

Symbiocene as an Effort to Build Ecological Balance in Danny Boyle's *The Beach* (2000)

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Abstract

The development of tourism today poses a significant problem in terms of environmental damage. The exploitation of tourism has had a negative impact on natural resources and the environment, especially in tropical countries such as Thailand. Although many beaches have become part of a highly protected national park, many tourists and divers still have access to some of these locations. *The Beach* (2000) is a film that explores the relationship between humans and nature. In *The Beach*, the main characters in the film are tourists or foreign backpackers who have ambivalence about treating nature. By examining the film *The Beach* (2000) by Danny Boyle, the purpose of this study is to identify the role of nature in building ecological balance through *the Symbiocene* ideology. This study uses a qualitative method with narrative theory and cinematography by Boggs and Petrie (2008) in analyze the structure of the text and then using Albrecht's ecocritical approach (2019) in analyze the ideology of the text that focuses on the concept of human and natural relations. In the film *The Beach* (2000), nature can be positioned as an object or subject. The positioning of nature reflects a critique of anthropocentrism because humans are faced with two choices: to be the preserver or the destroyer. One of the roles of nature in building ecological awareness is building symbiotic bonds through conservation efforts and building insight into environmental care. Green politics in films can also refer to the ecotourism movement devoted to travelers.

Keywords: Symbiocene, ecological balance, backpackers, green politics, ecotourism.

Introduction

The development of information technology and natural resources affects the ecological balance. Forest burning, illegal logging, and open exploitation of nature are complex ecological problems that continue to this day. In addition, another important issue related to ecological issues is the over exploration of natural tourism. The current development of tourism can also pose a significant problem for environmental damage. Tourism has significant value and benefits for local and global economic progress. Therefore, the tourism sector is classified as the largest industry in the world and is an economic sector that has very fast growth and provides many jobs (Susilawati, 2016). Economic sources and employment opportunities can be seen from providers of travel services, accommodation, restaurants, tourism services, and various other small businesses. As one of the important economic sectors, tourism has multiple impacts, both positive and negative, on humans and the environment. According to Susilawati (2016), broadly speaking, the impacts of the tourism industry can be classified into three types: environmental impacts, sociocultural impacts, and economic impacts.

According to Yoeti (2008), the impacts of tourism development on the environment include: littering (in addition to causing unpleasant odors, it also kills the surrounding plants); disposal of a hotel, restaurant, and hospital waste that damages river, lake, or seawater; damage to coral reefs as a result of fishermen no longer having a beach to find fish, because the beach has been pegged to build hotels and restaurants. The exploitation of tourism has had a negative impact on natural resources and the environment, especially in tropical countries such as Thailand. Although many beaches are part of a highly protected national park, many tourists and divers still have access to some restricted locations to dive in protected areas (BBC News, 2016). Failure to protect national parks from tourists has resulted in almost all national parks in Thailand being closed.

In 2000, Danny Boyle managed to make an adventure film for tourists in Thailand. *The Beach* (2000) is a film that explores the relationship between humans and nature. Nature can be both a subject and an object for humans. Nature as a subject has emotional power, namely as *Terraphthore* (Earth Destroyer) and *Terranascia* (Creator), who move and influence humans. Meanwhile, nature as a subject has implications for *anthropocentrism*. In *The Beach* film, the characters in the film are tourists or foreign backpackers who have ambivalence about treating nature. This study tries to identify the role of nature in building ecological balance through the Symbiocene ideology inside of *The Beach* film (2020).

