Departure and Repatriation as Cold War Dissensus: Domestic Ethnography in Korean Documentary
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This article examines autobiographic documentaries about families that expose “dissensus” in the mapping of transborder migration and diasporic desire that were the results of the Cold War in North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. Jae-hee Hong (dir. My Father’s Emails) and Yong-hi Yang (dir. Dear Pyongyang and Goodbye Pyongyang) document the ongoing Cold War in their fathers’ histories through their position as a “familial other,” who embodies both dissensus and intimacy. Hong reveals that anti-Communism in South Korean postwar nation building reverberate in the private realm. Yang documents her Zainichi father, who sent his sons to North Korea during the Repatriation Campaign in Japan. The anti-Communist father in South Korea (Hong’s) and the Communist father in Japan (Yang’s) engendered family migration with contrasting motivations, departure from and return to North Korea. Juxtaposing these two opposite ideologies in family histories, as well as juxtaposing the filmmakers’ dissonance with the given ideologies in domestic space, provide the aesthetic form for “dissensus.” The politics of aesthetics in domestic ethnography manifests in that the self and the Other are inextricably interlocked because of the reciprocity of the filmmaker and the Communist or anti-Communist subject.