What if at the Month Python Flying Circus had preferred the use of the Tong take technique? Exploring alternative history as a research tool for Scriptwriting amal Television.

André Leite Coelho, and Sol Alonso Romera

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What if at the Monty Python Flying Circus had been preferred the use of the 'long take' technique? Exploring alternative history as a research tool for Scriptwriting and Television.



André Leite Coelho^{1, a}, and Sol Alonso Romera²

- ¹| Programa de Doutoramento en Creatividade e Innovación Social e Sostible, University of Vigo, Spain
- ²| Drawing Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Vigo, Spain
- ^a Author to whom any correspondence should be addressed: andre.coelho@mail.com

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DOI: 10.34626 / 2184-9978_2021_1_002 **Abstract.** This paper aims to explore the idea of narrative continuity at the *Monty Python Flying Circus* television series, while understanding what might have occurred in the series and audiovisual comedies had they used the long take technique to connect comedy sketches, thus imposing a non-fragmented narrative. This research first addresses the characterization of this iconic TV show and the long take audiovisual technique, as a means of transition throughout narratives, where several examples from cinema and television are considered from classics to contemporary works, alongside theoretical definitions. Secondly, different humourists inspired by the *Flying Circus* are presented, inspecting afterward the need for comedy to cut to a new beginning after its inevitable ending, considering the 'cut to' and the long take techniques. Next, this paper explores, through the use of alternative history as a research tool, the outcomes of the counterfactual use of the long take technique at a selected *Flying Circus* episode as a case study, finishing with perspectives towards the future of a speculative continuity in comedy.

Keywords: Alternative History; Monty Python Flying Circus; Humor; Long take technique; Sketch Transition; Fragmented Audiovisual Narrative; Continuity

1. Introduction

Graham Chapman, Terry Jones, Eric Idle, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, and Michael Palin together are globally and unanimously acclaimed to be the fathers of modern British comedy, by having founded the group of comedians *Monty Python*, authoring, before three worldwide successful feature films, the famous television series *Flying Circus*.

Its sketch format and mainly its original scriptwriting made this comedy troupe famous, setting the landmarks of what comedy is still to-day. Their legacy and influence on comedy and culture more generally remain profound [1].

Ever since global subsequent milestones as far as humor is concerned were set free to be aired by different television networks: from the United Kingdom, like *The Young Ones* or more recently *Little Britain*, from the United States of America, since *Cheers* to *Seinfeld*, or even Portugal, with the *Tal Canal* show from Herman José, aired by RTP 1 in the early eighties.

Besides these narratives' dark cold comedy style, another common characteristic is its idea of fragmented continuity, a final editing preference early defined by scriptwriters originating breaking transitions from one sketch to another through the use of the 'cut to' classic technique as a means to the ending.

On the *Monty Python Flying Circus* television series, the comedy narrative is generally taken into the most absurd logical point possible, to reach a sudden ending which forces spectators to inevitably feel the need to laugh as a sign of relief, thus accomplishing the show its initial comedy goals. As such, cutting the climax to another comedy beginning was the way to continue throughout the episode by fragmenting its narrative.

Despite this preference having proved to be of enormous success, with countless followers and vast audiences worldwide, the present work brings to discuss what may have been the consequences of using at the Flying Circus the long-take technique as the key transition in-between sketches, both aesthetically and narratively, thus provoking a linear uninterrupted humor narrative. To achieve so, the authors resource the concept of Alternative History as a tool to explore what consequences might have occurred considering a particular Flying Circus episode as a case study and also generally in television comedy, where some examples are shown. This investigation continues pointing out, as much as possible, perspectives regarding the development of humor non-fragmented narratives in the future.

Throughout the following second section is presented an overview of this television show and the 'long take' technique, as well as distinguished influences. In section three, the ending in humor and its inevitable new beginnings within a narrative are examined. Then materials and methods are presented. After in section five, a case study is presented applying the preference for the 'long take' technique, and being alongside with it presented other sequential transitions and their speculative impact in the history of comedy narratives. This paper finishes with possible suggestions and recommendations towards a future in comedy where the idea of continuity prevails.

2. Background

2.1. The Flying Circus

The first season of the *Monty Python Flying Circus*, containing thirteen half-hour programs, began airing on BBC television on October 5, 1969. The second and third seasons also contained thirteen programs of the same length as the first, whereas the fourth contained only six programs, bringing the total episodes to forty-five. The final program was aired on December 5, 1974 [2]. The entire series was conceived, written, and performed

by the authors stated above, and mainly directed by Ian MacNaughton, being animations, one of the distinctive characteristics of this show, and a later topic on this paper, credited to Terry Gilliam, the only one American of this troupe.

