

The People Are (Still) Missing: Bhanu Kapil's *How to Wash a Heart* and the Problem of Minor Literature Today

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Abstract

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari proclaim the 'productive use of the literary machine' with the aim to extract from the text its 'revolutionary force' – their book on Kafka, in which the concept of minor literature is put forward, is their experiment in doing this. The premise of this article is that Bhanu Kapil's book-length poem *How to Wash a Heart* provides an apt point of reference for thinking through the problem of minor literature today. Kapil's work is part of a significant development within contemporary poetry and poetics, writing informed by and building on postcolonial and feminist critiques of humanism and its encoded whiteness. In the light of Kapil's work, the three characteristics of minor literature identified by Deleuze and Guattari are examined: the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation.

Keywords: *Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Bhanu Kapil, Jacques Rancière, minor literature, poetics, contemporary poetry*

Introduction

I want a literature that is not made from literature.¹

Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.²

First published in 1975, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* was written between the two volumes of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1981). *Kafka* responded to the call issued in *Anti-Oedipus* for a 'productive use of the literary machine' to extract the 'revolutionary force' of a text,³ and in *Kafka* Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature as an expression of the revolutionary desires of an existing minority; in the

¹ Bhanu Kapil, *Ban et Banlieue* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2015), 32.

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, foreword by Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3; hereafter cited as *K* followed by page number.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004), 116.

case of Kafka, the situation of Czechs within the crumbling Hapsburg empire. Yet – and as Gregg Lambert indicates in a brilliantly provocative analysis⁴ – a significant shift occurs in how minority creation is conceived: by the time of Deleuze and Guattari's final collaborative work, rather than expressing the desires of an existing minority and a 'community whose conditions haven't yet been established' (*K*, 71), the minor artist is creating for a 'people to come'⁵ who are not identified with any existing community; further, instead of a 'revolutionary force', it is the 'fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance' that is then emphasized by Deleuze.⁶ This shift can be looked at from two perspectives, and both views are relevant to addressing the problem of minor literature today.

From a first perspective, the backdrop to this change is the impact of neoliberalism, the political-economic ideology of privatisation, deregulation and withdrawal of the state from areas of social provision, already gaining momentum when *Kafka* was published. Deleuze's statement in *Cinema 2*, published in 1985, that 'there will no longer be conquests of power by a proletariat, or by a united or unified people',⁷ sums up an assessment (from a post-Marxist tradition) of profound social transformation. However, Deleuze's statement also underlines a conceptual development which had been worked through in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where we are told that while 'ours is becoming the age of minorities', and 'the power of minority, of particularity, finds its figure or its universal consciousness in the proletariat',⁸ as long as the proletariat defines itself by 'an acquired status, or even by a theoretically conquered State, it appears only as 'capital', a part of capital (variable capital), and does not leave the plan(e) of capital' (*TP*, 472). In other words, a new revolutionary subject had to be invented – one not defined in relation to capital – to take the place of the proletariat. Thus, the idea of a minor art that calls for a 'people to come', but a missing people that can no longer be identified with any existing people; as Lambert puts it, the sense of the refrain has changed and becomes a 'millenarian and eschatological' faith in some far-off future community.⁹ The 1975 publication of *Kafka*, then, marks a moment of social, economic and political transition. In fact, just as Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka recording a change between old and new bureaucracies, or different forms of social organization through which the totalitarian powers were 'knocking at the door' (*K*, 83), the shift in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking after *Kafka* can be understood as registering how the forces of neoliberalisation were likewise knocking at their door. Yet we need to keep in mind the tactical aspects of a concept's creation and its usage by Deleuze and Guattari:¹⁰ for example, in *Kafka* their characterisation of minor literature is a key

⁴ Gregg Lambert, *The People Are Missing: Minor Literature Today* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2021).

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), 218.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 322-3.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 211.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988), 469; hereafter cited as *TP* followed by page number.

⁹ Lambert, vii.

¹⁰ I want to evoke here a distinction between tactics and strategies that Todd May formulates. May states that for a strategic political philosophy, there will be 'a single explainer, a single node, to which politics can be reduced [...] By contrast, a tactical political philosophy rejects the idea that there can be a single node that, when changed, corrects the injustices of all social relationships' – Todd May, *The Political*

element to what they see as a necessary attack on the reductive thinking that Marxist and psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka had imposed. As they see it, their enemy is the freezing of understanding, the introduction of ‘the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation’ (*K*, 3). By recognising the ways ideas are developed out of particular contexts, we can avoid thinking of a concept as a fixed entity and, instead, employ it as a tool that might be modified according to our own current and site-specific needs.

However, according to Lambert there is another perspective to consider: the shift in how the minor is conceived marks an abandonment of the political interpretation of art as a ‘dead end’, an awareness of an ‘error in the transcendental deduction of the symbolic analogy between aesthetics and politics’, that there is no basis to presume a ‘passage’ between an aesthetic act and a political action.¹¹ For Lambert, this recognition is what underlies the alteration to the sense of ‘the people are missing’: from the expression of an existing people’s desire for revolutionary change to the prophetic hope for a ‘people to come’. The further conclusions Lambert draws are striking. The problem of a minor literature is clearly not the concern of any ‘people’ (living or dead). Literature may be capable of invoking a missing people but cannot invent them. Further, minor literature today exists only in the university, and literary history, the publishing industry and the creative writing workshop are ‘majoritarian institutions’ whose foundations rest on the promotion of an obsolescent belief in individual genius. In order to have any relevance today, the concept of minor literature must be re-connected to a process of *becoming-minor* – just as Deleuze and Guattari had, in fact, intended – but, as Lambert declares, this also requires some demolition work: ‘the first thing we do, let’s kill all the critics, and second, close all the creative writing factories’.¹² Moreover, we are left with an important question Lambert’s provocations pose: can the concept of minor literature be liberated from ‘the nightmare of the political interpretation of literature and culture that we have inherited over the past fifty years’?¹³

