

5-15-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Chadderton, Helena (2017) "The littérature mineure of François Bon," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1870>

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## The littérature mineure of François Bon

### **Abstract**

This article shows how the work of contemporary author François Bon can be read as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's littérature mineure. Bon's work stands out on the French literary scene for its capacity to be political in both its content and its use of form. Furthermore, Bon brings form and content together by demonstrating the impact of language and textual features on the perception of social division. Focussing on characteristic features of Bon's style pertaining to genre, syntax and rhythm, I propose that the relationship between reality and text in Bon's work is one of mutual effect and influence rather than one of a simple transferral of meaning from one to the other, recalling the definition of Deleuze and Guattari's agencement. In the socially marginal contexts Bon represents the reader is encouraged to focus on the political potential of the text and notice the ways in which major use of language entrenches marginality.

### **Keywords**

François Bon, littérature mineure, marginality, social division, style

## The *littérature mineure* of François Bon

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The prolific contemporary author François Bon has been writing since the early 1980s and is the author of over thirty full-length texts. His position in contemporary French literature is one of innovator, both in terms of his choice of subject and his style. He focused on the working-class industrial and post-industrial experience at a time when such topics had fallen out of favor in contemporary French literature, but he also distinguishes himself by his innovative use of language and textual features. This article will examine the capacity of Bon's work to be both textually experimental and socially and politically motivated. Bon achieves this duality by demonstrating the impact of language and textual features on the perception of social division. His subversion of the conventions of language, in order to clearly link the use of language and social marginality, can be seen as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's *littérature mineure* 'minor literature.'

From the 1950s onward, literary experimentation in France arguably started to take precedence over the work of writers who used their creative talents to comment on social and political issues of the time. This opposition is represented, on the one hand, by Sartrean *engagement*, the idea that a literary text operates as a call to action because language functions instrumentally to contain a message and, on the other, by Barthes's understanding of the *engagement* of form and the poetic and revolutionary capacity of language itself.<sup>1</sup> Expression of support in literary works for specific causes was replaced by the abstract generalities of structuralism, the practices of the *nouveau roman*, and the tendency to concentrate on the political potential of form. The role of the novel as a tool with which to explore social and political realities thus became problematic.

François Bon's first novel, *Sortie d'usine* ('Leaving the Factory'), with its account of strike action and the mind-numbing monotony and danger of factory work, appeared in 1982 and was at the forefront of the movement back towards an engagement with social and political content on the French literary scene. Indeed, at this time, the critical narrative surrounding French literature began to chart a *retour au récit* or return to the story as well as a revival of novels that re-engaged with the contemporary world around us.<sup>2</sup> Yet in an increasingly unequal world, and in a contemporary France riven by inequality, how do contemporary authors reflect social realities while nonetheless honoring the loss of innocence that has been brought about by literary theory? As Barthes lamented: "Notre littérature serait-elle toujours condamnée à ce va-et-vient entre le réalisme politique et l'art-pour-l'art, entre une morale de l'engagement et un purisme esthétique, entre la compromission et l'asepsie?" ("La réponse de Kafka" 138) 'Is our literature forever doomed to this exhausting oscillation between political realism and art-for-art's-sake, between an ethic of

commitment and an aesthetic purism, between compromise and asepsis?’ (“Kafka’s Answer” 133). More than fifty years after Barthes’s question, Bon’s work still stands out for its ability to overcome this duality. His approach twins politically charged subjects with a visceral and innovative style, which testifies to both the desire to present the social and political world and an awareness of the complexities of representing reality. Bon’s focus is the working-class industrial and post-industrial experience. This marginal social world is endlessly represented in dominant media discourses in a language of cliché and judgment.<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to draw attention to the significance of representation, Bon focuses on the materiality of language within this political context, thus recalling Deleuze and Guattari’s work on literature.

