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“What makes a person a subject who both has a sense of self and makes sense of objects?”¹ This question is central to *Bildung*. In this process of self-determination, narration plays a key role. The process of *Bildung*, which I view as reflexive and aimed at the formation of the self, is closely linked with narration, as a fundamental aspect of human experience and understanding. The thesis on which I base this paper is that narration, especially also telling a person’s life story, strengthens the sense of self and makes sense of objects. In my discussion, I clarify and justify this thesis.

4.1 *Bildung* as Self-Determination

Every person has the task and freedom to determine who he or she is. This task involves action, not merely thought. “The essence of personhood—of human existence—is to make sense ... of oneself, the world, and one’s place in the world”² I understand *Bildung* as an action aimed at one’s own person, not only as *subject*-determination, but also as *self*-determination.

The subject and the self differ from each other, however: The subject is an individual, “... who can say *I* and adopt a first-person perspective”³ From the viewpoint

¹ Auyang, 1999, 2.

² Drath, 1990, 485.

³ Auyang, 1999, 12.

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of action theory, the subject stands for the consciously acting person. An essential characteristic of action is its intention: “Intentionality means that *my* mental state is directed at an object or that *I* am thinking about an object”⁴ With regard to the epistemological position of Karl Jaspers, who coined the concept of the “subject-object split”, the subject stands for the knowing person and the object for the object of knowing:

“Allen... Anschauungen ist eines gemeinsam: sie erfassen das Sein als etwas, das mir als Gegenstand gegenübersteht, auf das ich als auf ein mir gegenüberstehendes Objekt, es meinend, gerichtet bin. Dieses Urphänomen unseres bewußten Daseins ist uns so selbstverständlich, daß wir sein Rätsel kaum spüren, weil wir es gar nicht befragen. Das, was wir denken, von dem wir sprechen, ist stets ein anderes als wir, ist das, worauf wir, die Subjekte, als auf ein gegenüberstehendes, die Objekte, gerichtet sind. Wenn wir uns selbst zum Gegenstand unseres Denkens machen, werden wir selbst gleichsam zum anderen und sind immer zugleich als ein denkendes Ich wieder da, das dieses Denken seiner selbst vollzieht, aber doch selbst nicht angemessen als Objekt gedacht werden kann, weil es immer wieder die Voraussetzung jedes Objektgewordenseins ist. Wir nennen diesen Grundbefund unseres denkenden Daseins die Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung.” (One thing is common to all... viewpoints: they grasp existence as something that faces me as an object, to which I, as to an object facing me, thinking of it, am oriented. This ur-phenomenon of our conscious existence is so self-evident to us that we scarcely sense its riddle, because we do not even question it. That which we think, of which we speak, is always something other than we, [it] is that to which we, the subjects, are oriented, as to something facing us, the objects. If we make ourselves the object of our thinking, we ourselves become as-it-were the other and are always at the same time again there as a thinking I who does this thinking itself, but indeed can never itself be adequately thought as object, because it is always again the precondition for every [case of] having become an object. We name this innermost finding of our thinking existence the subject-object split).⁵

The subject determines itself in relation to the object, because the subject is not a preexisting entity. It arises simultaneously with the intelligibility of objects and intersubjective understanding. Auyang regards intentionality as an intrinsic relationship in which the subject becomes aware of himself only when he can encounter objects in the world.⁶

The “self,” to the contrary, refers to a meaning-making system.⁷ In psychology, the concept of the self often refers to a set of characteristics that a person connects to himself. People find it difficult or impossible to imagine themselves without

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Jaspers, 1953, 24f.

⁶ *cf.* Auyang, 1999.

⁷ *cf.* Auyang, 1999.

these characteristics.⁸ I also understand the term “identity” in this sense. Identity represents the quality of the “me”; it reflects the efforts of the “I” to bring various narratives into a larger narrative context in order to endow life with meaning. In philosophy, however, the self is the agent, the subject of desires, and the one who knows himself and the possessor of thoughts and sensations.⁹

If the present thought of future reward or punishments is to encourage or deter me from some course of action, I must be thinking of the person rewarded as me, as myself, as the same person who is now going to experience the hardships of righteousness or not experience the pleasures of sin to gain this reward.¹⁰

Auyang adopts a similar viewpoint regarding the determination of the structures that characterize a subject who has a sense of self: “Together, the first-person *I* and the third-person *One* constitute the *existential self*, our full sense of subject and our consciousness as personal identity”.¹¹ In personality psychology, the *I* is viewed in the process of “selfing”, of narrating experience to create a modern self, whereas the *me* can be viewed as the *self* that the *I* constructs.¹² The self thereby encompasses both the subject as the *I* and the consciousness of one’s own person, here of the subject as the *me*. Equally, the self is the locus of identity.

