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“Somewhere in California”: New Regional Spaces of Mobility in Contemporary Vancouver Cinema

Katherine A. Roberts

In memory of Cory Monteith (1982-2013)

1. “What Are You Doing *Here*?”

- 1 On a rainy afternoon in downtown Vancouver, would-be actress Nikki (Amanda Crew) waits in vain at a hotel bar for a sleazy film producer who has given her his phone number. Instead she meets Henry (Tom Scholte), a construction worker and smooth talker who is also “in the business” and who impresses her with tales of his younger brother’s success on a *Jackass*-style reality TV show entitled “Hot Dog.”ⁱ Yet he and his brother have even bigger plans. They are apparently “cooking up” a new series “down in L.A.” that will take them “into the stratosphere.” When Nikki expresses interest in the female lead, described by Henry as “the strongest alluring kick-ass femme superstar role that has ever graced the face of television,” and gushes about her passion for acting, Henry turns to her and asks: “What are you doing *here*?” This scene is one of the numerous comedic moments in Vancouver filmmaker Carl Bessai’s quirky independent film *Sisters and Brothers* (2011) and serves as a fitting and humorous introduction to the exploration of new types of transnational regionalism in North America, specifically that which connects Vancouver and Los Angeles. It brings to the fore a host of issues related to a “sense of place” in home-grown Canadian cinema, its relationship to American location filming in Vancouver, and to the entertainment world’s inescapable vertical integration, which means that for most aspiring industry professionals “dreaming in the rain”—to borrow the title of David Spaner’s 2003 monograph on film production in Vancouver—is less and less about “here” (Vancouver) and more about “going down there” (L.A.).
- 2 In the Pacific Northwest, as elsewhere, cultural competence tends to flow only one way, from north to south (Canadians know more about Americans than vice versa), while

cultural products are shipped and Internet/satellite channels beamed up in exactly the opposite direction. In this article, I will examine what I see as a potential new regional space of flows governed by the hyper-volatile film and television/entertainment industry that links Vancouver to Los Angeles in what globalization critic Saskia Sassen has called a "global network of local places" (226). Bessai's two most recent films, *Fathers and Sons* (2010) and the aforementioned *Sisters and Brothers* (2011), indeed feature a process-based cultural imagining of "West Coastness" that moves beyond a regional identity grounded in physical geographic contiguity towards identity formations that, for better or for worse and like the goods that flow along the north-south coastal corridor, are highly mobile and fluid, determined by and through commodity culture: both films feature Vancouver-based, non-traditional families in the throes of complex identity formation processes that connect them to the wider world and to the Hollywood image machine. Key characters in these families are working or desire to work in film and television in L.A. and are thus the envy of their less "fortunate" siblings. Through caustic humor, the films engage in multiple levels of critique: of the dysfunctional nature of cross-border families, but also of the superficiality of image-culture and the "forced" migration of talent who are sucked into the entertainment vortex. Analyzing these films through the lens of critical regionalism, I will argue, foregrounds the West Coast as a region of transnational flows, of bodies in mobility/circulation yet without side-stepping the inherent complexities in Canada's enduringly ambivalent relationship with the United States.

2. Critical Regionalism and Borderzones

- 3 Regional literatures and cultures in North America are currently undergoing a dynamic re-conceptualization. Scholars in American western studies, for example, have increasingly sought to re-imagine traditional, coherent, or unifying western identities as already transnational, multicultural, and perpetually mobile. This critical approach foregrounds concern for how regional inhabitants are determined by powerful economic forces, how new conceptions of regionalism emphasize a complex nexus of overlapping identities, and how these multiple identities interact and intersect with a global technological world. As Krista Comer has argued, "as an epistemological project, western critical regionalism has partially recuperated 'the regional' as not inevitably productive of conservative nationalisms... or essentialist/authentic definitions of place" ("Everyday Regionalism" 32), but as a site from which to interrogate present-day global economic restructuring. Attention to regional as opposed to a nation-based political economy, Comer explains, is one of the more novel ways to theorize new economic structures of production, labor, global migration, and culture (34). In this sense, "a revamped 'regional' perspective might be understood to underwrite American studies in its postnational or critical American phase" (Comer, "Everyday Regionalism" 35). Fellow western studies critic Steve Tatum also argues for a rethinking of the western region in terms of the "new geographies' created by transnational flows" (6). "In an emergent global economy of flows," he claims, "the 'regional' should be regarded more as a liminal, *discursive terrain*, a cultural imaginary produced at the point where the circulation of media imagery, the movement of transnational capital, and the voluntary or forced migration of peoples intersect with a particular geographic locale" (9). The American West is a particularly fruitful zone to test the idea of new regional discursivity. Tatum cites the managerial

class, laboring in the advanced technological infrastructure of Silicon Valley and other research parks, and the workers of the advanced digital effects technology associated with cinema and computer gaming, as well as the animatronics associated with theme parks in California and Nevada, as examples of how particular industries are reconfiguring the region wherein workers "do not inhabit specific, local places" so much as they belong to a delocalized cross-border culture of city-spaces. Developments in the technology-information, aerospace, military and entertainment industries have contributed, in the West, to a "postregional" and largely post-industrial global economy of "city-regions" whose nodal points, in Tatum's text, are Houston, Denver, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, Seattle, San Francisco Bay Area, Mexico City, and Los Angeles, cities which are in turn linked to the main trading blocks in the global economy (12-13).

- 4 I think it is worth revisiting, briefly, the work of Sassen that has inspired the arguments of several aforementioned contemporary western critics. In "Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization" (2000), Sassen examines the multiple processes that constitute economic globalization, cautioning that the global is not (yet) all-encompassing for the lived experience of actors or the domain of institutional orders and cultural formations. Instead, it persists as a "partial condition" (215) that intersects and overlaps with the domain of the national. While some scholars of the social sciences have critiqued the idea of the nation as a "container, representing a unified spatiotemporality" (215) and have contributed to a partial unbundling of national space, Sassen reminds us that global process are often "strategically located/constituted in national spaces where they are implemented usually with the help of legal measures taken by state institutions" (218). Social actors, today, she maintains, "are likely to live, and entities likely to operate, in overlapping domains of the national and the global" (221). What is particularly interesting for our purposes here, and for scholars of critical regionalism, is the idea that the global economy "materializes" in a worldwide grid of strategic places that can be said to constitute a new economic geography of centrality that cuts across national borders (225). As she explains, "these features of the global economy underline the need to rethink the distinction between the global and the local, notably the assumption about *necessity of territorial proximity* to the constitution of the local" (226; emphasis added). In this global network of local places, we see emerging a "relation of intercity proximity operating without shared territory: proximity is deterritorialized" (226).
- 5 The reconceptualization of region in western studies has been effective in moving beyond the national/regional hierarchical dyad in American studies while simultaneously dovetailing with similar critical interrogations in U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies. This region, defined by a history of conflict and conquest, shifting populations, migration, bi-national conurbations (San Diego/Tijuana, El Paso/Juarez), transnational social, cultural, and political communities, and more recently by militarization and drug-related violence, is indeed well-posed to challenge the homogeneity of U.S. nationalism and popular culture. Several decades of research and writing on and from the U.S.-Mexico border have brought attention to these issues and confirmed the prominence of the region as a site of crossing, mixing, resistance, and circulation points (see Saldívar for an important introduction to the field). In addressing questions of assimilation, immigration, nationalism, and cultural identity around the instability of the borderzone, research on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands enables, as Neil Campbell claims, complex imaginings that have important implications for rethinking and reimagining the West as a "travelling"

