

Chapter 7

Learning the Rules: Local Activists and the Heimat

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The question of 'Heimat' (roughly translatable as 'homeland' or home territory, with connotations of a sense of emotional 'belonging') is significant for any consideration of popular culture in the GDR. From the late 1950s, it acquired its own, significant role within socialist ideology, as the lynchpin between socialism and patriotism. Through the 'socialist Heimat', individuals would feel at home wherever they contributed to its transformation, irrespective of place of birth. And, by having a share in the Heimat and its transformation, they would learn to love the fatherland, the GDR.¹ This paved the way for the state's self-representations through Heimat from the 1960s. The SED had already begun to use the iconography of Heimat in its propaganda as early as the 1950s,² and by the time of its twentieth anniversary in 1968, the idea of the GDR as the socialist Heimat had become an important theme that combined history and transformation, tradition, and industrial change.³

Heimat became important not just for the ways in which the state represented itself to its population and to the 'other' Germany. Expressions of individual identification with the locality or a particular region were extremely popular in everyday life, and they had remarkable staying power throughout the GDR's existence. The popular resonance of the Heimat is easily missed if one concentrates on the one official Heimat organization in the GDR,

1. Jan Palmowski, 'Defining the East German Nation: The construction of a Socialist Heimat, 1945–1962', in *Central European History*, 37 (2004), pp. 365–799.

2. Alon Confino, 'Heimat, East German Imagination, and an Excess of Reality', forthcoming.

3. This is discussed further in chapter two of my forthcoming book on 'Potemkin's Nation: Heimat in the GDR'.

the 'Heimat friends' organized within the cultural league (*Kulturbund*). From their creation in 1950, the 'Nature and Heimat friends' were, until they were split up into interdisciplinary societies between 1976 and 1981, the largest individual organization within the cultural league, with about a quarter of its total membership. However, this only translated into around 50,000 members GDR-wide. In terms of membership, Heimat friends were a significant factor for the cultural league, but less so in relation to almost any other mass organization in the GDR. Heimat was much more popular than this figure would indicate. Folklore and Heimat music constituted a staple of cultural life where the majority of the population lived during the 1950s, in villages as well as mid- and small-sized towns. Moreover, the popularity of Heimat and folklore entertainment persisted into the 1980s. One indicator of this is the disproportionately high audience, which Heimat shows such as 'Klock Acht, achtern Strom', or the 'Oberhofer Bauernmarkt' reached on GDR television throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

The significance of Heimat in the self-representation of the GDR, and in popular culture at the 'grassroots', provides an important context in which a number of the key questions about the concept of 'normalisation' can be discussed. If culture relating to the Heimat was important both at the grassroots and to state and party, local functionaries come into view as actors mediating between officially promoted visions of the socialist Heimat, and individual cultural Heimat practices on the ground. These actors had to manoeuvre every day between individual motivations for cultural activity, and the expectations by state and party about what such activity signified. Any processes, or state, of normalisation as it related to the Heimat would be likely to be reflected—and in turn, reinforced—by these actors, their experiences, and their activities. By looking at actors concerned with the Heimat, we can uncover processes of 'stabilisation', in terms of how culture could be mediated between official encouragement and individual activities in the everyday.

Normalisation as a concept relates not just to a particular state of 'stability', however that may be defined. Any question about the nature of regime stabilisation in the GDR is also inherently one about when that stabilisation set in. In the sphere of popular culture, the longevity of the Heimat ideal offers the great advantage of considering the 'timing' of stabilisation and normalisation from the *longue durée*. Folk music, choral singing, and local dialect were not equally popular in all parts of the population, but they retained an average popularity between the late 1940s and the late 1980s, which invites comparative questions about what might constitute a 'normalised' experience of the Heimat, and when we might observe this phenomenon.

Finally, the sphere of Heimat and of popular culture invites a consideration of how ‘stabilisation’ and normalisation, such as it existed, entailed a ‘learning the rules’ of behaviour in everyday life. The ideal of the socialist Heimat was predicated on individual initiative and activity. In this regard, Heimat friends within the cultural league did acquire significance completely out of proportion to their numbers. They were the ones who could be relied upon to set up Heimat exhibitions, organize the signposting of footpaths, and, most important of all, take a leading part in the organization of Heimat festivals. The socialist Heimat, and socialist cultural activity in general, worked in as much as it was popular, and in as much as it encouraged individual activity. In this regard, one question inherent in the normalisation concept, about individual voluntary activity and initiative, is crucial, and it is a question that leads back to the activists. For their task, in the sphere of Heimat, was to encourage individual activity and initiative within the confines of the political and economic environment. At the same time, the individual initiative they encouraged continued to provide a constant potential challenge to the desire of the party to control and direct individual activity. How did activists, then, learn the rules of changing what could be changed, of accepting what could not be changed, and of distinguishing one from the other? And at what point, if any, did a normalisation of such rules set in?⁴

This chapter considers these issues related to the ‘normalisation’ paradigm by looking more closely at two individuals who played an important part in their respective local ‘Heimat’ culture. As the central issue under investigation is under what conditions individuals were able to initiate and encourage Heimat activities, it makes little sense to look at ‘functionaries’ as a clearly defined category. Individuals could acquire an important role in encouraging the active and passive reception of Heimat in a variety of ways. Both of the individual ‘actors’ under consideration here lived in small- to mid-sized Thuringian towns: Altenburg in Leipzig district, and Mühlhausen in Erfurt district. Neither individual nor the towns in which they lived were ‘typical’ in any way; but that does not diminish the potential importance of this chapter’s findings, for two reasons.

First, as regards the two individuals under consideration, both were recommended to me as prototypes of successful Heimat activity, albeit from very different perspectives. Heinrich Gemkow, a former vice president of the cultural league in the 1970s and 1980s, recommended Günther Hautal, the first actor under scrutiny here, as someone I should interview as a

4. On the concepts of normalisation and ‘learning the rules’ that this article discusses throughout, see Mary Fulbrook’s introduction to this volume.

good example of someone enriching the socialist Heimat through research on working-class history.⁵ The second actor investigated here, Jürgen Thormann, was pointed out by Kurt Ludwig, the former Erfurt district secretary of the cultural league, as a good example of an active and successful cultural league secretary working at the county level.⁶ Both actors under consideration here were naturally unique in their individuality. However, in as much as successful cultural activity rested, in the GDR as elsewhere, on individual initiative and drive,⁷ the conditions under which both succeeded, and the arenas in which they were less successful, does suggest a validity beyond these two cases. Second, as regards the local environments Hauthal and Thormann acted in, these, too, were highly specific. Nevertheless, Heimat engagement by definition was about accentuating the distinctiveness of any locality. It is the specificity of each locality, and the attempt by the two Heimat activists to reinforce and help articulate this, which makes them representatives for other Heimat enthusiasts.

A Heimat of Workers and Peasants

The son of a stoker, Günther Hauthal was born near Gera in 1925, and in 1945–46 he was trained as a teacher (*Neulehrer*). He taught in and around Gera, but after taking further courses he moved to nearby Altenburg, where he became a history teacher at the Institute for Teachers' Education (*Institut für Lehrerbildung*). Hauthal became interested in the history of the local working class through his father-in-law, whom he helped to write a local history of the working class in his native Liebschwitz.⁸ This publication caught the eye of Heinrich Gemkow, who worked at the Institute of Marxism and Leninism in Berlin and who, as vice secretary of the Nature- and Heimat friends within

5. I spoke to Gemkow towards the beginning of my oral history research, and at the time I had collected more interviews with central cultural league functionaries than with activists on the ground. Gemkow's recommendation had come at my request.

6. These recommendations were not just taken at face value. More than two dozen local Heimat activists I interviewed confirm that, within their passions and interests, neither Hauthal or Thormann were particularly out of sync with other enthusiasts—though Hauthal's passion for working class history remained, as this chapter also shows, definitely a minority interest throughout the existence of the GDR. The activities and relative positions of the two within their local communities and their actions were also cross-checked against other types of sources, including interviews with other Heimat activists, printed sources, and archival material.

