

HUBRIS OR UTOPIA?

Megalomania and imagination in the work of Paul Otlet

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▪ De documentalist en internationalist Paul Otlet (1868-1944) wordt door verschillende auteurs en curatoren beschreven als een utopisch, visionair denker. Ook in zijn eigen tijd werd Otlet vaak bekritiseerd omwille van zijn megalomanie. Dit artikel bevestigt de "hubris" in zijn karakter, maar geeft ook een nieuwe en meer positieve interpretatie van zijn utopisme. In die interpretatie wordt het anticiperend en organiserend karakter van Otlets verbeelding benadrukt waarmee hij nieuwe mogelijkheden verkende voor de organisatie van kennis.

▪ Le documentaliste et internationaliste Paul Otlet (1868-1944) est décrit par différents auteurs et commissaires d'expositions comme un penseur utopiste et visionnaire. À son époque également, Otlet fut souvent critiqué du fait de sa mégalomanie. Cet article confirme l'"hybris" dans son caractère, mais fournit également une interprétation nouvelle et plus positive de son utopisme. Dans cette interprétation, l'accent est mis sur le caractère anticipatif et organisé de l'imagination d'Otlet, qui lui permit d'explorer de nouvelles possibilités d'organiser la connaissance.

In 1898, the Belgian art critic Octave Maus portrayed his friend, Paul Otlet, then thirty years old and still at the beginning of his career, with the following colourful words:

*"About thirty. His bushy beard and a pince-nez, which under a wide forehead shadows inquisitive eyes, a bony face and the dogmatic nature of his gestures, makes one think of a professor of philology from Bonn or Heidelberg, without the formality of the university. The severity of his appearance is lightened by a smile that is now malicious, now ironic and relaxes his features, cutting little wrinkles around his half opened mouth. Laughter lives in this mobile face, but a silent inward laughter that masks the rapid movement of his thoughts"*¹ (figure 1).

According to Maus, he was a man of cordial character, with a multiplicity of tastes and an independent mind, a mind that had absorbed the complexity of the intellectual culture of his time. As Maus observed, *"his intimates cannot imagine otherwise, when they think of him, than as the image of a man surrounded by cards, boxes, files that he juggles with the agility of a slight-of-hand artist"*². By *"the ardour of his faith and the firmness of his convictions"*³, he pursued the dream and the ambition to *"inventory human thought, to establish a registry of thirty or forty million works scattered in all the libraries of the globe, and then to keep this colossal enterprise up to date, to make the work permanent"*⁴. This was the *Universal Bibliographic Repertory (Répertoire Bibliographique Universel*, often referred to as the *RBU*), a project that he developed in collaboration with the lawyer, freemason, and socialist Henri La Fontaine (1854-1943). In addition to his bibliographical enterprise to inventory all publications, as described by Maus, Otlet's work is a milestone in the history of information science in that he formulated the concept of "documentation", a



Fig. 1: Portrait of Paul Otlet in his late twenties.

field both of study and practice that evolved out of bibliography and developed into information science.

But Otlet was more than a bibliographer, encyclopaedist, and founding father of the discipline of "documentation". He was also a sociologist, an internationalist, and an untiring promoter of his conception of "universalism" or "mondialisme", of the Mundaneum and the Cité Mondiale. In 1907, Otlet founded in collaboration with Henri La Fontaine and Cyrille Van Overbergh (1866-1959; principal private Secretary to the Minister of Science and Culture) the Central Office of International Associations (Office Central des Associa-

tions Internationales). This was an umbrella organization for international organizations which had their main headquarters in Brussels. During the World War I, Otlet worked actively promoting the organization of a League of Nations and on the role that international associations should have in its constitution. Furthermore, much of Otlet's career was absorbed by the development of the Mundaneum and the Cité Mondiale. The Mundaneum, as Otlet conceived it, was to be a scientific, documentary, educational, and social institution which aimed to explain the World in all its parts and, therefore, help to bring peace to the world. It took its preliminary form in the Palais Mondial in the Parc du Cinquantaire in Brussels. The Cité Mondiale was for Otlet an extraterritorial district where all the great international institutions would be centralized and where each nation-state would have its pavilion, and each international association its residence.

