

WELCOME TO *THE WORLDLINESS OF OIL*, THE SECOND DOUBLE ISSUE OF 2021.

With the notorious oil company Royal Dutch Shell, there is no denying that the Netherlands is a petrostate. Yet, the significance of this goes beyond anything tangible, as it seeps into our life experiences and memories. My, Joyce's, granddad worked at Shell and therefore he and his family could use the private outdoor swimming pool built for Shell employees. During the Summer holidays, my mum, my sister, and I would drive there in our bathing suits; no queues, no noisy families. I now realize retrace what lies behind these seemingly innocent memories; that the pool is more than an exciting place to go to. It represents the privilege that oil-money provided for.

In Denmark, an urban petro legend has caused amusement and embarrassment; story goes that in 1963 the Danish foreign minister, Per Hækkerup, had a little too much whisky at a meeting in Oslo and more or less gave away the North-sea to the Norwegians, an area which contained oil worth billions. While this myth has been debunked, it is retold again and again; the Scandinavian stereotype of greedy Norwegians and drunken Danes are perpetuated. Such stories, be they national or personal introduce the idea that Northern states should be considered petro-states and theorised as such. This issue does not take this for granted, and asks how the experiences and trajectories that oil has influenced might parallel and differ in relation to the inhabitants of states which has long been perceived as petro-states.

We would first and foremost like to thank Anne Szefer Karlsen and Helga Nyman, our amazing guest editors. The collaboration with you became possible in the way it did because we were working remotely anyway – the distance between Norway and the Netherlands seemed non-existent. Covid-19 opened up the possibility to connect internationally in a much easier and natural way than previously would have been possible and we treasure that it brought this possibility. We speak for the entire editorial team when we say that we enjoyed working with you tremendously. Thank you for your commitment, seemingly endless energy, and the jokes.

We would like to extend our thanks to the contributors and the artists for their words, works, and time. We also want to thank Framer Framed for hosting our hybrid (!) launch, taking place in the digital *and* physical realm. With this issue of *Kunstlicht*, we have said goodbye to Jasmijn Mol, who has been with us for the previous four years. We wish you the best, Jasmijn!

Warm regards,
Joyce + Anna

THE WORLDLINESS OF OIL: RECOGNITION AND RELATIONS

Anne Szefer Karlsen and Helga Nyman

The extraction and use of crude oil and natural gas has fundamentally transformed societies and lifestyles over the past 150 years. As a both visible and invisible agent, oil continues to shape individual experiences and national identities, propelling conflict and creating disparate economic opportunities.

Although cultural expressions dealing with the extraction economy and its effects are frequent, it is those concerning ecological perspectives that have gained the most traction in academia and mainstream media. The field of environmental humanities, and specifically “petrocultures,” has directed cross-disciplinary academic research into the implications of oil on individuals and societies.

Founded in art, art histories, curatorial practices and visual cultures, *The Worldliness of Oil: Recognition and Relations* investigates the experiences of those that have lived through – even shaped – the present, traced through personal histories, archival analyses, and artistic work.

Throughout the twentieth century, the intensified extraction of oil and later gas, led certain nation states to rely heavily on the income generated through their petro-economy, either directly or through heavy taxation. The spaces of extraction vary from deep ocean beds to deserts, from densely populated urban sites to sparsely inhabited but intimately managed Indigenous territories, like those where hydraulic fracturing of geological formations are located. Overall, the moment of discovery and extraction is tethered to technological development, energy depletion and consumption. Perhaps more importantly, those historical discoveries of oil are catalysts that translate into politics, such as fights for independence, or a tighter grip of colonisation.

In this double issue of *Kunstlicht*, the reader is invited to investigate the (parallel or displaced in time) relations between, and experiences of, oil nations, or petrostates, if you will. These are countries that are marinating in resources, but also deeply entrenched and engaged in resource conflicts and wars. Those who live on and support themselves off the lands and oceans are directly impacted by this industry, and consequently its economy and politics.

When setting out to edit this edition of *Kunstlicht*, we were looking for socio-spatial interconnectedness, where experiences of narratives, architecture, visual art, literature, social expressions, bodily and other archives,

economy and ecology are translated and interpreted to investigate heroism, infrastructures, practices, responses, and traumas related to extraction, politics of experiences, the effects of colonisation, neo-colonisation, and settler colonisation.

