

## Cataloging the world : Paul Otlet and the birth of the information age

Wright, Alex, author

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### Abstrak

#### Summary:

"In 1934, a Belgian entrepreneur named Paul Otlet sketched out plans for a worldwide network of computers--or "electric telescopes," as he called them -- that would allow people anywhere in the world to search and browse through millions of books, newspapers, photographs, films and sound recordings, all linked together in what he termed a réseau mondial: a "worldwide web." Today, Otlet and his visionary proto-Internet have been all but forgotten, thanks to a series of historical misfortunes -- not least of which involved the Nazis marching into Brussels and destroying most of his life's work. In the years since Otlet's death, however, the world has witnessed the emergence of a global network that has proved him right about the possibilities -- and the perils -- of networked information. In *The Web that Wasn't*, Alex Wright brings to light the forgotten genius of Paul Otlet, an introverted librarian who harbored a bookworm's dream to organize all the world's information. Recognizing the limitations of traditional libraries and archives, Otlet began to imagine a radically new way of organizing information, and undertook his life's great work: a universal bibliography of all the world's published knowledge that ultimately totaled more than 12 million individual entries. That effort eventually evolved into the Mundaneum, a vast "city of knowledge" that opened its doors to the public in 1921 to widespread attention. Like many ambitious dreams, however, Otlet's eventually faltered, a victim to technological constraints and political upheaval in Europe on the eve of World War II. "--Résumé de l'éditeur