

**Exploring the notion of Bildung in theatre work: conversations with actors rehearsing Brecht's *Fatzer***

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**Abstract**

The article explores the German notion of Bildung, in relation to drama and theatre work, with a particular focus on the rehearsal process. Bildung is a term used to describe education that is simultaneously a process and a product, one that is oriented towards developing life competencies rather than predetermined or set skills. Drawing on an example from Bertolt Brecht's *Fatzer*, directed by Tore Vagn Lid for the Bergen International Arts Festival (Norway) 2012, the article examines if Bildung, as a cultural, self-reflexive, developmental kind of learning, can be identified when five actors rehearse for this performance. It is set against a global education backdrop where the humanities and the arts in particular, are devalued and vulnerable.

**Author's Note**

I have translated and adapted this article especially for *NJ Drama Australia*. The original Norwegian version appeared as a chapter in Heggstad, K., Eriksson, S., and Rasmussen, B. (2013). (Eds.). *Teater som danning*, Bergen: Fagbokforlaget. The two main theoretical sources used here are German (Hentschel) and Swedish (Ahndoril); some source material is also Danish (Szatkowski), and the empirical responses (interviews) are originally in Norwegian. All translations have been completed by me. The reader should therefore bear in mind the cultural colouring that may occur in translation of terms related to empathy and personal growth – i.e. to Bildung. The term Bildung comes from German for 'education' and 'formation', 'self-cultivation' and 'personal development'; historically a term with both philosophical and political connotations – freeing of the mind - and associated with a 'liberal arts education'. The term is increasingly becoming integrated in the (arts) education discourse in English as well as in Scandinavian languages, and actualised in the current debate about the importance of the humanities, including the arts, in contemporary education.

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BILDUNG, BRECHT, FATZER, THEATRE REHEARSAL, PERSONALISED LEARNING, DANNING

## Introduction

The concept of *Bildung* brings together the aspirations of all those who acknowledge – or hope – that education is more than the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills, that it is more than simply getting things “right”, but that it also has to do with nurturing the human person, that it has to do with individuality, subjectivity, in short, with “becoming and being somebody”. *Bildung* is a rich, but also a complex concept – a concept, moreover, with a long history (Biesta, 2002, p. 343).

The intention of the article is to explore the German notion of *Bildung*, in relation to drama and theatre work, with a particular focus on the rehearsal process. *Bildung*, as the quotation from Biesta (above) suggests, is a term used to describe education that is simultaneously a process and a product, one that is oriented towards developing life competencies rather than predetermined or set skills. Drawing on an example from Bertolt Brecht’s *Fatzer*, directed by Tore Vagn Lid for the Bergen International Arts Festival (Norway, 2012), the article examines if *Bildung*, as a cultural, self-reflexive, developmental kind of learning, can be identified when five actors rehearse for this performance. It is set against a global education backdrop where the humanities and the arts in particular, are devalued and vulnerable.

Within the article two theoretical perspectives on theatre and *Bildung* are used as the basis for analysis: a theatre studies perspective (Hentschel, 2010) and a reflective practitioner perspective (Ahndoril, 2005). The first of these, the work of Ulrike Hentschel, is used to outline the characteristics of aesthetic *Bildung*, while Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril’s theorizing, contained within a report entitled *Bildning och teater [Bildung and theatre]* (2005), is applied to outline four theses about the relationship between theatre and *Bildung*.

## Background

As a starting point for these explorations, I draw upon the work of Danish theatre scholar Janek Szatkowski who suggests that one can ‘learn by learning to create theatre’ (Szatkowski 1991a, p. 38). Just as Brecht used ‘the street scene’ as a basic model for his epic theatre (Brecht 1963b, pp. 77-89), Szatkowski considers the theatre rehearsal as a basic model for “the open theatre” - a theatre with an audience and not for an audience, i.e. a theatrical structure in which the distinction between stage and audience, players and spectators is dissolved but without eliminating the distinction between fiction and reality (Szatkowski 1991b, p. 18). The same basic structure is recognised in the British process drama tradition and in the German *Lehrstück* tradition: a group of players agree to create and explore dramatic material through which all participants can alternate between being role-takers and spectators. To succeed, according to Szatkowski, all contributors must explore and experiment, process and communicate:

The theatre rehearsal is an artistic process. It is only productive if the many involved actually manage to be creative together. There must be a felt share of “ownership” by everyone of the creative element. The objective is that as many as possible are involved in a creative state, as deeply as possible, as long as possible. A central dynamic in this creative work is the alternation in the rehearsal process between “opening”, i.e. playing many different expressions in hand, and “closing”, i.e. choosing, strengthening, making precise (Szatkowski, 1991b, p.18-19).

In this way, the complex creation process of the theatre rehearsal combines knowledge about content and form, through interaction between education and art. It constitutes formative<sup>1</sup> development work.

This investigation has been motivated by my interest in studies of fruitful relations between drama education, theatre studies and theatre arts. Spurred by curiosity about the professional theatre's rehearsal situation as an arena for learning, I became interested in examining the potential educational journey of professional actors in a rehearsal process including: individual and collective creation; immersion in the play and the circumstances of the characters; exploration of theme and form aspects; recognition and reconciliation of the director's impulse; the scenographer's impulse; the playwright's impulse; the impulses of music, sound and light; and the actors' impulses, all that is together the theatre collective's impulse, which becomes the final theatrical expression.

