

9/00

THE POLITICS OF VIDEO MEMORY: ELECTRONIC ERASURES AND INSCRIPTIONS

By: Marita Sturken

I remember that month of January in Tokyo, or rather I remember the images that I filmed of the month of January in Tokyo. They have substituted themselves for my memory. They are my memory. I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape. How has mankind managed to remember?
-CHRIS MARKER, *Sans Soleil*

Since its invention, the camera has figured centrally in the desire to remember, to recall the past, to make the absent present. Photographic, cinematic and video images are the raw materials used to construct personal histories: events remembered because they were photographed, moments forgotten because no images were preserved and unphotographed memories that work in tension with camera memories. The memories constructed from camera images are not only personal, but collective. History is represented by the black-and-white photographic or cinematic image, and increasingly by a faded color film image or low-resolution television image. The camera image produces memories, yet in offering itself as a material fragment of the past it can also produce a kind of forgetting.

Projected and transmitted on screens, these images can be seen as "screen memories." According to Freud, a "screen memory" functions to hide painful memories that are too difficult for a subject to confront; the screen memory offers itself as a substitute, while "screening out" the "real" memory. The camera image can often screen out other, often unphotographed memories and offer itself as the "real" memory, "becoming" our memory.

Freud demonstrated that memory is essential to the notion of a self and described the complex ways that we disremember those memories that are too damaging or painful. Similarly, the construction of memory and history is essential to a specific culture or nation; we often "forget" as a nation. I am employing the term *cultural memory* to designate cultural processes that stand outside official history and mainstream culture yet have served as a catharsis for healing, the sharing of personal memory, and community building. History in the United States is constructed through a complex apparatus of media, written texts and popular culture. Cultural memory is a kind of living memory that is produced at sites of disruption in history; it intervenes and tangles with history-making. For instance, both the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the AIDS Memorial Quilt are sites of an intense production of cultural memory, where people have actively shared memory, usually anonymously, in order to construct meaning out of the grief and loss of those events. The stories shared at these memorials are powerful testimonies that actively question aspects of their historical narratives.

Similarly, independent video constitutes a field of cultural memory, one that contests and intervenes with official history. This is not to say that all memories produced with a video camera constitute modes of resistance or political intervention - the 1990s, videotapes as cultural forms shift meaning all the time. Yet many independent videotapes are deliberate interventions in history and conscious memory constructions. The politics and phenomenology of television and video converge to both produce and negate history and memory.

THE TELEVISION IMAGE MAKING HISTORY

In the late twentieth century the photograph, the documentary film image, and the docu-drama are central elements in the construction of history. Yet electronic images have a constantly shifting relationship to history. The television image is an image of immediacy, transmission, and continuity. "Flow," as defined by Raymond Williams - the incorporation of interruption until it becomes naturalized in the stream of images - is a central aspect of television. Television is the image without an original, for which the status of the copy is ultimately irrelevant. Stanley Cavell has noted that the primary "fact" of television is its serial format; we do not distinguish the particular television episode so much as the ongoing series or event; hence, the series is what is memorable in television. 1

In contrast, most videotapes that fall under the rubric of video art or independent video are meant to be seen not as interruptions in the flow but as unique events. Certain works are designed for the context of satellite transmission and other videotapes are identified as "art for television." However, most independent videotapes aspire to be seen in contexts that separate them from the ongoing information flow of TV.

Yet the video image is implicated in the relentless electronic flow of the television image. Television is coded, like all electronic technology, as live and immediate; it evokes the instant present, in which information is more valuable the faster and more immediate it is. Television technology has thus never been conceived in terms of preservation, and videotapes deteriorate rapidly. Videotapes that were made as recently as the 1970's, look like distant antecedents to contemporary television, with their blurred and worn images and muffled sound. Many videotapes and early television shows are in fact already irretrievable.

