

“THE WORLD, IT’S CHANGING, AND MOST PEOPLE DON’T FUCK WITH YOU—NOT  
LIKE THEY USED TO”: NOSTALGIA, PORN, AND THE MYTH OF NEW YORK IN  
HBO’S *THE DEUCE*

A Project Submitted to the  
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts  
In the Department of English  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

MACKENZIE READ

## PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis/dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis/dissertation in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis/dissertation work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis/dissertation or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis/dissertation.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other uses of materials in this thesis/dissertation in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the English Department  
9 Campus Drive, Arts Room 515  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5 Canada

OR

Dean  
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9 Canada

## ABSTRACT

In HBO's *The Deuce*, nostalgia for 1970s New York City is potent in its aesthetics and subject matter. Set in Times Square, the series follows the lives of sex workers, pimps, hustlers, mobsters, and police officers during the rise of the pornography industry. This project seeks to examine the ways that the series effectively manipulates its nostalgia to illustrate that all people, regardless of their era, are perpetually contending with social change. In this way, the past mirrors current political and social injustices in the United States.

Connected to nostalgia is *The Deuce*'s portrayal of New York City. Critic James Sanders has suggested that the physical city is inevitably tied to its imaginative counterpart: the mythic city. In the same way that nostalgia works, the mythic city creates a veneer of stability and fantasy. *The Deuce* troubles this portrayal of New York by connecting it to its characters, all of whom are challenging the expectations attached to their respective identities. In particular, the character of Candy demonstrates the social evolution of the city, the pornography industry, and feminism.

While social change is a major focus of the series, I argue that *The Deuce* is invested in demonstrating that the past is not so far removed from the present. Specifically, the series' exploration of the pornography industry informs current issues of misogyny, racism, and classism in the politics and culture of the United States today. As a result, *The Deuce* takes a decidedly feminist approach to its subject matter and suggests that viewers do the same.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. William Bartley. His love of Emily Dickinson, film, and good television inspired me to pursue graduate studies in the first place. As a supervisor, I deeply appreciated the kindness, patience, and guidance he bestowed on me and this project. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lindsey Banco for his excellent advice and support as Graduate Chair and as my second reader. His suggestions helped sharpen my writing and turn this project into a piece of scholarship that I am extremely proud to represent.

Further acknowledgement must be paid to Dr. Ann Martin and Dr. Wendy Roy. Their mentorship made me a better scholar, writer, and person. I am also grateful for the funding I received from the University of Saskatchewan. My studies would not have been possible without receiving a Graduate Teaching Fellowship, the Hantelman Humanities Scholarship, and the Prescott-Daykin Scholarship.

My family and friends are owed many thanks for their unconditional love, support, and patience. I feel extremely fortunate that I have such a good network of lovely people in my life.

Lastly, I am indebted to my husband, Bryan, for all he did to keep me sane, healthy, and happy. This project is just as much his as it is mine. Thank you, always, for everything.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
“THE WORLD, IT’S CHANGING, AND MOST PEOPLE DON’T FUCK WITH YOU—NOT LIKE THEY USED TO”: NOSTALGIA, PORN, AND THE MYTH OF NEW YORK IN HBO’S <i>THE DEUCE</i> .....	1
WORKS CITED.....	27

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure i: STILL FROM WOODY ALLEN’S FILM MANHATTAN (1979).....	5
Figure ii: NEW YORK NIGHT SKYLINE.....	6
Figure iii: 42 <sup>ND</sup> STREET, JUST WEST OF SEVENTH AVENUE.....	8
Figure iv: TIMES SQUARE ENTERTAINMENT.....	9
Figure v: CANDY WORKING “THE DEUCE”.....	12
Figure vi: CANDY IN SEASON TWO.....	14
Figure vii: OFFICER ALSTON AND RUBY.....	16
Figure viii: C.C. RESISTING CHANGE.....	18
Figure ix: DOROTHY CONFRONTING C.C. IN SEASON TWO.....	19
Figure x: ROBERT DE NIRO IN TAXI DRIVER (1976).....	23
Figure xi: SKYSCRAPER REFLECTION.....	25

“The World, It’s Changing, and Most People Don’t Fuck with You—Not Like They Used To”:  
Nostalgia, Porn, and the Myth of New York in HBO’s *The Deuce*

In recent years, nostalgia in television has proven to be a trendy aesthetic and tool for storytelling. Serialized dramas like AMC’s *Mad Men* (2007-2015), HBO’s *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014), and ITV’s *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015) have recreated eras for viewers that have long since faded in memory and time. While nostalgia is used to varying success as a way of dreaming past realities into existence again, it is also effective for revealing current cultural anxieties under the sheen of sentimentality. In HBO’s *The Deuce*, the nostalgia for 1970s New York City is potent. The fashion, music, and technologies signal a romance for so-called simpler times. Yet, *The Deuce* is not a series about the glory days of the past. Consider this exchange between leading character Candy and her brother, Patrick. While visiting him in a dingy hospital waiting room, she asks him, “Are they still doing the electric shock stuff?” He responds, “No, mostly meds for me now. I don’t think the shock treatment thing is something they want to do anymore.” The two of them have been traumatized in the past by their father’s rejection of them. Candy, who had a child as a teenager, and her brother, Patrick, for his attraction to men, are both struggling to come to terms with their identities and self-acceptance. While Patrick is in denial about his homosexuality, Candy, on the other hand, is growing more confident as a filmmaker in the pornography industry. As she tries to reassure Patrick that their father’s judgment does not reflect the evolving social culture, she tells him, “The world, it’s changing, and most people don’t fuck with you—not like they used to.” Ultimately, this is a series about social progress, but nostalgia plays an important role in revealing such evolution. Under its guise, nostalgia invites viewers into a world that feels, at first glance, considerably distant from today’s culture. That distance allows viewers to meditate on the progress that has been made since the 1970s. Still, that nostalgia eventually gives way to the more important fact that people, regardless of their era, are perpetually contending with change. *The Deuce* uses its historicity (and the romantic associations attached to it) to examine the ongoing legacies of misogyny, racism, and classism in America. In this way, the world of the series is not a depiction of the past but rather a mirror of the country at present moment.

On its own, nostalgia is a complicated concept that requires some attention before turning to its application in the series. For instance, in representing the past, nostalgia plays an interesting yet deceptive role. Under its spell, the past is often coloured by the emotions, expectations, and

beliefs we hold. As the years grow more distant in the rear-view mirror, our sharp focus softens and fails to retain the boring, painful, and frustrating minutiae of our days. In its place, nostalgia captures the imagination and offers a seemingly stable, appealing portrait of the past. The saying “the good old days” demonstrates this cultural and often personal attitude to the past. As a kind of coping mechanism, nostalgia offers an escape from present reality and invites us to dwell in a secure and comfortable time or space. In other words, nostalgia acts as a counterpart to the unpredictable and volatile nature of present existence. When broken down into its parts, nostalgia explains this phenomenon: the Greek word “*nostos*” means a “return to native land” and “*algos*” refers to “suffering or grief” (Sullivan 585). The longing to return home in order to quell suffering is a reaction to the perpetual uncertainty of real time. Changes, of course, are difficult to experience because they demand a reaction and, ultimately, adaptation. Nostalgia for the past, on the other hand, is easy because it effortlessly conjures an ideal place in the mind that is unreachable by present hardships brought on by unpredictable changes.

