The Image of Future Human Represented in Chappie (2015)

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Abstract

This research discussed the image of the future human which is represented in Chappie (2015) movie by using representation theory. The researcher focused on the way the movie director created the figure of the future humans in his movie. This research undergoes the representation approaches as proposed by Stuart Hall. The implementation of representation theory is used to analyze the image of the future humans created by the movie maker in Chappie (2015) movie. Chappie is a robot that has artificial intelligence to support itself in making decisions toward its acts. Furthermore, Chappie which is an Artificial Intelligence human-robot occurs as the most suitable figure to represent the human in the future era.

Keywords: Chappie, future human, image, movie, representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is quickly heading to the modern era of technology and science. The change of human life on the earth becomes faster with the help of many technological and scientific inventions. The invention of the internet became the trigger of so many new inventions. Nowadays, there are online systems for parking, online vending machines, smartphone inventions, robotic machines, etc. The invention of those technology and science devices influences many factors of human life, including economy, society, politics, and culture. These inventions are created to help humans. However, the impact of these inventions is not always on the positive side. Some people might think that these inventions are giving a bad impact on human life. We still remember the bad impact of the Revolution Industry. The invention of factory machines caused so many workers to be fired from their jobs. However, for some people, those inventions give advantages and help humans to do their job effectively.

In this modern era, technology and science inventions also make so many medical treatments as the surgery can be done with a higher percentage of success. The invention of robots also helps humans in

exploring outer space and doing some heavy work. The attachment or augmentation of technological devices to the human body is even possible to do nowadays. Humans can even find medicine to cure some illnesses. This technological and scientific invention in robotic machines helps humans in many factors. These robotic devices can replace the function of some parts of the human body such as a leg, an arm, an eye, even hearing sense, etc. The robotic invention called the bionic legs can help the disabled. The Wall Street Journal informed that Parker Hannifin Corp. invented a set of motorized robotic braces (called indigo) that support, bend and move the legs of people who can't walk on their own because of spinal-cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, or strokes (*Robotic Legs for the Disabled - WSJ*, n.d.). There are a lot of technological and scientific inventions that can help humans nowadays. Technology and science become more important and influential to the life of humans.

The attachment of technological devices to the human body has often become the topic of many science-fiction movies. The attachment of technological devices to the human body is often depicted as a way to gain special power inside Sci-fi movies. Moreover, some important ingredients are needed to make the sci-fi movie, making it not only popularly watched in America but also in many other countries. Hollywood, the biggest movie industry in America and maybe in the world, pays the professionals who mastered their jobs in the movie production to make the movie meet a certain standard and become popular. Nachbar & Lause argue that "the producers will go to great lengths to mold their products to reflect the audience's beliefs and values" (Nachbar et al., 1992). These producers (including the producers of science fiction movies) have to do research about what exists in society now, and what the society thinks about technology and science invention to the lives of humans. This research is conducted to make producers able to carry the exact values and ideas of society in their movies. The movie is still believed as a cultural product that carries cultural beliefs expressing complex feelings, values, and ideas through symbols and myths (Cawelti & Adventure, 1976).

Hollywood, the biggest movie production in the world, knows how to make movies that will be accepted and famous across the globe. This industry consists of several major studios like Universal, Paramount, M.G.M., United Artists, 21th Century Fox, Columbia, Warner Brothers, R.K.O., and Walt Disney—which operate as production houses and distributors to support the films to reach a global audience, and they have been dominating for ninety years (*Hollywood Dominance of the Movie Industry*, n.d.). This industry is not hesitant to spend a lot of money to make a movie that meets the taste of people. A more substantial aspect that supports the attraction of Hollywood productions is the formal aesthetic of the movies themselves, making Hollywood movies the "standard" of how a movie should be. Barry Keith Grant talks about the Hollywood standard in his book *Film Genre from Iconography* (2007),

> Hollywood movies have become so dominant throughout the world that the terms 'Hollywood style' or 'classic narrative style' are often used interchangeably to refer to the style of narrative filmmaking that emphasizes the crisp and seamless flow of the story combined with high production values. (Grant, 2007)

In order to maintain the movies meet certain standards, producers of the movies would spend hundreds of millions of budget to hire the best director, cast, and crew for a single production. In addition to making details into the plot narrative and dialogues as written in the screenplay, the technical aspect of the movie is also put into high consideration—for example, the cinematography, angles, art direction, visual effects, music scoring, etc. The distinctive "mode of film practice" in Hollywood movies—often known as the term 'Hollywood style'—is adopted in almost all movies targeted at mass audiences (Bordwell et al., 1985). We may say that a Hollywood movie is an embodiment of what the people want because of its success and popularity among both domestic and global audiences.