The Flying Circus underwent alterations during the four seasons, experimenting with different uses of comedy within their type of comedy, often identified as a stream of consciousness, a narrative method that attempts to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of a narrator or creator [3]. This surreal perspective is generally characterized by the normal inversion of linguistic categories, current distortion of body language, or twisting the general perception of stereotyped people, places, institutions, common knowledge, or events. The show challenged traditional borders of gender, race, authority, social class, and national and regional identity [2], deconstructing the establishment by establishing a new narrative order. According to most professionals that report narratives to change as they are not pre-determined [4], this process seemed rather be an ongoing writing process, as deconstruction itself doesn't consist of a set of theorems, axioms, tools, rules, techniques, or methods [5]. Television, which seemed to be their preferred comedy subject, far from other original themes as law, sexuality, politics, classic literature, psychiatry, language, philosophy, or world history, was innovatively used at the Flying Circus bringing to the show increasing popularity. Their original diverse defiance of television programming as news, interviews, talk, and children's shows or, sitcoms, challenged the television status quo as it was perceived at that time. Television was a medium that was established, particularly by BBC, a new British social order, which was under a broadly acknowledged moment of transition. According

to the historian Tom Nairn, that was the breakup of Britain, migrating from a society of consensus to one of increasing, if not threatening, diversity [6]. This specific cultural moment was intrinsically relevant for the success of the *Flying Circus*, breaking away from the early decades' social commodity.

According to Michael Palin, "there was no predecessor for what we were doing. We were being different," [7] admitting *Monty Python Flying Circus*' unorthodox comedy, its bizarre transitions from one sketch to another, and the absurd premises by merging silliness with intellectual concepts. As Brian Boyd states, the *Flying Circus* founded the idea of dropping punchlines at the end of sketches, developing a more stream of consciousness, absurdist, approach to TV comedy [8].

Therefore, comedy sketches were the play-ground of a new idea in comedy. The succession of sketches, priory tested by David Frost's, *At last, the 1948 show*, created by John Cleese and Graham Chapman, along with Marty Feldman and Tim Brooke-Taylor, and at *Do not adjust your tv set*, costarred by Eric Idle, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, and three additional scriptwriters, both compiled for the DVD collections shown of figure 1, appeared to be the kindergarten of future comedy schools [9]. Being transitions from one sketch to another its bell ring, which sounded different for the first time, by abandoning punch lines and conclusions, allowing a fragmented narrative set free during the entire episode.

Firmly opposed to going out on drastic finishings, the *Pythons* would either abruptly cut to another sketch or to a Terry Gilliam's original animation, freeing other future groups from the clean curtain-drop endings. 'The Restaurant Sketch', in which a kitchen staff is driven to suicide over a dirty fork, is one of the few sketches that end on a joke ("Good thing I didn't tell them about the dirty knife!") [10].



Figure 1 – One of the authors' personal DVD collections of 'At last, the 1948 show', created by John Cleese and Graham Chapman, along with Marty Feldman and Tim Brooke-Taylor, and 'Do not adjust your tv set', co-starred by Eric Idle, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, and three additional scriptwriters.

2.2. The Long Take Technique

The Long Take is the technique of taking a shot with a long duration that is not the same as the usual techniques [11], which both in practice and in theory seem to differ from the director's perspectives and purposes for each scene. Technically, a long take is any shot lasting longer than about 20 seconds, being the Hollywood average throughout the studio period about 12 seconds [12], while in practical terms it can be also understood as a medium to reconstruct spaces for the possibility of wonder [13].

Long takes exist to present a point of view within a narrative. In any story, principal char-

acters do one thing, then another, and the writer's recounting of that sequence creates the narrative. At its simplest level, a narrative is just a chronology of events [14]. Alongside this aesthetic and technical conditions of the long take, it has been also a matter of theoretical research, having evolved in a not always consensual manner. In the middle of the last century André Bazin, the magazine Cahiers du Cinéma co-founder, became interested in this problem by defining a sequence shot as the filming of a continuous action during a long period, in which the camera performs a sequential movement, without the occurrence of cuts and in just one take. The same author argued that this resource was closely related to the notion of cinematographic realism since it avoids the future of reality that occurs precisely in the editing phase [15].

On the other hand, Jean-Louis Cornoli affirmed that the sequence-plan, one of the synonyms of the long take, was decidedly more an aesthetic than a realistic option [16]. Another perspective to be taken into account is that of the theorist Jacques Aumont, for whom what characterizes the long shot is not only its duration but rather the fact that it is articulated to represent the equivalent of a sequence [17]. Therefore, it would be useful to distinguish it from the long shot where, according to the same author, no sequence of events is represented, such as fixed plans of above-average duration involving dialogue or simple locations of characters and scenarios. For this reason, Aumont himself warns that this distinction is difficult and that the very concept of the long take technique is often misunderstood with that of the long tracking shot.

Influenced by the notion of audiovisual realism transmitted through the long take promoted by Bazin, countless filmmakers made use of this option to give a real effect to the scenes, bringing the viewer closer to the narrative. So, it became consensual that cutting is the death of a scene, and consequently, that breaking reality transmits the notion of fiction to the audiovisual work. Currently, the long-take technique continues to be used in contemporary cinema and television, seemingly rather as a director's decision as opposed to an initial scriptwriter idea.

Historically, from classic cinema to more contemporary productions, in audiovisual artistic creation for cinema and television, the interest of numerous scriptwriters and directors in using the long take technique has been diverse as presented in table 1, that organizes relevant examples of the use of the long take

technique, with references regarding the reason why it was undertaken [18 – 27]. Examples are shown to establish either a technical purpose, a conceptual decision, or an aesthetical preference to change between the time of the film and the time of the narrative. Often this option has provoked lively aesthetic discussions and awarded its responsible in renowned international film and television festivals. But has also brought with it numerous logistical production concerns, once all action must be carefully worked out in advance. Long shots and staging in-depth help because they give greater possibilities of movement in the frame. Alternatively, moving the camera by panning or tracking allows greater freedom [12].