In large part, television has exhibited the same indulgence in nostalgia. Modern serialized dramas, in particular, demonstrates this longing for the past. By letting these forgotten eras once again shine on the screen in serialized form, they facilitate a longing for the past despite, perhaps, viewers having never experienced the period themselves. Katherina Niemeyer and Daniela Wentz expand on this point in their work on serial nostalgia and nostalgic television series: “Media can trigger nostalgic emotions, media are formative in the aesthetics of the nostalgic world they portray (through visual appearance, sound and narrative) and, at the same time, nostalgic media serve as a cure for the viewers’ suffering and longing for a past era, the concept of which the media themselves may well have created” (129-30). These series then wield a great deal of control when it comes to indulgence in nostalgia. The series *Mad Men*, for instance, by virtue of its 1960s aesthetics, created a mass resurgence in mid-century fashion and design after the series’ debut in 2007. In particular, brands like Michael Kors, Marc Jacobs, and Banana Republic released *Mad Men*-inspired clothing collections during the series’ run (Stoddart 5). Moreover, in New York City, where the series takes place, it is possible to take “*Mad Men* Tours” and visit the sites referenced in the show (“Tour Highlights”). All of this is to demonstrate that popular viewership and consumer participation in vintage-inspired television series point to our very real occupation with a fantasy of the past.

Still, nostalgia in the serial period drama should not be dismissed as merely an object of lighthearted consumption. *Mad Men*, the same series that churned out sixties-inspired



commodities across multiple industries during its seven seasons, also “serves as a cultural barometer and challenges viewers to explore how a show about an advertising agency in the 1960s speaks to our current anxieties regarding capitalism, consumerism and human relations” (Stoddart 9). Indeed, nostalgia plays a large part in revealing such modern anxieties because it seduces viewers before revealing to them the very fears and challenges that still exist today. It is the sugar that helps the medicine go down, so to speak. Fredric Jameson’s work on historicity in film further emphasizes this point. He writes, “historicity is neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future . . . it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history: that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which we call historical” (523). In other words, film has the ability to create distance from present circumstances by means of historical representation in film. Coloured by the lens of the present, the past depicted on screen says more about the current moment than any other time period. With historicity in mind, *Mad Men*, and nostalgized television more broadly, offer a multifaceted perspective on the function of nostalgia and its manipulation in media and culture alike.

In HBO’s *The Deuce*, nostalgia is most profoundly interrogated to expose persistent anxieties surrounding shifting dynamics of gender, race, and class in the United States. Created by George Pelecanos and David Simon (best known for his series *The Wire* (2002-2008)) *The Deuce* examines the rise of the pornography industry in New York City during the 1970s and explores themes of corruption, violence, drug use, and sexual politics. Through its characters—especially, Candy, a leading character played by Maggie Gyllenhaal—*The Deuce* demonstrates that change is inevitable despite its slow progression. Viewers also see how positive change emerges, however gradually, when social structures are questioned, and alternative perspectives are offered. Standing in the way is nostalgia or, rather, the longing to see the past as stable; however, in linking the series’ characters to New York City, *The Deuce* demonstrates that the past is not so far removed from our turbulent present. After all, New York, though in a constant state of cultural flux, is still recognizable today as it was in the 1970s. By connecting the past to the present, the series asks viewers to adopt a feminist position on the current political and cultural climate in the United States. Nostalgia in the series may be effective but only to a point. Interrogating the past to understand the present, however, is necessary to move forward.

In order to investigate *The Deuce*’s “myth busting” of nostalgia in general, it is imperative to consider the ways it destabilizes its own relationship to nostalgia. The first place to turn to is in

the location of the series. Indeed, New York City is significant because it is an iconic city shrouded in its own mythic narrative. It is known as a “City of Dreams” as well as “The City That Never Sleeps.” It is where individuals go to realize their wildest aspirations and find success through hard work. These connotations turn the real New York into a mythic city of epic proportions. Consequently, the mythic city is susceptible to the same glossy veneer that nostalgia promotes. But the city is more than just the fantasies inspired by it. By virtue of New York’s constant evolution and renewal, it is a city dedicated to change and survival. Much like *The Deuce*’s characters, the city undergoes a transformation that extends beyond a fantasy of glamour and fame. This tension between the city’s myth and reality matches the same problem encountered in nostalgia. While myth and nostalgia offer comfort and stability, they neglect to deal with change and consequence. *The Deuce* attempts to resolve this issue by intimately connecting New York City to Candy. In drawing connections between her and the metropolis, viewers see how both places and individuals grapple with change. Candy’s narrative is especially relevant because her journey from sex worker to filmmaker illustrates how she reflects and engineers personal and cultural change. Still, her world is not so far removed from today. Similar social injustices in Candy’s 1970s New York have simply mutated rather than disappeared completely. In particular, misogyny and its persistence in modern American culture and politics remains a problem. As in the past, today we struggle to deal with the discomfort that springs from change despite its essentialness to progress. *The Deuce* understands this persistent habit and challenges it by playing with and ultimately subverting the romantic notions we carry about places, people, times, and even porn.

Analyzing how *The Deuce*’s creative tactics undermine the ostensibly stable past first requires a look at the metropolis and its complex relationship to fantasy. It is in Joan Didion’s musing on New York that the magnitude of the metropolis becomes most apparent. She writes, “New York was no mere city. It was instead an infinitely romantic notion, the mysterious nexus of all love and money and power, the shining and perishable dream itself” (qtd. in Sanders iii). Her statement captures the essence of New York City and its reputation as a place to tell stories. Not only is the city a popular destination, but it is also one of the most photographed, filmed, and written about cities in the world. Springing from these words and images is a fictional city that holds an infinite amount of narrative possibilities. Perhaps for this reason no other city is quite so beloved as New York. In his book *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*, James Sanders

suggests that because of the city's rich urban presence, two forms of the city exist: the real and its mythic counterpart:

From the earthly city there arises an immaterial counterpart, a city of the imagination. This other "place" lives what is an admittedly fictive existence, but one so complete and so compelling that it may come to rival the real city in its breadth and power. When this happens, the city can no longer be defined entirely by its earthly coordinates; it has given rise to a place of mind and spirit—a mythic city. (15)

In this case, it is very difficult to sever the material city from its imaginative equal since New York is so intimately connected to the entertainment industry. Thanks to Hollywood, ironically, New York is an adaptable and chameleon-like place for film. Indeed, it is a menacing concrete jungle to a supersized gorilla in *King Kong* (1933) as well as a matchmaker for two lonely New Yorkers in the romantic comedy *You've Got Mail* (1998). It is also the inspiration for the fictional Emerald City in *Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Batman's Gotham City in comics and films alike. Given the city's long entertainment resumé, New York has proven to be a geographical and creative destination for telling interesting stories. It is no wonder then that nostalgia also permeates the mythic metropolis.



