

On the Emergence and Diffusion of  
Cultural Innovations: The Cubist Aesthetic  
in Twenty-first Century Television  
Programming

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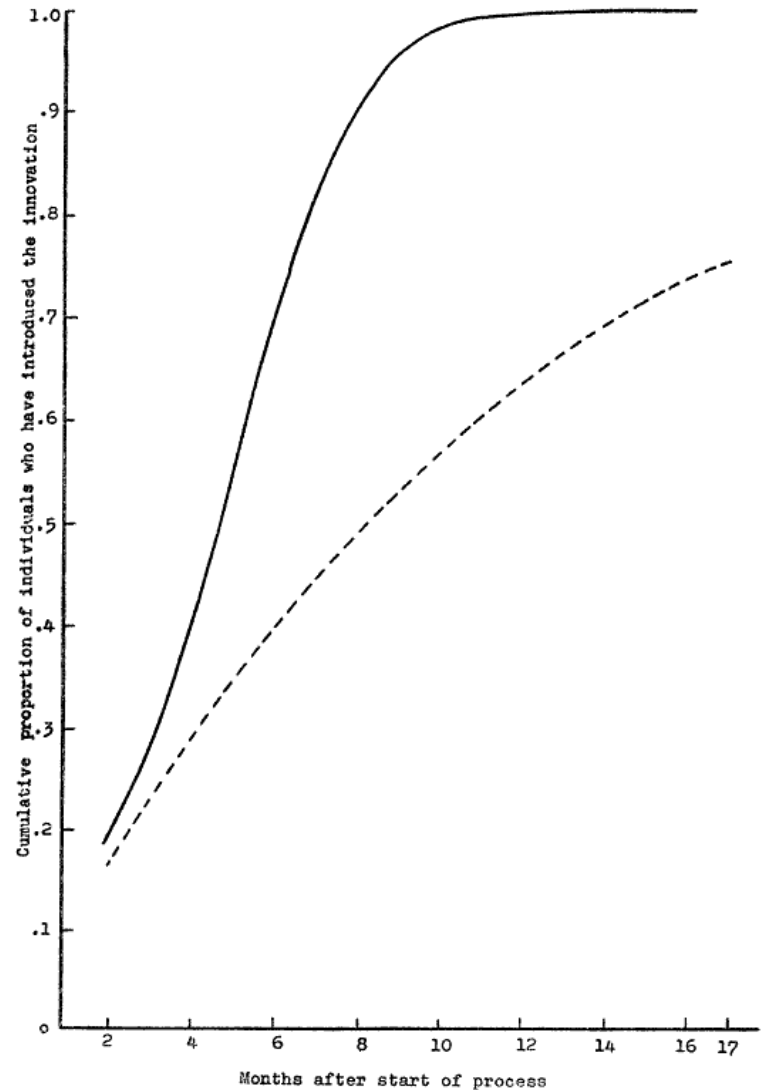
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# Sociological Theories of Cultural Forms

- Exogenous models emphasize the role of external conditions, usually the political-economy
- Ecological models operate within the cultural realm
  - Fashion models (Simmel 1957; Blumer 1969; Lieberman 2000)
  - Cultural Innovation models (Coleman, Katz, and Menzel 1959; Rossman 2012)

# Cultural Innovation Model

- Functional argument: Cultural innovations emerge to meet a particular need.
- Diffusion pattern: Cultural innovations spread throughout ecosystem but do not become passé as with fashion, as long as they continue to meet a need.
- Key question: What function does a cultural innovation serve?



# Cubist Television as a Cultural Innovation

*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 Cubist Aesthetic



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



Picasso (1912) *Violin and Grapes*

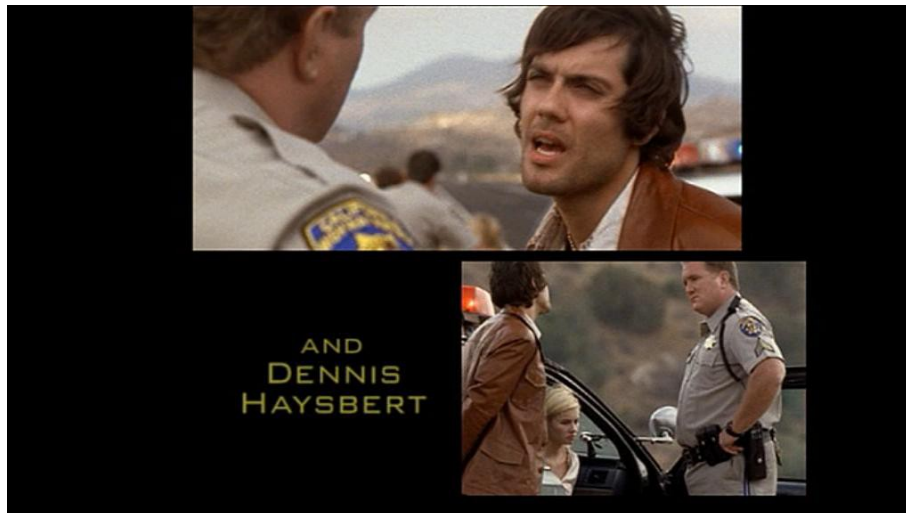
# The Cubist Television Aesthetic



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 Emergence of Cubist Television