Various environmental problems are related to knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and human assessment of the environment. The results of Makmur's (2020) research on the relationship between humans, the environment, and science show a humanitarian crisis and mistakes in dealing with the environment. Afandi (2019) reveals that the harmonious relationship between humans and animals has an impact on the destruction of the surrounding environment. Environmental damage is also affected by the exploitation of nature and the current entrenched capitalist system. Putra (2014) stated that the exploitation of nature causes many bad impacts, such as air quality, flooding, and animal extinction. These effects cause the ecosystem to become unbalanced, which disrupts the survival of all living things on earth. This is reinforced by Puspita (2019) and Abdillah (2018), who reveal commodification as a capitalist system that causes several environmental problems such as loss of diversity, potential depletion of natural resources, land grabbing, and technical problems such as repressive apparatus and corruption of businessmen and officials for projects reclamation. Annesley (2004) adds that literary works can expose the ecological problems raised by idealist efforts to reject developments in aesthetics, culture, and globalization. An example is a relationship between tourism and film. Law et al. (2007) reveal the modification of the Maya Bay set for the film *The Beach* as part of a wider process whereby a tropical environment staged in line with the view of tourists can show environmental resistance in literary works but can also lead to the problem of eco-imperialism.

In contrast to previous studies that discuss nature as a source of life, exploitation of nature and capitalism, the purpose of this study is to uncover the ambivalent attitude of humans in *The Beach* film (2000) by Danny Boyle. In addition, by developing previous studies that uncovered the inequality of the relationship between humans and nature, this study tries to examine more deeply the role of nature in building ecological awareness through the Symbiocene ideology. Therefore, by examining the film *The Beach* (2000) by Danny Boyle, the hypothesis of this research is that the relationship between humans and nature indicates a critique of anthropocentrism that objectifies nature. This study uses a qualitative method using narrative theory and cinematography by Boggs and Petrie (2008) in analyze the structure of the text and then using Albrecht's ecocritical approach (2019) in analyze the ideology of the text that focuses on the concept of human and natural relations.

Theory and Method

The theories that will be used in this research are the narrative and cinematographic theory of Boggs and Petrie (2008) and the ecocritical approach of Albrecht (2019). According to Marcel Danesi, (2010) a film is a text that contains a series of photographic images that result in the illusion of motion and action in real life. Meanwhile, according to Himawan Pratista, (2008) a film is formed from two elements, namely narrative elements and cinematic elements. Narrative elements relate to aspects of the story or film theme and cinematic elements are technical aspects in the production of a film.

Boggs and Petrie (2008) reveal that a good film is a film that can inspire admiration to explore and continue to explore it in the frame of analysis. In their book *The Art of Watching Films* (2008), Boggs and Petrie also provide several benefits when we conduct the analysis process of a film. One of them is to be able to increase intuition to a conscious level until finally it is at the level of focus to grasp the meaning or message of the film. Boogs (2008) introduced the theory of film structure, namely narrative elements and cinematographic elements. The narrative element focuses on plot, setting, characters and characterizations as well as symbols. The cinematographic elements of the film are divided into two aspects, namely the visual aspect and the sonor aspect. Visual aspects include lighting, point of view, camera motion, camera position, costumes and make-up. While the sonor aspects include dialogue, sound effects, music, atmosphere and silence.

Albrecht's ecocritical approach (2019) in his book *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* discusses concepts that focus on natural or environmental damage, ecosystem damage, and disasters from the perspective of ecocriticism. Albrecht (2019) introduces the term emotional power that characterizes the universe, namely *terraphthora* (earth destroyer) and *terrannascia* (earth creator). The universe displays its terraphthoric characteristics in violent destructive power and creative terrannascent power in terms of creation. The power of *terraphthora* (earth destroyer) and *terrannascia* (earth creator) will produce the Symbiocene. The symbiocene or period of reintegration between humans and the rest of nature is the theme used to define Earth's emotions.

Albrecht (2019) argues that many are currently suggesting that we should rename this period on earth as the Anthropocene. This era could be called the Obscene, not the Anthropocene. Albrecht gave the example that he, a human being, did not want to be associated with a period in Earth's history where dominant people in one species erased the foundations of life. Life for all humans and other non-humans. Albrecht wanted to be part of the "Symbiocee" where humans lived in harmony with all other creatures. He argues that we humans can do this through eco-economy, biomimicry and eco-industry. Although difficult, at least thermodynamically, perhaps even more ethical and beautiful. Earth's positive emotions are reemerging as the defining characteristic of what it means to be human in the collective called life. This is very relevant to the discussion of nature as a subject and object in this study.

