

The Last Humans Coming From the Sea

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Like the landings of the tilapia, the ancestor of land vertebrates, on a quiet beach on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines, five silent children pace ashore from the waves: they are the last of the humans. The children are adorned in ornaments both worn and fancy. Bamboo hats, bone ornaments, aluminized cloth, nylon rope, plastic sieves, and diving helmets, haphazardly sewn together relics of their ancestors that were once considered deadly marine pollution but have now become bearers of history since human society disappeared. The leader, a skinny girl with brown skin, leads the other children into the jungle, plucking leaves from a slab of stone with an inscription — “Built by Lao refugees, January 1988.”

This is the opening scene of Tuan Andrew Nguyen’s film “The Boat People,” in which the last humans drift between continents, exploring the empty ruins on these lands. Throughout Vietnamese history, the term “boat people” carries a special meaning, referring to the refugees who fled the country by boat after the Vietnam War. This also reflects a hint of the past of Nguyen, an artist who was one of the countless “boat people.” However, the children in the film, who are also called “boat people,” are not merely the leftovers of history. In an interview, Jun Nguyen expressed, “she (protagonist) is not merely a survivor, but a creator — the bridge between the past and the future.” (Nguyen & Ingawanij, 2020) Similar to the story collectors depicted by Ursula K. Le Guin (1986) in “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” these children, guided by innocent curiosity, arrived on these lands in search of the relics of different civilizations and, like creator gods, collage them into a new humanity. So, they do not live on the same land for long, they seem to be the embodiment of Fred Moten’s (Harney & Moten, 2013: 97) “unsettled feeling”, always prepared to sail to another continent. It was this unsettledness that piqued my interest in exploring whether it is necessary to imagine an ocean-based future in the face of the catastrophe of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene?

As terrestrial creatures, human beings are naturally inclined to contemplate their future in terrestrial terms. To reject the Darwinian tendencies in posthumanism (Gane, 2006), in “Staying with the Trouble,” Donna Haraway (2016) proposes an alternative perspective of humanity based on symbiosis. She compares humans to “composts” because, like the humus produced by the dead bodies and excrement of plants and animals in compost, humans can only survive on the planet by living and dying with other species. Likewise, Bruno Latour (2018) advocates a “terrestrial politics” that calls for a rethinking of the issues of life and climate rooted in the land beneath our feet. Inspired by this, he illustrates the necessity of this way of thinking by borrowing the geographic concept of “earth’s critical zone.” Specifically, this refers to the organic surfaces that terrestrial life depends on, and it is this thin layer of critical zone that supports human life. (Kofman & Latour, 2018) In the exhibition with the same title at the Karlsruhe Media and Art Center, Latour also repeated the

word “terrestrial” as if it were a mantra that would dispel anxiety regarding ecological disasters.

Both Haraway and Latour perceive the land as the foundation of their rethinking. Visions of the ocean’s future are almost always excluded from serious discourse, and the few existing oceanic utopian projects are often dismissed as unrealistic rightist fantasies. For instance, critics enjoy arguing that the “Seasteading,” an oceanic utopian project promoted by Silicon Valley techno-libertarians, is not as revolutionary as it is claimed (Wainwright, 2020). Indeed, for these entrepreneurs, the ocean is the perfect place to revive classical liberalism, because, in their perspective, the unregulated high seas acted as the perfect tax haven, and the vast expanse of the ocean was “free enterprise at its freest” (Langewiesche, 2004). Philip Steinberg, Elizabeth Nyman, and Mauro Caraccioli (2012) hit the nail on the head: these ideas are essentially capitalism’s immune response to its own internal contradictions. When Silicon Valley’s anarchist entrepreneurs realized that they could not resolve the conflict between economic order and individual freedom on land, they projected the myths of capitalism onto the oceanic utopia. Unfortunately, however, these myths only ended up reinforcing the structures that created the conflict.