- Analysis of top-30 ranked hour-long dramas from the 1996/97–2006/07 U.S. Broadcast seasons

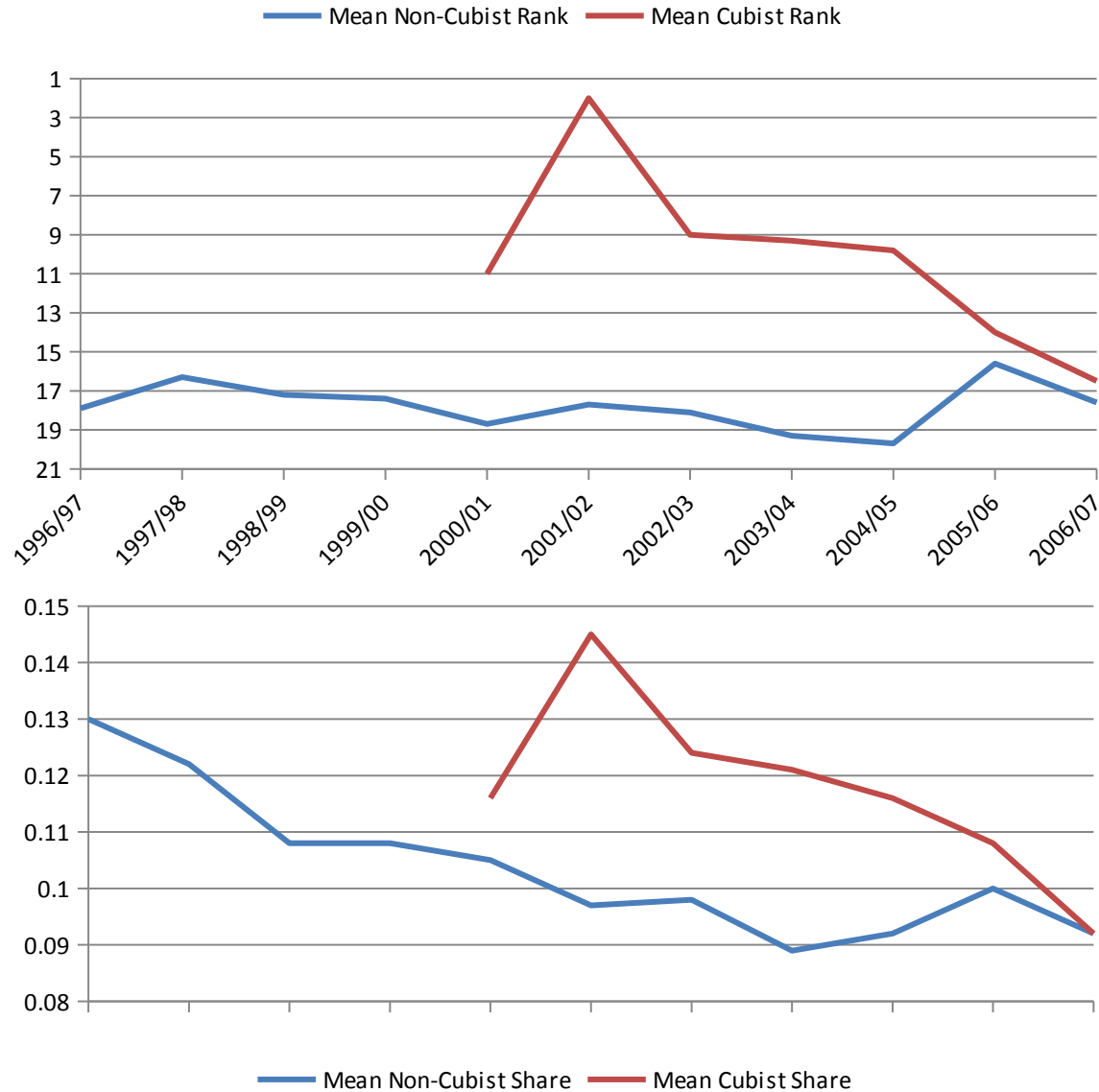
# The Emergence of Cubist Television

- 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*

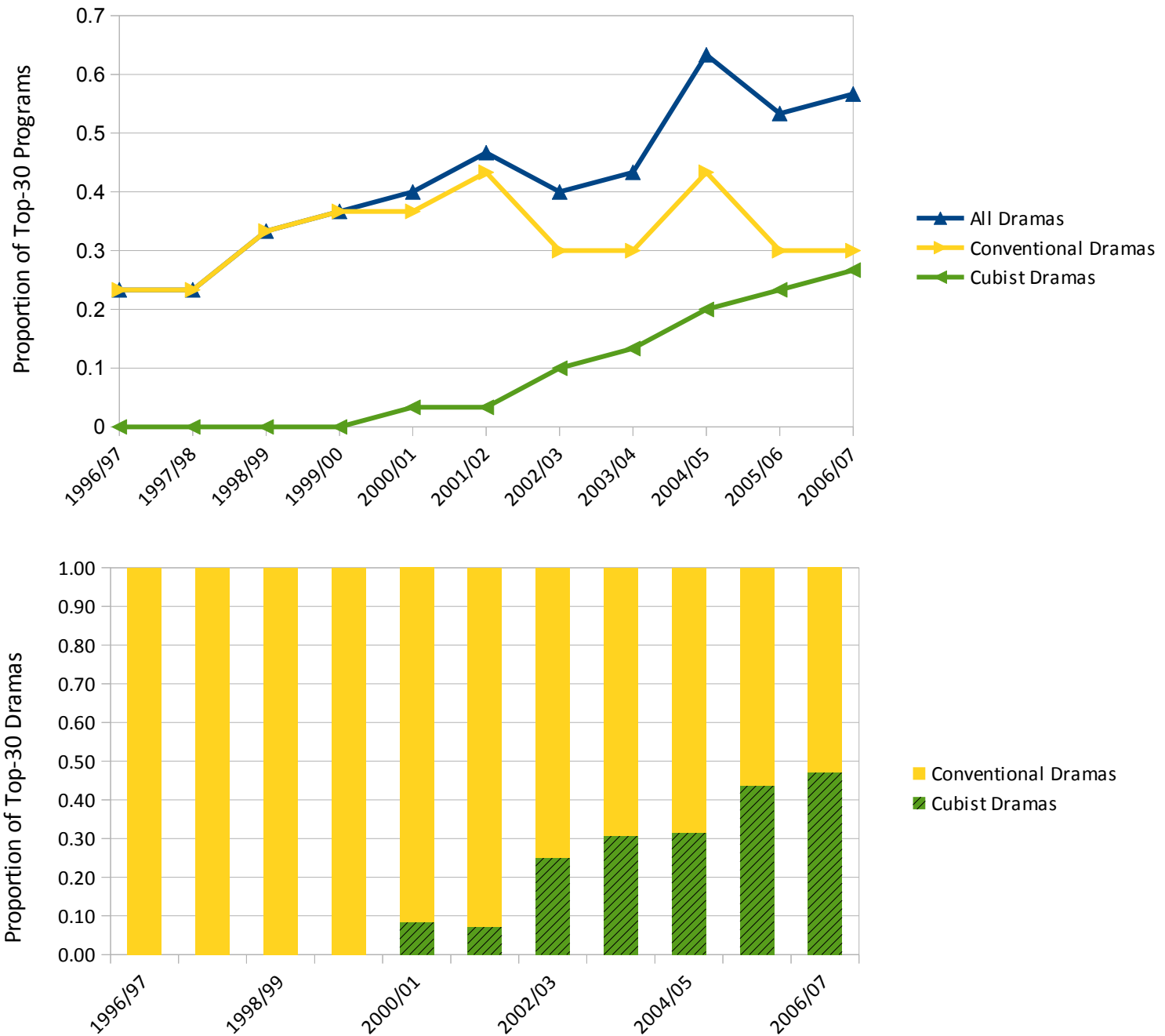
# The Popularity of Cubist Television

Season	Cubist Dramas	Dramas in Top-30	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

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- Simmel: aesthetic forms as manifesting a society's world-view; artistic style as a way of imposing order on the world.
- Sorokin: sensate periods portray reality as it really is; secular subjects and naturalistic representations; sensate periods are materialistic and characterized by organic solidarity.