Findings and Discussion

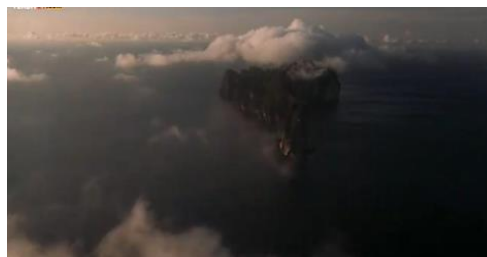
The discussion in this article, the author divides it into three chapters. The first is to dismantle the narrative text that emphasizes the positioning of nature and humans. The second focuses on the symbiotic concept which is the result of the relationship between humans and nature. The last chapter describes the concept of a symbiocene that reflects efforts to build an ecological balance.

Significance of a Film in Positioning Nature and Humans

Based on the analysis of *The Beach* film (2000) using narrative theory and cinematography of Boggs and Petrie (2008), there are two positionings that will be discussed in this chapter. First, nature is represented as an object through the perspective of travelers in the novel. As in the title of the film, the object depicted is a beautiful beach. The natural environment that is manifested through the beach becomes the main significance in the film. The beach is one of the most visited tourist destinations by tourists. Thailand is one of the countries in Asia that is visited by many tourists. Apart from the fact that the weather in Asia is tropical, Asia also has a lot of uniqueness such as culture, language, and some deep-rooted myths. As in the quote below.

here there is a myth, is about the beach. And This beach is perfect man, its in island, right... hidden from the sea. you can imagine? You get pure white sand, crystal clear water, palm trees, yeah and coconut and shit.. Yoo, tell the best part... Plus, plant helmets... to smoke all day, everyday, for the rest of life. But only small people who knows exactly the secret. (Boyle: 2000)

Through the quote above, there is a myth about a beautiful beach. The myth was built by the surrounding community. The secret beach is a national park or protected natural environment. The word "myth" became a belief in an effort to protect the indigenous people by maintaining the secrecy of the beach from foreign tourists. In the first sequence, it is also seen that local people challenge the main character of the film namely Richard to drink snake blood. In film, local people interpret snake blood as a symbol of strength, so tourists are challenged to drink it. These myths about nature and animals indicate the role of the local Thai people in protecting and believing in nature and animals as something very sacred and powerful. However, unlike tourists or backpackers, they see the beach as a tourist attraction that must be visited. Richard's acceptance of the challenge of drinking snake blood is also a form of proving that tourists are brave and not afraid of challenges, including finding a secret beach.



Picture 1. Secret Island and Beach.

In the film, the camera uses long shots that focus on the beach. Sonor and visualization give an exotic impression of seeing the beach. In picture No. 1, reflects the shadow of the beach, which is so beautiful that it bewitches all tourists to go there. Richard, Sammy, and other tourists have imagined the beauty of the beach without ever seeing it. Desire of tourists refers to anthropocentric human nature, viewing nature as an object that will provide satisfaction for humans. Based on the significance in the text, the beach as a place for tourists

to seek pleasure not only is the natural environment but there are two natural elements that are also the focus of discussion, namely plants and animals.

Cannabis is a plant that is famous all over the world. Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa* L.) is an annual plant, which can grow and spread in tropical and subtropical areas with a tree height of one to five meters (Emcdda, 2015). This plant has become one of the forbidden plant species in several countries around the world. Cannabis is a cultivated plant that produces fiber but is better known for the content of narcotic substances in the seeds, namely THC, which can make the user experience euphoria (a prolonged feeling of pleasure for no reason). The cannabis plant is usually made into marijuana cigarettes (Siahaan, 2019). There are European tourists from abroad, such as America, France, Sweden, and Croatia, who meet each other and enjoy the natural beauty of Thailand. These tourists also reflect an influencer in the field of tourism. In the film, tourists have the habit of consuming marijuana all the time. This reflects the cannabis plant's role as part of the European tourist lifestyle. Their desire to constantly smoke marijuana is illustrated in a dialogue between tourists who talk about how one of the many advantages of secret beaches is marijuana in abundance. As in the previous quote, marijuana is one of the objects that tourists look for to be able to enjoy every moment, every day, even a lifetime.