The background perspective also includes a long-lasting interest in Brecht's learning play model and his fragmented collection of texts and commentaries called the *Fatzer* material. When it turned out that the Bergen director Vagn Lid had also become interested in the *Fatzer* material, the opportunity presented for me to try to follow the rehearsals aimed at transforming these fragments into a performance entitled *Fatzer* (2012). Interviews with the cast before and after the rehearsal period constitute the framework of the investigation, which was developed from the general research focus: What kind of Bildung may be identified in the work of the five actors adopting roles as the play's protagonists?



Photo: Kyrre Bjørkås.

The re-construction and the Nordic premiere of Bertolt Brecht's legendary 'Fatzer Complex' [...] is prepared and worked with intensively over several years, and will in practice emerge as a brand new stage play (!) by Bertolt Brecht" (Transiteatret-Bergen 2012 - website). First performance of the play, entitled *Fatzer*, takes place during the Bergen International Arts Festival, 25 May 2012.

## Bildung

An educational philosophy often used for discussing the impact of drama and theatre work for young people stems from progressive education forerunners like Comenius, Rousseau, Froebel, and Dewey. These thinkers pioneered an educational reform tradition in which the arts were regarded as formative domains for developing life competencies - competencies for

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<sup>1</sup> *Formative* is used in this article beyond the conceptions of 'determinative' or 'shaping'. It includes the notion of 'influencing the development of someone's character, values and beliefs', i.e. the notion of the educational that is found in the concept of *Bildung*.

mastering the cognitive, aesthetic, physical and moral challenges of life, including the notion of each arts discipline being a formative power (Fuchs 1998). This life competency perspective influenced the development of drama pedagogy in schools, and tie in with recent international research reinforcing this view (DICE Consortium/Cziboly, 2010). In fact, this perspective represents a personal enlightenment dimension that still resonates in current education discourse and carries with it the German idea of Bildung as an ongoing formative process:

[Bildung] can be taken to mean 'formation,' 'growth,' 'shaping,' 'cultivation,' 'civilization,' or 'refinement.' Bildung is not limited by specific goal-orientation, nor is it passive. Bildung is ongoing, unlimited in scope and most importantly, encompasses the whole person. No one leads you anywhere. Bildung is the education you give yourself. (<http://www.enotes.com/bildungsroman/discuss/definition-bildung-apart-from-bildungsroman-2289>; read 06.09.2012).

Within this general education concept, more specialized Bildung-areas can be described, such as cultural education and aesthetic education. German theatre scholar Hentschel, specifies aesthetic Bildung as the individual's own education in and through an artistic medium (2010, p.19). She considers aesthetic Bildung as a "tighter" term than the "extended" and rather general concept of aesthetic education. Hentschel also uses the phrase "aisthetische Bildung" in parallel to aesthetic Bildung. This provides an etymological explanation for understanding aesthetic Bildung as a sensory and perceptual experience with art as a basic reference. For Hentschel then (2010, p.11), it is the process of creating theatre that constitutes the genuine 'object' of drama/theatre pedagogy, that the making of theatre contains experiential knowledge that has a value in itself, independent of possible instrumental effects.

In a drama educational perspective, Hentschel is clear that for her the arts are not generically the same and that aesthetic judgement about the arts must be explained with consideration to the specificity of each individual art form (2010, p.73). Theatre education begs its own questions from its own material and aesthetic particularity, and as such, Hentschel asks 'what special formative importance the art form of theatre holds and what impact it has on the producing subject, that is, what kind of formative effect the act of playing in theatre represents' (2010, p. 24). Hentschel is therefore interested in how theatre art is created and consequently what kind of experiential learning modes the theatre artist undergoes in the production process<sup>2</sup>.

As prerequisites for theatre as Bildung, Hentschel suggests two foundational conditions: (a) theatre's special double attribute – i.e. the awareness levels related to the reality of the role-taker and the reality of the character, and (b) the particular materiality of theatre – i.e. the performer's own physicality as expression together with other contributing iconic or auditive expressional factors, such as sound, lighting, set design, props, costumes, media, etc. In the following section these two foundational conditions will be examined in turn.

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<sup>2</sup> The title of Hentschel's seminal text *Theaterspielen als ästhetische Bildung* ([1995] 2010) creates an association to a similar title in the Canadian drama education literature: Gallagher, K. and Booth, D. (Eds.) (2003). *How Theatre Educates: Convergences & Counterpoints*, Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press. Its preface introduces an intention to present a broader understanding of 'theatre as an educative force', by looking at theatre 'as a way of learning that continues throughout one's life' (p. xi).

