“The oil adventure”

A timeline exhibition at the Norwegian Petroleum Museum

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Abstract: *“The oil adventure” has frequently been used to designate Norway’s oil history, and this gestures to the real world of industry and politics as well as to the magical world of folktales. This article explores resemblances between a timeline exhibition on oil history at the Norwegian Petroleum Museum and narrative elements from folktales. The analysis is based on the idea of petroleum as a relational museum object that gains cultural reality through curatorially established connections. This perspective is combined with insights from folktale and literature research, as well as from museum studies and energy humanities. Norwegian authorities show few signs of wanting to restructure the country’s economy away from its reliance on fossil fuel. This article argues that the exhibition supports the governmental position by favouring continued industrial growth.*

Keywords: “The Norwegian oil adventure”, oil history, timelines, climate change, folktales, parataxis.

At the Norwegian Petroleum museum in the country’s “oil capital”, Stavanger, the exhibition *Petrorama: Milestones in Norwegian Oil History* presents the country’s oil history in the form of a timeline. The exhibition was set up in 1999, and it has later been extended. It consists of posters describing the years between 1958 and 2018, hung on a circular wall.¹ A photo of an offshore drilling rig being towed out to sea covers the 1966 poster, and the accompanying text explains that the “first exploration well on the Norwegian continental shelf was spudded at 08.20 on 19 July 1966 by Esso from the Ocean Traveller drilling rig” some 160 kilometres off the coast of Stavanger. No petroleum was found in this first well, the text continues, but more

exploration would follow. The poster ends by stating that “the Norwegian oil adventure had started...”

Petroleum holds a central place in today’s discussions on climate change and is an important topic for museums. However, neither oil nor gas are particularly eye-pleasing substances, and petroleum in itself is rarely put on display. Instead, museums present practices and histories that incorporate the natural substance. Petroleum is contained in other entities, figuratively and literally, in exhibitions, and by relating oil and gas to ideas and beliefs, people, politics and technology, to economic prosperity and climate change, petroleum becomes part of history and culture.

The first major oil discovery on the Norwegian continental shelf was made in 1969, and the country's oil age has often been called “oljeeventyret”, translated to English as “the oil adventure” (Hansen & Brage 1982, Simonsen 2008).² Adventures imply dangerous, risky undertakings and exciting, exceptional incidents, and, as in English, the Norwegian term suggests this meaning. However, the term “eventyr” is also the Norwegian term for folktales, and the “oil adventure” refers to the universe of folktales as well. Norway's oil history could be described as an exceptional adventure, and the timeline gives many examples of clever politicians and civil servants, ambitious companies, bold engineers and risk-taking divers securing national ownership, defying harsh natural environments and providing the country with enormous wealth. The oil age has been adventurous and exceptional; it belongs

within the real worlds of industry, politics and welfare and it also relates to the magical, idealised universe of folktales.

The Petroleum Museum is assigned with the national responsibility of conveyance, research and the collection of knowledge related to the petroleum industry's development and its importance to Norwegian society.³ The museum opened in 1999 in a 5,000 square-metre building in the Stavanger harbour. It offers a variety of exhibitions, among them the timeline. Timelines always begin and end, and the chronologies in between are guided by some cultural rhythm. This article explores the *Petrorama* timeline, and the analysis is based on the idea of relational materiality (Mol 2002; Latour 2004a, 2005; Law 2008; Damsholt *et al.* 2009). The relational approach will be combined with research on folktales and literature (Morris 1901; Olrik 1908; Lüthi

Fig. 1. The Norwegian Petroleum Museum is located in Stavanger, the country's “oil capital”.
Photo: Erik Thorstensen.

1984, 1986; Propp 1990; Butler 2003; Pettitt 2013). In this paper, museum researchers Steven Lubar's and Andrea Witcomb's discussions on, respectively, timelines and use of juxtaposed elements (parataxis) in museum conveyance will also be drawn upon, and references to research on climate change exhibitions and energy humanities will be made (Lubar 2013; Cameron & Neilson 2015; Witcomb 2015; Newell, Robin & Wehner 2017; Szeman & Boyer 2017). The first section elaborates on a relational approach for studying petroleum within a display. Thereafter and through two sections, the episodic rhythm and forward-moving character of the timeline will be explored. The last two sections discuss the connections and disconnections between environmental concerns and industrial growth in *Petrorama*. While one specific exhibition is explored, the article has a broader scope and seeks to shed light on "the oil adventure" as a specific Norwegian way of integrating petroleum into broader cultural practices.