Picture 2. The joy of seeing Marijuana.



Picture 3. Marijuana Field.

Apart from marijuana, fish is also their staple on the island. They take fish from the sea for consumption. Beautiful beaches, marijuana fields, and the wealth of the sea make them objectify nature as a source of pleasure. Although fish are living things that are commonly consumed by humans, in the film, there is a connection between the characters and fish. The tourists in the film show that other pleasures they get on the beach are one of them by hunting fish. Hunting for these fish is not only a place to fulfill basic needs such as food, but also a place to reflect on human domination of these fish. The number of fish caught and the defeat of sharks killed by Richard are an indication of the film's narrative showing the position of animals. In this case, fish are under human control.

Based on the structure analysis of *The Beach* film (2020) using narrative theory and cinematography, in this case, nature is also represented as a subject. In the film, camera perspective (point of view camera) refers as subjective and observer. Subjective refers to the camera as a participant, while observer refers to the camera as an observer (Boogs, 2008). Nature as a subject is presented by the title of the film, namely *The Beach*. The title in a film or literary work is a symbol of the meanings that can be found in the content of the story. The title can also be a theme or a summary of the story. The word "The Beach" became the subject. It was based on the desire of the tourists to find the beach. In this discussion, the beach seems to be a character that brings exoticism and sensation to the people who see it, as in the following quote.

There is a beach, you understand?!
The beach beautiful too much.. and too much.. sensation
She is on an island... an island is perfect..

*I'm just talking "that's nice" ...
Perfect...
...she is like a lagoon.. you know lagoon.. she's seen by cliffs..
Totally fucking secret.. Totally fucking forbidden.. (Boyle, 2000)*

The quote above describes a perfect and natural island and beach. The word "She" refers to the island metaphor as a woman. Women reflect beauty, both beauty and exoticism. Nature is also symbolized as mother earth, which means that the relationship between them is represented through the depiction of natural elements with feminine characteristics possessed by women. One example is that nature's relationship with women is spiritually associated with the myth of the earth as a mother figure with feminine characteristics, such as giving birth and giving care (Rahwati, 2018). The beach as a living environment provides life for humans. In the film, tourists or backpackers can live because the island has plants that can be used as clothing and food for them to survive.

On the other hand, the significant elements that become the object and subject of this discussion are plants that represented by cannabis and animals represented by fish. Cannabis as a subject can be seen in several scenes in the film. First, marijuana is a plant that can make people addicted. Second, marijuana can cause euphoria (a prolonged feeling of pleasure for no reason). All three marijuana strains have the potential to be lethal (rumahcemara.or.id). The third reflects the cannabis as a subject capable of influencing humans. In a film, excessive cannabis consumption can lead to death and imaginable madness. Richard and Daffy are examples of the subjective discourse of the cannabis plant. Richard is depressed and mad everytime, while Daffy has to commit suicide. Marijuana is a subject for humans because it has a role in human life.

Animals represented by fish can be positioned as subjects. Even though Richard and his other friends manage to kill the sharks and other fish, the sharks can also kill them. Sharks become subjects when their existence is disturbed by human exploitation. Several people were killed by shark bites. The subjectification attached to sharks reflects that animals can provide something that is dangerous for human. A fight that may be defeated by humans can be a form of resistance for animals to protect themselves.

Beaches, plants, and animals are human friends and partners in living life. The existence of the beach as a national park and the protection of indigenous peoples is one of the efforts to treat nature as a subject. In essence, the universe is not much different from humans, who have a life as well as a soul. This can be observed in several scenes in the film that show a response from nature itself. They have the right to live and develop. They should also want to be treated well by humans. So far, nature give the best for humans by providing food and drink, providing beauty for the needs of the human soul, and even giving everything. The universe has emotional power (Albrecht, 2019). It is one form of nature as a subject. Nature has the power of creation and destruction.

