectures which we also had to do beforehand. Some were interesting.... It was a trip for the class, whether it [the topic] was a communist in a show trial against fascists, that went wrong, that didn't matter. We were not interested in it. It was a trip and you got out of your hometown. And the same [holds true] for the ceremony. It was a celebration and that you got a book there that was called *Sozialismus - Deine Welt* and you had to do a vow and before you the Young Pioneers were standing with a blue neckerchief and everything and handed flowers to you. You just accepted it. After this it was: "all together please", a picture of the group and of yourself and then you disappeared and the most important thing started, the [family] celebration. Right?

Jan seemed quite impatient at the end of his story and uttered the concluding 'right' loudly and forcefully. He seemed to think that I was quite stupid since I still had not got the point. I therefore want to make the point to the reader in a similar fashion: The ideological content and meaning of the *Jugendweihe* simply did not matter for most participants. It was not important. While the speech was conducted, their minds were already occupied with something else, something that had more significance for them. I will come to this in the following section.

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[4] Young people of this age group faced similar political instructions in all educational institutions. At school they had the subject *Staatsbürgerkunde* (studies in state citizenship), which was mainly concerned with Marxist-Leninist ideology and the fight of the socialist countries against imperialism. Lessons in history included similar issues. There were furthermore FDJ and pioneer meetings that also covered these topics; all these meetings took place on a regular basis.
[5] The uniform of the FDJ.
[6] See footnote 4.

6.1.2. 'And I remember...' - being on stage

Returning to Nadine's story we remember that the central topic of her narrative was her dress. Her narrative style showed great involvement when she told the interviewer how awful the dress and her coat had been and how much she had hated wearing them. Using a short excerpt from Siglinde's interview, I concluded that both accounts focused on the aspect of presenting the self with regard to the *Jugendweihe*. It appears that this is the central issue in most of the private accounts.

After Frank's brief list-like report of the public ceremony his wife tries to resume her story; the interview was actually conducted with her. She does not get the chance since Frank suddenly interrupts her once more and tells the following story:

> And another thing was that all girls had such white crochet scarves I can remember. That was back then, that must have been fashionable. And I remember with horror the mother of my friend was a hairdresser and she thought that my hair wasn't right yet...

From an account of the political and ritual elements of the ceremony he suddenly jumps to the aspect of self-presentation. Frank reiterates 'I remember' in an attempt to make his narrative convincing and viable. He starts with a remark about the fashion of the time, meaning the clothes the girls were wearing. Frank, however, does not remain with this topic but retells a story of how his own proper appearance at the ritual came into danger. He recalls in some detail how the mother of a friend had tried to 'improve' his hair style. She added ample amounts of hair spray to his head until everything was 'sticky and gluey'. When Frank switches to this part of the narrative his language changes. The sentences become more complex, he uses evaluation and emotion terms: 'with horror'. By doing so he marks this story as a strong memory. These linguistic means make the story much more fluent than the earlier 'list' of ritual elements. The obvious difference in story telling seems to depend on the fact that the endangerment of Frank's hairstyle is an issue that concerns him and affects his emotions.

I am arguing that the reason as to why the protection or, as in Nadine's case, the creation of a suitable image of the self in the *Jugendweihe* is so important lies in the participants' view of the ritual. In their perception the *Jugendweihe* seems to be

primarily about the presentation of the self. I pointed out above (chapters four:99, five:141) that according to Sahlins clothing is used to produce classes of status, gender identity and numerous other differentiations (1976:178-179). The question of the outfit, the outer appearance is so vivid in the memories of the informants because clothes function as carriers of messages about a person's identity. This identity is one of an independent, individual, adult persona, which the participants put forward for approval in the *Jugendweihe*. Clothes are an important means in the creation of a certain image of the self. In the *Jugendweihe* the young people are on stage in the very Goffmanian sense of the word, and understandably want to look their best (Goffman [1959] 1969). Approval of this grown up self needs to come from the audience (chapters four:101, five:140). The audience or congregation of older members of the group decides whether the young people are worthy to be accepted as members (La Fontaine 1986:78). It is of minor importance here that the *Jugendweihe* does not actually leave space for disapproval. The ritual determines by its ruling that all participants will be initiated. However, this does not take away the tension and the anxiety that the participants seem to have experienced.

This interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* as a ritual of self-presentation is also the reason why Siglinde is able to use the term 'guess' when she talks about the anxiety to go on stage. If the reader remembers, she said that she would 'guess' that most girls are afraid of going on stage, they might fear that they will stumble. The use of this verb suggests that there is common agreement that this moment on stage, walking up to the stage, is a task of which one may be apprehensive. This element of the ritual has become linked to certain feelings, the experience of which is, through reification, by now a cultural expectation. A cultural 'scheme' has developed which suggests a certain emotional stance towards an action (D'Andrade 1992:23-44). This indicates, furthermore, that it is common knowledge that the action on stage is the most important aspect of the ritual. The action on stage is the issue with which the minds of the participants are preoccupied before and during the ritual. This fact, however, contests the official master narrative, which regards the vow as the most significant element and states that collectivity should prevail over individuality in the ritual.

The pre-eminence of the appearance of the self in the mind of the participants was evident in the stories presented above. Nadine talks for a few minutes about the

ugly dress she was in and that 'really heavy winter coat', whereas the political element of the ritual is not mentioned. The quote right at the beginning of the chapter notably started with a remark about buying clothes. The question of shopping is on the other hand certainly a special topic in a country with an economy of scarcity like the GDR. Nice clothes were hard to get and usually not much choice was offered.[7] The emphasis on the aspect of clothing in the narratives nevertheless points towards a general dominance of individual and private aspects in the *Jugendweihe* on the part of the participants and their families. Once the narrators have said some things about the public ceremony they immediately settle on the family celebrations.

6.1.3. The 'real thing' - family celebration

This last point, the dominance of individual aspects in the experience of the ceremony, leads us directly to what came afterwards, the family celebration. I argued in chapters four and five that with regard to the aspect of 'recognition' in the *Jugendweihe* the role of the audience, and therefore the parents, is crucial. The family celebration is an extension of the public ceremony into the private. The participants are celebrated here in the literal sense of the word and the family celebration therefore belongs in an essential way to the whole of the *Jugendweihe*. It is the 'final act in which the new status of the initiate is recognized' (La Fontaine 1986:185). This celebration furthermore includes ritualised actions which test and affirm the change of status.

All narratives showed a clear dominance of the family celebration over the public ceremony. In those cases where the ceremony was mentioned, the narrative structure between the two parts of the story differed greatly. The syntax was more complex, terms of emotions and evaluation were used; suddenly the listener was told stories and even anecdotes that asked for reactions of laughter and astonishment. The memories that were recounted were obviously vivid, they had achieved a narrative form which many accounts of the public ceremony had lacked. Siglinde for example described the public ceremony as an average political event. The family celebration was, however, a different matter for her. She introduces this part of her narrative with

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[7] See Kaminski on consumption in the GDR (1999; on clothes pp.50-59). Many people made their own clothes (personal experience; interviews).

'so', stating that she now moves to the 'actual time line of the story', the important section (Baumann 1986:38). In this part she also includes a direct evaluation of the events: 'That had been nice'. This yet again marks an involvement of the self in the happenings not only with regard to the narration but also the experience of this event. Siglinde makes her argument of a predominance of the family celebration even stronger:

> ... and you had been looking forward to what would come afterwards. Celebrating with the family.

Jan also makes it unmistakably clear that the family celebration had greater importance:

> A picture of the group and of yourself and then you disappeared and the most important thing started, the [family] celebration. Right?

> Right then. Let us turn to some descriptions to see what happened:

> Josephine: On the 19th of April 1982. It was at my parents', in the garden, where we celebrated. It was nice weather. We had lunch and in the afternoon my boyfriend came around and collected me and we went from one to the other [celebration] looking what they were doing. I can't remember anything else...
> The public ceremony itself I can't remember.

Josephine introduces the general structure of the family celebration. After the public ceremony the family would often go for lunch. Then during the afternoon more guests would arrive and coffee and cake be served. The celebration would extend into the evening with a dinner. During one of the meals the father might stand up and toast to his daughter or son (Helbig 1987:26-27). This toast refocuses the attention of all attendants on the purpose of the family gathering by putting the participant at the centre of attention. During the afternoon and early evening the young people often meet to 'cruise' all the different places. This involved having a drink at each party.

Altogether this does not yet sound like anything special, anything that could not be happening at any time. The interviews show that this, however, was not quite the case. Nadine also mentions the aspect of drinking: 'And the men drank a lot I remember.' However, more importantly she tells us that she 'was allowed to have [her] first glass of cherry liqueur' (emphasis added). The ritualised drinking of the first glass of alcohol is a vital part of the family celebration. We have to imagine a situation where it is announced that the young man or woman will now drink their first beer, glass of wine, or liqueur in Nadine's case. Parts of the congregation might then assemble around the initiate and watch her or his accomplishment of the task, acknowledging it with laughter. The father might toast the young person over the table and nod meaningfully when they drink. Exercising the right to drink alcohol, and the ability to take it properly, is connected to growing up. The communal drinking of alcohol is an essential part of socialising in many western societies. With their first glass the young people are allowed to join in the adult community and their way of socialising and having fun.

Similarly to Josephine, Nadine also leaves the family celebration to go out with her friends:

> And then I went to the youth club with a friend of mine. In the youth club somebody from my class was celebrating with his [sic] family. And we had another shot there. Then I got into trouble with my father when I came home. [laughing].

It is not hard to guess that she got into trouble because she had been drinking some more.

Another crucial part of the family celebration is the accumulation of gifts. Whereas the gifts that are received during the public ceremony can be regarded as bearing mostly symbolic value, the gifts that are given out and received at the family celebration are also economically valuable. The greatest part of these gifts are made in the form of money. The amount of money that was accumulated at a *Jugendweihe* will have hovered around 1,000 *Ostmark* [GDR currency]. This considerable amount, which enables its owner to make an independent acquisition, was spent by most people on a tape recorder. Most interviewees bought a certain brand of tape recorder

that was popular at the end of the 1970s in the GDR; it was only just about affordable with the money the young people received. Electronic devices counted as luxury goods and were accordingly very expensive in the GDR (Kleßmann 1997:408-409). To receive such a considerable amount of money and to be able to spent it independently is another symbol of the transition. This sum of money makes the participants somewhat more independent from their parents; at least in one instance. It enables the young people to buy themselves whatever they chose. This would not only be something small and ordinary like a book or a tape, but rather an expensive luxury good of their own choice. In a similar fashion to the symbolic first glass (or glasses) of alcohol, this acquisition of money is another step towards future, financial, independence. This ritual act furthermore shows the certain degree of trust the family has in the young people. They are regarded as mature enough to handle a considerable sum of money themselves.[8] The same holds true for the symbolic meaning of goods which could supplement the money gifts or also substitute them entirely. Nadine for example received a camera at her *Jugendweihe* which is an expensive and valuable present. She also received money and meticulously took account of it, which was not appreciated by some guests as she recalls. The increase in material wealth symbolises growing independence. This independence will only be achieved fully in the future; the sudden and rapid accumulation of valuable goods nevertheless functions as a marker.

The following quote illustrates once more all the points I have touched on so far:

> Helmut: That was always the same whether it was birthday or Jugendweihe. What mattered was that all were sitting together and got drunk until their faces were numb. But that is what one recalls of the day. The other thing [public ceremony] was protocol which no one was interested in. Important was what came afterwards [family celebration].
>
> *A: Presents? Something special, big?*
>
> Helmut: The usual thing you bought from the money in GDR times. When it was enough a cassette recorder and that was about it. It cost about a thousand Ostmark if

[8] The emphasis on materialistic values shows that despite socialism GDR society was nevertheless a consumer society, which the authorities were aware of (Helbig 1987:39).

you wanted to get a good one. I didn't have that many relatives or relatives with money so that that much money would come together. It was just enough for the recorder and then you were happy. You could keep up with the others.

A: Jealousy?

Helmut: Wasn't there. Sure, there will have been people who looked around and compared what the other one got making sure they hadn't less. Also the parents: Who has got most. But that is worse nowadays than at GDR times.

I have argued earlier that the *Jugendweihe* is a transition rite, and explored this question in relation to the public ceremony. I argued the same with regard to the private ceremony and noted the gifts and the ritualised drinking of alcohol and the celebration itself as instances and proofs of this transition. The interviews, however, showed that even the participants themselves regarded the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual. Michael for example starts his account with the sentence:

> That was an experience! To be accepted in the circle of adults.

He then goes on to one instance that is a symbol of this change of status:

> At the [family]celebration itself you probably would have had a beer, which you otherwise wouldn't have...

Thomas also recalled that the initiation into the adult community was the day's purpose:

> On the other hand one was proud to be accepted in this circle.

A: Circle?

Thomas: Circle of adults... That was one point that you were addressed in third person afterwards.

A: Did that happen? Had you been addressed in third person afterwards?

Thomas: Oh yes. [Yes.] That had been such points....

Admittedly, most interviews make this point less explicitly; it is, however, implicit in their narrative in the way they talk about the ceremony and the family celebration. The examples above show this.

This change of status is, however, limited to the duration of the celebration. Nothing changes with regard to everyday life afterwards. The money will certainly soon be spent and the tape recorder be out of order in some years' time.[9] It might have been the case that some teachers offered to address the young people with the polite form, the third person pronoun *Sie*; many interviewees indicated that this, however, did not last longer than a day or two. The juridical status of the young people changed in so far as they received their passport at the age of fourteen in the GDR. The passport does not seem to be related to the *Jugendweihe*, however, since it is never referred to during the ritual. Apart from this, life would go on as usual.

I believe that the meaning of the *Jugendweihe* as a coming-of-age rite stems from its earliest history. In the nineteenths century it had marked the finishing of school and beginning of life as a fully responsible adult (chapter two:22,23). With the elongation of the educational process the ritual lost this function but its meaning as a transition rite was nevertheless maintained in the practice. The ritual is now used to mark the beginning of 'teenagehood', a liminal phase in life which is a gradual process of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Coming back to the initial enquiry, the question of the relation between the official discourse and the private accounts, it becomes apparent that the ideological arguments of the state are not mentioned in relation to the transition either. The two men quoted above, talk about being received in the circle of adults, not the circle of the workers and peasants. Agreeing with Linde that life stories entail information about the identity of the story teller and their membership of a group (1993:3) I can with some certainty say at least that the ideologically defined group of workers and peasants is certainly not the one that the narrators feel they belong to now. They rather seem to be referring to a more or less depoliticised community of adults and to their families; society in general, as it were.

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[9] Some of my informants still had their tape recorders when I met them in 2001. Nadine pointed out that it was lying in the garden somewhere as a toy for the children.

6.1.4. Depoliticisation

This point takes me to my first conclusion of this chapter. The socialist state ritual *Jugendweihe* was perceived and conducted as a private coming-of-age ritual by the participants and the families. I therefore argue that the *Jugendweihe* was depoliticised at the grass roots of GDR society; its ideological meaning seems to have been ignored by the majority of attendants.[10] The phenomenon of depolitisation had also been observed by Binns with regard to the Soviet Union; Gerholm's argument that I noted at the entrance of this chapter makes a similar suggestion (Gerholm 1988:200; Binns 1980:170-187). The structure of Nadine's story shows this counter-interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* as an apolitical coming-of-age rite very clearly (chapter six:178).

Nadine starts by mentioning the one youth lecture which she remembers. She then switches to the *Jugendweihe* thereby remarking that, apart from her outfit, she does not remember much of it. She then tells a long and detailed story about her clothes. The public ceremony is only mentioned in a structuring sense: 'when we were finished', not as an issue in itself. From there, Nadine slips directly into a narration of the family celebration. She talks about the presents, the first publicly sanctioned glass of liqueur. She goes out with a friend and when she come back, she gets into trouble with her father because she probably had some more drinks. 'That was my *Jugendweihe'* is how she finishes her account. This, her, *Jugendweihe* did not entail much ideology or politics; it is strikingly different from the *Jugendweihe* as it was outlined in the Committee's *Handbuch* (Zentraler Ausschuss 1986).

The narratives above show how the public ceremony was reinterpreted in a more private sense by the participants. Curiously enough those ritual elements were emphasised by the participants which I identified as being ambiguous and multivocal in the preceding chapter: the moment on stage, the different identities and roles of the actors on stage. Now it can be said with more certainty that on stage the participants display their individual and private self and ask the adult community for acknowledgement of this self, rather than of a political persona. It became apparent that the emphasis of the moment on stage is not only a characteristic of individual

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[10] See also Fischer (1998:250); Bornemann (1992:165); Tschiche's article (chapter three:48).

experience but has furthermore become a cultural scheme; a certain set of emotions, mostly nervousness and anxiety, is connected to the act of appearing on stage. This suggests that the apolitical, individualised interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* was a shared cultural concept at the grassroots of socialist society.

The *Jugendweihe* as a ritual of transition is then further continued in the private celebrations during which the newly achieved status is tested and affirmed. I identified two ritualised actions as part of this complex; one was the first glass of alcohol; the other instance was the accumulation of material wealth during the ceremony. It seems that most of the *Jugendweihe* happens within the families. No interviewee reported that they had looked at the town hall to see how far the decorations had advanced each day. It is much more likely that they would have looked into their family's storage room and kitchen, helped to clean the living room, hoped that their father would book a table at a restaurant and gone shopping for clothes: 'Shopping for clothes... The stress one might remember' as Helmut said. The participants only leave the private and familiar environment for the hour when they step into the public domain to pass the rite of transition. This ritual encompasses other families, which, although collectivity in itself is not predominant, creates a feeling of community and togetherness. It was furthermore argued that the public acknowledgement of the change of status is a necessary part of the *Jugendweihe*. After this the participants return to their familiar surroundings to be honoured and toasted, to celebrate and be celebrated.

The *Jugendweihe* reinforces family and kinship ties by assembling and uniting all members in the celebration of one of their number. Family bonds and therefore the private sphere are fostered against the backdrop of an ideology that demands private life to be public and argues for a diffusion of ties between individuals in favour of general collectivity. [11] Although the state propagates the importance of relationships, the overall expected primacy of collectivity consequently devalues close bonds between individuals, and also within the family. If the ideological demands are not fulfilled in individual relationships, or if such relations prevent the individual from

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[11] The importance of family and friendship ties was facilitated by a number of factors, see chapter seven footnote7.

participating in other collectives, then they would be considered improper and probably even hostile.

