

## **On Cam! Micronarrative-Based Typology of Cameos in Films and Video Games**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Studies on cameos predominantly revolve around their production, humorous effect, and the commercial issues surrounding their appearances. There are, however, gaps left unaddressed by previous studies: how cameos may be considered micronarratives and how they function in films and video games. This article attempts to formulate a micronarrative-induced typology of cameos along with the rationalization of their appearances. Employing Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana's micronarrative theory, Aarseth's ergodic literature theory, Reinhart's gestalt perspective on a narrative text, and Coe's theory of intrusive narrative, two issues regarding the typology and functions of cameos as micronarratives are addressed in this paper. Different kinds of cameos and their functions are discussed in the study.

*Keywords:* cameos; ergodic; film studies; gestalt; micronarratives

### **Introduction**

In art or gemology, cameos, according to James David Draper, are engraved stones in a projected relief fashion (5). In literary works, as implied by Joceline Andersen, cameos are characters which audiences recognize as not being a part of the works but have a transformative role for the audiences (2). Cameos are commonly played by famous figures with intertextual or commercial relationships with the works and even those who produce the works themselves. Whoever takes the cameo roles are bound by the audiences as their recognition of the former is necessary (Andersen 4). Having recognizable qualities implies that cameos tend to have what Pramod Nayar calls the dual values of celebrities: commercial and social (27). A critical

question, thus, arises from this audience-bound necessity for cameo appearances: how might they disrupt the narrative of the works where they appear? This concern with narrative disruption becomes more urgent when the cameos seem to obligatorily appear in particular works due to tributary and fan-demand reasons. Such is the case with Stan Lee, the writer of Marvel Comics who has given birth to iconic superheroes such as Spider Man, Wolverine, and the Avengers. Peter Bryan Cullen states that Stan Lee may have been the first comic book celebrity due to his roles that bridge comic fandom and mass culture (361).

As a tribute to Stan Lee, films adapted from the comics of Marvel superheroes reserve a scene for him to appear and function as an ambassador of Marvel (Jeffries 306). He made cameo appearances in the live action adaptation of Marvel's superheroes from *Fantastic Four* in 2005 to *The Avengers: End Game* in 2019. The fourteen-year cameo appearance of Stan Lee is an example of the obligatory aspect of having him as a celebrity cameo. Interestingly, Stan Lee appeared not only in films but in comics and video games as well, with each cameo role revealing different narrative strategies in incorporating him in the works. In *The Amazing Spider-Man* by the game developer and publisher Activision, for instance, Stan Lee is made into a character with the same spider power as Spider-Man, implying that he has his own narrative though they tend to be comical. That Stan Lee is assigned the power of Spider-Man suggests that a micronarrative is at work.

This micronarrative is perceptible from the fact that the appearance of Stan Lee embodies what Simona Venditti, Francesca Piredda, and Walter Mattana call fragmentation, where the story structure and character are subordinated to the macronarrative or the micronarrative (275); the macro story structure is the narrative of Spider-Man, and the macro figure, Spider-Man himself. The relationship between micronarrative and macronarrative reflects what Tanya Reinhart calls figure and ground (785) in her application of gestalt theory on narrative texts. In our example, the figure is Stan Lee, and the ground where the figure is held is Spider-Man. As a figure, Spider-Man functions both as a character and a franchise. This relationship signifies an interdependence between Stan Lee as the cameo and Spider-Man as the main character. It is this relationship that bridges the micronarrative and macronarrative.

Complexities occur when the media where the cameo appears in are ergodic where the flow of the narratives depend on how the audiences – game players – engage and interact. Non-trivial traversals are required to access the media and its content (Aarseth 3). An example of non-trivial traversal is when game players have to select two choices that determine the ending of the game. In ergodic media like video games, narrative functions work mechanically and vice versa; when game

players play playable cameos, what they like doing—like punching and kicking—are a part of the narrative. In Squaresoft's fighting video game *Ehrgeiz: God Save the Ring*, for instance, Cloud Strife, the main character of another video game, *Final Fantasy VII*, appears as a playable cameo for the game. His enormous buster sword and magic called Materia are intertextually linked to his original game but modified for fighting game mechanics. This implies that Cloud Strife's narrative in the original game, which falls under the role-playing game (RPG) genre, is mechanically modified to fit the fighting genre of *Final Fantasy VII*. From a micronarrative perspective, Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana call this the remediation of narrative aesthetics (277). The aesthetics is seen wherein a character from an RPG that puts game players on exploration is brought into another game as a cameo and modified to fit a fighting genre that emphasizes player-against-player and player-against-computer duels.

The distinct features of cameos in films and video games like their various ways of displays on screen and their micronarrative roles in both media suggest that cameos could be typologically classified based on those characteristics. Earlier studies on cameos did not include a micronarrative-induced typology because they usually focused on the structural elements of cameos (Miller), the functions of cameo seen from the perspectives of the actors who play as the cameos (Jeffries), and cameos from the perspective of audience reception and engagement (Andersen). Thus, to address the gap in these studies, we attempted to formulate a typology of cameo appearances as micronarratives and present strategies that can be used to explain their presence.