The present perception of Otlet as a utopian

Because of his vision of the Mundaneum and the Cité Mondiale, Otlet is often considered as a utopian, visionary thinker. Although Rayward, in his biography, does not explicitly brand Otlet as a "utopian", he detects a growing "abstractness" of his proposals, and an increased detachment "from actual, competitive, international organization"⁵. This tendency is confirmed in the last chapter, "last decades", in which Rayward concludes that Otlet in his seventies "appears to have become increasingly introspective":

*"One can imagine him hunched over his desk, surrounded by perilously balanced mountains of documents, cards, books and papers, drawing before him some sheets of papers to note down the thoughts that came as he contemplated his life"*⁶.

The photograph that seems to correspond to this description was used by Françoise Levie for the cover of her documentary film (figure 2). For the cover of her biography – *L'Homme qui voulait classer le monde* (2006) – however, Levie used a drawing by François Schuiten that is inspired on a photograph (figure 3) that shows Otlet at about seventy years old seated before the staircase in the municipal school in the rue Fétis, in Etterbeek, in front of where he lived, described by Levie as giving:⁷ *"an impression of infinite sadness, juvenile fiddling around and unforgiving failure. In this photo, the secretary of the Palais Mondial appears resigned to his lot. Cut-off from his beloved museum, he goes around in circles, repeats himself, and lapses into dotage or even monomania. How to escape this situation?"*⁸.

In his drawing, Schuiten transforms the scenery described by Levie into a laboratory of dreams that Otlet fantasied to live in, as an escape from a life of disappointments. In her biography, Levie gives ample attention to *"his dreams, his utopias, his accomplishments, his disappointments, his delights, his hopes, the ups and downs of a life*



Fig. 2: Photograph of Otlet at his desk in his house in the Rue Fétis.

*from birth to death"*⁹. The man who wanted to classify the world is necessarily a megalomaniac; and the story by Levie novelizes this megalomania.

The visionary or utopian dimension of Otlet's monumental oeuvre has also been emphasized in the last decade by different journalists, exhibition makers, and authors. In an article in *Le Monde Magazine*, in 2009, the journalist Jean-Michel Dijan calls Otlet and his colleague Henri La Fontaine "two utopians/lawyers" who *"have devoted their life to a mad enterprise: to assemble and to make accessible to everyone all the knowledge of the world"*¹⁰. Like Dijan, the journalist Alex Wright mythologized Otlet in *The New York Times*, in 2008, in contemporary terms as the forgotten forefather of the World Wide Web¹¹.



Fig. 3: Photograph of Otlet before the staircase in the municipal school in the Rue Fétis.

Furthermore, several exhibitions or shows have portrayed Otlet as an extraordinary or somewhat eccentric visionary. This is the case for example of the exhibition hall in the Mundaneum in Mons, of which the scenography is created by the cartoonists and designers François Schuiten and

Benoît Peeters, and of several exhibitions at the Mundaneum, such as *Utopia, de l'Atlantide aux cités du futur* (2007), *Du papyrus au livre électronique* (2007), and *Jules Verne: savoir rêver, savoirs rêvés* (2006). Furthermore, in 2002, the theatre Ad Hoc made a theatre production on "the tragedy and humour" of Otlet's urge to completeness; in *La Belgique visionnaire. C'est arrivé près de chez nous* (2005), Harald Szeemann put Otlet on his list of Belgian surreal visionaries¹²; and in 2006, the exhibition *Dwaze wijzen en wijze dwazen* in the Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent included Otlet in a series of Flemish and Dutch "morosophes" [wise fools], thinkers whose comprehensive theories are 'so absurd and monomaniacal that they attain almost a literary quality'¹³. In this series of popular accounts about Otlet it seems not entirely clear whether Otlet, rather like the historian Edward Hall remarked of the utopian thinker Thomas More, should be called a foolish wise man, or a wise foolish man¹⁴.

Contemporary critiques on Otlet's megalomania

It is necessary to emphasize however that, although the work of Otlet is characterized by the authors mentioned above as visionary or utopian, Otlet himself never considered his concrete endeavours to be utopian in the sense of unrealistic, although he did on different occasions relate his more visionary schemes to a utopian mode of thought¹⁵. He spoke, for example, of his vision of the "Universal Book", which will be discussed, as a conception which he had arrived at "*by means of reflection, generalization, inventive and creative imagination that is applied to answering desiderata that are clearly defined*" and which he related to "similar attempts" which "*the ancients referred to with the term "utopia" and even more, with the term "anticipation"*". "*Nowadays*", Otlet continued, "*each act of science and technology must consider what could and what should be; what should take place after what already is or has been*"¹⁶. Yet, he believed that all of the different organizational schemes and projects which he pursued could be fully realized, and, in effect, he did everything in his power to realize them, albeit in a preliminary, experimental form.

