

# TRUTH GAMES

## NATURALIZING THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## Abstract

The city is not resultant, it is deliberately constructed. And in turn, that city is shaping the truth of its inhabitants. This thesis analyzes Neoliberalism, and architecture as its active agent, not only in constructing space, but in constructing subjectivity within that space. Neoliberalism exists in two forms: policy and ideology. I contend that architecture serves as a mediator between these forms. Ideology and Architecture construct Truth Games, which do not contain intrinsic truth, instead, they simulate truth from reasonable assumptions. In the landscape of Neoliberal policy, there emerge particular environments which aggressively naturalize Neoliberal subjectivity. I entitled these spaces Capital Imaginaries, as they take on a utopian imaginary of the ideal city according to the market. It is within these islands of raw and exaggerated capital that Truth Games, typically obscured, float at the surface and begin to expose themselves. The objective of this thesis is to interrogate these spaces in order to uncover their Truth Games and re-represent the city without its veil.

The Capital Imaginaries of Kop van Zuid (Rotterdam), Canary Wharf (London), and Hudson Yards (New York) become the targets of this interrogation, each revealing one aspect of the market's ideal subject. The Truth Games were uncovered by a cross-disciplinary research and observation of daily life. Once scripted, the Truth Games drove new representations of the city unmasked. The final installation of these representation is a digital exhibition, designed to allow for exploration, connections, and cross-referencing. This medium, as a collector of all the mediums this project has taken, is both an archive and a provocation. All in an effort to see again what is right in front of us.

## Executive Summary

The city is not resultant, it is deliberately constructed. And in turn, that city is shaping the truth of its inhabitants. This thesis analyzes Neoliberalism, and architecture as its active agent: not only constructing space, but constructing subjectivity within that space.

Neoliberalism exists in two forms: policy and ideology. I contend that architecture serves as the mediator between these forms. On the policy side, Neoliberalism's tenants are deregulation, privatization, and competition. These policies shape the space of the city. On the ideology side, I contend that the market is the ordering system, not just for the economy, but extended to cover the social and political spheres. Margaret Thatcher was quoted in 1981 saying, "Economies are the method: the object is to change the heart and soul." Neoliberalism leads us to this inevitable changing of the soul by constructing a series of Truth Games. Truth games do not contain intrinsic truth, instead, they simulate truth from reasonable assumptions. Like any ideology, these simulated truths become naturalized. They fade into the subconscious, and are accepted as intrinsically true.

Neoliberalism plays the following Truth Game: our society is too complex for us to understand, and therefore it cannot be ordered by humans. By contrast, the market is itself a mechanism of spontaneous order, and therefore is better suited to calculate, process, and order our society. Subsequently, it is humans who must adapt to the needs of the market.

This conclusionary statement is action-oriented. Those thoughts, beliefs, and aspirations which would align humans to the ideal market subject must be formed. It is here that architecture assumes her role in the cycle of ideology informing policy, policy creating space, and space naturalizing ideology.

In the landscape of Neoliberal policy: tax breaks, enterprise zones, and visa incentives, there emerge particular environments which aggressively naturalize Neoliberal subjectivity. I entitled these spaces Capital Imaginaries, as they take on a utopian imaginary of the ideal city according to the market. These environments are shiny, tightly-controlled, inexplicably sterile, and they begin to unravel the Truth Games at work in the city. It is within these islands of raw and exaggerated capital that Truth Games, typically obscured, float at the surface and begin to expose themselves. The objective of this thesis is to interrogate these spaces in order to uncover their Truth Games and re-represent the city without its veil.

The first step in this process was uncovering the Truth Games, the second developing representational tactics to lay them bare. The Capital Imaginaries of Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam, Canary Wharf in London, and Hudson Yards in New York became the targets of this interrogation, each revealing one aspect of the market's ideal subject.

