

**Adrian May.** *From Bataille to Badiou: Lignes, The Preservation of Radical French Thought, 1987-2017.* Liverpool University Press 2018. 328 pp. \$120.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781786940438).

Notwithstanding the attractive main title of this book (which is slightly misleading), this volume is not about Georges Bataille, nor is it a book about Alain Badiou. In fact, it isn't a book about any philosophical author in particular at all. Surprising as it might seem, it is a book about the rather marginal French intellectual review that goes under the name of *Lignes*. Probably not many people will have heard of it; not only are (scholarly) monographs on literary reviews rare, but up until this volume by May, no such monograph was available on this particular French intellectual review. However, Adrian May's uncommon, very interesting, and even unique book gives a very good view of what they are missing.

*Lignes*, to offer just a couple of words of general description, is, as just mentioned, a somewhat marginal French Intellectual review that was founded in 1987. Initially it was directed by Michel Surya, Francis Marmande, and Daniel Dobbels, but the year 2000 saw a renewal of the review, and besides a new publisher, the editorial team was given a good shake-up. Michel Surya, the only one of the original three editors to remain (Dobbels remained to 2001 while Marmande, who left in 2000, would return for a period later down the road 2010-2015), was now accompanied by frequently changing editorial members. *Lignes* has consistently published three volumes per year (with the exception of 1990 which saw four volumes, and 1991 which saw only two). That we can describe it as 'somewhat marginal' is mainly due to internal editorial decisions. General consensus thinking has largely been shunned and disapproved of, but more radical oppositional thinking (both left and right wing inspired) has never been its main position. Although the political left could be considered its more 'natural habitat' (*Lignes* is one of the few reviews that stuck, sticks, by the importance of *le pensée de 68*)—especially when one considers some of the more frequent contributors to (the new) *Lignes*: Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, Daniel Bensaïd, Enzo Traverso, etc.—but that would be a superficial generalization. The importance of its insistence on the thought of 68 and of its 'left' contributors should be counterbalanced by the fundamentally important heritage and legacy of George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot (who can hardly be considered 'lefties') to *Lignes*. Basically, as May's volume so diligently renders evident, its political positioning is not done justice when considered on the oppositional line of left vs. right. It is the history of this persistent and intentionally marginal review that is beautifully drawn out by *From Bataille to Badiou*.

The book, besides having a clearly written introduction and conclusion, is neatly divided into seven chapters. It has to be said, these seven chapters are very cleverly organized. They not only touch upon the more important authors and topics confronted by *Lignes*; they do so in a historical way. One is thus confronted with what one could call a scholarly 'two in one' for which May deserves to be applauded (considering the void in scholarly literature on *Lignes*, that the author was able to pull this off is a great gift for its readers).

To briefly summarize the content of this volume: May cleverly dedicates his introduction to the function of the intellectual in French 'recent' culture. Without some understanding of the meaning and the various reversals of this meaning in the last half of the past century, the importance of the review in general, and *Lignes* in particular, in France's intellectual culture could not be understood. The first and second chapter are, respectively, mainly dedicated to George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, two authors whose legacy was and is fundamental for *Lignes*. Surya and Marmande, before getting involved with *Lignes*, had already published on Bataille—in the same year as *Lignes* was founded, Surya's by now classical volume on Bataille saw the light of day, and

Marmande had just published his doctoral thesis on Bataille—and Dobbels was very close to Blanchot and his intellectual circle. These first two chapters deal, first of all, with the importance of the intellectual heritage of these two authors; second, with how *Lignes* positioned itself in the battle and preservation of their legacy (and *Lignes*' own positioning) against the accusations of fascism (an accusation with which both authors were confronted); and, third, with the Nietzschean heritage of these authors and the neo-Nietzschean tendencies of some of the more important French thinkers of that period.

The third and fourth chapters deal with the first series of *Lignes* editions (1987-1999). The third chapter takes up the notion of (neo-) Nietzscheanism and sees how this found its way into a large number of contributions in, and editorial positionings of, *Lignes*. The review's take on *laïcité*, the collapse of grand narratives, and the rise of 'moralism,' are the major topics treated in this chapter. The fourth chapter, in its turn, deals with more political and economic issues. These issues became more important towards the end of the 1990s, and *Lignes*' take on the rise of the extreme right, the problem of immigration (the question of the *sans-papiers*), and the rise of global capitalism are dealt with in this chapter.

The fifth and sixth chapter take on the second series of *Lignes*. Even though some fundamental changes had taken place, as both chapters evince, the editorial line of the review did not change radically. Accordingly, the fifth chapter takes up the economic issue that had already surfaced in the fourth chapter (and in the first series of *Lignes*). More specifically this chapter deals with *Lignes*' (and its contributors') take on domination theory. Interestingly, it also evinces the disagreement that at times existed between the 'editorial line' (which generally meant Surya's position) and that of some of the (new) contributors of *Lignes*. The sixth chapter then deals with *Lignes*' 'renewed' political stance. The new editorial board had brought in a considerable number of leftist authors, and the chapter demonstrates how this new blood had an effect upon some of the earlier treated cases (cases that remained of public interest in France of the New Millennium) such as migration, and the rise of the extreme right.

The seventh and final chapter reads *Lignes* less sympathetically and offers a number of criticisms of the review. Two chief criticisms are raised: its lack of serious interest in the feminist cause and the review's almost clear rejection of identity politics. According to our author, 'a more affirmative stance on minority struggles may help the review extend its lifespan into the future' (24). The very well written conclusion brings all of the previous separate narratives, narratives that have characterized *Lignes* over its 30 years long lifespan, together.

If one is to voice a critique, one almost naturally tends towards the observation that at times there is just too much going on. Even if the audience envisioned by this study is 'scholars,' the fact that these scholars preferably do not belong to the field of French Studies (cf. 16) should have made our author hold back at times in trying to explain everything in such a detailed way—especially as it regards topics not directly related or touched upon by *Lignes* or its main representative(s)/contributor(s). For example, the whole discussion of the *Wertkritik* as it was formulated and discussed by the Groupe Krisis and the Frankfurter Schule (179-184), although not completely unrelated to the discussion of the fifth chapter, could and probably should have been avoided, because it did not appear in *Lignes* itself (as our author himself honestly admits, 181). In the end, it adds very little to the discussion, besides perhaps complicating it unnecessarily for scholars not belonging to this particular field of French Studies. And this is just one example of a more general pattern that can be discerned while reading the volume. On more than one occasion, I had the feeling that the author just wanted to give too much information, making it all just a little much to consume and digest.

To conclude, the author dedicates the last chapter (before the conclusion) to two areas which

he thinks should be(come) more present in future editions of *Lignes*: feminism and identity politics. Particularly regarding this latter, I could not disagree more and hope that this important, albeit somewhat ‘marginal,’ intellectual review will not fall for the lure of this highly detrimental siren’s song. Although many (especially from the Anglo-American intellectual world) are convinced that identity politics is related to what they call ‘continental philosophy,’ it is not. Identity politics is a result of the American reception and interpretation of an enormous (and almost impossible to unite) variety of European intellectual constructs. I profoundly hope this remains excluded from European and *Lignes*’ thought. Even if it might yield a small sales boost in the beginning, it will destroy it in the long run.

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