From the series of projects that occupied him during his career, he linked only the Cité Mondiale to the concept of utopia in the traditional meaning of the word; as a type of work whose name derives from the *Utopia* of Thomas More and which imagines a city through which the ideal commonwealth is realized and which aims at the good life¹⁷. In his writings, Otlet presented the Cité Mondiale as a continuation of

other utopias, such as Plato's *Republic*, Saint-Augustine's *City of God*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and the fantastic cities described by Jules Verne, Herbert George Wells, and Frederik Van Eeden¹⁸. However, the Cité Mondiale was for Otlet – to use the terminology of Lewis Mumford – certainly not a "utopia of escape" which belongs to the department of pure literature but, rather, a "utopia of reconstruction" which reckons with the world in which it seeks realization¹⁹. Otlet believed that the Cité Mondiale could be realized. "*Utopia? Chimera? Not at all*", he declared²⁰. He explored the financial and juridical conditions for its realization, negotiated with land owners and politicians, and commissioned architects to draw plans for specific sites²¹.

Whereas Otlet himself did not consider his ideas to be utopian, some of his contemporaries designated them as such, because they considered his ideas to be in principle unfeasible, unrealistic, or impracticable. As Karl Mannheim has observed, the meaning of the concept utopia "*depends necessarily upon one's perspective, i.e., it contains within itself the whole system of thought representing the position of the thinker in question*"²². In the first place, it was Otlet's opponents and critics who termed his ideas utopian or megalomaniac. His dream to make a bibliography of all that had been published, was criticized by several European library professionals, as Uyttenhove and Van Peteghem have observed, as "a pipe dream" or "simply megalomaniacal"²³. Otlet was criticized for the megalomania of his schemes, but he also was praised for his courage and perseverance. As his career developed, it seems that he continued to gain more sympathy but less support from influential political protagonists who had supported him earlier in his career. The Swiss architect Le Corbusier, one of Otlet's friends, remembered how Otlet, when he presented his grand vision of the Mundaneum and the Cité Mondiale in Geneva in 1928, was confronted with the audience's incomprehension. "*In Geneva, in 1928, when Paul Otlet suddenly took from his pocket a little metal case no bigger than a walnut and unrolled its microfilm, carrier of documentary truth, he was greeted by sarcasm and smiles. "Poor fool", they thought*"²⁴.

The organizational schemes of the "propagandist of "Mondialisme"", as Le Corbusier calls Otlet, illustrated by means of projections of all sorts of schemas, were considered by the public in Geneva to be unrealistic and impracticable. One of the key figures in Geneva at that time, Albert Thomas, the first director of the Office of the International Labour Organization (ILO), sympathized with Otlet's work but found nonetheless that his ideas held a certain "naïveté". In a letter

to Edgard Milhaud, a socialist and professor of political economy at the University of Geneva, Thomas mentioned what he thought of Otlet:

*"You know what my policy is in relation to Otlet. I respect his efforts, despite the fact that what he does is a little uncertain and naïve. I want to help him the best that I can. But I cannot at all engage the Office in his causes. I would just like to assure him of my sympathy and [let him know that], should the need arise, me and my friends are there to help him"*²⁵.

In contrast to his critics and opponents, Otlet's loyal friends and collaborators thought that his failure to realize his ideas should be blamed on the declining support his projects received from others, in particular from the Belgian authorities. Igor Platounoff, for example, who was a collaborator of the Palais Mondial in the 1930s, stated in 1999 that he *"does not agree with those who consider him as a utopian. [...] What he lacked was money, to maintain things, to catalogue documents ..."*²⁶.

Otlet's work may be labelled to a certain extent as utopian today for the very same reasons he was criticized in his own time: the megalomania, overly systematic character, and large scale of his endeavours. The fact that his enterprises eventually withered or failed to be realized is what makes them utopian from the present point of view, as Benoît Peeters has observed: *"the peculiarity of a true utopia is of not being transformed into reality, and the melancholy engendered by this succession of failures is by no means foreign to the charm that the history of the man who wanted to classify the world continues to exert"*²⁷. Moreover, especially from the mid-1920s onward, his overestimation of his influence and the increasing loss of contact with reality and contemporaries modes of thought is captured even better than "utopia" by notion of "hubris"; what in Greek tragedy was used to describe the actions of a protagonist who challenged the gods and their laws, resulting in his or her death or downfall.

