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Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

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ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the role of the literary and cultural imagination in constructing alternative imaginaries of the planet which exceed the purely economic dimension of the global and globalization and are open to different modes of knowing and doing. Expanding on Erin Wunker's suggestion of a planetary poetics as an aesthetic mode with which to think and write across multiple spatial and temporal scales and engage with the ethical implications of living in a globalized world, this article looks at Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator* (2019) and its neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics as planetary poetics.

Keywords

Canadian poetry; planetary poetics; neo-cosmopolitanism; tidalectics; Kaie Kellough.

The last few years have seen the emergence of the planetary as a critical-theoretical category in the humanities and the social sciences. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru have termed this the 'planetary turn' in their essay collection *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (2015), in which they identify a lack of critical paradigms with which to adequately respond to the complexity of living in the 21st century, and consequently try to stake out a claim for the planetary, or rather planetarity—a concept originally coined by Gayatri Spivak—as a “way of being and a way of measuring time, space, and culture in the human sciences and on the planet at large” (vii). They argue that the planetary is able to rupture the homogenizing cultural logic of globalization—meaning the imposition of neoliberalism’s teleology of progress and economic growth—through “*relationality*, namely, by an ethicization of the ecumenic process of coming together or ‘worlding’” (xii), i.e., developing alternative ways of being in the world.

Looking at the role of the poetic imagination in providing such alternative imaginaries, Erin Wunker’s article “Toward a Planetary Poetics: Canadian Poetry after Globalization” (2016) examines the current trajectory of Canadian poetics and poetry and the way its production, consumption, and circulation is affected by globalization. Charting the ‘transnational turn’ in Canadian literature and following Jeff Derksen’s observation that there is a “growing body of poetry in North America that is critically and intensively engaged with the politics and restructuring brought by neoliberalism” (qtd. in Wunker 94), Wunker argues that Canadian criticism has to take the global as one element of poetic production into consideration. Utilizing the notion of planetary poetics, she argues for a relational and networked understanding of poetics and poetic production, and consequently emphasizes “the importance of understanding poetics in Canada as open, mobile, polyvalent sites of productivity that push against or offer alternatives to the seemingly relentless movement of global capitalism” (93). Modeling her understanding of planetary poetics closely after Spivak’s concept of planetarity as a way to “respond to the conditions of globality within a poetic framework” (94), Wunker’s article looks at the diverse poetics of Nicole Brossard, Dionne Brand, and Sina Queyras. What surfaces from her analysis are the specific ways in which these poets think and write across multiple spatial and temporal scales to engage with the ethical implications of living in a globalized world, and reconstruct and reposition the subject in relation to global processes.

While Wunker’s understanding of planetary poetics remains largely within the limited frame of the economic flows of the global, I want to suggest in this article that in times of the Anthropocene it is vital to also take into consideration the materiality of planetary forces, the vast timescales of geologic deep time, as well as the vitality of the non-human world. Emphasizing an eco-critical

Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics
in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

perspective, Elias and Moraru, for instance, suggest that the planetary is “polemically subtended by an eco-logic” (xxiii, emphasis removed). In *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), Dipesh Chakrabarty similarly points to the need for a “new ‘commons’ [...] in search of a redefinition of human relationships to the nonhuman, including the planet” (20). In a passage worth quoting in full, he suggests that we

need to connect deep and recorded histories and put geological time and the biological time of evolution in conversation with the time of human history and experience. And this means telling the story of human empires—of colonial, racial, and gendered oppressions—in tandem with the larger story of how a particular biological species, *Homo sapiens*, its technosphere, and other species that coevolved with or were dependent on *Homo sapiens* came to dominate the biosphere, lithosphere, and the atmosphere of this planet. (7-8)

Understanding planetary poetics in this way then allows for imagining alternative modes of engagement that not only resist the homogenizing tendencies of the global, but that also generate imaginaries of collective planetary futures that are open toward other ontologies and epistemologies.