Despite this problematic relationship to preservation, television-video has inevitably become a medium in which memory and history are recorded. Since the early 1980s, an increasing number of "historical" incidents have been recorded on television (until the late 1970s, most television news footage was still shot on film). The Challenger space shuttle exploding, the lone Chinese student halting a tank in Tiananmen Square, the people clambering on top of the Berlin Wall, and the "targets" taken from cameras on bombs in the Persian Gulf War: these are distinctly television's images of history. Slightly blurred, often shot with the immediate feeling of a hand-held camera, these images seem to evoke not a fixed history but rather history as it unfolds - the making of history. While the feverish immediacy of these images connotes an instantaneity, their status as historical images is somewhat muddled. They will, in a sense, always be coded as live, immediate images - their blurriness or lack of image resolution is often read as evoking the speed of information rather than their electronic materiality. The electronic image thus presents a paradox for memory and history, connoting the immediate instead of the past. This has led certain cultural critics to declare television as the site of memory's demise. For instance, Fredric Jameson has written: "But memory seems to play no role in television, commercial or otherwise (or, I am tempted to say, in postmodernism generally): nothing haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film (which do not necessarily happen, of course, in the 'great' films)." 2

Yet, despite Jameson's pessimism, it is too easy to declare memory dead in a postmodern context. Jameson nostalgically mourns the passing of history in the postmodern "weakening of history, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality." 3 But what is the history mourned here, a pre-television history? I would argue that the stakes in memory and history are ever present in electronic media (and postmodernism) - that despite its paradoxical relationship to the preservation of memory, television-video is a primary site of history and cultural memory, where memories, both individual and collective, are produced and claimed.

VIDEO MEMORIES

In independent video, the preservation of images and recording of history has been an underlying desire in the accumulation of videotapes. Video collectives in the 1970s, such as the Videofreex and Raindance, were interested in compiling databanks of alternative images and in accruing an alternative visual history to the nationalist history produced by broadcast television. Concerns with preservation were deemed irrelevant; consequently most of the early videotapes by the collectives have not survived, and television stations routinely destroy master tapes of old programs. The maintenance of collective memory is a problem, it seems, in the case of bulky one-inch tapes or old heat-sensitive reel-to-reel videotapes. While the notion of a video databank utopically envisioned by these collectives conjured up alternative histories stored neatly in electronic space and accessible to everyone, in reality tapes are material objects that stick, erode, and warp.

Yet in this dual role of image retention and loss, video has increasingly become a medium in which issues of collective and individual memory are being examined. The politics of memory and identity, the elusiveness of personal memory, and the relationship of camera images to national and cultural memory have become topics explored by artists in video. I would like to examine several of these artists' works in order to explore how the phenomenology of video intersects with a contemporary politics of memory, and how video has been used to create

counter-images to nationalistic histories: Woody Vasulka's *Art of Memory* (1987), Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991), Janice Tanaka's *Memories from the Department of Amnesia* (1990) and *Who's Going to Pay for These Donuts, Anyway?* (1992), and Jeanne Finley's *Nomads at the 25 Door* (1991). These tapes are concerned with the memory of political and historical events, how those memories are preserved and embodied, how they permeate the present, and the intersections of personal memory, cultural memory, and history. In all these works, the role of video as a technology of memory is ever present: remembering, forgetting, and containing memories.

Among these tapes, Woody Vasulka's *Art of Memory* is concerned most directly with the different phenomenological relationships of film and television-video to memory and history, and the fluctuating cultural meanings of images that are coded "history." *Art of Memory* takes as its material the black-and-white photographic and filmic images of the "historic events" of the twentieth century: the Spanish Civil War, the Russian Revolution, World War II, the atomic bomb. Vasulka mixes codes and tropes to make the signification of historicity his central topic. Cinematic tropes for the passage of time, such as images reeling past or flipping by, are contained within stylized, electronically created shapes that deny these cinematic codes their narrative potential. Vasulka's project is to use video to examine and ultimately consume cinema.

In *Art of Memory*, newsreel and documentary footage and still photographs are transformed into image objects that appear to sit on a southwestern desert landscape. These image objects are evocative, strange, and unpredictable. Sometimes they resemble large movie screens in the desert, at other times their shapes are awkward and bulky. They function to decontextualize the film images: one cannot read them as windows onto the world, but only as generic images of history. Some assert themselves to suggest narratives - Oppenheimer's famous post-bomb speech, in which he quotes the Bhagavad Gita, for instance - but then are submerged again in the stream of images contained within the object forms that deconstruct narrative in the tape.