PETROLEUM AND RELATIONAL MUSEUM STORIES

According to energy humanities' scholars Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, fossil fuels "have been surprisingly hard to figure – narratively, visually, conceptually – as a central element of the modern" (2017:6). The idea of relational materiality is one way of conceptualising it, and this article builds on the idea that petroleum obtains cultural shape and content when it is related and connected to something else by curators. It is not gas or oil in themselves, as physical objects, that are of analytical interest. Rather, objects are believed to be generated through their relations to other actors and elements (Latour 2004:53ff, Law 2008:157ff, Damsholt *et al.* 2009:9ff). Oil and gas gain

historical and cultural reality in exhibitions when humans and petroleum, ideas and beliefs, nature and culture, as well as pasts, futures and flows of time, are connected by curators (Latour 2004a:53ff; Ruud 2019:149f). Museums are trusted producers of knowledge; they contribute to petroleum's reality when they define and display connections. They are also important places for environmental reflection.

While oil and gas, as natural substances, look quite similar around the world, their connections with people and culture take different shapes in different places. Museums may act as important resources and agents of change in climate change debates, and it is important to discuss how petroleum is incorporated into different cultural histories (Cameron & Neilson 2015, Newell *et al.* 2017). In the North Sea, the petroleum industry has existed for around sixty years, and museums in the surrounding countries collect and display oil and gas. Petroleum is a flexible museum object, and curators connect it to urgent issues. One example is the ongoing collection of petroleum-related objects at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh being understood to represent "the end of a technical endeavour" (Alberti *et al.* 2018:417). The broad decommissioning of offshore infrastructures motivates collecting, and the focus is on the decline of petroleum industry, the removal of platforms, and on the personal histories told by the people working offshore (Alberti *et al.* 2018:418, Cox 2017). Another example is seen with the exhibition "Energy from the Ocean – Danish Offshore in the North Sea," which opened in 2016 at the Fisheries and Maritime Museum in Esbjerg, Denmark.⁴ Entering the exhibition, visitors first encounter the petroleum industry, and as they move through the exhibit, oil and gas disappear while wind power continues, as

Fig. 2. The exhibition *Petrorama – milestones in Norwegian oil history* at the Petroleum Museum.
Photo: Camilla Ruud.

well as ends, with the history of energy. Esbjerg used to be the “oil capital” of Denmark but became the “windmill capital” as wind power gained a central position in the Danish energy industry.

Museums may exhibit histories leading towards the end of oil. In the case of Norway, petroleum represents a tremendous source of income, and the authorities show few signs of wanting to restructure the country’s economy away from fossil fuel reliance. The timeline at the Petroleum Museum, as the analysis will show, supports the industrial desires and political strategies as it favours continued industrial growth. Petroleum is a relational and political museum object, and when curators set up a timeline, they define starting and ending

points and structure and relate the events in between. Folktales are characterised by a predictable sequence of episodes. Narrative functions such as repetition, predictability, one-dimensionality, beauty and trickery will be used to shed light on how the beginning, the end and the rhythms of oil history are shaped (Olrik 1908; Lüthi 1984, 1986; Propp 1990). The section below explores the beginning of oil.

FOLKTALE RHYTHMS: TROUBLESOME BEGINNINGS AND FORESEEN SUCCESS

Folktales follow standardised, sequential plots. A detailed scheme on the episodic narrative structure of folktales was presented by folklorist Vladimir Propp in 1928. He sketched out 31

functions of the *dramatis personae* which “fit into one consecutive story” (Propp 1990:25). The functions form a predictable sequence of actions and events. A shortened version could look like this: at the outset, the hero is poor and considered insignificant. He leaves home and encounters challenges, both worldly and supernatural. He struggles and is threatened by enemies. He is rescued, given difficult tasks, achieves magical powers or is assisted by magical objects or beings. He arrives in another kingdom, where he, after having faced more challenges, enters a marvellous palace and wins the princess and the kingdom (1990:25–65). The episodic character provides a predictable rhythm: trouble will appear, again and again, but the story will always end with success.