Deleuze and Guattari put forward the concept of *agencement*, translated as “assemblage” in English, which is a multiplicity of interactive forces in which the binaries of content and expression, reader and text, are necessary and united: “Le contenu n’est pas un signifié, ni l’expression un signifiant, mais tous deux sont les variables de l’agencement” (*Mille Plateaux* 115) ‘Content is not a signified, nor expression a signifier; rather, both are variables of the assemblage’ (*A Thousand Plateaus* 101). The constant interaction that occurs among interlinking forces means that text no longer represents reality, but rather that text and reality are bound in a relationship of mutual production, circularity, and interdependence. As Ronald Bogue has shown:

An assemblage (*agencement*) necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows and social flows simultaneously. There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders. (Bogue 62)

The concept of *agencement* is at the center of what Deleuze and Guattari call *littérature mineure*, coined in 1975 to designate subversive and experimental literature in a major or dominant language that attempts to resist cultural and political hegemony. Their thesis is based on the work of Kafka and his use of German. They propose that Kafka, as a German Jew, undermines the narratological and ideological conventions of literary German in order to reveal and deconstruct literary and political convention and thereby subvert its power. They compare *littérature mineure* to a use of language in literature which is “grande” or “établie” a “langage de papier” a “langue d’Etat, langue officielle” (“Kafka” 33-4) a ‘great’ or ‘established’ use of language, a ‘paper language,’ a ‘state language, an official language’ (“Kafka’s Answer” 10). Deleuze and Guattari use the term *déterritorialisation* (deterritorialization) to refer to the breaking of established conventions for sense making, thus emptying language of its referential meaning. The metaphorical, representative relationship

between content and expression no longer functions in examples of *littérature mineure*:

Nous ne sommes plus dans la situation d'une langue riche ordinaire, où par exemple le mot chien désignerait directement un animal et s'appliquerait par métaphore à d'autres choses . . . Kafka tue délibérément toute métaphore, tout symbolisme, toute signification, non moins que toute designation. ("Kafka" 40)

We are no longer in the situation of an ordinary, rich language, where the word dog, for example, would directly designate an animal and would apply metaphorically to other things . . . Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation. ("Kafka's Answer" 22)

Language in examples of *littérature mineure*, then, disrupts the relationship between signifier and signified, questioning the referential value of language, and on a secondary level, encourages a problematization of the literary relationship between content and expression. Bon's work focuses on these relationships, demonstrating the inseparability of his subjects and the means of representation.

Spanning three decades of writing, the four texts this article will deal with—*Sortie d'usine* ('Leaving the Factory' 1982), *Le Crime de Buzon* ('Buzon's Crime' 1986), *Prison* ('Prison' 1997) and *Daewoo* (2004)—are representative of Bon's work in that they explore both personal and collective experiences of alienating work, unemployment, and prison. In addition to publishing full-length works of fiction, Bon now additionally disseminates his work electronically through his website, *tierslivre.net*, which he calls "le labo vivant des explorations et tentatives qui n'ont pas vocation à passer à l'édition commerciale" 'the living laboratory of explorations and experiments which are not destined to be published commercially.'<sup>4</sup> Bon's attitude to writing, and the opportunities for collaboration and exchange which his website offers, are characteristic of an author who has also held creative writing workshops in schools, prisons, and community centers since 1992. He wrote about his experiences of this in *Tous les mots sont adultes* ('All words are adult'): "la voix des humbles, la voix des anonymes, ne résonne encore que bien trop faiblement dans la littérature" (300) 'the voice of the humble, the voice of the anonymous, still resonates all too feebly in literature.' This quotation suggests Bon's concerns about the right and access to public expression, yet direct comments on social injustice or exploitation in his texts are rare. One such example includes the opening of *Daewoo*, in which the narrator explains his desire to undertake the project of recording the closure of the Daewoo factory: "Effacement: parce que ce qui transperce l'actualité, séparant ou brisant ce qui était établi de façon stable entre les hommes et les choses, a disparu sans suffisant examen préalable des conséquences" (*Daewoo* 13) 'Erasure: because