Table 1. Some long take examples used in cinema and television.

Directors	Work	Scriptwriters	Date	Country	Long-takes reason why / Ref.
Lumiére brothers'	La sortie de l'usine Lumiére à Lyon ^a	Auguste Lumiére, Louis Lumiére	1895	France	Cinématograph's technical characteristic [18]
Roberto Rossellini	Paisá ^b	Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Sergio Amidei, Rod E. Geiger	1946	Italy	Neo-realism aesthetic [19]
Alfred Hitchcock	Rope ^c	Arthur Laurents, Ben Hecht	1948	USA	Hide cuts [20]
Kenji Mizoguchi	The life of Oharu ^d	Keiji Mizoguchi, Yoshikata Yoda	1952	Japan	Intention to convey the reality [21]
Manoel de Oliveira	Palavra e Utopia ^e	Manoel de Oliveira	2000	Portugal	Director's particular intention about reflection [22]
Alexandr Sokurov	Russian Ark ^f	Aleksandr Sokurov, Anatoli Nikiforov	2002	Russia	Reality-effect form; Conceptual initial purpose [23]
Quentin Tarantino	Kill Bill: Volume 1 g	Quentin Tarantino	2004	USA	Aesthetic and style option [24]
Sebastian Schipper	Victoria ^h	Sebastian Schipper, Oliva Neergaard-Holm, Eike Frederik Schulz	2005	German	Offer spontaneity [25]

Directors	Work	Scriptwriters	Date	Country	Long-takes reason why / Ref.
Alejandro Iñarritu	Birdman ⁱ	Alejandro Iñarritu, Nicolás Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris, Armando Bo	2014	México	The illusion of no editing [26]
Miguel Sapochnik	Game of Thrones ^j	George R. Martin, David Benioff, D.B. Weiss	2016	UK	Keep the audience in the center of the action [27]

^a https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0525910/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

All transitions mentioned above, as well as other examples liable to be mentioned here, admitted several different ways of being idealized, written, and directed, to achieve the common goal of carrying the viewer from a closing scene to the following one. The selection of how to merge these specific moments into a non-fragmented sequential narrative could have been a consequence of an initial conceptual decision, a purpose, or encountered aiming to express a specific goal in the narrative or to reach a pre-determined aesthetic level.

Equally, but within the humor genre for television, the British collective *Monty Python* at the *Flying Circus* television series used sequential transitions as a way to interrelate different comedy sketches, thus tending to keep each episode's narrative fluid. But rather than defining first on the script and then capturing on camera these transitions, the decision relied on the innovative Terry Gilliam's animations. According to Marcia Landy, these were mainly based on fantastic, nonsensical, and imagined new worlds of catastrophes, cannibalism, or figures crushed by an oversized

foot often culminating in explosions, mythical creatures, or labyrinthine images as a way to reinforce the absurdity of the previous sketch, by selecting one image of it, as a character's head drawing or a photograph of an objected related, which once integrated into a short different narrative would culminate in, or cut to, a new different comedy narrative [2].

2.3. Influences Fast Forwarded - IFFW

Over decades, the *Flying Circus* influences appear to have been innumerable and global, tending to gather the totality of successful comedians' followers worldwide, from diverse humor spectrums.

According to John Oliver, this strange group of wildly talented, appropriately disrespectful, hugely imaginative, and massively inspirational idiots changed what comedy could be for their generation and for those that followed [28]. Matt Groening, the creator of the global hit *The Simpsons*, stated that he was influenced by Monty Python's high-velocity sense of the absurd and not stopping to explain him-

^b https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038823/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast

^chttps://www.imdb.com/title/tt0040746/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

^d https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0045112/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

ehttps://www.imdb.com/title/tt0200257/?ref_=nv_sr_srsg_0

fhttps://www.imdb.com/title/tt0318034/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

g https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266697/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4226388/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

i https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2562232/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4283088/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/

self [29]. For the actor Jim Carrey, Monty Python was the Super Justice League of Comedy [29]. Regarding Austin Powers' Mike Myers, if comedy had a periodic element table, Python would have more than one atom on it [29]. In parallel, for Tina Fey, the acclaimed comedian from Saturday Night Live and the creator of the 30 Rock television series, sketch endings are overrated. Their key was to do something as long as it was funny and then just stop and do something else [30]. As far as Sacha Baron Cohen, the Borat and Bruno's creator, is concerned he often attributes his filthy humor to Monty Python's fearless style of pushing the boundaries so much they narrowed his audience [31]. South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone are also firm Python fans, as well as Seth MacFarlane, the television show Family Guy's creator, which combination of provocative humor is influenced by

the same [29]. In regards to Jerry Seinfeld and his homonymous sitcom co-creator Larry David, *Monty Python* affected the series more than anything else, as they are the absolute essence of comedy [32].