Before oil was discovered, Norway was a poor country, much like the folktale hero. A folktale hero tends to be the youngest of three brothers, and for around half a millennium Norway was governed first from Denmark and then from Sweden, and was often referred to as the little brother of Scandinavia (Bergesen & Malnes 1984, Braunerhielm & Olsson 2016:271, Olstad 2018:130). The *Petrorama* timeline starts in 1958 with the question “No oil?” on a poster. The accompanying text explains that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, preparing for the UN conference on the law of the sea in Geneva in 1958, requested an assessment of the likelihood of finding valuable mineral materials on the continental shelf, from the Geological Survey of Norway. The reporting letter from the scientific institution to the Ministry is reproduced on the poster, and the highlighted conclusion is unambiguously negative: “The chances of finding coal, oil or sulphur on the continental shelf off the Norwegian coast can be discounted.” Among the initiating episodes of a folktale, as described

by Propp, is an interdiction to the hero, such as “don’t pick up the golden feather” or “don’t open the chest”. Interdictions may be presented as a bit of advice, such as when a mother urges her son not to go out, since “you’re still little” (Propp 1990:26). Similarly, the scientific report functions as a warning: do not try to find the black gold; there is nothing to be found!

Norway was little and poor, and the timeline presents more trouble. Axel Olrik, considered a founding father of European folklore studies, articulated a series of principles for understanding the form and structure of folktales in *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative* (1908). Among these are “the law of three” and “the law of repetition” in which “three persons, three things, three similar incidents” occur after one another (1908:81). Repetition represents a “main architectural principle” of folktales, and it is a common strategy for marking the overall importance of something. Three repetitions signify that something is hard to overcome or dangerous (1908:82). The absence of petroleum would indeed have been troublesome for an emerging oil nation, and the timeline records two further challenges before oil is finally discovered in 1969. In 1962, the oil company Phillips Petroleum approached Norwegian authorities requesting a sole licence to search for petroleum in the Norwegian part of the North Sea. The answering letters of rejection are reproduced on the poster, and at the time, as the timeline explains, the government had no knowledge about whether there would be oil on the shelf: “But the Norwegians had experience from foreigners seeking to exploit their natural resources, particularly hydropower. So, there was no question of the government handing the whole continental shelf over to a single company.”

Repetition, according to Olrik, is often used in folktales due to a lack of means to fully

provide detail on situations (1908:83). The timeline presents troubles and obstacles, but visitors are not offered much detail. In this case, the “experience” referred to is not explained, but the informed visitor knows that it concerns the passing of the early twentieth century concession laws. These laws ensured public ownership and prevented foreigners from buying Norway’s valuable natural resources by regulating the acquisition of waterfalls and the reversion of them to the State through escheat (Løding 2017). The concession laws are not mentioned on the poster, and instead the emphasis is put on the threat of theft, which is a narrative element resembling Propp’s function of trickery: “The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings” (Propp 1990:29). Foreign looting of Norwegian petroleum resources was avoided, and then a third challenge appears on the timeline.

The 1963 poster explains that Norwegian authorities declared sovereignty over the submarine mineral resources off the coast. The 1964 poster, in turn, makes this declaration seem bold. Under the headline “Deep trouble”, the importance of the Geneva convention is explained. The convention “specified that coastal states could exercise jurisdiction over continental shelf areas out to a water depth of 200 metres, or as far out as it was possible to exploit the mineral resources”. Located close to, and extending alongside the Norwegian coast, the Norwegian Trench, a deep submarine valley, descends from 250 to 700 metres. At the time, there was no technology that could be employed to cross the trench. In theory, this implied that sovereignty could not be declared outside the trench (where petroleum later would be found). Nevertheless, sovereignty was declared, and, fortunately, the UK “gave early support to the Norwegian view that this feature

had to be regarded as a chance depression in the seabed – almost an aberration”, and thus it did not affect the application of the median-line principle when North Sea jurisdiction divided between its surrounding countries (Ryggevik 2010). Deep trouble was avoided, by chance and luck, and “The Norwegians thereby acquired sovereignty over a sector of the North Sea which almost equalled the southern parts of Norway”.

Petrorama begins with threefold trouble, and it seems almost accidental that oil was discovered at all. Within the logic of folktales, however, trouble predicts success. Olrik coined the “law of epic unity” to describe how elements of folktales work together to promote a specific event; early obstacles and challenges make an audience foresee the upcoming event already from the beginning (1908:74). The hindrances presented on the timeline work in a similar way: the repetitions enable visitors to already know that challenges will be solved and that the story will end well.

