

**WHO HOLDS THE KEY TO HEAVEN'S DOORS?  
An Analysis of Symbolism in Images of Norwegian Oil Top Managers**



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In memoriam

Alexander Trukhachev, PhD (1953 – 2012)

You were right: trouserism is a religion.

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Avignon, France  
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## Abstract

This thesis investigates symbolic aspects of gendered power relations in images produced by the Norwegian petroleum giant Statoil ASA (henceforth “Statoil”). Large organizations such as Statoil are amongst the significant power structures that generate images. These images construct gendered power relations in society. Analysis of the images that are produced by such organizations can provide significant insights into the workings of gendered power relations.

The main question that is examined in this thesis is: What symbolic allusions of gendered power are generated by the visual representations of Statoil’s presidents in the images featured on its corporate website, [www.statoil.com](http://www.statoil.com). To examine this question, I map the symbolism of three image categories: images that capture the signing of international agreements, images taken off-shore and portraits of the company’s presidents.

I chose Statoil as a subject because this multinational petroleum company plays a central role in the Norwegian economy. My other reason for choosing Statoil was that the company (through its 45 years of history) has never had a female president. Its present corporate executive committee consists of eight men and two women. This constitution actualizes the question of gendered power imbalance, both in the Norwegian petroleum industry and the more general sphere of Norwegian industry.

My main theoretical approach is hermeneutics—or, more accurately, hermeneutic symbols theory. Following Geertz (1973), I approach culture as a system of meanings embodied in symbols. Symbols are a core analytical tool. I use them to explore and interpret cultural meanings. Similar to Solheim (1998, 2004), I approach gender as a key symbol of culture and society. In addition, I employ neo-Marxist ideas about power dynamics in modern society.

When examining the images, I draw predominantly on semiotic visual analysis, following Roland Barthes’ semiotic model of “decoding” and “reading” images.

The thesis consists of seven chapters: an introduction, a theory chapter, a method chapter, three chapters that describe the analysis of images and, finally, a summary chapter.

## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

### *1.1 When No Words Are Needed*

This master's thesis is a result of a long journey. When I look back at the process of writing it, I understand that the story of this work started many years ago. It began with my fascination for symbols and their meaning for humans. Sometimes, I think that this thesis started with one of the finest jokes in my life—one of the best proclamations of friendship I have ever received.

It happened in June 2002 while I was ill and in the hospital. My friend called me to ask what I wanted him to bring me. At that moment, I was reading a crime novel, *All Red*, by the Polish author Joanna Chmielewska (1997) and, therefore, I answered without thinking thoroughly: "Bring me all red." Two hours later, he appeared with cherries, tomatoes, two bottles of red wine and a watermelon: "The watermelon is partly green," he said. "I know you like green as well." That action—his choice of colors and products, the obedience with which he followed my wishes and his consideration of my other preferences, told me much more than any words could.

Yet it was not only about the symbolic meaning of his action. It was about the look and presentation of the items he brought me. I remember the redness of those cherries on my white hospital bed. The color, the shape and the gleam of the berries are imprinted in my memory. I looked not at the berries but at the pure care around me. At the same time, I saw a piece of freedom, which was outside the hospital (the place that I was not permitted to leave). I looked at a little revolution and a manifestation of life. Those berries expressed all of this at once, with their color and freshness. It was probably the first time I had realized the importance of the visual. *Maybe the visual is the most important of all?* I wondered. *Maybe I would have been less impressed if my friend had brought me something less intensely red and shiny, like a pair of dull red socks?*

Those berries challenged me during this work to question the way in which people possibly "read" and "understand" endless symbols around them. What connotations humans choose to put in symbols they see? Do people really have a choice? I wondered when a "berry" stops being "just a berry" and becomes something else. I asked myself how symbolic allusions emerge; how they interplay with each other and with reality; how symbols intertwine with human feelings; and how a look pertains to meaning.

Through this master's work, my interest in symbols coincided with my interest in gendered power relations, which is one of the main topics of gender studies (Skjeie, 1993). The distribution of power seems to me highly unfair in society, in relation to gender. Large socially influential organizations accumulate and



possess great power, and it is mostly men who lead such organizations (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

## *1.2 Thesis Question and Research Questions*

I chose to examine pictures of top leaders in large Norwegian organizations in the petroleum industry. Statoil seemed a natural choice of company due to its size and its importance for Norwegian society and the Norwegian economy. Today, it is one of the most influential companies in the world. Globally, it is the 11th biggest petroleum enterprise and the 26th biggest company, regardless of industry.<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian state owns about 70 percent of the company.<sup>2</sup> I was interested in the company's visual presentation of its top management. For this reason, I decided to analyze the images that are published on the official corporate webpage at [www.statoil.com](http://www.statoil.com).

Stitching it all together, the main question of this master's project is:

***What symbolic allusions of gendered power are generated by visual representations of Statoil's presidents in the images featured on its corporate website?***

In addressing this question, I focus on the symbolic resonances of the images. I explore symbolism related to nature and technology, and I look at religious symbols and identify the symbolic use of artefacts and the ways in which the human body functions as a symbol. I focus on three types of images: those portraying international agreements signings, images of top leaders taken in open-air settings and portraits of the corporate leaders. Specifically, I ask the following questions:

1. What kinds of symbolic allusions are generated by images in which the Statoil's president is portrayed signing international agreements? What kind of artefacts are involved in the composition of such images and what kind of meanings do these artefacts produce? What does an act of signing *look like*, symbolically?
2. Which associations are awoken by images of Statoil's presidents in open-air settings, such as offshore oil platforms? How does nature symbolism interplay with industrial symbolism in these images? What place does female symbolism have in them?

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<sup>1</sup> Statoil (2016) *Wikipedia*. Available at <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statoil> (accessed 18 June 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Statoil (2016) *Wikipedia*. Available at <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statoil> (accessed 18 June 2016).

3. How are the presidents portrayed in official portrait photos? What do their pose and bodily appearance *signify*? What symbolic connotations emerge from their use of artefacts, such as clothes and accessories?

### ***1.3 Background: Gender Studies on Power Symbolism in Large Organizations***

In this thesis, I pay special attention to gendered power symbolism. In addition, I look at the interplay of dimensions such as class, age and social status with gender and with each other. Power is a central topic in gender studies, and it is quite intentionally so. Power and authority are predominantly associated with men and maleness in modern Western culture (Skjeie, 1993). This is also true in large organizations (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

Over the past two decades, large organizations have gained special attention in gender studies. One of the main reasons for this is the importance of large organizations for society and the fact that such organizations accumulate and possess significant power, economic and labor resources (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Simultaneously, it is common knowledge that women have less access to the named resources in such institutions (Kumra, Simpson and Burke, 2014). Gender inequality is especially visible in the top leadership of large companies, since men lead the majority of influential organizations across the world (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

Power symbolism is a recognized hot topic in the field of gender organizational studies. Researches also show that power symbolism in organizations contributes to gender imbalance in their executive management, as it makes multiple references to maleness of a special kind—namely white maleness (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). In addition, images of large influential organizations are often associated with power. Finally, male and power symbolisms are not isolated within organizations, but intertwine with a general Western cultural context and ideas about power in society and culture (Bell, 2008).

Here, I would like to include some comments on gendered power symbolism from organizational studies and the related field of political anthropology, which is occupied with gendered power symbolism.

Thus, the famous gender researcher Silvia Gherardi (1995) explores the construction of gender symbolism across different types of organizations in her book *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Studies* (1995). She argues that symbolism is one of the keys for understanding an organization and gender within an organization. She writes: “... we may possess aesthetic, technological, historical, cultural and symbolic knowledge of an organization: paradigm plurality is implicitly assumed by the symbolic approach” (1995, p. 32). She also

claims that, despite symbolic diversity, symbolism of organizational cultures is about male-connoted rationality.

The prominent organizational scholars Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Due Billing concur with Gherardi. In their work *Understanding Gender and Organizations*, they claim that there is a great diversity of gender-related issues, which vary from organization to organization according to culture, country and society (2009). However, in many cultures, management and leadership are symbolically constructed as male realms. Gendered symbolism plays a central role in the construction of organizations, through artefacts, rituals, verbal and non-verbal communication (2009).

Another side of gender organizational symbolism is its appearance for society. In her book, *Reading Management and Organization in Film* (2008), Emma Bell studies the power imagery of large organizations, as depicted in films. She argues that such visual narratives mostly contain stories of power, money and success. Films and other means of popular culture generate ideas about powerful men who spend their time in offices with their names on the door and in executive rooms with men who are similar to them. In addition, films depict power of male leaders as unemotional, rational and competent (Bell, 2008). Women, in contrast, tend to be depicted as alien to business and large corporations. Many films show women as incompetent and awkward. It is also common for films to bind women symbolically to the home and to childcare (ibid.).

Norwegian academics are dedicated to learning more about visual power symbolism. Thus, the Norwegian gender researcher Anne Krogstad explores the role of visual dimension in political rhetoric (2015). She references Niccolò Machiavelli, noting: “*leaders do not need necessarily to possess so many good qualities, but it is definitely necessarily to look as they would have them*” (2015, p. 244). She also recognizes the importance of the Internet and social media for gender and visual representation of politicians in her article *Avatar Politics and Visual Rhetoric. Profile Pictures at Facebook* (2013).

Together with another gender researcher, Aagot Storvik, Krogstad also explores images of female politicians in France and Norway (2007). Storvik and Krogstad map the symbolism of visual strategies used by female politicians, for instance, symbolism of motherhood and female sexuality.

Other Norwegian researchers, Agnes Bolsø and Wenche Mühleisen, study cultural and symbolic structures related to gender and authority in photos of Norwegian female top leaders. They examine the dynamics and the possibilities for shifts in symbolic meaning of the suits that are worn by the female leaders. The scholars analyze three visual strategies used by women in power positions

“crossdressing to power,” “passing to power” and “feminizing to power” (2015, p. 224). Bolsø and Mühleisen inquire into images from statoil.com among other sources. They conclude that female top leaders at Statoil use the strategy of “passing to power,” wherein the male leaders are recognized as the legal power possessors and the women follow the men’s visual outfit strategies in order to suit the men’s image (2015).

#### ***1.4 Norwegian Large Organizations and Statoil as an Emblem for Norwegian Economic Power***

Some gender researchers have pointed out that Norway is praised for having one of the highest gender equality rankings in the world (e.g., Krogstad and Storvik, 2007). Several factors support such praise. For example, women in Norway are well educated and they participate in political power. Thus, 39.6% of the seats in parliament are held by women.<sup>3</sup> Women also contribute almost as much as men to the Norwegian economy, in terms of working power, with 61% of women participating in the labor market, compared with 68% of men.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of women with higher education grows annually. Today, 8.3% of women and 10% of men have four or more years of university education.<sup>5</sup> Due to their education levels and working experience, many women in Norway have the competence to fill leadership roles. Yet economic power is generally concentrated in men’s hands, and the top leaders of large and socially important Norwegian companies are still predominantly male (Niskanen and Nyberg, 2010; Engelstad and Teigen, 2012).

The situation is turning rather slowly, despite government attempts to, e.g., introduce gender quotas in public stock companies (such as Statoil)<sup>6</sup> (Engelstad and Teigen, 2012). Recent numbers from Statistics Norway (the Central Bureau of Statistics) show that only one-fourth of all board heads are women. The same data demonstrate that the situation is worse in the petroleum sector. Here, only 25 of the 179 board leaders of Norwegian petroleum companies are women, which equates to 13%.<sup>7</sup>

The petroleum industry is the largest contributor to the Norwegian economy, and Statoil is the biggest Norwegian company within this industry. In this way, Statoil can be understood as an emblem of corporate power in Norway (Bolsø and

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<sup>3</sup> Malik, K. (2013) *UNDP rapport 2013*. UNDP. Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf) (accessed 29 October 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen, 1. kvartal 2016* (2016) Oslo: SSB. Available at <http://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/statistikker/aku> (accessed 18 June 2016).

<sup>5</sup> *Befolkningens utdanningsnivå* (2014) Oslo: SSB. Available at <https://ssb.no/utniv> (accessed 18 June 2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Fakta-ark: Kjønnsvotering i styrer* (2011) Oslo: Regjeringen.no. Available at <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/nfd/kontakt/pressekontakter/fakta-ark/fakta-ark-kjonnsvotering-i-styrer/id641431/> (accessed 16 November 2015).

<sup>7</sup> *Styre og leiing i aksjeselskap* (2015) Oslo: SSB. Available at [www.ssb.no/styre](http://www.ssb.no/styre) (accessed 16 November 2015).

Mühleisen, 2015). The company was established in 1972. Throughout its 45 years of history, it has had eight heads. None of these has been a woman. As a public stock company, Statoil was required to have a board that consists of at least 40% women. The present board consists of four men and five women, yet the corporate executive committee consists of eight men and three women.<sup>8</sup>

The described imbalance points to a need for more research to map the possible reasons for the situation and to investigate strategies that might contribute to overcoming this imbalance. It also points to the necessity of exploring other power dimensions that might be pertinent for the development of power relations in Norway's economy. Power symbolism is one such dimension, since "*authority and masculinity are often seen as connoted, while femininity holds a more ambivalent position related to formal and legitimate power*" (Bolsø and Mühleisen, 2015, p. 224). Mapping and deconstructing the allusions that are generated by images of Statoil's presidents can provide a better understanding of the symbolic implications between maleness and power in nowadays conditions. In this way, this thesis builds on the findings of previous studies of gender-related symbolism by applying them to the Norwegian context as a part of a larger Western cultural context.

### ***1.5 Power in Images and Power of Online Images***

This project concentrates on the visual symbolism produced by images on Statoil's website, which I interpret as power symbolism. Manufacturing images is one method of both initializing and supporting power (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Authorities have understood the power of images for millennia. Pharaohs' pictures in Ancient Egypt, emperors' statues in Rome, the Bayeux Tapestry and many thousands of other examples illustrate the way in which authorities have long used images to enhance and personify their power and right to rule.

As in the past, at present, images are widely used to generate support for power (ibid.). Large organizations are among the institutions that produce and use images to gain power and other resources (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Multiple methods are used for image production, including placing visual advertisements in media outlets (e.g., television, newspapers and street posters). In addition, organizational leaders and workers might be featured guests on television programs, and their images are often presented in print and online media (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).

Global digitalization and the Internet have changed corporate representation. The Internet has also changed our global understanding of geographic and national borders (Sørensen et al., 2008). Websites introduce companies on a global scale,

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<sup>8</sup> *Corporate Executive Committee* (2017) Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/en/about-us/corporate-executive-committee.html> (accessed 18 April 2017).

reducing national limitations. Large organizations understand the importance of the Internet for self-representation. Today, most large organizations in the Western world have their own corporate websites. The Internet holds a key role in the strategic provision of information about a company, and use of carefully selected images seems an integral part of information strategies (Bidgoli, 2004).

It is common for highly qualified personnel to manage the content of corporative webpages, and this is certainly true at Statoil. The company has several websites in different languages, each designed to appeal to a different group of readers around the world. The main website, [www.statoil.com](http://www.statoil.com), is richly illustrated and well-structured with a large amount of content. In order to support the page, Statoil employs an information director and several media contacts and consultants.<sup>9</sup>

### ***1.6 Ocularcentrism, Visuality and Power***

This work is based on visual analysis. Since “*visual culture is integral to ideologies and power relations*” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 22), power relations is a central theme of visual analysis. In order to comprehend how visual analysis can contribute to an understanding of power relations, it seems necessary to clarify the significance of images and visuality for society. In his famous film (and later book), *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argues that vision is the primary of the five senses. He points out that vision comes to humans before their understanding of words (Berger, 1990).

The visual researcher Gillian Rose comments ironically on this statement, noting that Berger has evidently not taken blind people into account (Rose, 2007). Despite this obvious generalization in Berger’s proclamation, one can agree that the majority of humans start their lives in a world full of images. Over time, the quantity of images grown, and the saturation of society by images has never been as high as today. Daily, most humans look at hundreds—if not thousands—of images on television, in newspapers, in advertisements and so forth. Images have become tremendously dominant in society, and some authors have started to speak about “ocularcentrism,” or an “ocularcentric culture”—a culture in which vision dominates the other senses (Rose, 2007).

How does an ocularcentric culture interplay with power relations? To answer this question, Rose follows Foster (1988) and distinguishes between vision and visuality. Vision is inherent to many animated beings, and the term “visuality” refers to cultural processes in human society (Rose, 2007): “*how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing*

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<sup>9</sup> *Media Contacts* (2017) Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/en/media-centre.html#media-calendar> (accessed 18 April 2017).

*therein*” (Foster, 1988, p. ix). Foster’s and Rose’s description defines visuality as a vital element of power relations and positions power relations at the core of visuality.

Similar to Rose (2007, 2012), Sturken and Cartwright (2001) differentiate between the physiological capacity of seeing and the practice of looking. The last one involves interpretation/negotiation and power relations. The practice of looking occurs on both conscious and unconscious levels due to general knowledge of culture and reality. Humans are taught to “read” and “decode” images. Hence, images play a central role in looking processes and exert great power on feelings (e.g., stimulating desire, fear, jealousy, etc.) In addition, knowledge intertwines with visuality and images, since, for the majority of humans, looking and knowing are inseparable processes (ibid.). Hence, one can say that most people are involved in a constant process of reading images. Images, in many ways, define what people believe they know about reality. Thus, visual analysis seems to be a useful tool for understanding visuality and the role of images in culture.

### ***1.7 Thesis Structure***

This master’s thesis consists of seven chapters. The introductory chapter presents the background of my thesis, the thesis question and research questions and the substance of the research in the context of gender studies. I briefly introduce Statoil as a large organization and discuss the importance of websites for large companies. In addition, I discuss visuality and its place in postmodern society. Finally, I outline the thesis structure.

The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis. I enquire into hermeneutic approaches to symbols and analysis. Further, I map the analytical apparatus and define the central analytical terms used in this thesis, including “culture,” “symbol,” “gender” and “power/power dynamics.”

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology that was used for this research—predominantly semiotic image analysis. I also explain my data selection in detail and formulation of the thesis question. Further, I discuss the ethical considerations of my analytical process.