7. Knut Kreuch, 'Jede Zeit braucht Leitfiguren und Arbeitstiere. . . . oder, wer sonst kann eine hoch motivierte ehrenamtliche Herde führen und sie immer wieder mit neuen Visionen zur Mitarbeit begeistern?', *Der Heimatpfleger* (Autumn, 2003).

8. Rudolf Behr, *Die Entwicklung der Arbeiterbewegung von Liebschwitz und Taubenpreskeln bis 1946* (Gera: Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 1956).

the cultural league, was responsible for approving all Heimat publications in the GDR that appeared outside the big publishing houses. Gemkow evidently took his duties very seriously, because it entailed educating Heimat friends in socialist values, so that these friends could then act as replicators of these values in their own environments.⁹ Gemkow met Hauthal at a local history conference in Jena. Both were of the same age, both were loyal members of the SED, and both were committed to a new, socialist Heimat. To Gemkow, who experienced so much frustration in his efforts to encourage new approaches to the writing of Heimat history amongst especially older Heimat enthusiasts, Hauthal was a welcome ally who could change things from the bottom up, on the ground. Gemkow encouraged Hauthal to pursue local history in his new place of work, Altenburg, and to do so not just within the local history committee of the SED, but to work in and through the cultural league as well. It was an encouragement that Hauthal never forgot.¹⁰

Gemkow was not concerned about adding a new recruit to the membership lists of the cultural league. What was at issue was the very nature of Heimat activity in Altenburg. The city of almost 50,000 inhabitants is dominated visually by the castle, the former residence of the dukes of Saxony-Altenburg. Following the war, local popular culture mushroomed in Altenburg county as everywhere in the Soviet Occupied Zone. Local choirs proliferated, and if they offered a mixture of folklore and classical singing in the town itself, village choirs in the surrounding countryside sang almost exclusively folkloristic Heimatsongs.¹¹ Naturally, the cultural authorities tried hard to exert their authority over these activities, but during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the demand for fare that sang of a Heimat idyll remained the staple of popular entertainment, much to the frustration of cultural officials in Thuringia.¹² Meanwhile, one topic relating to the Heimat exercised Altenburgers more than any other: the return of the 'Skatbrunnen', a statue of four figures representing the Jacks on a deck of cards. Altenburg considered itself as the town

9. Many of Gemkow's exchanges with a number of Heimathistorians 'on the ground' are preserved in BArch-SAPMO DY 27 2615. Gutachten zu Manuskripten über regional- und Heimatgeschichtliche Themen 1954–59.

10. Hauthal continues to acknowledge his debts to Gemkow's encouragement at the time. Interview with Günter Hauthal, 19 May 2003. See also the new introduction to his dissertation manuscript, which he wrote in 2001 (Günter Hauthal, *Der Kampf der Arbeiterbewegung gegen Militarismus und Imperialismus im Land Sachsen-Altenburg 1890-1916* (Diss. Potsdam, 1974). This is subsequently referred to as Hauthal, 'Introduction', here p. 8.

11. ThHStA Altenburg, Deutsche Volksbühne 33. Table: Deutsche Volksbühne: Laienkunst Gruppen. A good insight into some of the programmes offered at choral concerts in Altenburg between 1949 and 1950 is in ThHStA Altenburg, Deutsche Volksbühne 20.

12. ThHStA Altenburg, Deutsche Volksbühne 20. Programm 1.12.1949 Altenburger Akkordeon Orchester. See also: Brief an den Landesvorstand der Deutschen Volksbühne, von der Abteilung Volkskunst Landesregierung Erfurt, 29 October 1949.

where Germany's most popular card game, Skat, was invented. It was a matter of local pride that both the money and the raw materials were collected to restore the bronze figure, which had been melted in 1942. This issue exercised local minds for years, until in November 1955 a new statue was erected.¹³ For Altenburg citizens, their ability to restore traditions and artefacts in the face of the financial difficulties and the material shortages that characterized life in the GDR only heightened their sense of accomplishment and local pride.

It is unlikely that Heinrich Gemkow would have been aware of the particularities of the popular culture in Altenburg in the early 1950s. However, Altenburg was by no means peculiar in the pervasiveness of folklore and traditional Heimat tropes in popular entertainment after the war.¹⁴ Nor was it unique in the citizens' desire to reconnect to prewar Heimat traditions. To Gemkow, Hauthal was in a perfect position to make an impact. At a time when the state was evidently too weak to impose socialism in popular culture (in Altenburg as elsewhere),¹⁵ an individual like Hauthal, a young, energetic socialist working at the prestigious institute for teachers' education, was ideally placed to bring socialism to the activities of fellow Heimat enthusiasts.

Following Gemkow's advice, Günther Hauthal became active in the 'subject group' (*Fachgruppe*) for Heimat history in the Kulturbund. With a number of other enthusiasts, he founded a working group on the history of the local workers' movement. Hauthal and his group met regularly to discuss their findings, and from time to time they also presented their work to the subject group for Heimat history in public meetings. He also encouraged many of his students at the Institute of Teachers' Education to engage in research on local working class history. Hauthal also became a prolific writer, and over the next year alone he published thirty-four articles in local publications, most frequently in the local edition of the SED district newspaper, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.¹⁶ Hauthal was also invited, by the Altenburg Heimat friends in the cultural league, to publish a booklet on the Altenburg workers' movement from 1900 to World War I.¹⁷

13. Eberhard Heinze, 'Unser Skatbrunnen ist wieder da!', *Altenburger Kulturspiegel* (October, 1955).

14. For a detailed account of the revival of traditional Heimat folklore in Saxony, see Thomas Schaarschmidt, *Regionalkultur und Diktatur. Sächsische Heimatbewegung und Heimat-Propaganda im Dritten Reich und in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2004).

15. I have described the difficulties faced by the state in achieving 'realism' in Heimat culture in Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation. Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945–1989* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2009), ch. 2. On the constraints faced by the state in other spheres of popular culture, see Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

16. List of Publications, presented by Günther Hauthal.

17. Günther Hauthal, *Die Altenburger Arbeiterbewegung von der Jahrhundertwende bis zum 1. Weltkrieg*, ed. Rat der Stadt Altenburg (Schloßmuseum) in Zusammenarbeit mit der Arbeitsgemeinschaft 'Natur- und Heimatfreunde' der Ortsgruppe Altenburg des Deutschen Kulturbundes (Altenburg, 1959).

To Hauthal, joining the cultural league offered access to older generations, those who had been engaged in local history research since long before 1945. Many of these were, according to Hauthal, also glad to have him in their midst. As Hauthal explained:

At the foundation of the GDR they no longer knew how to respond. They withdrew completely. . . and no longer organized public events. Well, when these tensions were over, and they re-entered public life in 1951 with talks made by the group, they also had quite a few listeners. Well, but they had nobody who had done work on the workers' movement, this was the 'in' topic at the time. . . . That is how they welcomed me, a good part welcomed me immediately, five or six people, while I became familiar with, and was accepted by, the others after a while.¹⁸

Hauthal gave a number of presentations to the Heimat friends during the second half of the 1950s, and remembers lively discussions afterwards. And yet, he stopped going to meetings after a while. The other Heimat historians could not really relate to his interests, while Hauthal found the discussions at the Heimat historians' meetings too far removed from his own concerns.

