

A Semiotic Analysis of the 2021 Netflix Series Squid Game

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Submitted to the
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Communication and Media Studies

Eastern Mediterranean University
January 2023
Gazimağusa, North Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

The 2021 Netflix series Squid Game directed by Korean filmmaker Hwang Dong-hyuk has been credited as Netflix's Biggest Series Launch in the year 2021. The series garnered a monetary value of about \$891 million in addition to 250 game related apps, a warm reception with unforeseen achievements in the film industry, and critiques from various institutions. The series garnered an unexpected popularity that drew in a lot of attention and has resulted in why this research has been conducted.

The present study intends to answer the questions as to what elements have been infused in this visual production that makes it draw such attention and what those elements mean to the viewers.

To answer this, the research has taken on a semiotic perspective toward identifying a part of the reason as there are other aspects involved. The researcher conducted preliminary research on film theories and concepts for understanding human behaviour before employing semiology as a qualitative research method. Through this, the necessary framework used to draw out the text and image data identifying the signs was initiated. The framework consisted of the use of Charles Sander Peirce's triadic semiotic concept (icon, index, and symbol), Stuart's Hall concept of representation and signification, and Roland Barthes's concept of denotation and connotation. to make visual and verbal (speech) analyses.

Through the use of the Qualitative method, a total of 54 signs were discovered but to further aid an understanding of them in the text, the research study employed the use

of Roland Barthes's dyadic semiotic typology (denotation and connotation) and Hall's representation and Signification theory to discuss what meanings were derived.

Overall, the study showed how signs had been used repetitively in different contexts to portray power, fear, relationship and other characteristics to keep viewers immersed and interested. The findings of the research also called to attention and defended the originality, realism, and cultural relativity associated with the Squid Game series, which the director also deems is the basis for Netflix's series popularity. This is valid as through watching the series and conducting an analysis any reader can determine how the plotline was structured around signs very peculiar to the director's place of origin.

Keywords: Semiotics, Squid Game, Hwang Dong-hyuk, Charles Sander Peirce, Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall.

ÖZ

Koreli film yapımcısı Hwang Dong-hyuk tarafından yönetilen 2021 Netflix dizisi Squid Game, Netflix'in 2021 yılındaki en başarılı dizi lansmanı olarak gösterildi.

Yayınlandığı dönemde, film endüstrisindeki başarıları ve çeşitli kurumlardan gelen olumlu eleştirilerle dizi beklenmedik bir popülerlik kazanarak büyük ilgi gördü ve bu akademik araştırmaya konu oldu.

Bu çalışma, prodüksiyonun bu kadar dikkat çekmesini sağlayan unsurların neler olduğu ve bu unsurların izleyici için ne anlama geldiği sorularını yanıtlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Budoğrultuda araştırma, dizinin farklı perspektiflerde izleyici üzerindeki etkisini ve sebeplerini ortaya çıkarmak adına göstergebilimsel bir bakış açısı benimsemiştir. Araştırmacı, nitel bir araştırma yöntemi olarak göstergebilimi kullanmadan önce insan davranışını anlamaya yönelik film teorileri ve kavramları üzerine bir ön araştırma yapmıştır. Bu sayede, işaretleri tanımlayan metin ve görüntü verilerini çizmek için kullanılan gerekli çerçeve başlatıldı. Analiz yapısı dahilinde, Charles Sander Peirce'in üçlü semiyotik kavramının (ikon, indeks ve simge), Stuart Hall'un temsil ve anlamlandırma teorisi ve Roland Barthes'ın düz anlam ve çağrışım kavramının kullanımından yararlanıldı.

Nitel yöntemin kullanılmasıyla toplam 54 işaret keşfedildi, ancak metinde bunların anlaşılmasına daha fazla yardımcı olmak için, araştırma çalışmasında Roland

Barthes'ın ikili semiyotik tipolojisi (düz anlam ve çağrışım) ve Stuart Hall'un temsil ve anlamlandırma teorisi kullanıldı.

Genel anlamda çalışma, dizinin güç, korku, insan ilişkileri ve kültürel değerlerin nasıl sembolize edildiğini ve izleyici üzerinde ne tür çağrışımlar yarattığı sorusunda odaklanmaktadır.

Araştırmanın bulguları, yönetmenin Netflix'in dizi popülaritesinin de temelini oluşturduğunu düşündüğü Squid Game serisinin özgünlüğüne, gerçekçiliğine ve kültürel göreliliğine de dikkat çekmektedir. Bu, diziyi izleyerek ve bir analiz yaparak herhangi bir okuyucunun olay örgüsünün yönetmenin bakış açısı ve tercihi doğrultusunda özel olarak seçilmiş işaretler etrafında nasıl yapılandırıldığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göstergebilim, Squid Game, Hwang Dong-hyuk, Charles Sander Peirce, Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would especially like to thank my parents who financially and emotionally supported me to attain this opportunity to accomplish this self-fulfilling journey. I also want to accord thanks to my supervisor, Asst. Prof. Dr Barçın Boğaç, because patiently and dedicatedly guided me with his advice and helpful corrections that aided the completion of this research study.

My heartfelt gratitude also goes to my Pastor, Mr Abiola, and his wife whose prayers and connecting me to the right people helped me secure a topic and work my way through the research process. I also thank the members of my family and my friends for their continuous reminders and support in times of difficulty emotionally, mentally, and financially during the period of the thesis.

I am truly indebted and grateful to everyone who stood by me, heightened my morale, shared their knowledge, cleaned my tears, and held me when I found it hard. Joy, Femi,

Seun, Sister Tamar, Brother Victor, Chiamaka, Coreen, Ebun, Malik, Adaora, Helga, Temple, Immaculata, Ugochi, Grace, Jamie, Mira and so many other people.

Overall, I am most grateful to God who provided, protected and bestowed the wisdom needed to move beyond this stage.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This research involves the semiotics study of the popular 2021 Netflix series "Squid Game." directed by Hwang- Dong Hyuk. The series which was initially written as a two-hour feature film but produced by Netflix as an eight-episode series challenged the notions of only Hollywood productions receiving universal recognition.

The Korean production which was produced by a Korean but streamed by an American streaming service and further analyzed in Cyprus shows the depth of its popularity. Thus, in order to find out what innate qualities that has made this series so universally accepted, this research has to decide to explore various textual and visual elements has been used in the Korean production to represent reality.

In this chapter, the Background of the Study, Aim of the Study, Motivation for the Study, Research Objectives and Significance of the Study has been discussed.

1.1 Background of the Study

The influence of films spans far beyond the 20th century, and with the advent of technological developments in photography, sound recording, and eventually electronic and digital imaging (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2007, p.2) the cinema has utilized its potential fully and matured into a global entertainment industry by taking advantage of the value film lovers place on movie spectacles.

The cinema can be defined as the production of films associated with a certain political (usually national) agenda or a certain aesthetic or cultural movement (Rossoukh & Caton, 2021, p.2). Therefore, with its emergence, the consumption and production of films have moved swiftly, especially with the rise of the internet revolution in the 1960s. According to Pramaggiara and Wallis

The cinema not only contributed to a mass culture of entertainment and celebrity; it also provided a forum for education and critique through the tradition of social documentary and served as a medium of personal expression as in the form avant-garde films and home movies (2020b, p. 13).

The cinema acted as a pioneering platform that spirited the pull and love for film by many viewers, but it didn't stop by instigating viewership it also motivated the drive to learn about film through theoretical breakdowns and analysis of the films and the society at large. The cinema and filmmaking created room for filmmakers to express themselves and transport viewers to a world of romance, drama, intellect, and aesthetic experience (Pramaggiara & Wallis, 2007).

This is because films can communicate through visual and verbal means with the use of dictions, gestures, and dialogues which are merged into narratives. These narratives mostly follow a linear model of three phases: equilibrium-disruption-equilibrium (Beginning-middle-end). The narrative doesn't have to follow a linear plotline but can be interchanged by making references to people, events, issues, or history, and this in turn can make the audience find the narrative familiar, coherent, and predictable (Roger, 1946).

According to Dianiya, “the new generation of coding technique has made it possible to encode and represent objects in audio-visual scenes in a way that is semantically meaningful” (2020). This means that there are certain elements placed in films or series to pass on a piece of information. These elements consist of a signifier that signifies a familiar concept. The signifiers can be in the form of words, images, gestures, odours, flavours, acts, or objects with no intrinsic meaning until interpreted as a signifier for something and that is what semiotics is concerned with.

Squid Game is a fictional, cultural series about the realities of people within South Korean society, and to complement it more, Ahmed et, al described it as a dystopic and gory Netflix production (2022, p. 222). The short series is a product of Netflix incorporation (an American entertainment streaming service company that operates by producing films and displaying films over the internet through various segments). Squid Game makes use of symbols, icons, and signs of language to present a violent dystopian society created through the use of adolescent games played by adults. The series has been credited as Netflix’s “Biggest ever series launch” by Pallotta and Kang (2021) and rival to its pacesetter Parasite (2019) as the first foreign film to ever win the best picture Academy award at the 92nd Oscar in 2020. The horror and thriller genre has succeeded in creating a nationwide buzz and trend still igniting till today through its first season and has generated an income which according to a Bloomberg report is about \$891 million in what streamers refer to as ‘impact value’ (Khan, 2021).

Lowry (2021) describes Squid Game as “old wine presented in a new bottle, especially as the variations of themes used in the series are visually captivating, in addition to the timing, packaging, and platform on which it was distributed through”. Regardless of

this statement presented by Lowry, Squid Game has been able to create a distinct plotline on economic inequality and divide through a dark narrative.

This narrative coupled with semiotic features highlights a difference in what is portrayed in other series with life-battling game plotlines like Alice in borderland (2020). Furthermore, the series has also opened a gateway to an increase in interest in Korean-produced dramas, products, culture, and the country itself. Overall, this has contributed to why it has been chosen as a topic of interest.

The Netflix hit TV series Squid Game which fits into the Korean popular and commercial culture has acclaimed popularity which cannot only be linked to its nature as a trending series but also due to its commercialization value. As such, its selection for film analysis is gratified. The series instigated the production of 250 game-related apps featured on the google play store, inspired pop culture (Wright, 2021), and attracted advertisement endorsers and social media capitalists who have incorporated the show's attributes on their various channels (Craft, 2021).

1.2 Motivation for the Study

There are a number of reasons provided by various individuals regarding the reasons why Squid Game has achieved much popularity. One of the reasons given stems from Bong Joon-ho, a veteran Korean director, and Award-winning director who states that Squid game's originality and plot development made it different from other films and series with a death game genre and that's part of the reason it was able to hit home for many people. He also bases this originality on certain cultural elements like childhood games relative to the Korean populace (Still Watching Netflix, 2022).

Whilst the director of the series, Hwang Dong-Hyuk believes the series Squid Game succeeded 10 years after its creation in 2008 due to the realistic content and the pandemic. He says, “the increase in social and economic inequality in the past decade made Squid Game feel more plausible, pointing to factors like the increasing wealth gap, climate change” (Rowley, 2021). He also goes on to say,

I feel like the world is gradually moving towards dystopia. There are more and more people who really don't dream about a future, and that drives people to want to gamble, to really take it all and put it all on the line and hope for the best.... these changes have created an environment where the idea of people putting their life on the line playing children's game is no longer something that is too absurd.

These ideologies fall in line with the themes presented in Squid game and as a result, the present study has been motivated to point out the semiotic and filmic factors that make the series seem more realistic and relative. As the series is still recent, the reception that greeted the series warrants the need for an academic scholarship. As such, this research is conducted to elicit the various significant elements, fictional and cultural, in the form of action, words, or things that have been incorporated into the thriller series.

While researching the series, it was discovered that efforts have been carried out to produce the trending masterpiece that not only yielded much profit for the streaming giant Netflix but also amplified the cultural richness of South Korea where the plot took place.

Furthermore, the research has been motivated to show how two theoretical perspectives can be used to make an analysis. To work out what meanings can be derived from the signs and determine what message is being passed on. This will show

an aspect of what could be contributing to the profit growth. Furthermore, the audience might view the series as just another violent production. This research will correct that perception by uncovering the underlying meanings of the overall series.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The present study aims to examine which signs have been used in Squid Game, the Netflix series, and analyze the symbols in the most popular episodes of the series in accordance with IMDb ratings. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic concept of semiotics, the research study will draw out the signs and make use of Roland Barthes's concepts of denotation and connotation and Halls ideology of representation and culture to analyze them. This is because this research intends to show how signs are crucial to enhancing the themes and visual elements that introduce suspense, tension or irony in Squid Game.

The signs are further expatiated to show how the plot, characters and even props have been structured through the use of certain elements that have become significant in creating relativity that stirs up certain emotions and keeps the viewers interested.

Overall, the aim of this research is to pick up from where the filmmaker and viewer ended and analyze the systems that have contributed to how the series has been understood.

1.4 Research Objectives

This present study focuses on the Netflix series Squid Game, released in 2021. To achieve its goals, the study concentrates on the following objectives:

- a. Which symbols are used in Squid Game?

- b. What icons are used in Squid Game?
- c. What indexes are used in Squid Game?
- d. What Denotative meaning is derived?
- e. What Connotative meaning is derived?

1.5 Significance of the Study

After preliminary research, the researcher found out that there have been limited studies on Squid Game that analyze the semiotic codes present in the series. The lack of research that employs Stuarts Hall's concept of representation, Charles Sanders Peirce's models of signs and Roland Barthes's sign concept in highlighting details particular to Squid Game has resulted in why this research study is being conducted. The present study examines how society is incorporated into film narratives and determines what can be fused into a series to make it popular. This is possible as the filmic codes and signs are drawn from carefully selected episodes that have high index viewership.

This research aims to contribute to the literature by conducting a semiotic analysis of Squid Game by inspiration of, semiotician Charles Sanders Pierce, Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this research lies with the analysis being made on four select episodes rather than all the episodes of Squid Game season 1 (2021). These four episodes are based on what the director found as the most captivating episodes and on what IMDb ranking displayed as the most viewed episodes. This choice was made due to Netflix not releasing ratings of their own and to fulfil the objective of the research

study. This however does not limit the value of the information derived from the analysis of the 2021 series Squid Game.

This research draws data from these selected episodes and analyses following a semiotic basis to fulfil the goal of this research and provides efficient answers to the research questions.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the theory that will be used to conduct the analysis and its various theorists that have contributed to the basis of this research study have been discussed.

This section introduced The Concept of Semiotics, Ferdinand De Saussure, Charles Sander Peirce, Roland Barthes Semiology Theories, Christian Metz and Film Language, and Stuart Hall's Representation and signification theory. This chapter further gave brief detailing regarding the, Background of Sitcom Popularity in Digital

Platforms Including Netflix, the Squid Game Series, Synopsis of Squid Game, the Popularity of Squid Game, Korean Cinema, and Hwang Dong-Hyuk, the director of the series.

2.1 Introduction

Entertainment is fast becoming an all-you-can-eat buffet. Call it the Netflix effect (Mudhar cited in Matrix 2014, p.119). This statement references Netflix as an entertainment source through which people are catapulted into a televised dream-like world filled with thrilling experiences. In addition, with the advent of technological advancement, globalization, and large consumption of shows via Netflix, this chapter takes a step further to provide a detailed review of Netflix and the global show Squid Game which will be analyzed in the course of the research.

The section contains brief notes on, The Concept of Semiotics, Ferdinand De Saussure, Charles Sander Peirce and Semiotics, Roland Barthes Semiology Theories, Christian Metz and Film Language, Netflix, Squid Game, Background of Sitcom Popularity including Netflix, Synopsis of Squid game, Popularity of Squid game, Korean Cinema and Hwang Dong-hyuk.