Museum objects take shape and become real through curatorial practices that emphasise and establish connections, and petroleum may take different shapes depending on the relations established around it (Mol 2002:vii, 5; Latour 2004:53ff; Latour 2005:173ff). As mentioned earlier, 1966 is declared as a starting point of “the oil adventure”, but even the beginning is displayed three times. The beginning is repeated in 1967 with the heading “Hydrocarbon traces found.” Phillips Petroleum made a discovery in February of that year, but it turned out to be a petty one. Nevertheless “it held large influence on the companies’ continued commitment to the Norwegian shelf.” A photo of a smiling Minister of Industry, Sverre W. Rostoft, pours the first refined drops of Norwegian petrol into the tank of his car, illustrating the small discovery. Finally, as a third repetition, the true

beginning of the oil adventure is spelled out on the poster of 1969: "I think we have an oilfield here"! The poster is titled "The Christmas gift" and the giant Ekofisk discovery was reported to the ministry of industry by Ed Crump, head of Phillips in Norway on the day before Christmas that year. The legendary words made by drilling superintendent Ed Seabourne to Crump is quoted: "I can cover the North Sea from here to the North pole with oil".

Folktale scholar Max Lüthi explains how the mundane and the magical are in the same realm of experience in folktales, they are "one-dimensional": "the folktale lacks a sense of any gap separating the everyday world from the world of the supernatural" and the marvellous events "require no more explanation than do events of daily life" (1986:11, 8). A one-dimensional oil history is promoted with repetitions in the timeline. The fortunate discovery of oil, despite the scientific conclusion and the too-deep trench, the jurisdiction of the shelf and the enormous wealth resulting from the natural resource... the oil adventure is magically real!

To sum up: The designation, "oil adventure", was frequently used some decades ago, around the time when the exhibition was set up. Various oil historians have described the early years of Norwegian oil history as having an incidental character, a character that resonates culturally with the narrative rhythm of folktales.⁵ For a very long time, Norway was a small, poor country, and the designation points backwards to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' collecting of oral lore as important parts of political and scientific strategies to re-establish national culture after centuries of Danish and Swedish governance (Hodne 1998:40; Nerbøvik 1994:142). When oil and gas turn into museum objects and topics for display in the timeline, curatorial

work establishes connections with this national past. Also, the incidental character of early oil history resounds what Max Lüthi terms the "depthlessness" of folktale heroes; they tend to be simple figures with little inner depth. Folktale narrative drives forward by external impulses and events, and the hero's responsive actions are often guided and aided by chance, challenges, discoveries, gifts or miraculous aids (1986:15). Correspondingly, the timeline is characterised by events the Norwegians had little opportunity to control. The oil age achieves a familiar rhythm: the episodic sequence of challenges is culturally well-known, and it allows the spectator to foresee future success. The visitor is made to already know that all trouble will be solved, one way or another. Norway used to be the little brother of Scandinavia, but the young nation proved clever and was incredibly lucky, and oil enabled him to outsmart his elder brothers. Life is fair within folktales; the bad ones get punished and the good ones rewarded.

MOVING FORWARD: UNRELATED MILESTONES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Historian and museum researcher Steven Lubar argues that timelines are frequent in museums, and suggests that they appear as "a natural, intuitive way to present and understand the past" (2013:169). As visitors move through a timeline exhibition, they recreate historical time and such exhibitions carry with them "assumptions about the narrative structure of history, about the primacy of chronological understanding, and about progress" (Lubar 2013:169). Similarly, *Petrorama* draws on ideas of progress and development. After the troublesome start, the poster of 1971 marks the increased presence of political strategies. Under the heading "National oil policy", the

poster explains how the national parliament established a set of future-oriented political guidelines, or "the ten oil commandments". These were formulated as political principles for the management of petroleum resources based on the idea that "the new industry should benefit the whole country" and secure "national management and control of all activities on the Norwegian continental shelf". Timelines often build on ideas of causality and progress, and one recorded event leads with necessity to the next. With the guidelines, oil politicians set the conditions for sequential action that would ensure national control and future societal wealth.

Many posters record forward-oriented events, such as the elaboration of political strategies, development of advanced technology or economic profit. One example is the development of Condeep (concrete deepwater technology) during the 1970s. Another example is the signing of the energy agreement with European gas companies and the following development of highly advanced technology to put gas on stream from the gigantic Troll field, detailed on the posters of 1981, 1985, 1986 and 1996. Such events contribute to a forward-moving character, and they also contribute to the idea of an oil adventure structured according to a predictable and episodic folktale rhythm. The events of 1971 resemble one of Propp's functions, namely how "the initial misfortune or lack is liquidated", for instance when an "object of a search is seized by the use of force or cleverness" (1990:53). The poster repeats the threat represented by foreigners: "Leaving oil production to foreign companies was out of the question", and after the troublesome start, political heroes cleverly seized control.

