

Music Production and Analysis in the Post-Media Era - Focusing on “Squid Game”

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This study analyzes the music of the Netflix original, “Squid Game”, a Netflix original that has become a worldwide box office success. Music and sound in film provide meaning in visual pictures and are linked to the visualization of the sound source, and the connection between hearing and vision allows for perceptual cognition. “Squid Game” is a complete work that blends film and drama genres and was made for the Netflix multi-platform service. In the post-media era, the diversity of music that reflects the visuals and music that enhances the completeness of the sound can induce differentiation in content production in the form of work that assures workmanship, such as Netflix's original content. This study examines the music of “Squid Game” that uses 'non-synchronization' from the perspective of creating a montage using sound, the overlapping of acoustic positions due to the repetition of minimal melodies and the use of dissonance, and the music direction that expresses narrative and visual images. This study aims to examine the role of music and sound, which still play an important role in the video content of new media in the 21st century, contributing to the completeness of the work and creating meaning in the narrative and image of the video, from the perspective of montage theory.

Keywords: Squid game, OTT, Sound Montage, Post media, Video sound, Video Music

1. Introduction

The sound of the video convinces the audience along with the image. Hearing sounds immediately predicts the object, situation, location, and spatiality that caused the sound, and has the ability to believe in the intangible and embrace the situation and existence visible. This is feasible because Pierre Schaeffer's (Seo, 2018) definition of "acousmatic" includes the characteristic that noises are sonorous. In other words, listening to sounds is also linked to visualizing the source of the sound, and the link between hearing and vision makes perceptual cognition possible. This sonorous ambiguity, according to Rick Altman, is made possible by the same compositional materiality and spatial presence of sound; the video is projected onto a two-dimensional screen, while the sound convinces the audience in three dimensions. (Botía, 2021) When referring to the theory of approaching the auditory element from a subjective

perspective as opposed to an auxiliary perspective, sound montage cannot be excluded. After the introduction of the satellite film, it was common to view sound as a technical component of the film. However, Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Illarionovich. Pudovkin's and Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's montage theory of Soviet montage directors and Michel Chion's sound theory provided the theoretical foundation for the expansion of expression using sound and music.

In the post-media era, social, cultural, and phenomenological studies of the analysis of video media content in the context of media transition and the phenomenon of moving from television and cinemas to multi-platform platforms such as Netflix are active, but they must be accompanied by the study of the auditory component representing qualitatively improved video content. The purpose of this study is to examine the various manifestations of post-media music performance, as well as the music and sound that continue to play an important role in the new media of the 21st century. Furthermore, the music analysis of "Squid Game" will examine how the combination of various artistic elements, as well as the association of visual and auditory elements, a multilateral emotion, and a multi-layered situation, are generating meaning in the work and its process, which can present an expanded concept of sound expressing narrative and visual images through concrete examples based on Montage theory.

2. Netflix's Genre and Media Diffusion

Adoption of smart devices has led to the emergence of numerous Internet-based media platforms. With this OTT (Over The Top) service, viewers no longer have to rescind plans for the broadcast of popular drama shooters, wait for broadcast time, and can watch the content they want anywhere and at any time as long as they have a smartphone. As a result of global content distribution companies like Netflix and Korean media platforms like Watcha, Wavve, and Tving, consumers have the convenience of locating any type of desired content directly on their mobile devices.

Netflix is directly producing, distributing, and distributing works of various materials through content production referred to as "originals", and also offers competitive content based on capital strength to create excellent production personnel and increase the completion of the work during the production period. In an interview, the director of "Squid Game" stated, "Only Netflix recognized it, and no one has invested in it for the past decade," which carries significant connotation.

