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**Angus, Ian. *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. Pp. x + 257. CDN\$19.95, (paper).**

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What are the possibilities for an English-Canadian national identity in an age of corporate globalization—a phenomenon that appears to undermine national identities around the world? Such is the central question which Ian Angus, professor of sociology and humanities at Simon Fraser University, seeks to answer in this rich and tightly argued text. Indeed, *A Border Within* is so abundant in ideas and insights that a simple review can hardly do it adequate justice. Thus, after outlining the basics of the argument, I can only critically examine a few of the issues raised by Angus as he struggles to reform “the national-popular collective will” (20).

Starting off with an examination of English-Canadian left-nationalism, Angus sees this as “the key component of the self-expression of English Canada in the period of permeable Fordism from the end of the Second World War to the beginning of the FTA in 1989” (27). The focus here was on the dependent nature of Canada’s economy in opposition to which the ideal of economic and cultural autonomy was espoused. The work of Innis and Grant are therefore explored in depth since they are seminal figures in the articulation of English-Canadian thought with respect to the dependency issue. Angus carefully elucidates their strengths and weaknesses in a detail that is beyond the scope of this review, but the idea of a “Red Tory” containment of the most homogenizing aspects of corporate capitalism is brought out as the core of the Innis-Grant critiques. If there is a weakness in these critiques, it is in their ambivalence to the “system”—the failure to mount an effective opposition insofar as containment is essentially negative and a renewed sense of identity requires more positive forms of identification.

At this point, Angus deftly avoids the dangers of a futile choice between parochialism and a rejection of the local in favour of some homogenizing universal. This is done by exploring “English-Canadian-ness” as an “essential part of what it means to be human” (106). It is here that the notion of border enters—a concept pertaining to the tension between what is “one’s own and the Other” (111). Unlike America’s overcoming of the Other expressed as a taming of the wilderness, Angus sees English-Canadian “particularity” (i.e., identity rooted in a set of unique historical and geographical circumstances) as growing out of a respect for Otherness, where this respect is the basis of an ethical responsibility. Put in different terms, the border between areas of settlement and the surrounding irreducible wilderness is maintained rather than denied. Moreover, the “border” between different ethnic communities within Canada is also seen as an opportunity for discourse, where the universality of citizenship is supplemented and ultimately constituted by the particularities inherent in the experience of immigration.

While traditions of collective rights based on “Loyalism” have been surpassed by individualistic, competi-

tive market relations, Angus seems to be suggesting that a non-aggressive encounter with Otherness (ecologically or ethnically based) can provide the basis for a renewed sense of English-Canadian identity. Thus, particularism or tradition rooted in local relationships is not only a space of respect and love but is also the foundation for a universal standard or ideal that distinguishes an evolving English-Canadian identity from those of other nations. Angus admits that this “post-industrial ecological ethics based on an ontology of participation” (104) cannot be adequately developed in the present volume, but at least a start in this direction has been made.

Encountering a border that separates us from a natural environment with its own ecological integrity is associated with encountering a border with a set of multicultural groups, each with its own ethnic integrity. The point is that the encounter is in the form of an ongoing discourse and is not to be taken as an act of homogenization. But whether this discursive struggle is feasible remains an open question, which Angus cannot really answer. Certainly the suspicion of empire, of technology, of rampant competitiveness is an essential part of the intellectual tradition of English Canada. However, whether this can be translated into an effective challenge to a highly capitalistic globalism can be brought into question by a phenomenon that Angus would do well to address—namely, the rise of populist governments in Alberta and Ontario. Here it would seem that “particularism” has been highjacked by a philosophy that supports competitiveness, entrepreneurial initiative, and a suspicion of centralized wealth redistribution, as well as of an “overly generous” social safety net. Although the socio-political outlook of the “new right” in English Canada might not be pro-globalist in any obvious sense, it is certainly capitalist in such a militant way that impatience, if not outright disdain, seems to animate its rhetoric towards its political opponents.

This points to a second area of criticism, that of the possibility of practical discourse, which has to be the cornerstone of any respectful, growth enhancing border crossing. Angus’ position here appears overly idealistic. He talks of identity arising out of inter-ethnic communication as well as an ecologically based discourse, but it is far from clear how this would actually work. In this context, I recall hearing a CBC radio interview with Preston Manning, who stated that clear policy directions would arise after a proper airing of differences. Perhaps this would be true if the parties to the debate were all sufficiently like-minded at the outset of the debate. Yet what evidence do we have that such would occur in a practical context if participants in the debate are possessed of widely different philosophies and come from radically different cultural backgrounds? How often do hard-core capitalists and socialists have meaningful interchange? Does Angus expect that those committed to capitalist globalism quietly join in a debate oriented toward new identity formations if their interests were directly threatened? Does he expect them to be drowned out in a multicultural-ecological discourse? Moreover, might not this idealized discourse be further threatened by different kinds of religious fundamentalists, who, in principle, are not sympathetic to the discursive process? Does Angus believe that fundamentalists constitute only a small and insignificant group despite a strong representation in the Canadian Alliance?

I do not mean to imply by the foregoing criticisms that Angus is utopian or unaware of the opposition’s power. Indeed, he puts forward the idea of a “locus of tensions” to describe how anti-systemic social movements do not seek to supplant the opposition but only attempt “a subordination of market exchange to the self-organization of communities” (184). While there is evidence that such a strategy is not ineffective, it appears as if this foundation for identity formation is for the most part a rearguard action against a force that is continually pressing and requires endless countering in the form of intellectual vigilance as well as practical strategies. This pressing force is the cultural ideal of the domination, control, and domestication of “excess” (197)—the richness of the world as manifest in the untameable frontier and an emergent ecological consciousness. Intellectual vigilance implies a recognition of the cultural significance of excess, and in this respect Angus could draw useful support from writers such as Plotnitsky (1994) who explore the notion

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of excess from the perspectives of Bohr's quantum physics, Bataille's economic philosophy, and Derrida's theories on deconstruction.

Yet this leads to a final criticism, one that perhaps touches on all viable identity formations. The embracing of a wild order (204) that Angus sees as an "excess-oriented" foundation for identity seems overly externalistic. How does it relate to what I would term internalistic manifestations of excess, these being associated with the mystical traditions that play a key role in a variety of religious traditions? While the aforementioned religious fundamentalisms tend to fear such "spiritual wildness" and a materialist science would tend to scoff at such "New Age" nonsense, a mystically based spirituality might provide many with the resources to mount more than a rearguard action against the "tamers of excess." After all, one wants Angus's project to succeed, and he might find unexpected allies within the English-Canadian tradition. The literary output of the late Robertson Davies is a valuable resource in this connection, and in the nineteenth century the work of Maurice Bucke on cosmic consciousness points toward the existence of yet another strand in the rich tapestry of English-Canadian thought—a tapestry that Angus has done much to elaborate.

### Works Cited

Plotnitsky, Arkady. 1994. *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology after Bohr and Derrida*. Durham: Duke University Press.