This social counter-interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* seems to indicate a number of things. It should not, however, be mistaken for resistance or subversion. Even the ridicule of key elements, as Frank recalled it, should not be overvalued. He and his friends still took part in the ritual. The special version of the vow the teenagers created may not even have been noticed by the officials. Phenomena like this (political jokes, ridiculing official acts, changing practices to serve private ends) are rather a common feature of East German society or totalitarian states in general (Niethammer 1992:45-69; Watson 1994:3). Members of this society countered the hegemonic claim of the ideology and the public structuration of life with their own view of things resulting in informal behaviour. Such informal modes of behaviour have been called '*Eigen-sinn*' (your own will, particularism) by some. The term goes back to Luedtke who used this concept to describe deviant models of behaviour among German factory workers during the last century and has recently been applied to GDR society to better explain the dynamics of everyday life (Luedtke 1993; Lindenberger 1999:21). Humphrey called such models for behaviour which contest the dominant political narratives, 'evocative transcripts' (1994: 23). This is an elaboration of Scott's hypotheses of hidden transcripts, which he identified in peasant societies (1990); hidden transcripts were shared by certain groups within society. Humphrey argues, however, that in the case of Mongolia these transcripts were shared by the whole society, including officials. They are therefore not 'hidden' but rather 'evocative'. This, she explains, was a result of the special encapsulated quality of these societies; the Soviet system had not transgressed into the society but rather remained on the bureaucratic surface. Humphrey concludes that once the domination of the discourse has disappeared the evocative transcripts will as well (1994:42).

The concept of evocative transcripts is compelling and many anthropologists have agreed with it (Schwarcz 1994:45-64; Jones 1994:149-165). I believe though, that it is a little misleading in its connotation. Although the term 'transcripts' reminds one of cognitive theory, cognition is not what Scott or Humphrey refer to. They talk, rather, about texts and their interpretation. The hypothesis is that members of totalitarian states share stories that sound ambiguous and are understood to be

ambiguous. In their unofficial interpretation these stories contest the official master narrative. The argument of this thesis, however, goes a little further than that. The East Germans interpreted ideology and official models for behaviour according to their own judgement; a judgement that was partly based on older traditions (the practice of *Jugendweihe* and *Konfirmation* in the nineteenth century) or on thoughts coming over from West Germany (individuality) as well as on 'individual creativity' (Carrithers 2000:356-379). These counter-interpretations entered East German culture and became models for perception as well as action. They became part of the culture as cognitive schema (D'Andrade 1992:23-44). The emphasis on action and practice but also the question of perception in my opinion, needs to be added to the concept of evocative 'transcripts'.

When combined, all these different aspects result in a ritual that is ambiguous and multivocal and serves many different, and probably even contradictory, purposes. It serves the state by transmitting ideology and uniting a great number of people in a socialist state ritual. At the same time it also serves individual purposes; the participants present themselves as grown up individual personas and they achieve acknowledgement in that respect. The ritual finally serves the social network in society by uniting families and reinforcing friendship and family ties. Similarly to Humphrey's observation, one could say that the grass-root practice of the *Jugendweihe* is a positive counterpart to the ideological master interpretation of the ritual (Humphrey 1983:438); at the same time this practice also makes the socialist ritual seem to be even more important. It seems to me that this multivocality of the *Jugendweihe*, if it was sustained, accounts for the current disagreement about the practice of the ritual in eastern German public discourse.

If the GDR *Jugendweihe* could be so different in the two discourses, the official ideological discourse and the private or social discourse, then it needs to be asked in how far this also applies to the modern ritual. I will address this question in the following section.

6.2 Young people telling stories

I will now turn to narratives on the modern *Jugendweihe*. These narratives should show whether, and in what respects, parallels exist in the experience of the GDR and the modern *Jugendweihe* or where significant differences lie. Secondly, they will give insights into how the teenagers' accounts compare to the institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung regarding the evaluation of the ritual. As in the section above, I will start with some excerpts from interviews to get a feeling of what is at stake:

> Janine: Hmm, you started by preparing yourself. Well,... no.... first there was the question who wanted to do *Jugendweihe* and the people who were interested told them. And then you got a note to tell you when everything starts etc. And later we prepared everything, bought clothes, made invitations. Then our relatives came and we went there together, to the ceremony. And during the ceremony there was some talking and there was singing. And then you were called [to the front] in the [groups of] school class. Then you stood on stage briefly (?) and then we got flowers and then we got books, then we had to go down again. There was some more talking and then... Then we went for food and there was more talking. And that was it then.

This narrative of a *Jugendweihe* sounds quite unspectacular. It recounts roughly the important actions during the ritual and mentions the family celebration. There is no evaluation of these events; neither does Janine apply any means to authenticate her experience. When Janine was asked what had been the nicest thing about this day, she replied that her friend had come along. There seems to be nothing, however, that made a special impression on this interviewee. Her account of the public ceremony is a mere list of elements: 'then we got flowers, then we got books, then...'. It sounds a little similar to Frank's account of the *Jugendweihe* but lacks the concern with personal appearance. This is only touched on shortly when Janine mentions that 'they', possibly she and her mother, went shopping for clothes. She seems emotionally detached from the experience of the *Jugendweihe*. Other accounts give some more details about the individual's perception of the ritual. I will explore those in the following section.

6.2.1. 'Nothing great'? - The public ceremony

Janine's narrative has a very formalised style that lacks any personal involvement is a single case. Other accounts show more engagement with regard to both the experience and the narrative. For example, here is an excerpt from an interview with Sarah:

A: What had been important occasions in your past?

Sarah: Jugendweihe. Oh, yes I liked it. ...

A: So what had been so great about it then?

Sarah: The money... No. Well, my parents had asked me whether I wanted to go onto a trip or have a [family] celebration. And I had wanted to celebrate with the family, you know? You don't see them every day. And it was great. So, we had lunch at a restaurant and then and ... Oh no, I was so afraid of the stairs, really...

A: Where, in the restaurant?

Sarah: No, I mean on stage there, at the ceremony and I had to walk next to such a strange boy and I uuuh... I found that terrible...

A: And afraid of the stairs because of...?

Sarah: Stumbling.

A: High heels and stumbling.

Sarah: Yes, hmm that was... But I thought I looked really nice on the picture. We took a picture afterwards. I was in black [clothes], red hair, pale skin. It all fitted. [laughter]

[laughing:] Vamp.

Sarah: No, I thought it was a nice picture. I was a bit slimmer. It was a nice picture. And the celebration afterwards with the whole family was nice, too. I got good money and was able to fulfil my wishes afterwards.

A: May I ask how much that had been and what you had bought from it?

Sarah: About 3.000 [Deutsch]Mark and I got shoes. I needed a new rucksack. I had already got a bike from my father. Otherwise I would have bought one... And other things, things in between, clothes.

A: How was the ceremony?

Sarah: Hmm, well, not that great. I mean it was all nice, music and so on but it passed very quickly. That was just walking in, thanks, here a flower and out again. Taking a picture quickly. Nothing great. Then he did his speech, my teacher.

Similarly to the narratives of the adults, Sarah focuses on the family celebration. She goes into more detail about it later during the interview. In the quote above, however, the public ceremony is already contrasted clearly to the family celebration. Whereas the latter is described as having been 'great' the former had been 'nothing great'. Although Sarah describes it as 'nice', she regrets that it did not make a big impression on her. She mentions nevertheless some ritual elements which have obviously stuck to her mind. The account, she gives of these is, however, very detached; it is similar to Frank's list of ritual elements and also Janine's story (chapter six: 183, 198). Sarah explains why the public ceremony does not impress her any more, she felt rushed through it. 'It passed very quickly' is how she puts it.

Amongst the ritual elements she mentions is the speech. According to the institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung the speech is the core element of the modern *Jugendweihe* (chapter four). The speech has, however, not had a substantial influence on Sarah's experience of the ceremony; it is mentioned in passing and Sarah never gets into detail about it. Janine had described the speech as merely: 'There was some talking'. What seems to be dominant in Sarah's case is the appearance on stage and the taking of pictures, these elements are treated with much more emotion and evaluative terms in her narrative. In the later course of the interview with Sarah the family celebration takes clearly over. The next case makes the predominance of the family celebration and the related devaluation of the public celebration even more clear. Clara expresses a strong dislike of the public ceremony:

> The Jugendweihe. At the age of fourteen, One hundred Deutschmark it had been to participate. On stage you got a flower, we also got such an atlas. That was one hour. There also was such a speaker who was talking some stupid nonsense.
>
> *A: You didn't listen?*
>
> Clara: No, yes. But I wasn't interested. Because... it might have been nice for the adults but he talked in such a posh way that you hardly understood him. You hadn't wanted to [listen] any how, it just had not been of any matter. Then it continued with friends from Erfurt, who had arrived already...

Clara then switches quickly to the family celebration. Her comments about the ceremony are, however, very clear. The speech had been boring. Not only had her attention slipped once she realised she would not be interested, but she had not even intended to pay any attention from the very beginning. She states this matter of factly: 'It just had not been of any matter'. The use of the first person pronoun in the second paragraph emphasises and authenticates her judgement. Clara also disregards the speech; this is so because she did not understand the speaker due to the formal language he was using. She, however, admits that the adult generation might have enjoyed this part of the ceremony. Her dislike of the ceremony is easier to understand knowing the fact that Clara and her brother had actually not wanted to do the public ceremony in the first place:

> It was an obligation so to say.

This explains her very negative view of the ceremony and emphasis on the family celebration. It needs to be added here that I encountered some other cases where mothers complained that their son or daughter had requested a celebration but not necessarily the public act. Parents in this situation usually told their child that either the 'real thing': *Jugendweihe* or *Konfirmation*, or nothing at all. This indicates that the public ceremony might actually be more important for the parents than for their children, the actual participants. This is, however, not true in every case as the following quotation shows.

Amongst all interviewees only one considered the speech to be important. Christin explains that the speech is a significant part of the ceremony:

> Well it is quite long and in the beginning you listen more closely than towards the end. Because of my work I knew the content. But I think there is a lot of truth in it and also much you can keep in mind for your future life.

She admits nevertheless that it is quite long and it might be hard to maintain concentration. Christin is also one of the few who regarded the public ceremony to be important. This might be due to the fact that she works for the Interessenvereinigung

in Schönebeck as a helper at the ceremonies; she arranges the gifts and helps distribute them. It may therefore be the case that because of her relation to the association she has by now included parts of the institutional discourse into her own repertoire of talking and thinking about the *Jugendweihe*. However, she also puts much emphasis on the question of self-presentation during the ritual:

> That was bad. I mean you try to present yourself there. You dress up.

The more common, disinterested attitude of many young people was summarised very well and much better than I could do it by one interviewee. Although his statement might, admittedly, oversimplify things a little:

> Sven: It was just a ceremonious hour with talking.

6.2.2. 'I had been so afraid of the stairs, really…' - presenting the self

What Sarah can tell a story about with regard to the public ceremony is the action on stage (chapter six: 199). She relates this ritual element to herself by calling it 'terrible'. This evaluation is authenticated by the phrase: 'I thought...' . Sarah seems to have been excited in anticipation of this moment throughout the whole ceremony. Her excitement is due to feelings of anxiety connected with climbing the stairs in high heels. This is expressed explicitly: 'Oh no, I had been so afraid of the stairs, really...'. This phrase is clarified by the term: 'stumbling' as reply to a question from the interviewer. She makes her experience of anxiety very strong by putting the phrase 'really' behind the sentence, which makes her narrative appear unquestionable.

Sarah's comment about the picture that was taken is also interesting. This indicates again the great importance of self-presentation in the *Jugendweihe*. Sarah's story shows how far this preoccupation with the appearance of the individual self goes; it can already be influenced by one's company. In Sarah's case walking next to a 'strange' boy served to create a feeling of embarrassment. This statement is validated by an emotion term: 'I uuuh... I found that terrible'. It is not quite clear what this

phrase refers to, the stairs or the boy next to her. For Sarah there does not seem to be a great difference between those two elements. They are both influencing and potentially threatening the presentation of her good-looking individual self; they are therefore equally 'awful'.

The importance of presentation and the related fear of failure is explained very clearly in the narrative of Christin:

> That was bad. I mean you try to present yourself there. You dress up. The girls probably a bit more then the boys, I don't know. Although they also come in nice clothes, jacket. That is exciting the whole morning. You get up, make your hair, the right make-up, suitable clothes. Especially hard is... You sit there [in the ceremony], there is some restlessness. In general you nevertheless listen to what is being said at the front and what is shown. Really awful is to walk up onto the stage, because you are always so afraid to fall, there might be some new shoes, you haven't had before. Yes and then you stand on the stage and pictures are taken. And then it is important: 'is everything perfect?' Isn't there anything that might be embarrassing? May I fall? Yes, then your are a little [anxious].

During the whole narrative Christin makes use of indicators for the personal experience of the ritual: 'that is exciting', 'really awful', 'you are so afraid', 'then it is important'. Any point that she evaluates in such a way, thereby indicating that this point concerns the participant and affects the emotions, concerns the action on stage. Christin indicates that it might be hard to concentrate on the speech because everyone is already anticipating their turn on stage. However, the way in which she makes these points suggests something else. Christin uses the second person 'you' to show that she makes general points. She does not actually talk about her own experience, although she will surely use her experience as a source from which she draws these conclusions, but rather makes universal claims about how anybody would experience the *Jugendweihe*. We encounter here the same schemes for emotions that Siglinde's story in the last chapter entailed. It is common knowledge that everyone, at least the girls, is afraid of going on stage, that this moment bothers them considerably. This indicates that it is commonly known that the action on stage has great significance for

the participants. This is in contrast to the institutional discourse which puts most emphasis on the speech.

The pre-occupation with the attire and presentation of the self is quite a common phenomenon in many 'rituals' of modern society. College balls, graduation, and similar occasions may be considered. The situation here is, however, slightly different. At the *Jugendweihe*, a ritual of selfhood, the emphasis of appearance and outfit has a special meaning because this is the first time that the self is presented as a grown up individual. The young people ritually present themselves and ask for public acknowledgement of their change of status and of their self. This is why a 'perfect image' is necessary. If the appearance is odd or wrong in some respect a feeling of embarrassment will result. I have noted the importance of clothing in this respect before; clothing is an essential part of this communication of messages about and to the self. Pictures taken at the time preserve the moment for the future and with it the statement about the self, which is written on and displayed by the bodies and attire of the participants. To illustrate this, let us consider the story of a young man who was forced to wear 'unfashionable' clothes:

A: So a little bit like: How do I look, how do I appear?

Clara: Yes.

Patrick: Yes, One looked horrible.

Clara: That's right.

A: Had the clothes been chosen by your parents?

Patrick: Yes.

Clara: More or less. I was allowed to have a say concerning my brothers clothes. And I did say: No, you can't. You can't do that to him. And then it really was a poison-green jacket with some black squares and that looked horrible. And he was also supposed to wear a tie but I said: No you can't. Nobody does that. So he was allowed to leave it away.

In neglecting the different way in which the story is told and only pay attention to its content, the parallels to Nadine's story become obvious. Nadine pointed out that her dress had been 'awful', Patrick even tops this evaluation by calling his attire

'horrible' in a very fatalistic tone of voice. The complete agreement of his sister further stresses the truth of his argument. The story of Clara and Patrick is similar to Nadine's narrative with regard to an intergenerational conflict that is acted out during the *Jugendweihe*. I stated before that the *Jugendweihe* in its quality as a coming-of-age rite ritually facilitates the argument between parents and child about growing independence and resulting separation (chapter four: 102). The issue of clothing seems to be the focal point of a possible acting out of intergenerational conflict. With regard to Clara's and Patrick's story the conflict is caused by different opinions about the 'proper' or at least acceptable appearance of the young man. The parents have obviously a very different view of how their son should look at such an occasion than the young man himself. This indicates that the quality of the *Jugendweihe* as a ritual of self-presentation is acknowledged by the parental generation. This is an important point with regard to the argument that such an 'identification' of the ritual is generally held at the grass roots of society. This is also plausible if when considering the fact that the parents experienced the *Jugendweihe* in a very similar way and might have retained an interpretation of the ritual according to their former experience of the *Jugendweihe* serves as a ritual of self-presentation and transition.

The story of Clara and Patrick shows also that an awareness of appearance is independent from gender. It effects young men and women alike. It seems though, that girls are especially concerned due to their feminine attire: the long dresses and especially new shoes with high heels. Because of these they are more likely to stumble and embarrass themselves when they go on stage than the young man. However, this was contradicted by field work experience. Right after a *Jugendweihe* ceremony I heard how a young male participant told his family how nervous he had felt about going on stage; he had feared he might slip in his new shoes. The boys may well share the girls' feelings since many of them are in equally unfamiliar attire. With regard to the shoes many wear slip-ons for the first time, and those can certainly prove to be more slippery than the trainers many young boys use commonly.

6.2.3. The family celebration

A second major focus in the accounts of the teenagers' is the family celebration. This goes so far that Clara and her brother for example would have preferred to neglect the public ceremony altogether. Sarah had actively chosen to celebrate with the family rather than to go on a holiday trip, which shows similarly that the family is quite important for her. I will therefore now turn to re-tellings of this family celebration since

Franziska: The nicest thing had been being together with the family.

[*A: In the evening you celebrated at home?*]

Sarah: No, in a different restaurant. We had had lunch with the closest family and then in the evening the others joined us.

A: Did anything interesting happen?

Sarah: Uuuh, I had to dance with my father. That was such a strange song and they dance so strangely [adults, she refers to dancing together], don't they. Not like we do. And I could hardly keep up with his steps. He is so huge. He went to Malaysia once or so and he brought such a strange costume back, with a turban. And of course he had put it on and both of us danced there and I couldn't keep up. Uuuh.

A: Had you also been allowed to drink for the first time and so on?

Sarah: Hmm, I hadn't been allowed that much but I nevertheless did it. I always went up to the bar and said: Another *Feigling*[12], and another *Feigling* and another one [laughs]. Yes. But I didn't get drunk. The only thing was I had got a glass of sparkling wine for lunch. And [laughter], yes, I got a bit tired after that. And then I had wanted to take a nap at home but that didn't happen. No.

