

Oubapo

(OUvroir de BAnde dessinée POtentielle)

Comics is a medium founded on constraints. Our very sense of what a comic is—whether a newspaper strip, Sunday page, comic book or web comic—is to a large extent determined by formal characteristics or constraints. (cont. on p. 4)

Below: a palindrome strip by François Ayeroles, from *Oupus 3: Les Vacances de l'Oubapo*. An example of a generative constraint.



THE UPSIDE-DOWNS OF LITTLE LADY LOVEKINS AND OLD MAN MUFFAROO

A FISH STORY.



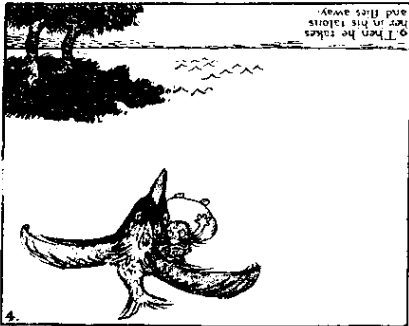
1. In the canoe is an enormous fish that Lovekins and Muffaroo have caught.



2. Lovekins takes the fish on shore, while Muffaroo pushes off in the canoe to see if he can catch another.



3. Unluckily he hooks a sword-fish, and there is trouble right away. The old man fights bravely. The sword-fish dives,



4. Then he comes up again, and this time he thrusts his sharp snout right through the bottom of the canoe. Muffaroo tries to get the sinking boat to the nearest shore.



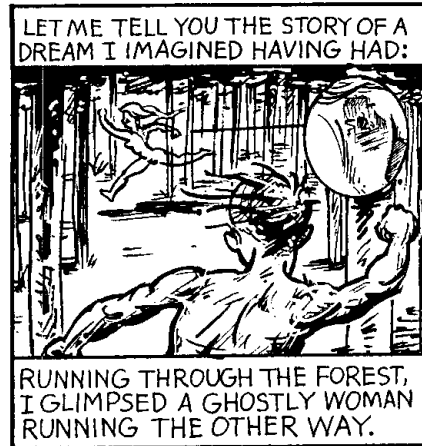
5. Just as he reaches a small grassy point of land, another fish attacks him, lashing furiously with his tail.



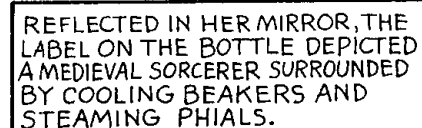
6. The canoe sinks in the sea which has now become choppy, but Muffaroo jumps ashore, safe and sound, and starts back across the point to rejoin Lovekins.

Above: anticipatory plagiarist Gustave Verbeek's "Upside-Downs," as reprinted in *Oupus 1*.

Below: an episode of "Hector" by Tom Motley. This strip's story consists of several nested narratives.



LET ME TELL YOU THE STORY OF A DREAM I IMAGINED HAVING HAD:



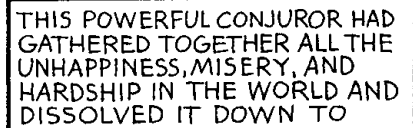
RUNNING THROUGH THE FOREST, I GLIMPSED A GHOSTLY WOMAN RUNNING THE OTHER WAY.



REFLECTED IN HER MIRROR, THE LABEL ON THE BOTTLE DEPICTED A MEDIEVAL SORCERER SURROUNDED BY COOLING BEAKERS AND STEAMING PHIALS.



ON HER FAR SHOULDER WAS A FAINT TATTOO: AN OLD MAN SITTING ON CONCRETE STAIRS, DRAWING DESIGNS IN GRAY CHALK.