term, as part of the *transnational* imaginary. For him, "the deterritorialization of the borderlands, neither purely Mexican nor purely American, gives them a particularly resonant force in cultural studies and explains why the whole metaphor of 'borders' has become so bound up with postmodern critical writing" (*Rhizomatic West* 76).

- 6 There are two points I want to make at this stage. It has become common in reframing regionalism to focus on how the region—a complex contact zone already embedded within the universal and global—could potentially "displace" the centrality of the nation-state in accounts of U.S. cultural production (Comer, "Taking Feminism" 113). The impetus towards the extra-national in these arguments leads most often to a discussion of the U.S.-Mexico borderzone as the location of this transnational space: reframing regionalism means re-envisioning the American Southwest as "Greater Mexico." While this critical turn is promising given the new possibilities it initiates, I am hesitant as to its pan-North American applicability. In other words, Canadian scholars have been reluctant to engage in thinking that takes their field into a postnational phase and eschews the centrality of the nation-state. American studies may well be posed, in its postnational musings—and here I paraphrase Canadian literary critic Herb Wyile—to critique insularity from a position of strength; it is quite another thing to critique insularity from a position of cultural vulnerability (50). While recent scholarship in Canadian studies engages critically with the nation as a political, social, institutional, and discursive construct (see Cormack and Cosgrave; Mackey; Wright), this work continues to acknowledge the central role the nation plays in the lives of Canadians, given the reality of sharing a border with the U.S. Added to my reservations concerning American critical regionalism's postnational impetus is the invisibility of Canada within this new paradigm; it is to the southern and not the northern border that such regional re-mappings extend.ⁱⁱ
- 7 Second, the predominance of the U.S.-Mexico border paradigm in the critical regionalism writing has the effect of reframing border studies, literally, around a border *like no other*, i.e. not necessarily representative of other border regions in North America. Indeed, in her work on frontier zones or borderlands, Sassen recognizes the challenges of specifying borderlands and identifying the activities that distinguish them (220). Taking the cue from Sassen with respect to borderzone specificities, I want to bring the burgeoning critical reflection in U.S.-based critical regionalism to bear upon the study of the Canada-U.S. border in ways that could be beneficial for Canadian studies scholars. Numerous aspects of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies paradigm, predicated on linguistic, religious, and ethnic differences, economic discrepancies, uneven development, a sizable contiguous population (straddling the border), and a vibrant transnational community, are not always fruitful to furthering an understanding of the vast, sparsely populated, and largely unmanned line that separates the U.S. from Canada. What further complicates the discussion of the place-based, place-specific analysis of North American borderzones is the notion that all of Canada is, for some, a borderlands society (see Gibbons), the majority of its population subject to American economic, political, social, cultural, and intellectual influences. "To represent or reflect on Canada," claims cultural critic Jody Berland, "is to write to, about and across the border" (32). To the all-pervasive nature of the border in Canadian society she adds its asymmetry: "Canadians live and write as though the border is everywhere, shadowing everything we contemplate and fear, while Americans live and act as if there is no border there at all" (32). How exactly should we study Canada-U.S. border culture? Where is it located?

3. Canada-U.S. Border Culture

- 8 The analytical possibilities offered by critical regionalism open up new ways of thinking about Canada-U.S. transnational regional and border culture, the study of which has tended to be overshadowed within Canada-U.S. border research by a focus on economics and trade dynamics. For those who argue for increasing political and economic convergence within North America, sub-national/regional areas of cross-border activity (e.g. Niagara, Great Lakes/Lake Superior, Cascadia/Pacific Northwest) seem to be the most likely places to chart such formations. For some, Cascadia/Pacific Northwest (PNW)—comprised by British Columbia and Washington State (for some encompassing also Oregon and Northern California)—best illustrates this new, rising border region. Here, a “complex ideational construct” spanning economic, social, cultural, and political elements forms a regional and transnational “symbolic” regime in which various state and non-state actors (trade groups, sub-national bureaucrats, and environmental groups) can promote their specific agendas (Brunet-Jailly 117). Cascadia/PNW is characterized by shared topographies, so-called democratic “values,” distance from Eastern metropolitan centers, and structured by an important trade corridor that stretches down into Southern California and beyond. It has been the object of many micro- and macro-level policy studies focusing on transregional trade dynamics, parallel policy developments, and cross-border environmental cooperation (Alper; Brunet-Jailly). However, Cascadia’s regionalizing potential has been critiqued for some time now, most succinctly by social geographer Mathew Sparke, who has convincingly argued that trans-border “re-mappings” like Cascadia are not *geopolitics* but *geoeconomics*, representing “a neo-liberal, market-oriented, anti-state transmutation of what is generally understood as a democratic political sovereignty” (7). Despite all the appeals to the impact of borderless free trade, Cascadia’s promoters, he counters, are unable to point to any widespread *regionalizing* impact, i.e. the increase in north-south flows do not indicate the rise of *regionalizing* tendencies in supply networks that cross the border and integrate Cascadia economically; instead, the trucks cross the border and then frequently drive on to other distant places (25). The study of the Pacific Northwest’s *transnational culture* also remains a challenge. Both Brunet-Jailly and other experts of the Canada-U.S. border (Konrad and Nicol, *Beyond Walls*) have made important gestures towards including a cultural component in their cross-border research, calling for a re-articulation of local culture in the discussion of borderlands theory, since it is culture “that ultimately sustains linkages, assures continuity and maintains prosperity between bounded states” (Konrad and Nicol, “Border Culture” 70). This cultural component has not yet involved an extended analysis of specific literary texts, films, cultural institutions, or other cultural manifestations; it remains in most Canada-U.S. border research, for the most part, embryonic.
- 9 Literary critic Laurie Ricou’s work constitutes a significant exception to the rule and has paved the way for imagining a “shared sense of place” in the literatures of the Pacific Northwest, pointing to new and older, underused comparative frameworks outside of the nation-based paradigm. For him, the PNW is a shared region defined and delineated by “ocean currents and species distribution” (6), drainage basins, and watersheds. In the *Arbutus/Madrone Files*, he groups texts from both sides of the border into “files” (“Salmon File,” “Raven File,” “Kuroshio File,” “Salal File,” and “Sasquatch File”) in a conscious effort to find and read writing that responds to the notion of regionalism as “local life

aware of itself" (29). This sort of Canadian-American literary comparison, which remains rare in the discipline, points to the possibility of privileging "ecological and autochthonous patterns that omit national boundaries" (39).

