

“...and Starring Jerry Bruckheimer as  
Picasso”: The Cubist Revival in Twenty-first  
Century Television Programming

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# The Cubist Aesthetic



Picasso (1910) *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*



Picasso (1912) *Violin and Grapes*

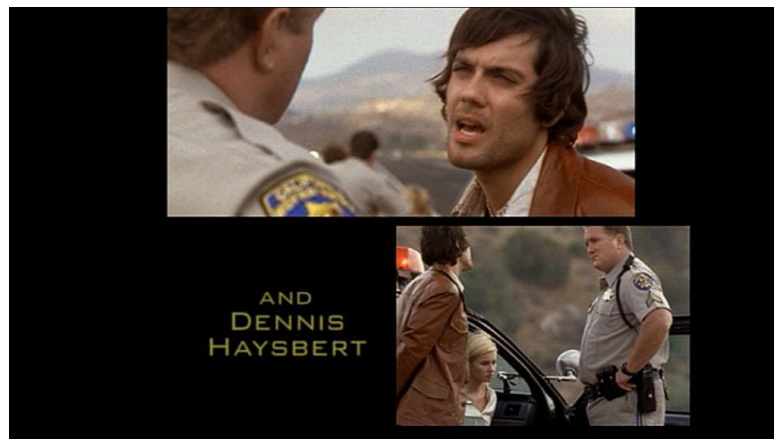
# The Cubist Television Aesthetic



24 (Season 1)



24 (Season 2)



24 (Season 2)

# The Cubist Television Aesthetic



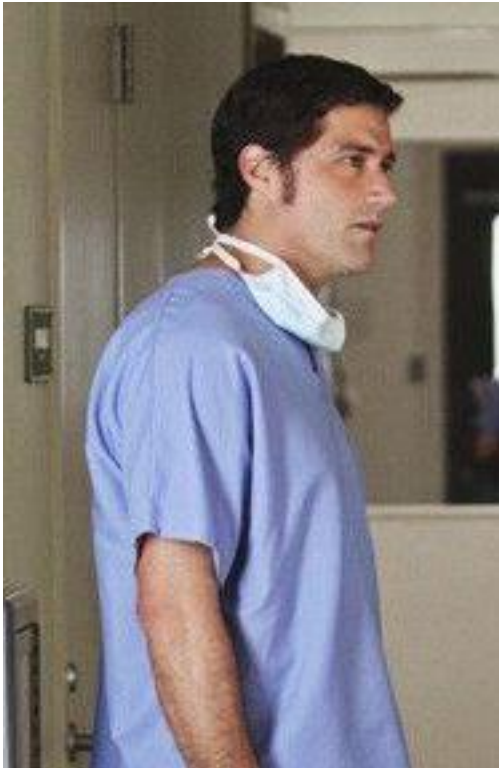
*CSI: Miami*  
(Season 6)





# The Cubist Television Aesthetic

*Lost*  
(Various Seasons)



# The Cubist Television Aesthetic



*How I Met Your Mother (Season 7)*



*Without a Trace (Season 1)*

# The Cubist Television Aesthetic

*Cubist Television:* A narrative technique that decenters audience perceptions and presents the story from multiple perspectives.

*Visual Cubism:* Multiple perspectives are conveyed through split-screen or other visual effects (e.g., trajectory shots or flashbacks).

*Narrative Cubism:* Multiple perspectives are conveyed through intersecting storylines, often geographically or temporally dispersed. Intersection is integral to the plot.

# The Popularity of Cubist Television

- Analysis of top-30 ranked hour-long dramas from 1996/97—2006/07 broadcast seasons