## The composite nature of theatre Bildung

An established view in the drama/theatre education literature is that the double layer of "reality" in a theatrical situation is a basic premise for the possibility to learn something. Through playing a role, the players are involved in a split identity situation. They are both themselves and the figure they are playing at the same time. This applies whether the players are part of a process drama or performers in a play, and is a principle independent of any particular acting tradition or form. For this reason, Hentschel suggests (2010, p. 24): 'The distinction between "portraying" and "experiencing", and their affinity to specific theatre theories, emerges in this context as purely theoretical alternatives'. However, players must always be conscious of the experience of identity doubling with an awareness of the distancing levels in play; otherwise it may no longer be playing, just either a private or an abstracted reality experience<sup>3</sup>. Hentschel also refers to Richard Schechner's use of a double negation to explain what the distinctive character of the theatre "game" amounts to: in role the player is both 'not himself' and 'not not himself'<sup>4</sup>. Schechner's point is that being able to play with different identities simultaneously constitutes a potentially significant learning experience. Being subject and object at the same time in a creative process is a distinctive kind of aesthetic experience available to players involved in making theatre. In this way, theatre is not only an expressive experience but also a reflective one. Here lies the central Bildungs-potential of the theatre making process, a principle available for both non-professional and professional players.

In a report, *Bildning och teater [Bildung and theatre]* (2005) by the Swedish actress, author and theatre researcher Ahndoril, the hypothesis is put forward that theatre form contains inherent possibilities for Bildung (2005, p. 29). The report is a practical-theoretical reference document based on Ahndoril's own experience as a professional actress and theatre researcher. As such, it offers a set of deliberations about theatre as an educative force. In the empirical part of this article, I explore if Ahndoril's theorizing works in practice by drawing upon data collected during the rehearsals for *Fatzer*. Here I invited professional actors to reflect on their experiences.

As noted in the introduction above, Ahndoril's work is of value in exploring this potential, for she discusses the particular education potentials and characteristics of theatre that make it a force for creating Bildung (2005, p.38) including appreciating, engaging in the experience of others, accepting new circumstances, making perspective shifts, etc. For Ahndoril, theatre requires a range of qualities such as empathy, imagination and originality, interactive and critical thinking, tolerance and open-mindedness, readiness – and knowledge of the human condition (pp. 32-33). As frame story and exemplification, Ahndoril uses Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King*, and discusses aspects of Bildung in the light of Oedipus' educative journey from hubris to anagnórisis, which in turn leads to a new Bildungs-process. The key concept for Ahndoril is forming (gestaltning), or creation. The term is understood as artistic forming and includes, as I perceive it, the notion of being formed – i.e. educated<sup>5</sup> - as a human being. To be involved in art, including its processual interactions, experiences are created that are based on own identity and understandings of self. Ahndoril asks: 'Do we educate ourselves through forming? By identification?' (p. 29). Thus, she introduces her second key concept: identification, which she also associates closely with empathy, putting forward the ideas, that, 'taken to an extreme, forming and identification are concerned with making knowledge vital' (p. 29).

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<sup>3</sup> That which, in another article, I have characterised as *under distancing* vs. *over distancing* (Eriksson 2007, p. 107).

<sup>4</sup> This idea originally stems from Michael Kirby's 1972 essay: On Acting and Non-Acting, *The Drama Review*, 16 (1)

<sup>5</sup> Built, shaped, developed, etc.

Ahndoril regards the empathetic forming process in theatre, and especially its active exploration of different perspectives, as an ability to constantly be prepared to "negotiate" (p. 30). It is an ability to master both critical and creative thinking. According to Ahndoril, theatre provides training in unprejudiced reflection, which in itself is a quality that characterises Bildung. She notes: 'To me, Bildung is the opposite of prejudice. Perhaps, because Bildung presupposes a kind of curiosity, a readiness to question old, habitual conceptions, a dislike for the safe road and sloppiness in appearance and behaviour' (p. 28) – an idea that is reminiscent of Brecht's claim to make the habitual strange, in order to awaken a creative and critical willingness to change (Brecht 1963a, p.101).

In summary, Ahndoril's (2005) reflections on theatre and Bildung could be reformulated in four theses:

- identification and empathy are fundamental prerequisites for Bildung (pp. 8, 13 and 23)
- forming/creation is a key to Bildung (pp. 16, 25 and 29),
- readiness to be 'the other' creates a tolerance and a deeper knowledge of what it means to be human - which is formative (p. 23),
- Bildung and theatre are co-operative concepts (p. 29).

To explore the views of the five actors involved in the production of Brecht's work, I have formulated these Ahndorilian "theses", or assertions, as reference points for conversations with the actors about their participation in *Fatzer*, and from them verbalized the guiding questions for the interviews: What is the actor's view on empathy as a component in the work? How is the actor's own creation/forming process taking place? Which insights about being human has the actor gained from the production? Can the actor's work be characterised as an educative journey?

These research questions structure the analysis offered below. First however, some brief facts about the origin of the play and the basic story are offered.

### *Fatzer – or Downfall of the Egotist Johann Fatzer*

The Fatzer fragments derive from the period 1926-1931. They are experimental fragments and cover approximately 500 draft pages by Brecht for the basic story, some dramatic scenes, chorus parts, theoretical notes and isolated sentences (Wilke, 1998). Two main versions can be identified: a *Schaustück* version (play) from 1927 and a *Lehrstück* version (learning play), from 1929 (Wirth, 1999). However, the Fatzer fragments are primarily learning play material and a precursor to Brecht's actual learning play corpus and his *Theory of Pedagogies* (1930) (Steinweg 1976, pp. 205-210). My original interest in this material is in the learning plays - in their form as applied theatre – i.e. as exploratory learning and formative education (Eriksson, 2009).

