Cut-scene, a Re-conceptualization of

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Abstract

Cutscene is a pre-scripted sequence of event in videogame. It is triggered when the player reaches a certain part of the game. During the cutscene, the player cannot do anything aside from observing what is on the screen, or skipping the cutscene altogether. Cutscene is generally used to tell a story. In addition, there has not been much critical discussion about cutscene in the field of videogame studies. As a result, cutscene is conceived for its face value as a space-time of storytelling, removing the agency of play from the player by story-as-reward. The objective of this research paper is to re-conceptualize cutscene as a concept not limited to its being the opposite of play, and as a concept that makes possible the play aspect in videogame. The concept will be referred to as cut-scene. By studying how player plays around cut-scene in videogames, it can be seen that the non-play moment in cut-scene can maximize the play potential of the player. The study of the concept of combo in fighting game also show that cut-scene is not of narrative in the general sense only, but of attack animations of the characters also. The reason that combo has never been related to cutscene because the involved cutscenes are too short to be noticed as ones. Lastly, the study shows that the non-play elements of videogame, such as sound design, font style, interface, and so on, are what make videogame sensible and playable. Cut-scene, then, is not only a feature in videogame, but related to the unavoidable experience of non-play in videogame.

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คัต-ซีน และการสร้างกระบวนทัศน์ใหม่

ก่อพงศ์ วิชญาปกรณ์[2]

บทคัดย่อ

คัตซีน คือลำดับเหตุการณ์ในวิดีโอเกมซึ่งสัมพันธ์กับเนื้อเรื่องและการเล่าเรื่อง ในช่วงที่คัตซีนกำลังดำเนิน
ไปนั้น ผู้เล่นเกมไม่สามารถทำสิ่งใดได้ นอกจากดูภาพยนตร์หรืออ่านบทสนทนา หรือกดข้ามคัตซีนไป อย่างไร
ก็ตาม ในแวดวง "วิดีโอเกมศึกษา" ยังไม่มีการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับคัตซีนอย่างแพร่หลายเท่าที่ควร จึงมีความเข้าใจ
ว่าคัตซีนเป็นเพียงพื้นที่และเวลาของการเล่าเรื่องที่ผู้เล่นไม่สามารถเล่นวิดีโอเกมได้ ซึ่งทำหน้าที่เป็นการรางวัล
กับผู้เล่นเมื่อเล่นถึงจุดใดจุดหนึ่งในวิดีโอเกม ฉะนั้นบทความวิจัยนี้จึงมุ่งศึกษากระบวนทัศน์ใหม่ของคัตซีน เพื่อ
ทำให้เห็นว่าผู้เล่นสามารถเล่นกับคัตซีนได้ และคัตซีนประกอบสร้างการมีอยู่ของวิดีโอเกม และกระบวนทัศน์
ใหม่เรียกคัตซีนว่า *คัต-ซีน* เพื่อเน้นให้เห็นว่าผู้เล่นกำลังกล่าวถึง *คัต-ซีน* ในลักษณะใด จากการศึกษาพบว่า
ผู้เล่นสามารถเล่นกับสภาวะของการไม่เล่นที่เกิดระหว่าง *คัต-ซีน* ได้ โดยทำให้สภาวะดังกล่าวเป็นกลยุทธ์ในการ
เล่น การศึกษามโนทัศน์ของ "คอมโบ" ในเกมต่อสู้ทำให้เห็นว่า *คัต-ซีน* ไม่ได้เป็นการเล่าเรื่องเพียงอย่างเดียว
แต่ยังยังเป็นภาพการเคลื่อนไหวในวิดีโอเกมอีกด้วย ภาพการเคลื่อนไหวในวิดีโอเกมนั้นไม่เคยถูกเรียกว่าคัต
ซีนมาก่อน เพราะมีระยะสั้นเกินไปจนทำให้ถูกละเลยความสำคัญไป นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังพบว่า *คัต-ซีน*
ทำให้เห็นว่าองค์ประกอบต่าง ๆ ในวิดีโอที่เล่นไม่ได้ เช่น การออกแบบเสียง อินเตอร์เฟซ การออกแบบ
ตัวอักษร ฯลฯ ล้วนสัมพันธ์กับโทนและธีมของวิดีโอเกมไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม และยังเป็นองค์ประกอบที่
ทำให้ผู้เล่นสามารถเล่นกับวิดีโอเกมได้อย่างมีเหตุผล ฉะนั้น "*คัต-ซีน*" จึงไม่ได้เป็นเพียงส่วนหนึ่งของการเล่น
และไม่เล่นในวิดีโอเกม แต่ยังสัมพันธ์กับประสบการณ์ของการเล่น ว่าประสบการณ์ของการไม่เล่นเป็นแง่มุมที่
เลี่ยงไม่ได้ในการเล่นวิดีโอเกม

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Introduction

Cutscene[3], functioning as a cutscene of itself, is often taken for granted in the discussion about videogame. Most of the time, it is referred to as a short film within videogame or a non-interactive sequence of videogame, as a narrative space. It is often structured within cinematic experience, inserted between gameplay sessions, interrupting with the player's agency by shifting from the mode play to spectating (Juul, 2001; Hancock, 2002; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 176; Rehak, 2009, p. 127; Elkington, 2009, p. 220; and Sicart, 2012, p. 118). Some players perceive cutscene as unwanted because it interrupts with their gameplay (Finegan, 2010). Similarly, according to NG (2008) and Dutton (2011), filmmakers, such as Steven Spielberg and Guillermo del Toro, do not like the idea of cutscene in videogame because it, as a mini movie, undermines videogame as a medium by interfering with the sense of play. During the cutscene, videogame plays itself in a sense that it plays the scripted scene triggered by the player. Hence, the player's agency is reduced – even removed in some cases – during the cutscene. In other words, it is a space-time of non-play in videogame. Rune Klevjer's "In Defense of Cutscene" (2002) might be the only writing that analyzes cutscene in details. He proposed that cutscene is essential to videogame. It decreases the tension during the gameplay by giving the players time to prep their next move, acts as a rest stop for the player, enhances the player' immersive experience, and is as a reward in itself (Klevjer, 2002, pp. 194 – 196). Nevertheless, Klevjer's criticism, though in support of cutscene, still regards cutscene as space where player's input is removed.

