

#Kalasatama:

Discursive views of the Helsinki skyline through a virtual window

This paper examines the role of digital visualising technology in the mediation of urban spaces in Helsinki, Finland. The research analyses how urban space is mediated through the smartphone with images from Instagram. Focusing on visual encounters in Instagram posts tagged with #Kalasatama, the research examines how these encounters reshape perceptions of urban space through the formations of new skylines and publics in Helsinki. Kalasatama is a suburb to the east of Helsinki's city centre. Formerly an industrial area hosting a small port, it is currently being developed with an envisioned finish date in the late 2030s. The area is being developed as both a commercial and residential space.

Experiences of the city and its exploration are constantly mediated through images using digital visualising technologies, such as smartphones, advertising screens and surveillance cameras. Social media plays a significant part in these experiences and apps, such as Instagram, now make it easier to quantify citizens' visual experiences of urban space. The research takes inspiration from and builds on, postphenomenology and the philosophy of technology, which examines how technology shapes our experiences of the world and how it shapes us within that world. Inside that framework, the research explores how the screen acts as a virtual window into the world, creating a coherent reality for us to experience. We embody the experience of viewing urban space through the smartphone, leading us to believe we have transparent access to it via images.

The research also creates a framework for examining how our experiences are mediated through technologies used to capture images. It also examines the role the camera plays in a mediated practice of making images and how those images can create authentic experiences of the world. Classical phenomenology is often problematic when applied to technological mediation as it seeks to describe the world as it is present in human consciousness. In contrast, postphenomenology recognises the nature of things depends on a relational context. Therefore, a postphenomenological practice recognises the role of the camera as a mediator of human-world relations, bringing these relations explicitly to the fore.