Child's Play and Survival: Examining Children's Games in the *Squid Game*

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ABSTRACT

Children's games have never strictly been 'children's' games and what goes into the commonly, oft-lightly used term, 'child's play' has a close relationship with a lived, socio-cultural context. Netflix's new TV series, *Squid Game*, presents an interesting take on children's games by placing popular Korean children's games into the frame of a dystopian, survival game which is watched as a live telecast by a group of entertainment-hungry billionaires, finally presented to the Netflix audience in the master-frame of an episodic drama, and, subsequently, replicated and subverted as online games by fans of the series. This paper is an examination of the six games, including— *Ddakji* game, Red Light, Green Light, the Dalgona Challenge, the Tug-of-War, multiple variations of marbles games, the Stepping Stone Bridge game, and finally, the Squid Game itself—played in the series, with specific interest towards the game design, player strategies, and subversive gameplay.

The games in *Squid Game* are a cyborgization of children's games into violently competitive games and tell the story of voyeuristic capitalism, the political ecology of gameshows, and nerve-wracking choice-based and choice-defying gamification of the players. The cyborgization of the children's games carries within it a doubling, mirrored in the cyborgization of the players who participate in these games where, in the absence of any notion of fairplay, the very figure of the player co-opts and reinvents itself in the figures of the 'cheater' and the 'spoilsport' to win, a win in which survival constitutes at least part of the prize. This is further problematized by the audience which is both witness and participant in the violence of the game. At the same time, this paper is interested in, conversely, looking at the championing of an ethics of care by the players in this survival game. In doing so, *Squid Game* offers a point of intervention into existing notions of players in co-op playing, and how cooperation and teamwork exist precariously in games when the players must choose between care and survival. *Squid Game* presents a valuable opportunity to study games in reference to the politics of competitive survival as well the category of games in and as digitizing the planetary and using the concept of 'teamwork' to 'stick together' and make it out.

Keywords

squid game, children's games, player, survival, care, cyborgization

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"Hey, Kang Sae-byeok.

We should stick together.

…

Whatever the game, we'll help each other get through this as teammates."

—Gi-hun to Sae-byeok, *Squid Game*, Episode 8, 00:18:38-00:18:47.

Whispered between Gi-hun and Sae-byeok, this dialogue is part of a conversation that takes place before the final round of the *Squid Game*. It is dark, emulative of night but in the arena and dormitory of the *Squid Game*, which by now the remaining three contestants know is part of the arena, night is more of a construct. Time is regulated by the in-game clock, never seen but often buzzed and announced by the Frontman, the MC of this edition of the *Squid Game*. The contestants never see the outside world but the outside world is reduced to a replica inside the game, almost like a child's nursery, decorated with brightly-coloured drawings and ornaments. The Frontman comments at one point in the show that this nursery-like place is 'innocent' as it is fair, created with only intentions of ensuring justice, with face-less workers who handle this space much like cyborg nannies. The idea is to usher in a return to childhood as per the theme of the *Game*.

Invitations to the *Squid Game* come on a minimalist piece of card paper, only to people who truly *need* them which also means mostly to people who usually can't refuse to play the game because of the stakes. The winner, out of the 456 participants, gets to take home 45.6 billion won, which, according to one of the promotional posters, is 'child's play'. In the scheme of the game, there is no concept of teamwork. Every individual is given a dream of owning the 'globe' of their desire *only* and *individually*. This is symbolized in the prize money appearing as a glittering globe of plenty right after the players begin to ask for an escape from the game after the bloody first round. At the same time, the sheer impossibility of the game in the popular imagination means that none of the players can successfully articulate a complaint about it outside the arena, that is, the world outside the game, though Gi-hun will realize at one point of time that 'the world outside' and the game itself are not really as distinct.

The first round which the players play without even entering the gamified architecture of the arena is the game of ddakji. A genial salesperson approaches a desperate person in a subway station and offers to pay money in exchange for winning a game of ddakji. Origami expert Dana Hinders writes about the craft of the traditional Korean game of ddakji in her article "How to Make and Play the Korean Ddakji Game". Not only is it automatically identifiable to its Korean audience, it is also known as a "fun and educational game", for children as well (Hinders, 2019). The origami of folded paper tiles has now become hugely popular all over the world but "Korean ddakji is a great activity to keep children entertained. Folding the tiles helps them learn basic origami techniques and work on fine motor skills. Playing with friends encourages them to work on social skills like sharing, taking turns, and graciously handling winning or losing the game" (Hinders, 2019). When the salesperson asks Gi-hun to play ddakji with him, he is offering an experience of this childhood innocence to Gi-hun. Gi-hun's first response is that of a refusal to what he assumes to be an invitation to a religious cult. Only when the salesperson offers to pay Gi-hun, a rule that is not part of the traditional game, does Gi-hun show interest. The penalty for losing doesn't necessarily demand money but every round lost can be paid back by being slapped. One has a 50% chance of winning at ddakji. It is one of the fairest games in the show and yet this pre-game round is littered with unfairness. Gi-hun, who can't pay anything as a penalty but is egged on