Hauthal's enthusiasm soon became threatening to the entrenched activities of Altenburg Heimat friends. Like many Heimat groups at the time, the Altenburg cultural league published a cultural magazine, the *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, which provided readers in the county with news about cultural events, reviews, and articles about the local Heimat. The *Altenburger Kulturspiegel* was run by Eberhard Heinze, a conferencier without party affiliation, and the political direction of the journal attracted frequent criticism in the local pages of the *Leipziger Volkzeitung*, with Hauthal emerging as the central critic. In 1956, Hauthal suggested that his newly founded group on Heimat history should publish its findings in the *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*.¹⁹ This would be one way of politicizing the journal, another being the introduction

18. The full quotation is: Die wußten auf einmal bei der Gründung der Republik nicht mehr was sie machen wollten. Die haben sich dann ganz zurückgezogen, waren aber schon im Kulturbund. Die nannten sich Untergruppe des Kulturbundes, fühlten sich also nicht engstens verbunden. Da haben sie sich also zurückgezogen, keine öffentlichen Veranstaltungen mehr gemacht. . . na ja, und als diese Spannungen vorüber waren, sind sie 1951 wieder an die Öffentlichkeit getreten mit Vorträgen im Kreise ihrer Gruppe, [da]hatten sie auch immer ne ganze Menge Zuhörer. Naja, aber se hatten niemanden der so Arbeiterbewegung [erforscht hat], das war ja sozusagen 'in'. Sie hatten dann einen Lehrer, aus der Weimarer Zeit, der hatte aber nur bis zur '48er Revolution gemacht. . . . Naja, so kam das, das ich da reinkam und die mich wollten, zumindest ein ganzer Teil, fünf bis sechs Mann sofort, [mit] den anderen wurde ich später bekannt, oder warm, sozusagen.

Interview Günter Hauthal, 13 May 2003.

19. *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (Altenburg), 15 January 1956 ('Jedes Mitglied des Arbeitskreises erhielt einen Forschungsauftrag').

of new rubrics on, for instance, the history of the working class, general Heimat history, educational life, the local economy, and so forth. This should take the place, he argued, of discussions of films shown in the local cinema, and of advertisements. The cultural magazine should connect more to the life of schools, in other words, and to the life of workers.²⁰ In this way, Hauthal argued, culture could become truly integrative, and relate to the life not of a few elites, but of the whole community.

Hauthal was not alone in its criticisms. In 1957, the local SED leadership criticized the local cultural league and urged it to become more political.²¹ The *Kulturspiegel* responded immediately by printing a number of political discussions,²² but soon the ‘politicisation’ of the journal had lost momentum, and the articles reverted to their original choice of style and topic. In its May issue of 1958, it printed a poem by a reader, Herbert Schiffmann, on the ‘love of duty’. In its lines, Schiffmann described how ‘duty’ allowed all to suffer hardships beyond endurance, closing with the line that ‘She [duty] is the soul of German history, hence Germany will never go under.’²³ In theme and in diction, this poem had clear resonances to the Third Reich, and this caused another storm in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, initiated once again by Hauthal.²⁴

Over time, the debate about the meaning of socialism in the Heimat did have consequences for the public activities of the cultural league, as their magazine became more politicised. However, this politicisation took much more than just Hauthal’s persuasive attempts, it took the direct intervention of the party. Not until 1963 was Eberhard Heinze relieved of his duties as chief editor of the journal.²⁵ The *Kulturspiegel* that emerged from 1963 was less erratic in its support for socialism, and no longer offered a home for overly critical articles about the state of the Heimat, for instance, about the

20. Günter Hauthal, ‘Wie wäre es, wenn der “Altenburger Kulturspiegel” so gestaltet würde?’, in *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, March 1956, p. 58.

21. ‘Der Weg des Kulturbundes’, in *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, December 1957, pp. 239–40.

22. ‘Das sozialistische Altenburg wird schöner sein!’ in *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, January 1958, pp. 2–3. ‘Wie gefällt Ihnen unserer “Kulturspiegel”?’ in *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, February 1958, p. 39. ‘Wo liegt die Heimat?’ in *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, June 1958, p. 121.

23. ‘Sie ist die Seele vom deutschen Geschehn/und deshalb wird Deutschland nie untergehn!’ Herbert Schiffmann, ‘Die Liebe zur Pflicht’, *Altenburger Kulturspiegel*, pp. 90–110.

24. *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (Altenburg), 15 May 1958 (“Gartenlaube”-Ideologie). See also the ensuing discussion between Heinze and Hauthal (who wrote in the name of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*’s editorial team): *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (‘Gartenlaube Ideologie. Antwort der “Kulturspiegel”-Redaktion auf die Kritik vom 15. Mai’). And, registering Heinze’s defeat, see the article written by the *Kulturspiegel*’s editorial team: *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (Altenburg), 26 June 1958 (‘Gartenlaube Ideologie’). I am grateful to Günter Hauthal for sending me these three articles.

25. ‘Das interessiert auch Sie’, in *Kulturspiegel Altenburg Schmölln*, April 1963, pp. 116. Heinze was extremely vague about the reasons for his dismissal, and stated that he never found out what had led to it. The only reason he did name was the fact that he had not been a party member. Interview Eberhard Heinze, 19 May 2005.

desperate state of repair of many historic buildings. Henceforth, the *Kulturspiegel* worked hard to propagate the socialist Heimat, for instance, in its promotion of new socialist Heimat festivals. However, the *Kulturspiegel* still did not become the paedagogic instrument along the lines Hauthal had suggested. In this important respect, the party still shied away from the kind of confrontation with traditional Heimat attitudes that Hauthal sought to fight head-on. As far as Hauthal was concerned, representing the new beginning and engaging in the socialist Heimat did not guarantee the support and gratitude of either the Heimat friends or the party.

Hauthal continued to work on the Heimat, but from the late 1950s onwards, he became more detached from the cultural league and the Altenburg cultural elites. There were plenty of other outlets for his energies. During the 1960s, he continued to publish in the local pages of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, while also researching as part of a working group attached to the local SED. In his spare time, Hauthal took his university examinations, and from 1970 he wrote his doctoral thesis about the history of the workers in Altenburg County, 1900–1918.²⁶ However, whereas in 1966, the SED had enthusiastically supported his endeavours to publish a commemorative volume on the history of the local SED,²⁷ in 1974 the local SED refused to support the publication of his dissertation. Hauthal continued to publish articles in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* during the 1970s and the 1980s. However, after working so hard to bring the local cultural league into line in the late 1950s, the lack of party support for his dissertation came as a real shock. Hauthal increasingly went into ‘internal emigration’ from the SED local history group, and in 1985 he formally resigned his position as the chair of the (by now largely inactive) committee for research on the workers’ movement.

Günter Hauthal was, like thousands of other activists, passionately engaged with his Heimat. In many respects, Hauthal was also extremely successful: in fifteen years, between late 1955 and late 1970s, he published over one hundred short articles, mostly in local newspapers, on the history of workers in the local Heimat. In this respect, and as a public speaker, he did become well known and influential in his Heimat. However, where Hauthal had failed was in the attempt to transform the Heimat, and change the meaning of Heimat in socialism, or at least to bring socialism to the majority of activists interested in the Heimat.

26. Günther Hauthal, ‘Der Kampf der Arbeiterbewegung gegen Militarismus und Imperialismus im Land Sachsen-Altenburg 1890–1917’, (PhD diss., Pädagogische Hochschule “Karl Liebknecht”, Potsdam, 1974).

27. Günther Hauthal, *20 Jahre SED–Zur Entwicklun im Kreis Altenburg*, ed. Kommission zur Erforschung der Geshichte der örtlichen Arbeiterbewegung der SED-Kreisleitung (Altenburg, 1966).

Hauthal's biography demonstrates the difficulties of constructing a popular culture that was infused by socialism 'on the ground'. By the time Hauthal began his Heimat activities in Altenburg, the difficulty of infusing the Heimat with socialist connotations had already become apparent in Altenburg, as elsewhere. Nevertheless, if Heimat could acquire a new meaning in socialism, then this could only happen through individuals like Hauthal, those with the education, the conviction, and the commitment to make visible the socialist aspects of the Heimat. Yet, the case of Altenburg shows that commitment was just not enough. 'Learning the rules', in this case, meant appreciating the resistance of traditional local elites. The essence of the socialist Heimat contained the principle that birth no longer mattered for one's belonging to the Heimat. Yet, in places like Altenburg it clearly still mattered. It would have been difficult for anybody to convince the local notables of Altenburg of the merits of working-class history, and of a popular culture for workers' edification. However, the fact that he had just moved there and that he was not a native son, meant that Hauthal started his quest from a position of disadvantage for which no political loyalty to the new order could, over the long run, compensate. For, as the SED's lukewarm commitment to Hauthal's activities, especially from the 1970s, demonstrates, the political rules of engagement proved much more fickle than local ties and local networks.

