Discuss how the conditions of the 'post-photographic era' relate to a particular area or institution of photography.

To what extent has vernacular photography changed in the 'post-photographic era'? In a digital age how do we share, use and disseminate once private photographs?

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By the late 1980's the growth, easier accessibility and lower cost of digital technology precipitated the emergence of what is termed the 'post-photographic era'. Digital cameras and smartphones revolutionised the taking of photographs whilst the internet enabled the sharing and dissemination of personal imagery on an unprecedented scale. The principle (but not exclusive) function of a snapshot prior to the digital revolution was as a tangible keepsake, an aide-mémoire. During the majority of the 20th century family albums in the main included a miscellany of printed photographs, my personal archive certainly confirms this. Whilst temporality and memory are traditionally linked with photography this connection appears to be becoming increasingly tenuous.

However the veracity of a photograph as a factual token of memory has always been unreliable, distortion of memory is neither new nor unique but following the inception of digital technology, rather than a choice, image manipulation appears to be the standard. Analogue techniques are lengthy, easier to detect and generally undertaken by experts, whilst digital technology enables amateurs, even the smartphone owner, to use a photo editing app both easily and convincingly. It is no longer a specialised and difficult process, hence manipulation must be considered a fundamental element of digital photography. The everyday use of camera phones' in particular has created 'shifts in the practices of snapshot and personal photography' (Lister p.p 1). Images are viewed on a screen, manipulated by software, they can be immediately checked and instantly deleted.

Although manipulation is not unique to digital photography what is unparalleled is the expanding potential to reassess and enhance our own images whilst old family photographs are easily restored and altered,
ameliorating identity and appearance. José van Dijck a media and culture studies professor at the University of Amsterdam proposes this process of altering identity could be a lasting task as the past is constantly altered and re-invented. Nevertheless whilst 'digital photo cameras have been touted as novel instruments of identity formation' (Dijck, V.J. 2008 p.p 63) photography has always been used as a tool to shape identity.

However rather than existing as a physical print and kept in a box or album for private viewing to be used as a device for remembering, many personal images are now globally shared via digital platforms such as Flickr, Facebook and Instagram. The ubiquitous camera-phone is always on hand to snap daily life, we continue to document the same events, weddings, birthdays etc we have always done but how we do this and the sheer number of images taken has changed. Vernacular photography is no longer used to solely capture special or momentous occasions but 'permits entirely new performative rituals' (Dijck, V.J. 2008 p.p 62) as images are more commonly shared instantaneously via live streaming, social media sites and emailed to relatives and friends. Photo blogs and emails are used to keep in touch, physical albums rarely kept. The intangible and ephemeral images taken and shared with camera-phones are seldom intended as mementos, nor private viewing, are rarely printed but discarded once received and seen, their importance momentary and primarily used as a device for communicating daily experiences not just special occasions. Hence their perceived function as an aide-mémoire is questionable in the 'post-photographic' age.

Due to the proliferation of personal images taken and shared on a daily basis 'digital photography has provided the sense that photographs are no longer as precious' (Murray, S. p.p 175); they cease to be thought of as unique and
important when so easily replaced. In 2014 an approximate 1.4 million photographs were uploaded daily to Flickr; to order to view them would take over a fortnight allowing just a second per image. Dutch artist Erik Kessels’s installation 24 Hrs in Photos (figure 1) offers a fascinating insight into the sheer number of internet images we are inundated with every day. Images shared on Flickr on a single day were downloaded and printed forming a huge mound of photographs that visitors to the exhibit were encouraged to walk over. Kessels display is a sombre reflection on how expendable and "public your private photos have become" (Kessels 2011).

Furthermore there seems to be an evolving distinction between the printed photograph and digital imagery shared online via social media sites where often the motivation to share is frequently to gain followers, likes or re-
tweets. Such images are no longer linked with the past nor considered symbols of memory, but 'become proxies for craving validation...less about the personal value residing in the image' (McLaren p.p 136). Whilst older generations continue to use 'the primacy of photography as a memory tool, particularly in the construction of family life, ...teenagers and young adults use camera-like tools for conversation and peer-group building' (Dijck, V.J. 2007 p.p 113). Snapchat, a social media and messaging site popular with teenagers, allows users to share imagery that is short lived and deleted within 10 seconds of viewing, the antithesis of a printed snapshot that can be held and kept as a constant token of remembrance. Transitory digital images are occasionally accompanied by a brief note; their function first and foremost to maintain friendships, communicate not commemorate.