By focusing on *becoming-minor*, the problem of how a text works within and against majoritarian cultural forms and practises might be addressed. It is when minor literature is used only as a label, rather than for thinking through problems, that we run up against its limitations. According to Lambert, in a North American context the legacy of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘little manifesto’ on Kafka has been the establishment of an ‘official programme of political interpretation’,¹⁴ frequently applied, he notes, to the work of postcolonial writers, with minor literature attaining the status of a political slogan. In addition, the concept is pressed into a binary framework; for example, an analysis of Sean Bonney’s poetry by Jon Clay refers to ‘minoritarian poetry’ that subverts ‘common sense, moralism, the illusions of representational clarity’, in

Thought of Jacques Rancière (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 93. May identifies the strategic approach with Marxism and the tactical with anarchism. The rejection of any and all forms of reductionism is entirely in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari’s wider schizoanalysis project.

¹¹ Lambert, iv-vii.

¹² Lambert, ix. According to Lambert, alongside the publishing industry and the creative writing workshop, literary prizes are also ‘factories for producing ‘outstanding talent’ and ‘major authors’’ (ix). On this point, it should be mentioned that *How to Wash a Heart* was the winner of the 2021 TS Eliot prize.

¹³ Lambert, 123-4.

¹⁴ Lambert, 123.

opposition to the 'conservative, mainstream or majoritarian poem'.¹⁵ However, what Clay is describing in Bonney's 'experimental text' – how 'it mixes utterances of different register and, it seems, source, even if the latter cannot be clearly identified; it combines modern and archaic lexis; it interrupts itself with violent outbursts; what coherence it has does not seem to be either semantic or syntactic'¹⁶ – are established practices of collage and parataxis influenced by currents within twentieth-century modernist poetry; moreover, I would argue that Clay's use of the concept of minor literature upholds what has become a clichéd formula for criticism promoting anti-lyrical poetics: that is, how linguistic experimentation is somehow in itself 'political'. But 'alternatives to mainstream lyricism aren't without their own problems for the 'foreigner'', as Sandeep Parmar argues, and the use of multiple voices 'to render oneself without a voice, is only appealing or possible for those who have not been screened out, marginalised, silenced by the powers inherent in language itself.'¹⁷ We therefore need to be attentive to the fixity of thinking that dichotomies introduce, as well as with how the linguistic innovations of 'avant-garde' poetry may hide as much as they reveal about power. As Deleuze and Guattari stress, fluidity and suppleness (which might be associated with the linguistic practices Clay describes) are not in some way better than rigidity, they can even become more oppressive than rigidity, a seemingly paradoxical possibility that Kafka shows with the movable barriers in the offices of *The Castle*. We must avoid simple dualisms between two types of assemblage: even the construction of massive paranoid bureaucratic machines also brings into operation tiny schizo machines. It is in fact a single assemblage that is involved, producing different states of desire and liable to be transformed by a process of becoming-minor.

The work of Bhanu Kapil is highly relevant for exploring the conditions for minority creation today. Kapil describes herself as an 'immigrant writer',¹⁸ and her border crossings between practices and genres, encompassing books, film, performance and installation, explore in different ways the impacts and effects of migration and displacement. In a review of Kapil's *Ban en Banlieue*, Steven Maye refers to her 'ongoing project' to reveal how dehumanization functions and to 'present the wavering, overlapping figurations that attempt to contain or articulate this inhuman leakage. Immigrant, monster, animal, child, schizophrenic, brown girl, wolf – this is a partial account of a growing and recursive vocabulary through which she charts the network of social violence that overtakes the bodies she describes.'¹⁹ In what follows, Kapil's book poem *How to Wash a Heart* is read in relation to the problem of minor literature today. As Kapil describes in her 'Note on the Title', the voice of *How to Wash a Heart* is 'an immigrant guest in the home of their citizen host. The speaker is an artist.'²⁰ The 40 pages of poetry that constitute the fragmented narrative of the guest's stay in their host's home – divided into five untitled sections with each poem on a single page having the same length (between 20 and 22 lines) – are an 'attempt to work out that relationship

¹⁵ Jon Clay, "'A New Geography of Delight': Communist Poetics and Politics in Sean Bonney's *The Commons*", *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 7.1 (2015): 6.

¹⁶ Clay, 9.

¹⁷ Sandeep Parmar, with Bhanu Kapil, 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space', in Sandeep Parmar, Nisha Ramayya and Bhanu Kapil. *Threads* (London: Clinic, 2018), 11.

¹⁸ Bhanu Kapil, 'Hallucinating Citizenship', *[out of nothing]: Theoretical Perspectives on the Substance Preceding #0* (2012): 68.

¹⁹ Steven Maye, [Review of *Ban en Banlieue*, by B. Kapil], *Chicago Review* 60.2 (2016): 176.

²⁰ Bhanu Kapil, *How to Wash a Heart* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 49; hereafter cited as *HWH* followed by page number.

which, so rapidly, begins to go wrong' and, by extension, to reflect on Kapil's own experiences of the 'mostly white' educational institutions that she has been involved with (*HWH*, 49-50). Kapil's work is part of a significant development within contemporary poetry and poetics, informed by and building on postcolonial and feminist critiques of humanism and its encoded whiteness. My reading of Kapil's *How to Wash a Heart* aims to re-examine the three characteristics of minor literature identified by Deleuze and Guattari – 'the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation' (*K*, 18) – and to do so through a formulation of problems.