I conceive of *Bildung* as *self*-determination, and because of the consciousness of identity it reaches beyond *subject*-determination. The process of becoming oneself takes place in *Bildung*. *Bildung* refers to the action of forming the self. The object of the action of *Bildung* is the self: I justify this line of reasoning as follows. Barresi and Juckes¹³ refer to the personality “... as a unity that is a self-conscious agent, an intentional being”. In agreement with McAdams, I understand the personality as a construct with three sub-constructs or construct levels:¹⁴ Level 1 is characterized by the construct of *dispositional* characteristics. These are not contingent, but are rather stable and remain constant in different situations: “Dispositional traits are those relatively unconditional, relatively decontextualized, generally linear, and implicitly comparative dimensions of personality”.¹⁵ Level 2 is determined by the “characteristic adaptations”, which for McAdams include personal endeavors, life

⁸ cf. Perry, 2002.

⁹ cf. Perry, 2002, 190.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Auyang, 1999, 14.

¹² cf. McAdams, 1996, 295.

¹³ Barresi & Juckes, 1997, 694.

¹⁴ cf. McAdams, 1996, 301.

¹⁵ McAdams, 1996, 303.

tasks, defense mechanisms, coping strategies, domain-specific abilities, values and other motivational and strategic constructs. Characteristic adaptations are embedded in a context of time, place and role.¹⁶ They "... speak to what people want, often during particular periods in their lives or within particular domains of action, and what life methods people use ... to get what they want or avoid getting what they do not want over time, in particular places, and/or with respect to particular roles".¹⁷ Contextualization differentiates "characteristic adaptations" from "dispositional traits". On Level 3 there are pictures of a person's constructions, of his "life stories". People tell life stories and thereby give their own life a meaning, a purpose.¹⁸ Since *purpose* is central on this level, it is characterized by *meaning formation*.

Personality and developmental studies prove that the intentional formation of the personality is oriented in its ontogenesis in an exemplary manner to different centers of gravity of the personality. From studies, we know that the development of personality proceeds from the level of "traits" to the level of "characteristic adaptations" to the level of "life stories". Empirically we see that dispositional traits are, of course, established relatively early, but we can also find changes occurring in adulthood. From the life course perspective, it is above all the adult who poses the question of the life story, on Level 3 of the personality. What children and adolescents can examine and intentionally form in their own personality is located on Levels 1 and 2, because typically they are still not yet able to experience the unity and purpose of their life as problematic.¹⁹ In the frame of personality development the person sees himself confronted on Level 3 with the fundamental question: "Who am I?" In modern societies, no specific life stories are prescribed for adults. "Rather, modern selves must be made or discovered as people become what they are to become in time".²⁰ One consequence of the pluralization of life forms is that the subject's development is no longer determined by an innate *telos* or image of God. The anthropological position that is developing and continues to be held today assumes that the person is basically open under conditions of indeterminacy and is not predetermined.²¹

If *Bildung* were understood as the determination of the person as a subject, then this process would, first of all, be related to the level of characteristic adaptations, for the subject is perceived as knowing and acting; for it is precisely *intentionality*

¹⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 301.

¹⁷ McAdams, 1996, 301.

¹⁸ cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹ cf. *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ cf. Buck, 1984.

that constitutes the relationship between subject and object.²² *Bildung* as action includes, however, as well the highest level of the personality. It refers to the meaning-forming system, the self, which has a reciprocal interactive relationship with the two other levels. For: To portray *Bildung* as on the first level, namely on that of dispositional traits, would remove it from its context and from the personality. This is because in the sense used here the dispositional traits would be reduced to personality factors that, admittedly, manifest themselves in different variants, but in a de-individualized manner. To the contrary, the characteristic adaptations are rather context-specific, but individuality still does not yet have an effect even in interaction with dispositional traits. To place *Bildung* on these two levels would ignore the question of self-determination, which according to McAdams genuinely characterizes the third level in the personality construct.

