

5.2.1 *Encyclopedism*

Encyclopedism is the notion that all knowledge can be brought together in one place. At one time, it was considered feasible to create a compendium of all knowledge, which would become the universal source. One of the most famous (and most frequently cited as foundational) was the effort of French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713–1784), known as *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Diderot spent 20 years compiling and writing his encyclopedia, and perhaps the most lasting influence, aside from his devotion, is his method. A complete philosophy underlay the entire undertaking, thus influencing every concept represented. He sought to allow lay people, for the first time, access to the most recent and useful knowledge. He brought together knowledge compiled by scholars and artists as well as trades people, the better to provide social integration of useful knowledge. Diderot's compendium was highly influential, and arguably contributed to the liberalization of knowledge that led to the French revolution. It is clearly the successor of today's tools such as *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and in the *Brittanica* one can see clearly the outline of the classification of all knowledge that informs the compendium—tribute to Diderot's determination.

Perhaps most famous in bibliographical circles, and seen clearly as a forerunner of the Internet, are the famous Belgian team of Otlet- and LaFontaine. Paul Marie Ghislain Otlet (1868–1944) who together with Henri LaFontaine (1854–1923) envisioned a central repository of all knowledge of every kind. In 1895 they called an international conference to discuss this “repertory,” which would make use of newly perceived global means of bibliography. Their efforts led to the development of a process known widely as “Universal Bibliographic Control,” which was technologically much before its time. Otlet and LaFontaine called their vision the “Mundaneum” or City of Knowledge, and they were given a wing of a palace in 1924—hardly the “city” they envisioned. Eventually they did manage to compile an immense card catalog with 16 million entries made by 1930 (Rayward 2008a, 13). The Mundaneum was to have been the home for a new kind of documentation that made use of artifacts of all sorts, which would, in turn, lead to a new global information society. Otlet intended to “transform knowledge” by disassembling and reassembling the facts available in individual sources and make his newly transformed knowledge available via electronic broadcast media such as radio and television (Van den Heuvel 2008, 132).

In 1938 science fiction author H.G. Wells (1866–1946) wrote several essays about what he called the “World Brain.” It was to be a digest of all human knowledge, and in particular it was intended to help scholars to synthesize disparate knowledge. He called it a “mental clearing house” for the mind. Like Diderot and Otlet before him, Wells intended to re-create society into a global “world-state.” Wells' notion was to make use of social engineering, which only would work if all of the best scientific knowledge were available. Thus Wells' World Brain was to be a utopian encyclopedia-library-museum-archives-gallery-atlas etc., which would represent the “memory of Mankind” whose tentacles would spread everywhere so as to constantly incorporate new discoveries (Rayward 2008b, 233). Indexing, of