To construct the typology of cameos and the narrative rationalization of cameo appearances, we employed micronarrative theory (Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana) which focuses on the concept of fragmentation and remediation of narrative aesthetics, ergodic theory (Aarseth), gestalt perspective on the narrative text (Reinhart), and intrusive narrative theory (Coe). Fragmentation theory was applied to reveal how cameos in films and video games are treated as inseparable fragments of the whole narrative. On the other hand, the concept of remediation of narrative aesthetics was used to analyze which aspects of the cameos are modified and adjusted to fit the narrative aesthetics of the target media. The theory of ergodic literature was applied to determine whether the cameos were interpretively, exploratively, or configuratively treated. Treating a cameo interpretively indicates that the cameo is static – they are merely spotted or recognized by the audience. Treating a cameo exploratively points to the significant role of the cameo in the narrative. Approaching the cameo configuratively looks at the highest degree of interactivity where a cameo is played by the audiences, generating the effect of methexis or audience involvement. The gestalt perspective was also used to

indicate the position of a cameo as the figure and main character as a ground where the cameo draws attention away from the main character. Through the relationship between figure and ground projected through the main character and the cameo, micronarratives and macronarratives are intertwined.

Cameos have a narrative (Andersen 10). Being part of the film narrative, their narrativity tends to be micro. While micro pertains to the fragmentary presentation of cameos, the remediation of narrative aesthetics is the process of adapting the cameos to the target media. As explained by Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana, fragmentations and remediations are features of micronarratives (274). It is the micronarrative that hooks the viewers or players into analyzing the presence of the cameo and how it relates to the film or video game narratives. As stated by Andersen, cameos drive the audience to participate in the meaning-making process (128).

That cameos elicit attention from the audience who are prompted to participate in decoding the meaning of the cameo's presence indicates that the interpretive user's functions are at work (Andersen 130). In the context of cameos, audiences have the least interactive participation toward the cameos with interpretive user's function. A higher degree of interaction between cameos and audiences is seen in the explorative user's function. Cameos with this kind of function are perceived to have a greater role in the narratives of films and video games compared to those cameos with interpretative user's function. The last kind of cameo function is the configurative user's function, which manifests the highest degree of interaction. In the context of video games, cameos with configurative user's function are optionally playable as an alternative for the main playable characters. The presence of this interactivity leveling in the cameos points out that cameos tend to be dependent on audiences and how they interpret, explore, and configure the cameos. Whatever the user's functions of the cameos are, the appearance of cameos involve a multitude of narratives ranging from the narratives of the audiences, of the film or video game makers, and of the media themselves. Through this convergence, as implied by O'Donnell (274), different user's functions tend to influence how the narratives of the cameos unfold.

According to gestalt perspectives, the interpretation of cameos must be done in the context of the relationship between cameos as a figure and the media in which the cameos appear as a ground – the media where the cameos appear. The figure is the object that lies on another object, while the ground is where the figure lies (Reinhart 787). As a figure, cameo functions as a form of intrusive narration, in which the ideas of the authors are inserted into a work disruptively (Coe 3). According to Gerard Genette because an intrusion happens in the microscopic level,

the analysis of how it is related to the entire narrative and how it is affected by any intrusion requires a part-to-whole analysis (239). The insertion of a cameo in films or video games is accomplished through various means which impact the micronarrative differently. The effect is due to the narrative disruptions that the cameo as a micronarrative has over the whole macronarrative. The losses of narrative control between the micro and macro are eminent, and thereby, limitations on the chrono-spatial elements of the cameo as micronarrative become a concern.

This intrusion within the macronarrative indicates that a cameo might create its own text which is called supertext (Mathijs). The supertext emerges because of the intertextuality of the micronarrative of the cameo in the narrative of the franchise film or films with the same directors. The presence of supertext implies that micronarratives that are intertextually connected could transform into their own text with their own distinctive features in reference to the macronarrative. Questions arise when cameos are not constructed in a multiplicity context. For example, how can the cameos be rationalized when being micro is not intertextually linked with the other micronarratives of the other cameos?

The cameo might be the fragment of the film and the video game's narrative. Moreover, it might also be a fragment of a narrative outside the film or the video game. The rationalization of the former fragmentation is intratextually linked with the film or game as the macronarrative, while the rationalization of the latter might involve intratextual and intertextual linkage. In SNK's *King of Fighters* series, for example, the fighters in the game have their own video games and narratives in their original video games. However, when those characters are packed into a single video game, SNK has to come up with a narrative rationalization that can bridge the original narratives and the background narratives on why they join *King of Fighters*. To do so, SNK narrates that the characters from different video game titles are invited to fight in a world tournament called King of Fighters to decide the best fighter. Significant problems might arise when the rationalization itself is a fragment or the whole rationalization of the macronarrative. When rationalization is a fragment, cameos might suffer from the arbitrariness of insertion. Thus, remediation is required to signify the distinctiveness of the cameo as a micronarrative. Remediation as a micronarrative bridges the micronarrativeness of the cameo with the macronarrativeness of the films and video games. Remediation may take various forms such as reduction and augmentation with the former circumnavigating around reducing the narratives and the latter adding new ones (Genette 229). Each of these forms might influence the macronarratives of the films or video games in terms of reducing the duration or segment of the macronarratives and adding this to the micronarratives. If a cameo departs from these remediation cases, then it becomes an intrusive narrative in the macronarratives. Square Enix