Utopia as anticipative imagination

Because of the scepticism and criticism with which the word "utopia" has been approached since the 1960s, the term "utopia" is mostly used in the negative sense to refer to megalomania. However, the adjective "utopian" can also be applied to Otlet's work in a positive sense, namely to pinpoint the visionary character of his work. I use and understand the term "utopia" positively, as meaning a productive mode of imagination and ideal thinking that is directed at the real and that is opposed to acceptance of the status

quo²⁸. As Zygmunt Bauman has proclaimed, utopias are all too easily dismissed *"as a figment of unrestrained fantasy, unscientific, at odds with reality—i.e., loaded with all those features which mark off an idea as something to be kept at a safe distance from scholarly discourse"*, and therefore are easily denied their original force, to use a metaphor of Bauman, of knives that were once pressed with their edges against the future²⁹. Otlet's schemes, as I take it, reveal the extraordinary sense of organizational imagination with which he was gifted, and may therefore be called utopian in the sense that they attest to a mode of thinking that operates through projective imagination. The utopian mind, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, leaps into a "non-place" or "u-topos", not as a place of refuge far removed from reality but as a laboratory of imagination³⁰. In that laboratory, it can try out different courses of action and redescribe reality. Like fiction, utopia is directed elsewhere, but it uses the power of imagination to unfold new possible directions in reality³¹.

Otlet's projects and projections were utopian in the sense that they addressed reality by exploring and anticipating the impact of issues such as globalization, internationalization, and the application to society of new information technologies. It is worthwhile to briefly explore some of the ideas of Otlet that, although firmly rooted in its historical reality, anticipated the future or at least resonate with questions that occupy us today. A first dimension in Otlet's work that may be called visionary is the way he approached "information" as consisting of "morselized", quantifiable, and coded units or pieces of information, much in the same way as Geoffrey Nunberg, for example, characterizes information today³². Otlet's idea to record information in separate chunks or units according to the "monographic principle" foreshadowed, in a certain sense, the present tendency to conceive of information as detachable and manipulable units or atoms of content, whose retrieveability has become more important than the information itself.

A second level on which Otlet's utopia still resonates with our present times is the similarity between his vision of a collective, mechanical brain, on the one hand, and the emergence of a global brain that some theoreticians and philosophers observe to be emerging today³³. From the "collective, mechanical brain" of Otlet, the "super-organism" of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the "world brain" of H.G. Wells (1866-1946), the "noosphere" of the French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), different scholars have tried to conceptualize in terms of evolutionary, humanist, and organicist models what seems to be an emergent cognitive

system that functions at a planetary level³⁴. Although Otlet's humanist dream of collective brain might seem for us more a dystopia than a utopia, because of its elitist and authoritarian characteristics, his hierarchical view is still relevant in that it is more concerned about historical continuity than about real-time coordination³⁵. Otlet's concern for knowledge to be passed on continuously through time and space also expresses itself in the central role that he attributed to education. For Otlet, education was crucial in securing the transmission of knowledge to future generations and ever larger social bodies. It is this concern for the collective process of communication as a historical process which is worth emphasizing in times when the focus on inter-individual real-time communication seems to dominate.

Thirdly, Otlet's ideas about the Cité Mondiale resonate with some of the trends that characterize current European planning politics. Otlet's idealist activism for the location of international organization in one world capital seems outdated in that the capital of Europe is today in fact a superposition of the three official capitals (Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels), a network of cities hosting European Agencies, and a rotating European Capital of Culture³⁶. Yet, even within this new paradigm of a polycentric capital, the process of centre formation within the European Union continues, as well as the competition for that matter between political, cultural, and economic centres. These centres continue to proclaim themselves on various occasions in the name of the higher cultural idea of the Europe or the European spirit to be the "heart of Europe", much in the same way as Otlet and others in the early twentieth century claimed in the name of various internationalist ideals and programmes that Brussels deserved to be entitled the Capital of the World³⁷.