#### **The story**

Led and encouraged by their charismatic leader, Johann Fatzer, a small "team" of four soldiers deserts from a desperate and weakening front-line. At their hideout the outlaws wait for a socialistic revolution – that never occurs. As all hope is gone – the political struggle becomes an existential struggle – and the waiting becomes a struggle for life ([http://torevagn.blog.com/?page\\_id=2](http://torevagn.blog.com/?page_id=2), read 16.10.2013).

With a Brechtian chorus commentary, Vang Lid frames the audience right from the start as witnesses to what will happen and provides information about the outcome, so that we will be able to make up our own opinion:

But when it all had taken place there was  
 Disorder, and a room  
 Which was completely ruined, and inside  
 Four dead men and  
 A name! And a door where it was written  
 Unintelligible things.  
 You, however, are now witnessing  
 It all. All that happened, because we  
 Have put it up again,  
 In exact order  
 And in the exact right position  
 And with the exact same words  
 That fell. And whatever you will see,  
 In the end you will see what we saw:  
 Disorder. And a room  
 Completely ruined, and inside  
 Four dead men and  
 A name.  
 And we have put it up again so that you will decide  
 By speaking the words  
 And listen to the chorus  
 What really happened, because  
 We did not agree.

(Brecht / Vagn Lid 2012: 94)

Within this frame, the performance is discussing issues of leadership, selfishness, lust, dependence, and asociality as it asks, what can happen to people when exposed to existential suffering and starvation? The audience, who are placed in the performance space and addressed by the characters during the event, are invited by the opening speech of the chorus to conduct a closer observation of the characters' destiny journey. The distinction between stage and audience is challenged. The distinction is not completely dissolved - as in Brecht's learning play model - but opportunities for interaction are provided. As audience we are in the "middle of it". With the ending given, the individual spectator has from the outset opportunity to create his or her own meaning.



Photo: Rune Sævig, Bergens Tidende – from the first night review 26.05.2012.

The five actors creating the characters in the play are: Fatzer (Eindrude Eidsvold), Büsching (Tor Christian Bleiklid), Koch (Øystein Martinsen), Keuner (Per Bogstad Gulliksen), Therese (Hanne Dieserud).

## Method and data collection

### *Interview and observation*

The investigation received advance clearance with the producer and the director through a memorandum of understanding, with my involvement limited to observation of selected rehearsals, divided over a period of 6-7 weeks and including two sets of interviews with all five actors. These interviews were recorded electronically and involved basically the same questions for each participant, but with scope for both interviewer and interviewee to make small departures from the set questions. The informants did not receive the questions in advance. After transcription, each informant received the interviews for approval, with minor adjustments and clarifications made when necessary.

The first interview was conducted before the rehearsal period started; while the second round of interviews were held after the performance had premiered, meaning that there was a period of 8 to 12 months between the two interviews. The first interview sought information about the informants' pre-understandings, for example with respect to form and content of the play, expectations regarding the production and the collaboration with director and other contributors, and about possible learning aspects anticipated in relation to this particular production. The follow-up interview returned to some of this, and attempted to deepen the experiences that the production had given each informant. I asked about preparations behind the development of the role, about reflections on the work during the rehearsals, and about experiences/insights in relation to the work with a retrospective glance. The observation sessions helped me to identify themes for the informants to elaborate on in the final interview. The concept of Bildung was not used in the interviews until the very last question as I did not want attention on Bildung as a particular focus in advance.

In relation to questions of ethics, it is obvious that the actors' names are publicly known from the production programme and for this reason each actor verbally accepted that their identity could be specified in connection with the interviews. However, it is not expedient to identify individuals in this investigation. For this reason, quotations are reproduced with references A 1-5, where the letter A stands for 'actor' and the numbers 1-5 for each of the informants in an order known only to me. An additional number indicates whether the quote stems from interview 1 or 2, for example A.2.1 indicates actor informant 2 in the first interview. None of the actors have worked together directly before; they come from different training and working backgrounds.

The director's name, Vagn Lid, is also well known publicly, due to his reconstruction and translation of Brecht's fragments to a performance script but also from production previews and reviews in the press and academic journals. Within these interviews, the actors frequently refer to his artistic points of view, working methods, pedagogic and poetic approaches. I did not interview the director, because his presence is an implied premise and his work is in the public eye as the production's principal participant. However, I conducted a preliminary meeting with Vagn Lid before the start of the project, in which he informed me about the basic intentions of the project and invited me to bring along drama students to serve as advisory dramaturges. We had regular contact during rehearsals and he made his work accessible through notes, articles and a blog.

