



The Reconstruction of Space in *Paysage Fer* by François Bon*

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BORN in 1953 in Vendée, François Bon studied mechanical engineering at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art et Métiers. After working for several years in the aerospace and nuclear industries, he published his first novel *Sortie d'Usine*, at the age of twenty-nine. After continuing his studies in philosophy in 1980-1982, now he is recognized as a prolific writer whose corpus counts more than thirty works in different literary and artistic fields. He also organizes numerous creative writing workshops throughout France.

His personal website, *tierslivre.net*, contains a large number of his works in digital format, as well as his debates, lectures, conferences, etc. He maintains that his literary works are articulated on three concepts: *to express himself*, *to discover himself*, and *to leave himself*. Focusing on a neutral view of the modern world and refraining from any judgments, Bon produces through his work a world permeated all over the daily and real-life of ordinary citizens of contemporary cities. The essence of these urban experiences implemented by Bon, is the experience of workers, employees, and engineers who are supposed to make work trips among different cities and of which Bon speaks, first of all, in *Sortie d'Usine* (1982) (Factory Exit) and then in *Paysage fer* (2000) (*Fleeting Frame*) and *Daewoo* (2004).

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Published in 2000, *Paysage fer* is based on the diurnal sequence of the life of an engineer who, given his work, takes an every-day journey by the railway. In this book, we confront an autodiegetic narrator who follows the tracks of a dream; that of the railway. Living in interdependence and interaction with space, the narrator seeks to discover it; he inhabits the space that surrounds him and is not indifferent to the environment that he perceives through the windows, the doors of the train, or the space he occupies each time in the same compartment. This narrator, about whose privacy we know almost nothing, observes throughout his travels a world that appears to him anew and strives to rebuild it. He peacefully welcomes the world, which appears to him on the railroads and lives an interaction with the world surrounding him, while creating an inner country and rejecting any relationship with others. He thus tells a linear narrative in which the reader does not encounter any adventure or accident. In other words, it is a kind of inner monologue in which the narrator-observer expresses to the reader his thoughts, feelings, and positions on the world of iron and concrete that encircles him. Along this journey, the narrator captures from this ironed world, another world that is based on his relationship with both the sensory and the tangible, and transforms daily life into an experience renewed each day.

Taking into account this remarkable and sensitive experience, we strive to trace the "landscape" that was born in this interaction with the surrounding world, in line with the principles set out by Michel Collot in his book, *Pensée-Paysage* (2011). The notion of landscape proposes, according to Collot, the image of an expanse of the country seen by an observer, a mental construction, a representation, a real "subjective". Using the concept of the simultaneous presence of the world and the subject, it is a perfect manifestation of what Husserl calls "the lived body": "Leib". This body that contradicts "the physical body": "körper", can design its own space. Articulating the near and the far, the visible and the invisible, the inside and the outside, this vertical body intersects the horizon line that allows him to structure the landscape. Moreover, Michel Collot affirms that a city becomes a landscape as soon as it is perceived by a subject as inserted in his environment and forming with him a whole, whose sensitive coherence has a sense. This urban landscape entails the images illuminating desires, fears, hatreds, loves, joys, and sorrows of the citizens who seek there a way of life and a form of organization. It is based on these thoughts that in this paper we attempt to identify two fundamental concepts in *Paysage Fer*, namely the "relationship with the sensitive world" and the "word crafting".

Here questions such as the following may arise: How the links among space, the narrator-observer, and the world are shaped? How do space and

landscape appear to the narrator? How a world marked by monotony, industry, and mechanized system is transformed, in the narrator's view, into a landscape that is renewed at every moment?

In fact, the narrator discovers the urban landscape in relation to its location in two different spaces, the first of which is the train and the interior space of the wagons and the second is the outer space of the city and the factories where he walks through once he gets off the train. Present work focuses on the images of cities that are perceived by the windows and are assembled into or complement each other as different parts of a puzzle. Each of these images that reflects a part of an industrial world dominated by the grey color of concrete, cement, and iron, gradually produces a personal space reverberated in all the experiences of the city's narrator, in all his memories, and all his knowledge of geography and history. Thus, he creates his personal and unique geography throughout the narrative and draws an inner country that does not appear on any official map. Certainly, this inner country stems from the conception of a landscape, in the proper sense of the term, in the work, that is born once the body of the narrator meets the horizon line. In *Paysage Fer*, seeking to discover the landscape and thereby, reconciling with the world, the narrator initially perceives the world through his five senses. Then, he cultivates this perception and removes its defects through his imagination and memories. Eventually, he creates a landscape that is rooted in his feelings of the world, a landscape that unfolds as the train moves, and the narration proceeds. In truth, it is the landscape that while standing on the page and paper, offers a specific view of the contemporary city. The narrator perceives the city and all its characteristics such as repetition, monotony, and lack of nature, by heart. The creation of this landscape gives rise to the steady formation of a unique, inner, and subjective geography that is unraveled in the text and reflects ideas such as "sentiment-paysage" (landscape feeling), "pensée-paysage" (landscape thinking), and "page-paysage" (landscape page).

Keywords— François Bon, Literary landscape, Michel Collot, *Paysage Fer*, *Pensée-paysage*.

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