Utilizing the framework of planetary poetics, this article looks at Kaie Kellough's Griffin-prize-winning volume of poetry *Magnetic Equator* (2019) and the specific ways in which it is carefully attuned to the materiality of historical, global, and planetary forces through Kellough's use of formal aesthetic experimentation. My argument is two-fold: as a first-generation Guyanese-Canadian poet who is writing and performing from within Canada's troubled narrative of multiculturalism, which is deeply embedded in the structures of the global, Kellough's poems examine the complexities of the black diasporic experience and confront feelings of (non-)belonging and in-betweenness by looking at different kinds of memory and drawing from multiple (post-)colonial archives. At the same time, however, his poems go beyond the global by transcending its spatial and temporal boundaries and by evoking a sense of perpetual movement and fluidity. This, I argue, establishes a relational subject-planet position that fosters and encourages a sense of planetary futurity and possibility that emanates from the past and the present moment.

Generally speaking, the poems in *Magnetic Equator* constitute a broad assemblage of multiple archives that, as described on the back cover,

puzzle their language together from the natural world and from the works of Caribbean and Canadian writers. They reassemble passages about seed catalogues, about origins, about finding a way in the world, about black ships sailing across to land. They struggle to explain a state of being hemisphered, of being

Florian Wagner

present here while carrying a heartbeat from elsewhere, and they map the distances travelled. (n.p.)

The poems seamlessly move across North and South America and the Atlantic Ocean by way of Georgetown, Vancouver, Calgary, and Montréal—cities where “black diasporas have localized in particular ways” as Karina Vernon points out (“Reckoning” n.p.). In a similar vein, Rob McLennan—alluding to the rich histories of these places and their entanglements—writes that *Magnetic Equator* is “populated, in a generative sense, by all who had come before” interweaving issues of “location, dislocation, immigration, longing, and belonging” (“Review” n.p.). The poems closely examine notions of home, nation, and identity while looking both at the consequences of colonial histories of these places and the role they play in today’s globalized economy. They ask what it means for the diasporic subject to belong, or rather to live in-between and navigate these particular geographies. As Vernon suggests, they “explore the peculiar double-ness that frequently characterizes diasporic experience of place, of living in the ‘stereo’ of overlapping geographies” (“Reckoning” n.p.). Rob McLennan similarly recognizes this state of in-betweenness in which these places take on personal significance in addition to their historical and extra-historical dimensions as they are all also important to Kellough from an autobiographical point of view. McLennan writes that throughout *Magnetic Equator*, Kellough

excavates and investigates the materials of his own past, and the pasts that made his possible, moving through a deeply personal and intimate series of investigations, memories, joys and frustrations, many of which come with the shifts of geography and culture. He writes of between-ness, being of one place in another, and then of being of both, but somehow neither, concurrently evolving into and away from. (n.p.)

As will become evident throughout my subsequent readings, the poems in *Magnetic Equator* are constantly looking for new ways of expressing the intricate vortex of historical, global, and planetary forces as experienced by the speaker’s body which is put in relation to and radiates outward towards these forces. In doing so, I argue that the poems in *Magnetic Equator* generate what I would term a *neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics*, which I use in reference to the feminist and postcolonial scholar Sneja Gunew’s understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism and the Caribbean poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s tidalectics tradition.

In *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017), Sneja Gunew argues for a revitalized understanding of cosmopolitanism that is shaped by post-multicultural writers and modeled after Spivak’s planetary position. The neo-cosmopolitan project Gunew proposes against the homogenizing

tendencies of transnational capitalism and rising global inequality, tries to instigate a shift towards "re-interpreting notions of the spatial and temporal to create a new cultural politics and ethics that speak to our challenging times" (3). Such a shift would be achieved by questioning "traditional ways of conceptualizing space and time by invoking the planetary to set against the ubiquitous use of the global and by referring to deep or geological time (often associated with Indigeneity) as distinct from a linear colonial time that undergirds most national histories" (ibid.).

Gunew's reading of neo-cosmopolitanism as filtered through the relationality and translationality of the planetary position would open up toward new ways of becoming, meaning that it would provide a means of "denaturalization that would enable receptivity to other ways of 'being at home in the world'" (7). Utilizing Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of *mondialisation*—the *creation of the world* or *world-forming* as opposed to *globalisation* as the *immonde* (the non-world)—Gunew's understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism "originates and stays rooted in the specific, unassimilable singularities of the local" (Schoene qtd. in ibid.) while simultaneously taking the planet in its radical alterity into consideration.