Timelines are chronologically ordered. One year is followed by the next and there is only

room for one event at the time. Not all years are on display in the Petroleum Museum, and some years have more than one recorded event. If one tries to find causal connections between events recorded, however, confusion is likely to occur because the events often point in different directions. The year 1987 is illustrative: events are placed side by side, without being causally related. One poster concerns the economic scandal related to the modernisation of Statoil's refinery at Mongstad outside Bergen, with a total cost rising to three times the original estimate. Under the heading "Sustainable development", another poster describes the work of the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development, the "Brundtland commission" led by Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and its report *Our Common Future* published that year. The poster presents the term "sustainable development", which is introduced in the report and explains how carbon emissions from human activity result in global warming, and why reducing these emissions is important. Here, the visitor will also remember a leap forward in time, concerning 1987 and made on the poster of 1979, located a couple of metres to the left. Detailing on the gigantic Statfjord field, it is highlighted how "an incredible record" was set "on 16 January 1987, when its three platforms produced no less than 850 204 barrels of oil in a single day" and "almost as much oil as the whole Gulf of Mexico" would produce during a day.

Oil history is complex, and the exhibition includes a variety of events and actors; some contribute to industrial progress and economic growth or scandal, others manifest in environmental concerns. Interestingly, no connections are explicitly made between the three incidents chosen to represent 1987. The

all-time high record of oil extraction happened the same year as the Brundtland commission coined the term “sustainable development”, and many visitors will probably see the first as a cause and the second as consequence. Within the folktale narrative, however, the absence of explicitly determined causal connections is not at all a problem. The folktale, according to Lüthi, “presents only pure action”. No amplifying descriptions are made, since folktales provide “a story line but does not let us experience its setting”, and the meagre storyline “is divided into separate segments that are sharply divided from one another” (1986:38). If one sees the timeline as governed by a folktale rhythm, then a lack of causality is quite logical as the episodes are supposed to stand alone. Different actions and events merely occur, in chronological order, and they seem unrelated.

The idea of relational petroleum implies an analytical search for connections between events, actors and elements (Mol 2002:5ff; Latour 2005:173ff; Law 2008:157ff). Combined with insights from folktale analysis, however, the absence of connections becomes just as relevant. A lack of relations results from isolation, and folktale figures tend to be simpletons: “The characters of the folktale do not learn anything, nor do they gain any experience. Heedless of the similarity of the situations in which they find themselves, they act again and again from their state of isolation” (Lüthi 1986:38). Folktale heroes head from one situation to the next, unable to control their surroundings, and they do not take any lessons from experience. Within the oil adventure and according to folktale rhythms, then, “incredible records” and “sustainable development” may co-exist very well and without controversy since one cannot expect the hero to be capable of dealing with such causal complexities.

“Timelines seem natural”, and they are powerful frameworks for understanding history, as chronologically ordered pasts coercively show things “as they really were” (Lubar 2013:169–170). In the case of the oil adventure, disconnectedness and contradictions do not result in narrative disintegration, since this adventure “really was” characterised by both unforeseen events and well-planned strategies, by luck, chance, destruction, growth, creativity and cleverness.

Although the recorded events lack curatorially commented connections, they do relate in formalistic ways. In a discussion on the juxtaposition of events in folktales, the scholar of culture and literature Thomas Pettitt argues that episodic narratives may pose a structural challenge and signify a need to avoid disintegration. In order to ensure an integrated narrative, one strategy may be to use verbal repetition in order to establish narrative parallels, such as when the same words are used to introduce seemingly detached episodes (Pettitt 2013:376–381). Correspondingly, the subtitle of the timeline exhibition is “Milestones in Norwegian oil history”, and despite the huge variety, the recorded events connect due to their shared status as significant landmarks. Further, the exhibition design promotes narrative integration through formalistic unity: highlighted on a petroleum-black background, the yellow timeline stretches from beginning to end. The design emphasises chronology and visually unifies all events recorded.

A paradox of oil history, according to energy historians Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, is the way in which “a natural material understood from its beginnings to be non-renewable and disastrously destructive came to be embraced [...] as an unassailable ‘fact’ of everyday [...] experience” (Barrett & Worden 2012:269). *Petrorama* was set up in 1999 and has been

continuously updated. During the same period, the association between petroleum combustion and climate change have emerged as acute global and societal challenges. Throughout the timeline, environmental concerns and industrial achievements are juxtaposed, and the following section explores their co-presence with the concept of parataxis.

