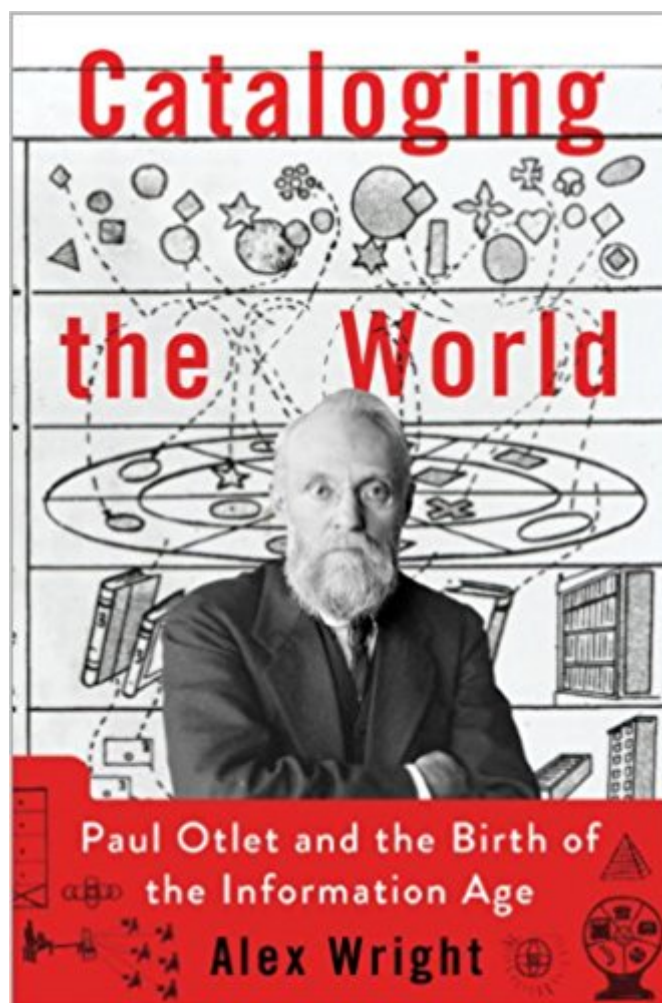The book was found

Cataloging The World: Paul Otlet And The Birth Of The Information Age

Synopsis

The dream of capturing and organizing knowledge is as old as history. From the archives of ancient Sumeria and the Library of Alexandria to the Library of Congress and Wikipedia, humanity has wrestled with the problem of harnessing its intellectual output. The timeless quest for wisdom has been as much about information storage and retrieval as creative genius.In Cataloging the World, Alex Wright introduces us to a figure who stands out in the long line of thinkers and idealists who devoted themselves to the task. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Paul Otlet, a librarian by training, worked at expanding the potential of the catalog card, the world's first information chip. From there followed universal libraries and museums, connecting his native Belgium to the world by means of a vast intellectual enterprise that attempted to organize and code everything ever published. Forty years before the first personal computer and fifty years before the first browser, Otlet envisioned a network of "electric telescopes" that would allow people everywhere to search through books, newspapers, photographs, and recordings, all linked together in what he termed, in 1934, a r?seau mondial--essentially, a worldwide web.Otlet's life achievement was the construction of the Mundaneum--a mechanical collective brain that would house and disseminate everything ever committed to paper. Filled with analog machines such as telegraphs and sorters, the Mundaneum--what some have called a "Steampunk version of hypertext"--was the embodiment of Otlet's ambitions. It was also short-lived. By the time the Nazis, who were pilfering libraries across Europe to collect information they thought useful, carted away Otlet's collection in 1940, the dream had ended. Broken, Otlet died in 1944.Wright's engaging intellectual history gives Otlet his due, restoring him to his proper place in the long continuum of visionaries and pioneers who have struggled to classify knowledge, from H.G. Wells and Melvil Dewey to Vannevar Bush, Ted Nelson, Tim Berners-Lee, and Steve Jobs. Wright shows that in the years since Otlet's death the world has witnessed the emergence of a global network that has proved him right about the possibilities--and the perils--of networked information, and his legacy persists in our digital world today, captured for all time.

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Customer Reviews

A fantastic read about a man that was the steampunk analog Google before there were computers. Paul Otlet's story as told by Alex Wright is riveting. The author pulls you in with a Nazi raid on Otlet's work. I thought to myself, "Where could it go from here?" Well the story goes from continent to continent, famous characters from the arts, politics and scientists. It perfectly illustrates how one man's obsession can influence the world...even if his ideas were way ahead of his time. There is a sadness to the man's life but also a prevailing sweetness of the allegiance to his work. His understanding that all things are connected and should be accessible to all of mankind is illustrated by the sheer influence his obsession has had. His work involved some of the greatest architects, like Corbusier, writers, world leaders and artists. How a book about the history of library science can be this interesting, is a testament to wild passionate imagination of Paul Otlet and the writing skill of this author. Truly couldn't put the book down.

Wright's Changing the World is a fascinating portrait of Paul Otlet, an information scientist (and man of letters and public intellectual) who was not only in the 1930s able to foresee the future and anticipate both the World Wide Web and Google search as well as add some additional elements that we haven't yet brought into the mainstream of information sharing, but he was able to actually build much of this with the elements that he had available at the time--index cards, microfiche, and the like. He was, like Google, concerned with the organization of the world's knowledge. In contrast

to Google, he was deeply concerned about world peace, and his universal organization of knowledge (BTW, the Library of Congress system of classification is basically a spin-off of otlet's) was an integral part of a much larger vision of world piece--a vision that he shared with La Fontaine (who won the Nobel Peace Prize), Le Corbusier and others. He envisioned his palace of knowledge as part of a League of Nations, devoted to world peace. Wright tells the story of Otlet and his vision with compelling prose and insightful analysis and in the process gives Otlet his proper place in the development of knowledge. A terrific read.

Paul Otlet, one of many Fathers of the Internet" worked to establish a global means of classifying and sharing the world's knowledge. He was a man ahead of his time condemned to sing index cards and microfilm rather than bytes and dependent on meagre government handouts rather than advertising dollars. His story is an interesting prequel to the Internet Age.

This is a compelling read that connects some obscure dots leading from the early 20th century to the Internet Age. I'd had an interest in Otlet's work since about 2008, but little information was available. Here comes Alex Wright to tell Otlet's story. Great read.

Kindle version is already available. Fascinating story of social scientist Otlet's attempt to gather all the world's information in one place. Well-written and compelling narrative brings Otlet, his world, and his struggles to life.

Recommend.

Ok

The desire to organize information seems innate, especially when you consider what lengths people have gone to do it. Alex Wright uncovers the life of one man who was passionate about capturing the world's knowledge in Cataloging the World: Paul Otlet and the Birth of the Information Age.Wright portrats Otlet as a librarian with a simple goal: to expand our use of the card catalog. His hope was that he could connect his home in Belgium to the rest of the world; however, his endeavor encompassed much more than this. This book also explores his creation of a Mundaneum, which was meant to hold everything that had ever been printed. His invention would allow "everyone from his armchair to contemplate creation" with images and text "projected on an individual screen." His

dreams were big and so close to what has come to be. Unfortunately, he lost his greatest achievement to the Nazis in 1940 and died just four years later.Cataloging the World is well-researched without feeling dry. Wright's style is easy to read and engaging, and his overarching idea about humanity's quest for wisdom is most intriguing. Compared to his first book, Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages, I find this one superior. With so little known about Otlet, this is an excellent resource that explores his character and shares the history of collecting knowledge.

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