The Problem of Language

The first characterisation of minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is the deterritorialisation of language. Before we go into a close reading of Kapil's poetry, this idea of linguistic deterritorialisation must be related to a problem of language – this is necessary to see how Kapil can be said to deterritorialise lyric and anti-lyric traditions. This problem-forming approach is in keeping with Deleuze's philosophical project: his books about other philosophers uncover the problems motivating the creation of concepts and explore how these concepts are put to work within a field of thought. Deleuze and Guattari also formulate problems for their reading of Kafka in two ways: they seek to identify the problems preoccupying Kafka by showing how these are present in different and connected ways across his corpus, and they formulate problems for themselves as Kafka readers (how can we enter into Kafka's work? what is an assemblage? what is a minor literature?).²¹ We can enter into the problem of language via the model of language put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

A first aspect to the problem this model of language makes apparent is the double bind we, as language users, are put in: on one side, as the main function of language is social, language fixes and limits thought in accord with social requirements; yet, on another side, language in turn reflects and is therefore constrained by society's demands. A second aspect to Deleuze and Guattari's model of language follows, with what they call the 'order word': at an elementary level, language functions as command (regardless of grammatical construction) and a given statement presupposes a particular action or social obligation. An individual's utterances are just one element plugged into a collective arrangement, what Deleuze and Guattari term 'assemblage' of various elements (including social, cultural, technological components): 'each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind, and we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name when we produce its statement' (*TP*, 36). In fact, the relation between statement and act is always one of reciprocal presupposition; as Deleuze and Guattari put it, 'each statement accomplishes an act and the act is accomplished in the statement' (*TP*, 79). However, this pragmatics does not involve, as in other theories, notions of linguistic competence.²² Deleuze and

²¹ Throughout his career Deleuze was concerned with the status and function of the problem, both for how he approached the work of other philosophers and for the ontology that his philosophical project constructs.

²² In the 'Introduction' to *Pragmatics: A Reader*, ed. Steven Davis (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Steven Davis states that theories of pragmatics are divisible into two camps: on one side those which form part of a theory of linguistic competence as 'a psychological theory that plays a role in accounting for what speakers tacitly know which enables them to understand and to use

Guattari are more interested in rule breaking than rule formation and reject purely syntactic models of language, which they argue are always reductive. By postulating rules governing application, such models separate language from real world contexts. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari make no distinction between writing and speech, arguing that such notions presuppose treating language in terms of an extraction of constants (*TP*, 103-4). Any attempt at controlling the variability of language is an enterprise, they maintain, that goes hand-in-hand with the standardisation of a language, and a majoritarian project (*TP*, 100-1). As with other thinkers associated with the 'linguistic turn' of post-structuralism, Deleuze and Guattari understand that language is not governed by a transcendent system of signification nor grounded in an individual's subjective experience; rather, since language operates across and within a social terrain, language, as they put it, 'in its entirety is indirect discourse' (*TP*, 84).

Based on Deleuze and Guattari's discussion in *Kafka*, the deterritorialisation of language involves the ways a writer transforms a major language from within. I have already indicated that assemblages involve a process of composition through which pre-existing entities are organized. A concrete rule of an assemblage as given in *A Thousand Plateaus* is that an assemblage requires a territory; a territory is marked out and an assemblage is always constructed in relation to a specific environment. Deleuze and Guattari state that an assemblage begins by 'decoding' a 'milieu', or in other words, by extracting certain uses from and of its surroundings. These actions (that soon become habits) are what demarcate the assemblage's territory – to put this another way, a particular world is constructed. However, Deleuze and Guattari use 'territory' in a highly abstract way and do not only mean to refer to a physical space.²³ Assemblages also have a built-in tendency to want to preserve themselves, to rigidify so that their forms of content and expression – the two sides to an assemblage – become fixed; from this perspective, then, we might think of the nation state as a 'hard or slow' assemblage (*K*, 87), bound up with social norms and the standardisation of language, with the literary canon that establishes its major authors also a key element of the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka – a Czech Jew writing in German (the official language of the then crumbling Austro-Hungarian empire) – adopts the Prague German of his social milieu and, in doing so, displaces or deterritorialises the standard language from its function as the language of law and trade, purging it as well of its associations with the dominant culture.

Kapil's book is also concerned with its relationship to a national culture, and *How to Wash a Heart* begins with reference to a poetic tradition:

Like this?
 It's inky-early outside and I'm wearing my knitted scarf, like
 John Betjeman, poet of the British past.
 I like to go outside straight away and stand in the brisk air.
 Yesterday, you vanished into those snowflakes like the ragged beast
 You are.
 (*HWH*, 1)

sentences of their language'; on the other side theory that 'attempts to account for a range of pragmatic facts without making any commitment to whether the theory is psychologically realized' (4). Deleuze and Guattari's model does not fit comfortably into either camp.

²³ For the 'concrete rules' of assemblages see the final plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 501-14.

The first three lines invoke the dilemma of mimicry ‘implicit in the post-colonial condition’,²⁴ yet the question at the start immediately problematises this notion, while the repetitions and different uses of ‘like’ in subsequent lines generate multiple vectors of meaning. What I term the *interstitial voice* of the poem – ironic, ambivalent, and even contradictory – inhabits a space between lyric and anti-lyric traditions. Betjeman, ‘poet of the British past’, epitomizes the premise from which lyric poetry operates, that of a subject position – an ‘I’ – capable of speaking, as Parmar describes it, ‘from within a kind of integrated knowingness and belonging, even if anxious, transcending the self in favour of coherence [...] Its border guards are the literary gatekeepers of shared assumptions about experience, language and tradition.’²⁵ However, critics of the lyric ‘I’ all too often fail to address the encoded whiteness inherent in the presupposition of universality, as well as how, as Parmar argues, ‘literariness points back, in both “avant-garde” and mainstream poetry, to established traditions founded on aesthetic principles from which those [non-white] subjects have been historically excluded.’²⁶ As Parmar then puts it, how can ‘poets of colour themselves differently embody the ‘I’’, without the constraints of both the lyric’s flattening into an ‘exoticised subject’, as well as the anti-lyrical negation of referentiality?²⁷ The movement from first to second person in the final two lines of the quotation above, a shifting of perspective which occurs throughout *How to Wash a Heart* and which we read as happening to the voice of the poem (the immigrant guest) – not, then, as a switching of voices – shows the ‘I’ becoming nomadic subject or, as Rosi Braidotti writes, the project of ‘[b]ecoming nomadic as a variation on the theme of becoming-minoritarian’.²⁸ The interstitial voice of the poem is how the nomadic ‘I’ expresses itself: seeing and speaking from multiple and conflicting perspectives. Kapil hints at this nomadic ‘I’: ‘The linearity required of immigrants / Ebbs’ (*HWH*, 34) – but an important element to the ambivalences of this voice is how this statement is then accompanied with the recognition that ‘There’s a cost / To that refusal’ (*HWH*, 34).