Figure i, Still from Woody Allen's film *Manhattan* (1979)

Perhaps no other filmmaker has dedicated his career more to the inherent nostalgia of New York than Woody Allen. Since the 1960s, Allen's films have evoked romantic imagery connected to the city. Notable films such as *Annie Hall* (1976), *Manhattan* (1979), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *Radio Days* (1987), and *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993) are particularly

outstanding examples of Allen putting New York at the center of his narratives. In them, he dedicates not only a great deal of screen time to the architecture of the city, but he also incorporates its streets, parks, and buildings into the very plot of his films. It is for this reason that critics such as Leonard Quart argue that the city plays as much (if not more) of a central figure as Allen's protagonists:

It's never merely used as a visually interesting or picturesque background for the narrative to evolve in or to complement the interaction of his characters. His Manhattan is an extension of Allen's protagonist's personalities—its streets are places to walk in, hold conversations, have random and absurd encounters, reflect on both one's private angst and the city's plight, and mute or escape one's anxieties. New York is also a public projection of Allen's protagonists' generally best selves and moments—a city of infinite promise, possibility, and grandeur. (17)

Certainly, Allen's vision of New York inspires and sustains a nostalgia that is potent for effective storytelling. The romantic vision of the city, in turn, creates a longing in viewers even if they have never visited before. Still, the powerful associations that Allen and other filmmakers relate to the metropolis inform its mythical status. New York is not simply a city in these films. It is an imaginative machine linked to our deepest feelings and desires.



*Figure ii, New York Night Skyline, photo by Petr Kratochvil*

Of course, New York is both an old and new city. It has experienced hardship and struggle, as well as great success. It is rich in history and yet, by its reputation, promises future fame and fortune. The Art Deco architecture of the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building, for instance, may be reminiscent of the past, but the colossal skyscrapers signal future

possibilities. The city then is constantly putting forth a reminder of what once was and what is yet to come. Coupled with its mythical depictions on screen, the physical city too holds a great deal of meaning:

For decades, [the Manhattan skyline] has engendered astonishingly personal responses from millions of individuals, who have somehow seen in its towers the embodiment of a remarkable range of human feelings and impulses: of aspiration and struggle, of foreboding and transcendence, of an eerie sense of the future and haunting sense of the past. (Sanders 95)

Connected to these feelings is the notion of urban nostalgia. In the case of New York, urban nostalgia is sparked by the constant transformation of the city. Shops and restaurants come and go, buildings are torn down and new ones are erected in their place, and the constant changing of faces in the street creates an urgency in individuals to remember and retain what fragments of the city are still familiar. Perhaps as a reaction to these anxieties, the city has its very own institution called Museum of the City of New York, which celebrates and preserves the city's evolving history and culture. Tamar Katz suggests that "[New York City's] constant novelty matters most for the way it generates a perpetually vanishing past. Thus, while urban change makes us confront the new, such change still more importantly causes us to inhabit a world by definition gone; it guarantees that we see a city that is no longer there" (811). Film and television play an important role in preserving the vanishing city, and so it is no surprise that New York has an especially vast and lengthy record of its changes. As such, the city is constantly in a state of nostalgic dreaming. New York is not simply a mythical city but a place to yearn for the seemingly stable past.

*The Deuce* presents its own version of New York City. The show's narrative takes place in the 1970s during one of the most tumultuous periods of economic struggle and high crime in New York. The previous decade had witnessed a steady decline in major industrial activity because the city could no longer compete with significantly more affordable costs of production elsewhere. Furthermore, the role of the city's port diminished in economic importance during the 1960s. Major corporations closed their New York offices and warehouses to settle in other locations. The city's threat of bankruptcy was only exasperated by the desperate need for funding of social-assistance programs because so many working-class families were now out of jobs. In *A History of New York*, François Weil suggests that cities like New York did not receive federal help under the Republican presidencies of Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, because they had previously been "coddled by Democrats" (265). This political snubbing put the state in a particularly fragile

financial position. Where once New York City was a thriving mecca of business, it now resembled a ghost town of abandoned warehouses, dilapidated housing complexes, and garbage-filled streets.



Figure iii, 42nd Street, Just West of Seventh Avenue, New York by Dan McCoy (1973)

In Manhattan's Times Square, where *The Deuce* is primarily set, the economic downturn was especially acute. Before the 1970s, Forty-Second Street (nicknamed "The Deuce" and serving as the inspiration for the series' title), especially, had a reputation for being a sleazy area of Times Square because of its night life and cheap entertainment. Its reputation dates back to the Prohibition Era when Forty-Second Street and its surrounding area went from a theatre district to "a flashier but seedier neighborhood of movie houses during the 1920s and 1930s" (Kornblum 698). Despite attempts to "clean up" the area, by the 1960s "the street became known as the haunt of midnight cowboys, hustlers, and others who lurked around the edges of the world of commercial sex and drugs" (698). John Schlesinger's film *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) only further solidified Times Square and Forty-Second Street as "a distinctly rotten core of the Big Apple" because "here was a grim underworld of violence, crime, con games, and male prostitution" (Reichl 44). The financial crisis of the 1970s certainly contributed to Times Square's reputation as a dangerous place in which illegal activities thrived, but its representation on screen further sealed the area's status as a sordid slum for degenerates.

Given the potential violence and sexual hostility of Forty-Second Street, women, especially, felt unwelcome and unsafe in the area. In Marshall Berman's article "Women and the



Metamorphoses of Times Square,” he recalls that during this time, “West Forty-Second Street, anchor of the Square, came to reproduce the social order of the ship—all mates, no dames—while the girl and her friends came to feel that there was no place for them on what used to be their street” (78-79). The steady presence and increase of pornography is perhaps the biggest culprit for this shift in gender dynamics. The female body became synonymous with sex as a commodity in Times Square thanks to the increasing visibility of prostitution, pornographic magazines, and sex films. As Claire Bond Potter writes in her reflection on Times Square during this time, some women took pains to avoid the neighbourhood because of their resentment towards the sex industry in the area: “Even when pornography could be avoided, the act of doing so reminded women that their social freedom and peace of mind was circumscribed by anonymous images of breasts and vaginas that were meant to stand in for all women” (72). Indeed, the environment of Times Square was one that privileged the male gaze as well as the heterosexual male consumer. Combined with its reputation for potential danger and violence, there is no question that the area was especially hostile towards women and their interests.



Figure iv, Times Square Entertainment, photo by Jane Dickson

With this idea in mind, the creative team of *The Deuce* wanted to reconstruct on screen this menacing world in order to create historical verisimilitude in the narratives of its characters, a number of whom are sex workers and patrons of the area. As a result, they were tasked with

redesigning two blocks of Washington Heights<sup>1</sup> with props, cars, and signage. Production designer Beth Mickle chose the neighbourhood based on the area's architecture, lack of trees, and older storefronts (Rorke). In order to capture the grimy aesthetic of the time period, however, Washington Heights still had to be "made over." Mickle and her team had custom-made movie theatre marquees, peep shows signs, and subway exit stations created for the neighbourhood and covered the streets with trash in order to recreate an uncanny replica of "The Deuce" (Rorke). Although many sets were dressed by hand, CGI was also used to further develop the architecture of the era. The result is a world that feels so authentic that director Michelle MacLaren hopes viewers feel as if "[they] can smell the show" (qtd. in Friedlander). This attention to detail obviously points to the significance that the city possesses in the series. Creating nostalgia for this time through set design certainly contributes to capturing the "memory" of 1970s New York, but more importantly, it heightens the emotional and, at times, physical stakes for its characters.