Hauthal's example brings into focus another important 'rule' of Heimat engagement in the GDR, namely the importance of individuals. Hauthal's commemorative book on the history of the local SED had been encouraged, in 1966, at the behest of Werner Heinecke, the first secretary of the local SED who was from Altenburg itself. He was succeeded by an 'outsider', who had little time for local history, and who refused to take any responsibility for it. Under this new regime, the *Altenburger Kulturspiegel* was discontinued in March 1970. Moreover, as Hauthal's doctoral dissertation on the pre-1918 workers' movement dealt mainly with social democrats rather than the communist party (KPD), the SED leadership never expressed an interest in printing this part of its own history.²⁸

Hauthal's Heimat engagement does not end in the 1970s, however. Although he was no longer closely involved with the cultural league, he did give occasional lectures there. He also lectured for the URANIA society for the spread of knowledge, and he continued to write for the *Leipziger Volkzeitung*. Hauthal also wrote the history of the ceramic works Hermsdorf,

28. For this reason, it is particularly ironic that a (West-) German post-unification dissertation on the social democrats in Saxony-Altenburg asserted that Hauthal's dissertation, even though it was never printed for political reasons, could be regarded as a 'Paradebeispiel für die marxistisch-leninistische Geschichtsschreibung der DDR'. Hauthal, 'Foreword', p. 5.

and in 1982, he popularized his Heimat's tradition to a wider and national audience by designing a pack of commemorative Skat cards with traditional local folk designs.

Hauthal continued thus to contribute to Heimat history in Altenburg, but he did so very much as his own agent. Yet in 1980, a further context to Hauthal's work emerged. In that year, he received a visit from the head of the agricultural cooperative in Altkirchen. This village was ten kilometres away, but it lay in a different county, Schmölln. They knew each other because during the 1950s, Hauthal had supervised his students at the institute for teachers' education during a year of practical work in agricultural production. When they renewed their acquaintance, the visitor from Altkirchen had an unexpected request: the village wanted to have a small Heimat museum, and the cooperative, which was interested in maintaining its status as one of the model cooperatives in the district, helped with the funding. Hauthal accepted the commission, and even managed to have a new building constructed for the purpose. The museum was opened in 1982, but Hauthal's connection with the village and its people did not end there. The cooperative built him a datcha at the edge of the village. Subsequently, Hauthal spent his weekends and the summer evenings in Altkirchen, he continued to advise the village on the representation of its Heimat in the museum, and he wrote the book for Altkirchen's 850th anniversary celebrations.²⁹

In Altkirchen, Hauthal had finally found a context in which he felt appreciated. Altkirchen was situated in a different county, Schmölln. Here, Hauthal felt that, in marked contrast to Altenburg, the SED leadership was more embedded in the locality (not least by origin). The Schmölln SED was much more open to his work, and did not mind hearing about social democrats as part of the county's working class traditions. More importantly, Hauthal experienced in Altkirchen what he had missed in Altenburg, a combination of political and social support and recognition. Altkirchen became what Altenburg had never quite become: Hauthal's Heimat.

The Three Golden Rules

Twenty-five years separate Günter Hauthal and Jürgen Thormann in age. Born in 1940, Thormann was socialized entirely in the GDR. Like Hauthal, Thormann was a member of the SED, and where Hauthal had developed a passion for local history, Thormann had developed a passion for music. He

29. Günter Hauthal, *850 Jahre Altkirchen. Unsere Dörfer, Unsere Landschaft, unsere Geschichte bis 1850, Unsere Chronik bis 1990* (Altenburg, 1989).

loved (and played) jazz, and, by 1969, he had become the leader of the trade union ensemble in his native Mühlhausen. In 1970, Jürgen Thormann, a baker by profession, accepted the position of first secretary to the cultural league in Mühlhausen County.

Before Thormann took up his position, the local organization had declined in numbers and activities, a development that was not untypical for this period in the GDR's history. In Mühlhausen, the demoralization of cultural league members had developed its own particular forms. During the 1960s, the aquarists' energies, for instance, were taken up in a running battle with the director of the Heimat museum. The fish enthusiasts had set up an aquarium in the museum, but from 1963, the group accused the museum of not supplying the aquarium with sufficient electricity so that the fish suffered. In return, the director accused the group of not taking sufficient care of the aquarium. This became so acrimonious that the aquarists split up over the issue, and had to be reconstituted in 1970.³⁰ The dialect speakers were also under pressure in the 1960s, because the majority of attendees at the meetings refused to join the cultural league. Meanwhile, the forest enthusiasts challenged the local army over its (lack of) respect for environmental laws.³¹ More generally, cultural league members voiced repeatedly their frustration at the lack of support and recognition they received from the town council and the SED. Finally, the club of the intelligentsia also concerned the cultural league leadership. Even though discussion evenings on local politics were well attended, meetings on most other issues were not, with outside speakers frequently finding that no audience (apart from paid officials) had turned up.³²

When Jürgen Thormann took up his office in 1970, therefore, he had his work cut out for him. Yet, under his leadership, the cultural league in Mühlhausen blossomed. Membership levels increased markedly, from 980 members in the county in 1972, to 1180 in 1979, to 1466 in 1988.³³ The increase during the 1980s is roughly equivalent to an increase in membership levels that the cultural league experienced GDR-wide. However, at the national level,

30. StA Mühlhausen. Kulturbund Mühlhausen 18. *Protokoll über die am 26.2.1964 durchgeführte Jahreshauptversammlung der Ortsgruppe Mühlhausen; Protokoll über die am 3.11.66 stattgefundene Ortsleitungssitzung; Protokoll über die am 30.10.70 durchgeführte Ortsleitungssitzung des deutschen Kulturbunds, Ortsleitung Mühlhausen.*

31. The question that excited the working group 'Wald und Wandern' was: 'Sind die Naturschutzgesetze nur für die Bevölkerung, oder auch für die NVA, gültig?'. StA Mühlhausen, Kulturbund Mühlhausen 18. *Protokoll über die am 5.5.1964 geführte Leitungssitzung.*

32. StA Mühlhausen, Kulturbund Mühlhausen 18. *Bericht über die gesellschaftliche Wirksamkeit des Klubs der Kulturschaffenden in Mühlhausen* [no date and signature, but evidently written for the central membership meeting of the club on 3 April 1963].

33. StA Mühlhausen. Kulturbund Mühlhausen. *Berichterstattung, Mühlhausen, den 14.10.1988.* (Membership level on 30 September 1988).

membership levels of the cultural league were relatively stagnant during the 1970s, and so the membership increase by 20 percent in Mühlhausen was out of the ordinary.³⁴ This impression of numerical progress is confirmed by an examination of some of the cultural league's activities. One of the cultural league's innovations of the 1970s, the 'small galleries', which were designed to bring art to smaller communities, found a particularly successful manifestation in Mühlhausen. A small gallery was created inside the town's largest factory, the Mülana clothing factory, and the exhibitions there received generous funding. This link to the Mülana factory gave photography enthusiasts, philatelists, and other collectors added opportunities and encouragement for creating exhibitions, while many hobby groups also participated actively at local Heimat festivals, elections, and anniversary celebrations through displays and exhibitions. As the effective leader of the local cultural league, Thormann did not create these events himself, but he facilitated them. In that sense, he did have an impact on the local cultural league's fortunes from the 1970s. Thormann was clearly successful in his work, and this was recognized not only by his superiors.³⁵ After the collapse of the GDR, the cultural league was refounded as a voluntary association, and over 400 members 'voted with their feet' and rejoined the cultural league, which Thormann continued to direct.³⁶

34. Statistics in the GDR clearly need to be treated with caution. See, for instance, Burghard Ciesla, 'Hinter den Zahlen. Zur Wirtschaftsstatistik und Wirtschaftsberichterstattung in der DDR', in Alf Lüdtke und Peter Becker eds., *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 39–55. However, there are good grounds for assuming that cultural league membership levels were more indicative than membership statistics for the German-Soviet Friendship organization, for instance. Those who wanted to join a mass organization to protest their allegiance to the GDR could do so more effectively through other organizations. Moreover, although there was always the problem of inactive members, any local secretary who artificially inflated membership numbers would have had to justify this to his hobby activists, who were in the cultural league out of enthusiasm for their hobby. This is not to exclude the fact that some joined the cultural league also in order to appear to be loyal to the state. However, the cultural league at the local and GDR-wide levels never appeared to do much to hide the slight decline in membership levels during the 1960s, or the stagnation in the 1970s. Together with qualitative indicators, which are present also in Mühlhausen, there are thus grounds for taking these increased membership levels seriously.