The deterritorialisation of language is also a process through which new assemblages are formed. In the example of Kafka, by using the relatively ‘poorer’ Prague German, the language is taken to ‘to the point of sobriety’ (*K*, 19) and hitherto unknown possibilities are released. It is the presence of non-signifying enunciations that are then of particular interest to Deleuze and Guattari. They offer numerous examples: the short story about Josephine the mouse, the peasant’s gesture in the opening chapter of *The Castle*, Gregor’s warbling in ‘Metamorphosis’, moments in stories when music obliterates itself or language is cut through by its own sonic qualities, tearing words away from sense, so that a component of expression finds value in itself. Disarticulate sound, words and gestures mark a threshold of intensity. In these examples Kafka shows how expression can precede content, enunciation coming before the statement, making it ‘the function of an assemblage that makes this into its first gear in order to connect to other gears that will follow’ (*K*, 85). However, we must pay attention to the allegorical nature of what is going on here: this disarticulation is happening as part of

²⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.

²⁵ Parmar, 9-10.

²⁶ Parmar, 12.

²⁷ Parmar, 11.

²⁸ Rosi Braidotti, ‘Writing as a Nomadic Subject’, *Comparative Critical Studies* 11.2-3 (2014): 170.

the stories.²⁹ Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the literary 'machine' they construct in *Kafka* only works in the case of Kafka. This point needs emphasising because, in order to address the problem of minor literature today, it has to be recognised that language can be deterritorialised in differing ways; or to put it another way, non-signifying techniques and approaches influenced by twentieth-century modernism should not be seen as *the* way language is deterritorialised.

What matters, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is how a writer uses what is at hand – the materials offered up by their life – so that writing and living are interfused (Deleuze and Guattari state in their discussion of minor literature that art and life are only opposed from the perspective of a major literature) and move beyond the personal, to 'make writing an act of thought and life a non-personal power'.³⁰ However, this notion of 'non-personal power' might be problematic for the immigrant guest of Kapil's book – this would be another marker of ambivalence – since disempowerment is the guest's immediate and everyday experience. Cathy Park Hong writes about how '[t]he avant-garde's "delusion of whiteness" is the specious belief that renouncing subject and voice is anti-authoritarian, when in fact such wholesale pronouncements are clueless that the disenfranchised need such bourgeois niceties like voice to alter conditions forged in history.'³¹ Concepts, such as 'non-personal power', then, need to be tested out and problematised from different perspectives.

The emphasis on using what is at hand also opens up the paradoxical relationship between language and its users, between the coercive powers of language and, at the same time, the power in language to produce knowledge and meaning. This relationship is arguably even more tense (and intense) for the immigrant writer, especially when navigating the 'fixity and nostalgia, promulgated by majority and minority cultures' at the same time as carrying 'the weight of their ethnic difference as subjects situated in the minority against a national culture that has not addressed its legacy of violence.'³² Part of the force of *How to Wash a Heart* is the guest's struggle for expression, and, by extension, for subjectivity, despite the position they are ascribed, including as 'sexual object' for the host culture's 'entertainment' (*HWH*, 14). The guest has to contend with the host's exploitative 'desire for art / That comes from a foreign / Place' (*HWH*, 40), with the host as a 'wolf / Capable of devouring / My internal organs / If I exposed them to view' (*HWH*, 3). Yet the guest is grateful: 'You made a space for me in your home, for my books and clothes, and I'll / Never forget that' (*HWH*, 1). The 'host-guest chemistry', then, 'Is inclusive, complex, molecular, / Dainty' (*HWH*, 40) but

It's exhausting to be a guest
In somebody else's house
Forever.
Even though the host invites
The guest to say
Whatever it is they want to say,
The guest knows that host logic
Is variable.

²⁹ Moreover, as Lambert comments, Deleuze and Guattari claim that Kafka 'kills all metaphor' (*K*, 22), yet their reading of Kafka's oeuvre as forming the components of a literary 'machine' is 'nothing less than a forced metaphor' (13).

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (London: Continuum, 2006), 23.

³¹ Cathy Park Hong, 'Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde', *Lana Turner* 7.3 (2014): 2; available at <https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/delusions-whiteness-avant-garde> [accessed 26 April 2022].

³² Parmar, 12-13.

Prick me.
 And I will cut off the energy
 To your life.
 (HWH, 4)

In the final three lines a shift of perspective occurs again, from the guest to the host's (we hear this change still through the voice of the guest). Across the book, there are also abrupt shifts of location and time: for example, from the host's home to a performance space (the title of the book comes from an installation and performance Kapil made with her sister at London's ICA in 2019). Ambivalences and contradictions form the threads to the poem; these include divulging a 'secret' that 'Though we lost all our possessions / I felt / A strange relief / To see my home explode in the rearview mirror' (HWH, 13), and the ironic assertion that 'As your guest, I trained myself / To beautify / Our collective trauma' (HWH, 2). The immigrant guest gestures as well in the direction of the anti-lyrical with a desire for disintegration: 'I want to be split / Into two parts / Or a thousand pieces' (HWH, 38). Moreover, the frequently abrupt syntactical line breaking is a further destabiliser, disturbing metrical flow or balance that might be associated with the lyric.