2.2 The Concept of Semiotics

Semiotics formerly spelt and known as ‘semeiotics’ originated from the Greek word ‘semeiotikos’ coined by Hippocrates, the founder of Western Medical science, who established it as a branch of medicine for the study of symptoms-a symptom being in effect, a semeion ‘mark, sign’ that stands for something other than itself (Sebeok, 2001, p.4). Semiotics is described by Charles Sanders Peirce as a formal doctrine that aims at discerning what ‘something’ counts for, the features it has and the various ways in which it is presented (Liszka, 1996, p.1). Semeiotics can be understood as the analytic study of the essential conditions to which all signs are subject (Liszka, 1996, p.1). According to Sebeok, the phenomenon that distinguishes life forms from inanimate objects is semiosis. Defined simply as the instinctive capacity of all living organisms to produce and understand signs (2001, p.3).

For example, the word bird is not just a sound but stands for a kind of avian, similarly, most people would view a poster of a skull head as symbolizing death rather than part of the skeletal body. In other words, Semiology highlights what constitutes a sign and what laws govern them.

There are two major contemporary models of what constitutes a sign and they originated from Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American Philosopher

Charles Sanders Peirce. The other key figures in the early development of semiotics are, Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles William Morris, Roland Barthes, Christian Metz, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, and others (Chandler, 1994, p.7).

2.2.1 Ferdinand De Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure was born in 1857 in Geneva and educated at the University of Geneva and the University of Berlin before acquiring his PhD at the University of Leipzig in 1880. He was a linguist and philologist who taught at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris before returning to his birthplace. He was a professor at the University of Geneva, where he taught from 1891 to 1912. Saussure published specialized monographs, but his current fame is linked to his course in general linguistics that he gave in Geneva, which has posthumously recreated from lecture notes by his students and published in 1916 as *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (The Course in General Linguistics) (De Saussure, 1916, p.832). Ferdinand De Saussure states that,

It is ... possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. it would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeion, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is the only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be laws applicable to linguistics and linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field (Chandler, 2007, p.2-3).

According to Saussure, semiotics study the role of a sign as part of social life (cited in Pauzan, 2018, p.10). For that reason, semiotics to Saussure is a model of social science that understands the world as a social system of relations. He came up with the dyadic model of Semiotic which comprises the 'signifier and signified'.

Saussure classifies a sign as a composition of a 'signifier' and a 'signified'. The sign is a whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified and the relationship between the signifier and the signified is called signification. The signifier refers to the concept of sound/sentence/acoustic. It is the material aspect of the language, while the Signified is the mental concept. According to Saussure, the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

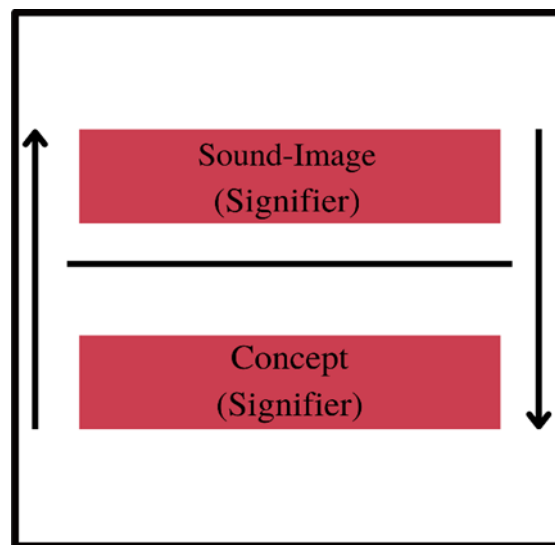


Figure 1: Saussurean sign model (Berger, 2004, p.8)

This means there is no innate relationship that connects them, only a mere concept and a sound-image (De Saussure, 1916, p.833). Saussure states that in linguistics the object (signifier) can reveal different things depending on whether the word is considered as a sound or an expression of an idea. In linguistics, the viewpoint creates the object (Innis, 1985, p.28).

2.2.2 Charles Sander Peirce and Semiotics

Charles Sander Peirce was born on September 10, 1839, and passed away on April 19, 1914. He was an American philosopher, logician, mathematician and scientist born in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Peirce, 2014, p.234). He contributed largely to logic, mathematics, and philosophy and even coined the concept of semiotics as the

examination of various signs and signifiers in relation to one another. His discoveries regarding the three classes of signs and the notion of pluralism have had a Pierce defines semiosis as, “an action, or influence, which is or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this irrelative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs” (as cited in Cummings, 2010, p. 433).

For Peirce, signs are more or less, evaluators or interpretants of reality, meaning signs are dependent on who uses them and where it is used. Peirce’s theory of signs asserts that all objects are signs, from anything within the mind to anything that conveys knowledge, stands in, or represents other things. Signs are everything that could give guidance in a process of communication, like a house, shirt, and every symbol with meaning (cited in Pauzan, 2018, p. 11).

Charles Sander Peirce provides a triadic model of the studies of signs. According to Golden and Gerber (1994: 204), the model is a central process of semiosis that involves; the sign, interpretant, and object.

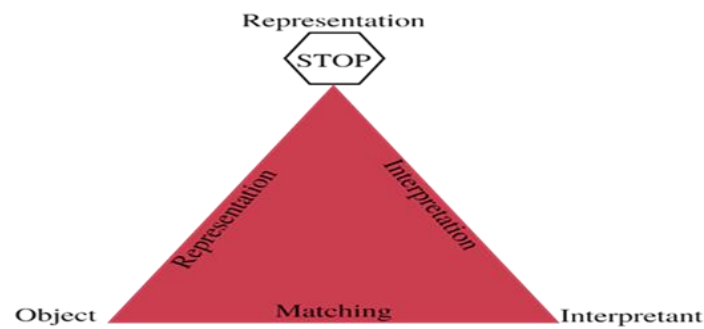


Figure 2: Peirce Triadic semiotic model (Studies, 2020)

This model was not fully expatiated on in Peirce's published works and as a result, writers had to explain it by referring to secondary sources.

The sign or representamen is the first element in the triad. Also known as the 'sign vehicle' it refers to the form the sign takes in relation to the second element (the object). According to Sobur, Peirce's 'representamen' can be divided into three: Qualisign, Sinsign, and Legisign (cited in Pauzan, 2018, p. 12). Qualisign refers to the quality which is in the sign. It does not necessarily act as a sign until is embodied like a loud and sweet voice. The Sinsign is an actual event with a sign. For example, a screaming girl depicts that a dangerous situation or occurrence is probable whereby the girl is getting hurt. Then, a Legisign, is a law within a sign. This law is established by men and agreed upon. E.g., Traffic lights or Road signs.

The second element which is the sign as the 'Object' stands for something beyond the sign to which it refers. The object is what we know as Saussure's 'signified'. Peirce developed a comprehensive typology of signs divided into three kinds: icons, indices, and symbols. This fits into Peirce's 3 categories of phenomena: quality or feeling; Reactivity and Lawlikeness.

The icon operates by virtue of its shared features and similarities with that which it signifies (Wolfreys, 2006, p.2). For Peirce, the icon is dependent on the subjective ability of the interpreter to see the sign as resembling something else. Iconicity speaks to the subjective possibility of an interpreter freely associating a sign with past experience (Robins, 2014, p.4). For example, a picture of President Barack Obama means the picture is an icon of the president of the United States of America, or the formation of a rectangle using the thumb and index fingers of both hands.

The index is Peirce's second class of sign, it denotes a sign a kind of sign that enjoys a natural relationship with the cause and effect of what it signifies (Wolfreys, 2006, p.2). The index is a sign in which the object has a relation to the sign user. For example, smoke is an index of fire.

Then the symbol is an arbitrary sign in which the signifier has neither a direct nor an indexical relationship to the signified, but rather represents it through convention (Monaco, 2000, p.164). E.g., Traffic Light and national flag.

Thirdly is the interpretant. The interpretant represents the sign as a possibility or as a sign of fact or reason (Eskola, 2021, p.146). In this aspect, the signs consist of a rheme, a dicisign, and an argument (also called sumisign, dicisign, suadisign, also seme, pheme, delome term, proposition, argument). The theme is a sign which is understood to represent its object in respect of quality, merely such as how a red-eye indicates a person is drunk, high, sleepy, or has been crying. A dicisign or a proposition is a sign to describe the object in respect of fact. For example, a dangerous road in a city has a sign that the road is dangerous because there are so many accidents on the road. Then an argument is a sign interpreted to represent its object in respect of habit or law. One

example is that if a person is standing in a room without lighting, he will say this room is dark because of its lack of light (Peirce, 2014, p.255).

2.2.3 Roland Barthes Semiology Theories

Roland Barthes is regarded as one of the most influential figures in Semiotics, and much of his work has served as a source of inspiration and information for many students and professors in the area. Roland Barthes was born on November 12th, 1915, in Cherbourg, France. He spent the early years of his boyhood in Bayonne before relocating to Paris in 1924. He got sick in 1934 with tuberculosis and spent several years in sanitariums. Although he was unable to complete his PhD studies as a result of this, he was free to pursue other interests. His meteoric ascent to popularity corresponded with the publication of *Mythologies*, a collection of articles he wrote in 1957. His views captivated the people, and his judgment was frequently sought in public forums (UKEssays, 2018).

There are always multiple ways to read a text, according to Barthes. There are multiple interpretations of a text rather than a single proper one. Finding the plural meaning of a text necessitates not only reading but also rereading. You read a text in a marginally different way each time you read it. Each time you read it again, a new meaning emerges. We are all aware of the concept of multiple storylines in a work. The semiotic level, instead of the narrative level, is where Barthes' theories are discovered. His fivecode theory is a technique for categorizing signifiers based on their function in the text. Makaryk states that according to Roland each code is a voice out of which a text is woven and that each code examines a different aspect of the text (Tohar et al, 2016).

Barthes distinguishes five types of semiotic elements that appear in all writings. He organizes these descriptors into five codes. All narratives, according to Barthes, have

one or more of the five codes that weave a narrative's voice (Zaib & Mashori, 2014). These codes are symbolic, semantic codes, hermeneutic codes/enigma codes, proairetic codes/action codes, and cultural codes/referential codes.

The Semantic Code applies to those parts of a text that can be best comprehended by inferring its connotative and suggested meanings (Zaib & Mashori, 2014). The semantic code consists of connotations as they appear throughout the text (Jureczek, 2017, p.146). For example, the use of dark colors and the color red in horror movies connotes danger. The Symbolic Code involves the use of symbols, i.e., images to represent meaning. For example, a movie poster may use an image of the crucifix to represent a connection to Christianity. This is comparable to the Semantic Code, which focuses on the meaning and organizes them usually by way of Antithesis (Jureczek, 2017, p.146). The reader's attention is drawn to the binary polarities as a result of this code (Zaib & Mashori, 2014).

The Hermeneutic Codes/Enigma Codes refers to any part in a storyline that isn't explained and hence remains a mystery to the reader, posing questions that must be answered (Nuri, 2016). This introduces enigmas and riddles to be solved by the reader (Jureczek, 2017, p.146). Whilst the Proairetic Codes/Action Codes which is like the enigma code also builds suspense. It refers to any action that foreshadows a subsequent narrative action (Nuri, 2016). For example, a shot of a character packing a suitcase could signify that they are about to go on a trip. Proairetic code is constructed by actions that constitute the plot of the story (Jureczek, 2017, p.146).

Then the Cultural Codes/Referential Codes are codes that use elements of a media text that have cultural reference and therefore appeal to people of a certain culture e.g.,

Age, gender, etc. It refers to bodies of knowledge such as science, religion, or a particular profession (Barthes, 1970 cited in Jureczek, 2017, p.146).

Semiotics is applied today in most, if not all media consumed by the public. It can be used to influence the actions of the public, sometimes in elections, and sometimes it can be used to promote sales of a product. Understanding therefore how semiotics is used is imperative so that one can see the hidden meaning in whatever media or information is consumed. Barthes' theories are very useful to that end.

According to Barthes, there are two levels that can be used to analyze a sign system: denotation and connotation (Bouzida, 2015, p.2). According to Barthes (1957), denotation is the first order of signification. Denotation is the step of the sign which explains the relation between signifier and signified producing the explicit meaning (Rifa, 2018). The denotation of a word or phrase is its literal or obvious meaning or reference as specified in a dictionary; the connotation of a word or phrase is the secondary or associated significance that it commonly suggests or implies (Green et al, 2012, p.298).

The word is etymologically derived from the postclassical Latin compound verb *denoto* which conveys the idea of singling out an entity by way of distinctive features (Chapman & Routledge, 2009, p.25). The notion of denotation is said to be traced back to Aristotle's classification of denominative names (categories 1), whereby denominatives point directly to the property (grammar) and indirectly to the (grammarian) (Chapman & Routledge, 2009, p. 26).

According to Russell, denotation involves asserting an identity to an object. It is the employment of words or concepts to describe a designated thing due to the logical relation that exists between the concept and some terms (Makin, 2001, p. 17, 18). In logico-philosophical semantics, denotation corresponds to the bidirectional relationship between entities in the world and the linguistic expression or given utterance used to refer to them (Chapman & Routledge, 2009, 26).

The word connotation is derived from the medieval Latin compound verb *con-noto*. It refers to an implied or accompanying feature (Chapman & Routledge, 2009, p.25). connotation is referred as the second order of signification which uses the denotation sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier (Rifa, 2018, p. 14).

The real power of linguistic languages lies in their denotative ability but also in their connotative ability. Connotation is the ability to draw out a wealth of meaning from a word or object that surpasses what can be easily understood. However, connotation stems from the film's denotative ability. This 'wealth of meaning' can be drawn out because the film is a product of culture and it has a resonance that goes beyond what the semioticians call 'diegesis' (the sum of its denotation) (Monaco, 2000, p. 162). A picture is, on occasion, worth a thousand words, as the adage has it (Monaco, 2000, p.162). Barthes asserts this by stating that, 'to perceive what a substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of a language: there is no meaning which is not designated, and the world of the signified is none other than that of language' (Allen, 2003, p.46).

The connotative power of films depends on devices that are indexical; that is, they are not arbitrary signs, but neither are they identical. (Monaco, 2000, p.167) Two terms

also aid with implying connotative meaning and they are ‘metonymy’ and ‘synecdoche’. This is because they invoke an abstract idea.

According to William of Ockham, connotative terms can refer to the names of qualities (golden) or substances (boat). It is often paired with sense or intention. Sense encompasses the whole set of properties of an entity, intension refers to the qualities of the entity which are implied in a given utterance (Chapman & Routledge, 2009, 26).

The connotation of a word or phrase emerges from the way it is used in a particular language community. Connotations are linked to the cultural assumptions made up by parts of the society that has been accessed (Green et al, 2012, p. 298), For example, the statement “my love for you burns brightly” connotes a passionate noticeable feeling that is not hidden. This connotation is derived from the long association that exists between strong feelings and the object fire in western culture.

Connotation can also be shaped by context and vary from person to person; however, denotation remains the same in all contexts (Condon et al, 2004 p.3). According to Hjelmslev, secondary connotations are always anchored by primary denotation. Barthes asserted this in his suggestion of how signs on the plane of denotation become signifiers on the plane of connotation (Green et al, 2012, p.298).

Connotation	Denotation
Figurative	Literature
Signified	Signifier
Inferred/Conclusion	Evident
Suggested meaning/giving Impression	Describes/explanation
About meaning	
Realm of myth	Realm of existence

Figure 3: The Comparison of Connotation and Denotation (Rifa, 2018, p.15)

Films communicate meanings in different manners which are either denotative or connotative (Monaco, 2000, 161). A film image or sound has a denotative meaning (the literal meaning that you don't have to strive to recognize) which gives films great strength as it creates to the eyes of the observer a close approximation of reality (Monaco, 2000, p. 161).

