

## ***LIMITE* unbound**

François Bon's digitalized fiction and the reinvention of the book

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### **Abstract**

Since 2005, François Bon, who began his literary career in the 1980s as a novelist, has gradually shifted the focus of his work onto his now all-encompassing web-based literary and multimedia oeuvre, tierslivre.net. As part of this transition from paper to web, Bon returned to his printed books to showcase them digitally. Most notably, in 2010 he undertook to retype his second novel, *Limite* (1985), to publish it in the form of a blog, prefacing each passage with an autobiographical and critical commentary. Once completed, he reedited the full commented text as an e-book. This article argues that even though all three versions have the same narrative at their core, each stage of this project offers something different to the reader and suggests a different focus and conception of literature. Together they illustrate that the shifts between media change the reading experience even without exploiting much of the potential for hyperlinking and interactivity, and that before and beyond all the possible narrative experiments it enables, the digital transition means for literature a move away from the logic of the book towards the 'logic of the project'.

**Keywords:** François Bon, digital transition, e-book, electronic literature, *Limite*, literature on the web, project, reader experience, rewriting, *Le Tiers Livre*

As of July 2016, the shortest version of François Bon's autobiographical notice on his website *Le Tiers Livre* [The Third Book] reads: 'Fut.' ['Was'] (Bon 3569).<sup>1</sup> The verb is

hyperlinked to the front page of the site, directly identifying the author with his virtual writerly empire. It is only in the longer versions of this ‘bio’ that he mentions the printed books that preceded the site. Bon began his writing career in 1982 as a novelist with *Sortie d’usine* [*Leaving the Factory*] (Paris: Minuit), created his first website in 1997, and has since transferred all his activity onto his constantly evolving and expanding virtual *Le Tiers Livre*, which is now also home to his one-man e-publisher, Tiers Livre Éditeur. *Limite* (Paris: Minuit, 1985) was his second novel, which he undertook to retype manually in 2010, publishing it as a series on tierslivre.net as he progressed (Bon 2242), changing very little but prefacing every passage with an autobiographical commentary on its genesis and content. When the annotated digital series was completed, he published the whole as an e-book, now available from the catalogue of Tiers Livre Éditeur.

*LIMITE*,<sup>2</sup> as a project now encompassing three versions, stands out among Bon’s experiments on the web and in the French digital literary landscape in several respects. First, rather than simply moving from the web to a book or from a book to the web, the novel has journeyed from a book through the web to an e-book,<sup>3</sup> and then back again to the book, but of a different kind, with the print-on-demand option launched in June 2016, after the completion of this article. As such, it also offers a complete small-scale image of Bon’s overall journey and transitions. Second, it combines two distinct and distant modes of engagement with (re)writing: on the one hand, the physical gesture of recopying an entire book in a different medium or surface, and the authorial self-commentary on the other. Third and perhaps most importantly in the context of the present collection of articles, it shows that literature’s active and creative engagement with digital technology does not need to involve either innovative narrative techniques or experimentation with modes of human-machine interactivity in order for it to manifest a logic fundamentally different from the one associated with the printed book.

Hayles (2008: 3) quotes the definition of ‘electronic literature’ proposed by the Electronic Literature Organization: ‘work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer’, noting that ‘this definition raises questions about which capabilities and contexts of the computer are significant’. She distinguishes between ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’ works based precisely on the exploited ‘capabilities’ of the technologies available to them. The former, up until around 1995, were innovative thanks to the use of the hypertext link, but still working with ‘blocks of text’, while the latter ‘make much fuller use of the multimodal capabilities of the Web’ with ‘a wide variety of navigation schemes’ (Hayles 2008: 6–7). The focus of Hayles’s study on ‘electronic literature’ is on stand-alone fictional works, and the possibility of an entire literary *oeuvre* being produced in the digital environment as an organically digital product of literary authorship, or literary product of digital authorship, falls outside her perspective, as it does for much scholarship on the subject.

This is, however, where François Bon’s primary interest lies. Rather than expanding literature by producing new forms of narrative or poetry enabled by technology, Bon explores the potential that has always been present in literature and writing but which technology allows us to make more visible and accessible in its immediacy and processuality. Accordingly, ‘electronic’ or ‘digital’ does not simply dictate the logic of the individual work, but the approach to writing, literature, and authorship more generally, and all that that means for the reader. In this respect, *LIMITE* is representative of Bon’s active advocacy of the need for literary authors to embrace new technologies and the advantages such progress can offer.

In this spirit and with all these features, rather than simply a book, *LIMITE* is a ‘project’ and part of a larger project or series of projects, both in the sense in which Bon (2016c) himself uses the term to explain the digital transition in literature, where the logic of

the book is replaced by the logic of the project, and in the sense elaborated by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham (2005: 1) as a ‘cultural practice’ involving

setting up experiments, taking soundings, carrying out sets of instructions or sticking to carefully elaborated programmes. The ‘work’ made available to the reader/viewer is ... an account of the conduct of the project or experiment, the record or trace of its success or failure, its consistency with or deviation from its initial premises.

While the commented complete re-edition of the novel on the web has been noted and analysed by Gilles Bonnet (2014, 2015), the publication of the e-book did not attract much attention and Bonnet himself mentions it only in passing, identifying it with the online version. Yet this transfer is not without implications: the logic of the e-book is not the same as that of a website. It creates a different context and facilitates different modes of reading, inviting the media-specific analysis advocated by Hayles (2004). The particularity of the mobile e-reading device has recently begun to be considered distinct from the computer screen, with its specific implications for reading and opportunities for creative practice (Guilet and Pelard 2016). Alexandra Saemmer (2015) has elaborated on how texts anticipate specific modes of reading and how the rhetoric of digital texts differs from other forms of textual existence. Differences can be observed not only in the transition from paper to digital, but also between two modes of digital existence, the web (blog or website) and the e-book, as the case of *LIMITE* will show.

In addition to the semantic and rhetorical features examined by Saemmer in relation to the medium and the reader expectations they can generate, the e-book also lends itself to a different framing in terms of genre and status. In *LIMITE*, the generic and editorial framing of the text changes with the e-book, partly encouraged by the medium and partly taking

advantage of the opportunity offered by the different medium to propose a yet again modified version. The reframing thus concerns not only the material conditions of reading but also the work's inscription into existing social and cultural practices, the changes in which, as frame theory (Goffman 1974) and the pragmatic genre and fiction theories inspired by it (Nielsen et al. 2015; Schaeffer 1989, 1999) have demonstrated, affect the reading.