I will explain this train of reasoning from a further perspective with regard to Husserl's phenomenological or image concept: Husserl²³ refers in connection with the concept of the picture to a terminology that differentiates among the representing material, the depicted real object and the physical representation on the material. Husserl refers to the representing material as the picture bearer. This can be paper, wood or a canvas. Husserl refers to the portrayed real object that is represented in the picture as the subject of the picture. The object of the picture is, finally, the representation perceptible in the picture of the subject of the picture. A self that is forming itself can in turn be understood as a representing material, as a picture-bearer. The physical picture stands for the depicted real object, for the subject of the picture or in the case of *Bildung* essentially for *mentifacts*. The concept of culture refers to what is created by people, that manifests itself *and is mediated* by artifacts, mentifacts and sociofacts. Artifacts refer to material objects, sociofacts to created social relationships, and mentifacts, as the most enduring and central components, to created ideas. Artifacts are material forms of expression, including tools, architecture and clothing. With mentifacts the focus is on mental dispositions, such as knowledge, ideas, convictions, values and attitudes. Sociofacts refer to sets of rules, conventions and interaction patterns, customs and practices that are collectively shared and to which the members of a group orient their action. "Das Bild ... bezieht sich auf die Sache durch Ähnlichkeit, und fehlt sie, so ist auch von einem Bilde nicht mehr die Rede". (The picture ... refers to the subject matter *through similarity*, and if this is lacking, one can hardly speak of a picture.)²⁴ A picture in Husserl's sense is only present if there are analogies to the real object, or in a

²² cf. Auyang, 1999.

²³ cf. Husserl, 1904/05/2006, 31.

²⁴ Husserl, 1920/1992, 587.

figurative sense, if the subject of the picture that a person makes of himself, starting from the real object, to stay with Husserl's language, exhibits analogies, e.g., to the nature of the most important mentifact. "Das physische Bild weckt das geistige Bild, und dieses wieder stellt ein anderes: das Sujet vor".²⁵ (The physical picture gives rise to the intellectual picture, and this again introduces another: the subject.) In the process of *Bildung* the picture subject represents the object of action. At heart, what concerns the subject is meaning formation, here the level of the life story, so that the meaning-forming system can be derived from this analogy-formation as a specified object of the action of *Bildung*. Thereby it holds that: "Eine Abbildung kann Abbildung eines Abbildes sein, das selbst wieder ein Abbild sein kann usw.; wie wenn eine Reproduktion, etwa eine Handzeichnung einer Statue vorliegt, und dann später eine Reproduktion dieser Handzeichnung selbst" (A portrayal can be the portrayal of a portrayal that itself can again be a portrayal, etc.; as when a reproduction is available, e.g., a hand sketch of a statue, and then later a reproduction of this hand sketch itself.)²⁶

The picture object, finally, is the visible representation in the picture of the picture subject. With reference to *Bildung*, the picture object represents the result of the action of bringing a picture subject of itself as a person to expression, which manifests itself in a general way in the meanings that mentifacts, e.g., have for a person.

In the process of the action of *Bildung*, the object of action, the meaning system, assumes a central role. The formation of meaning is a process that reflects one's own existence, in which the person creates a new perspective that entails specific changes for the person. Meaning formation, which first occurs on Level 3 of the personality²⁷, is anthropologically central: "It is meaning that gives life unity and coherence".²⁸ The concept of the self refers to the meaning-making system.²⁹

Bildung, in contrast to the non-intentional formation of the self, acquires greater theoretical significance with advancing age: "As development forms action and intentionality, intentional action gradually comes to form development".³⁰ When an educand is young, it is primarily the educator who sets the aims of education, but as the educand matures, the educator tries to support him in achieving his own aims. *Bildung* is, however, neither a continuous process with a telos that an identical

²⁵ Husserl, 1904/05/2006, 31.

²⁶ Husserl, 1923/24/1992, 133.

²⁷ cf. McAdams, 1996.

²⁸ Emmons, 1996, 333.

²⁹ cf. Fingarette, 1963.

³⁰ Brandtstädter, 1999, 58.

subject underlies, nor an absolute action of the person. The moment of contingency is inherent in it.

Since *Bildung* is understood as action, this action is characterized by aims. To systematically classify these aims, I draw on Hoff and Evers³¹ and distinguish four levels of action:

1. Level of everyday action
2. Level of action going beyond the everyday
3. Level of biographically significant action
4. Level of identity action

It becomes clear that the first three levels do not represent *Bildung* in the sense defined here. These are: first, that of everyday action with concrete, repetitive and quickly realizable tasks (e.g., going shopping); second, actions going beyond everyday action units, such as monthly or annual projects (e.g., renovating a house); third, that of biographically significant action, that sets the switches for life and comprehends several years (e.g., the choice of a program of studies and studying). *Bildung* can be located on the fourth and highest action level, namely that of *identity action*. *Bildung* is neither repetitive action nor quickly realizable. *Bildung* is performed with the aim to design an ideal scheme and realize it in the self, to transform a complex system. If *Bildung* is identity-creating action, then we can infer the conclusion of a relatively low consciousness of this action, for generally formulated, identity aims not characterized by an explicit end state are stored in the implicit mode.