A PARATACTICAL RELATION: ENVIRONMENT AND INDUSTRY

To approach petroleum as a relational museum object entails following it into curatorial practices and assessing how “*many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence” (Latour 2004b:246). Museum objects are such material gatherings, and they come into being when actors, objects, ideas and events are related and connected (Latour 2004b, Damsholt et al. 2009:26, Ruud 2013). Combining this insight with the logic of folktales, museum objects may even appear where no relations are being explicitly made and as a result of juxtaposition.

The concept of parataxis originates from literary studies, and it designates the juxtaposition of dissimilar elements without clear connections in speaking or writing. It can shed light on connections and disconnections in *Petrorama*. While parataxis’ opposite, hypotaxis, designates causality and the narrative placing of dominant and dependent elements, paratactical elements are of equal status. They follow each other, but they do not depend upon one another (Morris 1901:113ff; Butler 2003:260ff). Folklore scholars have shown how the episodic ordering of folktales can be paratactical (Rabkin 1977; Lüthi 1984:111; Kim 2013:310; Pettitt 2013). Museum scholar Andrea Witcomb uses parataxis in a discussion of new forms of exhibition practices and a new

“pedagogy of feeling” (Witcomb 2015; see also Tzortzi & Hillier 2016). In her analysis, the concept functions as a method for staging affective encounters between viewer and the viewed. Parataxis, “when applied to exhibitions [...] refers to the power of juxtaposition to create meaning in the gaps between things, and particularly to the idea that these gaps work through poetic or affective realms rather than explicit rational forms of knowledge production” (Witcomb 2015:323). The placing of objects, images and texts side by side without indicating connections between them leads visitors to create “meaning by working the spaces between the juxtapositions” (2015:232).

Gaps appear between different events on the timeline, which was seen in 1987 with events concerning sustainability, record-high extraction and economic scandal. Another example is seen between 1973 and 1974. “Into the Concrete Age” and “Skyscrapers of the Sea” are the titles on two posters representing 1973, both elaborating on Condeep technology. The first Condeep project was the Ekofisk tank with an external wall functioning as a breakwater, and “intended to store oil in order to ensure continuous production from the field, even if bad weather prevented this output being loaded into tankers.” The tank was installed in the North Sea in 1973, and the same year, the oil company Mobil placed an order on a Condeep platform: “The first of these giants were almost 150 metres tall and incorporated some 60,000 cubic metres of concrete”.

In contrast, a 1974 poster is headed “Oil’s yoke” and describes an “alternative oil debate” arranged by the regional Nature Conservancy Association. Should “oil revenues alleviate world poverty or reinforce the problems of our own affluence?” was among the questions discussed in the debate. The accompanying image presents two men, one of them a

- 34 fishmonger, holding a placard titled “Oil or fish?” that depicts a white fish-skeleton in a black ocean. Another reproduced image visualises a giant black spider coming in from the sea, stretching its long legs across the entire city of Stavanger. Underneath the image, the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*’s alarming vision of Stavanger’s future is quoted: “A city which will die under oil’s yoke.”

The gap between technological advancements and environmental issues is not commented upon; they are paratactically arranged. Petrorama presents forward-oriented events in the form of political strategy, technological mastering and economic profit. Running parallel are stories about environmental concerns. It is as if the timeline tells us: here you see one side of the story and here you see another side, and they are simply very different. An environmentalist version of oil history would explain Condeep technology as a gigantic cause for environmental concern. Parataxis, however, does not refer to causality; on the contrary, paratactical arrangement may inhibit reflections on causal connections.

The timeline seeks to present historical events chronologically and “as they really were” and it is up to the audience to work the spaces between the events (Lubar 2013:170, Witcomb 2015:323). The timeline stages affective encounters through parataxis, and it offers visitors help to work out meaning between events. Stark contrasts and disconnectedness contribute to create an oil history marked by a familiar and culturally agreeable episodic rhythm. In the real world, however, the incompatibilities between environmental crisis and continued petroleum extraction are very difficult or impossible to overcome. In the real world it is not a paratactical but a strong causal connection between the two: environmental damage results from increased combustion of

fossil energy enabled by technology such as Condeep.

In a pioneering work on parataxis, Edward P. Morris argued that “in connected discourse there is no such thing as complete independence of thought between two contiguous sentences” and “when one concept-group immediately follows the other, a relation always exists between them and it is always strong enough to be felt, though it may not be defined” (Morris 1901:115f). Correspondingly, the paratactical arrangement of *Petrorama* induces a devious association which hides away causality, and the visitor is not aided in seeing how events on the timeline relate in their displayed disconnectedness. The folktale rhythm leads forward in time, and the last section examines the timeline’s finale.