In this research paper, I hope to propose a different perspective of cutscene in tangent with the concept of play and narrative in videogame; and to re-conceptualize cutscene as a concept of "*cut-scene*". Cutscene can be more than a narrative space of videogame. It should not only be limited to its materiality – that is, of cinematic in its nature. *Cut-scene* would refer to a specific experience in videogame. While cutscene is sometime seen as an "add-on" of videogame experience, *cut-scene* shows that it is what structures videogame *as such*. *Cut-scene* is not about narrative only, as cutscene is, but of a sense of play also, of how the player can make sense of the game. While cutscene is often related to the sense of non-play or the removal of player's agency, *cut-scene*, as an experience, shows that it is possible to play around cutscene. This would imply that there is a specific form of play in videogame, made possible only by *cut-scene*. In addition, *cut-scene* is also an experience that insists on videogame, a subsisting non-play on the play experience. That is to say, *cut-scene* covers other non-play elements in videogame, from sound design to the font style. These elements are both non-playable and related to the theme and tone of the game. Hence, they are, in

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[3] While the word could be either written as cutscene or cut-scene, in this research paper, to distinguish between the general sense of cutscene and the re-conceptualized one, cutscene will be used to signify the former while *cut-scene* the latter.

fact, structured like cutscene – hence, a *cut-scene.* This would emphasize that the non-play experience is part of play experience.

Objectives

1. To study the play phenomena of *cut-scene* in videogames

2. To re-conceptualize *cut-scene*

Literature Review

Play

Before a discussion of cutscene and videogame, it is necessary to define play despite the fact that cutscene is generally regarded as the opposite of play. The scope of definition of play here will focus on the idea of space and time of play, not the throughout definition of play. In *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga argued that the study of play should not be limited by its psychological and biological element only. It should cover the cultural aspect of play as well since play plays an important role in many cultural activities, such as war, politics, poetry, philosophy, arts, and law. It can even be said that play presupposed culture (Huizinga, 1980, p. 1). In 1958, Roger Caillois reworked Huizinga's definition of play in *Man, Play, and Games* (1958). He did not criticize what Huizinga said about the definition of play, only re-writing them in a more precise manner. Caillois proposed that 1.) play is not a mandatory activity, 2.) play has its own space and time, 3.) play can only occur when there is uncertainty, 4.) play is unproductive, 5.) play is rule and about rule-following, and 6.) play gives the player an awareness that the rule of play are not real (Caillois, 2001, pp. 9 – 10). Overall, play, as an activity, has its own rule for its space and time. The player can decide whether they will play or not. Without the knowledge of the rule at play and the will to play, the individual cannot play despite the fact that she is in the space and time of play. Yet, following Huizinga's line of argument, it can be seen that play is also non-play in a sense that it can be found in other activities that is not defined by play.

While Hector Rodreiguez (2006) noted that Huizinga did not clearly define what seriousness was when Huizinga tried to refute the argument that play is a non-serious activity, implying the difference between play and non-play activity, Huizinga stated that play can turn from a non-serious activity to a serious and vice versa. "The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid" (Huizinga, p. 8). For example, this could be seen from the psychological and physical strain invested by the player on the game, and the idea of playing-as-working. This refers back to Huizinga's main argument that play is cultural in a sense that it can be seen in many of the "serious" activities.

Play is also *acultural* in a sense it is not limited to human only. This could be seen in Bekoff and A. Byers' *Animal Play* (1998) which collects numbers of articles that study the play

activities of different groups of animal. However, it is impossible to define play activity of the animal. In the study of play among a group of ravens, Heinrich and Smolker (1998) argued, "[p]lay is an elusive concept …. It evades definition [because] we see no clear dividing line between play and non-play behavior" (p. 42). The concept of play is problematic to define because it eludes the sense of non-play and play. It also undermines the binary opposition between man and animal. The paradoxical definition of play will play an important role in the re-conceptualization of cutscene. It is true that play has a very specific set of definitions, and yet those definitions can be breached at any moment because of the nature of play. Play is too subjective to be defined to be *such and such*, and yet, it is objective enough to have rule and condition for it. This can both be seen from Huizinga's definition of serious and non-serious, and Heinrich and Smolker's argument regarding the elusive defintion of play. This is related to *cut-scene* in terms of the fluidity of play in videogame, that it cannot be limited to one part of the game only. It can be found in the non-play part of videogame also; and that the definition of play in videogame, a digital text, should not be limited to the preceding definition of play from the analogue era only. Overall, *cut-scene* should offer another perspective on play.

Videogame and Cutscene

The discourses around cutscene in videogame study are mostly related its contradictory nature with videogame as a medium – between play and narrative. Firstly, the idea of ergodic literature, proposed by Espen Aarseth, will be elaborated to show the differences between videogame and other medium in terms of its texutality. Secondly, the idea of ludology and narratology will be discussed briefly to emphasize how videogame is usually studied and talked about. Lastly, the definition, criticism, and history of cutscene will be examined shortly in order to set a scene for the re-conceptualization of cutscene.

