

# Praxis

Theaetetus2 \*

# Theaetetus<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> \*

## Expectations, disappointments and fulfilments

By Ralf Richardt Strobec

Welcome to my paper, I'm so happy that you chose to read it. In this paper I'll be exploring what constitutes an account in *artistic research*. But I won't get there straight away, not by a long shot. As you can perhaps guess from the outline, it will be necessary to start over a couple of times, I think that you should know this in advance. The argument is kind of complicated, and the conclusion isn't necessarily true. It isn't necessarily false either. It is just imaginary. In fact, that is exactly what it is, imaginary. Hopefully it is a productive imagination.

*Terpsion*

So, how did the conversation go?

*Euklid*

Very well. I took notes as soon as I got home. And when I discovered gaps, I filled them in from memory. And when I came back to Athens, I asked Socrates about the stuff that I might have forgotten. This meant I could make corrections. I am now very close to having everything down on paper.

*Terpsion*

Yeah, that's what you keep saying. Actually, I have been wanting to ask you for a long time. Could you show me what you have written? I always forget to ask. Can we do it now? Nothing would suit me better than a rest, I just arrived from the countryside.

*Euklid*

I could use a rest as well, in fact. I walked with Theaetetus as far as Erineum. Let us go inside, then. My servant can read the manuscript, while we are resting.

*Terpsion*

Great!

*Euklid*

Perhaps I should say that I have changed everything a little bit. People don't necessarily talk to me, sometimes they talk to the people they are talking about.

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1) Everything in this project builds on the form of the Theaetetus-dialogue. You can find a rundown of the dialogue in fact box 1.

Also, since it is more practical and contemporary, I have removed all kinds of interjections and repetitions, so that it doesn't become too difficult to read.

## EXORDIUM

### **Plato, *Theaetetus* 101**

For those of you not well acquainted with the *Theaetetus*-dialogue by Plato, I should offer a brief introduction. To those of you who are, I apologize in advance for any inconsistencies with your own understanding that you might experience. Many people have opinions on the *Theaetetus*. Actually, a whole war is going on between the *Unitarist* and the *Revisionist*. I tend to lean towards the revisionist, but that is a character flaw, really, so I will not go into that debate at all.

The *Theaetetus*-dialogue is about the nature of knowledge. It is divided into three broad sections, but it also makes a lot of digressions, twists, and turns whenever something interesting or simply peculiar emerges. It is a dialogue: it reads like a sort of play, and it certainly has both character and characters, even a dramatic plot. Eventually, Socrates has to go to court, where, as you are probably aware, he will be sentenced to death, which is one of the reasons (or pragmatic excuses) that the dialogue ends unresolved. The dialogue is *aporetic*, which just means that its central question, “*What is knowledge?*”, is never answered to anyone's complete satisfaction. It was written almost 2400 years ago, but it still holds its own, and still proposes the most simple and useful definition of what knowledge might be: *true belief, with an account*, or *True, Justified Belief (TJB)*, as it is more commonly put. The question of what qualifies as an account is where it gets stuck. This question is precisely what truly interests me, and what I will be exploring in this context in roundabout ways. I love the *Theaetetus*-dialogue. It sets out to examine something but only partially provides an answer in the form of a riddle and a dream. It is playful and funny and weird and idiosyncratic. But somehow it still manages to provide insight and leaves you with a truth-like sensation. It cares about its subject - the matter at hand, its characters, and its reader – though Socrates is often presented as self-important and obnoxious.

The *Theaetetus* is, in short, a prime piece of artistic research and an example to revere and follow in my view.<sup>2</sup> If you know it well, read it again; if you have never heard about it, go home and read it as soon as you get the chance and have a week to spare.

### **Money Laundering and whitewashing.**

Ok. Now for the second and really different beginning.

2018 was a crazy year for Denmark regarding matters of finance and ethics. A lot of huge scandals were unearthed by zealous journalists, most spectacularly the tax fraud scandal that haunted many European states. It focused on a group of Dubai based bankers, especially a man named Sanjay Shah.

In addition to that, we witnessed the huge money laundering scandal in Danske Bank involving thousands of suspicious customers making dubious transactions worth a staggering 200 billion Euro for almost a decade.<sup>3</sup>

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2) Actually, many great philosophical works were developed in the field between philosophy and art. Perhaps *Mille Plateaux* (Deleuze and Guattari) or *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Nietzsche) could be said to be artistic research as well, but I am not familiar enough with those works to say for sure.

3) Even in this context, footnoting the source of propositional knowledge seems appropriate.

Finally (although I should probably use the word *finally* with caution, as stories continue to surface) a woman named Britta Nielsen stole 111 million from the social services during the twenty years she worked there.

It is important to make some etymological points so that the narrative may proceed. In Danish, the word for the process is not *laundering*, but rather the more generic *washing*. *White washing*, specifically. Obviously, the two words are related, but they have somewhat different connotations, and the processes and outcomes they imply are a little bit different.

Allow me to be a bit pedantic.

*To wash* comes from the PIE-root \*wed-, meaning *water* or *wet*.<sup>4</sup> The English path is mostly associated with clothes and dishes, and obviously means removing something from something else. The Frankish path takes the opposite stance, and makes it mean to soil or stain, now *gâcher*, through *gashier*, the old French version builds on Germanic \**waskan*. It also means to spoil (your kid or something else), but in any case, means to put something in place where before it was not present in itself. The most prominent example of *washing-as-applying* in English is exactly *whitewashing*, which originally meant applying a thin coat of paint to make different pieces of wood in a barn, or any other uneven surface, seem more homogenous and thus by weird and to a large extent fallacious implication more desirable. This became something you might do to people much later, and only in the 1960s did it become something you do to money.<sup>5</sup>

*To Launder*, on the other hand, ironically, comes not from *wet* or *water*, but from the PIE-root \**leue-*, that means to wash, and is thereby originally more closely associated with the process of changing an appearance. The criminal sense of making illegally obtained money useful in ordinary society originated in 1961 but did not become widespread until the Watergate scandal in 1973.