The magnitude of the difficult subjects that are difficult to deal with on television, the director's creative artistic ideas, and the themes that appear in each episode are unfolding in a variety of genres including horror, melodrama, and human drama. This can be seen as the succession of "quality" TV companies that have acquired both artistic and commerciality through video, sound, content, auteurism, and so on. (Hong, 2021) The excavation of content that is qualitatively superior to quantitative construction in the meaning of the term "quality" is the competitiveness and survival of subscription-based platforms such as Netflix. (Kim, 2021) The public, both consumer and audience, has a receptive discourse in choosing other media platforms that deliver superior content at all times. Since 2020, Netflix has focused on

producing more originals, focusing more on quality than quantity. Netflix originals such as "Squid Game," "Kingdom," and "Money Heist," which combine artistry and entertainment, are so complete that they could have been organized as a series by borrowing the format of several movies into a drama. The sophisticated directing and compositions, as well as the use of language in music direction and various aural expressions that embody the visuals and narrative, are very similar to the way film music functions. While cinema used to be experienced only in theaters, with the perception that it was a high art that was differentiated from other TV content, access to it through platforms such as Netflix can make the characteristic distinction between film and drama less contextual (Hong, 2021). The competitiveness of subscription-based OTT platforms that enable viewers to choose their content is based on creating and securing quality content.

With 12,576,954 subscribers as of January 2023, Netflix has the largest number of subscribers among domestic OTT platforms and is positioning itself as the post-media of our time. Netflix is publishing content with popularity and artistic quality that is differentiated from the works of legacy media through its self-produced content so-called "originals," and the Netflix original drama "Squid Game" is a noteworthy work. The distinction based on production method and quality is now ambiguous. In the case of drama music in legacy broadcasting, it is challenging to plan pre-production due to time limitations in the post-production process, and there are limitations in the music spotting process (Ha, 2015). Also, the limitations of musical expression from limited materials cannot be disregarded. However, in the form of work that guarantees quality, such as Netflix's original content, it is natural to improve the completeness of music and sound that expresses images and visuals, and the diversity of musical direction in combination with visual elements is a work method that induces differentiation in the production of content in the post-media era. Amidst the phenomenon of diffusion between movies and dramas, media and genres, and changes in the media foreground, Netflix seems to be proving the advent of the post-media era that makes the distinction between media invalid.

3. <SQUID GAME> and Montage

3.1. Netflix Original <Squid Game>

Squid Game is a Netflix original drama that was released on September 17, 2021, and became a worldwide phenomenon when it became the number one show on Netflix. The show includes a narrative about deadly survival game called "Death Game" and the title is borrowed from the children's playground game of the same name. Hundreds of people who can no longer find hope in the real world join in a mysterious survival game with a significant sum of money, challenging themselves to extreme games for a chance to change their lives around. However, nostalgic games like 'Dalgona' swiftly develop into gory and brutal death scenes, and the drama turns into an aura of fear with each episode owing to unpredictable storytelling and contrast. The sound design is excellent in conveying the extreme tension between the characters in the twisty narrative and confined space structure. The music of "Squid Game" is a strategic work of symbolic meaning that contrasts with the despair and brutal reality that pervades the entire drama. The intentional sound effects are used to express the implications and symbolism of the visual images in the limited space of the drama, and the use of contrapuntal music that

enables metaphorical expressions that are not resolved in the narrative, so that the sound of the drama takes the lead in stimulating the viewer's imagination, which is different from the function of supporting the narrative. Music and sound play an essential role in the composition of the drama's uncanny atmosphere. Hong Kong's South China Morning Post remarked, "The clever plot is brought to life through colorful sets, costumes, and great music," while North American online review website The Review Geek appreciated Squid Game's music, adding, "The show's other appeal lies in its brutal gameplay and music."

3.2. Audiovisual Montage

Montage theory must be considered when contemplating theories that take a primary rather than secondary approach to the auditory component of film. Since the debut of *The Jazz Singer*, the first sound film, in 1927, sound has frequently been regarded as an auxiliary tool that contributes to the technical aspect of a film. The audiovisual montages of Soviet montage directors such as Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein in Russia during the mid-1920s, along with Michel Chion's sound theory, provided a rationale for the use of sound, including music, as an essential component of montage.