and Alim's *Final Fantasy Brave Exvius*, for example, is a mobile game that carries the franchise of *Final Fantasy*. In the game, players can summon characters from *Final Fantasy* to *Final Fantasy XV*. The summoned characters' unleashing of their signature attacks is a remediation since the characters have different worlds and they are forced to come to the world of *Brave Exvius* to assist the game players.

## Design, Data, and Data Sources

This descriptive qualitative study derived its data from thirty films and thirty video games. The criteria used in selecting the films and games were the presence of cameos, cameos with intertextual and non-intertextual relationships, and cameos which appear animatedly and inanimately. Additional criterion for films was the appearance of Stan Lee and for video games, narrative-driven plots. The sources of data are as follows:

**Table 1.** Sources of Data

Year	Films	Year	Video Games
2015	Antman	2021	Death Stranding Director's Cut
2018	Antman and the Wasp	1998	Ehrgeiz: God Bless the Ring
2015	Avengers: Age of Ultron	1987	Final Fantasy
2019	Avengers: Endgame	2020	Final Fantasy VII: Remake
2018	Avengers: Infinity War	2000	Final Fantasy IX
2014	Big Hero 6	2016	Final Fantasy XV
2018	Black Panther	2016	Final Fantasy Brave Exvius
2011	Captain America: The First Avenger	2007	Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions
2014	Captain America: The Winter Soldier	2018	Gwent: the Witcher Card Game
2016	Captain America: Civil War	2019	Kingdom Hearts III
2019	Captain Marvel	2010	King of Fighters XIII
2016	Deadpool	2014	Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII
2018	Deadpool 2	2011	Marvel vs Capcom 3: Fate of the Two Worlds
2016	Doctor Strange	1998	Metal Gear Solid
2005	Fantastic Four	1998	Pocket Fighter
2014	Guardians of the Galaxy	1998	Ridge Racer Type 4

Year	Films	Year	Video Games
2017	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	2021	Romance of the Three Kingdoms XIV
2008	Iron Man	2012	Sonic & All Stars Racing Transformed
2010	Iron Man 2	2016	Street Fighter V
2013	Iron Man 3	1996	Suikoden
2017	Spider-Man: Homecoming	1999	Suikoden II
2018	Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse	2002	Suikoden III
2012	The Avengers	2018	Super Smash Bros Ultimate
2008	The Incredible Hulk	2021	Tales of Arise
2011	Thor	2017	Tales of Berseria
2013	Thor: Dark World	2015	Tales of Zestiria
2017	Thor: Ragnarok	2015	Tekken 7
2000	X-Men	2015	The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
2016	X-Men: Apocalypse	2007	Warriors Orochi
2006	X-Men: The Last Stand	2016	World of Final Fantasy

The data of this research include the verbal and nonverbal elements that construct the cameos. Verbal elements comprise of the dialogue of the cameos, the dialogue of the other characters about the cameos, and signs and insignia which might refer to or allude to cameos. Nonverbal elements comprise of scenic images where the cameos appear, visual portrayals of the cameos, and the mechanical elements i.e., skills and abilities assigned to the cameos. These two kinds of elements were drawn from the cameos to reveal the attitudes of the characters, the scene types, the scenic description, the roles of the cameos, the duration of their appearance, and the intertextual connections reflected by the cameos.

## Analysis

From the Spradleyan framework that emphasizes revealing the themes of cultural products for analysis, four phases were taken for the analysis. These four phases are domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analyses. In the first phase, domain analysis, fragmentation and remediation of narrative aesthetics (Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana) and gestalt perception on the narrative text (Reinhart) were utilized to reveal how fragmentations, which engage with the characters, scene types, scenic descriptions, cameo roles, duration of appearance, and intertextual

connections, construct the cameos. Revealing how the fragmentations were employed and what were remediated to generate new narrative aesthetics was uncovered. The next phase was taxonomy analysis where the results of fragmentations and remediations were analyzed in terms of user's function (Aarseth 64) to reveal how the fragments and the remedies may be categorized into interpretive, explorative, or configurative user's functions. The next phase was componential analysis where Coe's intrusive narration theory was employed to point out the level of intrusion the cameos as micronarrative had. The last phase consisted of cultural theme analysis where a typology of cameo was constructed based on the findings from the previous phases and a rationalization of the cameo appearances is presented.