THE END: BRIDGED GAPS, ENTWINED CONTINUANCE AND BLACK GOLD

Under the title “Binding Paris Agreement” the 2016 poster asserts the aim “to ensure that the world’s temperature rises no more than 2°C above the pre-industrial level – and preferably goes up by only 1.5°C”. It further explains how “each signatory to the agreement undertakes to implement their national goal for reducing greenhouse gas emissions” and that Norway’s target is “a 40 per cent cut by 2030 compared with the 1990 level.” The text ends with a statement: “The whole Norwegian oil and gas industry supports the goal adopted in the Paris Agreement”. On the same poster, another topic is presented: “A northern giant”. Production in the Barents Sea is controversial, and the text details on the “world’s northernmost offshore oil field”. Cost overruns and issues of safety triggered debate, the poster explains, but most of the description is dedicated to the connections between environment and

Fig. 3. Unrelated events on the timeline: sustainable development, an incredible record and economic scandal. Photo: Camilla Ruud.

industry. Reference is made to two opposites: “On the one hand, the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate has estimated that large quantities of oil and gas exist there. A number of companies are exploring and have made commercial discoveries”. And, continuing: “On the other hand, environmentalists maintain that Barents Sea reserves must remain untouched to avoid the risk of polluting vulnerable Arctic nature

and to help reduce fossil fuel consumption so that climate goals can be reached.” A photo of Greenpeace activists lying in the sea near a platform, holding banners with the slogans “No to new arctic oil” and “One scandal-rig in the Arctic is enough”, illustrates the point.

The phrasing “on the one hand” and “on the other” manifest a gap between environmental issues and continued extraction, and visitors

will try to figure out the meaning (Witcomb 2015:323). The previous highlighting of the oil industry's support of the Paris Agreement functions as an aid for bridging the gap. If the entire industry agrees upon the need to reduce emissions and achieve goals, then consequential action is likely to follow. The photo of the activists likewise functions to reduce the contrast by highlighting the importance of environmental concerns. Nevertheless, the bridge between the two opposites, rather than enabling two-way journeys, points in one direction. Continued growth is singled out to conclude the poster: "Johan Castberg is the next Barents Sea field in line for development" with a scheduled start in 2022. It appears possible to combine industrial growth with reduced emissions and environmental concerns.

The last year recorded is 2018, and it is introduced with a toponymic change: "Statoil becomes Equinor". The Norwegian state owns around 70% of the company, and the change of name "created a considerable stir and much discussion". While the poster does not elaborate on the content of these discussions, it concludes them by referring to Eldar Sætre, CEO of the national petroleum company, who "made it clear that the renaming was both right and necessary". Sætre's main argument for the new name is as follows: "We're moving from being a pure oil and gas enterprise to becoming a broad-based energy company involved with oil, gas, wind and solar." The company's website explains the reasons for the choice in name: "The name Equinor is formed by combining "equi", the starting point for words like equal, equality and equilibrium, and "nor", signalling a company proud of its Norwegian origin, and who wants to use this actively in its positioning."⁶ Claimed energy equilibrium aids visitors to bridge the gap and foresee a

sustainable future in which environmental concerns and industrial growth co-exist harmoniously. Their relation is not one of incompatible opposition, instead environment and industry appear as consonant.

The same poster, with the last entry on the timeline, explains the reduced presence of major international oil companies on the Norwegian continental shelf. Smaller firms have taken over, while multinational "big players" sold out, reduced or merged. A couple of reasons are suggested, one being the aftereffects of the oil price slump in 2014, another the lack of large new discoveries and that the most accessible parts of the shelf are believed to have been emptied out. The Norwegian shelf seems to have lost economic attraction. Oil is sometimes referred to as black gold, and in folktales, gold relates to beauty, and beauty "takes on the shimmer of the perfect, the indestructible, the timeless, the absolute" (Lüthi 1984:12). Beauty is radiant, enchanting and its intensity is often shown by its effects (Lüthi 1984:3ff). Adapting the point to the timeline, such an effect is seen by the magical transformation of nature's resources into golden money and the Norwegian oil fund. The fund was established in order to safeguard the future national economy, and despite the reduced presence of "big players" and variations in petroleum prices, the fund has risen steadily and by October 2019 it is around NOK 10 000 000 000 000.⁷ The size of the fund is overwhelming, and it stretches into the future, promising continued societal well-being.

