

---

than they are to Ontario; on the West Coast, Vancouver's nearest big-city neighbour is not Calgary but Seattle. The Rocky Mountains run north-south; the prairies run north-south; most of the big rivers run north-south. Then another thing: about a quarter of all Canadians have French as their mother-tongue, and three-quarters of *them* live in the province of Québec, which sits astride the east-west anglophone line of communication.

And here's another fact of life: *our* northern neighbour is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The shortest distance between the world's two great superpowers is not across Europe but across us. It is an exciting and challenging position to be in, with many advantages – but I'm sure you can see that it gives us a different perspective.

And it is a difference of perspective that has been fortified by history. From the very beginning, Canadian and American histories have been intertwined – but the threads are quite different. To mix the metaphor, if *you* have been a melting-pot, *we* have been more like a salad, in which the ingredients have been encouraged to retain their own savour. And it is this promise that has held us together when every shred of common sense suggests that the continent has been carved up the wrong way.

Canada is an improbable nation, born not out of triumphant revolution, like the U.S., but out of consensus among a bunch of losers. The Indians lost to the French, the French to the British, and the British to the Americans.

One of our writers sees SURVIVAL as our common preoccupation. When Canada was born, not a shot was fired, not a single malcontent thrown into jail. A bunch of colonial politicians got drunk together one night in 1864 and decided they loved each other (with modified rapture) enough to start a nation – at the beginning there were only four provinces involved. As the country has grown to the west and the east, the principal problem facing Canadians has

always been to establish and maintain communication with each other across differing civilizations, across water, tundra, prairie and mountain – in a word, all along that 5,000-mile border. That has always been our deepest, most commanding need. Even today, Canadians are the world champion talkers on the telephone. To build their first railway and telegraph lines, linking the nation for the first time from east to west, both private enterprise and government had to work together. The same thing applied with our first airline, and with our radio and television networks, which are the most extensive in the world – eating up, incidentally, 62 per cent of all federal government expenditures on culture. In 1967, the year of our centennial, federal, provincial and municipal governments combined to give the nation, as a birthday present, its first complete chain of theatres and arts centres across the land. That was only sixteen years ago.

This had little to do with political ideology or precepts about government and private enterprise; it was simply the only way communication between us could be established and maintained. Collective action of some sort was dictated by circumstance. Despite our relatively small population, we lacked the advantage of larger European societies collected closely around cultural centres – London, Paris, Rome, for example. Instead we faced all the centrifugal headaches of countries as big as India, China or your own – just to keep in touch. It is no accident that the two most influential philosophers of communications in modern times, Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, were Canadians. Or that our most renowned thinker, Northrop Frye, should find it entirely natural to sit as a member of our federal Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

I mention all this not as a kind of instant lesson in Canadian history, which I'm sure you don't need, but because without this background it is hard to begin to understand the situation of the arts in our society – especially such problems as distribution for