8.

Persuasive Figures: Harnessing Stasis Theory for Rhetorical Criticism

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The theory of the stases is an established part of the rhetorical tradition. As such, most rhetoricians will recognize the fundamental categorization of the contestable issues of a case, not just as a historical phenomenon, but as a tool for rhetorical invention and practical argumentation (Fulkerson 1996; Jørgensen and Onsberg 1987; Kock 2011). Nevertheless, theoretical discussions of the stases are usually limited to the question of the proper interpretation of the classical texts, and stasis theory rarely appears in rhetorical criticism (but see Fahnestock and Secor 1988; Gross 2004). In what follows, we will seek to demonstrate the critical potential of the stases, beginning with a discussion of their theoretical foundation. What is the underlying rationale of stasis theory? Is there one consensual interpretation of the stases or are there several competing definitions of them? And how do notions developed in the classical context of production apply to conceptually guided criticism today? In considering these questions, we arrive at the underlying argument of this chapter, namely that the rhetorical use of stases shapes meaning formation and decision-making alike. Thus, understanding the stasis is not just an exercise in rhetorical classification, but practical prerequisite for advocacy—and a key crticial resource.

In making this argument, we zoom in on three theoretical issues: First, the number of stases and their exact definition. Are there three or four? And can the classical definitions of each stasis be applied directly to contemporary cases? We will advocate the use of four levels and the direct application of the first three classical stases to contemporary phenomena. The fourth stasis, however, must be reinterpreted to fit our analytical purposes. Rather than a literal relocation to a different court, we view *status translationis* as a change of scenes in the metaphorical sense. Thereby, the fourth stasis becomes a matter of discursively 'staging' or 'framing' the issue anew.

Secondly, it is necessary to discuss the application of stasis theory. What is its precise function? Is it to identify the point of contestation within a dispute? Or is it to designate possible rhetorical responses to the contested issue? In our presentation of the theory of the stases, we will advocate a broad understanding that embraces both options. When harnessing stasis theory for rhetorical criticism, the determination of the level used within an utterance is imperative, but it is equally important to situate different responses at the various levels. By doing so, one will understand what the speaker advocates as well as the arguments that support the advocacy. To tease out this duality, we link the stases to the conceptual pair of strategy and tactic, seeing each stasis as a strategy with a variety of tactical options.

Thirdly, we discuss the relationship between the four stases. Is it static? That is, a question of finding the stasis that fits a given case? Is it an evolutionary development from stasis to stasis, changing as the case evolves? Or is it, perhaps, combinatory—meaning that the stases can be selected and conjoined freely, even within specific utterances? Here, we will recommend the latter view. Processes of meaning formation do not develop as linear movements from one stasis and on to the next or as iterations back-and-forth between the stases. Rather, rhetors have opportunities to combine and activate the stases in many different ways—at any one moment in time and across the course of an exchange.

We believe that these transformations and adaptations of the classical theory of the stases make it an apt tool for rhetorical criticism of the rhetorical process of shaping public opinion as it occurs in contemporary contexts. In what follows, we will illustrate this claim using two cases: one concerning the developments of the Danish housing market in the immediate prelude to the global financial crisis of 2007-2008; the other having to do with the Danish response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021.[1] While the former case will hardly need much introduction for years to come, the second might merit some contextualization—beyond the coincidence that one byproduct of the pandemic has been a tendency towards overheating of the housing market that has led experts to warn about a repeat of the events of 2005-2007 (Bitsch 2021).

To explain our choice, recall that what the pandemic now is to global health, the financial crisis was to the health of the global economy. As such, we illustrate the applicability of the stases as explanations of Danish public responses to two of the main global crises in recent years. Or, more precisely, the case of the housing market indicates various actors' complicity in creating a crisis, as key participants in this process of meaning formation were eager to maintain and fuel the momentum of the market, which eventually crashed. As opposed to this development, the case of the pandemic illustrates how central actors use the stases to define and resolve a crisis, as key stakeholders in this process seek to understand and defuse the spread of the virus.

In addition to aptly illustrating the parallel uses of stases before and after a *krisis* in the classical sense of a turning point (Millar and Beck 2004), the two cases share the significant rhetorical

1. For the housing market, we collected newspaper coverage from two broadsheets (Berlingske Tidende and Jyllands-Posten) and one specialized business periodical (Børsen) at four different points in time during the two years leading up to the financial crisis. Thus, we cover four months at six-month intervals: October 2005, April 2006, October 2006, and April 2007. For the pandemic, we conducted a similar data collection, but focused on two broadsheets (Jyllands-Posten and Politiken) and a tabloid (Ekstra Bladet). Due to the vast amount of coverage, we restricted the collection to one week at each point in time: 9th-15th March 2020, 14th-20th September 2020, 15th-21st March 2021, and 13th-19th September 2021. The first week marks the beginning of the first lockdown in Denmark, and the three others are located at six-month intervals, meaning we span a period of a year and a half (as is the case for the coverage of the housing market). We abbreviate the five sources BT, JP, Bør, Pol, and EB, respectively, providing in-text references using source and date, which allows identification of the full reference in the appendix.

feature of seeking to persuade with figures, understood both as ‘numerical fact’ and ‘linguistic fiction’. The stases, we will seek to show, are uniquely suited to unpacking this duality, indicating how ‘the facts of the matter’ are never just ‘matters of fact’, but rather offer a set of rhetorical opportunities that can, themselves, be shaped rhetorically. Thus, establishing the point of dispute and building one’s argument may shape one’s rhetorical advocacy, but this establishment is, in itself, a persuasive process. In what follows, we build this cross-cutting point gradually as we move through the three theoretical issues and involve our illustrative cases at each turn.

The Classical Roots of Stasis Theory

As is the case for many other classical rhetorical concepts and systems, the roots of stasis theory are unknown, and the various elements of the theory are debated. In a text that has now perished, Hermagoras was supposedly the first to articulate the theory of the stases in the form that is now typically presented to us—namely as a system for determining the central issue of contestation in a given case and for systematizing the ways in which the case can be discussed at four distinct levels, corresponding to the four stases (see inter alia Andersen 1995, 161; Hohmann 2001, 741; Braet 1987, 79). This does not mean, however, that Hermagoras invented the theory of the stases, since we can find various traces of it in texts that are even older than his lost examination.[2] As Hans Hohmann (2021, 742) concludes, “it can […] be surmised that Hermagoras systematized and elaborated a fairly rich vein of traditional rhetorical materials.” Undoubtedly, stasis theory owes a great debt to Hermagoras, but the fundamental insight—that any case can be discussed at different levels, which can be described systematically seems to pervade rhetorical thinking from its very inception.