The post-multicultural writer then enters as a leading figure of such a neo-cosmopolitanism as this world-making is also an imaginative task. It is important to note here that she understands the "post" in post-multiculturalism not as an "after" but rather in the Lyotardian sense of the "future anterior," that which was left out in the construction of multiculturalism, i.e., the *petit récits* of localized differences and local vernaculars that have been subsumed by the "grand narratives of nationalism or internationalism, or even of West and non-West" (Gunew 10). She writes:

I am suggesting that inside these vernaculars we need to expose the cosmopolitan dimensions that connect us to a world that should not remain fully mediated by the nation-state or by prevailing neoliberal models of globalization. My argument is that what was left out of multiculturalism was the cosmopolitan element, something that draws us into the world via the perspectives (combining languages and histories) of those "minority ethnics." My contention is that post-multicultural writers offer a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary. (10-11)

The mediation between nation-state, the global, and the planetary is best exemplified by Gunew's attempt to re-frame the migrant condition, i.e., "the belief that [migrants] are at home nowhere or in more than one place" which is often deemed constitutive of their suffering and oppression, as their "greatest attribute" (5). For Gunew, this condition of in-betweenness of the migrant, however, means that they "can navigate the structures of belonging in numerous

ways not least by putting into question the complacent assumptions of self-evident universalism that undergird many forms of both nationalism and globalization" (5). In this sense, post-multicultural writers would act as "mediating figures that facilitate new relations between national cultures and [...] the *planetary*" (5, emphasis in original) because they "provide a more nuanced grammar for cultural legibility within globalization, a sensitivity and reflexivity toward what cannot be taken for granted that is in contrast to nation-states and their assertions of autonomy vis-à-vis the global" (11).

Kellough's poems in *Magnetic Equator* mirror Gunew's understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism precisely through the way they challenge seemingly self-evident universalisms such as nation, space, and time, etc., and instead emphasize the complex dynamic interplay of historical and planetary forces and the way they shape the black diasporic subject. Resisting the imposition and administration of blackness by the nation-state, the poems embrace a poetics and politics of becoming and allow for a different understanding of 'being at home in the world and on the planet' by rethinking and remaking linear conceptualizations of space and time.

In *Magnetic Equator*, this reshaping takes place in the spirit of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics tradition as is also invoked by the poet and writer M. NourbeSe Philip on the cover copy: "*Magnetic Equator* joins the tidalectics tradition of Brathwaite. This is a poetry of place, albeit a fluid place of in-betweenity, of migration and hybridity, ethnic, geographic, historical, temporal, and chronological" (n.p.). Tidalectics, as understood by Brathwaite, seeks to break with fixed Western universalisms and instead tries to replace them with notions of fluidity and hybridity. According to Brathwaite, tidalectics is "the rejection of the notion of dialectics, which is three—the resolution in the third. Now I go for a concept I call 'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide movement" (qtd. in Reckin 1).

As a play on Hegelian dialectics, tidalectics ultimately aims at replacing a linear understanding of historical time by eliminating the final step of sublation (*Aufhebung*), i.e., the resolution of the negative, which is an indispensable part of the historical process in Hegel's philosophy as it is that which moves history forward. In Brathwaite's understanding, however, history is not linear but tidal. It moves in overlapping waves and dwells in contradiction. I align myself here with Elizabeth DeLoughrey who describes the concept of tidalectics as follows:

Challenging the binarism of Western thought, the ocean and land are seen in continuous relation—as shifting points of contact, arrival, departure, and transformation. Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This "tidal dialectic" resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking

Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics
in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics foreground “alter/native” epistemologies to colonialism and capitalism, with their linear and materialist biases. In contradistinction to Western models of passive and empty space, such as *terra* (and *aqua*) *nullius*, which were used to justify territorial expansion, tidalectics reckons a space and time that requires an active and participatory engagement with the island seascape. [...] Tidalectics are concerned with the fluidity of water as a shifting site of history, invoke the rupture of modernity created by transoceanic migration and transplantation, and imagine a regional relationship beyond the bifurcations of colonial, linguistic, and national boundaries. (94-95)

Tidalectics establishes an ‘alter/native historiography’ based on transoceanic movement and mobility—thought of in terms of migration and dislocation—against linear conceptualizations of space and time. As Stefanie Hessler points out, the tidalectic worldview allows for a “different way of engaging with the oceans and the world we inhabit,” i.e., by “[d]issolving purportedly terrestrial modes of thinking and living, it attempts to coalesce steady land with the rhythmic fluidity of water and the incessant swelling and receding of the tides” (31). Consequently, Brathwaite’s tidalectics resonates with the planetary project in that it puts forth different ways of being in flux, of moving in relation to the planet, and of actively (re-) inhabiting spaces—including the poetic space.