Most stories give a similar picture to the one above. First there is a lunch with the closest relatives, then the extended family gathers during the afternoon, and spends the evening together. Apart from these general features many stories also mention the fact that the participant would publicly have a first glass of alcohol:

[12] A special brand Fig schnapps that is popular in Germany.

Sven: I got a big bottle of *Feigling* as a present. That felt like: "Aa, now I am allowed to have it".

Similarly to the stories of the adults, the public drinking of a glass of alcohol is another ritualised action that symbolises the acceptance of the young person amongst the adults. There seem to be other actions possible, though, that similarly mark the change of status. Sarah gives account of one of these. She describes that she had to dance with her father. The symbolic meaning of this action is enhanced by fact that she had to dance 'like an adult'. She had to dance as a pair with her father, holding his hand and being led by him, which she was not used to. Young people at discos will usually dance with someone by standing close to that person but without much body contact. The *Jugendweihe* was therefore the first time for Sarah to dance like adults. This part of Sarah's story is more elaborate and much more fluent than the one before where she referred to the public ceremony. Sarah gives much more detail here, she also builds coherent sentences which contrast clearly with the fragmented syntax she had used in the earlier parts of her story. All these indicators suggest that the private celebration has been more important for Sarah; it is a vivid memory that compels herself while she is retelling it.

Asked what had been most important on the day of the *Jugendweihe* interviewees replied in the same way: the money. The sums given out to the young people hover between 1,500 and 3,000 *Deutschmark*. This is more than at GDR times, it is also of more value nowadays. However, the young people handle this substantial amount quite differently than the adult generation did.

Most use the money to invest for their future. Some put parts of it into a savings account and use the remaining amount for smaller and immediate investments. Those who spent most of it immediately have usually considered carefully what to do with it and use it for long-lasting acquisitions. Sarah is one of the few who spent her money without much consideration on a number of things: shoes, a rucksack and some clothes. This is in contrast to another interviewee, who said that she received a flute as a present; Franziska had asked for it because she had been playing the flute for some years by then. Clara and Patrick used the money for their drivers' license. Another young man invested the money into a professional stereo since he wants to

work in the music business later. As opposed to the acquisition of luxury goods in GDR times, the teenagers of today consider more carefully how to spent the money and usually put it to use for their hobbies or their future. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the parental generation did not have much choice on what to spent their share. Most of today's young people will already have a stereo and a TV.

However, the way the young people make use of their acquisition shows the orientation towards the future that is a property of the *Jugendweihe* as a coming-of-age ritual. Although the participants do not come 'of age' in the juridical meaning of the term, they nevertheless acquire material possessions and wealth after the ceremony which are first steps towards a future independence. I will explore this question of transition in the next section.

6.2.4. Coming of age?

If the young people were asked to explain the purpose of the *Jugendweihe*, they answered that coming of age was its purpose or meaning. They nevertheless showed reservations with regard to their own reply. Very often the question would be answered in this sense while the speaker had a grin on her or his face, which negated the statement simultaneously. When asked more closely the interviewee would admit that actually nothing really changes. However, they cannot see any other purpose in the ritual:

> Christin: It really is a little step at least to growing up. I think that what the young people look forward to most is all the money they usually get and some other presents. And that they from there... well.... in the evening spent time with their folks and celebrate nicely and spent the whole day nicely. And then they hope that they will also get some more freedom in their future life. That is what me... what I had known about it beforehand. And what I had hoped for myself.

Many state, in similar vein, that the *Jugendweihe* is at least a step towards growing up. That this is a general agreement apparent in eastern German society is yet again suggested by the way in which Christin explains why the *Jugendweihe* is

practised at all by young people. She generalises her answer by using the pronoun 'they' as if she was talking about all participants. She rightly identifies the money and the presents as the greatest attraction; a fact, she also admits for herself:

> Yes, the thing about the money is right.

She also includes the expectation of coming of age as a motivation for participating in the *Jugendweihe*. That is 'what I had hoped for myself'. The fact that she describes the notion of coming of age as an expectation future participants can hold before the ritual means that this meaning is generally attributed to the *Jugendweihe*. This reified purpose contrasts, however, greatly with reality. The participants 'hope' a transition to be taking place; this hope is contradicted by reality:

> [*A: Did you feel more gown up?*]
> Christin: Yes and no. On the day itself you feel quite like it, yes... But afterwards life just goes on and you don't think about it that hard any more I think. You don't feel [more grown up] then... on the day maybe.
> *A: More freedom?*
> Christin: I believe that depends on the parents. Closing time moved back an hour for me I believe....

Christin uses the verb 'feel' in the attempt to explain something that lies beyond her cultural knowledge and awareness. According to the cultural concepts that are connected to the *Jugendweihe*, the ritual marks the transition to adulthood. There are, however, other markers of growing up in German society which contradict this property of the ritual. The ritualised transition that takes place during the *Jugendweihe* and the legally and socially structured transition to maturity differ even more from one another in modern Germany than in GDR times. In contemporary Germany no change of status at all is linked to the age of fourteen. According to the law, young people are only allowed to drink alcohol at the age of sixteen and to smoke cigarettes at the age of eighteen. The passport is handed over at the age of sixteen. The coming of age with regard to the law takes place at the age of eighteen.

Considering these facts, it appears that the ritualised practices in the family celebration actually contradict the law. This discrepancy between the ritual practices and the legal regulations proves that the *Jugendweihe*, that means not only the public ceremony but the whole of the *Jugendweihe*, comes out of a tradition that is much older than these regulations. Its origin in the nineteenth century was outlined in chapter two.

Christin fails in the attempt to bring these contradictory cultural concepts together. The reason for her inability to explain is the simple fact that the *Jugendweihe* is a coming-of-age ritual in a limited sense of the term. I already indicated this with regard to the GDR ritual. The modern *Jugendweihe* is still celebrated as a coming-of-age rite within families. The increase of rights that goes along with the change of status is, however, limited to the duration of the celebration. It does not extend into the life of the participants in a significant fashion. Important symbolic markers of the process of growing up are nevertheless set: the first publicly sanctioned glass of sparkling wine or shot of schnapps, the adult attire and the accumulation of material wealth, which becomes capital for a start into a future independence. Some interviewees pointed out that teachers started to address them in the polite form, using the third person pronoun. The young people do not regard this change to be of special importance though. The *Jugendweihe* introduces, as pointed out above, the beginning of the elongated process of growing up – teenagehood (chapter four:94). That teenagehood is a process rather than a set status is quite clear to most young people:

> Franziska: No, I mean, you can't just say: Cut! Now I am adult. So nothing really changed, no.

The explanations some interviewees gave in reply to the question of why the *Jugendweihe* was celebrated if nothing really changes afterwards revealed something else that needs to be noted here. Many interviewees were left aghast when confronted with that question since they had been asked to explain a cultural practice, to step out of the ordinary and reflect on their way of life. That this, the *Jugendweihe* as part of a culture, was indeed at stake became obvious in the replies:

> Christin: And apart from that, *Jugendweihe*... I mean you hear a lot even if you hadn't had yours yet. And it is said [that] you are looking forward to that day. I don't know why that is so. That is just tradition and you get enrolled and you do it.

Christin repeats what 'people say' about the *Jugendweihe*, what prospective participants are told about it. It is a cultural norm that you look forward to the *Jugendweihe*, that you are excited about it. I already concluded earlier that it is a cultural norm to be nervous about going on stage. Christin concludes her explanation with the remark that it is at least a small step to adulthood. This shows that the young participants themselves experience the *Jugendweihe* as a tradition, a cultural practice symbolising growing up, which nevertheless remains a symbol for the time being:

> Steffen: Jugendweihe? Is to be accepted in the circle of adults.
>
> *A: Did anything change?*
>
> Steffen: So for me... personally... not a lot. And according to the law nothing changed either. Its only the celebration and that you are accepted in the circle of adults. So with the teachers and so, most address you with „Herr [Mr.] Theben" and so, but... Apart from that not much changed.
>
> *A: Did you realise this that day, that you would get older?*
>
> Steffen: That was important because that has belonged to it since many years or decades... that you do this Jugendweihe and that you are accepted in the circle of adults...
>
> *A: That was your idea before?*
>
> Steffen: Yes, that had been my idea. But more... I don't know...

The *Jugendweihe* is perceived as a tradition, a self-explanatory practice very much in the way that Humphrey and Laidlaw, and La Fontaine may expect it (1994; 1986). This indicates that it is one of those practices comprising the cultural pool which lies beyond individual awareness. The ritual's meaning, the initiation into the circle of adults, is similarly unquestionable but understood as being mainly symbolic. Since it conflicts with other markers of growing up it is experienced consciously and can be questioned. The reader may remember that some adults made similar remarks about the meaning of the GDR *Jugendweihe* (chapter six:192). That this

interpretation of the ritual as a transition rite seems to be stronger today can be explained by the change the ritual underwent with the dissolution of the socialist ideology. The *Jugendweihe* is no longer a means of education within a highly structured educational system. The focus now is on the process of growing up in the modern public ceremony. This is the theme of the ritual, which is expressed explicitly in the speeches (chapter four:93). It is taken up by the teenagers and enters their self-reflexive explanation of the ritual. However, the modern ritual makers only draw on an interpretation that has existed in society for much longer. I pointed out before that this interpretation stems from the original purpose of the ritual to mark the end of school in the nineteenth century and that it survived at the grass-roots level during GDR period.

6.3 Conclusion

Comparing Rosi's narrative and the siblings' complaint about the green jacket, and comparing Siglinde's story and Sarah's anxiety about walking up the stairs a number of parallels in the stories of adults and young people become apparent. Both generations retell the actual ceremony in abstract and dissociated terms, they tend to list ritual elements rather than narrate their experience. This changes immediately when they talk about the moment on stage, about walking up and down the stairs and having pictures taken. These moments when their selves are at the centre are perceived as most important, which is reflected in the style of narration. In both cases the narrated experience of the event therefore differs from the official or institutional discourse which puts most emphasis on the vow or the speech respectively. Yet these ritual actions are regarded as uninteresting and incomprehensible by most participants. They are mentioned only in passing.

The stories are often especially colourful and emotional when they come to the family celebration. Both generations seem to agree that the family celebration was the focal point. This celebration includes more ritualised actions proving and testing the change of status which are the same in both sets of narratives. These include the

public drinking of a glass of alcohol, the valuable presents and especially the money given over, probably a dance with the father or the mother of the initiate. It is also clear to both generations that the change of status is a liminal one, the ritual initiates to teenagehood; it does not mark a clearly defined new status. For the duration of the celebration the participant is nevertheless treated as someone who has passed a transition.

The 'socialist state ritual' and the modern 'voluntary coming-of-age rite' prove to be very similar when viewed from the perspective of the participants. The parents of young participants today are very well aware of this fact:

> The appearance:
>
> Siglinde: My Jugendweihe. I remembered what I noticed again this year. That all looked the same, the girls. According to the ruling fashion, the same hairstyle and nearly all the same outfit. That was a little different at ours. We were all in long skirts with flower patterns...

> The family celebration
>
> Dieter: That was so... went so... [it] was nice, too. Since it was, at least from my point of view, celebrated according to the model from GDR times afterwards... That means [there were] those family celebrations. At our Jugendweihen that had been a suitable occasion ... to do the family celebration after the public ceremony had finished... [...] Because not the whole family lives in the same place that was an opportunity [to get together] at least with our children and at my Jugendweihe. Although it was not like it sometimes happened in GDR times, where it turned into a drunken occasion only...
>
> Wife: At your Jugendweihe or at the kid's?
>
> Both. We continued this way.

> The symbolic quality of the transition:
>
> Frank: Nothing really changed [after the Jugendweihe] in principle. All this talking, the circle of adults etc. that had sounded quite nice but nothing changed. And I think that is not any different today. Yes...
>
> *Looking back what had been most important at the Jugendweihe?*

> The money that came in. Absolutely. Since you didn't really see anything else. And I think that is still the most important thing today.

The similarities between the private accounts of the adult generation and the teenagers in modern Germany suggest that there is less discontinuity in the *Jugendweihe* than had appeared on first examination. This is possible because the socialist ritual was already practised in a de-politicised fashion at the grass-roots of society during the GDR. The participants and families engaged in a counter-interpretation of *Jugendweihe*, which shaped its perception and practice. This regards the experience of the ritual on behalf of the participants and their families and the conduct of the family celebration.

The *Jugendweihe* has been carried over the Fall of the Wall as a ceremony and celebration of coming of age by the families. It is the official interpretation of the ritual, the meaning that was attributed to it by the state and the Committees which disappeared or was consciously discarded during the *Wende*. This ideological master-interpretation of the GDR *Jugendweihe* accounts for the discontinuities that seem to be apparent in its modern successor: the missing vow, the absence of a proper preparation, its forced character, the connection to education to a great extent. These discontinuities and their consequences, the problem of value transmission for example, are the main issues in the public discourse (chapter three). Furthermore is the fact that there is not yet a coherent and acceptable cosmology in the discourse of the Interessenvereinigung that could fill the vacant space the ideology used to inhabit viewed as a problem by members of the churches and others. They see it as proof of a lack of content and meaning (chapter three; see Meier especially).

However, when paying attention to the grass-roots the phenomenon is quite understandable. The *Jugendweihe* was not the same for the participants and the GDR officials and it is this second identity of the *Jugendweihe*, its private version and the *Jugendweihe* in practice that has survived the Fall of the Wall without any major disturbances.[13]

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[13] In the years of 1990 and 1991 it was the initiative of the parents that kept the *Jugendweihe* alive (chapter two:30)

The narratives in this chapter provide a view of the *Jugendweihe* as a practice and of its place in eastern German culture. The ritual is even linked to wider cultural norms and models that shape its experience. The stories expressed a general nervous expectation of the ritual and a feeling of anxiety before having to go on stage. The *Jugendweihe* is understood as a family tradition and a self-explanatory practice. Along with Halbwachs one could say that the parental generation might have shared their narratives with the younger generation in such a way that a collective memory was established (1992:54-83). When I asked the young people, however, whether their parents had ever talked about their *Jugendweihen*, they said this was not the case. It seems plausible though that the parents will nevertheless have transmitted certain messages regarding the expectations that are linked to the ceremony by their behaviour and remarks.[14]

The modern *Jugendweihe* is again not the same at the level of the public and institutional discourse as it is in the culture. The two discourses on the ritual, the institutional and the private, are nevertheless more similar nowadays than they used to be in GDR times. This is certainly due to the fact that the organisers nowadays pay much more attention to the actual practice since they need to serve people's needs; they depend on them financially. However, although practice and discourse have moved closer the 'evocative transcripts' have not simply disappeared with the Fall of the Wall (Humphrey 1994:42), neither has the *Eigen-Sinn* of the eastern Germans (Lindenberger 1999:21). The teenagers still regard the speech as 'nonsense', although there are exceptions, and attribute most weight to the action on stage. The institutional discourse in contrast, which emphasises the significance of the speech, sees consequenly the reception of congratulations and tokens as being of minor importance. Rather, it seems that *Eigen-Sinn* is a feature of culture in general. Reified cultural concepts do not match cultural practice in the majority of the cases. The former appear as schema (D'Andrade 1992:23-44) or landmarks (Halbwachs 1992:41-189; especially 175) and similar, which provide models and can be used for

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[14] During the weeks in the run-up to the *Jugendweihe* of the son of my landlord I witnessed how various people teased him about it, asked about the stage of the preparations, whether he was nervous etc., thereby creating an atmosphere of excitement and expectation.

orientation, but do not directly translate into action. This difference between official discourse, or the reified cultural concepts, and the grass-roots practice is certainly stronger in totalitarian states than in democratic societies. This is, however, only the expression of a tendency; a tendency which in itself is a capacity of 'culture' and 'society'.

In this chapter I illustrated how complex an interpretation of the past can be when official ideology was only apparently followed at the grass roots level. The fact that this 'covered subversion' will not have been obvious to everyone explains why former opponents of the state remain suspicious about the ritual. The characterisation of the *Jugendweihe* as neither political nor just private ritual but a complex combination of both that I applied illustrates this problems clearly (see also Creed 2002:69).

If the *Jugendweihe* is part of an eastern German culture, how does this culture manifest itself and on what sense of identity is it based? In order to explore this question I will remain on the level of individuals but now explore how the personal past and present are understood, how continuity in life and coherence in the life-story are created.

Chapter Seven

'The Eastern Germans'

> ...what we map is not the physical world 'out there' but rather our relationship within.
>
> (Paine 2000:104)

7.0. Introduction

The last chapters showed that the ritual *Jugendweihe* can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Chapter six in particular, showed that the ritual can serve many purposes as a result of its ambiguity; it can be a means of fostering social ties for the family, a means of celebrating the self for the participants and of aggrandisement of the state. The *Jugendweihe's* ambiguity is also the reason why the transition rite serves as a catalyst in a debate about the eastern German past and culture.

I will return to this debate in this chapter. Having traced continuity and discontinuity through the ritual and the institutional discourse of its organisers, and having explored the same question with regard to the individual experience of the *Jugendweihe* and the family celebration, I will now turn to the question of how the socio-cultural change in eastern Germany is incorporated into life-stories in a meaningful way. I will also consider explanations and evaluations of the past, and the way in which persons position themselves within GDR society. This will then lead us to the question of how the present is perceived. With regard to this I will explore the issue whether there is a notion of eastern German particularity and culture, and if so, how it is manifested in life.

The question of life-stories and narrative has been addressed by a number of scholars. The strong interest of social sciences in narrativity was motivated by the hypothesis that 'identity is a life story', as McAdams puts it (1993). For this reason narratives have attracted psychologists (Shotter 1993; Shotter and Gergen 1989) and anthropologists and linguists alike (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Linde 1993; Peacock 1983; Schiffrin 1996). Since the question of coherence is the main interest in this chapter I will rely primarily the work of Linde.