Pudovkin's rejection of realism in favor of slavich imitation is repeated in his use of sound (Kim, 1999). Pudovkin consistently pursued expressive and remarkable sound while maintaining an objective stance, rejecting naturalistic representation. He did not believe that visuals and sounds must coincide in order to produce expressive sound, but rather saw artistic potential when they did not. Combining the sounds of a vengeful woman and a vicious cat, for instance, can create a more impressive and artistically inspired scene, and the visual and aural representation of various images can create a more meaningful and expressive image. Eisenstein shared Pudovkin's view. Eisenstein incorporated sound, a new element of cinema since the advent of planetary cinema, into his montage theory system, believing that the principle of creating meaning through the combination, collision, and confrontation of visual image elements could be applied to sound, while creating new meaning through the multidimensional combination of sight and sound. Focusing on shots, the smallest unit of cinema, the natural connection and collision of shots conveys images to the mind of the audience, and the audio-visual associations formed by this process create a new meaning system. Based on Eisenstein's perspective, we focused on the relationship between cinematic elements and attempted to create an artistic film by connecting and colliding various elements. The theory of vertical montage, which combines artistic elements such as audiovisuals from various artistic disciplines such as literature, art, and theatre to create a "single, unifying image," can be classified as follows:

Table 1: Classification and characterization of vertical montage

Type	Characteristics
Natural Synchronicity	Montage that seamlessly blend visual and auditory elements
Metrical Synchronicity	Montage that corresponds with the duration of the scene in terms of music, sound effects, tempo, etc. Rather than relying on mathematical length matching, a sequence's structure determines its relationship to the intended length.
Rhythmic Synchronicity	Montage in which sounds depart from a simple metrical unity and combine in an asymmetrical, disjointed manner. The movement within the frames makes montage between frames possible.

Melodic Synchronicity	Montage that combines the scene's content and the melody to produce an emotional impact.
Tonal Synchronicity	Montage in which the sound changes in conjunction with the movement of the characters, the setting, or the passage of time. Movements driven by tone as opposed to rhythmic characteristics.
Overtonal Synchronicity	Montage with an intricate polyphonic quality

Tonal synchronicity is influenced by the emotional or rhythmic impact of the montage of mise-en-scène, actors, camera frames, etc. in a movie frame, whereas natural and metrical synchronicity are based on the fact that the narrative process can change due to variations in the physical length of frames and differences in the way shots are connected. This emotional montage generates overtonal synchronicity, which differs from tonal montage in that the combination of related montage frames elicits a holistic experience (Eisenstein 1977). Important to Eisenstein's vertical montage is audio-visual synchronicity, which can be classified as "outer synchronicity" and "inner synchronicity." "external synchronicity" is comparable to "natural synchronicity" in the sense that the auditory elements are a direct representation of the visual image. However, "inner synchronicity" does not refer to the physical matching of visual and auditory elements. From the beginning of sound films, the various possibilities for effectively combining the audiovisual were of great interest to Eisenstein, and for him, artistic montage is not simply a horizontal continuation, but a vertical juxtaposition of a new superstructure on top of a horizontal continuation (Kim, 1999).