35. In fact, Thormann was recommended by his erstwhile boss, Kurt Ludwig, who was the first district secretary of the cultural league in Erfurt in the 1970s and 1980s. Ludwig may have had a variety of motives for pointing me to Thormann's direction when I asked him for names of county secretaries, but it is unlikely that Thormann would have received Ludwig's recommendation had he not appreciated his work.

36. The cultural league still exists in many areas of the GDR, and a 'rejoining rate' of one third of the former membership is high, but not completely unusual. The bulk of the hobby enthusiasts, such as ornithologists, environmentalists, aquarists, and so on, normally joined (or rather: were 'reunited' with) the relevant West German head organizations. Usually, Heimathistorians and folklore enthusiasts were large enough to create their own local organizations, as they were keen to connect to their pre-GDR roots. As a result, a third of the former membership, consisting mostly of the smaller subgroups and more specific local interests, as well as debating groups, was about the maximum number available for rejoining the cultural league in any local setting.

I conducted two interviews with Jürgen Thormann, one in 2003 and one in 2005. When I asked him whether he thought the Mühlhausen cultural league had been particularly active, Thormann did not answer directly, but explained instead the basics of cultural league engagement in Mühlhausen. In the 1970s, he began, cultural work became easier because the restrictions of the 1960s, caused by the 'Bitterfelder Weg' and other movements, ebbed away. And, in consequence of the Basic Treaty and other external developments, culture was promoted once again by the local party. At the same time, he continued,

those who wanted to collect stamps properly, had to join the cultural league. Those interested in sundials, or the stars, had to do this within the cultural league. There, the specific hobby was central. . . these were idealists, [dedicated to] their hobby. They did not come for political motivations as to the German-Soviet Friendship organization, where they [the party] forced them in, they came voluntarily. And now it was the specific skill of the local leadership to guide this.

For his part, Thormann had three principles that determined his work:

First, no criticism directed at the party, but not in the slightest. In plain language: asslicking for eternity. Even in subject specific matters. One could tell umpteen examples. . . : they were always right. One had to avoid these disputes, they did not yield anything.³⁷

The second principle was that there should be no contacts, in the name of the cultural league, with individuals or organizations abroad. Thormann included contacts to socialist countries in this, and all such requests he directed immediately to the district leadership. Third, there should be no contact with the Church as an institution.

There was a further crucial activity that Thormann estimated cost him up to a third of his working time: attending meetings in the National Front and wherever else the cultural league participated. These were meetings that were almost completely irrelevant for the work of the cultural league, and where the cultural league, in turn, was not taken seriously. But attending, '*That* was important. *There* one had to be present' [Original emphasis in the interview]. Thormann had one piece of good fortune: the head of the local cultural league organization, a voluntary position, was occupied by

37. In Thormann's own words: 'Erstens: keine Kritik an der Partei, aber nicht die geringste. Auf deutsch gesagt: Arschleckeri bis zum geht nicht mehr. Auch in fachlichen Fragen, man könnte zig Beispiele erzählen, wo's nicht um politische Fragen sondern [um] fachliche Fragen ging: die hatten immer Recht. Und diesen Auseinandersetzungen mußte man aus dem Wege gehen. Die brachten gar nischt.'

the director of the Mülana works. This not only enabled Thormann and the cultural league to create the small gallery and have access to occasional practical help. The director, Fries, also was in good standing in the town in general, and in the party in particular, and ‘when he took the word for us, then that had an effect, also amongst the powers that be’.³⁸

Thormann, in other words, tried to act as a buffer between the political and ideological expectations that state and party had of the cultural league, and the aspirations of his members to be left alone with their passions. ‘If I say to the numismatists, let’s do a course in ideology or some other nonsense, they would say to me: you must be insane’.³⁹ Thormann saw his role as one of leaving his members alone as much as he could, and this proved crucial to his own standing among his members. Thormann remembered the reservations with which he, the baker, had been met originally by some of the local elites, which were organized in the cultural league’s club of the intelligentsia. Thormann had sought advice from his district secretary on how to deal with this situation, not least because he was intimidated himself. Given the vast array of hobbies and specialisms of cultural league groups, the district cultural league secretary Kurt Ludwig, who was his superior, advised Thormann to ‘make a wise face, and pretend to be ignorant.’ Thormann kept to his organizational tasks and refrained from interfering in the subgroups themselves. After one and a half years, the club of the intelligentsia thanked him by offering him the address they had reserved when they were amongst themselves: ‘colleague’ instead of the more formal ‘league friend’ (*Bundesfreund*).

The *modus vivendi* which ensued between the cultural league and the local SED meant in practice that the cultural league became much more visible to the party in its activities. Philatelists, for instance, organized a county exhibition every two or three years. They made sure that the exhibition was dedicated to a current political event, such as the party’s ninth plenary session. The first exhibits were dedicated to the SED, the history of communism, or another appropriately political topic. This, according to Thormann, ensured that the local party supported and funded the exhibition, while the cultural league could point to its contribution in preparation of the ninth plenary session of the SED. Meanwhile, the philatelists could, for 80 percent of the exhibition space that remained, display their collections on the topics of their choice—all for the ninth plenary session, of course.

38. ‘...er war ein hervorragender Leiter, war sehr angesehen, auch hier bei der Partei, und wenn der bei einer Tagung in die Bütt ging, und sagte: unser Kulturbund hat das und das, dann wirkte das auch bei der Obrikkeit.’

39. ‘Wenn ich jetzt zu den Numismatikern sage: wir machen einen Parteilehrgang oder irgendwelchen Firlefanzen, würde er sagen: Du spinnst wohl!’

In addition to such tactics, which ensured that the relationship between the local SED and the cultural league improved markedly, Thormann was also concerned to diffuse problematic areas before they came to a head. For instance, the dialect speakers, the ‘Müllhisser Schpellstoppn’, were, in the early 1970s, renamed into the working group on Heimat poetry (AG Heimatdichtung). In Thormann’s subsequent reports and protocols, there were no hints that the problems of control which had existed during the 1960s continued to exist. This was formally a different organization now, and the dialect speakers were subsequently left to themselves.

The kinds of compromises found by the Mühlhausen cultural league can be replicated for everyday life in the GDR with ease, as cultural activists everywhere were concerned with manoeuvring between the ideological demands of the party on the one hand, and their particular passions, on the other. Dedicating particular activities to the political event of the day became a ubiquitous ritual, a code that could be learned by active and passive consumers of culture with relative ease. More importantly, from the point of view of this chapter, is that not all cultural activity could be ritualized in this way. Cultural engagement created individual spaces that created zones of ambiguity which even Thormann’s three golden rules could not circumscribe easily.

One such instance was the plan of the National People’s Army (NVA), in the early 1970s, to use the residential villa that served as the cultural league’s headquarters as the site for selecting, twice per year, its recruits for the army (*Musterung*). This caused great consternation within the cultural league, and Thormann decided to oppose this plan resolutely. The NVA’s plans would have made sustained cultural work impossible, and Thormann emphasized how this contravened the pronouncements and decisions of the party both in the locality and at the national level. Thormann succeeded, and the NVA moved elsewhere to conduct its selections.