Linde is above all concerned with the creation of coherence in life-stories. The question of the creation of continuity or coherence is of greatest interest here since this chapter will explore how such a narrative continuity is achieved against the backdrop of the socio-cultural change of society. According to Linde coherence is a prerequisite for any narrative since the experience of ourselves as stable persons depends on it (1993:3). Some life-stories nevertheless show discontinuities or breaks. The focal point of Linde's argument is how these are managed and explained in the narrative. She identifies six different strategies of how discontinuity is dealt with in the narrative. These are: the strategy of apparent break, strategy of temporary discontinuity, strategy of discontinuity as sequence, strategy of self-distancing, strategy of discontinuity as meta-continuity, and discontinuity without account (Linde 1993:152-162). This list is, however, not exhaustive (Linde 1993:162).

McAdams takes the argument that a life-story serves as a means of communicating one's sense of self even further than Linde; he argues that a life-story is a 'personal myth' (1993). It is developed in adolescents from material that has been gathered during childhood in the search for unity and purpose in one's life. McAdams agrees with Linde that life stories are based on cultural norms and values. This point is also made by Peacock, who concludes that a life-story is as much a 'cultural structure' as religion is (1983:95). McAdams points out further that such stories or personal myths function like any myth in culture; they 'delineate an identity' and 'illuminate the values of an individual life' (McAdams 1993:34). I will not go quite that far in this study. However, if life-stories draw from the pool of cultural values to make their argument (McAdams 1993:60); and if by doing so they also establish the story teller as a worthy member of a certain group, as Linde says (1993:3), then the question for this chapter is what group do the story tellers identify themselves with

and which values are used in this argument: western German, eastern German or other?

7.1. Connecting past and present - a life-story

I met Oliver when I sought contact with the Humanistischer Verband Magdeburg. As part of my research I had wanted to collect life-histories of people who organise the modern *Jugendweihe* rituals. I wanted to see how they explain their motivation for actively engaging in the practice of the ritual despite its contested nature.[1] Oliver was the head of the office of the Jungen Humanisten in Magdeburg. I therefore approached him with regard to a life-story interview. His first reaction to my request was a certain degree of reluctance. He did not seem to be too happy about exposing his life. As it turned out later this reluctance had not been caused by personal reasons but rather by the fact that he was standing for mayor in Magdeburg and he had feared that his life might become public before the elections were held. Once I explained that it would be several years before anything might be published, apart form the confidentiality with which I would treat the interview, he agreed to my request.

Oliver's life-story is not an ordinary one, as the reader will see soon. Not every East German had as many adventures, was as financially well-off and managed so brilliantly after 1989. However, it seems to me that Oliver's narrative combines many aspects of life in the GDR, for which I otherwise would have had to use a number of different stories. The story will therefore bring certain important points to our attention, and material from other interviews will be used to further illustrate and discuss these points. Let us now turn to the life-story of Oliver.

Ok, I should start then, shouldn't I? I was born in 1961 in Magdeburg. I grew up in Magdeburg in a, well I would say, a relatively quiet neighbourhood. In the Beims-

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[1] Some might object because Oliver organises the 'West German' *Jugendfeier*. However, for most eastern Germans all secular coming-of-age rituals are *Jugendweihen* and share the same past. When asked about this past Oliver does not object to the question pointing out that the *Jugendfeier* needs to be distinguished. This is a good enough reason for me to use him here.

siedlung [a neighbourhood in the town]. Then the first new blocks in Reform were built [another neighbourhood], I mean at the time when I experienced it consciously, the time when you experience childhood consciously and also get together with others, so probably at school age. I therefore thought the Beimssiedlung was a quiet area and none of these new blocks [were there]...'

Oliver stays in this 'quiet' neighbourhood for most of his life. The fact that he does not move out after finishing school and job training is, in his view, due to the GDR bureaucracies. GDR citizens would apply for accommodation at the office in their area which allocated them a place to live in that same area. This is the reason why Oliver stayed in the Beimssiedlung. After school Oliver trained to become a car electrician which was a well paid job in those years. Before he started that, however, he had to do his service in the army. When talking about this Oliver stresses the compulsory aspect of the service. He makes it clear that his service was not a matter of his free will. It nevertheless turned out to be a good experience for him, although not for its ideological aspects:

> It had nevertheless been an interesting time because I got together with people who came from the area Berlin-Potsdam where fifty per cent of the parents had private businesses. They had craftsman-factories or garages. [...] They had a completely different approach to life and a different experience in dealing with the state. I thought that was interesting for me. We had really exciting days in the political lessons when debates and discussions got really hot. I hadn't known that before because my youth had been different. It had been very quiet in the family.

Although Oliver's father had been a truck driver transporting goods between the two German states the life of the family was quiet, as Oliver says. The father had to become a member of the socialist party SED because of this profession. The family therefore kept a low profile to avoid risking the father's job. He would bring over youth magazines and other things from West Germany for Oliver. Oliver was, however, not allowed to show these magazines to his friends. He was also not allowed to wear certain clothes, for example certain fashionable shirts, which other

kids got from Hungary and similar places. The family practised secrecy in order to deal with the dilemma the father found himself in.

An example from Oliver's childhood illustrates this secretive way of life nicely. It was common practice in the family, as in most East German families, to watch the West German news show rather than their own national one. Both started at the same time in the evening and both had a similar symbol; a huge clock counting down the seconds until it started. The only thing that distinguished the two shows distinctively was the appearance of the clock; the East German clock had little lines symbolising the seconds in the circle, the West German clock had dots to indicate the seconds. To find out which news show the parents watched at home teachers sometimes asked the children about this TV clock. This practice was well-known, and Oliver was therefore taught by his parents before he started school, what to say when a teacher asked this question. However quiet or secret the family life was, though, Oliver had nevertheless always appeared different or even non-conformist, as he points out:

> Yes, we watched West TV and I had long hair, always. Which the school didn't like.

His parents were summoned to the school's principal to explain the 'problem' of their son's disagreeable hairstyle. In this case, however, they stood up against the school authorities insisting on the personal freedom of their son. Regarding other questions, however, the family showed conformity quite consciously in order not to risk the father's occupation.

All the examples above show that Oliver must have experienced the split that separated private and public life in the GDR from an early age. Although he was not yet aware of the reasons for all this secretive behaviour and downright lying he acquired a sense of the discrepancy between 'real life' and 'party talk'/ideology. Furthermore, he learned strategies by which he could incorporate this discrepancy into his life and use it for his own ends. Other instances from his time at school also show this strategy of keeping quiet in spite of one's realisation of discrepancies. During his first years at school he just went along, as he says:

> I then did the normal thing, too: Pioneers. You were always proud when you got a distinction at the end of the year, distinction for 'good knowledge' or similar. That was the normal way of things. You just hung in there. I never thought about it.

However, already when he joined the FDJ he had an experience that made him question this unconcerned way of life. In one of the youth lectures before the *Jugendweihe* the group had been asked about their role-model. One boy in the group answered harmlessly that he admired the boxer Cassius Clay. This answer was regarded as 'wrong' by the teacher. He had expected proper communist role models like Ernst Thaelmann or Wilhelm Pieck to be mentioned. Because the boy did not want to withdraw his reply he was finally banned from the youth lecture; which also excluded him from the *Jugendweihe*. Oliver's group of friends, however, never really considered this incident and its consequences in all its depth. They thought the boy had just been unlucky and stupid. Oliver explains this by talking about adaptation:

> Well, you served the usual clichés. That was what you had been taught to do. [...] Because at that age you hadn't thought about it. That was the way of things. And he hadn't thought about it either. He had been a fan of boxing. That was all.

Only later did Oliver realise what this incident meant. The experience of strong criticism of the state during his service at the army made him see things differently. The people he met there, who came from a very different background to his, 'taught' him to be critical. They questioned everything that was taught in the ideological lessons that were part of their training:

> ...these people didn't give in at all, they destroyed anything the guy teaching wanted to tell them.

Often the discussion had to be broken up to be continued outside the school realm. This experience, however, did not result in Oliver assuming an oppositional attitude. Instead he started looking for niches, as he believes everyone else did. These

niches were groups of close friends with whom he could share criticism and laugh about things that were not to be laughed about in public:

> You always found a niche somewhere, a corner where you couldn't go to sleep because you were laughing so hard. And you could cope with that and live.

Oliver did the *Jugendweihe* in much the same vein as anything else; he did it because everyone did. Oliver did not care much about the public ceremony; that was simply something that needed to be done. After that the more important part took place:

> Then comes the real high point. Then all the relatives come and give you money.

He says that for himself the money was not that important but it was what one generally looked forward to most. He then switches back to the public ceremony remembering his suit. The story about his clothes is emphasised by the line 'I remember that like today'. The reason for the vividness of this memory is the fact that his mother complained about his suit. It was the only kind of suit available in the shops at the time, which resulted in the fact that two other boys who were on stage with him were wearing the same outfit. This story validates the conclusion that self-presentation and appearance are the dominant aspects in the individual experience of the *Jugendweihe*. Oliver's story indicates furthermore that this is not only true for the participants but also and sometimes even more so for their parents.

The family celebration took place at home. Oliver reports that he got to drink alcohol. He also went out to meet his friends on the street. What he disliked most about the celebration was that he celebrated only with his family. He knew that some of his mates celebrated together in a communal hall. Oliver would have preferred that; he felt a little lost among all the adults. He furthermore points out that visits of western relatives had been quite important in the *Jugendweihe*. To get 'West money' was of course the greatest present because it enabled him to go and buy something

from the intershop[2]. That was exciting not only because of the special goods available there but also because these shops had a very special atmosphere; Oliver remembers especially their distinct smell.

Oliver then worked as a car electrician for several years. To get a job in this profession had been easy. In GDR times everybody received training and everyone was offered a job. Oliver repeats again that everyone had taken that for granted at the time. He admits, though, that looking back he realises that such a job market must have been maintained artificially. He knows now that his placement was created artificially. In the particular year when he finished his training there was a surplus of vehicle electricians and not enough work for all of them. Jobs needed therefore to be made up. Oliver was sent to work for the bus drivers in his firm. The bus drivers had never asked for an electrician; they were quite capable of doing what was necessary themselves. This meant for Oliver that he had a great amount of spare time, which he used to work privately. This, plus the fact that car electricians received very good pay, meant that he made a lot of money in a short time. This situation was, however, not wholly pleasant:

> You made money and had time. I thought that was quite convenient. Less convenient was that I couldn't do anything with my money.

The fact that he made money but could not use it created the first serious difficulties for Oliver:

> One day the knot exploded. There had been white Nike trainers available in our Ex [expensive speciality store]. And you could get them from underneath the counter. One hundred eighty [Ost]Mark. And after three days they broke and I couldn't go and complain because I hadn't bought them officially and I wouldn't have got any new ones. So I threw them around in my room and screamed: I am leaving. I am so fed up. My father nearly got mad. I calmed down again [...]

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[2] Shops that sold West German products in a special currency which you could exchange for *Westmark*.

This frustration about having the means but not the possibilities to spend money runs as a theme through Oliver's life from then onwards.

He makes a small career in his firm; his wages are increased on a regular basis. He spends the money going out with friends and on trips to other socialist countries including skiing holidays in the Czech Republic and plane rides to the Soviet Union. Holidays like this were unusual for many GDR citizens. For Oliver they were necessary because at least in those places he was able to 'spend' money. Those goods, available to him in the GDR, were so cheap that he simply was not able to get rid of his small and ever increasing fortune. The only problem regarding shopping in other countries was that he needed to exchange his *Ostmark* into *Westmark* [currency of the GDR and FRG] first because the GDR currency did not sell anywhere outside the home country. Oliver was able to achieve this via 'connections', meaning relations to people in influential positions[3] often crossing the borderline of illegality in the action. For example, he faked tax declarations in such a way that they justified the exchange of another 100 *Ostmark*.

Oliver's life has so far been shaped by strategies that enabled him to incorporate the experience of discrepancy between the ideological 'should be' and the reality of East German society into his life in a meaningful way. This strategy, the 'maintenance of niches' as he calls it, is directed towards his personal goals and needs. The 'system of coherence' Oliver uses to justify his 'compliance' in front of the interviewer is that of custom (Linde 1993:163): 'everyone did this' (and so did I). That Oliver does not see a need to justify his unconcerned way of life more than that indicates that he regards formal compliance with the state as self-explanatory; it cannot be questioned. However, underneath the public surface life was very different. Oliver knew to a certain extent that many things in the ideology but also East German economy were wrong or at least unrealistic; he understood that his personal happiness needed to be achieved elsewhere. This seems to be common sense; Oliver does not explain it any further.

However, a slight doubt remains, otherwise Oliver would not have made any explanatory remarks at all. The fact that Oliver feels it more necessary to justify

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[3] To have connections was very important in the GDR, often in relation to the second economy (Berdahl 1999:115-122).

compliance than acts of subversion is certainly motivated by the interview situation. With the Fall of the Wall the GDR state and life within it had been devalued by a West Germany that had the moral high ground. Although this devaluation of East German past is currently contested (this is discussed later in this chapter), the fact that uncritical compliance is regarded as naive has remained. Acts of subversion are therefore self-explanatory but an uncritical trotting along in the GDR needs to be legitimised. The question for the moment, however, concerns how a person leading a very well-adapted life and using the system for his own ends experienced and coped with the Fall of the Wall.

Oliver says that he experienced 1989 in a 'strange way'. Although the relationship to his long-term girl friend was stable, he nevertheless felt relatively free. Both lived in different towns because she was studying. Then she became pregnant. Her pregnancy created a new and unusual situation for Oliver, who found his freedom suddenly limited. Concerning his work and social life he was also unsatisfied. He and his friends became more and more affluent and were running out of ideas how to spend their money. They were drinking sparkling wine at work every day because it was one of the most expensive drinks. They could not buy anything in Hungary any more because they had bought 'every possible item'. Running out of options of how to spend his time and his wealth Oliver realised that he lacked something in his life:

> What do you need? You need more freedom somewhere.

His growing orientation towards western Germany was reinforced by the fact that many of his friends had already escaped from the East. In the spring of 1989 Oliver and some friends even went to the Czech Republic to meet one of their friends who had escaped from the East some time ago. That meeting made a great impression on Oliver. He saw that the young man was happy, he had a cool car, a home, a job. The realisation that West Germany might be a better place for a living fell on prepared ground. He and his friends had frequently met other West Germans on their holiday trips. Young West Germans serving in the army in Berlin also came to Magdeburg sometimes on a one-day-permit. At 10.30 p.m. they had to leave again because otherwise they would get into trouble:

And I thought, why is this world like this? The knot exploded.

The idea that West German society would provide a more balanced way of life, combined with the realisation of unjust practices of the GDR state, made Oliver decide to go. He had already exchanged a lot of *Westmark*. He cleared his apartment, changed his car and hid his money in an old *Trabant* [a GDR car brand]. He was ready to leave the country just before the great wave of escapes that followed some weeks later. He planned to go via Hungary.

Once he had arrived in Hungary he stopped at a camping site at a lake. He spent two weeks there, time enough to start reconsidering: he had a good job, there was a small baby growing. Also the friend who was supposed to give him a lift over the Hungarian-West German border did not come to meet him. At the end of the second week Oliver packed everything up again and left for home.

This incident helped Oliver finally make up his mind to stay in the East:

I don't go. I am staying. And that helped me very much in this other time. The time that came now, where so many escaped out of Hungary. And so many from the circle of friends left.

There followed the time of demonstrations in the autumn and yet again Oliver had to decide where he stood:

Finally you went in order to show courage, at least now.

He went because there were enough people by then to make changes likely. Oliver believed firmly that changes were necessary but he was not in favour of a reunification. When the demonstration took the turn to demand the reunification of both German states he stopped going:

Then I quit. Although I had no idea how it should have worked with two countries. I already saw the nightmares happen. The rich *Bundies* [West German soldiers] would invade Magdeburg, we are near to the motorway and drive home with our wives [he

laughs]. That was some strange idea. Or [they would] play the big wig with their money as it had been before when three or four [of them] had come. But how it would be when hundreds came and changed money to amazing conditions and would buy everything. I had no idea, but I didn't want to catalyse the reunification.

The events of 1989 forced Oliver to change his life pattern. The hidden, secret subversion that had been the main characteristic of his life so far could not be maintained any longer. The demonstrations on the street asked him to show his disagreement with the regime in public. Knowing about the flaws of the GDR state and even its unjustness had obviously not been the problem with GDR society. It was rather that covered subversion this knowledge had resulted in, the *eigen-sinnig* way of life, that showed compliance towards the authorities but used the system for private and individual purposes, had maintained the regime for such a time. This life strategy is invalidated by the situation of 1989; the artificial and blurry distinction between public and private breaks down.

It is interesting that although Oliver had considered going to western Germany he now rejects a reunification of the two German states. The reason for this is his fear of what might happen when the border opens. In contrast to the actual situation later that year he believes that the western Germans would invade eastern Germany. Oliver had always been amongst the most affluent people in society. He could afford a lot and he was able to achieve a lot with his money. This regards the sustenance of relations to people in influential positions; the maintenance of a great circle of friends and a luxurious life-style. It seems that some of his reservations stem from the fear of not being able to compete with the western Germans. They would have more money, influence and better cars and might therefore drive off 'with the wives'.

That Oliver relies very much on his affluence became apparent at another point in the interview. He points out that when he was negotiating leaving the GDR a friend told him that they [car electricians] were kings in the GDR, whereas in West Germany they would be just one amongst many.

In 1989 Oliver and a friend had a great idea how to make some more money. They anticipated an imminent break down of GDR economy and therefore started their own small business. They went shopping in the Eastern block to resell their

acquisitions for a higher price in the GDR. Because both knew the sources for goods and had the necessary relations to buy them cheap they were able to make a few good deals. However, the business only worked for one and a half years, then their suppliers grew more demanding and made real investment necessary. When this happened they dropped out of the scheme.

At that time someone else had asked Oliver whether he wanted to work with him in youth work. In order to explain this change of profession Oliver points out that he had always been interested in youth work and tells a story from his teenage years. As a teenager he applied for a training course to become a disk jockey. He was not chosen at that time because he had not been delegated for it by the FDJ. Only those people delegated for it were allowed on the training. Youth work had therefore always been a great interest of his:

> And suddenly there with this offer [...] like a children's dream [becoming true] to work in this area again and to do exactly this. And that is why I agreed.

A regional association for social care offered him rooms and two placements. Another association wanted to establish a branch in Magdeburg and was seeking people and places. Oliver therefore had a job, the space, and an association with experience at hand. He only needed to create a particular concept for Madgeburg and make it reality. The small branch soon flourished and it became accepted in the governmental youth work associations. In 2001 the club consists of two sites and is independent from the former head association.

