Ian Angus’ ambitious book traverses a daunting landscape of thinkers as he attempts to provide an account of the barriers to unity found in Canada. Through the lens of postmodern thought, Angus focuses on both Harold Innis and George Grant in an effort to provide a ground for the unity of Canadian identity in the notions of wilderness and ecology.

By setting the problem of unity within an historical context, Angus argues that the difficulty in understanding the problem of Canadian identity is deeply complex and we should not expect it to be easily solved. For this reason, he engages in a critique of Innis’ and Grant’s dual laments concerning the failure of Canada and its intellectuals to rescue the identity of Canada as a free and independent state. The dominance of the mechanized, industrialized state over the modes of communication for Innis, and of technology over the particularity of individual life and nationhood for Grant, would appear to confront these thinkers as intractable barriers, allowing only for a sense of fatality and resignation. Left at this point, there remains little else but to lament the loss of national and, indeed, personal sovereignty, identity, and freedom.

Turning first to Innis, Angus describes how original oral modes of communication engaged the whole person in acts of communicating, requiring response in the immediacy of the act. With the onset of the written word, and the later development of technological means for facilitating such communication, Innis argues that the immediacy of oral communication surrenders to detached analysis and consideration. His concern is that modern modes of communication that focus on the written and intellectual, fragment and shatter the original unity of a person. This transition results in what McLuhan considered to be the twilight of humanism.

In his examination of Grant, Angus considers the debate between Hegel (via Alexandre Kojève) and Leo Strauss, on the possibility of recovering philosophy, to be a necessary step in the recovery of individuality. As a
Straussian, Grant accepts that such a recovery is impossible in light of the inevitable dominance of the state. The Hegelian doctrine, through which philosophy is to be recovered, is simply wrong, and acts more as a homogenizing force of the modern technological state. Thus, Grant sees no escape from the contradiction in the modern state, since reliance on reason to give grounding for ethics and individuality turns out to be a reliance on the very source of technological dominance which subordinates the individual to the demands of homogenization. Modernity turns in on itself as it seeks to ground its vision and identity in reason, a conclusion that leads Grant to find a foundation in the Christian God through faith. Grant then can abide in the contradiction that reason evinces.

Angus' rejection of this leap into faith is motivated by the fact that the leap solves nothing in the end and indeed fails to reconcile the need to overcome technological dominance. He adopts a stance which juxtaposes the phenomenological tradition with this recognition of the inescapable contradiction. Taking his lead from the notion that reason moves to find a universal ground (in reason) for ethics and political life, and that this inevitably leads to a technological subjugation of the individual, Angus shows that, so conceived, reason renders ethics and politics nothing more than management tools of respectively, human behaviour and administration. Where Innis is resigned to the inevitable overcoming of immediacy in oral communication, Angus sees the possibility of understanding rational movement toward universality differently. If universalizing tendencies can be understood as behaviours of communicators, and if those communicators 'embrace' the local and immediate, it need not be the case that invoking reason will inevitably lead to a domination of the universal over the particular or a subjugation of the individual by the state and technology.

The notion of the hermeneutic circle is invoked at this point to show how the interpretation of the individual according to universal categories remains open in such a way as to ensure the mutual influence of universalizing and particularizing tendencies. Learning how to operate within this openness, on the one hand, makes determination of an origin or end impossible, but also avoids the swallowing of the particular by the latter, which allows particulars to retain their identity as individuals. Angus sees this mode of communication as critical for confronting the problem of multiculturalism. By living within the tension that is created when calls for multiculturalism are faced with demands for a particular cultural identity, new universal forms of multiculturalism can emerge as modes of mutual understanding rather than as the swallowing up of one identity by another. What is sacrificed, however, is a clear and formal defining concept of multiculturalism.

Dichotomies between the particular and the universal are wrong-headed from the start, Angus argues. What we need to do is to take a 'step back' and see that every human is a relation between particularity and universality. In
feeling the sameness and difference of one another, we engage in the
coloration of a common culture. Being engaged in this process is more akin
to the experience of caring and loving which, when engaged, are understood.
There can be, after all, a mutual construction of Canadian identity amidst the
uncertainty generated in the tension between particularity and universality.
Angus utilizes the term ‘tension’ here to distinguish the act of engagement
between two poles of humanity from the ‘contradiction’ that Innis and Grant
see between the particular and the universal. In this tension, respect is the key
element allowing for the embracing of the tension, rather than a rejection of
otherness.