what has broken the present apart, separating or shattering what was created, what was stable, between people and things, has disappeared without prior and proper examination of the consequences.<sup>5</sup> Bon has always stressed the independent and aesthetic side of his work over any social or political viewpoint. Indeed, he refuses the very concept of *littérature engagée*, or politically committed literature, stating that “La question de l’engagement part toujours d’un malentendu . . . parce qu’elle constitue le monde social et son actualité comme cible et but de l’activité d’écriture” (Kantcheff) ‘The question of political commitment always starts from a misunderstanding . . . because it sets up the social world and current affairs as the objective and goal of the activity of writing.’ This objection stems from a refusal of the sense that writing and the social world are separate entities; that one is a medium, a means, a tool, and the other is an object to be captured, represented, reflected. Bon has expressed dislike of the description of his work as “l’écriture *sur* [quelque chose]” (Hesse 135) ‘writing *about* [something]’; again we see the idea here of writing as a tool with which to describe an object outside itself. His objection suggests the importance of language, and of the writing process itself, to his project. Accordingly, rather than using text to represent an existing reality, Bon has talked of the relationship between text and reality in his work as a chain (*Exercice* 127), suggesting movement and linkage, recalling Deleuze and Guattari’s *agencement*: what is represented and the way it is represented influence and act upon each other.<sup>6</sup>

A great deal of work has been done on the relationship between realism and reality in Bon’s writing.<sup>7</sup> While Bon’s work is not realist in the sense of literary style, it is nonetheless clearly linked to the social world and uses social detail as a way of reminding the reader of that. Indeed Alexandre Gefen talks of a “réalisme objectal” ‘object-related realism’ in order to emphasize the materiality of Bon’s focus. The four texts examined here all have recognizable contemporary social contexts. They offer concrete indicators of time and place: “le Miami à Andernos et le New Dream à Arcachon” (*Prison* 36) ‘the Miami in Andernos and the New Dream in Arcachon’; “Chez Daniel ça s’appelait, au coin de la petite rue à droite qui rejoint le quai de Seine” (*Sortie d’usine* 18) ‘It was called Daniel’s Place, on the corner of a little street on the right that leads to the embankment of the Seine.’ Attention is given to material detail, such as the particular plastic from which the chairs are made in prison, the smell, and the carefully maintained temperature: “avec les tables jaunes du mobilier scolaire, les chaises à tubes verts de chez Heurliez à Cerisay fournisseur des écoles . . . une uniforme température de grotte et l’odeur fade des cuisines collectives plus la Javel du nettoyage des sols” (*Prison* 11) ‘with the yellow school tables, the chairs made of green tubes from Heurliez in Cerisay which supplies schools . . . a uniform cave-like temperature and the stale smell of institutional kitchens plus the bleach for cleaning the floors.’ This precise reference to location, sense, and material reminds the reader that we are in the real world, the world outside the window: contemporary France, analogous to that inhabited by its readers, filled with prisons, schools, danger, violence, and homelessness. These

instances of referentiality, in which language is applied as a secondary system to an already existing world, thereby encourage the reader to consider the texts as commentaries on that world of social marginality and division. While the social context Bon gestures toward is important for the political power of his work, beyond this, Bon's style provides a direct challenge to this way of making meaning and, as Gefen has shown, in fact reveals the artificiality of any attempt to represent the social world (Gefen 95). One can thus understand Bon's style in terms of Barthes's "effets de réel," or 'reality effects,' which *signify* reality but do not directly represent it.<sup>8</sup> My analysis begins with explicit examples from Bon's texts that reveal the capacity of language to do much more than merely represent the external world.

In *Daewoo* Bon talks of "novlangue," the French translation of George Orwell's 'newspeak' in *1984*, which has since been used to refer to any deliberately obfuscatory use of language. It is used here to describe the language of administration with which the former employees of the factory are confronted:

*En effet, la facilité avec laquelle une personne sans emploi en retrouvera un autre dépend de la rapidité avec laquelle les entrepreneurs peuvent se départir des productions ne répondant plus aux attentes des consommateurs—qui sont eux-mêmes littéralement les employeurs des entrepreneurs. Cette mobilité du capital, si elle ne protège en rien les emplois liés aux productions périmées, constitue cependant la meilleure protection des emplois à venir—ceux qui sont justement liés aux productions qui ont désormais la faveur des consommateurs. Par voie de conséquence, les entraves artificielles à la mobilité des capitaux ne peuvent que rendre la recherche d'un nouvel emploi plus ardue pour tous. L'intelligence aurait dicté aux employés de l'usine sidérurgique de Forgeval ou de Cellatex de s'en prendre, non à leur employeur, mais bien aux butors syndicalistes réduisant le champ du possible pour tout le monde. (Daewoo 150; emphasis in original)*