In *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997), Espen Aarseth referred to videogame as an ergodic literature. It is a play on two Greek words: *ergon and hodos* (Aarseth, 1997, p. 1). The first word *ergon* means "work". It implies that the player has to invest more effort than other type of text (film, novel, poem, drama, and so on) when interacting with an ergodic literature. While Aarseth did not specify what this effort is, it can be said that this effort here refers to both somatic and psychological investment in the play activity. This effort should decreases the distance between the player and the text. For example, the player has to use more than a trivial eye movement, or a flick of the finger to turn the page (Aarseth, p. 2). The player has to be with the text psychologically *and* physically during the period of interaction. For Aarseth, unlike other types of audience, the player does not interact with the text from a safe distance of an observer: she has to put herself in text physically also (Aarseth, p. 4). This also shows that this sense of work is not limited to videogame only, but can be

seen in other types of text as well. A letter can be considered as an ergodic text because the reader has to interact with the envelope and the folded letter to be able to read the text; or a heavy metal concert in which the audience cannot just stand and watch.

The second word *hodos* refers to "path". It refers to both the path that the player had been making and had not made. The two paths will affect the content and material of the videogame.[4] Unlike other types of text, the Otherness of ergodic text occurs on both the level of meaning and content-material of the text. The player can affect the text at the level of content of the videogame, not just the meaning. This implies that the "path" of ergodic literature is not strictly of videogame only, but can be seen in other type of medium if the reader-audience decide to interact with the text in terms of ergodic (this will be explained at the end of the paper). In other words, play in videogame implies that the player can affect the content-material of the game itself. As a result, there exists a tension between play and story in the discourse around videogame study. Unlike game, story can only be affected in terms of its meaning, not content-material.

Gonzalo Frasca (2003) said that there are two schools of videogame studies. The first one is ludology where the focus is on the gameplay and mechanics of the videogame, and the other is narratology which mainly studies game for its narrative value only (Frasca, 2003, p. 222). Frasca argued that videogame could not be limited to the general concept of narrative because videogame is a simulation. Videogame does not provide pre-arranged signs, but simulates them simultaneously during play (Frasca, p. 223). For him, narratology might limit the potential of videogame if the aspect of game and play are not taken into consideration. Markku Eskelinen (2001) also believed that there is a distance between narrative and play by showing that if he was to throw a ball at a person he would not expect a person to narrate how he thrown a ball. Jesper Juul (2001) supported the incompatibility between story and videogame by showing the difference between time of play and time of story: the former is about emerging time while the latter of the arranged past. While Jan Simons (2007) argued that ludologist is ideological and elitist, that narratology and ludology shares the same root in humanity, and that the player needs character and plot for the sense of immersion. He did not criticize anything regarding the narrative in videogame. Here, it can be seen that the problem is not with the narrative itself, but the fact that the player cannot play with the narrative, and cutscene is known as a specific narrative space-time of this non-play.

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[4] The content and material of videogame are always affected by the player's input. Path is not structured in terms of either-or format since the player do not know how many paths are there in videogame. Paths are created simultaneously while playing. For example, in the famous opening stage of *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985), the paths are not limited to whether the player choses to walk forward or not, but in every choice the player made during the scene. There are always unmade choices. Hence, the content-material of the game is altered according to each player. There is always a structure to videogame, but each player express such structure differently.

As stated in the introduction, cutscene is a non-interactive short movie in videogame. The main point of cutscene is to tell a story as intended by the game developers. By removing agency from the player, the story cannot be affected by the player. It can even be said that it is a space-time of the author as the game developer can fully control the content-material in the cutscene. Ron Gilbert first used cutscene, as a term and concept, in the production of *Maniac Mansion* (Lucasfilm Games, 1987). He said that cutscene "automatically saves the state of the game and restored it after the cut-scene was over."[5] This helps him in designing a game that could tell a story from multiple points of view, not limited only to the character played by the player. This implies that cutscene is a space-time of scripted event (the past story) that interrupts with the flow (the nowness of play) of the videogame time.

An online video essay "A complete history of cutscenes in games" (2018)[6] showed that not much has been changed since conception of cutscene despite the fact that it has been implemented in multiple videogames since 1980s. The only drastic changes has mostly been about the technological aspect: the more advance the videogame technology, the better the presentation of the cutscene. In addition, while cutscene is often referred to as a mini movie[7], there are videogames that use text-based cutscene, such *Baldur's Gate* (BioWare, 1998), or comic strips, such as *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, 2001) and *Gravity Rush* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2012). This reinstates the criticism regarding the non-play aspect of story in videogame as stated before: it does not matter what forms a cutscene takes; the player cannot play during the cutscene. It interferes with the player's agency, turning the players into audiences, rewarding them with the narrative-value of the scene. However, there are cutscenes that can be played around with. This kind of cutscene is not usually talked about because they are too trivial and too short.

Discussion

Cut-scene

In his argument on the asymmetric relationship between videogame and narrative, Juul (2001) proposed, "[c]haracter description and development is either ignored or done in cut-scenes (since this is too hard to implement in game form)".[8] While this follows the formulaic description of cutscene, this proposition also implies that what cannot be achieved in game form is made possible in cutscene. *Cut-scene* is not just a story, but the place for what is impossible in play. *Cut-scene* is a space of the possible impossible play: the player can play *around* and with *cut-scene*. In addition, the use of *cut-scene*, instead of cutscene, is to

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[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNpjGvJwyL8

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZKxQ5-DtVA

[7] Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) even said that cutscene is a sign of incompetence of the videogame designer. They lack the skill to express their game through gameplay, so they turn to the passive aspect of cinema (p. 178).