10 As I have argued elsewhere, for this culture to materialize, to be truly transregional, these texts (or films) need to foreground not only "local life aware of itself," but an awareness of each other, a sensibility for the "extra-national," i.e. a taking into account the "other" socio-political reality that lies across the border with which each region supposedly shares topography, species distribution, and something akin to "West Coast" values (Roberts, "Cascadia"). It is difficult in practice for a shared regional culture to materialize in the PNW given the absence of established and sustaining transnational regional cultural institutions. I offer the following two examples to help illustrate my point. In terms of literature, the publishing industries in Canada and the U.S. remain two parallel nationally-based entities with disparate subsidy and distribution models. Canadian books are not readily available in Washington State bookstores (aside from internationally-known, award-winning authors like Margaret Atwood); certain books are also available under a different title.ⁱⁱⁱ Regional writing that is most often published by smaller presses has a much more limited distribution network. Anecdotes of B.C. authors driving across the Canada-U.S. border, selling their books out of the trunk of their car after a reading at a Washington State bookseller are not uncommon. Secondly, there are also two major annual international film festivals in the region: the Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF) and the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF). The VIFF has an important Canadian Images program which traditionally showcases local/B.C. film; B.C. film for obvious reasons receives a substantial amount of press-coverage during the festival. While American independent cinema is screened at the VIFF, no particular effort is made, on the part of the VIFF programmers, to screen American cinema of the PNW. Conversely, the Seattle Film Festival features a dynamic and entirely original Northwest Connections program that showcases local film—that is almost exclusively American (I counted one Canadian film in this program over a ten-year period). In sum, each festival effectively ignores its counterpart across the border.

11 The reasons for the lack of transnational cultural institutions are no doubt historic and linked to very different approaches to culture in Canada and the U.S., the exploration of which are outside the scope of this article. It is important also to underscore the presence of regional cross-border connections (e.g. Pacific Northwest Writers Association) and other cross-border interest groups (e.g. British Columbia-Washington Cooperative Environmental Council), and not to discount the possibilities for transnational cultural exposure: Canadian radio and television (CBC) is available in the northernmost region of Washington State while U.S. Public Broadcasting (KCTS Television and KUOW Radio) is included in the basic cable package and/or accessible in the southernmost parts of B.C. Yet, to argue, as do certain proponents of the Cascadia region, that "intense communication" (Brunet-Jailly 117) will inevitably lead to shared cultural values and to a shared regional consciousness that could possibly rethink national boundaries seems unrealistic and detached from the "social fabric" in the region. It is at this juncture that the remapping of critical regionalism, in particular the notion of new geographies formed by intercity proximity without shared territory, becomes useful in trying to articulate connections in Canadian-American culture, in particular the impact one city-space or city-region (L.A.) has or could have on another (Vancouver). I propose to move away from the "contiguous regions" perspective when studying the cultural aspects of the Canada-

U.S. border in favor of spaces defined and shaped by particular economies, by the effects of flows.

- 12 One economy that has had a considerable impact on Vancouver and B.C. and that has long been a presence in the province is the L.A.-based entertainment industry. The events of the last few decades are important to review here in order to understand the depth and complexity of this "extra-national" presence. As Mike Gasher documents, British Columbia has become in the span of twenty-five years one of the largest centers of film and television production in North America (4). Early film production in B.C. was linked to Hollywood's externalizing of production in the post-war period wherein the province's dramatic landscapes were used in location shooting. A local (B.C.) feature film industry developed starting in the 1970s, flourishing in the 1990s, spurred by provincial government policy initiatives and a perception or recognition of cinema "as a medium, not of cultural expression, but of regional industrial development" (Gasher 20). Today a burgeoning Hollywood locations industry (major studios have established local production facilities) exists alongside a small home-grown industry (of which Bessai's films are a part). Scholars like Gasher, Spaner, and Diane Burgess have all emphasized to varying degrees the impact that the transnationalization of Hollywood has had on the B.C. industry's pool of skilled labour, local production facilities, and policy incentives in the province—in short, on the interconnectedness of the "service" and "indie" sectors of the industry. It is undeniable that industry professionals gain valuable experience on U.S.-funded film and television productions that they then bring to local B.C.-based filmmaking projects. Locations industry filming can also help actors build a resume that enables them to get work in L.A. (Nikki's dream in *Sisters and Brothers*). The U.S. cinema and television industry is perpetually in search of cheap locales and tax subsidies; the rise in the value of the Canadian dollar in the 2000s and other factors have meant a downturn in production in Vancouver.^{iv} Despite this recent volatility, I think it fair to argue that Vancouver's relative proximity to L.A. (2,000 km, 2.5 hour flying time), longstanding industry connections with B.C., and the fact of sharing the same time zone have meant and will continue to mean a significant American film and television presence in Vancouver.^v

4. *Fathers and Sons*: Trouble in "Lotusland"

- 13 It is my contention that the entertainment industry that links Vancouver and L.A. forges a new type of non-contiguous West Coast transnational regionalism wherein the Canada-U.S. border is not explicitly represented or thematized. Bessai's two most recent films explore this regionalism in a particularly original and humorous manner. In 1999, Edmonton-born, Toronto-educated Bessai moved to Vancouver, where he began a career making low-budget, award-winning independent features. In 2008 he shifted his focus from serious dramas (exploring themes such as drug addiction and violence against women) to a more light-hearted, comedic examination of family dynamics. *Fathers and Sons* (2010) and *Sisters and Brothers* (2011) are part of a trilogy he began with *Mothers and Daughters* (2008). All three features involve an improvised, collaborative approach to filmmaking in which the actors participate in the development of different storylines that are woven together with staged to-camera interviews during which characters deliver their musings on key family relationships. The interviews highlight the comedic aspect of the films as there is often a contradiction between what the "characters" say in earnest