However, the oceanic utopia of the technological libertarian is not entirely meaningless. At the very least, these plans highlight the urgency of the issues of the ocean. Precisely speaking, the effects of climate change on oceans and humans do not exist only in computer simulations: the melting Arctic ice cap has already begun to reshape global geopolitics (Dittmer, Moisisio, Ingram & Dodds, 2011); islanders in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, have begun to abandon atoll habitats that are being destroyed by flooding (Luetz & Havea, 2018). While land-centrism ignores, separates, and even antagonizes the waters that are eroding land-based civilization, Silicon Valley fantasists are the first to return to the sea. This is especially because capitalism, keen to realize ideas, is precisely adept at following its own logic and proposing concrete solutions to the crisis in the first place. As Murray Bookchin (2015) argues, however, capitalism itself is largely the creator of environmental and ecological crises. Consequently, if we are to rethink the politics of the ocean, then we must attempt to incorporate this blue water, which covers the majority of the earth’s surface, into the world-making in a different way.

As Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters argue in “Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces,” the political power of the sea can only be truly grasped through emphasizing its materiality. Notably, both the oceanic utopia of Silicon Valley and the creationist life of the new humans in “The Boat People” rely on the unhindered mobility of the ocean. The difference is that the former solely reaffirms the value of mobility within its established system (The Seasteading Institute, 2009) — the rise of classical liberalism benefited from the mobility of the sea from the beginning, as it significantly reduced transportation costs. Meanwhile, the latter relies on the material properties of the ocean to reimagine other ways of world-making. Perhaps for the refugees adrift at sea, the days on the ship simply act as a transitional stage between

lives on different lands, while the new human beings in “Boat People” who make the sea their home can be seen as the embodiment of oceanic mobility. To these children, the ocean surrounds and dominates the continents and islands, while the lands that have lost their centrality resemble giant ships floating on the sea, or, what Foucault describes as “the heterogeneity par excellence” (1986).

In the film, the children discover refugee boats, Japanese machine guns, U.S. Army gas masks, the Bataan Death March Marker Mile, the Philippine *kampilan* sword (Magellan was killed by one *kampilan* sword) and the head of Kuan Yin buried in the beach of the Bataan Peninsula. Then, as always, they carved these witnesses of history into wooden replicas. In Nguyen’s perspective (Nguyen & Ingawanij, 2020), these replicas are very distinctive from the originals because humans prefer to understand the world in the present through replicating the past. In a world based on the ocean, the children must follow the characteristics of the water, so they can only treat these wood carvings like sacrifices, torching them and sprinkling the ashes into the sea, because only the ashes can dissolve in the water. In the process, the ocean not only absorbs the land as material — ash is a special kind of soil — but also absorbs the history of the land contained in the ashes. In this manner, the ocean becomes the subject of imagining the future, while the land as a heterotopia becomes the reserve of this imagination.

Carl Schmitt’s (2003) devaluation of the sea precisely represents the typical fallacy of land-centrism. He argues that the ocean lacks political power due to its historical barrenness because there is nowhere to leave the mark of history on a flat sea surface or between repeated waves that lack character (Mark, 2011). However, the fact is that waves are both complex and variable (Steinberg & Peters, 2015), and people have continuously recorded the history of the sea. This is as early as pre-modern times where the Marshallese in the Pacific used the technique of “stick charts” to identify different types of waves. Likewise, the ocean in “The Boat People,” where the ashes of all terrestrial civilizations melt together, declares that it is not only a mirage that can be built on the sea — the political power of the ocean does not depend on replicating life on land at sea, nor does it advocate abandoning the soil altogether and perceiving the oceanic utopia as a mobile refuge in a post-apocalyptic world, but lies precisely in, from the nature of the ocean—imagining a future that connects land and its history but drifts on the sea horizon.