2.2.4 Christian Metz and Film Language

Christian Metz (1931-1993) was born in Beziers, South France. He studied classical philology and humanities-based program (Khagne) at Ecole Normale Superieure and Lycee Henri IV. He was a student of Roland Barthes and his heart belonged to the cinema which he showed great appreciation and interest in. Modernized cinemas like that of Italian Neorealism (Golden age), contemporary French cinema, and other global films (Trohler, 2018, p. 17). Since Andre Bazin, Christian Metz is considered one of the most important film theorists to have ever lived. To Andre Bazin's question of 'What is cinema?', he answered that cinema is language and informed this answer with a sophisticated understanding of modern linguistics (Guzzetti, 1973, p.292).

Metz is referred to as the pioneering scholar and father of modern film theory who paved the way for film theory as a new intellectual discipline in the 1960s. His writings influenced audio films within and outside France and contributed greatly to film as an academic discipline (Trohler, 2018, p.19). Metz developed his film semiology on a 'phenomenological (post-) structuralism', into a multifaceted edifice of theoretical ideas that systematically approached the film as an (open, dynamic production of meaning, a discourse, and an artistic expression). He also approached cinema as a cultural institution and psychic apparatus or dispositif (Trohler, 2018, p.20).

Metz initiated a paradigm shift in the structuralist approach to film discourse and this shift was directed towards film and cinema from 'a state of innocence' (denaïsement) to a thorough theoretical and methodological grasp of the symbolic institution of cinema (la machine cinema) (Trohler, 2018, p.19). This aided film to become a scholarly object of study.

To appreciate Metz's work, it is key to note that little work had been done in the mid-1960s which analyzed the nature of the film (image) as a medium. This led to Metz developing two frame-works of analysis: the semiological study of film and the psychoanalytic study of cinema. Metz was more concerned with what film signifies and how it succeeds in presenting a narrative (diegesis), intrigue, description, and drama. The main point for Metz was not to interpret film but to analyze it as a structure of signification.

Films correspond to statements because, unlike words, images are of an indefinite number created by filmmakers and expressed to create a filmic discourse. This discourse is only realized through the direction taken by the camera, through

procedures like editing or montage, and the incorporation of character types and symbols. Metz intended to grasp film as a meaningful process. This is because he asserts that film is not a language system or a sort of object appropriate to linguistic study. He argues that just as a word is a basic unit in a film so is the shot to film.

He further defends this assertion by stating that the relation between a word and what refers to it is arbitrary whereas the relation between a film image and what is being used to represent that image is based on perceptual analogies (relative realism). The film does not have speech parts like nouns and adjectives articulated separately like (short, dark-skinned, man) but rather works as a compilation of shots that exhibits records of relation and properties. The shot does not work as single lexical units as far as it expressed an undefined range of predictions. The shot of a soldier exhibits that the subject is a soldier and portrays the properties likened to any soldier, but, the utterance, 'soldier' states one predicate of its subject.

According to Carroll, Metz argues that representational shots are radically distinct from words in ways that make basic linguistic concepts inapplicable (1974). A shot of a boy is not equivalent to a 'boy' but rather, 'here is a boy' and this is because the shot exhibits the subject with many properties the audience can relate to. Metz's ideology that shots are not equivalent to words or sentences is why Metz surmises that film is not a language system in the linguistic sense but a language in the broader semiotic sense. It functions as a vehicle for communication that makes use of recognizable ordering procedures (i.e sequence, editing). Metz is concerned with what can be denoted from an independent unit of the film narrative, generally described by terms like 'sequence' or 'scene'. Metz refers to this unit as film syntagma.

Nevertheless, Metz's film language theory lacks descriptive power as it isolates and looks at the shot denotatively and not connotatively. Metz looks at the shot as a whole without considering the possible chain of shots, non-subjective flashbacks, and flashforwards that are embedded rather than cross-cut into a sequence that is more than one shot in length. This shows that his system lacks descriptive machinery and detailed criteria for analyzing the shots, but rather leaves it to the intuition of the viewer. This results in why more than one specialist can have different ways of dissecting the film or series. This is why it has been combined with Charles Sander Peirce's semiotic model to evaluate further the meaning of the signs interwoven in the series Squid game narrative.

2.3 Stuart Hall and the Concept of Representation

Stuart Hall was a Jamaican-British academic, writer, and cultural studies pioneer, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1932 to Herman and Jessie (Stuart Hall Foundation, 2023). Stuart Hall was a Rhodes scholar at Merton College, Oxford, Director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and a professor of sociology at the open university. He focused on courses on in communication and sociology, courses that focused on questions of race and postcolonialism and on theorizing the migrant view of Britain that he had always cherished (Morley & Schwarz, 2014).

Stuart Hall was the first editor of New Left Review, a founding editor of the journal and author of many articles and books on politics and culture including Policing the Crisis and 'The Great Moving Right Show' (for Marxism Today), in which he famously coined the term 'Thatcherism' (Stuart Hall Foundation, 2023). His published work includes the collaborative volumes Resistance Through Rituals (1975); Culture,

Media, Language (1980); Politics and Ideology (1986); and so on which testify to the breadth of Hall's intellectual engagements, and to the ways he moved through the various new times of his own life (Morley & Schwarz, 2014).

Hall's experience of familiar disjunction which he termed as 'diasporic' at Oxford solidified the sense of continual negotiation of exile and loss, arrival and acceptance which he felt upon coming to Britain (Davis, 2004, p.6). This served as one of the reasons why Hall was concerned not just with the society but also with how individuals feel as he recognized the dangers of interpretation of Marxism which denies human agency and free will (Davis, 2004, p.15).

According to Hall, language is the form through which representation is made (Hall, 2020). This is because representation is the ability to 'describe, imagine or make meaning of' and by this ability culture is formed (Hall, 2020). Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language that enables one to refer to objects, people or events as either real or imaginary (Hall, 2020).

There are three types of representation, which are reflective representation, intentional representation, and constructionist representation. Reflective representation has to do with language or various symbols that reflect meaning. Intentional representation deals with how language or symbols embody the personal purpose of the speaker and constructionist representation is centered on how meaning is reconstructed 'in and through' language. (Wahyu, 2020).

Due to language being the key repository of cultural values and meaning, meanings can only be shared through common access to language. However, in any culture, there is always a great diversity of meanings about any topic. This is because there is more than one way of representing culture and interpreting it. Culture is much about feelings, attachments, and emotions just as it is about concepts and ideas (Hall, 1997, p.2). Culture, he argued, does not consist of what the educated élites happen to fancy, such as classical music or the fine arts. It is, simply, “experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined.” and it can tell us things about the world, he believed, that more traditional studies of politics or economics alone could not (Hsu, 2017).

Hall believed that culture was a site of ‘negotiation’. A space of give and take where intended meanings could be short-circuited. According to Hall, in a free society culture embodies an unconscious sense of the values we share, of what it means to be right or wrong. Hall was interested in understanding the various political, economic, and social forces that converged into these media. This is because according to Hall it wasn’t merely language or the content of the news or magazine that told us what to think, it was also how they were structured, packaged, and distributed (Hsu, 2017).

Stuart Hall’s work challenged the preferred readings of media text by describing the cultural power of those meanings as the ‘politics of signification’ (Campbell, 2016, p.11). He used the term representation to describe the complex ways in which the mass media not only presented images but engaged in re-presenting images in way that they had multiple meanings, especially when it came to meanings about ‘race and ethnicity’ (Campbell, 2016, p.11). Hall asserts that the analysis of media representations is key to unlocking the power of the dominant meanings ascribed to those representations, meanings that serve the interests of the wealthiest and most powerful members of a

society. He believed his notion of representation was transformational and states that, ‘a way of constantly wanting new kinds of knowledges to be produced in the world, new kinds of subjectivities to be explored and new dimensions of meaning which have not been foreclosed by the systems of power which are in operation (Campbell, 2016, p.12).

Stuart Hall's work on signification focused majorly on how messages were produced and disseminated particularly by the television. He suggests the four-stage theory of communication involves: production, circulation, use (distribution and consumption) and reproduction at which each stage is relatively autonomous to him. This can be understood to mean that in the coding of the message within a text, the audience perception of it cannot be predetermined. Hall further states that, a message has a “complex structure of dominance” because at each stage they are ‘imprinted’ by institutional power-relations and can only be understood if it is recognized (Hall 1972, p.36).

Stuart Hall's influence on the important body of work that uses the concept of representation as a means of examining the relationship between race and ethnicity. Campbell cites Hall from his seminal essay, “Encoding/Decoding,” as a “turning point” in cultural studies, in which he states that, ‘the idea that television programs do not have a single meaning but are relatively open texts, capable of being read in different ways by different people (2016, p.12). Hall also suggests that there is a necessary correlation between people's social situations and the meanings that they may generate from a television program.

Hall described “decoding” media texts through three levels of analysis. The first level is the denotative or “preferred” reading that which was intended by the producer and is followed by connotative (“negotiated” and/or “oppositional”) readings of the same message. Hall explains the domains of “preferred readings” have the whole social order imbedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs; the everyday knowledge of social structures, of “how things work for all practical purposes in this culture,” the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions (Campbell, 2016, p.12).

What Hall would describe as a “negotiated” reading of media texts allows for analysis beyond the meaning intended by their producers. According to Hall, such a reading requires a recognition of the dominant ideology that is at work and how that ideology is shot through with contradictions (Campbell, 2016, p.12).

For Hall, the denotative, commonsense meanings of the stories are insignificant without the connotative, interpretive readings. According to Hall’s “preferred reading,” the first order is the denotative message and “the sign is self-contained”. He also mentions about the “negotiated reading,” which is the second order which refers to the connotative reading of the message (Campbell, 2016, p.12).

Stuart Hall also asserts the necessity of “oppositional” readings of media messages in which a viewer “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.” (Campbell, 2016, p.13).

2.4 Background of Sitcom Popularity in Digital Platforms Including Netflix

The sitcom is stated to be one of television's founding genre-having existed on the radio before making a transition to television (Sanders, 2014, p.27). According to Wickham, the sitcom is, "rooted in the rhythms of everyday life with character types and situations that are familiar to its viewers and is in a particularly strong position to comment on how it feels to live within modernity (2013, p.10).

One of the ways in which sitcom functions is that it is produced and understood as a form in which is as distinct as possible from seriousness, upholding the validity of the serious in the process. Because of this, seeing comedy as a mode-as it conventionally is seen within Film studies and the analysis of other media- is difficult to argue for television comedy generally, and the sitcom specifically. If genres differ from modes because they are groups of forms who share similar characteristics and whose intentions and pleasure result from an understanding of the genre and the specific characteristics and whose intentions and pleasure results from an understanding of the genre and the specific characteristics within them, then the sitcom is clearly a genre, even if it uses the characteristics of the comedy mode as part of its makeup (Sander, 2014, p.35).

The comedy for this genre doesn't necessarily refer to the idea of 'making one laugh' as film marketers have portrayed to viewers. Comedy goes beyond the short-sighted perspective and according to King, 'comedy in film should be understood as a mode, in which a variety of different materials can be approached'. Geoff King further states that comedy tends to involve departures of a particular kind or particular kinds from

what are considered to be the ‘normal’ routines of life of the social group in question. In order to be marked out as comic, the events represented or the mode of representation tend to be different in characteristic ways from what is usually expected in the non-comic world. Comedy often lies in the gap between the two, which can take various forms, including incongruity and exaggeration. Comedy can result from a sense of things being out of place, mixed up or not quite right, in various ways. One set of examples is found in films that derive much of their comedy from temporal, geographical or other forms of displacement (Sanders, 2014, p.33).

This describes the series Squid Game in which the characters are taken to a cartoonish game-like setting different from their everyday life setting. Actions and objects are exaggerated to cause an impact. The use of such objects (props), characters, and plot settings creates a comic mode of representation regarding life.

Sitcom centres around the journey of characters and the situation they experience that mirrors life itself. The narrative is designed so that the situation is constantly changing, and the characters are continuously developing in a way that builds up a resonance between the audience and the production (Lei, 2017, p.1;10). According to Sanders, sitcoms have become low in this decade in comparison to the 70s and 80s, but it remains one of the most produced and consumed film formats and genres (2014, p.27). As television content expanded and diversified so did the dynamics of consumption, narrative, and means of distribution (Barker, 2017, p.137). Numerous networks have produced in-demand series that have maintained devoted fans throughout their runs ever since the sitcom format gained popularity in the United States in the middle of the 20th century. Sitcoms like Parks and Recreation, Friends, Community, and The Office have developed cult followings over the past 3 decades. The popularity of

streaming platforms and the endurance of the genre have elevated sitcoms to the top of the list of television genres in demand (ParrotAnalytics, 2021).

According to Vivian, Sitcoms have further become successful due to the use elements that can be related to the audience (Lie, 2017, p.1). The goal of sitcoms is to appeal to the audience of the generation by being consistent with the time and developing characters that the audience can connect with and relate to (Lie, 2017, p.1).

Unlike traditional television, Digital streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, etc. allow viewers to binge-watch their favourite shows, that is to watch two or more (sometimes many more) episodes of a single show in quick succession. They also make it a lot easier to re-watch older shows, bringing those shows back into popular culture and increasing their popularity. An average American consumes 3 hours of TV each day, or roughly 20 hours per week, according to a 2019 survey from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Binge-watching takes up the majority of that time (Westcott, Downs, Loucks, Arkenberg, & Jarvis, 2020).

Although a growing list of evidence supports the hypothesis that binge-watching may not be the most ideal method of consuming TV shows, it is still incredibly popular. Why then is it so popular if according to researchers it is linked to lower sleep quality (Coppola, 2020)? Sitcom binge-watching provides many viewers with a break from the daily grind. Binge-watching is no different from other forms of entertainment in that it provides a chance to escape the stresses of everyday life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic popularity of sitcoms like Friends and The Office skyrocketed thanks to digital streaming platforms. 'Friends' was the most-watched

comedy show in America in 2020 with approximately 97 billion minutes of viewing time. Friends saw a 30 per cent boost in minutes viewed compared to 2019, even if the comedy category as a whole declined. (McCarthy, 2021). 'The Office' meanwhile was cumulatively streamed over 57 billion minutes by Americans (Spangler, 2021).

Netflix positioned itself in the field of series production in a manner that brought about recognition due to its innovative narrative and good quality. The company's investment in series almost immediately paid out its dividends (139-140). Their first major investment was House of Cards which cost over 100 million dollars for two seasons and increased their subscriber base by more than two million in the first quarter of 2013. Netflix also invested in other series like Arrested Development, the dramedy Orange is the New Black, the comedy Derek (2012-2014), Hemlock Grove (2013-2015), and others (Barker, 2017, p.140).

According to Barker, Netflix also benefitted from the creative power and innovative capacity of the series producers (Barker, 2017, p.140). Netflix to outpace HBO assembled trending original series more than any other U.S. channel making them a platform with a wide-ranging video library.

2.5 Squid Game Series

TV series is a visual storytelling medium based on an 'endless' concept (Sanders, 2014, p.24). TV series consists of individual episode arranged for continuation but simultaneously concluded in their structure. In this manner, the interaction between characters is developed and meanings can be perceived by the viewers as each story is concluded in an episode (Sanders, 2014, p.24). The series follows a narrative structure

that permeates curiosity and allows the viewers to develop an understanding of the premise even after joining the story late.

Squid Game is a nine-episode South Korean series directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk that follows a group of participants as they compete in a variety of simple but lethal children's 'games'. The winner will get a cash prize payout of around \$38.6 million (Shirey, 2021).