## Analysis and findings

### *The first round of interviews*

In the first round of interviews, I asked the informants about their prior knowledge of Brecht and the Fatzer material. Generally, all had some broad advanced knowledge of Brecht but the Fatzer material itself was quite unknown to them. A typical response was, 'I did not know

that the Fatzner material existed. So for me it was a new encounter with a new Brecht that I knew nothing about' (A.3.1). At the same time however, all participants underlined that they learned a lot about Brecht and *Fatzner* through the director in the rehearsals. One notes, 'You are easily educated in Brecht when working with Tore [...]. He manages to bring Brecht into most of the work – either as a point of reference or as a resistance' (A.4.1). The interviews also demonstrated quite clearly that the director was using the rehearsal process - and even a pre-rehearsal process<sup>6</sup> - for research, experimentation and reflection:

We went on the streets and discussed, went to rehearsals and discussed, tried things out, and during the breaks we discussed, and then we went out to eat and discussed, and we went for a drink and discussed; then we went to bed and were silent, and stood up in the morning and discussed (A.3.1).

The actors listened in to the texts, discussed them and sought a basic understanding of the material: 'We read up, made tape recordings, listened to the material: 'What was that?' / We took it out on the street, played out dialogues in the cityscape, tried to do all the things that could tear it away from what you thought it should be (A.2.1). As such, the actors had the opportunity to break with their 'own expectations', to make 'complex experiences with the text', and to find 'openings to see it in different ways' (A.2.1). These experiences were passed on to the other actors in explorative ways, for as one actor notes, 'What we had in Bergen this weekend is very much about testing the concept, trying out directing ideas' (A.1.1), while another suggests, 'I like that it is created there and then' (A.5.1). Later, when the regular rehearsals were under way another claimed: 'The project is subject to a concept developed in collaboration with the actor. / Things become different, they change. / So, there is plenty of confidence, lots of artistic freedom here' (A.1.2). This open investigative attitude to the material is in good agreement with Szatkowski's demands for a creative, co-owner's approach, characterised by fruitful exchange between openings and closures. It also fits well with Ahndoril's requirements for open-mindedness and curiosity in creative work. She regards *Bildung* as primarily an empathetic way of being; it is about searching for 'a deeper understanding of the motivations that drive us on' (2005, p. 28).

### ***Second round of interviews***

Through close reading of Ahndoril, a list of aspects she suggests relate to *Bildung* within the context of theatre was created. These aspects include the reservoir of factors that help the actor to create a character. For Ahndoril, this *Bildung* reservoir on the part of the actor is characterised as readiness, with most factors assimilated into either (a) empathy, which for her is 'foundational for *Bildung*' or (b) forming, which is considered a source for generating educational recognition and insight.

The design of the interview questions in this round was inspired by these key concepts. I focus therefore on each individual's reflections, including what it means for the actor to create a performance, about his individual forming of the material, how he looks at empathy as a component of the work, about the actor as creator of meaning, and what possible insights the production has imparted about what it means to be human.

### **Identification and empathy are fundamental prerequisites of *Bildung***

The actors were asked initially to reflect on their understanding of empathy and identification in the rehearsal work, using the first research question: What is the actor's view on identification or empathy as a component of the work?

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<sup>6</sup> Three of the actors spent 10 days in Vilnius, Lithuania, in the Summer 2011, preparing and exploring the material together with the director and other partners, where 'we could take as many detours as we wanted / and got very far into the material, compared to what we are normally used to' (A.4.1).

This question arouses among many of the respondents some hesitation. For example, actor 1 responds: 'Empathy is not a word I'm comfortable using in a work context, I notice' (A.1.2), while actor 3 seeks clarification of the concept: 'I do not know if I understand the question - do you think of empathy in purely human terms, like compassion?' (A.3.2). I respond by suggesting that it is the 'ability to empathise with others' situation', a clarification that this actor perceives as a method acting question. As such, this participant rejects its relevance in the context of the *Fatzer* work by arguing: 'I have not thought anything like that at all, really. /I have in this production used tools other than empathy. /[Here] a character has a function' (A.3.2). Similar views are also expressed by actor 4 who notes, 'One must bring the psychology along to a certain extent. But there is never room to let out those things in the [*Fatzer*] scenes' (A.4.2), whilst actor 1 considers empathy as an important social-psychological dimension of respect vis-à-vis the colleagues' work in a vulnerable rehearsal situation: 'The ability to identify with the needs of others - their pain or demands - and to have a round on that every time something occurs - does good for everyone. /There must be a sense of security at the bottom of that kind of work' (A.1.2). I interpret these answers first and foremost in the light of the chosen postdramatic aesthetics of this performance, which draws on actors' lived experiences and imagination, distancing and devising, being in the event, rather than a psychological approach to the role work.

Later in the interviews, attention was drawn to a more universal understanding of empathy and its importance for the role work. For example actor 1 now suggests that: 'Empathy is essential. /I think everyone becomes better actors and performers from it' (A.1.2), a view that was shared by the others:

'[Empathy is] very important! Actually, perhaps the most important. It is the humility and the reverence that is the driving force in peeling away the layers of oneself. One rests in the empathy, or is captured by it' (A.5.2).

'Empathy is, the way I understand it, to be able to see a situation with another person's eyes, from the sight of someone who you are not. I feel it is essential to the *Fatzer*-complex"(A.2.2).

In these responses I find an attention to empathy that is personal and universally human.