4.2 The Development of the Self

If *Bildung* as action is aimed at a person's own meaning system, at the self, the question arises of what attributes or structures should be used to identify the development of the self. I understand the concept of development, in agreement with Paul Baltes³², as referring to all changes in the organism's adaptive capacity. Development comprehends, according to Baltes, the joint product of processes of growth (gain) and breakdown (loss). The determination of gains and losses is a normative process that can take place in theoretical, subjective and objective regards. I do not

³¹ Hoff & Evers, 2003, 131 ff.

³² Baltes, 1990.

understand development as a process directed at a specific end-state with a set, unidirectional sequence of developmental steps followed in an ascending manner.

Hans Thomae finds fundamental formal developmental processes in *differentiation*, progressing from an undifferentiated whole to greater differentiation, as well as *integration*, as a regulatory process. Related to the life narrative, this does not become simply a sequence of formal structures in development, but rather the story of a theme and its variations.³³

The development of the self, which finds expression in life narratives, occurs in the subsystems of the “meaning-making” and “significance-making” systems: “Meaning (whether semantic, logical, physical, or psychological) ... consists of the relations between an object or event and other objects or events ...”³⁴ While “meaning” stands for knowledge that is marked by relations among objects and events, the meaning of events and knowledge for a person is expressed with the concept of “significance.” The concept of “significance” refers to the “... relations objects and events have with people’s values, needs, interests etc”³⁵ “Significance” endows a person with unity and coherence. Conferring meaning on one’s own person is a process “by which we imbue an event with self-relevant meaning and connect it to the self”³⁶ In combining “significance making” and “meaning making,” cognitive, affective and conative processes are integrated: “The knowledge must combine with the deeper levels of the person, with feeling and strivings”³⁷

If development is characterized by the fundamental mechanisms of differentiation and integration, we should ask how the differentiation and integration of the “meaning-” and “significance-making systems” find expression. In the process of differentiation, a system is reduced to smaller units, in integration, differentiated sub-elements and structures are related to each other, and a more complex whole is created: “... the basic underlying principle of ‘complexifaction’ of mind is not the mere addition of new capacities (an ‘aggregation model’) nor the substitution of a new capacity for an old one (a ‘replacement model’), but the subordination of once ruling capacities to the dominion of more complex capacities”³⁸

The foundation of development occurs in accord with the “theory of the ontogenesis of the self” developed by Robert Kegan. Kegan regards the ontogenesis of the self as occurring in stages: The structuring of the stages occurs according to the “ways of knowing” that determine how a person creates meanings. A specific

³³ cf. Thomae, 1959.

³⁴ Blasi, 2009, 17.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 22.

³⁶ Weeks & Pasupathi, 2011, 471.

³⁷ Steindorf, 1985, 201.

³⁸ Kegan, 2001, 194.

subject-object relationship characterizes each developmental stage of meaning formation, and indeed with regard to the relationship of the person to himself, to others and to the world. The subject is that with which a person is involved, with which he identifies himself and with which he is so engaged that he feels it to be himself. The object, to the contrary, represents that which the person can regard, reflect on and change. If meaning formation changes, a transformation takes place: The subject becomes the object. The process of “meaning and significance making” is characterized by an epistemic structure that undergoes change in the life course.³⁹ In all, Kegan⁴⁰ arrives at the following stages in the ontogenesis of the self:

Stage 0: A new-born child lives in an objectless world in which it experiences reflexes, movements and feelings.

Stage 1: On the first developmental stage, independent elements represent the object: The child can recognize objects as separate from himself. The movements and feelings of the first stage become the object of attention. The new subjectively experienced forms are perceptions and impulses.⁴¹ “Their attachment to the momentary, the immediate, and the atomistic makes their thinking fantastic and illogical, their feelings impulsive and fluid, their social-relating egocentric.”⁴²

Stage 2: This development follows the acquisition of the ability to think about and know permanent categories: “... children’s capacity to organize things, others and self as possessors of elements or properties enables their thinking to become concrete and logical, their feelings to be made up of time-enduring needs and dispositions rather than momentary impulses, and their social-relating to grant themselves and others a separate mind and a distinct point of view.”⁴³ At this age, a person acquires concrete knowledge by recognizing and naming objects. A person is, however, still not in a position to organize facts into comprehensive abstract ideas, categories and value systems.

