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Personalizing History: The Postsocialist Aesthetics of Lou Ye's *Summer Palace*

Cinema as “heterotopia” can be a space where history is “represented and contested”: Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* is the first film from mainland China to involve explicit representation of the Tiananmen Incident. What does the film attempt to express through its recreation of the episode and its evocation of the years of reform as experienced by Chinese youth? Adopting what I will argue is a “postsocialist” stance in narrating history, *Summer Palace* engages less with the fast-changing social reality than with the internal turmoil of protagonist Yu Hong. The film's expressionist, affective language emphasizes sensuality and subjective perceptions, focusing on the psychology and emotions of individuals rather than the impersonal forces of history. Through its imaginative recreation of a recent historical episode, *Summer Palace* writes history with an aesthetic agenda: to reclaim cinematic space as one of affect and subjectivity, of personal memories rather than social reality.