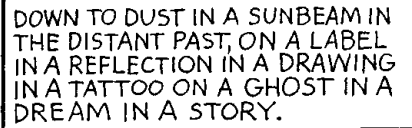
THIS POWERFUL CONJUROR HAD GATHERED TOGETHER ALL THE UNHAPPINESS, MISERY, AND HARDSHIP IN THE WORLD AND DISSOLVED IT DOWN TO PRACTICALLY NOTHING:



PINCHING HIS FINGERS, HE CRUMBLED A CLUMP OF DIRT INTO DUST.



ONE WAS OF A HOLLYWOOD STARLET SITTING AT HER DRESSING TABLE, REACHING FOR A BOTTLE OF PERFUME.



DOWN TO DUST IN A SUNBEAM IN THE DISTANT PAST, ON A LABEL IN A REFLECTION IN A DRAWING IN A TATTOO ON A GHOST IN A DREAM IN A STORY.

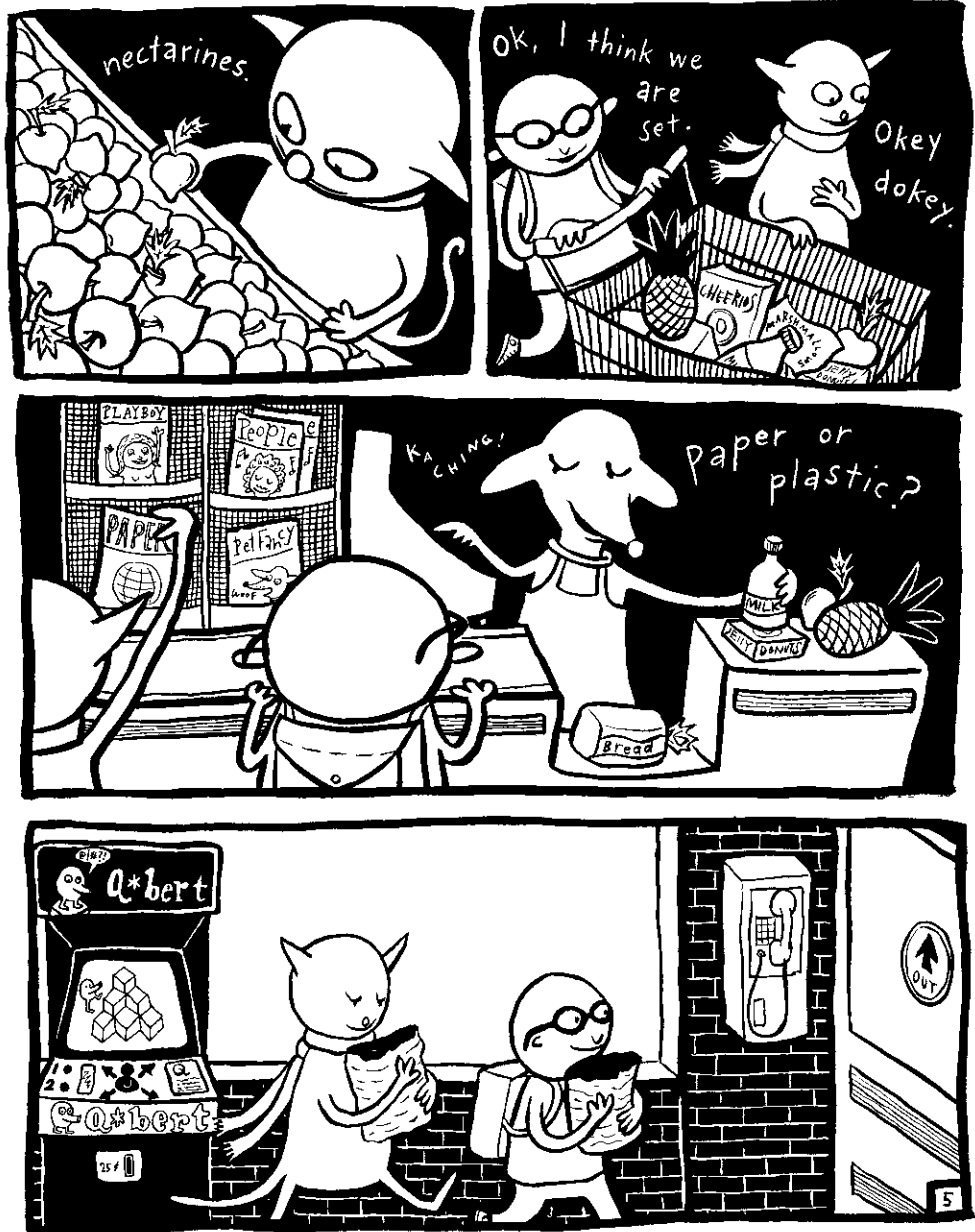


© T. MOTLEY '97



Above: a page from Matt Madden's *Exercises in Style*. This variation expands the story from eight panels to thirty.

Right: Sarah Varon's solution to the Alphabet City challenge posed at www.oubapo-america.com.



Oubapo is not a movement that you join or follow. Oubapo is an approach to thinking about and creating comics using constraints as a creative principle.

A brief history

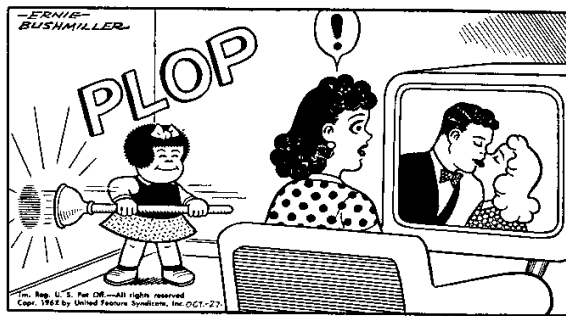
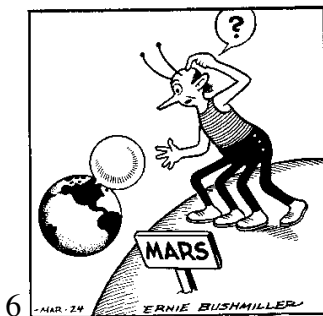
Oubapo, the *OU*vroir de *B*Ande dessinée *P*OTentielle (workshop for potential comics) was inspired by Oulipo, the *OU*vroir de *L*itterature *P*OTentielle (workshop for potential literature), a formalist writers' group founded in 1960, and including among its members Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, and Georges Perec. Oulipo's members took pleasure in inventing formal constraints applied to writing, an example of which is, famously, George Perec's novel written entirely without the letter "e": *La Disparition*.

A group of French cartoonists (Jean-Christophe Menu, Killoffer, Lewis Trondheim, et al), finding that comics could be constrained in a fashion similar to that of the work of Oulipo, founded Oubapo in 1992.

Inspired by the French Oubapo group, Matt Madden, Tom Hart, Jason Little, and Tom Motley formed their new world branch of Oubapo in 2001.



Above: a page from Matt Madden's solution to the Silent Running challenge posed at www.oubapo-america.com; an example of iconographic repetition.