Besides, a wide number of acknowledged comedy names worldwide could have also been cited here. From Stephen Colbert to Ricky Gervais, from Dave Chappelle to Steve Martin, Conan O'Brian, Herman José, or Fábio Porchat, the *Flying Circus* influence on their comedy careers have been determinant. In fact, according to the British television channel UKTV, this particular series has been granted first place in a poll of four thousand viewers as the most influential comedy series in British broadcasting history, among a shortlist of thirty sitcoms, sketch, panel, and satirical shows, as presented on table 2 [33].

Table 2. Ranking of the most influential British TV comedy series. Source: Authors, based on UKTV GOLD, 2007 [23].

ow revolutionized television comedy by
, ,
strands of animation h traditional techniques such as punchlines dly created a new language for comedy first wave of alternative comedians following decade.
and its memorable catchphrases
erization of different historical periods
ty and strong characters
reating a half-hour sitcom simply out of a n their living room and watching television
f f

^{*} No data available.

3. Humor needs an ending

Fiction has enabled humankind to imagine things and to do so collectively [34]. The general community of Homo Sapiens has a relevant connection to humor, a type of fiction that is evident in all languages and cultures. The ability to create and recognize humor has a biological basis, and its many positive effects on physical and mental well-being suggest that from an evolutionary standpoint, laughter can be understood as adaptive behavior [35].

Humor depends on an unusual point of view and, therefore, surprises about Life. It is almost a matter of looking at things with an inaugural look; it is looking at what is visible to everyone and yet seeing what no one else sees, or perhaps, more precisely, to see what almost everyone has already given up to see [36]. People recognize that idealism and pessimism are the extremes of experience since life is rarely all sunshine nor is it all doom [35]. It is both. So, the reality is relentlessly ironic, and this is why stories that end with irony tend to last longer through time and draw the greatest of love and respect from audiences [37]. As it appears to be the case of the Flying Circus, noted for its surreal, risqué humor and sketches without punch lines which still generate laughs around the world [38]. Their constant pursuit for the inevitable humor ending irreverently eschewed the convention of the fully formed and coherent script, the situation comedy's DNA. A type of humor that tends to be realistic and, as it depends on the characters, it is generally verbal, with a minimum of pratfalls. Here, the editing centers on timing to accentuate more than the performance, the ending of the sketch, in opposition to other types of comedy sequences as farce, such as Blake Edwards's The Pink Panther, or parody, such as Sergio Leone's The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly [39]. The end reliefs the laughter, the only comedy's goal, a necessary break for a new start.

3.1. From animation to 'cut to'

One of this iconic series biggest visual identities was animation. Its originality, fluidity, and absurdity together combined were a distinctive characteristic of the show, as a means of transition between one sketch to another: after the sudden ending of a sketch, an immediate cut to animation was followed, which end was again performed by a new cut to the beginning of a new sketch. Consequently, interrupting the linear narrative.

Terry Gilliam preferred cut-out animation, using old photographs and illustrations to create short surreal and hilarious sketches, which involved pushing bits of paper in front of a camera, a process that allowed for more spontaneity than traditional animation along with being comparatively cheaper and easier to do [40]. As examples of some of the animated intermissions separating sketches can be considered a pram devouring old ladies, a massive cat menacing London, or even a giant foot smashing whatever was underneath it.

As an alternative to inserting animations in-between cuts, it was most common at the *Flying Circus* cutting suddenly and directly to a new sketch. Numerous examples can be cited, as it seems to be the case of the legendary 'Dead Parrot' sketch ending by a sudden cut to an announcer eating a yogurt, the world acclaimed 'Flying Sheep' sketch cuts to an announcer saying the famous line "And now for something completely different", which immediately cut to 'The French lecture on sheep-aircraft' sketch or the saga 'Everest climbed by hairdressers' cutting directly to 'The fire brigade' sketch [41].

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Material

To this paper were analyzed *Monty Python's Flying Circus* original scripts and watched all four seasons of the show, presently broadcast by Net-

flix, as shown on figure 2, proofing this television show's particular relevance in the world today. Also, this experience was crossed with the reading of academic outputs on this matter, also reports and interviews by this troupe and their comedian followers as well.

Watching recent comedy television shows and the reading of its available scripts was also taken into consideration to establish a critical point of view.



Figure 2 – One of the authors being caught during one of his Monty Python Flying Circus viewing sessions.

4.2. Methods

Also determinant for the development of this paper was the early consideration of an alternative fact in the history of the *Monty Python Flying Circus* – the prevalence of the long take technique throughout the entire show, especially when applied to sketches' transitions. Given this particular premise, authors speculate on how the course of history might have been altered, considering what possible and different outcomes might have resulted not only in the show itself but also future ahead.

Therefore, the conceptual idea of alternative history is a prevalent tool for results to be reached.

Considering alternative history as a counterfactual approach, a ubiquitous phenomenon in everyday life, in literature, in film, in philosophy, and social sciences [42], this methodology offers a broad updated approach that plays a decisive role in minding the above shifting initial historical fact.

5. And now for something completely different: Results

Monty Python all agreed that they wanted to overturn the conventions of traditional sketch comedy – sketches with a beginning, middle, and end, punchlines, blackouts, and topical gags. Their approach to comedy was unpredictable, aggressive, and irreverent resulting in each episode as a thirty-minute stream of consciousness [43]. Therefore, fragmented narratives prevailed throughout the Flying Circus, by juxtaposing one sketch after another through the use of the 'cut to' audiovisual technique.