### ***A Typology of Cameos***

As Andersen explains, cameos tend to be culturally reliant on the celebrity playing the role for recognition (3). Such reliance indicates that the cultural recognition of cameos tends to be figure-tied. For example, when it comes to celebrities, as suggested by Cashmore, figures that are legendary might influence an existing media by any means from which the product of the influence, like a new rule of engagement, might be synonymously identified with the figures (243). The cameo of Stan Lee in almost every Marvel's superhero movie is an example of how cameo insertion into the macronarrative of films tends to become an obligatory feature for superhero movies. This practice continued until his death. Therefore, this reliance on the status of a celebrity figure suggests that cameo typology fits only when the cameo has influential power over the media and the audiences.

Based on the figure-influence relationship derived from the celebrity culture, we argue that the influences of the cameo move around not only on the macro level but also on the micro level e.g., the intrinsic elements of the films. Six cameo types have been identified based on the findings: intranarrative, internarrative, extranarrative, metanarrative, methectic narrative, and cosmetic narrative. The first type is a cameo whose micronarratives bridge the macronarratives of films and video games. The second is the type which connects micronarratives appearing from different films and video games under the same actors/actresses, the production houses/studios, the production teams, or the narrative events. The third type of cameo connects the micronarratives of one film or video game with the other film and video game titles. The fourth type of cameo has a narrative delivered not through the actions of the actors but through different locutors like speeches of the characters, signs, and references. A cameo that specifically appears in fighting video games, the fifth type, is a playable character from a different world where the video games occur. And lastly, the sixth type refers to altering the skins of



video game characters with the skins of the other characters, creating micronarratives that evoke nostalgia from the players. The following section discusses in detail all six types.

#### *Intranarrative Cameos*

Intranarrative cameos function as a connector or bridge between the micronarrative of the cameos with the macronarrative of the films or video games. For example, in *Fantastic Four*, Stan Lee plays a role of a mailman. He delivers a stack of letters to Richard Reed, the main protagonist of the film. The letters happen to be notices or bills indicating that Richard has not yet met the dues. This micronarrative attempts to show that Richard is in dire need of financial support for his life and research and the state of being broke macronarratively influences not only all aspects of Richard's life but also the plot. Without Stan Lee's cameo as a mailman, the plot structure will lose its foreshadowing element which connects certain parts of the plot. That Stan Lee was serving in the military signals corps responsible for relaying information and communication is signified in the mailman scene.

In video games, the connective functions of intranarrative cameos tend to be in the domain of ludonarratives i.e., character classes or called jobs in role playing games, where meaning-making is generated through the gameplay (Arjoranta). In *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions*, for example, Square Enix presents a cameo named Ffamran Mid Bunansa, also known as Balthier from *Final Fantasy XII*. The choice of this character is not without reason. Narratively, Balthier connects both titles, which share the same mythopoetic world called Ivalice – both titles take place in the same world but in two different continents. Ludically, Balthier connects the mechanics of the game. His status as a Sky Pirate in *Final Fantasy XII* is mechanized as a job-specific role going by the same name Sky Pirate. The players can even unlock specific skills such as Piracy possessed only by Balthier. This ludonarrative storytelling in delivering Balthier as a cameo might disclose a possibility of what is called as ludonarrative dissonance, where narratives told through game story and gameplay trigger a conflict between the narratives and the mechanics of a game (Hocking). In the case of Balthier, questions might arise such as how he could get into the timeline of *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions*. That Balthier is a famous character might to some extent generate an understanding from the game players that his role is that of a projection of the fictional world of Ivalice.

#### *Internarrative Cameos*

Unlike intranarrative cameos which connect the micronarrative and macronarrative within a film or a video game, internarrative cameos, as the name implies, connect intertextually two or more works. In the *Iron Man* series, the setting where Stan

Lee appears as a cameo is always tied to entertainment or exhibition. Besides connecting the intertextuality of Stan Lee's cameos, these settings also narratively reflect the wealthy man aura of Tony Stark. This intertextual connection is not only seen in the setting but also in the acting of Stan Lee, who says nothing in his appearance. In the first *Iron Man*, Tony mistakenly identifies Stan Lee as Hugh Hefner, the Playboy founder, since Stan wears a pajama-like attire iconic to Hugh Hefner and is surrounded by women. In the second *Iron Man*, somebody shouts "Larry" before Stan Lee, whose attire is identical to that of Larry King's. In the third *Iron Man*, Stan Lee attends a bikini show and raises a board with number 10 on it. This consistent appearance of a wealthy man indicated by his attire and his being surrounded by women signifies that the cameo is not intended primarily as a connector of the micronarrative to the micronarrative, but as a connector between micronarratives that appear in films with sequels.