*Indeed, the ease with which an unemployed person will find another position depends on the speed with which the entrepreneurs can move away from production that no longer responds to the demands of consumers—who are themselves literally the employers of the entrepreneurs. This mobility of capital, although it in no way protects the jobs linked to obsolete products, nonetheless constitutes the best protection for the jobs to come—those which are in fact linked to products that are hence favored by consumers. As a consequence, artificial constraints on the mobility of capital will only make looking for a new job harder for everyone. Good sense should have told employees at a steel factory such as Forgeval or Cellatex to lash out not at their employer, but rather at the union stooges, reducing what is possible for everyone.*

Bon's highlighting here of the subordinating conjunctions, whose linguistic purpose is to make connections and facilitate comprehension, functions ironically as a result of their incapacity to render the "novlangue" any less bewildering. Bon chooses to contrast the complex and euphemism-filled formulations associated with the administration with short, snappy, simple, direct descriptions of the strikes taking place all over France in one week of June 2003, as collated by Nadia Nasserri, one of the laid-off workers: "Sidérurgie. Les salariés de l'usine Metaleurop de Noyelles-Godault, dans le Pas-de-Calais, jettent des engins de chantier et des pains de sodium dans le canal qui jouxte l'usine, afin d'obtenir les indemnités au titre du préjudice moral que constitue leur licenciement" (*Daewoo* 150) 'Steelworks. Workers from the Metaleurop factory at Noyelles-Godault, in the Pas-de-Calais, are throwing machinery and sodium blocks into the canal next to the factory, in order to get compensation for the psychological damage caused by their dismissal.' The only conjunction used here is "afin de" 'in order to,' indicating a clear connection and purpose. He also notes the staff signs in the call center he tours, which he compares as a working environment to the closed factories. The jaunty familiarity of the abbreviations and informalities used here belies the fact that every employment right has been fought for, even the right to toilet breaks: "les salles joyeusement signalées *repos*, ou *fumeurs*, où la *café*" (*Daewoo* 274) 'rooms joyously labeled *break room*, or *smokers*, or *canteen*.' In *Prison*, Bon draws attention to the vague blanket terms used to describe the very different prisoners he teaches: "Celui de vingt-trois ans dont on tient à vous signaler qu'il est un *détenu très dangereux* sans rien vous dire d'autre ni la nature même du danger" (*Prison* 57) 'The one who is twenty-three years old and who they tell you is *a very dangerous prisoner* without telling you anything more or the nature of this danger.' In all these cases, the expressive inadequacy of language strikes the reader, as does its capacity to deceive and close down meaning. In contrast to this language of officialdom, Bon shows the paucity of his socially alienated protagonists' use of language, commenting on the prisoners' own limited expressions in *Prison*: "Cinq fois, dix fois, vingt fois le mot *foyer* et l'expression 'qu'ils en avaient marre'" (*Prison* 48) 'Five times, ten times, twenty times the word *hostel* and the expression "that they've had enough."' Yet when Bon asks his creative writing class in *Prison* to write about what the word "foyer" means to them, the response he receives shows the importance of the speaker's experiences, evoking the subjectivity of words and the fact that they are linked to social usage: "Mais quand on a eu treize foyers et cinquante familles d'accueil . . ." Et le mot *foyer* revenant donc encore une fois comme dépossession, au contraire exactement de sa si vieille histoire" (*Prison* 53) "But when you've had thirty homes and fifty host families . . ." And the word home/hostel coming to mean dispossession, the exact opposite of its long history.' The ambiguity of the word "foyer"—whether it means "home" or "hostel" here—emphasizes the fluidity of language and its dependence on context and social usage. By focusing on language as in the examples above,



Bon's work highlights its social force and capacity to manipulate and divide. However, as we will now see, his more implicit linguistic and narrative strategies also contain social comment on use of language and text.