by his desire to win at something in life, is repeatedly slapped but when he wins he can't get his small revenge of slapping back because the salesperson is able to pay the penalty instead. At the end of the game, Gi-hun's face is half-swollen but he has a bundle of notes in his hand and an invite card that promises more money at the simple cost of playing children's games. The shame and pain of being slapped, that he felt so intensely at the start of the game, is forgotten. Like the other 455 participants, Gi-hun accepts the invite and enters the game dorm, through an unworldly passage to an unknown space.

The first game is 'Red Light, Green Light', or to be closer to its actual title 'the *Mugunghwa* Flower Is Blooming' game. The mugunghwa flower in the title is a reference to Hibiscus syriacus, the national flower of South Korea and a popular motif in folk tradition. The players are well-aware of this game too; a popular children's game that often even features in variety shows with K-pop stars, actors and other celebrities. In the original children's game, there is no doll, but an actual child, the spotter, who faces away from the other players, recites the phrase, before turning around to 'spot' any player who is still moving. That player then loses the round and so on. The other children use the duration of the phrase to move towards the spotter and win the game after crossing the distance without being caught in movement throughout. Award-winning game designer Jeeyon Shim, who describes the experience of watching the show as "it's wild how much childhood nostalgia I feel watching these games", talks about the difference between the children's game of ddakji and the *Squid Game* version of the same (@jeeyonshim, 2021). These differences are subtle but as Shim recognizes they can "inform how you play – and strategize", "With RL/GL there aren't set rules that I know of or played with as a kid about how you vary the tempo or speed, and with a lot of my friends the chaotic, unpredictable variance in how we called out "red light/green light" was part of the fun (sometimes infuriating [Face with tears of joy]). With 무궁화 꽃 이 피었 습니다, the phrase is called out by the spotter in a rhythmic sing song - slowly at first, but gradually and rapidly picking up speed. That means that if you're savvy, you can predict your momentum to avoid moving after the spotter turns around" (@jeeyonshim, 2021). Unlike the children's game with its chaotic unpredictable variance of sound,

> …there's nothing like, potentially "unfair" in the rules (of 무궁화 꽃 이 피었 습니다) in the show because the cadence of the spotter's call phrase is predictable, and they're supposed to ramp up speed proportionally. But that doesn't mean the game is easy. If you were too conservative in the first rounds, you'll have to cover more distance as the spotter goes faster, which means increasing your own speed, and increasing the risk you won't be able to cut your own body's momentum short when the spotter turns around[.] When you're a wiry little kid whose body basically defies the laws of physics from ages 6 through 10, stopping short on a dime isn't necessarily a huge challenge[.] But an avg adult is not going to be as limber, their bodies are larger and heavier, and it's harder to pull yourself short if you don't move in a controlled, deliberate way. It's not *exactly* a rigged game - it's just way harder (unless you still play games like this routinely). (@jeeyonshim, 2021)

This game is the first that undergoes an obvious cyborgization of a children's game into a violent survival game. The child spotter is replaced by the robotic doll who though doesn't vary it's call phrase, does penalize moving participants in a stricter way. Armed with motion sensors, the eyes of the doll are both an exercise and a punishment in navigation. Any small movement, to the obvious exhale of a breath even, is picked up by the eyes of the gigantic doll and bullets mark wrong steps with death. The doll, a "real artifact residing in a horse carriage village in Jincheon County in

Chungcheongbuk-do, South Korea", borrowed for the game by the producers, is a reminder of the easily forgotten fact that all children's game always-already have a potential for violence and it doesn't take a lot for this violence to be sensed and sensationalized in a video game reality TV show populated by people (Craig, 2021). The game not just forces viewers to think about habitation but also is part of process which denies its participants haptic pleasures. To be touched by a competitor can mean death, to accidently come in contact with someone has a heavy price—the game almost succeeds in this censorship of touch. Not only amongst participants but also to the two levels of the viewers, the audience in-game and the one watching the show—there is nothing touching about the futile deaths of people on-screen. There is no scene which will ask the audience to press the pause button. The preoccupation with the ticking away of time, of making to the finish line, is underlined by the music score, the splatter of blood on face, the shrill echo of screams, the dull lifeless eyes of the doll, and its repetitive merciless call. The rules of the game are clear, there can be no networks of care in this round that penalizes affective correspondence. And yet, there is always the possibility of a player who doesn't know the rules, the outsider, the newbie, the rookie, the one with 'beginner's luck'.

