

Urban Space as Spatial Biography in Anthony De Sa's *Barnacle Love* and *Kicking the Sky*

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For the last few years scholars such as Edward Soja and Doreen Massey have tackled the notion of spatial biography in inspiring terms. According to Soja, we are “intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities” (*Thirdspace* 1). In his conceptualization of the trialectics of space, he relates the concept of thirdspace to the reading of individual life experiences as spatial biographies, claiming that “understanding lived space can be compared to writing a biography, an interpretation of the lived time of the individual” (Soja, *Postmetropolis* 11). Massey focuses on the concepts of trajectory and story as related to movement and change (12) and declares that “we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (9). However, it is Michel de Certeau who interweaves the concept of subjectivities as “spatial trajectories” (115) with literature, suggesting that stories “traverse and organize spaces” (115) and that the material and verbal presence of these fluid narratives becomes the discursive representation of an urban “opaque and blind mobility” (93, emphasis in the original).

Two works by Canadian writer Anthony De Sa illustrate de Certeau's insights on spatial practices: his short story collection *Barnacle Love* (2008) and its follow-up novel *Kicking the Sky* (2013) map the spatial biography of their protagonist and narrator, Antonio Rebelo, from childhood to early adulthood.¹ Both of De Sa's works are set in Toronto, represented as a city in transition, and through Antonio's narration the author “explores the immigrant experience from a Canadian perspective . . . that locates his work in the mainstream of Canadian culture” (Braz 73).

De Certeau claims that “the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else” (98); that is, walking through a city, and mapping its streets and avenues, is a way of telling the story of a journey. Different descriptions of the same cityscape, as well as the telling of stories related to each square, street or house, produce different spaces and/or convert these into places (118). Opposite and multiple life stories, together with new and ancient buildings, create a text that “remains daily and indefinitely other” (93). His insights on spatial practices help analyze how *Barnacle Love* and *Kicking the Sky* interrelate the protagonist's story with the spatial setting of Toronto's Little Portugal, and his changing perspective of himself in relation to the

urban space as he grows older. The cityscape maps Antonio's painful journey from childhood to youth, and the texts reveal how his growing connection with Toronto expresses a flourishing sexualized sense of self that reconsiders his original spatial and family attachments.

Barnacle Love relates the spatial biography of Antonio Rebelo, the son of a Portuguese immigrant. The narration is divided into two parts, set first in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland, and then in Toronto, Ontario. This collection of short stories can also be read as a novel, since its portrayal of the main characters, represented as a multiplicity of stories interrelated through a shared urban space, transforms the text into a whole. In the first part, Antonio tells the story of his father, Manuel Rebelo, his childhood and youth in Portugal, his arrival in Newfoundland, and later move to Toronto. In this section, St. John's symbolizes the possibility of a new life for Rebelo, a fisherman, who turned his back on his home village on the Azores island of Sao Miguel.

In the second part of the collection, set in Toronto, Antonio defines his subjectivity both by identifying himself with the cityscape and in opposition to his father's frustrated hopes and sense of failure. Antonio's spatial biography is mapped by his cartography of Little Portugal and also, yet not exclusively, by his relation with Manuel. In his Author's Note, De Sa points out that the core of *Barnacle Love* is the story of "a boy unwilling to carry the burden of his father's unfulfilled dreams" (222), and it is in this sense that his subjectivity is also defined in opposition to Manuel's marginal position within Canadian society.

Kicking the Sky continues and expands the narrative of one of the short stories in *Barnacle Love*, "Shoeshine Boy." It narrates the brutal sexual assault and killing of a 12-year-old Portuguese boy—a story based on a real crime, the murder of Emanuel Jaques in Toronto. In the summer of 1977, twelve-year-old Emanuel, from a Portuguese immigrant family, was kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and brutally murdered. Four days after his disappearance his body was found on the roof of a Yonge Street body-massage parlor. In "Shoeshine Boy," Antonio recalls that summer—when his family butchered a pig and when Emanuel went missing—as a time of lost confidence: "the place I knew so well could no longer protect me" (145).

This tragic event becomes the nodal point of *Kicking the Sky*, which examines how everything changed during "the summer that no one slept" (1). Antonio's voice links and unveils the characters' stories by interrelating them with Toronto at the time of the Jaques's murder, a tragedy whose memory has haunted the city ever since. David Stains points out that in

“*Kicking the Sky* De Sa creates a wholly convincing . . . portrait of a city and a community coping with their increasing self-awareness” (36).