In the context of video games, internarrative cameos tend to be more varied in function. In Konami's *Suikoden* series, for instance, cameos function to strengthen the video games' lore by connecting the game stories and gameplays of the series. In *Suikoden II*, the player, through the fulfillment of particular conditions, could encounter the primary protagonist of the first *Suikoden*, Tir McDohl, to reveal his life after the story of *Suikoden* is over. Recruiting him will allow the players to unlock a secret move called Double Leader Attack, implying that intertextuality in the video game also revolves around the intertextuality of gameplay. This intertextuality of gameplay is also found in video games of different genres which share the same lore. For instance, *The Witcher* series and *Gwent: The Witcher Card Games* are different in terms of genre, with the former being a role-playing game and the latter, a card game. Nevertheless, the gameplay is intertextually linked. Many characters in the original series are made into cameos with detailed drawings and adjusted game mechanics. For example, Geralt, the primary protagonist of *The Witcher* series, has an ability called quen, allowing Geralt to cast an invisible shield around the witcher. When this ability is transferred to the card video game *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*, the concept of 'shielding' the caster (i.e., protecting from the attacks of the enemies) is preserved with a shield symbol appearing on the cards to which the ability is cast. This condition indicates that gameplay consistency is an important aspect to consider when cameos are designed to appear in games of different genres.

#### *Extranarrative Cameos*

Cameos who appear internarratively tend to connect the narratives of two or more works under particular similar sequels. In contrast, cameos who appear extranarratively connect the narratives of two or more works without any narratives indicating the presence of the same actors/actresses, the production

houses/studios, the production teams, or the narrative events. This type of cameo is commonly found in a crossover work, where multiple characters from various titles are packed into a single new narrative. What differentiates this cameo from internarrative cameo is that an extranarrative cameo tends to have significant parts in the new narratives, blurring the status of being a cameo. In Capcom's fighting game franchise *Marvel vs. Capcom*, heroes from Marvel and Capcom are narrated to fight against the alliance of villains from both companies. This makes the status of a cameo blurred since all of the characters have their narrative parts that weave the entire macronarrative structure.

Extranarrative cameos in the context of video games also take the form of mascots whose narrative is embedded in the macronarrative of the games. For instance, Namco's *Ridge Racer Type 4* has a mascot racing girl called Reiko Nagase. This mascot, well-known as cyberbabe, has her micronarrative blended into the narrative the players weave as a racer. Her micronarrative as a single working independent character with a cheerful and attractive personality could somehow provide fan service in a playful manner leading to the expectations of the players that their macronarratives might intertwine with her narrative at some point. That Reiko Nagase stays iconic throughout the racing car series proves that her micronarrative is necessary in the racing car game. Fan service as seen from the case of Reiko Nagase is widely used in films and video games. It is, as studied by Beaty, a "reward" for the fans due to their loyalty in their continuous supports (324). The "reward" could take the forms of sexual pleasure intended to be projected from the character. Through this "reward," it is expected that audience engagement is preserved.

#### *Metanarrative Cameos*

Cameos are not always present in the form of a person. Their appearance in films or games may be in speeches of other characters or signs alluded in different ways. Metanarrative cameos might overlap with references in the sense that personage absence is the key focus. Two perceptible differences between metanarrative cameos and references are apparent in the explicit mentioning of a character's name and the existence of micronarratives tied to them. These two elements are intertwined since micronarratives, no matter how micro they are, need onomastic elements in the form of names for the characters to be present. Metanarrative cameos, though physically absent, might still have micronarratives surrounding them which might influence the macronarratives.

In *Final Fantasy*, after the players arrive at the Kingdom of Elfheim, they can interact with tombstones, of which one of the epitaphs says, "Here Lies Link." Link is a name of a character from Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda*. This is an example of

a metanarrative cameo since Link's character is alluded to by name and he has an accompanying metanarrative. That Link is an Elf in the original series and his supposed tombstone lies in Elfheim, which means homes of the Elf, signifies the metanarrativeness of the cameo in a ludic fashion. The ludicity is seen from the fact that Link is parodied to have died and buried in an Elf kingdom. This ludicity further suggests that *Final Fantasy* may perceive *Legend of Zelda* as a rival in the role-playing game market and thus, a tribute to Link is made.

Metanarrative cameos and references might become vague when the names are only partially mentioned. In Capcom's fighting video game series, it has always been its tradition to depict characters from its franchise and other characters from different games with which Capcom collaborates. In *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of the Two Worlds* series, for instance, on Spider-Man's stage, the platform where the game players fight slowly rises. As it rises, names and images of various superheroes from Capcom and Marvel become visible. Most of the names and images appear as playable characters in the game. One of the characters that do not appear in the game is Green Goblin, although Oscorp, the company associated with him, appears on the stage. This is a metanarrative since the presence of Green Goblin to which Oscorp is associated is only implied.

#### *Methectic Narrative Cameos*

Methectic is the adjective of methexis, a Platonic term which refers to the involvement of audiences in a theatrical context. We call playable cameos in video games as methectic since the cameos who commonly appear unplayable (e.g., the villain Dr. Eggman of *Sonic* series) are made playable in Sega's *Sonic & All Stars Racing Transformed*, signifying an active involvement and participation from the game players. This type of cameo is only found in video games, and the industry has made this type of cameo a formula in garnering more players. Crossover fighting and racing video games are two genres that dominantly employ this cameo type. They can be from the same video game developers or publishers or from different ones as well. In both cases, this cameo type tends to function as a "refresher" for veteran players or fans and as a means to introduce the games to new players.