Yet the most interesting thing (to me) about the word is that *lavender*, the wonderful "*fragrant plant of the mint family*," c. 1300, from Anglo-French *lavendre*, is probably a cognate. *To make money smell of lavender*. Imagine that! In Denmark, in our usual protestant, somewhat dull and pedestrian way, we normally insist that money does not smell at all, something that we all know to be not true.

Laundering, then, like whitewashing, regardless of what is being treated in the process, means making the object, situation, or subject appear different than it is or was. It implies presenting matters in a better way, or at least a more favoured way, for the one presenting. Or it implies staining or colouring an adversary. Or it just means to construe or interpret, which is something we cannot help doing all the time, to make something or someone appear more homogenous, and thereby more acceptable to us, for whatever good or bad reason.

*To clean, to make even, to make something smell of lavender.*

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One source of many, *The Guardian*, September 21, 2018 is particularly relevant for mentioning the amount in euro, not the Danish currency, kroner.

4) [www.etymologyonline.com](http://www.etymologyonline.com)

5) In culture, of course, it is very much linked to the practice of casting white people in roles of colour, to misleading representations of culture, e.g. the much debated whitewashing of Martin Luther King, or even the total change in perception of history present in the removal of people of colour in all public imagery and performative situations like the processions to the Arc de Triomphe at the liberation of Paris in 1944, which did not in any way show the actual demographical composition of the troops, but presented the victory as a purely white accomplishment.

**NARRATIO** - *inception*

Now for the true beginning. **Knowledge is perception**

**DI Knowledge is perception - Imaginary aspects of Thomas Borgen**

First, I will look at (or rather for) *Thomas Borgen*, the now former CEO of Danske Bank.



He has hardly said a word in public since the news of the scandal broke.

I imagine the character Thomas Borgen through multiple sketches. He is made of melting snow. He is elusive and impossible to fixate. I am not making a portrait, I do not claim any insight into the actual or factual Thomas Borgen, if such an entity even exists. Rather, I want to make a reflection, to imagine the qualities and beliefs we collectively project onto a role, a character, a physical presence.

I guess we do so in the naive and futile (greatly misleading, yet utterly understandable) hope that reality can be predicted, guided, and governed, and that events ultimately make sense outside of stories.

I imagine being Thomas Borgen. What is that like?

### **Whitewashing #1**

I am Head of a company with 3.7 million customers and 25 000 employees.

Is that even possible, and what does it actually mean? I used to be the Crown Prince of Danske Bank, then King of the Bottom Line,<sup>6</sup> but now I am dethroned. We are not free of Danish baggage; the media is rife with monarchical imagery.

It is not an easy task to imagine being Thomas Borgen. I know how difficult it is to make the hours in a day suffice, let alone the days in a week. I know how difficult it is to get just the basic information that I need to do my work, and how difficult it is to tell people all they need to know in return. This is not meant as an excuse, it is just meant as a sort of fact, on a human, not an institutional level.

I whitewash the press photos of Danske Bank. I am not supposed to use them contrary to the original intention. It is illegal. But if I wash them in paint, they are technically gone. There must be some sort of continuum between legal and illegal, when you whitewash using standard techniques from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a little bit of acetone.

I might be responsible, but I am not guilty.

### **Whitewashing #2**

Thomas Borgen is perhaps Sanjay Shah.

### **Coating**

I am a self-made man.

My father wanted me to be a doctor, but it was not for me. Instead, I climbed the corporate ladder, slowly making my way to the top. It was by no means an easy feat but being with like-minded colleagues made me do my best. I strive for better results and greater achievements.

I never did anything wrong.

I have made use of completely legitimate and legal procedures, getting tax refunds on dividend. Everybody does that. In fact, I have a counter-demand.

You still owe me money. A lot.

By the way, my wife should be allowed to travel wherever she wants, she has nothing to do with this.

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6) *Berlingske*, 2013 and *Fyens Stiftstidende*, 2018 amongst many others.



### **Staining**

I am the main character in the huge tax fraud scandal that also plagues 2018. I received a whopping 1.7 billion Euro from the Danish State in tax returns from dividend on stocks and shares I never owned (the amount is too big to fit in the currency calculator on Danske Bank's home page). This might not even be illegal. I currently have a counter claim worth 1.07 million Euro against the Danish State. I am a villain and a greedy money gatherer, a rich and ruthless optimiser, and I am part of a network of bankers. We sit around on huge piles of money, directing our minions. We know each other from The City. Together we got 57 billion Euro from the scam throughout Europe.

I live in Dubai and publish my *nouveau riche* parties on YouTube.<sup>7</sup>



### **Making smell of lavender**

I am a philanthropist. I have a son with autism. I love him very much, and I want him to be cured of his disease, or at least make sure that he can have a better life. I am the founder of *Autism Rocks*, a foundation to support scientific research into this awful disease.

I survived the cut-throat environment that is London banking.<sup>8</sup> I am a redeemed and reformed money monger who is now an IdeaMench and philanthropist.<sup>9</sup>

Sanjay Shah is more directly involved with a much clearer agency and intention to gain personally and directly from his actions. Thomas Borgen is perhaps a little Sanjay Shah, but mostly not, I suppose.

### **Whitewashing #3**

Thomas Borgen is perhaps Anders Dam, the CEO of the third largest bank of Denmark.