While each sketch is filmed and edited with classic camera angle shots in line with the scripts, using the 'cut to' technique to change according to dialogues or characters, transitions, notwithstanding, generally fragment the overall narrative.

5.1. 'Cutting to' the idea of continuity

Notwithstanding the preference of fragmenting their humor narratives, the very idea of continuity within the Flying Circus' narratives was present in some cases, as in the world acclaimed second season's 'Spanish Inquisition' sketch, which fluid narrative admitted transitions internally, although edited with the 'cut to' technique.

At the 'Cheese Shop' sketch, despite cutting directly to the 'Philip Jenkinson on Cheese westerns' sketch, the idea of transition was planted before, once its original script indicates Mousebender – the cheese client – puts a cowboy hat in his head;

cut to a stock shot of a man on a horse riding to the sunset [41]. Therefore, the sketch ending is proposedly prepared to link with the following via the Pythonesque [44] decision of having a normal cheese client putting a cowboy hat in his head.

In parallel, at the Flying Circus' fourth season the non-fragmented narrative idea can be found at 'The most awful family in Britain', which before cutting to the 'Icelandic Honey Week' sketch it evolves throughout different and successive cuts reinforcing a linear narrative. Other examples of continuity can be found, as the juxtaposition of 'The man who only speaks the ends of words, with 'The man who only speaks the beginning of the words' and 'The man who only speaks the middle of the words' sketches, or at the end of the 'Barber Shop' sketch when the life disappointed barber character ends by saying that "all I want is to be a lumberjack.", a dream that comes true by cutting to the legendary 'Lumberjack Song' sketch [41].

The 'Argument Clinic' sketch can also be cited as an example of a continuous narrative, despite being captured by a succession of cuts. Here, as the narrative stream occurs in different locations, intending to follow the protagonist's journey going in and coming out from different doctors' offices, cuts were edited every time the patient performed

each sequential scene, in a doctor office and through the corridor that led to the next one, in opposition to capturing him on camera in a one-shot only. Should have the long-take technique been preferred, this decision would reinforce realism and the aesthetic of the scene, a decision that could either have been technical and artistic.

5.2. Episode Twenty-Eight – a case study

As a way to perform throughout an entire episode the idea of continuity, the twenty-eighth episode, the second of the third series of the Flying Circus, initially aired on July 26th, 1972 can be taken into consideration as a case study of this alternative historical subject.

The choice of this particular episode for analysis as a case study of an alternative long take full-length episode, with non-fragmented transitions in-between sketches, thus avoiding the usual sudden use of the 'cut to' technique to implement a fluid and continuous narrative, relays on this particular episode's typical sketch structure and the fact of already admitting some sequential transitions, as it is possible to understand at table 3 below.

On this 30 minutes long stream of conscious-

Table 3. Original and alternative transitions of the Monty Python Flying Circus, Episode 28. [41]

Transition	Previous sketch	Following Sketch	Original Transition	Long Take
1	Emigration from Surbiton to Hounslow (5 min)	Prologue	Cut to nude organist	Caption 'THE END' with the shot of the nude organist in them, filling the screen
2	Prologue (40 sec)	Schoolboys' Life Assurance Company	Cut to a headmaster's study	Pull back from de animated giant foot revealing it to be a sculpture on top of the headmaster's table

Transition	Previous sketch	Following Sketch	Original Transition	Long Take
3	Schoolboys' Life Assurance Company (1.40 min)	How to rid the world of all known diseases	Cut to a sign saying 'How to do it'	Pan right into the sign placed on the wall of the headmaster's office, then zoomed out to a 'Blue Peter' type set
4	How to rid the world of all known diseases (1.20 min)	Mrs. Niggerbaiter explodes	Pull out camera revealing the 'Blue Peter' set is next to the living room set	Pull out camera revealing the 'Blue Peter' set is next to the living room set
5	Mrs. Niggerbaiter Explodes (1.30 min)	Vicar / Salesman	After the bell rings, cut to the house door that opens revealing a vicar with a suitcase. Cut to a doctor in a posh consulting room	After the bell rings, pan to the house door that opens revealing a vicar with a suitcase. Pan right into the doctor posh consulting room set built juxtaposed
6	Vicar / Salesman (1 min)	Animation 1	Cut to the skeleton diagram on the wall, that starts running in animation	Zoom in to the skeleton diagram on the wall, that starts running in animation
	Animation 1 (30 sec)	Farming Club	Cut to a TV Program Presenter	Zoom out from the white space where the running animated skeleton fell into after overpassing the edge of the cartoons' sprocket lines, revealing it to be the white wall behind the TV Program Presenter.
7	Farming Club (3 min)	Life of Tchaikovski	Mixed contents, a common narrative	(The idea of continuity is already present in a fully blended manner, narratively and technically.)
8	Life of Tchaikovski (4.40 min)	Trim-Jeans Theatre	Insert of a crowd roaring at Royal Albert Hall, where a flag goes up revealing three theatre actors	Pull back revealing the end of the previous scene stage to reveal the entrance of the three theatre actors forcing Tchaikovski to leave.
9	Trim-Jeans Theatre (3.20 min)	Animation 2	Cut to an animated closing curtain	Long shot of the same stage closing curtain, dissolved by its animation
	Animation 2 (35 sec)	Fish-Slapping Dance	Cut to a quayside, after an the animated sign saying "And now, the Fish Slapping Dance"	Close to a fish in that sign. Zoom out of the fish already in the hand of the guard dancing by a quayside.

