“...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)
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

<table>
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<th>Season</th>
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The Popularity of Cubist Television

Mean Non-Cubist Rank vs Mean Cubist Rank

Mean Non-Cubist Share vs Mean Cubist Share
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

• Content analysis of television dramas for Cubist visuals (fractured views, multiplied views, and circling shots)
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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?