

# Finding the Found: A reflective approach to experimental photography

## Keywords

Reflective Design, Experimental photography, Image Ontology, Found photo, Mediation



## Abstract

This research aims to reconceptualize relations between photographic images and the experience of noticing. It seeks to ground a burgeoning definition of Experimental Photography through aligning a shifting ontological status of images within discourse relevant to several subdisciplines of design.

In short, experimental photography stresses the need to rethink photographic practice given the trajectory of technological innovation to challenge long held ideas and ideals regarding the perception of personal agency. These occur within practices of looking and noticing deemed normative to daily life. It also seeks to reposition ontologically pertinent notions of ownership, trust, and privacy within the act of photographing as traces of technological mediation. In doing so, the photographic image becomes both an object of design to reflect upon, but also an arrow pointing to contextual factors influencing the act of noticing.

It is no secret that the ontological position of photographic images has changed dramatically within the past two decades. Temporal disruption is no longer enough to discuss how, and why the creating and disseminating of photographic images has become central to our networked use of photographs in daily life. The photograph now takes on an increasingly complex array of potentialities within which it can be interpreted, encountered, or even acted upon. To discuss these topics within a changing ontological landscape, the Found photo is used as a subject and analytical tool in this research. It provides insight into the factors relevant to experimental photography. These factors include discourse on design ethics through reflective design tactics. This occurs through first identifying and analyzing relational models which implicate a technological mediation of looking towards and noticing a photo worthy of taking or identifying as Found.

Noticing found photographs also imbues them with a sense of importance gained from discovery of the unexpected or unplanned. This seems a worthy, if not lofty goal to attach to such a wicked medium. At worst, such photographs remain overlooked in the dustbins of visual culture. At their best, they may transmit to their finder a potential to make present the very conditions that afforded their own existence. Here, they make themselves useful as objects of contemplation for designers and photographers alike. They provide insights through their discovery as objects and as well as decontextualized traces of technological mediation within unforeseen encounters. The paper unfolds in three phases.

### Phase 01

Introduction of Experimental Photography through addressing contemporary ontological issues of photographs within a post-phenomenological frame of media-interaction.

### Phase 02

Enacting a methodological framework relevant to image ontology and post-phenomenological discourse. This includes a concurrent use of literature review, practitioner interviews, and practice-led research into mediated relations between the perception, representation, and material presence of Found photographs in specific contexts.

### Phase 03

Expanding on these primary relations involves the design and implementation of reflective and reflexive practitioner workshops. These provide insight into ethical sensitivities relevant to interaction, visual communication, and social designers. In doing so, they also identify the potential for a joining of both image ontology and media theory with mediation theory. As a result, this study supports a defining and practice of experimental photography in the digital era.

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Research Field / Area

**Image Ontology, Mediation Theory, Reflective Design**

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