2. Thus, less developed approaches to the doctrine of stasis can be found in earlier works; see, for example, Aristotle 1417b and the pseudo-Aristotelian work Rhetoric to Alexander, 1427a.

The etymology of the concept offers a good starting point for the further examination of what, exactly, is at stake in stasis theory. The Greek word *stasis* can be directly translated as ‘position’ or ‘strife’, which can be clarified as the ‘state of a case’ (Andersen 1995, 161). This points us to a central feature of stasis theory: its categorization of rhetorical issues is not thematic, but rather introduces a number of *levels* across which any theme can be discussed. That is, we are not dealing with a list of potential rhetorical topics, like issues of war, political problems, and questions of love or law. The starting point is not simply that there are many different types of issues, but the more sophisticated observation that in any case dispute may arise at different levels—corresponding to the stases.

The typology that is at the heart of stasis theory, then, is, in principle, applicable to all cases, but it is *internal* to the case at hand in the sense that it deals with mapping the different levels of contestation within the case. It is about determining the character of the dispute, which changes according to where disagreement arises: does it concern the existence of something, its definition, the value of the matter, or how to rightfully settle the dispute? Within any topic and case, determining the point of disagreement will fundamentally shape the rhetorical response and the ensuing debate and, hence, how rhetors will seek adherence to the positions they advocate. This is basically what stasis theory helps us understand—and do.

In the literature, there is some discussion as to how many levels to include and how to define them, and we will attend to these matters shortly. For now, however, we will present the four possible stases schematically (see table 1). Here, it should be noted that the stases are given different names by different scholars, modern as well as classical, and we follow Øivind Andersen’s (1995, 161) designation of their Latin names.[3] The table contains a description of each level, a classical example, and examples

3. For the sake of distinction, however, we use the Greek ‘stasis’, pluralized ‘stases’, whenever we do not specify which one we refer to.

extrapolated from Danish public debate on the housing market and the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively.[4]

Three or Four Stases?

As has been pointed out by several commentators, the debate concerning the number of stases and their content is divided into two camps (Nadeau 1964; Hohmann 1989, 2001). The Greek tradition, on the one hand, begins with Hermagoras and is carried forward by Hermogenes. Here, it is assumed that a case can be discussed in four ways, corresponding to *four distinct stases*: the case can be discussed *factually*, according to its *definition*, in terms of how it should be *evaluated*, or one can look at the *process* of the debate as such (Hohmann 2001, 741). In the Latin tradition, on the other hand, as primarily represented by Cicero and Quintilian, the number of levels is reduced to *three distinct stases* (Cicero 1942, 113, 1993, 82ff; Quintilian 1969, book III, 6.68ff).[5]

The discrepancy relates to the fourth and last stasis, which deals with due process, and the reason to exclude this stasis primarily seems to be a concern for the universal applicability of stasis theory. The processual level was originally tied to the legal genre and the question of where to try a given case—a matter that did not seem immediately relevant to the other genres. The exclusion of the fourth stasis, therefore, aimed to broaden the theory to make it applicable to all rhetorical processes (Hohmann 2001, 742-743).[6]

4. In this first presentation, we generalize common arguments, as found in newspaper coverage of the two themes. In what follows, we will offer authentic quotes to substantiate the initial extrapolation.
5. Cicero's early work De Inventione marks an exception to this rule. Here, explicit reference is made to Hermagoras and Hermogenes and their system of four stases is applied.
6. However, it has been reported that Hermagoras developed a deliberative as well as a forensic version of the four stases (Gross 2004), and in the Topica Cicero mentions that the stases can be applied to both legal, political, and epideictic argumentation. Still, later discussions have typically limited the fourth stasis to the judicial genre. An important exception to this rule, however, is Christian Kock's approach to statis theory, as Kock argues for its general applicability in various public settings as well as

in court. He states: “The status system offers a typology of potential problems in correlating facts and norms, and as such it is just as useful in political and ethical debates as it is in legal argument” (Kock 2012, 369; see also Kock 2011).

Latin name	**Status conjecturalis**	**Status definitivus**	**Status qualitatis**	**Status translationis**
Level	The factual level.	The defining level.	The evaluative level.	The transcending level.
	At this level the facts themselves are disputed; what did and did not happen?	At this level the dispute concerns the definition of the facts; how can we rightfully name them?	At this level the dispute is about the quality of the facts: how should they be assessed?	At this level the process for settling the dispute is disputed: is this the right way to decide on the facts?
Classical example[7]: (a man is caught burying a body and is accused of murder)	Did he kill the person?	Was it murder?	Was it a justified, honorable, and/or appropriate murder?	Is the case being tried at the right court?

7. We draw this example from Conley (1990, 32), who credits it to Cicero.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Examples from debate on housing market</td><td rowspan="2">Are prices rising/ falling?</td><td rowspan="2">How should we interpret the price developments? E.g., ‘an emerging bubble’, ‘a stable market’, ‘a soft landing’, ‘seasonal adaptation’</td><td>How should we evaluate the price developments?</td><td>Is price the right framing for deciding on how to act in relation to the real estate market?</td></tr>
<tr><td>E.g., it is positive[8] that prices are adjusted because ‘a collapse is avoided’, ‘more people can enter the market’</td><td>E.g., price is not the central factor, but ‘psychology’, ‘national economy’, ‘long-term developments’</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Examples from debate on COVID-19 pandemic</td><td rowspan="2">Are infection rates rising/ falling?</td><td rowspan="2">How should we interpret the infection rates indicate? E.g., ‘a global health crisis’, ‘a controlled development’, ‘an invisible enemy’, ‘a mere flu’</td><td>How should we evaluate the infection rates?</td><td>Are infection rates the right framing for deciding on how to act in relation to the pandemic?</td></tr>
<tr><td>E.g., developments in infection rates indicate that the strategy for handling the pandemic is in/appropriate[9]</td><td>Infection rates are not the central factor, but ‘compliance’, ‘economy’, ‘other illnesses’</td></tr>
</table>

8. It is indicative that in the debate on the real estate market, all developments are predominantly evaluated as positive; we will return to this point below.
9. In the case of the pandemic, developments are, indeed, interpreted as both positive and

Table 1: The four stases

For classical rhetoricians, then, establishing the number of stases was closely linked to delimiting the reach of stasis theory. If the theory was to be applied beyond the judicial genre, the argument went, then the fourth stasis had to be omitted. This position is partially maintained in current research that deals with the applicability of stasis theory in relation to different topics and cases. However, modern contributions tend to generalize the use of stasis theory *and* maintain the four stases, redefining status translationis instead of omitting it altogether (see e.g. Kock 2011, 2012).