Whereas most players avoid contact and are quick to kick free from dying players, Ali, the Pakistani immigrant who has never played most of the Korean children's games, is someone who will continue to break rules and threaten the structure of the game by his mere presence. He saves Gi-hun and begins the first signs of a return to an ethics of care stemming from touch and correspondence, in the show's gamified architecture. The shock of being saved, the surprise at making through the round alive, the uncertain gesture of smiles passed between these two players, the dangerous idea of teamwork, friendship and transformative care—recorded but not really noticed by the in-game surveillance but definitely highlighted by the director's camera and noticed by the show's audience—means something unique. It is a revision of the very idea of survival. The light suggestion of the possibility of making it through together, of there being more than one winner.

Going from a nightmare where even touching one's face is enmeshed in a haptics of horror and the enduring stickiness of blood, there is an uproar for escape amongst the surviving players. They want to stop playing the game. To do so, and to ensure that the game is a game of fairness and wilful choice, the Frontman presents a voting system, asking the players to return to the subconscious comfort of touch but this is a mere continuation of the previous round in that choosing either of the options is to walk into the code of the game, to interact with it a techno-corporeal level, to enter into a contract with the game's cyborgization under the very guise of attempting to opt out. Incidentally, this is also the moment in the show where the viewer can opt out. By agreeing to 'play' the video forward and 'resuming' 'play' on-screen and in-game simultaneously, the audience is subsumed under the increasing arena of the game, while also miniaturized within the golden globe of *Squid Game's* prize. Note also how the final choice in the event of an equal vote depends on the player who has been seen as playing with a handicap, the handicap of age—and games and gamers can often be ableist and ageist.

The allowance of players to leave only for them to return or mortally perish at the hands of debt, disease, and more, has been cited as a divergence of the text from an otherwise choice-restricting subculture of competitive survival games as seen in *Battle Royale*, *The Hunger Games* and the like, but once again, this is a reinforcement of the seeping of the arena into everyday life—life where the odds seem to worse than those in-game because the game lures players in with the promise of the prize money or if at any point majority of the players decide to leave empty-handed, the family of those who die are compensated with money, which might also be the reason why no one leaves after

returning. Opting out, though the right decision ethically, places one at the disadvantage of suffering without compensation.

In the dalgona/bbopgi challenge, dalgona candy a "retro crispy street snack made from melted sugar and baking soda was popular among kids in the 1970s and 1980s" in South Korea, must be picked apart in a particular shape with the help of a needle (similar to how children try to eat the candy without breaking the shape) in a made-up playground surrounded by crayon-painted clouds (Kim, 2021). The barren landscape of the first game and the guard-populated and body-littered 'fake' playground of the second game is part of a schema which increasingly tries to divorce the players from any sense of belonging, the bracketing of people as tourists, in the most perverse sense, as tourists of survival, where life is the most dangerous game of all. So, of course, even the tiny bit of teamwork wanes. The figures of the 'cheater' and the 'spoilsport', gamers who pretend to play or have a disregard for and rebel against rules, the innovative configurer and the survivalist traitor, have always presented a version of the gamer which is difficult and problematic to comprehend especially for traditional game studies scholars who stress on the freedom of the gamer as well as the freedom to opt out. However, the cheater and the spoilsport are highly interesting within the choice-limiting gamified architecture of *Squid Game* as they offer alternative modes of play within a structure where the rules and odds are never in the favour of the players. Sangwoo picks up clues to choose the easiest dalgona option while letting his team members, the found family of sorts, choose the wrong ones even though at this stage, the four of them needn't play against each other. Han Min-yeo who smuggled a lighter in her body uses it to innovatively melt the outline of the shape. Gi-hun who has the toughest shape decides to use his tongue and spit to melt the candy, turning taste into a tool. Rules begin to appear fuzzy, especially when lighters can be shared and people can pick up innovative ways to cheat. Player 001 cheats in the cleverest of ways, of course, by hacking. Being host, feeling the limits of spectatorship, he enters the game as live-action roleplay of an old, weak, forgetful man. While the others play with their lives, he plays with playful abandon, knowing full well that the game is just a game only for him who is armed with hacks of all kinds.

