

OuBaPo

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Newsletter OuNe • April 2003

Welcome...

To this, the first newsletter of the newly formed OuBaPo UK. If you're reading this, then you've either found out about it through the ICA, or you've stumbled across our website. This first issue will outline what OuBaPo is all about, and provide some historical background, as well as giving you some idea of what we want to achieve in the future.

What is OuBaPo?

OuBaPo is the *Ouvroir de Bande Dessinée Potentielle*, or the Workshop for the Potential of Comics. Simply put, it's an organisation that tries to unlock some of the hidden potential of the comics artform by experimenting with it - normally by inflicting constraints upon their creation.

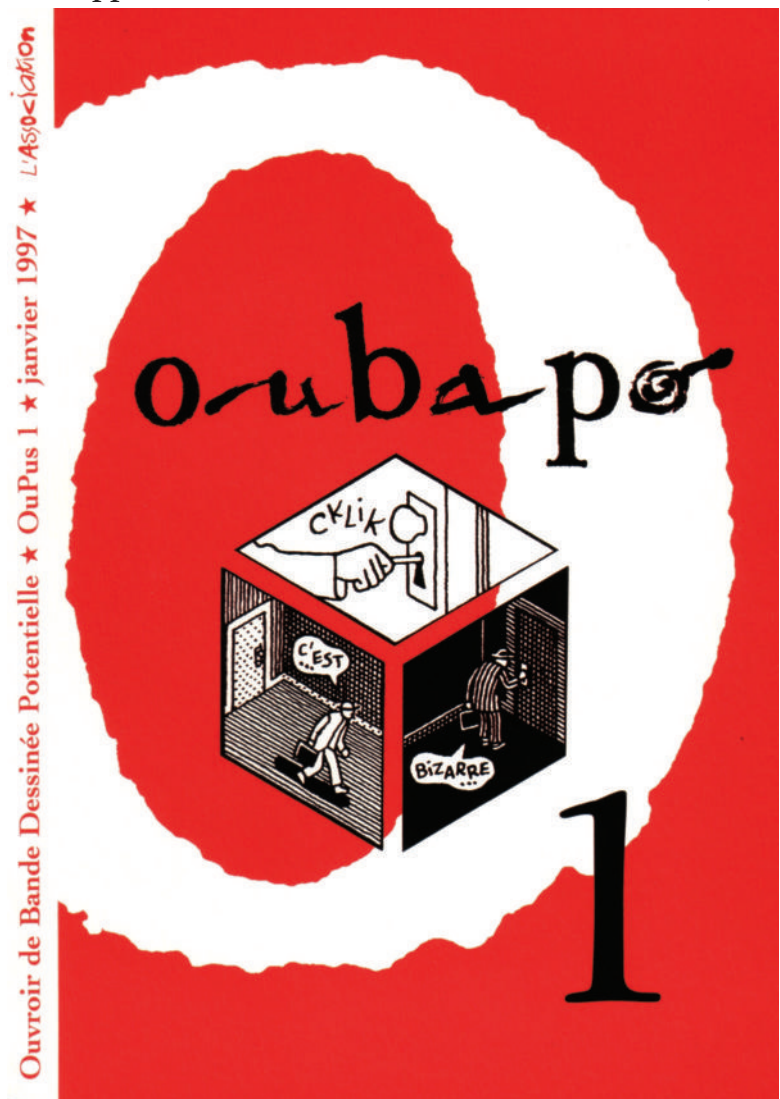
OuBaPo, an offshoot of the elder OuLiPo (workshop for the potential of Literature) was founded on the 28th October 1992 in Paris by Jean-Christophe Menu, Thierry Groensteen and other members of the independent comics publishing house *l'Association*. Since then, three books have been produced, and the organization has spawned an American offshoot led by Matt Madden, Jason Little and Tom Hart.

And now it's our turn. Paul Gravett and I, seemingly

independently, had been toying with the idea of a British OuBaPo, showcasing the experimentation of cartoonists based here in the UK, and bearing in mind the appearance of such

mother group's blessing, we formed on the 12th April 2003, nearly eleven years after the French, and two years after the Americans.

So what's next? Well, in this



The cover of OuPlus one, the first in the Bibliothèque OuBaPienne

OuBaPienne publications as *Sentence*, we both felt that the time was right to officially form the group. After speaking to Jean-Christophe Menu at the recent roundtable on Autobiographical comics at the French Institute, and receiving the

newsletter, I'll be giving you a rundown of what's been achieved so far, and then speculating on what we can do in the near future. I hope you'll come along for the ride...

Brad Brooks

An Initial Bouquet of Constraints...

In the first OuBaPienne publication, *OuPus 1*, Thierry Groensteen, the noted Belgian Comics scholar, detailed the first batch of constraints to be used in the production of OuBaPienne comics. As a guide to those of you new to the concept of applying constraints to aid in the creation of comics, here are those initial constraints:

There are two types of Oubapienne constraint:

GENERATIVE - which are those constraints that application of which lead to the creation of new strips;

and,

TRANSFORMATIVE - which are those constraints that use and modify existing strips.