While everyone seems to agree that stasis theory must be revised to be useful today, there are many different suggestions as to what such revision should consist of. When focusing on public meaning formation, we believe, a version of the theory that closely resembles the classical one is apposite. Thus, the first three stases can be applied without further ado, but *status translationis* only becomes applicable by widening the question of physical court of trial to a matter of change of scenes in the metaphorical sense. In other words, *status translationis* is useful as soon as one stops seeing it as a matter of changing the judicial body (which court?) and, instead, makes it a question of the criteria used for judgment (which context? For instance, long vs short time horizon or personal/social needs vs economic considerations).

As redefined here, *status translationis* covers the rhetorical activity that modern scholars have termed 'framing'. In their study of news media, Cappella and Jamieson (1997, 39-40) explain that "news frames are those rhetorical and stylistic choices, reliably identified in news, that alter the interpretations of the topics treated and are a consistent part of the news environment". It is the applied frame, and not the case itself, that guides interpretation of the case, and this is exactly what framing and our redefined version of fourth stasis have in common: as we use it, *status translationis* is the attempt to change public opinion on a matter by framing it

negative, as there is general agreement that falling numbers of infections is good and rising numbers is bad. The real dispute, as indicated here, concerns the appropriate intervention.

anew (Gabrielsen, Just and Bengtsson 2011). That is, rather than offering a view on the facts, the definition or the evaluation of an issue, it changes the very context from within which the issue should be established, defined, and evaluated—and, hence, offers a new foundation for advocating the appropriate resolution of the matter.

In our view, the critical application of stasis theory to modern processes of meaning formation may begin from the first three stases, as originally defined, and the redefined fourth stasis. Thus, the first step is to identify the stases that are used in the process or processes one is studying. In what follows, we illustrate this step by identifying the four stases in our two select cases of Danish public debate about the housing market in 2005-2007 and the pandemic in 2020-2021. Subsequently, we zoom in on utterances that belong to the redefined status translationis in order to show its particular applicability.

As mentioned, *status conjecturalis* is used when it can be debated whether or not something is, indeed, the case. For the housing market and the pandemic, respectively, the classical example—did he do it?—becomes a question of the direction of price developments and infection rates: rising, stabilizing or falling? In both cases, all three positions can be expressed as pure propositions with no further backing. Rising prices: "'It's still moving very fast. We're seeing a very intense increase in prices, no matter how you twist or turn the numbers,' says Steen Bocian, head of department in Danske Bank" (*BT*, 181006A). Rising infections[10]:

> When the director of the Danish Health Authorities, Søren Brostrøm, spoke at the authorities' press conference yesterday, he made it clear that the situation is very serious: "If we look at the developments day-to-day, Europe has the largest growth now, it is

10. Notice the recurrent use of the evaluative phrase 'worrying' in this example, which indicates how short the distance is from a statement of facts to the evaluation of them—and, further, to a recommendation of action ('If Denmark is a risk area, then we must act to mitigate the risk'). We will have much more to say about the combination of stases later.

> not just Italy, but also a number of other large countries in Europe that have a worrying development. There is a worrying rise in Denmark in just the past few days. All of Europe is a risk area. Denmark is a risk area." (*POL* 130320)

Market stability: "In the Council for Mortgages, head of section Lars Blume-Jensen says: 'We believe that the flattening price curve, which we have witnessed in the second half of 2006, will continue, meaning prices will remain stable and there will be zero growth'" (*JP* 080407). Stable infection rates: "The epidemic is following the expected development, says Viggo Andreasen, associate professor in mathematical epidemiology at Roskilde University: 'The number is a bit higher than in the preceding days, but it is what we can expect from statistical chance" (*EB* 200321). Decreasing prices: "Chief analyst Johnny Bo Jakobsen in […] Nordea predicts an actual drop in prices: 'We believe that a general fall in prices of five to 10 percent is very realistic, particularly in the larger cities and especially the capital area, where we cannot rule out drops of more than 10 percent'" (*JP* 080407). And fewer infections: "All the scenarios for corona that a group of experts have calculated show a decreasing or stagnating epidemic in the coming week, the State's Serum Institute concludes, based on the experts' evaluations" (*JP* 280921). Thus, it is possible to identify the factual level in its classical form in modern debates about matters as diverse as the housing market and the pandemic. Meaning, we can explain some statements about these matters in relation to whether or not something—in these cases the developments of housing prices and infection rates, respectively—is, in fact, the case.

Status definitivus is used to move from the facts of the matter to a determination of what type of matter one is actually dealing with—to not only state but define the case. The classical example of this stasis—was it murder?—is, in the meaning formation about housing prices and pandemic developments, turned into the question of how facts and figures should be interpreted. What is, for instance, the meaning of not only the sales prices, but also the number of houses for sale, the average sales time, and the bidding price versus the sales price? How do all these figures define the housing market? And, for the pandemic, in addition to the infection rates, what should we make of contact numbers, number of hospitalized, the spread of virus variants, etc.? What factual events hide behind the different numbers and what do the different interpretations of them mean for the public opinion of the market or the pandemic? Seeking to answer such questions, definitions often offer specific visualizations. For instance, price developments can be 'price parties', 'bubbles', 'natural corrections', and 'soft landings'. Similarly, infection rates can be seen to indicate diverse developments, e.g., 'a global health crisis' or a 'situation under control', just as the corona virus itself can be defined in very different terms, e.g., as 'an invisible enemy' or 'a mere flu'. Thus, it appears that the question of how to define a case can also be transferred directly to modern processes of meaning formation. More specifically, *status definitivus* is particularly suited to explaining the interpretation of facts, as we will detail in the next round of analysis.