Chapter 4 discusses the symbols found in pictures depicting signing of international agreements between Statoil and its international partners. I enquire into the symbolic meaning of the rituals and artefacts that are displayed in these pictures.

Chapter 5 examines the symbols found in the images taken *en plein air*—namely, images of Statoil’s leaders during their visits to oil platforms. I discuss the images’ symbolism of nature, technology and femininity.

Chapter 6 elaborates on the symbolic meaning of some of the portraits of Statoil’s heads. I discuss their postures, facial expressions and artefacts (clothes and accessories).

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the thesis. I reflect upon the results of the study and summarize the symbolic meanings that were mapped in the three analysis chapters. Thereafter, I discuss strategies for changing the symbolic presentation of male leaders such as presentation of power with different kinds of charisma and opportunities for to avoid the visual appearance of power as legalized with “male” rationality.



## **Chapter 2. THEORY AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS OF THE PROJECT**

*The previous chapter sketched the background of my master's thesis. This chapter aims at mapping the theoretical perspectives on which the project is based. First, I explain my choice of theoretical approaches. Thereafter, I discuss hermeneutics and, in particular, the hermeneutics of symbols and the hermeneutic understanding of gender. I also explore the hermeneutic approach to culture and map the analytical tools I employ in this project, e.g., symbols and an understanding of gender as a key symbol. Further, I evaluate neo-Marxian critiques of hermeneutics in terms of social dynamics and power relations. I also borrow some ideas from Max Weber and neo-Marxists about power and power relations. Mainly, I employ the understanding of modern power dynamics of the neo-Marxist humanist writer and philosopher Marshall Berman (2010).*

### ***2.1 Hermeneutics: Theoretical Perspectives***

I selected hermeneutics of symbols as my leading theory. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek word for the Latin *interpretatio*. Originally, hermeneutics was occupied with the interpretation of texts—especially biblical texts and other holy scripts. Later, it developed into a theory of interpretation outside theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was the first to present hermeneutics as a teaching about understanding. Modern hermeneutics developed through the ideas of philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1883–1911), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) and others (Hansteen et al., 2007).

Several criteria helped me choose theoretical perspectives for this project. First, I followed the idea that, in cultural analysis, different aspects of elaboration flow into each other and intertwine seamlessly (Thagaard, 2013). Second, it was important for me to “listen” to my data and follow my “gut feeling,” which led to my choice of hermeneutics (ibid.).

Beyond this, I had other, more practical, reasons for selecting the hermeneutics of symbols as my leading theory. Thus, hermeneutics holds a central role in cultural studies when it comes to interpreting symbols in different contexts and interpreting culture(s) (Sørensen et al., 2008). In addition, the hermeneutic framework is flexible and allows much space for creativity in analyses of allusions generated by symbols.

## 2.2 Understanding and the Hermeneutic Circle

I approach allusions as a product of what the outstanding theorist in modern hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) called for *prejudices*. The main idea of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is that human understanding is rooted in prejudices. The philosopher evaluates this concept in his work *Truth and Method* (1989). He explains that prejudices are not necessarily negative, but simply refer to human pre-judging mental structures. A mind without prejudices cannot understand. Culture and history play a central role in the formation of such structures, and human understanding is thus historically and culturally affected (Gadamer, 1989; Sørensen et al., 2008).

Understanding and interpretation correlate with each other in a so-called *hermeneutic circle* or, if translated, in a circle of interpretation (Hansteen et al., 2007). The hermeneutic circle is one of the main concepts of hermeneutics. To describe it briefly, humans understand and interpret cultural parts (e.g., a text) within a cultural entirety, and a cultural entirety as a product of its parts. Such interpretative motions can be described as circular. Gadamer explains the idea of the hermeneutic circle more deeply by referring to different horizons of meaning. He writes that there are two horizons of meaning: the original horizon of the author and the horizon of the reader in real time. Interpretation and understanding involve a *fusion of horizons*, wherein an author’s horizon of meaning melts into a reader’s horizon of meaning (Gadamer, 1989).

Gadamer was criticized for his idealism and traditionalism. He is especially critiqued for his ideas that hermeneutics aims at achieving a “right understanding” (Sørensen et al., 2008). In this thesis, I borrow Gadamer’s description of human understanding and his ideas about the hermeneutic circle. However, I distance myself from his goal of achieving a right understanding. This step makes me turn to ideas of one of Gadamer’s critics and another distinguished hermeneutist, Paul Ricoeur (ibid.).

## 2.3 Hermeneutics of Symbols

Ricoeur comes to hermeneutics at the same time as Gadamer. He publishes *Symbolism of Evil*, in the same year that Gadamer publishes his *Truth and Method*, in 1960. This Ricoeur’s work elaborates his ideas of the hermeneutics of symbols. However, rather rapidly, Ricoeur shows that there is not just one hermeneutics and there are many ways to interpret and to understand interpretation. Already in 1965, he publishes *On Interpretation. The Conflict of Interpretations* appears in 1969 (Grondin, 2014). These works explore concepts of the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of faith. Both ideas still draw on the

“hermeneutics of symbols,” and all three concepts are interrelated (ibid.; Itao, 2010).

The psychological researcher Ruthellen Josselson summarizes Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and their interrelations as follows:

*Ricoeur distinguishes between two forms of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of faith which aims to restore meaning to a text and a hermeneutics of suspicion which attempts to decode meanings that are disguised.<sup>10</sup>*

In this way, Josselson highlights Ricoeur’s argument that a text can both reveal and conceal meanings.

In order to elaborate on coded meanings, Ricoeur turns to symbols as the key elements of any text. He claims that where symbols are involved, interpretation is necessary (Itao, 2010). Interpretation and symbols correlate with each other since “*the symbol gives rise to thought*” (Ricoeur, 1967, p. 347). Hence, interpretations can take different directions, and there are many ways to interpret a symbol.

In addition, according to Ricoeur, symbols constantly produce and reproduce meanings. Ricoeur describes this property of symbols as a *surplus of meanings* (Ricoeur, 1981). Due to this surplus, humans are not able to learn all meanings of a symbol. Rather, they use their previous knowledge and understanding to “read” symbolic meaning, but this limits their interpretative possibilities. However, a symbol is always open for new interpretation, especially when the context in which interpretation occurs, changes (ibid.).

#### ***2.4 Defining Symbols and Culture as Text***

Ricoeur follows Heidegger and defines humans as linguistic beings (Itao, 2010). Both philosophers hold that people express themselves by means of language. Language is also the main tool by which persons relate to the world and to others (Itao, 2010). Followingly, Ricoeur and Heidegger concentrate their philosophies around the interpretation of texts.

Hermeneutics extends beyond its linguistic borders and finds new territory in cultural analysis through the works of the prominent American anthropologist and philosopher, Clifford Geertz.

Geertz inserts into the core of hermeneutics the metaphor of *culture as text*. He writes: “*The culture of people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles*”

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<sup>10</sup> Josselson (2004), p.1.

(Geertz, 1973, p. 452). The second powerful metaphor of Geertz's hermeneutics is *culture as webs of meaning*. Geertz claims: “*man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs*” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5).

Bringing these two metaphors together, Geertz defines culture as

*a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life.*<sup>11</sup>

Thus, similar to Ricoeur, Geertz sees symbols as the main elements of a text. Yet, he expands his understanding of a text to the entire culture. To understand culture as text, one must enquire into its symbolic dimensions.

### **2.5 Symbols as “Genes of Culture” and Other Properties of Symbols**

As symbols are one of the main *analytical instruments* used in this master's thesis (Thagaard, 2013), I see it as necessary to provide a closer description of symbols. Here, I follow Geertz's understanding, and thus I shall map his theoretical perspective.

Geertz employs many of Ricoeur's ideas about symbols, but develops them in accordance with the metaphor of culture as text. For instance, Ricoeur defines a symbol as:

*any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first.*<sup>12</sup>

However, although—according to Ricoeur—every symbol is a sign, not every sign is a symbol. A sign contains and expresses only manifested meanings; a symbol, on the contrary, carries deeper meanings that interpretations can help to uncover (Itao, 2010). Geertz extends Ricoeur's rather limited understanding of symbols and defines symbols as “*any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception - the conception is the symbol's meaning*” (1973, p. 91).

He elaborates further on this topic and points out that the core function and purpose of symbols is the conception, transmission and perception of meaning

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<sup>11</sup> Geertz (1973), p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur (2004), p. 12.

(ibid.). Further, Geertz attributes symbols with diverse properties. First, he claims that symbols are concrete expressions of ideas, wishes, settings and so forth, and that. These expressions are fixed in cognizable forms. In other words, ideas and wishes are abstract, and symbols express these abstract phenomena in diverse cultural forms (e.g., visual and audial forms). Thus, symbols are embedded in commonly shared interpretative (cultural) forms. Humans learn symbolic meanings through introduction to these forms; for instance, via exposure to fine art, popular culture and religion (ibid.). However, despite the numerous ways in which persons learn symbolic meanings, culture limits their interpretative possibilities, as people remain suspended in its webs (Geertz, 1973).

Hence, symbols are external sources of information. They belong to culture, not to human biology. To explain this property, Geertz compares symbols to genes. Though genes belong to biology, Geertz sees similarities between genes and symbols, as both provide information: symbols form cultural patterns and ideas from the outside, while genes shape biological patterns from the inside. Accordingly, he describes symbols as the genes of culture: they are numerous, microscopic and powerful and they create constellations of meanings (1973). Unlike genes, which are a biological fact, symbols are created by people. Humans possess a great ability to embody non-symbolic phenomena in symbolic forms and to bring reality into line with existing symbolic systems. At the same time, symbols and symbolic systems have tremendous power over humans, since humans perceive the non-symbolic as chaotic and view the absence of a symbol as a meeting with chaos (ibid.).

## ***2.6 Interpretations of Symbols in this Project***

Summarizing the described theoretic background in relation to my project, I would like to point out the next theoretic assumption. Following Geertz, I approach each image in this work as a text. Each text is considered part of a larger text: culture. Since each text/image consists of symbols, symbols are a central category for the project and the understanding and interpretation of symbols are its main tasks. I approach these processes of understanding and interpretation in the tradition of Gadamer's hermeneutics and his idea of the hermeneutic circle. Thus, I understand and interpret symbols in the analyzed pictures via circular motions from the parts of culture (symbols and images) to culture and from culture to the selected images. I analyze symbols from the position of my cultural background whilst acknowledging my own prejudices, which have been formed by (Western) culture. Simultaneously, I distance myself from Gadamer's idea that hermeneutics should seek the "right" interpretation. I do not state that my interpretations are the only right ones. Rather, following Ricoeur, I hold that numerous interpretations are possible.

As mentioned above, I understand symbolic allusions and associations generated by images as products of prejudices. For this reason, I also consider it important to reflect upon my them and the way in which allusions intertwine with texts of culture. Literature and the fine arts provide me with examples. I view the “transfer” of symbolic meanings and allusions from different cultural contexts to my data as important, as this way of transferring seems to leave the door open for a reverse process, whereby symbols from my data can be applied to broader cultural and social contexts. However, I do not think that such a transference can be absolute. In this way, I approach my project as an attempt to verbalize some actual symbolic meanings of power that, to me, seem to be taken for granted in culture and society.

### *2.7 Gender as a Symbol and a Symbolic Order*

Interpretations of *power* symbols occupy a central place in this work, which is mostly concentrated on the symbolism of gendered power. The Norwegian anthropologist Jorun Solheim argues that some symbols are more essential for culture and society than are others. According to her, gender is one such key symbol of culture. She writes that gender is about “*webs of meanings, a symbolic system, a cultural structure*” (2004, p. 21; my transl.) and that it is a “*symbolic order*” (1998, p. 29; my transl.).

According to Solheim, feminine and masculine symbols gain meaning from their inherent opposition. For this reason, relations between symbolic femininity and masculinity are highly dualistic (Solheim, 1998). Male symbolism is associated with external activity, power, strength, anatomic and spiritual autonomy, money earning power, clarity/clearness and light. Female symbolism is bound to the home, home chores, motherhood tasks, uncleanness, subordination, darkness, a lack of borders and dependency. Male power versus female subordination, and power symbolism, in general, plays a central role in the gender symbolic order (ibid., Gherardi, 1995).

Solheim argues that gender is a primary symbolic system or “*a symbolic order*” (ibid., p. 32). Gendered symbols run so deep in culture that most persons take them for granted. Moreover, although there is some discussion of gender, it is still impossible to express and/or understand all of its symbolic meanings, due to the surplus of meanings. As a result, gender symbolism permeates the cultural order on every level, works as a glue for society and defines our understandings of reality (ibid., p. 32).

## ***2.8 Hermeneutics of Symbols in Light of Critical Reflections***

Despite my use of the hermeneutics of symbols as a primary theoretical framework, I cannot overlook the critique of how hermeneutics, in general, and Geertz, in particular, perceives contemporary power dynamics. The sociocultural anthropologist Katherine Hoffman asserts that Roseberry's Marxian critique is probably the most recognized (2009). The American anthropologist William Roseberry argues that Geertz's writings are idealistic and do not consider materialistic realities. He states that a researcher should "*ask of any cultural text, be it a cockfight or a folktale, who is talking, what is being talked about, and what form of action is being called for*" (Roseberry, 1989, p. 28). In this way, Roseberry accuses Geertz of ignoring the historical production and relations of power. By this, he means that Geertz is so fixed on symbols that he misses the broader picture, wherein symbols are only one part of the social reality (Hoffman, 2009, p. 420).

Accordingly, another neo-Marxist anthropologist, Roger Keesing, argues that "*We need to ask who creates and defines cultural meanings, and to what ends [because there are not many people who] do the spinning of webs of significance; most people are just caught in them*" (1987, pp. 161–162). This argument turns the discussion to questions of power relations and who creates symbolic meanings.

## ***2.9 Power Relations and its Post-Modern Dynamics***

As questions of power relations are central to my project, the neo-Marxian critique of hermeneutics is relevant. This critique is also important because my research is conducted within the post-modern and quickly shifting landscape of the Internet. I agree with Roseberry and Keesing that Geertz overlooks current power dynamics. Postmodernity challenges Geertz's hermeneutics, as it seems impossible today to approach culture as an entity that is separate from other dimensions, such as economics and politics. However, I do not agree with the argument that only a few people have power over social reality. Rather, I look to other theoretical perspectives for a discussion of power and power relations. As a starting point for this discussion, I refer to the definition of power by the famous philosopher Max Weber:

*"Power" is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Weber (1978), p.53.

This definition attracts me through its emphasis on individualism, (since “*one actor*” can be a person) but it appears void of insight into the complicity and contractual nature of current power dynamics. In my view, a stronger theory would account for power as both an individual ability and a characteristic of (post-)modern social relations. In searching for such theory, I turn to the concepts provided by the neo-Marxist philosopher Marshall Berman. Berman also seems to disagree with Keesing’s claim that few persons spin webs of significance. *All that is Solid Melts into Air* is both the title of a book by Berman and its main leitmotiv (2010). In the text, Berman enquires into current social and cultural processes with the help of Marx’s so-called *melting vision*. He uses this concept to show that “unchangeable” social constructions find themselves in constant transformation, and that humanity is exposed to a multiplicity of overlapping, dialectic and conflicting streams that melt into each other. This point also applies to power processes. Who and what can change “unchangeable” powers in modern times? Who “melts” the “solid reality”? Berman’s answer is that *we* do—us humans, who are alive now. While he emphasizes that a ruling class exists, but he claims that this class has more control “*not in change but in crisis and chaos*” (Berman, 2010, p. 95). Outside of these moments of crisis and chaos, modernity develops through human wishes, independent of the social class to which they belong. It transforms through human experience, the human search for identity, the human controversial desire for stability and the human “*desire to embrace the limitless possibilities of modern life*” (2010, p. 35).

Berman’s ideas about modern power dynamics give me optimism and inspire my work on symbols. I find sympathy with Berman and borrow his described concept to understand power dynamics in this project. I believe that there are ways of changing current (gender) power relations. I also hold that the gender symbolic order is not untouched by present processes of power relations. Changes are already occurring and they are undertaken by humanity, itself.

In this thesis, I apply Weber’s definition of power and Berman’s understanding of power dynamics in my analysis of the symbolic allusions of images. I draw especially on these theoretical frameworks in the final chapter (Chapter 7), in which I categorize the symbolic allusions that were mapped in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and discuss the possibilities for changing the symbolic aspects of power.

In summary, I argue that large organizations present gender connoted images of power relations to the world. Power is depicted in these images as a set of vital abilities, and the images are delivered by means of organizational websites. I do not discuss the purpose of such a delivery. Rather, as I am mostly interested in the symbolic aspects of power, I concentrate on the (gender) power allusions that are produced by the visual representations of power possessors. I maintain that power relations—both internal and external to a large organization—melt into each



other. At the same time, symbols have an important place in post-modern power dynamics, as they have great power over humans. Still, humans have power over symbols, since they create them and fill them with meaning. This state of affairs creates the impression that, despite the tight web of culture, there is space for deconstructing and creating new meaning in old symbols, as well as creating new symbols altogether. Humans transform symbolic meaning through both volition and fantasy. Yet old symbols and old meanings of symbols do not vanish instantly, but rest solidly within cultural webs. The process of dissolving them is challenging and demands reflection and interpretation.

## Chapter 3. THE METHOD

*This chapter describes the methodological approach of this master's thesis, which is based on qualitative methodology. Namely, the thesis is a visual analysis project in which I discuss the symbolism in images of the two presidents of the multinational petroleum organization Statoil. Images are displayed on the corporate website. At the beginning of this chapter, I explain my selection of the theme and my formulation of the thesis question. Following this, I explain in more detail my choice of visual analysis as the main method. I understand visual analysis as a complex suite of methods and evaluate semiotics as the primary method used for this project. Further, I elaborate on my choice of the "field" and data images. I also evaluate the challenges I met in the research process—primarily methodological and ethical challenges—and the strategies I used to overcome them.*

### ***3.1 Formulation of the Theme and Search for a Field***

One of the main challenges—and attractions—of qualitative research is its non-linearity. Different aspects of the research, such as the thesis question, method, analysis and theory, tend to intertwine and flow into and across each other (Thagaard, 2013). Thus, during this project, I repeatedly re-evaluated my process due to new perspectives that were gained along the way.