Among Ahndoril's *Bildung* aspects of empathy/identification, are the following concepts: live the part, familiarise oneself with, bring to life, be real, recognise, perceive, situate, transform, and gain new understanding. I find echoes of many of these aspects in the informants' statements, although they show individual differences regarding whether empathy is a useful professional concept. However, actor 2 illustrates Ahndoril's view that empathy constitutes a fundamental opportunity for *Bildung* in theatre work when he suggests: 'It [...] is about acquainting yourself with, have a thought about, without necessarily having experienced it. /Empathy is part of the way you approach the material' (A.2.2).

### **Forming is the key to *Bildung***

The informants were not asked questions relating directly to this assertion, but requested to reflect on their own forming of the material in the rehearsal process. This is thematised in the discussion of the next research question: How is the actor's own creation/forming process taking place?

Here all informants understand questions about their own creation as primarily occupational. No one describes forming as personal development, or as exploring their own potential, or as opportunity to express themselves - which would be responses to be expected from non-professional actors. A common feature is that informants' first reaction is to contextualize themselves and their contribution to the artistic whole that the production

aspires to create, for example: 'I do not think there's an actor who creates a show; I think an actor is a co-creative part of making an integrated performance' (A.3.2). The collective responsibility is also emphasized:

'In this setting, it was very important to be able to achieve interaction within the group we worked with' (A.2.2).

'All of us who make a performance is the 'us' - the ensemble - and it gets pretty close' (A.4.2).

'In an encounter with the director and colleagues, you are curious about their thoughts on the nature of the material and how you can put yourself into it' (A.5.2).

Several emphasise the production's special character of being a kind of postdramatic total theatre that is developed in cooperation with several contributors:

'*Fatzer* is a production with many players who in a way have an equal function with the actors - a production that is not actor's theatre, but theatre equating other elements, such as music, scenography and space, sound and light, with the actor's presence' (A.1.2).

'Here, one is also constantly in dialogue with a room, which this time is very specific, with a sound scape and a musical picture' (A.3.2).

Acting technique and other aspects of artistic forming dominate the conversations, more than informants own beliefs or opinions with one typical response being: 'You put yourself away; you peel away the layers that are the trivial and mundane, to go into the rehearsal room' (A.5.2).

I register the same inclinations to underline the collective in conception when the informants speak about the actor as meaning maker: 'I feel that to make sense of the material, it means a partnership based on the conceptual, the staging, etc.'" (A.2.2). In terms of the production's meaning, the actors consider themselves primarily as mediators of opinions, most notably in terms of raising questions:

'That is my main interest in theatre. We asked some interesting questions not only formally but also intellectually, academically, and perhaps interpersonally too' (A.3.2).

'We are the opinion makers for the character's opinions' (A.4.2).

'In this kind of "role"', a sober presence is important. When I manage it, it is in itself an opinion, attitude" (A.5.2).

At the same time, the actors find the tension between asking opinionated questions during the work with the production, and through the production, stimulating and exciting for themselves as well:

'Throughout the rehearsals, we have asked each other questions that hopefully have come out to the audience, by which they in turn can get some questions they have to answer in themselves' (A.3.2).

'In *Fatzer* you play much straighter and confront the audience with an 'eh?'. /With the 'eh?' you yourself become aware in a very different way and really have to think 'yes, well, no, or what ...?'' (A.4.2).

‘I like to think that my own attitude and understanding of the material, my interpretation of what the material can represent, contributes to meaning-making - simply because there is such a clear dialogic space to work in’ (A.2.2).

Although the professional actor is in a communication situation bound by the final artistic product, I perceive through the interviews also an individual reflection on the dynamics that I have described earlier as identity doubling, i.e. a reflection in the role-taker about the character's significance for himself versus the importance for the audience:

‘I could almost feel a bit guilty about the opinions I presented in the play, because I did do my utmost to stand for them for the audience: 'Isn't that right what I'm standing here and saying now?' And then my awareness clicks in and tells me 'no, it's not - it's not right what I'm saying now - but believe me, for God's sake!' So, I must represent something that is completely wrong and represent it fully’ (A.4.2).

The interviews suggest that reflections on own practice are being stimulated by the kind of processual exploration of the material that Vagn Lid and his staff have prepared for the rehearsal work of *Fatzer*. It is tempting to think that this topical material from Brecht even in itself stimulates reflection in the actor – it is a material that ‘oscillates between learning play, epic theatre and theoretical discourse’ (Wilke, 1998, p. 9) - and that it works formatively.

To Ahndoril’s *Bildung* aspects of forming/creation, I have therefore listed concepts like exploring, testing, creating, shaping, expressing, mediating, perspectivising and transcending. I find echoes of many of these aspects in the informants' statements about forming the production in the rehearsals.

### **Readiness to be ‘the other’ creates a tolerance and a deeper knowledge of the human – which is formative**

This thesis is the basis of the research question: Which insights about being human has the actor gained from the production? Ahndoril has no special rubric for this. An explicit bid on theatre and human knowledge would be too broad and too ambitious. Nevertheless, the assertion is expressed in her report and figures like a thread running through it. For example, both of the two preceding paragraphs encompass competencies and insights in performance work relevant to the notion of knowledge of the human condition. It is a "big" question, but *Bildung* is essentially about the human being in development<sup>7</sup>. The actors respond to the question with interest but in different ways, ranging from (a) rejection: ‘I think it's damned nonsense this notion that actors get a deeper insight than other people about our own lives, just because we're doing plays’(A.1.2), to (b) acceptance of the idea that the actor can get insights working on the self: ‘Yes, definitely, it works reflectively and awareness-raising but I do not think it necessarily means [moral] improvement’(A.2.2).