Norway has become very rich, and the concluding words of the timeline do not envision an end but rather a continuance: "the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate estimates that roughly half the oil and gas present has yet to be produced." Statoil turned into a company

Fig. 4. Various Norwegian petroleum fields are named after folktale figures, such as the gigantic Troll field in the northern part of the North Sea. Photo: Øyvind Hagen, Equinor.

of energy equilibrium, the entire industry supports the goals of the Paris Agreement, and there are still a lot of oil and gas to extract from the continental shelf. The timeline offers visitors much help in working out the gaps, and it seems as if Norway can continue to produce just as much petroleum as it has done hitherto. Gold is the ultimate and enchanting goal in folktales. Only half the kingdom has been won, while half of the petroleum is yet to be extracted (Lüthi 1984:15).⁸

CONCLUSION

The exhibition was first set up in 1999, during a period when the designation “oil adventure”

was oft heard within oil industry and politics as well as in media and in a broader cultural context. In recent years, probably due to increased attention towards climate change, it is not so often heard. The authors of a popular science book on Norwegian oil history noted a decade ago how “the oil adventure was fun for a while, but now the fun is probably over, everything must come to an end, and now the challenge is to provide this history with a decent ending” (Skjeldal & Berge 2009:39). *Petrorama* does not envision any end to the oil industry.

Norwegian museums are generously funded by the oil-rich state, and governmental guidelines emphasise the independent and

critical role of cultural institutions: museums are both encouraged and expected to criticise governmental apparatuses and political practices.⁹ Museums are privileged places for public debate and critical reflection, and museum researchers and curators argue that museums should become agents of change: “climate change demands urgent transformations in the way we think about ourselves and our world” and “museums are effective places for supporting conversations about and action on this issue” (Newell *et al.* 2017:1). Exhibitions, according to Newell *et al.* “are the most distinctive way museums can engage with climate change. They bring together people and objects in ways that collapse past and present, near and far, eliding the linear chronologies of modernist progress” (2017:5).

Petrorama connects oil history with the idealised past of folktales, and it brings the distant offshore industry culturally closer. Progress is anchored in a culturally specific narrative on progress; chance and luck, magic and reality. Success and destruction run in parallel, structured as a familiar and pleasant rhythm. Scholar of environmental and energy humanities Stephanie LeMenager has asked why “oil remains so beloved” and why, in petroleum-modern societies, there is such a “strong resistance to the imagination of alternatives, even as we recognise its unsustainability” (LeMenager 2012:61). Emphasising the need for people to be emotionally and sensually moved in order to create an alternative, post-oil world, she argues that cultural expressions and narratives will be key actors “in establishing the ecological resilience of the human species” (2012:60). Indian historian Dipresh Chakrabarty makes the same point, as the development of responses to the climate crisis “will depend on the degree to which we can tell stories that

we can all agree on” (Chakrabarty 2015:xiv). Museums are privileged places for creating and conveying stories that we can be moved by and agree on, and the investigation of past or current histories represents a step on the way towards new histories needed for responding to the climate crisis. Oil has been “beloved” in Norway for a long time, and stories about the oil adventure have moved many, but the idea of an oil adventure makes oil history one-dimensional, and it functions as a hindrance to reducing or stopping the extraction of petroleum. The folktale universe is agreeable and treats its heroes fairly, and despite repeated trouble, it always ends with success. This is not at all the case with petroleum. While shimmering gold and a happily-ever-after is the foreseen ending point of the folktale, black gold bears the promise of catastrophe.

NOTER

1. See also: <https://www.norskolje.museum.no/forside/kunnskap/read> 18.10.2019.
2. See also <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/energi/olje-og-gass/norsk-oljehistorie-pa-5-minutter/id440538/read> 15.10.2019.
3. See <https://www.norskolje.museum.no/om-museet/organisasjon-og-medarbeidere/vedtekter-for-norsk-oljemuseum/> read 18.10.2019.
4. On the exhibition in Esbjerg, see: <https://fimus.dk/oplevelser/offshore/> read 18.10.2019.
5. See Hanisch & Nerheim 1992; Kindingstad & Hagemann 2002; Skjeldal & Berge 2009; Ryggvik 2015; Sandberg & Gjerde 2017; Sæther 2017.
6. See Equinor’s press release <https://www.equinor.com/en/news/15mar2018-statoil.html> read 09.10.2019.
7. See Lie 2018 for a historical analysis of the petroleum fund. For a real-time oversight, see <https://www.nbim.no/en/> read 18.10.2019.
8. See white paper *An industry for the future* –

Norway's petroleum activities. Meld.St.28 (2010-2011).

9. See white paper *Framtidas museum* <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/623a144b4e9a4efc8aefe1d73a406771/no/pdfs/stm200820090049000dddpdfs.pdf>.

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