The web series' unique and creative storyline explored new elements not common in an average thriller genre. The series positioned strong themes regarding socioeconomic difficulties and disparity from a variety of angles especially as it provided a summarized back story on the major character lives. The setting and props used to enact the further actions undertaken by the characters are even more visually captivating. Squid game creates beautiful, detailed scenery that is muddled by a blood bath to portray the depravity of human beings rooted out by 'MONEY AND COMPETITION'.

Squid Game is also a tragic action-thriller that critiques capitalism and places center light on how what can be so innocent can also be deadly and the concept fascinates a majority of the viewers. The genre of film is directed towards mystery and thriller, two genres that captivate an audience and create anticipation in the mind of the watcher.

2.5.1 Synopsis of Squid Game

The story revolves around 456 people who are crippled in debt and choose to become free by playing games to earn money. Their idea of an easy win is shut off when they find out how deadly the games are and that they are continually being watched and controlled by cameras and guards who wear masks dressed in red overalls and prevent

them from bringing in anything that could help or protect them. For every game they win, money is thrown into a ball-like piggy bank (Netflix, 2022).

The first game they play is red light, green light a children's game whereby the tagger says green light to enable movement and red light to stop movement, and any form of motion is met after a fatal gunshot. They must follow this command and reach the crossing line before the countdown. After playing this game only 201 participants are remaining, and they conduct a vote deciding to either continue the game or not. A majority of the people refuse to continue the games and they are sent home but after returning and refacing the harsh reality of their life 187 of them return.

The players on returning to the games, team up to survive and continually play several games recreated from their childhood activities like (Dalgona (cookie game), special game-kill or be killed, tug of war, gganbu (marble game), glass steppingstones and squid game). Seong Gi-hun, Cho Sang-woo, Ali Abdul from Pakistan, Kang SaeByeok from North Korea, and Oh Il-nam group together to play the games. At the final stage of the game only childhood friends Gi-hun and Sangwoo are still alive and compete against one another in the game, 'squid game'.

The final game requires only one person to be left standing and after fighting each other, Gi-hun decides to give up the game once he is at the point of winning. However, Sang-woo refuses to let Gi-hun do so and commits suicide to certify Gi-hun as the winner. With his last breath he begs Gi-hun to take care of his mother. Gi-hun wins the game and is given 45.6 billion Korean won (over 36 million dollars) as the prize money but he loses the friends he made and his mother. He is depressed due to the

memories that plague him but forges on and uses the money to help the families of his friends.

We discover at the end of the film that the whole game was orchestrated by a bunch of rich men who were bored after achieving everything, had doubts about humanity, and wanted a bit of excitement in their lives.

2.5.2 Popularity of Squid Game

Squid Game (Season 1) is one of Netflix's most-watched series based on Netflix reports on total hours of views in the first 28 days of title release. It acquired 1.65billion-hour viewing coming in first before Bridgerton (season 2) and Bridgerton (season 1) (Solsman, 2022). The South Korean thriller has been a worldwide sensation since its release on 17th September 2021 (Cloete, 2021). Its viewership grew by 481% within a month.

A "mind-bending" series that 142 million subscriber households worldwide viewed during the first month of its release according to Netflix's third-quarter results report. According to Netflix, the show has achieved the top spot in 94 countries, including the United States (Shirey, 2021). Squid Game became one of the "great TV shows of all time" (Cloete, 2021). Its popularity can be accredited to the public promotion and the show's unique concept which was publicized on Twitter, Tik Tok, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Secondly, the series' ability to be accessible in 37 different languages and with subtitles, in addition to the storyline and characters contributed greatly.

According to Hwang Dong Hyuk, Squid Game also appealed to the audience through its visual attractiveness. He used an ironic setting to display the horrors. He used an

unnatural colourful setting that appears like a place for children to entertain themselves. He also asserts that the similarity of the series to manga survival genres and the simplicity of the context in the series made a crucial difference regarding the other genres that emerged before it. He says that ‘the games are so simple that anyone can intuitively understand their rules’ (Lee, 2021).

Hwang Dong Hyuk also asserts that one of the reasons viewers can enjoy the series, sympathize with the characters, and get immersed in the games is because each episode is spent on getting the audience to understand the games and the focus is also placed on the psychology and personal relationships emphasized by the Characters. (Lee, 2019).

According to Bloomberg’s article, the dystopian hit Squid Game was streamed for 1.65 billion hours in the first 28 days since its release in September. The series which made use of about \$21.4 million as production cost garnered \$891.1 million in value (Lee, 2022). The show was also praised for having captured the zeitgeist through portrayals of minority characters who represent immigrant workers, the elderly, North Korean defectors, and workers who have been laid off (Lee, 2022).

2.6 Korean Cinema

Motion pictures aren’t only a significant source of revenue for many countries they’re also instrumental in shaping worldwide impressions of a country’s intellectuals, historical, and cultural environment” (cited in Rossoukh & Caton, 2021, p.2). Due to this film industries have become concomitantly more important and prevalent now than at any time in cinema history (Rossoukh and Caton, 2021, p.1).

The Korean wave (also known as Hallyu) saw the rise of the Korean film industry and increased success both at home and abroad. It also fostered the increase of exports of films to other foreign countries (Kyung-tae, 2015, p. 6). The widely circulated term Hallyu underscores the emerging popularity of South Korean culture in the regional market. Hallyu is typically associated with exported South Korean television series but also encompasses the dissemination of South Korean cultural products, including music and cinema (Choi, 2010, p.2). As of 2014, Korean films had become just as popular as their Hollywood counterparts in domestic theatres. Korean movies accounted for a total of 107.7 million viewers at the box office nationwide, which accounted for about 50.1% of the total number of viewers (Kim, 2012, p.6).

Thus, Korean films which were seen as low-budget imitations of Hollywood in the past had now gone beyond that label and made a more dignified mark in the film industry through their unique and highly creative content which has attracted a large number of foreign audiences (Kim, 2012, p.17). This was partly possible due to the trust Koreans had in their directors and their directorial talents, especially with Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, Kim Jee-woon, and so on.

Korean films also enjoyed overseas attention through the support programs facilitated by the national government by setting up a screen quota system to provide cinema space for Korean movies and ensure a certain level of cultural diversity. By 2005, the fueled obsession of fans with K-pop and K-drama had let the Hallyu craze hit its peak and this skyrocketed the popularity of Korean entertainers [Lee min-ho, Song Seunghun, Jun Ji-hyun, Bae Yong-jun, Lee Byung-hun] and celebrity directors (Park Chanwook, Hong Sang-soo, Bong Joon-ho) who were idolized (Kim, 2012, p.28). The

country's thriving film industry has also been able to secure its name on the map of global film world countries, like Brazil and Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the success of the Korean film industry cannot be fully recognized without acknowledging the brief history of South Korean cinema.

The Korean public initial exposure to film started in the late 1890s which was quickly followed by the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910 (Lent cited in Park 2014, p.31). South Korea is a country that has undergone various trials and successive authoritarian regimes which involved minor and major infringement of freedom, particularly in the area of political and artistic expression. This is because the government exercised control over the film industry through censorship, strict production regulations, heavyweight film policies, and selective promotion of films that met their agenda. This allowed them to influence the content and style of work produced by the nation's filmmakers (Paquet, 2010, p.1).

Korean filmmakers struggled with the colonial environment especially as they had to depend on Japanese theatre owners for funding and distribution and were guided by Japanese Motion Picture Censorship Guidelines in 1926. However, in time Korean films became propagandist tools. Further on, even after Korea's independence from the Japanese in 1945, Korean film production did not flourish and the Americans replaced the Japanese censorship with theirs and began importing and exporting

Hollywood films in general. Film activists did not support this and became anti Hollywood and counter-acted on Hollywood films being shown in cinemas by sabotaging the cinema halls.

Nevertheless, with the help of their government, the Korean film industry gained strength in the mid and late 1950s (cited in Park, 2014, p.32) which was due to the change from an authoritarian rule to a democratic rule. This led to film policy changes and censorship rights were given to civil organizations like FENS (film ethic national committee).

However, a military coup affected this filmmaking growth. Nevertheless, film activists used film as a medium to fight political oppression and the colonial legacy embedded in the mass media and Korean society as a whole (Park, 2014, p.34). In 1986, the MPL (Motion picture Law) was amended to grant direct distribution of major Hollywood studios, and two decades later, the MPL was modified to reduce the screen quota from 146 to 73 days allotted for domestically produced films. During these two decades, South Korea saw its domestic film industry blossom, and its film culture matured significantly (Choi, 2010, p.1).

Koreans heightened realization regarding the economic value of the cultural film industry came into existence after the release of Jurassic Park in 1993. This is because the film earned as much as the export of 1.5 million Korean manufactured cars exported worldwide (Kim, 2012, p.12). due to this, the Korean industry followed in the lead of Hollywood. They also followed in the footsteps of Hollywood practices in being more systematic and rational in terms of working. These infused workings gave room for unique production culture (Korean culture and Information service, 2012, p.22).

However, after facing some failures the Korean film industry broke away from the traditional means of instigating the Korean cinematic craze and came up with a new

wave strategy that explored China's film industry and merged with Chinese actors to create more film productions for the Chinese people. This was very much welcomed by the Chinese people, however, there was still a decline in Korean film exports till 2012. The Korean film industry has been recovering since. Till 2014 China was the largest importer of Korean movies surpassing Japan and this was due in part to the abundance of quality produced Korean films, the appeal to Chinese moviegoers, and the fierce competition that exists between Chinese film companies and Korean filming companies in the film market (Korean culture and Information service, 2012, p.32-33).

Furthermore, to establish itself, expand further and explore film technology, build a future base and promote cultural exchanges and open communication between countries, the Korean film industry engaged in more joint productions besides than with China. They have partnered with France, New Zealand, Taiwan, Australia, and India. This shows the recognition of Korean films worldwide (Korean culture and Information service, 2012, p.34).

Consequently, the anxiety over 'direct' competition with Hollywood and Japan within the domestic market was overcome by the generational shift within the industry (Choi, 2010, p. 4). Hence, the rebirth of South Korean film in the 1960s can be linked to the context of globalization. The South Korean film to remain in the film scene adapted to regional and global demand by modernizing industry practices and elevation production value (Choi, 2010, p.2). A quota system for production and distribution was implemented to encourage reinvestment in film production using distribution revenue (Choi, 2010, p.3).

The growth of the industry can also be attributed to the residual viewings by the average Korean viewer, and the filmmakers' unabated attempts to gradually grow the expectation of their Korean audience. According to Pacquet, the hallmark of Korean cinema is due to the high level of local audience attention it enjoys. He also attributed the large viewing as a testament to the love and support of Koreans for Korean cinema (Kim, 2012, p.24-25).

South Korean cinema provides a model for what Chris berry calls "full-service cinema", which ranges from both commercial and art cinema to independent filmmaking, documentary, and animation (Choi, 2010, p. 5).

However, the Korean film industry didn't have unlimited resources or a large budget to follow in their counterparts' filming luxuries and as a result, they began focusing their attention on enchanting their audience by developing their scenarios and plotlines to be more creative, dramatic historical and sympathy inciting (Korean culture and Information Service, 2012, p.13). An example of such a film is *Shiri* by Kang Je-Kyu which drew a record audience of 6.2 million and was a hit in Japan. The film inaugurated a new era in Korean cinema history. Films like *My Sassy Girl* (2001), *Shiri* (2000), and *Christmas in August* (1999) were also major box-office hits that drew attention to their cinematic quality (Korean Culture and Information Service, 2012, p.28).

The urge to tell one's story is emblematic of the current status of the South Korean film industry. They sought to share some of the cultural experiences of Korea with people from around the world (Korean culture and Information service, 2012, p.9) and they are doing that. South Korea is telling its own story, both personal and national,

and it has been heard loud and clear both inside and outside the country (Choi, 2010, p. 1). The films further continued along this path as they told stories of Koreans and certain issues and events they encountered (Korean culture and Information service, 2012, p.15).

According to Park, Yi hye-yong captures the three basic elements of Korean filmmaking which consist of filming subjects showing film objects to viewers. This in a Korean film context rooted in Korean reality refers to the film subjects as technocrats or intelligentsia, the film objects as the bourgeois lives and their world view and the viewers are the amorphous mass. This is the structure of Korean film that Yi hye-yong points out and asserts by stating that if these elements are alienated, then the genuine cultural activities cannot be accomplished (2015, p.35).

This is evident in the Squid game and will be pointed out in the course of the analysis. At present, film texts are produced to communicate an aura and ritual quality. Kim Dong-Wan a pioneer of Korean independent films made documentaries that detailed the lives of the Korean populace, especially those in urban areas, and this sparked a lot of interest concerning Korea and its people. According to Berry (cited in Park, 2014, pp.28-29), Kim's documentaries were distinct and the primary audiences for Kim's films are the subjects of the film itself. He featured issues like urban migration, sex workings, and the struggle of the poor in Seoul.

This can be seen as a pacesetter for his other filmmakers, in addition to Hwang Donghyuk who featured such issues and sociological themes in present-day South Korea and Seoul in particular. According to Hwang Dong-hyuk, Squid Game was

produced more for the Korean populace which validates why it was filmed in South Korea and a majority of the cast members are Korean.

2.6.1 Hwang Dong-Hyuk

Hwang Dong-hyuk, the director of Squid Game was born in Ssangmun-dong, northern Seoul (South Korea) on May 26, 1971. He is a screenwriter, film director, and producer. He studied Journalism at Seoul National University before heading on to acquire a Master of Fine Arts degree in Film Production at the University of Southern California. He wrote short films like Puff of Smoke, Miracle Miles (Graduation film), and so on (Ch. & Sherazi, 2022, p. 8).

He directed works like The Fortress (2017) which earned him the Blue Dragon Film Award for Best Screenplay for the film. His other works consist of films such as Miss Granny (2014), and Mile (2005) which earned him local recognition and an invite to the Cannes film festival. His debut film, My Father (2007) received praise from critics and his other film, Silenced (2011) which was a book adaptation became a critical and commercial success. The film also re-opened debates on the penalization of sexual crimes committed against children (KOFIC, 2013). He achieved this before directing Squid Game in September 2021 which screened on Netflix and received rapid fame (Ch. & Sherazi, 2022, p. 8).

Hwang Dong-hyuk's success stems from his ability to illuminate the feelings of his characters and build believable lives for them. He is skilled in weaving stories in a naturalistic way befitting that of television and film directors. In the short series Squid game, director Hwang brilliantly portrayed an intricate and savage world unlike ever

before, giving the series so much depth. He created a plot line around gaming and used that to touch on various issues about society and humanity (Lee, 2022).

Motivated by *Parasite* written by Bong Joon-ho, Hwang was dedicated and confident to create his masterpiece. He accomplished this as his story which was pitched to Netflix garnered 1.65 million views only four weeks after its launch and became a global phenomenon (Wong, 2022). According to Hwang, while he was studying in the United States, he believed that he had to make an English show for people around the world to be able to watch it but now that mentality has changed because now, he believes that no matter which language a film is shown, everyone around the world can resonate with it if it is centred on a theme and a relative message (Wong, 2022).

Hwang Dong Hyuk first thought of the narrative of *Squid Game* between 2008 and 2009. This was during the period when he was facing financial difficulty. During the time he wrote *Squid game*, he visited a lot of manga shops as a means of escaping his reality. He read comic books like ‘*Battle Royale*’ (2000-2005) and ‘*Liar Game*’ (2005-2015) which inspired his narrative of *Squid Game*. As a reader, he felt desperate enough to want to participate in the games and applied that rationality in a Korean setting.