Transition	Previous sketch	Following Sketch	Original Transition	Long Take
10	Fish-Slapping Dance (17 sec)	Animation 3	Cut to the animation of the actor underwater, after falling from the quayside	(The idea of continuity is already present in a fully blended manner, narratively and technically.)
	Animation 3 (50 sec)	World War One	Cut to the ship's bridge	Close up of part of a ship. Pan to the ship's bridge.
11	World War One (1.10 min)	The BBC is short of money	Insert caption 'A few days later'. Cut to a police chief's office.	Fast-forwarding stock images of a ship's sinking and people running, while inserting and then dissolving the caption 'A few days later'
12	The BBC is short of money (2 min)	Puss in Boots	Enter a pantomime of Pussy in Boots	(The idea of continuity is already present in a fully blended manner, narratively and technically.)
	Puss in Boots (7 min)	Final Credits	Long shot	
13	Final Credits	Extra sketch	Cut to	Long shot continuing to the studio with Ringo Starr
	Extra sketch	final	Mixed images of Ringo Starr and 'Its Man' in a studio with an ending title	(The idea of continuity is already present in a fully blended manner, narratively and technically.)

ness *Monty Python Flying Circus* episode, untitled at Netflix as *The Popular Ford of Mr. and Mrs. Nor-risl*, amongst its thirteen different sketches, where animations despite playing a central role are not considered by them as such [41], the idea of continuity can be found at some parts in opposition to others where the narrative is fragmented.

That fluid narrative attaching its distinct micro-narratives is expressed in different manners, both at the scriptwriting and at the direction levels. At the third transition, despite the existence of a cut, the first dialogue line of the following sketch referring to gynecology is a mention of the context of the previous one. In the next transition, it is used the long take technique, by panning right the camera imposing

continuity in the narrative itself.

At the fifth transition, despite the use of the 'cut to' technique, the last and the first lines of both sketches relate to each other. After the explosion of Mrs. Niggerbaiter, the punch line asks: "You wouldn't think this is medically possible, would you?". The answer is found at the Vicar / Salesman sketch's first line: "This is where Mrs. Shazam is so wrong. Exploding is a perfectly normal medical phenomenon." [41], So, the idea of continuity is present not by technical but by narrative terms although visually fragmented. The high stream of consciousness here proposes a fluid conceptual narrative, imposing the notion of the existence of a sketch within a sketch, where its alternative sequences could have been shot accordingly.

The authors of the *Flying Circus* were conscious about the need, or the absence of it, to link into each other their different sketches' narratives. This idea can be found, although formulated in an ironic style, at the end of transition number six, where a voice clearly states: "Oh my gosh, he's fallen off the edge of the cartoon.", continuing saying: "Well, so much for that link." [41].

The Farming Club and the Life of Tschaikowsky sketches appear to live as one, as both are built in the same narrative, thus expressing a converging and surreal continuity, under superb scriptwriting craftsmanship. Camera shots and movements are edited according to the script, admitting a wide variety of cuts of different types of shots and all sorts of editing techniques within a continuous narrative flow.

Despite all the cuts editing within the Trim-Jeans Theatre sketch, its entrance and finishing could have alternatively been shot preferring the long take technique, as panning right or left, or zooming in or out, to reinforce the linear narrative.

The Fish-Slapping Dance seventeen seconds long sketch became to be iconic and one of Monty Python's trademarks, not only because of its surreal scriptwriting but also because it is embraced by two distinct animations. Despite both relate to it via cuts, the use of mutual referential dialogues results as a whole fluid consequential narrative pushing it along, an example relevant to be mentioned for its originality still relevant today. The strength of this segment is dramatically high, in a way that it is reused again to introduce the following sketch, World War One, maintain the same superior level of creativity, intelligence, and pure sense of surreal scriptwriting.

The twelfth transition plays a decisive role in this episode's narrative, as it prepares the ending nearly ten minutes before it occurs, a notion only perceived at the very end of the show, with an utter appreciation of having passed thirty minutes experiencing a genius audiovisual comedy masterpiece. These two comedy sketches combined, existing at the same time, are crafted altogether under a converging stream of consciousness where it is always fluid and crossed the existence of each one of them. To take full advantage of the idea of continuity, the endless long shot unfolding the scene until a cut to a corridor could alternatively be extended, revealing not only the final credits written on sheets of paper being dropped in from the front door mail slot to the floor but also continuing into the studio where the acclaimed Ringo Starr appears with minor significance, a surprising irony reserved for the ending, at a typical Pythonesque final. The first sketch's concept is developed through the second one, being at the end not only the reason for the end of the sketch but also of the episode itself. It is a mixed narrative closed by a long shot of the final credits, after cut to an extra sketch which could be continued by the previous long take.

From agricultural to fashion programs, from references to Renaissance or to Toulouse-Lautrec, from the satire of medicine to social caricatures of that time, the author believes this episode to be a factual sample of the valuable cultural contents and structure of the overall *Flying Circus* series.

