

RECEIVED IDEAS

Keywords*Studio**Pedagogy**Found object**Cliché**Project*

As 'found objects', ideas received are mobilized as the arguments which prompt a critical, pedagogical formulation. In one case, constrictions trigger the project; on the other, clichés become a straitjacket to design. In both, the goal is the same: pushing the students to take architecture one step further, transforming the series of studios into a pedagogical project with its own life.

Under constraint

Raymond Roussel decided to write certain of his books by using two homonymous, or almost homophonic, sentences as the beginning and the end of his stories; Samuel Beckett decided to write several of his books in a language other than his own; Thomas Bernhard decided to write some of his novels in one paragraph; Jerzy Andrzejewsky decided to write a novel in one sentence; Michel Butor decided to write a novel in the second person; Italo Calvino decided to write a novel with ten beginnings; Raymond Queneau decided to write a set of ten sonnets whose corresponding lines could be replaced with one another; Jacques Roubaud decided to write a series of poems corresponding to the pieces of a game of 'go'; Georges Perec decided, but failed, to write a novel in the amount of time Stendhal had spent writing one of his; Marcel Bénabou decided to write a book by giving an account of his impossibility to write one; Jacques Jouet decided to write poems corresponding to the stops of his subway journeys; Gilbert Sorrentino decided to write a novel by only resorting to questions; Harry Mathews decided to write a novel under a constraint he declined to reveal.

Alain Resnais decided to make a film that would trace all the possible forkings of a story; Chantal Akerman decided to make a film by shadowing the protagonist; Luis Buñuel decided to make a film by constantly changing the protagonist; Dziga Vertov decided to make a film by using the city as protagonist;

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Joris Ivens decided to make a film by using the city and a rainstorm as protagonists; Werner Herzog's decided to make some of his films by documenting real actions; Jean-Luc Godard decided to make several of his films by resorting only to a girl and a gun; Chris Marker decided to make a film by resorting only to stills; Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau decided to make a silent film without resorting to intertitles; Alfred Hitchcock decided to make a film in one continuous take; Aleksandr Sokurov decided to make a film in one take; Néstor Almendros decided to accept Terrence Malick's decision to shoot a film almost entirely during the magic hour after sunset; Jørgen Leth decided to accept Lars von Trier's decision to remake one of his films five times; Stanley Kubrick decided to light a candlelight scene in one of his films by only using candles.

'Under Constraint' (2003-2006) was a series of ten consecutive design studios that examined the use of self-imposed constraints in architectural design. Subjected by definition to a regime of external forces, architecture has by and large disregarded self-imposed constraints as a critical tool, unlike literature or film. Given the abundance of restrictions in architectural practice, and the assumption that design problems are granted, constraints have with few exceptions been either dismissed as obstacles to the imagination, or accepted as requirements to be met. Architectural practice often embraces voluntary constraints when involuntary constraints are weak, though still masking them as external forces, and, in so doing, hindering their potential as a tool. Against this long-standing tradition of problem-solving in architecture, this series explored voluntary and, therefore, arbitrary constraints. The practice of self-imposed constraints entails deliberately formulating a design problem: an uncompromising decision, if not also a renunciation, which, if properly calibrated, this studio proposed, might open up otherwise unexpected paths of production. If the early installments in this series attempted to use self-imposed constraints to instigate findings, or alternative concepts, the final installments used constraints against concepts, as tools to undermine received ideas – and, as such, actual obstacles – inevitably installed in concepts.

The dictionary of received ideas

Gustave Flaubert started to collect received ideas at the age of nine, when, according to one of his earliest letters, he decided to write down the senseless remarks of an old family acquaintance who used to visit their house in Rouen from Paris. This early pastime would turn into a lifetime project. Flaubert outlined the plan for a dictionary of received ideas around the time when he began his novel *Madame Bovary*, and compiled the entries over the next three decades; at the time of his death, the book was still incomplete. The dictionary was meant to become a book in itself, or an appendix to his novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, which also remained unfinished. After devoting decades to the study in succession of a considerable series of disciplines, and systematically failing in their application, if not in gathering received ideas along the way, Bouvard and Pécuchet would have returned to their original trade of copyists, had Flaubert completed the novel, and, as their last endeavor and closure to the cycle, write down the dictionary. The entries Flaubert recorded appeared posthumously as *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues*; sometimes published as a book, sometimes as an appendix to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

The dictionary, a book for which Flaubert decided not to compose a single line, with the exception of a preface, would thoroughly record commonplaces, platitudes, and automatic thoughts current at the time, accepted ideas that were repeated ad nauseam precisely at the expense of thinking. Flaubert expected, as he wrote in a letter to Louise Colet, that after reading the book the reader would be afraid to talk, for fear of using one of the phrases in it. Accordingly, he recorded the dictionary entries as instructions, rather than definitions, as statements one ought to repeat with each of the terms. In retrospect, the unfinished series of entries posthumously published as *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues* reads less as an inventory of potential exclusions, or as a list of phrases one would be afraid to repeat, as Flaubert had intended, than as a collection of 'found objects.' More than a century after they were recorded, the received ideas contained in the dictionary, the very provincialism that Flaubert meant to castigate, and for which he also doomed many of the characters in his novels, have only in part remained current, and are largely open to be read and misread, used and misused.

'The Dictionary of Received Ideas' (2006-2015) was a decade-long project, whose aim was to examine received ideas in contemporary architecture culture; that is, those design strategies that exhausted their original intensity due to recurrence, and those that outlived the design problems they originally addressed. This series of architecture studios and theory seminars proposed to detect and record received ideas prevalent in the field of architecture over the previous decade, both in the professional and academic realms, as a means to ultimately open up otherwise precluded possibilities for architectural design and architectural theory. To that end, it focused on design operations and conceptual strategies, particularly in terms of the means of representation and the lexicon through which they were respectively articulated. This project took as precedent Gustave Flaubert's unfinished book, *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues*. Just as the latter, it recorded received ideas as a series of instructions – or user's manuals – in order to render them self-evident. But as opposed to the latter, by and large an inventory of potential exclusions, this project also sought to mobilize this collection of received ideas as a series of 'found objects' – or constraints – towards the formulation of alternative design strategies and design arguments. **ARQ**

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