and their actions. This formal technique participates in what has come to be known as the mockumentary tradition in contemporary filmmaking (see Druick), i.e. mocking the pretense and ideological content of serious documentaries, particularly relevant for Canadian national filmmaking which owes its origin to state-funded documentary/realist cinema. All three films feature multiple stories about characters connected by theme (types of relationships) that combine to form a shared narrative of Vancouver; the first two films feature several establishing shots of Vancouver (the port, the ocean) as well as recognizable cafés and other landmarks. That Vancouver is a place defined by global forces, connected to the wider world, is obvious to anyone who is familiar with the city. Bessai's choice of narratives acknowledges the city's diverse cultural make-up: *Mothers and Daughters* features an unorthodox pairing of Aboriginal women; the second film involves Jewish, African-Canadian, and South-Asian father-son narratives. In *Sisters and Brothers*, a seventeen-year-old only child must cope with the arrival of her adult South-Asian half-sister, the result of an affair her mother had with a cult leader twenty-five years earlier. Taken together, these stories indeed create what one critic has called a "multicultural mashup" (Takeuchi, "Cultural Mashup"), more representative perhaps of national notions of Canadian multiculturalism, and cultural communities, than one representative of contemporary demographics in Vancouver.^{vi}

- 14 What is of interest here in exploring the question of new types of transnational regionalism is tracking how the expansion of one angle in this family triptych, the predominance of Vancouver-based characters that aspire to fame and fortune through some connection to the entertainment industry and to L.A., grows in importance from film to film. This aspect is hinted at in *Mothers and Daughters* when a middle-aged successful albeit neurotic author, Mikki (Babz Chula), is taunted by her own friends at a dinner party for writing a book that is not "great art," but could be easily adapted to a make a successful soap opera-style TV series. The actor that plays the obnoxious dinner party guest who makes this suggestion is Tom Scholte. He will reappear in the next two films as Henry, the aforementioned smooth-talking loser and small-time schemer ready to do anything to get "down to Los Angeles" in order to take advantage of his younger brother's new-found fame. Thus from a mere hint in the first film, the Vancouver-L.A. connection becomes a dominant theme in the Anglo-Canadian narrative in *Fathers and Sons* and finally, in *Sisters and Brothers*, overshadows all the stories but one.
- 15 *Fathers and Sons* follows four intercut stories of father-son relationships. In the one I will be examining in detail, four Anglo-Canadian brothers Michael (Vincent Gale), Sean (Tyler Labine), Henry (Tom Scholte), and David (Hrothgar Matthews) gather at the family home in West Vancouver to pay their last respects to their already deceased father and, supposedly, to collect their inheritance. This narrative is in effect about meeting (or not) paternal expectations, but also about notions of fairness and equitable treatment between siblings—and in this sense it foreshadows the themes explored in *Sisters and Brothers*. The opening sequences show David (who has now changed his name to Marlowe) doing yoga poses, barefoot, on the floor of the family home, New Age music in the background. The camera cuts to a jeans-wearing and lumberjack-shirted Henry, hitchhiking in Vancouver, somewhere under an overpass. Unbeknownst to the viewer at this point, these men are brothers heading to a family reunion of sorts, which David (Marlowe) hopes will involve a commemorative ceremony for their father, but is motivated, rather, by the reading of the father's will. The Adams' estate executor is Michael, the third brother, a clean-cut lawyer, married family man who has flown in from somewhere else, possibly Calgary. He is shown

picking up Sean, the youngest brother, a scruffy, slightly overweight, unshaven, and sunglass-wearing "slacker" seated outside of a downtown Vancouver coffee shop, the caricature of the boorish, disheveled falsely unassuming celebrity, who is back in town from L.A. where he is the star of a reality TV show. A gaggle of young girls rush to him to ask for autographs and photos. He poses with the fans and his brother Michael; he is clearly pleased to be recognized. "Just remember Season 4 starts in three weeks. Same time," he calls out to the girls as he gets into the car.

- 16 The narrative of the four brothers is fascinating in how through location, natural lighting, and landscape, it foregrounds a certain sense of place, a feeling of "being" in Vancouver while exposing through dialogue that three of the four brothers no longer in fact live in the city and, as we shall see, two construct (or would like to construct) their identities around the "elsewhere" that is the U.S. Henry appears to be living a shadowy existence in New York, supposedly "making big things happen" stateside. As the day unfolds, it is clear he is pleased to see his younger brother from California so he can pitch to him a ridiculous scheme called "virtual artist park sketch" where people can be airbrushed into a photo of Central Park. For this venture he needs, of course, to borrow money from his brother, though the latter (and the viewer) fails to understand the gist of the scheme. This brotherly exchange and the staging of Sean is an obvious commentary on the part of Bessai on the inane stupidity of contemporary celebrity culture, amply illustrated by medium shots of a Sean, sporting cheap sunglasses, both a cigarette and a joint in his mouth, asking for alcohol in what is clearly very early in the day. The uneasy truce between these four very different brothers is broken during the reading of the will after a meal in the sunshine out on the deck of the family home. Again, the resentment and unhappiness that surfaces in this scene contrasts with the spectacular scenery: layers of mountains and lush vegetation and evergreen forests surrounded by a sparkling blue ocean. What is important to underline here is Bessai's foregrounding of a desirable and increasingly financially unattainable Vancouver. The city is known as "lotusland," its mild weather and beauty making it the envy of much of the rest of Canada and a "luxury" destination for high-end investors from around the world.^{vii}
- 17 Yet in *Fathers and Sons*, there is clearly trouble in paradise and, not surprisingly, it resolves around money. First and foremost, there is the house: perched up on a cliff in Lions Bay with a spectacular wraparound view of Georgia Straight and the nearby islands, this property, given its location and the state of the real estate market in Vancouver, would have netted a sizable fortune. However, the brothers learn during the reading of the will that Mr. Adams has left the house to his employer, the University of British Columbia. He has then subtracted all debts the boys owed him from their respective bequeathment, including room and board calculated at "fair-market value" from David who had stayed behind to look after him. Michael's portion goes into a trust for the education of his own son while Henry, the son who was counting the most on the money, finds himself with virtually nothing, as the father subtracts \$75,000 paid in tuition in three post-secondary institutions and "other numerous debts and financial handouts accrued during the last decade." Henry is furious at Michael, who knew the contents of the will, not to have alerted him to his virtually non-existent share. "You know the risk I take every time I cross the border," he quips, since he is no doubt living in the U.S. illegally. Ironically, the only brother who will receive full payment is the one that needs it the least, Sean, the reality TV show "star" now living in California. He also borrowed money to go to L.A. at one point, but as he reminds his brothers who begin to turn on

him, he paid it off "after the first season." Tensions mount as the reality of their financial situation sets in; the otherwise soft-spoken New Age David who wanted to enlist the brothers in a special four elements, four locations commemorative ash-spreading ceremony (in his mind each brother would spread the ashes in a place symbolizing earth, wind, fire, and water), tries, in what amounts to a moment of sheer comedic brilliance, to fling the ashes and urn over the deck railing. He has to be wrestled to the ground and restrained by the other brothers. Later on, Sean, "successful" and financially secure—though given his lackadaisical attitude his good fortune seems more accidental than linked to talent on his part—is oblivious to the anger seething around and entertains his brothers with mindless "showbiz anecdotes" from his L.A. life. Eventually the brothers break into a collective fistfight over what they see as Michael's "orchestration" of the offending will.