Status qualitatis is used to evaluate the matter at hand. The classical example takes up the question of the value of a well-defined and agreed upon case—yes, the man is guilty of murder, but might the murder be justified? Similarly, modern uses of this stasis accept a certain situation, but dispute its value. For instance, while a fall in prices might intuitively be understood a problematic development, it is possible to argue that it is a positive development, which creates new market activity: "'Fundamentally, we want first-time buyers to be able to enter the market for apartments, as this may snowball positively on to the market for houses […],' [says] Niels H. Carstensen [head of communications in the realtor Home]" (*Bør* 040407). In the case of the pandemic, it is difficult to view an increase in infection rates as anything but problematic, yet it is possible to argue that it could be worse or that the developments in Denmark are positive when compared to other countries. Thus, what is being evaluated is, typically, the Danish strategy for handling the pandemic:

> “We are through the winter, the sun has begun to shine, more and more Danes are being vaccinated, and it is phenomenal that we Danes are so good at holding on to what needs to be held on to in order to get out of this crisis. And if we continue to do so, the prognosis for continued reopening is looking good,” stated Mette Frederiksen [the Danish Prime Minister] (*POL* 210321).

Just like *status conjeturalis* and *status definitivus*, *status qualitatis* can be found in its classical form in current processes of meaning formation, and the question of the value of an issue can be applied directly in the analysis.

In the classical sense, *status translationis* concerns the issue of whether the case is being tried at the appropriate court; in relation to the study of processes of meaning formation, we have argued that this stasis can be reinterpreted as the question of the internal scene of the dispute: Is the case being placed in its proper context? Are arguments premised on the right assumptions? In short, how is the matter framed? Whereas the classical strategy was about moving the case physically, uses of it in contemporary public debate aim to change the rhetorical setting of the case. In the case of the housing market, this takes the form of breaking with the economic presuppositions that form the basis of the three other stases. Thus, it is argued, the case is actually not about housing prices at all, but about a number of other issues. As for the pandemic, a similar shift occurs when the exclusive focus on infection rates is supplemented by or substituted with attention to other matters. In both cases, various alternative framings are offered; let us look at some examples.

One use of *status translationis* in the context of the housing market aims at challenging the judgment of sellers: “‘Some sellers still believe they can get a high price, even if all indicators show that the price is too high. We are seeing cases where the sellers’ price deviates from what the real estate agent has advised,’ says Christian Brydensholt, director at Kim Rose A/S” (*Bør* 040407). The problem is not the prices, but the sellers’ inflated expectations of them. Thus, developments of the housing market are reframed;

they are not about actual economic fluctuations, but about people's lack of judgment and unrealistic expectations.

Similarly, Danish public debate about pandemic developments is rife with contestations of who might appropriately interpret these developments and, particularly, with the question of who is acting appropriately. Criticism of the official advice of the government and the health authorities flourishes in various counter-publics of vaccine skeptics and conspiracy theorists: "'Corona virus has acted like a match which has set fire to something that was already smouldering. There has been a rise of new conspiracy theories and there are theories that have resurfaced,' says Rikke Alberg Peters [researcher at HistorieLab]" (*POL* 170920). But there is also, especially in the latter stages of the period studied, a growing criticism of the pandemic response among established political actors and experts: "At Christiansborg [the Danish Parliament], the blue parties are pushing for a bigger and faster reopening. […] Venstre [the liberal party, in opposition to the social democratic government] has already argued that the country should be opened completely when everyone above 50 is vaccinated" (*JP* 200321). Here, then, the question of who should judge the matter of pandemic developments turns directly into the question of who should decide what is the right way to handle the pandemic.

Regarding the housing market, the perspective can also be shifted from price developments to buyers' psychology:

> "We see huge exposure of this market. It's something people talk about over the hedge and at family parties, which means the psychological factor hits harder than we've seen before. These different forecasts about market developments that we've seen over the summer confuse buyers and especially first-time buyers and make them hit the brakes. But the buyers are waiting behind the scenes, and they will enter the market again," says Torben Jastram [head of communications in the real estate chain Home] (*JP* 191006).

In this example, the psychological tendency to react to public attention replaces the economic factors that usually explain market developments.

Such attention to citizens' psychology is also a common reframing of the pandemic: "'The worst thing is the fear that the epidemic causes, because fear is just as viral as the pandemic', he [French psychiatrist Serge Hafez] emphasizes" (*POL* 150320). Just as fear in this quote is labelled 'viral', so it is common to talk of an 'infodemic'.Meaning, questions of citizens' fears and desires are tied to the issue of the relevance and quality of the available information, shifting attention from the pandemic itself to the meta-level of how it is communicated.

Finally, *status translationis* can be used to change the temporal and spatial frames of meaning formation. When applying the temporal factor to the housing market, the argument is that one should not view the market as a snapshot, but in a longer perspective:

> "The current drop only takes us back to the level of prices in the first half year of 2006 in Greater Copenhagen," says Christian Heinig [analyst in Danske Bank], who also mentions that home owners traditionally make money when owning their house for a longer period of years, no matter whether the prices were high or low when they bought (*Bør*, 130407).

The same argument is common in the meaning formation about the pandemic:

> Denmark needs a more long-term strategy in the fight against corona rather than coming up with new restrictions and guidelines recurrently. […] This is the reaction from two experts after the health authorities Friday presented a number of new restrictions (*POL* 20920).

The argument, here, is that the predominant perspective is too short-sighted and that the matter changes significantly when applying the longer—and correct—temporal lens.

The spatial argument shifts from an emphasis on housing in isolation to a focus on national economy as a whole:

> Senior economist in Jyske Bank Peter Skøttegaard Øemig believes that we can look forward to a moderate price party. "The interest rate has increased. But we are not expecting a drop in prices. As long as employment levels are high, and the Danish economy stays on track, there is a solid safety net under the housing market." (BT 181006B).

This spatial move is very common in the Danish coverage of the pandemic as emphasis is shifted from national to European or global developments, from a matter of physical health to societal health in a number of senses (most notably, social trust and economic growth), and, as in the following example, from the case of corona to a more holistic view of public health:

> "We need to look at covid-19 in conjunction with other diseases. We need to look at the combined burden on the hospitals. There will be an interrelation with the flu and other serious respiratory infections," says Kåre Mølbak [professor at University of Copenhagen, former head of Statens Serum Institut, the state's agency of disease control and reasearch] (*JP* 180921).