In his review titled “A Portrait of the Poet as Tidalectic Sound Artist” (2020), Mark Grenon specifically points to the manifestation of Brathwaite’s tidalectics in Kellough’s *Magnetic Equator*. He tries to frame Kellough as a tidalectic sound artist drawing on Anna Reckin’s reading of Brathwaite’s poetry as sound space. Her reading of Brathwaite’s poetry as multi-dimensional sound-spaces along specific vectors—i.e., that they constantly echo the past and project into the future, that they overlap multiple social worlds and forge trans-oceanic connections through their sonic qualities—is echoed in *Magnetic Equator* which follows similar dimensions. To highlight this, I primarily want to take a closer look at the first two poems, “kaieteur falls” and “mantra of no return” and show how they generate a neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics that rewrites diasporic subjectivity from a planetary point of view.

The opening poem of *Magnetic Equator*, “kaieteur falls,” takes the reader on a journey deep into the Amazon rainforest with Kaieteur Falls being the largest single-drop waterfall located on the Potaro River in Guyana. It is a highly unusual poem that defies linear reading practices with its complex arrangement of brackets, slashes, repeated letters, compounds, and portmanteaus. Instead, it is—much like Kellough’s other works—an invitation to dwell in the poetic place where it is impossible to take everything in at once. The reader is presented with a complex typographical landscape that takes time to decode and which requires a certain openness towards multiple readings in different directions, ultimately,

revealing endlessly branching connections, and mirroring the multi-layered complexity of the real landscape, its colonial past and the postcolonial present that are constantly reworked throughout *Magnetic Equator's* 'narrative.'

"kaieteur falls" is immediately striking on a visual level through its imitation of the natural landscape of the Kaieteur Falls, which is underlined by both, the sound and constant movement of water, as well as the abundance of flora and fauna that dominate the poem. On a phenomenological level, the slashes and repeating û's that run through the middle of the poem create the impression of water flowing down from the ledge. This is amplified by onomatopoeic expressions such as "potarorapidsfume," "waterthunders," "riverripples," "afarfrothin-groar," and "bankgurgle" (2-3). Sustained by the waterfall, plants like bromeliads, orchids, heliconias, *Victoria amazonicas*, sprouts, flowers, vines, fronds, moss, and ferns abound, and the place is inhabited by birds and lizards. The reader is presented with a lush and vivid ecosystem as "leavesdecompose," "distilledsound / syllablesricochet," "betweenmossslick / rockswordrides," and "earth'srockjaw / grinswidegapes" (ibid.), creating as Reckin calls it a "textual kinetics" (4) through the phrase's sonic qualities and frequent line breaks. The palimpsestic arrangement of natural history and geologic deep time of the Kaieteur Falls is complemented with the juxtaposition of brackets, slashes, lines, and dots that replace spaces between words following the nomenclature of objects in various programming languages or domain names, blending digital-visual culture, the information flows of neoliberal capital and representations of the landscape.

At first glance, the impression arises that the 'grammar' of the digital world is simply imposed on the natural landscape, seemingly creating a hierarchy in which the natural world becomes a resource—both in material and aesthetic terms—that is fully integrated into the global world market and the capitalist imaginary. Kellough, however, counters this impression with a much more nuanced understanding of the natural world in which every element is connected in a rhizomatic way—much like the digital world—, as well as teeming with agency as plants ruminate and the river remembers. The poem consequently points to an 'excess of life' that is non-commodifiable and emphasizes the dissonant tensions between the global and the planetary, in which the natural world is at once commodified and resists commodification. This resonates well with Reckin's reading of Brathwaite's poetry as having access to something "beyond" the "fantastical layering of New, Old, and other worlds" (2) that coexist at the same time and require different readings.