- 18 Morning in "lotusland" brings a relative calm and, as is the custom in the family drama, a tentative reconciliation. At Sean's suggestion, the four brothers dust off their father's vintage 1968 Galaxy and partake in the four-part Vancouver area road trip that David had proposed in order to scatter their father's ashes. They reflect at the foot of an ancient evergreen in the midst of a nearby old-growth forest, stand in the wind on Lions Gate Bridge that connects downtown Vancouver to the North Shore and the family home, visit an East Vancouver pizza oven and finally offer their father's remains to the ocean. The final shot of the brothers is of the four skinny-dipping with the urn in the frigid waters. The resolution to the Adams family narrative is a nod, on the part of Bessai, to the road movie genre. Shots of the vintage car cruising B.C.'s Highway 99 and the streets of Vancouver accompanied by a bluesy guitar/rock music reference both mobility and cruising in general, long associated with California and a cinematic mobility, but also establish a rapport with the road that is specific to Canadian national cinema.
- 19 Ever since Donald Shebib's 1970 classic *Goin' Down the Road*, numerous Canadian filmmakers have sought to explore the mobility/masculinity nexus as it relates to landscape and the national narrative. The road movie may well be a Hollywood genre synonymous with American culture and society, but it has also been a "fertile field for the ironic intervention of Canadian filmmakers who hijack this cinematic vehicle for the expression of a rebellious American freedom to visualize Canadian road adventures" (Gittings 149). The prevalence of the road theme, from Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* through Bruce McDonald's road spoofs like *Roadkill* (1989), *Highway 61* (1991), and *Hard Core Logo* (1996) to the more recent pan-Canadian motorbike odyssey *One Week* (2008), creates the impression that Canadian filmmakers, in delving into the road genre, are hoping to tap into some sort of magical essence of Canadian narrative cinema.^{viii} In *Fathers and Sons*, the "road trip" allows Bessai to highlight the natural beauty of Vancouver by mapping out various places in the city (all outdoor settings, three natural, one urban), providing a temporary homosocial space that permits a bonding between the brothers while at the same time connecting with the ambiguous Canadianness of the road genre. The vintage Adams family car even recalls the Eldorado convertible that Butch drives up to the Okanagan in another Canadian classic: *My American Cousin* (1985).
- 20 There are a number of things to conclude at this stage about the representation of region in this film. Vancouver becomes here a fluid repository of narratives that gesture towards multiculturalism and the inclusion of various ethnic groups in the cinematic social fabric of the city. Yet, it is important to point out that though Vancouver has become a stabilizing space for other characters in these father-son stories, the Adams brothers

have already left the city; the only one who has stayed behind is a caricature of a New Age yoga practitioner who does not appear to have a career outside of his care-giving role. There is no intergenerational transfer of family heritage: the house and car have been left to "research." The film suggests with a satirical tone that despite Vancouver's physical beauty and the general desirability of life in the city, other forces or "flows" are pulling the brothers outwards connecting them, as in the case of Sean, with L.A. (which will be further explored in the next film). This new transnational regionalism that links Vancouver southward exists as a "partial condition," to recall Sassen's terms in her work on globalization, that intersects and overlaps with the domain of the national, alluded to here by Bessai's nod to Canadian national cinema through the brothers' roundabout Vancouver road trip.

5. *Sisters and Brothers*: "Somewhere in California"

- 21 *Sisters and Brothers* uses members of the same ensemble cast and similar improvisation techniques and faux to-camera interviews to explore sibling rivalry. In Vancouver, as the holidays approach, guilt-ridden sister Louise (Gabrielle Miller) tries her best to take care of her brother Jerry (Benjamin Ratner), who has schizophrenia and refuses to take his medication. Then there is Nikki (Amanda Crew), the aforementioned aspiring actress, and her older half-sister, Maggie (Camille Sullivan), who berates and second-guesses her, even as she is filled with envy. As discussed, they meet Henry (Tom Scholte), the deadbeat would-be producer, now based back in Vancouver, who tries to bed both girls through his connection to his celebrity brother. With the promise of a role for Nikki in the new miniseries he is creating, Henry convinces Nikki and Maggie to drive him to L.A. to "take meetings." But the narrative that in a sense structures the film and represents an important departure in casting from both *Mothers and Daughters* and *Fathers and Sons* is that of Rory (Dustin Milligan) and Justin (Cory Monteith), two actor brothers who spend the day together in Justin's L.A. beach house. At the time of the filming, both Milligan and Monteith were young, Canadian-born actors who had had recent success on American television. In including them here, Bessai was no doubt hoping to attract a wider audience for this film, especially younger viewers who would appreciate the irony of Canadian actors in L.A. engaging in a critique of themselves and the industry. In *Sisters and Brothers*, Rory plays the earnest failed actor who, after a time spent in Africa where he tries to start a charity, meets up with his now celebrity older brother who headlines in superhero movies and who lives the life of a young Hollywood star replete with an "entourage" of dotting assistants whom he treats with an air of entitled nonchalance. Monteith's performance in *Sisters and Brothers* has in retrospect a chilling element of the prophetic: sadly, Monteith, who had a long history of substance abuse, died of a drug and alcohol overdose in Vancouver on July 13, 2013.
- 22 *Sisters and Brothers* maps out this dual-city transnational region from the opening frame of the film, which shows a cartoonish map of the world and then zooms in to North America and a dotted red line connecting two cities marked with an X: Vancouver and L.A. After several frames of graphic novel panels that prefigure the stories to be told and some quick introductory to-camera interviews, the film shifts to the Justin and Rory narrative, featuring Rory's arrival at LAX where his brother must fight free from a gaggle of screaming female fans. Rory's "has-been" status is underlined by the fact that none of the fans recognize him as an actor; he is almost left behind at the airport in the rush: "I'm

with him," he says to Justin's driver/bodyguard who wants to block him from getting in to the black unmarked SUV. The day in the life of these two L.A. transplants hits all of the requisite high notes of the Hollywood critique. Justin is basking in his newfound fame garnered from his role as a comic book super hero. His attitude is one of entitlement (happy to be surrounded by personal assistants and a doting housekeeper) and boredom (he yawns and looks out the window as his brother begins to tell him of his charity work in Africa). Rory, desperate for attention, tries to impress Justin's personal assistant, Liz, with the details of his ridiculous charity—"Change for change for the children." Their conversation only serves to expose the shameless opportunism of such ventures more designed to reboot an actor's failing/flailing career than to offer any meaningful development for (in this case) African peoples. Rory defends celebrity humanitarianism in a to-camera interview ("It's not about me," Rory argues, "It's about saying yes to change"), while Justin opines in a similar to-camera segment that, as far as he is concerned, his acting constitutes "humanitarian work."