7.1.2. *Eigen-Sinn* and coherence

Comparing Oliver's life in the GDR, his job as a manual worker, his apparent wealth and his very self-contained stance to his present situation, including his engagement in youth work, his financial modesty and his settled state (he is married with three children), there is clearly a change. Oliver explained his professional change to youth work with a reference to an older interest in this kind of work. He therefore uses the 'strategy of temporary discontinuity' to make sense of this discontinuity of profession

and life-style (Linde 1993:154-155). However, this model of a temporary break of interests does not go far enough for the special circumstances of eastern Germany.

As a result of his early experiences of the possible discrepancies between private and public life, Oliver has become a very flexible person. He managed to live in the GDR without supporting the ideology or even believing in it, and was nevertheless very successful. Following Luedtke I called this way of life *Eigen-Sinn* (1993), I could also have chosen Humphrey's notion of 'evocative transcripts' (1994:23).

Oliver's story shows that the stance which many East Germans took towards the *Jugendweihe*, showing their agreement with the government by participating but actually using the ceremony for their private ends, is a strategy he operated throughout his everyday life. It was a way of making sense of one's life within the private networks at a time when the difference between ideology and reality was so great that the ideology did not function any more as a sense-making cosmology.

That the ideology and the structures of society were regarded critically does not mean, however, that the East Germans disagreed entirely with the government. The same multi-purposefulness shown in the *Jugendweihe* seems to be inherent in most features of life in the GDR. Although Oliver distinguishes between the public and private domain by talking about the niches he lived in, the two spheres overlap and mingle. They are interdependent. Oliver's life shows this by the way he uses the socialistic system to gain money which he reinvests in the economy by spending it. An even stronger proof is the fact that Oliver nearly leaves the state because he is so well-off.

What Oliver's story also shows is that *Eigen-Sinn* can only go as far as it is meaningful for the individual. If the difference between ideology and social reality becomes too great life-strategies are changed. When the situation became too depressing for Oliver, he was not able to justify his existence any longer. He needed more freedom, as he said. However, after two weeks of consideration and talks with other people on the camping site in Hungary, he decides to return to the GDR once more focusing on his private life. This time it is, however, the establishment of a family that concerns him, not his individual happiness.

Before the Fall of the Wall Oliver retreats from his former job to such an extent that he is constantly taking sick-leave and holidays to engage in his second business of

trading. His story, however, emphasises a preoccupation with making money, as well as in taking risks and having adventures. It was the money the state provided him with that enabled him to take these risks which bordered on illegality. The life Oliver leads is, however, not fulfilling for him. Being young and energetic he needs a purpose in life, which he misses constantly. His work cannot satisfy him either since he has hardly anything to do. According to him, the one time he wanted to do something he was really interested in, he was not allowed; he did not get the training to become a disk jockey.

The dilemma Oliver saw himself in was resolved after 1989, despite the fact that he had not favoured the reunification. He is able to take up a job that provides him with a challenge and is in the area of his former interest; youth work. The challenge is to create a functioning association in an industrial town with a high unemployment rate, and Oliver takes it up with much enthusiasm. He picks especially those areas that are known for their amount of young trouble makers, where family situations are known to be tense, to situate his youth club. Within five years the club is self-sustaining, consisting of two sites. A year later the regional youth association has broken down and Oliver's site in Magdeburg is independent and flourishing.

The main focus of Oliver's story is his personal relationships. He constantly talks about the circle of friends he used to entertain and with whom he went on holidays, including the friends who left the GDR, the friend with whom he tried that semi-legal business in eastern Europe and the friend who suggested he get engaged in youth work. Even when he is on the camping site in Hungary it is relationships that make him reconsider his decision; this time he thinks of his girlfriend and his child.

We already encountered this focus on relationships in the narratives of the *Jugendweihe*. Like Oliver's life-story, these focused on the family celebration and other private or personal aspects of the ritual. There was also a strong emphasis on interpersonal relations in chapter five which dealt with the socialist ideology and the ideal of the socialist person. However, it may not necessarily have been the ideology but rather the structures of GDR society that facilitated the development of values and behavioural strategies which strongly rely on interpersonal relations.

In Oliver's story this becomes quite evident. It is never the ideology or the state that makes him take a conscious decision, but usually the social network that serves as

a motivation for him. Furthermore Oliver never puts himself into the foreground. With one exception he always makes it clear that he made decisions together with someone or took up suggestions that came from someone else, as evidenced in his two changes of profession after the Fall of the Wall. Only the decision to leave East Germany was his own, but he changes that later.

The dominance of the 'we' over the 'I' in the narrative points to another aspect; that of the notion of the person. Not only does Oliver make decisions because of friends but also usually with them. This feature of his narrative reminds us yet again of the two discourses on the notion of the person that I explored in this thesis. The institutional discourse of the Interessenvereinigung propagated the virtue of 'co-responsibility' (Interessenvereinigung web page); this virtues is based on a picture of the person that is distinctly different from the western German discourse. If one presumed that the western German notion of the person as an individual agent would be manifested in a narrative through a dominance of the 'I' over the 'we', it could be said that Oliver also does not conform to the western notion. I will come back to this question in more detail later in this chapter.

What does Oliver's story tell us with regard to a sense of self and group membership, which life-stories are supposed to communicate (Linde 1993:3), and with regard to values of an individual life' (McAdams 1993:34)? One of the main values that was communicated was the dominance of interpersonal relations. Another main thread of Oliver's story seems to be that of self-fulfilment. Oliver was unhappy in the GDR because he felt that he missed something in his life. This seems to be different today, and indeed his life has changed greatly. With regard to group membership the question is somewhat harder to answer. In respect of his past, Oliver maintains that he was neither a supporter nor an active opponent of the regime and it seems that some more information is necessary in order to answer this question. I will therefore ask how Oliver evaluates his past and present situation.

This enquiry is even more relevant when considering the fact that Oliver's story and his present life still seem to show discrepancies. He participated in the GDR *Jugendweihe* only because everyone had to; he therefore emphasised the family celebration. Today, however, he organises the public ceremonies of the *Jugendfeier*

himself with much effort. He has made a great change with regard to his profession and life-style. He had wanted to escape from the GDR, then changed his mind but finally did not support reunification. As regards the last points in particular it needs to be considered what identity Oliver sees for himself now; what does he think about the modern Germany and how does he evaluate his current life?

7.2. Identity or belonging?

There is a growing interest in questions of identity in the scholarly literature concerned with eastern Germany. Historians and anthropologists in particular have recently started to argue that a distinct ethnic identity is growing in eastern Germany. This argument was caused by a number of phenomena one of which is the widely discussed *Mauer in den Köpfen*; wall in the heads.[4] The phrase refers to a presumed further existence of the border in the heads of Germans. Another phenomenon was the appearance of so called *Ostalgie,* nostalgia for the East, in the mid -1990s. During this time goods from the GDR, products produced in eastern Germany suddenly became valuable again. Many people started to reorient their shopping habits to buy eastern German food stuff, parties were organised which featured GDR clothes and included auctions of 'things' from the GDR. The occurrence of debates like the one outlined in chapter three (41-51) furthermore encourages a hypothesis on the existence of an eastern German identity. In this particular debate the writers of letters also distinguished frequently between 'the East' and 'the West'; between 'us' eastern

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[4] The *Spiegel*, a major political magazine in Germany, published a special issue in 1991 called: *A profile of the Germans: that, which unites them and separates them*. The issue contains the outcomes of numerous opinion polls ranging from attitudes towards the socialist as well as the communist past to questions of life-style. In the second half double portraits of East and West Germans with the same profession were done.
For the impossibility of communication between eastern and western Germany see for example Simon *et al* (2000) and Klein (2001). For eastern German past and experience see Gabler and Sölzer (2000), and Ensikat (1999). This literature is complemented by a vast amount of joke books and satires about the eastern German past and present.

Germans and the 'other', patronising western Germans. For the case of the *Jugendweihe* Meier argued that the ritual was done out of nostalgia (1998:40), that it reinforced a sense of belonging and that it applied to the experience of the eastern German *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (Meier 1998:43). Similar points were made by Wolbert who regards the ritual as strengthening the "The East-feeling" (Wolbert 1998:203).

Several scholars in the field have tried to explain the perceived rise of an eastern German identity. One of them is Howard who maintains that it is actually an ethnic identity, which is developing in eastern Germany (1995:119-131). Howard argues that the two fundamental aspects of an ethnical identity are the creation of a feeling of familiarity and the establishment of continuity (Howard 1995:127). Regarding eastern Germany both of these are threatened by the constant attacks of western Germans on eastern German culture, by the experience of a devaluation of eastern German culture. This finally leads to the creation of an ethnic identity in eastern Germany. This ethnicity is based on three feelings, identified by Howard as follows:

1. 'we' have experienced communism in the GDR
2. 'we' are experiencing great difficult with the transformation to a new way of life
3. 'we' are fighting against the West German attack against our dignity. (Howard 1995:129)

Daphne Berdahl explores the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* arguing similarly that there is a sense of particularity amongst eastern Germans. Berdahl states that this nostalgic phenomenon recalls East Germany as it never existed (1999b:198). The products which are part of this wave are 'cleansed' of their negative connotations, and only the favourable sides of them are remembered. However, *Ostalgie* can also evoke quite different feelings in even the same person (Berdahl 1999b:203). Berdahl makes two important points about *Ostalgie* with regard to identity. One is that:

> Ostalgie can be an attempt to reclaim a kind of *Heimat* (home or homeland), albeit a romanticized and hazily glorified one.

> The products of Ostalgie, then, offer a means of remembering the GDR as well as of connecting personal biographies to the passing of time and a state. (Berdahl 1999b:202)

And secondly:

> Ostalgic and similar practices reveal and contest at a particularly dynamic historical moment official master narratives of a united Germany by proposing an alternative vision of "Germanness" - of Eastern German particularism and *Eigen-Sinn.* (Berdahl 1999b:205).

Berdahl therefore agrees with Howard regarding the experience of a devaluation of the eastern German past and culture (Berdahl 1999b:205). *Ostalgie* reclaims a *Heimat,* homeland, and creates continuity on the level of personal biographies. Secondly, *Ostalgie* contests western German cultural hegemony.

Fessen also addresses the question of a devaluation of eastern German culture. He argues that the experience of such is caused by a 'mis-recognition' between eastern and western Germans (1995:132-144). The feeling of a devaluation of cultural practices, which was caused by western German hegemonic behaviour, leads eastern Germans to ascribe an arrogant identity to western Germans. 'The *Wessi'*, the western German, became a stereotype that always goes along with the recognition of western German identity, regardless of an individual's behaviour and character (Fessen 1995:136). On the other hand, in the eyes of western Germans, issues relating to the East German past are linked tightly to a nostalgic memory of communism (Fessen 1995:142).[5]

From this point of view, the one of nostalgia and an 'East German group awareness' (Koch 1996:189-210), Oliver's engagement in the organisation of the *Jugendfeier* might easily be explained. Let us, however, hear first what Oliver himself thinks about identity.

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[5] Other scholarly works on German-German differences are for example Erpenbeck and Weinberg (1993) Koch (1996:189-210), Schmidtchen (1997), Schroeter (1994:55-73) and Wagner 1999.

7.2.1. Belonging and home

When asked what he felt more like; a German, an eastern German, a person from Sachsen-Anhalt or Magdeburg Oliver gave the following answer:

> Ultimately I am a German. I am not someone who constantly talks about the old achievements. I had a good life then. But I am not sad that it doesn't exist any more and I also wouldn't want it back. For the simple reason that - that connects back to self-confidence again - everything I am doing now is ruled by myself. I can rule my life. I therefore feel quite sorry for the older generation that hasn't got this chance any more.

Oliver establishes himself here as a 'German'. That is, however, a German with a particular past which necessitates an explanation of this feeling. He argues that he is a German because he does not engage in nostalgia. He admits, that he led a 'good life', which he nevertheless does not miss because he now possesses 'self-confidence'. This claim needs unpacking.

Before he made this statement Oliver discussed the differences between eastern and western Germans. With regard to this question he explained that he appreciates the new possibility for practising self-determination, to learn self-confidence and to express one's self. Oliver had been greatly unsatisfied in the GDR, although he made a fortune and had many friends. It becomes clear now that what he had missed was the ability to determine his way of life. He was automatically offered job training and a placement by the state when he finished school. He was not even able to move away from his neighbourhood because of the bureaucracy involved in the allocation of accommodation. In order to achieve some sense of freedom and self-determination he took on risky activities with his friends. Now, however, he can fully develop his self and do whatever he likes. That he currently seeks election as mayor is just one more step on this voyage of self-expression. He explicitly says later in the interview that he regards the chance to stand for election as a possibility of learning more self-confidence.

However, although Oliver calls himself German he admits a little later in the interview that he is very attached to his home town of Magdeburg:

Although I am the typical Magdeburger. I couldn't imagine a life anywhere else. Because I am also lazy. I know each stone around here. I also don't feel comfortable in West German [*westdeutsche*] big towns. Berlin is an exception. I always loved it. Its great. But I wouldn't move there. I find West German towns sterile but it might have to do with the people as well. Many say that the Magdeburger are...

Oliver places himself consciously in Magdeburg. This is his hometown and he does not want to live any where else. As flexible and adventurous as he is, the prospect of a move away from Magdeburg is not included in his flexibility. Oliver explains his attachment to this town with the fact that he knows it well. He literally knows every stone in the town, which he has explored from childhood onwards. Oliver started his life-story with a remark about the town. He said that he grew up in a quiet neighbourhood and contrasted it to another one, which was newly built at the time. This town, its structure and architecture therefore seems to play an important role in his experience of home and belonging. Oliver then goes on to mention possibilities of moving and curiously enough from talking about one particular town in eastern Germany he switches to any western German town in general. He furthermore indicates that his attachment to place has not only to do with the town as a geographical but also as a social environment; he may not like the people in western Germany. They are too 'superficial' as he explains later.

In the two excerpts I quoted above Oliver defines himself in three respects. Firstly he sees himself as a German, establishing a national identity. With regard to home he places himself in Magdeburg. This town is, however, used as a *pars pro toto* that stands for the east of Germany; the last point comes about in contrast to western Germany. What Oliver does not mention are nostalgic feelings to the GDR; quite the opposite, he rejects such by pointing out that he does not constantly talk about the old achievements.

Neither does he organise the *Jugendfeier* out of nostalgia. When he started to work for the Humanistischer Verband he did it because of the prospect of doing youth work. The *Jugendfeier* was a necessity the national association demanded. When

asked what he thought about the problematic past of the ritual Oliver calls on the widespread idea that it is self-explanatory since it is a transition ritual:

> I see it as a ritual. A ritual is not an invention of socialism. Rituals have existed since stone age. That it existed before 1945 we know as well. It has surely been instrumentalised as many other things in socialist times. That had been an opportunity to built something up. [...]
>
> The question is the system breaks down and how do I change? We have created something new under a different name. Its just a day and there is a celebration (you can't change that much), there is nothing else. [...] We think more deeply about the content and try to work on the content. And we marvel about many things. For example the preparation which are continuously redone.

Oliver sees the change brought about by the events of 1989 as a new start. With regard to the continued practice of the ritual, it is important for him that the ritual changed in its content. This is so because the content of the *Jugendfeier* is fundamental for Oliver. He sees the ritual primarily as a transmitter of values; the content therefore needs to be considered carefully. This preoccupation with content or meaning is much stronger in his association than in the Interessenvereinigung, in his opinion. This fact serves as a justification not only of the ritual's continuation but especially for the practice of the *Jugendfeier* which he organises in contrast to the *Jugendweihe* of the Interessenvereinigung. One of the values Oliver emphasises strongly in his *Jugendfeiern* is, unsurprisingly, self-confidence; he sees the *Jugendfeier* as an opportunity for the young people to practise self-expression. These two things are what he tries to transmit in the preparation of the *Jugendfeier* and during the ritual.

Oliver's view of the ritual in the GDR era is typical for his life-strategy. It had, admittedly, been instrumentalised by the state 'as many other things'. However, since individuals were able to distance themselves from the ideological content this past is not to be taken too seriously. Oliver seems to agree very much with Gerholm in this respect (1988:190-203). For the moment it is sufficient to note that when regarding

the *Jugendfeier/Jugendweihe* he does not take a nostalgic stance, he rather sees it in a functionalist way.

Oliver does not show the strong sense of eastern German identity which Howard mentions (1995:119-131). Instead, he states simply that he feels German but is strongly attached to his home, his town, his place of origin. This is due to the feeling of familiarity that has grown over the years of living there. This familiarity regards the town as a geographical but also as a social place. Oliver knows how to take the Magdeburger and he likes them for being the way they are; western Germans are different:

> I think you have to take them the right way. When I meet someone, a grumpy shop assistant, I make a comment on it and sometimes they cheer up and sometimes they are worse. They way I behave reflects back in the reaction. When you are open they are as well. In western Germany [*Westdeutschland*] they are superficial. Its all about money and business and you notice that when you talk to them. If they listen.

This is a quite negative and stereotypic description of western Germans. However, it is nevertheless based on some experience. Oliver concludes this fact from encounters he had with western Germans and from sudden changes of behaviour of one friend who became an insurance seller in the early 1990s. Having promised to separate friendship and business this friend soon tried to convince Oliver to buy an insurance from him.

With regard to identity, Oliver's narrative provides us with three different points which I will test in some other stories in the following sections. There is the feeling of being at home, *Heimat*, which comes about by a familiarity with place and people. Both these aspects are experienced in contrast to western Germany. It seems that also with regard to behaviour a difference between the two parts of Germany is perceived. This will take us back to the question of the notion of the person in modern eastern Germany. Finally, nostalgic feelings do not seem to play an important role with regard to a feeling of identity.