[8] http://gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/

emphasize the sense of cutting and of scene making, and to refer to how Juul wrote *cut-scene* in the first place. In terms of scene, it emphasizes that there is a structure to this scene of play; and to emphasize the visual nature of *cut-scene*.

The idea of cutting in *cut-scene* follows Jacques-Alain Miller's theory of *suture* where he proposed that there is a concept without object that insists on any structure, but does not exists in the structure, enabling the movement of the series-structure. It sutures the components of the structure without being a part of the series itself. He aimed to to criticize Gottlob Frege's theory of whole natural number (1, 2, 3 …), by showing that zero is a subject, in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, that makes the series of natural number possible in the first place. That is to say, zero sutures the whole series-structure together by insisting on them, not existing in them.[9] In the context of this research article, *cut-scene* sutures the structure of videogame together by acting as the possible impossible of play – a different kind of play. It insists on videogame as the non-play aspect of videogame, as a sense of videogame. Without sense-*qua*-non-play, the play experience would be impossible (the concept of sense will be elaborated later). Unlike Miller's suture, *cut-scene* is not of the structure, but an event erupting from the impact between, at least, two different forces: videogame and player. While Miller's *suture* functions as such on any structure, *cut-scene* is to be made – expressed – through interaction between the active part of the player (agent of play) and the passive part of videogame (scene of non-play).

In terms of the possible impossible play, this can be seen from the type of *cut-scene* that is not normally mentioned in relation to cutscene: character's (attack) animation. For example, in an action-RPG videogame *Astral Chain* (PlatinumGames, 2019), after the player performs a special move called *Synch Attack* on an enemy, the game will cut to a short cinematic scene of the attack, emphasizing the impact and specifiness of the move.[10] During the short movie, the player cannot do anything. However, in an online article by Espineli and Blumenthal (2019), the authors wrote that the player should exploit this cutscene to augment the combat mechanics.[11] During the short period of *Synch Attack*, the character's body cannot be affected by other enemies' attack because the character's body is in the cutscene. As mentioned before, the content and material of the cutscene cannot be affected by the player. As a result, the enemies cannot interact with the character's body. This means that for 2 – 3 seconds of *cut-scene*, the character is immune to enemies' attack. The player, as stated in the article, should play around this short period of invincibility.

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[9] For further information on the concept of suture, please refer to Miller, J.-A. (2012). Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier) (J. Rose, Trans.). In P. Hallward & K. Peden (Eds.), Concept and form (Vol. 1, pp. 91-102). New York: Verso.

[10] The scene also emphasizes the character position within the story of the game, showing that only this character can perform the move.

[11] https://www.gamespot.com/gallery/astral-chain-guide-advanced-combat-tips-and-what-y/2900-2998/

By timing each *Synch Attack* properly, allowing the *cut-scene* to play out, the player can play around the *cut-scene*, maximizing the score made during the fight (if the character is attacked during the fight, the score will be reduced). Unlike the general definition of cutscene, here during this *cut*-scene the player is still in the game. Her input affects the game itself. She is still playing. Narrative space has become play space. It is as if this *cut-scene* has become a new move in the game itself. While the game designers design this cutscene as something that resists the player's agency–it is uninterruptable, here it can be seen that the player can play around the resistance itself, not by negating the resistance, but by affirming the resistance as part of the play experience. This, then, shows that *cut-scene* is the possible impossible play. It ought to render play impossible, and yet it allows the player to around it, making it a part of the gameplay. It is an inventive and improvisational sort of play. It is still within the rule of play, and yet it is only possible because of the inventive force of the player, not of the rule alone. It insists as the possibility of the game, not as something existing in the game, but as an interaction between forces. The happening of suture. However, it should be noted that not every cutscene could be played around with. While *cut-scene* is of videogame, not every cutscene can be *cut-scene*(*d*).

The player is not the only one that could play around the *cut-scene*; the unintentional play of *cut-scene* can be accomplished by the game itself as well. This can be seen in *Nioh 2* (Team Ninja, 2020) during the fight with a boss called Ryomen Sukuna. Ryomen Sukuna has special a grapple attack, in which if the attack connects with character's body, the game will cut to a cutscene. If the attack hits, the cutscene of the attack will play on the screen. The player cannot play around it. However, the cutscene of the said special grapple attack can turn into a *cut-scene* if the player summon an NPC (Non Playable Character) to help with the fight. When Ryomen Sukuna performs the special grapple attack on the NPC, both Ryomen Sukuna and the NPC will be stuck in the attack animation. As a result, the player cannot attack Ryumen Sukuna as he is immune to the player's attack. To put in the aspect of *Astral Chain*, the player-character is now in the position of the enemies outside of cutscene whereas Ryomen Sukuna the player and NPC the attacked enemy are in the cutscene. Despite the fact that player can input attack command, the attack will not have any effect on the Ryomen Sukuna because the latter is in the space of *cut-scene*, a space that cannot be interrupted, and yet is able to play around with.

This, then, is a *cut-scene* in a sense that it is an unintentional effect of the cutscene, made possible by the interaction between the player and videogame. While this *cut-scene* aims to remove the player's input, the player can still play in this scene. This can be seen from how the player can control her character during the Ryomen Sukuna's attack animation, and yet her attack does not have any effect on the enemy. This does not mean that it rids the player's agency entirely; the player can use items on the character, buffing and healing

the character while waiting until the enemy is done with the *cut-scene*. The only thing that the player cannot do is attacking the enemy, which is the main objective in that stage of the game. This means that this *cut-scene* can either help the player or obstruct the player from play. The player cannot control this *cut-scene* because of its randomness. It is uncertain, as Caillois said about the elements of play. Not only the player, but also the videogame, the happening of the *cut-scene* cannot be predicted by.