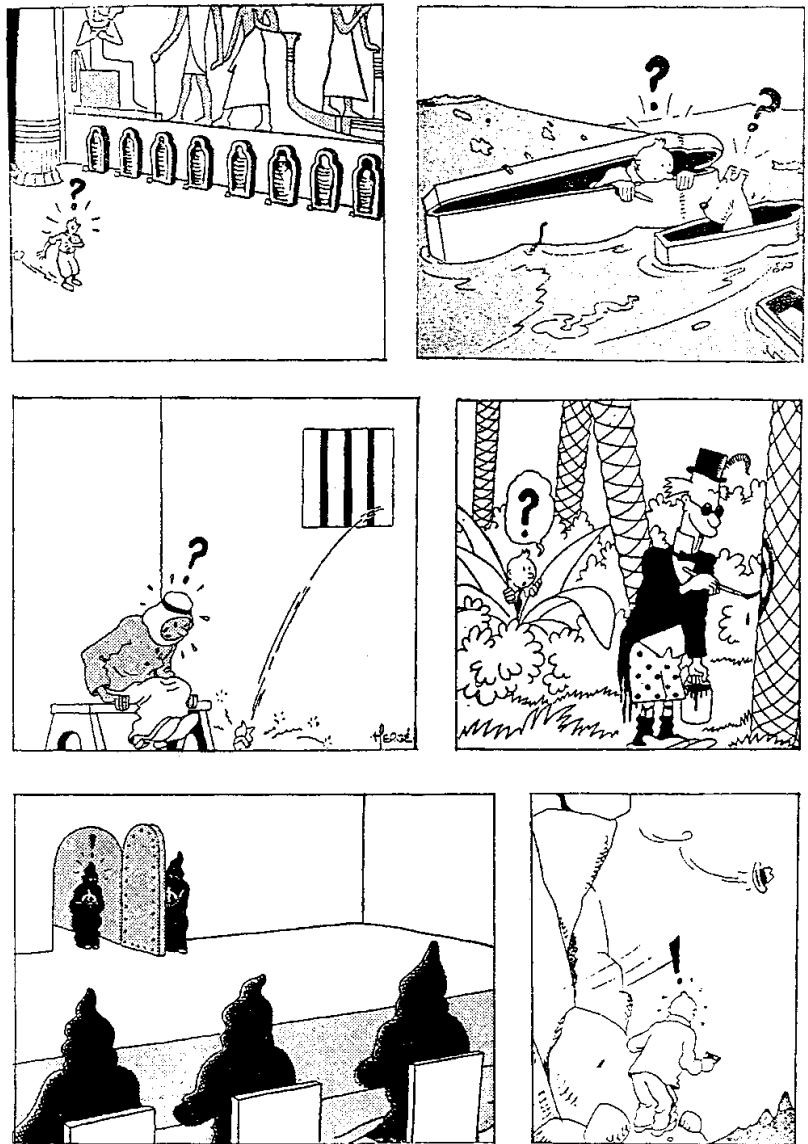
Bibliography

Matthews, Harry: *The Oulipo Compendium*. Atlas Press, London, 1998. ISBN 0-947757-96-1

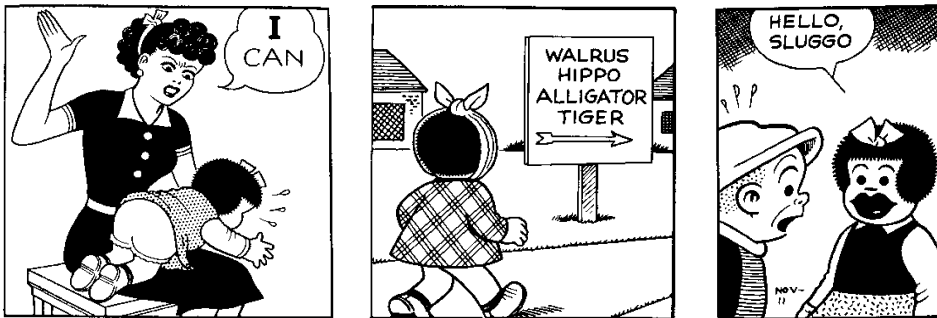
Oubapo: *Oupus 1*. L'Association, Paris, 1997. ISBN 2-90902-075-4

Oubapo: *Oupus 3, Les Vacances de l'Oubapo*. L'Association, Paris, 2000. ISBN 2-844140-54-8.

Website:
www.oubapo-america.com



Above: a reduction of Herge's *Cigars of the Pharaoh* to six panels by Gilles Ciment. An example of a transformative constraint. From *Oupus 1*.



Left: a solution to anticipatory plagiarist Scott McCloud's invention, the cooperative card game *Five Card Nancy*. Players take turns placing panels until the resultant strip is considered finished. An example of a transformative constraint.