In 1975, Mühlhausen was officially awarded the title ‘Thomas-Müntzer-Stadt’, on the 450th anniversary of the peasants’ rebellion led by Thomas Müntzer. Although the town had honoured its favourite son before, from 1975 onwards, the pressure in Mühlhausen, but also in the entire region and beyond, to name schools, factories, and anything else after the revolutionary leader increased yet further. Mühlhausen’s club of the intelligentsia was also encouraged, by the local SED, to award itself this name and be called ‘Thomas-Müntzer-Klub’. Instead, the club’s members wanted to name the club after Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius von Tilenau. Tilenau was born in 1769, and became a natural scientist, doctor, and drawer at the University of Leipzig. He accepted a position at Moscow University in 1803, and in that year took part in the first Russian circumnavigation of the Earth, a journey from which

he published three volumes of drawings and sketches of peoples and animals from different parts of the globe. He died in Mühlhausen in 1857.⁴⁰

The club argued that Tilesius von Tilenau had not just been an important scientist and a native son, but that he also represented the interdisciplinarity that constituted such a fundamental principle of the cultural league with its many subgroups. The local SED continued to insist on the name of Müntzer, but the Club was not impressed: if it could not use the name of Tilesius, it would not have any name. In 1983, the issue was finally resolved: the club was named ‘Tilesius-von-Tilenau Klub’. Not only had the Mühlhausen intelligentsia avoided being associated with the ubiquitous beacon of the workers’ and peasants’ state; but the timing of the naming, which was accompanied by a series of eight talks and other events on Tilenius von Tilenau, also meant that the Mühlhausen intelligentsia largely avoided participating in the GDR-wide commemorations of Martin Luther’s heritage in the GDR.⁴¹

These two incidents are very revealing about the ‘rules of engagement’ with state and party. This first rule was, of course, that one had to confront the state and the party with its own rules and arguments. In other words, the political language of the SED had to be appropriated and turned against the local authorities (never the party itself). It is, at first sight, surprising that the cultural league prevailed against a mighty agent such as the army; and it is quite possible that this was an exceptional case. But here, the cultural league itself was affected as an organization. It was clearly one of the least of the mass organizations in the GDR, but it was part of the country’s political and cultural fabric nevertheless. On that basis, Thormann could rally the cultural league’s district leadership, and he could make a number of allies within the town itself. The naming of the club is a striking illustration of ‘Eigen-Sinn’, of club members demarcating spaces of their own in relation to the local SED.⁴² Tilenius von Tilenau represented an impeccable choice, because he was a native son who had performed his major services to human knowledge on a Russian payroll. Moreover, club members were able to link in their demands with the contemporary ‘heritage’ debate that began in the

40. <<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/journal/heft698/S44.htm>>. Accessed on 20 May 2005.

41. StA Mühlhausen. Kulturbund Mühlhausen 4. Kulturbund der DDR Kreisleitung Mühlhausen, [Summer 1984], p.5. See also Bericht des Klubs der Kulturschaffenden Mühlhausen des Kulturbundes der DDR zur politisch-ideologischen Arbeit im Karl-Marx-Jahr 1983. gez. Fries (23 Sept. 1983).

42. Alf Lüdtkke, ‘Lohn, Pausen, Neckereien. *Eigen-Sinn* und Politik bei Fabrikarbeitern in Deutschland um 1900’, in Alf Lüdtkke, *Eigensinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus. Ergebnisse* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993), pp. 85–119. Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 23–26.

mid 1970s. The cultural league put itself in the forefront of the endeavour to explore the rich heritage of the GDR, and this meant, above all, underlining the diversity of influences on the GDR's past and present. Honouring Tilesius von Tilenau in a town identified by the party with Thomas Müntzer could be made to fit this cultural trend perfectly.

For the cultural league, such successes were important. The poor levels of activity in the club of the intelligentsia during the 1960s in part reflected, according to Thormann, a general disgust that the original aims of the cultural league, the promotion of German unity, had been betrayed in 1961. To such a club, the name of Tilesius von Tilenau made an important statement about the Wall, too, because of Tilesius von Tilenau's globetrotting past. Perhaps more importantly, both events created a sense of agency, of self-determination vis-à-vis the party. This promoted not just a feeling of unity among the membership, in pursuit of a common cause, but it also suggested a feeling of 'justice' (promoted by such acts as citing the law to the lawmakers) and achievement.

These moments of affirmation for Thormann and the cultural league were particularly important because they knew also that these small 'victories' were only possible not because of the force of their own pleading, important though that was, but because of the will of the party. 'And yet: the party did whatever it wanted, end of story!'⁴³ In the early 1980s, rumours emerged that the SED county section (SED Kreisleitung) wanted to build their headquarters on an old, historic cemetery. Preservationists and amateur historians within the cultural league treasured the gravestones there, while dendrologists studied the old bushes and trees on the cemetery. Thormann went repeatedly to the SED county leadership, since the rumour refused to die down. However, Thormann was assured, on each occasion, that the rumours were groundless. One day, Thormann remembers, he was in a meeting with all of the section leaders of all the different groups and sub-groups of the cultural league, when a cultural league member entered the room to say that he had just come from the cemetery where he had witnessed that tanks and the army had moved in to destroy the cemetery and make room for the building.

As with other decisions, the SED contradicted its own pronouncements about the importance of the Heimat, and it contravened the state's laws about the protection of nature and the environment. Nevertheless, such pleas were of little consequence when it came to the desires of the SED leadership—a typical experience of everyday life in the GDR, which reminded cultural league activists just how much their activities on behalf of the

43. Thormann: 'Und trotzdem: die Partei machte, was sie wollte, aus die Maus!'

Heimat depended on the goodwill of the party. This lesson had an important impact on everyday cultural activity. During the 1980s, the delapidation of the old town became an increasingly urgent problem, in Mühlhausen as elsewhere. However, even though he led such an active cultural league organization, Thormann had great difficulties in creating a subgroup devoted to preservationism (*Arbeitskreis Denkmalpflege*), and to find a leader for this group.⁴⁴ For it was clear that this would be a thankless task, and that whoever led the group was bound, according to Thormann, to get into trouble.

Cultural activity in Mühlhausen thus relied on rules that were learnt every day, through regular exhibitions or other activities of cultural participation, as well as through confrontational encounters with state, party, or an agency of the state. This was a learning process that had no beginning and no end. And it was a process that was learnt and relearnt not just by 'functionaries', but it was communicated to, and appropriated by, cultural activists more generally. This is best demonstrated through Mühlhausen's biggest cultural event that lay outside the realm of the cultural league, the annual Kirmes (church fair).

The Kirmes was prepared by between forty and fifty communities (*Kirmesgemeinden*), which met throughout the year, and each of which contributed to the main event of the Kirmes, the pageant. Each individual community was presided over by a 'mayor', and the mayors in turn elected their 'lord mayor'.⁴⁵ As before 1949 and after 1990, so also during the GDR, the main point of the pageant was to criticize authority. This created, every year, potential for conflict with the authorities, not least because the lord mayor and his committee were not shielded by the cultural league, but were directly answerable to the cultural department of the town council. Four weeks before the Kirmes, a detailed programme of the festival and of the pageant had to be submitted to the council for authorization. This evidently inspired the ingenuity of many communities to give a title to their themed representation at the pageant, which seemed to be innocuous, but whose 'real' meaning revealed itself visually, through the design of costumes or the cart at the procession.

From the second half of the 1960s, the SED leadership of the county tried hard to appropriate the festival and make it ideologically more palatable. In 1967, an article in the local newspaper argued that the pageant should be interpreted as a giant festival of political participation (*Ein*

44. StA Mühlhausen. Kulturbund Mühlhausen 4. *Selbsteinschätzung der Kreisleitung des Kulturbundes zu den Schwerpunkten der weiteren Arbeit 1982.*

45. The following paragraph is based, in addition to the quoted written sources, on an interview with Günter Würfel on 21 April 2005, who has been lord mayor since the 1970s.

großartig gelungenes Einwohnerforum). The pageant highlighted a series of local problems, it held, and this democratic way of raising concerns constituted a perfect act of local democracy.⁴⁶ The local council's attempt to appropriate the festival reached its highlight in 1969, when it ordered that the name be changed, from 'Kirmes' to the 'Festival of Socialist Joy'.⁴⁷ The Kirmes communities protested against this, but the council refused to allow any material to be printed which did not feature this title. In 1970, a compromise was found, when the festival was named 'Kirmes—a festival of socialist joy'.⁴⁸ For Mühlhausen citizens, it became a matter of local pride not to refer to the event as the festival of socialist joy, but to remain true to 'their' Kirmes. Eventually, references to the 'festival of socialist joy' were quietly dropped, but not until the late 1970s.