Bon mixes genres, producing infamously hybrid texts in order to highlight different representative modes. In 2007 Bon founded the collection "Déplacements" ('Displacements') with Seuil, which aimed to encourage the publication of unknown first-time authors and break down generic norms. His own texts mix the tropes and style of *récit* (an account—often used to refer to a non-fictional genre in France), poetry, novel, theatre, and interview. As Korthals Altes has shown, this work on genre speaks of the importance of "des manières de dire et de voir," 'ways of talking and seeing' in Bon's texts (71). The following example from *Daewoo* shows a mixture of *récit* and poetry in its use of concrete geographical information followed by a poetic image: "Mont-Saint-Martin c'est la périphérie immédiate de Longwy, une ville qui autrefois, quand les cheminées des usines remplissaient la nuit le ciel de leurs flammes orange, ne prenait pas assez soin d'elle, et maintenant paraît comme quelqu'un qui aurait maigri sans changer d'habit" (*Daewoo* 16) 'Mont-Saint-Martin is the immediate periphery of Longwy, a town whose factory chimneys, in the past, filled up the night sky with their orange flames, a town which has not taken enough care of itself and now seems like someone who has lost weight without changing clothes.' Bon draws attention to the banality of the surroundings and suggests the need for this hybrid form and an element of *récit* in addition to what might be considered a more "literary" style: "Le monde ici, avec l'autoroute d'un côté et les immeubles de l'autre, ne prête pas à poème, ni à la création de mondes fantastiques" (*Daewoo* 118-9) 'The world here, with the motorway on one side and the tower blocks on the other, doesn't lend itself to a poem or to the creation of fantasy worlds.' Certain parts of *Daewoo* are divided into sections like an encyclopedia. Bon uses a system of headings and descriptions to depict the strikes taking place all over France in one week of June 2003. These headings consist of the name of the industry involved followed by a short account of the dispute and the actions taken by the workers: "Textile. Les salariés de la Compagnie de développement textile de Wesserling, dans le Haut-Rhin, en liquidation depuis le 31 mars, brûlent une partie du stock de tissu de leur usine et menacent de la faire sauter pour obtenir indemnité de licenciement" (*Daewoo* 150-1) 'Textiles. The workers from the textile development company at Wesserling, in the Haut-Rhin, in liquidation since March 31, are burning some of the stock of material from their factory and are threatening to blow it up in order to get severance pay.' The reader is surprised to find the actions of the industrial strike, often emotive and dramatic events, reported here with such measure, precision, and control. The baldness of the presentation of facts in this section also contrasts with the subjectivity and perception surrounding this presentation and makes clear that modes of representation can alter how we see and feel about these social issues.

In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, Bon's deterritorialization of language takes the form of a refusal to normalize situations through choice of language;

rather, he makes the language strange so that its subjects cannot be packaged and judged. Indeed, while we recognize the social world he portrays, often we do not recognize the language with which he portrays it. The reader comes across fragments, limited accounts, multiple voices, ellipses, repetition, and delays. As Dominique Viart puts it, Bon's work effectively unmasks language to show us how language can hide its own power, its capacity to influence (*François Bon: écrire les fractures du monde*, 'Writing the World's Divisions' 130). Indeed, a close examination of Bon's use of syntax and rhythm shows that the representative relationship between signifier and signified no longer functions.

Jan Baetens has noted Bon's attention to "la chair des mots" 'the flesh of words' (31), while Gianfranco Rubino claims that Bon's style, "à la fois touffue et elliptique" 'simultaneously dense and elliptical,' delays the creation of a referent in the reader's mind (105). The referential connection between signifier and signified is stalled or interrupted. How does Bon achieve this? He often uses language to embody experience and emotion rather than simply describe it. In *Sortie d'usine*, the main character's horror at witnessing an industrial accident is expressed in the faltering representation of the thought process: "Comme, mais l'os et du rouge et" (*Sortie d'usine* 31) 'Like, but bone and red and.' Similarly, when he is plunging into depression, the language embodies his breakdown: "Vite parfois puis. Plus lentement et" (*Sortie d'usine* 139) 'Quickly sometimes then. More slowly and.' The protagonist's thought pattern is transcribed in its nascent, pre-logical state with the clumsiness left intact. In the same way, lists function to embody experience: "Et froter, forcer, battre, racler. On tapait et cognait, cela sifflait et craquait" (*Sortie d'usine* 81) 'And scrub, force, beat, scrape. We banged and thumped, it whistled and cracked.' Our understanding here of the monotony and physicality of the job depends less on the semantic meaning of the words and more on the rhythm which is produced as a result of the signifiers' positioning in relation to each other. Alternatively, in this example from *Le crime de Buzon*, rather than embodying events or experiences in language, Bon shows how our choice of language can alter our perception of a situation. Bon describes a fight scene between two prisoners in their tiny cell:

Alors je me retourne et je le prends. Je l'ai agrippé des deux mains et l'ai soulevé, c'était pas un gars fort, ses pieds dans le vide me talonnaient en débattant. Je l'ai plaqué contre moi, il ne pouvait plus rien faire, contre moi sa poitrine dans mes deux mains qui serrent le tissu; ma bouche contre la sienne, à deux centimètres, toute sa tête rejetée en arrière. Et le tissu craque, sa chemise en déchire.

Il m'échappe, du pied reprend appui, alors à distance de bras, j'avance, sa main dans la joue m'a saisi comme on voudrait froisser, sa paume racle, et me retournant le nez fait soudain venir les larmes, ma vue se brouille. Plus rien que ses ongles, qui en griffant approchent de

mon œil, le cherchent, s'enfoncent. Je le sentais, et c'était une rage froide, sans colère... (*Le crime de Buzon* 103)

So I turn around and I grab him. I gripped him with two hands and I picked him up, he wasn't a big guy, his feet in the air kicked at me in the struggle. I held him against me, he couldn't do anything, against me his chest in both my hands which were gripping the material; my mouth against his, two centimeters away, his head thrown backwards. And the material gives, his shirt tears.

He gets away from me, gets back on his feet, at arm's length, I go towards him, his hand grabs my cheek like he wanted to squeeze it, the palm of his hand scrapes down, and twisting my nose suddenly there are tears, and I can't see. Then nothing but his nails, which are getting near my eye as they scratch, look for it, dig into it. I felt it, and it was a cold rage, without anger.

What is remarkable in this scene is how slowly it seems to occur. Each action is carefully described, the narrative is broken up into paragraphs, a variety of tenses are employed giving a sense of different perspectives, and the very lengthy sentences are divided by commas and semi-colons. Bon also makes use of repetition to highlight the capacity of language to control perception. This surprising use of language means the reader is forced to pause and reflect. The message the brain receives is not simply “a fight in prison,” but rather, the stretched-out language, as well as the extreme detail in this account, forces the reader to look again, to avoid the snap judgments that “a fight in prison” might encourage, and take the time to consider the situation.

In *Prison* the author-narrator reports reading of the death of a former inmate and student, Brulin, three times: “Buffet de la gare Saint-Jean à Bordeaux, un mardi entre 17h50 et 19h40, dans la dispersion des tables et le peu de gens résistant aux courants d'air, devant une tasse de café froid et ressassant l'article de journal . . .” (*Prison* 23, 26, 28) ‘The station buffet at Saint-Jean in Bordeaux, a Tuesday between 5:50 and 7:40pm, among the scattered tables and the few people resisting the wind, a cold cup of coffee in front of me and going through the newspaper article again . . .’ The careful recording and repetition of where and when he read about Brulin's death serves to emphasize its importance to the narrator and challenge the reader's potentially dismissive attitude toward the death of an ex-prisoner and homeless drifter. Syntax again dictates our perception of events in *Sortie d'usine* when the setting up of a picket line is introduced in unexpectedly poetic terms:

Une perspective de parallèles: la façade, le rectangle de gazon, le trottoir, la route, une autre bande l'étroit parking puis très large le fleuve, trouble, laissant à nu la force agitée terreuse du courant, engoncée dans sa double rive de ciment. C'était en l'autre bord des bétons à l'infini, gris épais les picots des tours, la banlieue dont le jour pour lever semblait

se suffire de ces pans sombrement violets que les vents guidés par le fleuve vers l'amont, l'est au-delà des ponts, arrachaient à l'obscur. Le bitume trempé de pluie reflétait le fleuve comme d'en répéter la profondeur et les camions lançaient en passant des gerbes, on avait établi le piquet de grève. (*Sortie d'usine* 101)

A perspective of parallels: the facade, the rectangle of lawn, the sidewalk, the road, another band the narrow parking lot then the very wide river, murky, revealing the agitated earthy force of the current, scrunched up in its double bed of cement. On the other side there was concrete to the horizon, thick grey wedge-like towers, the suburbs where in order to rise the sun seemed to settle for the dark violet patches that the wind, guided upstream by the river, the east beyond the bridges, was tearing from darkness. The rain-soaked asphalt reflected the river as if repeating its depth and the trucks sprayed as they passed, the picket line had been set up.