Stage 3: On the third stage a person is able to develop trans-categories: She has developed a comprehensive understanding of her needs and of the world, internalized the values of the environment and can fulfill expectations that become permanent. A person is, to be sure, in a position to think abstractly and share feelings with others, but she still does not experience herself as a person independent of others, however.⁴⁴ “The capacity to subordinate durable categories to

³⁹ cf. Kegan, Lahey & Souvaine, 2009.

⁴⁰ cf. Kegan, 2000, 107 ff.

⁴¹ cf. Kegan, 2000.

⁴² *ibid.*, 32f.

⁴³ Kegan, 2000, 32f.

⁴⁴ cf. Kegan, 2000.

the interaction between them makes their thinking abstract, their feelings a matter of inner states and self-reflexive emotion . . . , and their social-relating capable of loyalty and devotion to a community of people or ideas larger than the self".⁴⁵ Stage 4: Characteristic of the next developmental stage is that a person can make a system an object. She has developed a type of inner authority that enables her to determine for herself what she regards as valuable. This transformation enables a person to live in a self-determining manner in a society with different value systems. However, she still cannot recognize the limitations of the institutional *I* of this inner authority.⁴⁶

Stage 5: On this stage, a person can contemplate various abstract systems. The person makes the world accessible from an integrating perspective and recognizes the limits of self-determination, as well as the one-sidedness of his own internal personal system. The new worldview brings together contradictions and oppositions; thinking is dialectical. The self can move between various psychic systems that have become part of the self.⁴⁷

The development of the self is an *objectivation* process that is equally a process of becoming conscious. A person creates objects. "That which was subject becomes object to the next principle. The new principle is a higher order principle (more complex, more inclusive) that makes the prior principle into an element or tool of its system".⁴⁸ Simultaneously, a loss of the subject occurs that leads to self-determination, for on each stage a person is better able to recognize who she is, because she can observe, reflect on and change more of herself. "We *have* object; we *are* subject. We cannot be responsible for, or in control of, or reflect upon that which is subject".⁴⁹ The development or creation of the other that the person has held to be herself constitutes the process that proceeds from the experience to the experienced: "Experience is the moment of life in the presence of . . . ; the experienced is the therein emerging moment of reflexivity . . . , that knows of the 'Me' in the 'I'".⁵⁰

The objects of the subject's knowledge or respectively of the person are the person himself, the others or the world. If the person is himself the object, then with Perry self-knowledge is present: Self-knowledge seems "essentially indexical"⁵¹: You can only express self-knowledge when using the first-person.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Kegan, 2000.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Kegan, 2000, 32f.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Witsch, 2008, 54.

⁵¹ Perry, 2002, 211.

Self-knowledge can however be differentiated, because a person can also have know-ledge of his relationship to himself, to the world and to others: “Self-knowledge is knowledge about a person by that very person, with the additional requirement that the person be cognized via the agent-relative role of identity. This agent-relative role is tied to normally self-informative methods of knowing and normally self-effecting ways of acting. When these methods are employed, there will be immunity of misidentification as to whom is known about, or whom is acted upon”.⁵² As a bearer of identity, a person enters into a relationship to the world, to others or to himself and has knowledge of this.

The objects of perception through which the self determines itself are not only the world, others and the person, but also *knowledge* that a person has of her relationship to the world, to herself and to others. In this process of objectification, or also of becoming conscious, fundamental changes take place that determine how insights are generated in regard to thinking, feeling and interacting.⁵³ There is not only an increase in what we can reflect on and change, but there is a qualitative change in perception brought about by an increase in complexity – the person gains a new perspective from which to regard herself, others and the world.⁵⁴ “Greater complexity means being able to *look* at more [take more as the *object*]. The blind spot [which is the *subject*] becomes smaller and smaller”.⁵⁵

Since the subject-object transformation in self-development implies that the object status is subordinated to the subject status, the question arises of whether the transformation of experience into the experienced is essentially a growth process: The increase in complexity manifests itself in that the earlier principle forms an element of the developing more complex principle. At first, this integration does not comprehend the specific experience, but rather it is the object that changes into a new principle, for example, permanent categories into trans-categories. The reflected experience as the experienced does not, however, exclude experience on the object stage. Rather, experience finds another form and quality through reflection. Experience is the basis of the experienced, because without experience this cannot be reflected. With reference to Carl R. Rogers⁵⁶ theory of personality development, experience *per se* is relevant for the person, and not just in its instrumental function for the reflection of experience. The development of the personality and the self is manifest for Rogers in the reduction of incongruities between organismic experience and its evaluation by the person. The concept

⁵² *ibid.*, 212.

