

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

Claude Rubinson
University of Houston—Downtown
Houston, Texas

76th Annual Meeting of the
Southern Sociological Society
Atlanta, Georgia
April 27, 2013

The Cubist Aesthetic



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



Picasso (1912) *Violin and Grapes*

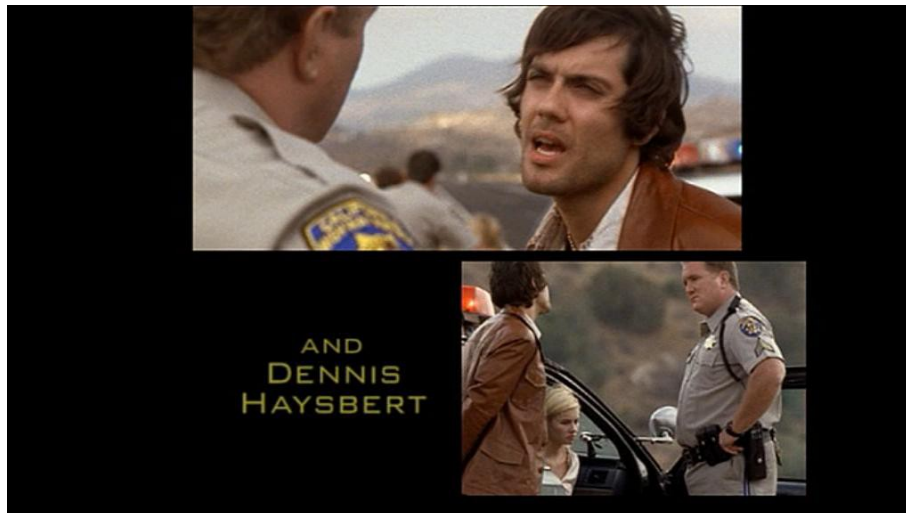
The Cubist Television Aesthetic



24, Season 1 (2002)



24, Season 2 (2002)



24, Season 2 (2002)

The Cubist Television Aesthetic



CSI: Miami,
Season 6
(2008)



The Cubist Television Aesthetic



Cold Case, Season 3 (2006)

The Cubist Television Aesthetic

Lost,
Various Seasons
(2004–07)



The Cubist Television Aesthetic



*How I Met Your Mother,
Season 7 (2011)*



*Without a Trace,
Season 1 (2002)*

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)