For Roland Barthes Ça a été (what has been) is at the core of photography's power, time is linear. However for a new digital savvy generation it appears the photograph is no longer associated with the past but with immediacy, the here and now. Unlike a photograph in a printed album, book or frame, the networked digital image is no longer singular but can be seen on screen in innumerably contexts 'what was once amateur or snapshot photography has become potentially global in scope' (Dewdrey, A. p.p 101). Family snapshots are no longer static, hidden and kept in the home, but publicly shared via email and social media; they travel around the globe suggesting that their status as a mnemonic is no longer considered as important as their use as a means of communication.

However despite photography's traditional connection during the 19th and 20th century with remembrance it has additionally always been used as a
device for communication and sharing events. Nevertheless how we choose to share imagery in the public domain or via email private images has consequences for their future use; one over which the individual may have little control. The infamous Abu Ghraib images were 'snapshots' taken by soldiers intended to be privately shared amongst colleagues and family at home (figure 2). Even more horrifying is that 'the visual style....most resembled that of a common snapshot....clearly made by an amateur' (Zuromskis, C. p.p 52). The sickening images were never intended to be 'objects of lasting memory' (Dijck, V.J. 2007. p.p 117) yet precisely the opposite occurred when the incriminating images, intended to be discarded once seen by their recipients, paradoxically entered the public domain. The Abu Ghraib images have been seen and used in varied contexts; as evidence, art work, exhibitions, painting, literature, books, essays, websites, emails, posters, TV and even featured in a film.

Figure 2
Yet however digital imagery is disseminated José van Dijck contends 'that photography's function as a memory tool is still equally vibrant, even if its manifestation is changing in the digital era' (Dijck, V.J. 2008. p. 59). Furthermore she suggests our changing relationship with photography does not originate from digitalisation but is 'part of a broader cultural transformation that involves individualisation and intensification of experience--rather than family re-presentation (Dijck, V.J. 2008. p.p 61).

Whilst identity can be modified and altered with relative ease, photographs portray who we desire to be and how we are recalled, she proposes digital photography is not exclusively the reason why people do this and believes its reconstructed practice originates from contemporary cultural and social change. 'Flexibility and morphing do no apply exclusively to pictures as shaping tools for memory, but also more generally to bodies and things. Memory, like photographs and bodies, can now be made picture perfect; memory and photography change in conjunction, adapting to contemporary expectations and prevailing norms' (Dijck, V.J. 2008 p.p 63).

Open University professor Gillian Rose conducted research investigating why family snaps remain significant in the digital age. She suggests 'in many ways digital photography allows people to do what they want to do with family snaps more easily, more often, and more extensively' (Rose. G. 2013 p.p 70). Her initial research was conducted in 2000 and only one of her interviewees (all female with children) had access to a computer, all used analogue cameras. The second interviews were conducted between 2006-8 by which time the majority owned a digital camera and all had a computer at home. She proposes rather than reconstructing family photography digital technology has augmented it. All her interviewees took numerous snaps,
they felt it crucial 'to take photographs of their family members and in particular of their children' (Rose, G. 2013. p.p 79). The mothers' Rose interviewed felt it vital to correctly date, store and organise their images 'and with digital photography, all these things are remarkably easy to do' (Rose, G. 2013. p.p 81). Social media sites and email enable the easy sharing of snaps with family members.

However emailed images are rarely printed and, more importantly, deleted. Rose concedes 'participating in email exchanges strips family snaps of much of the destiny of memory....they are not sent primarily as a truthful record of a happy moment...their indexicality, in fact, is no longer key' (Rose. G. 2016 p.p 68); their function more to maintain family relationships. Indexicality has traditionally been presumed important in photography hence digital technology challenges its continuation as a commonly perceived medium of truth. Furthermore Rose suspects 'that a really significant transition in family photography---one which will articulate changed subjectivities and a different relation to digital images is likely to take place in another decade, when today's teenagers who use social networking sites as a central part of their social relations and representations of self become parents in their turn' (Rose. G. 2016 p.p 129). If the indexical function of the networked photograph become expendable in favour of its communicative function will the digital family album of the future cease to be of mnemonic value?

Nevertheless despite the prevalence for sharing imagery online rather than as physical prints 'many families still find pride of place on mantleplaces for framed pictures of beloved family members' (McLaren, S. p.p 141). Furthermore because of its instant worldwide reach photography is an influential medium to provide 'human connection and kindred resilience' (McLaren, S. p.p 137) and perhaps we need to acknowledge how digital
technology has enabled an undoubtedly different but easier more cost effective method of creating and sharing family snaps.