In Koei Tecmo's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms XIV*, a simulation game based on the novel by Luo Guanzhong, game players have the chance to play characters who are not from the era of the Three Kingdoms. Lin Chong, for example, is not a character from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He is a character from *Water Margin*. Genghis Khan, who was a Mongol and was born a thousand years after the events in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, appears in the game. Ryza and her friends from *Atelier Ryza*, an *animesque* alchemy themed game from the same developer, also

make an appearance in the video game though they do not have any relations with neither the game nor the novel. That they are playable signifies the importance of interactivity for their states as a cameo. Furthermore, that these cameos are from different periods and even from a fictional universe points out that fan service is also the purpose behind the presence of the cameos. Due to fan service, narrative construction between the characters and the cameos of the narratives might suffer from distortion and disorientation. Distortion, as seen in the cases of Lin Chong, Genghis Khan, and Ryza, appears when new narratives are inserted to the already established narratives. This distortion then leads to the disorientation of the game players. When characters that are not a part of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are inserted, game players may experience a disorientation, which is seen when they enjoy the video game as a game adaptation of a novel or as a crossover game that packs many characters from different games into one.

#### *Cosmetic Narrative Cameos*

Cosmetic narrative cameos only appear in video games, especially fighting video games and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games. To refresh the playing experiences of the gamers, developers and publishers tend to offer cosmetic modifications in the form of skin changes. These changes on the skin will overhaul the appearance of the characters but not their gameplay. Some of the skins offered are constructed based on principles of nostalgia commodification, where past experiences in playing the characters are revisited and capitalized on. In Capcom's *Street Fighter V*, for instance, players can change the skin of G into Skullomania, a character from Capcom and Arika's *Street Fighter EX* series. Skullomania is a fan favorite character from the era of Playstation 1 and 2. Bringing the character as a cameo in the form of skin in the Playstation 4 and 5 eras are attempts at nostalgia commodification and fan service.

In selecting the skin, the character's narrative from which the skin is used becomes a consideration. In the case of G with Skullomania skin, the two characters share the similar superheroic traits and tropes. G claims himself as the President of the World while Skullomania, as a Japanese-like masked rider superhero. Both work their lives as saviors of mankind in a comedic narrative. This narrative synchronicity points out that narratives are of concern when cosmetic cameos are introduced though fighting video games that tend to focus more on the gameplay, not the story.

#### ***Narrative Rationalization of Cameos in Films and Video Games***

Narrative intrusions involve the insertions of the author's ideas from which significant impacts or changes might occur (Coe). In the context of the narrative rationalization of cameos, intrusions also need to be rationalized. Reasons such as

paying tribute, evoking nostalgia, or investing commercial or social interests might be the tool of rationalizing films and video games. The problem lies in whether the rationalization of the intrusion is justified. For instance, in the case of “figured author” (Dvigubski), authors appear as cameos themselves for in their view they are able to comprehensively bring in their opinions about certain topics into the narrative in this way. This, to some extent, indicates the presence of a supertext in which the director of a film may appear as a cameo (Mathijs). Through the “super” status of a text in the context of a cameo, narrative intrusion is rationalized.

In the context of video games, the rationalization of narrative intrusion has somehow become a convention since gamers tend to demand that intrusion refreshes their gaming experiences. These narrative intrusions might be constructed in the form of downloadable contents or DLC, for those who willingly pay extra cash. DLC gives the game players new characters and new narratives in which intrusion might occur on the macronarratives. Narrative intrusions might take the form of New Game Plus to appreciate the hard work of the gamers in completing the video games. New Game Plus, a term identical to role playing game genre, is awarded to game players who have completed the game. In New Game Plus, game players could experience the already completed narratives through a different engagement. These forms of narrative intrusion are the narrative aesthetics of what Aarseth calls non-trivial way of traversing (3). This traversal requires a rationalization of whether fans would accept cameos. This consideration in gestalt perspective on a narrative text signifies the role of the ground and figure relationship (Reinhart). In the context of DLC-related cameos, the input by fans become the figure narrative of the overall narrative of the video games and the ground is the video game itself. In Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, for instance, Sakurai revealed through an official YouTube channel that Sora of Square Enix's *Kingdom Hearts* series is the most requested cameo character to appear in the game by Asian fans and the second most requested by North American fans. Sakurai dramatically granted the requests by adding Sora as the last cameo character to appear in the fighting video game. This decision points out that the narratives of the fans are significant for the whole narratives of the video games, and further points out that the narrative rationalization of cameos tends to be contextual and subjective with many considerations. Thus, it implies that cameos and their narrative rationalization are different in video games and films and their specific characteristics result in different engagements. While the interactions between audiences and cameos in films tend to be passive, they are active in video games.