The series' protagonist Candy is the key to understanding this kind of relationship between cities and individuals. In season one, Candy is a single mom and sex worker who chooses to work without a pimp. She is first introduced to viewers soliciting potential clients (or "johns" as they are called) on Forty-Second Street. The only man circling her, however, is a pimp named Rodney (Method Man) who is trying to persuade Candy to take him on as her procurer. The connection between city and Candy is palpable in their first exchange. Early in the pilot episode, Rodney tells her that "a thoroughbred like [her]. . . would own this damn street." He promises to make her "a star." In the background, the blurry lights of theatre marquees illuminate their faces. When she misses her opportunity to get "a date" because of Rodney's threatening presence, she is visibly exasperated. Still, Rodney persists and says, "It's a scary world out here, baby. Volatile. A girl could get her arm broke. Or she could get cut. This one girl I knew thought she could handle it herself. Got served a Drano cocktail" ("Pilot"). Rodney's shifting tactics to get Candy to take him on as her pimp demonstrate what the city has to offer a woman in Candy's position. It is both a playground for potential fame and a menacing environment that threatens her safety and survival.

The *mise-en-scène* confirms this play between fame and violence. With its long stretches of theatres, Forty-Second Street embodies the starry quality of Hollywood. There are bright lights

---

<sup>1</sup> Apart from Washington Heights, very few locations in New York have preserved the storefront facades of the 1970s. Times Square, especially, transformed from an area to avoid into a commercialized spectacle in the 1990s after Mayor Rudy Giuliani's clean-up operation of the area. Washington Heights, however, has remained comparatively untouched by developers and thus maintains some of the key features (such as its six-lane street) that signal 1970s Times Square.



trimming every marquee, movie posters plastered everywhere, flashy cars, and neon signs advertising pleasure and entertainment. Obviously, the myth of New York City as a place for celebrity, success, and money has trickled down to even the lowliest areas of town. Yet the street is grimy and there is garbage strewn about the sidewalks. The faces that pass by the camera are sullen and worn. Viewers already understand the danger that lurks in Times Square because the opening scene of the episode shows another main character named Vincent (James Franco) getting attacked at gun point. Moreover, viewers will later witness in the episode the kind of violence stereotypically reserved for sex workers when a character named Darlene (Dominique Fishback) gets assaulted in a role-playing scenario gone wrong with a customer. The physical city then embodies the complex experiences and feelings that the series' characters must sort through.

Still, Times Square's false veneer of glamour is best captured in Candy. Although she remains stoic throughout her conversation with Rodney, her responses to him express weariness. By their banter, they appear to have had this conversation before, and Candy clearly understands the demands and potential danger of her work. But the exchange also gives viewers the opportunity to see Candy perform. In fact, it is the first glimpse viewers see of her demonstrating her adaptability and perseverance, which will later serve her as she rises the ranks of the porn industry. In this moment, however, when a potential customer catches her eye, Candy's face lights up and her movements, speech, and confidence suggest that she is an expert actor. She slips off her jacket to expose her barely dressed body and her voice softens to seduce the john. When he notices Rodney leering over her shoulder, however, he quickly shuffles past Candy. She calls after him, again sweetly, but when she realizes she has lost a client, her face and body language fall back into a weary state and her frustration is palpable. Her oscillation between the role of fun date and pragmatic hustler demonstrates, on an individual level, how the city operates on a bigger scale. Indeed, the glitz of Times Square cannot mask the hardships that lurk on every street corner. Try as nostalgia might to keep the focus on the gritty glamour of Times Square, the violence and suffering on screen disturbs the place's allure.



Figure v, Candy Working "The Deuce"

A further connection is made between city and Candy in her style and clothing. Early in the series, for instance, when Candy is still very much working on the street, her wardrobe mirrors the aesthetic of Times Square. She wears glittery tops, faux fur jackets, and mini-skirts that suggest glamour but, upon closer inspection, show wear and tear. *The Deuce's* costume designer Anna Terrazas said that to "highlight Candy's financial hardships and the toll of the constant hustle, [she] added little rips in her skirts or cigarette burns" (qtd. in Soo Hoo). These details, though small, are integral to Candy's look and her life on the street. As she struts up and down "The Deuce" navigating its litter, traffic, and customers, she too becomes part of the tableau. Her blue eyeshadow and bright halter tops make her an extension of the colourful lights of the cheap cinemas surrounding her and, indeed, she is a kind of entertainment for sale. Essentially, Candy's presence gives Forty-Second Street its identity, and in return, it defines her.

Perhaps as a way of resisting total submission to her environment, Candy uses clothes and hairpieces as a costume to create distance between her personal life and her work. Her most recognizable look is when she is sporting a curly blonde wig that contrasts strikingly with her naturally wavy brunette hair. In an interview with Seth Meyers, Maggie Gyllenhaal said that in creating a look for Candy, she wanted the wig to "look like cotton candy" because of the character's name (qtd. in "Maggie Gyllenhaal Had"). Her statement points to the fantasy placed on Candy's identity and, by extension, the city. When she is made up in her blonde corkscrew wig and clothing, she becomes a superficial concept of desire and entertainment; she may be

delicious to look at, but her appearance does not feel like a full expression of her complex personality and identity. Perhaps for this reason, the series makes sure to present intimate moments of Candy's life away from Times Square. In these moments, she is no longer "Candy" but rather "Eileen." When she is visiting her son at her mother's house, for instance, Eileen's hair and dress appear more natural, casual, and sophisticated. Yet, there is still in these scenes a sense of performance. She wants to be, in these moments, a devoted mother and daughter despite her mother's thinly veiled hostility towards her and her choice to be a sex worker. Eileen cannot escape her other world then, but she is nevertheless fragmented and compartmentalized by her surroundings.

These dichotomies are perpetually reinforced in *The Deuce* because the series is interested in depicting the ways in which the city environment circumscribes its predominantly female workers. It is why in the first episode, for example, a pimp named C.C. (Gary Carr) asks his newest recruitment, Lori (Emily Meade), to change from her "small town girl" clothes into something "more New York" when he picks her up at the Port Authority bus terminal ("Pilot"). The women must, of course, look a certain way in order to convincingly play the role of a street worker, but this identity is inherently wrapped up in the identity of the city. Looking "more New York" aligns Lori and her fellow sex workers to their place of business. It also reinforces the reciprocal relationship of meaning making between cities and individuals. She literally must embody the fashion indicative of the city's culture in order to be perceived as authentic. In Candy's case, her armour of wigs and costumes help her to maintain, at least superficially, distance between her work and her identity, but as the series progresses, it becomes clear that the boundaries Candy sets for herself become increasingly blurred. Candy's rise in the pornography industry means a breakdown of her compartmentalized life.



*Figure vi, Candy in Season Two, photo by Paul Schiraldi*

Consider the evolution of Candy's appearance from season one to season two. In season two, it is 1977 and six years have passed since the previous season. In the opening sequence of the first episode of season two, viewers are treated to a lengthy tracking shot of Candy strutting on the same street that she had formerly operated on as a street worker. This time, however, her fur coat is lush and expensive looking, and her hair is dyed blonde and styled in loose waves. She walks with a discernable swagger that suggests confidence and power. She is no longer working on the street but well into her career as a porn filmmaker. When she walks into a new discothèque, she is greeted like a celebrity. Clearly, the times have changed, and so has she. Her clothes and hairstyle suggest a union of sorts between her fragmented identities as Candy and Eileen. Though she no longer wears the blonde curly wig, she has dyed her brown hair a platinum blonde. Still, her hair is fashioned closer to her natural style and her brunette roots are a reminder of the previous season's stylings of Eileen. Visually, Candy appears to have married the parts of her that she tried in vain to keep separated in season one. Now that she has found creative and financial success in the porn industry, she seems more comfortable in her skin.