8 COMICS IN ONE!

by Ed Subitzky

A DIRTY COMIC, A SPORTS COMIC, AN EDUCATIONAL COMIC, A LOVE COMIC, A TRAGIC COMIC, A HUMOR COMIC, A DETECTIVE COMIC, AND A HORROR COMIC!

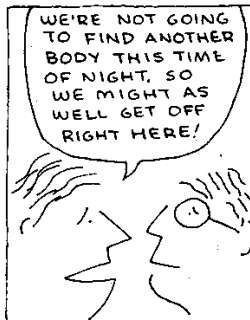
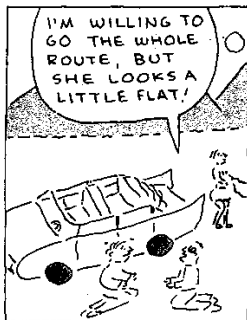
TO READ
DRESS DEPT. TRAGEDY
START HERE
AND READ
DOWN

TO READ
TEEN JALOPY YOCKS
START HERE
AND READ
DOWN

TO READ
SCOTLAND YD. CASEBOOK
START HERE
AND READ
DOWN

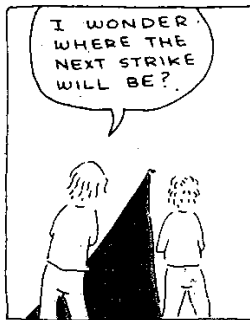
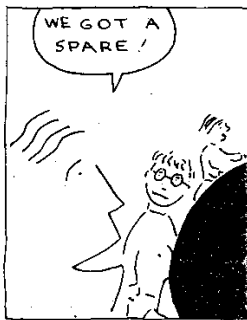
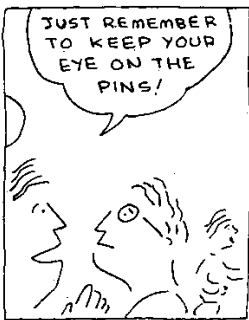
TO READ
TERROR OF DRACULA
START HERE
AND READ
DOWN

TO READ
UNDER-GROUND SEX COMICS
START HERE
AND READ
ACROSS



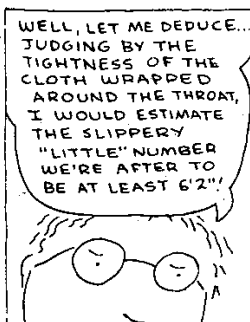
END
UNDER-GROUND SEX COMICS

TO READ
BOWLING WITH THE BOYS
START HERE
AND READ
ACROSS



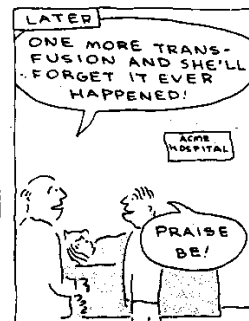
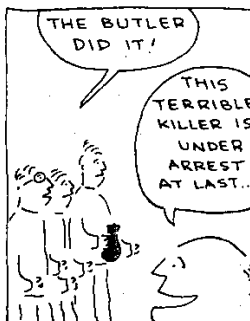
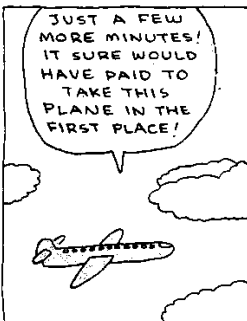
END
BOWLING WITH THE BOYS

TO READ
YOUNG ISAAC NEWTON
START HERE
AND READ
ACROSS



END
YOUNG ISAAC NEWTON

TO READ
TRUE LOVE DRAMA
START HERE
AND READ
ACROSS



END
TRUE LOVE DRAMA

END
DRESS DEPT. TRAGEDY

END
TEEN JALOPY YOCKS

END
SCOTLAND YD. CASEBOOK

END
TERROR OF DRACULA