⁵³ cf. Kegan, 2000.

⁵⁴ Kegan & Lahey, 2009.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁶ Rogers, 2009.

of *experience* includes everything that takes place in an organism in a specific moment and which is potentially accessible to being made conscious. A faulty adaptation is present if the organism rejects specific experiences of becoming aware or distorts its conscious perception so much that this cannot be integrated exactly symbolized into the pattern of the self-structure. *Congruence* refers to the agreement between the perceived self and the actual organismic experience. For Rogers, adequate perception of organismic experience and adequate experience are a basic precondition for self-development. The synthesis of the subject-transformation finds expression in an increase in complexity and in integrated experience.

Depending on the development of the “meaning-making system”, a person has different amounts of knowledge available for creating relevance. And knowledge, however complex it is, has varying degrees of relevance for the person and thereby for the creation of significance. The developmental processes of the self can be understood as a differentiation and integration of the “significance-making” and “meaning-making” systems: For the “meaning-making” system, it is clear that this process is above all an epistemic one that integrates differentiated knowledge into a more complex system, even if emotions play an important role here. The growth of the “significance-making” system is, in contrast, an affective and conative process that, however, also comprehends cognitive processes.

4.3 Narration in *Bildung*

Drawing on McAdams, the formation of identity occurs above all on the level of life stories. *Life stories* are episodic self-representations of the person, while dispositional traits are semantic self-representations that offer the most abstract and important categories and adjectives with regard to one’s own person.⁵⁷

A life story can be understood as a narrated product of a characteristic sort, as the “I” arranges elements of the “Me” in a temporal sequence.⁵⁸ In the story of a person’s life, the “I” as subject narrates its own experience and thereby constructs the “Me” as the object or respectively as the self. The “I” functions as the narrator, while the “Me” is the protagonist of the story.

What is a “*life narration*”? In terms of its architecture, a story corresponds essentially to the grammar of aim-directed behaviour: A protagonist acts in order

⁵⁷ cf. Diehl, 2006.

⁵⁸ cf. McAdams, 1996, 307.

to achieve an aim and then reacts to the consequences.⁵⁹ “Narrative is the natural mode of expression to match the inherent structure of personal experience”⁶⁰, for a person’s intentionality is also the core of every narrative, which is a retrospective interpretation of the action.

The components of the story, the setting of the initiating event, the internal response, the attempt to act, the consequences, and the reaction, are arranged in a causal chain. Good stories present a network of causal chains: they are coherent. In poorly told stories, narrative elements are not connected to each other, and at the end of the story many narrative elements are not brought together.⁶¹

The narration of a life story or respectively of parts of the life story represent from an educational science viewpoint a method for subject-object transformation and for integration and can thereby be regarded as a means of furthering self-development, as a constitutive process of *Bildung*. Objectivation and integration are processes that are achieved by telling life stories *qua form*, even if with varying degrees of success. The premises are first made explicit in order to identify, starting from this, facilitating moments to set forth the objectivation and integration of the life story.

Through the narration of one’s own life story, a person becomes an object of his own thinking and gains a perspective from which he can examine himself, others and the world. The objectivation of the self is a process inherent in telling or writing about oneself.⁶²

Telling a life story also serves an integrative function for the self. The approach of the narration of one’s own life story assumes that intra-psychic coherence is created in that the individual develops a story, a narrative, that is suitable for himself. Experiences are of little value as long as they are not connected to a story, because the unity created in the story is still not present in the experience.⁶³ Telling the life story can integrate disconnected experiences: “By binding together disparate elements within the me into a broader narrative frame, the selfing process can make a patterned identity out of what may appear, at first blush, to be a random and scattered life. The I can provide an integrated telling of the self as a more or less followable and believable story.”⁶⁴ In all, it thus holds that through a purpose various aims are shaped into a unity, and the implicit meaning of life is made explicit

⁵⁹ cf. Stein & Policastro, 1984.

⁶⁰ Barresi & Jukes, 1997, 695.

⁶¹ cf. Stein & Policastro, 1984.

⁶² cf. Wiener & Rosenwald, 1993, 32.

⁶³ cf. Widdershoven, 1993, 7.