Yet within this dense layering of images, Vasulka does hint at a narrative of history and the image. In one of the few purely video images, a mythical figure with wings sits on a cliff. Seeing it from a distance, a man tries to capture its attention. He tosses a pebble at it, and then, when it turns toward him, he photographs it, causing it to rise up in apparent anger and swoop down upon him. The creature is ultimately unexplained in this tape, but it evokes many possible meanings - an unattainable, mythic man/beast that the nervous and distracted middle-aged man, haunted by images of history, tries to capture with his camera. It is as if he is trying to photograph the well-known "angel of history" described by Walter Benjamin:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. 4

This sense of a propelling forward of history permeates *Art of Memory*. Vasulka's alter ego tries to create an image of the figure to hold it in place, to prevent it from hurtling toward the future, away from the photographic into the electronic grids created by Vasulka's machinery. The images of history lose their individual meaning and become a tangle of memories swallowed by the electronically rendered desert landscape. Voices echo and haunt these images; we cannot understand them, but we know, with their scratchy sound and intonation, that these are the voices of history. Still photographs, some of famous historical figures such as the anarchist Durruti and the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, scroll across the screen, processed until they become almost translucent and shredded by the passage of time. These images of history are set in the desert, a landscape coded as both timeless and post-apocalyptic.

In its form and its contrast of the cinematic and the electronic, *Art of Memory* is an attempt to chart the death of cinema. Here, the cinematic is the past, the fading black-and-white images of history, swallowed up by the electronic. In the structure of the tape, Vasulka is attempting to configure an electronic language that defies the legacy of cinematic codes. He uses complex wipes and fades to avoid the "cut," which he considers to be a cinematic trope that is not inherently a part of the language of electronic imaging. In creating image "objects" on

the screen, he is attempting to defy the fetishizing aspect of cinema, to render the cinematic images into a relentless flow in which any pretense of realism gives way to the simple code of cinema as history. *Art of Memory* is a meditation on the ways in which cinema defines and creates history, and on redefining its legacy in the realm of the electronic.

While the status of the cinematic image as history propels *Art of Memory*, the tape does not attempt to trace the meaning of its historical images or their consequences. In *Art of Memory*, the images of war meld together into a totalizing image of history, one that does not question the status of the image as history. In contrast, Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* presents video as memory (as opposed to cinema as history) as a means to construct counter-memories to history. For Tajiri, the critical issue is the construction of history and how the historical image screens out the images of personal memory. This is a dense work of found and reconstructed images, a cathartic reworking again and again of history.

History and Memory attempts to understand the intersections of personal memory and historical events, specifically the history and memories of the imprisonment of Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II. Tajiri is compelled by the gaps in her mother's memory and her own sense of incompleteness to counter the historical images of the internment of her mother and her father's family in California, specifically in U.S. propaganda films. The story of her family forms a microcosm of the consequences of racist American policy: her father served in the army while the government interned his family, all of them Americans, in concentration camps and took their possessions. Their house was not only confiscated by the government but literally moved away; they never found out where. Tajiri's task is a kind of retroactive witnessing; cameras were not allowed in the camps, so her raw materials are the images she has carried in her mind of this non-imaged past. From her mother's stories of the camps, recounted to her as a child, she creates an image of her mother filling a canteen at a faucet in the desert, an image for which she wants to find the story. When cameras are not there to witness, when memories fade and people forget, the sole witnesses are the spirits of the dead:

There are things which have happened in the world while there were cameras watching, things we have images for. There are other things which have happened while there were no cameras watching, which we restage in front of cameras to have images of.

There are things which have happened for which the only images that exist are in the minds of observers, present at the time, while there are things which have happened for which there have been no observers, except the spirits of the dead.

She imagines the spirit of her grandfather witnessing an argument between her parents about the "unexplained nightmares that their daughter has been having on the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor." Where are the memories of those events for which there were no witnesses? Where are those memories when the witnesses are gone? Where are the unphotographed images? The prohibition of cameras in the camps asserts itself often in the narrative weavings of this work. An unearthed home movie image of the camps, made with a smuggled camera, contrasts sharply with the evenly lit, steady, and clean images of government propaganda films in its jerky camera movement and, unexpectedly, its everydayness.