Here, the premise is that we should see the housing market and the pandemic, respectively, as parts of larger contexts rather than as isolated matters. In sum, when *status translationis* is used as a matter of time and space, a specific focus on the situation here and now is exchanged for a broader perspective that enables other conclusions than those implied by momentary conditions.

In the debates about housing and COVID-19, we find a number of statements that are neither explainable as *status conjeturalis, definitivus* or *qualitatis,* but still are decisive for the processes of meaning formation. These statements can be explained in terms of our expanded definition of *status translationis,* which does not just refer to the external context of a case, but to its internal framing as well. That is, to the form and content of the process of meaning formation as such. What is its baseline, which premises are taken for granted, and how is the case framed? As we have seen, contributions to the debates, especially that concerning the pandemic, even turn explicitly to these matters and do not just offer a reframing, but actually discuss how the case is framed. The redefined *status translationis* helps us unpack such moves, which are decisive for understanding processes of meaning formation as well as the decisions they elicit.

The Two Levels of Stasis Theory: Strategy and Tactics

Despite disagreements as to the number of stases, the basic insight of stasis theory is quite unambiguous: any matter can be discussed at different levels. However, it is not entirely clear what that insight might be used for. This is because the theory of the stases is, in fact, two-dimensional, as is clear from Hohmann's (2021, 741) presentation: "the theory of stasis develops a system designed to assist rhetors in *identifying the central issues in given controversies*, and in *finding the appropriate argumentative topics* useful in addressing these issues" (our emphasis).[11] If one zooms in on the first half of the quote, the theory is mostly a *tool for analysis* in the sense that applying the different stases will help a rhetor determine the core contested issue of a given case: for instance, this might be the realization that the crux of the matter is, in fact, not whether something happened (*status conjecturalis*), but how to understand what happened (*status definitivus*). Here, stasis theory is a catalogue of strategies, which might be thought of as the gateway to the *inventio* process. It is about *understanding and categorizing* a dispute, not about formulating specific arguments.[12]

If one considers the second half of the quote, however, the theory of the stases is pulled in the direction of a *heuristic, productive tool*. Against the backdrop of the levels of the stases,

11. The duality of stasis theory is also highlighted by Conley (1990, 32) and Carter (1988, 99).

12. We find examples of this emphasis in Cicero's De Oratore and in Hermogenes' On Stases. In fact, Hermogenes makes the point explicitly, as he distinguishes between the stases and the process of inventio, treating the two in separate books. Malcolm Heath (1994, 116) reproduces this distinction in his treatment of the stases.

the process of finding and choosing specific rhetorical *tactics* can be systematized. We find an illustration of this use of the stases in the pseudo-Ciceronian work *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which applies the different stases as part of the *inventio* process. For instance, the author lists three specific ways of establishing/refuting a given fact (*status coniecturalis*). Viewed thus, stasis theory is not limited to the initial analysis of a problem that leads to a general strategy. Instead, the stases are also tools for *making and responding to arguments*, basing the development of rhetorical expressions on the specifically available tactics.

In attending to this duality, we do not wish to advocate one understanding and reject another, but rather to suggest that the two levels of stasis theory—the strategic and the tactical level—are equally important.[13] As such, they should supplement each other in the production of rhetorical utterances—and in rhetorical criticism thereof. It is a central feature of stasis theory that it contains both an analytical level for determining the overall persuasive strategy and a productive level that draws on different argumentative and stylistic tactics. Both levels can be transferred from practical to critical work, enabling the rhetorical critic to not only identify the strategy of a rhetor, but also to explain how the strategy is expressed in and as specific tactics.

Following this division, the second analytical step of stasis-oriented rhetorical criticism is a consideration of the specific expressions of the stases within the process of meaning formation. What tactics are used in the context of each of the strategies that were identified in the first round? We have already foreshadowed this step in our unpacking of the uses of *status translationis*, and

13. Contrary to current usage, which tends to conflate ‘strategy’ and ‘tactic’, the two concepts referred to qualitatively different types of consideration in classical military theory. The role of the strategist was to read the enemy and make long-term plans, whereas the tactical officer’s role was to decide where to engage in battle. Today, when a distinction is made at all, the two concepts may refer to various pairs; e.g., long- and short-term planning or ethical vs unethical actions. Therefore, we do not contend to be presenting the ‘actual’ meaning of the pair, but use them to conceptualize the dual function of stasis theory. In our usage, ‘strategy’ is a general course of (rhetorical) action and ‘tactic’ a specific (rhetorical) act.

in what follows we will provide another illustration of the strategic and tactical levels by detailing the uses of *status definitivus* in Danish public meaning formation about the housing market in 2005-2007 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. We focus on this stasis because explanations and interpretations of various conditions and inclinations are central to both cases. Thus, *status definitivus* is, indeed, definitive, not only to the matters at hand, but the processes of forming opinions about them, and the centrality of the strategy is underscored by rich and varied sets of tactical expressions.

The general strategy of *status definitivus* may be captured by the simple formula of A = B, which is what happens when developments on the housing market are presented as ‘a slump’, ‘a bubble’ or ‘a natural correction’ and when the pandemic is labelled ‘a global health crisis’, ‘an invisible enemy’ or ‘a mere flu’. Further, the strategy is expressed through a number of distinct tactics, of which we will unfold three that serve to interpret contested matters by defining their meaning, their scope, and their value.

The first tactic is the dissociative definition, which functions as a reaction to existing interpretations—it is a re-definition rather than a new definition (or, to return to the formula, here, A ≠ B). Based on the dissociation, the correct definition of a concept or phenomenon can be offered as opposed to the definition commonly used (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 444). In the context of the pre-financial crisis Danish housing market, this tactic is typically used to show that circumstances that seem to point towards a certain development—often a fall in prices—are, in fact, indicative of something else—a stabilization, a flattening of the price curve, etc. The tactic usually consists of the presentation of these circumstances, followed by an assertion of their real interpretation:

> Chief economist John Madsen from Nykredit also points out that the turn-over is retracting, that bidding prices are lowered in many places, and that the number of houses for sale is increasing.

> "The market is preparing for a soft landing. The long-awaited deceleration is now in sight" (*BT* 181006B).