He initially wrote the script in 2009 as a two-hour feature film however the response to it was not enthusiastic especially due to its unfamiliarity and surreal nature which felt too risky. Netflix, however, showed avid interest and turned the film into a nine-episode series. He, thus, had to revise *Squid game* into an eight-hour series that centre in Korea but hints about the themes and games happening in every part of the

world. This can be noticed in the scene where VIPs fly to view the game and place their bets on the players (Wong, 2022).

Hwang Dong Hyuk used Squid Game to show the poor treatment of Human beings. He stated in an interview when asked about the painted women used as beautification objects in the series that, ‘that is the reality of our society in which humans are not treated or respected as humans’ (Lee,2021).

Hwang Dong Hyuk is further recognized as the man who skyrocketed the global stardom of actors like Lee Jung-jae (Seong Gi-hun), Jung Ho-Yeon (Kang Saebyeok), Park Hae-soo (Cho Sang-Woo) and Lee Yoo-mi (Ji-yeong) who went on to win awards like Outstanding Lead Actor whilst He won the award for Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series award at the 74th Primetime Emmy Award (Lee, 2022) and Baeksang Arts Award for Best TV Director.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter sets out to describe the research carried out for the aim of the present study. This chapter has been organized into four sections: Research Methodology and Design, Data Collection Methods and Research Procedure, Context of the Study, Population and Sample, and Data Analysis.

3.1 Research Method and Design

According to Creswell, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems” (2014, p.64). Therefore, for this research to successfully conduct a semiotic analysis of the series Squid Game, it will employ the use of qualitative research methodology, to enhance the understanding of the information determined. Research methods are strategies, processes, or techniques utilized in the collection of data or evidence for analysis to uncover new information or create a better understanding of a topic (University of Newcastle Library Guides, 2022). It should privilege a deep understanding of human actions, motives, and feelings. It should also illuminate how cultural symbol systems are used to attribute meaning to existence and activity (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002, p.11).

Qualitative analysis, furthermore, can be defined as the determination of nonnumerical information about a subject. It is also concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena (cited in Pauzan, 2018, p.21) and uses subjective judgment to analyze a

piece of given information. It deals with intangible and inexact information that can be difficult to collect and measure.

The purpose of qualitative analysis is to understand things, unlike quantitative analysis which measures things and uses statistical techniques to analyze the data. Through it, the researcher gathers data about lived experiences, emotions, or behaviors, and the meanings individuals attach to them. It assists in enabling researchers to gain a better understanding of complex concepts, social interactions, or cultural phenomena. This type of research is useful in the exploration of how or why things have occurred, interpreting events, and describing actions (Libguides, 2022).

For this reason, the researcher has chosen to use this research methodology to retrieve both image and text data from the series Squid Game. The researcher focused on the context of the events from which the text and image data were derived to make interpretations of the data and validate the accuracy of the findings. In other words, this method was founded suitable to explain the signs and describe and interpret the results attained from the Squid Game series.

3.2 Data Collection Methods and Research Case

The data in this research is taken from the Squid Game series and focuses on the scenes that contain Charles Sander Peirce's triadic representation of signs: icons, index, and symbol. Following preliminary research on semiotics, Charles Sander Peirce, icons, symbols, index, Roland Barthes, denotation, and connotation, Stuart Hall concept on representation, signification and culture the researcher watched each episode (6, 4, 1, 2) that had been selected for analysis. Video discussions concerning the theorists used and their theories were also watched to further aid understanding and have a visual

example of what concept was being emphasized and how it can be used in any research work that intended to employ the research theory. The points identified were then jotted down in a notepad dedicated to the research.

The episodes were watched repeatedly and meticulously in both English and Korean language with subtitles to create a brief synopsis of each episode and fully determine what signs fell under Peirce's model of sign representation in order to make coherent interpretation.

The researcher whilst watching the series documented in a personal log book the signs identified and then selected four signs out of all the signs discovered within each representation group to analyze. The researcher then went a step further to acquire the necessary images to provide visual details about where the signs were presented.

Four select signs were chosen to be analyzed based on the recurring patterns and important defining moments that played a crucial role in the development of the plot line and characters. The scenes where these samples appeared served as evidence to reinforce arguments and findings.

In addition, after this process, written documentation detailing the context of the situation, and the denotative and connotative meaning of the selected icons, index, and symbols were also provided. This aided the research study in presenting in-depth and substantial information beneficial for the aim of the research.

3.3 Context of the Study, Population, and Sample

The research will conduct a semiotic analysis of the 2021 Netflix survival drama series Squid Game directed by Hwang Dong Hyuk in South Korea and distributed by Netflix.

The analysis was conducted on the thriller series to determine the type of signs used according to Charles Sanders Pierce's triadic structure of semiotics and determine what meaning and messages had been derived from them whilst considering the text as a language. For this purpose, qualitative research which requires a sampling strategy has been used to guide the choice of what to observe or whom to view will be employed. This is because it enables systematic contact with communication phenomena which aids in solving the research problem with a minimum of wasted effort.

Thus, the researcher has employed a purposive sampling technique which entails "defining the population of eligible data source prior to selecting the actual sample" (Given, 2008, p. 797). Hence, for this research study, the purposive sampling of the population has been made dependent on the ratings of the most watched episodes according to the online streaming service IMDb and the director's ideas of the episode that captured most of the inner emotional struggles and complexities of the characters and their situation. This limits the research but prevents clusters of information by focusing on impacting episodes.

Population basically can be defined as, 'the cluster of people, events, things, or other phenomena that you are most interested in; it is often the 'who' or 'what' that you want to be able to say something about at the end of your study' (Blackstone, 2018). In this research, the population unit consists of 4 episodes (6,4, 1, and 2) within the first season of the series Squid Game (2021). The subset population includes the three types of signs categorized as an icon, Index, and symbols. Each sign description and the shot image develop the secondary data in which the meanings and messages incorporated in the text Squid Game are explained.

Furthermore, to enhance the research's secondary data qualitative purposeful sampling was used to decide on what signs in Peirce's types of signs will be analyzed. For the Icon, Index and Symbol sections, four signs were chosen for each section for representation and analysis. To aid further understanding a number of 54 images have been used to show a pictorial display of the signs. The images are classified from figures 3 to figure 56.

3.4 Data Procedure

The primary independent variable is the series Squid game. To provide a detailed analysis, each episode that had been selected for analysis was analyzed at a visual and verbal level. This means both speech and images were carefully considered during the review of the episodes.

The episodes were watched repeatedly to consider and carefully determine which sign is represented and under what Peircean typology of sign it belongs to either icon, index, or symbol. It further then relied on Roland Barthes's concept of denotation and connotation to produce an in-depth description of the identified signs.

The research data also pointed out what has been used as a signifier and a language that presents meaning in a way that stirs up emotions of intrigue, tension, and drama.

By presenting each piece of information in a documented form and with the display of scenes by pictures, the information derived has been rendered to show validity.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS FINDINGS

This chapter deals with the findings of the research and the discussions that have been drawn up based on those findings. The findings presented as data descriptions were derived from the Squid Game series and the analysis of those findings has been documented here.

In this section, four sign samples have been purposefully presented for each of Peirce's typology of sign and analyzed following Roland Barthes's semiotic concept of Denotation and connotation. This has been done to produce adequate results which fulfil the aim of the present study on the research on the semiotic analysis of Squid Game.

4.1 Episode 6: 'Gganbu'

A brief summary of episode 6 and samples of the signs selected for analysis have been detailed below.

4.1.1 Synopsis

The players are given the assurance that the games are made to give each player an equal opportunity without discrimination after witnessing the bodies of Player 111 and his accomplices being strung up for cheating. After being instructed to pair up for the fourth game, the participants learn that they would not be playing as a team but rather versus their partner in a marble game of their choice. The winner is whoever gets all their partner's marbles within 30 minutes while the loser is to be eliminated. When

Sae-byeok and Player 240, also known as Ji-Yeong, realized that one of them would have to die, they shared their life stories; Ji-Yeong saw that Saebyeok had more to live for and offered herself as a sacrifice. Sang-woo successfully convinces Ali into handing over his marbles. Player 278, Deok-su, and his henchman play against one another, and Deok-su win. Gi-hun uses Player 001's dementia to his advantage to overcome him, only to find that the elderly man was aware of the trick the entire time. Player 001, who recalls his name to be Oh Il-nam, concedes defeat in favor of Gi-hun because he is his gganbu (trusted friend).

4.1.2 Icon

Using the selected samples and images. This section will analyze the following icons identified in episode 6 of Squid Game.



Figure 4: Hanged corpses

In this scene, the teams are moving to an unknown location where they will play the next game. As they ascend the stairs, they hear the voice of the game master echoing through a speaker, addressing them about the bodies hanging on the roof.

The denotative elements in this shot are the dead bodies hanging from a balancing scale, which signify punishment for cheating and breaking the rules of equality. The

connotation of the hanged corpses on the scale refers to the severe consequences that may be imposed upon those who violate the rules put in place to guide.

In accordance with Stuart Hall's concept of representation, the use of the hanged corpses on a balancing scale in this scene represents how a balance has been achieved. In Korea, the concept of a balancing scale is often referenced in the legal system as a means of ensuring fairness and justice for the rights of individuals and welfare of the society to be achieved. The idea behind the balancing scale is that different factors and interests in a legal case must be weighed against each other to determine the most just outcome.

It also depicts how real balance and equality lies in death. The perpetrators hanging on the scale dead shows the verdict has been reached and their crimes are heavy, but the punishment is equally balanced amongst the perpetrators.



Figure 5: Timer

In this scene, the contestants are playing the marble game but there is a timer in the dome where they are playing. The game master informed the players that they only have thirty minutes and will be timed.

The timer denotes a digital clock counting down thirty minutes. The timer also connotes larger societal themes such as the role of time in determining life and death.

According to Stuart Hall's concept of signification, this scene is rich in meaning and cultural representation. The scene signifies the idea of time as a finite and constantly shifting entity, creating a sense of urgency and pressure as seen for the contestants as they play the marble game. The timer in this scene is a powerful icon that emphasizes on the cultural value of the Korean people towards time. As Evason states, “Koreans are reasonably punctual and usually prompt. They tend to try and make the most of the time they have. In certain settings, this can come across as impatient” (2016). By using a digital clock one can see how time is significant and creates the feeling of anxiety and anticipation. A feeling only felt by the characters but also the spectators who are eagerly awaiting the outcome.



Figure 6: The Marble game

The men in red, giving pouches filled with ten marbles to Gi-hun and Il-nam and other players and then the game master's instructs them to collect all ten marbles without using violence to pass this round and those who do not are killed.

The marbles denote a miniature round glass-like objects for game play. However, a full pouch of it connotes power and control; victory and success, while the empty marble pouch connotes loss and defeat.

According to Stuart Hall's concept of representation and signification, this shot contains cultural elements and meanings that communicate larger ideas about the Korean society. The old men's enthusiasm to play the game and Ji-yeong's referral to it as 'what those boomers used to play as kids' represents the game as an old-fashioned source of entertainment that was popular back in the days in South Korea. According to Cardoniga, this game and several other games were popular with young boys in the 1970s (2021).

The scene also represents an idea of life whereby what one possesses can always be taken by someone else and that small objects can have a profound impact on an individual's life. This is exemplified in the scene where those who lose all ten of their marbles are immediately killed. In this shot, the objects and actions are not simply physical entities, but rich in cultural significance and representation.

Foreboding music

The music begins as the main characters are at their lowest points in the game, further emphasizing the gravity of their struggle and desperation. Their actions, such as lying,

manipulating, and accepting loss, are represented by the intense and dramatic instrumental composition, typically a combination of strings and piano as is denoted.

This musical representation also connotes a lurking danger that is much saddening than scary. This music composition is used to incite the feeling of tension, sadness, and pain. The music in this scene is not just a background element, but a significant component of the cultural depiction of the sound of emotions stirred up as the result of events unfolding.

4.1.3 Index

Using the selected samples and images. This section will analyze the following indexes identified in episode 6 of Squid Game.



Figure 7: Il-nam urinates on his pants

This scene in which Il-nam pees on his pants and is covered by Gi-hun with his jacket can be understood as a significant moment in the construction of the film's narrative and the characters' relationships.

The act of peeing on one's pants denotes a physical occurrence, a liquid substance on Il-nam's trousers. However, it connotes a deeper level of meaning, suggesting shame and a loss of control on the part of Il-nam. This meaning is derived because in most cultures peeing on one's pant is presented as something to be embarrassed about. This is represented in this scene as immediately Gi-hun sees Il-nam's trouser he proceeds to cover it.

This scene serves to highlight the severity of Il-nam's illness and at the same time shows Gi-hun's kind-heartedness and selflessness. Through the representation of this moment, the filmmakers use the visual and emotional power of cinema to create a rich and nuanced picture of the human experiences.

Clock-ticking sound

Aline Remael notes that "sound shapes the picture sometimes as much as the picture shapes sound" (2012, p.258), emphasizing the interplay between the two elements in constructing cinematic meaning.

In this context, the ticking sound in a film can be seen as an index that signifies the passage of time. On one hand, it straightforwardly denotes that time is counting down. On the other hand, it connotes a deeper level of meaning, suggesting that the players' time is limited, and their lives are at risk. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of representation and signification, the relationship between sound and picture in cinema can be seen as a dynamic process of meaning-making. The use of this ticking sound serves to heighten the sense of urgency felt not only by the players, but also by the viewers who are aware of the ticking clock and the limited time remaining. Thus,

the sound functions as a powerful index in constructing the narrative and eliciting emotional responses from the audience.



Figure 8: Sae-byeok crying for Ji-yeong

In this scene Sae-byeok is crying because Ji-yeong sacrifices her life so she can live. The act of Sae-byeok crying denotes a physical expression of sadness and pain, showing that Sae-byeok has been emotionally touched by Ji-yeong's sacrifice. This act of crying connotes a deeper level of meaning, revealing Sae-byeok's vulnerability and helplessness in the face of Ji-yeong's death.

The scene in which Sae-byeok is crying can be understood as a significant moment in the construction of her character and the film's narrative. Sae-byeok is portrayed as a tough character who normally keeps her emotions in check, but the impact of Ji-yeong's sacrifice brings out a soft and vulnerable side of her that was previously hidden. This reinforces the idea that we are not defined solely by our own actions, but also by the actions and influence of others in our lives.

In this way, the scene of Sae-byeok crying serves to further develop her character, add depth to the film's narrative, and elicit emotional responses from the audience. Through the representation of crying, the filmmakers use the visual and emotional power of cinema to convey complex themes and ideas about the human experience.

The sound of gunshots

The sound effect of a gun being fired in the film can be seen as a significant indicator that conveys a range of meanings. The sound effect denotes the use of a gun, informing the audience and characters that a shot has been fired. This sound is used to connote the outcome of the game and the consequences of losing – namely, that someone has been killed as a result.

The use of this sound effect triggers a powerful emotional response in the audience and the characters. It elicits feelings of shock and keeps the audience awake and on edge, heightening the suspense and tension of the scene. The sound also adds to the overall mood of the film, underscoring the seriousness and danger of the game.

Through its use, the filmmakers are able to convey complex themes and ideas about violence, power, and the consequences of loss in a compelling and emotionally impactful way.

4.1.4 Symbol

Using the selected samples and images. This section will analyze the following symbols identified in episode 6 of Squid Game.

Sombre music

It is played after Ji-Yeong, Ali, and Oh Il-nam is eliminated along with others. This denotes a sorrowful musical tune and connotes that something impactful yet painful has occurred. It used to represent something sorrowful.