I really try to do the right thing, but it is not easy. I favour after-the-fact rationalisations and pre-emptive narration to ensure not being falsely accused of something that was not even my concern:

*Anders Dam*<sup>10</sup>

*Three times, I guess, we were approached by someone who wanted to borrow our shares... Across the dividend pay-out day. We were offered a generous eight-figure amount to lend them out. The Bank in question offered to handle everything. We didn't have to do anything.*

That sounds like a really good investment, Anders Dam. You said yes, of course, straight away?

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7) "Følg Pengene", October 31st, 2018

8) Ideamench.com April 17, 2017

9) Who will ever believe him? That is *reproductive* imagination, he is re-using and applying a worn-out trope that will never hold.

10) "Følg Pengene", October 31, 2018

Who wouldn't? I totally understand if you did.<sup>11</sup>

*Anders*

*No, we didn't. We were puzzled. Lending shares is a normal, uh, activity, but it is not normal to receive amounts of this calibre. And not across, uh, pay-out day in that magnitude, that we are discussing here.*

And when is all of this happening, Anders Dam? Also, *a generous eight-figure amount?* How much money are we really talking about, surely you remember that?

*Anders*

*I think we are in 2014, uh, and I think it was 3.4 million dollars that we were offered, shared between the ones who would do the work and us...*

*But we said: 'no, thank you'. And the memos that are there, that we revisited. They luckily show us the clarity of sight, that we couldn't see clearly what would happen, and that we didn't want to participate in potential tax evasion in this context.*

*So, we are steering clear of this case, and I am as appalled, I think, as everyone else who has seen this excellent documentary, that is has been possible.*



But, Anders Dam, when you reflect on it..., back in 2014, shouldn't you have contacted the Financial Supervisory Authority: "Hey, we have had this request, and it sounds really, really strange"?

*Anders*

*You can say that, but as a matter of fact, we didn't.*

...

Thomas Borgen is Anders Dam. He is trying really hard to project the image of a conscientious citizen, an old school accessible fellow, laying out the facts as best he can.

3.4 million dollars to do nothing.

It happens.

I tried, I tried, He says, but no one listened, and also it really should be handled by the state, and not by me.

Hindsight is cruel that way.

## **Whitewashing #4**

Consider Elizabeth the First.

*Stark mute*, not showing any emotion or thought.

Much like Thomas Borgen, Elizabeth had 3.7 million citizens to care for and about 25.000 employees, depending on how you count.

She famously painted her face white with a mixture of white lead and vinegar.

She *white-faced* herself. Perhaps to seem less like a person, and more like an artefact. Perhaps to

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11) This, and the following, paraphrases the questions of Casper Schröder in that same interview.



even out her skin that had been destroyed by smallpox a couple of years earlier. It did wonders for her character but nothing for her health. Apparently, it took her four hours to get dressed each morning, and she ferociously separated public affairs from private, court and household matters. Being a very well-educated renaissance monarch, she wrote poetry, and no one knew more about the pitfalls of assigning guilt and blame than her:

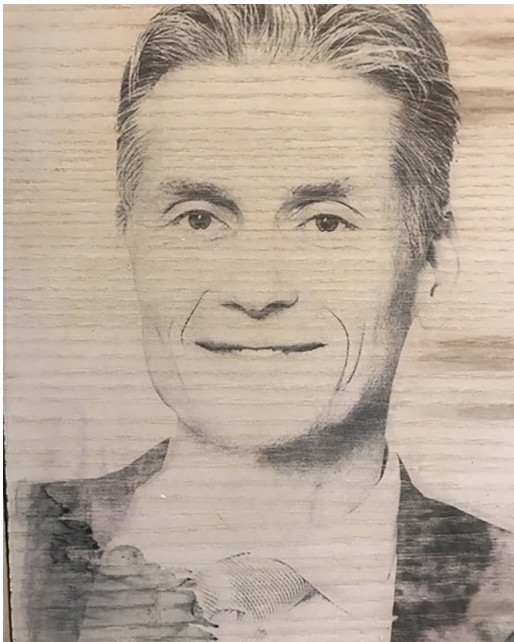
*Much suspected by me,  
Nothing proved can be,  
Quoth Elizabeth prisoner.<sup>12</sup>*

Perhaps she can provide insight as to what it means to be both person and institution?

A poem by Elizabeth I treats the subject of the separate identities of the monarch and the woman, or rather, the coexistence of two separate true identities and a mediating consciousness.

Depending on your stance on abstraction, the poem *On Monsieur's Departure* can either be read as a poem of unrequited love (although, perhaps a bit unusual, from the point of view of the non-requirer), or as a more general separation of role and person, of institution and individual.

Of course, we are never only one thing, and neither is Thomas Borgen:

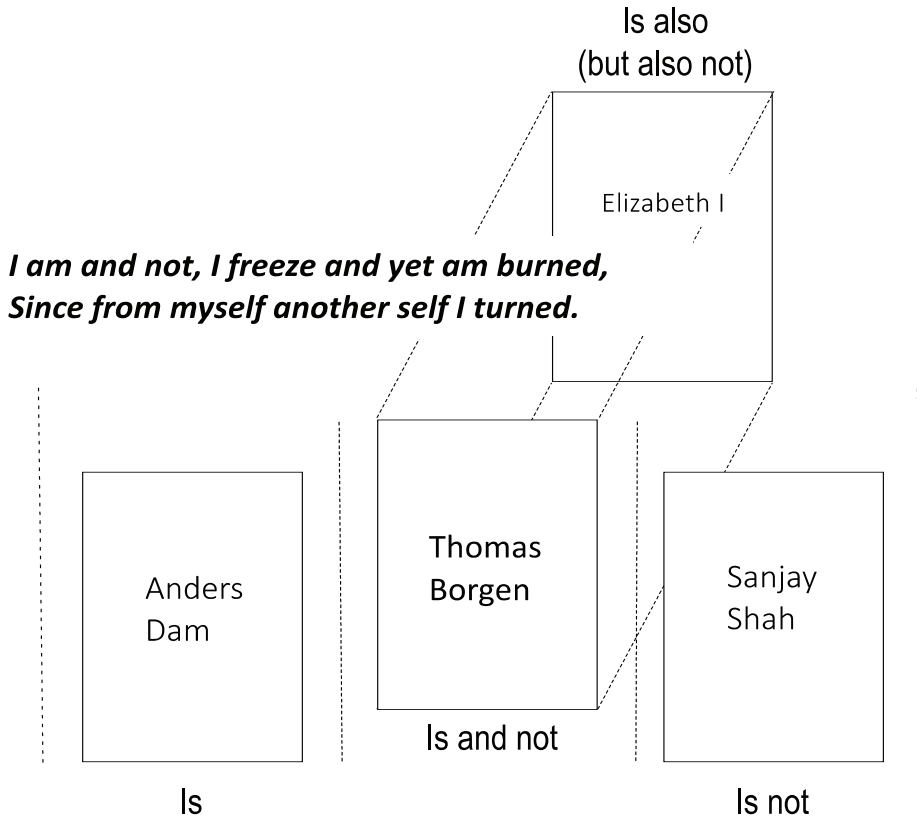


*I grieve and dare not show my discontent,  
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,  
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,  
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.  
**I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,  
Since from myself another self I turned.**  
My care is like my shadow in the sun,  
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,  
Stands and lies by me, doth what I have done.  
His too familiar care doth make me rue it.  
No means I find to rid him from my breast,  
Till by the end of things it be suppress.  
Some gentler passion slide into my mind,  
For I am soft and made of melting snow;  
Or be more cruel, love, and so be kind.  
Let me or float or sink, be high or low.  
Or let me live with some more sweet content,  
Or die and so forget what love ere meant.*

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12) Written with a Diamond on her Window at Woodstock, ca. 1554

**An initial outline of the imaginary character 'Thomas Borgen'  
could the look something like this:**



**It is of course not true in the strictest sense of the word.  
But it isn't completely false either.**

## D2 Knowledge is True Belief – Viewing this complex of material from three angles: Law, Journalism, Art

I conduct three Theaetetus-dialogues, based on the material,<sup>13</sup> with three highly experienced, knowledgeable, reflective, skilled, and talented women:

A lawyer: *Malene Lei Raben*

A journalist: *Gertrud Højlund*

An artist: *Ellen Hillingsøe*

I want to know how you *perform* knowledge *in practice*. How do you apply knowledge gained through training and experience to these murky issues which contain more gaps than knowns? You all come from fields with an ambivalent relation to knowledge production and to the concept of truth in the empirical, positivist sense.

I want each dialogue to be performative knowledge production *in itself*. We should both know more after we finish, and we should somehow aim at creating knowledge together that was not there before.<sup>14</sup>

I record and transcribe the dialogues.<sup>15</sup>

The dialogues are vast, both in scope and in length, and I can only present a fraction of them here.

I have arranged them according to central insights of vital matter to knowledge production.

It is no longer dialogues, but fragments of thoughts, giving context to themselves.

But let us begin:<sup>16</sup>

*Ralf*

Hey Malene, ...

Hey Gertrud! So, the first question is “Who are we, and where are we going?”

Hey Ellen. Here we go!

*Malene, Gertrud, Ellen*

Hey Ralf. And then, we were sitting here... [*laughs*]

We begin with the easy questions, I see... [*laughs*]

Right, off we go, then... [*laughs*]<sup>17</sup>

(*Facts – the lawyer*)

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13) The structure of the dialogue follows that of the Theaetetus, see fact box 2

14) I have worked with performative dialogues many times before, both as part of more conventional public talks about specific subjects, and as part of more conventional theatrical treatments of narrative content.

For instance, I have made a version of Orlando that featured three long segments of discussions between the main characters of *time*, *art* and *love* respectively. To me, those parts were always the most interesting parts of the show, and most life-like, since they allowed for the characters, the actors, and dancers who played the characters, as well as the audience, to connect in a different way, more at face value. During my time at Hotel Pro Forma, the Danish performance company, we also often worked with this format.

15) Actually, a very talented anthropology student called Marie transcribes them, as I run out of time.

16) Let me repeat, in case it was not explicitly stated in the prologue, that they did not, in fact, say exactly what I write here. But they did say something to that effect. Also, they were not in the same room at the same time.

17) She actually says what directly translates as “then, the bus drives”, invoking a race or a process that we are caught up in together.

*Malene*

To be a lawyer, (how do I explain this to a non-lawyer?), is a way to think about the facts of the world, and to sort them, under the general body of law. That is *the legal method*.

As you practice, you notice there is a pattern to what you do. You get experience with how heavily something factors in. Law is like making a jigsaw puzzle, first you find the parts, and then you apply the rules.

I remember going to a lecture at the Office of the Attorney General. She told us a story to illustrate the importance of *facts*, and it was quite the eye opener to me. A young clerk had come to her office, the day before going to court in a case concerning faulty goods, and he had not understood, *the day before going to court*, what it actually was that had been broken. And that is a *fact*. You can't use the rules until you understand what has happened.

People often get frustrated when they call me with a case.

I need to know exactly what was said, and when. And there are always things they don't mention, and more circumstances and intonations, and correspondences back and forth, and things that are done, and said, and told.

Your job is to understand that *completely* before you can figure out how you can read it legally.

*(Facts – the journalist)*

*Gertrud*

A *fact* is something you can get confirmed by different, independent sources.

Something that *has happened*, something that *is*. Perhaps it is written somewhere, black on white, tested.