This kind of *cut-scene*, a mini movie played after inputting a certain command, can be seen in other videogames. In *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware, 2011), there is a mechanic called Backstab. Similar to the two games above, a cutscene of the Backstab animation will be triggered if the player successfully attack the opponent from behind. However, if the player could perform a Backstab on an enemy during the PvP mode (Player versus Player), her character's body cannot be attacked by other player during the period of the *cut-scene* animation. In a first-person online shooting game *Apex Legends* (Respawn Entertainment, 2019), instead of shooting, the player can input a special command to perform a *Finisher Move* on the downed opponent. During the *Finisher Move*, the game will shift from a first-person to a third-person point-of-view, and will play a short cutscene for the player who inputs the command for the *Finisher Move*. This leaves the character, who is in the cutscene, vulnerable to other players not in the cutscene. The other players can walk right up to the player and attack her, and the latter cannot do anything because her character is stuck in the *cut-scene*. This is possible because *Apex Legends* is a competitive online game – hence, one person's cutscene cannot remove the other player's agency from the game.[12] The *Finisher Move* is the point where play and non-play could meet visibly on the screen, at the point of *cut-scene*.

Combo and Animation Frame

One of the most noticeable and well-known examples of *cut-scene* can be found in a 2D fighting game called *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991). According to McKinney (2016) and Smallwood and Cantrell (2011), it popularized and unintentionally, with the help of the players, invented the concept of "combo" in videogame. The players accidentally discovered that there were glitches[13] in the game that allows them to chain attack moves together. If done successfully, it would leave the opponent unplayable because the opponent is stuck in the stun animation until the end of the combo (usually around 1 – 2 seconds). Later, when the game developer had discovered that the player were abusing the glitch, instead of fixing the glitch, they decided to incorporate "combo" as one of the feature in the game. This is

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[12] The very simple reason that the players would perform a *Finisher Move* in the first place, is solely for the enjoyment they would gain from it. As Klevjer said, cutscene is in itself a reward for the player.

[13] According to McKinney (2016), the developers were aware of the glitch but they did not expect the player to find out about the glitch.

related to *cut-scene* because of the attack animations. They, too, are the space of non-play and narrative.

According to Jett (2012) and Khan (2016), the attack animations of the character in fighting game can be divided into three stages.[14] Startup attack animation refers to the series of animations depicting how the character moves during the attack before her body connects with the other character's body. Active attack animations show the animations of the moment the character's body connected with the opponent's body. Recovery attack animation represents the moment when the character returns to the neutral stance.[15] Each animation is counted in frame to calculate how long a move takes to perform from beginning to end. After inputting the attack command, the attacking player cannot control her character as the character is stuck in the attack animations (all three of them) which usually take no more than a second. The more frame the move takes, the more powerful the attack, and vice versa (Jett, 2012). The player has to wait for the three stages of animation to playout before she could control the character again. These here, I propose, are cutscene in a sense that they put the player out of play for a short time. During these animations, the player loses control over the character. In addition, these attack animations are all related to story and plot of the videogame because each animation is specific to each character; they emphasize the character's personality and background in the story of the game itself (these will be explained more below).

Combo then is a way of playing around cutscene (attack animation) as *cut-scene*. The player can bypass the recovery animation of the normal attack animation by inputting a special attack combination during the active attack animation. As a result, the attack animation of the special attack replaces the recovery animation of the previous normal attack, maximizing the damage output.[16] A cutscene is being replaced by another cutscene. This then gave birth to the concept of combo, as a byproduct of playing-around with *cut-scene* (attack animations as cutscene). While it may seem that combo is not related directly to *cut-scene*, aside from the fact that it was not designed to be played as such in the first place, combo is related to *cut-scene* in terms of its relationship with the non-play. A way of playing around the non-play. In other words, combo are related to *cut-scene* because of the following reasons.

Firstly, attack animations, which are essential to combo, are the space-time of non-play. Similar to *cut-scene*, during the attack animations (or any animation for that matter), the

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[14] In fact, there are five of them. The other two not mentioned are on-hit and on-block animation. However, those two can be put under the active attack animation.

[15] For further details of animation frame in fighting game, please refer to Jett. (18 April 2012). Universal Fighting Game Guide: How to Read Frame Data. Retrieved from https://inthirdperson.com/2013/07/29/universal-fighting-game-guide-understanding-frame-advantage-as-it-relates-to-safe-on-block/

[16] The examples of combo in *Street Fighter II* can be found on a VHS video "Street Fighter 2: Mastering Great Combinations & Strategies" (1993) which is still available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfS02WjRU8g

player cannot control the character – hence, the player cannot play for a short period (no more than a second). They can only vicariously watch the character performing the move while giving the other player chance in attacking her character if her attack whiffs. The short period of animation may seem trivial on the paper, but on any competitive real-time videogame, such as in a MOBA game[17] *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), this signifies a difference between life and death of a character. For example, this could be seen from a YouTube video around 2:35 where a *League of Legends* game streamer Hashinshin said that his character was killed because the character is trapped in the Ultimate move animation.[18] What this means is that while the character was performing its *Ultimate*, the character cannot be controlled until the end of the animation. This, then, as could be seen from the clip, gives the two opponents opportunity to attack his character. In the fighting game community, there is a terms called "whiff" and "whiff-punishing". Whiff refers to how the player tricks the opponent into attacking and missing the attack. In turn, while the opponent is stuck in the attack animation, the player has the opportunity to attack the opponent – hence, a whiff-punishing.