However, despite this non-linearity, every qualitative project must begin concretely. In my project, defining the general theme seemed a good place to start (Thagaard, 2013). I discussed my interest in symbolism and power relations in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1). Due to this interest and my understanding of an unequal gendered power division, I decided to use visual symbolism and gendered power relations as the *theme* of my research. This decision was made relatively early. The theme led me to develop general ideas about the direction in which I would take the work.

As a result of my lifestyle and daily behaviors (as someone who has constant access to the global web and prefers it to other media sources), I quickly realized that the Internet could be an interesting resource for learning more about the topic. The Internet is an important channel for information gathering and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, large companies understand the importance of the Internet as an information resource.

Regardless of the fact that the theme and resource were identified quickly, I did not immediately proceed to the idea of analyzing allusions in online pictures of the top leaders of petroleum companies, nor did I immediately decide on visual analysis of images as a method. Rather, I considered various methods and data

sources, such as movies, images and online text. Further, the question of what I would use as my “field” (which websites I would analyze) remained open for a long time. I looked through popular websites (such as YouTube and Facebook) and thought about the theme of the project.

This process of rolling-through-pages was rather unsystematic. Thagaard points out that qualitative research relies on two central aspects: systematics and immersion. Immersion is important for reaching understanding, while systematics is important for achieving reliability (2013). My preliminary form of immersion involved unclear impressions and feelings whilst reviewing materials online. Part of my search involved scrolling through the websites of large organizations, which commonly displayed photos of top managers. What feelings did these pictures elicit in me? Initially, I could not imagine myself taking one of the chairs on which the photographed subjects sat. The pictures were generally of men, and women appeared not to belong. The men in the images seemed different than me. They looked as if they had a special right to sit in the chair. At the same time, it seemed to me that even if I had the relevant education, work experience and other pertinent qualifications, I would not be able to rule as cleverly as these men seemingly did. They appeared to have special abilities and qualities, which I lacked. These unclear feelings demanded systematization, and they became a starting point in the development of my thesis question.

### ***3.2 Development of the Thesis Question***

Thagaard writes that formulation of a thesis question is a continuous process, and that it is common for a researcher to adjust her thesis question several times over the course of a project. Indeed, a preliminary thesis question should be sufficiently open to enable space for creativity. At the same time, it should provide guidelines in the form of boundaries and limitations. In addition, the thesis question intertwines with all other aspects of the project, such as the theory, data, actuality of the research and method (2013). Taking all of this into consideration, I decided to investigate the *visual symbolic representations of top leaders, in terms of gender*.

This formulation seemed to accurately capture my immersion feelings and my theme. First, I discovered that other researchers have found visual symbolic representation to be important in the gender analysis of leaders (see, e.g., Krogstad and Storvik, 2007). Second, it seemed that the situation in Norway, as described in Chapter 1, provided a basis for this formulation.

With this preliminary thesis question in focus, I started to search for data images. I describe this search process and my systematization of images later in the chapter. The data images I ultimately selected provided further ideas for the

research questions, and I settled on an exploration of three motifs I discovered while systematizing the online images: 1) images depicting international agreement signings, 2) images taken “in the open air” and 3) portraits of the Statoil’s presidents. The motifs served as the basis for the three research I outlined in Chapter 1.

The images I selected required me to reformulate the thesis question in terms of analytical aims, theoretical approaches and methodology. Stitching all these together, I decided to investigate:

*What symbolic allusions of gendered power are generated by visual representations of Statoil’s presidents in the images featured on its corporate website?*

### ***3.3 Justification for the Selection of Visual Analysis for the Analysis of Power Relations***

As I had decided to investigate visual symbolism, visuality became one of the central aspects of my research and visual analysis served as my main method. However, the preliminary formulation of the thesis question, theory and other aspects of the research presented a new question: What kind of visual analysis is most relevant for an analysis of the allusions suggested by symbols in images? This challenging question related to visual analysis as a methodology. Currently, visual analysis is a broad suite of methods consisting of a variety of theoretical approaches. As the British researcher Gillian Rose notes, due to its diversity, it would be wrong to define visual analysis as a single methodology. Rather, it should be spoken of as a well-developed corpus of methodologies within the *field* of visual analysis (2007). Rose presents at least seven ways of analyzing images in her book *Visual Methodologies* (2007, 2012). Most of these approaches take power relations as a central focus (Rose, 2007).

Rose argues that visual analysis deals with three *sites of images*: the site of production (how an image is produced), the site of the image (what an image looks like) and the site of the audience (how an image is seen). Power relations are implicated in each of these sites (Rose, 2007). I discovered that my interests mostly pertained to the site of the image, as I was fascinated by the power symbolism. This preference provided further direction for my methodological choice.

Rose writes that each method has benefits and disadvantages for analysis of power dynamics. For instance, discourse analysis can be an effective tool for investigating the effects of an image on contractions of social differences. Rose distinguishes between two kinds of discourse analysis in visual analysis

methodologies: discourse analysis I and II. Discourse analysis I concentrates on a “*notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images [...] discourse analysis II tends to pay more attention to the practices of institutions than it does to the visual images*” (Rose, 2007, p. 146). Both kinds of discourse analysis consider visuality as a kind of discourse. Visual subjects present phenomena in such a way as to encourage viewers to think in a certain manner. However, discourse analysis II involves little consideration of the site of an image. It also has no interest in an image’s complicities and contradictions (2007). In this way, discourse analysis II seemed less relevant for my analysis of symbols in images.

### ***3.4 Semiotics and the Analytical Process***

Reading about different methods brought me to semiology, or semiotics. Rose writes that semiotics is a method of semiology. According to her, semiotics is one of the most advanced methodologies for penetrating the site of the image and social phenomena in an image from multiple perspectives (Rose, 2007). Methodologically, I decided to draw on the guidelines for semiotic visual analysis described by Rose, by combining this analysis with a hermeneutical approach to symbols. Several studies have used this methodological combination. In this way, I follow e.g. Wagner and Bozzo-Rey (2014), who enquired into the ways in which postage stamps reflect upon French national identity. Semiotics and the hermeneutics of symbols are harmonic and complementary; the approaches are deeply connected, as hermeneutics is a predecessor of semiotics (Nöth, 1995). The two disciplines have many similarities when it comes to ideas of “reading” an image, text and culture (ibid.).

My analysis (i.e., “reading”) of images drew on Roland Barthes’ semiotic model. Barthes refers to two levels of meanings in an image: denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning has a descriptive character. It conveys “facts” to a viewer about the subject of a picture. Connotative meaning, in contrast, conveys cultural values and beliefs. In addition to these two levels, signs convey additional meanings within an image. A sign consists of two parts: the signifier and the signified. An image/sound/word is a signifier, while meanings that are invoked by signifiers are signified. A signifier and a signified combine into a sign, which a viewer “reads” and “decodes,” often without conscious awareness (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).

Another important advantage of semiotics is that it provides a rich vocabulary for explaining and mapping the way in which an image produces cultural meanings (Rose, 2007). In my master’s project, semiotics provides ample opportunity for enquiry into issues such as: What does a leader’s image signify? And what associations are awoken by a leader, in terms of race, gender, class and social

status? In this way, semiotics contributed to a better understanding of relevant social processes and power relations by mapping them carefully and giving them various explanations.

### ***3.5 Disadvantages of Semiotics as a Method and the Researcher's Role***

Semiotics' idea of "reading" images, its relevance to my theoretical approaches and its vocabulary seem to be central advantages of the method. However, semiotics also has some disadvantages. For example, Rose writes that the semiotic approach does not demand reflexivity. In addition, it has little interest in the way in which different viewers may look at the same image (2007).

In my analysis, I constantly reflected upon these methodological challenges and asked myself how I could overcome them. I found two interrelated points especially useful in my processes of analysis and research. First, I emphasized openness and reflexivity. I believe that reflexivity should be an inseparable component of qualitative research. A researcher must be open about methodological challenges, describe them carefully and reflect upon them. Second, following Riessman, I rejected the idea of a final/absolute truth. Neither semiotics nor any other visual analysis methodology aims at establishing a final/absolute truth (Riessman, 2008). Being at once a viewer and a researcher, it is central for me to recognize that my interpretations are not the only ones for understanding the symbols I analyze. My interpretations, in many regards, are the results of my experiences (Kvaal, 1997, p. 3), and for this reason, I had to consider other spectators' perspectives and to invite readers/spectators to look into the process of analysis. I remain open to their consideration of quality criteria in relation to my interpretations and analysis, and the other stages of my research (Sørensen, 2005, p. 23).

### ***3.6 The Choice of Data***

One of the fundamental stages of the project was the selection of images for analysis. As I considered my method, thesis question and theory, I remained puzzled by my selection of a "field" and images. I decided to limit my research to images that: 1) were provided by a company, 2) depicted a company's leaders and 3) were presented on a corporate website. However, the question of what website(s) I would focus on remained open.

I considered several large Norwegian companies in the biggest sectors of the Norwegian economy, such as fishing, finance and telecommunication. Ultimately, I limited my field to the petroleum sector and, specifically, the website of Statoil. As I elaborated in Chapter 1, this choice was justified by the social importance of the gas and oil industry for the Norwegian economy. Statoil, in particular, plays a

central role in the Norwegian economy and political landscape.<sup>14</sup> Another argument for my choice was that the top management of the company, outside of the board, was male dominated, consisting of eight men and three women. In addition, the company had never had a female president.<sup>15</sup>

Statoil.com is a significant web resource that is illustrated with numerous pictures. The company publishes new information at least once a week. Since I was specifically focused on information about leaders, I limited my search to three kinds of empirical material: 1) news, 2) press releases and 3) the CVs of top managers. As I was interested in current time, I also restrained the window of publication to 2007 to 2016. Finally, I chose images of only the two presidents of the company, the former president Helge Lund and the recent president Eldar Sætre, who each had the official title of the president and CEO.<sup>16</sup> In addition, they were often referred to as “directors” and “concern leaders.” In this thesis, I use each of these titles interchangeably. Lund led the company from 2004 to 2014, and Sætre took over this position in 2015.

My focus on the images of Lund and Sætre was justified by the following reasons: 1) despite Statoil’s large group of top managers, the company’s directors had particular (photographic) prominence on the website; and 2) the company heads were public figures who officially represented the company.

With my search criteria in mind, I started my search of images for analysis. I searched on the website and used key words such as “konsernsdirektør” and “konsensrsjef.” Further, I systematized my findings in tables with columns such as Internet address, topic of post, image thumbnail and notes. As my search progressed, I developed a better understanding of the specific situations in which the corporate heads were depicted, and certain motifs were identified.

The tables enabled me to form an overview of the data. Once they were complete, I discussed my findings with my supervisors and ultimately chose three motifs for analysis: 1) images of international agreement signings, 2) pictures taken in the open air and 3) portraits of the leaders (including the leaders’ CVs and portraits that accompanied news stories). These motifs represented typical illustrations of the corporate messages on the website, and the final images I selected were typical of each motif. Thus, my research method followed the approach advocated by Thagaard, who writes that the selection of items should draw on typical choices, as these enable investigation of a social phenomenon (2013).

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<sup>14</sup> Statoil (2016) *Wikipedia*. Available at <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statoil> (accessed 18 April 2017).

<sup>15</sup> *Corporate Executive Committee* (2017) Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/en/about-us/corporate-executive-committee.html> (accessed 18 April 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Statoil (2016) *Wikipedia*. Available at <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statoil> (accessed 18 April 2017).

My second argument for the selection of the three motifs and representative images intertwines with the previous argument and involves immersion. As I looked at the selected images I experienced a feeling of *déjà vu*, as if I had seen them all previously. I recognized the symbolic language they were communicating to me. Following these immersion feelings, I selected the images I found most “talkative” and “recognizable.”

I present the selected images in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

### *3.7 Challenges in the “Field,” “Truth” and Visual Analysis*

My review of the websites was not as painless as I had initially imagined. When I started the process, I did not see a need for field notes. I was aware that the Internet landscape changes quickly, but I also felt that my field was lying in front of me on the PC screen and did not seem so big; indeed, for the purposes of my research, it was only one website. However, very soon, lacking tools for systematization and an overview of my field, I started to take notes and, as described above, fill tables with information about the images I found. Time later revealed that these measures were not sufficient to manage my empirical material.

On the Internet, information can be erased in a second. During my data collection, Lund left his position as head of Statoil. Just a few days later, after the new president, Sætre, had taken over, the company deleted Lund’s CV, forcing me to revise my data. As I had not made “screen shots” of Lund’s CV as it had appeared on the website, I was no longer able to use his pictures from that page. I wanted to prevent such accidents from occurring in the future and, for this reason, I reconsidered my method of documenting my research. I started to take screen shots of pages on which images were found. In 2016, Statoil changed the layout of its corporate website and, as a result, pictures changed locations. I updated all the web locations of the pictures and documented the revised locations in the form of footnotes in this thesis. However, as I neared completion of my work, one of the images completely vanished from the site. This forced me to include the screen shots in an appendix to this thesis (see Appendix 1), so that readers could see how the images appeared during my work, even though some are no longer presented on the website.

Taking screen shots of my field also seemed important in relation to validity. More concretely, I felt it was important for me to “preserve the facts” on which my project was based. Qualitative methods treat the “truth” (including “historic truth”) as a relative category and generally take the position that there is no objective truth (Kvaal, 1997). Thus, a fact that a participant describes as real does not need necessarily have a place in “reality” for qualitative research (Riessman, 2008). One can make the same argument about “photographic truth” (Sturken and



Cartwright, 2001). Visual analysis approaches an image as a product that is created by photographers, designers and people who are pictured - not a reflection of “reality” (ibid.). In the case of my project, it was irrelevant whether the images showed “historic truth.” For example, it did not matter for the project if Lund had indeed visited a platform and his picture had been taken there, or if his image had been digitally manipulated into that scenario. In my research, the relevant question was the leaders’ visual representations on the website. For this reason, it was vital for me to demonstrate that my empirical material had been published on statoil.com.

### ***3.8 Ethical Issues***

Finally, yet importantly, I would like to evaluate the ethical issues I navigated during this project. Rose writes that the main ethical challenge in visual analysis pertains to copyright (2012). A researcher cannot reproduce a photo without permission from the copyright holder. This matter of copyright was indeed important in project, yet there were also other ethical issues at play. One such issue pertained to my use of images of real persons with mentioning their names and without informing the organization about the project and its research question.

It emerged that Statoil does not allow information from their corporate website to be reproduced without written permission from the company. I emailed two persons in charge of media contact at the company to inform them of my thesis question and to provide further information about myself. I was aware that gender is a sensitive topic in the Norwegian petroleum industry, particularly as it pertains to top leaders, and that the company might refuse my request to use their images. However, for the reasons mentioned above, it was important for me to take this step.

One of the media consultants asked me to provide the images I wanted to use for the project. As I did not have the final selection at that time, I sent the consultant eleven images (nine of which were included in the final selection). I informed the consultant that I did not know which pictures from that selection I would ultimately use for my analysis, and thus I sought permission to use all of them. This permission was granted.

Before I had contacted Statoil, I had begun my review of the corporate website. The question of whether I should use the photos and names of the corporate presidents was one that I felt I, alone, should answer. Visual analysis and qualitative methodology, in general, separates between information and images relating to private persons and those relating to public persons (Thagaard, 2013). If a researcher works with private persons, she is obliged to protect their anonymity and/or to solicit permission to use their image. In visual analysis, this

could mean manipulating faces in pictures to render them unidentifiable. In contrast, depictions of public persons as they perform their official tasks are approached differently (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001), as such persons have a different social responsibility. In my study, I considered Lund and Sætre as representatives of Statoil as a company (and not necessarily as representatives of themselves) in the images in which they were depicted on the website. For this reason, I deemed it ethical to reveal their identity in this work.

## Chapter 4. PERFORMANCE OF RITUALS IN IMAGES DEPICTING AGREEMENT SIGNINGS

*This chapter examines the symbolism of images that depict the previous head of Statoil, Helge Lund, and his colleagues from other petroleum companies, as they sign international agreements. I approach these moments of signings, as captured in my data images, as rituals. Accordingly, to enquire into the symbolism of these images, I explore the roles of the rituals and artefacts that are used in the signings—namely, documents, pens and folders. Finally, I evaluate the connotations raised by the supporting figures in the images.*

*I argue that certain symbolic meanings of artefacts, the ways in which participants in the rites manipulate the artefacts and the symbolism expressed by the main and supporting participants have significant (gendered) power connotations. The symbolism of the artefacts creates and emphasizes (gendered) power meanings in signing rituals.*

### ***4.1 Choice of Empirical Material***

As described in Chapter 3, I limited my selection of pictures to those depicting the two most recent presidents and CEOs of Statoil. Through a search with the key words “Lund/Sætre” AND “signing” I discovered eleven posts about international agreement signings during the relevant period (2007–2016). These eleven posts were illustrated with eleven photos of the company’s heads. Six of these images were portraits and five were pictures of the ceremonies. I limited my empirical material to three images of signings in which Statoil’s signing partners came from three different countries – Russia, China and the UK. As the motifs in the images were quite homogeneous, the pictures I selected can be understood as typical choices (Thagaard, 2013).



**Image 1.** *The signing of an agreement between Statoil and Russian Gazprom. Moscow (Russia) 2007. The CEO and President of Statoil, Helge Lund, sits on the*

left and the CEO and Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of the Russian energy company Gazprom, Alexey Miller, sits on the right.<sup>17</sup>



**Image 2.** *The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Statoil and Chinese Sinochem. Oslo (Norway) 2010. Liu Deschu, President and CEO of Sinochem Group, is seated on the left and Helge Lund, President and CEO of Statoil, is seated on the right. He Guoqiang, Standing Committee Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Gao Hucheng, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Commerce of China, Terje Riis-Johansen, Norway's Petroleum and Energy Minister, and Trond Giske, Norway's Trade and Industry Minister, are also present. (Photo: Harald Pettersen)<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Photographer unknown. The image has been removed from the website (last checked 18 April 2017). To see how the image originally appeared on the website, see Appendix 1.