There can be journalistic facts, of course. But mostly we work with statements that can't be tested. Statements about something that people experience or believe to be true of some situation or other. We know that you rarely, if ever, experience according to what happened.

If, for instance, the Danish Parliament was informed of something, and didn't react properly, then we, as journalists, can see that certain documents were part of the material that was accessible when they made the decision. Then that is a fact, it was knowledge, that was accessible to them, right?

Or, a colleague of mine was killed yesterday, uh, and it was curious because we knew there had been a shooting incident yesterday, we had that information from ourselves, TV2, that it was him, and that he was in a critical condition. And then the CEO of Radio 24/7, where he worked, informs the media, that he is dead.

But then the police give a press conference saying that he is not dead, but in a critical condition.

So, I spend the entire morning today trying to figure out, what the hell...?

Two facts exist side by side.

Who is most trustworthy?

How did *we* know, how did *Jørgen* know?

And I, TV2, we broke the news that he had been killed, and *then* that he had not, and that sucks.

But his boss is supposed to know. He didn't pull it out of his ass, he has to have gotten it from somewhere.

Yes. What are facts, right?

*(Truth – the artist)*

*Ellen*

What do you mean by facts? This is an adventure.

We have a king, and funnily enough he is called Borgen.<sup>18</sup> He is handsome and an authority. And he takes care of our money. He is *Danske Bank*, where we all came with our piggy bank as children. And Handsome Thomas Borgen, he took it, and put the money into an account. He takes care of us, and he is our father. He takes care of our energy, because Money is Energy.

And it turns out, he was a slob, that is the tale. It is an adventure that teaches us not to believe everything we hear, everything that surrounds us. It is a tale to give us strength, to remain sensible, and to be critical.

We want more, and we can never be satisfied. And we were all charmed. A lot of money was surely made in that tiny branch, but we wanted him to be Thomas Borgen.

We wanted a handsome man to enter the stage and say: "Everything is going well" (in Norwegian), sleeves rolled up. We want that, to be reassured and to feel safe, and he accepted that, he accepted the role. He wanted the pedestal, and he sat there, after the financial crisis, and he made us feel safe.

He is a myth, he is *no one*.

If I should play him? He is only king because we create him. I need concentration, and I need the focus to be on me. If someone is distractedly picking his nose while I play the king, then I can't play it. It needs to be staged. We need someone shorter than me, and less good looking, and then we need the light to be just right, and I need to know, that I know how to *do* something.

I am now, and you look at me. And you know, what I am going to say. And then Thomas Borgen became Thomas Borgen, he started to believe it himself. He got better and better at being Thomas Borgen.

We become what others see in us of potential, and if we recognize and realize the potential, then we become what we are.

*(Time – the journalist)*

*Gertrud*

Have you ever had your phone stolen?

It doesn't take more than that to demand harsher punishment. You stole my phone, I fucking want to kill you, and all other evil cell phone thieves as well. It is

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18) 'Borgen' means 'the castle' in Danish.

probably for the best that others are in charge of the punishment.

Think about that whole case about Britta, the social worker who stole 111 million from the poor. Her lawyer went on the news, saying that it was problematic that so many journalists covered the case, because it changes what happened. The stories change how people see the facts, that was what she said.

But that happens all the time, we have a shared stage and we send our different chess pieces onto that stage, to see what will happen. And of course, it changes the overarching narrative, but it is always in an attempt to find a place where the different narratives keep each other in check, so you get a balance. And then we can say, okay, if we can find that place where all the pieces are in play, and if nobody attacks anymore, now it is like this, and everybody has been heard and has nothing more to say. When they form a constellation.

Then that is the truth. They just stand there, having said what they had to say. Sometimes they collide again, and then you can ask, why do you do that? Is something wrong here or is somebody telling an untrue story? And I believe, that when they are all locked together – in this tension-filled constellation that is the opposite of a power vacuum, but rather a stage filled with meaningful statements – then, I think, we are as close to the truth as it is possible to be.

*(Relevance – the journalist)*

*Gertrud*

If we go back to Britta, the headline would probably be that she stole the 111 million kroner.

It creates an impact.

Then it would be that it was money stolen from The Social Services. It is important because it is our shared money. It becomes relevant for society as a whole. If the money had been stolen from Sanjay Shah, it would have been heroic. I almost wish she had [laughs]. And to continue that line of thought, how many people does this concern? What are the consequences? Was one person the victim of something, or did it happen to a lot of people? And it is important how long it lasted. If she had only done it for a month it is bad, but it is much worse, because nobody noticed for almost twenty years!

It is about scale, or impact, or reach.

No, it doesn't really matter that she coloured her hair, unless you use it as an image of how she has been doing the last couple of months.

We don't really care if an employee in the social services colours her hair.

They probably colour their hair all sorts of colours all the time.

*(Knowledge – the artist)*

*Ellen*

You can be presented with knowledge you are not ready to receive.

Take a theatre process, for instance. If someone says something too early, I'll not be able to understand what they say until I have passed through an entire process



of recognition. Only then I can say; shut up, you are completely right. Sometimes it takes days.

It needs to be recognized, and that is what the audience wants to see, the process of recognition: ‘ah, so that’s what it’s all about, there it is. I see’.

That is what *art* is, that which is being treated, the treated.

Nothing can be translated. And everything is a portrait, and a self-portrait. And what lawyers, and journalists, and artists explain are self-portraits. The fear of oneself. It all leads to the kaleidoscopic, the fragmented.

But in the end, it is all self-portraits. Fundamentally, we can only see ourselves, and through ourselves, using ourselves as filters.

...

They say many beautiful and insightful things. It isn’t possible to capture everything here. But I still want to share the most important things.