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最后的人类来自海洋

奚雷

就像陆地脊椎动物的祖先提塔利克鱼登陆时那样，在菲律宾巴丹(Bataan)半岛一片宁静的沙滩上，五位沉默的孩子在浪花中踱步上岸：他们已然是最后的人类。孩子们穿着既破旧又花哨的装饰品，箴帽、骨饰、镀铝布、尼龙绳、塑料筛子以及潜水头盔，这些先祖们的遗物被随意地缝制在一起，它们曾被视为致命的海洋污染，但自人类社会消失之后，却成为了历史的承载者。为首的是一位黝黑瘦削的女孩，她带领其他孩子来到丛林中，拨开一块石板上的落叶，上面刻着铭文——老挝难民于1988年二月所建(Built by Lao refugees, January 1988)。

这是阮俊(Tuan Andrew Nguyen)在影像放映平台VDrome上展示影片《船民》(“The Boat People”)开篇所描述的场景：最后的人类漂流在大陆之间，探索着空无一人的陆地遗迹。在越南历史中，“船民”一词具有特殊的含义，指的是越战后乘船逃离国土的难民。而这也暗示了阮

俊流散者的身份，这位艺术家曾经就是无数“船民”中的一员。然而，影片中那些被称为“船民”的孩子们并非只是历史的遗民。阮俊在采访中说道：“她（主人公）不仅是一位幸存者，也是一位创造者，是过去与未来之间的桥梁（She (protagonist) is not merely a survivor, but a creator—the bridge between the past and the future）。”[1]就像厄休拉·勒古恩（Ursula K. Le Guin）[2]在“背袋理论”（The Carrier Bag Theory）中描绘的故事搜集者那样，这些孩子们被天真的好奇心所指引，来到陆地上寻找着不同文明的遗物，并如创世神般地，将它们拼贴成新的人性。因此，他们并不会长居在一片土地之上，他们似乎比弗雷德·莫顿（Fred Moten）[3]笔下的漂泊者更为漂泊，总是准备着驶向另一块大陆。而正是这种漂泊性（unsettledness）真正引起了我的兴趣：面对人类世或资本世（Capitalocene）的灾难，我们是否有必要去想象一种由海洋所主导的未来？

当然，人类作为陆生生物，天生倾向于从陆地出发思考自身的未来。为了拒绝后人类主义中的达尔文主义色彩[4]，唐娜·哈拉维[5]在《与麻烦共存》（“Staying with the Trouble”）中提出另一种基于生物共生性（symbiosis）的人类观。她将人类比喻为“堆肥（compost）”，因为就如堆肥中动植物的尸体和排泄物所生成的腐殖质（humus）那样，人类只有与其他物种共生共死，才能生存于地球之上。同样，布鲁诺·拉图尔[6]也倡导一种“陆生的政治（terrestrial politics）”，呼吁人们植根于脚下的土地来重新思考生命和气候。因此，他借用了地理学概念“地球关键带（earth's critical zone）”来说明这种思考方式的必要性[7]。“地球关键带”指的是陆生生物赖以生存的有机地表，而正是这一层薄薄的关键带支撑着人类的生命。在卡尔斯鲁厄媒体与艺术中心的同名展览中，拉图尔也不停重复着“陆生”（terrestrial）一词，仿佛这是一句咒语，能够驱散人们对生态灾难的焦虑。

无论是哈拉维还是拉图尔，都将土地视为反思的基石。对海洋未来的构想几乎总是被排除在严肃话语之外，而那些本身就寥寥无几的海洋乌托邦项目也常被当做是不切实际的右派幻想。比如，人们乐于批判，硅谷技术自由意志主义者（techno-libertarian）所热衷的“海上家园（seasteading）”和“漂游城市（floating cities）”并不像宣称的那样具有革命性[8]。的确，对这些企业家来说，海洋是复兴古典自由主义（classical liberalism）的绝佳场所，因为在他们眼中，无人监管的公海就是完美的避税天堂，广阔的海域即是“最自由的自由企业（free enterprise at its freest）”[9]。菲利普·斯坦伯格（Philip E. Steinberg）[10]则一针见血地指出了问题所在：这些构想实质上是资本主义对自身内部矛盾的免疫反应。当硅谷无政府主义的创业者发现，他们无法在陆地上解决经济秩序与个人自由之间的冲突时，便将资本主义的神话投射于海洋乌托邦之上，但不幸地是，这些神话最终只会强化制造矛盾的结构。