According to Parmar, nomadic subjectivity 'demands that our addressability be negotiated from multiple angles, from our many sites of being and from the strength of our shared resistance',³³ an affirmation of the positive structure of difference.³⁴ As Deleuze and Guattari insist, dualities are the mechanisms with which language freezes thought and limits both our understanding and experience. Deleuze and Guattari formulate a dynamic in *A Thousand Plateaus* for addressing this problem of language, between the order word on the one hand and 'passwords' on the other, between 'compositions of order' and uses of language that convert order words into 'components of passage' (TP, 110). But Deleuze and Guattari are not setting up a simple dualism here between the major and the minor (or between constants and variation in language). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari insist that these two poles continually pass over and into each other. There are not two kinds of language in opposition to each other but rather two 'treatments' of language: '[c]onstant is not opposed to variable; it is a treatment of the variable opposed to the other kind of treatment, or continuous variation.' (TP, 103, emphasis in original) Moreover, 'the more a language has or acquires the characteristics of a major language, the more it is affected by continuous variations that transpose it into a "minor" language.' (TP, 102) There is thus no fixed and categorical opposition between two types of literature: the major and minor; the minor, then, as process of transformation of the major, as with the interstitial voice of *How to Wash a Heart* expressing the 'I' as nomadic subject, a becoming-minor of the lyric 'I', and a minoritising – and problematisation – of anti-lyric tropes to do with incoherence and instability.³⁵

³³ Parmar, 27.

³⁴ Yet it is crucial as well to the argumentation I am presenting here that difference is consistently problematised, so that, as Braidotti writes, while central to the task of undoing the majoritarian 'white, masculine, ethnocentric subject', the concept of difference also has to be understood as 'contested and paradoxical' (180) – in other words, a problem.

³⁵ As Braidotti then puts it, '[t]he point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify lines of flight, that is to say a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories. The point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the

The Problem of Politics

My introduction outlined a two-fold problem of politics. On the one hand, the concept of minor literature began life as part of Deleuze and Guattari's invention of a new revolutionary subject, the 'people to come'; however, this revolutionary subject could not be identified with any existing people and a shift in emphasis occurs, from the idea of revolution to that of resistance. On the other hand, this shift might also be seen as a reassessment of the relation between art and politics, so the symbolic analogy between an aesthetic act and a political act is no longer tenable. Following on from the discussion of the nomadic subject of Kapil's poem, as well as this twofold problem of politics as I am presenting it, I want to suggest that an attempt at revitalising the concept of minor literature today – or at harnessing a process of becoming-minor – needs to address this question: to what extent does the construction of a nomadic subject possess a politics? We can start tackling this question by first turning to how Deleuze and Guattari construct their 'Kafka politics' (*K*, 7, emphasis in original).

In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari identify the second characteristic of minor literature as its political immediacy. For Deleuze and Guattari, the minority condition is characterized as a 'cramped space' which 'forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within' (*K*, 17). Personal issues are symptoms of problems operating in relation to a wider social and cultural terrain. This view on politics is also a rejection of any didactic conception of art – literature does not tell (this would be an imposition of order words), rather, it shows, by functioning as an assemblage of expression that plugs into the working parts of a social assemblage and those forces capable of transforming the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari devise their second characteristic of minor literature by appropriating Kafka's well-known diary entry from 25 December 1911. Listing the aspects of the 'literature of small peoples', Kafka includes in a third category titled 'popularity' the 'connexion with politics.' Moreover, politics is the 'limiting boundary everywhere', so that 'what is a matter of passing interest for a few' in a major literature, 'here [in the literature of minorities] absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death.'³⁶ However, according to Lambert, Deleuze and Guattari 'strategically exaggerate' Kafka's discussion of the literature of minorities and, as Lambert then observes, this identification of the private with the political gets overstated further by critics, adopting the slogan 'the personal is political' as an axiom of their political interpretation.³⁷ Since anything and everything in the cramped space of the minority condition has the potential to be political, the idea of political immediacy can lead to a circular logic in which the political interpretation of a text is based on a claim that the text must be political, the passage between aesthetics and politics taken as a given rather than seen as a problem.

status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms of their specification and of our political interaction.' (179)

³⁶ Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-23*, ed. Max Brod (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 150-1. It can be noted in passing that Kafka's list could well describe US and European cultural conditions today, with the breakup, since around the mid-1970s, of what could be described as mainstream culture.

³⁷ Lambert, 5; emphasis in original.

For the immigrant guest, it is not so much the breakdown of any boundary between the personal and political that matters; rather, it is a question of the blurring of a distinction between art and survival: ‘How do you live when the link / Between creativity / And survival / Can’t easily / Be discerned?’ (*HWH*, 30) And, moreover, the cramped space they inhabit is one of danger:

The art of crisis
Is that you no longer
Think of home
As a place for social respite.
Instead, it’s a ledge
Above a narrow canyon.
(*HWH*, 28)

For the guest the personal is geopolitical. The ever-present legacy of colonialism and empire, the memories of violence and the impacts of inherited trauma – ‘Partition and its after-life’ – is the ‘texture present in these poems’, as Kapil puts it (*HWH*, 52).