The three circumstances mentioned in this example are interpreted by means of the metaphors of the soft landing and the deceleration; thereby, the circumstances are dissociated from the category of falling prices, within which one might otherwise tend to place them.

In the context of the pandemic, the dissociative definition is used to redefine a situation, which might otherwise look uncontrolled and uncontrollable, placing it within the bounds of the manageable. Here, the recurring tactic is to posit other figures (e.g., number of hospitalized, number of dead) as alternatives to and more important than infection rates. It is, however, also possible to find dissociative definitions of the infection rate itself: "'At 50.000 antigene tests a day, 250 will statistically be false positives. Thus, it depends on the specificity of the test and the number of tested people how many false positives there will be', [the Statens Serum Institut] says in a written answer" (*JP* 180321). Here, the real number is dissociated from the stated number through the introduction of "false positives", which is an inversion of another frequent tactic that states the number of infected is really bigger than what is being reported because of the 'dark number' of those who are infected without knowing it or without being tested (and, hence, are not counted).

The second tactic involves splitting a whole into its parts (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 234). In the case of the housing market, this involves pointing out how only some parts of the market (some areas, some types of housing) are affected by price drops and other tendencies[14]:

> Chief analyst Thomas Kyhl from Nykredit agrees that the arrow is pointing downwards, especially when one looks at apartments

14. The use of the expression "natural correction" is both reminiscent of the dissociative definition, as already presented, and of the persuasive definition, as will be established below. In the third round of analysis, we will return to the question of the combination of stases, but focus on the combination of strategies rather than tactics.

> in Copenhagen, houses in Northern Zealand and other expensive areas. "The places where prices have gone up the most in recent years are now also the places where prices are falling the most. So, this is a natural correction. But at the national level prices are more or less unchanged," says Thomas Kyhl (BT, 210407).

The exact same tactic is used in the case of the pandemic in order to change the scope of the crisis by pointing out that only some areas of the country (often big cities) or some groups of the population (the elderly and other people at risk) are severely affected, just as only some types of people and events are very problematic, often labelled "super spreaders" and "super spreader events". When this tactic is used, the goal is not to change the meaning of the conditions one is defining (as in the dissociative definition), but to delimit their relevance. Here, the scope of the mentioned phenomena is redefined to acknowledge the fall in prices/rise in infections while maintaining that this development does not pertain to the entire market/population.

The third tactic is the persuasive definition, in which the interpretation turns evaluative (Jørgensen and Onsberg 1987, 41). Here, the prevalent understanding of a phenomenon is accepted and it is acknowledged that this understanding pertains to the entire field, but one argues that the situation is actually in keeping with one's own position—turning the definition into an argument in one's favor. Thus, it becomes possible, for instance, to argue that earlier price hikes were exceptional while the current situation is normal: "'The decelaration of the housing market is first and foremost due to a normalization after a number of years with unusually big leaps in prices […]', he [chief economist Jacob Graven, Sydbank] says" (*JP* 250407).

While it is difficult to argue that accelerating infection rates are actually a good thing, there are plenty of other persuasive definitions involved in the meaning formation about the pandemic. This tactic was especially prevalent in the early stages, during which the pandemic response had to be established, and later in reaction to the decision to redefine the pandemic as no longer “critical to Danish society”.[15] Here is an example of the latter in which the observation that all restrictions have been lifted leads to the argument that the pandemic is not over: “For those who are old enough to remember the cold war or the war against terror there is an element of déjà vu: the war against covid-19 is also this time a constant. The goal is to survive without causing society too much harm” (*JP* 180921). Thus, the persuasive definition reinterprets the value of the mentioned circumstances while establishing an alternative context of interpretation.[16]

Pointing to different argumentative tactics through which the general strategic function of *status definitivus* can be realized enables a deeper understanding of differences and similarities between specific utterances. A full analysis would, of course, detail the relations between the strategies of all stases and their tactical expressions, but with the analysis of *status definitivus* we hope to have illustrated the usefulness of viewing stasis theory as a tool for dividing matters of contestation into levels, which are themselves operative at different levels. Further, the three definitional tactics, as identified in this analysis, point towards a certain connection between the stases. As such, the dissociative definition with its emphasis on the meaning of the articulated circumstances is closely related to the determination of whether something is the case or not that is the domain of *status coniecturalis*. The persuasive definition, with its interpretation of the facts and their value, is almost entirely merged with *status qualitatis*. And the division of a whole into its parts seeks to re-frame the discussion in a manner that is not very different from our reconceptualized version of *status translationis*. Taking our cue from these indications, let us turn to the issue of how the strategies of stasis theory relate to each other.

A Static or a Dynamic Concept? Stasis Theory as an Arsenal

15. This decision was enforced on the 10th of September, 2021, just a few days prior to our last week of data collection.
16. As such, it folds the stases of evaluation and transcendence into that of definition, as will be the topic of our third round of analysis.

of Arguments

The dominant classical view of the relationship between the stases is that each case can be categorized according to one of them. That is, there is, for any situation, one central issue of contestation, which may, however, contain sub-questions, drawing on other stases that are secondary in relation to the primary conflict of the case (Heath 1994, 122).[17] In opposition to this view, practical argumentation is, today, often presented as a dynamic process in which the stases are positioned as the phases that a case must go through before coming to a final conclusion (Jørgensen and Onsberg 1987).[18] In principle, this process begins with the first stasis and moves linearly through each level. In practice, however, one does not have to begin with *status coniecturalis*, and in the course of the argumentation one may have to move back and forth between the stases. Still, the dynamic has a particular direction and a typical order because the purpose of practical argumentation is the realization of a recommendation.

When stasis theory is applied to the study of the genre of apology, the theory also becomes a dynamic tool. This dynamic is, for instance, the basis of Kramer and Olson's (2002) study of the different strategies that Bill Clinton used during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Here, the process is even further removed from the classical understanding, as it is not limited to the linear movement towards a recommendation. Instead, the study reveals how a rhetor can jump between stases as some opportunities are closed and others opened in the process of public meaning formation.[19]

17. While the passage is not entirely clear, Cicero's De Oratore (1942, I.X.14) does mention the possibility of using more stases at once, thereby prefiguring the position we will develop here.
18. Although Jørgensen and Onsberg link the stages of a discussion to the notion of Topics, the inspiration from stasis theory is evident; the three first stages are identicial with the three first stages and the fourth is replaced with the question of what should be done.
19. Specifically, these authors show how Clinton first used status coniecturalis, then status translationis and status definitivus, ending in status qualitatis.