One of many genres of movies produced by Hollywood is science – fiction. This genre highlights the narratives about the attachment of technology to the human body, even radically this technology is used as the replacement of certain parts of the human body in order to get more power than ordinary humans. This idea of a new human form or known as post-human existed in Hollywood a long time ago. Related to the idea of Post-Human, Francis Fukuyama through Kim Toffoleti's book entitled *Cyborg and Barbie Dolls: Feminist, Popular Culture and The Posthuman*, argued that human nature will be profoundly altered by technology and as a consequence, there will be a change in social and political instability across all level of society. Toffoletti supported Fukuyama's arguments, he stated that the "post" prefix in the term of "post-human" is signaling something that comes after the human, but remains in a continuum of human existence and change (Toffoletti, 2007). Katherina Hayles (1999) through Toffoletti (2007) also argued that the post-human does not have to mean the end of humans or the rise of anti-human, however, it can signal a shared partnership between human and non-human forms that in the process of this engagement challenge the boundaries between the two (Toffoletti, 2007). Based on the statements above, it is clear that post-humanity is a condition when human beings are attached to technology in order to evolve themselves. Moreover, this image of future humans is shown in Hollywood science-fiction movies, whether it plays as the heroes or villains.

The image of this future human occurred in Hollywood movies even before the 1990s. The first appearance of this future human creature was in Hollywood as a movie and TV series entitled *Six Million Dollar Man* in 1973. The hero of the movie is Steve Austin, a NASA astronaut who was severely injured in the crash while testing a lifting body aircraft prototype, he is "rebuilt" in an operation that costs six

million dollars. His right arm, both legs, and the left eye replaced with "bionic" implants that enhance his strength, speed, and vision far above human norms: he can run at speeds of 60 mph (97 km/h), and his eye has a zoom lens and infrared capabilities, while his bionic limbs all have the equivalent power of a bulldozer. From the information found in the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) website, it is found that this movie got 7.2 from 10 stars (*The Six Million Dollar Man (TV Series 1974–1978) - IMDb*, n.d.). The success of this depiction of future human heroes in this movie is adapted to the next American TV series named *The Bionic Women* (1976-1978) and remade into a movie with the same title in 2007 (*The Bionic Woman (TV Series 1976–1978) - IMDb*, n.d.).

Up until now, the image of future humans in Hollywood remains and is portrayed in the new science-fictional movies such as The Terminator series, Iron Man series, and other movies. These future human characters are not only depicted as the hero or protagonist of the narrative, but it often occurs as the villain. The popularity of these science-fiction movies that brought the image of future humans shows that these movies are successful in fulfilling the taste of America. However, these science-fiction movies in some countries were not as popular as in America. This may happen because the background belief about the idea of the future (post-human) is different.

Chappie (2015) is chosen as the object of research because it was rated higher than other films such as *Transcendence* (2014) and *She* (2013). *Chappie* was directed and produced by Neill Blomkamp. The title of the movie, *Chappie*, is taken from the name of a robot with artificial intelligence that was invented by Deon Wilson, a newly hired computer technician in Tetra Vaal Company. It is an adaptation from Blomkamp's short movie entitled *Tetra Vaal* released in 2005. Although *Chappie's* rating in some rating websites is not as good as *Ex Machina* (2015) but the scenes of action inside *Chappie* movie are more fascinating for some movie critics, since the other two science-fiction movies made by Blomkamp entitled District 9 (2009) and Elysium (2013) were popularly known, watched, and well-rated by some critics.

This research is held to find out the imagery of future humans as represented in Cappie compared to other movies that brought the same topic. Furthermore, this research will also focus on the image of Chappie as a future human which is often used by Hollywood in its movies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted below the literary study. Furthermore, this research undergoes the representation approaches as proposed by Stuart Hall. The representation theory is used to seek the way Hollywood movies represent the idea of future humans in its science-fiction movies, as seen from

Chappie, and to find out how this Hollywood idea about future humans in *Chappie* becomes something different rather than other movies.

Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture (Stuart, 1997). Furthermore, Hall stated that "*Representation connects meaning and language to culture* (Stuart, 1997)." Representation is the process of linking the 'things', concepts, and signs which is the core of the production meaning of language. There are two processes, two systems of representation, to do while we are employing Representation theory in research. Those are the system of representation that enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalence between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc to our conceptual map and the system of mental representation constructs a set of correspondences between our conceptual map to a set of the sign. Moreover, the sign is the term that we use for words, sounds, or images that carry meaning. Then, the sign is structured into languages and it is the existence of common language that enables us to translate our thoughts (concepts) into words, sounds, or images and use them to express meanings and communicate thought to other people. The meaning that creates the relationship between concepts and signs is made by the codes. And it sets up a correlation between our conceptual system and our language system. Moreover, the meaning is not in the object, person, or thing, nor is it in the world. We fix the meaning so it would come to seem natural and inevitable.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The depiction of future humans in Hollywood movies will be approaching the myth/value that is believed as the important thing that makes the science-fiction movie of Hollywood become popular. There are many science-fiction movies produced by Hollywood that are famous in other countries. The *Six Million Dollar Man* is seen as the pioneer of the Hollywood science-fiction movie that brought the idea of future humans. Each nation has its bedrock belief and value that passes and remains to exist through generations but this bedrock belief is not something that cannot be questioned. Nachbar and Lause stated that even the bedrock belief of American society as the American dream might be challenged or called into question at specific times as the Great Depression happened in America (Nachbar et al., 1992). It is almost the same with the idea of future humans in America as depicted in some Hollywood science-fiction movies. The myth that implies through the narrative of science fiction movies is something influenced by this bedrock belief and value of American society.

3.1. The Shift Depiction of The Future Humans shown in *Chappie (2015)*

There are so many science-fiction movies that are produced by Hollywood. These movies are surely bringing the ideology, myth, and values of the certain society that is implied in the narrative of those movies. In Hollywood science-fiction movies, the implementation of technology and science inventions often occurs as the cause of the revolution of human beings. Americans put their mind and thought based on logic, seeing that technology is the best way to the future of humanity. This is why almost all Hollywood science fiction movies are focusing on the impact of technology on human nature, resulting in a new human form that exceeds ordinary human ability. This idea of future humans in America seems to have existed from a long time ago and this is proven by the first release of a sci-fi movie and TV series that brought the idea of future humans in 1973 entitled the *Six Million Dollar Man.* Moreover, the success of *The Six Million Dollar Man* was followed by *The Bionic Woman*, which also brought the idea of the attachment of technological devices to the human body. Moreover, the idea of future humans in the previous sci-fi movie is also adapted by other sci-fi movies such as *Terminator* series (1984-2015), *Batman* Series (1939-2015), *Iron Man* series (1963, 2008, 2010, and 2013), etc.

However, the bedrock belief in society is changeable as Nachbar & Lause explained before. *Chappie* is a Hollywood science fiction movie that was released in 2015. It shows that there is a shift of belief in the idea of humans in the future in American society. The previous sci-fi movies released before 2010 still show the advantages of attaching new technological inventions to human beings. Look to the *Iron Man* movie series, one of many Hollywood famous sci-fi actions. Tony Stark, the hero, wears and uses modern technological devices that cover his human body, changing himself into a man covered by iron or known as Iron Man. Many sci-fi movies bring a similar depiction of future humans as *Iron Man* movies. Those sci-fi movies show that the attachment of technological devices in the hero's body is something needed in order to be able to defeat the criminal. However, there is a shift of the idea of the attachment of technology to the human body shown from many sci-fi movies released after 2010, especially in *Chappie*.

Although *Chappie* belongs to Hollywood science fiction movies, the idea of future humans in it is different from other science-fiction movies that brought the mainstream idea of future humans. It is because the idea of the future human in it is the way humans left the entire body to the robotic body. This idea of transferring human life or consciousness to the robotic body remarks the change of Hollywood's idea about the future human identity with the attachment of technological and science devices to the human body. However, the future human in *Chappie* occurs when the human leaves the nature of humans

and fully transforms to robotic technology, leaving only the consciousness of those humans. There are no more blood, flesh, and bones shown in this new form of a future human as depicted in the movie Chappie.

3.2. The New Appearance of a Hero.

Commonly, the hero in Hollywood science-fiction is a white American man who is clever, rich, and works as a scientist. For the example is the hero in *Six Million Dollars Man* (1973) who is a white man who works as a scientist for NASA, the hero *Iron Man* (2008, 2010, 2013) who is a white rich man who owns a well-established superb wealth company and the heroin Transcendence (2014) that is a clever scientist who owned huge laboratory. However, a white-man actor does not play the hero in *Chappie*. Neil Blomkamp as the director prefers to cast Dev Patel, the one who played as a hero in *Slum-dog Millionaire,* as the main character in *Chappie*. Dev Patel was born in Britain. His parents are the descendants of Gujarati Indians who migrated to Britain (*Dev Patel - Biography - IMDb*, n.d.).

In addition, Blomkamp made the hero different from the other sci-fi movies. He draws the hero, not as a well-established or rich man. Dev Patel who plays Deon Wilson is a newly hired expert of computer programming in a company that produced a security robot in order to help the police. He invented an artificial intelligence program to make a robot feel like a human. Then he grabbed and reconstructed some parts of the broken robot. He programmed that script into that robot under the oppression of a gangster called a ninja in order not to be killed by the gangster. Later, he found out that his script for an artificial intelligence program works well when there is a report of a robot who acts like a gangster, robbing the bank.