When we do not have access to images to construct memories and histories, Tajiri makes it clear, we make others. Her sister follows a young man with her camera, too shy to talk to him except to ask him to pose for her. His photo ends up in her box of movie stars, that only years later Tajiri realizes is filled only with images of white people. Her own task is to create images to fill the void of those absent images of the camps, to make the absent Japanese American - absent from the box of movie stars and from history-present. The war in the Pacific produced a kind of hyper-visibility of the Japanese Americans. Tajiri notes, "Whereas before we were mostly ignored and slightly out of focus, the war brought us clearly into view and made us sharply defined." The historical camera focused and saw not citizens but enemies of the state.

These are not just the memories of survivors, now fading, but the memories of their children as well. Tajiri has lived this memory:

I began searching for a history, my own history, because I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something, that I was living within a family full of ghosts. There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there, yet I had a memory for it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved, uprooted. We had lived with a lot of pain. I had no idea where these memories came from yet I knew the place.

Her tape is in many ways an attempt to coexist with the ghosts of the past by creating images in which to place them.

History is constructed not only through documentary images and propaganda films, but it is also constructed via popular culture. American cultural notions of World War II, for instance, are for the most part constructed through Hollywood films. These are screen memories that both substitute themselves for the personal memories of survivors and supersede documentary images in signifying history. These are, in Tajiri's words, the events that we restage in front of cameras. The history of this era in American history is signified for Tajiri by the jingoistic film *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) and the absent presence evoked by *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), in which Spencer Tracy investigates the death of a Japanese American man in the United States after the invasion of Pearl Harbor. Kimoko, the murdered man, is never seen in the film; Tajiri notes that his murder was one the townspeople wanted to forget, just as the people who live near Poston, Arizona, where the internment camps were constructed on a Native American reservation, attempt to forget until an Asian face reminds them. The narrative film presents itself as both history and memory, filling and supplanting our memory gaps, offering images when there were none, Tajiri's nephew, in reviewing the Hollywood film *Come See the Paradise* (1990), a sentimental depiction of the camps seen through the eyes of an internee's white husband, actively resists the capacity of these film images to replace memories, although, he says, his grandparents didn't tell him any stories.

Tajiri's desire to fill in the memory gaps with new images and reworked images of the past allows her to re-remember for her mother. When her mother cannot remember how she got to the camp, Tajiri goes back to film the drive for her. Imagining her mother filling the canteen, she says, "For years, I have been living with this picture without the story.... Now I could forgive my mother for her loss of memory and could make this image for her." The camera image thus participates in a process of healing, allowing through recreating, re-imaging, a kind of memory closure. Yet, Tajiri makes it clear that this is a partial memory and a partial healing, one remembered and constructed in opposition, one peopled with multiple subjectivities, racist images, counter-images, fragments of the past, absent presences.

Public commemoration, as a memorial or a videotape, is a form of bearing witness. Tajiri, in questioning historical narratives and creating counter-memories, attempts to create memory out of forgetting. For Janice Tanaka the video form also becomes a means of bearing witness and reclaiming memories. Tanaka states that in her childhood home, "silence was the keeper of memories," and her videotapes are a means of speaking through that silence. *Memories from the Department of Amnesia* reflects on the death of her mother, and *Who's Going to Pay for These Donuts, Anyway?*, chronicles her search for a father she hasn't seen since she was three, a father she continues to search for in the frail man with a confused memory whom she comes to know.

In both these tapes, Tanaka juxtaposes "official" historical accounts with personal memories and anecdotes. On paper, both her parents clearly suffered because of their internment as Japanese Americans during World War II, yet it is the different ways in which they responded to American racism that Tanaka investigates. In *Memories from the Department of Amnesia*, she opposes a chronology of her mother's life events with the seemingly "unimportant" quirks and anecdotes remembered by herself and her daughter. Tanaka uses cryptic and dreamlike images to suggest the elusive nature of memory: a figure rides a bicycle through a restaurant; a surgeon walks through deep snow; a white figure stands in a white space, perhaps a hospital waiting room; the bicyclist and surgeon pass each other in the snow-images of passage, remembering, and death.

The photograph as a marker of the past, as a totem of death, infuses this tape. A hand lays photographs on the screen, creating negative and positive layers of images, each shifting with movement, focusing and refocusing. The photograph is both stationary and moving, freezing the past yet moving within the present. As the hand lays

these still images on the screen they appear to briefly come alive and then resume their two-dimensional form, as if floating in and out of consciousness.