7.2.1.1. The place of origin as *Heimat*

> The differential experience of landscape is thus an important mode of socialization. Movement, memory, and daily routine within a landscape may work to create a particular sense of personhood, as well as ideas about appropriate action in different contexts. (Thomas *et al* 2001:547)

Thomas *et al* take this insight from Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Tilley (1996) and use it in an analysis of 'ritualized architecture' in a Solomon Island society, which they compare to the oral tradition of the society (Thomas *et al* 2001:545-572). Green *et al* explore the changing perception of landscape in Epirus, Greece (2001:255-288). They conclude that the perception of place is affected by the practices and activities in it (Green *et al* 2001:285). With regard to eastern Germany De Soto discusses the reconstruction of landscape and memory in Sachsen-Anhalt (2000:96-113). She illustrates the different positions and groups that participate in the negotiations of the reconstruction and notes that the citizens, and especially women, feel widely excluded from the processes of landscape restructuring; their needs, especially the pressing matter of unemployment, do not seem to be considered.

My concern here, however, is not with re-construction. It is rather with the perception of landscape and architecture which seems to reinforce a feeling of belonging. This argument is justified by the fact that Oliver was not the only interviewee who pointed out a feeling of attachment to place. In the following I will consider some more excerpts from interviews in order to see how some people describe their experience of identity via the 'lived experience of architecture' and place (Thomas *et al* 2001:569).

I asked every interviewee how they perceived themselves with regard to a national, regional or local identity. The couple quoted below could be regarded as very knowledgeable addressees for such a question. Thomas and Siglinde, who both grew up in the area, moved with their two and a half year old son to western Germany in 1990. They stayed in Rheinland-Pfalz for four years. Both had well-paid jobs during

that time and enjoyed a good standard of living. However, they decided to return to the run-down town of Schönebeck where jobs were very rare at the time. The quotation below explains why they decided to come back:

> *A: What do you feel like? A German, East German, Sachsen-Anhalter, Schönebecker?*
> Siglinde: We feel as Germans, don't we? But attached to the homeland [*heimatverbunden*].
> Thomas: Extremely *heimatverbunden* in Schönebeck to put it that way.
> Siglinde: But as an East German [*Ostdeutsche*] I wouldn't see myself. [...]
> *A: How are you rooted in Schönebeck? Mainly by family relations or how?*
> Thomas: No, we are also attached to the country-side here somehow. We lived near the mountains there in Rheinland-Pfalz, yes? And we were always fascinated by these wide landscapes when we came here to visit. The *Elb-auen* [river banks of the Elbe] etc. And we noticed that we somehow are linked to here. Of course we also have very good family ties, we always had. That certainly played a role for us, but I also think that we are attached to the nature here as well. With the soil, to be honest. But the people have not been the motor, so that we would have said: 'Right, yes [we like] the Sachsen-Anhaltiner and we can't get along with the Rheinland-Pfälzer. Or the Baden-Würtemberger.
> Siglinde: No, not at all.
> Thomas: Those in Sachsen-Anhalt are much better', no. But the country itself. For that you had a feeling of *Heimat*.
> Siglinde: And the family. Well, mainly the family. But also the landscape.
> Thomas: Well, I had to deal with the landscape. I found the mountains suffocating. [...]

Siglinde and Thomas negotiate two reasons for their return to Schönebeck. One is the attachment that both, but especially Thomas, feel to the landscape. This feeling is so strong that Thomas was not able to cope with the mountainous area in Rheinland-Pfalz; he physically felt the 'suffocating', closed structures of the mountains. The *Boerde*-area around Schönebeck is in contrast characterised distinctly by its flatness (figs.7,8). Thomas values this feature because he can see until the horizon without anything barring his view. Siglinde insists, however, that the family was another important motivation for the move back; at least for herself.

This conversation between Siglinde and Thomas illustrates very clearly that their sense of identity is grounded deeply in a feeling of being at home. Being at home is experienced as a result of a sense of familiarity with the environment, that includes the geographical, or architectural but also the social environment. The senses seem to play an important role in this experience. For Thomas this is the visual sense; he cannot cope with a restriction of his view over the landscape. 'Identity' in this sense is not the ethnic political identity which Howard describes (1995:119-131) but rather a deeper feeling of belonging. Before I discuss this in more detail I will examine some more examples.

Another sensuous experience of home and *Fremde* (foreign country) is narrated by Phillip. This narration refers to his first border crossing in 1989. He was eighteen years old at that time:

> Arriving there at the main station in Hamburg. Not seeing much, immediately out [of town] again on the train to a suburb. A small town, neat, very nice. ... It was dark outside, already in March. Everything well lit [in the town]. It smelled nicely everywhere. Like the parcels you got, they used to smell as nice. It smelled like that, all the streets smelled like that, I believed. I was ill, I was ill for days. I couldn't eat anything etc. it was just too much. Now I am laughing about it, but back then. [...] I was very happy when I was back home again. With back home I don't mean here, in Schönebeck, but just to pass the border again. Back into the East [*in den Osten*]. The East was my home and it still is. I notice that when I drive into the West [*in den Westen*] the West in quotation marks. I can't say why. It still is different. It still looks different. It still smells different, I believe. It just is different. ... You realise that immediately when you drive there. Somehow it is like that. I am not saying that it isn't nicer anywhere else. I don't know. A typical Ossi. Bad.

When Phillip travels into western Germany for the first time he is overwhelmed by the intense sensuous experience of the place. He becomes sick as a result of it. It is so different from his experiences, so different from home, that his body just cannot deal with it. And he feels relieved when he is 'back home again'. This 'home' is, according to Phillip, not just the town where he lived, it is 'the East' in general. The

East was and is his home, as he points out. This is once again based on a feeling of familiarity; Phillip knows the East with its architecture, distinct smells; its visual, odorous and certainly also auditory characteristics. Phillip adds that this difference between eastern and western Germany is still apparent for him. He is not quite certain about it and indicates this by saying: 'I believe that'. This phrase is this time not used to validate a general belief but rather to point out that this is his personal experience which may not be shared by others.

Although Phillip bases his identity on his attachment to a certain place; this feeling of belonging comes about in contrast to that what is not home, in contrast to the foreign country. That is in both, Phillip's and Thomas' case, western Germany. Phillip furthermore labels himself as an '*Ossi*'. *Ossi* and *Wessi* are labels for the stereotypic eastern and western German which came about in the first years of the *Wende*. They are associated with a certain set of character traits. Oliver, however, does not mean this seriously. He rather acknowledges that he might sound like an *Ossi* but, actually, he does not feel like the typical eastern German; someone who would identify himself as an 'East German' with an exclamation mark.

The idea that familiarity with a certain place results in a feeling of belonging is quite simplistic. It nevertheless seems to be widely neglected by anthropologists who are preoccupied with imagined groups (Anderson 1983) and boundaries (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985) and seem to overlook the obvious. Only the idea that ethnicity strongly correlates with the notion of kinship captures this feeling in a vague sense (Cohen 1985:107). I will return to this point shortly. For the moment I shall remain with the 'simplistic idea of belonging' in the sense in which another interviewee describes it:

> Michael: I mean you [meant generally; everyone] have been living here in Magdeburg for a while, since 1982. Yes in 1982 we moved here. And then you feel [at home, familar]... with the town a little bit. So I would say I am a Magdeburger.

After years in the same place people get accustomed to the surroundings and develop a sense of belonging to the place but also the people there. In many of the cases above the identity that was expressed sounded therefore much more like a local or regional identity. However, it needs to be admitted that 'The East' is still very

often mentioned when people talk about their home or their identity (Phillip:242 and Hannah below) which seems to hint at the perception of an East German community which would support the argument on the existence of an ethnic identity. The critical reader may also insist that this sense of identity may very well be experienced by those eastern Germans who were reasonably well-off during GDR times. It may be hard to imagine that those citizens who suffered hardship under the regime would develop a similar attachment to the place. This argument is, however, countered by Hannah who talks about very similar feelings to those of Phillip and Thomas. Hannah comes from a Christian family background and frequently ran into problems with the GDR authorities during her youth, nevertheless:

> Hannah: I couldn't quite understand that back then. This: Oh, I don't want to live there. I was happy to visit the people in the West [*im Westen*] and to go there but I was also happy to come back again. To home.
>
> *A: Home is here?*
>
> Hannah: Yes. And into the East [*in den Osten*], right? Well, although I hadn't agreed to many things, this was nevertheless my home.

Hannah makes explicit that she refers to eastern Germany specifically. The reference to eastern Germany, however, is not due to an ethnic or even national pride. Rather, the identification with the eastern part of the country in the cases above comes about through the experience of the distinct differences between eastern and western Germany at the time of the border opening, which still persist to a certain extent in the present. Many towns in the GDR were shaped by a certain architecture that is known as *Plattenbau* (concrete tenements), at the same time older buildings were often in poor repair; they looked grey and part-demolished (fig.6;8). This contrasted greatly to the shiny and colourful appearance of West German towns, which were crowded with advertisements, pictures and flashing lights. The little Trabis on East German streets, which lacked catalysers, and the non-existence of similar devices in smoke stacks, coupled with the use of coal for heating made for a distinct smell as well. In comparison, in West Germany all cars possessed catalysers; oil, gas or electricity were used for heating.

It is this sensual experience of difference that manifested the sense of belonging to eastern Germany during the first visits to western Germany. That the perception of cultural distinctiveness is an important factor in the construction of identity has been noted by both Barth (1969:15-16) and Cohen:

> It is much the same sentiment of distinctiveness that leads communities and ethnic groups to the reassertion and reaffirmation of their boundaries. (Cohen 1985:40)

I argued that the sense of belonging is the simple feeling of being at home and knowing place and people. Verdery argues in her work on reburial in post-socialist states that national identity actually is a kind of kinship (1999). According to her it becomes visible in such reburials that 'nationalism is a kind of ancestor worship' (Verdery 1999:41). The rhetoric of ethnicity itself is also strongly related to the notion of kinship, as I noted before. It is therefore plausible that identity could be experienced through a feeling of belonging to a certain kind of people and being part of a social network including family and friends.

To know people is, however, not only a question of social networks. It is furthermore a question of sharing certain models of behaviour and values. Oliver pointed out above that he knows how to take the people living in Magdeburg whereas western Germans appear superficial to him. This statement takes us back to the notion of the person in modern eastern Germany and the question of 'persisting cultural differences' (Barth 1969:16) which I will explore in the following section.

7.2.1.2. Belonging and the experience of cultural differences

The notion of 'mutual individualism' was introduced in chapter four (122;123) and contrasted with the Western concept of 'elbow-individualism' (chapter four:112). The main characteristic of mutual individualism is the predominance of social relationships over the individual. This became quite clear in Oliver's life-story that centred around social networks; the circle of friends and his girlfriend. I will now explore another story in order to illustrate the differences between eastern and western German models of behaviour. This story will also show how it becomes increasingly difficult

to make a clear evaluation of the different values at play due to the simultaneous existence of two value systems.

Nadine tells the following story about her boss, a district administrator, to illustrate the differences she sees between eastern and western Germans:

> Yes, and therefore what you notice, what you have said before [her husband] that they can present themselves better. You do realise that when you work in the office and there are people from West Germany [*Westdeutschland*] who have stayed here. You notice that they know how they get their position. Yes and when there is one who was Landrat (district administrator) after the Wende. His party lost the next election and now he isn't Landrat any more. But to go back to the West [*in den Westen*] and be a nobody? He didn't want that either. So he just stood for mayor here again. Since he was the only candidate, who else should the people vote for? So he became mayor of a village and now there is a new election and now he is standing for mayor in the town of Bernburg. Because there he can still be someone. And after some time he might try to be Landrat again or become a Landtagsabgeordneter [representative of federal parliament]. [she laughs] So and I believe that in that respect we here... Not everyone but many, are still a bit more ponderous. So... We are not flexible enough to concentrate on a new task. Probably also not that hungry for power. I don't know. Or we have less need to present ourselves. Surely there are also politicians here that are like that. But sometimes I get the feeling that the Westler [person from the West] have a greater need to present themselves and to shape opinions. Probably that's another remnant of the GDR; that you rather let yourself be guided. Rather [that] than to guide yourself. And partly, what I have noticed as well because I have worked for Westler and am now working for an East-Landrat, is that they are much more happy to make decisions. They would rather make decisions and make a mistake which is corrected afterwards, than not make any decisions at all. The Ostler [person from the East] are the opposite, they would rather make no decisions than make a mistake. What makes it difficult for... So that in the first four years with our Westler we did more then in the six or seven years with our East-Landrat.

Nadine's story was a reply to the question whether she thought there were any differences between eastern and western Germans. She answers positively by saying

that western Germans have greater skills in presenting themselves. This skill of self-presentation, which is also often referred to as the ability 'to sell oneself', has also been described by other interviewees. This is an ability that is necessary in a society where competition amongst individuals is a part of everyday life and which focuses on the abilities of the individual rather than to rely on a system of referral or 'connections' as in the GDR.[6] The need to present oneself in the most favourable light is therefore grounded in a notion of the person as an self-expressive individual. The eastern German idea of a restricted individuality that is realised through social networks does not encompass the idea of self-presentation. Although I identified self-presentation as an aspect of the *Jugendweihe* it is not a skill as such, it is a ritual element in that case.

Nadine goes on to describe the administrator she works for. The most important element in this description is the fact that he does not 'give up' after the first election loss but continues standing for different positions. She identifies this behaviour as an overt need for self-presentation and disregards of it. However, she then starts to find it difficult to evaluate this behaviour. She contrasts it to eastern German ponderousness: 'We are not that flexible'. From a negative judgement of the western Germans' behaviour she arrives at another negative evaluation of the contrasting eastern German character traits. Rather than to point out that the people in eastern Germany are modest and less egocentric, she describes them as inflexible, which results in the break of her story line. Shortly after this Nadine re-evaluates the eastern character and adds that people might not be that 'hungry for power'. This is now a very negative description of the administrator's behaviour, which she also refers to as 'the need to shape opinions'. This is yet again contrasted by her statement that the eastern German passivity might be a remnant from GDR times. The example Nadine gives concerns decision making strategies. She points out that western Germans are happy to make decisions quickly whereas eastern Germans consider much more carefully and prefer not to make a decision if it may result in a failure. Nadine does not give an evaluation of these two different strategies; she merely states them.

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[6] Junghans notes for the case of Hungary that the notion of the self underpinning civil society, for example the concept of self-actualization, is in contrast to the notion apparent in the post-socialist society (2001:3383-400).

The western German ease in making decisions is once again part of the notion of the person as an [individual] agent. According to this idea individuals take up the initiative and make decisions themselves based on the realisation of their own opinions. This idea is not only in stark contrast to a notion of the person as a member of a wider collective only, who therefore does not make any decisions of their own, but also to a society which possessed very different structures.[7] To consider all decisions carefully was a necessity in this environment. It is clear that the two value systems differ in fundamental aspects. Erpenbeck describes the situation as the difference between an 'agreement-culture' for the east and a 'culture of argument' for the west of Germany (Erpenbeck and Weinberg 1993:45).

Nadine finishes her story by pointing out that the western German administrator was actually more successful than the eastern German candidate. However, she does not come to a final conclusion with regard to a an evaluation of the different behavioural models she outlined. The 'incoherence' and 'contradictions' in her story are discursive indicators of the social change in eastern German society (Fairclough 1992:97). Nadine's shifting negotiations of an evaluation of the different models of behaviour, the frequently broken up story line that misses a coda but ends with a non-evaluated example, is an expression of the fluidity of these different values.

Nadine juggles with two value systems at the same time, one eastern German and the other western German; she compares both, but the grounds on which she compares them are constantly shifting. Based on her '*habitus*' which was acquired in East German society she despises an overtly self-demonstrative behaviour (Bourdieu 1977:83); it is too eccentric and too selfish for her feelings. However, basing her judgement on the requirements of the new society this behaviour suddenly appears in a new light; it seems suitable for the current circumstances, a market economy and a system of democracy. This seems to appear at least when she points out that the western German administrator was ultimately more successful. Despite this fact

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[7] The domination by the state and the knowledge of surveillance certainly conditioned people to avoid to attract attention (Wolle 1999:152-162). The forced unanimity in decision making discouraged leader personalities (Bytwerk 2001: 109-123 on unanimity). The second economy worked on the principle of reciprocity within social networks (Verdery 1991:423; footnote 3). See Gauss on the 'niche-society' (1986).

Nadine still does not seem to be convinced that preference for the western German behaviour is the right conclusion; she therefore avoids a conclusion.

Another important difference between the two notions of the person that are at work in Germany has been captured by another interviewee. Hans points out that

> After the Wende you had a lot more personal freedom. But I always thought and said that rights go along with duties. I can say this and that but then I affect somebody else.

The idea of freedom is fundamental to Western individualism as chapter five (158) showed. Hans acknowledges this, he, however, bases it on the necessity that such a freedom entails consideration for others. His statement is a very good description of the eastern German notion of mutual individualism. This notion is creative and flexible as well as a conservative reaction to social change. Personal freedom is not denied in eastern Germany, but since the eastern German notion of the person emphasises interpersonal relations, such an increase in rights is accompanied by a greater awareness of the 'other'. This notion ultimately results in a heightened sense of responsibility for one's actions. The speeches held at *Jugendweihen*, which I analysed in chapter four, showed very clearly the relation between these different elements in the notion of the person. It needs to be noted, however, that this insistence on a social framework was initiated by the parental generation in order to counter the social change. It was probably reinforced by the anticipation of an imminent diversion of society due to the loss of former mechanisms for cohesion. However, with Hans' idea that freedom is inseparable from duties we have finally returned to the virtue of 'co-responsibility' which the Interessenvereinigung promotes in their discourse.

The examples cited above should have shown that the sense of belonging many eastern Germans feel with respect to their place of origin is not only based on geographical and architectural features but is also manifested in social networks. There are two reasons for this. As with their experience of the environment, the people will feel a familiarity with the kind of people they interact with. As Oliver points out, he knows how to take the shop assistant in Magdeburg; he is accustomed to their behaviour and has learned strategies to interact with them. A certain system of

values, though shifting, is shared by the inhabitants of the area and they can rely on this fact. People from western Germany behave differently; they are therefore harder to deal with.