In place of the idea of political immediacy put forward in *Kafka*, I would argue that Jacques Rancière’s concept of politics provides a better way to engage with *How to Wash a Heart*. Rancière’s view is that politics happens rarely: as Rancière sees it, what Western liberal democracies circumscribe as political activities for their citizens, whether the ritual of elections or the spectacle of protest, is not really politics. For Rancière, politics is what results from the ‘presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone’.³⁸ By necessity, this presupposition disrupts what is generally thought of as politics; this general idea is described by Rancière as the ‘procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution.’³⁹ The name Rancière gives to these systems is the *police*, based on the usage of this term from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as shown in Michel Foucault’s work) to denote a ‘general order that arranges that tangible reality in which bodies are distributed in community’, so that the uniformed forces of law and order are just one element in a wider ‘social mechanism linking medicine, welfare, and culture.’⁴⁰ What is then significant in Rancière’s analysis for my reading of Kapil’s book is how this police order makes parts of the population *unrecognisable*. This also broadens the possible meanings to the refrain ‘the people are missing’, as the allusion to the invisibility rendered to so many by a police order.

What Rancière’s concept of politics also shows is how the police order is always constituted by an outside, but that the vested interests of those benefitting most from this order render this outside invisible.⁴¹ Rancière’s states that the police order is a “partition of the sensible” whose principle is the absence of a void and of a

³⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy* *Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 17

³⁹ Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 28.

⁴⁰ Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 28.

⁴¹ The significance of the outside is an important point of overlap between Rancière’s concept of politics and Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory. In an assemblage, the line of deterritorialisation is the outside, so, for example, a State apparatus is conceived in opposition to nomadic war machines, a formulation of how ‘the State itself has always been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship’ (*TP*, 360).

supplement.’⁴² By ‘partition of the sensible’ Rancière refers to how experience is shaped to ensure people are in the places and roles allotted to them. The police order is then governed on the basis of its unquestioned naturalness, as if consensus exists. Politics as Rancière defines it – that is, the presupposition of equality – is antagonistic to the police order and the majoritarian assemblages that sustain this order. Rancière indicates that this antagonism is also a contradiction between the major and the minor: ‘the major premiss contains what the law has to say; the minor, what is said or done elsewhere, any word or deed which contradicts the fundamental legal/political affirmation of equality.’⁴³

Kapil shows how liberal progressivist ideas function as part of a police order, as the advocacy of democratic values that conceals exploitation and abuse: ‘The political face you showed / To your neighbors, / For example, was contra- / regime’ (*HWH*, 21), yet

When what you perform
At the threshold
Is at odds
With what happens
When the door is closed,
Then you are burning
The toast
And you are letting the butter
Fester.
Verbally, you state egalitarian
Ideals.
Financially, you hook
That brown baby
Up.
(*HWH*, 39)

As the guest comments, ‘The wealth and property / Of my host / Require constant surveillance’ (*HWH*, 25). For the guest, the host can be a ‘predator, the one / Who stops the flow of life / With a sweet gaze’ (*HWH*, 32); ‘Was I your art?’ (*HWH*, 21), the guest then wonders. What we see, then, is how the host cannot comprehend the guest – ‘Are your children / White?’ asks the host, a question which confuses the guest – and, by extension, how a police order must, by its very definition, render *unrecognisable* parts of the population. Those whose identities and circumstances cannot be recognised are, for Rancière, the subjects of politics as the ‘part of those that have no-part’.⁴⁴ This is how a minoritarian ethics can be thought, as the expression of those that have no part in the community sanctioned by the police, through a process that undoes the limits and controls of that order. However, according to Rancière, the political subject cannot be defined or identified at the outset: it emerges or manifests itself by refusing the partition of the sensible. This manifestation is what Rancière calls ‘dissensus’, a dissensus from the exclusions manufactured by a police order ‘for the sake of nothing at all other than one’s own equality.’⁴⁵ However, the objective is not to then obtain an identity within

⁴² Jacques Rancière, ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, trans. Davide Panagia and Rachel Bowlby, *Theory & Event* 5.3 (2001), Thesis 7.

⁴³ Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 46.

⁴⁴ Rancière, ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, Thesis 5.

⁴⁵ May, 49.

the regime of allotted places and roles, so dissensus is also, therefore, a declassification: '[t]he essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division.'⁴⁶ The nomadic 'I' of *How to Wash a Heart* is one such 'figure of division'. This casts a different light as well on Deleuze's statement that 'there will no longer be conquests of power by a proletariat, or by a united or unified people', since it is dissensus, rather than unity or consensus, that is at stake in minoritarian politics. However, as I will discuss further below, there is also a contradiction to consider between a missing *people* to come, since the notion of a people implies a consensus, and the dissensus of becoming-minor.

Rancière explains that politics involves expression: 'political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order'.⁴⁷ I would argue that Kapil's work contributes to dissensus, in this case as the expression that is the interstitial voice of the immigrant guest. To assert that poetry can be a mode for politics, in the way Rancière defines politics, does not then re-establish the presumption of a relay between aesthetics and politics; nor is it reinstating the cramped space of minority creation as characterised by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*. Politics, as Rancière insists, happens rarely. Rather, I would argue that becoming-minor is always immanent within and across different practices, intersecting the social field, as the ever-present potential to call into question the consensus of the police order. This potential might be plugged into, sustained and fostered in various ways, including through poetry. However, as Kapil shows, this will have been a precarious process, as the final lines to *How to Wash a Heart* show:

And in these last moments,
I clock the look
That passes between you.
You and the officer
From the Department
Of Repatriation.
And I understand.
This is your revenge.
(*HWH*, 44)

The Problem of the Missing People

As we have seen, the subject does not occupy a central position in Deleuze and Guattari's model of language. The subject, as Deleuze puts it in his monograph on Foucault, is located and formed within language's 'deep anonymous murmur',⁴⁸ so that 'a single statement can even have several positions. So much so that what comes first is a ONE SPEAKS, an anonymous murmur in which positions are laid out for possible subjects: "the great relentless disordered drone of discourse".'⁴⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, the subject functions as one dimension amongst many involved in the construction of a 'collective assemblage of enunciation'. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari argue that a statement never refers back to a subject: '[t]here isn't a subject who emits

⁴⁶ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 32-33.