The city too has demonstrated an increasing acceptance of pornography and sex work. In season one, despite Times Square's visible display of prostitution and adult entertainment, it is still a highly taboo and criminalized industry. Police raids on bookstores carrying pornographic material and massive incarcerations of sex workers demonstrate the legal and social culture surrounding sex in New York City in season one. By the second season, however, many sex

workers have moved indoors into brothels, and pornography has evolved into a commercially successful industry thanks to early major hits like *Boys in the Sand* (1971) and *Deep Throat* (1972). Indeed, the city and the series' characters have changed along with the growing visibility and acceptance of porn culture. It is in this evolution that *The Deuce* considers the issues surrounding the intersection of class, race, and gender.

On the one hand, the blossoming porn industry is represented as opening doors for the city's most marginalized. Candy, of course, is an excellent case of this positive influence. By the end of the first season, she has survived the brutal assault of a client as well as the unexpected horror of witnessing the death of another mid-sex-act. She is clearly exasperated by the quality of her life and her future as an independent hustler. But thanks to New York's changing obscenity laws in filmmaking, she is able to reach out to porn director Harvey Wasserman (David Krumholtz) for work. Their collaboration proves to be fruitful for Candy. As she becomes more involved in the industry, she develops a passion for filmmaking as an art. Moreover, she gains recognition and respect for her work. The industry, though drenched in misogyny, catapults Candy's career and, more importantly, provides her with the professional and creative satisfaction she deserves. When asked about Candy's budding career in pornography, Maggie Gyllenhaal was quick to point out the ways in which it satisfies her character: "Ultimately, she is an artist and realizes she is an artist through making porn . . . in every way, it turns her on, it wakes her up, it lights her up" (qtd. in "Maggie Gyllenhaal On Misogyny"). Clearly then, Candy's personal and professional circumstances are proof that the liberation of sex in films also extends, in some ways, to her own liberation.





Figure vii, Officer Alston and Ruby

On the other hand, *The Deuce* is careful to criticize the ways in which pornography further cements misogyny and racism in American culture. Any romantic notions that colour the sex industry are shattered by the series' interrogative look at disparities between white and black workers. While white workers certainly are subjected to violence and exploitation in the industry, they are given more opportunities to move away from street prostitution and into safer working conditions in brothels and film sets. Black workers, however, experience more difficulty gaining the same opportunities. At the series' most tragic moment in season one, a plus-size black sex worker named Ruby (Pernell Walker) is pushed through her apartment window by a customer. Her death is horrifying and senseless. Earlier in the episode, a friendly police officer named Chris Alston (Lawrence Gilliard Jr.) asks why Ruby is working on the street instead of in the safety of the brothel. Ruby tells him that "[she] wasn't getting chosen all that much on the inside. Out [on the street], men with special tastes, they find [her]" ("My Name"). Her comment highlights the ways that her size and skin colour make her more vulnerable to violence and misogyny. She does not get the same opportunities as Candy because she is not white, thin, and conventionally attractive. Whereas Candy feels that "the world [is] changing, and most people don't fuck with you—not like they used to," Ruby's reality is very much different ("My Name"). Unlike Candy, Ruby's options for safer and more regulated work are harder to achieve because of entrenched racism and prejudice.

Ruby's death also recalls the relationship between cities and bodies. Her life, of course, ends on the sidewalk in front of the Hi-Hat, a grimy bar that anchors the series. As a crowd gathers around Ruby's body, it is clear that she is still on display, albeit in a more gruesome way. The men at the scene of the crime further emphasize the misogynistic attitudes towards sex workers by their reactions to her death. Vincent, the owner and bartender of the Hi-Hat, looks up at his building and assesses the damage her fall has done. He also wonders if he has insurance. His lack of concern for Ruby makes his girlfriend, Abby (Margarita Levieva), walk away in disgust. Moreover, when pimp C.C. sees Ruby's body, he cracks a joke that "she was in a hurry" and "could've taken the stairs" ("My Name"). Officer Alston punches C.C. for his insensitive comment, but it is clear that the men do not value Ruby's life as seriously as they should. Their reactions speak to the city's overall attitudes towards sex workers—especially those of colour. The street is where Ruby worked and lived. Because her identity is so intimately connected to the street, the crowd that surrounds her body seems unfazed by her untimely end. It is expected that she should die on the street because that is what becomes of sex workers in Times Square. Unfortunately, Ruby's death perpetuates these assumptions about the neighbourhood and her line of work.

Positive change then is not so readily available to Ruby as it is to Candy. Because of her race, gender, and size, Ruby is unable to experience progress the way that Candy can. Her tragedy suggests that however slow change may be for women like Candy, it is even more excruciatingly slow for marginalized women like Ruby. Whereas Candy is able to reflect and seize change by leaving sex work behind to pursue her real passions in filmmaking, women like Ruby struggle to earn the same opportunities. Darlene, perhaps, is the character that bridges Ruby's and Candy's outcomes. Like Ruby, Darlene is black, but she is also young, attractive, and ambitious. When she transitions from prostitution to pornography, she is able to do so because of her beauty, but she encounters limitations that her fellow white performers do not. For example, in the episode "Seven-Fifty" in season two, Darlene discovers that she is being paid less than her white co-stars despite doing the same work. When she asks her pimp, Larry (Gbenga Akinnagbe), to talk to the director, Bernie (Stephen Gevedon), about this pay discrepancy, it is revealed that black performers are paid less because they are not as sought after in porn by consumers. Larry, who has also been trying to break into the porn business as an actor himself, says to Bernie, "Say, uh, say a guy wants to get into something like this here?" Bernie responds, "Well, first thing I would say is that that guy needs to be white." Despite Larry's shock and protest, Bernie tells him,

“White guys are the major consumers of porn, and they don’t want to see a black guy’s cock. It makes them feel insecure . . . It’s not racism, it’s economics.” Darlene too is told by Bernie that she is not paid the same wages because she is “the wrong part of the Oreo” (“Seven-Fifty”). While economics is used to justify racist practices, the conversation is a frank reminder that social change is a slow process often influenced by economic and political factors. Moreover, for women like Candy, it is possible to stir nostalgic feelings for the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, but the sentiment falls short for women like Ruby and Darlene. For them, they are not afforded the same privilege of nostalgia because their realities reflect grimmer circumstances.



*Figure viii, C.C. Resisting Change*

Grim circumstances also fall on characters who try to speed up change or halt it altogether despite the inevitability of social progress. The pimps, for instance, are fearful of the developing industry of porn and brothels because it signals an end to their power and income. Indeed, as the women rely less and less on their protection, the pimps behave in ways that resist the changing conditions of their environment. Larry, who arguably adapts the most quickly, realizes that his career as pimp is essentially over, and he must now try and make it as a performer in the pornography industry. Still, other pimps like C.C. and Rodney are less apt to change and fight instead to keep the status quo. C.C., in particular, aggressively and violently terrorizes his sex workers and brothel owners in order to keep his position and power. Most notably, when C.C.’s prized worker, Lori, grows in fame as a porn star, he wields emotional and physical abuse in order to subdue her. When he is eventually paid off by the mob to release Lori from his so-called



custody, C.C. still ensures that Lori feel his ownership of her. Viciously, he rapes her and belittles her in their final moments together. The violent episode is the result of C.C.'s growing resentment of change. As one critic aptly puts it, "It has felt inevitable that this charismatic, violent man, seething with resentment about his power ebbing in changing times, would end up exploding" (MacInnes). Unable to conform to his evolving world, C.C. meets a violent end in, ironically, a brothel. His death suggests that those who do not at least move along with the times will be left behind in history.