The transmedial metamorphoses of this book, which is no longer a book, touches on key questions literature faces in the Digital Age: the status of the text and its relation to what surrounds it; its instability, extensibility, and the limits of its identity; the role of the author; the author's relationship to the reader; the new modes of reading, including the new 'pacts' the text offers to the reader, and their impact on the reception. Lurking behind these is the big question of the life or death of books and literature in the digitally networked society. Alexandre Gefen (2015) observes a sharp opposition in this respect between the Anglophone optimism about the continuing love of literature and the francophone discourse decrying the end of literature. The apocalyptic spirit has indeed been thriving on the challenges digitization undeniably poses to print culture and sustained reading. Alain Finkielkraut (2001, 2015), Cédric Biagini and Guillaume Carnino (2007) have been the loudest and most persistent among the French voices, but the American Nicholas Carr (2010) has reached farther, setting the balance straight. Gefen (2009) reminds us that the French catastrophism did not need the Internet to see disaster and has a long tradition, which he traces back to the seventeenth century, and we can add that the positive approach also remains well represented today. François Bon is the most prominent figure in the camp of those who, without denying the challenges technology poses to the traditional forms of textuality associated with literary quality, see in the digital revolution an exciting opportunity for creative writerly practice and active engagement with texts, both as a writer and as a reader, including the fading of the separation between these roles.

The case of *LIMITE* provides an insight into how Bon conceives of using this opportunity to refresh our image of the text and reinvent the book. This article examines the way in which this happens through the transitions of a literary work from print to web and then from web to e-book. The analysis of the particularities of the medium and the authorial modifications in the framing of the text as well as in its content from one version to another will highlight the shifting place of the work within the author's oeuvre and the broader context of the culture as an ecosystem, the impact of these on the text's status in terms of fictionality and literariness, the implied conception of literature, and the role attributed to the reader. In all this, it is ultimately the concept of the book that is at stake, and the three versions of *LIMITE* and the project as an open whole show a successful example of how they can coexist and complement one another.

### ***Limite*, the book**

*Limite* is composed of the inner voices of four young men in late-1970s France: Joël, the guitarist; Alain, the industrial designer; Joly, the factory worker and footballer; and Yves, who is unemployed. We see each of their perspectives in turns, following their respective streams of consciousness mixing present, past, and dreams, thinking about their own life and each other, and about Monique, who is their shared point of reference as a friend and/or a lover, past, present, or only coveted. The flux of these interior monologues, only interrupted by switches between the voices, revolves around a fracture present in each life, except perhaps for the musician: Alain suffers from Monique leaving him and his joyless work routine; Joly's marriage is poisoned by his wife's awareness of his adventure with Monique; and Yves is trapped in the vegetative state of unemployment. Monique's abortion and Yves's attempted suicide linger in the background in an obscure zone between the implicit and not-yet-happened and materialize for the reader only at the end of the novel. As a reviewer sums

up: '[s]traightforward, sad, depressing, distressing, *Limite* sets no new limits, breaks no bounds, but gives a cold picture of a cold reality' (Greenberg 1986: 446).

With its clear distribution of characters across a range of working-class social situations and life-like spoken register on the one hand, and the fluid temporality and movements between realms and consciousnesses on the other, the novel suggests a double interest in a critical, society-oriented realism and in the modernism-inspired writing of the Nouveau Roman [New Novel] with Nathalie Sarraute. Despite his great admiration for Balzac, Bon refuses the former when it comes to his own writing, but affirms the latter. In *Limite*, just as in Bon's other novels from *Sortie d'usine* through his series of factory stories to *Daewoo* (Fayard, 2004), the world presents itself as a tough social and economic reality, and the image of post-1975 France, losing stamina after the *Trente Glorieuses* of post-war reconstruction and recovery, underpins the lack of perspectives expressed and embodied by the characters. Yet Bon's interest in lived reality is not motivated by the ambition of recording the splendours and miseries of French society. Instead, as Viart puts it (2008: 13), '[t]rouver comment, aujourd'hui, écrire le réel' ['finding how to write the real today'] is the first and persisting preoccupation of his work, which Gefen (2010: 101) characterizes as a 'littérature redevenue transitive' ['literature that has become transitive again'], after the *Nouveau Roman*'s alleged turn away from reality from the 1950s on and Barthes' (1984) programme-setting concept of intransitive writing. Gefen (2010: 94, 97) speaks about a 'non-representational', 'empirical', and 'ontological realism' in Bon's case.

Rather than the representation of life in society, it is a deeper contact with the real as a quality and as a realm that Bon is seeking through writing, in this novel as well as throughout his later work. He is intrigued by writing's ability to *touch* reality in both senses, to palpate the pulse of the world with language and to talk to the world about the world through the power of language: 'qu'est-ce que ça me plaît, on y va avec les mains et on touche, on touche

le monde, on touche avec les mains et on touche avec la langue’ [‘how much I like that, you go at it with your hands and touch, touch the world, you touch it with your hands and your tongue/language’],<sup>4</sup> he enthuses over Giorgio Manganelli’s writing in a video lecture (2015b). Ruth Holzberg-Namad (1987: 424) accordingly calls Bon’s writing in *Limite* ‘visceral’ and Mahigan Lepage titles his 2010 thesis on Bon ‘la fabrique du présent’ [‘the construction of the present’]. Ultimately, ‘[l]a réalité, pour l’auteur, c’est la langue’ [‘reality, for the author, is language’] (Bon 3621): it is through language that he reaches and creates reality. In this spirit, defying the negative Baudriallardian discourse on hyperreality and the advent of simulacra, Bon’s interest in the web is rooted in the more fluid, malleable, dispersed and immediate contact with the real, between language and reality, and between texts and people that it enables.

### **Beyond the book: From the novel to the networked novel of the novel**

Bon (2011: 64) explains the purpose of his website, *Le Tiers Livre*, ‘[I]l ne s’agit plus seulement d’une médiation du livre via le réseau, mais d’une présence tierce du livre, un livre à côté des livres’ [‘this is no longer simply about the mediation of the book through the web, but a third mode of presence of the book, a book beside the books’]. Alison James (2011) provides an overview of Bon’s transition from print publishing to the web in terms of an extension of the domain of writing and reading. This new, virtual literary space has indeed come to dictate the very logic of Bon’s writing, as he notes: ‘[c]’est de moins en moins facile pour moi d’écrire pour ailleurs que ce site, et *dans la logique même de développement de ce site*’ [‘it is less and less easy for me to write for anywhere other than this site, and *following the very logic of the development of this site*’] (4109, my emphasis). The double embeddedness of each new piece of writing into the inner network of tierslivre.net and in the World Wide Web brings a new ‘façon d’organiser la pensée, par plaques et nappes, par

conjunctions et superpositions, et non plus enchaînement' ['mode of organizing thought, in panes and layers, by conjunction and superposition, rather than sequentially'], Bon (4224) explains, adding a note on the consequences: 'Ne pas être surpris si le discours en est quelque peu affecté' ['Do not be surprised if the discourse is somewhat affected by it']. Emphasizing the impact of the digital on Bon's writing, Bonnet (2015) goes so far as to call him an 'écranvain' (from 'écran' ['screen'] and 'écrivain' ['writer']) – though it is not so much the screen but the network that is responsible for the radical change. Were it not impossible to pronounce, 'wwriter' would seem a more suitable term.

In addition to changing the logic of the individual work and from production to publication, the web environment also impacts on the concept of the *oeuvre* as a whole. René Audet and Simon Brousseau (2011: 10) observe that moving online involves:

un double mouvement de diffraction des contenus et d'accumulation archivistique, mouvement qui vient ainsi estomper l'identité propre de chacun des projets littéraires et artistiques au profit d'une saisie stratifiée et réticulée d'une œuvre-archive profondément mosaïquée.