Coupled with the compulsory yet symbolic cyborgization of the pink-clad guards who must never show their human faces, living and walking like clockwork robots, these guards are reminiscent of Stahl's "virtual citizen-soldier" whose pleasures are "predicated on participatory play, not simply watching the machine in motion but wiring oneself into a fantasy of a first-person, authorial kinetics of war" but also, the deeper networks of interactive violence (2010, 42). In his reading of Stahl's "virtual citizen-soldier" Dennis Jansen comments on "play-as-cyborgization" to contrast this figure with what is not, that is "a technologically literate cybernetic subject capable of making sense of their technologized surroundings by virtue of having engaged with supposedly playful simulations" (Jansen, 2020, 46). The faceless masked guards seem to be as much under "a symbolic immersion that contains, modulates, and produces" the game as the players themselves if not more so (Stahl, 2010, 42). This immersion as well as the realization that the players face challenges at the turn of a controller, or a press of a button depending on the whims of the group of entertainment-hungry billionaires watching a live telecast of the games in close proximity, the orders of the Frontman, and the plan of the elusive host; comes the understanding that the participants are surrounded by another level of play, that of its audience (at both levels). This audience is both witness and participant in the violence of the game. Not only is this violence immersive and consumptive, reminiscent of George Orwell's "sporting spirit", "bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence" (Orwell, 1945) but also, very sharply, is about what Edmond Y. Chang refers to, "in Squid Game, or, "The Squeamish Pleasure of Asian Death"" as the "tremor of "Asian Death" that haunts the viewing experience of

watching over four hundred Korean men and women and one Pakistani man get shot, stabbed, clubbed, crushed, even cut up for spare parts" (Chang, 2021). Chang raises important questions about the popularity of the show in its context of the spectacle of Asian death, by personalizing reception, "How do I feel, or how should I feel, watching episode after episode of Asians being killed? What does it mean to find pleasure in the show's cavalcade of Asian death?" (Chang, 2021). Chang finds interesting parallels of the samee in Kishonna L. Gray and David J. Leonard's discussion of *Battlefield 1* (DICE 2016),

> For example, by signalling the impossibility of survival for Black and Brown men, the opening mission within *Battlefield 1* illustrates this trend. This first-person, World War I military shooting game allows the player to engage as a member of the Harlem Hellfighters. Given the erasure of soldiers of color within war games as well as popular culture as a whole, there was initially much praise around the inclusion of this regiment, comprised of Black men who identified mostly as African American and Puerto Rican. The game, however, still forces death upon the player, even remarking in the opening sequence that survival is not an option. Upon the first death, a screen appears providing a fictional name and timeline of life for the gamer to preview.
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> The gamer then spawns the life of another Harlem Hellfighter, and he too succumbs to the violences of war. This trend continues throughout the game, causing many Black gamers on social media to reflect on their uncomfortableness witnessing and experiencing hypervisible Black Death. We liken this pattern within *Battlefield I* to the present era of consuming and sharing Black Death via associated hashtags, where we witness the final moments of Black and Brown life without context or a historic backdrop (e.g., #PhilandoCastile, #EricGarner, #TamirRice). The humanity of Black lives is lost, reducing life to the spectacle of Black Death. The pleasure in and normalization of Black Death… (Gray and Leonard, 2018, 6)

Unfortunately, this is isn't limited to *Battlefield 1*. In numerous FPS and combat-participatory games, the destiny to die as also, conversely, the way the muzzle of the gamer's gun is almost always pointed at a particular kind of body, and the perverse renaactment of violence on coloured bodies in games and popular media not only tells us about the "squemish pleasure of Asian Death" as Chang calls it in the context of *Squid Game* but is also very telling about a certain kind of reduction of these bodies to somehow less than human, disposable, not even an afterthought (and at the same time, it is crucial to think of what it does to the human psyche to then look at the very real images of violence on coloured bodies in news and media). Chang describes feeling "a little uncomfortable and disturbed not only by the colorfully graphic ways the characters die but also by the immense popularity of the show in the US and the West, which cannot help but be framed by the ongoing pandemic, geopolitical fear over China, and the escalation of anti-Asian hate and violence. I cannot unwind the horror of Asian Death from the pleasure of Asian Death any more than the characters can compartmentalize the brutal juxtaposition of playing a children's game and playing to survive". This is further problematized by the "uncomfortable possibility that I occupy the point of view of the villainous VIPs, the bored billionaires betting on whether players live or die…much of the gaze of the camera—from the long tracking shots from above to the intrusive panopticon of the security cameras—places the viewer in the perspective of those positioned to be watching and enjoying the action. Netflix's viewers then are implicated in the blood and circus and in a way complicit in the funding and enjoyment of the spectacle" (Chang, 2021).