Spatial biography as belonging

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau states that spatial narratives transform spaces and our relationship with them. In his view, the act of moving around a city defines its spaces in a way that counteracts the dominant meaning of the cityscape: “there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences” (118).

In *Barnacle Love*, as Albert Braz suggests, the character of Antonio allows the author to “convey an adolescent’s view not only of his family but also of his society, particularly his city” (69). The description of the cityscape gives voice to Antonio’s frustration and sadness, but also to his feeling of connection with Toronto. Urban space becomes a text that tells its characters’ spatial biographies and turns their multiple trajectories into a generational “dialogue between identities” with the potential to develop new urban biographies (Zucchi 75). As a matter of fact, it is through Antonio’s voice that the reader comes to know the feeling of failure that Manuel Rebelo was struggling with during his years in Toronto. Antonio’s love and admiration for his father seem to constantly clash with Manuel’s own erratic behavior.

In “Pounding Their Shadows,” Antonio writes of the day when his drunken father began hallucinating and had to be taken to hospital: “They said they’d take him to Toronto Western. I could hear their exchanges, caught words like *hallucinations, stink, withdrawal, alcoholic*. Things were happening so fast” (190). His thoughts of his father reveal a pathetic image of a man defeated by life and Antonio’s anguish at the discovery of Manuel’s addiction; De Sa gives Toronto multi-layered meanings that relate to Antonio’s emotional landscapes at different moments of his life story; these “give their shape to spaces” and “weave places together” (de Certeau 97). As Antonio rides his bicycle through Toronto’s streets to visit Manuel in the detox unit of the mental hospital, his gaze defines and deconstructs the urban space and gives it a different and personal meaning; the familiar streets and buildings of a city that he normally sees as welcoming and familiar now transmit a sense of growing concern: “I pedaled my ten-speed along Queen Street . . . I sped by Trinity Bellows Park and then the Candy Factory before crossing Shaw and the ominous gloom of the mental hospital . . . I approached slowly. *They are drunks*, I thought” (192). The narrator’s shifting emotional states connect him with the cityscape and help him find answers to unsettling life situations;

as a result, the urban space is “situated in networks of affects and meaning” (Pile 47).

The short story “Oh Canada!” presents Antonio’s growing sense of alienation from his parents’ native culture and his family in favor of his emotional connection with Toronto and its Canadian values. He finds Toronto a protective shield that soothes his humiliation at his father’s behavior. Every year Manuel celebrates Canada Day getting drunk while sitting on the porch of the family’s house in Little Portugal and playing the national anthem of his new country on a record player. Antonio’s mother and sister leave home to avoid this embarrassing ritual, his friends from the neighborhood make fun of it, yet he stays at home so as not to leave his father alone. Feeling ashamed though, he seeks refuge in his bedroom, from where he can hear the city: “The air, punctuated by the sounds of sirens, ambulances and fire trucks, smelled thick and warm. I wanted to meet those noises” (174). The buzz of the imagined cityscape represents a wider reality that offers new emotional attachments and possible solutions to Antonio’s frustration. The city acquires a new significance through the narrator’s experiences. It “becomes multiple . . . an array of ‘signs,’ a ‘code’ to be read . . . to ‘decipher’ the world” (Mitchell 113). The specular relationship between the city of Toronto and the narrator’s emotions constructs an imaginary urban space that parallels the transformative process of his own growing self, his new understanding of the familiar environments of both family relations and Little Portugal. Antonio’s growing attachment to Toronto means that he feels Canadian—a sense that, paradoxically, he shares with Manuel, who cannot leave behind his immigrant subaltern position.