- 23 Eventually the brothers' "reunion day" wears thin after Justin invites three girls over who fawn over him and ignore Rory, and the two argue over family. Rory is of course resentful that the vacuous Justin, whom he encouraged to come down to L.A., has found such easy showbiz success and can now "look after" their mother financially. Justin mocks Rory's "humanitarian" endeavours: "You can take care of people in the world and your own people at the same time—here, in Los Angeles," suggesting that, for him, L.A. is now the only "here" that counts. Rory tries to storm off on his own after lambasting Justin's clichéd lifestyle and reminding him that for all intents and purposes, in the end, he is completely alone; the close-ups of a seemingly very sad Justin (Monteith) during these scenes is again prophetically tragic given the circumstances of Monteith's death. The brothers eventually reconcile and enjoy some Vietnamese soup, supposedly on the way back to LAX.
- 24 *Sisters and Brothers's* critique of Hollywood may seem for some to be an unoriginal attack on an easy target. One reviewer claimed that there was nothing in the portrait of Justin's Hollywood life that had not already been successfully spoofed in the hit HBO series *Entourage* (2004-2011) and likened this aspect of the film to Bessai's hypocritically wanting to be part of the club that he satirizes (Izay). The Justin/Rory sequences take on a much more complex meaning when they are read from a Canadian-based transnational perspective. Justin and Rory's characters in the film are conspicuously Canadian; Rory quips upon entering the beach house that Justin is "keeping it Canadian," perhaps a reference to a gigantic wall mural that foregrounds a totem pole (traditional iconography of West Coast Native tribes). In his final to-camera interview, Rory describes the ideal brother as a "wing-man." While for American audiences, this term might first evoke a fighter pilot who supports another in a potentially dangerous flying environment, for Canadian audiences, a wing-man is a nickname for a winger, or ice hockey forward, and thus refers to Canada's national sport. The Canadian actor brothers thus bring to the film's imagined L.A. an outside context, a series of extraterritorial references linking that space back to Canada.
- 25 This transnational connection also exists on another level. There is the national origin of Cory Monteith and Dustin Milligan. Hollywood has always been a magnet for talent from around the world, yet the largest group of foreign nationals working in the entertainment industry are, unbeknownst to many, Canadian. Critics of Canadian popular culture have begun to study this phenomenon, known as the "star-system-in-exile"

(Acland), wherein Canadian audiences *recognize* "their" own actors when they see them in U.S. productions.^{ix} As I have argued elsewhere, the linguistic and (perceived) cultural sameness of English Canadians with respect to the United States has facilitated both their success and invisibility south of the border (Roberts, "Crossover Stars"). Of the numerous Canadians that have become household names in the industry, a significant number either come from Vancouver or have moved from places elsewhere in the Canadian West to gain experience in Vancouver before moving south.^x Monteith and Milligan are not only actors playing characters in a Hollywood satire but western Canadian actors exploring a narrative about going to L.A. that dovetails with their own experiences.^{xi} What Bessai has done with this narrative is to foreground a very particular migratory pattern of industry professionals that thus redefines the West Coast region as a network of related yet non-contiguous spaces but adds the necessary asymmetry that is part of the Canadian-American relationship: one city-space (Vancouver) is "thinking about" or "aware of" the other (L.A.); but this relationship is certainly not reciprocal.^{xii} The Justin/Rory narrative is in many respects one long "in-joke" wherein two former Vancouver roommates play a version of themselves in L.A., hinting at the "invisibility/visibility" of English-Canadian industry professionals who masquerade as all-American heroes—Monteith as the singing football star Finn Hudson in *Glee* and Milligan as the surfer/lacrosse star Ethan Ward in the Beverly Hills TV drama *90210* (2008-2009)—but are still recognized as Canadian by fans at home.^{xiii}

- 26 In terms of cinematic space, the film features a number of quintessential establishing shots of L.A. (freeways, sunshine, palm trees, the ocean, the exterior of a beach house), but the rest of the Justin/Rory narrative, including the airport scenes, was filmed in Vancouver; there is no mistaking the greyish muted light and lush green vegetation of the PNW, not to mention the pouring rain during the brother's trip to the Vietnamese restaurant. The choice to substitute Vancouver for L.A. was no doubt motivated by budgetary considerations. But the effect this choice has on the "look" of the film merits our attention. Key sites in British Columbia and Vancouver have had a long career of starring as somewhere else. Numerous American films and TV shows have carefully disguised the city to look like Anywhere, USA. So-called "home-grown" independent B.C. film is expected to a certain extent to counter the displacement of Vancouver by highlighting its specificity, showcasing the city and making films that can only come from Vancouver. What Bessai is doing here is delivering a meta-commentary on the placelessness of the place that is Vancouver: even so-called "home-grown" local film such as his own ends up asking Vancouver to stand in for somewhere else because that somewhere else, L.A., has become so important for local professionals. L.A. is where two Vancouver "actor brothers" would realistically be.
- 27 Bessai pursues his critique of how the entertainment industry restructures place in the Nikki and Maggie half-sister narrative. Fresh from an audition in Vancouver for a non-speaking lesbian vampire-killer role where the producer/director gives the impression that she would do well to meet with him "after hours" if she wants a chance at the part, Nikki, in a scene described at the outset of this article, instead meets Henry, the "loser brother" from the previous film who never stops talking to anyone who will listen to his talk about his brother Sean's "success" in L.A. The Nikki/Henry meeting is preceded by establishing scenes of Henry working on construction sites, hardhat and all, boring his co-workers with his new scheme, the TV show he and his brother supposedly have "in development," and then stealing away to talk to his brother by payphone to ask for

