Cold War Mnemonics: History, Melancholy, and Landscape in South Korean Films of the 1960s
Hyun Seon Park

This article examines the way that cinematic mnemonics of the 1960s South Korean films ciphers the heterogeneous and conflicting experiences regarding two entangled wars: The Korean War and the Cold War. In the close reading of Kim Suyong’s Mist (An’gae, 1967) and Yi Sŏnggu’s The General’s Mustache (Changgun ŭi suyŏm, 1968), the article argues for the multi-faceted aesthetics of the Cold War mnemonics, which illuminates a binding and unbinding technology of affective memories in which the traumatic experience of the Korean war parallels dominant narrative of the Cold War historiography. In Mist and The General’s Mustache, historical trauma and the experience of loss take up important positions in relation to melancholic landscape and mnemonic devices. Visualizing the interstice between melancholy and mourning, between memory and history, and between landscape and interiority through the devices of flashback, widescreen, montage and meta-narrative structure, the exploration of mnemonic technologies is inextricably linked with the postwar Korean subject’s dual efforts to remember historical loss and to incorporate shameful memories. While Mist shows the male protagonist’s short visit to his countryside hometown, during which he is troubled by memories of the past and, thus, his encounter with the unfinished work of mourning, The General’s Mustache, beginning with a photojournalist’s suspicious death, assembles the fragmentary pieces of modern Korean history’s secrets and traumas through multiple frames of testimony and confession. Produced during the time of the Cold War turmoil as well as at the height of global modernization, these films release alternative thinking of time, memory, and history, asking us to remember what is left behind the Cold War historiography.