Otlet's laboratory of imagination

The output of the laboratory of Otlet's organizational imagination didn't take the form of a novelistic text (as for example in Thomas More's *Utopia*), but a series of graphic schemas containing a mix of symbolic, iconographic and geometric figures, complemented by a loose collection of notes and passages in articles and books³⁸. The large collection of drawings that he produced throughout his life, helped him to organize his thoughts but also to propagandize and to keep in high visibility his internationalist ideas and projects through exhibitions, pamphlets, articles, lectures, and not in the least, the International Museum occupying the prestigious Palais du Cinquantenaire in Brussels. Otlet propagated his ideas to the point that there arose an Otlet fa-

tigue in diplomatic and political circles, although his visualizations also made him successfully attract the support of leading modernist architects and urban planners such as Patrick Geddes, Le Corbusier, Victor Bourgeois, and Raphaël Verwilghen. At the same time he assembled his schemas in a visual educational encyclopaedia, called the *Encyclopedia Universalis Mundaneum (EUM)*, which was a notable encyclopaedic experiment against the background of the long-standing research of the International Institute of Bibliography, but of which the graphical techniques and its synthetic pyramidal approach, set him apart from others, such as the sociologist and philosopher of science Otto Neurath, using more rigorous forms of statistical representation and adopting a dynamic, anti-foundational, logical-positivistic conception of encyclopaedic unity.

Nevertheless, Otlet's visionary schemes did not remain visions on paper but also were anchored physically in that reality. The many abstract structures which Otlet imagined were linked to the many concrete, highly ambitious, and innovative projects that he pursued throughout his career. They sought but failed to be fully realized in the order of the reality in which they originated and against which they reacted. In his work, Otlet's more abstract schemes and his concrete projects interacted and complemented one another. His concrete projects - for example the *Universal Bibliographic Repertory*, the *Documentary Encyclopaedia*, and the Palais Mondial - were laboratories in which he tested his abstract arrangements in a preliminary and uncompleted form; at the same time, his abstract programs extended what he had explored in concrete form. To use Foucault's distinction between utopias and heterotopias, we could say that Otlet created both utopias and heterotopias. He created utopias or "arrangements which have no real space", that "are by their very essence fundamentally unreal" and which "represent society itself brought to perfection"; while he also created heterotopias, or real and effective spaces that lie outside all places and yet are actually localizable, "places which are absolutely **other** with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect"³⁹.

In the work and career of Otlet it is hard to draw a line between the more visionary, utopian schemes and his practical accomplishments. The abstract, visionary structures which he imagined, extended the concrete, practical projects which he pursued throughout his career; while his concrete projects may also be considered as laboratories in which his abstract arrangements could be tested in a preliminary and uncompleted form. The *Documentary Encyclopaedia* (1907) gave form to or tested what he had theorized as the *Universal Book* (1903); the *Mundaneum* (1924)

stood at the same time for the *Palais Mondial* (1920) and for an abstract institutional concept; the *Encyclopaedia Universalis Mundaneum* (1925) was conceived to have its spatialized, scenographic version in the *International Museum* (1910); and the development of the *International Institute of Documentation* (1931) was influenced by and gave rise to his vision of the *Universal Network of Documentation* (1934).

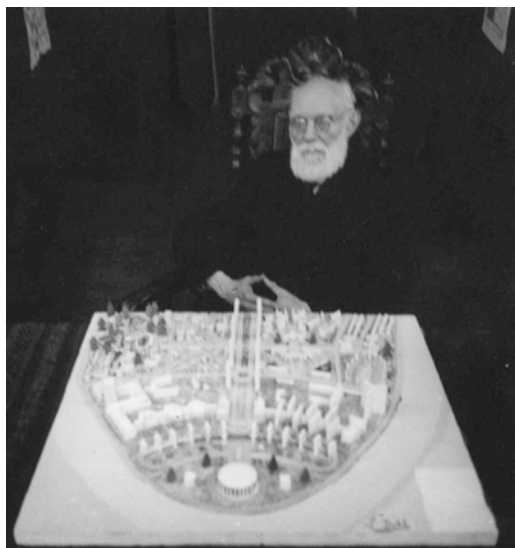


Fig. 4: Photograph of Otlet seated behind a scale model of the *Cité Mondiale* designed by the Belgian modernist architect Stanislas Jasinski in 1941.

Jasinski in 1941 (Figure 4). From the picture emerges a man who despite all his setbacks, tenaciously kept reflecting on what he understood and imagined to be the drift and potential of the society in which he lived, suggesting as such not so much the failure and drama of Otlet's pursuit of his dreams, but the increasing perfection and concreteness he gave to his schemes.

While previous historical research has justly emphasized that Otlet appeared to many outsiders as someone who had become increasingly obsessed by his own visions, and while it is therefore tempting to characterize him like the stereotypical utopian as a tragic and even tragicomic figure who died unfulfilled, his utopia cannot be explained or assessed, by turning only to its life-context. As Frank and Fritzie Manuel have stated: "One of the most prickly tasks for the commentator on utopia is to assess the commitment of a utopian author to his own work"⁴⁰. Utopian theories are in principle not to be realized and to value utopian theories on the basis of the extent to which their dreams were realized is therefore a deluding criterion for judgment. A historical appraisal of Otlet's utopian visions must also go inside the utopian theory itself, search for its intent, unravel its toolbox of concepts, reveal the provocative realist behind the megalomaniac, and analyse what he repudiated in the present and what he sensed to have potential for the future.