Symbiocene Construction: Nature and Human Relations

The relationship between humans and nature can produce a relationship that is mutually dependent on each other. Nature has emotional power as a feature of the universe. *Terraphthore's* emotions can be *Terraphthore* (Earth Destroyer) and *Terranascia* (Creator). These two terms became the concept of Albrecht's study in seeing the emotions of the earth. Earth as a destroyer can be in the form of natural disasters or natural damage. While nature as the creator can be in the form of plants, lakes, lagoons, microorganisms, and others. Analyzing the emotions of nature is very important in building ecological awareness in order to understand and interpret nature as a source of life. In addition, through the analysis of the

relationship between humans and nature through the symbiotic concept, it can provide knowledge about one of the concepts that can be used in the study of ecocriticism.

Symbiocene is a term that comes from the word symbiosis, originating from the idea of living friendship (living together). The concept of symbiosis is the basis for what I think will be the next period of Earth's history. *The Symbiocene*, as a period in the history of mankind on Earth, will be characterized by human intelligence and praxis that imitate the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing forms and reproductive processes of life found in living systems (Albrecht, 2019). Through *The Beach* film, we can see how anthropocentrism still dominates nature. The desire of tourists to go on adventures to see the beauty of nature and the selfishness of humans to have all the elements that nature has to offer is implemented in an anthropocentric attitude. The prohibition of humans from entering protected areas is still a problem for the government and the community. In the film, it can be seen how human efforts to find beaches become national parks or protected environments. Although there are many tourist attractions created, humans will continue to look for something different, something new from nature.

In several scenes in the film, the symbiotic forms that are presented can be examined. In essence, the love displayed by backpackers or tourists on the island reflects the attitudes of *endemophilia* and *topophilia*. While nature in the film shows *eutierria*. According to Albrecht (2019), *endemophilia* is a discrete emotion associated with certain special places and love with what is unique or endemic to them. In some scenes in the film, Richard really loves the cliff-covered lagoon beach. Daffy really loves the marijuana found on the beach. Some characters love fish and flower plants. This can be the basis for the positive emotions that actually exist in each character. Sal character has a significant *topophilic* attitude, namely the love of the place (Albrecht, 2019: 22). Sal loves the beach very much, taking care of it and making it his home. The island in the film shows *eutierria*, or a good feeling of the earth (Albrecht, 2019). The island offers all the beauty and sources of life for humans.

Nature as a subject can destroy and create. In the film, the beach can give pleasure but can also damage the order of human life with the presence of plants and animals that can cause death. Damage and pleasure can produce a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. In essence, life is about symbiosis, or "living together" (Albrecht, 2019). *Endemophilia*, *topophilia*, *eutierria* are some attitudes that can be built to strengthen the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. It is at the end of the film that humans try to eliminate any desire to stay on the island. This indicates that nature conservation efforts are prioritized, even though tourists really love the beauty of nature.

Game over...

But she was not gonna leave..

She believes too much that everything never changes...

So that is exactly why we leave her..

And for the rest of last..

We carried away our sin and made our way back to what we called as home..

To pick up the pieces of whatever was waiting... (Boyle, 2000)

The quote above reflects what is called sin. Richard gave recognition to everything that has damaged the beauty of nature itself. The natural beauty that was fun for Richard and his friends had turned into fighting and destroying them. Their arrogance towards nature makes those who live on the island experience bad things. Several of Richard's friends died from shark attacks. Thus, human selfishness is also seen through the figure of Sal and the old members of the community. They don't care about a friend who is dying from a shark

bite. Sal also makes Richard depressed by forcing him to stay in the forest for weeks to spy on Richard's friends who come because of the map he gave earlier.

Through the character of Richard and his friends at the end of the story, it can be identified that there is a feeling of regret towards the human treatment of nature. The more humans are obsessed with the beach and obey all their lustful desires, the more depressed humans will be until they can no longer have a sense of humanity. Richard invites his friends, Etienne and Francoise, to leave the beach. Sal, as the community leader, finds pressure from the indigenous groups who guard the island. Sal must choose to kill Richard or stay on the beach. Sal chooses to kill Richard, but fails because the coast guards accidentally fire the trigger. Richard's departure was followed by the entire community. The last scene in the film shows how humans can do anything to fulfill their desires, which is to stay on the beach that has become part of the conservation area.