# The Diffusion of Cubist Visuals

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

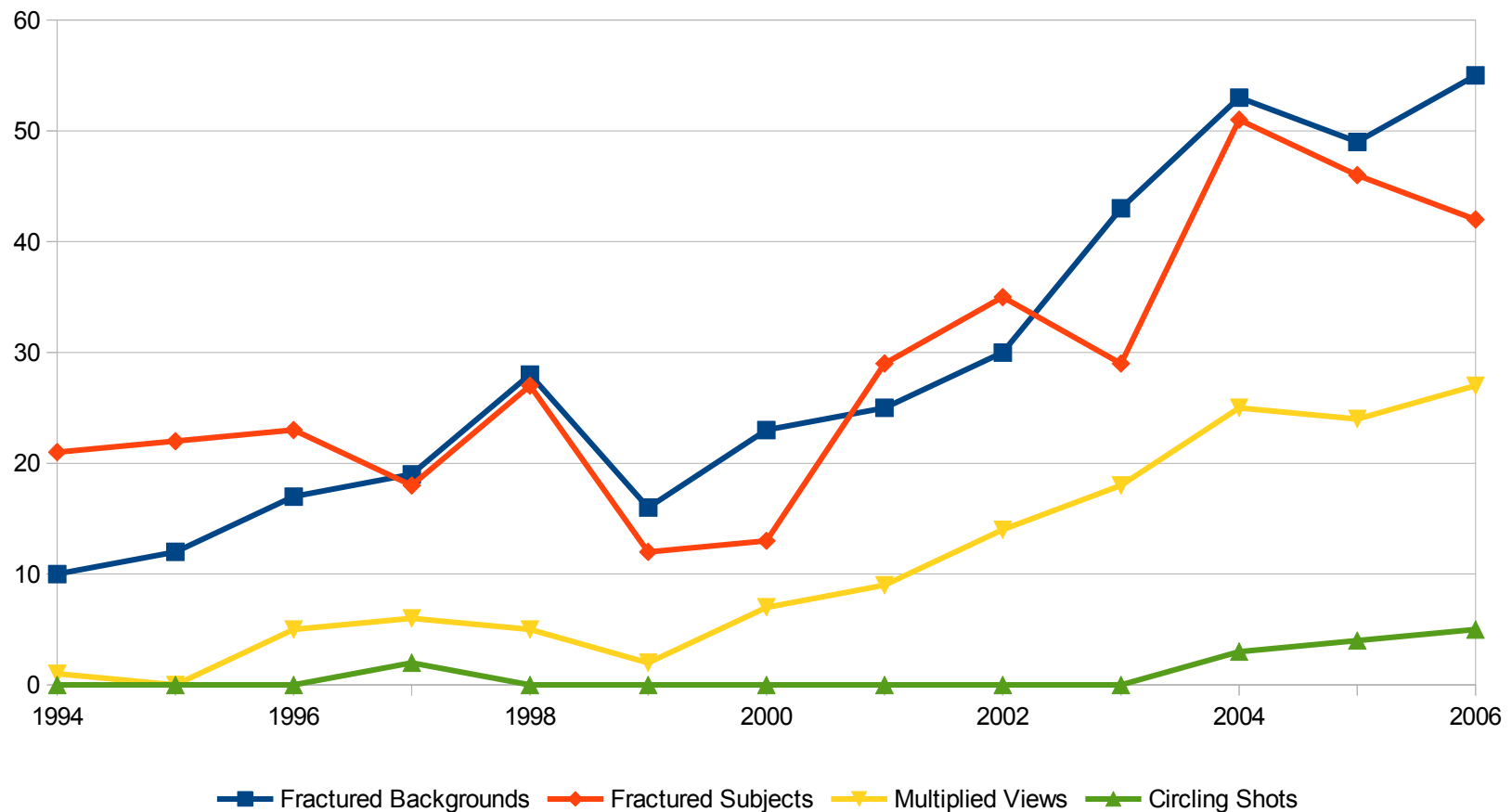
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Mean Minutes per Episode		
	Non-Cubist	Cubist
Fractured Backgrounds	5.93	8.50
Fractured Subjects	4.89	7.17
Multiplied Views	1.26	2.67
Circling Shots	0.15	0.17
Number of Episodes	590	150

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# Explaining the Emergence and Diffusion of Cubist Television

- Supply-side explanations:
  - Institutionalized mimicry (Bielby and Bielby 1994)
  - Production of symbolic culture (Peterson)
- Demand-side explanations:
  - Fashion cycle (Lieberson 2000)
  - Psycho-cultural resonance (Simmel and Sorokin)
- Functional explanation:
  - Cubist television as a cultural innovation added to our shared cultural repertoire (Swidler)
  - Cubist television as a symbol that we have learned to interpret, and may therefore be deployed as needed