[a double movement of diffraction of the contents and archival accumulation, a movement which thus comes to blur the identity of each literary and artistic project in favour of a stratified and reticulated capture producing a truly mosaic-like work-archive.]

*Le Tiers Livre* as an extensive and intensive literary and multimedia website is characterized by the proliferation of small-scale writing that often engages with the present and inscribes itself in fluxes running across the web, developing simultaneously on a variety of

interconnected threads, each with their own rhythm. The hypermedia environment in which all this is embedded encourages adventuring beyond textuality, which Bon has engaged in first through photography and now increasingly with his video series,<sup>5</sup> including a regular video blog, readings, and ‘service de presse’, a review of the books received, and active participation in social networks, so that *Le Tiers Livre* is constantly approaching the ‘œuvre totale fantasmée’ [‘dream of a total work of art’] that Florence Thérond (2015) perceives behind it.

Bon’s (hyper) active involvement with the web also means that he ‘réinterroge les livres depuis le web’ [‘re-examines books through the web’] (4224), including the books of others as well as his own. The ‘Publications’ section of *Le Tiers Livre* (Bon 27) offers commentaries on, excerpts from, and manuscript reproductions of, his literature published previously in print. Anaïs Guilet (2015) calls Bon a ‘ré-écrivain’ [‘re-writer’] because ‘il reprend sans cesse ses propres textes: il les corrige, les complète, les remédiate dans un travail de reconfiguration permanent’ [‘he repeatedly returns to his own texts: he corrects, completes, remediates them in a constant effort of reconfiguration’]. Migrating his work has required a systematic rereading and re-evaluation of those works, which has given the books a presence in Bon’s digital literary space and integrated them into its semantic network.

The post-book work on *Limite* inscribes itself into this integrative and reflective re-visitation of his novels. Bon presents the 2010 project in the following terms:

**Limite, Minuit, 1985 & roman de Limite**

*republiation numérique révisée de mon 2ème livre, Limite (éditions de Minuit, 1985), avec commentaires et making-of*

**Limite, Minuit, 1985: la reprise numérique comme réécriture**

En septembre 2010, j’entame la recopie manuelle de *Limite*, mon 2ème livre, commencé à Marseille en 1983, terminé à la Villa Médicis l’hiver 1984–1985.

L’idée: à mesure que je revisite ces strates très anciennes de mon travail, mener une réflexion sur les sources autobiographiques, les formes littéraires convoquées, et le travail lui-même.

L’idée – confirmée à mesure de la réalisation: un livre numérique complet en ligne, composé de deux couches superposées – le texte réécrit (peu), et le commentaire qui vient s’associer à chaque section. (2242)

### **[Limit, Minuit 1985 & novel of Limite**

*revised digital re-edition of my second book, Limite (Minuit, 1985), with commentaries and making of*

### **Limit, Minuit 1985: the digitalization as rewriting**

In September 2010, I begin to manually retype *Limit*, my second novel, started in Marseille in 1983 and completed at the Villa Medici in the winter of 1984–1985.

The idea: as I am revisiting these very old layers of my work, reflect on the autobiographical sources, the literary forms present, and the work itself.

The idea – confirmed as the project progressed: a complete digital book online, comprising two superposed layers – the (lightly) rewritten text, and the commentary which accompanies each section.]

The undertaking seems to begin as a ‘geste éditorial’ [‘editorial gesture’] (Bonnet 2015): the first and only edition of the original novel is out of print, posing a problem of accessibility which, as Théron (2015: 7) notes, is an important motivation for Bon, always keen to ‘promouvoir un modèle de rencontre entre auteurs et lecteurs’ [‘promote a model of

encounter between authors and readers’]. Moreover, Bon emphasizes the importance of searching occurrences as a question-led inquisitive reading, made possible by electronic editions. *Working* with texts and a much richer reception are facilitated by the digital, an indispensable tool for the writer and the literary critic in particular (Bon 4224).

Yet the editorial aim and accessibility issue do not explain the trouble Bon goes to with the actual reproduction. Rather than simply scanning the book, he prefers the labour-intensive and long-term, periodically immersive task of ‘manual recopying’. The tools and the medium have changed – ‘[l]e geste littéraire, alors, est-il différent?’ [‘so, is the literary gesture different?’], Bon wonders (2240). The affirmative answer transpires from his attention to the process, and it is precisely the metamorphoses of the literary gesture that is at the heart of Bon’s interest in the inter- and transmedial movements of texts. The recopying evokes the almost trans-inducing copying projects that pay homage to an author, as does the artist Jean-Christophe Norman (Bon 1869), who reproduces long novels on walls and streets, or Hungarian author Péter Esterházy, who transcribed Géza Ottlik’s 500-page *School at the Frontier* on a single sheet of paper as a birthday present for the writer he considered his master. Referring to Norman, Patrice Joly (no date) argues that re-writing is ‘contrary to nature for a writer’ and might speak about their crisis, but that it ‘may ... be understood as much as a sacrilege as an act of deference compounded by humility’, comparable to ‘the selflessness of those monastic copyists and transcribers’, whose work ‘verges on heroism’. He also points out the paradoxical nature of the gesture, since the recopying actually makes the text unreadable. Esterházy (no date) notes the resulting ‘oedipal overtone’ of the act, which makes it ‘a bit of a parricide’. While Bon recopies his own novel with a different purpose and produces a legible text, the temporal distance, Bon’s long journey as an author that separates the two texts, and the importance this gesture attributes to the book, associates *L2* with these transformative transcription projects.

At the same time, the close engagement with the text which, for Esterházy, the necessary immersion entails is something Bon admittedly seeks. This aspect of the undertaking is reminiscent of the authors who perfected their texts through obsessive rewriting, as Bon (1869) reminds us of Flaubert. The intensity of this mode of engagement makes the descent into the different layers of the text with its various contexts across time and the reflections on them almost inevitable. The reflexivity of the product is thus inscribed in the very gesture, which in this perspective seems more a literary than an editorial one. Just as one can never step twice in the same river, it is also impossible to write the same thing twice, even by copying it. If Pierre Ménard's *Don Quixote* is not the same as Cervantes's, François Bon's *Limite* (L1) and *Limite et roman de Limite* [*Limit and the novel of Limit*] (L2) could not be the same even if the first had been transcribed without any change.

There are nonetheless a number of actual modifications with further important consequences: (1) the change of medium that restructures the text by offering it in a series of passages of varying lengths published in separate articles (blogposts) and enables hyperlinks; (2) the commentaries introducing each passage; and (3) small but sometimes highly significant modifications in the body of the recopied text. The result of these is that reading L2 is an entirely different experience to reading L1.

The combination of (1) and (2), which affects both the inner structure and the outer limits of the text, with implications for its reading and its status in terms of autonomy, results in what Bonnet (2014: 33) has theorized under the concept of *hypérite* [hyperitext]:

l'hypérite désigne en réalité une modalité neuve, car dynamique, d'appréhension du rapport du texte à son paratexte, et se définit comme l'assimilation par le pélite de tout épélite, au sein d'un *hypertexte*, entendu à la fois au sens de la transtextualité genettienne et de la publication Web d'un texte s'offrant à la navigation.

