

## **The Shop Window in Nature: A Media History of Glass**

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This paper looks at physical aspects of show windows, with a special focus on the glass material of which they are made, and connects show windows not only with issues related to consumer culture but also with issues related to the natural environment and politics.

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese kimono shops were evolving into department stores, and show windows were installed in one department store after another around 1900. In the 1920s and into the 1930s, show windows established a solid position as an advertising medium for urban spaces. At first the transparent glass itself attracted attention as it exhibited product images in the form of window displays. Elements that disturbed the media, such as air bubbles, warping, and seams in the glass, were seen as problematic “noise.” From around 1920, Japan followed other countries in adopting technologies for mass manufacturing of high-quality plate glass, facilitating the expansion of show windows nationwide.

However, when we think about show window glass in light of the points raised by Jussi Parikka in *Geology of Media*, we see that the silica sand and limestone that are the raw materials of plate glass, along with the coal that serves as fuel for fusing these raw materials, are natural resources that the earth produced over a very long period of time. Back then, massive mining of those resources led to the creation of slag heaps—mounds of mining residues—in coal-producing regions. The use of mining waste as landfilling material and runoff from the heaps led to the pollution of local soil and of rivers and other waterways. In addition, high-quality silica sand was extracted from the Korean Peninsula, which at the time was under Japanese colonial rule, and Koreans labored in Japanese coal mines under harsh conditions. In today's digital society, glass remains an indispensable material used in displays of computers, smartphones, and other information devices. Interest in this material raises new questions about the context required to understand modern digital media, and suggests new possibilities for exploring the history of media.