Conclusion

In apposition to the portrait of Otlet at thirty with which I opened this article, I want to conclude with a photograph that shows Otlet in his early seventies, seated on a high-backed chair behind a scale model of the *Cité Mondiale* as designed by the Belgian modernist architect Stanislas

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Notes

- ¹ "La trentaine. Avec sa barbe en broussaille et le binocle qui abrite, sous un front développé, des yeux fureteurs, avec son visage osseux et le caractère dogmatique de ses gestes, fait songer à quelque professeur de philologie de Bonn ou d'Heidelberg, moins la raideur universitaire. La gravité de sa physionomie s'éclaire d'un sourire tour à tour malicieux et ironique qui détend les traits, creuse de petites rides autour de la bouche entr'ouverte. Le rire habite cette face mobile, mais un rire muet, en dedans, qui masque le rapide passage des pensées". Maus, Octave. Paul Otlet : Pressophiles et journalistes. *La Presse Universelle, Organe officiel de l'Union de la Presse Périodique Belge*, 1898, Vol. 2, n° 5-6, p. 77-81 (77).
- ² "Ses intimes ne peuvent se le représenter autrement, lorsqu'ils évoquent son image, qu'entouré de fiches, de boîtes, de classeurs avec lesquels il jongle en prestidigitateur agile". Ibid., p. 77-78.
- ³ "Paul Otlet s'est révélé, dans l'un et l'autre de ces monuments, bâtisseur résolu, opiniâtre, fidèle à une idée qu'il a fait triompher, malgré les résistances, par l'ardeur de sa foi et la fermeté de ses convictions". Ibid., p. 80.

- 4 "Inventorier la pensée humaine, établir l'état-civil des trente ou quarante millions de travaux disséminés dans toutes les bibliothèques du globe, et tenir ensuite à jour cette entreprise colossale, donner à l'œuvre la pérennité, quel rêve et quelle généreuse ambition !". Ibid., p. 77-81 (78).
- 5 Rayward, W. Boyd. *The Universe of Information. The Work of Paul Otlet for Documentation and International Organisation*. VINITI, 1975, p. 283.
- 6 Ibid., p. 359.
- 7 Levie, Françoise. *L'homme qui voulait classer le monde : Paul Otlet et le Mundaneum*. Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2006, p. 279.
- 8 "L'ensemble dégage une impression de tristesse infinie, de bricolage puéril et d'échec inéluctable. Sur cette photo, le secrétaire du Palais Mondial semble résigné à son sort. Coupé de son cher musée, il tourne en rond, se répète, a tendance au gâtisme et même à la monomanie. Comment sortir de cette situation ?". Levie, ibid., p.279.
- 9 "Il me paraît exceptionnel d'être ainsi confrontée à ce mur de caisses contenant tout de la vie d'un homme : ses rêves, ses utopies, son œuvre, ses chagrins, ses joies, ses espoirs, les tenants et les aboutissants d'une vie de la naissance à la mort". Levie, ibid., 12.
- 10 "Au début du XX^e siècle, deux juristes belges ont consacré leur vie à une folle entreprise : rassembler et rendre accessible à chacun tous les savoirs du monde. Outil de connaissance au service de la paix, leur grand œuvre, le Mundaneum, a posé les bases de la science documentaire - et préfigurait Internet avec un siècle d'avance". Djian, Jean-Michel. *Le Mundaneum, Google de Papier*. *Le Monde Magazine*, 19 December 2009.
- 11 Wright, Alex. *The Web Time Forgot*. *New York Times* [on line], 17 June 2008.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/2006/2017/science/2017mund.html?_r=2001&pagewanted=all>
(consulted 17 May 2012).
See also the blog of Alex Wright on Paul Otlet: Wright, Alex. *Forgotten forefather: Paul Otlet*. *Boxesandarrows* [on line], 10 November 2003 (consulted 17 May 2012).
<http://www.boxesandarrows.com/view/forgotten_forefather_paul_otlet>
- 12 Costermans, Barbara; Szeemann, Harald. *La Belgique Visionnaire. C'est arrivé près de chez nous [à l'occasion de l'Exposition "La Belgique Visionnaire. C'est Arrivé Près de Chez Nous" qui se tient au Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles du 4 mars au 15 mai 2005] = Visionair België*. Fonds Mercator, 2005, p. 40-41.
- 13 Museum Dr. Guislain, *Dwaze wijzen en wijze dwazen* (3/06/2006-3/09/2006)
<http://www.museumdrguislain.be/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=208&Itemid=44>
(consulted on 13 February 2010).
- 14 Holinshed, Raphael. *Chronicle*. John Harrison, 1577, p. 793.
- 15 Otlet, Paul. *Le Livre Universel. Le Livre de demain. Encyclopédie mondiale - Réseau de documentation*. (1938.12.08). MDN, Notes numérotées, Atlas de Documentation, Note n° 8338, 3.
- 16 "On arrive ainsi à concevoir le Livre Universel. On y arrive [...] par voie de réflexion, de généralisation; d'imagination inventive et créatrice s'appliquant à répondre aux desiderata nettement formulés". Otlet, Paul. *Le Livre Universel. Le Livre de demain. Encyclopédie mondiale - Réseau de documentation* (1938.12.08). MDN, Notes numérotées, Atlas de Documentation, Note n° 8338, 2.
"Le système du Livre Universel] est destiné à répondre aux desiderata exprimés. Les anciens qualifient semblable tentative autrefois, du terme utopie. Plus même, de celui d'anticipation. Cependant en tout acte de science et de technique on doit maintenant considérer ce qui pourrait être et devrait être, prendre place après elle de ce qui déjà est antérieur ou a été". Otlet, Paul. *Le Livre Universel. Le Livre de demain. Encyclopédie mondiale - Réseau de documentation* (1938.12.08). MDN, Notes numérotées, Atlas de Documentation, Note n° 8338, 3.
- 17 For a discussion of the definition of utopia as derived from More's *Utopia*, see: Choay, Françoise. *La règle et le modèle : sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*. Éditions du Seuil, 1980.
- 18 Otlet, Paul. *Sociologie et Urbanisme. L'Époque*, 2.4 and 5 (1934), p. 72-76 and p. 81-92 (87).
- 19 Mumford, Lewis. *The Story of Utopias*. [1922]. BiblioBazaar, 2008, p. 26.
- 20 Otlet, Paul. *Sociologie et Urbanisme*, ibid., p. 88.
- 21 Otlet, Paul. *Cité Mondiale. Geneva: World Civic Center: Mundaneum*. Palais Mondial, 1929.