money (we only hear one side of the conversation). Nikki and Henry's meet-up conversation in the downtown bar on a rainy afternoon illustrates poignantly how for these characters the space of Vancouver is defined by its relationship to elsewhere (L.A.) and foregrounds the inevitable one-way migration that awaits them. Nikki admits she has not yet been to L.A. but recognizes that that is where she is headed: "I was told you need to build up your resume here first" before going down there.^{xiv} Henry's claim to be "in the business" is tangential at best; yet, in this new regional narrative economy, it becomes something he can barter for goods, transportation, and, in his mind, sex. He believes himself to be a star simply by association and thus irresistible and deserving of female attention. Henry's potential connection to the business allows the otherwise seemingly levelheaded Nikki to be "played," to give in to self-delusion: she agrees to drive the penniless Henry (he supposedly just had all his money and identification stolen) to L.A. on the promise of meeting with industry executives. Fortunately for Nikki, all of this occurs under the watchful eyes of her older half-sister Maggie, fresh out of the hospital for what appears to be depression, but not too ill to catch on to Henry's trickery. She invites herself along on the road trip as both intermediary and bodyguard. During a stopover at a motel, preceded by a graphic novel image with the title "Somewhere in Northern California" (though the viewer can clearly see snow on the ground), Henry attempts to kiss Nikki (who naively claims to have "misunderstood") and then succeeds, the next morning, in having sex with Maggie. Eventually the two sisters tire of stopping repeatedly so that Henry, in a superb road movie cliché, can make (collect) calls from pay phones to supposedly announce their arrival and, especially when Nikki learns he also made advances to her sister, the two decide to throw him out of the car and drive back to Vancouver. A disgruntled Henry threatens them as they drive away: "I am the brother of Sean Adams and you are no-one without me." The camera then lingers on Henry on the side of the road hitchhiking with a hastily drawn cardboard sign that reads: Hollywood.

- 28 According to Paul McEwan, the Canadian version of the road movie borrows from the American genre the idea that the road is where you learn something about yourself (13). But what makes a road movie Canadian is its ability to ironize that notion as evidenced by the films of Bruce McDonald. The Canadian road is a place where you do not necessarily learn about yourself. The humor in *Sisters and Brothers* derives again from tapping into the comic anti-road trip vein that links the film to Canadian national cinema. There is no great revelation for Nikki and Maggie on this road to nowhere; the two sisters reconcile and return home. Yet the road trip itself is important for how it structures this transnational regional space. The viewer imagines Nikki, Maggie, and Henry's vehicle travelling along the dotted red line shown at the beginning of the film that links Vancouver to L.A., with the sole purpose of leaving the rainy city for what Henry calls "The Dream Factory." There are numerous scenes of conversations in the car, of Henry using a pay phone and of their one stopover at a motel and a morning visit to a coffee shop. The use of close-ups and conversations in closed spaces, coupled with far fewer establishing shots of Vancouver, create in this film a feeling of constraint and even claustrophobia, an unsettling of cinematic space. Bessai does not hide the fact that the stopover scenes were filmed at the "August Jack Motel" in Squamish, B.C. Otherwise the viewer sees little of the "region"; there is no interaction with local people, a staple element of the road movie genre. It is as if the space "in between"—Washington and Oregon State—does not exist. Nor is there any mention whatsoever of crossing the Canada-U.S. border (which was important in *Fathers and Sons*, as Henry claimed to be putting himself at risk when crossing). For Henry, Nikki, and Maggie and by inference for

entertainment industry travelers, the West Coast is figured as a borderless region since the three obviously cross the line without incident. The film is fiction but its non-treatment of the border crossing is no less significant. What the viewer knows of Henry's and even Maggie's circumstances would make an easy crossing unlikely.^{xv} The road trip in this film is, hence, purely ironic: it subverts the quintessential road movie tropes of the relationship to landscape, to the mapping out of regional cinematic space. It is obvious to the viewer from what we see of the landscape and the use of locations that the three hapless travelers never go anywhere but simply drive around the Lower Mainland in the rain and cold and then head up the Whistler highway (Highway 99) to Squamish. Again, not shooting the road trip "on location" was no doubt a choice dictated by funding considerations. The end result on screen, as in the Justin/Rory narrative, is no less important for how it figures both Vancouver/B.C. and L.A. as deterritorialized or decontextualized spaces: the characters live in denial of one (Vancouver) and in the dream of the other (L.A.) that never, at least in this narrative, materializes onscreen.

6. Conclusion: Mapping the Transnational Space

- 29 At the end of *Sisters and Brothers*, a newly reconciled Nikki and Maggie, back at Nikki's apartment, giggle on the couch as they watch an interview with Henry, the sleazy television producer, and his brother Sean, supposedly in L.A. The two men are promoting their new TV series "Fembra the Huntress," whose heroine will offer, as Henry claims, a "positive role model for young girls" and in which Sean's role will be "darker" than his role on "Hot Dog" since he will be covered head to toe with black fur. This *Entertainment Tonight*-style spoof is the parting joke for this trilogy and a fitting (humorous) closing for my discussion of Vancouver-L.A. transnational connections. The sisters are back in Vancouver; Henry may have realized his dream, though the sheer lunacy and ridiculousness of the show's content gives the sisters the last laugh. The film closes with the comic-book style dotted red line linking Vancouver and L.A.
- 30 In his work on British Columbia film, Mike Gasher ponders, given the transnationalism of cinema production and the heavy reliance on U.S. locations production, how one is to understand B.C. cinema's relation to place (6). In my view, Bessai's two films examined here go a long way in exploring that question, both satisfying and unsettling our expectations of Vancouver as a city-space and underlining its connection with both the continental and the global. What I have tried to expose here is how the films foreground a transnational regionalism that is *transnational without being cross-border*. What is central for these characters is not occurring anywhere near the border. In fact, this new regionalism structured by the entertainment industry seems to skip over Washington and Oregon State entirely, reminding us of Mathew Sparke's misgivings on the negligible regionalizing impact of certain industries in Cascadia/PNW, of north-south flows that pass through without integrating the rest of the region. The trajectories of the characters in these films do indeed map out a north-south flow that points to a transnational regionalism or network of places, divorced from considerations of geographic contiguity, but that foregrounds at the same time a reality of one-way migration: Vancouver to L.A. This dual-city relationship has historically involved two sets of flows if you consider the south-north movement of the locations industry. Yet this U.S. industry presence is predicated on the negation of place, of portraying Vancouver as an affordable, picturesque stand-in for an American locale. This flow cannot be said to be conscious of

its "other" in the way that Vancouverites in the industry are conscious of L.A.; the only "place" that counts in both of these flows, in the end, is "American."