The Worldliness of Oil: the contributions

We invite you to investigate comparative or displaced relations and experiences of oil nations through cultural expressions of personal and national landscapes, forged by oil. The contributors to this issue delve into these complex cultural fields from a wide range of perspectives relating to the past, present and future.

In her paper, Natasha Marie Llorens, turns our gaze to the socio-political imaginary of Algeria. Through an analysis of the Algerian filmmaker Bencheikh El Fegoun's documentary video, *Fragments de rêves* (Dream Fragments), she challenges the official narratives of Algeria and its monopoly on the representation of "the people," particularly the perception that oil made the country free. Ashley Maum analyses the ethical potential in an interactive art installation by Radha D'Souza and Jonas Staal, which invites the public to take part in staged court tribunals on behalf of humans and non-humans in the past, present and future. They aim to "demonstrate that [scientific and bureaucratic trajectories created to document and assess the extinction of species] can be effectively rewritten, offering a site in which to revise our understanding of climate crimes." In her photo essay, artist Sanaz Sohrabi, traces oil narratives through philatelic archive material. In the archive of stamps she acquired and assembled over time, she discusses their individual "political significance for resource nationalism and decolonial politics."

Turning our attention to the sensory aspects of oil, Murtaza Vali advocates for an aesthetic and material analysis of oil's effects. Taking the works of artist Raja'a Khalid as his case study, he argues that contemporary artists in the UAE engage with the everyday to uncover a specific petroculture related to commodity culture and consumptive behavior. Oil Fiction is a literary genre that has grown out of different contexts in regions that are deeply entrenched in oil extraction. In her essay, Niloufar Nematollahi argues that the overlooked workers' perspectives in the official oil narratives of Iran is being articulated in the "Southern School" of Iranian literature. Recognising that workers, protests and strikes have had a major impact on the political and historical landscape of Iran, she analyses the counter-narratives produced in a short story by Ahmad Mahmoud. The artist Tove Kommedal's drawing entitled *Vene* (Vein) from a 2011 newspaper spread is an intervention into the often conflicting narratives of oil, though rarely appearing in such close proximity to one another. Her contribution is accompanied by a contextualising essay by Marie Skretting, interpreting the work in light of its specific Norwegian context and her own personal history.

Focussing on the contemporary political context of Greenland and the Indigenous resistance to the extraction of natural resources, Anna Sejbæk Torp-Pedersen interviews artists Jessie Kleemann and Inuuteq Storch to investigate how the history of Greenland informs their work and which petro-futures they imagine. In her photo-essay, artist Roshini Kempadoo invites the reader into her latest project *Like Gold Dust* (2019). In the extraction and exploitation of the recent findings of oil and gas in the historical disputed waters of Guyana's coastline, Kempadoo sees a continuation of colonial structures. By highlighting stories about women, she challenges and reconfigures the normalised, patriarchal structures at play. Susanne Kriemann and Ruby de Vos trace the path of plastic in Kriemann's ongoing project, *Mngrv*, linking their bodies and conversations to distant geographies through everyday objects.

The invisibility of the material infrastructure of oil is discussed by María Matilde Morales. In her article, she argues that conceptual artist Andrei Molodkin and documentarist Vitaly Mansky reverse this invisibility in their work. By rendering pipelines visible, they counter official narratives about the prosperity and geopolitical strength brought on by oil in post-Soviet Union Russia. Agnieszka Wodzińska analyses art works by Agnieszka Brzeżańska and Rumiko Hagiwara, arguing that their engagement with water acts as a healing force to the damages of petro-capitalism. The post-industrial landscape of the North Sea is the subject of Dutch artist Tanja Engelberts' work. In a conversation with the art historian Anna-Rosja Haveman, they discuss Engelberts' work on decommissioned platforms, and the ephemeral residues she found in the form of anecdotes and reflections on the passing of time.

Artist Clementine Edwards' contribution is the cover of this issue of *Kunstlicht*. Folding out the cover, which depicts an installation view of *Spiral Jetty at KFC* (2014), you can read the brief poetic text 'Squeeze the Lemon.' It reflects on how extraction is a cultural and social symptom of (settler-) colonial landscapes as much as it is financial, and that proximities matter. The poem is about Clementine's visit to rural Bavaria over summer 2021, and being struck by how everything appeared to be working, how distinct that is from what she knows of denuded and land-grabbed so-called Australia.