What is even more important than these cultural differences, however, is the fact that people are located within a network of face-to-face relationships. Though this may sound trivial, it is a very important fact in a society that features a notion of the person which realises individuality through social networks. The establishment of identity through social networks is thus culturally determined. Siglinde made clear that she moved back to Schönebeck because of her family. I pointed out in chapter six (206) that many young people still value their family highly with regard to the *Jugendweihe*. This means that people not only know how to get along, they know the people in their environment as they know the landscape, and both these factors are based on the cultural models and values that shape their experience and guide their interaction.[8]

Eastern German identity does not seem to depend on very obvious nostalgic practices or even ideas. I personally was unable able to find indications for the *Ostalgic* practices of the mid-1990s, which Berdahl describes (1999b:192-211), during the period of field work.[9] Because there are no obvious nostalgic practices and because the people usually did not express any feeling of East German identity writ large in the interviews, it is in my opinion rather a muffled sense of belonging and attachment to place and people that is at work. This feeling is reinforced and validated by the difference between these aspects and the other part of Germany. This argument would therefore, amongst others, contradict Berdahl's and Howard's (1995:119-131) arguments.

However, it has to be admitted at this point that I have omitted some information. What does not fit into this picture are those letters I quoted in chapter

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[8] I experienced frequently during the field work how important the family is for eastern Germans. When people heard that I was studying in the UK while my family was living in Germany they would look at me with a very serious expression and say something like: 'And how do your parents feel about that?'; 'Oh, but so far away from home.'

[9] The only instance of so called *Ostalgie* I witnessed during the field work was at a book store. The book store had put together a presentation of all sorts of East Germany-related literature, from cookbooks and historical accounts to collections of jokes and famous toys as key rings. This, however, does not bear the same quality as the ostalgic practices of the mid-1990s, in my opinion; the original wave had a much stronger demonstrative and oppositional character.

three (44;45), for example. These spoke a very clear language regarding a distinct notion of eastern German identity. I will therefore consider these in the next section in order to finally arrive at a conclusion.

7.2.2 Identity politics in eastern Germany

I already noted a number of points with regard to the letters of newspaper-readers, which discussed the 'meaninglessness' of the *Jugendweihe*, in chapter three. The writers often called upon a shared identity when talking about the eastern German past and culture. One of them explicitly said: 'The East has only been waiting for this' (*Volksstimme* 12th of February 2000; emphasis added), thereby indicating the existence of a community in eastern Germany. These letters, however, seemed to be primarily a reaction to a contestation of the shared past and culture by a western German. In this sense Howard's point about eastern German identity as a counteraction of a devaluation of the culture seems to be right. However, this 'political' identity that presumes a cohesive but 'imagined community' (Benedict 1983 *passim*) does not seem to be apparent at all times. In this section I will explore further its intermittent nature and how this is explained by the people themselves.

> Dieter: But this is what I experienced.... From the western point of view, from my colleagues' [point of view], they would have liked to see that I should have buried nearly forty years of my life [and] identity. Or should have forgotten about it. Meaning: now there is a new start and now you can. That is certainly true. We wanted to make use of the possibility of a new start, we also have used it, but, we never, and I think this is what my wife pointed out, we never forgot our identity and where we come from. And even today I am not ready to do so! I spent more than thirty years of my life in the GDR and as I said the system didn't damage me. I had adapted in a way, alright. I never overstepped the boundaries that had been put up [...] [in that sense] I don't need to forget my GDR identity and I am not willing to.

When I asked Dieter's wife how she perceived differences between eastern and western Germans she replied immediately by calling western Germans 'insidious'. I

was left wondering where this very strong critique of western German behaviour stemmed from. When her husband later joined the interview it became clear. However, when we discussed whether it would or would not be imaginable to move to western Germany he explained that moving between the two parts of Germany should not be a problem any more, although there are regional differences which one should take into account. He then reported that he had heard about certain regions, for example Bavaria, where it is hard to make friends. So his sudden change of tone in the excerpt above came as a surprise to me.

In this excerpt Dieter explains that he feels his life-story is questioned by western Germans. This statement is based on experiences he has with his colleagues from western Germany who seem to demand from him a negation of 'thirty years of [his] life in the GDR'. Dieter does not deny the possibility of starting 'afresh' after the Fall of the Wall; he explains that he and his wife took advantage of this possibility. However, to 'bury' his life-experience is nevertheless impossible for him. It seems quite plausible to me that no one would be able or willing to erase the experience of a whole life-time. The problematic situation after the Fall of the Wall, the moral condemnation that followed the realisation of one's 'adapted' life-style, nevertheless resulted in a strong questioning of the life-story for many people. The life narrative practised to that point by many eastern Germans suddenly did not function any more, and did not establish them as 'moral individuals' because the values applied to it had changed. This fact was made clear to them mostly by western Germans but also by those eastern Germans who now held the moral high ground, the former victims of the state. Verdery points out that in the first years after the collapse of communism a new morality was established simply by 'stigmatising the communist one': 'All who presented themselves either as opposed to communism or as its victims were ipso facto making a moral claim' (Verdery 1999:38). What then followed for the ordinary citizens was a process of re-evaluation of the life-story by 'putting up' with one's past self. Oliver displays this ability in his life-story. Although he shows clearly that he was not fully obedient to the regime, he states explicitly that he was not in opposition to it either. Dieter makes the same point; he explains that he 'had adapted in a way, alright'. The phrase 'alright' indicates his awareness that with regard to morals this adaptation could be despised. However, it is a fact and there is nothing he can do

about it now. The fact that he does not want to forget his past identity, which is the basis for his present identity, remains. He states that explicitly.

Once again the critical reader might say that this defensive mechanism of eastern German identity may well be practised by former 'ordinary' citizens, but how about those who did not comply, do they share these feelings? This is a delicate question that might need more examination in the future. There are, however, indicators that hint at a similar attitude. Mike, for example, takes a similar position to Dieter, although he comes from an entirely different background. He grew up in a very religious area and describes himself as having always been highly critical of the GDR if not in active opposition to it. Very shortly before the Fall of the Wall he was even in a situation where he faced imprisonment for a political offence. It never came to that, but the incident shows that Mike certainly has no reason to feel nostalgic about the GDR. Now, how does he think about his past experience?

> I am very grateful to have been an East German [*Ostdeutscher*]. Because I don't want to miss any experiences that I had in GDR times. Because of the experiences that I made I am who I am. When I am talking to someone it matters to me from which federal country he comes. Meaning whether he is an Ossi or a Wessi. Because I know that he... a Wessi has completely different experiences.

Mike explains that he values his past life-experiences. They are part of his present self. Not only do they shape him, they also account for the differences between him and those people with other backgrounds, especially western Germans. The shared life-experience of the GDR establishes a common ground for conversation and discourse amongst eastern Germans. This fact is acknowledged and used in everyday life. It seems to be yet another factor which fosters the feeling of belonging to this part of Germany. Mike's answer indicates that this is also true for people who experienced hardship in this state. [10] For this reason, I would not go so far as to call eastern Germany a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, as Meier does (1998:43). The term

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[10] Wierling notes in 1990 that the more than forty years of post war German experience 'might separate the two German societies perhaps even more when united in one state'. She says furthermore: 'There is an East German identity - again directed against something: the wish to forget it' (Wierling 1990:207).

Schicksalsgemeinschaft implies yet again much more then I believe is apparent in eastern Germany. The term seems to be more similar to Taylor's politics of recognition than to a sense of belonging (Taylor 1994:25-74). It is too strong to be applied to the current eastern German situation. I will explain shortly why this is so.

I argued earlier that feelings of belonging and/or identity in eastern Germany are primarily experienced and expressed in comparison to western Germany. The 'political' identification of oneself as *Ossi* and of the other as *Wessi* in particular is strongly dialectical. The interview reports showed though that with regard to self-identification, in contrast to much literature, the eastern Germans do not constantly call themselves East Germans with an exclamation mark. Eastern German identity rather appears as a muffled feeling of belonging. A similar situation seems to be the case for the identification of western Germans, which can either be based on stereotypical ascription as Fessen argues (1995:132-144) or on actual experience which may change the formerly held point of view. The following quotation shows how both identifications can be combined in the same statement:

> Maria: No he [the Wessi] is insidious!
>
> *A: Insidious? [laughter]*
>
> Maria: Insidious. He plays nice and friendly and is generally mean. Yes. Apart from that we don't... we don't really know anybody else. [...] No... As I said it's simply... its not all of them. This is a special example, but... We went on holiday last year to Oldenburg in the Black Forest. Nice people, whom you saw there. I think if you move somewhere... Here or there, the difference is not that great any more.

Maria is well aware that she plays on a stereotype when she calls western Germans 'insidious'. Encounters with more people from the western part of Germany on holidays etc. have shown that the stereotypes do not always hold true. She mentions people the family met in the Black Forrest who were nice. Her very negative judgement refers to the above mentioned colleagues of her husband who, according to her, fulfil all those stereotypical assumptions about *Wessis*. They pretend to be friendly but do not mean it. I mentioned above a similar perception of western Germans as being superficial with regard to social relations and as being egocentric

(Oliver:239 and Nadine:246). Maria's statement indicates, however, that many people are well aware of whether they use stereotypes and generalisations or not. It also shows that both perceptions of western Germans, the political or stereotypical and the more fluent everyday life perception, can be at work in one person at the same time. The same might be the case for the personal identity as an eastern German. Ten Dyke makes a similar point when she talks about 'remembrance work' in Dresden, an eastern German town:

> Thus the museum represents a history of the GDR that does not coincide with either the dominant (condemnatory) or oppositional (nostalgic) discourses. Though some of the objects contained within it evoke pleasing recollections (the toothpaste, the smell of Konsum [a shop]), they simultaneously bring to mind memories of personal and political difficulties in East Germany. (Ten Dyke 2000:156)

The same ambiguity and fluidity that Ten Dyke describes for things from the GDR is in my opinion true for the identity of eastern Germans and / or their sense of belonging.

7.3. Conclusion

'From the great stream
time swims into the town
into the old church towers
salt-crusted walls
and new streets

From the great stream
blows the wind
rushes through the long aisles
sings in houses' maze
and brings the odour
of *Elb*-meadows.'[11]
(Schallehn 1999)

All the examples above indicate that eastern German identity is primarily a 'muffled feeling of belonging'. It is based on a sense of familiarity with and attachment to the place but also the people, family and friends. I picture it as the feeling you have when you sit on a train, exhausted from a long visit in a different part of the country, a buzzing metropolis for example, if you come from a rural area. And you ride along the motorway and see the junction that you have to take every time you get home by car. It is the feeling of being home again. This feeling, I believe, is shared by most eastern Germans regardless of their different experiences with and in the regime. Some of the interviews cited above indicate this.

I identified three different factors which are mentioned by the interviewees. There is the lived experience of the architectural and geographical environment. This can be extended to the sensuous experience of one's surroundings. There are

[11] This poem is published in a collection of works of lay poets in Sachsen- Anhalt. The author Waltraud Schallehn was the mother of the author's landlady in Schönebeck. She gave the book to her as a good-bye present.

furthermore the social networks people are engaged in, most notably that of the family but also of friends and neighbours. Finally, these social networks are especially important because they are experienced against the backdrop of a notion of the person that puts considerable emphasis on social relations.

The 'mutual individualism' that is at work in eastern Germany accounts for individuality only through networks of face-to-face relationships. People are expected not to focus only on themselves but to care equally about their fellows, to feel a 'co-responsibility for society' as the Interessenvereinigung has it (Interessenvereinigung web page). The virtue of co-responsibility is not realised in quite this extensive fashion at the grass roots level of society. It is, however, at work with regard to the closer social environment. Friendships and family ties are valued highly and regarded as fundamental to social life. This is practised in a ritualised way in the *Jugendweihe* but was also apparent in Oliver's life story. Furthermore when eastern Germans talk about moving to western Germany they very often discuss the problem of making friends. The interview with Dieter illustrated this. Field work experience showed that this topic comes up frequently. It is yet another indicator of the importance of social ties.

This difference in personhood shows at last the general cultural differences that are apparent between the two Germanys. This was pointed out yet again in reference to character traits. People described the differences they see in the behaviour of eastern and western Germans and it became apparent that there are strong discrepancies in cultural values and models of behaviour. This fact, the cultural knowledgeability of eastern Germans, accounts furthermore for the feeling of belonging to the place in which one grew up. Eastern German culture is, however, not only manifested in the notion of the person but also in practices. I did not tackle specific cultural practices in this chapter. The *Jugendweihe* which this thesis is concerned with is, however, one of the most famous eastern German cultural practices.

The *Jugendweihe* was used by most eastern Germans for their private ends while they could, simultaneously, display agreement with the government by participating. For this reason the ritual could be carried over 1989 and the following cultural devaluation. Because it has been sustained through this major socio-cultural

change it remains an element of specifically eastern German culture and contributes to the 'muffled feeling of belonging' as I called it.

All the factors mentioned above result in a feeling of belonging that is not primarily based on nostalgic feelings towards the GDR, regardless of the way in which one describes those: as a nostalgia for 'a kind of *Heimat*' 'albeit a romanticized and hazily glorified one' (Berdahl 1999b:202) or a nostalgia for the 'second GDR of social services' (Meier 1998:40). It is also not the ethnic identity Howard describes (1995:119-131), which is based on a very strong feeling of community and a shared past. It rather seems that the *Ostalgie* wave from the mid 1990s has more or less disappeared. Some of the formerly included elements have been discarded (*Ossi*-parties), others have been altered (products), and some were added.[12] The remaining elements combined with other attributes of eastern German culture including things, practices and values foster the feeling of familiarity discussed above. Most of those cultural elements are by now taken for granted and rarely questioned or debated; they can therefore not be seen to be part of a reaction to the cultural hegemony of western Germany. They have become ordinary and are exciting often only in so far as they evoke feelings from childhood or teenage years:

> Mike: This Ostalgie-wave that exists I understand partly. When I hear a song from Karat today of course the childhood comes back [then], the memory. But also this apparent feeling of security, strangely enough. [...] but I always think then: Have you forgotten everything?

The distinct eastern German cultural practices are now also passed down to the next generation.[13] The construction of continuity from before 1989 therefore does not

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[12] The catalogue of an Internet firm that sells *Ossi*-products, shows that many of these have by now been adapted to the new circumstances, i.e. new flavours, the packaging made more attractive, and some new products have entered the range (Ossi-Versand.de AG, Katalog 2001).

[13] The case of the *Jugendweihe* is an obvious example. Compare also *Volksstimme* 24th January 2001, 6th of March 2001, 22nd November 2000. The first two articles advertise tours of famous GDR children's entertainers, i.e. R. Lakomy and an ensemble showing Pittiplatsch. The latter one reports the revitalisation of the so called 'Friedensfahrt', tour for peace, which was a great cycling race in the socialist countries. It was done for the first time on a local scale in Magdeburg in 2000.

end in the present. It is rather extended into the future, thereby securing eastern German culture and community. Furthermore, the revaluation and current pride in eastern German products has to be seen against the backdrop of economical decline in most regions in eastern German.[14] The economic differences, which are mirrored in party politics as well as the media help to foster the experience of differentiation. The economic hard-ship of the new countries also reinforces feelings of pride for successful regional firms and businesses.[15] This is yet another source that can be used when a defence of eastern German culture is regarded as necessary.

The 'muffled feeling of belonging' I have eluded to is therefore a strong resource which can be drawn upon to establish an eastern German identity in the sense of identity politics. This identity comes about in a defensive reaction to any presumed attack on the personal and collective past and culture. This is the *Ossi*-identification which was apparent in many letters cited in chapter three and in some interviews cited above. It is used in the ongoing negotiation of the evaluation of the eastern German past between eastern and western Germans. In such a case one encounters the situation Berdahl and Howard describe; the feeling of western German hegemony and patronisation that needs to be addressed.

It seems that eastern German society is on course to achieve what Appiah so strongly asks for in his essay (1994:149-163). This essay is a reply to Taylor's article on the *Politics of recognition* (Taylor 1994:25-74). Appiah points out here that politics of recognition, the establishment of a favourable identity in contrast to the ascribed identity (for example Gay liberation movement and Black Power) accompany the creation of another delimiting identity, that again includes expectations and demands. It is worth quoting Appiah at length here:

> It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between the world of the closet and the world of gay liberation, or between the world of Uncle Tom's cabin and black power, I would, of course, in each case the latter. But I would like not to have

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[14] Saxony-Anhalt for example faces about 20% unemployment at the moment.
[15] See footnote 12; *Volksstimme* 13th Nov. 2000; 3rd Jan. 2001; 23rd Jan. 2001; 29th Jan. 2001; 14th May 2001.

to choose. I would like other options. The politics of recognition requires that one's skin color, one's sexual body, should be acknowledged politically in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And personal does not mean secret, but not too tightly scripted. (Appiah 1994:163)

It seems that eastern Germany has gone through a scenario such as Appiah describes and is now slowing down, approaching something more like a status quo. The defensive political identity comes to the forefront when this still frail status quo is shaken by, for example, western German claims to a moral and cultural hegemony.

In everyday life, however, a fluid and disparate feeling of familiarity and belonging is nevertheless the firm basis on which identity, in this restricted sense, is built. This allows for a more relaxed perception of western Germans than the coined stereotype of the *Wessi*. This feeling is admittedly grounded to a great extent in the awareness of the difference of 'home' to other places, in this case western Germany. Indeed Cohen argues that the experience of difference is a general feature of communal identity (1985:40). The feeling of difference is not necessarily always in opposition to western Germany; this oppositional stance requires special circumstances as outlined above.

The ambiguity of many institutions in GDR society and the life-strategies of a hidden subversion these institutions created, the *Jugendweihe* was one instance, accounts for the possibility to re-evaluate the personal past. Because of this ambiguity which made room for the expression of *Eigen-Sinn* at the grass roots level, continuity of cultural practices - the *Jugendweihe* - and coherence in life-stories – Oliver - could be established. The shared 'evocative transcripts' at the grass-roots-level, which I noted in chapter six, furthermore allow eastern Germans to feel a sense of community in their sharing the same life-experiences while at the same time disagreeing with the past regime. Since they did not ground their sense of self in the project of this regime in GDR times, they do not have to negate their past in the present.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

> How sound this theory may be I can hardly judge, but it is put forward in all seriousness, and I have a special affection for it since, though now the theory stands as a rather unimportant detail in the book, it was from this detail that the whole synthesis grew. (Bateson [1936] 1985:260)

8.1. The problem

The substantive focus of this thesis is the *Jugendweihe*, a ritual which I generally described as a secular, eastern German, coming-of-age rite. I have shown, however, that this apparently simple ritual is characterised by considerable discursive complexity. There exist several views of the *Jugendweihe*: as an element of the public discourse on the GDR past; the *Jugendweihe* as a transition ritual in the institutional discourse of the *Interessenvereinigung*; the past identity of the *Jugendweihe* as a socialist life-cycle ritual, and finally the ritual's identity as the personal experience of its participants. These different 'identities' of the ritual are certainly not easily comparable: they occupy different levels of discourse, and different contexts. However, the fact that one ritual bearing one name can appear in so many different forms makes a crucially important statement about the anthropological concept of culture and about the significance that experience has for culture. I will now discuss the different 'identities' which the ritual possesses and relate them to the different concepts of 'culture', which I introduced in chapter one, and to some other concepts, which occurred throughout the thesis.