The question of whether the stases should be conceptualized as static categories or dynamic processes may be tied to the focus of the rhetorical criticism. When a study is centered around one particular rhetorical utterance, it is usual to assume that the rhetor has picked one stasis and stuck to it. Here, the theory presents the categories that the rhetor can choose from when designing the utterance and that the critic can subsequently identify in the utterance. When the aim is to study the stases at the levels of the utterance as well as of the process of which it is part (thus, introducing yet another layering of the theory), it becomes clear that processes of meaning formation are never restricted to one and just one stasis. Here, one can point to a chronological movement from stasis to stasis, as in practical argumentation, or one can, as do Kramer and Olson, suggest a more contingent process in which the order of the stases depends on the particular case and the specific developments of the debate about it.

We adhere to the dynamic view, generally, but believe that this dynamic is neither linear nor contingent. Instead, it may best be understood as a combinatory potential. Meaning that it is not just the context that conditions the use of one stasis or another at any given moment, but also a choice the rhetor makes. In the course of a process of meaning formation, different stases may become dominant at different times, but this is as much an expression of the involved rhetors' choices as it is an indication of situational demands. The choice between the stases and the decision to combine them is always at the discretion of the rhetor—just as some choices will always prove more apt than others. As such, the possibility of combining the stases is both present at the level of the utterance and the process. At the level of meaning formation, this implies that several stases can be present at the same time, but in different utterances. At the level of the utterance, this means that more than one stasis can be applied *within* it.

This reinterpretation of stasis theory involves a shift in the understanding of the stases. They are not more or less exclusive levels, which one has to decide between or run through in some order. Instead, we believe, the stases are best understood as an *arsenal* of argumentative strategies and tactics that are, in principle, always available. This does not mean that we should stop talking about levels altogether, but it does mean that the levels are not mutually exclusive—to the contrary, they condition each other. Thus, one must have some understanding of what 'it' is (*status definitivus*) to be able to ascertain whether it is the case or not (*status coniecturalis*), and the definition of a case often contains an evaluation (*status qualitatis*), just as the three other stases are dependent on and can be reconfigured through a certain (re-)framing of the case (*status translationis*). In sum, the levels can be combined; there are no barriers between them. Rather, they are in lively interaction. We seek to capture this potential for simultaneous, successive, and singular uses of the stases through the notion of an arsenal of arguments, understood as a potential to choose from and combine various strategies and tactics.

When the dynamic of the stases is expressed as an arsenal of arguments, the role of the rhetor is emphasized. Seeking to influence the process of meaning formation, each rhetor makes choices at the strategic as well as the tactical level, choosing one or several stases and how to articulate them. Accordingly, the critic's task is to examine these rhetorical choices, and the third step of rhetorical criticism involves interpreting the interrelations of text and context, based on the involved rhetors' choices of strategies, tactics, and combinations. Following the three steps—identification, analysis, and interpretation—the rhetorical critic may evaluate the appropriateness of the uses of the stases in the course of the studied process(es) of meaning formation. To what extent is the involved rhetors' use of the stases persuasive? To what extent is it proper? In what follows, we will sketch the combination of the stases in the cases of the housing market and the pandemic, and in conclusion we assess whether the central rhetors of these cases have used the stases in ways that are apposite to them.

In the course of 2005-2007, the price developments of the housing market were reflected in processes of meaning formation as a series of openings and closures of rhetorical opportunities. For instance, it became increasingly difficult to deny the imminent fall in prices, implying the impossibility of continued use of *status coniecturalis* in its pure form. As consensus arose on the direction of price developments, however, this did not rule out contestation of other facts and reinterpretations of market developments in light of these newly elevated figures. Conversely, in the 2020-2021 developments of the pandemic, infection rates fluctuated, causing constant negotiations of what was, in fact, happening—and, more importantly, how to interpret the unfolding events. As facts constantly changed, so did policy recommendations, but, more importantly, over time the same facts led to different recommendations (i.e., when Denmark opened up entirely in September 2021, terminating the national state of crisis, the daily number of newly infected was similar to the total number of infected when the country closed down entirely in March 2020), leading to constant negotiations of what to make of and do with the available information. Thus, even if the tendency is for the stases to be used differently at different times, this is not an evolutionary process. Rather, all four stases are available all the time, and it is a fundamental task for any rhetor to assess which strategy/-ies to use at what time.

The option of using different stases simultaneously is not just theoretical, but has the practical implication that it is, for instance, possible for one rhetor to redefine what might seem like a fall in prices as a "natural correction" at the same time as another rhetor uses *status qualitatis* to explain that the drop they take for granted is actually a positive development, which will 'kick-start the market'. Similarly, one rhetor can use the infection rate as a reason to maintain restrictions at the same time as another uses the number of hospitalized to argue that restrictions can be lifted—and a third suggests that it is time to focus more on economy and less on health and open up the country entirely. These examples show how different stases can actively and simultaneously shape meaning formation concerning the same circumstances.

When the stases are combined, they often build on each other, but there is no necessary order or end-goal to such combination, as definition may, for instance, just as easily lead to a statement of facts as to an evaluation. Further, a rhetor may counter another's use of the stases with a different combination—or use the same stases to make a completely different point. As such, current mediatized meaning formation is very unlike the ideal typical case of the criminal trial of classical rhetoric in so far as, today, it is the exception rather than the rule that any rhetor listens, let alone responds, to another's arguments, whether delivered in mediated political debate or on social media (Hall 2018, Reinemann and Maurer 2005). This makes the combination of arguments an even freer endeavor, but also one that has even more difficulty in making an impact.

What is common to all these potential combinations, then, is the type of meaning formation they lead to. It is not the individual utterance, but the process of meaning formation that prevails. In the case of the housing market, the tendency of this process is to support the market by establishing any development as both the right time to sell and to buy. That is, the particular price is not paramount; rather, the drive is towards continued market activity at any cost. As for the COVID-19 pandemic, the general direction of the meaning formation is, to the contrary, towards ending the pandemic as each contribution takes aim at what may most effectively stop the continued spread of the virus.