[hyperitext refers in reality to a new, dynamic modality of the understanding of the relationship between text and paratext, and it can be defined as the assimilation of all the epitexts into the peritext in the form of *hyperitext*, referring both to the Genettian sense of transtextuality and the online publication of a text that lends itself to browsing.]

The hyperlinks, which represent ‘multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality’ (Landow 2006: 2), create a direct connection to the rest of *Le Tiers Livre* and the web beyond it, making it all a cotext of the ‘book’ and inviting ‘un parcours potentiellement infini’ [‘a potentially endless journey’] (Bonnet 2014: 32), which can begin anywhere on the web and lead through the text without keeping the reader in the territory of *L2* longer than a few minutes and making them encounter more than one passage. The text placed in the network thus loses the material unity of the physical book, becoming part of a reader’s journey which weaves a mental text following the logic of their points of interest and the links offered across the web, rather than a logic proposed by any single author or work. Decentring and rhizomatic structure are indeed two crucial features Landow (2006: 56–62) associates with hypertextuality. Renouncing the sacred status of the work’s structure as a self-sufficient entity with a core is the price to pay for opening up to the web and entering the flux, which at the same time brings more readers to the text, who might want to stay longer.

On the other hand, the internal links to other regions of *Le Tiers Livre* reinforce the coherence of the author’s work as a whole, readily available around any point of *L2* where the reader – or rather the ‘internaute’ [‘internaut’], as the fitting French term has it, the sailing-navigating user of the internet – might land. As Bonnet (2014: 30) observes, the

‘porosity’ of the hyperitext amounts to a ‘contestation en acte de la notion même de livre, comme objet clos’ [‘the active contestation of the very concept of the book as closed object’]. Yet by the same token, it affirms the unity of the author’s *oeuvre* as a whole in its digital existence, as a literary space shaped by him. The fact that every single page of *L2* is headed by the same banner of *Le Tiers Livre* is the clearest statement of the text’s integration into the author’s digital work-universe. If the logic of the book is contested, the logic of the *oeuvre* is reinstated. Except that rather than the author’s name, it is the title of the website that now signals this unity. Ironically, that title, inspired by Rabelais’s *Tiers livre des faictz et dictz heroïques du noble Pantagruel* [*The Third Book*] (1546), contains the word ‘book’. Bon (2011: 64) has noted that this word, associated with the logic the site proposes as an alternative, now seems to misrepresent his work. It is remarkable, however, that even in the above-cited description of the project, Bon calls the result ‘a complete online electronic *book*’ (my emphasis). The term continues to impose itself even when the gesture implies precisely the superseding of the logic of the book. With all the terminological innovations critics and authors are attempting to introduce, the most basic vocabulary to speak about modes and forms of textuality in the digitally networked environment is still to be invented, or the old terms opened up to new interpretations.

The commentaries added to the passages and their framing show further tensions and raise questions as to their nature and the nature of the entire online text. First, Bon calls the newly added part ‘roman *de Limite*’ [‘the novel of *Limit*’]. The generic label is especially striking in light of Bon’s repeatedly expressed aversion towards the novel, which he qualifies one of the ‘mots les plus dangereux’ [‘most dangerous words’] (3621). In an often-cited text from 1998, he explains:

Non, plus de roman jamais, mais cueillir à la croûte dure ces éclats qui débordent et résistent, non plus d'histoire que ces bribes qu'eux-mêmes portent et comme avec douleur remuent sans s'en débarrasser jamais, plus de tableau qui unifie et assemble, mais dans le dispositif noir laisser résonner les linéaments dispersés d'images et de sons. (67)

[No, no novel ever again, but gathering those resistant shards sticking out from the hard crust; no more story either, only those scraps which they themselves carry and seemingly painfully stir up, without ever getting rid of them; no picture to unify and piece things together, but allowing scattered outlines of images and sounds to resonate in the darkness.]

In 1994 Bon abandoned the novel for a decade, but the label reappears on the cover page of *Daewoo* and *Tumulte* (Fayard, 2006), even though neither of these looks like what one normally expects from a novel, and suggests that the aim is, as Benjamin Renaud (2007) observes, 'retrouver [le récit et la fiction] en les débarrassant de ce qui est devenu une carcasse inerte' ['to rediscover (narrative and fiction) by ridding them of all that has become an inert carcass'] in the twentieth century. The reappearance of the label can be interpreted as a reversal, a re-appropriation or extension of the term for the 'récit web' ['web-based narrative'], in line with Bon's programmatic invitation:

Apprendre à constituer symboliquement ces séries et développements à temps différenciés dans la même unité de valeur que le *roman* linéaire qui bénéficie de toutes les prescriptions d'une presse vieillissante et d'une université figée. (4224)

[Learn to symbolically constitute these variously paced series and developments in the same units as the linear *novel* that benefits from all the prescriptions of an ageing press and a fossilized academia.]

In this light, the generic label appears to aim to define the place of the project within the logic of the book industry: updating the meaning of the term on the one hand, and identifying the project with a well-established category on the other.

For the reader coming to the text in a less theory-focused mindset, ‘novel’ continues to associate fictionality and the idea of a full, round story. The genre indication ‘structure la lecture’ [‘structures reading’] in line with the relevant conventions, as Schaeffer (1989: 199) observes, is part of the guidance the author provides for the reader (Jauss 1982: 22). Fictionality, in Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh’s dynamic approach (2015: 66), is ‘[f]rom the perspective of the receiver [...] an interpretive assumption about a sender’s communicative act’, implying that it ‘neither refers to actual states of affairs nor tries to deceive its audience about such states. Instead it overtly invents or imagines states of affairs’ (ibid.: 63). Yet in the prefatory note following this title Bon describes the commentaries as a ‘*reflection on the autobiographical sources, the literary forms summoned up, and the work itself*’ (my emphasis). Such content, reminiscent of Gasparini’s (2008: 315) category of the ‘auto-essai’, resembles the conventions of critical commentary or ‘secondary’ literature, both in the chronological and in the epistemological sense: post- and meta-writing that happens *after* and *about* the ‘primary’ literature. The generic label is clearly at odds with this description and the two prescribed modes of reading which are in tension with one another. ‘*On est entrés dans une zone de chocs*’ [‘we have entered a shock zone’], as Renaud (2007) notes (author’s emphasis).

From the perspective of Bon’s overall work and authorial image, however, this is more

than a simple twisting of the reader's mind and is best understood in its political dimension. In addition to the pragmatic and economic questions of the relationship between author, reader, publisher, and market(ing), the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory indications regarding the factuality or fictionality of the commentaries can be read as a statement about the relationship between literature, language, and the real, in which experience and invention are inextricably intertwined, though not necessarily at the expense of authenticity – and as the contestation of an easy opposition between fictional and factual writing. As Nielsen et al. (2015: 63) also note, 'fictive discourse is not ultimately a means of constructing scenarios that are cut off from the actual world but rather a means for negotiating an engagement with that world'. Bon confirms these tight links and his understanding of the hybridity of the novel in *Tumulte*: 'un livre fait de ces chemins accumulés, un défrichement imprévu, soumis à la friction du monde et des jours. Est-ce que ce n'est pas aussi tout cela, le roman?' ['a book made of these accumulated paths, an unexpected clearing subjected to the friction of time and the world. Isn't the novel also all of this?'] (2006: 7).