Figure 9: Sang-woo kneels and begs Ali

The scene in which Sang-woo pleads with Ali to give him a chance to survive highlights the power dynamics between the two characters. The act of Sang-woo bending down on both knees denotes a physical display of reverence and acknowledgement of Ali's power over him. This physical gesture connotes the eagerness for survival and the desperate acts that individuals may take when someone else has control over their fate.

Through the representation of this scene, the viewers can see what contrasting perspectives look like and priorities of the two characters. While Sang-woo is pleading for survival, claiming that he has a family to protect, Ali remains steadfast in his refusal to give up, as he too has a family he is trying to survive for. This highlights the idea that different people may have different priorities and that these may come into conflict in intense and stressful and uncertain situations. The scene serves to convey deeper

themes and ideas about power, survival, and the human emotions that arise when people are forced to make decisions that can change.



Figure 10: Gi-hun and Il-nam play marble

The scene in which Gi-hun and Il-nam play the marbles game using the "Guess the odd or even number" system highlights the cultural and historical significance of the game. The act of playing the game with marbles denotes a physical activity, involving little shiny round objects. However, it connotes a deeper level of meaning, suggesting the presence of a memory connected to the game and the cultural traditions and values that are associated with it.

The scene also serves to demonstrate the dynamics of power and manipulation in relationships, as Gi-hun takes advantage of Il-nam's deteriorating memory to win the game. It presents that even your own people can cheat you. The scene further highlights the idea that systems and structures can be used to advantage one person over another, and that relationships can change quickly and easily when they no longer serve the interests of one of the parties involved.



Figure 11: Handshake



Figure 12: Pinky finger swear

In figure 11 the viewers see a beneficial partnership being formed through a handshake by most of the players after they are instructed to pick a partner while in figure 12 an emotional companionship between Il-nam and Gi-hun is formed and sealed with a pinky swear stamp.

These scenes denote a formal agreement being formed using a part of the body to show an act of acknowledgement. It connotes teamwork, friendship, and a promise being formed from a connection.

In Korea, a one-handed handshake is seen as bad etiquette in Korea, and you should instead shake with two hands. This etiquette goes back to times of court intrigue, where

people showed both hands to prove they weren't hiding any concealed dangers, such as a knife or poison (Marinnan, 2022). However, the director of the film does not employ this and rather uses a western concept of shaking hands to show acceptance of the other party.

Furthermore, the use pinky finger represents a promise and the modified version used in South Korea is depicted in this scene as both thumbs are stamped together. It represents a culture whereby actions seal words of commitment. In this scene Hwang Dong -hyuk shows a culture said to have originated from the Japanese culture in the Edo period (1603-1867). In Japan, the pinky promise is known as yubikiri genman (指切りげんまん), which translates to finger-cutting based on the popular Japanese folklore in which a prostitute was willing to amputate her pinky finger as a sign of her commitment or eternal affection to the customer (Indita, 2022). The length of this promise is proven when Il-nam sacrifices himself for Gi-hun.

4.2 Episode 4: Stick to the Team

In addition to the summary of the episode, each sign has been portrayed vividly with the use of visual images. The images have been provided to provide a mental picture that supports the analysis detailed below.

4.2.1 Synopsis

In this episode, Player 111, a doctor is seen secretly working with some of the masked guards to harvest vital organs from the dead players to sell on the black market. He does this in return for information on upcoming games. Deok-su kills a player accusing him of taking extra food but the guards do nothing to stop him. The murder of the innocent man increases the prize money. Realizing they could freely kill other players to increase the prize money, Deok-su and his gang start a massive riot at bedtime. The

game master enjoys the gruesome scene in which players fight one another. Oh, Ilnam however pleads to bring the violence to an end.

Gi-hun group endures and uses name exchange to foster trust. Players are instructed to form groups of ten for the third game. Sae-byeok enlists Player 240, a young woman roughly her age, for Gi-side. hun's A team wins the game by dragging the other team off the platform, where they will perish, and the game is revealed to be a tug of war on two high platforms. Deok-su rejects Mi-nyeo and chooses only strong guys to be on his team because he had already learned about the game from Player 111. Deok-su and Gi-hun's team emerges victorious.

4.2.2 Icon

The close physical resemblance of the icons has contributed to the reason behind the signs that have been analyzed.



Figure 13: Money (Piggy) bank

In this scene after they have completed the game, money falls from an open space into a transparent pig-shaped plastic containment high above the players. They see the money increase due to the names of the players that lost their lives in the last game.

This denotes a piggy bank, a saving containment however it connotes a form of motivation, a reward for being alive.

The invention of the piggy bank originates to over 600 years ago in the 15th century when people would use pots to store what money they had. The pots were made from an affordable clay called 'pygg'. This became the trend in the 19th century, English potters would create pots shaped like pigs for people to use as a bank, humoring the origins of the word. This may have been accidental but has been used ever since and this is why we still use piggy banks today (Paragon, 2019) and this is represented in this scene whereby although the piggy bank isn't made with clay it is shaped liked a pig and used to store money.



Figure 14: Drink and egg



Figure 15: Egg with red paper

In figure 14 of episode four when all the players are lined up to get something to eat after their game and to their dismay, they are given a drink and an egg to eat. The drink and boiled egg denote food. The boiled egg is further emphasized in figure 15 when the doctor discovers a red paper detailing the information about the next game in the egg. He reads it and then proceeds to swallow both the paper and the egg.

This meal connotes limitations, a limit has been placed on a source of sustenance hence limiting the lifespan of a person. This meal is used to present types of food that can provide sustenance but also lead to the savagery when provided in limited quantity. In the course of the episode, a fight breaks out because some players took extra food which belonged to others that had not eaten.



Figure 16: Black box

After the games, the bodies are placed in a black box and then placed inside a furnace. In this scene, the contestants are grouped into a team of nine and are meant to compete in a tug of war with another team of 9. Team 1 and team 7 play first, and team 1 wins after having dragged team 7 past the line before the rope is cut and they fall to their deaths. After the fall the men in red place their bodies in black boxes knotted with red ribbons.

This denotes a black box for packaging. It connotes the loss of another life or in this scene, the loss of 9 lives. The black boxes represent coffins in which people who are no longer living are stored away in.



Figure 17: Eyeball

The close-up shot of the eye in the scene where the doctor is opening a body for harvesting conveys a rich array of meanings and interpretations.

It denotes a delicate part of the human body that can be preserved. The delicate nature of the eye connotes the vulnerability and fragility of human life, while also suggesting the idea that even in death, a person's body can have value and purpose. The scene also implies a sense of detachment and clinical detachment, which further underscores the dehumanizing aspects of the act of organ harvesting.

The act of removing the eye and placing it in a bag filled with water-like substances represents the objectification and commodification of the human body.

4.2.3 Index

The Index of Episode 2 has been highlighted in this section.



Figure 18: Thermal Images

The act of watching and controlling the players through the camera denotes the manipulation and exploitation of their bodies and lives for the purposes of entertainment and profit. The use of the camera connotes the idea that people are constantly under scrutiny and that their every move is being watched, even in seemingly private spaces.

The use of an infrared camera in the series indicates the act of surveillance and control. The camera's ability to detect heat movements and create images in the dark represents the growing power of technology to monitor and observe human behavior. Furthermore, the scene where the front man of the game sees Il-nam through the thermal image and orders the staff to stop the fights represents the power dynamics that exist between the watchers and the watched.

Overall, the use of the infrared camera in the series serves as a powerful symbol that highlights the issues of privacy and control in our increasingly technological society. It raises questions about the ethical implications of surveillance and the ways in which technology is being used to manipulate and control individuals.



Figure 19: Ali's amputated fingers

This scene denotes a handicapped person. It also connotes the systemic inequalities and injustices that exist in society, particularly for those who are marginalized or vulnerable.

According to Stuart Hall's concept of representation and signification, the amputated finger of Ali in the series can be seen as a indicator of his bodily injury and the consequences it has had on his life. The loss of his finger represents not only a physical wound, but also the societal and cultural stigma surrounding disability. The act of hiding his hands, as suggested by Sang-woo, indicates that there is a pervasive belief that disability is a source of shame and embarrassment, and that those who are physically disabled are seen as less valuable or competent.

Furthermore, the amputated finger can also be seen as a signifier of the broader social, economic, and political issues that have led to the lack of medical care and support for Ali and others like him.



Figure 20: Blood flowing on the floor

The flowing blood from his head denotes the physical trauma that has been inflicted on his body and the life-threatening nature of his wound. The scene connotes the idea that the human body is delicate and that even small wounds or injuries can have serious and life-threatening consequences. It highlights the importance of taking care of the body and protecting it from harm, as well as the need for access to medical care and resources in the event of injury.

According to Stuart Hall's concept of representation and signification, the scene of the man lying on the ground gasping for life with his head wound represents the fragility of the human body and the consequences of violence and injury. Additionally, the scene can also be seen as a representation of the wider social and cultural attitudes towards violence and injury. It depicts violence as a destructive force that has serious consequences for individuals and communities and the importance of taking care of ourselves and others in order to prevent harm and promote well-being.



Figure 21: Deok-su's Groups



Figure 22: Gi-hun's Team

In figure 21, Deok-su and the people who support him and stay by his side can be seen discussing while spotting out people that have offended them, this is noticed by the audience because the camera trails their eye point of view. In figure 22, Gi-hun's team battles Deok-su's team as they try to kill Sae-byeok.

The scenes of people coming together denotes a formation of teams formed to teams to ensure survival and satisfy mutual benefit. This scene connotes that survival cannot

be attained alone the interdependent nature of human beings and the need for social connections and support in order to thrive. The notion that there is more power in the majority than in the minority connotes the idea of the power dynamics that exist in society.

It is a representation of cooperation and community in human life. This represents the idea that individual well-being and success is inextricably linked to the wellbeing and success of the community as a whole. Overall, these scenes serve as powerful indicators of the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings.

4.2.4 Symbol

The symbols in this episode have communicated meaning to the interpreter without physical resemblance to what is represented.



Figure 23: Broken line



Figure 24: Broken bottle

These scenes show that there was an order of things that has now been broken. A straight organized line that had been broken by Deok-su and his team members, a broken bottle with its spilt contents across the floor because the rightful owner of the drink fought Deok-su for it. Denotatively this scene just showcases a break in transmission and shattered glass. Connotatively it symbolizes the destruction and waste that can result from small acts of disorder. This can be seen as a metaphor for larger social and political systems, where small acts of disruption can have farreaching and potentially devastating effects.

The scenes of the broken line order and the shattered glass can be seen as symbols of disruption and chaos. The scene of the broken order can also be seen as a representation of the power dynamics at play and the fragility of order and the importance of maintaining a sense of stability and organization in society. They also highlight the potential consequences of even minor disruptions and the importance of resolving conflicts in a peaceful and orderly manner.

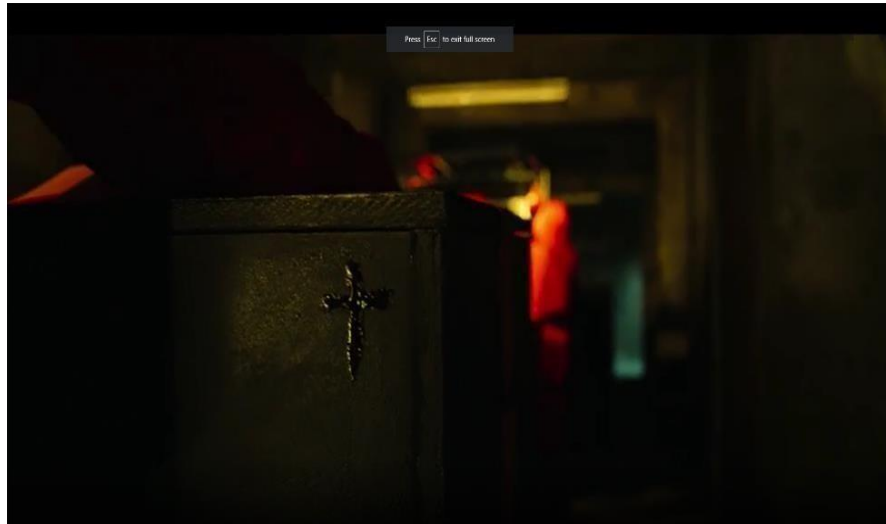


Figure 25: A cross

The Police officer disguised as the head staff in charge of collecting the dead bodies draws a cross on the coffin of the players and offers a short reverence before they are taken to the incinerator to be turned to ashes.

This denotes a religious insignia. It connotes belief in the Christian religion. The cross is symbolic as it represents a western religious culture that is also evident in Korean way of life.

It also represents the ideology of Jesus Christ and His death being known to all. The police officer's act of drawing the cross and offering a reverence is a way to express his belief that the soul of the deceased will find peace and rest in the arms of the Lord, and to offer comfort and solace to the families of the players. In this way, the cross serves as a signifier that carries a specific meaning and message to those who witness it.



Figure 26: Numbered 7 ball



Figure 27: Numbered 1 ball

The scene of the numbered balls being drawn to determine which teams will compete against each other serves as a representation of fate and chance. Denotatively, these balls are simply numbered objects, but connotatively, they depict how something as small as a numbered ball can determine the fate of the teams, particularly Deok-Su's and Sang-hoon's.

This representation is a common theme throughout the series, as the use of childhood activities, such as numbered balls, serves to emphasize the idea that something seemingly small and insignificant can have a profound impact on one's life. The scene sets the mood for tension and anticipation in the minds of the viewers, as they patiently wait to discover the outcome of the drawing. In this way, the numbered balls highlight the idea that fate and chance can play a significant role in our lives.

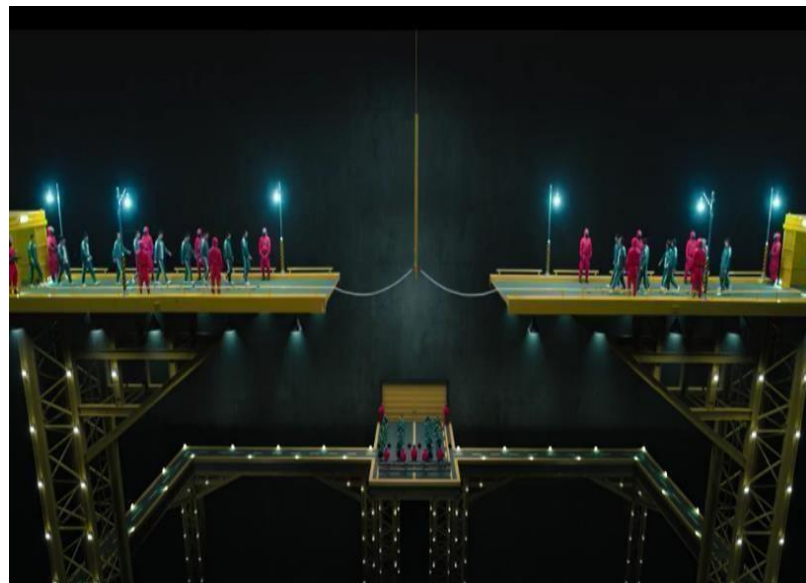


Figure 28: Tug of war

In this shot, two teams are on the tug-of-war platforms getting ready to be cuffed to the rope before the gunshot goes off signaling for them to tug at the rope till they can drag the other teams out of their platform.

This denotes a game whereby teams must war against one another to emerge victorious. This scene is symbolic as it connotes life as a war in which to survive, wisdom, good leadership skills, tactics, and the desire to fight must be highly exercised.