⁴⁷ Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 30.

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, ed. and trans. Seán Hand (London: Athlone, 1999), 8.

⁴⁹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 47.

the statement or a subject about which the statement would be emitted.' (*K*, 83) Statements only function as the working parts of an assemblage. What Deleuze and Guattari call the 'K function' to Kafka's work is the way the writing problematises the relationship between a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement (and, we can add, between Kafka as author and the work itself). According to Deleuze and Guattari, in Kafka's novels the protagonist 'K' becomes a 'general function' of a 'polyvalent assemblage' of which the individual, and by extension the singular writer, is one part, the social assemblage to come another (*K*, 85). This is how Kafka makes use of the law, to show how statements function on behalf of assemblages. However, there is an oscillation to be aware of here in the movement of expression to content, between the possibility of engendering rigid forms of content and expression transforming contents along lines of deterritorialisation. Moreover, whilst expression may be primary in minor literature, it is still determined by the assemblage just as content is. Nevertheless, we now see the third characteristic of minor literature according to Deleuze and Guattari: how, when expression leads content, language's functioning as a collective assemblage of enunciation is drawn out and literature then functions as collective enunciation.

The relegation of the subject is also connected to the problem of politics (I hope by now the three problems I am posing here are seen as interwoven): that is, how the project of reinventing a revolutionary subject had to contend with the need for this subject to be neither singular nor immutable – thus, the emphasis on the collective and unstable nature of assemblages. For Lambert, however, Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of the '*fact* of individual enunciation' is 'more than a little precipitous'.⁵⁰ Lambert argues that the removal of the subject can be seen as a 'remarkable "gesture"' (or even as a tactics, I would suggest) that was able to resolve the 'entire dilemma of "mediation" that had preoccupied the tradition of Marxist aesthetic criticism [...] they solve the problem by skipping a step in the equation, thus avoiding the need for any dialectical mediation between the individual and the collective.'⁵¹ But as Lambert then points out, when the concept of minor literature is applied selectively, rather than as the understanding of a process of becoming-minor that is a potential within all literature, the individual writer is then re-inserted as the relay between the individual and the collective.⁵²

The concept of collective enunciation is also a concern with the status of the individual writer. Deleuze and Guattari's interest in Kafka is partly accounted for by how Kafka exemplifies two key ideas about the role of the writer: a writer is both at a border and singular or unique. Kafka is a border figure, not in any geographical sense, but historically and socially. His writing records the historical transition between old and new bureaucracies, or different forms of social organization. Further, in the insurance company where he works, he operates between technical machines (including injured workers, employer-employee conflicts, etc.) and the juridical statements that function as rules to be followed. What is then important for Kafka is how both sides provide a model for a form of content and a form of expression applicable to any social terrain and to any statement anywhere. He shows how 'machine, statement, and desire form part of one and the same assemblage' (*K*, 83). Kafka's writing can then be described as singular, or what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'bachelor-machine' (the use

⁵⁰ Lambert, 122, emphasis in original.

⁵¹ Lambert, 122-3.

⁵² Lambert, 123.

of ‘bachelor’ may seem odd, but perhaps Deleuze and Guattari wish to play on Kafka’s terminal bachelor status and his constant deferral of marriage as recorded in his letters). They argue that it is this status as a singularity or bachelor that enables a writer to create new statements and by extension to make available the conditions for a new social assemblage. The literary machine that Kafka constructs is ‘[a] machine that is all the more social and collective insofar as it is solitary, a bachelor, and that, tracing the line of escape, is equivalent in itself to a community whose conditions haven’t yet been established.’ (K, 71) On this basis, Deleuze and Guattari argue that literature is a ‘concern of the people’ (K, 84) – it is important to add here that it would be a mistake to consider this claim as a utopian appeal: they clearly state that the collectivity yet to be constituted is ‘for better or for worse’ (K, 84).

Rancière shows that there is a historical context to Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis. With the inauguration of the ‘aesthetic regime of art’,⁵³ starting around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a radical change took place in how art was conceived and discussed. Poetics as a discourse formulating the rules governing the production of art was replaced by aesthetics as a regime ‘for identifying what is recognisable as art’.⁵⁴ According to Rancière, this change was accomplished by putting the *aistheton*, the power of the sensible and of subjective feeling, at the centre of art, thus ‘privileging the affect, and an affect that belongs to the receiver or spectator’.⁵⁵ This project involved, therefore, the ‘constitution of a new, undifferentiated public to replace the designated addressees of representative works’.⁵⁶ As Maryvonne Saison explains, ‘Kant’s regulative idea of a *sensus communis* is the pivot of those systems conceived under the jurisdiction of the aesthetic’,⁵⁷ as the aesthetic regime requires the values of universality and consensus necessary for the construction of a public. It is in relation to this regime that Deleuze and Guattari exhibit a paradoxical approach to art: on the one hand, they say that art preserves the percept and affect as a ‘being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself’ as they put it in *What Is Philosophy?*;⁵⁸ on the other hand, they argue art is tasked with moving in the direction of its own disintegration, the immanence of pathos in logos as the power of the sensible to undo thought, that is, to deterritorialise. A comparable paradox is present as well in the refrain of the missing people, as the tension between dissensus and consensus, or as Maryvonne Saison writes, the contradiction ‘between the multiplication of peoples and the idea of a missing people as a regulative political idea of the value of the minority.’⁵⁹

But for Kapil, the status of a writer is even more problematic than the conception in *Kafka*. As the immigrant guest knows, a border is real and not metaphorical; it is where she has to ‘disrobe / In the facility’ (HWH, 28). Further, her solitude is a source

⁵³ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 8.