Secondly, since the author decided to place the commentaries *before* each retyped passage, the focus of the reader's attention is in the new version redirected from the 'primary' text to the 'secondary', from the first novel to the second. Rather than just inviting the re-reading of the first text, perhaps offering a revised version, he thus emphasizes the process and context of writing, which are the subject of the commentaries. 'Le carnet de travail appartient aussi au projet' ['the working notes also belong to the project'], Bon wrote already in *Tumulte* (2006: 515). He sees in this approach a characteristic development of contemporary literature: 'C'est une des dimensions essentielles de la littérature depuis quelques décennies d'avoir à avancer en nommant son propre procès de création, quitte à une épreuve supplémentaire, à des mises en abyme forcément vertigineuses, et à une épure bien plus brutale des contenus' ['It has been one of the crucial missions of literature for a few

decades to progress by naming its own creative processes, ready to face the additional challenge, the inevitably dizzying *mises en abyme*, and a much rougher outline of the contents'] (2005: 313). The process is consubstantial with the product, or even its very essence, just as for Proust, Gide, the New Novelists, Laporte, Gracq, Roubaud, and for the 'project' as conceptualized by Gratton and Sheringham (2005). Allowing the reader easy and immediate 'accès au chantier' [access to the construction site] (Thérond 2015) is accordingly one of the major motivations behind Bon's enthusiasm for the dynamic web environment that facilitates it. In the case of *Limite*, however, twenty-five years separate the novel and the *post hoc* (re)constructed 'chantier' we get access to. In reaction to Bon's introductory reflections in *L2*, a commenter posted the image of an 'objectif à bascule et décentrement' ['perspective control lens'] (2242), which he suggests might be a suitable metaphor to grasp this digital rereading of the novel. The French name for this device felicitously combines three key notions that are in play: the question of objectivity and factuality; the 'bascule', which is also the term often used to refer to Bon's digital transition, and decentring, which is both structural, with the above discussed hypertextualization, and semantic, with the shift of focus to the commentaries.

The commentaries that constitute the '*novel of Limite*' are as much a fragmented autobiography of the author as a biography of the novel – an 'autoblographie' (Bonnet 2015). They recount 'real-life experiences' that inspired different characters and their thoughts: working as an industrial designer, the infatuation with Rock music, the bullying in the boarding school, military service, and so on. The 'same' stories are thus told twice – or rather, the same events are proposed in two versions – in the 'deux couches superposées' ['two superposed layers'] as the commentaries tell the 'real' events that inspired some of *L1*'s plot, which is then presented as their fictionalized retelling. The question arises: can the fiction, which could be seen as the 'original', 'authentic', and properly 'literary' text, as

opposed to its later autobiographical and critical extension, outweigh the power of factuality and authenticity associated with the latter, so that the whole maintains the status of a literary enterprise rather than a merely curatorial or critical one? If it cannot, is a balance between the two possible? And if not, does that not mean that the account of the process takes precedence over the product thus undermining the integration and consubstantiality of the two? Raising these questions can also be understood as an authorial gesture that targets precisely the conventional interpretation of the concepts of originality, authenticity, and literariness, and calls for opening them up to allow for a more complex dynamics of the life and identity of the text. Thus the disruption of the fiction–fact binary as an evaluative pair implied in the contradictory paratextual indications is doubled with the questioning of a series of other value-laden notions traditionally associated with book culture in an all too static fashion.

There remains a third point of divergence I mentioned between *L1* and *L2*: Bon slightly retouched the text while copying it. Bonnet's (2014) thorough review of the differences highlights that the orientation of the modifications is consistent in making the text more explicit, summing up allusive sequences with a brief clarification, and explaining certain cultural and linguistic peculiarities that may no longer be familiar to today's reader. In short, the additions make the text more accessible and the reader's work easier. This entails filling some of the spaces in which the semantic dynamics of the literary text deploys its productive potential and which make the text 'writable' by the reader in the Barthesian sense. If, as Saemmer (2010: 252) notes with Barthes, it is in the holes in the book, in the gaps of the text, that lies its productivity ('[L]e livre est troué, et c'est là qu'est sa productivité'), filling such gaps gestures towards closing the open work. In sum, *L2* moves away from *L1* in different directions that may seem to be contradictory: the hypertextualization opens it up structurally towards the surrounding virtual world while embedding it into *Le Tiers Livre* and defining its place within Bon's overall authorial image and activity, and the textual additions and

modifications open it up towards a processual, rather than product-oriented approach to literature and undermine traditional concepts and binaries, but at the same time contributing to the text's semantic univocality and closure.

### **Beyond the web: From the networked novel to the e-book**

'Et puis vient un moment où le livre prend le relais, exige d'autres outils' ['And then comes a moment when the book takes over and requires different tools'], Bon writes in 'Fragments du dedans' ['Fragments from inside'] (3621). If writing integrates seamlessly the logic of the web(site), which allows it to deploy a potential for dynamism that paper could not accommodate, the website has also given birth to printed books. *Tumulte* (Fayard, 2006), *Après le livre* (Seuil, 2011), *Autobiographie des objets* [*Autobiography of the Objects*] (Seuil, 2012), *Proust est une fiction* [*Proust Is a Fiction*] (Seuil, 2013), *Fragments du dedans* [*Fragments from the Inside*] (Grasset, 2014), and *Fictions du corps* [*Fictions of the Body*] (L'Atelier contemporain, 2016) are all such born-digital transmedial projects. The web-based and the printed versions coexist in all these cases except for the first and affirm their differences in structure, mode of existence, and to some extent, content.<sup>6</sup> We have highlighted the opposite movement in *Le Tiers Livre* with Bon's self-archiving and self-curating activity manifest in the 'Publications' section of the website. There is another section, however, which fulfils a similar role differently: on the homepage, under the title banner, the invitation to subscribe, and the set of links to Bon's profiles on various social media, we find a link to his 'librairie numérique' ['digital library']. It leads to a 7switch digital bookstore platform embedded in tierslivre.net, selling the (as of April 2016) forty-six titles available from the catalogue of Tiers Livre Éditeur. These include Bon's translations from English, the digital edition of a number of his earlier books (presumably whenever the existing copyright agreements allowed and/or the previous publisher does not offer an

electronic version) with a most often slightly revised, but sometimes also expanded text. This work of electronic (re)edition began with *public.net*, the first exclusively electronic publisher in France created on Bon's initiative by a collective of authors in 2008, but which he left in 2013 to devote himself entirely to his individual projects. Bon's own e-books have now been largely transferred to Tiers Livre Éditeur (Bon 554). The catalogue is available for purchase by item through the website's virtual bookstore or *en bloc* with an all-inclusive, unlimited subscription for a one-off fee of €20.