- 31 *Fathers and Sons* and *Sisters and Brothers* also gesture towards a better understanding of "Vancouver, Canada's" relationship to Hollywood. As Acland, Gasher, and others have argued, Hollywood is not a parallel "other" cinema that can be ignored in the analysis of Canadian film. It is best understood as a cinema that Canadians (and others) "have both helped to create and have integrated into their own popular culture" (Gasher 10). Independent filmmakers in Vancouver may well seek to re-assert the distinctiveness of a city that continues to be used as a backdrop in American movie-of-the-week specials. Bessai, in using Vancouver and B.C. as a stand-in for a nebulous "Northern California" or unspecified "Los Angeles beach house," suggests that in this hyper-mobile, globalized, and newly regionalized world, a comforting, self-closed recognizable portrait of Vancouver is no longer possible: even when starring as itself, Vancouver is always already connected to "elsewhere."

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NOTES

- i. *Jackass* (2000-2002) was an American reality TV show, originally broadcast on MTV, that featured participants performing various dangerous, crude, and self-injuring stunts and pranks.
- ii. For example, Steve Tatum's aforementioned list of city regions in the North American West excludes Canada. Given what we know about the interconnectedness of the oil and gas industry in North America, cities like Calgary and Fort McMurray, Alberta should have been included.
- iii. Lawrence Hill's 2007 award-winning novel *The Book of Negroes* (Harper Collins), for example, was published in the United States under the title *Someone Knows My Name* (Norton and Company).
- iv. Faced in 2012 with an 80% drop in production, members of the B.C. Film Industry recently lobbied the B.C. government for increasing tax credits in order to attract more (foreign) productions.
- v. For more recent data on foreign film and television production in Vancouver see Takeuchi, "B.C."
- vi. The absence of the Chinese and Aboriginal communities in the two latest films is striking given each community's importance for the demographics of Vancouver. Bessai, no doubt aware of this, explained in an interview about *Fathers and Sons* that a Chinese-Canadian story "didn't make it to camera" (see Takeuchi, "Cultural Mashup"). In my view, the multicultural aspect of

Fathers and Sons and *Sisters and Brothers* is naturalized rather than problematized, meaning that multiculturalism is not the subject but the backdrop for these films. For example, aside from some elements of social stereotyping, particularly in the story of the drunken Russian Jewish father, Anton (Jay Brazeau), who forces his son, Bernie (Ben Ratner), to prove his manhood by drinking vodka and engaging in a knife-fight, Bessai avoids issues of conservative values and social silencing. In the South-Asian narrative it is the successful accountant-son, Kama/Cameron (Stephen Lobo), who is ashamed of his father's sexuality and flamboyance, trumping the more standard narrative of the South-Asian son or daughter afraid to reveal his/her sexuality to more traditional parents.

vii. The use of "lotusland" as a nickname for Vancouver was coined by *Vancouver Sun* writer Allan Fotheringham, referring of course to Homer's *Odyssey*, in which the hero, Odysseus, visits a land whose inhabitants are befuddled by a narcotic lotus. The insinuation is that Vancouver is an idyllic land of contentment and self-indulgence. It sometimes is used to describe parts of coastal British Columbia.

viii. Recent Canadian road movies include *Down the Road Again* (Donald Shebib, 2011), the sequel to his 1970 classic, *Foreverland* (2011), and *Cas and Dylan* (2013).

ix. As Acland explains, "[t]he U.S. industry plays a role in the measure of accomplishment for Canadian talent. As such, it offers a way for Canadian audiences to view that success, to read a film or television program as a mark of Canadian achievement" (190-91).

x. Vancouver-born or Vancouver-based stars that have had high-profile careers in the U.S. include Carrie Ann Moss, Jason Priestley, Joshua Jackson, Seth Rogen, and Ryan Reynolds.

xi. Monteith and Milligan reportedly shared an apartment in Vancouver before they left the country and even worked in the same downtown dessert café (Leong). In an interview with CBC's Jian Gomeishi, Monteith described making the 20-hour drive alone to L.A. and paying for his own hotel to be "in place" for the audition that eventually launched his short-lived career (see Monteith).

xii. It is worth noting that Bessai himself admits to traveling to L.A. once a month for work-related projects (see Wolak).

xiii. Vancouver-based actors have a history of playing California "heartthrobs." One of the most popular actors in the original *Beverly Hills, 90210* TV series (1990-2000) was Vancouver native Jason Priestley. Both Monteith and Milligan appear to attach a certain importance to their national origins, i.e. being Canadian gives them a different perspective on their careers. They have commented in interviews on how the improvisation-style of *Sisters and Brothers* differed from the commercial television work they had been doing. For Milligan, "[s]uccess means LA, but you can't improvise anymore in your work because of the money involved." Both relished the irony of Monteith playing the actor (Justin) that no Canadian wants to become. Canadians, for them, remain less superficial (see Leong).

xiv. The need to maintain a physical presence in L.A. in order to continue to get work is well known to Canadian artists who attempt to achieve success stateside. In a recent interview, one of Canada's best-known actors, Callum Keith Rennie, mentioned the stress of having only worked a few days in L.A. in the preceding year. "You have to maintain a presence [in L.A.] at all times" (see Roberts, "Crossover Stars").

xv. Henry claims to have lost his wallet and all of his identification without which he would have been unable to cross the Canada-U.S. border. Maggie has obvious mental health issues, a fact that could also result in her being denied entry into the United States (see "Canadian Woman Refused U.S. Entry because of Depression").

ABSTRACTS

Scholars of critical regionalism have argued convincingly for a complex re-definition of regions/ regionalism that examines the inherent mobility of cultures and their re-appropriation of place. This article aims to bring American-based critical regionalism into dialogue with research on Canada-U.S. cross-border regions, specifically the Pacific Northwest (Cascadia). I will examine an emerging aspect of western culture in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, i.e. a (post)regional space of flows governed by the hyper-volatile film and television/entertainment industry that links Vancouver to Los Angeles. The cinema of award-winning Vancouver *auteur* filmmaker Carl Bessai is illustrative of this phenomenon. Bessai's two most recent films, *Fathers and Sons* (2010) and *Sisters and Brothers* (2011) feature characters in non-traditional families who desire to work in film and television in Los Angeles. Through caustic humor, the films engage in multiple levels of critique: of the dysfunctional nature of these cross-border families, but also of the superficiality of image-culture and the "forced" migration of talent who are sucked into the entertainment vortex. Analyzing these films through the lens of critical regionalism foregrounds "West Coastness" as a region of flows, of bodies in mobility/circulation yet—in the case of Bessai—without side-stepping the obvious asymmetries inherent in Canada's complex and enduringly ambivalent relationship with the United States.

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