A similar sense of identification with the cityscape appears in “Shoeshine Boy,” where Antonio reflects on his childhood and youth and his sense of belonging to Toronto: “I felt safe growing up. I was comforted by what I knew, what was familiar” (145). His life story takes shape in the telling of a past that merges with urban spaces. In fact, when Antonio speaks of the city of his childhood, readers feel his thriving sense of belonging: “By the age of ten I knew everything about where I lived, every picket and dented door” (144). Riding his beloved ten-speed bike around the city and, later, beyond the familiar boundaries of Little Portugal Antonio discovers Toronto’s spaces and becomes more intimately connected with the urban diversity: “I pedaled to the clicking of colored straws that covered my spokes, all the way to the top of our street to the synagogue . . . and onto Dundas Street with the blur of the Red Rockets. That’s where I stopped . . . By the age of seven, Palmerston, Markham, and Euclid Avenue all bored me” (144). The

discovery of the city which is pulsing beyond the boundaries of his neighborhood symbolizes Antonio's own pressing necessity to come to terms with becoming a young adult: "As I grew older I ventured farther" (143). But this growing connection with Toronto is dramatically interrupted by the murder of Emanuel Jaques.

When Antonio learns of the boy's murder, he rides from his home in Little Portugal to 245 Yonge Street to the place where Emanuel's body was found. As the city unfolds in the background, Antonio imagines a desperate dialogue with Emanuel in the last horrid hours of life:

I rode up the street, passed the neon signs and the dirty curbs that lined the new Eaton Centre *They touched me with their strong hands. They tugged at my shirt, tore at me as I looked up into a searing sun, and they groped. I wanted to dip my hands into cold water to soothe their burning . . . the haunting images left me as I pedaled faster I stopped just above Dundas Street—across the street from a place called Charlie's Angels that had been cordoned off with yellow tape.* (156)

In Antonio's mind, Emanuel is alive and tells his story in the first person; in the story, the voices of the two narrators blur and become one. It is the most moving and dramatic moment in the whole narrative:

I rode past all those boarded-up shops on Queen Street, past all the drunks toward Spadina *My lungs were filled with a burning fire. My throat was dry and their voices grew nearer, louder: "Treat you good, like one of the boys" . . . City Hall and then Yonge Street . . . I could hear the thunder of their feet on cement. They clipped my heels and I fell forward with my hands splayed out like spiders. My wrists buckled against the pavement. I looked at my hands, striped with thin lines like red hair.* (156)

The Toronto that Antonio had always felt as a familiar and reassuring space is suddenly revealed as a place where casual brutality can happen. Antonio would henceforth be haunted by the memory of the murder. Such memories, as de Certeau claims, relate people's perceptions of themselves to places, either positively or negatively: "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence" (108).²

After the murder of Emanuel the city is transformed into a metaphysical space of discovery and growth, allowing the narrator to begin to understand the otherness and human tragedy behind the once-familiar cityscape. In an interview De Sa reveals that he was also "trying to make sense

of that senseless murder” and adds that “I’ve been writing this book [*Kicking the Sky*] in my head ever since I was 11 [and] living in the Portuguese neighborhood in Toronto” (Koul 3). Lavender Harris points out that De Sa’s intent was not only “an effort to expunge all this from the city’s psyche,” but also to memorialize the events of that summer (235). The murder changed Torontonians’ perception of their city as “Toronto the Good.”

Antonio is overwhelmed by his discovery of the dark side of the urban spaces of his childhood. “Something that should have remained hidden is revealed, brought into the familiar world of the everyday” (Creed 484). As Pile points out: “Memories are a persistent feature of people’s experiences of the city and city life . . . childhood memories can be especially intense, especially disturbing, especially haunting” (137). Antonio remembers this shifting perception of Toronto as he leaves his state of innocence and acquires a more complex sense of self. The anguish and the community fears that followed the murder, and the knowledge that the city suddenly revealed an unknown dark side, is voiced in the very first pages of *Kicking the Sky*. “I can pinpoint the very moment it all started to change, when the calm broke: when news that twelve-year-old Emanuel Jaques had disappeared spread through our neighborhood in the whispered prayers of women returning from Mass” (1).

Spatial biography as the loss of innocence

In *Kicking the Sky*, Antonio’s spatial biography ignores the antagonistic presence of his father and focuses on renegotiating his relationship with Toronto. The book opens with the description of a traditional Portuguese event: the annual slaughter of a pig. The community all join in to watch or help and the women make enough sausages (*chorizo*) to last for a year. “The pig continued to struggle, letting out high-pitched squeals. My uncles took up their position along the pig’s haunches and pressed their weight against its rough skin” (27). The description of the pig’s death parallels the TV news of Emanuel’s kidnapping, the search for him, and finally the grim discovery of his body: “A picture of the large-eyed boy appeared on the screen. ‘The search is over. The body of a twelve-year-old boy police have identified as Emanuel Jaques has been found on a Toronto rooftop’” (37).