Secondly, the attack animations, as the non-play aspect, are necessary related to plot and story. Each character has their own series of animation that represent their subject position in the story and the theme of the game. Two characters could have a move with the same set of frame data on startup, active, and recovery animation; however, the animation themselves, the visual and sound aspect, are portrayed differently for each character. For example, in *Street Fighter II*, Ryu and Sagat could perform a similar move style called Shoryuken.[19] However, the animation made during the moves are entirely different compared frame-by-frame. The animation of Ryu's Shoryuken emphasizes more on jumping and floating whereas Sagat's *Tiger Uppercut* more on his larger and longer body frame as the animations show that he does not have to jump as high as Ryu. The sound aspect of the two moves are also different. These differences play an important role in terms of theme and story of *Street Fighter II*: Ryu is portrayed as a character that relies more on his fighting technique where as Sagat on his brute force.

Thirdly, attack animation frames are *cut-scene* because they can be played around with – hence, the concept of combo. The idea is strongly related the structure of combo, but it is not limited to 2D fighting game only. The practical aspect is almost the same in a sense that the players plays around the non-play aspect of game with another non-play aspect, to maximize their gameplay. It has to be reminded that this is not the same as skipping a cutscene (as most cutscene can be skipped by button shown on the screen). For example, in *Monster*

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[17] Multiplayer online battle arena game.

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eRpYzeH3Zs

[19] Sometime it is referred to as "dragon punch". When performed, the character will jump forward with an uppercut.

Hunter Ultimate 4 (Capcom, 2015), the player can be stuck in a recovery animation-cutscene (muscle flexing animation) after using items, such as potion and seed. This animation-cutscene, of course, cannot be skipped, not only because it is important to the story in the game (as a cultural gesture after taking the potion), but also because without this cutscene, the game will lose its challenging aspect. However, this non-play cutscene can be played around with, turning it into *cut-scene*, by placing a small bomb behind the character before using any item, and facing the character in the direction that the player wants to be next. If timed correctly, the bomb will explode after using the item. As a result, the long recovery animation will be replaced with animation of the character being blown-away in the chosen direction.[20] This will save around 5 seconds of cutscene and animation (3 seconds of recovery animation and 2 seconds of walking animation). Keep in mind that, bombs are not designed to be used this way. They were designed to be used as weapons against monsters, not to be use as a "combo". The blown-away animation is there to disrupt the player, not to help them. But here, they can be played around with. In other words, this animation-cutscene, as a scene of non-play, can be made into a *cut-scene* when the player interact with the cutscene creatively. Without the player, *cut-scene* would not be actualized. Without cutscene, this would not be realized as well: the possible impossible play.

The Expressible as the Insistence of Non-play

In addition, *cut*-scene shows that non-play dictates the play experience of videogame. Like attack animations, character design, from how they speak to how they walk, is a non-play element of videogame that connect story to gameplay. The implementation of this idea can be found in almost every videogame regarding their stylistic choices, how those choices thematize the game. The movement (animation-cutscene) and design (representation-cutscene) of each character and object must be sensible, expressing the theme and story of the game. For example, the bigger the character, the longer the animation is. Likewise, if the story of the game shows that the larger size character, such as Bob in 3D fighting game *Tekken 7* (Bandai Namco Studios, 2015), could move faster than normal, the gameplay part will reflect this effectively to preserve the relationship between gameplay and story. Likewise, the movement of any object and character in any videogame, whether an RPG, adventure game, racing game, or fishing game, is designed in such a way as not to break the play experience of the player. Gameplay is made possible because of the theme and background story, expressed by those non-play elements. That is to say, without the non-play-as-the-thematic-expression, videogame would be lacking in sense – hence, unplayable. It does not matter whether how non-sense a game design is, or how much "experimental" that game is, the player needs

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[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPTmVa35rjE

sense – the expression of videogame as the insistence of non-play – to play the game. It *sutures* the player and the game together.

Story and theme, as non-play element of videogame, structure the play aspect of videogame. This is not the same as narrative, but of the subject matter, theme, tone, or background story of the game itself. They are related more to the poetic discourse: a poem can be sensible without a well-strutted narrative because of its sense. It is sense that sutures gameplay together, making it sensible to play and for play. The idea of sense here is part of what Gilles Deleuze proposed in *Logic of Sense* (1969). Unlike language, which is grounded in a loop of denotation, signification, and manifestation around meaning and truth-value, sense exists prior to meaning as sense makes language and things sensible. Sense can be known through utterance, and yet it is neither an utterance nor the object itself (Deleuze, 1990, p. 22). It is what makes thing and language expressible. It is not of thing-*qua*-body because sense is incorporeal, and not of language because it is not meaning, but the meaningfulness of the meaning.[21] Johnson (2017) commented on Deleuze's concept of incorporeal-as-sense that it "never happens, but subsists as a verb that can be attributed to [corporeal] bodies" (p. 275).[22] Idea, story, or theme in the context of *cut-scene* function similar to sense. They are the aspects of videogame that make videogame expressible: playable. This is the second proposal for *cut-scene*: *cut-scene* is this very sense of videogame. It is a sense of play; and also aspects of videogame that make it sensible to play, by being non-play itself.