Perhaps you can imagine the stories that lie behind?

|           | Journalism / Gertrud     | Art / Ellen           | Law / Malene        |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Time      | Unfolding                | Now, always           | Past, future past   |
| Facts     | Weak, trustworthiness    | Weak, everything      | Strong, certain     |
| Relevance | Scale (position, volume) | Fleeting, contextual  | Hierarchical        |
| Truth     | Constellation            | Apperant, appears     | Decided by argument |
| Knowledge | Finding and telling      | Insight and oversight | Jus – fact          |

Each dialogue ends with three statements that we both believe to be true.

Not all of them are really statements:

*Power is not its own purpose*

*Art is not its own purpose*

***Knowledge is its own purpose***

*In the future, will we be able to agree on knowing anything?*

***Individualized knowledge is not knowledge***

*Truth is a good in its own right*

*Words become your own, when you shape them*

***Be critical, but also be critical of your own position***

*Aim to gain a sense of applicability*

## ARGUMENTATIO

### D3 Knowledge is True Belief with an Account (TJB) – Artistic Research (sometimes)

*An Artistic Researcher: Ralf Richardt Ströbech*

*A Dramatic Character: a different, less obnoxious and more supportive Socrates*

*Ralf*

Truth in artistic research is the end of research. 19

*Socrates*

Finally, you are talking the way I want you to. In clear, unambiguous sentences.

*Ralf*

Good thorough research produces good thorough truth; just as weak superficial research produces weak superficial truth. And truth is valuable, when it is somehow productive.

Speaking with the three women has made me even more aware of that.

*Socrates*

But they were all speaking about research *in practice*. That is, using research to gain insight in a concrete, well-defined situation. Much like when you want to make an omelet, or a banana cake, and you google a recipe. You might get new knowledge, but no one else does.

*Ralf*

Good point, and a very valid one. For it to be really *Artistic Research*, a true and valid complement to scientific research in the natural sciences, it would have to be not only true, it would also have to be somehow new, and shareable. Another recipe, perhaps, or insight into making the omelet or about omelet recipes in general. Or about the difference between the recipe and the finished omelet. Or

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19) This is, of course, also the point made by Dewey and the American pragmatists. Just because artistic research does not have an obvious errand in post positivist paradigms of knowledge, it does not mean that it does not have anything meaningful to say.

Besides, many aspects of life are not accessible to empiricist verification, a point that is already made in the first part of Theaetetus, ironically as part of a refutation of relativist positions. Plato makes the point that we as humans exist not only in a sensible world. We also inhabit an intelligible world that is not accessible to the senses. This world consists of concepts and abstractions, of mental constructs made of thoughts and language.

This, in turn, means that knowledge cannot *only* be perception because perception relies on senses, while concepts and abstractions are not accessible to the senses as more than sounds or other sensory input, meaningless without cognitive work. But it also implies that knowledge cannot only be based on empiricist evidence-based paradigms, since they require external sensory-based evidence and as such are not well-suited to serving as validation of abstractions.

Also, perhaps more importantly, artistic research has access to both the sensible and the intelligible, perhaps just in other ways. This is where the pragmatist position becomes really important: it is not really a question of whether artistic research produces knowledge *as such*, rather it is important if it produces knowledge that somehow gets us going. Knowledge that is useful in the situation.

what it means to make it. Or eat it.<sup>20</sup>

Not the one omelet itself, but in general, and not the nutritional point of view, or the insights into protein configuration during the heating process, but the experiential action in itself.

The point about *truth being the end of research* still holds, though, even when taken out of the concrete practice. You can never know everything about one thing anyway.<sup>21</sup>

*Socrates*

Ok, let us follow that thought then: what does it mean for knowledge obtained by artistic research to be productive?

*Ralf*

I guess it proposes a possibility that something contrary to our current thought might be the case. We tell children sometimes: “Well, now you are just imagining stuff”, in the sense of making things up. Or we lie on the beach on vacation and imagine a different life. This is the imagination as absence, non-productive imagination. It might provide pleasant escape from harsh reality, even suspension of disbelief, but it is not *productive* in itself, it doesn’t change anything, it represents an absence.<sup>22</sup> Unproductive imagination can also be just mindlessly making a copy

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- 20) Karen Blixen is supposed to have reflected on this, although the story is apocryphal. It was relayed to me in an email from Peter Johannes Erichsen on November 16, 2017: When Simon Spies financed the magazine *Savoy*, edited by Jurij Moskvitin, Moskvitin told Spies about his visits to Karen Blixen. Unlike Orson Welles, who never dared to take a cab to Rungstedlund when he stopped over in Kastруп, Jurij had no trouble freeloading, showing neither regret nor remorse. One day, the Baroness said: “Jurij, today you can ask me anything”, “Dear baroness” he replied, “what is the meaning of life?”. “Well, Jurij, what is the meaning of an omelette?” “To eat it, of course”, “Don’t be silly, Jurij, if that was the case, you might as well eat a couple of raw eggs, a small pile of flour and some butter! The Ingredients! The meaning is the path to the omelette, and so it is with life”.
- 21) Nabokov also makes this point in a radio interview on the BBC in 1962: “Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization. If we take a lily, for instance, or any other kind of natural object, a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. You can know more and more about one thing, but you can never know everything about one thing; it’s hopeless. So that we live surrounded by more or less ghostly objects— that machine, there, for instance. It’s a complete ghost to me— I don’t understand a thing about it and, well, it’s a mystery to me, as much of a mystery as it would be to Lord Byron.”
- 22) Paul Ricoeur talks about this in the unpublished “Lectures on Imagination” delivered at The University of Chicago in autumn 1975, and recounted in George H. Taylor, 2006. In these lectures, Ricoeur tries to outline a theory of imagination in four different domains: 1. The Social/Cultural, 2. The Epistemological, 3. The Poetic and 4. The Religious. As a starting of point, Ricoeur mentions the distinction between *Utopia* and *Ideology* as being one of productive vs. reproductive imagination in the social field, Utopia being a vehicle for change and productive in the sense of producing a new opening, a departure from the current paradigm of possibilities, whereas Ideology is reproductive imagination, aiming only at what is not currently the case if viewed from a specific ideological viewpoint, but that will come to be if divergent positions are purged out of existence. To Ricoeur, imagination in general is something that “permeates all thought and conceptualization”. Imagination, he says, in almost all western European thought with the exception of Aristotle and Kant, has been conceptualised as a substitute for something absent, substituting an *image* for *reality*, and derivative in nature.