John Clang *Being Together*

Many families now live far apart, frequently in different countries, a group family snap of the sort found in analogue albums is effectively impossible. Born in Singapore New York based John Clang's project *Being Together* began as a way of creating a 'very basic family portrait......to show the technological aspect of the time we are living in' (Clang, J.2013) continuing the Asian tradition of recording formal family gatherings. The images are not composites but made as the virtual get together occurs, just how a family would have gathered together for a traditional photograph (figure 3). Using digital technology Clang initially attempted this with using his own family members but extended the venture to include other families in Singapore and their far off relatives. Using a webcam and Skype to connect distant relatives the Skype images are projected onto a wall enabling Clang to take his photograph of the virtually reunited family.

Figure 3
Mimi Mollica *Nora There*

Mollica's project was shot exclusively using a smartphone camera and shared via social media on Instagram. Mollica began photographing his daughter, Nora, as he pushed her pram around London. Initially the shots only featured Nora against dismal London backdrops but gradually other (human) subjects appeared in the frame along with his daughter (figures 4 & 5). The resultant images are the antithesis of what is usually seen in a more traditional analogue family album; Mollica comments "funnily enough my project *Nora There* turned out to be less about Nora and more about the "strangers" I photographed with her, that's why this series differs from the tradition of family photography, where I'd guess photographing the relatives is rather the focus" (in McLaren, S. p.p 140). We live in a connected world and Mollica’s work reflects this.

**Figure 4**
Figure 5

**Operation Photo Rescue (OPC)**

Following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans 2005 OPC was established, a voluntary organisation that restores personal photographs destroyed by natural disasters. The volunteers use digital techniques to restore damaged but treasured images, which "following family and pets, photos are the next most cherished possession, as the memories captured in photos are all that remain after a natural disaster" (Howarth, S. p.p 13)

**Salvage Memory**

Over three quarters of a million photographs were restored and digitised by Japanese artist Munemasa Takahasi and a team of volunteers in the
aftermath of the 2011 Japanese tsunami and earthquake. The project began with the intention of reuniting them with the original owners (400,00 have been returned) but those deemed too damaged were put into a 'hopeless' container (figure 6).

The **Lost and Found** project was initiated "to use these photos, which were destined to be thrown away, to reach out to the people living far-away places to show these photos, tell our stories, and ask for donations. These pictures offer visceral feel for the presence of the people and their lives in the photos, something that the press reports, videos and casualty figures cannot communicate. These photos also show compassion with which they were handled by so many people who retrieved and washed them" (Takahasi, M. 2012). The project can be viewed online, and has been presented as a book and exhibition.

![Figure 6](image_url)
Taylor Jones *Dear Photograph*

Taylor Jones is founder of the *Dear Photograph* website where past and current time are presented in a single frame accompanied with information (figure 7). Archival images are re-photographed years later in the same location, whilst some of the contributions are humorous a central theme is of loss and remorse, common human emotions. Jones believes the printed photograph is incomparable and is worried there is a danger of losing the physical connection to the past that a print, unlike a digital image viewed on a screen, provides. The site initially only contained Jones's images but grew rapidly to include contributions from those eager to commemorate their own personal histories.

![Figure 7](image-url)

Dear Photograph,

My Mom, a young girl in her twenties, had lived an impoverished life in German-occupied Italy during WWII. Her fiancé was a member of the resistance and he was tortured and killed. Life as she knew it was over. Until one day in April, 1949 my Dad (age 51), had moved to the US from Germasino, Italy in 1921 came by her house to visit with family members. It was a chance meeting as he was about to leave to return home when he saw her. He always said he watched her walk down the staircase and knew at that moment she was the one. He had never married, was hard working and had built a new life for himself in the United States after his father deserted him and his mother when he was just a baby. Mom always said he rescued her, just like a Prince would, and took her away to live in California. They had two children all the while living happily ever after, until cancer took them both - just 53 days apart.

As I stood in the shadows of yesterday where they once walked on their wedding day August 5th, 1949 the energy was palpable and powerful. Thank you both for life and for all the stories that keep me connected to you and my heritage. Your legacy lives on. I will never forget.

Love, Oliva
Louis Quail *Before They Were Fallen*
Louis Quail is a documentary photographer. His before and after series of images of UK families who lost family members in the Afghan war are very emotionally charged. The project addresses the themes of loss, memory and commemoration whilst "the central concept of the work is the recreation of the family snap" (Quail, L). Viewing the former images, taken in more carefree times, alongside their contemporary version forces the viewer to contemplate the pronounced blank space (figures 8 &9). I find the sets of images extremely poignant, captions accompany each set put the photographs into context. Interviews with the bereaved families can be read by clicking on a link and a video also accompanies the project, it is truly touching work.