To avoid or minimize narrative distortion or desynchronization between the cameos, the plot, and their relationship with the other characters, the findings indicate that

the selected texts employ what we call narrative rationalization. In the context of our study, this refers to rationalizing the narratives where the cameos appear by relying on plot modifications or what audiences generally agreed to. Narrative rationalization is intrinsically, extrinsically, and diatrinsically executed. The first primarily revolves around rationalizing the plot of the films and video games where cameos make an appearance while the second deals with erecting tributes for a person influential in the films or the video games, or inciting and commodifying nostalgia. The third revolves around how intrinsic and extrinsic rationalizations are employed in tandem.

### *Intrinsic Rationalization*

We would like to classify intrinsic rationalization into plot alternation and plot mechanization. The former refers to introducing and inserting a micronarrative into the macronarrative of films or video games. One of the most adapted concepts to narratively rationalize a plot alternation is the Japanese *isekai* narrative or drifting to another world, where the main protagonist is accidentally transported or teleported to a different world or realm. In the accidentally newly found world, the cameos encounter characters from different video games. In Bandai Namco's *Tales of* series, players are often given a chance to unlock an encounter with cameo characters from previous *Tales of* series, and the rationalization tends to look at the forces which cause them to slip into the world of the current *Tales of* series. In *Tales of Arise*, for example, two characters from the previous *Tales of Berseria* and *Tales of Zestiria*, namely Aizen and Edna, are accidentally trapped in the world of Dahna, the setting of *Tales of Arise*. The siblings are trapped due to a dimensional rift they experienced in their original world. Encountering them, the game players will engage in a battle and it is in winning this battle that the former will have a complete comprehension of the relation between the two siblings.

Meanwhile, plot mechanization deals with additional content or add-ons. In video games, DLCs might take a new additional plot that continues the already finished plot of the base video games. In these add-ons, cameos who do not appear in the main plot might take a presence. For instance, Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros Ultimate* employs methectic cameos in its fighter rosters, implying that characters from different video games and video game platforms are packed in a single Nintendo universe. Some of these characters have been taken into the roster in the DLC format. For example, the DLC characters were periodically introduced from 2018 to 2021 through Nintendo's and Super Smash Bros' YouTube channels. Through these channels, Sakurai introduced and explained each DLC character in the past three years. His explanation of the gameplay and the narrative backgrounds of the DLC characters signifies the presence of the micronarrative of the character

since the DLC characters are taken from the other video games. Sakurai, the creator of Smash Bros. series informs the game players about the narrative backgrounds of the characters that he imported from other game titles and why the characters are included into the roster.

### *Extrinsic Rationalization*

Extrinsic rationalizations tend to take place when cameos are presented as tribute to the films and video games, signification of nostalgia for the fans, or for commercial or social reasons. For film and video game makers and fans, a person's right to appear as a cameo is what defines tribute-based extrinsic rationalizations. For example, due to Stan Lee's influence on the superheroes genre, especially Marvel's superheroes, he deserves to have his narrative incorporated in all of the works in which he participates in the creation of iconic superheroes. The challenge film and video game makers face when rationalizing their cameo narratives from extrinsic elements is the need to rationalize them through intrinsic lens. This necessity implies that to reveal how extrinsic elements are employed as a narrative rationalization, makers have to ensure that they are narratively in line with the intrinsic elements. In the case of Stan Lee, intertextual consistency and alignment between his micronarrative and the macronarrative of the films, as seen from the examples of his appearance in the *Iron Man* trilogy, are the intrinsic lens the makers adopt.

Extrinsic rationalizations are also exercised through nostalgia. As seen from the example of Skullomania's skin applied to G, Capcom's *Street Fighter V*'s character, the narratives the two characters have are aligned, thus preserving their narratives' synchronicity of narratives. In the context of nostalgia commodification, this narrative synchronicity is significant in providing past experience recall of the narratives of the cameo used as the skin. Though gameplay desynchronization takes place, video game developers and publishers widely use cosmetic narrative cameos to further increase their profit.

Commercial or social reasons, moreover, may also inform extrinsic rationalization. Since particular products or services have supported the production of a film or a video game, they are rationalized to have the right to appear as a cameos in the works. As for social reasons, support for film and video game makers may be for specific causes or programs such as cancer awareness or global warming campaign. In the context of video games, displaying commercials or advertisements is a common practice. Generally called in-game advertising, the ads displayed might take the form of sponsorships or promotion of other video games from the same developer or publisher. The problem is whether or not the ads displayed could be considered cameo when they do not display any character. An example is the



Nissin's Noodles commercial in Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XV*. The products are placed in the games as in-game items, posters, food truck, and a side quest. We believe, however, that a cameo should take the form of a character to differentiate it from the game's Easter eggs.