8.2. A ritual with manifold meanings and complexities of discourses

The brief historical outline of the *Jugendweihe's* development, which was provided in chapter two, pointed to the ritual's capacity for adaptation. I noted that the coming-of-age rite was used by a number of different groups for their very own purposes; this was evident not only during the course of history but even simultaneously, as in the case of the Weimar Republic (chapter two:23). These groups drew on the general structure of the ritual and merely changed the content and the values which they wanted to transmit according to their own cosmology.

This multi-purposefulness of the *Jugendweihe* was retained in GDR times and accounts for the current debate which addresses the meaning of the ritual in modern eastern Germany. In order to understand the complexity of this debate, explored in chapter three, it was necessary to describe the *Jugendweihe* as a metaphor. This concept has merit due to the fact that a metaphor can bear different identities (Fernandez 1986:28-70); any of these identities can come to the forefront at one time, depending on the context. Taking this point of view, it appeared that the *Jugendweihe* was used rhetorically in a debate which is concerned with the interpretation of the East German past and, consequently, with current eastern German identity. The examination of Meier's article and the letters it provoked illustrated that this debate is an east-west German exchange about eastern German culture (chapter three:41-51). For the eastern Germans this debate is, however, primarily a struggle about domination in a discourse (Foucault 1977; 1972) which touches on and ultimately questions their personal life-history.

The metaphorical use of the *Jugendweihe* in the public arena furthermore caused a number of misunderstandings in discussions, which addressed the ritual's meaning and conduct. These misunderstandings came about by the conversational partners ascribing different identities to the ritual. Members of the church would for example talk about the *Jugendweihe's* past identity as part of a regime, whereas its modern-day supporters would take it to be a natural rite of transition. The phenomenon can therefore also be described as a 'misrecognition' of the particular view of the *Jugendweihe*, which the conversational partner ermployed (Bourdieu

1977). The identities ascribed to the ritual are inevitably linked to certain expectations regarding the rite itself and its organisers. Chapter three showed, for example, that the view of the ritual as a rite of education results in the demand of a systematic preparation. This request is countered by the Interessenvereinigung which due to its claim to conduct a universal ritual of transition wants to provide general guidelines for life.

This ambiguity of the ritual is not only notable in the public domain, but also in the scholarly literature on the coming-of-age rite. Most of the early works on the ritual similarly address the *Jugendweihe* in its former identity as part of the socialist system, which made it difficult for these authors to explain the continued existence of the *Jugendweihe* at a time when the former ideological underpinning of the rite no longer exists (chapter three:58-65).

From this rhetorical dimension of the *Jugendweihe* I proceeded to examine the ritual as practice in chapters four and five. This analysis was based on my field notes as a non-participating observer. I did not take part in the ceremony; it was not my *Jugendweihe* and I therefore did not share in the emotions, nor did I gain the same impressions as either the participants or their parents. Cohen and Rapport argue that the ethnographer is never at home since she is constantly questioning everything that is common to others (Cohen and Rapport 1995:10; see also Arweck and Stringer 2002). In this respect, I remained aloof from the ceremony, a dissociated observer who takes notes, photographs (see figs. 1-5) and records the speeches.

The findings which emerged from this data showed that the *Jugendweihe* is indeed a transition ritual. It encompasses a phase of segregation, a phase of liminality and status reversal and a phase of aggregation (Van Gennep 1960:11). These elements are apparent in both the modern and the GDR ritual. The latter furthermore included situations where the meaning of ritual activity was ambiguous and the observer was not sure how to interpret them. This was particularly true of the moment on stage where roles and identities were confused and resisted any single determination of meaning.

My initial reading of the *Jugendweihe*, both past and present, as a transition ritual echoes the institutional discourse of the ritual's organisers in most points. I

actually used this discourse for guidance in arriving at certain interpretations. With regard to the GDR *Jugendweihe* in particular I examined the texts of the Central Committee to determine which ritual actions it emphasised and how it interpreted these (chapter five). It seems tempting to regard this institutionalised knowledge in terms of the 'landmarks' which Halbwachs (1992:41-189) and Carrithers (2001:356-379) describe. These landmarks would be the interpretations of the ritual that are available to everyone (in leaflets or on the internet, for example) and serve as indicators for possible actions, according to Carrithers (2001:356-379). In the case of the GDR *Jugendweihe* this would be the conception of the ritual as an act of integration into the community of the workers and peasants. This notion in turn relates to a whole set of values and norms that are grounded in socialist ideology. The main point of these was the precedence of collectivity over individuality. As regards the modern rite of transition the landmarks would point to the idea of coming-of-age and finishing childhood, which is connected to the consequential significance of the 'educational' speech.

However, with regard to the GDR *Jugendweihe* there was, on first sight, at least one point which did not seem to conform to the institutional discourse. That was the moment on stage, which was not only characterised by its ambiguity but furthermore featured the dominance of the individual over the institutionally favoured collective atmosphere. This observation, coupled with the arguments of Lewis (1980), Gerholm (1988:190-203) and Binns (1980:170-187), that meaning in ritual cannot be fully prescribed and that interpretation may be individual, led me to an examination of the personal experiences of the *Jugendweihe*.

The study of these personal experiences, carried out in chapter six, showed that the ritual manifests a second discourse which exists on the grass-roots level of society. Whereas a comparison of the GDR and the modern *Jugendweihe*, underpinned by the two institutional discourses, highlighted a strong discontinuity which had been caused by the *Wende* in East Germany, individual narratives of participants in both rituals indicated continuity. The narratives of both generations were surprisingly similar; they highlighted the same actions and reported similar feelings and opinions about the *Jugendweihe*. In these narratives it appeared that it was not the speech but the

moment on stage that was important for the individual participant. This was linked to the importance of one's outfit and appearance, and I concluded that the transition of the participants is symbolically manifested in the presentation of the self which is carried out on stage. This point, however, was not mentioned in any of the institutional discourses, which rather stressed the weight of the speech since the main purpose of the transitional ritual is value transmission (chapters four, five).

The personal narratives furthermore emphasised the pre-eminence of family celebrations. This is another part of the *Jugendweihe* which the institutional texts omit since they only deal with the public ceremony. The family celebration is, however, of great significance if we consider the elements of presentation and of coming-of-age as fundamental to the conduct of the ritual. The celebration in itself is an act of approval and recognition with regard to the transition of the young person, it furthermore encompasses ritualised actions which test and prove the change of status (chapter six:188-193; 206-208). As regards the notion of landmarks one could conclude that the grass-roots view of the *Jugendweihe* as a family celebration of the imminent maturity of the young boy or girl is a landmark on the interpretation of the ritual. Following this landmark, the transition rite would be characterised by individuality and the presentation of the self.

However, pursuing this line of thought it appears that one aspect of the *Jugendweihe* manifests two landmarks, both of which point in different directions. One points to the ritual as primarily educational advising the young people to pay attention to the speech. The other landmark characterises the ritual as a rite of self-presentation, instructing the participants to feel a nervous expectation of the moment on stage.

This fact, the existence of two contrasting landmarks on the interpretation of the *Jugendweihe*, reflects the differences in emphasis between the institutional master narratives on the ritual and its status as a personal experience. Taking account of this fact, I discussed anthropological theories of cultural resistance in socialist states (chapter six:197). Humphrey's concept of 'evocative transcripts' (1994:21-44) and Luedke's argument about German '*Eigen-Sinn*' (1993) were the most compelling. However, such concepts have, as yet, mostly been applied to totalitarian states.

Although such theories are attempts to move away from the misleading notion of resistance (and in most cases there was no actual open resistance to the ruling elite), they only describe subversion in an oppressive environment. Luedke's notion of *Eigen-Sinn* is, admittedly, more general; it implies that a predisposition to resist is part of German culture. This concept, however, is still used primarily to describe the behavioural strategies of groups which are dominated in certain power structures. Luedtke initially used it to illustrate the subversive strategies of factory workers in nineteenth-century Germany (1993), others have applied his argument to GDR society (Lindenberger 1999). Humphrey's argument is similarly only valid for totalitarian situations; she even points out that the 'evocative transcripts' will disappear once the oppression has faded away (1994:42). With regard to her definition of this concept, which sees transcripts as shared stories contradicting official master narratives, she might be right. The point this thesis makes, however, goes a little further than that.

The evidence presented in this thesis shows that the grass-roots interpretation of the *Jugendweihe* refers not only to its practice but also to its perception. This is of great importance when studying the socialist ritual. The point that practice and perception need to be considered as being merely two aspects of the same whole is a point that is inherent to Bourdieu's theory of the '*habitus*' (1984; 1977). In GDR times the *Jugendweihe* was experienced by the participants as an individual coming-of-age ritual which was crucially defined by its quality as an act of self-presentation. These perceived features of the rite were realised in practice by the participants and their families; they consciously created the act of self-presentation by using formal clothes and make-up, by their behaviour, and through the family celebration. Evocative transcripts therefore need to be regarded as cognitive entities or as interpretative capacities of individuals. These transcripts were shared at the grass roots and even included statements about the emotional effects which the ritual would have on the participants, as Siglinde and Christin pointed out (chapter six:182; 203). This indicates that the transcripts are better described as cultural schema 'through which interpretations of the world are made' and which have 'the potential of instigating action' (D'Andrade 1992b:52; 1992:29). I argue furthermore that although the participants might have taken on a 'ritual stance' (Humphrey and Laidlaw

1994:98), they did so certainly not in relation to the 'socialist' ritual but in relation to their own, personal perception of the *Jugendweihe*. Frank's story indicated this clearly (chapter six:183;186).

These schema and the accompanying practice of the *Jugendweihe* did not disappear with the dissolution of the GDR state. The material in chapter six shows convincingly that similar perceptions guide behaviour in the ritual in modern eastern Germany. Certainly the role of the parental generation needs to be considered, who might actively transmit their own interpretation of the ritual to their children. However, I believe that the similarities in the interview reports of both generations are evidence of the existence of a shared grass-roots level interpretation of the *Jugendweihe*, which is then again confirmed by the participants' individual experience of it.

The fact that the grass-roots version of the *Jugendweihe* constitutes the ritual's continuity means that experience and practice is of more importance for society and culture than the discursively expressed notions of values and norms. This finding was reaffirmed in the following chapter.

The exploration of the notion of the person in chapters four and five reflects the same evidence. The GDR state had propagated a certain ideal of personhood, the 'socialist personality', which, in its emphasis on collectivity, was already countered in the grass-roots practice of the *Jugendweihe*; a practice which put most stress on individual and private aspects. Although I noted that a particular East German notion of the person exists, which I called 'mutual individualism' (chapter four), this notion was not the same as the one described by the socialist ideological discourse. It, rather, developed according to the structures of GDR society, the secrecy of private life on the one hand and the collective organisation of most institutions on the other, which facilitated a notion of the person that stressed interpersonal relationships.

This concept has changed with regard to certain aspects since 1989. These changes are due to the new environment in which personhood is set today; this is related to the new market economy and a new political sphere based on democracy. The dominance of the interests and well-being of society over individual needs which was propagated by the GDR state has therefore, in this setting, become the value of

'co-responsibility for society' as it is expressed by the Interessenvereinigung (chapter four).

The latter two points, the fact that the *Jugendweihe* inhabits cultural schema and the notion of 'mutual individualism' in its distinct difference to the western German notion of 'elbow-individualism', necessitated a return to the question of eastern German culture and identity. Similarly to my exploration of the *Jugendweihe* as rhetoric (chapter three) and as experience (chapter six) I noted in chapter seven that identity also appears in these two dimensions, each of which bear different emphasises.

The evidence provided by the interviews illustrates that eastern German identity exists foremost as a 'muffled feeling of belonging' to a place and people. Identity is therefore experienced in a subtle way as an attachment to the environment a person has grown used to. In the case here, this was the landscape of the Boerde, as Thomas described it so vividly, but also the architecture of the towns and even their smells, as Phillip pointed out (chapter seven:241;242). This sensual experience of 'home' was reinforced by the intense and very different impression which western Germany made on many people during their first visit after the opening of the border.

The second dimension in which belonging is manifested is social relationships, as became apparent in the statements of Siglinde and Oliver (chapter seven:241;232). I concluded that the eastern German notion of 'mutual individualism' reinforces the importance of social relationships for the feeling of belonging. The cultural difference between eastern Germany and western Germany is therefore experienced with regard to personhood. The western German idea of individual competition and the skill of 'selling oneself', for example, is quite alien to many eastern Germans and clashes with their conception of a more modest form of self-expression.

I recognised finally that this feeling of belonging is nevertheless a strong resource which is drawn upon when the eastern German past is felt to be under attack, as in chapter three. When contested, this feeling is transformed into a 'political identity' (Appiah 1994:149-163) that calls on '*Ossies*' and 'The East' for its defence, indicating the existence of a close community and erecting clear boundaries between 'the East' as home and the 'other Germany'. This behaviour should, however, not be

taken as an indication of ethnic identity. It is, rather, a rhetorical means of defence which is applied consciously when necessary, as the interview with Maria showed (chapter seven:255).

8.3. Landmarks, schema, metaphors: negotiating culture

The evidence provided in this thesis suggests that culture is neither simply 'metaphor' (Fernandez 1986; 1982), nor just 'schema' (D'Andrade 1992) and that its 'landmarks' can be strongly contested (Carrithers 2001:356-379). This is clear if we only consider the multiple ways in which the *Jugendweihe* exists. It should be noted nevertheless that Fernandez' notion of metaphor goes further than I applied it in this thesis. Following his line of argument one may well say that the *Jugendweihe* is a metaphor which is filled with different meanings in different contexts; it takes on particular identities for participants and organisers. In my opinion, however, his theory still highlights the rhethorical aspect of social life; this is already implied in his idea of 'expressive culture' (Fernandez 1986:28-70). I, on the other hand, emphasised experience and practice in the analysis.

A study which wants to achieve a better understanding of the dynamics of any part of culture needs to consider each of these different aspects. The metaphorical identities which the *Jugendweihe* takes on in the public discourse need to be coupled with its form in the institutional discourse and with the individual experiences of the participants. Rapport makes this point very strongly (1997; 1993). Rapport describes how he once was drawn into a situation where the rules were heavily prescribed; participating in a prize draw he had to face an experienced salesman who was attempting to make the scholar sign a leasing-contract (Rapport 1997:161-164). However, the situation determined neither his perception nor his actions:

> And what I have tried to show is that there was no moment at which I did not experience the mixed emotions of both recognising what the language game expected of me and knowing precisely where I stood - actually, personally - in relation to it. It was not always so easy a matter to know how to reconcile these positions - what to say, how

> to act ... but it was never hard to see myself both present and absent: a conscious player in the game (however reluctant) but never unconsciously played by it. (Rapport 1997:163)

This thesis supports Rapport's argument. The necessity to take personal experiences of insiders seriously in anthropological analysis applies to all studies of culture. Experience and practice are of as much importance for the understanding of a ritual as they are for the exploration of identity or the notion of the person. All aspects of culture therefore need to be examined in the different ways in which they exist, are experienced and expressed. A concentration on one aspect, for example the powerful rhetoric of *Ossies* and *Wessis*, would result in an incomplete presentation of a more complex situation.

Only when considering these different dimensions of culture as norms, rhetorics, practice and experience we will gain greater insights into the dynamics of socio-cultural change. In eastern Germany this socio-cultural change was characterised by both continuity and discontinuity; processes which were, however, apparent on different levels of culture and which related to different aspects of the cultural element in question. Whereas the institutional interpretation of the ritual and the publicly propagated notion of the person showed great discontinuity, the practices at the grass-roots of society were marked primarily by continuity.

The capacity of culture for ambiguity, for possessing a number of different identities, is what makes continuity of practices and values in post-socialist, eastern Germany possible. It furthermore accounts for the experience of coherence in a life. Oliver showed with great mastery how the constant negotiation between private and public life, between individual and official values in the GDR, enabled him to re-evaluate his personal past in the present of the united Germany; a society in which different morals are to be applied to a life-story (chapter seven:229-239). Furthermore, the negotiation of 'proper' values has not stopped with reunification, as Nadine's narrative clearly exemplified (chapter seven:247). It is an ongoing process, in which the value systems from both Germanies are compared to one another and tested against personal experiences. The same holds true for the reified identifications of cultural differences, as Maria pointed out (chapter seven:255). Due to personal

experiences she is aware that these cultural differences are neither clearly delineated nor general, but that they differ from case to case.

It therefore seems to be the case that not only experience in general but, more concisely, individual experience is of fundamental importance to social life and ultimately to culture. All the explorations of the preceding chapters showed that experience and practice are the arenas in which continuity and discontinuity, change and creativity are negotiated and acted out. As Kondo argues:

> Culture .... is no reified thing or system but a meaningful way of being in the world, inseparable from the "deepest" aspects of one's "self"- the trope of depth and interior space itself a product of our own culture conventions. (Kondo 1990:300-301)

This is so because, ultimately, it is the individual who on the basis of a life-experience decides which values to follow and how to interpret its surroundings. It is also the individual who chooses, more or less consciously, which identity to take on, and whether to express it rhetorically or subtly in everyday life. On the one hand it is this possibility of choice, though often limited (Appiah 1994:155), that I have tried to highlight here. I attempted to show furthermore that this possibility of choice accounts for an individual's capacity to escape presumably determining discourses (or rituals) by establishing practices which counter the master-narrative. In this way culture and belonging are negotiated in eastern Germany and their manifestations may be found more obviously between discourse and experience rather than simply in any one sphere.

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[1] The articles will be ordered alphabetically with regard to the paper and in reverse chronological order with regard to the various issues. The referencing will be as follows:
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Speeches

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