The process of uncovering the Capital Imaginary's Truth Games was executed in two phases: research and observation. In the research phase, I collected information on all three cities to support both the claim that they were created by Neoliberal Policy and that their space produces an aspect of the Neoliberal Subject. The policy argument is made through three drawing types: a site plan, a timeline, and an economic elevation. Each drawing allowed me control over a particular medium of the project: its form, its political history, and its economic structures respectively. In order to make the argument that the Capital Imaginaries each naturalize an aspect of the Neoliberal Subject, I conducted further research into the architectural techniques of each place and its quirks. From this research, I constructed the argument that in each Capital Imaginary, the architectural technique (View / Simulacrum / Experience) produced an aspect of the conventional subject (Individual / Laborer / Consumer) with a particular adjective describing the nature of that subjectivity as perpetuated in that space (Depoliticized / Uncritical / Entertained). I.e. Kop van Zuid is about the view, which constructs the individual, who is depoliticized by the view. Concluding with the claim that Kop van Zuid constructs the Depoliticized Individual, while Canary Wharf constructs the Uncritical Worker and Hudson Yards constructs the Entertained Consumer. Together, these three figures compose the market's ideal subject.

In the observation phase, I traveled to the three cities and spent four to six days immersed within them. In this time, I walked, observed, and used a subtle video camera to capture long takes: still shots at least thirty seconds in length. This footage was cut into three 20-minute short films, one for each Capital Imaginary. The films deployed the long take as a mechanism for reintroducing criticality into the smooth and shiny space. The films became the basis for analysis on how the Capital Imaginaries work, and the behaviors within them.

It was at this point that I began to script the Truth Games. Information and ideas from both the research (drawings) and observations of daily life (film) came together with a conceptual foundation (reading) to develop a 9/10-step Truth Game for each city. Similar to the observed Truth Games of Neoliberalism, these Truth Games were held to parameters. They all begin with a neutral statement about a requirement of the market. From there, they build, one statement on top of the next, to reach absurd conclusions about the function of the city. Here, the Capital Imaginaries began to take on new names: The Empty City (Kop van Zuid), The Factory City (Canary Wharf), and The City™ (Hudson Yards). The assertions of the Truth Games were paired with film stills that had been altered to become speculative renderings of what is hidden beneath the banal surface.

Now that the Truth Games were uncovered, the thesis became a project of representation. Through an immersive film exhibition put on in Slocum Hall, manipulations of the stills as renderings, x-rayed axonometrics, a revised manifesto, and stolen drawings the thesis has experimented with tactics for unmasking the Truth Games and laying bare the spatial mechanism that lies underneath.

The final installation of these representations is a digital exhibition, designed to allow for exploration, connections, and cross-referencing. The digital exhibition is intended to be accessible, both literally and intellectually, to anyone who is ready to take a second look at the city. This medium, as a collector of all the mediums this project has taken, is both an archive and a provocation. All in an effort to see again what is right in front of us.

To the words which have carried me through this:

“There may not be much hope, but there remains a responsibility.”

*Francisco Sanin*

# WELCOME

to the  
Digital Exhibition

## HANNEKEVANDEURSEN.COM

Viewing suggestion:

This exhibition, like any other, can be experienced at many levels. If you're in a rush, you can click through and get the main idea. If you have some time, or it catches your interest, you can spend hours reading every placard and studying all the artifacts. There is no "right" way to see it, so explore! Click around, and get sucked in.

The honors component resides in the 3 films, which can be found under "The Long Take."  
The films are also directly linked later in this document.

## **My Experience Producing *Capital Imaginaries*, A Reflection.**

Hanneke van Deursen

When given the opportunity to engage a field adjacent to architecture for the honors component of my thesis, I challenged myself to try something new. From early on, there were ideas about making a movie. The first source of inspiration was a documentary, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, which analyzed the use of urban plazas in the 1970s. It made me wonder, fifty years later, how has our use of space (and the space itself) changed? Second, there was a gloomy Sunday afternoon in London stuck in my head. In February 2018, on a class assignment, I had stumbled into Canary Wharf. Its eeriness had haunted me since. These two experiences gave me the idea to implement film as a medium to research the urban condition.