The initial subdivision of constraints are further broken down thus:

GENERATIVE CONSTRAINTS:

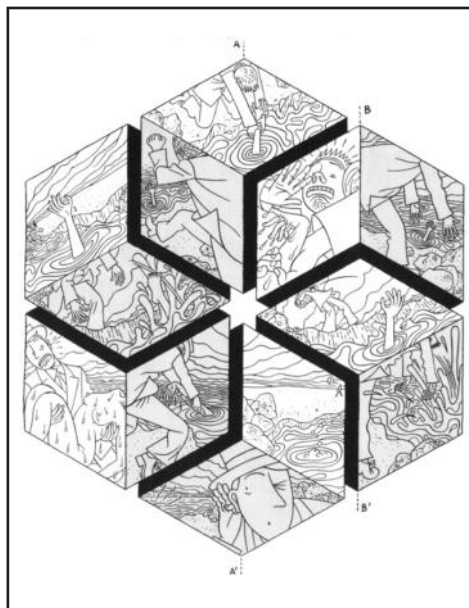
Initially, Groensteen has highlighted ten constraints that create new strips. These are:

1. ICONOGRAPHIC RESTRICTION

This constraint consists of the exclusion of specific pictorial elements. An example of this is Martin Vaughn-James' book *La Cage* where no animate being (either Man or animal) appears in the narrative.

2. GRAPHIC RESTRICTION
Like Iconographic restriction,

this constraint involves the exclusion of a visual element of a strip. Graphic restriction, however, revolves around the exclusion of specified graphic elements of the strip - sort of like limiting the visual vocabulary of the strip. Those minicomics made up of dots as characters (sorry, I can't remember the name of them, or the creator -



Pliage, or folding strip, by Killoffer

Slingshot comics?) would be a good example of this.

3. SCENIC RESTRICTION

This constraint limits the way that the scenes within a strip are portrayed or how the strip is framed. Floc'h and Rivière's book *Blitz* is an example of this constraint, being as how every panel in this strip is drawn from the same viewpoint.

4. ICONOGRAPHIC REPETITION

This is the repetition of a single image or sequence of images within a strip. David Lynch's *The Angriest Dog In The World* is an example of this

constraint, as is *Moins d'un quart de Seconde pour Vivre* by Jean-Christophe Menu and Lewis Trondheim.

4a. PARTIAL ICONOGRAPHIC REPETITION

A subdivision of the above constraint, this is where elements within the image or sequence of images are repeated, but the actual image itself changes somewhat as the sequence progresses. *Jean qui Rit et Jean qui Pleure* by François Ayroles is an excellent example of this. In each two panel sequence, a man who is almost identical in appearance and pose is shown in different locales and is either laughing or crying.

5. MULTIREADABILITY

These are strips that can be read in more than one direction. This constraint is further subdivided into two sections:

5a. ACROSTIC STRIPS

An acrostic is a word sequence where a vertical succession of letters in a series of lines or verses forms a word, line or phrase. Likewise, an acrostic strip is one where the panels of a strip can be read either vertically or horizontally.

5b. PALINDROMIC STRIPS

These are strips, that like a palindrome made up of words, can be read backwards or forwards.

6. REVERSIBILITY

This constraint creates strips that can be read the right way up, or when the strip is turned upside down. The most

celebrated example this is the



Jean qui rit et...

work of Gustave Verbeek (Another subdivision of this could possibly be the mixing of the Oupeinpo concept of Rotatory pictures (images that can be read whatever way you turn them) with acrostic strips. This last subdivision isn't in Groensteen's original essay - It just came to me. I'm not sure if it'll work though - thoughts, anyone?)

7. OVERLAPPING

This is the modification of a strip by either folding it or by adding elements on other supports (like clear acetate) that alter the strip. The Mad fold-in is an example of the former, although Étienne Lécroart, has taken this a stage further by creating actual strips that fold, rather than a single image.

8. RANDOM CONSECUTIVENESS

These are strips whose panels can be read in any order. The Dice game that Anne Baraou created, and 5-card Nancy (as well as Jason Lutes' dice, and Robert Boyd's Fridge magnets) are obvious examples of these.

9. REGULATED DISTRIBUTION

This means that any pictorial element within the strip can be regulated by mathematical, Oulipian or other constraints. For example, you may have a nine panel grid, with one character in the first panel, two in the second, four in the third and so on.

10. GEOMETRICAL ARRANGEMENT

The layout of the strip follows a predetermined constraint. Examples of this include the 'Fearful Symmetry' issue of Watchmen by Moore and Gibbons, 'The Plot Thickens' by Bill Griffith or works by Andreas.