These could be seen from the font style, sound effect, interface, character voice, background music, and so on. These are not cutscene *per se*, but function as *cut-scene* because they cannot be played with, and yet it makes videogame playable-sensible. They express idea, theme, or tone of the game, and yet they are not of story. These non-play aspects *are* the sense of "to play", a resonation between meaning and play. For example, the font style, interface, sound effect and background music in a social simulation game *Animal Crossing: New Horizon* (Nintendo, 2020) are designed in such a way as to express the relaxing theme and "story" of the game. They makes the game sensible to play with. The fonts are round and smooth. The interface is simple and easy to understand. The sound effect and background music are minimal, and yet create a peaceful ambiance. Without these design choices, there would certainly be a dissonance between game and story, interfering with the

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[21] For further elaboration of the concept of sense, see Deleuze, G. (1990). *The Logic of Sense* (M. L. a. C. Stivale, Trans. C. V. Boundas Ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

[22] In "On the Surface: The Deleuze-Stoicism Encounter" (2017), Johnson proposed that Deleuze's concept of sense was influenced by Stoic's idea of *leka* or the sayable (p. 273). For the Stoic, what exists are only corporeal body, which the incorporeal always insists on them. Johnson proposed that there are three types of incorporeal in Deleuze's work: void, *lekta*, and time. In terms of *lekta*, it refers to the attribute of the corporeal bodies. For example, in the expression "rain falls", the corporeal bodies are rain, water, air, ground, gravity, and so on, while the incorporeal is "to fall" which is expressible, but does not exist in terms of corporeal.

play experience. *Cut-scene* is the non-play elements of videogame, such as graphic, sound design, and so on, structured by the theme or the story about the game, and creating the playability of the game itself. In other words, *cut-scene*, as the non-play aspect of the story in videogame, makes the play experience possible because it the game can be expressed. Without these non-interactive elements, videogame would not be playable.

For example, on the face value, *Tetris* series is a videogame with neither story nor theme, and can be played without any narrative element. The player only needs to stack blocks or *tetriminos* to form horizontal lines. As a result, the lines would disappear and player would gain a score. However, this does not mean that *Tetris* does not have any non-play elements as the expression of the game. These elements could refer to the blockiness of the blocks, the sound effect and soundtrack, the big square where the blocks are put inside, the style of fonts and numbers, and the background graphic. Without these elements, the player would not be able to play the game.

In order to interact with the game, the player has to interact through these elements. These elements give the player a sense of play, a meaning in play. How can the player play without sensing the blockiness of the blocks? How can they play without sensing the boundary where the blocks fall? This does not mean that all of these elements have to be present at all time. One could play *Tetris* on mute if one prefers. Again, is this not a *cut-scene*, a way of playing with the unplayable? By muting the sound, is not one playing with the *cut-scene* itself? The background music sets the tone and theme for the game – an idea. Hence, by muting a game, is this not a way of creating your own way of playing with the game, by interacting with the *cut-scene*. This will not only affect how the game will be played, but also the emerged content of the game.

Furthermore, there is a kind of theme or a sense in *Tetris*, a poetic one. This could be seen from the blocks themselves. They have become a kind of signatory events, in a Derridean sense, of the game. A thematic story always insists on the *Tetris*. Like a poem, the name of the game itself and the blocks are the "theme" of the game. On one hand, the narrative form is present in *Tetris*. The characters are the blocks and the players. The antagonist and complication are the randomness and speed of the game. The tone and setting can be found on the sound design and the design of the interface. On the other hand, the narrative form cannot be found in *Tetris* because the thematic-story persists as a trace. The player cannot experience it directly, but it is there nevertheless: the movement of the block, the blockiness, the shifting of score, or even the unavoidable game over itself. Its existence is its *ex-sistence*. It is there, functioning as a sense, putting the player in a certain direction. It is neither a rule-game (ludology) nor a story (narratology), but a scene of cutting between the two: a *cut-scene*. Again, it has to be reminded that the sense of theme and story here are not those of narrative in a classical sense, but a poetic one, not of cutscene, but *cut-scene*. Sense, not meaning.

Without the non-interactive elements on the screen, such as the design of the block or the square-as-the-field of play, is *Tetris* still playable? Can the player still play *Tetris* without those lines, and color (foreground and background), that make up those blocks? It is not about how the player moves those blocks, but the fact that the movement (interactability) has been grounded by the non-movement of the non-play aspects in the first place. This is not *cut-scene* that can be played around with (at the moment, at least), but a *cut-scene* nonetheless as it emphasizes a type of cutscene missing from its general definition of cutscene. *Cut*-scene is not limited to story formulated according to narrative formula only; it covers the story-element presented as poetic as well. While *Tetris* is a videogame without cutscene, it is one with *cut-scene* – thus, the non-play elements that make sense for its playability.

Cut-scene is an emplacement of the limit of play, a non-play element mentioned by both Huizinga and Caillois without which play and game would not be as such. Play must have a specific rule that conditions its space and time. It can neither go on forever nor be anywhere at any time. This non-play is that Lacanian *a*, putting the desire in motion (play will always return to its inverted form?); that Derridean *différance* that functions as *arche-writing* (can non-play be *arche-play*?); that Deleuzean *sense* that makes sense of the game-rule and narrative (non-play as a sense of play?); and that Miller's *suture* that cuts by connecting a play together, a cut with non-play (a zero of play?). *Cut-scene* has never been anything in-itself, and certainly not a new concept. It is a re-conceptualization, not a conceptualization. It is an attempt in making a scene of what which has been cut from cutscene. It is not a question of binary opposition between of what can be and cannot be played. It is about a trace – an instant, a moment– during play, a flickering of an event that disrupts and preserves the continuity of play-immersion. The problem with the perspective of cutscene-as-reward is that it focuses mainly on one specific type of non-play and one type of experience (a cinematic reward)[23] while ignoring another kind of experience, a non-cinematic, a non-rewarding, and, altogether, a non-play. It is not the opposite of play, but something/someplace/somewhere other regarding play. It is still play all the same, but not play *at all*.