Recognition and Relations: the pandemic postscript

The conversation between editors Anne Szefer Karlsen and Helga Nyman, and the editorial board of *Kunstlicht* was brought about by the conference "Experiences of Oil" that the undersigned editors organized online in November 2020. The conference was hosted by Stavanger Art Museum, located in Norway's "oil capital" on the west coast where editor Helga Nyman works as a curator. Building on curator Anne Szefer Karlsen's long-standing investigations in the intersection of art and oil, the conference was devised by both editors as a transparent and inclusive research phase

leading up to the exhibition carrying the same title as the conference, opening at the museum in November 2021 and a forthcoming reader.

We as guest editors want to pause and share some notes with the reader on the process leading up to this moment. The conference open call was published during the first phase of the Covid-19-pandemic, in late March 2020. One challenge we quickly faced was how to connect to a wide field of professionals that were interested to discuss issues of cultural expressions dealing with the extraction economy and its effects during a pandemic that had severely limited our physical interfaces. The situation was unusual and called for new ways of connecting. Reaching out to editorial platforms was one of the ways we hoped to broaden the scope and reception of the conference. Little did we know that would be the start point of a wonderfully productive collaboration with Kunstlicht and its editorial board and team, who invited us to edit this double issue of the journal entitled *The Worldliness of Oil: Recognition and Relations*.

At the end of this process, we find ourselves still operating remotely. Not only did the planning and execution of the conference occur during a pandemic, but all the curatorial and editorial work preceding the exhibition, this issue of Kunstlicht and the forthcoming reader continue to be marked by this global event.

The generosity, openness, and competence that we have been met with by the editorial board and team of Kunstlicht through our many digital meetings has been remarkable, and for this we wish to wholeheartedly thank you!

Thank you also to all the contributors, many of whom were also contributors to the conference, who have been adjusting to the many restrictions imposed on their research and working conditions throughout this time. Your commitment has impressed us all!

With lasting gratitude,
Anne Szefer Karlsen and Helga Nyman

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THE DREAMS OF THE PEOPLE: BAHIA BENCHEIKH EL FEGOUN'S “DREAM FRAGMENTS”

Natasha Marie Llorens

Tahar Belabès is sitting on the ground. It is after dark and the night beyond the camera's frame is thick black, like most nights are in the Algerian desert. Belabès wears a bright blue cotton hoodie, his legs crossed easily beneath him on a plastic woven mat that has been laid out to separate his body from the ground. In a pool of light, he speaks calmly about a sense of political frustration that is also deeply personal, that touches the very core of his social identity. His tone is thoughtful and unguarded as he admits to the interviewer, “I am unable to have a dignified life. How could I even consider starting a family?”

The scene takes place near the end of Algerian filmmaker Bahia Bencheikh El Fegoun's documentary film *Fragments de rêves* (Dream Fragments). The film is composed of discussions between the filmmaker and Algerian activists and intellectuals, footage shot by medical professionals on strike, union meetings for the unemployed in the southern Algerian city of Ourgala, and long panning shots taken from a moving car on the highway leading to the oil fields in the south of the country.

The way Bencheikh El Fegoun dwells on details such as lighting that emphasizes the soft, clean material of Belabès's hoodie or the centrality of his hands in the shot as he explains the circumstances that led him to become an activist renders a political portrait on the scale of the individual. More than a documentary about Algeria, *Dream Fragments* revolves around the individual people that motivate and sustain activism in Algeria. The fact that Bencheikh El Fegoun proposes subjective fragments as a political image is a strong counter-proposal in a country with a long visual history of glorifying its War of Liberation from French colonialism (1954–62) and of touting its government as the standard bearer of that now historical collective social movement.¹

The specific fragments Bencheikh El Fegoun chooses to draw together are also significant, like the documentary images of protests organized by medical professionals in several Algerian cities in 2011 related to their labor conditions and wage stagnation. The protests were part of a wave of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, now largely related to as the Arab Spring. This footage is significant because it shows protestors challenging one cornerstone of the

¹ Algeria was first claimed by the French as a colony in 1830, although armed struggle for liberation continued after this date and large sections of the Algerian territory were not occupied until much later. For an authoritative account of the War of Liberation, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006). For an overview of the state's production of films glorifying the war, see Guy Austin, *Algerian National Cinema* (Manchester University Press, 2019). For a contemporary Algerian reading of artistic production as resistance to the heroic state narrative, see Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche, “Resistance, appropriation et réappropriation dans l'art algérien,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 19, no. 2 (May 2011): 179–193.