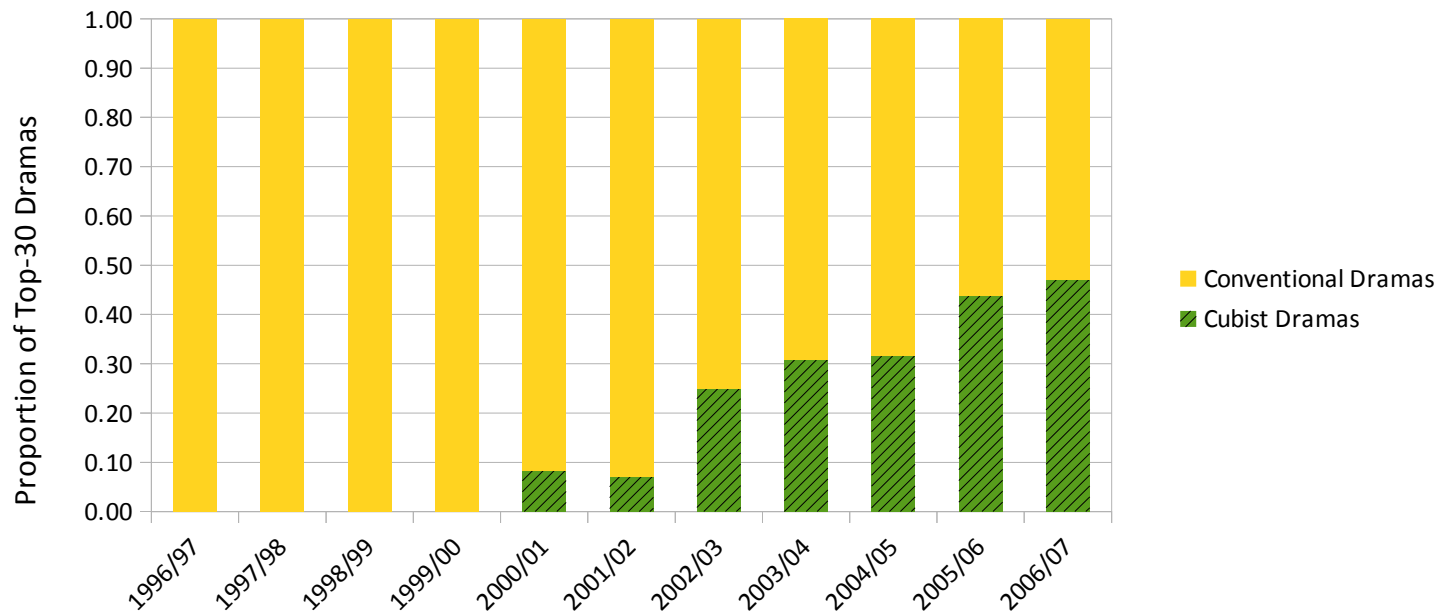
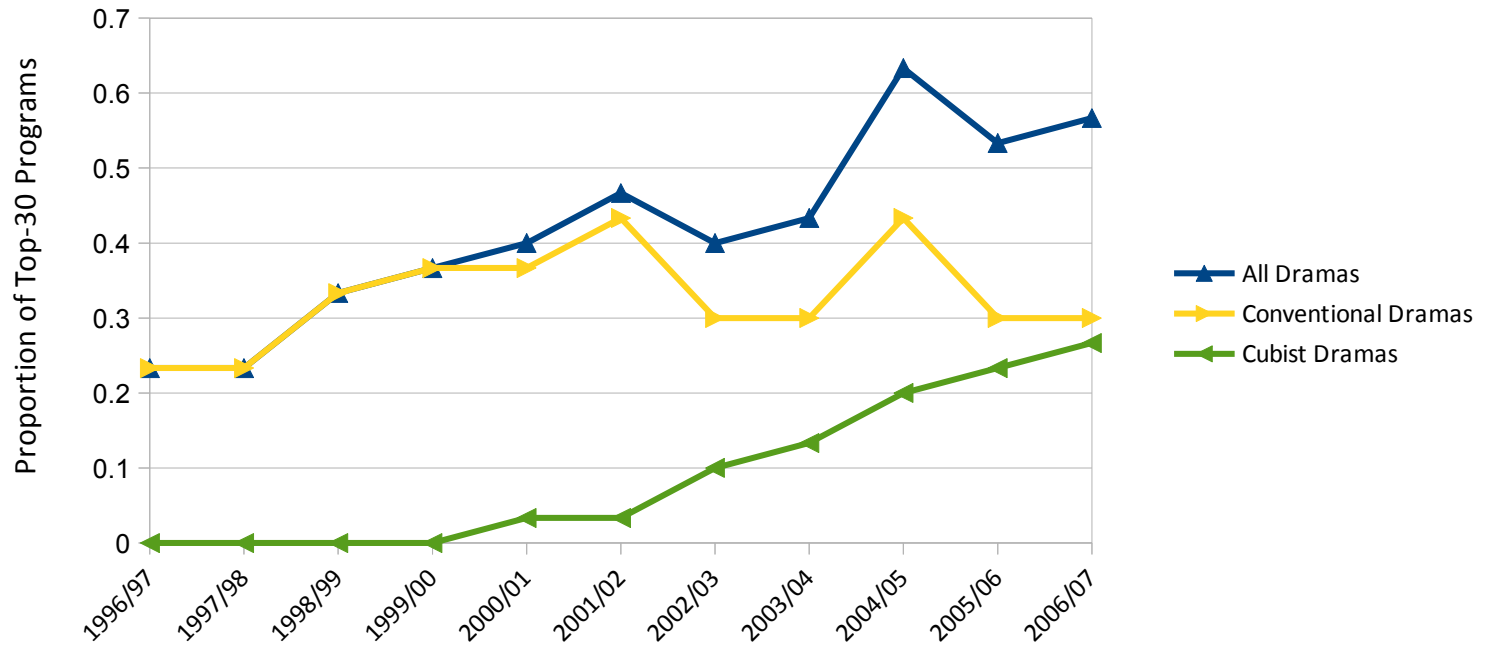
Narrative Cubism: Multiple perspectives are conveyed through intersection storylines, often geographically or temporally dispersed. Intersection is integral to the plot.