The rejection from actor 1 warns against the myth of “the role that changed my life” and that the role develops new knowledge: ‘You do not always need to know something, in order to do it. I am opposed to such a thought’ (ibid.). Nevertheless, the question leads to after-thought: ‘It is a very great question, I'm glad you ask it. I notice that it sharpens my reflection on it’ (A.1.2). It is as if the actors are unfamiliar with being asked these kinds of questions about their work and need some time for digestion: ‘Yes, perhaps it belongs to what it means to be an actor that you have to take into account such [existential] things?’ (A.3.2).

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<sup>7</sup> A relevant reference here is the international research project DICE (2008-2010), which claims that educational drama and theatre ‘is fundamentally concerned with the universal competence of what it is to be human’ (DICE Consortium/Cziboly 2010, p. 49).

The informants are also aware of the possibility of idealisation inherent in the question: 'I am not comfortable with claiming or acknowledging that I have undergone a very intellectual or heartfelt change by making a piece of work' (A.1.2). The occupational relevance is emphasized: 'There's not a closeness in relationships with other's than with the colleagues, I think' (ibid.). Some of these responses contradict an inherent presumption in the question about the actor's special sensitivity of the human condition. I acknowledge this tension, although I interpret it first of all as a spontaneous reaction to what is perceived as an opinionated stance in the asking. All the informants have a critical awareness of the danger of romanticising the professional actor's human knowledge. Yet, it seems that they are just unaccustomed to responding with a personal attention, so their first thought tends toward the vocational focus. That is an understandable response. However, with some after-thought, there is an acceptance of the idea that role work may function as soundboard of human knowledge, about...

'...the paradoxical things about being human, about being complex, which consist of good and evil, which consist of desire and aversion, which consist of urge for freedom and herd thinking, /the existential things that drive us, our desires and our will to be a free and independent human being' (A.3.2).

The role work initiates reflective processes in themselves, for example in relation to the position of the *Fatzer* character in the collective: 'Emotionally, I came in closer touch with the experience of being in a group vis-à-vis a leader, a one of a kind, or an outsider - and the price it takes - the vulnerability and the fragility of being in that position' (A.5.2). The actor's own reservoir of experience can be both "technical" and "private":

'Clearly, in practice I will have to feel it more than others. /I have been busy in acting for some years now and I have felt these things at times. It may well be that now - analogous to learning text - I am not thinking so much anymore about why I do it. But now and then I visit the basement and look around a bit in my own life. It is a natural thing that you need to make use of that toolbox too' (A.3.2).

Some of the reflections elicited by *Fatzer* are "political", with a concern about man in society, but they are also at the same time personal:

'In reflecting about it this way, I become aware that I want to be a better man than I am. But I'm not willing to leave my family to go to a developing country and build schools. I'm not willing to start a revolution. I become almost a bit guilty of the heavy issues, because they do come up. The material really makes me think about the problems, and that I am too uncommitted politically. But [... ] I have not become a more politically committed man after having worked with it. Would like to see that it resulted in me doing something but I have not done anything' (A.4.2).

Even though the professional actor has his work routines, the colleagues and the production standards as primary objectives and framework to relate to, it still appears that the theatre work creates personal reflective resonance: 'Of course material like *Fatzer* invites anyone who approaches it, whether actors or audience, to reflect. /I feel that it was like that throughout the whole process of it' (A.2.2). This kind of processual (and collective) reflecting on the theatre experience seems very similar to the explorative working format that is common in educational drama. It is about negotiating art and meaning, which is a dynamic that provides for *Bildung*.

### **Bildung and theatre are co-operative concepts**

Ahndoril sees Bildung and theatre as complementary concepts. The similarity is typically apparent in the process of 'appreciating and taking part in other people's experiences and other people's articulations of these experiences' (Ahndoril 2005, p. 29). The basic theatrical situation of '[... ] imagining or embodying a number of possible situations and perspectives [... ]', is the basis for Bildung as well. Supplementary formative "skills" that theatre develops, according to Ahndoril, include: imagination and originality, critical thinking and readiness, spontaneity and open-mindedness, capability to accept new circumstances, unconditional stance, ability to redefine and negotiate historically with the present, willingness to transform and change (2005, p. 29-40).

Such concepts are regarded as characterising contributions to the thesis that Bildung and theatre are co-operative conceptions, because 'the continuous renewal of education for every new role work creates in the end an accumulated and unprecedented body of composite knowledge' (p. 30). These are difficult measureable variables, which for Ahndoril are merely grounded in her 'reflective practitioner' stance. She has no ambition to provide a definitive answer to the assumption that theatre and Bildung are co-operative interacting conceptions. Nor have I, apart from a curiosity regarding my informants' experiences on this.