TRANSFORMATIVE CONSTRAINTS

In Groensteen's initial list of constraints, he further proposed seven (not including subdivisions) constraints that transform existing strips:

1. SUBSTITUTION

This constraint plays on the fact that, most of the time, comics are a mix of words and pictures. It's divided into three subsections:

1a. VERBAL SUBSTITUTION

This is where the text in an existing strip is substituted with a new textual element. As Groensteen notes, the Situationists famously did this back in the late sixties/early seventies.

1b. ICONOGRAPHIC SUBSTITUTION

Conversely, this is where new art replaces the old in a strip while the text remains the same.

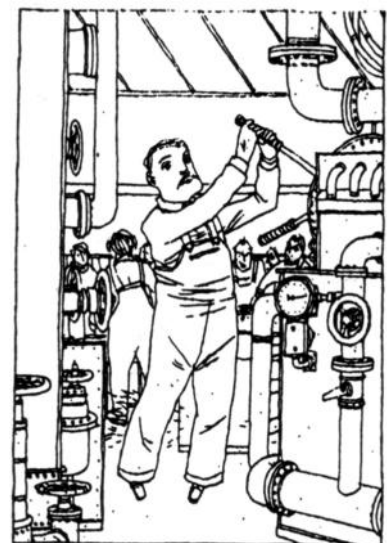
1c. TOTAL SUBSTITUTION

More complex than the first two subsections, total substitution is a game-like exercise created by Killoffer that requires three participants. The first cartoonist creates or chooses an existing strip and gives its art to a second participant (but not the text), and the text to a third participant (but not the art). The second cartoonist creates a new textual element to the strip, while the third creates new artwork. Neither of them are allowed to see the other's work until the new text and art are combined to create a new strip.

2. N+7

The text in a strip is changed according to the Oulipian method of N+7. This is where the Nouns in the text are changed with the seventh noun following in a specified dictionary (for example, "To Be or Not To Be: That is the quibble"). Other Oulipian constraints can also apply to the text of a strip, and I'll

...Jean qui pleure by Ayroles



detail more of these in a later newsletter.

3. EXPANSION

New panels are inserted into

From previous page

an existing strip according to a predetermined (and usually mathematical) rule.

4. REDUCTION

An existing strip is taken and panels are removed to create a new strip. This can either to create a entirely new narrative, or to create a Précis of the existing strip.

5. RE-FRAMING

There are two methods of re-framing:

5a. Details of an existing strip are excerpted and re-framed.

5b. Additions are made to an existing strip, the original panels becoming part of the new ones. The most celebrated example of this is "The Malpractice Suite" by art Spiegelman.

6. GRAPHIC REINTERPRETATION

An existing strip is redrawn according to a predetermined criterion. Examples would include change of genre (a western strip redrawn as a humour strip), altered viewpoint (a thriller redrawn to match different protagonists' viewpoints), or as in Pilote No. 631 in 1971, a Blueberry page created by Morris and Goscinny, and a Lucky Luke page created by Charlier and Giraud.

7. HYBRIDISATION

Two (or more) strips are combined into one, by alternating their panels, exchanging texts or integration of graphic elements.

**Brad Brooks
(after Thierry Groensteen)**

What's Next?

We hope to be involved in many areas of comics outreach, from publishing OuBaPienne works, to public demonstrations and exhibitions. We also hope to team up with our French and US counterparts in order to create some very exciting work.

Make no mistake, OuBaPo isn't only an intellectual game for cartoonists - although there certainly is a large element of that at work - it's also a way to free ourselves and create interesting work that can show that comics aren't just a bankrupt medium fit only for kids and idiots. By using experimentation, such as constraints, I hope that we'll see a new generation of really exciting comics. The point of OuBaPo really is this: Experimentation can free the muse, but it cannot wholly be the muse itself. If you can't entertain, inform and/or elucidate with your work, then OuBaPo isn't going to help you. Like music in movies, the experimentation in OuBaPo should be there as a support to the comic - not the sum total of the comic. Of course, there's no reason why you can't just do an experimental comic. But by using the techniques of experimentation, you may find that it helps you when you really have something to say...

To whet your appetite, I can tell you that the first real outing for OuBaPo UK will be at the upcoming COMICA exhibition at London's ICA. Details are still to be ironed out, but the exhibition will have OuBaPienne overtones, and this entire exhibition marks a new

and exciting period for comics in the UK, and not just for OuBaPo UK.

So, if you're interested in finding out more about OuBaPo UK, please drop me an e-mail at bradled@btinternet.com. Alternatively, have a chat with Paul or myself the next time you see us.

The logo for Oubapo UK, featuring the word "oubapo" in a lowercase, rounded, sans-serif font, with "uk" in a smaller font below it.

Members:

Brad Brooks
Paul Gravett
Fareed Choudhury
Paul Peart
Roger Langridge
Dave Shelton
Matt Broersma
Daniel Goodbrey
Mike Kidson
John Barber
Tom Gauld
Gary Northfield

Others to be announced

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