It is in small glimpses and in the margins of the poem that one also finds hints to the 'old world,' i.e., Guyana's colonial history and its significance in the Atlantic slave trade, as, for instance, in the naming practice of the water lilies "*Victoria amazonica*" (2), named in honor of Queen Victoria and which are now

Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics
in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

the national flower of Guyana, or in the presence of "africvocabulary" and "empire'sseasons" (ibid.). Connecting the seemingly random letters in the brackets and between the slashes reveals talk of exiles, creole dialect, mapping practices and blood in the vines. The complete fragment hidden in the interstices of the poem reads as follows:

exiles evaporate in the mist wafting over the waterfall generator of electric bloom
creole dialect lilie shoots rusted trunks escape map map create echoes exiles
contemplates silent generations of plant cycles blood in the vines xeeate [?] in
the mist wafting over the waterfall generator of electric bloom creole exiles con-
templates silent generations of plant exiles evaporate in the mist wafting overt
map map create echoes exiles contemplant cycles blood i. (2-3)

Kellough plays here with contemporary attitudes towards the natural world in which the colonial past is often glossed over, veiled behind the sublimity and grandeur of an aestheticized and commodified landscape that serves as a popular tourist attraction. Throughout the second repetition, the original phrase deteriorates and ultimately collapses towards the end. Colonial and natural history are blurred and become indistinguishable ("plant exiles," "contemplant"). The last line of the poem also introduces and culminates in the displacement of the diasporic subject, whereas the river continues to flow as if nothing happened: "i}exiled{riverripples" (3). Deciphering the colonial history of the Kaieteur Falls thus requires active work to render it legible in the margins of the poem otherwise it risks being overlooked.

Recalling Rob McLennan's observation that Kellough writes about the 'materials of his own past' additionally adds a personal layer to the poem as *Magnetic Equator* interweaves pieces of the author's life with (post-)colonial archives arranging them in a continuous stream. The displacement that is experienced by the speaker in the last line then can also be read through this personal dimension as it is a recurring theme throughout *Magnetic Equator*. To emphasize this, I briefly want to turn to Kellough's auto-fictional short story "Smoke that Thundered" in *Dominoes at the Crossroads* (2020), which I think proves valuable when read as a companion text to *Magnetic Equator*. The short story details the protagonist Kaie's difficulties of growing up in Calgary, his first trip to Guyana, and a visit to Kaieteur National Park, providing a deeper meditation on cultural rootedness, hybridity, and feelings of (non-)belonging, while also reflecting on South American Indigenous myth and naming practices.

In the beginning of the story, the protagonist states that growing up in rural Canada he would have preferred a more 'common' name, like Kelly, Jay, or Chris, thus allowing him to blend in better. Recounting Kunta Kinte's naming ceremony in Alex Hayle's *Roots*, he writes that Kinte's "name is imbued with

meaning, ancestry and spiritual resonance" (180). Yet, the protagonist's connection to his name is uneasy:

I didn't finish the book. I understood that I was born here, in the suburbs of southwest Calgary, that we owned a 3,000 square-foot house, two cars, and I had 'everything' [...] A byproduct of my reading was that I became doubly sensitive to my name, which features in South American Indigenous myth. Kaie was an Arawak chief who paddled his canoe over a waterfall in a sacrifice to Makunaima, the creator, to assure his people's future. I always withheld that story when people asked me about my name, because Calgarians despise Indians. One of my uncles disputed the story of Chief Kaie and Makunaima [...] He dismissed the myth as a fiction of patriotism or a fable to lift the hearts of children and the credulous. He annoyed everyone by asserting that the real legend is about an irascible old man who drank too much high wine, went out on the Potaro River in his canoe, but he was too drunk to control the canoe, and his canoe sailed over the falls, and since then the falls have been known as Kaie Teur Falls, which means Old Man Falls. (ibid.)