3.3. *The Chappie* movie reflects the condition in Real Society.

A lot of crime happens in America in a day. Those crimes are various as robbery, hijacking, murder, etc. Police are needed to keep the peace and catch the criminal. However, the number of police officers is not even enough to anticipate the crime happening in a day. From the FBI official website, the criminalities in America are Bank robberies, burglaries, larcenies, rapes, murders, etc. The frequency of these criminalities in America is high. Almost all criminals bring weapons such as guns, and knives. Although the FBI reported that the criminalities in America are decreasing from 2009 until 2013 as (www.fbi.gov) informed, American citizens, seem unhappy with the work of the police. They thought that they had to protect themselves from the criminals. The inability of police officers to fight the criminals raises the disappointment of citizens.

United States police have to think of another way to cut down the increasing number of criminalities and victims from the civilians and police officers. *Chappie* movie tells about the advantages of the implementation of robot technology to help the police catch the criminals. Robot occurs as the

figure that effectively catches the criminals and keeps the safety of the state from the threat of criminality. In the movie, the chief of the U.S police officer in Johannesburg even stated his welcome and gratefulness to this employment of robots as the police assistant as he said 'welcome to the new world without crime'. This movie reflects the dangerous condition in America where criminality is increasing from time to time. As a response to these dangerous conditions, the moviemaker creates figures that can help the job of police officers. The character of *Chappie* occurs in contrast to the robot nature. *Chappie, who* has artificial intelligence, shows that even a robot can have human feelings. The difference between *Chappie* and other robots in its type who treat the criminals based on the rule is that Chappie has the consciousness of human beings that makes it more humane. The existence of *Chappie* as a robot with artificial intelligence shows that the technological devices are invented not to replace or change humans but more to help and assist humans.

The *Chappie* movie also shows how the technology shall be used for the purpose of protecting and assisting humans. There are not any egoist heroes who transform themselves to be a hero because of their popularity as *Iron Man* or a hero who voluntarily undergoes surgery as *Captain America*. *The Chappie* movie shows that humans and technology are different in nature, except for *Chappie* robots that have artificial intelligence. Furthermore, Deon Wilson as the inventor of artificial intelligence and the creator of the Chappie robot did not volunteer himself to be transformed into a robot body. Deon does not even have a mind to transfer his consciousness to the robot even on the edge of his death, getting shot by a cruel robot. It is *Chappie* robot that proposed the idea of transferring Deon's consciousness to the robot body in order to keep Deon alive. Deon, who does not want to die, agrees to *Chappie*'s idea and here *Chappie* is the one who does the process of transferring Deon's consciousness to a robot body. Here, the technology is a choice to humans as the user, whether or not humans will use the technology is up to them.

3.4. The Pro and Contra behind The Idea of Future Human as Shown in *Chappie*.

The situation inside the Chappie movie may be reflecting the real situation nowadays. The first is the situation around Tetra Vaal Company in Johannesburg city and certain abandoned areas. There is a contrast between the condition of the place drawn in the movie. Although most scenes of the fight mostly took place in the abandoned area near the city, the hiding base of gangsters. Those abandoned areas are drawn as poor areas, dirty, and very different from Johannesburg city. Those gangsters go to the city to rob money from the bank.

The existence of *Chappie* robots to the mass-produced security robots is also an exception. *Chappie* robot shows that technological inventions not only give negative impacts on human

beings but also have positive impacts. This is a new depiction of the use of technology in a science-fiction movie. Technology and science are often drawn as the only way to achieve extraordinary power beyond human nature, and it changes human characteristics, habits, and ways of thinking.

4. CONCLUSION

The release of *Chappie* movie in 2008 marked a change in Hollywood's perspective about the future life of humans. *Chappie* movie depicts the future form of humans like robots, showing the radical evolution of human beings into technological machine-based, called robots. There will be no modification of a part of the human body because all that is left from humans is only consciousness. *Chappie* movie brings new ideas about the depiction of humans in the future that can replace their body, even their consciousness to the robotic machine or cyborg.

Moreover, the selection of the hero and the plot of the story make *Chappie* movie is different from other science fiction movies. The conflict about the attachment of technological devices to human life, whether it helps humans or brings destruction to humans still occurs in this movie. However, *Chappie* movie implies that it is up to humans to decide whether to accept technology and science as part of their life or not. The movie implies that technology and science cannot be blamed for the change of human nature because it is human who invents and uses this technology.

The figure of chappie looks alike a human even with its brain which is supported by artificial intelligence resembles human beings with different enhancements. The movie provides the idea that transferring the human consciousness to the AI robot will erase the concept of lifespan as the robot can be electrically charged. Here, AI robots come as a new figure of human beings in the future era as they are not worried about death and can live normally without human body limitations.

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