The last few scenes of the film show an effort to build ecological awareness, which is very visible through a confession of sin. *Symbiosen* shifts *anthropocentrism* due to conservation efforts and ecotourism awareness. Richard distinguishes what he calls "home". Richard interpreted "home" before is something that is not important to him because the most important thing is the place where he goes on an adventure. Then, at the end of the film, the "home" becomes the place where he works. This is the contradictory part. At the beginning of the film, Richard is seen in the city of Bangkok, where he sees some tourists and natives. Meanwhile, at the end of the film, Richard is in front of a computer screen with other people who are also working. Thus, it can be observed that the important process of this film in building an ecological balance is an effort to restore the normal life of tourists from all tourism trips. Tourism is one part that is needed by humans to enjoy nature, but ecotourism that emphasizes the aspect of nature conservation is prioritized. The symbiotic relationship that leads to green politics in the film can provide an illustration of efforts to fight the exploitation of nature by humans.

***Symbiocene* and Green Politics in Building Ecological Balance**

Symbiosen is one of the human efforts to build an ecological balance. This period of human existence will be a positive affirmation of life and offer the possibility of complete reintegration of the human body, soul, and culture with the rest of life on Earth. This is also a way to avoid more solastalgia and other negative psychoterrestrial earth emotions that damage the soul, which must lead us to the *Symbiocene* (Albrecht, 2019). In the film *The Beach*, there are two choices that also represent the ambivalent attitude of the characters in the film. Love for nature is something that is born as a living being that is close to nature. On the other hand, the anthropocentric attitude still dominates our ability to exploit and explore all the wealth and beauty of nature.

Humans are faced with two choices: to be the preserver or the destroyer. Albrecht (2019) reveals the reality and repetition of symbiosis in evolution, showing that we are still in an invasive, "parasitic" stage and that we must slow down, share, and reunite ourselves with other creatures if we are to achieve evolutionary longevity. This shows that *the symbiosen* is one way to build a good relationship between humans and nature. At the end of the story, it is revealed how a human being who loves nature should be. Nature as a subject provides awareness that beaches, plants, and animals are significant elements in building ecological balance. Through these elements, humans can live together without becoming "parasites" to other creatures, one of which is by not destroying nature.

Through an ecocritical perspective, the film *The Beach* can be a part of green politics, namely an effort to encourage an ecologically sustainable society rooted in the environment, non-violence, and social justice. *Symbiosen* shows a shift in anthropocentrism due to

conservation efforts and insight into the environment. The green politics contained in the film is one aspect of sustainable development, which focuses on aspects of life on land, namely national park conservation and life below water protection of marine ecosystems. Green politics in films can also refer to the ecotourism movement. According to Albrecht (2019), the key principles of organizing symbiotic societies should include all species, large and small, whose life interests and biocommunal traits are understood and respected; the re-establishment of the symbiotic bonds in which they have been broken in the *anthropocene*. The relationship between humans and nature through a symbiotic bond that produces a green political movement can be one of the efforts to build an ecological balance.

Conclusion

In the film *The Beach* (2000), the role of nature and humans in building an ecological balance is one of them building a symbiotic bond. From an ecocritical perspective, the film *The Beach* (2000) can be seen as one part of green politics, namely efforts to encourage an ecologically sustainable society rooted in the environment. *The Symbiosen* shows a shift in anthropocentrism due to conservation efforts and building insight into environmental care. Green politics as a result of the symbiotic relationship in the film can also refer to the ecotourism movement that is devoted to travelers. *The Symbiosen* is a reflection of human relationships that live in harmony with all other creatures. This ideology can be useful as a basis for building an ecological perspective for travelers who also act as influencers in the tourism sector. This research is expected to be a reference for deepening the analysis of *the symbiosen*, green politics, and ecocritical studies that can be used for further research with different study objects.

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