There is an implicit kinship to the postcolonial poetics of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris in this passage whose work examines Guyana's multiethnicity and its cultural imagination through the lens of its colonial past. I am particularly reminded of a passage in his novel *Jonestown* (1996), where the narrator, Francisco Bone, muses about the meaning of Indigenous myths for modern-day Guyana:

the mixed peoples of African or Indian or European or Chinese descent who live in modern Guyana today are related to the Aboriginal ghosts of the past [...] if not by strict, biological kinship then by ties to the spectre of erosion of community and place which haunts the Central and South Americas. (7)

Harris's strategy of re-mystifying the present as a strategy to address the trauma of colonization is outright dismissed as fiction by Kaie's uncle, who puts a humorous twist on the story, whereas Kaie who questions the myth's validity still acknowledges an imagined connection as he is affected by it in his dreams: "Whatever the case, I still think about it. I even dream about it. The dream dissipates in the mornings so I can never completely remember it, but I wake up gasping, to a chorus of voices shouting: Kaie! Kaie!" (181). Nonetheless, Kaie feels like he must repress or deny his Guyanese heritage as "Calgarians despise Indians" (180), which is a recurring topic throughout *Magnetic Equator*—a poignant example would be the trauma of racist violence in the poem "high school fever: nowhere, prairie" for instance, in which the speaker reflects on Calgary as a repressive "shithole built by bitumen" and dreams of "suicide in the back seat"

of his car (20). By contrast, the described trip to Guyana—which also prominently features in *Magnetic Equator* in poems like “mantra of no return” and “exploding radio”—is supposed to establish a connection to the protagonist's Guyanese heritage, which is again critically reflected in “Smoke that Thundered”:

I was going somewhere I'd never been before, somewhere I was supposedly from, and that word, “from,” carried unspecified expectations, although the force of inflection told me that “from” assumed a connection, one that I was expected to feel and to further establish. What if I didn't feel a connection? I didn't know what I was supposed to feel when I arrived. [...] The idea seemed to be that I couldn't know myself until I encountered myself in Guyana. (183)

Kellough here essentially captures what Fred Wah calls “living in the hyphen,” (53) the constant feeling of in-betweenness and the uneasiness of belonging, which underlies the entire collection, following the speaker from his childhood in Vancouver and Calgary to his adult life in Montréal.

I hope what becomes clear at this point is how “kaieteur falls” combines several dynamic vectors that draw from personal memory, the digital, the natural, the colonial, and the postcolonial, emphasizing the complex interplay of historical and planetary forces. Through its formal experimentation, “kaieteur falls” dissolves linear conceptions of space and time and replaces them with non-linearity and the tidal that depends on “hearing / reading through” (Reckin 2) its multiple layers. The poem's edges are not clearly defined by punctuation and fray out into the book's margins, mirroring the vast openness of the planetary. The locale of the Kaieteur Falls is turned into a symbolic space that serves as an imagined point of departure for *Magnetic Equator* as a whole by positioning the diasporic subject in relation to the global, the trans-national, and the planetary.

The following poem, “mantra of no return,” stays with these ideas and particularly focuses on the entanglement of colonial history and modernity, i.e., the way colonial history echoes into the present globalized economy as the poem speaks of human cargo and the legacy of slavery, of global commerce, as well as the fragmentation of human experience. The poem's title echoes Dionne Brand's image of the ‘door of no return’ and the poem also utilizes quotes from *A Map to the Door of No Return*. “mantra of no return” focuses on the multiple wounds that slavery and the slave trade have left upon the world while simultaneously emphasizing that movement and mobility are inexplicable parts of human existence. This is established in the beginning of the poem and fleshed out in the central narrative of the poem that details the speaker's experience of a trip to Guyana for his uncle's funeral.

The first part of “mantra of no return” immediately conjures the open ocean and formulates an oceanic worldview through the waves that break on the

Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics
in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

without ever arriving at a store. thoughts know no store
are unsure and sometimes dissemble. economies are unsure and
sometimes dissolve. cargo sinks to the bottom asv shift, overheard.
somewhere in an office, the cargo is written off. the written onus. (7)

Kellough seemingly puts in tension the ubiquity of the commodity form, i.e., as cargo and its circulation in the form of global commerce, and the way language seeks to contain things, i.e., by trying to make sense of the world through words and thoughts. While Kellough compares thoughts to cargo that can be transported in the hold of a ship and are able to migrate across the world's oceans, they seemingly elude commodification as they never arrive at a store: "thoughts know no store" (7). At the same time, Kellough acknowledges the instability of language and economies alike, meaning that while the world is mediated by language and thoughts and structured by economic processes, both are ultimately unstable to a certain degree: while thoughts are "unsure," and sometimes "dissemble," "economies are unsure and sometimes dissolve" (7).