⁶⁴ McAdams, 1996, 309.

in a story. "... [I]n telling stories we try to make sense of life"⁶⁵, and "... in telling ... stories we also change the meaning of our experiences and actions."⁶⁶ A "story ... is an articulation of life that gives it a new and richer meaning."⁶⁷

Identity represents the quality of the "Me." It mirrors the ability of the "I" to bring various stories into a greater narrative context in order to confer meaning on life. The life story is able to endow the "Me" with a unity and a life purpose.⁶⁸

A person can have more than one life story or dispose of numerous disconnected stories about herself. Studies have shown that persons answer the question of the sense of continuity, direction and purpose in life in various different ways. The various forms of dealing with the creation of identity make it clear that the furthering of self-development is a relevant pedagogical aim, and especially, moreover, of adult education. Reflection on one's own life begins already in adolescence, but it likewise characterizes above all the phase of "emerging adulthood"⁶⁹ and because of the decreasing time horizon reaches its peak at a later age.

4.4 The Determination of the Self Through Furthering Conflicts

The development of the self as a transformation of the life story is facilitated when a person acquires the ability to experience the limits of meaning formation.⁷⁰ Kegan and Lahey draw on research by Piaget, Inhelder, Baldwin, Werner and Kohlberg, who represent the *optimal conflict* as a central force in changing the self.⁷¹ This is characterized in a person's experience in that the person senses discrepancies between the demands and the level of meaning formation. Conflict has the effect that the person feels the limits of the way of knowing.⁷² In this experience of limits, the object becomes, in a very real sense of the word, an "ob-jectum", something that has offered resistance and thus becomes an object.⁷³ The motor for the development of meaning and sense formation are the demands of life. In a person's life, transitional

⁶⁵ Widdershoven, 1993, 9.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁸ cf. McAdams, 1996, 309.

⁶⁹ cf. Arnett, 2000.

⁷⁰ cf. Kegan & Lahey, 2009.

⁷¹ cf. Shantz & Hartup, 1992.

⁷² cf. Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 54.

⁷³ cf. Fichte, 1794, 418.

phases represent triggers for retrospectively examining his life and times of intensified self-reflection. They are linked with a person's attempts to form meanings. "... [O]ne can describe a life-trajectory of meaning-making as a sequence of confrontations between one's actual way of making meaning and societal demands, as a sequence of conflicts, solutions for these conflicts, and new conflicts".⁷⁴ Conflict arises as a motor for the development of meaning and sense formation if a person can no longer give a relevant demand a stable and satisfying meaning. The greater the discrepancy between the demand and one's own level of meaning formation, the greater is the probability that this situation will lead to conflict. "Thus, one level at which adults must respond to difficult life experiences is the level of challenge to narrative identity".⁷⁵ Also pointing in this direction is the finding that narrative identity is constituted from memories of emotionally significant experiences, because they have self-defining functions and are compressed to form a life story.⁷⁶

In phases where there is a challenge to narrative identity by a crisis of meaning, telling the story of negative experiences can contribute to self-development and thus to *Bildung*. A specific mode of narration facilitates self-development in that by negatively experiencing an event, the optimal conflict, personal learning results occur that are explored, and positive significance is ascribed to the negative event.

Ligendahl and Pahls⁷⁷ regard the development of the self as a "... result of a two-step process of (1) acknowledging the impact of a negative event and openly exploring its meaning and potential to change the self and (2) coming to a sense of positive resolution". These processes involve differentiation and integration. The optimal conflict, which is here specified as the negatively experienced event, is to be understood in its positive sense for the person: The generation of meaning contributes to an increase in coherence, to the integration of life experiences. The recognition of learning potential through a furthering conflict is also a process of differentiation: The more differentiated the "meaning-making system" becomes, the more potential learning possibilities a person has available to help him interpret the crisis as positive for the development of his personality.

A person's maturity, which finds expression in a high degree of consciousness and in cognitive complexity, is connected with an exploratory narrative mode. This is grasped as: "... the active, engaged effort on the part of the narrator to explore, reflect on, or analyze a difficult experience with an openness to learning from it and

⁷⁴ Kunnen & Bosma, 2000, 60.

⁷⁵ Pals, 2006, 1081.

⁷⁶ cf. McAdams, 2001.

⁷⁷ Pals Ligendahl & McAdams, 2011, 395.

incorporating a sense of change into the life story”.⁷⁸ More complex perspectives that result from the exploratory narrative mode are, for example, a new view of the domains of work or of religion. The unexplored life lacks meaning.