This scene of the tug-of-war competition serves as a representation of life as a battle or war. The teams are cuffed to the rope, ready to compete against one another, and the gunshot symbolizes the beginning of the struggle. This scene connotes the idea that in life, one must be prepared to engage in battles and struggles in order to survive and emerge victorious. The competition serves as a symbolic representation of the challenges and obstacles that one may face in life and the skills and qualities that are necessary to overcome them. Wisdom, good leadership, tactics, and the desire to fight are all important aspects that must be highly exercised in order to succeed.

4.3 Episode 1: Red light, Green Light

In addition, with the analysis, a prior summary of episode one of the text has been detailed below.

4.3.1 Synopsis

This episode introduces a majority of the main characters and their relationship. In this episode, the audience is introduced to Gi-hun a forty-seven year [47] old man who lives with his mother, works as a chauffeur, and gambles to earn money. He owes a lot of money to loan sharks and the bank. He has a 10-year-old daughter whom he loves but cannot get custody of as he is divorced and cannot provide her with suitable living conditions. He decided to join the games after he is introduced to them by a passerby. In the first round of the game, he meets Sang-hoon his educated childhood friend who is also in debt, an old man with a tumor in his brain, and a petty female thief from North Korea. They play the game red light, green light which involves getting to a finishing line within 5 minutes by moving fast when the green light is called and stopping when the red light is mentioned. With a little help and an understanding of the game, they all survive the game.

4.3.2 Icon

The icons displayed here have been chosen due to their referable physical likeness to what they represent.

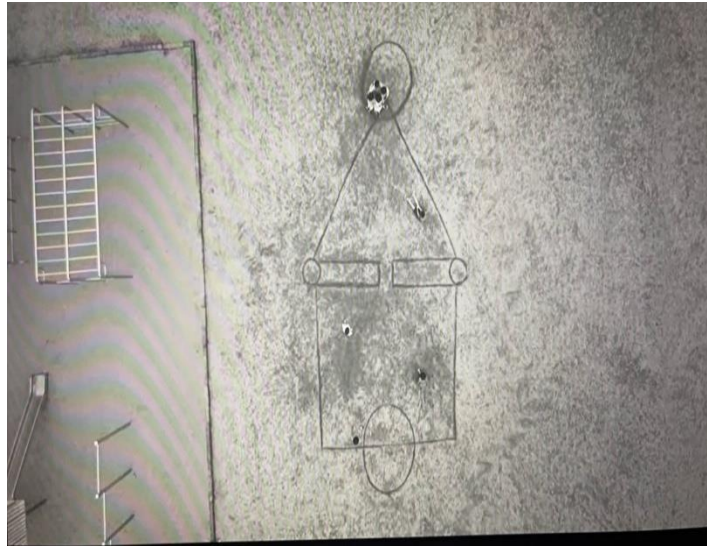


Figure 29: The grid shaped like a Squid

Figure 29 introduces the actual game which the series is titled after 'Squid Game'. The first scene in the first episode starts with children on a playground playing the Squid game on their well-drawn-out structure of a squid.

Denotatively, the structure of the squid is a combination of triangles, squares, and circles merged to create the imagery of a squid, hence its name. However, connotatively, it represents the importance of creativity and skill in survival and is essential in life and is taught and developed from an early age through games and play.

The opening scene also shows a representation of the level of childhood imagination.



Figure 30: Notes with currency sign

In the scene, Gi-hun is waiting at the subway when he is approached by a man who offers him the chance to earn some money by playing a game of ddakji. Through this, the viewers can denote that the money being won is Korean Republic Won especially because of the symbols of Shin Saimdang, the globe of Honcheonsigye, and the currency price printed on them.

This connotes that these are legitimized paper notes used for commencing transactions to maintain a livelihood. The scene further represents a monetary exchange that through which many of life necessities are attained.

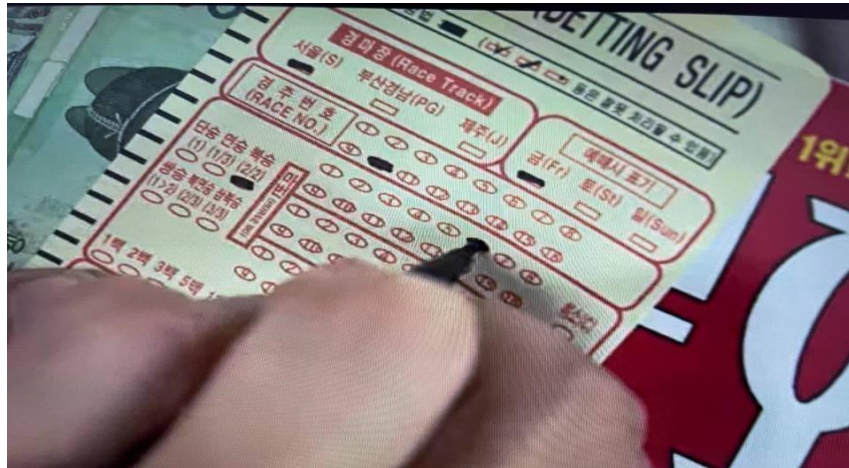


Figure 31: Lottery ticket

In the scene, Gi-hun uses the money that his mother gave him for his daughter's birthday and the money she had saved in her bank account to purchase lottery tickets, which he then uses to place a bet on a horse race in an attempt to earn extra income. Although he loses the first bet, he is fortunate enough to win the second, resulting in him making some money.

The act of buying a lottery ticket denotes a type of gambling that requires the purchase of a ticket and the selection of random numbers, with the hope of winning a prize. However, it also connotes a way of trying to increase one's income that is heavily dependent on luck, rather than skill or hard work. Additionally, this scene presents Gihun's life as person of lower socio-economic status and represents those of such status as people who are irresponsible and lack a stable source of income.



Figure 32: A Gun

In the scene, Gi-hun employs the use of a gun to intimidate the man who approaches him at the train station. The man is taken aback by this and raises his hands in surrender, indicating that he poses no threat. The use of a gun here denotes a weapon.

It connotes that such a weapon has the power to instill fear in others, causing them to act submissively. It further represents the gun as weapon used by these the lower economic status to protect themselves or appear stronger than they are.

4.3.3 Index

The index selected for analysis have acted as indicator for certain concept in the various scenes shown in Episode four.

The “bang” sound, bullet holes, and blood splatters

In this scene, there are instructions given to the participants to follow the signals green light (which means move) and red light (meaning stop). They are told to follow the instructions and successfully cross over the finishing line before the countdown. Those who shake during the red-light call are instantaneously shot to the ground.

The gunshot hole, blood stain and lifeless body followed after the sound of the gunshot indicate that the player is dead. This denotes death caused by a gunshot. It connotes that there has been failure to comply with the rules given. It thus connotes that one wrong move can cost a life.

This further represents the gun as a weapon used to force people to comply with given rules and command obedience or cause death.

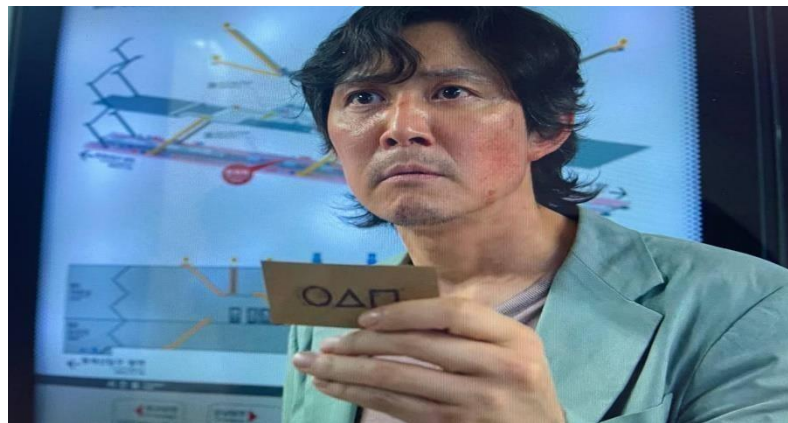


Figure 33: Card with Squid game shapes

Gi-hun is given a card after the game of ddakji to use as a medium of contact if he wants to play more games to win some extra cash. This card contains a number he can call to play and the shape markings that form the structure of the Squid game. Denotatively, the viewers can tell it is a regular business card. Connotatively, it implies a medium of communication, a path, a gateway through which an opportunity can be reached.

The use of the card shows and the way it is collected represents a universal culture of giving and collecting cards with information in order to communicate. According to Marinnan, in the South Korea, it is customary for Koreans to hold or receive the

business card with both hands at the edge of the card and leave room for the other person to touch the other half of the card (2022). But this is not done here revealing a different form of culture has been infused within the Korean production.



Figure 34: Disheveled Gi-hun

Gi-hun is dressed up in a worn-out grey suit, a face cap, and sneakers which he wears to go out with his friend to gamble before being beaten up in the stall of the men's restroom by loan sharks.

In the scene, Gi-hun's dress style and the bruises on his face serve as signs that are invested with meaning. The worn-out grey suit, face cap, and sneakers denote poverty, while the bruises on his face connote manhandling, as well as potential involvement with illegal activities.

This representation of Gi-hun paints a picture of how those from poor economic background appear to look. It represents them as people intertwined in all sorts of illegal activities in their eagerness to survive. It also represents the dangers of being in

such a classis by highlighting the bodily harm that comes from being indebted to illegal lenders.



Figure 35: Gift box

Gi-hun takes his daughter to a local eatery to get something nice to eat for her birthday, there he gives her a gift box that he was able to win from a crane machine. she is thrilled to receive a gift from her dad, but the happiness she feels quickly turns sour as the gift box contains a gun lighter.

The gift box denotes a celebration is taking place and a gift is going to be given within a box. It connotes, however, that not everything that is wrapped nicely is profitable. Gi-hun giving his daughter a gift box and the manner in which he gives her represents an etiquette of Korean culture that is known regardless of status. Giving and receiving gifts in Korea should be done with two hands. In Korea, when presenting a gift to the other person, it should be done with two hands extending it forward and waiting for the other person to accept it (Marrinan, 2022). However, Gi-hun daughter opening the gift represents a different culture not customary to the Korean people as it is considered impolite by Koreans to open a gift in front of the gift giver (Marrinan, 2022).

4.3.4 Symbol

The selected symbols have been chosen for analysis based on the significant role they play in the series.



Figure 36: Targeted players

In this scene, the 456 players are brought to an open area to participate in a game of "Green light, Red light." The players are instructed to only move when they hear the command "Green light" and to remain stationary when they hear "Red light." Through this game, many of the players are eliminated by a doll-like motion sensor that detects their movements and places a target marking on them, ultimately leading to their death.

The target marking denotes a chosen target. This scene connotes the idea that people are targeted based on their actions and the symbolic significance attached to them. The fear on the players' faces represents the fear of the consequences attached to faults, mistakes, wrongdoings. The scene also represents how someone can become an exemplary target based on the actions they make.



Figure 37: uniforms on staff and players

A group of people who are to be the contestants wakes up in beds in a hostel-like space dressed in green sweat set while a group of men enters dressed up in red overalls. One of the men in red informs them of the recent events that have happened and will happen in the course of their stay. From this scene, the viewers can denote that they are all in different uniforms which differentiates who are the players and staff.

This connotes both equality and division structured in a way to ensure order. The players all dressed in green are victims of the sort to the establishment, and they are given the same level of games, food, and basic treatment. The men in red overalls show they are in the position of maintaining the law and rules of the establishment.

This differentiation is further expanded on in this scene as the men in red overalls are given different masks with different shapes printed on them. The leaders wore black masks with square shapes while those below him wear masks with circles and triangles on them. Hwang dong-hyuk makes colorful representation of class differentiation and hierarchical status with any society in this scene.



Figure 38: 'Green light, red light'

For the first game, the contestants are instructed to play the children's game "Green Light, Red Light." The words "Green Light" and "Red Light" have both a denotative and connotative significance.

Denotatively, the words "Green Light" and "Red Light" refer to the traffic regulations in most countries, meaning "to go" and "to stop." However, connotatively, these words that command movement also symbolize the stop-and-go nature that people live by and the safety that comes with moving forward or just staying still.

This scene represents green and red light as a universal concept although pronounced differently remains the same in the meaning. The words are artistically used to represent common knowledge and show how following or disregarding these words or colors can prevent or cause life and death. This representation highlights the power and significance of language in shaping our perceptions and experiences.

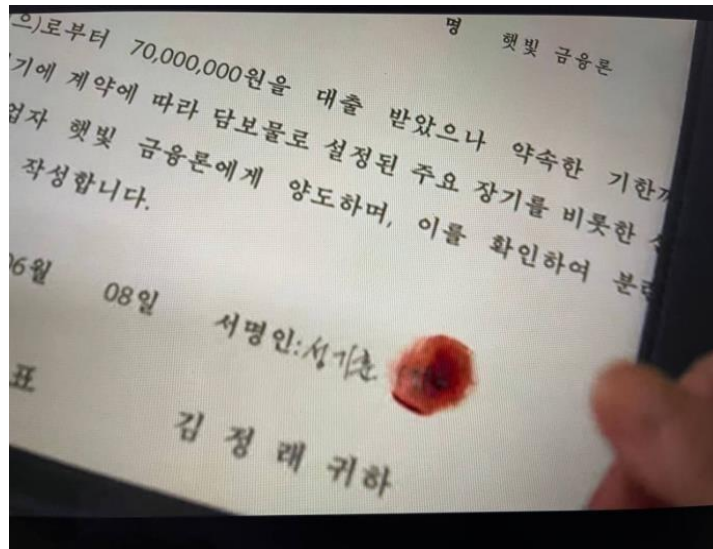


Figure 39: Signed contracts in blood

The scene in which Gi-hun is beaten and forced to sign a contract with loan sharks highlights the ways in which power and meaning are constructed through language and image.

The use of the document and the signature in blood denotes a somewhat legal form of transaction, suggesting that the right to life and health can be taken away through a simple legal agreement. It connotes which Gi-hun's life and health are reduced to mere commodities that can be traded and taken away.

Through the lens of Stuart Hall's concept of representation and signification, this scene represents the power dynamics at play in the interaction between Gi-hun and the loan sharks, with the latter holding the upper hand and exerting control over the former through fear and violence. Through this representation, the audience can see how society values human life, The act of signing the document with a fingerprint on a bloody nose represents a symbolic exchange in which documents now govern the

length of life one has. It represents the importance of documentation and the benefits that can come with it.

4.4 Episode 2: Hell

This section has descriptively discussed the signs within the second episode of the series and has provided a brief synopsis of the episode.

4.4.1 Synopsis

In this episode, the audience is shown the harsh reality of each main character's life. The maltreatment of immigrants like Ali, the struggle of a North Korean refugee in South Korea, the lack of funds to cater to family needs and health issues, and the betrayals that occur from people that were trusted. This episode depicts the saying 'only you can help yourself. After deciding against playing the game by making a vote, the contestants are all returned home.

Nevertheless, after getting home, they are faced with their realities and struggle once again. When they see no means of help, they are allowed to return once again and at the end of the episode, they choose to return and take the risk.

4.4.2 Icons

Through the use of images shown here to aid in the analysis, the icons' connection to what they stand for can be understood.



Figure 40: Guns

The scene in which the leader of the men in red uses his gun to silence the players who are complaining and pleading for release highlights the power dynamics at play in society.

The gun denotes a weapon. It connotes a form of power that is loud and doesn't require consent. This connotation of the gun highlights its role as a tool for subjugation and control, and reinforcing the idea that those with the guns hold the upper hand.

The scene also highlights the cultural significance of guns and the ways in which they are used to exert power over others. The act of pointing the guns at the players and forcing them to kneel reinforces the idea of helpless surrender and the idea that those with guns have the power to silence and control others. Overall, the scene represents the unequal distribution of power in society.