In the novel, the cartography of Antonio’s world breaks the frontiers of his own neighborhood and Toronto becomes the background of his coming of age: “I was eleven, almost twelve, and everything I said or did was an attempt to show everyone around me that I wasn’t a kid anymore” (1–2). His gaze and narration resignify both Little Portugal and the metropolis. The

seamy side of Toronto is, however, now represented not just by anonymous murderers and distant characters such as prostitutes, pimps, and the marginalized. People in Antonio's own world also suffer violence and abjection, which he has never before associated with places or people he knew. His friend Ricky is sexually abused by his own father and by older men from the neighborhood. The teenage girl Gloria is sexually abused by her stepfather and thrown out of the house by her mother when she becomes pregnant. These characters are already sketched in *Barnacle Love*, but in *Kicking the Sky*, the author delves into their lives in more depth. Antonio's emotional response to their stories also maps a different view of the city. These multiple understandings of space in personal or biographical terms give way to "alterations of spaces" that question and give new meanings to "the clear text of the planned and readable city" (de Certeau 93).

Social divisions in Little Portugal are no longer merely between people who come from the mainland and people who come from the Azores (Leal 209). His neighbors are not only hardworking families that have no time to look after their children as they would like to do, but also his everyday life is not defined simply by religious traditions and family gatherings. Antonio tells the stories of Ricky's rape by a neighbor; of the two boys' role in secretly disposing of the body of Gloria's stillborn baby; and of James, the young male prostitute who makes his home in a neighborhood garage. De Sa explained that his goal was to write a book "where we were exposed to not only what we saw in front of us, but the kind of seedy underbelly of the city, and what happened in those laneways during the 70s" (Serafin).

Antonio's bike rides through the city do not follow the abstract mapping of the planners but instead reconstruct Toronto as a fragmented, polysemic, and multidimensional space—one where the personal and the public merge to create a complex, changing cartography. As de Certeau points out, boundaries among stories are indistinct. Their shifting represents the movement of the protagonist, transforming the spatial biography into a dynamic process—"an increasingly complex network of differentiations, a combinative system of spaces" (126). These different but combinative spaces are thematized in *Kicking the Sky*, where the personal and the public merge to conceptualize Toronto as a space of social interaction.

"Shoeshine Boy" portrays the private trauma of the Portuguese community, which is shocked and paralyzed by the murder. "*Where is everyone?*" Antonio asks. "I passed one expectant porch after another where plastic crates held empty pop bottles, where rubber mats awaited muddy shoes, and where the blue-and-white glazed saints, *azulejos*, whispered empty

blessings” (158, emphasis in the original). Homosexuality is not an issue in “Shoeshine Boy” and there is no allusion in this story to the prevailing atmosphere of anger against and rejection of homosexuals that followed Emanuel’s murder. There is only an incidental reference to an obviously gay neighbor, Mr. Barber, who gives Antonio’s father a trout: “My mother insisted that the man he lived with [Mr. Wolenka], who lisped and wore outrageous shirts, was his brother” (148).

In contrast, in *Kicking the Sky*, the same issues are addressed in political terms. Antonio experiences how anger at the brutal murder turns into violence against the gay community. The house of Mr. Barber and Mr. Wolenka is attacked, and they are forced to move away. Seeing Antonio’s distress and confusion, a relative explains the situation. Aunt Edie tells Antonio of how homosexuals will be used as scapegoats by politicians to calm the Portuguese community’s enraged reactions to the murder. When he asks her, “But they caught the men, didn’t they? It’s over” (46), she answers: “It’s just the beginning. Now it turns into a blame game. The Portuguese blame the politicians and the police for not protecting the boy. They’ll take matters into their own hands and they’ll target the homosexuals simply because they hate and fear them” (47).

These social tensions rewrite the urban text in both personal and political terms,³ Edie’s words are a reminder of what happened during the weeks that followed Jaques’s murder. “The police will crack down on all illegal stuff they’ve been turning a blind eye to downtown, especially among the homosexuals, because they think it will deflect blame and responsibility from them. And the politicians just see votes—they’ll make promises they don’t even believe, only to keep their butts in office” (47). After the paralysis of the first days, and after the funeral service, the Portuguese community gathers and marches on City Hall to demand justice. “People came down their walkways and through their front gates to merge with others that passed by in a rising jumble of roars. These were the same people who only a day before had been so sad at the funeral. Now they punched the sky with their fists” (75).