The delay of the most important part of the paragraph until the very end allows it to linger in the reader's mind. The grandness of the form and the use of multiple complex sentences to describe the drab scene of concrete towers and rain-soaked tarmac make us alert to the use of language. In all these examples, meaning is created by the syntactic relations in the texts and the position and recurrence of words, in addition to their reference to something outside themselves. Syntax is made strange, and consequently, the representative function of language is disrupted. Bon manipulates and stretches language, fragments it, limits it, repeats it, slows it down. This use of language recalls Deleuze and Guattari's description of *littérature mineure*: "faire bégayer la langue, ou la faire 'piauler' . . . , tendre des tenseurs dans toute la langue, même écrite, et en tirer des cris, des clamés, des hauteurs, durées, timbres, accents, intensités" (*Mille Plateaux* 131) 'make language stammer, or make it "wail," stretch tensors through all of language, even written language, and draw from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities' (*A Thousand Plateaus* 115). Bon has said that "la séparation du signe et de l'image directe" 'the separation of the sign and the direct image' is something which will become normal practice in literature in the future (*Exercice* 116). Removing the direct signification of language means, as I have shown, that the reader's attention is instead drawn to the materiality of language itself, allowing a long-lasting communication with the reader on not only the situation being presented, but in addition, the nature and power of that language.

In conclusion, Bon's texts have both literary and social consequences. First, his style demonstrates the productive role of language and shows that it contributes to society's vision of itself. In these texts, language is shown to contribute to a society that judges, marginalizes, and criminalizes. The political instrumentality of Bon's texts is therefore located in his use of linguistic and textual strategies. In this work, language is not merely a tool or a medium with

which he presents a particular point of view; rather, it is both his message and his means. Bon's texts thus succeed in presenting the social and political world while harnessing the power of language to talk about itself. They reveal the power structures at play in language, and by extension, in the literary text. The representative relationship between text and reality is thus replaced in Bon's work with a relationship of interdependence and interaction, the binding of text and world in a relationship of mutual production evocative of Deleuze and Guattari's *agencement*. Considering Bon's work in this theoretical context encourages the reader to focus on its political potential and draws attention to the ways in which language functions to entrench marginality. Indeed, his work shows the impact of language and literature on the perception of social division. Bon makes his readers aware of how language positions and controls. As readers we are encouraged to see language, to hear language, to consider language, as the active, productive, and divisive tool that it is and consequently to think about the events presented to us differently: a fight in prison, a strike, factory work. As Viart has said of Bon's work: "on se met à *voir* la vie devant laquelle on passe sans regard" (*François Bon: écrire les fractures du monde* 130; emphasis in original) 'we start to *see* a life which we pass by without looking.' On reading Bon, the reader is left questioning, uncomfortable, unable to turn away, potentially contributing to a reassessment of social and political preconceptions.

#### Notes

1. See Sartre *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (*What is literature?*) and Barthes *Le degré zéro de la littérature* (*Writing Degree Zero*).
2. See Davis and Fallaize, Kemp.
3. See Clarke.
4. See *Le Tiers Livre* (*The Third Book*): <http://www.tierslivre.net/spip/spip.php?article4014>.
5. The epigraph to *Daewoo*, from Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, reads "Et là commençay à penser qu'il est bien vray ce que l'on dit, que la moitié du monde ne sçay comment l'autre vit" 'And I started to think that what people say is true, that half the world doesn't know how the other half lives,' clearly indicating the political division presented by Bon.
6. See also Di Iorio.
7. See Asholt, Gefen, Rubino, and Viart "François Bon éclats de réalité" ('Flashes of reality').

8. See Barthes "L'effet de réel" ("The reality effect").
9. The word "foyer" in French can mean both "young workers' hostel" and "household/home." I draw attention to this plural meaning in what follows.

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