Also, this Case Study presents alternative non-fragmented transitions demonstrating how the entire episode's narrative gains a higher sense of continuity. Providing, consequently, as far as continuity is concerned, on top of a clear understanding of each sketches' ending, also a general fluid entertainment experience, with higher realism in some cases and deeper aesthetical cinematography in others.

5.3. Sequential transitions in comedy: cross-referencing with other comedies

After *Monty Python Flying Circus* uncountable comedians have been presenting diverse approaches of different perspectives of humor. In regards to television comedy, the 30-minute format sketches and sitcoms have been particularly popular. From *Little Britain* to *Seinfeld*, from *Tal Canal* to *Cheers*, or even from *Contemporâneos* to *Fawlty Towers*, at the sketch format fragmented narratives have been preferred.

Nonetheless, the idea of continuity has been present seldomly, to maintain a linear humor message linking opposite, different, or even nonrelated sketches' ideas. Reflecting on the legendary Kramer's entrances, at the Seinfeld series, this crucial humoristic narrative incident is always captured by a Jerry Seinfeld's living room wide-angle shot, performing a transition in the narrative itself, always taking it where the audience didn't see it coming. As such, every time the character Kramer interrupted the previous narrative by surreally entering the house, a new beginning started. At the Portuguese Tal Canal show, this idea can also be found, although not abundantly, as exampled by the zoom out from the famous 'Felisberto Lalande' sketch into the television set at the 'Carlos Filinto Coelho' pivot news sketch. At Ricky Gervais' The Office sitcom, continuity is only present when following David Brent, the protagonist, around the office, from his workplace to the open space or from the entrance to the meeting room, by using steadycam camera movements to fragment a particular scene via leaving a specific physical area to start, in transition, a new one at its very same destination.

As far as *Porta dos Fundos* is concerned, the acclaimed Brazilian comedian collective, the idea of continuity is also present but expressed in a rather different way. Here, the internet as a medium is the ground base of continuity, by commonly airing short-fragmented humor sketches, as it seems to be how comedy is mostly consumed here, that end with cutting to visual separators, immediately followed by the continuation of the same sketch, thus finally reaching to its end. Alongside this,

during this continuity final part, small-scaled screens of following episodes pop up inside the very same sketch screen, promoting a different quest for immediate continuity, not in narrative terms but rather as consumer experience.

5.4. From Examples to Hypothesis: Discussing an Alternate History of Comedy Narrative

From the analysis of the case study and the above-mentioned material, it seems reasonable to believe that the use of the long take technique at the Flying Circus series would have reinforced their characteristic stream of consciousness scriptwriting methodology. Should this preference had been implemented, their acknowledged generations of followers' comedians' work would have been deepened and carry the expression of continuity at another level, thus democratizing at a broader scale the sense of continuousness in humor. As comedy stands for timing, always urging for its ending, the 'cut to' technique seems to be the elected one to keep the development of fragmented narrative's plots, not only because it is easier and economic, but also due to the technical limitations that the use of the long take technique demands. Which, at the time the Flying Circus was conceived and produced, were of higher difficulty.

Notwithstanding, the use of the long take technique as the means to convey a linear comedy's narrative is not preferred, since this genre is rather focused on each humor event's narrative than on the full-length episode.

Finally, the long take technique, from Martin Scorsese's classic *Goodfellas* to Alfonso Cuarón's recent *Gravity*, seems to be more than an editing technique, but rather an artistic decision that amplifies the initial audiovisual concept, enabling the audience to engage through long exposure [45]. The notion of realism, time, space, and photogra-

phy are some of the benefits brought by the longtake technique that plays a central role in cinema and television genres in opposition to comedy, mainly centered on the message to be conveyed.

In summary, despite real continuity having had been rarely present during the Flying Circus' four seasons, it was technically implemented not by using the long take technique due, most probably, to the fact that it was not as evolved as their scriptwriting ideas were at that time, but mostly by preferring <cutting to> each fragmented short humor narrative to the following one. Thus, achieving possible linearity, whenever it was intended. Should have this technique been sufficiently evolved, it would have been considered by the authors and, consequently, this iconic comedy show would have been alternatively written under the idea of continuity, with alternative artistical, cinematographic, and scriptwriting outcomes that would certainly influence the course of history in comedy.

Their subsequent comedy followers did not develop to its extent the possibility to link comedy events into each other. Despite stand-up comedians crafting their text as a whole, tending to link tightly each monologue via plots transitioning, at television shows, both comedy sitcoms or thirty-minute sketch programs, the use of the 'cut to' technique still seems to be the global continuity preference. Culturally, the population seems to relate to comedy as snacks, rather than meals. The experience of consuming humor tends to be short and to finish at a sudden point. In case the alternative use of the long take on the Flying Circus had occurred, the idea of non-fragmented comedy narratives might have had a different presence in the world today, replacing the present short comedy contents' formats on the internet, television, and radio to another sort of format, different in length and aesthetical visuals, demanding higher budgets for a more ambitious logistic planning

with actors and staff. As a consequence, the general public's expression that 'life is a drama ' might have been already not so popular and prevalent in western society's culture, being replaced with the sense that 'life is laugh ', which would offer a positive global conception about life.