<sup>18</sup> Pettersen, H. (2010) *The Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding Between Chinese Sinochem and Statoil ASA*. Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/content/statoil/en/news/archive/2010/06/11/11JuneSinochemAndStatoil.html> (accessed 18 April 2017).



**Image 3.** *The signing of a long-term agreement between Statoil and British Centrica. London (UK) 2011. Centrica's CEO, Sam Laidlaw (front, left), and Statoil's President and CEO, Helge Lund (front, right), sign the gas sales agreement at 10 Downing Street, as witnessed by the (then) UK Prime Minister David Cameron (left) and Norway's Ambassador to the UK, Kim Traavik (right).*<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.2 Rituals and Artefacts**

All three images depict moments from the ceremonies of signing agreements. I choose to call this kind of ceremony a *ritual/rite of signing*. Rituals are of interest to a wide range of disciplines, including history, anthropology, ethnography and organizational studies (Wilentz, 1985; Kertzer, 1988; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). The American religious studies scholar Catherine Bell points out that a ritual, as a kind of ceremony, has rich symbolism, certain sequences of activities and established manipulations of artefacts, words and gestures. Time and place are also important for a performance of a ritual (1992; 1997).

A ritual is a complex social phenomenon that serves multiple roles for society and culture, not least in terms of power (Kertzer, 1988). The American historian Sean Wilentz calls rituals the “*clothing of power*” (1985, p. 1). Rituals are used to legitimize, personalize and reinforce power (Kertzer, 1988). Moreover, the symbolic personalization of power constitutes the core of many rituals. For example, rites such as inaugurations and coronations aim to personalize power (Wilentz, 1985; Kertzer, 1988; Bell, 1992; Bell, 1997). Other rituals serve to reinforce existing power (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

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<sup>19</sup> Pettersen, H. (2011) *Statoil and British Centrica Have Signed a Long-Term Agreement*. Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/content/statoil/en/news/archive/2010/06/11/11JuneSinochemAndStatoil.html> (accessed 18 April 2017).

Rituals belong to what Durkheim describes as the sacred, within his dichotomy of the sacred/profane (1965). In this understanding, the profane is forbidden from entering the sacred and is separated from it. Durkheim writes about rituals:

*A rite can have this [sacred] character; in fact, the rite does not exist which does not have it to certain a degree. There are words expressions and formulae which can be pronounced only by the mouths of consecrated persons; there are gestures and movements which everybody cannot perform.*<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned above, ritualistic symbolism is constructed and expressed with the help of artefacts (Bell, 1992, 1997). Artefacts gain special symbolic meanings within a rite, depending on a multitude of factors (e.g., their interaction with other artefacts, the time at which a rite is performed and the place of performance). Also, the symbolism of artefacts changes according to the symbolism that participants represent (and vice versa). In other words, the person who performs a ritual and manipulates artefacts during the performance necessarily brings to the ritual own symbolic meanings (Bell, 1997; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Each of these contexts brings its own dimension to the symbolism of artefacts (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Wilentz, 1985; Bell, 1997; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). For instance, the same Bible will create a different symbolic impression depending upon whether a protestant priest or a Pope reads from it during a service.

### ***4.3 Participants and Artefacts in the Rite of Signing***

In this way, interpretation of the symbolic meanings of artefacts in images is inseparable from an interpretation of the interplay of ritual symbolic systems, including those of participants, words and gestures. I choose to call Lund and the heads of other companies the “*main participants*” in these images, since they perform the main action that is depicted. At the center of all three images are two men dressed in what appear to be expensive business suits and luxurious looking accessories (e.g., ties, watches and cufflinks). The men are properly shaved and have neat haircuts. These are the main participants.

The supporting participants are also all men, and are similarly dressed in suits and ties. Despite their homogenous outfits, the men are depicted as performing varying roles. I enquire into the symbolism of these main and supporting participants later in the chapter. First, however, I discuss the artefacts in these images and their symbolic places in the rite of signing.

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<sup>20</sup> Durkheim (1965), p.52.



The data images capture artefacts of furniture, textiles, cloth and artworks, with the precise artefacts differing from image to image.<sup>21</sup> The images depict the heads of companies as actively manipulating only three objects: folders, documents and pens. These artefacts occupy a central place in the compositions, as well as (seemingly) the performance of the rite. In each image, the main participants hold or use pens. Images 1 and 2 show the very moment of signing, while image 3 seems to capture an instant immediately before or after the signing. In all of the pictures, at least one of the CEOs is touching (with his free hand and/or with a pen) a folder or document, and thus is in immediate physical contact with all three artefacts simultaneously. The documents and folders are touched rather carefully. For example, in Image 3, Lund touches a folder almost tenderly, with only the tip of his fingers. Yet due to this physical contact, the folder seems to symbolize a close connection with the CEO.

#### ***4.4 Symbolism of Artefacts***

##### *4.4.1 The Smell of Leather*

Images 2 and 3 clearly display folders, revealing their dark brown leather. Leather is among the most expensive materials, and it is designed to underline the high status and wealth of its owner. The critic John Berger notes that the depiction of expensive fabrics and furniture aims at emphasizing the prosperity of the human subject of an image (1990). However, leather not only reflects price, but it can also be read as masculine fabric—especially when it is applied to furniture and accessories (Sanders, 1996). In addition, the smell, texture and look of leather may elicit associations with stability and paternity (Marsh and Musson, 2007).

Leather is sometimes used in fiction as a masculine fabric. For instance, the American writer Margaret Mitchell, in her famous novel *Gone with the Wind*, introduces Gerald O'Hara to readers as a rich owner of a big plantation and an influential member of the local society. At the same time, he is a loving father to his daughters. Mitchell uses leather twice in the passage in which she introduces Mr. O'Hara (Mitchell, 2008, pp. 39–40). First, she writes that he loves horses, drinks whiskey and wears leather boots (always of the finest quality). Second, she notes that 16-year-old Scarlett inhales the aroma of her father, who smells of mint, horses, tobacco and well-oiled leather. Scarlett loves this odor and, at the same time, she unconsciously associates the smell with men (*ibid.*).

Thus, Mitchell reminds her readers that leather—with its unique, easily recognizable aroma—seems to involve in its symbolic system both vision and olfaction. I would argue that even looking at pictures of leather artefacts can

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<sup>21</sup> Following Alvesson and Billing, I approach cultural artefacts as material objects that are produced by humans (Alvesson and Billing, 2009, p. 124).

trigger associations to its specific smell, as the visual and olfactory systems are tightly connected. Such allusions especially apply to colors in an image (Sakai et al., 2005). In this way, the brown, “natural” color of the folders in each image seems to add to the rites’ symbolism, suggesting the authenticity of leather as an organic scented fabric. Consequently, the leather may be reminiscent of the traditional male hunter, with characteristics such as strength, courage, inventiveness and the ability for breadwinning.

Another property of leather is its solidity. Due to its durability, leather is commonly used to protect fragile, important papers. Thus, leather bindings are often used for valuable book manuscripts, including religious texts. In this way, a leather binding can be related to timelessness and the unchangeable value of the contents within.

The primary value of a paper source is the information and knowledge it carries. Drawing further on religious associations and association with knowledge, leather covers might bring to mind allusions to monastic libraries filled with folios. Throughout European history, since the fall of the Roman Empire to the time of the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church and male monasteries had almost full control of education and almost full possession of knowledge (Innis, 2007). Due to this monopoly on knowledge, male monasteries had a great influence on society. At the same time, information that was hidden in monastic libraries was unavailable to women. Thus, leather bindings can elicit powerful gender connoted metaphors of monastic life, with its self-restriction, celibacy, absence of women and fraternity on the one hand and the wisdom of its hermits and its possession of valuable information as a source of social domination on the other hand.

#### *4.4.2 Rationality, Bureaucracy and Documents*

It is not only the leather bindings that carry religious symbolism in the images. Covered with leather, decorated with silk-looking bookmarks (Image 1) the documents also elicit associations with holy scripts. They seem to be treated with great reverence. For instance, the head of Gazprom (Image 1) touches his copy of the agreement in the same careful manner as Lund does. He does not press the pages but rather pets them. In the images, the documents appear more important than some of the people. For example, Images 1 and 2 crop the top of the heads of the people standing on the periphery, in order to focus on the agreements. In this way, the documents seem to have higher symbolic value than the people who are depicted.

The people at the edges of Images 1 and 2 seem to display an emotion close to admiration for the papers. For instance, in Image 2, they hold their hands away from the contracts but watch the signing intensively. Image 1 captures a man on



the left who holds his right hand some centimeters away from the documents in a rather unnatural gesture, as if he does not dare touch them. His colleague on the right touches the documents, but only with the tips of his fingers.

The central place of the agreements in the compositions and the described relation of the depicted persons to these contracts evokes both religious and other connotations, such as the symbolic significance of official documents for modern society. Individuals, organizations and social institutions demonstrate dependency on the production and use of a wide range of documentation: laws, passports, agreements, resolutions and so forth. The symbolic meaning of documents in the sense of their compulsory, binding and enforcing power is incommensurable to the rather fragile “paper” substance on which they exist. For example, documents have almost almighty power in proving a person’s identity, and a state has a monopoly on the production of a range of important documents.

It is natural to think of modern bureaucracy when one considers the symbolism of documents. The famous German sociologist Max Weber imagined bureaucracy as a perfect kind of social management and understood documents to be its foundational stone (1978, p. 957). He described ideal bureaucracy as a machine that rules and serves society unemotionally, practically and rationally. According to Weber, an absence of emotion and the enforcement of rules formulate effective management (1978).

Modern bureaucracy continues to hold the Weberian bureaucracy as its ideal. Simultaneously, practicality, rationality and control over emotions in bureaucracy interlaces with male symbolism, since Western culture imagines men as highly rational creatures and, hence, effective managers. Such symbolic interplays contribute to constructions of modern bureaucracy as an implicitly male system (Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004).

The documents shown in the images (and many official documents, more generally) seem to mirror the ideology of modern Western bureaucracy, with its striving for rationality and the negation of human emotion. Even their appearance is aesthetically boring, consisting of plain, white sheets of paper with printed text.

#### *4.4.3 Magic Pens and the Process of Vivification*

Yet, regularly, not all documents take the form of a printed text. Commonly, symbols on the final page of a document dilutes the sterility of the otherwise black and white paper print and vivify a document’s appearance and content. Such symbols may include seals and personal signatures. The signing of a document is meant to culminate a rite, and for this reason, the signature is often captured in photographic documentation of the ritual, also in the analyzed images. The Images

1 and 2 depict this moment of the signing, while Image 3 seems to capture a second immediately before or after the signing. The images do not depict the signatures on the documents. However, they showcase the pens and suggest that the purpose of the ceremony is the signing of an agreement.

In this manner, the pens and document folders are core artefacts of the ritual. Pens have a particular place in the compositions. For example, the pens in Image 3 have special cases, and each of the main participants has one. Though there are two main participants in each image, there are three pens depicted in Images 2 and 3. The head of Centrica (in Image 3, on the left) appears to prefer his own pen, since the pen that is similar to his partner's pen lies unused in front of him. The source of pens is more confusing in Image 2, in which it is difficult to discern which of the presidents is using a personal pen. The Statoil leader's pen differs in color from the other two pens in the image, and the leader of Sinochem Group has a pen that resembles the one lying in front of him on the table. Still, it seems that at least one of the corporate heads is using his own pen.

The presence of eight expensive-looking pens in the three pictures, their central place in the compositions and the preference of some of the figures to use their own artefacts for signing the important documents raise questions about the symbolic meanings of the pens. I would argue that public signings are common for socially important agreements that involve essential human, financial and other resources. The agreements that are documented in these images are indeed socially important. It is implied that the signing men in all of the three images influence the lives of thousands of petroleum workers and preside over the distribution of necessary resources such as heat and electricity. Finally, yet importantly, these men set into motion transactions involving giant sums of money. They initiate these processes with their signatures. Thus, the images show the very moment of power personalization, wherein power is manifested in a set of handwritten signs produced by a given person.

Pens play an important role as the vehicle of this personalization. The elongated form of the pen and its "almighty" power metaphorically relates a pen to a magic wand, both in the specific context of the ritual and in the general (Western) cultural context.

For instance, the English poet Edward Bulwer-Lytton writes in his play *Richelieu, Or the Conspiracy*:

*True, This! –  
Beneath the rule of men entirely great,  
The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold  
The arch-enchanters wand! – itself a nothing! –*

*But taking sorcery from the master-hand  
To paralyse the Caesars, and to strike  
The loud earth breathless! – Take away the sword –  
States can be saved without it!*<sup>22</sup>

I would argue that a metaphorical connection between pens and almighty magic requires closer elaboration, especially in relation to the symbolism of privacy and personalization. It is suggested that a magician or priest should use his own magic artefacts for rituals because this will lead the ritual to have better effect (Lamond, 2004). J. K. Rowling is among the authors who has popularized this idea in her novel about Harry Potter. She describes carefully the importance of the personal connection between a magic wand and a wizard: a wizard should take care of his wand, as it is very difficult to create “correct” magic without use of one’s own wand (Rowling, 2001). Yet without their master, both pens and magic wands reduce their utility, as they take “*sorcery from the master-hand*” (Bulwer-Lytton, 1873, p. 37).

As described above, in the images, each participant is offered “a wand,” but due to unknown motives, the participants often prefer their own artefacts. The provision of individual pens and the use of personal pens to sign the documents seem to reinforce the personal meaning of the signings. An impression is formed that power should stream from a power source (a participant) through a magic wand (a pen) and take solid form in a signature that brings to life an otherwise meaningless set of papers.

The use of personal pens can also be read as a measure to strengthen male autonomy and self-sufficiency (Solheim, 1998). In other words, it can be understood as a symbolic refusal to “open” one’s physical and symbolic borders to an unknown “wand.” Such a reading suggests that a pen is a very private artefact that is closely connected to its owner.

#### ***4.5 The Symbolism of Supporting Participants***

Unlike invariable ritual artefacts, the supporting participants at the signing ceremonies differ across the three images. Despite these variations, the symbolism of the supporting participants interplays with and strengthens the gendered power symbolism of the CEOs. Reinforcement of power representation can occur, for instance, as a result of national and cultural symbolism, as well as the symbolism of domination and hierarchy.

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<sup>22</sup> Bulwer-Lytton (1873), p. 37.

### 4.5.1 *The Helpers*

The symbolism of hierarchy and status appears intensely in the image depicting the ceremony involving Statoil and Gazprom (Image 1). The image shows two men standing on both sides of the CEOs. The men seem younger than the main participants, and their names and statuses cannot be discerned as such information absents on and bellow the image. They stand at the periphery of the image and only a few millimetres are visible between their backs and the image's edge. Their heads are not fully captured: each is missing about a quarter of his head, which is cropped by the image frame. Both men bow towards the leaders, indicating their readiness to assist. The man on the right holds Miller's set of documents with both hands, while the man on the left stretches his hand in a motion that can be understood as an assisting gesture. Neither man smiles, and both seem very concentrated on their task. The men wear formal "ceremonial garments"—suits and ties. Finally, there are no chairs available for them to sit on. Taken together, these features suggest that the men are performing the role of helper—or even server—for the CEOs during the rite.

Involvement of helpers in rituals is a rather common practice. One can imagine altar servers in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, as examples. Such servers assist priests, light candles, hold wine and bread, care for altar and church silverware, hold liturgical books and ring bells. It is usual for boys and young men to serve as ceremonial servants. In contrast, girls and women are often forbidden from performing such tasks. It is only recently that the Catholic Church began to allow female altar servers. Yet despite this recent liberalization, a priest is not obliged to have female altar servers, and the strong tradition of altar boys is largely maintained.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the tasks and ages of ritual servers, these roles are commonly associated with a low status and obedience to those in higher ranks. In the case of the men in Image 1, their cropped heads and lack of identifying information in the image caption seem to signify their lower status of "helper" in relation to both the artefacts and the main participants. The main participants' powerful status is emphasized by the poses of all four persons in the picture. The presidents sit and are served while the men bow to them and serve. The CEOs do not look at the helpers, but the helpers concentrate on the main participants and the documents. The younger men are allowed very close to their masters to observe their masters' right to power. They have the privilege to serve and to be in touch with the "Holy Scripts" of the documents, while the presidents, alone, are permitted to write on

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<sup>23</sup> *Concerning the Use of Female Altar Servers* (2001). Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. <http://www.catholicliturgy.com>. Available at <http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/DocumentContents/DocumentIndex/556> (accessed 14 October 2016).

the documents. In this way, the presence of the servers seems to highlight not only the dominant position and power of the CEOs, but also their skills and wisdom, even relative to persons of the same (male) gender.

#### *4.5.2 Observers*

Not all of the participants in the images seem as anonymous and subordinate to the presidents as these helpers. The supporting figures in Image 3 suggest different associations and roles in the signing ceremony. The (then) Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, stands on the left side of the image, in front of a big British flag. The (then) Norwegian Ambassador to the UK, Kim Traavik, stands on the right side of the image, in front of a Norwegian flag. Unlike the servers in the previous image, Cameron and Traavik stand upright—Cameron with his hands on his sides and Traavik with his hands locked in front of his body. Both men have their heads turned toward the table with the documents, and they look at Lund and Laidlaw, whilst maintaining distance from them.

This composition gives the impression that Cameron and Traavik are important observers of the ceremony. They do not participate in it directly, but they are important enough to be presented (in full) in the image. At the same time, the image gives no indication of whether Cameron and Traavik are there to control the ceremony. The absence of the controlling function is also manifested by their respectable distance from the table—a distance from which they could not presumably read the documents on the table.

This image was taken in 2011. At that time, David Cameron, as the Prime Minister of the UK, was among the most influential and famous politicians in the world. Kim Traavik had held different positions in the Norwegian government and was rather famous in Norway. The presence of these official representatives of the UK and Norway from the highest political levels symbolizes the importance of the action depicted in the image.