As noted above, I didn't ask the actors about Bildung until the very end where the term is used to support exploration of my final research question: Can the actor's work be characterised as an educative journey? Three of the informants find my question about theatre work as an educative journey surprising, something they initially are reluctant to address:

'Isn't generally all we are doing in life educative?' (A.3.2).

'I think I have to say no. Not because I do not see it as a great ideal - and it's something that's very easy to say yes to, but [... ] you can say that about all things. /I guess I think more of it as a job' (A.2.2).

'The question feels a bit general, so I need to have it more specified' (A.1.2).

The other two, however, respond spontaneously in the affirmative, and subsequently it turns out that all interviewees have the experience that theatre work does have dimensions of Bildung that they can put into words:

'It is because in your work as actor, you constantly touch the major issues in life' (A.3.2).

'The actor must wonder about quite a few things [...] - both positively and negatively. One is forced to address issues that one would not otherwise grapple with' (A.4.2).

'What makes it great being an actor, is that you get to work in depth with great literary materials, or with basic questions that people have raised and still raise - and you must take it seriously' (A.2.2).

'Being an actor in a project can be an educative journey, because during the rehearsals I'm exposed to many impulses from partners with different skills, insights, opinions, requirements, wishes. It makes me very often reflect on my own preferences [...] and thus I become both challenged and changed' (A.1.2).

'This has to do with empathy/; it's about being able to be present and available on a human level' (A.5.2).

Openness to change and open-mindedness in encounters with colleagues and the working environment are also emphasized:

‘It’s when faced with other people and society - a project is also a community - that I get answers and know something whether formation (change) has happened to me as actor’ (A.1.2).

Finally, the potential for Bildung happening through the aesthetic experience is expressed pointedly and personally by actor 3:

‘Art is part of my daily presence; art draws my curiosity, not only within acting, but also within music, painting, dance, literature. Here I have a Skybert<sup>8</sup> walking beside me all the time. If that makes me an educated person, I cannot answer. But I have to ask myself some questions all the time about our existence, and our co-existence, which I think is good for me’ (A.3.2).

The hermeneutic approach of the analyses used here makes no attempt at systematic cross-referencing of the actors' statements with Ahndoril's dimensions of Bildung. However, the citation examples are varied enough to maintain a reasonable correlation between the informants' statements and Ahndoril's claims.

## Conclusion

Ahndoril's report contends that theatre and Bildung are co-operative variables, suggesting that there are special competencies of theatrical work including to: appreciate, participate in the experience of others, accept new circumstances, and make perspective shifts. As such, theatre work requires a range of human qualities, including empathy, imagination and originality, interactive and critical thinking, tolerance and open-mindedness, readiness – and knowledge of the human condition. The discussion of the research questions confirms Ahndoril on these points. At the same time the discussion exemplifies Bildung aspects identified in the work of the five actors (per)forming the play's protagonists, which was the more general research focus of the investigation.

The five actors come to the Fatzer-project from very different backgrounds and contexts. One belongs to the National theatre, another to the artistic staff of an established city theatre in another region; two are free-lance actors with their training largely in physical and text based experimental theatre respectively, and one belongs to the director's company – a company that describes itself primarily in relation to a contemporary postdramatic performance tradition. Although I have not specifically addressed individual background experiences in the interviews, this diversity likely accounts for some of the differences in the responses – both between the respondents and within the respondents. It has not been my intention, however, to conduct a detailed analysis of individual reactions to my research questions. The main interest has been whether Bildungs-aspects in more general terms can be identified in a theatre rehearsal process, as experienced by a group of professional actors, using theoretical reference points from Hentschel and Ahndoril. Ahndoril's report (2005) inspired the investigation's research questions.

Hentschel (2010) does not take normative competencies and knowledge goals for Bildung as her point of departure. She emphasizes that Bildung through theatre work is an aesthetic kind of formative education. She is interested in how playing theatre can work formatively. This means centring on what constitutes the specific materiality of theatre and the players' experiences in the theatre work. The concept of Theatre as Bildung rests on the notion of aesthetic doubling as the basis for reflection, the possibility of theatrical forming of a social reality, and the idea that social situations can be constructed and reconstructed – i.e. a

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Åberg's invisible soul mate, who follows him all the time and is his best friend.

conception of theatre as laboratory, which is also Brecht's starting point. The empirical data of the investigation provided some illustrative examples of theatrical Bildung methods described and presupposed by Hentschel. In the same way, the empirical examples corresponded well with Szatkowski's idea of the theatre rehearsal as an educative model. This view presupposes an artistic work process that involves collective making and creating, and constructive exchanges between openings and closures in the creative work. It is a work process for learning that combines knowledge of content and form through an interaction between education and art.

Theatre as Bildung – or personalised learning - is usually associated with educational drama work, which in the present article has been referenced in the literature of Brecht, Hentschel and Szatkowski. The theatre rehearsal as a model - and arena - for investigation of Bildung aspects in dramatic work, represents an interesting context for opening up parallels between drama education work processes and the professional actors' work processes in preparing a performance; in this case with a stage material and a director's pedagogy that allows and encourages exploration. Similarities between educational drama philosophy and reflections on the educative aspects of theatre production have been identified but with no intention to ignore the differences in goals between producing a professional performance and conducting educational drama work.

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