In Mühlhausen, the process of 'learning the rules' in the sphere of popular 'Heimat' culture, therefore, affected not just members of the cultural league and their families, it also affected dozens of communities besides. These communities learned every year afresh how boundaries and rules shifted. The majority of themes represented at the Kirmes pageant was never rejected by the town council, because individuals adapted to the rules of the possible, and if they did not do so of their own accord, the Kirmes committee headed by the lord mayor was there to oversee the programme and judge what would be permissible and what was not. The example of the Kirmes points to another important fact: the rules of engaging in Heimat activities did not just affect the relationship between individual communities and the party. Perhaps more important for these communities were experiences of organizing materials from the place of work, or from associated factories or agricultural cooperatives. Here, too, rules developed about what was permissible and what was not, a matter quite distinct from the question of what was legal and what was not.

The Mühlhausen example demonstrates a final crucial point. In the cultural sphere, the rules shifted and changed constantly, and they had to be learned not just by cultural activists, but also by the party. This process cannot really be described as one of 'negotiation', because the rules were set by the party. However, the party had conflicting interests, and these shifted over time. In the case of Mühlhausen, for instance, the party had an interest in ensuring that the cultural league managed to rally the intelligentsia in its club, as a form of integration and control. From time to time, the

46. *Das Volk* (Mühlhausen), 5 September 1967 ('Eine knappe Stunde Spaß').

47. *Das Volk* (Mühlhausen), 4 September 1969 (Anzeigenteil—Mühlhausen).

48. See, for instance, the festival's schedule in: *Das Volk* (Mühlhausen), 26 August 1970 (Anzeigenteil Mühlhausen); *Das Volk* (Mühlhausen), 19 August 1976 (Anzeigenteil—Mühlhausen).

county party secretary and the secretary for agit-prop had to decide which concessions to make in order not to endanger this aim of individual cultural engagement. In fact, as it was with the cultural league, so also was it with the Kirmes communities: every hour of an individual's commitment for the Heimat could be (and was) passed on by the local SED to the district as an example of socialist commitment. The SED, in other words, could and did try to impact upon cultural life, and, 'as a rule', it could forbid anything it wanted. However, if it aimed at fostering individual cultural activity while influencing it at the same time, it, too, had to learn how it could best achieve this in the face of constantly shifting political, personal, and material conditions.

Conclusion: Normalizing the Rules?

Günter Hauthal was in many ways the ideal type of a socialist enthusiast for the Heimat, who was committed to bringing the socialist perspective into the knowledge, reception, and practice of Heimat. Hauthal did not just have commitment; he also had energy and enthusiasm. Hauthal was not afraid to speak his mind, and did not hesitate to point to the shortcomings he witnessed in the transition of his local Heimat to socialism. However, neither these attributes, nor the additional support of the party, were sufficient to turn Altenburg into a socialist Heimat. For Hauthal to have had impact upon the way others related to their Heimat, it would have been necessary, apart from an ideological commitment, to relate to traditional local structures, form relationships, and make compromises. In fact, as Hauthal found out in the 1970s, local ties and structures proved much more enduring and important than party support, for local party hierarchies changed, bringing with them often abrupt changes in the interpretation of party guidelines, while local elites and structures transformed themselves much more gradually.

Jürgen Thormann was also an outsider in important respects. He did not have a university degree, and the fact that he was in the SED had clearly been an important factor in his selection to head a malfunctioning organization. Yet Thormann had grown up in the GDR, he had no reason to believe, as Hauthal had been perfectly entitled to assume, that a belief in socialism and in the party would guarantee success in the 'new Germany'. Thormann was successful because he shielded the cultural league members as much as possible from politics, while doing his utmost to conform to the rules of every-day local politics in style, language, and appearance. When a conflict of interest arose, Thormann sided with 'his' cultural league

and not with the SED. He could be successful in encouraging Heimat activity amongst Heimat friends in the cultural league because he was accepted as ‘one of them’.⁴⁹

Thormann’s success at influencing the cultural league in Mühlhausen and in encouraging a growing number of members to pursue the ‘sensible use of free time’ which the party proposed as its cultural ideal came at a price. Attempting to shield individuals meant, in effect, a surrender of the party’s ultimate goal, to create socialist citizens not least through the ways in which these citizens spent their free time. This had been a price which Hauthal had never been prepared to pay. To Hauthal, exploring the socialist Heimat meant pursuing new themes for a newly dominant class. Hauthal was committed, in effect, to shaping a new memory based on remembering working class activists, and more generally the traditions of the working people, within the particular locality. From the late 1950s, Hauthal had to accept that he would not be able to pursue this commitment with other cultural league activists. Rather than submitting to the personal and ideological continuities among Altenburg Heimatfriends, Hauthal chose instead to go his own way, and stuck with his interests in working class history.

Thormann succeeded because he knew and applied his ‘three golden rules’ and many other rules besides. Yet the real art lay in knowing which rules to apply when, at what point to yield to political pressures, and when to resist. Learning the rules, and learning how to apply them, was a process that never ended. Hauthal confirms this from a very different perspective. Hauthal had a more difficult start than Thormann, because his ‘founding generation’ had no precedents that they could follow in their political and cultural engagements. At the same time, it is possible to see Hauthal’s path as one of choosing which set of rules to follow. Having failed to make his mark within the Altenburg cultural league, Hauthal worked more closely on behalf of the SED during the 1960s. Following his disappointment by the local SED leadership, Hauthal managed, during the 1970s, to create a remarkably independent role for himself, until 1980, when he chose his new socialist Heimat, Altkirchen. There was, then, not just a set of rules to be learnt, but also a choice of rules that could be followed in the pursuit of Heimat activities.

49. The importance of this for successful cultural league activity on the ground was also underlined explicitly by another interview partner of mine, Gertrud Glandt, a successful and long-serving secretary of the cultural league in Rudolstadt County. Glandt was more ideologically committed to the state than Thormann (she was an evacuee from the Rhineland who, after the war, opted to stay in the GDR and joined the SED). Yet she, too, emphasized the importance of shielding ‘her’ members (*meine Leute*) from political pressure. Interview with Gertrud Glandt, 30 April 2003.

Beyond the comparison and contrast of Günter Hauthal and Jürgen Thormann, there are a number of observations that both activists and their respective environments suggest. The first is a distortion of national cultural politics, which often made it very difficult to discern what the rules in the locality were. To highlight but the two most obvious instances here. First, the concern by the Altenburg SED leadership about the ideological significance of Hauthal's work on the SPD, and its ban on the cultural monthly *Der Kulturspiegel* seems strikingly at odds with the cultural context of the early 1970s. Such ideological rigidity would not have been out of place from 1956, when work on the history of social democrats as part of working class history could be—and often was—attacked as 'revisionism'.⁵⁰ Moreover, the difficult decade for Heimat journals was the 1960s, when most of these publications were discontinued for economic and ideological reasons. From the early 1970s, by contrast, cultural Heimat activities became much more diverse, with a relaxation of attitudes that can be traced back to the growing demand for Heimat activities following the introduction of the five-day working week in 1966.⁵¹ The early 1970s, indeed, are notable for the expansion of the concept of 'tradition' (*Erbe*) into the sphere of Heimat and popular culture. From 1974, the party encouraged individuals to explore local traditions in all of their richness and diversity. For the local SED to reject Hauthal's dissertation at precisely this point runs counter to contemporary GDR-wide trends.

Moreover, establishing a new festival culture was a hallmark of SED cultural politics during the 1960s. Mühlhausen was far from the only town in which a 'festival of socialist' joy was invented. However, for the county not to attempt to transform the Kirmes into the festival of socialist joy until 1969, and to hold on to this idea until the end of the following decade, is late to the point of apparent anachronism. Even in democratic centralism, then, local individuals filtered directives and laws from above according to local conditions, their own political and social networks, and their individual personalities.⁵²

50. This happened, for instance, to Kurt Ludwig in Erfurt. As first secretary to the Erfurt district cultural league, Ludwig was Thormann's boss. In 1958, Ludwig drew the ire, among others, of Heinrich Gemkow.