### *Diatrinsic Rationalization*

We employed the word "diatrinic" derived from the Platonic concept of *diairesis*, which refers to the collection and division of truth. In *diairesis*, to achieve truth, as implied by Nijhof, one should reduce a concept into sub concepts in order to acquire the truth (23). In the context of cameos, the audiences should understand that the narrative of a cameo is part of a film's narrative. However, they should also understand that a cameo's narrative works not only intrinsically but also extrinsically. Thus, to comprehend the narrative of a cameo, the audiences should examine both its surrounding intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

The case of diatrinic rationalization is commonly found in cameos that appear in what Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer call multiplicities, such as sequels, prequels, spin-offs, and any other forms of intertextual narratives (2). The necessity to preserve narrative consistency requires a form of rationalization which considers the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the narratives. In the *Captain America* trilogy, for instance, the intertextual connector of the cameo roles played by Stan Lee is the man in the uniform archetype. In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Lee wears a military uniform that signifies his war veteran status in the war Captain America engaged in. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, he wears a museum security uniform which signifies his status as a man who preserves and guards the legacy of Captain America's history. And in *Captain America: Civil War*, he wears a FedEx uniform and acts as a delivery guy who asks Tony Stark, "Are you Tony Stank?" allusively pointing out his position as a supporter of Captain America who engages in a battle against Tony Stark, the Iron Man. That Stan Lee wears a FedEx uniform and that his micronarrative is built around the man in the uniform archetype indicate that a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic rationalizations is built across uniforms that allude to the signal corps life of Stan Lee and the military life of Captain America.

### **Cameos, Celebrity Culture, and Cultural Recognition**

A celebrity possesses dual values, namely, commercial and social-cultural (Nayar 27). To have commercial value points out that the celebritised figures are expected to generate income. To have social-cultural value, moreover, implies that celebrities have the power to influence society. Due to this power of influence, celebrities given a cameo role are expected to garner a huge viewership. Such expectation

shows that the cultural recognition of a cameo derives from the celebrity culture surrounding it.

Perspectives on intrusive narratives argue that cultural recognition of cameos departs from the values celebrities carry, which intrude the values of the films and video games. Thus, the values of the cameos and the values of the films and video games need to be negotiated to prevent the exposure of the value intrusion. Coe suggests that to avoid a sense of blatant or hostile intrusion, a consideration of the concept of the same world introduction where the same laws operate should be applied (16). In the context of cameo in Marvel's films, assigning Stan Lee as a cameo has fulfilled this concept of the same world introduction since he is identical and synonymous to Marvel Comics and its superheroes.

However, in the context of cameos in video games, this concept of same world introduction tends to be more complex since video games are ludically designed. Due to this ludic culture, wherein players actively engage and communicate through the controlled characters, the same world introduction concept would find itself in a paradox. The paradox is visible from the facts that the communication of the video game characters, which Purnomo et al. call prosthetic communication (4), requires interaction from the players because video game characters are not alive without the involvement of the players. In the same world introduction concept, this prosthetic communication might spark confusion since the worlds of the characters and the players are different. The concept of same world introduction in the context of video games might be revisited in the lens of figure and ground relationship. Through this gestalt relationship (Reinhart), video game characters become the figure, and players become the ground. Their reciprocal relationship generates immersion of the players in the video game worlds, and thus, we can assume that the players and the video game characters share the same world.

From gestalt perspectives, those who become celebrities tend to be ambiguous if the cameos are playable. Stan Lee in the *Amazing Spider-Man* video game, for example, is playable. He can do anything that Spider-Man can. Since video game characters are a gestalt entity along with their players, Stan Lee cannot move around without the involvement of the players. However, since the status of Stan Lee is a figure in gestalt perspectives, the celebrity status is culturally recognized through him. Further, this gestalt figure, as seen in the Spidey Stan Lee, evokes a unique presentation which requires further studies to address.

### **Cameos and Narratives: A Recap**

Cameos are structurally micronarratives for their film and video game macronarratives. Their status as a micronarratives signifies their roles in intertwining the film and

video game narratives where they make an appearance. Their roles range from cameos who connect the narratives of the films and video games intranarratively, internarratively, extranarratively, metanarratively, methetically, and cosmetically. By comprehending the roles of cameos as micronarratives, film and video game makers can consider how cameos should appear in their works as narrative fragments or remediations. Moreover, considering how celebrity culture influences the cameos will lead to an understanding of how the celebritisation of certain figures may determine the commercial and social values of the cameos as micronarratives. Each cameo role has a different form of fragmentation and remediation, implying that each cameo has its own distinctive feature that might generate a supertext. Video games, due to their configurative user's function (Aarseth 65), have more complex and diverse cameo roles, and thus the fragmentation and remediation might be bound to audiences or fans.

The engagement by audiences or fans of films and video games with the cameos will influence the narrative logic generated by cameos. To ensure the consistency of this logic, film and video game makers apply what we call narrative rationalization. To rationalize the appearance of cameos, film and video game makers apply the narrative rationalization intrinsically, extrinsically, and diatrinsically. The problems of narrative rationalization include the necessity of justifying the appearances of cameos, fragmentation and remediation (Venditti, Piredda, and Mattana), narrative intrusion (Coe), and the gestalt ground and figure relationship (Reinhart). Holding onto these rationalizing elements, film and video game makers could devise possibilities of fragmentation levels and consider how to remediate them, the severity levels of narrative intrusion, and what could be taken as ground and figure.

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