It is difficult to say whether all viewers of this image would recognize Cameron and Traavik and, in this way, understand the significance of the rite. Yet the image features even more symbols that bind petroleum and state business together. The large British and Norwegian flags placed behind Cameron and Traavik appear to reinforce these men as guardians of national interests. In addition, these national symbols suggest that the signing of an agreement pertains to more than the private business of two companies and moves the ritual to a level of national concern.

Taking all of this into account, it is possible to say that the Prime Minister and the Ambassador were there to observe the signing and, in this way, protect the national interest of their respective states.

The symbolic hierarchy in Image 1 seems different from that of Image 3. All of the men in the image are wearing the same kind of suit, and all four are smiling and look quite relaxed. There are no subordinate or dominate persons in the picture. Rather, the image seems to depict four equally powerful men who have gathered to perform an action of national significance. The symbolic relation between them could be described as a heterarchy—a kind of tangled hierarchical relationship in which each participant refers to the other and to himself and there are no subordination or domination. In this way, each participant in the heterarchic system confirms each other's and his own right to power (Hofstadter, 2000).

The symbolism of supporting participants in Image 2 seems to mix the symbolism of Images 1 and 3. In Image 2, there are clear indications that the main participants are performing an action of national significance. As in Image 3, Image 2 depicts the flags and figures of famous politicians from Norway and China. The politicians stand behind the central figures, in a row. Two men stand beside Deschu and Lund, bowing to the main participants. It is difficult to say whether these men are helping or controlling the signing rite. Yet the level of concentration they demonstrate suggests that they are performing something important.

The significance of the action is also underlined by the quantity of participants, but in a different manner than that of Images 1 and 3. Image 2 seems to depict a crowd of VIPs who are present for the moment of signing. Due to their higher statuses, these people seem to have been selected and special, and the large number of them present at the event seems to turn the rite into something very significant.

Images 1 and 3, in contrast, depict a rather private action with only a few figures who have been allowed to participate. The participation of limited persons generates allusions that the ceremony is mysterious and sacred—an event that is only open to those who have been selected. This symbolism emerges especially in Image 1. Here, viewers may guess that there were once more people around the table. The table features two name cards (one to the left and one to the right of the two men at the center) with no persons seated behind them. It is unknown who might have been sitting by the leaders before the picture was taken, yet it is possible to conclude that these persons were not permitted to participate in the ritual.

## *4.6 Summary*

In summary, the three images analysed in this chapter connote power through forms of symbolism that have long been implemented in Western culture. This symbolism presents the power of Lund and other power possessors as sacred zone and a supernatural ability—one that is not available to “regular” people (Durkheim, 1965). Such relations between Lund and the realm of the sacred are communicated through ritual and artefacts.

Lund, his male colleagues and the male state representatives are depicted in hierarchical opposition to the other men in their respective photographic compositions. The hierarchical relations between the men are actualized by, for instance, the denial of bodily integrity and the lower status of certain men in contrast to the leaders. At the same time, the images generate illusions that men of the same rank enter into what I describe as a heterarchical symbolic relation.

Finally, yet importantly, the images’ symbolism presents bureaucracy as a superficial value and legitimates the power of the president and his colleagues as a rational-legal authority. The right to rule is also depicted in associations with state interests and politics.

Most of symbols I have described, on which power and domination rely in the images, are gender connoted.

## **Chapter 5. EARTH, OCEAN AND BOSSES**

*This chapter examines some of the symbolic meanings in images of the presidents taken en plein air. In particular, I explore images of Statoil's leaders during their visits to offshore oil platforms. What signifiers are present in the leaders' images? How does the symbolism of the presidents interplay with that of nature and industry? What is the role of female symbolism in these images?*

*I argue that some symbols of nature, industry and femininity underline maleness as an important component of power and authority. The analyzed images contain references to symbols that are deeply implicated in Western and Norwegian culture. This symbolism binds nature to femininity and substitutes it with the male beginning. The images also make references symbols of modern technology. These symbols associate the petroleum industry with a male enterprise that has no space for women.*

### **5.1 Presentation of the Images**

I selected the data images for this chapter using the same method as described in the previous chapter, with the search key words "Lund/Sætre" AND "platform." My final selection of images was typical of my wider data. My only conditions for the selection were that the photo had to have been taken outside and had to depict nature, industrial elements and the Statoil president. Aside from a few images that had been taken indoors, all of the images that resulted from my search met these criteria.

My final selection reflected my aim of achieving variety. One image depicts Lund, another depicts Sætre and a third image depicts a female figure amongst two males. This latter picture depicts the official opening of Gudrun field. This is one of very few pictures I found in which a woman is presented together with one of the presidents, and it is the only such picture that I analyze in this work.





**Image 1.** *Helge Lund presents small bottles of Gudrun oil to the Norwegian Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, and the Norwegian Petroleum and Energy Minister, Tord Lien. (Photo: Harald Pettersen, 19 August 2014)<sup>24</sup>*



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<sup>24</sup> Pettersen, H. (2014) *Helge Lund Presents Small Bottles of Gudrun Oil to the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and the Norwegian Petroleum and Energy Minister Tord Lien*. Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/en/news/archive/2014/08/19/19AugGudrun.html> (accessed 18 April 2017).

**Image 2.** *Sætre on Troll A platform. (Photo: Harald Pettersen, 19 November 2014).*<sup>25</sup>



**Image 3.** *Lund, location unknown. (Photo: Øyvind Hagen, November 2012)*  
The third image is a portrait of Lund that illustrated a news article about Statoil in 2012.<sup>26</sup>

## ***5.2 Nature and its Female Symbolism***

Nature symbolism is an important topic for this chapter. For this reason, I begin by exploring some symbolic meanings of nature in Western and Norwegian culture.

Nature, and especially the Earth (as one of the main elements of nature), is tightly bound with femininity, prosperity and all aspects of fertility (Merchant, 2008; Vakoch, 2011). The main symbolic role of the Earth is that of motherhood. Symbolism relating to motherhood is ancient in origin and continues to circulate in postmodern culture (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996). Particularly, one can find such symbols in mythology and language. For instance, in English and Norwegian one may speak about “Mother Nature” and “Mother Earth.” Mother Earth is also a goddess in many mythologies, such as the Roman Terra Mater and Slavic Mat Zemlya, and the goddess Jord is the mother of Thor and the personification of the Earth in Norse mythology. Later in history, one can find examples of nature as a mother in the fine arts. Renaissance artists commonly depicted the Earth as a young woman surrounded by fruit, vegetation and happy children. One can see that modern culture has inherited and developed the nature symbolism of the past to fine arts, movies and music (Roach, 2003).

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<sup>25</sup> Pettersen, H. (2014) *Eldar Sætre on Troll A Platform*. Statoil.com. Available at [https://production.preststogo.com/mars/search\\_solr.searchobjects?p\\_com\\_id=34&p\\_ptl\\_id=14225&p\\_oty\\_id=110136&p\\_lae\\_id=2&p\\_qcl\\_id=1](https://production.preststogo.com/mars/search_solr.searchobjects?p_com_id=34&p_ptl_id=14225&p_oty_id=110136&p_lae_id=2&p_qcl_id=1) (accessed 19 April 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Hagen, Ø. (2012) *Helge Lund*. Statoil.com. Available at <https://www.statoil.com/content/statoil/en/news/archive/2012/11/19/19NovWEO.html> (accessed 19 April 2017).

Associations between female power and the Earth and nature seem strong, even though the Christian Genesis narrative attempted to prescribe the role of a demiurge to God “the Father.” This Judeo-Christian God often demonstrates too much rationality, destructive power, anger and hardness, as in the Genesis flood narrative (Gen. 6–9). However, the Bible also associates God with light. It states: “*God is the light and there is no darkness in him at all*” (1 John 1:5). Thus, despite scriptural attempts to redistribute the role of creator to Jehovah, such symbolic contradictions lead to a situation in which Mother Earth maintains the role of demiurge. Darkness of her bowels, her fertility, “kindness” to her children, softness and diversity appear to contain too much symbolic femaleness (Merchant, 2008; Vakoch, 2011).

Nevertheless, the darkness and fertility of Mother Nature/Earth is not independent from the male beginning. “*Symbolically Earth is contrasted with Heaven as the passive with the active principal; the female with male aspects of manifestations; darkness with light*” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 331). Substituted by her spouse, Earth requires penetration and insemination to be fruitful (ibid.).

The Western philosophical tradition has developed penetration metaphors in line with ideas of the domination over nature of humanity and science. The eco-feminist and researcher Carolyn Merchant explores the language of the prominent English philosopher and father of the scientific method Francis Bacon. Among other things, Bacon writes:

*But any man whose care and concern is not merely to be content with what has been discovered and make use of it, but to penetrate further; and not to defeat an opponent in argument but to conquer nature by action; and not to have nice, plausible opinions about things but sure, demonstrable knowledge; let such men (if they please), as true sons of the sciences, join with me, so that we may pass the ante-chambers of nature which innumerable others have trod, and eventually open up access to the inner rooms.<sup>27</sup>*

Analyzing this and other metaphors by Bacon, Merchant argues that the philosopher’s imaginary “*treats nature as a female to be tortured through mechanical inventions*” (2008, p. 732). At the same time, Merchant claims that Bacon is not innovative with such thinking. She points out that Bacon was an educated man who understood social and cultural realities and was well acquainted with ancient and medieval writings. Thus, Bacon had developed socially recognized ideas and metaphors about the places of nature and the ways

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<sup>27</sup> Bacon (2000), p. 30.

in which humans should treat it. These ideas are still widely spread and blended with the concept of the domination of technical progress, male power, rationality and the supremacy of science (2008).

Water is another major element of nature that is often linked to femininity. Cold, dark, fluent water is a source of life, as is the Earth. Foster waters and irrigation waters, rivers and lakes symbolize female nature as floating, fertile, calming and soft. The ocean is also sometimes understood as a symbol of the Great Mother. In many mythologies, life appears from the ocean (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996). Yet the symbolism of the ocean seems in many ways to be associated with maleness. The ocean can be brutal, hard and challenging; it is the domain of the great but cruel Poseidon and his Roman counterpart Neptune.

Despite its brutality, the ocean is a breadwinner for the traditional male professions of merchant, explorer, seaman and fisherman. It is also the home of pirates and oil workers. In this way, men have dominated over the ocean, professionally, since ancient times. Traditionally, women have not participated in these ocean-based occupations. One of the most popular explanations of this is that women onboard a ship may bring about bad luck—their presence may anger sea gods and bring about storms and rough water (Pagh, 2001).

### *5.3 Nature in Norwegian Culture*

Nature is one of the core values of Norwegian culture, and its importance is manifested in national symbolism. For instance, the Norwegian anthem praises nature in its first verse. The Norwegian attachment to nature and its importance to the nation is reflected in the popularity of open air activities. Norwegians associate being in nature with health and an ability to manage challenges. In addition, they commonly believe that people who are involved in nature have better finances and a better career and are more highly educated. Such people are attributed with properties such as good health, skillfulness and intelligence (Vogt, 1987).

The ocean plays an important role in Norwegian culture and society due to the country's geographic position. Fishing and fish mongering have been vital for the Norwegian economy throughout the nation's history. In many ways, modern Norway still relies on fishing and sea-trading. In addition, new branches of ocean industries: such as tourism, research, ship construction and offshore oil and gas extraction also contribute to the modern economy.

Norwegian fine arts manifested nature as one of the core Norwegian values especially in the period of national romanticism in the mid-nineteenth century. Paintings from that time show the specific beauty and eternity of Norwegian

nature. Marine motifs are a central part of the art-heritage of that time. They are featured prominently, particularly in the work of such famous artists as Hans Gude, Adolph Tidemand and J.C. Dahl (Grøtvedt, 1999).



*Funeral on Sognefjord* by A. Tidemand and H. Gude (1853)<sup>28</sup>

These paintings commonly portray the ocean and the sky as animated powers, in complex relations with humans. The ocean is seen to potentially bring great harm to people, as in J.C. Dals' paintings of shipwrecks. On the other hand, paintings, such as "*Innseilingen til Christiania*" ("*From the Inlet of Christiania*") (1874) by Gude, depict the ocean as friendly to sailors and fishermen. Its soft, breadwinning waters surround the frail boats without harming them. "*Likferd på Sognefjorden*" ("*Funeral on Sognefjord*"), by Tidemand and Gude (1853), depicts a mournful landscape. The sky is grey with heavy clouds, while the ocean is quiet and motionless. There are no waves on its surface, and its waters are grey and dark. The ocean seems ready to receive and follow the deceased to his/her last journey (Haverkamp and Lange, 2003). "*Brudeferd i Hardanger*" ("*The Bridal Procession in Hardanger*"), also by Tidemand and Gude (1848), shows the opposite: a serene landscape with a blue sky and clear waters, which seems to celebrate the wedding together with the humans. Thus, the ocean helps people, shares their emotions and participates in their special occasions and daily activities (ibid.).

#### ***5.4 In Clear Control?***

Being on a platform seems to involve a lot of work in the open air. Offshore oil extraction occurs far out into the ocean, away from the mainland. Challenging weather conditions, social isolation and long working hours are regular attributes of work on the sea, and this is also true for oil workers. Before I began working

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<sup>28</sup> Gude, H. and Tidemand, A. (1853) *Funeral on Sognefjord*. Private collection.



with images taken on oil platforms, I had some prejudices about the nature of oil extracting work and oil workers. I imagined a dirty production process with oil spots everywhere and hardworking sweaty men covered with raw oil. I pictured their dry foreheads and calloused hands leaving black and noxious oil prints on their faces.

However, the images I found depicted a different reality. The persons in the photographs appeared clean and tidy. They wore luminescent yellow coveralls and full protection equipment, including gloves, helmets and earmuffs. While some black appears on their uniforms—such as on a right sleeve, breast pocket or trouser leg—the yellow color of the safety gear dominates so strongly that any black marks are not easily noticed.

In the images, Lund and Sætre wear the same uniform as the other workers. Only small details indicate that they are anything other than regular workers. The workers' light outfit gives me the impression that they work not with a potentially "dirtying" material such as oil, but in conditions of high cleanliness, such as a hospital or laboratory. This association binds oil extraction to high technology and, at the same time, to order and discipline. It appears that the people wearing these light garments have so much control over something so dirty that they remain spotless in the working process.

Still, two spots can be seen in the images of the presidents. In Image 1, Lund has a spot on his left pocket; in Image 2, Sætre has a spot on his right pocket. Lund's spot is more blue than black, while Sætre's is more black. What stories do these traits of imperfection tell? Stories of loose control? For me, it seems that these spots bring the heads of Statoil even closer to the workers on the platforms. Such little details might speak of equality and involvement in the production process, hard work and readiness for challenge.

The same hint one can read in Image 2. Sætre's coverall is opened at the top, revealing not a white office shirt but a plaid shirt. This shirt brings associations with cowboys and the Wild West. The shirt, itself, seems to narrate a story about a hardworking man. In Image 3, Lund appears more as a leader, and the blue spot on his chest could easily be mistaken for an ink spot. In addition, unlike his successor in Image 2, here, Lund wears a white or blue shirt. All considered, it is possible to say that Lund looks like a leader who is unafraid of challenges and who maintains control and distance. Thus, Lund's portrait awakes symbolic connotations that extend beyond gender differences. It narrates class differences between the leader and the workers.

### 5.5 *A Woman on Board*

Despite these differences, Lund (and Sætre) appear very much the same as the workers. They appear to fit into the surroundings and their presence on the platform seems natural. The symbolism of the uniforms worn by both leaders generates allusions that the heads respect social democracy as a value and stay close to their workers.

The light uniforms worn by the men bring about different associations when they are worn in the presence of women, as in Image 1. Here, Erna Solberg, Tord Lien, Eldar Sætre and Helge Lund are dressed in the same uniform, as they participate in the ceremonial opening of the platform. Yet while Sætre, Lund and Lien look quite comfortable in their clothes, Solberg looks as if she has borrowed clothes that do not fit her. Her uniform clings tightly to her body, especially around her hips. Though the coveralls are seemingly unisex, they appear to lack space for female curves. One can argue that the uniform is tight because the Prime Minister is overweight. This argument seems fair, but it requires further elaboration, as Solberg is not the only person carrying extra weight in the images. Sætre, as pictured in Image 2, also appears overweight. However, his uniform sits as well over his hips as it does over his stomach. He also looks rather relaxed in his uniform, in contrast to Solberg, who seems uncomfortable and out of place. Her look also appears to contradict the Norwegian understanding of the type of person who is involved in activities and/or work in nature, as described above. Chubby, poorly dressed, eyes lowered and unsmiling, Solberg appears unready for the challenges of nature—lacking such resources as strength and durability. This look is reinforced by the presence of the two smiling men in front of her.

### 5.6 *Rituals and Nature: Concur and Penetrate*

Lund presents small bottles of raw oil to Solberg and Lien against the background of a helicopter. The helicopter is painted in the colors of the Norwegian flag, evoking state symbolism. The main artefact that is manipulated by the participants is a small bottle with dark liquid—raw oil. Extracted “*through mechanical invention*” (Merchant, 2008, p. 733), oil represents the essence of Earth: it is dark and originates deep in the planet.

Thus, the dark essence of the Earth is captured in tiny bottles by men in light-colored garments. The participants of the rite can see the essence but cannot come into direct contact with it. In this way, they remain clean—separate from the oil. Nonetheless, the significance of the oil seems lessened by the size of the vessel and the ceremonial atmosphere, which seems to suggest conquest of the Earth’s essence.

The main ritual action, as shown in the image, occurs between two men. It might seem that there are three participants in the rite: the two men and the Prime Minister. However, while Solberg holds her bottle in her right hand, it appears as if she has been excluded from the rite. She seems rather lost and perplexed, as she does not smile and her eyes are cast down—not on the others.

### 5.7 *The Strange Loop*

Hierarchically, the Prime Minister should be the highest ranked of the persons in this image (not counting the person whose hand holds the microphone, as this is considered an extension of the microphone rather than a part of a human). However, the image's symbolism portrays her differently. She stands behind the men, with her figure partly concealed by the men's hands in front of her. Visually, she looks smaller than both the men and the helicopter in the background. She is the smallest of the significant objects in the composition.