*Figure ix, Dorothy Confronting C.C. in Season Two*

The opposite problem—that of trying to speed progress beyond its capabilities—is also explored in the series. When an ex-worker named Dorothy (Jamie Neumann), whom viewers meet as one of C.C.'s girls in the first season, returns to New York City in season two, this time as an activist for sex workers, she encounters similar resistance to her cause. Not only are street workers leery of Dorothy's motives, but the pimps are angered by Dorothy's attempts to lure the girls away from their control. The problem becomes dire when Dorothy's activist friends share their concern for her careless regard of the safety of the sex workers and herself. In response, Dorothy says, "I don't have the patience to wait around for politicians to make new laws—that takes years, if it happens at all! I can help these girls today!" ("Nobody"). Dorothy's irritation with the pace of change seems to come from a place of resentment sparked by her own experiences as a sex worker. As one of C.C.'s girls, she was humiliated and abused in season one. This history is intertwined with the city itself. New York represents to Dorothy all the horrible

suffering she endured on and off the street. It is understandable then that Dorothy's initial trepidation at being back in the city sparks an aggression in her. Dorothy fails to see that social change takes time and the gradual cooperation of society in general. Recalling Fredric Jameson's notion of historicity, Dorothy's attempts to speed up progress are a reminder to viewers that it is not possible to escape the framework of the present. But because of Dorothy's impatience, she too cannot survive in the present. In the finale episode of season two, Dorothy is found murdered behind a dumpster. Although it is unclear who killed her, it seems most likely that a pimp put an end to her life to protect his business. Ultimately, she and her tormentor C.C. fail to move forward because neither is willing to recognize that change is inevitable despite the time it takes.

These vicious deaths may seem to glorify the violence that surrounds the world of commercial sex, but *The Deuce* is resistant to perpetuating stereotypes for the same reason it is resistant to promoting nostalgia for nostalgia's sake. This approach may seem paradoxical given the graphic violence and sex depicted on screen, but *The Deuce* is not interested in denying the violent realities that face sex workers as in the case of Ruby or Dorothy. Rather, it contrasts those moments with scenes of genuine human connection that disrupt the harmful stereotyping and sentimentality of sex work. For instance, despite the abusive relationships between the colourful cast of pimps and sex workers, *The Deuce* is careful to show moments of tenderness, camaraderie, and support between them. As a result, the series avoids the unrealistic romanticism or excessive brutality of sex work that plagues other films, series, and books. *New Yorker* critic Emily Nussbaum agrees that this subversion of expectations is one of the series' greatest features:

There are sad scenes here of transactional rutting; there are also loving ones, and plenty that walk a line, like one in which an abusive pimp gives his girl a screaming orgasm. But the show's gift is that it doesn't imagine that liberation and a trap are so easily distinguished, in bed or out of it, a truth that resonates long past 1971. ("The Deuce")

Her assessment of the series points to a general theme of destabilization, a key element to the series. Cops, mobsters, sex workers, and pimps are sometimes difficult to distinguish from one another. Corrupt officers, for instance, take financial cuts from the mobster-run brothels. A sex worker is known for beating on her pimp. Rudy Pipilo (Michael Rispoli), the capo for the Gambino family, is a hardened criminal but also a savvy and charming businessman. All of these characters, despite their professions, behave in ways that challenge viewers' assumptions about their work and behaviour. So, despite stereotypical ideas surrounding a sex worker's profession, "the series does an excellent job of making sex work seem like *work*: it's tiring, repetitive and often pretty dull" (Chandler-Wilde).

In season two, the series echoes this sentiment during a scene in which Candy is getting ready to direct and act in an upcoming porno. As she waits for the crew to settle, she says rhetorically, “Who would have thought that the most boring part of this whole thing is the fucking?” (“Our Raison d’Etre”). Her comment rings true of her job but of the series too, since despite its premise, it is not interested in the salaciousness of porn. Rather, it seeks to understand the complex implications of an industry so integral to the cultural make-up of modern America. For this reason, the series takes a decidedly feminist approach to its subject matter. Though not shy to show the naked bodies of women and men, *The Deuce* never lingers in a way that feels exploitive or extraneous. Sex instead is depicted in a way that exposes its paradoxical nature in contemporary culture. It is, all at once, recognizable as a cliché by the fake moaning of porn actors, and yet when Candy, for instance, decides to masturbate when she is left unsatisfied by a boyfriend, sex in these moments seems profoundly intimate and empowering. As Emily Nussbaum aptly points out, “‘The Deuce’ is certainly a feminist series—and half its directors are female—but its smartest move is to resist turning sex into a thesis, exploiting the contradictions instead” (“The Deuce”). It is in these contradictions that the series is able to destabilize the sexist rhetoric that is so pervasive in pornography and sex work more generally.

This motive of subverting stereotypes in the series also extends to its own nostalgic aesthetic. In discussing the ways that it does so, however, it is useful to turn to scholarship that has examined televised nostalgia in a series already mentioned: AMC’s *Mad Men*. Given its subject matter and aesthetic, *Mad Men* is primed for nostalgia, but the series itself produces its very own nostalgia as well because of the medium of television. Indeed, through ritual and its ability to transport viewers, the series acts as a “complex time machine navigating between an ephemeral present, an often unknown future and an intriguing past” and is “very often the object of its audience’s longing” (Niemeyer and Wentz 130). In other words, the series as a commodity becomes a product of nostalgia by virtue of its medium. While not inherently troublesome, this result suggests that televised nostalgia is a political tool that wields representational power over the past and, by extension, its audience. At its best, series like *Mad Men* and *The Deuce* have the serial form to explore in depth all the complexities of a bygone era. At its worst, however, series’ nostalgia can romanticize an era to the point of erasing the uglier aspects of history.

For this reason, some critics have expressed concern for the ways that nostalgia dismisses or diminishes problematic behaviours and attitudes from the past. In the case of *Mad Men*, for instance, critic Mark Greif writes that the series is “an unpleasant little entry in the genre of Now

We Know Better. We watch and know better about male chauvinism, homophobia, anti-semitism, workplace harassment, housewives' depression, nutrition and smoking. We wait for the show's advertising men or their secretaries and wives to make another gaffe for us to snigger over" ("You'll Love"). By contrast, Christine Sprengler argues that "when *Mad Men* succeeds in its critique of the past and the present . . . it is because of, rather than in spite of, its operation in the nostalgia mode" (247). The success of the series and its justification for manipulating nostalgia, she concludes, is because the show "prompt[s] us to acknowledge . . . our era's self-mythologizing efforts, and to remember to cast a critical eye on the present as we do on the past" (248). Sprengler is right in her assessment that the series is most successful at revealing the human condition through nostalgia and not despite it. *Mad Men* dares to show that the past is far more complex than nostalgia typically allows; however, the series' manipulation of nostalgia makes it possible for critical engagement, because it inherently points to the ways we mythologize the past. Consequently, nostalgia invites viewers to dismantle the myths that make up the past and, by extension, the present.