The titles include *Limite et feuilleton de l'invention de Limite* [*Limit and Feuilleton of the Invention of Limit*] (L3). The effect of the change in technology and physical medium implied in the transfer from web to e-book is here intertwined with a generic reframing and small textual modifications which are paratextual in the way they guide the reader. A note after the title page of this edition explains:

*Limite* a été écrit à Marseille l'hiver 1983–1984, puis à la Villa Médicis, Rome, l'hiver 1984–1985.

Première publication: les éditions de Minuit, septembre 1985

Version numérique relue, révisée & augmentée d'un feuilleton sur la genèse du roman pour le 30ème anniversaire de sa publication.

[*Limit* was written in Marseille in winter 1983–84, and then in the Villa Medici in Rome in winter 1984–85.

First edition: Minuit, September 1985

Reread and revised digital version augmented with a feuilleton on the genesis of the novel for the 30th anniversary of its publication.]

A number of practical considerations may have played a part in this republication as an e-book, including interest in building a complete digital archive, the economic consideration of selling copies (the web-based version is available on the open-access part of *Le Tiers Livre*), and the intention of making the complete text of the web-based augmented edition available in an even more easily searchable single file. But presenting the e-book as the anniversary re-edition of the novel diverges from the avowed original motivation of the web-based rewriting project, which is the basis of this edition. While *L2* seemed to move away from the logic of the book and traditional publishing, this reframing with reference to an anniversary as a trigger draws on the editorial strategy of the conventional book market. In the (modified) introduction to the e-book, under the heading ‘30 ans après, ou le numérique comme récréation’ [‘30 years later, or the digital as recreation’], Bon also calls the result of the recopying-commenting ‘a second book’: ‘Un deuxième livre naît, qui inclut à la fois le premier, et ce monologue durant la recopie.’ [‘A second book is born, which includes both the first one and this monologue during the recopying.’] (2014a: 3). If we are not entirely returning to the fixity of the printed book published by a third-party publisher, there is nonetheless a return to the logic of the book as an ‘objet quantifié’ [‘quantified object’] (Bon 2015a), severed from the website even though sold through it, and readable independently from the network that gave rise to it. As Norwenn Tréhondart writes, ‘[e]n opposition aux pratiques erratiques sur internet, le livre numérique se revendique du livre imprimé et de son modèle de lecture, avec de réelles “potentialités immersives”’ [‘in opposition to the erratic online practices, the e-book is modelled on the printed book, to be read in the same way, with a genuine “immersive potential”’] (2013, cited by Bikialo et al. 2015).

The modification of the title is no less striking: while the online version, published in segments following the logic and temporality of a blog or a feuilleton, was labelled ‘roman’, the collection of the entire series as a single document, which would traditionally reframe a

‘feuilleton’ as a ‘novel’, here becomes a ‘feuilleton’. This term today associates seriality and fictionality, reaffirming both the episodic nature and the continuity of the thread of the ‘invention of *Limite*’. This continuity is confirmed throughout the e-book: while the online version introduced the commentary preceding each passage with the matter-of-fact heading ‘à propos de ce passage’ [‘about this passage’],<sup>7</sup> in the e-book this becomes ‘Limite, le commentaire, un feuilleton’ [‘Limit, the commentary, a feuilleton’], followed by the number of the passage in the series of twelve. Highlighting the commentaries’ continuity endows them with a degree of independence as an extended text, affirming their potential to be regarded as more than a functional explanatory epitext added to another, ‘primary’ text, and inviting a reading for their own sake.

At the same time, this continuity is now more tightly intertwined with the original novel’s passages as here they alternate throughout in a single document. In other words, the recasting of the structure of the extended text in the form of an e-book both affirms the commentaries’ inner coherence and facilitates a reading that alternates between the two threads. While in *L2* seeing the continuity of each thread required navigation between the blogposts of the series – made difficult by the fact that the otherwise handy ‘previous – next’ buttons available at each post often do not work, so that the reader needs to return to the content page listing the passages to find the next one in line, increasing the chance that one will simply navigate away from the project – the e-book edition makes both the continuous and the thread-focused skipping mode of reading easier. In this light, despite the identical chapter divisions, from the reader’s perspective, the e-book clearly does *not* ‘conserve la structure fragmentaire que la publication en feuillets sur le site Tiers Livre lui avait imposée’ [‘keep the fragmented structure imposed on it by the publication on the Tiers Livre website as a feuilleton’], as Gilles Bonnet suggests (2014: 25), but rather facilitates two modes of linear reading, one continuous and the other by threads.

The term ‘feuilleton’ also reinforces the ambiguity concerning the nature of the commentaries in terms of the fictional–factual distinction, insofar as it historically implies both. ‘Feuilleton’ first referred to a non-fictional column in journals, but since the nineteenth century came to be closely associated with the predominantly fictional genre of the ‘roman-feuilleton’.<sup>8</sup> This polysemous label thus continues to blur the boundaries between fictional and factual writing and contributes to the homogenization of the two threads, the original narrative and the meta-narrative, in a hybrid ‘third’ literary space that questions the usefulness of conventional binary distinctions between factual and fictional discourse, and between text and paratext. This does not mean that the concept of reality or the possibility to speak about it is rejected, but rather that ‘fiction’ is not necessarily less relevant or less authentic as a discourse about the real than the discourse about actual facts, as we have already seen with *L2* and its different framing pointing in the same direction.

This balance between the two modes of reading is, however, further upset by a technical detail that can give place to different receptions. Saemmer (2015: 59–62) argues that the device (‘dispositif’) determines the reading, just as the technology frames the writing of born-digital texts. The size, luminosity, manipulability, multifunctionality, and mobility of the screen all count, and despite their increasing resemblance to computers in terms of possible uses, tablets and e-readers still represent a different technology with their largely reading and mobility-focused layout and touchscreen. Two recent collective volumes on tablet-based works highlight the specificity of this medium and demonstrate that ‘les transformations, les usages et les pratiques de lecture des œuvres disponibles sur ces supports numériques, nomades, reliés ... réclament une nouvelle ergonomie, aussi bien au niveau de la création que de la lecture’ [‘the transformations, uses, and reading practices of the works available on these nomadic, connected digital devices ... require new ergonomics with respect to both the creative process and the reading’] (Bikialo et al. 2015).

Even the type of mobile reading device used matters. *L3* is available in different formats (epub, Kindle, Mobipocket), but the way it is displayed will not be the same on every device. On an Android tablet – tested with two applications, Aldiko and eReader Prestigio – commentaries and recopied novel chapters appear with the same homogenous typography, effacing the distinctions between the two threads which is clearly visible on the website, with the commentaries’ smaller font and tighter line spacing. Reading *L3* on such a device and with such an application emphasizes the continuity and homogeneity of the entire text and encourages a fully linear reading. iBooks, on the other hand, maintains the website’s typographic distinctions. If web-based publications seem unstable because of their too easily modifiable nature, the e-book presents us with the problem of latent device-dependency.