然而，技术自由意志主义者的海洋乌托邦并不是全无意义的。至少，这些企划指向了海洋问题的急迫性。气候变化对海洋和人类的影响并不只是存在于电脑模拟之中：逐渐融化的北极冰盖早已开始重塑全球地缘政治[11]；巴布亚新几内亚布干维尔自治区（Autonomous Region of Bougainville）的岛民也已开始遗弃即将被洪水摧毁的环礁岛栖息地[12]。而在陆地中心主义忽略、分离、甚至敌视正在侵蚀着陆上文明的海洋世界时，硅谷的幻想家们反而率先重返海洋，因为热衷于实现理念的资本主义，恰恰善于依循自身的逻辑，首先提出应对危机的具体方案。但就如慕瑞·布克钦（Murray Bookchin）[13]所说的那样，资本主义本身在很大程度上就是环境和生态危机的制造者。因此，如果我们要重思海洋的政治，那么就必须尝试用另一种方式，将这片覆盖着大部分地球表面的蓝色水域纳入对世界的构造（worldmaking）之中。

就如斯坦伯格[14]在《潮湿的自体与流动的空间》(“Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces”)中所说的那样, 只有强调海洋的物质性, 才能真正把握海洋的政治力量。而无论是硅谷的海洋乌托邦, 还是《船民》中新人类的创世生活, 都依赖于海洋畅通无阻的流动性(fluidity)。不同的是, 前者只是在自身的既有系统中重申了流动性的价值[15]——古典自由主义的兴起从一开始就受益于海洋的流动性, 因为这能极大地降低运输成本——而后者则依循海洋的物质特性重新想象了造构世界的方式(ways of worldmaking)。也许对漂流在海上的难民来说, 船上的日子只是陆地生活之间的过渡阶段, 而《船民》中以海为家的新人类却已成为了海洋流动性的化身。在这些孩子们看来, 海洋包围并主导着大陆和岛屿, 而失去了中心地位的陆地似乎更像是漂浮在海面上的巨型船只, 也就是福柯[16]所形容的“卓越的异托邦(the heterotopia par excellence)”。

于是, 在影片中, 孩子们在异托邦般的巴丹半岛上发现了难民船、日本机枪、美军防毒面具、巴丹死亡行军纪念碑、菲律宾坎皮兰剑(kampilan)(麦哲伦正是死在坎皮兰剑下)以及埋在沙中的观音头像。然后, 就如同以往那样, 他们将这些历史的见证者刻成了木制的复制品。在阮俊[17]看来, 这些复制品与原物截然不同, 因为人们其实更希望通过复制过去来理解当下的世界。而在一个以海洋为主导的世界中, 孩子们必须遵循海洋的特性, 所以他们只能像对待祭品一般, 将这些木刻品付之一炬, 并把灰烬洒入大海, 因为唯有灰烬才能真正溶解于海洋。而在这个过程中, 海洋不但吸收了作为物质的陆地——灰烬即是一种特殊的土壤——也承接了灰烬所代表的陆地历史。由此, 海洋成为了想象未来的主体, 而作为异托邦的陆地则成为了想象的储备。

卡尔·施米特[18]对海洋的贬低恰好代表了陆地中心主义的典型谬误。他认为, 海洋因历史的贫瘠而缺乏政治力量, 因为在缺少特征的平坦海面上, 在重复的海浪之间, 无处留下历史的印记[19]。但事实是, 海浪是复杂而多变的[20], 人类也从未放弃过记录海面的历史: 早在前现代时期, 太平洋上的马绍尔人就开始使用“木枝航海图”(stick charts)技术来标识海浪的类型。同样, 《船民》中融汇着一切陆地文明灰烬的海洋也宣示了, 能够建造于海面之上的不仅仅是海市蜃楼——因为海洋的政治力量并不取决于在海上复制陆地生活, 也不意味着完全抛弃土壤, 并将海洋乌托邦视为末世中移动的避难所, 而是恰恰在于从海洋的特质出发, 想象一种连接着陆地和历史, 但又漂流在地平线之外的未来。

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