Continuity, however, is possible to be found in diverse ways, remaining the long take, despite all its actual possibilities, a technique unexploited by comedy, a genre that seems not to be as fertile on this kind of artistic decision as drama generally is. Therefore, the idea of continuity should be interesting to be further explored in future papers, with deeper and diverse analysis on its impact on recent audiovisual contents.

6. Future Perspectives and Recommendations without spam

Considering the long take technique has been preferred by dramatic and action movie genres, it would be interesting to follow how could it be beneficial in comedy. Exploring the idea of continuity throughout full-length humor narratives, from its initial concept to its further development, appears to be a valid recommendation given its unprecedented characteristics.

In addition to the novel use of the long take technique in comedy, it would also be relevant to understand how its different ways would bridge distinct comedy scenes, and interesting to follow consequent direct implementations as far as acting is concerned and logistic wise.

The continuity idea's broadness is potentially high, and when is preferred the use of the long-take technique, with all its diversities, as a way to add more realism and emotion, it seems this decision to go beyond directors and scriptwriter's preferences as a mere alternative transition means, in comparison to the 'cut to' or 'dissolve'

techniques. This option has the potential to be the very beginning of the whole process, a fundamental conceptual initial decision and an artistic instrument serving the narrative itself.

Considering the lack of updated academic knowledge on this subject and its potential theoretical and practical appliance contributions, the authors believe it to be highly relevant to further investigate and understand the advantages of continuity in comedy, also to evaluate the long take technique usage in television comedy and, specifically, the audiovisual narratives sequential transitions, as well as their intimate correlation with the original concept and consequent scripts as it appears to be unprecedented.

Should have Monty Python have fully expressed in a more expanded manner their already existing idea of continuity by using the long take technique, comedy, as a true part of Life, could achieve a higher visual artistic value in visual terms and cinematographic conceptualization of realism.

7. Nobody expects this final admission: Conclusion

Humor is a subject for extended searching discussion and study as it is richly endowed with the learning capacity, and for resolution. It summons our attention. As it is a unique factor of human nature with so much to contribute to the positive zones of human life, it reveals and encompasses a multiplicity of points of view.

Monty Python Flying Circus is still globally considered as of higher reference not only in comedy but also in culture today, influencing authors and performers throughout the entertainment business, from stand-up to television shows. Their original form of scriptwriting was enough to defy the British social establishment at that time, prevailing fragmented narratives edited with the 'cut to' technique to attach different humor

sketches under a logical sequence. However admitting an initial form of the idea of continuity, they did fragment their narratives as they were not screened using long take sequences, which is present, more than fifty years later, still very much successful in other audiovisual genres.

For comedy to benefit from this cinematography technique's advantages, humor scriptwriting should be encouraged to explore the idea of full-length continuity. Because humor is part of Life which is a succession of events worthy to be captured at its whole realism and beauty.

Alternative History is a transversal relevant tool to address different perspectives in Life, as it helps to consider and project facts in a different order. One of the fields where this concept is of great value is cinema and television content creation, traditionally enriched by diverse forms to make narratives evolve. In this case, minding alternative history kickstarted a positive contribution to one of the most successful comedy television shows in the history of television and humor.

8. Two Knights at the Round Table Insight

The very essence of this paper was initially presented along with the research 'Using alternative stories to promote organizational change> brough by Prof. Cynthia Montaudon from UPAEP University at round table #3 of the 2nd International Meeting of 'What if?...' World History / 1st Hypothesis Cultural Week promoted by Casa Comum, of the Rectorate of the University of Porto, Portugal. Despite both themes' initial differences, backgrounded by different fields of knowledge, this interaction was most influential to this final paper as from it arose plural, distinct, and important common points:

 First, how alternative ideas are important in the world today. Both in real everyday life itself, whether from public or private organizations, from the entertainment business to political sectors or, more specifically, from television to cinema, the presence and the development of alternative stories is crucial to overpass social issues as well as to open different new story-telling paths in designing narrative ideas.

- Second, the constant need for change, as the only immutable aspect of Life. For one to be better prepared for the next inevitable change, alternative stories play a decisive role, very much like in television fiction that constantly needs plot presence, forwarding the present into a new future.
- Third, the importance of implementing the smoothest of changes. To avoid the impact of changing, a circumstance that humans always tend to avoid, and rather implement the passage for the alternative plan in the most beneficial manner, key real-life transition actions were presented in parallel with the alternative idea of using the long take technique in opposition to the cut to.
- Four, the positive idea that Life as a whole must not stop. Accepting as a common ground for both themes that Life itself is a no stopping action, once considering, therefore, it to be a one-take only real-life shot, then events transitions should be fluid and dynamic, bonding the past with the new unexpected future at a present time where rhetorical actors, screenwriters, and directors play a decisive role for a successful implemented alternative story.

Moreover, the idea of implementing a non-fragmented narrative in life as in television narratives appeared to be essential on both sides. If learning from the past and developing different successful possible implementations is crucial, the preference of using the long take technique to merge related fiction events is also necessary. And this will affect future procedures.

As a result, it seems relevant to recall the final words of this round table chair, Prof. Êmili Rosseti: there was so much positivity involved: the idea of building the future together, the need for genuine, and the desire to look at the past to think how it has built the present, leading us to think of the future in cinema and in life itself.

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