In addition, there is also the ghostly presence of the Middle Passage that haunts these passages from the beginning: slaves as human beings and as cargo that is transported in the hold of the ship. Cargo sometimes gets lost, it "sinks to the bottom," and "somewhere in an office, the cargo is written off, the written onus" (7). Yet, the thoughts and memories of the 'sunken cargo' persist in the offing:

the letters
crouch and signify in the offing. the signifying mitigates but never ashores.
the arrival is delayed, in four-four tide. the time elects to move forward and
back at once. the tide elects not to arrive but rather to lingo between, among,
within, beneath, atop. the letters syncopate atop the screen but are backspaced.
the is rewritten (7)

This is where the presence of the tidalectic as an alter/native historiography is most visible as the poem opens up tensions between the globalized point of view of the digital economy and the planetary in its attempt to reckon with colonial history, as the letters syncopate atop the screen and are backspaced. The empty space is rewritten on the screen by the 'post-multicultural' poet. Words create resonances and are able to create new worlds within the linear narrative of globalization, thus writing a planetary historiography in which pasts, presents, and futures coexist as the "tide elects not to arrive but rather to lingo between" (7).

The second part of the poem continues this planetary historiography as it presents a collage of human experiences based on movement and migration,

which takes on a mantric quality by telling stories of arrival, of voluntary and forced departures:

people arrived from portugal. people arrived from africa. people arrived from india. people arrived from england. people arrived from china. people predated arrival. people fled predation. people were arrayed. people populated. whips patterned rays into people. people arose. people rayed outward to toronto, london, boo york. people raided people. people penned the past. people roved over on planes. people talked over people. people rented places. people planted people in people. people raided plantations. people prayed. [...] people departed and arrived again. people retreaded. people stole knowing. people plantation. people horizon. [...]

people arrived riven, alone in the world. people made their way from time. people hailed from climes. people fanned their spreading. people cleaved unto people. people writhed over / under people. people arrived over / under people (8)

Kellough constructs an abstract image of humanity that is based on a constant ebb and flow of bodies, depicting colonial histories of violence and its echoes into the modern world. What is striking is that this part is unanchored from a linear understanding of time, and instead moves in concentric circles, in waves that defy any sense of linearity. Instead, what emerges is a constant echoing of the various material connections to the planet, as people are “planted” or “hailed from climes” (8).

The enjambment at the end of the second part allows for a seamless transition of another form of “arrival.” It is precisely against the backdrop of this abstract image of movement and migration, that the speaker situates his ‘story of arrival,’ namely in Guyana for his uncle’s funeral (9-15). While the first two parts of the poem have dealt with questions of belonging from a broader perspective, the third part turns to the speaker’s experiences as a globalized diasporic subject who is constantly situated in the ‘in-between’ of multiple worlds. This part also problematizes the notion of a simple return to “one’s roots,” or rather expresses the impossibility of such a return as alluded to by the title of the poem. Both issues are expressed by constantly contrasting global and planetary entanglements and disentanglements on multiple levels.

Beginning with a cab ride from the airport, the poem expresses the global embeddedness of Georgetown in subtle ways, starting from the arrival at “cheddi jagan international,” to “japanese car gears,” and “retired expats” caring for their “suburban gardens” (9). On the surface, there is a light, rhythmic quality that connects the city and its inhabitants: “the car swerves, and everyone

Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics
in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

serves together. dancehall's two-beat / rattles the dash. passengers in the dash, we bide the / same interval, the same interrupt idle lyricism" (9). The "irruption of the riddim into our pensive longing" that connects the speaker, is held in tension with Guyana's (post-)colonial history, i.e. "blood, / sugar estates combusting" (ibid.) and the assassination of Walter Rodney, which also resurfaces in the poem "exploding radio." The bustling atmosphere of Georgetown is then compared to other postcolonial cities in the following paragraph highlighting a certain continuity and similarities between them as a consequence of their colonial histories: "we gear into georgetown traffic, brake across latitudes, across martin carter's / 'insurgent geographies' the city's compressed cacophony echoes / lagos, mumbai, where urgencies converge, simultaneous, improvised" (10).