- ²² Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. [1936]. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 196.
- ²³ Frantz Funck-Brentano, sub-librarian of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris, thought the repertory was "a pipe dream" that created more disorder than order; Charles Langlois (1863-1929), who became director of the French Archives nationales in 1913, considered the project of Otlet and La Fontaine "to be simply megalomaniacal"; while Ferdinand Van der Haeghen (1830-1913), the librarian of Ghent University, was convinced that the aims of Otlet and La Fontaine "will not be attained" and that, although he honoured their courage, he believed they had "not taken fully into account the immensity of their enterprise". Uyttenhove, Pieter and Van Peteghem, Sylvia. Ferdinand van der Haeghen's Shadow on Otlet: European Resistance to the Americanized Modernism of the Office International de Bibliographie. In Rayward, W. Boyd (ed.), *European Modernism and the Information Society*. Ashgate, 2008, p. 96, 100 and 95.
- ²⁴ Le Corbusier, *UN Headquarters*. Reinhold Publishing, 1947, p.38.
- ²⁵ "Vous savez ma politique à l'égard d'Otlet. Je respecte son effort, malgré tout ce qu'il comporte d'un peu incertain et de naïf. Je veux l'aider de mon mieux. Mais je ne peux pas engager ni de près ni de loin le Bureau dans toute son affaire. Je me contente de l'assurer de ma sympathie et, le cas échéant, de l'aider auprès d'amis". Thomas, Albert. Letter to Milhaud [around 1928]. ILO, *Archives of Albert Thomas*, CAT 7-539 M. Paul OTLET. With thanks to Jasmin Van Daele.
- ²⁶ "Concernant Otlet, je ne partage pas le point de vue de ceux qui le jugent utopiste. Je crois que les Américains ont donné des millions de dollars pour payer les Instituts. Mais c'était toujours insuffisant. Il est faux de dire comme vous le faites qu'Otlet a été dépassé par l'afflux de publications. Ce qui lui manquait c'était l'argent, pour entretenir les choses, répertorier les documents...". Füg, Jean-François. Un entretien avec Igor Platounoff, fidèle du Palais Mondial dans les années trente. *Le Mundanéen*, nr. 10, March 1999.
- ²⁷ "Mais le propre d'une véritable utopie est de ne pas se transformer en réalité. Et la mélancolie engendrée par cette succession d'échecs n'est sans doute pas étrangère au charme que continue d'exercer l'histoire de l'homme qui voulait classer le monde". Peeters, Benoît. La revanche d'Otlet. In Levie, Françoise (ed.). *L'homme qui voulait classer le monde : Paul Otlet et le Mundaneum*. Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2006, p. 321-326 (326).
- ²⁸ For a reassessment of the notion of "utopia" in contemporary urbanism and a discussion of the critiques by K. Popper, B. Russell, and L. Mumford on the alleged totalitarianism of utopias in the 1960s, see: Vidler, Anthony. *How to Invent Utopia: The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Plato's Polis*. Mellon Lecture at the CCA (2005.05.17) <http://www.cca.qc.ca/system/items/2485/original/Anthony_Vidler.mp3?1244230891> (consulted on May 17 2012).
- ²⁹ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Socialism, the Active Utopia*. Allen and Unwin, 1976, p. 9 and 12.
- ³⁰ This is a point made by Paul Ricoeur in: Ricoeur, Paul. Imagination in Discourse and in Action. Robinson, Gillian and Rundell, John (eds.). *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*. Routledge, 1994, p. 118-135 (124).
- ³¹ Bachelard, Gaston. *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie: Selections from Gaston Bachelard*. Dallas, Spring Publications, 1987. See also: Wunenburger, Jean-Jacques. *La vie des images*. Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2002, p. 13.
- ³² Nunberg, Geoffrey. Farewell to the Information Age. In Nunberg, Geoffrey (ed.). *The Future of the Book*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 103-138 (117).
- ³³ For other work on this see:
Stock, Gregory. *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism*. Simon & Schuster, 1993
Goetzl, Ben. World Wide Brain: Self-Organizing Internet Intelligence as the Actualization of the Collective Unconscious. In Gackenbach, Jayne (ed.). *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Transpersonal Implications*. Academic Press, 1998.
Heylighen, Francis. The Global Superorganism: An Evolutionary-cybernetic Model of the Emerging Network Society. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 6, nr 1, 2007, p. 58-119.
- ³⁴ For a historical review of the "global brain" idea, see:
Heylighen, Francis. Conceptions of a Global Brain: an historical review. In *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* [in press], available at: <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/Papers/GBconceptions.pdf>> (consulted on 17 May 2012).
On H.G. Wells's "World Brain" and its relation to more recent reflections, see:
Rayward, W. Boyd. H.G. Wells's Idea of a World Brain: A Critical Reassessment. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 1999, vol. 50, nr 7, p. 557-573