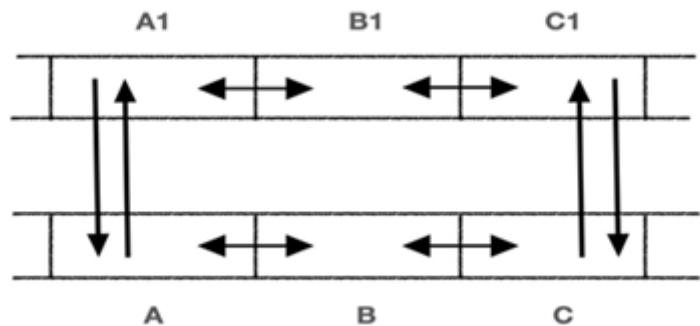


Figure 1: Vertical Juxtaposition of Montage

Figure 1's substructure elements A, B, and C represent the visual aspects of the film. Contrary to appearances, a vertical montage is not simply a horizontal arrangement of footage. With the addition of auditory superstructures such as A1, B1, and C1, the superstructure and substructure exert influence in multiple directions, giving it a multidimensional nature. As a consequence, the vertical montage assumes a significantly more intricate form. In the 1930s, Eisenstein's theory took a new turn when he argued that the ultimate purpose of montage is to borrow its means of expression from various artistic disciplines to more effectively present a "single, unified image" (Kim, 1999). Eisenstein's montage would expand the concept of editing in a narrow sense to include not only the combination of shots with shots but also the combination of various artistic elements, particularly audio-visual montage, which effectively combines visual and auditory elements (Eisenstein, 2014). The image sequence conveys to the audience the veracity of the images and emotions conveyed by the narrative and enables a

variety of montage applications. Eisenstein believes that these montages not only heighten the viewer's emotions sensually, but through the theory of montage, the association with the film can also affect the realm of reason, creating an intellectual resonance, enabling the audience to generate artistic empathy and a multidimensional understanding of the film's intended meaning.

3.3. "Squid Game" and Sound Montag

Pudovkin, a Soviet director, discovered that a multitude of artistic possibilities in cinema originated not from the alignment of visual and auditory elements, but rather from their conflict. Based on the fact that auditory images can be chosen based on the audience's subjective interests and psychology, his belief that the collision of the audiovisual amplifies the cinematic imagination and expands expression not only provides a framework for the fundamental concepts of Soviet montage theory, but also marks the beginning of "dialectical montage." Eisenstein's "dialectical montage" has advanced Pudovkin's theory and influenced montage researchers, and in the creation of montage using sound, 'non-synchronization' means that the more unrelated the auditory image is to the narrative development, the more it is out of sync with the visual image, the more it can amplify the effect (Kim, 1999). Sound montage is a discussion of how the sounds of various objects in a scene or sequence - dialogue, ambient, sound effects, noise, and music - are combined and connected to form narrative layers (Eisenstein, 1977), and it provides a suitable foundation for analyzing and comprehending modern video sound. It is also noteworthy that the focus of the sound discussion is not limited to music and dialogue, but also includes noise, aperiodic waveforms, and modern-day sounds such as electronic sounds. The exploration of auditory expression, which has been centered on music, has expanded to acoustic materials, and it is not only a phenomenon observed in films, but also one of the original and effective methods for conducting music in various video contents. Sound montage intentionally places music that contrasts with the situation through the inconsistency of visual images and auditory elements, also known as 'music dissonance', resulting in a sardonic emphasis on the situation (Jung, 2021). This direction of music direction is consistent with the contradictions and conflicts of the characters in Squid Game's plot, the chaotic situation in which it is impossible to determine who is good and who is malevolent, and the contradictory aspects of life between classes in modern society.



Figure 2: 《Way Back Then》 Thematic Melody

The instrumentation of "Way Back then" opening employs nostalgic instruments such as recorders and castanets, and repeats a simple, short motif of five notes: e, g, a, b, and d#, disarming the audience with a relatively relaxed sound. It would have been a cliched gruesome drama if the music had been heavy and dark with dissonance and sound effects to match the

narrative. Consequently, despite the fact that the score music is distinct from the narrative content, it achieves the same objective as the narrative content, dilutes the brutal narrative, and displays an expressive montage effect based on the counterpoint combination of various artistic elements of video expression. As a result, it is expressed as a sound montage with a unique mode of expression by combining multiple senses, including sight and hearing.