Conclusion

The argument of this research paper is not to deny that cutscene is a space of non-play and of story, that cutscene interrupts with play in videogame, and that cutscene is rewarding, but to show that it should not be limited only to those propositions. The first proposition is that *cut-scene* can be played around with. Following Aarseth's idea of path and work in

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[23] Having been a gamer for more than 20 years, I agree with the idea, that cutscene is rewarding. That is the reason why I have been playing videogame most of the time. However, as a player, I do not want to play with the same old "game" – a way of looking and interacting with things – forever without coming up with anything. It can be the same game, but I have to come up with a new way to play around it – metagaming, a speedrunning, a *cut-scene.*

ergodic literature which he used to describe videogame and other cybertext, *cut-scene* asks the player to "work" through the text in order to play by creating her own "path". This could be seen from how the player has to work something out in *Astral Chain* and *Street Fighter II*, not just following the givens. In *Astral Chain*, it can be seen that the player is still playing while not playing. In addition, the game itself can unintentionally play around its own *cut-scene* as could be seen from the boss battle in *Nioh 2*. Furthermore, each videogame has their own experience of *cut-scene*.

The other proposition is that *cut-scene* is not limited to the space of cutscene *per se*. While cutscene is often referred to a cinematic space-time in videogame, here the analysis shows that the experience of cutscene is not limited to those moments only. These can be seen from concept of combo which plays with character attack animations. During those animations, the player will not be able to control the character because the character is stuck in the animation itself. They are too short and trivial to be considered a cutscene, but they are structured as ones. Not only that the player cannot play for a short moment, but those animations are related to the plot and background story of each character also. Each character has their own attack animation that reflects their personality and their place in the narrative. While combo referred to the first proposition of *cut-scene*, its components are of the second proposition.

Furthermore, *cut-scene* of the second proposition also covers other videogame stylistic choices from voice and sound design to fonts and letters design on the interface. These elements are *cut-scene* because they, too, are unplayable elements that is related to the theme and tone of the videogame; and because they, too, are designed according to the theme and tone of the game. They provide the player a sense of play for the player – making the game sensible to play (the non-sense design is sensible because there is sense is non-sense.). Without these elements, without *cut-scene*, the player would not be able to play. Play must have meaning (it does not matter how trivial or grand it is), and sense is the possibility of meaning, of play. Non-play is inevitable in play experience.

Cut-scene is an attempt to give an attention to other aspects of cutscene and other elements of videogame that could function as *cut-scene*. In a way, it is a conceptualization of *cut-scene* in itself, to give name to something; however, to say that this is a new concept would betray the point of *cut-scene*. It is not something new, only the possibilities of the structuring series. Following Aarseth's idea of an ergodic object, *cut-scene* is the unchosen paths that have to be worked through in any cutscene of videogame. Following the Huizinga and Caillois' concept of play, *cut-scene* is uncertain, and yet only possible within a certain limitation of rule.

While the general perception of cutscene is that it is non-interactive and passive, *cut-scene* is neither active nor passive. It is reactive: an emergence of an event-*qua*-object. The player

reacts to the object of videogame; and in turn, the game reacts to the player's input. The player reshapes the content-material – body – of videogame; and the videogame reshapes the player's body – fingers and eyes coordination, breathing pattern, emotion, feeling, breathing, and so on. As a result of the two interacting bodies (of player and videogame), there emerges a *cut-scene* (this is not to say that has not been there in the first place). In the context of *cut-scene*, there is neither subject nor object, only the reactive interaction between, at least, two agents or bodies (in a Deleuzean sense), forming, by way of inventive improvisation, new bodies and concept. It is more about a chance for the emergence of a specific play experience in videogame, made possible by *cut-scene* and the player, rather than a rule of play.

Lastly, *cut-scene* might not be limited to videogame only – that is, *cut-scene* might be related the concept of play, not of videogame. This means that *cut-scene* has a potential to be more than *cut-scene* and to not be *cut-scene* at all. As stated above, *cut-scene* is not a new concept *per se*, but a re-conceptualization of cutscene, giving attention to other aspect of cutscene. This is not to say that *cut-scene* can occur in any other object, but that *this event* might be the specific interaction found in any interaction between bodies in the field of play. *Cut-scene* is only a specific named event expressible only by the interaction between videogame and the player.

For example, how the size of the novel, the feel of the paper, the font size and style, and page format affect the reader's experience of reading by making her read more faster, slower, longer, shorter, more intense, less intense, more or less immersive, and so on, could be referred to as *cut-scene* as well. The unreadable aspect of the novel (that is not related to the content) affects the readability of the text. They are what make the content readable and interactable. *Cut-scene* might emerges when the reader plays around the text by skipping words, reading the same phrase over and over, holding the book in a certain way, or reading in a certain position and light in order to "read" the text. A solidified *cut-scene* might be seen from the necessity of the author's introduction of a novel, a table of content, page numbers, or even the format of research article that affect how the reader (and writer) interact with the text. This is not limited to object with narrative content only. For example, a scissor could be used as a paperweight; or a chair could be used as a stair. *Cut-scene* (in the context of videogame) expresses an insisting experience of inventive and improvisational play, made possible by the interaction between bodies; and creating new bodies and concepts in turn.

The problem regarding *cut-scene* is not of its meaning and definition (can definition be contradictory?), but of how, when, and where of it. It re-conceptualizes itself when/wherever it appears. This is not to deny the linguistic structure of *cut-scene*, but to be more attentive to the emergence, potentiality, possibility and usage of the event. Reading is not of what is shown on the paper only, but of the attributes and quality of the interaction between the

reader and the paper also. I believe this subject matter, regarding this kind of event needs further study as this research article mainly covers videogame and *cut-scene*. *Cut-scene* will-have-been found in other kind of text, apart from videogame, but its expression and definition will not be of *cut-scene*. It will be something else entirely, the Other of itself. Nevertheless, how can it be the Other of itself if it has never been constative (in-it-self) in the first place, but performative? And yet, without constative, how could the *cut-scene* be performed at all? A velocity, a *cut-scene.*

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