Rayward, W. Boyd. The March of the Modern and the Reconstitution of the World's Knowledge Apparatus: H.G. Wells, Encyclopedism and the World Brain. In Rayward, W. Boyd (ed.), *European Modernism and the Information Society*. Ashgate, 2008.

For the analogies between the Web 2.0 as conceived by Tim Berners-Lee and Otlet, see:

van den Heuvel, Charles. Web 2.0 and the Semantic Web in Research from a Historical Perspective. The Designs of Paul Otlet (1868-1944) for telecommunication and machine readable documentation to organize research and society. *Knowledge Organization*, 2009, vol. 36, nr. 4, p. 214-226.

³⁵ Institut International de Bibliographie. *Actes de la Conférence Internationale de Bibliographie et de Documentation. Bruxelles, 10 et 11 Juillet 1908. Tome premier*. Bruxelles, IIB, 1908, p. 5.

³⁶ Hein, Carola. *The Capital of Europe*. Westport, Praeger, 2004, p. 166.

³⁷ My own analysis here has been influenced by that of Derrida in: Derrida, Jacques. *The Other Heading*. Bloomington, 1991 & Indiana University Press, 1992.

³⁸ I have studied this collection of drawings in detail in my doctoral dissertation:
Van Acker, Wouter. *Universalism as Utopia. A Study of the Schemes and Schemas of Paul Otlet (1868-1944)*. Ghent University, 2011.

³⁹ Foucault, Michel. Of other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias. In: Leach, Neil (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Routledge, 1997, p. 350-356 (352).

⁴⁰ Manuel, Frank and Manuel, Fritzie. *Utopian thought in the Western world*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 27.