Similar criticisms of *The Deuce* exist when it comes to its power of representation. It too is a series that, at times, begs its viewers to marvel at the blatant sexism or racism on display. While it certainly suggests the absurdity of these wrongdoings by siding with the victimized, some critics have suggested that there may be other ways that it fails to challenge those offences. For instance, Rebecca Sullivan and Laura Helen Marks point out that the series' use of cinematic effects to replicate the 1970s era of filmmaking are potentially problematic because of its associations with filmmakers who did little to promote or represent women's interests:

*The Deuce* has no nostalgia for the [pornography] industry, [*sic*] the sentimentality comes through the claims of its creators who say the era is marking a turning point in misogyny. At the same time, they invest in the stylistics of '70s American cinema — an era well-documented for its own sexism, objectification and systematic discrimination of women.

The era of Frankenheimer and Scorsese is known for great social commentary cinema, but is hardly known for its advancement of women's rights either representationally or professionally. ("The Deuce")

Of course, *The Deuce*'s production designer Beth Mickle cites Scorsese as a major influence on the look of the series. In planning the show's aesthetic, she explains in an interview, "It was a massive collaboration inspired by research from the '70s, both real photographs and movies, many shot by Martin Scorsese" (qtd. in Friedlander). Of course, Scorsese's most notable film from this period is *Taxi Driver* (1976), a psychological drama that focuses on the declining

mental health of a Vietnam war veteran in a decaying New York City. Considered an American classic, the film is not without valid feminist criticism. It is not surprising then that Sullivan and Marks find it problematic that a series so adamantly feminist should borrow from material that is arguably not. While their assessment raises an interesting concern for the historical and political implications of aesthetics, they fail to see how using the look of the era's films can precisely undermine its misogyny by changing the subject matter, tone, and gaze of the camera.



Figure x, Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Consider one of Candy's early directorial cuts of a porno in season two. While her collaborator, Harvey, finds her experimental cutting between scenes of sex and random images jarring, Candy has made a film that reflects the female gaze. As she puts it, "It's cut the way an orgasm feels. It rushes up on you; you stop making sense. So, some of it is in her head, some of it is real, some of it is somewhere in between" ("Our Raison d'Etre"). Though she is told that she must edit again to make the film look like traditional porn, this moment demonstrates how Candy is able to appropriate the genre to tell a different story. And later, when Candy goes on to direct a big budget porno, she does just that. Her reimagining of "The Little Red Riding Hood" illustrates again how she is able to turn a patriarchal narrative on its head by using the story's identifying characteristics but presenting them using a new and deliberately feminist tone. In a similar way, *The Deuce* is subverting its own genre by executing the same tactics. Although the series may look like a relic from the *Taxi Driver* era, it operates in a way that challenges the male gaze and the nostalgia attached to it.

Even from the opening credits, *The Deuce* is troubling the perceived purity of nostalgia. In season one, the credits' irresistibly catchy theme song "(Don't Worry) If There's a Hell Below, We're All Going to Go" by Curtis Mayfield plays over flashing images of women's bodies, cars, and city streets. The aesthetic of the sequence includes light leaks, colour fades, and other seventies-inspired effects which signal the nostalgia of Polaroid photos and 35mm film. Certainly, the influence of Scorsese is palpable in its opening sequence. But upon closer inspection, the credits produce a sense of foreboding that invites critical engagement. In Mayfield's song, for instance, the music is soulful and upbeat, but his lyrics eerily match the themes of corruption and power relations in the series. Most notably, Mayfield sings, "Sisters / Brothers and the Whiteys / Blacks and the Crackers / Police and their Backers / They're All Political Actors" and "If There's Hell Below / We're All Gonna Go" (Mayfield). In scrutinizing the images that accompany the lyrics, it becomes clear that they are depictions of exploitation and crime. These elements demonstrate how the series is able to play with nostalgia and subvert those expectations just by paying attention.



*Figure xi, Skyscraper Reflection*

The final shot of the credits features a puddle reflecting a New York skyscraper. It lasts for only a moment before a bare foot splashes into the puddle and distorts the image. Any assumptions viewers have made about the series' content or its room for unmediated nostalgia are effectively squashed when the foot lands in the water. Recall James Sanders' explanation of the emotional response to New York's architecture, and it becomes clear that the puddle's broken

image disrupts the projections placed on it. But the imagery also evokes Tamar Katz's "vanishing city" in urban nostalgia, since the perfect image of the skyscraper vanishes in the ripples of the water. The puddle also, in its fluidity, suggests that change is inevitable and that our notions of people, moments, cities, and history are constantly evolving and transforming with the times. This notion of evolution and cultural development is at the heart of *The Deuce*. Take, for example, the credits again. From season one to season two, the seventies effects remain the same; however, Curtis Mayfield's song becomes Elvis Costello's "This Year's Girl." New shots of the city, its people, and technology are included to reflect the changing times. Yet, the final image of the skyscraper in the puddle remains the same since it acts as a thread connecting the past to this new era. While change is inevitable, the skyscraper itself is a permanent fixture reminding viewers that the past is not so far removed as it may seem.

One point that the creators of *The Deuce* want viewers to understand is that the misogyny in the series is not so distant from today. The first season of the series was filmed in 2016 during the election that led to Donald Trump becoming the forty-fifth president of the United States. Although they had not believed he would win, the cast and crew drew parallels between the misogyny in the series and the deplorable treatment of women in current politics. In an interview with Stephen Colbert, Maggie Gyllenhaal said, "We were shooting when Trump was saying he could grab women's pussies if he wanted to . . . that was happening as we were shooting, so even though we didn't know that he was going to be elected, misogyny was on all of our minds" (qtd. in "Late Show"). Creator David Simon echoes this point when he says, "I don't think you can look at the misogyny that's been evident in [the 2016] election cycle . . . and not realise that pornography has changed the demeanour of men . . . the aggression that's delivered to women I think is informed by 50 years of the culturalisation of the pornographic" (qtd. in Smith). *The Deuce*, of course, is interested in exploring the ways that pornography has fueled the sexism evident today. While the series never blatantly condemns pornography on a moral basis or suggests that misogyny was born out of the pornography industry, it does force viewers to reflect on its history and, perhaps more importantly, how it shapes today's society.

New York City is integral to this exploration of culture and power because it developed and transformed along with the times. Viewers only need to look at the Times Square of *The Deuce* to recognize that it hardly resembles the Disney-esque spectacle it is today. Times change and so do cultures. As a result, the past shares with the future a sense of distanced curiosity and speculation. This act of meditating on the past takes the same work as imagining the world of

tomorrow. Televised historical dramas work in the same way that science fiction does because they create worlds that are familiar yet distant from this moment. So, if *The Deuce* is a kind of science fiction, then New York City is a time travelling machine. It takes us back to a period we hardly remember or never knew and brings us back to the present in one smooth motion. It reveals to us the people and events of a bygone era, yet it forces us to examine the similarities we share with that forgotten world. To some, New York may be just a city, but I tend to agree with James Sanders' observation that it is "an urban environment whose form has emerged in the closest possible alignment with human experience" (12). The series understands this connection and uses the city and the nostalgia interwoven in its image to interrogate a culture that perpetuates social injustices to this day. Yet *The Deuce* is not simply a platform to criticize American culture. Rather, it is like one of Candy's porn films because it dares to shift the gaze and focus the camera on a subject that deserves our attention.