The same is true of the jazz tune "Fly Me To the Moon," which is inserted into the "Red Light Green Light" game scene. Contrary to the lighthearted nature of the game, the urgency of the characters in a moment of horror, where bullets penetrate their bodies relentlessly if they fail to draw, is oddly rhythmic. However, through a dialectical montage of the emotion of the sweet jazz song and the inconsistency of the video, the audience's perception of the phenomenon is fundamentally diminished by being independent of the reality in the video. Such efforts are not uncommon in other films. In *Good Morning Vietnam*, a movie set during the Vietnam War starring Robin Williams, Louis Daniel Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" plays softly in the background to illustrate the brutality of the conflict. This disparity between the video and the music becomes an essential keyword for *Squid Game*'s musical direction.



Figure 3: *Squid Game* <Red Light Green Light> Scene

3.4. Diversity in Music Direction

Lawrence Kramer, a musicologist, has described classical music as "the paradigm of cinematic realization." (Cho, 2013). The soundtrack of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (2001: A Space Odyssey) contains a total of seven classical compositions. Using simultaneously the

music of Richard Strauss II and Gyorgy Ligeti, the structure of the conflict is conveyed through the depiction of human beings in the tonal music and the representation of non-human civilizations in the esoteric and experimental atonal music. The modern sound drives the auditory representation, which cannot be forced into synchronization, while the waltz is discreetly counterpointed throughout the drama to depict the violent tendencies of a balanced civilization. Rhythmic montage, in which images and sounds deviate from a simple metrical synchronization and intensify the conflict with an asymmetrical combination of offbeats, is frequently attempted in the musical direction of "Squid Game", depicting characters or themes through familiar sounds like opera or symphonic poetry. The contestants are awakened by Haydn's "Trumpet Concerto in E Major, Third Movement," which was famously used as the signal music for the popular 1970s and 1980s Korean television program Scholastic Quiz. Haydn's lone trumpet concerto is regarded as a masterpiece of concise and bright tonal expression, and the trumpet's melody in "Squid Game" leads the audience's imagination by sounding like a prelude to the inevitable mortality that someone will face in every game. "The Beautiful Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss II is a second piece of music that surfaces as the plot develops. This elegant and majestic composition overlaps with the contestants' death-defying march to the game, expressing their desperation at the brink of survival. The combination of sight and sound creates a distinct narrative collaboration and methodology than the original musical expression and intent. The use of rhythmic montage in the sound production creates a new meaning of visual expression while fulfilling the role of music as the most dynamic medium of narrative expression. A sound montage that goes beyond the role of background music to imply symbolic meanings that are not covered in the video content or to their own creative interpretation.



Figure 4: <Pink Soldiers> Melody

"Pink Soldiers" is the theme song for the pink-clad guards who fire relentlessly at the losing contestants. The minimal melody, centered on the key of A, is layered with the melodies of the other voices in a horizontal progression of increasingly rapid patterns to create a unique effect. It would not be an exaggeration to state that minimalism is one of the most widely used

musical techniques in film and video music. The use of short, repetitive ideas and unique textures allows for infinite variation throughout a scene or drama, and composers such as Philip Glass and Michael Nyman have created minimalist music in their own distinctive styles (Matthias, 2010). This trend can be heard in the other soundtracks of "Squid Game." Maximized "repetition" in music generates strange colors by overlapping acoustic positions, and the dissonance between the A and A \flat pitches in the middle of the piece suggests an unusual and conflicting circumstance. In the vertical montage, "inner synchronicity" of sensory representations does not refer to the exact physical congruence of visual and auditory elements. Rather than focusing on the definitional distinction between dissonance and consonance (Kim, 1999), it is important to evoke a single, unified image in the audience's mind. From this perspective, it is clear that the variety and scope of sound montage can be expanded, as well as the internal organization of the various senses of hearing and vision, through the use of various modalities of expression.

The composition "Murder without Violence" from the soundtrack is dominated by a heavy percussive sound with no discernible pitch, giving the impression of a percussion ensemble. There is no melodic line, but the metrical and rhythmic synchronicity of the repetitive bass percussion noises creates tension.