Simultaneously, the image shows the moment at which the male participants exclude the Prime Minister from the rite with their body language. The men look at each other's faces. Lund bends toward Lien with his upper body, and one of his legs is placed in such a way as to suggest that he is stepping closer to Lien. Lund grins, revealing his teeth. In turn, Lien seems to be saying something to Lund. Lund and Lien touch each other with both hands. Lund shakes Lien's hand with one hand and passes the bottle of oil with his other. Thus, the men's hands create the sign of infinity, or the ouroboros (the dragon/serpent that consumes its own tail).

Infinity and the ouroboros share common meanings, and some researchers hold that the ouroboros is the original source of the infinity symbol (O'Flaherty, 1986). Both symbols manifest self-sufficiency, self-reference, autonomy, eternity and endlessness in the processes of creation and interaction within space (O'Flaherty, 1986; Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996).

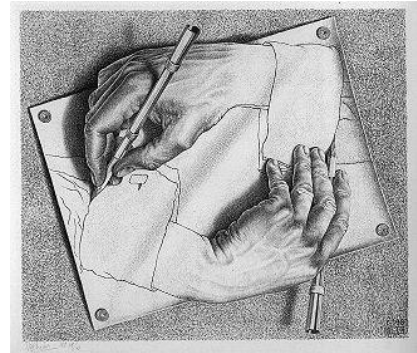
Modern art has long been interested in infinity symbolism. The Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher was especially occupied with it one of his most prominent works, "*Drawing Hands*."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Escher, M. (1948) *Drawing Hands*. Wikipedia. Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drawing\\_Hands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drawing_Hands) (accessed 19 April 2017).



The cognitive researcher Douglas Hofstadter refers to “*Drawing Hands*” as an outstanding example of the “*strange loop*” (2000, p. 689): a kind of tangled hierarchical relationship in which the highest and lowest levels are not clearly defined. A strange loop is a closed cyclical system in which different levels refer to each other (2000). Applying this concept to Image 2, one can claim that Lund and Lien refer to each other and their own selves through their body language and create a closed heterarchical system within the ritual space. As the Prime Minister is not part of the system, she is excluded from the ritual.



### *5.8 Symbolism of Metal and Technology: Size Matters*

The ritual contact between Lund and Lien occurs against a specific background that combines elements of technical and nature symbolism. This combination is also present in the other two images. Image 1 includes a helicopter and a metal deck. Image 2 shows Sætre surrounded by a metal handrail, which is likely part of an elevator or another mechanic invention. In Image 3, probably, the oil tower is used as a background for Lund’s portrait.

In Images 1 and 3, technical elements dominate in size over natural elements. Cold and strictly (often symmetrically) shaped constructions appear to refer both to technical symbolism and to symbolism of the metal of which they are made. Metal (steel and iron, in particular) is considered a male element. Symbolic connections between maleness and metal are illustrated by descriptions of the physical properties of metal in terms of strength and durability. Such connections are also actualized in relation to metal products that are used in traditional male professions (e.g., weapons, agricultural tools and mechanical and technical devices) (Gherardi, 1995; Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996). The symbolism of technical constructions, in turn, refers to rationality, symmetry, progress and control. The presence of such technical elements evokes the allusions that modern, ultra-precise technologies make fewer mistakes than humans, who are hindered by emotions and physical weaknesses.

While technical devices prevail in size over natural elements in these images, the depicted men are nearly the same size as the devices. Thus, in Image 1, Lund and Lien look taller than the helicopter. In Image 3, Lund’s head is almost the same size as the tower. In this manner, the metal constructions and the men seem to be equal partners. Yet certain details suggest that the men have a higher position than the technical elements, or that they are at least equivalent to these devices, in power. For example, Image 3 shows Lund standing slightly to the right of the tower, wearing protective equipment such as earmuffs, glasses and a helmet that

is imprinted with the Statoil logo. The earmuffs are black with a bright scarlet stripe that complements the scarlet cabin of the tower that is aligned with the stripe in the photograph. The tower in the background is blurred, which lessens its apparent size in the image. The combination of the focus on Lund's bust and the defocus on the tower not only equalizes Lund and the tower, visually. However, in combination with the tag on the helmet and the similar colors of the earmuff, these symbols seem to signify that Lund represents both the tower and the entire company.

### *5.9 Affiliation with the Ocean*

Despite the many symbols of a subordination of nature in these images, the photographs also include symbolism that seems to indicate a partnership and affinity between the presidents and nature. These symbolic allusions seem to refer, in many regards, to the sky and the ocean. Image 2 shows Sætre standing behind a yellow rail in a small cabin, which looks like an elevator and seems to float in the air. Only the top half of Sætre's body is pictured. he is depicted slightly to the right of center. The horizon's line is not straight, and for this reason all of the objects in the image seem to slant to the left, as if the platform were a boat in a storm. Sætre looks sideways, rather than at the camera, and his smiling face expresses gladness and joy. His hand, in a red glove, holds the rail in front of him in a rather relaxed fashion. He does not seem anxious about the small room he is in, or the apparent instability of the room. His head is foregrounded against the sky, with the rest of his body taking the ocean as a background. Visually, Sætre occupies almost as much space as the ocean and the sky. The proportions of the picture and the inclined horizon suggest good relations between the head of Statoil and his challenging surroundings. Even if it is a bit stormy, Sætre appears to enjoy the collaboration: he is brave and can manage the trials that the ocean or sky may bring.

Though the slight inclination of the composition hints at the unrest of the ocean, the waters behind Sætre are blurred and no waves can be identified. It seems peaceful and blue. The light of the picture is soft and it seems as if the image captures a time close to sunset. The sky is also soft, with a few clouds but no rain or storminess. Due to such details, the picture gives a feeling of peace and evokes the beauty of nature.

Image 2 is not an exception from the full set of data images analyzed in this chapter. All three pictures show the Statoil leaders in the circumstances of good weather conditions. Images 1 and 3 also display a blue and clear sky. In particular, Image 1 showcases white clouds and a small bit of calm ocean. The ocean appears to favor the people in the images and the activities on the platform.

### *5.10 Summary*

The images analyzed in this chapter produce many similar allusions to the images analyzed in the previous chapter. Power is again depicted as a supernatural ability, belonging to the sacred. The images show powerful men in the process of creating heterarchy. But here, other kinds of men and women find themselves in hierarchical relations with the presidents. Femininity seem to be excluded from power and subordinate to maleness. This gender subordination is, in part, evoked by ancient symbolism. But modern symbolism also contributes, with its frequent reference to rationality. In these images, state symbolism is also established, and a range of informal but widely recognized national Norwegian values (e.g., the value of collaboration with nature, the importance of traditional professions and the central role of the ocean) are expressed.

## Chapter 6. PORTRAITS OF POWER IN NOWADAYS STATOIL

*This chapter analyzes the symbolism of “official” portraits of Statoil’s directors. Because all of the portraits are bust portraits, I first enquire into this form of portraiture, which is popular in depictions of those with power. Further, I present the data images and my first impressions of them. Thereafter, I discuss the symbolism of the images and the power connotations of the symbols, which include heads, faces, smiles and accessories.*

*I argue that many symbols in the images depict the leaders as wise, in control, lacking human weaknesses and imperfections. The CEOs also wear symbols that ascribe them to a special group associated with selectivity. At the same time, these and other symbols signify the CEOs’ power, based on competency, cooperation and democratic values.*

### ***6.1 Bust Portraits of Power Possessors: A Historical Retrospective***

Portraiture is a popular form of depicting individuals. Today, it is arguably more popular than ever before, due to the wide availability of technical devices such as camera phones and selfie sticks. Many large organizations publish portraits of all their employees on their corporate website. In this way, modern portraiture is relatively class independent, at least in Western cultures.

However, the described situation is a rather recent trend. In the past, portraits were the privilege of only those who could afford to pay for the work of an artist or sculptor. I limit this overview to an analysis of the bust portraits of influential persons in the past and in modern times, as all three of the images I analyze in this chapter are bust portraits, depicting the subject’s head, shoulders and chest (in part).

The consistency of this form led me to consider the symbolism of busts found in Western art.<sup>30</sup> Busts portraits and sculptures are described as minimalistic; yet, as the cultural researcher Ronit Milano puts it, busts have a “*remarkable ability of such concise and limited art form to formulate and communicate complex cultural ideas and messages*” (2015, p. 2).

Use of busts to depict powerful persons has been popular since ancient times. For example, busts had a special place in the art of ancient Rome (Henig, 1983). At that time, when copies of the emperors’ busts were scattered across the empire for propaganda purposes. The appearance of the emperors was frequently idealized.

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<sup>30</sup> I discuss bust portraits and bust sculptures as two forms that share much in common when it comes to symbolism and portrayals of persons. I define and refer to these forms as “busts,” and understand busts to be visual portrayals of a person’s head, neck, shoulders and—sometimes—chest and arms.

For example, the posthumous head of Emperor Trajan found in Ostia differs from portraits from his later years of his life.

*In the Ostian portrait the stern, vigorous head, with a low, sloping forehead, is set on a thick powerful neck. There are none of the marks of age and fatigue which tend to characterize the portraits of the last years of his life [...] The features are idealized and the Emperor appears as a god even though the human personality of the disciplined soldier and able administrator palpitates within the marble.<sup>31</sup>*

Bust portraits and sculptures also achieved great popularity in the Enlightenment period, when they depicted monarchs and other powerful persons, as well as thinkers, writers and artists (Milano, 2015). According to Milano, busts from that period reflected ideas of selfhood and individual identity. These ideas, in many regards, took shape in that period of Western history (ibid.).

Busts were also popular for depicting powerful persons in the twentieth century. For instance, they were regular components in personality cults. For example, busts of Stalin and Mao Zedong were widespread at the time of their ruling. These mass-produced busts and bust portraits were commonly featured in offices and homes (Apor et al., 2004; Pisch, 2016).

They were also used during demonstrations and parades, as depicted in this picture.



A celebration of Stalin's 70th birthday in the People's Republic of China.<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, busts competed in popularity with the full-size statues that decorated the streets of the USSR under Stalin's rule (Apor et al., 2004). However, these two forms of propagandistic art seem to have served different purposes in ancient Rome and Stalin's Soviet Union. The full-size statues aimed at intimidating and reminding viewers of the greatness of the ruler, whereas the busts represented

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<sup>31</sup> Henig (1983), pp. 86-87.

<sup>32</sup> *A Celebration of Stalin's 70th Birthday in the People's Republic of China*. Wikipedia (2017). Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalin%27s\\_cult\\_of\\_personality#/media/File:Stalin\\_birthday2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalin%27s_cult_of_personality#/media/File:Stalin_birthday2.jpg) (accessed 14 October 2016).

more “intimate” kind of propagandistic art. Smaller portraits and sculptures found their place on working tables and walls in homes, offices and schools. Their presence in these smaller public rooms and private homes provided constant reminders of the power possessor and his pervasive presence.

Today, as the images of this chapter show, power possessors still seem to prefer bust portraiture. It is sometimes difficult to find sculptural busts or even painted portraits of such people in today’s Norway, but it is easy to find such portraits online.

Do these modern portraits resemble the propagandistic portraits of Stalin and Mao, or do they give a different impression? What are the power allusions in these pictures? On which principals does power seem to rely? Can one see in them the influence of society and Norwegian social values, such as social democracy? Can one find symbolic references to elitism? And what place does gender take in relation to power in these images?

## *6.2 The Presentation of Data Images*

The first picture I analyze illustrates a press release from the 15th of October 2014, that announced the resignation of Lund from his position at Statoil.

In the image, Lund looks straight into the camera with a smile that reveals his dimples. He stands slightly to the right of center, and wears a dark suit with a deep blue tie and a light shirt. His only decoration is a pin on his lapel. His arms are beside his body and his right arm is slightly lifted. The background is a soft yellow/grey. A blurry green plant is visible on the left side.



*(Photo: Ole Jørgen Bratland)*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bratland, O. (2014) *Helge Lund*. Statoil.com. Available at [http://www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2014/Pages/15Oct\\_HelgeLund.aspx](http://www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2014/Pages/15Oct_HelgeLund.aspx) (accessed 06 September 2016).



*(Photo: Harald Pettersen)<sup>34</sup>*

The second image is of Sætre. It was used to illustrate a message from the 4th of February 2015, announcing Sætre's new position as the company's official leader. Sætre faces the camera and looks at it head on. He smiles. His hair is cut short and he wears glasses with a thin frame. Unlike the two other images analyzed in this chapter, this image reveals little more than his head; only his shoulders and a small portion of his chest are visible. Sætre wears a suit jacket but no tie. As in Image 1, here, the background is blurry and Sætre wears a pin on his lapel.

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<sup>34</sup> Pettersen, H. (2015) *Eldar Sætre*. Statoil.com. Available at [www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2015/Pages/04Feb\\_EldarSaetre\\_CEO.aspx](http://www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2015/Pages/04Feb_EldarSaetre_CEO.aspx) (accessed 6 September 2016).



*(Photo: photographer unknown)<sup>35</sup>*

The third image is an illustration taken from Sætre's CV, which is publicly accessible on [statoil.com](http://statoil.com).

Here, Sætre stands slightly sideways, in the same manner as Lund in Image 1. He wears a dark suit and a blue tie, and his glasses and a single pin are his only accessories. The background is dark, and his arms are by his sides. He looks straight at the camera and smiles so broadly that his teeth are visible.

All three images are so-called posed portraits. The models are aware that they are being photographed, and they pose accordingly in front of the camera. The images are quite similar in their composition, the posture of the depicted persons, the clothes the subjects wear, their exposure of particular body parts and their style. Due to the similarities between the images, it was very difficult for me to analyze them individually. Moreover, I quickly concluded that the similarities provided a fertile ground for analysis. Thus, this chapter focuses mainly on the symbols found in all three images. Only occasionally do I discuss some symbols in the context of a specific photograph.

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<sup>35</sup> *Eldar Sætre*. Statoil.com. Available at <http://www.statoil.com/no/About/CorporateGovernance/GoverningBodies/CorporateExecutiveCommittee/Pages/Saetre.aspx> (accessed 6 September 2016).



### ***6.3 First Impression***

One of the principal similarities of the images is their minimalism. There are relatively few details in the compositions, and the postures of the depicted figures. The backgrounds are simple. I perceive Image 3 as the most laconic in its symbolism—featuring a man in a dark suit against a dark background. However, neither of the other two images have many details or colors. Unlike the images analyzed in Chapter 5, the photos analyzed here show no expensive items. Probably, the clothes appear to have been made of expensive fabrics, and the haircuts and glasses suggest that the depicted men earn a good income.

Though the pictures, themselves, are brief, my first impression from looking at them was that the portrayed persons were rather secure in their state. They appeared to me as independent men who did not need the support of others. Their images suggested autonomy and self-sufficiency, but of a different kind to the self-sufficiency discussed in the previous chapter.

When I reflected on my first impression, I determined that my feeling arose from the composition of the portraits. In official portraits, symbolism tends to concentrate on the uniqueness of the person depicted. A blotted or dark background seems to remove “unnecessary details” that could potentially disturb viewers from the figure in the camera’s focus. In the three images analyzed in this chapter, the pictured figures take up more than two-thirds of the composition. However, it is not their body that takes up this visual space, but their heads and faces.

### ***6.4 Head and Shoulders Above***

The photos of Lund and Sætre do not depict their heads, alone. Yet the head is the only body part that is fully depicted in all three images. There is even extra space around each head, as if to ensure that not even one hair should be hidden to viewers. The same careful treatment of the heads is found in all of the images in this master thesis, when it comes to the depictions of influential persons. Yet heads are dealt with much less accurately when they belong to persons who are less important, such as the helpers in Image 1 in Chapter 5.

The head is an ancient symbol of rule and leadership. “[It] *symbolizes the driving force of the active principle, including the power of government [and] legislation*” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 476). As such, it is an established metaphor in many European languages. For example, the word “head” has a double meaning in English, referring to both a ruler/leader and the top of a body. At the same time, the head is a symbol of not only leadership but also *male* leadership, as it correlates with other principal male symbols, such as light, rationality and order.

For instance, the Bible refers to the head as a symbol of male primacy: “*I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God*” (1 Cor. 11:3).

1 Corinthians (12:12–14) and other Christian writings develop these ideas in relation to the church as an organization, wherein the church is the bride and metaphoric body of Christ, while Christ is its head.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the double meaning of the head as a leader and an organ provides a metaphor through which an organization can be understood as a body—a live organism with a vital need for a head as a ruling part. In addition, the head is atop a body. This symbolic dimension emphasizes vertical hierarchy as a necessary aspect of an organization.

Finally, yet importantly, the head is a leading organ due to its capability for mental activity. The head is where thought processes are conducted (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996), and it houses the brain, which is one of the main symbols of rationality and human dominance over reality. In this way, the head manifests the treasury of mind, wisdom and knowledge.

### ***6.5 Face: Individuality Turned to the World***

More “symbols of wisdom” in the photos can be found on the faces of Lund and Sætre. The face is the body part that is most revealed in the images, and arguably the most visible part of any human head. Indeed, it is one of the most principal parts of any human body. Culturally, there is a common belief that one’s face has a superficial ability to express one’s nature, virtues and vices. In this sense, a face directs one’s individuality to the outer world (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996).

Hamlet, talking to his mother about his deceased father and his uncle, shows her two portraits. As he describes his father’s personality, he refers to the traits of the face:

*Look here, upon this picture, and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;  
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;  
A combination and a form indeed,  
Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
To give the world assurance of a man:*

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<sup>36</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2016). Vatican.va. Available at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> (accessed 14 October 2016).

*This was your husband...*<sup>37</sup>

Hamlet explains that his father's face expresses his individuality: the king's facial traits, both individually and collectively, express his positive personality. Hamlet's description of his father in relation to the portrait sounds idealized. It is impossible to say whether Hamlet describes a romanticized view of the portrait or a personal idealization of his father. However, as mentioned above, it has long been common for portraits to be idealized in order to emphasize their subject's positive characteristics and/or to hide "vices."