The cyborgization of children's games into violently competitive games framed within the framework of voyeuristic capitalism marks an entry-point into the history of videogames. Jansen has argued that "videogame play is a form of cyborgization—the act of becoming a metaphorical cyborg through participation in cybernetic feedback loops" (2020, 36). At the same time, he can't help but note "The history of videogames as simulations is intimately entangled with the development of training simulations in the military-entertainment complex of the late twentieth century United States (Crogan, 2011; Lenoir, 2000)" (2020, 36). Similarly, and Jansen points to this as well, Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) talks about "how the cyborg was created as a technological artefact and cultural icon in the years following World War II" (2). Jansen develops a motion towards what he calls 'beyond "Cyborg-Utopia", but at the same time, it is increasingly fascinating that while cyborgs as "entities" and "metaphors," can be differentially illustrated as the one being "the computer keyboarder joined in a cybernetic circuit with the screen" and the other "the adolescent game player in the local video-game arcade" (Hayles, 1999, 113-114), the contemporary gamer who is no longer sitting in the local video-game arcade but at the computer keyboard or a console is the picture of evolution of the entanglement of as Brendan Keogh notes in *A Play of Bodies* (2018) the "player's physical body, the videogame hardware, and the virtual bodies and worlds of the videogame's audiovisuality" (47). It is this image of entanglement, and not its total negation, that the invisible rulebook of the *Squid Game* would *like* to portray, an image that seeks to unlink gamer experience from both the history and contemporaneity of military simulation technologies in video games, and other entertainment systems, or to use Stahl's term, the 'militainment' and its machinery.

Player 001, Il-nam, in his position of comfortable mastery over the game is the image, and the return, of the hacker-gamer, exercising absolute control of the machine of the game, using the submission of the other players to the rules of the game. He play-acts at collaboration to create a truer sense of gaming and play, which he admits is rooted in 'teamwork', a concept he fantasizes over but doesn't truly believe in, unlike Gi-hun who champions teamwork as 'care' more and more as the show sets up the finale and its epigraphic meeting with Player 001.

The tug-of-war game requires a team and while most teams want able-bodied, strong, young men, Gi-hun's team is a group of misfits but they are able to win because everyone, coming from a different context, is able to add something to the team. Gi-hun's team by virtue of its figuration of differentiation and correspondence is the only 'proper' team participating in an ethics of care grounded in their patchwork teamwork in this survival game. In this, they are Golding's "imperfect configurers" (2013, 42), they too "get lost, and do things in strange and unconventional ways" (42) and, similarly, their perspective too can be "analogous to that of the strategist" (37) but, to specify, their knowledge is more patchwork than holistic. They configure play-as-cyborgization in a gamified dystopian arena through making-do "with limited vision" (Golding, 2013, 39). "Players do not have knowledge of the whole, and will not always be aware when an alternate path has been missed, or even when they have made a decision affecting the entire structure of the videogame" but for this team, 'sticking together' becomes a path in game that minimizes navigation and the world to a globe of cash (Golding, 2013, 39). Even in the 'informal' death game at night, where players go on a killing spree to spur the end of the game by reducing competition, this is the only team which sticks together to protect each other even though it has both the hacker-gamer and the cheater-traitor in its midst. This team manages to take apart the problematic politics of 'looking-at' both in-game and of the show, and re-model it into an agential 'looking-after', defying the response-based harrowing conditions to, instead, carry out 'response-ability', "stay with the trouble of living and dying" (Haraway, 2016, 2), a "sympoiesis—making with" (5), "cultivating…collective

knowing and doing" (34), thereby, making a nuanced argument against competitive survival. The audience of the show wants this team to win as they symbolize and embody the "answer to the trust of the held-out hand" (Harayway, 2016, 34). This team offers a point of intervention into existing notions of players in co-op playing, how cooperation and teamwork exist precariously in games when the players must choose between care and survival, and to imaging worlds and 'worlding' as 'becoming-together' even in the throes of the 'cyborg-*dystopia*', as this is what the game of the *Squid Game* represents even though the Frontman postulates on the cyborg-utopianism of its arena.