A few other seemingly small yet important modifications distinguish the e-book edition from the online one. First and foremost, while the print edition indicates the name of the character whose consciousness we are entering on the first occasion of their appearance and then leaves it up to the reader to figure out who is speaking when the subsequent switches occur between narrators (the four characters take turns but not necessarily in the same order or in equal measure throughout), in the web edition those indications disappear entirely, yet in the e-book they reemerge multiplied and modified. Bon explains in the prologue of *L2* that in his original manuscript, there were no such indications at all and he inserted them on the request of the editor Jérôme Lindon, and that ‘[c]ette reprise numérique est l’occasion de revenir à la forme initiale’ [‘this digital retyping offers an opportunity to return to the initial form’] (2242). In the e-book, however, after a brief explanation of the familiarity of such narrative indeterminacy in Nathalie Sarraute, we read:

J’ai d’abord tenté d’en revenir à la forme initiale, façon d’assumer au présent ce qui avait été le premier laboratoire de son propre travail, et puis non: le projet narratif, avec

ses quatre narrateurs, est déjà assez compliqué comme ça, je préfère privilégier la vitesse et repérer chaque fois le narrateur.

[I first tried to return to the original form, accepting and showing now for what was the first laboratory of the work, but then decided against it: the narrative project, with the four narrators, is already complicated enough as it is, I prefer to give priority to speed and identify the narrator each time.]

While the light online textual modifications discussed above tend to clarify the text, the same version also challenges the reader by going against Lindon's advice to liberate space for writerly reading and committing what Bonnet (2015) calls a 'parricide éditorial' ['editorial parricide']. The e-book, on the other hand, goes back on that decision and goes even further, identifying the character *each time* we are entering their consciousness, even adding their profession for ease of reference. The move in either direction is significant for what it suggests about the author's concept of literature and what he offers to the reader: the openness of the text with a greater responsibility in the reader's hands, or clarity and ease of communication.

But the e-book edition makes further modifications:

J'ai même décidé d'aller plus loin: le narrateur sans nom, celui qui s'active sur sa table de dessin industriel, portera mes initiales. Il me semble, à ce quart de siècle près, que s'emboîte enfin ainsi le puzzle.

[I even decided to go further: the unnamed narrator, busy on his desk of industrial design, will have my initials. It seems to me, after a quarter of a century, that this way the puzzle finally fits together.]

Inserting the author's own initials into the 'fiction' creates a direct link between the voice speaking in the commentaries and the voice of one of the characters, explicitly stating their identity and approximating the fiction to the genre of autofiction but without inscribing itself in the broader cultural phenomenon associated with it.<sup>9</sup> If the unification of the entire text in a single file reinforces the symbiosis between the two threads visually and structurally, this newly declared identity of the two voices unifies them semantically and ontologically, further closing the gap between 'fact' and 'fiction' and contesting again their opposition.<sup>10</sup> While in the e-book Bon went back on the previous 'editorial parricide' and even went beyond Lindon's advice regarding the names, he did not update the online edition in the same spirit. Instead, he has kept all three versions in the three different media, each offering a different reading experience and communicating a different approach to the purpose of the text, the concept of literature, and the reader's and the author's respective roles.

Another seemingly small but important change in the e-book is that all hyperlinks but one were removed from the commentaries.<sup>11</sup> This seems to take us back to the logic of the book as an autonomous and structurally closed work readable independently from the rest of the author's oeuvre and associated with other texts only by pre-digital modes of intertextuality. The computer's usually larger screen seems more fit for the purpose of following links and returning to the point of departure than e-reader devices, but Bon (2016b) himself emphasizes how these enable an increasingly easy web navigation experience and networked reading. The reasons for removing the hyperlinks must therefore be other than technical – and its result is the affirmation of the work's emancipation from the web(site) and

its autonomy as a self-sufficient work: a book. If the web produces a ‘livre défait, déconstruit’ [‘undone, deconstructed book’], as Saemmer (2010: 251) observes in the case of *Tumulte*, and it ‘détisse la “chaîne du texte”’ [‘unties the “thread of the text”’], as Bonnet (2014) finds, while also being more inclined to ‘relier’ [‘link’] than to ‘relire’ [‘reread’] (Bonnet 2015), the e-book reinstates the structure of the book, constructs a new book with a new tissue and a new linearity, and lends itself to reading and rereading, and to reading the rereading. And if all linearity is the result of the ‘illusion linéaire’ [‘linear illusion’] generated by the brain from a flux of fragmented perceptions through a complex process (Bon 2011: 23), the technically linear textuality of the e-book reaffirms the value of that illusion by facilitating the construction of a beginning-to-end narrative of the birth of a book within the life of an author. At the same time, by also facilitating transversal, (re)search-led reading, it opens access to the semiotic and semantic tissue of the text and highlights the network that underpins the linearity. The e-book is not a denial of the network but the reaffirmation of the text with its inner network and the lines of flight it offers to the reader taking advantage of the medium to practice different modes of reading.

### **The logic of the project and the book beyond the book**

The modifications of the text in its content and form across the stages of the project show a changing approach to its purpose and raise the question of the identity of the work. The authorial decision of allowing all three versions to coexist suggests, however, that they should not be regarded in terms of a hierarchy of values or as gradual improvement, but rather as equally valid and complementary versions that explore different potentials inherent in the text, in the novel, in its history, in its relation to reality, and in textuality as such, as they appear or fade in different environments and modes of embodiment. *LIMITE*, like *Tumulte* and now even more so, has truly ‘plusieurs existences’ [‘several existences’] (Viart

2008: 156), and while each version can be read separately following its own logic, as a printed novel, as a networked ‘hyperitext’, and as a self-sufficient electronic book respectively, each one also shows a different face of François Bon as an author, from novelist to wwriter, of his work from the *Minuit* novel to the autobiography and the self-published e-book, and more generally of literature in the Digital Age. The ‘project’ is in this sense truly a transmedial one in that each version brings something new (Jenkins 2006) even if in terms of content it remains strictly textual, and it is not one but three *and* four:<sup>12</sup> *Limite*, the 1985 novel; *Limite et roman de Limite*, the 2010 online authorial autobiography; *Limite et feuilletton de l’invention de Limite*, the 2014 e-book, *and LIMITE*, the sum of all these.

Gratton and Sheringham (2005: 17–18) observe that the term ‘project’, which I have used to refer to *LIMITE*, has three temporal dimensions: future, as something envisaged; present, as something ongoing, in process; and past, as a ‘completed undertaking’. Yet ‘to apply the term in this retrospective way ... is necessarily to recognise the trace within the final product of the now past future and past present dimensions of the project’ (ibid.: 18). The coexistence of the three temporal dimensions is indeed particularly visible and significant in the digital environment and in Bon’s project(s), where ‘completion’ is always relative.