Tanaka and her daughter tell stories about her mother as the statistical events of her life are written on the screen: Born December 15, 1919, Los Angeles, California ... Abandoned by mother, 1925 Molested by father ... Married, February 1940 ... First child born, September 1940 ... Government freezes bank account, 1941 ... Interned Manzanar, 1942 ... Spouse declared insane, 1942 ... Nervous break-down, 1963 ... Finds mother, acknowledgment denied ... This visual litany of trauma, abuse, and hardship displaces the amused rememberings of Tanaka and her daughter. We see the layered existence of a woman whose life is unalterably changed by the actions of the government, the memory behind the history, the memories that emerged from the "department" of amnesia. The history of Tanaka's mother is told through a roll call of the traumatic events of her life, the institutionalization of her life's events. Yet her memory is evoked through video images, hands touching photographs, voices remembering her humor and her humanness.

In *Who's Going to Pay for These Donuts, Anyway?*, this tension between history and memory emerges in the absence of memory of Tanaka's father. When she discovers him after several years in a halfway house for the chronically mentally ill in Los Angeles, it is unclear whether he ever recognizes her to be his daughter, although he knows he has a daughter named Janice. Similarly, it remains unclear whether or not his mental instability was sadly coincidental with or actually the direct result of the Japanese internment. Tanaka remembers that her mother told her in anger not to make a hero of her absent father and, to prove his insanity to her daughter, said that he had written letters of protest to the president about the Japanese internment, that he had been questioned by the FBI, that he was diagnosed as a schizophrenic with paranoid tendencies, and that he had outbursts of anger - all of them, on the face of it, potentially sane responses to being interned in one's native country. Tanaka says, "You hated being a Jap and you hated your wife and children for being Japs."

Tanaka juxtaposes this portrait of her father as a man destroyed by history with one of her uncle, whom she also rediscovers: a calm, reserved man who speaks of the events of the war and their effects with a sad irony. Just as her uncle has devised a personal philosophy to reconcile his memories of interrogation and internment, so clearly her father has lost his memory not only through shock treatment and drug therapy but also perhaps by a strategic forgetting of things too painful to remember. In this light, those things that he does remember seem remarkable - his understanding of redress, for instance, and why he was given money by the government to compensate for his internment.

Like Tajiri, Tanaka uses the video camera as a tool to mediate between herself and the past that is also part of her memory; she states, "Observing the effect of the past could only be dealt with from behind the distancing lens of the camera." Focusing the camera on her father, however lost, makes him finally tangible. Her videotaping is thus an attempt to counter the anti-memory of her family, the lack of souvenirs and memorabilia, the lack of family cohesion. Memory, according to Tanaka, allows us to live more in the present: "When you have a past, it is easy to believe the present has a reason."

Tanaka's tape serves as a counter-memory to history, providing, like Tajiri's work, memories that tangle with history and disrupt its narratives. American national identity is constructed through the remembrance of certain historical events, as well as through the forgetting and rescripting of certain events. The historical event of the internment of Japanese American citizens during the war is not easily rescripted from its historical narrative - as necessary though regrettable, as different somehow from what other countries did. It is survivors, in particular their physical presence, who prevent history from being written smoothly and without disruption. In these three tapes it is the children of survivors who are refusing to leave history alone and whose image interventions place the bodies of their parents in the cracks of history.

The displacement so powerfully evoked in Tajiri's story of the house moved from its foundations and in Tanaka's image of her father as a man destroyed by history is echoed in Jeanne Finley's *Nomads at the 25 Door*, in which the ruthlessness of history-making and issues of home are presented within a context of bearing witness and memorializing fleeting moments in history's rapid accrual. The tape examines two separate worlds that are infused by displacement: Yugoslavia in 1990 and a women's prison in Carson City, Nevada. Finley toys with notions of

history by drawing analogies between the two situations: the upheaval of Yugoslavia and the burden of its rapidly changing history, and the ways in which the displaced women in the prison create a sense of home and bear witness for each other.