In the following months, I built my thesis. By final Thesis Preparation reviews in early December, a body of research had emerged which

established a three-way analytical case study of Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam, Canary Wharf in London, and Hudson Yards in New York. I began to call these environments Capital Imaginaries, interpreting them as the dystopian imaginations of perfect urbanism under capitalism. The analysis danced between politics, economics, geography, and urban studies to establish between the Capital Imaginaries a common origin in Neoliberal policy. From there, a hypothesis was established on truth games, the play of logics which Capital Imaginaries employ to naturalize Neoliberal Ideology. I positioned architecture as an active agent in these truth games and argued that architecture works in service of the market, naturalizing a passive subject in a constant state of production or consumption: the Neoliberal Subject.

At the Thesis Preparation review, each Capital Imaginary was presented in a series of analytical drawings. Each began with a detailed site plan, the drawing of which granted me immense control and understanding over the physical space. Next to the site plan hung a multi-layered timeline, which tracked connections between policy, public institutions, public/private partnerships, private individuals/companies, and the construction of the site. The timelines revealed that Neoliberal policy (tax breaks, quasi-public organizations, visa incentives) was directly responsible for creating each of the Capital Imaginaries. Next to the timeline hung elevational drawings. These street elevations layered information about financial models, tenants, architects, and programmatic functions onto each individual building. Next to these three research-based drawings hung my hypothesis on each Capital Imaginary. I extracted their truth games and represented them in both text and image. For example, in Rotterdam's Kop van Zuid, the truth games say that it is the architectural mechanism of 'view' which flattens the city to an image and constructs the depoliticized individual behind its picture plane. It is those truth games, a means of understanding ideology, which enable the architectural environments of Capital Imaginaries to construct the Neoliberal Subject.

During the review, two big questions arose: what's next? And where is your voice? What's next was straightforward, at least in the short term. I was flying to London two days later to begin producing a 3-part film series. As far as finding my voice went, the production of the films, and therein

taking a month-long detour from the policy / economics / architecture side of the thesis, was intended to shift my focus towards observation and image production. The films would be the lynchpin between my thesis prep research, and my thesis design project. My honors reader, Vasilios Papaioannu, came to see the review, and put his perspective on the work. For him, it was a project of translation. He saw the same place unpacked through the lenses of politics, geography, economics, sociology and architecture. To follow his rhetoric, my next step was to make another translation, this time articulating the ideas through film.

There was a bit of a problem with my filmmaking plan: over the years, I developed a sensibility for taking photos, but had never worked with moving pictures. Rather than attempt to master filmmaking in a month, we decided it would be stronger to leverage my existing skills of careful observation and photographic composition to create for a simple, static, and voyeuristic film that would offer a peek into the world of a Capital Imaginary. Each clip would be a living photograph. Professor Papaioannu lent his sensibility for the editing and in the end we were able to create something I had never expected to turn out so well. The following is a reflection on my experiences making the films, *Capital Imaginaries: Canary Wharf, Kop van Zuid, and Hudson Yards*.

As scheduled, I flew to London two days after my thesis prep review. Emerging from Canary Wharf Underground station, my eyes darted around in wonder. It was like stepping into the world of a videogame I had been playing for months. Since October images, google models, and drawings of this strange place had occupied my screen. And now I was in it. The next six days were spent fully immersed in Canary Wharf. Armed with my subtle little video camera, I walked and observed and sat and chatted. My hope was to capture the way in which Canary Wharf avoided criticality, and perpetuated a constant state of work. As I looked around, moments would catch my eye (a beautiful composition, an interesting interaction). Doing my best to keep still, I would aim the camera at that moment and wait. At least 30 seconds, no more than five minutes. This became my technique for all three films: full immersion into the environment, long and steady takes, keep looking for the next shot. In the process of making each film,



and thus in occupying the Capital Imaginaries, a series of unexpected observations surfaced. The following are my observations in Canary Wharf:

1. At first, I was extremely paranoid about getting caught. Canary Wharf is private property, and the private security could remove me from the premises at any moment for any reason. The website specified that filming required a permit (though not for student work) and filming security equipment, building entrances, etc was strictly prohibited. This is precisely what I needed to film. A man with a large camera told me that security had spotted him within fifteen minutes. But, after a while, I began to realize that no one really noticed me. My camera was small, which helped avoid security, but even those being filmed at a single meter's distance did not see me. My paranoia waned as time and time again I was completely invisible to the subjects of my film. Those who did notice me were typically not those wearing business suits.
2. My hotel was just beyond the border of the property, which meant it was 4m below the 'ground level' of Canary Wharf. This strange boundary was masked by an art piece that obscured the view from Canary Wharf beyond its border. To get to the hotel, I would have to go to a stair tucked into a neighboring building to get down. From street level, a tunnel entrance was visible. It took me four days to build up the courage, but after going inside I discovered the entire site is connected by the tunnel system.
3. Those who did not appear to be high income individuals were almost always in a uniform which clearly communicated their occupation. It appeared as a sort of justification for why these people were occupying the space of Canary Wharf, that without the uniform they would be out of place.