Modern photography uses multiple methods to "improve" a person's facial appearance. One method is the application of makeup (Cortese, 2007). Another is the use of digital editing. I see no trace of makeup on the faces of Lund or Sætre but it is difficult—if not impossible—for me to say whether the images were in any way digitally manipulated. Nonetheless, some details appear to have been especially emphasized in the photos, and these features seem to narrate a story of wisdom, experience and health as essential components of their subject's individuality. Here, I shall take a closer look at three of these features: skin color, wrinkles and smiles.

In my opinion, the faces of the presidents appear healthy. This opinion emerges, primarily, due to the skin texture, which is rather smooth. Further, the color of the skin is sun tanned in Image 1 and rosy in Images 2 and 3. In these photos, there is not even a hint of pallor or another color imperfection that might evoke associations with fatigue, stress or illness. On the other hand, some features have clearly *not* been digitally removed from the faces or hidden by makeup. For example, both Lund as Sætre have visible wrinkles on their faces (especially Lund, in Image 1). These wrinkles are particularly observable around the eyes.

Wrinkles have several symbolic connotations in Western culture. One of the most common connotations is of aging, withering and declining sexual attractiveness. These meanings are especially associated with wrinkles on female faces, and are common motivations for the complete removal of wrinkles on female faces in images. As the media researcher Anthony J. Cortese describes:

*women use foundation makeup to hide small wrinkles, because eliminating of any age signs of aging contributes toward a more desirable and attractive image. Skin tones are warmed up in order to project a healthy sexual glow.*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Shakespeare (1805), pp. 220-221.

<sup>38</sup> Cortese (2007), pp. 33-34.

The situation is different in these images of Statoil's presidents. While their facial skin is largely smooth and healthy, some wrinkles are visible. Unlike women in public images, Lund and Sætre are seemingly allowed to "wear" their wrinkles. They are permitted to be as they are, and the "candor" with which they expose the only nude part of their bodies seems to give their wrinkles a different symbolic meaning than one of age. Their overall healthy look appears to reject any symbolism of withering. Rather, it awakes allusions to maturity, experience, wisdom and knowledge. This impression appears even stronger in combination with the men's gray hair, as gray hair is also a symbol of life experience and a cause for respect from those who are younger (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996).

Finally, yet importantly, all three images show the leaders with large, expansive smiles. Viewers can see dimples on Lund's face and teeth in Sætre's second image. Smiling can have very different meanings across different cultures, and can express a wide range of feelings from fear and insecurity to sarcasm. However, in the context of Western culture, smiles are viewed as indicative of positive traits, such as kindness, openness, an easy temper and charisma. Smiles establish confidence and communicate self-sufficiency. In addition, people who smile are perceived as more intelligent and trustworthy in the business world (Harris and Nelson, 2008).

Smiling can be distinguished from other features, such as wrinkles and hair, because it is a method of *nonverbal communication*. As Harris and Nelson note:

*In organizations, nonverbal communication is more important than verbal communication in informal settings (Richmond, McCroskey and Payne, 1987). Power and affiliation are shown through nonverbal behaviour.*<sup>39</sup>

As a method of communication, a smile often calls for an informal, relaxed atmosphere. It creates a certain intimacy between a smiling person and the person at whom s/he smiles. All considered, one can say that the leaders in the images not only appear as gifted and credible, but they also seem to communicate their power as open to dialogue.

In this manner, the smiling and relaxed presidents with wisdom wrinkles appear to fit ideas of open and democratic leadership, with governance based on experience, knowledge, competence, cooperative ability and trust.

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<sup>39</sup> Harris and Nelson (2008), p. 138.

## ***6.6 The Chest and the Heart: Protect and Live***

The third part of the body (following on from the heads and faces) that takes a visible space in the images is the chest. The only picture in which the chest is virtually absent is Image 2. The men in Images 1 and 3 stand with their shoulders back and their chests pushed forward, given emphasis. When I look at these images, I think about the chest and breast as two of the most ancient female symbols, manifesting motherhood, a mother's protection, tenderness and compassion (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 118). This symbolism is difficult for me to associate with these photos. The chests in these images seem overly masculine. They appear wide—probably wider than they actually are, as the width seems to be emphasized by their sideways pose and the rectangular shoulders of their jackets. Image 1 differs slightly from the other two images. Here, Lund's chest appears rather athletic, and this evokes associations with energy, strength and durability. Although the chest in Image 3 does not appear as athletic as the chest in Image 1, it is possible to say that, in this image, Sætre still displays a similar posture to Lund: shoulders back, back straight and chest thrust out.

In addition, Lund and Sætre (literally) wear, on their chests, a sign of maleness in the form of a suit. The suit is a modern male symbol associated with authority, control and discipline (Bolsø and Mühleisen, 2015). As the Swedish social anthropologist Fanny Ambjörnsson puts it, the suit became a civil uniform for men with authority, signaling self-restriction and rationality in its wearer (2011).

These characteristics, together with the suit, seem to cover not only the chests of the depicted men. Metaphorically, they also shield the heart. Commonly, the heart is associated with the center of human nature and human life (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 479), and it is often believed to be the location of the human soul. Together with the head, the heart represents one of the most vital parts of the human body, as the body cannot function without it. The head and the heart symbolize wisdom of two kinds—rational and spiritual; the head thinks and the heart is thought to feel (ibid.). A suit that covers the heart seems to restrict the wearer's emotions and instead emphasize the strengths of the head: discipline and good sense.

## ***6.7 Pin it Up***

The thrust-out chests, uniformity of clothes, strict and simple lines of suits, dark and monotone colors and even short haircuts and smoothly shaved faces can be described in terms of a symbolism of discipline, minimalism, restriction and control. These details and their symbolic connotations also evoke associations with the military, as if the presidents of Statoil are commanders who are called to

lead and protect the organization. This symbolism appears even stronger due to the lapel pins seen on their chests.

The chest is a common body part for displaying military decorations such as medals, orders and ribbons. In the images, the small pins occupy this traditional place. It is very difficult (impossible) to discern the pin in detail. Thus, I shall not discuss the symbolic meaning of the pin, itself, but rather explore the common meaning of pins on suits.

Frequently, a pin is used as an emblem. Lapel pins regularly indicate membership to an organization or a group or society bounded by the same ideology (e.g., labor unions, scout organizations and the Freemasons). In addition to adhering to a certain ideological program, such organizations are typically based on principals of collaboration, mutual help and fraternity. In this way, a lapel pin can symbolize not only individual power, but the power of a group in which members support each other's interests in the event of an external threat. It is also typical that becoming a member of such an organization (and consequently gaining the right to wear its emblem) requires some effort, such as application for membership, payment of a regular contribution or even successful execution of initialization rites. Membership is rarely automatic, as selection criteria vary from organization to organization. Thus, a pin may signify selectivity and belonging to a special group. In the context of these images, the question of what kind of group the pins indicate membership to remains open. However, the membership is clearly important enough to these men that they wear their lapel pins as a necessary part of their "uniform" in their official portraits.

The pins on the jackets of Statoil's leaders evoke another symbolic meaning of insignias on the chest. There are established traditions in which a powerful person inherits symbols of power from a predecessor and wears these symbols on the chest. For instance, a mayor may receive a chain of office from his/her predecessor. Indeed, it is no place for such idea that Lund transmitted a lapel pin to his successor, Sætre. However, the presence of a pin in all three official portraits can be understood as a symbol of continuity and succession, which again evokes an allusions about a closed system and the selectivity of those who are depicted. Pins are written into the general symbolic narrative of the images. They interplay with other symbols, such as suits, short and neat haircuts, elegant glasses and closely shaved, healthy faces. In this way, the pins seem to signal that the described selectivity pertains to not only gender, but also class—perhaps a class of leaders. Taken together, these symbols indicate the men's membership in the upper class of society—its elite.

## 6.8 The “Whole Man” and Symbolism of Amputation

In the final section of this chapter, I return to the bust as a form of depicting gender and power. When I started to work with the portraits of the presidents, there did not seem to be much symbolism present. Nonetheless, a feeling of male domination was salient. This impression appeared to be rooted in the minimalism of the bust. I looked at the pictures and understood that, despite the absence of the majority of the body, I felt I could see the individuals in their entirety. The core of the person—his Alpha and Omega—was there.

I was not the first to notice this remarkable ability of busts. The cultural historian Irving Lavin describes this phenomenon in relation to Italian Renaissance busts, wherein parts of the body were deliberately amputated to give viewers a feeling that they were looking at a fragment. He writes:

*The arbitrary amputation specifically suggests that what is visible is part of a larger whole, that there is more than meets the eye. By focusing on the upper part of the body, but deliberately emphasizing that it is only a fragment, the Renaissance bust evokes the complete individual – that sum total of physical and psychological characteristics to which contemporaries already referred as the “whole man.”<sup>40</sup>*

Analyzing this quote, I ask: What about the “whole woman”? The Norwegian gender researchers Agnes Bolsø and Wenche Mühleisen note that women in power positions are pictured with enough symbols to convince viewers that they are indeed looking at a woman. Such portraits often include numerous symbolic references through accessories, colors, hair styles and sartorial elements such as frills and low necklines (2015). In this way, the minimalism of busts is reversed in order to establish the depicted person’s gender characteristics.

The situation is rather opposite in my data images. Here, all details and parts of the body that could be associated with femininity have seemingly been removed. The only place in which femininity could, in theory, find a place—namely the chest—is overloaded with references to maleness.

Moreover, by removing the majority of the body, the images seem to remove any hint of bodily “imperfection” that fall short of Western standards of beauty and maleness (e.g., excess weight, shortness and/or incorrect proportions). Any human aspects of (for example) somatic diseases and infirmity are also hidden. Thus, the absence of a visible body appears to convey that the pictured person has no “weakness” of a regular human.

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<sup>40</sup> Lavin (1975), p. 353.

## *6.9 Summary*

To conclude, it is possible to say that the dominant symbolic motifs in the portraits associate power with rationality, selectivity and belonging to a special (elite) group. While many of the symbols refer to the elitism of the presidents, others paradoxically suggest that the corporate leaders abide by modern Norwegian values of social democracy, legal authority, cooperation and openness.

Individuality and charisma are important reference points in the symbolic representation of dominant ability. They bind authority to maturity, experience and visible health. In the three images analyzed in this chapter, the presidents are depicted in a way that minimizes their human wrongs and weaknesses through a symbolic concentration on the upper part of their body. Rationality appears as their individual and superior value. The minimalism of these portraits is important for suggesting a lack of failure and “optimal” function. Rationality, individuality and charisma, as they are depicted in the images, awake associations with their implicit maleness as necessary characteristics for power and domination.



## **Chapter 7. TEARING THE OUROBOROS RING**

*In the beginning of this thesis I asked: What symbolic allusions of gendered power are generated by visual representations of Statoil's presidents in the images featured on its corporate website? This master's thesis has not aimed at exploring all of the symbols of power in the images. The surplus of meanings would have made such a purpose a meaningless task, beyond my capabilities. Instead, I have concentrated on a few symbolic interpretations relating to power and gender. Yet it is important to note that my interpretations do not cover all gender power symbolic meanings. Many of the symbols that I have explored in previous chapters have connotations that I felt incapable of writing about. In addition, there is no such thing as a consensus or continuity in symbolic allusions. Many allusions are ambivalent and even contradictory. Nevertheless, new interpretations can emerge from each symbol in an image. For instance, I am aware that my interpretations might have been rather different if I had chosen images with more women in them, even though the women would have been shown in the company of the presidents. For this reason, as described in the theoretical part of this work, there is no "right" interpretation of symbols, but numerous valid interpretations of them. This chapter discusses my general observations following my analysis of allusions, which seemed real to me.*

*To summarize my interpretations, I found several trends relating to the ways in which gendered power was manifested in the images. I concentrate here on gender interpretation, especially, but it is fair to say that this theme intertwines with other dimensions, such as class, health and economic wealth.*

### ***7.1 Power as Sacred and Supernatural***

Power, as shown in the images, seems to be communicated through symbols that run deep in time and Western culture. Such symbols can be read in all of the analysed images. Much of the ancient symbolism that is apparent in these images involves references to power as a supernatural phenomenon. This happens, among other things, due to employment: for instance, due to the use of ritual motifs and the depiction of power possessors as persons enriched with special gifts such as the ability to launch global processes through private action (by signing documents, passing on an artefact, etc.) and/or to collaborate with and rule over nature. In such depictions, power and domination are connoted as sacred in terms of being separate from and inaccessible to those who do not belong to a special group of men.

## ***7.2 Symbolic Exclusion and Domination over Femininity***

The symbolic veneration of power is gender connoted in these images not only because the images predominantly depict men. Traditional male symbolism and the symbolism of the sacred allude to each other, since maleness (much as the sacred) is separate, autonomic and immune to external invasion (Solheim, 1998). In addition, the artefacts that are manipulated by the power possessors awake associations with maleness in their connection to traditional occupations, paternity and fraternity.

Generally, there are few clear female symbols in the images. However, wherever femininity is symbolically established, it seems subordinate. Communicative motifs with nature stand out especially in this regard.

Gender subordination is also connoted through old symbolism—for instance, the symbolic domination of size and shape. Male-associated symbols occupy major visual space in these images. Further, due to the overrepresentation of men and the lack of women in the images, females are explicitly excluded from power. Where women are pictured, they are shown to lack the necessary characteristics for possessing power.

## ***7.3 Hierarchy, Heterarchy and Belonging to a Special Group***

In the images, power is communicated not only through gender symbolism. Additional symbolism alludes to class difference, age difference, occupational difference and hierarchical difference. Many such references are established through the symbolic hierarchies between different kinds of men. Relations between powerful men and other men are constructed as oppositional through the postures, gestures, facial expressions and bodily devaluation of the other men. Infraction of the bodily integrity of other men opposes the bodily inviolability of the presidents and their equals.

Hierarchy—in terms of subordination—is not symbolically established in images in which the presidents are depicted amidst a circle of male colleagues and state representatives. In such cases, the company's heads are shown as equal to the other men, who also possess power. The symbolism between these men is one of heterarchy. Heterarchic symbolism alludes to fraternity, elitism and belonging to a superior society that is closed to other men and women. This closeness may be expressed through body language, gesture, mimicry and dress. In addition, the heterarchic symbolism of power is self-referent and self-re-establishing.

#### ***7.4 National Symbolism and State Power***

Many of the images depict official state representatives who are high ranking men. These men appear to be in a heterarchical—power equal—relationship with the presidents. The state officials and state symbolism in these photos connote the power of Statoil’s presidents as legitimate and one that is exercised in accordance with state politics. In addition, depictions of the presidents in the company of high ranking state officials emphasises the important role of the company heads and suggests that the petroleum industry is important to the state.

“Informal” national values are also symbolically presented. The photos illustrate a wide range of cultural values, such as the symbolism of nature, values relating to traditional Norwegian ocean-based occupations and ideas of social democracy (Bolsø and Mühleisen, 2015).

#### ***7.5 Rationality as a Superior Value***

One of the most dominant symbolic motifs in the images is the symbolism of what Weber calls “rational-legal authority” (1978). This includes symbolic variations on themes such as rationality, clarity, order, bureaucracy and control. Such allusions are often made through modern symbolism; for instance, the symbolism of office dress, documentation and technology. Rationality appears as a central value in this symbolism, associated with both maleness and effective management. The rational/“male” effectivity is established in depictions of the presidents in both the office and the open air. Such visual representations complement a traditional understanding of managerial jobs that “*have been defined as a matter of instrumentality, autonomy, result-orientation etc.*” (Billing and Alvesson, 2000, p. 144). Finally, yet importantly, rationality appears error-free, due to its disconnection from emotions.

#### ***7.6 Between Rationality and Charisma***

While rationality stands out as a core virtue of the presidents’ individuality. The images also grant the CEOs other positive properties, such as wisdom, experience and knowledge. Their calm, wrinkled, healthy-looking skin and smiling faces, surrounded by soft collars and solid materials suggest that the presidents have abilities to negotiate, co-opt and attract. They combine the properties of good fathers and effective managers, simultaneously. Similar to priests and magicians, these men seem to belong to an elite group in which other members are also unique and this uniqueness legitimizes their power.

In this way, the images seem to step back from ideas of rational-legal authority. They introduce the heads of Statoil as persons with individuality and charisma, wherein charisma is:

*[A] certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.<sup>41</sup>*

Taken together, it is possible to say that power is visually expressed in these images through symbols that connote it as a supernatural ability belonging to a closed (elite) group of men. Paradoxically, the men are simultaneously loyal to national ideas, such as social democracy. In addition, the men are symbolically enriched by a strong set of individual characteristics that rely on a web of symbolism of (gendered) rationality and (gendered) charisma.

In the symbolic polyphony of allusions of elitism, class differences, wellness and more, gender—in terms of maleness—is symbolically established as the leitmotif of power and manifested as an essential property for power possession.

### ***7.8 Is Change Possible?***

This state of affairs leads me to wonder: Is there a space for changing the depiction of symbolic gendered power in the images produced by large companies? If so, where is this space? What symbolic metaphors should be avoided, and how? Is it need to change the symbolic appearance of rationality? Or charisma? I would say that the symbolism of rationality, with its implicit allusion to maleness should be avoided. Following Krogstad and Storvik (2007), I also argue that charisma can be helpful for visually representing authority as gender equal, but it must be depicted differently from its representation in the images analysed here.

At the end of the previous section I quoted Weber's definition of charisma. Analysing this quote, Geertz writes:

*Like so many of the key ideas in Weber's sociology—*verstehen*, legitimacy, inner-worldly asceticism, rationalization—the concept of charisma suffers from an uncertainty of referent: does it denote a cultural phenomenon or a psychological one? At once “a certain quality” that marks an individual as standing in a privileged relationship to the sources of being and a hypnotic*

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<sup>41</sup> Weber (1978), p. 241.

*power “certain personalities” have to engage passions and dominate minds, it is not clear whether charisma is the status, the excitement, or some ambiguous fusion of the two.*<sup>42</sup>

I concur with Geertz’s statement and also add that the symbolism of power in the analysed images, employing charisma as “*a certain quality*,” takes a conventional—and quite boring—route. The images invite viewers to believe that male leadership, based on charismatic and rational “good sense” with a dash of social democracy, is what companies such as Statoil need. The images’ habitual symbolism of power is rather convincing. As the American anthropologist David Kertzer puts it: “*It is hard to argue with a flag, especially if you do not have another flag of your own; hard to argue with a song, unless you have another anthem to sing*” (1988, p. 184).