The Popularity of Cubist Television

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

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 Diffusion of Cubist Visuals

- Content analysis of television dramas for Cubist visual compositions (fractured backgrounds, fractured subjects, multiplied views, and circling shots)

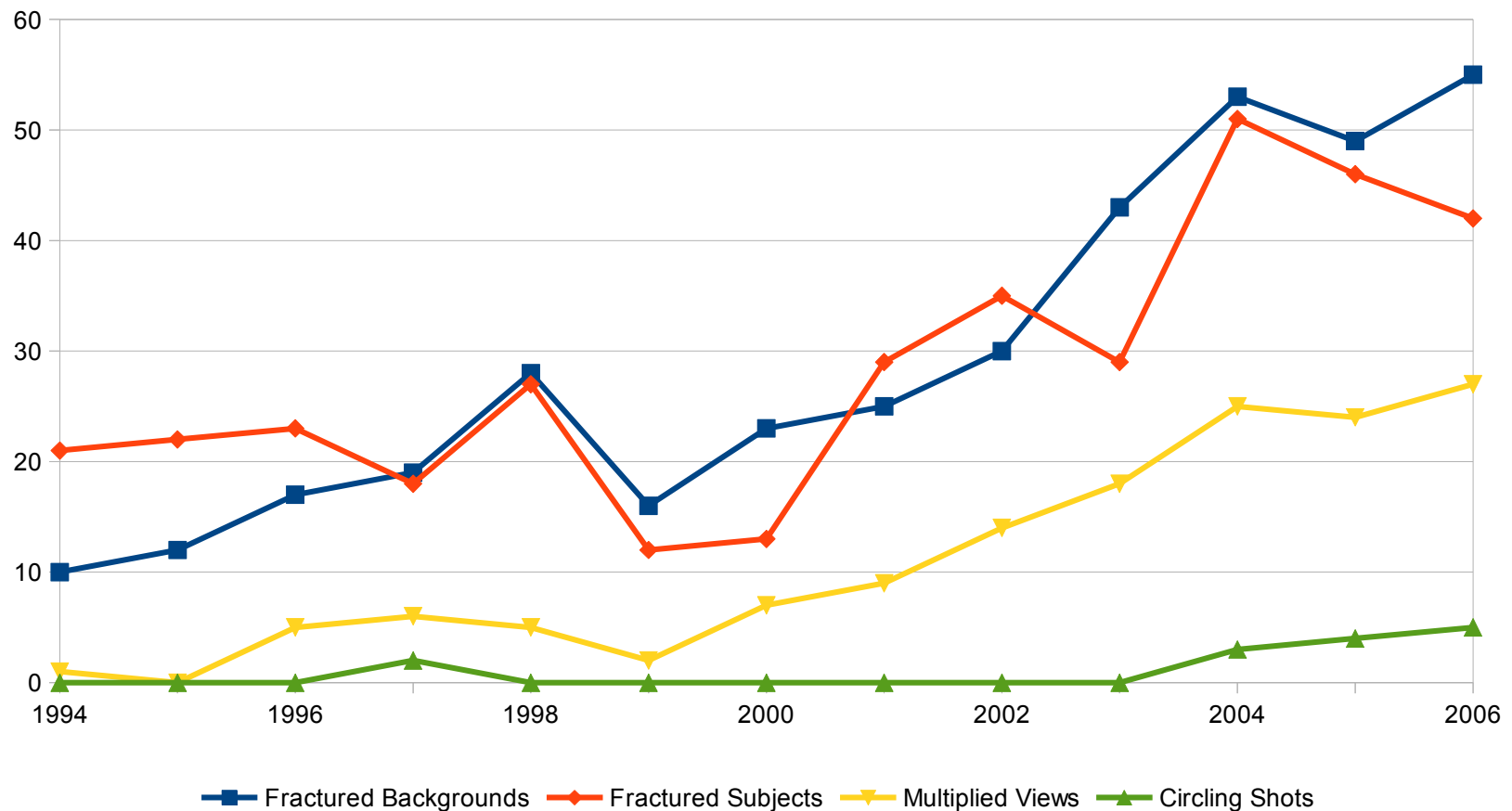
The Diffusion of Cubist Visuals

- Content analysis of television dramas for Cubist visual compositions (fractured backgrounds, fractured subjects, multiplied views, and circling shots)

Mean Minutes per Episode		
	Non-Cubist	Cubist
Fractured Backgrounds	5.93	8.50
Fractured Subjects	4.89	7.17
Multiplied Views	1.26	2.67
Circling Shots	0.15	0.17
Number of Episodes	590	150

The Diffusion of Cubist Visuals

- Content analysis of television dramas for Cubist visual compositions (fractured backgrounds, fractured subjects, multiplied views, and circling shots)



Explaining the Emergence and Diffusion 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.
- An ecological process describes the shift away from comedies and to drama/reality programming.
- Simmel: aesthetic forms as manifesting a society's world-view and as a way of imposing order on the world.
- Sorokin: Cubist television as a product of sensate culture and a more general turn toward realism; sensate periods seek to portray reality as it really is with secular subjects and naturalistic representations.