Figure 41: Scoreboard

After Sang-woo reminds the men in masks of the clause in the contract which states they can go home if all vote in favor of ending the game, they are made to vote in an orderly manner by clicking on X [to leave] and O [to stay] button. At the end of this voting process there are more people who decide to leave than stay.

This denotes a board with numbers, but it connotes individual choices and desires of each person involved. It connotes the desperation of those who want to earn a living and the desire to continue living.

The signification of this representation is multi-faceted and reveals deeper truths about human nature. The scoreboard represents a moment of truth, in which each person must weigh their own interests and desires against the potential consequences. It highlights the individuality of each person and the complex interplay of desires, motivations, and circumstances that influence our decisions.

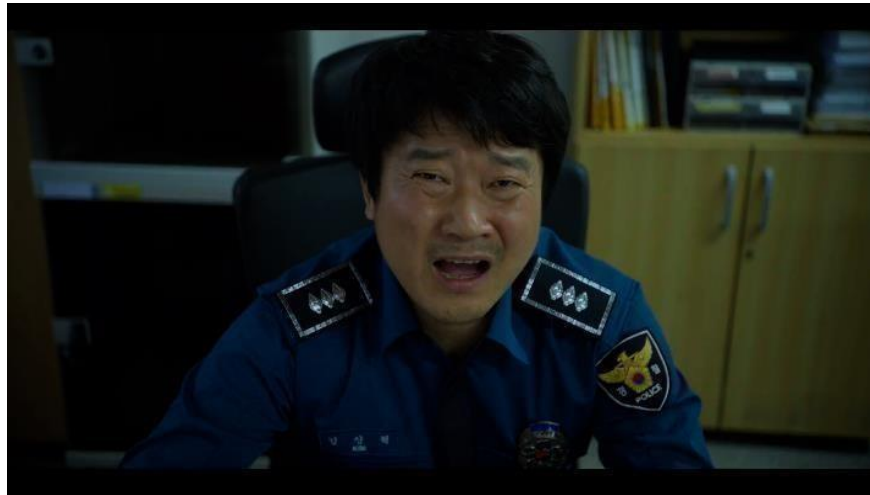


Figure 42: The Police officer



Figure 43: The Police station

Gi-hun after being released goes to the police station to make a report on the incident and requests for the culprits to be arrested however he has no evidence and the source of contact he has is proven ineffective. This causes the case to be dropped and Gi-hun is considered drunk and sent out of the police station.

This shot denotes governmental personnel and an institution of Law and order. This connotes a structure that is depended on to bring peace, order, justice, and punishment to those who carry out unjust, improper activities.

Gi-hun's experience at the police station illustrates the ways in which institutions of law and order is represented. The fact that Gi-hun has no evidence and his source of contact is ineffective suggests that access to justice is not equally distributed, and only those with power and influence can truly hold others accountable. This representation undermines the idea that the police serve and protect all citizens equally.

Additionally, Gi-hun being considered drunk and kicked out of the police station represents the mistrust and skepticism that exists between citizens and the police. This signification raises questions about the responsiveness and accountability of law enforcement institutions and undermines the notion that they are impartial and unbiased in their dealings with the public.



Figure 44: Card

In the scene, the business card serves as a sign that is invested with meaning. On the one hand, the business card denotes a small piece of hard paper with detailed information. It also connotes a line of connection between the individual and an institution, as well as a string of hope for an opportunity as demonstrated by the experiences of Gi-hun, Sang-woo, and the other players.

Hall argues that representation and signification are never neutral but are always shaped by the historical and cultural context in which they are produced. In this case, the representation of the business card as a means of escape and hope is a culturally specific and historically constructed way of depicting opportunity and success and reinforces dominant ideologies about work and success.

4.4.3 Index

These index signs point towards the objects and concept displayed which has contributed to the analysis given.



Figure 45: Sang-hoon and Ali eat Noodles



Figure 46: Raw Noodles

Sang-hoon buys noodles for himself and Ali to eat, while Il-nam sees Gi-hun at a convenience store and shares a pack of uncooked noodles with him.

In this scene, the noodles denote a basic convenience food. The fact that they are all eating the same food, regardless of their individual circumstances, connotes that noodle (Ramyeon) is a staple food for them.

This representation of noodles as a staple food reinforces dominant ideologies about food, poverty, and affordability. It is represented as a meal that is affordable and tasty but eaten majorly by those in lower socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the representation of them eating the noodles only in the store where they bought it also shows the food culture of South Korea.



Figure 47: Gi-hun's mother in hospital

Gi-hun is called to the hospital where he sees his mother lying unconscious on the bed. The doctor tells him she has been sick, and her wounds are due to her being diabetic and if she is left untreated the wounds will fester and her legs will have to be amputated. Although, Gi-hun pleads with his mother to stay and get treated she refuses as they cannot afford it and she endures the pain and goes back home.

In the scene, Gi-hun's mother denotes an old female relative and a victim of diabetes, denotes the health problems that arise with aging and lack of proper care.

This representation of Gi-hun's mother reinforces dominant ideologies about aging, health, and the relationship between health and wealth. The representation of Gi-hun's mother's situation also shows how the lower-class lack of access to proper healthcare and financial resources. It serves as a cultural and historical representation of the healthcare system and the relationship between health and wealth in society.



Figure 48: Torn Pockets

Sae-byeok seeks information from a broker who specializes in relocating North Korean refugees in order to find her parents and bring them to South Korea for reunification. The broker informs her that she needs to bring more money, as the previous funds she provided were stolen. Before departing, Sae-byeok promises to bring the additional funds, but simultaneously shows aggression and threatens the broker before ultimately robbing him.

The torn pocket serves denotes theft. It connotes a vicious side of North Korean defectors forced into life of crime due to their shortage of the necessities.

This scene represents low-income earners as thieves and North Koreans in South Korea as displaced, struggling people with no real financial backing in South Korea (Tokyo, 2021).



Figure 49: Sang-hoon Graduation picture



Figure 50: Gi-hun's Ex-wife family photo

In shot 49, Sang-woo is seen in a picture with his mother wearing a graduation outfit and smiling. The mother uses the picture to brag about her son graduating from Seoul

National University. In shot 50, Gi-hun looks longingly and sadly at the portrait picture of his ex-wife and daughter with their new family.

The picture frame denotes a type of containment for preserving pictures. This photo frame connotes an existing familial bond and achievement captured in a single photo. This index implies represents a story and ways of preserving that story.

4.4.4 Symbol

The symbols highlighted in the analysis has contributed greatly to the series and the meanings derived through the analysis.



Figure 51: X (red) & O (green) buttons

In this scene, the players are given the chance to vote after they are made aware of the prize money, and clause 3 of the signed contract. A clause that states that, if the majority of the players wish to end the game, then it will end.

This denotes green (O) and red (X) push buttons. It also denotes a democratic voting process. However, the green and red buttons connote the choice for the disapproval and approval of a notion, cause, or idea.

The scene represents a democratic community where everyone has a stake on the outcome of their lives. It portrays the communal act of decision making that determines the future of all involved. The players are given the opportunity to vote after being made aware of the prize money and Clause 3 of the signed contract, which states that if the majority of players wish to end the game, then it will end.



Figure 52: Sang-woo's choice



Figure 53: Gi-Hun's choice

Sang-hoon gives Ali money to go home to his family as the distance he intends to walk home is too far. Ali thanks him happily before leaving. Gi-hun punches his ex-wife's

husband after he offers him money to not show up in front of his family again. An angered Gi-hun throws his money at him and shouts at him before his daughter calls to him with tear-filled eyes.

Denotatively, this scene shows which Gi-hun and Sang-woo different choices with the press of a button. It connotes the ideas of "yes" and "no". The act of pushing a button represents the expression of opinions. It also represents the various pathways and options people from lower backgrounds can have. Gi-hun's choice to push the X button represents a desire to live without taking risks, while Sang-woo decision to push the O button signifies a willingness to take risks in pursuit of a certain outcome. This representation further depicts the dichotomy between a life without risks and a life with risks.



Figure 54: Sang-woo gives Ali money



Figure 55: Gi-hun fights the Stepfather

Sang-hoon gives Ali money to go home to his family as the distance he intends to walk home is too far. Ali thanks him happily before leaving. Gi-hun punches his ex-wife's husband after he offers him money to not show up in front of his family again. An angered Gi-hun throws his money at him and shouts at him before his daughter calls to him with tear-filled eyes.

Money in this scene denotes a medium of exchange in the form of banknotes; by having these notes, transportation and bargains can be made. It connotes that such banknotes can stir up emotions of gratitude and anger, and make a person appear inferior or superior, efficient or deficient.

This representation underscores the role that money can play in shaping social relationships and emotions.



Figure 56: Kang Sae-byeok & her brother

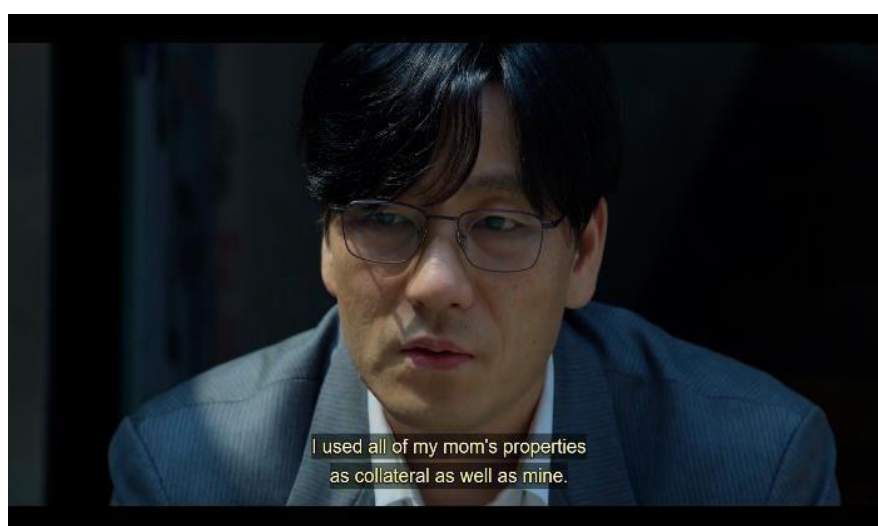


Figure 57: Omma/Mother

The word ‘mother’ in English, written and pronounced as ‘어머니, eomeoni’ is used when Sang-hoon is telling Gi-hun how he used his mother’s house as collateral for his debt. The word is also used by Sae-byeok in comforting her brother who is being teased in the orphanage that no one will come for him. She uses the word mom and dad to assure him and give him a mental picture of having a family again. It is also used in

some other scenes like when the police officer is driving and he receives a call from his mother and he assures her about finding his brother, her son so she can be at peace.

The word ‘mother’ in English, written and pronounced as ‘어머니’, eomeoni’ in South

Korean language and denotes a female relative. Mother is symbolic as it connotes a person who cares, can be depended on, and worries about the life of those who are close to her.

It is represented in this episode as one of the closest and heart-warming form of relationship. In all these scenes the viewers can hear and see how those with the reference ‘mother’ have an emotional connection and play a big role in the lives of the men and women in the series.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

In this section, the summary of what has been discussed, the conclusion derived and further recommendations concerning the study has been detailed below.

5.1 Summary of the Study

In summary, this present study using a semiotic approach has explored four episodes in Squid game based on IMDb (Internet Movie database) ratings of the most watched episodes of the series and the director's choice of the most significant episodes.

To fulfill the focus of this research which is to point out the semantic components introduced in the series Squid game and make a composite analysis on each one in relation to representation and society. This research has relied on Pierce's semantic model (icons, index, and symbol), Barthes concept of denotative and Connotative meanings and Stuart Halls concept of representation and signification. A total 54 signs, with four signs within each Peircean category were discovered and analyzed.

In brief, the research study has shown how the triadic and dyadic semiotic concept coupled with theory of representation and signification were fused together to provide visual and written documentation behind the meanings of the signs identified within the Squid game series.

5.2 Conclusion Drawn from the Study

This research study has discovered the underscored elements that has been both thought-provoking and engaging in the series Squid game. Elements that have greatly contributed to the unique viewing experience of the audience. The researcher chose

Squid game as it was deemed the Netflix number one most watched show of all time (Spangler, 2021) and took ten years before it was finally produced by Hwang donghyuk and shown to the public by Netflix. Another reason was due to the fact that Squid game was a Korean production produced by an American streaming service but recognized globally.

A semiotic perspective was implemented towards this research because this perspective regarding the cause of Squid's game's popularity has not taken enough attention in academic studies. The research found significant element used and explained what they represented to further communicate the intended message of the director.

Hence, from this research, it is evident that the Netflix series Squid Game uses a variety of semiotic elements to convey its themes and messages. The series use of icons, indexes, and symbols to connote themes of poverty, childhood competitiveness and hope in a naturalistic aided the plotline development in which the Korean culture was portrayed in diverse ramification. Their lifestyle, speech, monetary value, lifestyle, beliefs and even delicacies are all portrayed by formulating these signs within the series.

By also analyzing the series using Charles Sanders Peirce triadic model, Roland

Barthes denotation and semiotic concept, and Stuart's Hall concept of representation and signification, this research has shown how director Hwang dong-hyuk's infusion of basic universal cultural elements has made the series rich in meaning. Basic actions like the hand-shaking and pinky-swearing, the characters dress styles, work ethics, religion and even places like governmental institutions were emphasized on allowing the universal audience understand and relate with the series easily although it is a product of the Korean cinema.

The Netflix production which has succeeded in making what was specific to the Korean society now common knowledge to the rest of the world has also influenced the growth of the society. Games like the Dalgona cookie challenge and the red light, green light had become popular group time activities during past times amongst young and middle-aged people around the world. Even the Dalgona candy became a popular snack that was sold frequently in Korea. According to Schlitz, even the sellers were swamped for a week to be able to keep up with orders (2021). This helped the financial growth of roadside stalls that sold this product.

Furthermore, in the course of this research, the researcher has come to the conclusion that Netflix ability to make the South Korean television's Squid Game translated in 31 languages and available in 90 countries (Juagdan, 2022) paved the way for the series widespread popularity both home and abroad. It further showed the effort and lengths the streaming service Netflix took towards making Squid game the most popular series on the Internet. This act in addition, has sealed Netflix as a universal market platform to be reckoned with.

The findings of the present study one can deduce how important significant elements are in making representations that create meanings. Another interesting fact discovered was how certain representations regarding people in society were reiterated and redefined. For example, the representation of Gi-hun as a dishevelled, disoriented, unserious lower-class member and Sang-woo as a straightforward, goal-oriented, smart lower-class member. Even Ali and Sae-byeok were represented the same in different lights. The representation of the characters and the society in which they belonged to were all shown differently in different scenes of the series. Ironically, another example of this, is although they are taken to a place where they are continuously killed, they are fed and clothed properly.

Furthermore, the signs used act as hidden gems in artistically expressed work of the Squid game series and not till it is broken down can the underlying meanings be seen, understood, and appreciated. Therefore, the series can be defined as the masterful use of semiotics that effectively communicates its intended message to the audience.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the study, the research will suggest more learnings about semiotics by Pierce, Barthes and other experts in the field of semiotics to get the clearest meanings expressed within a series or film. More reading can also be done in consideration to Halls concept on representation, signification, and culture.

The study recommends analysis being conducted on the cultural, social, political and economic representations and meanings within the text. Furthermore, any other episodes in the eight-episode series can also be analyzed using other semiotic perspectives by the various explored and unexplored theorists.

Furthermore, other researchers can choose to explore on the cinematic language used (camera angles, lighting, sound, editing and performance) and topics like gender role construct and identities, community, environmentalism and so on which was noticed during the assessment of the series.

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