However, Weber’s ambiguous definition of charisma seems also to provide space for other kinds of charisma that are not found in the images. It also provides a tool for overcoming the rigidity of Weber’s rationality, with its implicit maleness, and weakening the influence of rationality as a superior value.

Thus, Geertz continues his analysis of charisma and leadership by enquiring into the rituals through which Queen Elizabeth I of England legalized her right to rule. The Queen employed the symbolism of virtues such as compassion, wisdom, love and justice. She also used examples from the Bible (e.g., Deborah, the Judge of Israel), to defend her rights despite being a woman (1985).

The Norwegian researchers Krogstad and Storvik claim that contemporary Norwegian and French female politicians use the symbolism of charisma in a similar way as Queen Elizabeth more than 400 years ago (2007). Many female politicians—both in France and Norway—try to avoid a symbolism of rationality. Visually, they establish their charisma through a wide range of symbolic manifestations—from allusions to female heroes such as Jeanne d’Arc to ironic references to their own sexuality (ibid.).

In turn, Bolsø and Mühleisen analyze images of Norwegian female top leaders and describe “*feminizing to power*” as a fertile visual policy. They analyze an image of Kristin Skogen Lund (the administrative director of Næringslivets Hovedorganisasjon). The researchers note that, wearing a top with an open neckline and red frills, she looks approachable, open for conversation, not dressed in luxurious looking clothes and feminine. Nonetheless, this precise look helps to support her power (2015).

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<sup>42</sup> Geertz (1985), p. 13.

The difference between Queen Elizabeth I of England and Kristin Skogen Lund is only one of time. The Queen had to maneuver symbolic systems that had been narrowed by the traditional society of that time. In contrast, Kristin Skogen Lund, as a contemporary of post-modernity, has wider choices that has been provided to her by current social dynamics. Throughout history, seemingly rigid symbolic systems change due to social transformations. As Kertzer puts it, “*when symbolic systems collide with refractory social or physical forces, the potential for change in the symbolic system is ever present*” (Kertzer, 1988, p. 4). In such collisions, humans create new symbols and give new meaning to old symbols. Exposed to social changes, humans melt seemingly solid symbolic systems into the air (Berman, 2010). Postmodern dynamics, by spinning numerous contractionary processes at once, provide enough fuel to melt any supposedly solid construction. Gender symbolism is no exception. Today, there are countless visual strategies for charismatic presentation. Such strategies support the legitimacy of power but do not involve allusions to subordination, gender supremacy and (gendered) rationality. So, what is preventing the integration of such visual strategies?

In searching for a possible answer to this question, I would like to return to the mentioned article by Bolsø and Mühleisen (2015). Writing about the symbolism of male and female clothing in pictures, they note the paradox that influential men have fewer variations in their outfits (Bolsø and Mühleisen, 2015, p. 227). I agree with this observation, and when I look at my data images, I think that this paradox is not only about clothes. It also pertains to the composition of the images. Despite the images’ varying motifs, in each of the photos, the men appear condemned to pose in given positions, to wear certain clothes and to serve concrete roles in specific circumstances, as prescribed by protocol. While women may try different strategies as they would try different garments, men are captured in the same visual rhetoric of office suits. In light of postmodern power dynamics, their faithfulness to the symbolism of rationality, their attachment to dominant rituals and their dependence on heterarchy seems to be symbols of an obsession with their own elitism, a sign of an unrealistic belief in their own almightiness and a fear of leaving the comfort zone provided by the quadratic frames of rationality.

When I began this work, I did not expect to find photographs of the presidents dancing a dance of thanks to the Earth for the gift of oil in Hawaiian shorts and slippers. Today I ask myself: Would this be so comical? Is a rite of thanks to the Earth for her gifts more comical than a rite of passing her essence to others in a tiny bottle or being served a pen by someone who bows to you? I say no. Actually, to me, the rite would seem more respectful to nature and more loyal to Norwegian values. However, I guess it would be rather frightening to perform this rite in front of cameras.

So, there is a question of daring. Or, more precisely, a question of daring to exercise the great human ability of symbol creation. Are current male leaders in the Norwegian petroleum industry brave enough to tear the ouroboros ring? Can they step out of the rigid box of rationality and the unavailable sacred? Do they have enough courage to look equal to their female colleagues, wearing red frills? Are they daring enough to give people in red frills space in images? Can they create new symbols and use old symbols in accordance with the demands of postmodern power dynamics? I want to believe that if women can do this, then men also have this potential. Moreover, as contemporaries of current times, in order to survive, they must demand transformations, “*seek them out and carry them through*” (Berman, 2010, pp. 95- 96).

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# APPENDIX 1

## Screen Shots from Statoil.com

The screenshot shows the Statoil website's news section. The main headline is "StatoilHydro signs Shtokman agreement with Gazprom". Below the headline is a photograph of Helge Lund, CEO of StatoilHydro, and Alexei Miller, chair of Gazprom, signing the agreement. The text below the photo states: "StatoilHydro has today, 25 October, signed a frame agreement with Gazprom to become partner in the Shtokman development, phase 1." Further text explains that the agreement gives StatoilHydro a 24% equity interest in the Shtokman Development Company, which is a joint venture between Gazprom (51%) and Total (25%). It also mentions that StatoilHydro will be responsible for planning, financing, and constructing the infrastructure for the first phase of the Shtokman development, and will own the infrastructure for 25 years from start of commercial production. The implementation of the project is subject to a final investment decision in the second half of 2009. A quote from Helge Lund states: "This agreement represents an opportunity for StatoilHydro to participate in the development of Shtokman phase 1."

The screenshot shows the Statoil website's news section in Norwegian. The main headline is "Statoil og Centrica inngår stor gassavtale". Below the headline is a photograph of Helge Lund, CEO of Statoil, and David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, signing the agreement. The text below the photo states: "Statoil ASA (OSE, STL, NYSE: STOI) og Centrica har inngått en langsigtig avtale om levering av 5 milliarder kubikkmeter gass per år fra 2015 til 2025 til det britiske markedet." Further text explains that the new long-term agreement is a sale of gas to existing customers between Statoil and Centrica, starting in 2015. It also mentions that the agreement shows the importance of natural gas as a key role in the UK's energy mix, and that Statoil's commitment to natural gas is seen as a competitive advantage. A quote from Helge Lund states: "Dagens kunngjøring er av høy strategisk viktighet for to av Storbritannias viktigste energikjætere på seg langsigtede forpliktelser for å bidra til Storbritannias energisikkerhet. Avtalen viser også at Statoils portefølje av naturgass på norsk sokkel er konkurransedyktig, sier Helge Lund." A second quote from Helge Lund states: "Jeg ønsker denne kunngjøringen velkommen. Den understreker styrken, dybden og den gjensidige gløden av det gode partnerskapet mellom Storbritannia og Norge - ikke uten at spilletrolle i vår økonomi og det vil"

www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2010/Pages/11JuneSinochemAndStatoil.aspx

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## Sinochem og Statoil undertegner samarbeidsavtale

Det kinesiske selskapet Sinochem Group og Statoil undertegner en intensjonsavtale i Oslo i dag som vil fremme samarbeid og langiktig erfaringsdeling mellom de to selskapene.



**Sinochem blir 40% partner i Peregrino-feltet i Brasil**

Statoil ASA har inngått avtale om å selge en 40 prosent...

**Brasil**

Vi er operatør og har 60 prosent eierandel i Peregrino-feltet.

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Kommerselråd i Sinochem Group Liu Deshu og Statoil-kommerselråd Helge Lund undertegner intensjonsavtaler i Oslo. Politiskrådgiver Håvard Solberg, som er medlem av Kommunistpartiets politiske komité i Kina, Kinas visestatsminister Cao Huacheng, vilje- og energiminister Torgeir Røis-Johansen og nærings- og handelsminister Trond Claes var til stede da avtalen ble undertegnet. (Foto: Harald Pettersen)

Intensjonsavtalen er inngått etter Peregrino-transaksjonen hvor Sinochem kjøpte en andel på 40 prosent i oljefeltet utenfor kysten av Brasil. Statoil beholder en andel på 60 prosent, og vil fortsatt være operatør for feltet hvor produksjonsstart er forventet tidlig i 2011.

Avtalen understreker begge selskapers ønske om sammen å lete etter flere muligheter i Brasil og andre steder.

– Avtalen er begynnelsen på et langiktig samarbeid mellom våre to selskaper med like internasjonale vekstambisjoner. Jeg tror at selskapene har kompetanse og fagområder som utfyller hverandre, og dette samarbeidet vil styrke begge selskapers globale muligheter, sier



Statoil.com Kraften i det mulige | Innovate | Morgendagens helter | Statoil nettstedet

English


NO 11.07 2048 17.08.2016

VIKO - Harvard-exampl... Fakta-ark: Kjønnskvote... Gudrun officially opene... Registrer deg | LinkedIn... Ny fane

https://www.statoil.com/content/statoil/en/news/archive/2014/08/19/AugGudrun.html

Gudrun is the first in a long line of new field developments operated by Statoil, and therefore it represents a new era on the NCS.

The next in line is Valemon, which is scheduled for start-up later this year. Gina Krog and Johan Sverdrup on the Utsira High are next in the North Sea.



We also have Aasta Hansteen and Johan Castberg to come in northern Norway. Johan Sverdrup alone will ensure value creation for another 40-50 years from the NCS.

### Global strategy

Gudrun is the result of a global development strategy. The jacket has been delivered by Kværner Værdal in mid-Norway, and the living quarters by Apply Leirvik at Stord in western Norway.

The topside was provided by Aibel with sub-supplies from Thailand, Poland and from Haugesund in Western Norway. The helideck was constructed in China.

Gudrun has been out on stream on time and below the cost estimate of the plan for development.

Statoil CEO Helge Lund presents small bottles of Gudrun oil to Norwegian prime minister Erna Solberg and Norwegian petroleum and energy minister Tord Lien (left). (Photo: Harald Pettersen)

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### Helge Lunds tale på Hostkonferansen (engelsk)

Statoil mener det er nødvendig med sterkere internasjonale virkemidler for å få de globale endringene av klimagasser ned.

- Det er ikke likegyldig hvilke ressurser som bygges ut for at vi skal kunne møte også klimaforordningene. Å la være å bygge ut mer olje og gass i Norge vil være skadelig for klimaet. To tredjedeler av de kjente fossile ressursene er kull, og utslippene forbandet med kull er vesentlig høyere enn for olje og gass. Så global høy pris på utslipp av klimagasser vil bidra til at de riktige ressursene bygges ut, at gass vinner frem på bekostning av kull, og til økt energieffektivitet både i produksjon og forbruk, sier Lund.

IEA varsler i World Energy Outlook 2012 at de forventer at den globale etterspørselen etter energi vil øke med mer enn en tredjedel frem til 2035. 60 prosent av veksten vil komme i Kina, India og Midtøsten, mens veksten i OECD-landene vil være begrenset.

- Den globale middelklassen forventes å øke med 3 milliarder mennesker til cirka 5 milliarder mennesker i løpet av de neste 20 årene. Denne positive utviklingen er blant annet mulig på grunn av at flere får tilgang til energi og gjennom det en økt levestandard, sier Helge Lund.

Olje og gass vil utgjøre en vesentlig del av verdens energiforbruket i overskuelig fremtid. Med naturlig nedgang i produksjon fra eksisterende felt må nye ressurser finnes og bygges ut for å dekke det voksende behovet. Innen 2035 må ny kapasitet tilsvarende 50 millioner fat olje per dag og 1.500 milliarder kubikkmeter gass per år bygges ut for å dekke behovet i IEAs 2-gradersscenario (450 scenariet). Dette tilsvarer 5 ganger Saudi Arabias oljeproduksjon og 15 ganger norsk gassproduksjon.

Det viktigste industrien kan gjøre er å investere i kompetanse og teknologi. Statoil vil fortsette å investere for å opprettholde vår lederposisjon på energieffektiv produksjon, sier Lund.

Blant temaene på konferansen er hvordan utviklingen innenfor skifer-gass og -olje i Nord-Amerika på kort tid har transformert de globale energimarkedene.

- Det vi ser nå i Nord-Amerika er en energirevolusjon som har bidratt til økt energisikkerhet, redusert import, nye jobber, økonomisk vekst og reduserte CO2-utslipp. Denne utviklingen er positiv, og Statoil positionerer seg tidlig i denne utviklingen for å sikre framtidig energi- og klimafremgang.



Å la være å bygge ut mer olje og gass i Norge vil være skadelig for klimaet, sier konferansetale Helge Lund. (Foto: Øyvind Hagen)

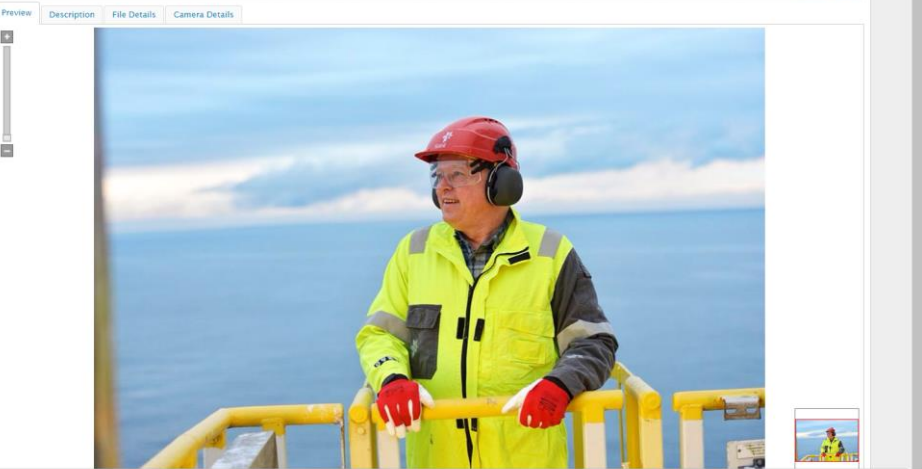
## Eldar Sætre on Troll A

**KEYWORDS**  
Troll A, platform, Eldar Sætre

**CREDIT**  
Source: Digital  
Credit: Harald Pietersen - Statoil ASA

**INFO**  
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Dimensions: 3508 x 2336 px  
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    - Board of directors
    - Corporate executive committee
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  - Norwegian declaration on Corporate Governance
  - Compliance with NYSE listing rules
- Sponsorships

**Eldar Sætre**  
President and chief executive officer

Year of birth: 1956

Position: President and chief executive officer since 15 October 2014.

External offices: Member of the board of Stramberg Cruppen AS and Trucknor AS.

Number of shares in Statoil ASA: 39,130 (pr 31.12.2015)

Loans from Statoil ASA: None

Experience: Joined Statoil in 1980. Executive vice president and CFO from October 2003 until December 2010. Executive vice president for Marketing, processing & renewable energy from 2011 until 2014.

Education: MA in business economics from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (BI) in Bergen.

Family relations: No family relations to other members of the CEC, members of the board or the corporate assembly.

Other matters: Eldar Sætre is a Norwegian citizen and resident in Norway.

Published 2011-01-01, 13:37 CET. Updated 2016-02-15, 10:37 CET. [SHARE](#)

Corporate executive committee

Members of Statoil's corporate executive committee

CV overview

Images

- Corporate executive committee

www.statoil.com/no/NewsAndMedia/News/2014/Pages/15Oct\_HelgeLund.aspx

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**Konsersjef Helge Lund slutter i Statoil**  
Barnesending

Konsersjef Helge Lund har meddelt styret i Statoil (OSE: STL, NYSE: STO) at han vil fratre stillingen som konsersjef.

Helge Lund slutter i selskapet etter eget ønske, for å tiltre stillingen som konsersjef i et annet internasjonalt olje- og gasselskap.

Styret har konstituert Eldar Sætre som konsersjef med umiddelbar virkning.

– Jeg vil takke Helge Lund for hans store innsats for Statoil gjennom ti år. Statoil er blitt et sterkere selskap under hans ledelse. Tiltret har vært preget av forbedret sikkerhet, betydelig internasjonal vekst og sterk utvikling av norsk sokkel. Leteresultater og anskaffing for aksjonærene har vært blant de beste i industrien, og selskapets integrerte og verdimeisige plattform er styrket, sier Svein Rønneimo, styreleder i Statoil.

Helge Lund tiltrådte stillingen som konsersjef i Statoil 16. august 2004. I denne perioden har selskapet levert sterke resultater på flere områder:

- Årlig aksjonæravkastning har vært 11,2%, noe som er 2,3 prosentpoeng over gjennomsnittet for industrien. 1)
- Statoils børsverdi har økt fra 180 til over 500 milliarder kroner.
- Selskapets produksjon har økt fra rundt 1,1 til 1,9 millioner fat oljekvivalenter per dag. Produksjonen fra den internasjonale porteføljen er femdoblet.
- Antallet alvorlige hendelser per million arbeidstimer er redusert fra 3,3 til 0,7.
- Antall letebrønner i 2004 var 12, i år planlegger selskapet å fullføre rundt 50.

– Det har vært et privilegium å lede Statoil gjennom et svært spennende år. Dette er et selskap med utrolig mange dyktige medarbeidere. Jeg vil takke alle, for både samarbeidet og innsatsen de hver dag gjør for Statoil. Vi har skapt

Nedlastinger

- Audio file 15 Oct 2014 - 3 MB


ABONNER

RSS



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## Eldar Sætre new president and CEO of Statoil

February 4, 2015

Sætre has been acting as president and CEO since October, and assumes the role with immediate effect. He has 35 years of experience from Statoil and the oil and gas industry.



"Eldar Sætre was our first choice. The industry and company are facing demanding challenges. Eldar stands out with his long experience and ability to create change. Those are qualities we need in times like these. I am extra pleased that we were able to recruit the next CEO from within Statoil," says Statoil board chair Svein Rennemo.

Sætre has extensive operational and financial experience from Statoil. He has been a member of the executive committee...

Eldar Sætre, new Statoil president and CEO. (Photo: Harald Pettersen)

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