What follows are personal notes on belonging by looking at the speaker's mother:

she is estranged, returning
and we are revenants to a place inside a narration contrived
to read like non-fiction, a continuous telling since one
mouth inside another, one word emigrating from another's vowels.
a paper place we've glossed in novels, in atlases
materialized into sweltering road printed under us, the car
horns blasting past, the black faces that map ours for relevance, the faces that
could belong to our relatives faces we are instructed not to trust, into
whose night we are cautioned against venturing, whose have-not we must not
tempt. my mother banters with the river driver, her voice
angles into accent, some words chop others stretch. she ent
home, but her return bends
here, her speech soaks into the air near the equator (11)

For his mother, the visit to Guyana marks a return to her estranged home. However, this is not an easy return as she has been gone for so long that she has taken on an accent and has lost the ability to fluently communicate with the driver. On a poetological level, this uncomfortable return is heightened by mixing up of 'river' and 'driver,' as well as the ambiguity of 'ent' as a possible misspelling of 'ain't.' In the end, her speech still connects her to the place as it "soaks into the air" (11). For the speaker and his brother, on the other hand, this is not a return. They are compared to spectral presences in this place that they only know from stories and from atlases and which suddenly materializes in front of them. Similarly, there is an ambiguity between the faces of people that could be their relatives that is put in tension with a warning often given to tourists, namely, to be cautious and not go out at night. What is interesting

There is a gap in the speaker's memory before his grandparents' generation. Before that, there is only what he has read in history books, seen in photographs, or heard from the remnants of oral histories, such as the story behind the naming of the Kaieteur Falls. This belonging / non-belonging and the feeling of in-betweenness is also reflected in the following passage, where the speaker and his brother smoke a cigarette on the verandah. Both feel neither at home in Canada where they are viewed as "high yellow niggers" (14), nor in Guyana, where they are perceived as wealthy tourists, "prince, resented, / drunk on gold" (14), which both superficially laugh off, hiding their real feelings. This idea also reoccurs during the funeral passage where the "unruly / beach whose stones rebuke sandals / reject tourists" (15).

The poem ends with a meditation that riffs on and quotes Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* and highlights the arbitrariness of planetary being: "too much has been made of origins / all origins are arbitrary / too much has been made of others / all others are arbitrary" (16). While this last part follows a fixed and regular structure and every arbitrary subject starts with the same letter, thus raising awareness to the poem's overall material structure and underlying design; it blurs and puts into question notions of stability and fixedness and instead replaces them with a sense of relationality by taking into consideration material and lived realities. Together with the opening passages of the poem, the last passage then acts as a planetary frame in which the individual life and the experiences of the speaker are situated.

What has emerged from my readings of "kaieteur falls" and "mantra of no return" is how the poems in *Magnetic Equator* recognize how the current moment has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the histories of colonial exploitation and its continuation in the global. By utilizing the framework of planetary poetics, however, I looked at the function of poetry as a disruptor that, precisely because of its openness and often experimental formal qualities, is particularly apt in rupturing the perceived hegemony of globalization and global capital. The poems in *Magnetic Equator*, as I have shown, put forth a poetics of resistance to essentialized accounts of the diasporic experience, transcend the spatial and temporal boundaries of the global, are closely attuned to the material forces that encompass the planet, and celebrate the vitality of the non-human world.

Overall, they represent a multi-dimensional assemblage that proves valuable in responding to the ethical demands of living in a globalized world and resonate with the demands of the planetary condition by tapping into the ebb and flow of life and matter on the planet. In this sense, I suggest that understanding poetics from a planetary perspective can initiate a paradigm shift from homogenizing theories of globalization towards planetary multitudes and multiplicity. By opening up towards different ontologies and epistemologies,

planetary poetics enunciates positions of collective responsibility for the future of the planet and its human and non-human inhabitants and cultivates visions of shared planetary futures. I hope that this view contributes to the ongoing conversation on the planetary and consequently works towards a politics of possibility of acting and living 'otherwise.'

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