

Imagined urban intervention. The city beyond form

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This paper examines how cities are not only constructed through physical form but are continually completed through imagination, perception, and cultural production. Moving beyond conventional frameworks of urbanism grounded in infrastructure and planning, it proposes that architecture, literature, and music function as parallel modes of urban knowledge. These disciplines operate as “imagined urban interventions,” shaping how the city is experienced, interpreted, and inhabited without necessarily altering its material fabric.

Drawing on the work of John Hejduk, Italo Calvino, and David Byrne (Talking Heads), all working in the mid-20th century, the paper establishes a triangulated epistemological framework in which the city emerges through narrative, rhythm, and symbolic form. Within this framework, the perceivable city is completed through the application of meaning across multiple media. Despite their differences, these disciplines share a common structure defined by the urban context, the imagined object or narrative, and the active participant who interprets and activates it.

In Hejduk’s architectural practice, the city is inscribed with poetic objects and characters that invite interpretation. In Calvino’s literary constructions, urban space unfolds through memory, metaphor, and narrative. In Byrne’s musical work, the city is rendered as an affective and temporal experience shaped by movement and sound. Across these media, the participant—viewer, reader, or listener—actively completes the urban condition.

These imaginaries are situated within broader perspectives on lived urbanism, emphasizing human-scale experience, adaptability, and social infrastructure. A distinction is drawn between the “imageable city,” as perceptible and legible form, and the “imaginary city,” as culturally and emotionally constructed. These dimensions are mutually constitutive, with imagination serving as the mechanism through which meaning is produced. Ultimately, imagination operates as a critical urban practice, expanding architectural discourse and offering new tools for evaluating and envisioning livable cities and the function of built form.