The next game, however, is an anti-worlding, fracturing teamwork by asking team members to play against each other as individuals. This is tougher especially if one was a part of a team which had each other's back in the previous rounds—the unwilling task and burden of disengaging from the sticking together articulated above is a painful one requiring either selfishness or sacrifice. The arena is changed into that of a general model of the neighbourhood and the players have to play any version of popular Korean marble games to win. Much of the nostalgia behind children's games can be traced back to playing with friends while dwelling in one's neighbourhood, or the world proper. This is also where the debates around the show's incorrect closed captions, subtitles and translations are crucial. Shim Jeeyon notes how subtitles translate "동네 (dongne) which could *technically* mean "town," but in daily usage it's closer to "the neighborhood you came up in"", the place and space of dwelling (@jeeyonshim, 2021). Shim adds that there can be "multiple 동네 within the same town or city". That's why it's significant that Gi-hun and Sangwoo were both kids together in the same working class 동네, because they'll always have that shared foundation as kids who came up *together*" (emphasis mine). The roleplay of gganbu, loosely described as a neighbourhood friend you trust, with whom you "share everything" by player 001 is one of the misses of closed captions and translation noticed and explained by Youngmi Mayer on *Tiktok*. The correct translation of gganbu's description, Mayer explains, is "There is no ownership between me and you. Not; we share everything" (@youngmimayer, 2021). Within the constructed, ghost neighbourhood of the marble game, it is not player 001 and Gi-hun's relationship that is the prime example of gganbu, though, since as the audience later realizes player 001 is anything but. The two women, Sae-byeok and Ji-yeong, who don't have a history of neighbourhood friendship and children's games like Gi-hun and Sangwoo and aren't loudly proclaimed gganbu like Gi-hun and Player 001, re-formulate gganbu in this spectral space. Jiyeong cheats by letting her newly found gaming co-op 'friend' win. It is in her case, of selfless sacrifice, that there is truly no ownership between the two of them, an anti-*Squid Game* navigation and inhabitation, a "dwelling perspective" within the cyborg-dystopia of the game mechanics, "a field of relations that crosscuts the boundary between human and non-human" (Ingold, 2005, 504). The marbles, many but same, miniatures of the world, belong to both of them, against the anti-worlding of the round which is played mere feet away from them when Sangwoo and Gi-hun cheat their partners to save themselves. The final game is the Squid Game itself, the one that used to be played in the neighbourhood between Gi-hun, Sangwoo and their friends. Between these two remaining players there is no pretence. They've known each other since they played games as children. In them, the twin poles of child's play and survival are enmeshed most painfully against the backdrop of this final round. The squid game, has been cited as a children's street game that was played by many Koreans in their childhood, including the series' director Hwang Dong-hyuk, who remarked in a press conference for the show, that it was the most competitive of the games he'd played as a child and is most symbolic of the "modern capitalist society" of contemporary lives (Frater, 2021). Grids drawn on the ground in the shape of a squid become the battleground for children to compete in teams. Just like the rope with its strands is cut in the in-game

tug-of-war, the in-game squid game lack teams, with only the duo facing off each other against the image of the line and the ground, the particular versus the general. The round ends with Sangwoo's understanding that he can only win the game by losing it and he teams up, again, in the sense of an "imperfect configurer" to allow Gi-hun to win rather than end the game. Gi-hun never touches the prize money for himself after winning the game but he does fulfil his promise to his now-dead teammates, of fulfilling *their* wishes and desires. Having lost everything, he cannot value the prize money and is seen to be leaving the country at the end of the show. However, on realizing that the *Game* is recruiting players again, he turns back, letting go of tourist-dreams to instead take the response-ability of dwelling, of actively seeking out and embodying an ethics of care, of sticking together while tearing apart the rules of an unfair game out of consideration for the possibility of other players. He is the cyborg-player of possibility and care because his formulation is schematized as ludic cyborgism; having played the game, he understands the situatedness of children's games, of the emptiness of control and mastery, of killer-adults in child-like playgrounds, of play-as-cyborgization, and he bets on teamwork, cooperation, correspondence, and collaboration.

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