Their anger is fueled, in part, by a sense of betrayal. When interviewed by journalists, Antonio narrates, many Portuguese complained: “*We build their houses. We clean their houses. We mind their children. For what? For this? For them to do this to one of our children? This is not why we came*” (47). In the following days, rage grows stronger and at another demonstration that follows the funeral, as Antonio describes it, “A forest of signs read HANG THEM and DESTROY

THE DIRTY PIGS. At first, I thought they referred to the murderers. But one placard flashed above the crowd read KILL THE FAGGOTS” (76).

But De Sa, and his protagonist, question the homophobic campaign against the gay community, a political crusade which has been investigated, for example, by Catherine Nash (2014), Nick Larsen (1992), Péter Balogh (2015), and Miriam Smith (2014). They explain how in the early 1970s, the downtown sex market was growing, and more and more Torontonians were concerned about how to deal with it. Street prostitution centered on the Yonge Street strip; a certain area, near the YMCA, was primarily used “by male prostitutes serving male clients” (Larsen 178). De Sa contrasts the locations of the sex strip with the Portuguese protest marches along Queen Street, heading for City Hall. These are the spatial backgrounds of two social groups that, though very different, are both starting to appropriate public space “for political engagement, commentary and change” (Moretti 252).

As many scholars have pointed out, the murder spurred civic authorities to clean up prostitution (Larsen, 1992; Balogh, 2015; Smith, 2014). Media coverage, especially by the conservative press, took advantage of the tragedy to campaign against the gay community. As Michael Graydon notes, “Jaques’s murder was a catalyst for political and police actions seemingly designed to constrain the gay community” (315). Newspaper reports “caused an explosion of anti-gay feeling” (315). The result, Graydon points out, was that after Emanuel’s funeral on August 4, “15,000 people gathered on Yonge Street, urging reprisals against Toronto homosexuals” (329). The murder was widely used to equate gayness with pedophilia and “to demonstrate the folly of gay rights” (330).⁴ The conflation of the queer and the pedophile was one reason, as Péter Balogh recounts, why many people were demanding the death penalty for Emanuel’s killers (135). Antonio tells of these tensions and how rage and fear are directed at the gay community; De Sa recalls in the novel how José Rafael, a DJ at a local radio station, gave a speech to the people gathered in Nathan Phillips Square and how he “blamed the police and the politicians and the homosexuals for what had happened to Emanuel” (73).

After the murder both Toronto and Antonio have lost their innocence. Antonio’s coming of age matches his shifting perception of the changes in his own life with those of the cityscape. A few weeks after the murder, he is on a streetcar going to the movies with James when he looks up to see “the needle tip” of the CN Tower. Built in 1976, it had earlier been a proud symbol of the city that, only a few weeks earlier, seemed to be immovable and safe. “It was just over a year ago that a helicopter had hovered

above the tower, dangling its final piece, and the city froze The tallest free-standing structure in the world. We could do anything now” (182).

Antonio is frightened and confused not only by Emanuel Jaques’s death. He must also deal with the fact of his emerging sexuality and the homoerotic desire he feels for James, the young prostitute. Antonio is both attracted to the young man and repulsed by this form of sexuality. The pressures of the intense media campaign, and of his own community, create “the discursive formation of the homosexual as child molester, murderer and monster” (Balogh 136). When James tries to touch him in the movie theatre, Antonio’s tensions explode. He panics and dashes out of the building—to the place where Emanuel’s body was found, only a few buildings away. The morbid appeal of the body-massage parlor on Yonge Street, and the feeling of horror that it transmits at the same time, parallels Antonio’s intense sexual fear. The place symbolizes the uncanny feelings which are haunting both the city and Antonio as a sinister attraction for a familiar place now turns into a perturbing presence in the urban landscape of Toronto.