51. On the fundamental importance of this event as a turning point in the organization of leisure, and the cultural significance of this, see Jan Palmowski, 'Regional Identities and the Limits of Democratic Centralism in the GDR', in *Contemporary European History*, 41 (2006), pp. 503–26. The significance of the introduction of the five-day working week is also highlighted in Esther von Richthofen's contribution to this volume.

52. An excellent introduction to the significance of the individual for local culture is Lu Seegers, "Schaufenster zum Westen". Das Elbfest und die Magdeburger Kulturfesttage in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren., in Adelheid von Saldern, *Inszenierte Einigkeit. Herrschaftsrepräsentationen in DDR-Städten* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), pp. 107–144.

This meant also, in the spheres of popular culture, that the transition from Ulbricht to Honecker was less marked than has often been asserted. It is true that the demand that the Heimat culture should reflect the diversity of local traditions set in from the 1970s, and by the early 1980s this had led to a genuine diversification of the ways in which the Heimat could be celebrated and discussed. At the same time, Günter Hauthal was frustrated, in the 1950s and the 1960s, precisely by the diversity of research into the history of the Heimat, which left so little room to concentrate on what he considered to be so essential for the socialist heimat, working class history. The ways in which the Heimat was experienced at the grassroots is better seen in terms of persistent evolution, rather than in terms of dramatic change.

A further point to emerge is the problematic nature of the term 'functionary' when it comes to the sphere of popular culture. This is because in this realm, the ideal was for individuals to engage in cultural activity themselves, and this is true for both cultural activity sponsored by the factory, as well as activity within the cultural league. Although Thormann was actually paid by the cultural league, cultural leaders at the village level, for instance, were not, and such activists at micro-level were crucial for the development of popular culture in their particular communities. In places like Altenburg, the development of Heimat activities, of hobby groups, choirs, or Heimat festivals were often the result not of the work of cultural functionaries, but of individual activists who, for a wide variety of motivations, became active on behalf of their communities, and of their Heimat.

It is helpful in many ways to consider this process of cultural activity in the GDR as one of learning the rules and learning how to apply them, particularly so if the rules included are informal and elastic. Basic rules were valid throughout the GDR: cultural activists anywhere would have done well to follow Thormann's three golden rules, and the other rules that existed in everyday life. If philatelists, ornithologists or anybody else conducted an exhibition, they had to acknowledge the politics of the GDR. Any pageant at a Heimat festival had to include references to the achievements of the socialist Heimat. And virtually any attempt to create a vibrant culture of the socialist Heimat in new towns was doomed to failure. Yet, in their application and elasticity, these rules varied according to the economic structure, the history, and the size of a locality. They differed in the way they were interpreted and applied through the individuals in any locality, both those in the local party hierarchy, and those active in popular culture.

If we consider cultural activism on behalf of the Heimat as being in part about learning and applying the rules, then this helps greatly to complicate our understanding of the GDR. It takes further the endeavour to explore the limits

of power, of 'Herrschaft'.⁵³ Culture was, like politics and social policy, designed as an instrument of state power, a tool to help realize socialism in and through every human being. Looking at the putative protagonists of the socialist Heimat in their local environments allows one to observe the strength of social networks, of local pride, and traditions which were reconfigured over time, but which retained many of their pre-1949 features. The perspective of 'learning the rules' allows one to go one step further, and to try and determine more clearly the relationship between traditional norms and new rules, whether written or unwritten. And they allow one to explore the dynamics in this shifting relationship as the rules of cultural activity and cultural success changed constantly, over time and between locations.

At the same time, a focus on 'learning the rules' makes it more difficult to apply the concept of 'normalisation' to cultural activity, at least in the wide cultural realm that related to the socialist Heimat. There are three reasons for this. First, there is a definitional problem. On one level, Heimat activities may represent the ideal type of a desire to return to the way 'things used to be', and to represent how things 'ought to be'. And in many respects, this is a valid characterisation. Ornithologists wanted to watch their birds as they did before the war, free from political interference. The people of Mühlhausen wanted to celebrate their Kirmes just as they had done for over fifty years. However, the problem arises because such Heimat activities rarely existed in isolation. Ornithologists did not just watch birds, they also became upset at local pollution levels, and endeavoured to do something about this. Kirmes enthusiasts not only tried, on occasion, to complain about local issues, they were also greatly affected by local politics—the construction of new towns, for instance, destroyed entire Kirmes communities.⁵⁴ Engaging with the Heimat could thus never be simply about wishing to flee into the past, accepting the present, or wishing things were different. Put in these terms, Heimat activities were often linked to a respect for the past, they indicated an acceptance of the present, but they always also entailed a po-

53. On the concept of a 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft', see Alf Lüdtke, "Helden der Arbeit"—Mühen beim Arbeiten. Zur mißmutigen Loyalität von Industriearbeitern in der DDR', in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka and Hartmut Zwahr, *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), here p. 188. See also Jürgen Kocka, 'Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft', *op. cit.*, pp. 547–53.

54. Even such apparently stable forms of activity were subject to constant 'subversions' and challenges up to the end of the GDR's existence. Jürgen Thormann, himself part of a Kirmes community, remembered how in the late 1980s, his community contributed to the pageant a cart on the theme of the polluted air in Mühlhausen. They knew that this cart had no chance of being approved, so they did not submit the suggestion in the first place, but just 'snuck' in the cart as the pageant was on the way—an act that would have been inconceivable in earlier decades, but that reflects again how even in this most constant cultural activity that Mühlhausen had to offer, the rules were constantly learnt and tested for their elasticity.

tential challenge to the way things ought to be. The key analytical task lies in exploring the tension between these assumptions, and this cannot be done through a concept of normalisation that encompasses these dimensions in equal measure.

A second problem, beyond the definitional one, is the usage of the term by contemporaries as has been noted in other contexts. In around forty different interviews with cultural activists from nine different districts whose activities covered almost all of the areas of Heimat activity, I cannot recall a single respondent using the term of 'normality' or any derivative in any context. Other interviewees may have had different experiences, and it is likely that these depend upon the context in which individuals are approached. In my case, my interview partners had all taken some active stance towards the Heimat, and this is what I wanted to ask them about. The question as to whether their experience represented one of 'normality', or whether any particular activity within their range of experiences lent itself to the description of being normal, clearly did not arise to them. Since Heimat activities were about individual passions and the accentuation of local distinctiveness, the term 'normality' or 'normalisation' suggests itself neither from contemporary usage, nor from archival sources, nor from oral history interviews.

Finally, what is at issue is whether the 'normalisation' term passes the major litmus test for its usefulness as an analytical concept and its ability to allow us to see what we otherwise would not see. The problem is that in the sphere of Heimat, the normalisation concept obscures rather than enlightens. This may be different in other spheres of popular culture, such as the small gardeners' association. With regard to Heimat activities, there was never one period one could identify as something of an ideal-type framework for Heimat activity in the GDR. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the rules of engagement shifted constantly at the local, regional, and national levels, and these levels interacted with each other in different ways. The problem with an analysis of Heimat activities, of course, is that this is a category that denotes a very wide variety of interests, from philately to ornithology, from local history to environmental engagement. If one narrowed one's focus towards folklore dance groups or dialect speakers, for instance, one might well uncover relatively stable and conducive conditions for the activities of such enthusiasts from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. However, many of those who engaged in local folklore were also concerned about the preservation of their built environment, or the pollution of the natural environment. And in environmental questions, the attitude of the state and the conditions for individual activism changed quite dramatically in the same period. Throughout the existence of the GDR, the conditions under which Heimat activists pursued their hobbies constantly changed depending on

GDR-wide ideological, political, and economic shifts, local personalities and conditions, and the specific dynamic between GDR-wide and local developments. Heimat activists experienced their engagement in everyday life less in terms of a process of normalisation, but rather as activities that were subject to shifts and ruptures forcing them constantly to fine-tune and adapt their own responses.