⁵⁴ Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 8

⁵⁵ Jacques Rancière, ‘Is There a Deleuzian Aesthetics?’, *Qui Parler* 14.2 (2004): 9.

⁵⁶ Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 9.

⁵⁷ Maryvonne Saison, ‘The People Are Missing’. *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)* 6.1 (2008): para. 2; available at https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol6/iss1/12/ [accessed 9 September 2022].

⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 164.

⁵⁹ Saison, para. 11. Rancière has suggested that a logic of ‘disincorporation and dissolution’ versus one of incorporation is a ‘positive contradiction’. See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. and intr. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 59. Although Rancière’s comment is a reference to the work of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, I would still argue that the notion of ‘positive contradiction’ is applicable to Deleuze and Guattari’s discussions of art.

of anguish and not a resource for a creative practice: 'My links to the community / Of writers I had been part of / Had broken overnight' (*HWH*, 21); moreover, the guest's 'identity as a writer was precarious / During the time / I lived with you' (*HWH*, 6). On this basis, the poem asks:

Is a poet
An imperial dissident, or just
An outline
Of pale blue chalk?
(*HWH*, 29)

In the book's 'Acknowledgements', Kapil explains that the image of pale blue chalk 'derives from the memory of preparations for a mud sculpture, the reclining form of a female Buddha that Sharon Carlisle constructed in my garden a few years ago' (*HWH*, 52). As well as a feminist re-appropriation, this blue outline is an absent presence that captures all the ambivalences and paradoxes of the nomadic 'I' discussed here, its status as in-between the lyric and anti-lyric. It resonates too with what Saison writes about how

[a]rt intervenes as resistance and dissenting energy founded on a visceral refusal of the consensus. However, it is paradoxically animated by the just as visceral affirmation of a necessary foundation played by the role of the public but which can only be invoked under the name of the people, and moreover in its absence. It is from the angle of minorization that art acquires its political dimension and not through a given engagement that is claimed to be political: art carries with it the absence and the call of a people. The cry 'the people are missing' is only heard after mourning the *sensus communis*.⁶⁰

But for the immigrant guest, their 'mourning' is not for a people missing because their conditions are yet to come; it is for a people who have been erased:

What happens to the memory
Of other languages,
Carried in the body as poetry,
When everyone on the periphery,
The people who memorise
These poems
On their long journeys
To other lands, is gone.
My ancestral line
Was decimated,
For example,
One hot night.
(*HWH*, 29)

Conclusion: *Toward a Minor Literature*

The subtitle Deleuze and Guattari give to their book on Kafka – 'toward a minor literature' – is significant. It emphasises how we need to think of minor literature today as a movement in the direction of minority becoming and not as an arrival at a classificatory framework. What I have presented here as a re-examination of the three

⁶⁰ Saison, para. 25.

characteristics of minor literature, as Deleuze and Guattari identified them in their 1975 book on Kafka – the deterritorialisation of language, political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation – is an attempt to give these characteristics another complexion. My reading of Kapil's *How to Wash a Heart* shows how language is deterritorialised by a nomadic subject, how the minor can be addressed via the conception of politics put forward in Rancière's work, and how the paradoxes underpinning the refrain of a missing people can be viewed in the context of mass migration and forced displacement, as the legacy of colonialism and the effect of inequalities maintained by global capitalism. However, it has to be stressed that this reading only works in the case of Kapil and is not meant as offering predetermined criteria for an encounter with other writers. The focus throughout has been on mobilising a problematic: in other words, to see minor literature today as, first and foremost, a problem.

Deleuze once summed up his approach to reading as an 'extra textual practice': 'For me, a text is nothing but a cog in a larger extra-textual practice [...] it's about seeing what one can do with an extra-textual practice that extends the text.'⁶¹ Kapil's declaration that 'I want a literature that is not made from literature' – a statement frequently cited in reviews of her work – signposts a creative practice that resonates with Deleuze's statement. As an artist, Kapil extends her writing across disciplinary borders into performances, films and installations; but her work also draws inspiration from various fields outside of literary traditions and contexts, in particular building on the trans-disciplinary approaches of postcolonial and feminist thinkers. This web of different components to the writing is also constructed through a continual relay between theory and practice, what I have termed elsewhere as schizoanalytic poetics.⁶² It involves as well navigating complex, ambivalent and at times contradictory vectors of thought. The cartography that Kapil constructs includes the idea of literature as a health – think too how the title to *How to Wash a Heart* is suggestive of a kind of instruction manual – so that a creative act is understood as inseparable from survival and indistinguishable from, as Kapil insists, 'caring and being cared for' (*HWH*, 52).

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⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 260.

⁶² See Jason Skeet, 'Applied Schizoanalysis: Towards a Deleuzian Poetics', *Word and Text – A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 7.1 (2017): 86-102.

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Poporul (tot) lipsește. Volumul *How to Wash a Heart* al lui Bhanu Kapil și problema literaturii minore astăzi

În *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze și Félix Guattari proclamează „folosirea productivă a mașinii literare”, cu scopul de a extrage dintr-un text „forța sa revoluționară” – cartea lor despre Kafka, în care aduc conceptul de literatură minoră, este experimentul prin care fac acest lucru. Premiza acestui articol este că volumul-poem al lui Bhanu Kapil intitulat *How to Wash a Heart* ne oferă un punct de referință potrivit pentru a regândi problema literaturii minore astăzi. Opera lui Kapil este o parte a unei evoluții semnificative în poezia și poetica contemporană, din perspectiva scriiturii ce se bazează și se construiește pe critica umanismului și a supremației albe a acestuia în formă codificată, din perspectivă feministă și postcolonialistă. Prin prisma operei lui Kapil sunt examinate trei caracteristici ale literaturii minore identificate de Deleuze și Guattari: deteritorializarea limbii, conexiunea dintre individ și imediatitate politică și asamblajul colectiv al enunțării.