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Being Singular Plural (review)

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Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Bryne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 207 pp.

If individualism and subjectivism are but sticky residues of our modern tradition, how is it that we continue to value the singularity of events and identities? By highlighting the limits of Heidegger's critique of individualism we come, roughly, to the view that the communalization of meaning need not reduce events to their common properties. To do so, we must think of community not only as expropriating individual properties but simultaneously as individuating material events. But is that enough to justify the sweeping generalizations ("Philosophy is . . .," "The whole question of politics is . . .") that accompany Nancy's contribution? Only for the already converted, I suspect, which is all the more unfortunate given the communication that might have taken place along these lines. The second half of the book shows Nancy as social critic, applying an artillery of theoretical neither-nors to recent chapters in the ongoing story of human barbarism. Someone else might one day draw a good argument from these musings, especially those on "sovereignty," but there is too much pontificating to see the matter clearly. "Human Excess," a short essay toward the end, returns from the glib depths and reminds us, as does the title essay, that Nancy is indeed one of the most interesting thinkers in France today.

—*Michael Fagenblat*

Zhang Liang, compiler, and Andrew Nathan, ed., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 513 pp.

In the past century, two comparable political movements on the streets of Beijing substantially affected the history of China: the May Fourth movement of 1919 and the Tiananmen movement of 1989. Both were initiated by students who called for democracy. The former led eventually to China's adoption of communism without democracy, and the latter led to China's virtual abandonment of communism, though still without democracy. These failures for democracy are due, at least partially, to the disingenuous shift or manipulation of the pro-democracy movements into struggles for power. This volume of Chinese government papers of the Tiananmen episode provides rich material for studying the relation between the movement on the streets and the power struggle in 1989. However, in reading the compiler's preface—which asserts that "the pro-democracy faction in the [Communist] Party is the key force for pushing political change in China"—we may feel that the political goal of this volume is more in keeping with the power struggle than with the students' original calling.

—*Fang Lizhi*