Spatial biography and the spectral city

In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud postulates that feelings of anguish originate in repressed childhood traumas. For Antonio, 245 Yonge Street will forever bear “the memory-traces of the dead” (Pile 150) and will represent a spectralized cityscape with which he must come to terms. Alienated from the city of his childhood and threatened by familiar spaces, he projects his sudden sense of dislocation onto a painful mental map. As he says, “my nightmares began the night Emanuel’s body was found” (*Kicking* 42). His trauma is defined by the ghostly projection of familiar urban places onto the uncanny city of his dreams. As Justin Edwards argues in *Gothic Canada*, this cartography represents “an emotion that marks the subject from the homely to the unhomely” (xx).

Antonio describes three nightmares in *Kicking the Sky*, and all are similar: he is haunted by the specters of Emanuel, of his murderers, and of Gloria’s stillborn baby. These dreams articulate his anxiety at the development of a new and complex sexualized subjectivity. The uncanny “represents a reconceptualization of identity, not as a stable unified intersubjectivity, but as vulnerable to ruptures and divisions” (Edwards xxiv). The familiar spaces that Antonio sees distorted in his dreams represent the reality that Little Portugal and its known spaces now transmit new meanings. These must be reinterpreted in his progress toward a new spatial identity. When he dreams he is being chased by Emanuel’s murderers, he says: “The

laneway looked different, like what it would have looked like a hundred years back, with barns in place of garages I could hear pursuers puffing and blowing behind me” (42). His sense of solitude makes him feel that nobody can save him—not even his mother, whom he sees in the dream: “I stopped running and turned toward her. I was safe; she wouldn’t let the men catch me. I tried to call out to her, but my voice was gone I cried for help but again no sound” (83).

In another dream he tries to retrieve Gloria’s dead baby from Lake Ontario, but the little corpse keeps slipping out of his hands and finally sinks down into the icy water, staring at him with two black holes where her eyes should be (229). The baby is a constant spectral presence that haunts his conscience, which he is unable to exorcise—until he finally tells his mother the story. Once the unspeakable is finally uttered, he says, “I buried my face in my mother’s chest and sobbed” (229). A few days later he witnesses Emanuel’s murderers being brought to their trial: “There were two cops for each handcuffed man, one on each side” (269). That same day, he also learns that Ricky killed his father while trying to defend himself from a brutal beating. His friend has been sent back to Portugal to join his mother, who ran away from her violent husband years before. Antonio wonders “if Ricky felt like Portugal was his home now, if he ran into his mother’s outstretched arms, like it was the place he should have been all along” (274).

His ghosts having been exorcized, little by little, Antonio learns to cope with the complexity and paradoxes of his newly discovered worldview. The last of the three dreams seems to convey a new feeling of acceptance: “The baby danced in the wind . . . her thin arms outstretched. The men could not touch me; a force field held them back” (272). The nightmares have fulfilled their role of giving voice to his repressed anguish and fears and showing him how to recognize and accept a changed reality. “The living recognize that the dead have departed. Slowly, the living learn to live with their loss and their broken attachments” (149). This is what Antonio does, once he is no longer haunted by the phantasmal presences of the dead baby, or Emanuel and his murderers. At the end of the novel, we see him sitting on the roof of his father’s garage, looking at the backyards and lanes of his neighborhood. Antonio feels he is ready to map a new cartography of his life and the cityscape: “I hopped on my bike and pedalled up the laneway” (316).

Conclusion

In *Barnacle Love* and *Kicking the Sky*, De Sa maps his protagonist Antonio Rebelo’s spatial biography through the cityscape of Toronto. In the

aftermath of the murder of Emanuel Jaques, the narrator (Antonio) resignifies the city both through his sense of belonging and his sense of not-belonging. In both works, the textualized urban space acts as a metaphor: Antonio, the Rebelo family, and the whole Portuguese community share a (sometimes misunderstood) universe of pain and frustrated hopes. Antonio's narration gives voice to the underworld and to "the intricacies and subtleties of status and class within an ethnic community" (Zucchi 74). It also brings to life, through his shifting subjective map of Toronto, the complex interpretation of the physical space of displacement in a changing city. In this sense, Antonio's cartography of Toronto pictures the cityscape "as a compelling form of storytelling . . . to describe forms of spatial expressions that embody . . . personal experience of the environment and contribute to creating a deep understanding of places" (Caquard 136).