of something or referring to something that doesn't exist or is actually something else, as we often see on social media.<sup>23</sup>

*Productive imagination*, on the other hand, produces something new. It proposes another platform from which to gain new insight, it shows new paths, or changes our habitual understanding of something that we knew through and through.

*Socrates*

But surely this is true of all good art, and all good research? It is not particular to artistic research.

*Ralf*

Yes, you are right, but if it was *only* art it could rely on metaphor and on implicitly hinting at the bigger truths that make reality comprehensible. And if it was *only* research then it could ideally skip aesthetics altogether, and just present the facts and how they fit together, the simplified version of the world that makes it graspable.

This is precisely the reason why artistic research has its own particular relevance.

It is and is not research.

It is and is not art.

It is at once art and research, and at the same time neither art nor research.

It produces knowledge that is a type of productive imagination, which has qualities of both *poetic imagination* and *epistemological imagination*.

It is at one and the same time a metaphor reapplied to reality, and a model reapplied to the world. Ideally, it produces knowledge that makes the world both comprehensible and graspable simultaneously, not one before the other, as would be the case if it was *only art* or *only research*. Artistic research is interpretation and reapplication through metaphor and model both, and imaginary in essence.

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Ideally, productive imagination does not originate from and is not determined by an original. Rather, it seeks to conceive of a new place "to expand our sense of reality and realities possibilities". Impressionism, he says, is such an example, it created "a new alphabet of colours capable of capturing the transient and fleeting with the magic of hidden correspondences. And once more reality was remade, with an emphasis on atmospheric values and light appearances".

Taylor quotes Ricoeur saying the following (paraphrased by me):

The "nowhere" not bound by an original can be found in fiction. The fiction in *epistemological imagination* is the theoretical model that is available in science. It provides a new description of reality, whereby it extends and changes the domain. In parallel, *poetic imagination*, by way of the metaphor, unfolds new dimensions of reality.

In both cases, reality is not only described, it is altered. And this is why they are *productive imaginations*.

23) This phenomenon is also mentioned in Theaetetus as *Allodoxia*, or the fallacy of *mistaking one thing for another*.

*Socrates*

I still don't see entirely how that is any different from any production of art. You say yourself in the footnotes that "the 'nowhere' not bound by an original can be found in fiction". If that fictitious 'nowhere' is the very definition of productive imagination, and if the knowledge produced in artistic research is productive imagination, why are the two not the same?

*Ralf*

It is precisely the rigor of the epistemological productive imagination that makes the difference. Consider the atomic model of Niels Bohr: it is manifestly wrong, but it does get a lot of things right. And more importantly, it focuses your view on a particular aspect of the atom in order to enhance comprehension of that one aspect. The aim is not to be exhaustive or to say all that is true of any particular thing. But it does highlight a particular aspect, and it does make other explanations possible. It doesn't mean everything, but it doesn't mean just one thing either, it is not an illustration.<sup>24</sup> And it institutes a *practice of interpretation*, a point of reference, that can be shared and elaborated on. Much the same happened with the double helix model of DNA.<sup>25</sup>

In art, we are so used to defining ourselves and the work that we do in terms of difference and departure and idiosyncratic uniqueness. In artistic research, we are forced to look for common ground, somehow, for how the work connects rather than how it distinguishes itself. In art, words can mean anything, they can be *polysemic*. And in science, ideally, they should mean only one thing, they should be *monosemic*.

In artistic research it must be in between, the words we use can't mean everything, but they can't mean just one thing either. The context will provide the meaning.

I believe artistic research to be such an extended discourse as well, one that is not only linguistically, but more broadly aesthetic. The prominent possibility, even requirement, of aestheticizing this thinking provides an alternative path to coherence. Artistic research can be *formal* in other, and more local, ways than conventional scientific research. But it still needs to be formal somehow.<sup>26</sup>

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24) Paul Ricoeur talks about extended discourse as being consistent *practices of interpretation*. Narrative discourse is one such extended discourse, as is religious discourse and political discourse.

25) This is of course something that greatly interests Bruno Latour, especially in *Science in Action*, 1987.

26) This is what I currently believe to be true, and I hope to have provided justification:

**The account**, which Plato makes a requirement for knowledge, can be provided by way of aesthetics, understood as internal consistency of constituting elements, arranged in a certain way so as to provide a *productive*, recognisable *Imagination* (not necessarily in the pictorial sense).

This justifies the belief and makes it true and promotes the belief to being actual knowledge, if well-made and thorough, of course, and sufficiently connected to reality.

Plato tries out three different theories of the account, and all three of them ultimately fail.

They are still the best we have got, though.

I will get back to the **first way** in a little while. That is the one we are looking for.

The **second way** of providing an account is by listing the elements that go into or constitute something. He calls it *enumeration of elements*. It often works well in the natural sciences.