How does this relate to ecology and wilderness? For Canada, unlike
European or American societies, facing the wilderness was the key factor in
shaping identity. With its garrison mentality, in contrast to the American
frontier mentality, Canada developed its identity through the creation of
borders (forts and later cities) distinguishing itself from the vast primal
expanse. This primal wilderness represents a kind of homelessness against
which identity is to be constructed through drawing a border. It represents a
kind of chaos and indeterminacy, the context for Canadian intellectual
reflection on what it means to be a Canadian civilization.

But wilderness, as ecology or the complex of environmental factors and
processes, is also that from which we derive; it is the source of our values and
so cannot be treated with the same anthropocentric ‘for humans only’ ethic as
has been the rule in industrialized civilization. Hence, there is a creative
tension to be found also in the embracing of wilderness and civilization just
as there is in the embracing of individuality and universality. Angus relates
this embracing to the type of conservatism advocated by Innis and Grant.
This re-casting of the Tory ethic, then, provides a reason to understand the
process of forming a Canadian identity as in fact an environmental ethic to be
gentler on nature.

While I am sympathetic with many of Angus’ critical remarks and have
indeed enjoyed the many penetrating insights he offers, I find the synthesis
he attempts - through re-casting contradiction as tension and by employing an
ethic of respect - leaves me to a large extent even more worried about the
possibility of solution than I was with Grant and Innis. It is owing not to a
rejection of an ethic of respect, but to what amounts to a failed promissory
note. After addressing profound metaphysical and axiological problems,
Angus delivers an ethical solution that produces resolution through concrete
interactions between people.

The metaphysical discussion leads one to hope for a resolution or at least
the structure of what would count as a resolution based on some
understanding of how the world works and what it means for people to be in
relationships. It promises some hope of a formal ground for understanding
and resolving the tension between the universalizing tendency and the need
to protect the particular. Living within such tension may be possible in small
groups where knowing the members of the community and dialogue with
them is possible. But in larger contexts, let alone national ones, neither is
possible. For this reason we look to such devices as law and constitutions to
provide determinacy in setting out the terms of reference for relationships
between individuals. Angus' approach seems then to suffer from the same
malaise as his existentialist influences, Grant and Innis, in not being able to
account for large-scale organizational needs.

Developing strategies for national identity must include an understanding
of how we can deal with anonymity and the impossibility of genuine dialogue
between the players across the nation. It must also deal with the fact that,
after developing to a certain size, communities inevitably fracture into smaller
units whose identity needs to be protected. Angus sees this tendency clearly,
as he prescribes the setting of borders, but he does not seem to deal
adequately with the demand at large-scale community or national levels for
a more formalized, universal conception of identity.

BRUCE MORITO, Athabasca University

**Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader**
WALTER JOST and MICHAEL HYDE, Editors

This collection gathers contributions from an impressive list of scholars,
including Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and David Tracy to name a
few. Many of the contributions are reprints of previously published essays,
while some are published here for the first time. The two essays by Gadamer
appear here for the first time in English translation. The editors provide a
thorough index to accompany the essays, and they offer both a Prologue and
an Introduction to the collected essays.
The aim of the collection is "to show the novice and expert alike what some
versions of contemporary rhetoric and hermeneutics look like and to propose
how the two can be thought of together, for each not only presupposes but
extends and corrects the other"(xii). While both rhetoric and hermeneutics
have experienced a rebirth in contemporary thought, these two fields have yet
to enter into a fruitful dialogue. In order to generate dialogue, the editors
intend to avoid the imposition of strict definitions and delineations on either
field. Instead, they offer an open-ended exploration that encourages the
novelty that a dialogue between the two fields can generate. In their view, the
importance of this coupling of rhetoric and hermeneutics is that it can
germinate inventive ideas within the sphere of praxis (xx).