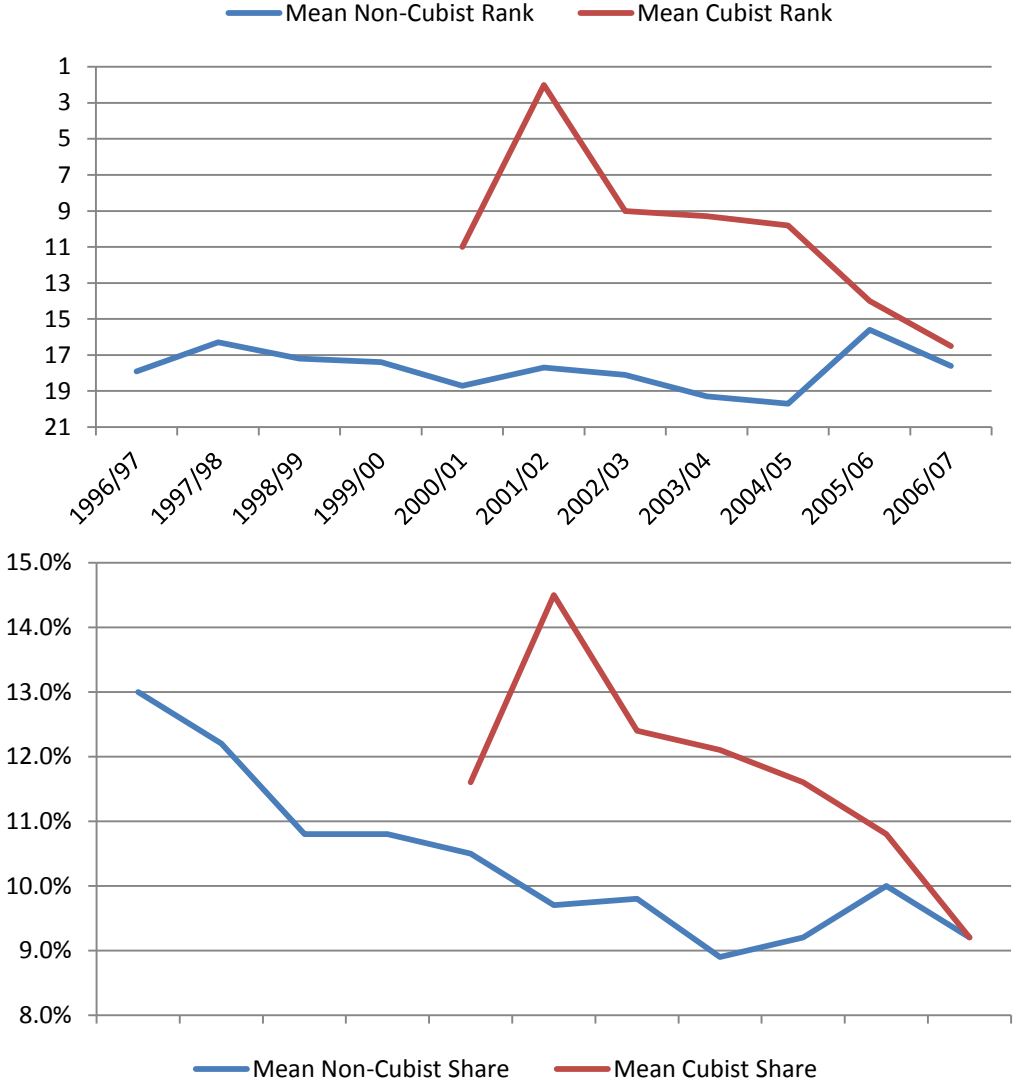
# The Popularity of Cubist Television

- Analysis of top-30 ranked hour-long dramas from 1996/97—2006/07 broadcast seasons
- 40 top-30 dramas over 11 seasons
- 8 top-30 Cubist dramas:  
*24, CSI:, CSI: NY, CSI: Miami, Cold Case, Heroes, Lost, Without a Trace*

# The Popularity of Cubist Television

Season	Cubist Dramas	Top-30 Dramas	Proportion of Top-30 Dramas
2006/07	8	17	0.47
2005/06	7	16	0.44
2004/05	6	19	0.32
2003/04	4	13	0.31
2002/03	3	12	0.25
2001/02	1	14	0.07
2000/01	1	12	0.08
1999/00	0	11	0.00
1998/99	0	10	0.00
1997/98	0	7	0.00
1996/97	0	7	0.00

# The Popularity of Cubist Television



# The Popularity of Cubist Television

- Media scholars emphasize slick production values, viewer distrust of the neoliberal state, and happy endings. These explanations are too particular and don't address the Cubist aesthetic itself.
- Sociological theories of cultural forms ask “Why did Cubist television arise when it did?”
  - Exogenous/political-economic models
  - Ecological/fashion models

# The Popularity of Cubist Television

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- Diffusion pattern of fractured views suggests possible third model: the cultural innovation.

# Cultural Innovation Hypothesis

- Based on Coleman, Katz, and Menzel (1957)
- Hypothesis: Cultural innovations spread throughout ecosystem but do not become passé as with fashion, as long as they continue to meet a need.
- Question then becomes: If the Cubist television aesthetic is a cultural innovation, what function does it serve?