That history is a process of displacement is played out daily in the upheaval of Eastern Europe. Finley captures this painful process of history via videotape and the television screens on which it was played. Ironically, the historical upheaval she documents seems trivial when compared with the brutal destruction of Yugoslavia that has taken place since that time. While in Yugoslavia she watches the televised images of the Romanian revolution that are broadcast twenty-four hours a day for a week. Yet the television revolution is confusing and chaotic. We see scenes of people speaking, lined up before the camera, trying desperately to get into its view. Finley remarks that the coverage was "incredibly confusing," and even the Romanians she knew could not decipher the scenes. A British newscaster tells us that "residents have placed their televisions in the windows of their homes so those who are engaged in street fighting can watch their own revolution as it is taking place." History is presented in the relentless flow of television, although finally it elucidates nothing except that power has changed hands. Yet the political stakes in what gets designated history and imaged as history are high. A friend of Finley's writes her notes every morning about tricky phrases in the Serbo-Croatian language, a hybrid language created by historical whim, which are mini-commentaries on history and home:

You might think you are in a vacation paradise, but you are not. You're in a complicated part of the world, used by a cruel and ongoing history. The possibility of a home for me has always been based on the whims of history. And history never seems too indulgent. It is always displacing people.

The search for a history represents a search for stability, community, a home. In the tape we see Finley write on someone's hands, "If only I could find history simply by pressing the palms of your hands against my chest." Yet history is elusive, intangible, ever changing: it stands outside these bodies.

It is through the unusual juxtaposition of the two disparate worlds of Eastern Europe and the women's prison that Finley pushes at notions of personal history, national history and the desires within both for community and home. Her interviews with the women in the Carson City prison are moving and compelling and ultimately overshadow the images of Yugoslavia because of their direct emotional intensity. These women speak of lives of abuse and fear and, strangely for those of us on the outside, the ways in which they finally found acceptance, love, families and a sense of home in prison. The tape centers on Mickey Yates, a young woman who very slowly tells her story of receiving two life sentences for her complicity in the brutal killing of her mother. For Yates, the notion of a home is profoundly troubling; she went *home* to find her mother dead. At first, she is reluctant to tell her story, her history, but then its telling becomes cathartic and essential. She actively constructs her history. Ironically, she reveals the paradox of history in a simple idiomatic expression: when the judge asked her about the sexual abuse she was subjected to, she started to cry - "I was history after that."

In its elliptical style, Finley's tape is about inserting personal memories into the mass of history. She begins and ends the tape with an image taken by her own mother of herself and her brother waving while going off to school. These were images her mother took for family calendars showing the children dressed in different outfits for each month, standing and waving - a project that crudely evokes the passage of time. They were instructed, says Finley, to stand and wave, walk, wave again, and then walk away without looking back. Yet clearly her tape is asking, "*How can we not look back? Isn't it cruel to ask a child not to look back?*" History and memory in this work are intimately allied, each pushing the boundary of the other, each permeating our lives.

The relationship of history and home is clearly evoked in Finley's tape. The women in the prison find their voices after establishing a sense of home. "I never realized that I would have to come to prison to find acceptance," one says. The displacement of the Japanese Americans during the war was equally a negation of home, of the right to call any place home. It is from the place of home that a historical voice can speak, and it is home where memories reside.

All these tapes are infused with the desire to create counter-memories to official historical narratives. While Vasulka wants to re-orchestrate the images of history and to show the empty frame of the totalizing historical image, these other video makers want to bear witness: the prisoners in Finley's tape bear witness for each other; the Romanians bear witness before the television cameras, watching themselves "make history"; Tanaka bears witness for her mother and father; and Tajiri bears witness for her family. Video thus acts as a form of cultural memory, providing a form through which personal memories are shared, historical narratives are questioned, and memory is claimed. Television will continue to play a central role in how Americans and other nations construct their national identities. Yet video's memories are tangling with its narratives, appropriating its images, and telling different stories.

In these tapes, memory is not seen as a depository of images to be excavated, but rather as an amorphous, ever-changing field of images. This memory is not about retrieval as much as it is about retelling and reconstruction. It is about acknowledging the impossibility of knowing what really happened, and a search for a means of telling. This is memory within a postmodern context, not destroyed but different, memory that is often disguised as forgetting.

NOTES:

1. Stanley Cavell, "The Fact of Television," in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John Hanhardt
2. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 7G-71.
3. *Ibid.*, 6.
4. Waler Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257-58.

End