Figure 5: Frequency Range in <Needles and Dalgona>

The drums in the 80Hz-200Hz range of another soundtrack, "Needles and Dalgona," produce a sense of space that is distinct from the tones of other percussion instruments that typically play in the lower range. When applied at a comparatively low level, the spatializer effect produces a sound that is dense with reverberation and depth. The weighty music, with its relative lack of articulation, is juxtaposed with the frustration of the participants, who are trapped in an arbitrarily limited space and unable to escape from a bizarre game of roulette. Thomas Newman once said, "The most exciting moment of the creative process is when you try anything," and traditional methods of working with music have limited capacity to fill the gaps left by the rapidity of change. Even though the technical effects and expectations of digital music production cannot be ignored, it is significant that it enables the creation of new sound colors. Through the combination and connection of multiple categories of sonic elements, a sound montage emphasizes similarities and contrasts. Sound effects, dialogue,

music, ambience, silence, etc. are connected, juxtaposed, or overlapped to create an increasingly complex structure; various applications of montage theory are possible depending on the connection of shots, sequences, and narrative meaning; sound montages will evolve into increasingly complex structures as film sound technology advances. It is not an exaggeration to state that the expansion of montage theory ceased after Eisenstein's death, so, logically, sound research should continue to adapt to the characteristics of contemporary sound and changes in the filmmaking industry.

In the post-media era, when post-TV, post-cinema, and post-drama are discussed, the development of image-expressing music production forms is an ongoing process. Diversified working methods, such as traditional music techniques, modern music techniques, and digital music production techniques, brought about by the evolution of modern technology, will coexist, and various methods of music production will be tested to determine the "originality" of music expressing visual elements.

4. Conclusion

"Squid Game" is a video content produced by Netflix, a representative multi-platform Netflix in the post-media era, and the competitiveness of subscription-based OTT platforms is to create and secure quality content. Through its sophisticated production, original narrative, mise-en-scène, and music, Squid Game has garnered international attention for its high-quality content. In the post-media era, when the center of gravity is shifting from television and movie theaters to multi-platforms such as Netflix, social, cultural, and phenomenological studies analyzing visual media content are active. However, research on the auditory component, including video music, which expresses qualitatively improved video content, should be conducted concurrently.

By contrasting the colorful sound and music with the situation, the music of "Squid Game" adds another meaning to the visual image, and the theory of montage, such as the disparity between visual and auditory images, confirms that the intended contrast between visual and auditory elements creates a third meaning. In video music production, 'non-synchronization' has the capacity to intensify the effect the more the auditory image is extraneous to the narrative development and the less it matches the visual image. In addition, the minimal melody creates strange colors when it overlaps with the acoustic position through 'repetition', and the use of sharp dissonance creates a sense of fear by suggesting an abnormal and conflicting situation. This study demonstrates that the system of meaning generation in video occurs through the combination of visual images and auditory elements, and that the way in which music generates meaning in video through creative music direction can express agreement or disagreement with the visual component. The "inner synchronicity" of sensory representation in a sound montage does not refer to a physically accurate convergence of visual and auditory elements, but rather to the evocation of a single, unified image in the audience's mind. From this perspective, it is clear that the variety and scope of sound montage can be expanded, as well as the inner arrangement of the various modalities of hearing and sight.

The study of the process of meaning creation in video montage, which arose from editing theory, allowed the exploration of auditory expression, which had previously been focused on

music, to analyze how sound, with its multilayered expressions such as sound effects, ambience, and noise, expresses visual elements through sound montage. Montage theory provides a suitable foundation for comprehending contemporary video sound, and it is significant that the focus of sound discussion is not limited to music and dialogue, but expands to include modern sounds such as noise, aperiodic waveforms, and electronic sounds.

This study aims to recognize the significance of the field of sound, including music, which has not received as much research and investment as other production environments, as content in the post-media era develops at a rapid pace, and that the aesthetic methodology of original video sound will lead to additional research through the continued study of sound montage.

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