These underlying purposes (maintaining the housing market, ending the COVID-19 pandemic), it should be noted, are closely aligned with the type of actors who take center stage in the mediatized arena for meaning formation as we have studied it here. For housing, the studied news media usually give voice to the views of realtors, banks, and mortgage brokers. These actors are not all involved in the market in the same way, but none are neutral observers, and they all have a stake in ensuring the stability of the market. As such, they seek to shape processes of meaning formation in such a direction as to establish an image of a healthy market into which both buyers and sellers may safely enter. For the pandemic, a similar situation arises around the public health professionals and experts, who are, along with cabinet members and other politicians, the persons most frequently quoted. Even when individual experts are employed by independent research institutions (e.g., universities) rather than health authorities, they have an interest in advising the government and ensuring the success of the chosen policy measures, as they are, generally, involved in limiting the effects of the virus as much as possible.

Whether aimed at maintaining market stability in the face of potential price drops or societal stability in the face of rising infection rates, the stases are used to shape central figures and tendencies in ways that, potentially, make the message of stability more persuasive. When facts and figures point uniformly towards a state of—health or economic—crisis, rhetorical work becomes more intense, and the full arsenal of stases is applied and combined in the attempt to redefine, re-evaluate, and re-frame in order to, ultimately, re-figure the facts.

When interpreting the combinations of the stases that are used in our two cases as persuasive attempts aimed at increasing the public's sense of stability, it is important to recognize that our case material covers a selective fragment of the meaning formation process. The housing market is not only debated in broadsheets and business newspapers, but also in popular television programs like "Flip that House" and "Designed to Sell". Further, the content paid and owned by realtors is central, as are the conversations of neighbors, colleagues, and friends, whether off- or online. In the same manner, social media and other informal (communication) networks are central to the meaning formation of the pandemic—even as, during lockdown, many Danes turned to the traditional news media for the latest updates from press conferences, for communal singing, and for other substitutes to physical social gathering and information sharing. Thus, we have only investigated small parts of the widely branching processes of meaning formation, and we are keenly aware that the general directions of persuasive attempts differ in various sub-publics. Still, the news media are one central arena of mediation as well as mediatization (Jensen 2013), as they refer to other sources of meaning formation in their coverage of events and are, in turn, circulated onwards on other platforms. Thus, there is an argument to be made that while news media may not be entirely reflective of the process of public meaning formation as a whole, they remain central to it.

A complete evaluation of the appropriateness and consequences of the rhetorical work carried out by the actors in focus here as well as other participants in the meaning formation processes would, of course, demand both a deeper analysis of the material we have covered and the inclusion of different materials. Nevertheless, we will offer a tentative conclusion to our analytical sketches. Our readings of the two cases have resulted in the view that in both of them, figures are used to persuade and are, in turn, shaped persuasively in the effort to ensure economic and societal stability. The entire arsenal of arguments—the general strategies of the stases and their various tactical articulations and combinations—is used to establish the positions that the market/the population is healthy. While in 2005-2007 and 2020-2021, respectively, evidence was mounting to the contrary, in argumentative terms this remained the dominant position. No matter what argument one might present to indicate the severity of the economic/health crisis, the rhetors in our material have a counter-argument at hand—or, we might say, a rhetorical cure at the ready.

What is particularly interesting is that some of these arguments should, in principle, exclude each other, but do not do so in practice. Rather, the same rhetor can claim that there is no fall in prices, that the fall should be redefined (e.g., as a ‘soft landing’), that falling prices are a positive development, and that the market should not be dictated by prices. And, for the pandemic, one can admit that infection rates are out of control and still suggest that the right measures have been taken—and vice versa. All in support of the common goal of ending the pandemic.

Admittedly, one will rarely find all four stases used as explicitly—and in as explicit opposition to each other—as in these stylized examples, but the tendency to maintain one’s preferred position no matter what the counter-arguments are is clear and pervasive. Hence, we can conclude that the stases are applied persuasively by those who seek to establish the position that the Danish housing market/population is healthy. Whether that has the desired effect on individual citizens’ behavior as buyers/sellers and subjects of the public health regime, respectively, is another matter. In the case of the housing market, we now know that a fullblown meltdown proved unavoidable; in the case of the pandemic, the persuasive figures seem to have had the desired effect of widespread support of and compliance with the authorities' changing pandemic response.

The Critical Potential of Stasis Theory

Providing theoretical reasons for and analytical illustrations of how to apply the stases to rhetorical criticism, we have shown how the stases are used in statements on market/pandemic developments. In conclusion we offer the hypothesis that rhetorical strategies and tactics are co-constitutive of not only the meaning formation concerning such developments, but the developments themselves. The meaning formation does not only react to economic/health tendencies, but is constitutive of the relationship between supply and demand/restrictions and compliance. In sum, there is a close connection between economic/medical figures and figures of speech, as numbers are used in and shaped by persuasive processes.

Our theoretical argument concerning the critical potential of the stases is more well-developed than our empirical illustrations; we have argued that the classical definitions of all four stases remain relevant, although the fourth stasis must be widened to include the internal argumentative framing of meaning formation as well as its external physical setting. On this basis, we have discussed the classical understanding of the stases as a clarifying and productive tool. Here, we suggest that these two dimensions of the stases can be better understood by distinguishing between strategies and tactics, just as we have shown that both the strategic and the tactical levels can be applied in analyses of rhetorical artifacts. Finally, we have advocated the view that the classical understanding of the relationship between the stases must be reformed when advice on how to produce specific utterances is turned into rhetorical criticism of meaning formation processes. In this new context, the stases must be understood as dynamic developments rather than specific choices. However, there are still insights to be gained from the classical idea that the individual rhetor makes strategic and tactical choices.

Thus, we do not believe that the dynamic understanding of the stases should lead to the view that only one stasis or the other can be used at any given point in a process of meaning formation. To the contrary, all stases are, in principle, available all the time as an arsenal of arguments from which rhetors choose their strategies and tactics, thereby contributing to the larger process. This enables an understanding of the process of meaning formation as a combination of the stases applied in particular utterances and linked together across them—meaning that the rhetorical critic must attend to both the level of the utterance and that of the process. The three analytical steps, as sketched here, focus on particular utterances, but on this basis, one may offer a joint criticism of the process of meaning formation in which the analyzed utterances partake. Such criticism, we hope, may continue to detail and explain how numerical figures persuade and are, themselves, the products of rhetorical figuration.

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