Figure 8
Without digital technology diverse narratives such as those presented by Quail and Jones could not be shared 'and clearly the meme of juxtaposing and contrasting analogue photographs with those taken in contemporary times and then sharing them online is a device that photographers will return to again and again' (McLaren, S. p.p 138). Archived images can be digitally enhanced and publicly shared to be used in present day contexts and once 'personal photographs are increasingly pulled out of the shoebox to be used as public signifiers' (Dijck, V.J. 2007, p.p 119).

In 2004 the digital edition of *Clarin*, an Argentinian newspaper, a coloured image of Daniel Taronopolsky was presented holding a monochrome photograph of his parents and sister (who is just visible in the frame). Father and son are about the same age and look very similar, family photographs
are regularly scrutinised for familial similarities, yet when the images are viewed in a present day context their function as an archival family snap takes on a new role. Taronopolsky was the sole survivor from his family of five, his parents and two siblings disappearance in 1976 was connected to the military government and he never saw them again. The black and white photographs of Taronopolsky's family are just ordinary snaps, characteristic of the vernacular genre, but have been brought out of the archive to be used as a form of political protest and expose injustice.

Charitable organisations use private family photographs to publicise their work. Missing People is an organisation whose website has a search directory that one can use to search for missing people. On the 24th May 2007, International Missing Children's Day, images of missing children were projected onto Marble Arch. Newspapers regularly publish family photographs of missing children and victims of atrocities whilst digital technology enables the use of family images that have the capacity to reach a global audience. 'We all recognise family snaps; and when they appear in the intimate public sphere as pictures of the dead or abused, we can all emphasise with the grief and pain for whom those photo's are just that, family snaps' (Rose, G. 2016. p.g 86).

Staying connected is a major benefit of digital technology and migrants are able to keep in touch with relatives, which in the past was difficult and expensive. Smartphones in particular are used by refugees to let their family know they are safe. Photographer Patrick Witty documented refugees when they first arrived via boat onto Lesbos, a Greek Island (figure 10). He observed 'that the taking of a portrait by smartphone was often the first ritual to be performed when the boat hit sand. As soon as the migrants, photographs of exhausted, but smiling are being posted on Facebook so that
those back home know that their loved ones have made it' (McLaren, S. p.p 137)

Figure 10

![Figure 10](image)

Approximately 1.3 trillion images are taken on smartphones worldwide and whilst for many the photographs taken are expendable photographer Alex Beck's series of work *Big Shots* presents the smartphone as a commemorative storage place. Portraits of Syrian refugees are shown alongside a treasured image from their smartphone which are accompanied by hand written information about the image (figures 11,12,13, &14). These people have lost homes, family members and been forced to flee their country; their smartphone snaps function as a perpetual mnemonic device and are documents of both personal and communal history.
“We want peace in our country. When would my children, sisters and I live in peace in our country, Syria?” | Za’atari Refugee Camp, northern Jordan. A picture sent by her 24-year-old son, Ghofran, on his arrival in Germany. He was working in a bakery when this picture was taken. “I didn’t hear from him for a week when he was on his way to Germany. A week. It is bittersweet because he’s far away, but he’s safe.”

“My young brother is like the rose. He went out and left his family and five kids. My only desire is that they leave Raqqa, and come to Lebanon.” | Beqaa Valley, Lebanon. A photograph of her brother, killed in Raqqa.
Figure 13

“If only the old days can come back. We miss Syria.” — M, several years ago, outside his workplace.

Photo by Alex John Beck

Figure 14

(Signs her name twice) Shatilla, Beirut. A picture sent by her elder son, who was killed by bombs in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp in the suburbs of Damascus.
Conclusion
Technological, economic and social change have always enabled the growth of new creative opportunities that can be embraced or shunned; digital technology has revolutionised how we take, store and share family snaps. A physical print can be handled, passed around, is tangible; its non-physical digital counterpart exists in the ether. I make a point of having many of my digital images printed in some form however the digital image can be shared via social media for immediate and maximal audience viewing rather than as a print seen by a select few. In the 'post-photographic' era the online image has infinite incarnations and shared photographs are no longer simply private tokens of remembrance.

The downside of their global reach and undetectable manipulation is how personal images might be used in the future. Their prospective afterlife and later reuse may have consequences over which the individual has little or no control. Being conscious of the implications of appropriation of personal (online) imagery and how it may in the future be viewed out of context or used to incriminate will possibly be instrumental in what and how we choose to record.

Yet despite the revolution in how images are taken manipulated and shared, their communal and emotive purpose continues to endure; they remain a mechanism with which we continue to initiate affinity and maintain relationships.
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