The **third way** of making an account is by providing something that functions as a distinguishing feature. It is a well-known strategy in identity theory, for instance, and in morphology, both the verbal and the biological variety. Also, it is more generally a strategy of providing an account that is used extensively in the social sciences and the

## PEROTATIO

*Artistic research is and is not research, is and is not art.*

*It is productive imagination.*

*Somehow useful and somehow beautiful,*

*at once epistemic imagination and poetic imagination.*

*It institutes a different way to work with the knowledge, merging account and true belief.*

*It is a type of extended discourse, aesthetics provides cohesion, coherence and consistency.*

*Perhaps not always, but often.*

*And perhaps not in essence, but in practice.*

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humanities.

The **first way**, rejected in the dialogue but immensely useful to *artistic research*, is to give a speech, or make a statement. It is rejected as a general dismissal of sophism (which is always a valid reason for dismissal), but more generally it is dismissed on the grounds that just saying something you believe to be true is not an argument, as it collapses the distinction between knowledge and account, even if it is true. It is said to be neither knowledge nor account.

But if whitewashing and money laundering and talking and reflecting about whitewashing and money laundering tells us anything, it is precisely that knowledge and account are rarely, if ever, the same, and that there are many things that can be said which are true, without reducing knowledge to perception, and by implication, to relativism. It is just that knowledge, like reality, is infinite, not just in scope but in depth.

It seems to me, then, that *artistic research* – this position between epistemological and poetic imagination, between model and substance, between sensibility and intelligibility – promotes this *speech or statement* to something more. At its best, it oscillates between describing and producing, understanding and explaining.

Still very much connected to reality, and at the same time an abstraction, a *practice of interpretation* put into matter. Committed to merging knowledge and account without giving one prevalence over the other.

This, to me, constitutes knowledge *and* account in artistic research. Perhaps not always, and perhaps not in essence, but surely *in practice*.



## Theatetus

Introduction, Euclid and Terpsion

The Wise are wise *sophiai* (by/because of/as a result of wisdom)

To Learn is to become wiser about the topic you are learning about

Wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*episteme*) are the same thing

### D1 – “Knowledge is Perception”

The Intelligible world      The Sensible world

Digression

Refutation

### D2 – “Knowledge is True Judgement”

Five Puzzles

- 1 Misidentification
- 2 Believing what is not
- 3 Allodoxia (inadvertency)
- 4 The Wax Tablet
- 5 The Aviary

### D3 – “Knowledge is True Judgement With an Account”

The Dream of Socrates

|           |             |  |
|-----------|-------------|--|
| Complexes | analyzed to | Simples  |
| (Known)   | (Account)   | (Perceived)  |
|           | Logos (I)   | Speech/Statement                                     |
|           | Logos (II)  | Enumeration of the Elements of O                     |
|           | Logos (III) | Semeion/Diaphora // Diagnostic feature of difference |

Structure of the conversation following Theaetetus by Plato:

## **Knowledge in Art, Journalism and Law, but mostly Art**

*Introduction* (Malene, Gertrud or Ellen) and (Ralf)

Who are we, where are we, where do we come from, where are we going?

What do we think about education and practice, roles and people?

*Statement 1* What is knowledge in **Art** for you right now?

*Statement 2* What is knowledge in **Journalism** for you right now?

*Statement 3* What is knowledge in **Law** for you right now?

### **D1 – “Knowledge is Perception” – on the Texts**

*“On monsieurs departure”*    *“Følg pengene”*                      *“Hvidvaskloven”*

How do we perceive these texts, what do they make us think of, do they remind us of something?

*Digression,* in this section we can talk about whatever we want. Do we think about something else?

*Refutation,* what have we been talking about until now, when it comes to knowledge in Art, Journalism and Law?

Where is our knowledge in motion, are there patterns, what do we take for granted, what has been confirmed?

*Pause in the conversation*

### **D2 – “Knowledge is True Judgement” – Knowledge in disciplines**

*Five Puzzles*                      1 Conversation about a time we just knew we were right (in our discipline)?

2 Conversation about a time we were wrong (in our discipline)?

3 Conversation about a time we changed our opinion (in our discipline)?

*The Wax Tablet*                      4 What is most firmly nested in our disciplinary thinking

*The Aviary*                      5 What are our most elusive thoughts - true, fake, doubtful (in our discipline)?

*Pause in the conversation*

**D3 – “Knowledge is True Judgement with an Account” – Knowledge in general**

*The Dream of Socrates*      Why is knowledge important? Why does everybody disagree? What do we do about that?

*Complexes*    *analysed to*    *Simples*  
*(Known)*      *(Account)*      *(Perceived)*

Data, emotions, credibility, faith, superstition, persuasion, believes?

*Pause, preparation of statements*

*Logos (I)*      *Speech/Statement*

Three statements from each participant in the conversation

*Logos (II)*      *Enumeration of the Elements of O*

A list of important single key words

*Logos (III)*      *Semeion/Diaphora // Diagnostic feature of difference*

Recording of a reading of the poem

Theaetetus 2<sup>1</sup> – argument

- **Truth** in artistic research is the **end of research** (Dewey)

*Good thorough research produces good thorough truth; weak superficial research produces weak superficial truth*

- It takes the form of **Productive Imagination** (Ricoeur)

*As opposed to reproductive imagination; image as distance, copy or absence*

- It is a specific type of productive imagination, one that has **qualities of Both Epistemological Imagination and Poetic Imagination**

*Interpretation and reapplication through model and image both, and metaphorical in essence*

- It is a type of **Extended** (Aesthetic) **Discourse**

*Not entirely monosemic, and not entirely polysemic  
Aesthetics provide the discursive context*

- **Aesthetics make the** (explicit, but not necessarily verbal) **argument congruent, coherent, consistent** and provides **organizing hierarchy**

*Equivalent to the way the standard form of the academic paper provides congruency, coherency, consistency and organizing hierarchy*

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