On the other hand, the term ‘project’ was suggested by the lack of a more suitable and specific terminology that would enable speaking about the series as well as about each version without falling back on the heavily loaded terms ‘book’ or ‘novel’, or on the far too general ‘text’ or ‘work’. This terminological gap suggests that we are facing a new paradigm that does not fit well-established discourses. *LIMITE* can be regarded as a novel in the traditional sense reborn in the form of ‘cyborg literature’, which Anaïs Guilet (2013: 85) defines following N. Katherine Hayles as literature that is cyborg ‘métaphoriquement comme matériellement, par l’hybridation dont [les oeuvres] procèdent et par la cyberculture à

laquelle elles appartiennent' ['metaphorically as well as materially, thanks to the hybridization that characterizes [the works] and the cyberculture to which they belong']. But for Bon, the point is precisely to *not* distinguish cyberculture from culture *tout court* as special and niche. Cyberculture should rather be understood in fusion with the dominant, as a currently emerging and quickly evolving space that (especially non-mainstream and aspiring) authors need to comprehend on its own terms and integrate into their practice, because it is affecting the life of books and changing the role of authors by placing a greater demand on them in terms of self-management while offering new opportunities with more artistic freedom. Bon (2016c) formulates this shift as a move from the logic of the book to the 'logique de projets' ['logic of the project'], which considers 'l'œuvre comme base de données' ['the work as database'], arguing that this is not entirely new because the 'books' of authors such as Baudelaire or Montaigne never existed as such. The digital allows the author to embrace the organic and continuous development of writing, in the life of which each publication, each update and new version is now admittedly just one stage rather than a conclusion. 'Oeuvre ouverte, ça veut dire qu'on peut la remodeler en permanence' ['an open work, meaning that it can be constantly remodelled'] (2016c), he notes, opening a new perspective on openness in the digital environment. This new logic impacts on the nature and role of writing as process and product; on reading as interpretation and experience; on the roles of, and relationship between, author and reader, including the process and modes of publication; on the relationship between literature and the real and between the physical space and the virtual. *Le Tiers Livre* as a whole embodies this logic, as do its numerous threads and series which constitute individual but interlinked (sub-)projects within it. And *LIMITE* is in itself illustrative of the complexity of the many-layered and multidirectional movements involved.

The web and the e-book are, in line with this sense of openness, not the end of the story. It was after the completion of this article that Bon launched the previously announced print-on-demand service. The catalogue of Tiers Livre Editeur is now available in this form, created single-handedly by the author on CreateSpace, with the books ordered and delivered within seventy-two hours wherever in the world Amazon can reach. There are again a few small but important changes in this version of *Limite*, now retitled *Le deuxième livre est toujours plus difficile à écrire* [*The Second Book Is Always More Difficult to Write*], with (currently) *Limite, et roman de Limite* as subtitle on the cover and *Limite, et feuilleton de la réécriture de Limite* [*Limite, and Feuilleton of the Rewriting of Limite*] as subtitle on the title page inside. This is worthy of discussion although scholarship on web-based phenomena is never able to catch up with its object. The printed book returns, not as a recognition of the failure of the digital adventure or the persisting superiority of the paper book, but as an affirmation of the technological advances that enable it, and of the author's autonomy in shaping his work. It also illustrates the persistence of the financial indispensability of the printed book. As with the previous innovations, Bon had emphasized in 2012 the opportunities print on demand offers for reinventing the book and the complementarity of the various forms:

mot essentiel: *complémentarité*. L'impression à la demande, pourquoi? 1, parce qu'elle existe, 2, parce qu'elle va devenir dans les prochains mois un rouage essentiel de la diffusion du livre. Elle n'est plus service de substitution, mais outil d'invention livre en tant que tel. (2810)

[key word: *complementarity*. Print on demand, why? 1, because it exists, 2, because it will in the coming months become a crucial component in the distribution of the book. It is no longer a substitute but a tool for reinventing the book as such.]

*LIMITE* remains a trace of the ongoing reinvention of the ‘book’ as a new logic of writing, as a material object giving birth to and emerging from a project, and as a literary object with a diffuse identity to be read and used – and reinvented constantly.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Bon’s publications on *Le Tiers Livre* will be indicated by the number of the article on the website, with full bibliographic details provided under ‘Works cited’. All translations from the French are mine, and I would like to thank Angela Bolton for her revision and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> For ease of reference, I shall use the fully capitalized form to distinguish the project including all three versions from the individual editions, referred to as *L1* (the 1985 novel *Limite*), *L2* (the online *Limite et roman de Limite*), and *L3* (the e-book *Limite et feuilleton de l’invention de Limite*) respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Another complete digitizing project is now in progress: Bon is retyping *Rock’n Roll, un portrait de Led Zeppelin* (Albin Michel, 2008). This is already available as an e-book from the publisher, but the new web-based version (3454) is augmented with links and videos.

<sup>4</sup> The French word ‘langue’ can refer to both and this ambiguity is no doubt intentional in this context.

<sup>5</sup> See his YouTube channel associated with *Le Tiers Livre* at [www.youtube.com/c/tierslivre](http://www.youtube.com/c/tierslivre).

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<sup>6</sup> *Tumulte* was written on a separate website of the same title, which disappeared from the web after the publication of the book. It is now archived at [web.archive.org/web/20051012065741/http://www.tumulte.net/sommaire.php3](http://web.archive.org/web/20051012065741/http://www.tumulte.net/sommaire.php3). For a detailed analysis of Bon's post-*Tumulte* web-based writing feeding into a book, see Guilet (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Except for the first two posts, headed 'Limite, roman, 1985–2010, une relecture, note 1 [2]'

<sup>8</sup> Feuilleton: 'article, généralement de critique, de littérature, de philosophie ou de sciences, paraissant régulièrement dans un journal, autrefois en bas de page' ['article, usually of criticism, literature, philosophy, or science, which appears regularly in a newspaper, in the past at the bottom of the page'] (*Trésor de la langue française*).

<sup>9</sup> Claire Boyle (2007: 18) explains the original meaning of the term coined by Serge Doubrovsky: 'producing *autofiction* involves supplying indicators which suggest that the text is an autobiography, whilst at the same time contradicting these indicators by asserting its fictional status'. Gasparini (2008: 300) points out that the autofiction borrows the homonymy of the protagonist with the author from the autobiography and the strategy of ambiguity from the autobiographical novel. At the same time, the voice identified as 'FB' in *L3* remains one among four streams of consciousness having equal weight in the narrative, which distinguishes it from the typically single-focused autofiction or autobiographical novel.

<sup>10</sup> It is confusing that in the monologues this same character continues to be referred to as 'Alain': the author's initials did not fully penetrate the text and the presence of two identifiers for the same character can only be explained rationally in light of the text's history. The commentary speaks of a previously 'unnamed character', but that character did have a name in the print edition both as a section heading and as a character referred to by others. This

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confusion does not seem intentional, but if it is, it suggests an intention to unsettle the reading, which is at odds with the character identification as a reading facilitating strategy.

<sup>11</sup> The one remaining is anchored to the name of Jérôme Lindon in the prologue and its destination is a post entitled ‘hommage à Jérôme Lindon’ [‘homage to Jérôme Lindon’] on *Le Tiers Livre* (495).

<sup>12</sup> A few weeks after concluding this article, in July 2016: four *and* five, see below.

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