Besides the exploratory narrative mode, the coherent positive conclusion of a difficult life situation in a story facilitates the transformation of the self. “Coherent positive resolution is defined here as the construction of a coherent and complete story of a difficult event that ends positively, conveying a sense of emotional resolution or closure”.⁷⁹ The positive conclusion of a story aims not at an objective solution of the problem. The meaning of a positive conclusion to a narrative lies much more in that a person can free himself from the fetters of negative emotional events.

If a person is able to recognize the learning and developmental potential connected with a crisis, it is probable that the crisis will be given a positive meaning. Persons who succeed in doing this in narration display “greater self-understanding, emotional awareness, and complexity” and an “enduring sense of positive self-transformation within the life story”.⁸⁰ The relevance of a positive emotional conclusion likewise lies in that negative feelings would harm the mode of mastery of new demands and likewise in the course of time a person’s ego-resilience.⁸¹

If we focus a life course perspective on these furthering conditions of becoming aware, we see that with increasing age there is a greater potential for *Bildung*, for self-determination. Anthropologically speaking, losses not gains predominate in the second half of life. As people age, losses become manifest not only in the deterioration of the body, but also in the increasing relevance of the basic human situation, as well as in the insistent surfacing of human meaning constitution. “Die leiblichen, zeitlichen, interpersonalen und geschichtlich-kulturellen *Konstituentien* treten, gerade durch ihr Gestörtwerden, aufdringlich zutage. Mit ihnen melden sich *Grenzen des Lebens*”. (The physical, temporal, interpersonal and historical-cultural *constitutions* insistently surface, precisely through their being disturbed. With them the *limits of life* announce themselves (italicized in original)).⁸² In view of the predominance of loss, age offers a possibility for self-transformation. Spranger⁸³ also identifies these changes as a process of becoming aware or conscious. Age makes possible insight into the interpenetration of finiteness and sense and intensifies the urgency of the question as to the deeper relationship to and a deeper and more

⁷⁸ Pals, 2006, 108.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *cf. ibid.*

⁸² Rentsch, 1992, 301.

⁸³ *cf. Spranger, 1958.*

complex meaning acquired by the world and one's own person. The problem of unity and purpose in adulthood, and above all in later adulthood, challenges the person in the construction of her life story and conferring identity. These unity-creating processes of *Bildung* increase in importance during middle and later adulthood.

4.5 Conclusions

To place *Bildung* in a broad context means, for one thing, that *Bildung* is to a great extent epistemically determined: The world in all its complexity must be made the object, grasped and intellectually delved into. *Bildung* is, for another, also affectively structured: First, experience is a basic precondition of *Bildung*. Negative feelings experienced in a crisis represent initiating events for the reflection of the self. Or generally, it is the moment that constitutes a stimulus. Second, emotionally delving into knowledge, through which its significance for one's personality is grasped, is a further fundamental moment of *Bildung*, for knowledge is situated in relation to one's own values and aims. Values and aims are characterized by emotions.

Staudinger⁸⁴ specifies the "life reflection" that is relevant for self-determination as a "meta-regulatory" process of development that furthers wisdom and maturity in the context of losses, weaknesses and setbacks. *Bildung* and self-determination are relevant for wisdom. Crises or transitional phases represent the events in a person's life through which meaning creation is challenged in a special manner, and reflection becomes imperative. However, it is not just in the frame of crises that narrations become relevant for purposes of self-development. Narrations on interaction with oneself, the world or others make it possible for a person to gain a sense of objectivation and an experience of others, events or knowledge as meaningful for one's person, so that to support *Bildung* narrations are pedagogically also beneficial even in the absence of crises.

Finally, I emphasize again that narration is a fundamental form with which to promote a subject-object transformation as a synthesis. In the synthesis subjective and objective aspects are separated from the relationship of merely being in opposition and unified. In that the subject and the object are led to a synthesis, they should undergo a transformation and be filled with new contents.⁸⁵

The synthesis may lead to self-determination through the integration of subject and object: The increase in complexity, the subordination of once-ruling capacities

⁸⁴ Staudinger, 2001.

⁸⁵ cf. Fichte, 1794, 418f.

to the dominion of more complex capacities⁸⁶, can be understood as the result of a synthesis. Likewise, the experience and the experienced are also synthesized. The person has a liberating sense of being able to become aware of an (irrational) cognition and to change this. The experience and the experienced are insofar brought into a synthesis as a person has a positive experience of becoming aware of an (irrational) cognition in demarcation from negative feelings of frustration and integrates this into a complex emotional experience of a recognition of significance. In self-determination, subject and object are not simply independent entities.⁸⁷

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⁸⁶ Kegan, 2001, p. 194.

⁸⁷ cf. Perry, 2002.

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