4. After three days of filming within the Canary Wharf property, I needed some shots from the surrounding area with the skyscrapers in the background. The experience of leaving was surreal. It was as if I had forgotten what a city really was like. There was a texture to the surrounding neighborhood, sounds, grit, people hanging out, that had been smoothed out in Canary Wharf. What stunned me was that even while making a film about the editing of urbanity which Capital Imaginaries produce, I too fell was subject to its naturalization.

The themes which emerged in the Canary Wharf film were: relationship between upper class and working class, the radiant gentrification impact, the edges/borders, the tight control of the environment, the obliviousness of the workers, and the banality of the architecture.

After my week in London, I took a train to Rotterdam, editing together my first cut of Canary Wharf on the journey. It was coming together nicely, and so expectations for the Rotterdam film were high. The goal for this film was to capture how Capital Imaginaries distance their occupants from the life of the city, and instead make the city an object to look at. This film was going to be different. I had lived in Rotterdam for 7 months in 2018, and so the city was familiar to me. While I assumed this would make things easier, Kop van Zuid became by far the most difficult place to figure out. The following are some of my observations:

1. My approach matched that in London: walking around and filming compositions and interactions. The issue was I could not get a feel for the place. After filming some 'B-roll' (nice shots of buildings without any action), there had not been many interactions to observe. There were few people to begin with, and when there were people they would be strolling, seemingly going nowhere. I did not know what to film. No themes were emerging.
2. After a few days of stressing about the illegibility of Kop van Zuid, I spoke with a Rotterdam-based friend of mine who put it quite simply. Kop van Zuid is a destination, not a place. With this in mind, the argument of the film began to fall into place. I focused on the

relationship between the image of Kop van Zuid from far away, the urban skyline, and the reality of the experience on ground level, sterile, empty and windy.

3. I began to notice that most of those strolling were couples. Their walk was a promenade of sorts, like they were parading their relationship in the place so it could be seen. Most visitors seemed to come over the Erasmus Bridge and do a lap around Kop van Zuid without any particular destination, just to get out of the house and stroll around.
4. There were many people at Kop van Zuid to take selfies, the city serving as backdrop.
5. There were multiple tours: segway tours, school groups, which reinforced the idea that Kop van Zuid is a place to go. Usually, the tours had little to see once they arrived, the group and I being the only people around.
6. So many people saw me and the camera. After my experience in Canary Wharf, this reinforced the see-and-be-seen nature of Kop van Zuid. I, with my camera, was a spectacle for visitors to observe, while, at the same time, some performed for the camera (waving, kissing, pointing).

The themes which emerged in the Kop van Zuid film were: city as photo backdrop, seeing and being seen, image of the skyline vs. experience at street level, and emptiness/non-place.

After a two-week break, I moved to my final location: New York City. Here, the film would capture how Capital Imaginaries relegate free time to consumption. This film was the easiest. Hudson Yards is small in comparison to the other two Capital Imaginaries, and it is exceptionally clear in its production of an Entertained Consumer. It was packed with people, so I had no shortage of subjects, and the mall even had a charging station, eliminating camera battery concerns. The following were some of my observations producing the final film:

1. Like in Canary Wharf, my fear of getting caught waned as I realized that no one noticed me. Moreover, *everyone* was there taking photos, so if anything I blended in.
2. The security, while less overt than in Canary Wharf, was incredibly present. People were frequently directed, checked in on, and monitored to ensure that the place ran like a well-oiled machine.
3. Everyone there looked like they would shop at the stores in the mall (ranging from Zara to Rolex). There were no homeless people, artist-types, and barely any working class people from my observations. There were, however, many tourists.
4. There was an extended metaphor between Little Spain (the Spanish 'market') and the entire complex of Hudson Yards. Little Spain reflects the Chelsea Market permanent-food-stall model, but all by a single chef. It is intended to recall a Spanish market, as the branding on the walls heavily insinuates, with around ten stalls that each sell a different category of product (sandwiches, meat, seafood, fruit). The displays are so neatly staged that the food appears fake. In the case of the jamón (an entire pig leg), the grossest part (the foot) is cut off so as to alienate the product from the animal it came from.
5. There is a store called b8ta full of gadgets that people can play around with. The place was always packed. On my third day, I learned that the business model of the store does not derive profit from sales, but instead from data collected on the customers. The whole store is rigged with cameras which detect age, race, gender, and duration of interaction to sell the consumer data to the startups.
6. I overheard someone say "they just don't build stuff like this anymore, it's all in China now, all the good architects are over there." This was quite amusing, especially considering that the buildings he was referring to were likely designed by western architects, a condition made possible by Neoliberalism.

The themes which emerged in the Hudson Yards film were: control of space and movement, commodification, spectacle, selfie-taking as

interaction with public space, the shed as controlled public space, and the banality of the architecture.

After the shooting, came the editing. I made an effort to finish at least the first cut of each film before starting to shoot the next. That way, the editing occurred in the same headspace as the shooting. After a 'first cut' was ready, Professor Papaioannu would watch the film together via Skype. He would pause and give notes: "put this one a little bit longer," "wait until she leaves the frame to cut," "cut before he moves his head." Because I had never made a film before, the editing session on the first movie, Canary Wharf, required about two hours to work through the 20 minute film. Professor Papaioannu was incredibly helpful in describing to me the rationale of where you cut and when. Through the editing process my sensibility began to develop.

Editing the Kop van Zuid film was as difficult as shooting it. There was 500GB of footage, but no clear direction. In an effort to make sense of it, I went through all the footage, selected the clips that were working well, and set in and out points for them (where the clip will start/stop). With screenshots of the 80+ selected clips, I started arranging the scenes in Adobe Illustrator to make a storyboard. With the visual oversight that Illustrator gave me, my architectural brain was much happier and the clips started to form more logical sequences. In our first-cut Skype session, Professor Papaioannu agreed that Canary Wharf and Kop van Zuid were two very different movies, but validated that it was because of the qualities of Kop van Zuid (or lack thereof) that the movie was so difficult to make. In the end, the film managed to capture the confusion of place that Kop van Zuid produces.

Hudson Yards was by far the easiest. This was a combination of my skills improving with every movie, the conceptual clarity of 'The Entertained Consumer', and the overt presence of this subject in the environment. This time having a printer on hand, I cut out my storyboards and began to move them around. There was so much strong footage that the initial storyboard contained 120 possible clips (to be whittled down to 66). The editing session with Professor Papaioannu was quick and easy, he noted that my

skills as an editor had improved drastically, and that in every movie the strongest element was my composition.

It was an incredible feeling to finish the three movies, and I truly surprised myself with the result. The films were shown in an immersive installation designed for the thesis mid-reviews in early February. The films began as a fun project, and a way to engage another discipline, but they have revealed themselves to be the mechanism for carrying my thesis project forward. The long-takes, prolonged shots where the camera does not move, force the viewer to unpack the image themselves. In so doing, the films begin to unravel the illusion of the Capital Imaginaries. It returns criticality to the banal environment. In the coming months, my thesis will draw from these long-takes to produce a project which unmasks the truth game. The films will invariably remain an active agent in the development of the thesis from here on out.

# CAPITAL IMAGINARIES



Kop van Zuid: The Depoliticized Individual  
[hannekevandeursen.com/fv-kvz](http://hannekevandeursen.com/fv-kvz)



Canary Wharf: The Uncritical Laborer  
[hannekevandeursen.com/fv-cw](http://hannekevandeursen.com/fv-cw)



Hudson Yards: The Entertained Consumer  
[hannekevandeursen.com/fv-hy](http://hannekevandeursen.com/fv-hy)