## Works Cited

- Berman, Marshall. "Women and the Metamorphoses of Times Square." *Dissent*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2001, pp. 71–82.
- Candy Working 'The Deuce.' *Dissent Magazine*, 2018, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/david-simon-the-deuce-review-sex-work-porn-economy>.
- C.C. Resisting Change. *Vulture*, 21 Oct. 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/10/the-deuce-recap-season-2-episode-7-the-feminism-part.html>.
- Chandler-Wilde, Helen. "'The Deuce, Season 2 Episode 1 Review: Back to the World of Seventies Smut, Where the Streets are Mean and the Sex is Tedious.'" *The Telegraph*, 11 Sep. 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2018/09/11/deuce-season-2-episode-1-review-back-world-seventies-smut-streets/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Dickson, Jane. "Times Square Entertainment." *The Gothamist*, 29 Jan 2019, [http://gothamist.com/2019/01/29/jane\\_dickson\\_old\\_nyc\\_photos\\_1970s.php#photo-9](http://gothamist.com/2019/01/29/jane_dickson_old_nyc_photos_1970s.php#photo-9).
- Dorothy Confronting C.C. in Season Two. *Margarita Levieva Blog*, 13 Oct 2018, <http://margaritalevieva.tumblr.com/post/179031929410/episode-5-season-2-the-deuce-i-actually-cheered>.
- Friedlander, Whitney. "9 Things You Need to Know About HBO's *The Deuce*." *Paste Magazine*, 27 Jul. 2017, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2017/07/9-things-you-need-to-know-about-hbos-the-deuce.html>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Greif, Mark. "You'll Love the Way It Makes You Feel." *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 20, 2008, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n20/mark-greif/youll-love-the-way-it-makes-you-feel>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Nostalgia for the Present." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 2, 1989, pp. 517–537.
- Katz, Tamar. "City Memory, City History: Urban Nostalgia, 'The Colossus of New York', and Late-Twentieth-Century Historical Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2010, pp. 810–851.
- Kornblum, William. "Working The Deuce." *The Urban Ethnography Reader*. Edited by Mitchell Duneier, et al, Oxford UP, 2014.
- Kratochvil, Petr. "New York Night Skyline." *Public Domain Pictures*,

- <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=204007&picture=new-york-night-skyline>.
- MacInnes, Paul. "The Deuce Recap: Season Two, Episode Eight—He Had It Coming." *The Guardian*, 29 Oct. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/oct/29/the-deuce-recap-season-two-episode-eight-he-had-it-coming>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- "Maggie Gyllenhaal Had an Intellectual Pornographer Answer Questions." *Youtube*, uploaded by Late Night with Seth Meyers, 7 Sep. 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A6tn-V\\_1yU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A6tn-V_1yU).
- "Maggie Gyllenhaal On Misogyny: 'I'm Not Going To Take It Anymore.'" *Youtube*, uploaded by Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 6 Sep. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2iaYjmLj1U&t=438s>.
- Mayfield, Curtis. "(Don't Worry) If There's a Hell Below, We're All Going to Go." *Curtis*, 1970, Track 1. *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Curtis-mayfield-dont-worry-if-theres-a-hell-below-were-all-going-to-go-lyrics>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- McCoy, Dan. "42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Just West of Seventh Avenue, New York." 1973. *Wikipedia Commons*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:42nd\\_Street,\\_just\\_west\\_of\\_Seventh\\_Avenue,\\_New\\_York.\\_-\\_NARA\\_-\\_554297.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:42nd_Street,_just_west_of_Seventh_Avenue,_New_York._-_NARA_-_554297.jpg).
- "My Name is Ruby." *The Deuce*. HBO. 29 Oct. 2017.
- Niemeyer, Katharina, and Daniela Wentz. "Nostalgia Is Not What It Used To Be: Serial Nostalgia and Nostalgic Television Series." *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present, and Future*. Edited by Katharina Niemeyer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 129-138.
- "Nobody Has to Get Hurt." *The Deuce*. HBO. 28 Oct. 2018.
- Nussbaum, Emily. "'The Deuce' and the Birth of Porn." *The New Yorker*, 15 Sep. 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/25/the-deuce-and-the-birth-of-porn>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- "Our Raison d'Etre." *The Deuce*. HBO. 9 Sep. 2018.
- Officer Alston and Ruby. *Pure Fandom*, 8 Nov. 2017, <https://www.purefandom.com/2017/11/08/season-1-finale-of-the-deuce-ruby/>.
- "Pilot." *The Deuce*. HBO. 10 Sep. 2017.
- Potter, Claire Bond. "Taking Back Times Square Feminist Repertoires and the Transformation of Urban Space in Late Second Wave Feminism." *Radical History Review*, vol. 2012, no. 113, 2012, pp. 67–80.

- Reichl, Alexander J. *Reconstructing Times Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development*. UP of Kansas, 1999.
- Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver* (1976). *Indiewire*, 21 Apr. 2016, <https://www.indiewire.com/2016/04/the-8-best-things-taxi-driver-super-fan-quentin-tarantino-has-said-about-martin-scorseses-enduring-classic-289562/>.
- Rorke, Robert. "How 'The Deuce' Turned a Quiet NYC Neighborhood into Porn-Tastic Times Square." *New York Post*, 10 Sep. 2017, <https://nypost.com/2017/09/10/how-the-deuce-turned-a-quiet-nyc-neighborhood-into-porn-tastic-times-square/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Sanders, James. *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Schiraldi, Paul. "Candy in Season Two." *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 10 Sep. 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/tv/tv-news/the-deuce-season-2-new-theme-song-elvis-costello-722041/>.
- "Seven-Fifty." *The Deuce*. HBO. 23 Sep. 2018.
- Skyscraper Reflection. Screenshot from "The Deuce: Season 2 Opening Credits." *Youtube*, uploaded by HBO, 13 Sep. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lsPcc7uxho>.
- Smith, David. "David Simon: If You're Not Consuming Porn, You're Still Consuming Its Logic." *The Guardian*, 10 Sep. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/sep/10/david-simon-george-pelecanos-the-deuce-pornography-drama-interview-the-wire>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Soo Hoo, Fawnia. "How the Costumes in HBO's 'The Deuce' Expose the Authentic Grit of '70s Times Square." *Fashionista*, 8 Sep. 2017, <https://fashionista.com/2017/09/hbo-the-deuce-costumes>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.
- Sprengler, Christine. "Complicating Camelot: Surface Realism and Deliberate Archaism." *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series*. Edited by Scott F. Stoddart, McFarland & Co., 234-252.
- Still from Woody Allen's film *Manhattan* (1979). *Time Out*, 24 Mar. 2016, <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/film/the-best-and-worst-woody-allen-movies>.
- Stoddart, Scott F. "Introduction." *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series*. Edited by Scott F. Stoddart, McFarland & Co., 2011, 1-11.
- Sullivan, Erin. "Nostalgia." *The Lancet*, vol. 376, no. 9741, 2010, p. 585.
- Sullivan, Rebecca, and Lauren Helen Marks. "The Deuce: Porn, Nostalgia, and Late Capitalism."

*The Conversation*, 18 Sept. 2017, <https://theconversation.com/the-deuce-porn-nostalgia-and-late-capitalism-83859>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.

“Tour Highlights.” *Mad Men Tours*, <https://madmentour.com/tour-highlights.php>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2019.

Weil, François. *A History of New York*. Translated by Jody Gladding, Columbia UP, 2004.