De Sa's interpretation of Toronto as the background of Antonio's spatial biography constructs a complex interaction with the cityscape and its different emotionally conflicting spaces. Urban space is also produced by memory: according to de Certeau, the haunting of past events obliges us to observe the city from a new perspective and to discover its dark side as "symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body" (108). Antonio's memories of his childhood and youth are used to "redefine" his "personal identity" and "explain" his "connection with the past" (Jimerson 90). In broader social terms, De Sa also uses Antonio's memories to articulate the lights and shadows of Toronto's culture in the seventies. They delve into the complex urban social reality formed by subalternity, hard work, sexual exploitation, spectral memory, and family affects while "exploring, connecting, layering and contesting meanings" (Bey 1).

Antonio's narration of his spatial biography gives visibility not only to Little Portugal, but also to the gay world of the Yonge Street Strip. To greater or lesser degrees in *Barnacle Love* and *Kicking the Sky*, De Sa's storytelling questions the concept of Toronto the Good and reconfigures the social meaning of the tragedy of Emanuel Jaques.⁵ In both books, the author's examination of Little Portugal and its prejudices contrasts with his obvious sympathy for the gay movement. Yet, the two works differ slightly in their approach to urban space. *Barnacle Love* shapes the protagonist's spatial biography mostly in relation to his family and to his sense of belonging in the Toronto cityscape. In the story "Urban Angel," for example, Antonio says: "My mother, and what seemed like most of my family, worked at St. Michael's Hospital, amid the glass buildings in the center of the city" (121). But in *Kicking the Sky*, the hidden city comes to life: rather than being a

unidimensional entity, it becomes transformed into what de Certeau would call a narrative. Toronto also takes on the aspect that Soja describes in *Thirdspace*: “Cityspace is no longer just dichotomously gendered or sexed, it is literally and figuratively transgressed with an abundance of sexual possibilities and pleasures, dangers and opportunities” (113). In this sense, Antonio’s spatial biography is meaningful of the possibility of expressing difference and of a new spatial articulation of his awareness of life and sexuality. Space is not static, but it is fragmented as well as constructed in relational, personal, and political terms.

De Certeau affirms that “[e]very story is a travel story” (115). In that sense, Antonio appropriates the urban space to map his story by drawing a city that differs from the idealized city of the planner (93). In these two works, we see him creating and recreating his own meaningful spatial trajectories. In De Sa’s vision, the actual city of Toronto becomes a rhetorical space—the backdrop for a coming-of-age narration that empowers Antonio Rebelo with invention and agency and launches him toward adult life.

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Notes

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¹ *Barnacle Love* was a finalist for the 2008 Giller Prize and the 2009 Toronto Book Award, while *Kicking the Sky* was shortlisted in 2014 for the Toronto Book Awards and for the Canadian Authors Award.

² For more see Ann Chinnery, “What Good Does All This Remembering Do, Anyway? On Historical Consciousness and the Responsibility of Memory.” Her analysis focuses on “the moral significance of memory” (397), drawing on Emmanuel Levinas’ significance of memory as moral responsibility, Jacques Derrida’s insight on the trace of past events as reminders that their ghostly presence always shapes individuals’ perceptions of reality in a way that stays with them, and also referring to Deborah Britzman’s psychoanalytical approach to stress individuals’ ethical obligation to address the demands of history (398). Chinnery’s point is that the memory of past events cannot be either denied or avoided and that remembering the past is “about acknowledging our responsibility . . . regardless of what part we may or may not have played in that history and regardless of our ability to know or understand it” (401).

³ For a diachronic study of the Portuguese participation in political and public life, see Gilberto Fernandes, “Beyond the ‘Politics of Toil’: Collective Mobilization and Individual Activism in Toronto’s Portuguese Community, 1950s–1990s.” *Urban History Review* 1.39 (2010) 59–72.

⁴ For a discussion of the influence of the Jaques case on the Ontario Board of Censors' decision not to allow Louis Malle's 1978 film *Pretty Baby* to premiere in Toronto, see Alexina Cameron, "Inhibition vs. Exhibition" (13).

⁵ For a social analysis of the political use of the Jaques case as an excuse to clean up Yonge Street, see Albert Braz, "The Martyr of Yonge Street: Reflections on the Sexual Murder of Emanuel Jaques." *Comunidades* 23 May 2009. Web. 5 Feb. 2016. Braz draws on the sociological analysis developed in Yvonne Chi-Ying's M. A. Thesis "Ideology, Media and Moral Panic: An Analysis of the Jaques Murder" (1981).

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