



## Documents and Documentation: Retro-prospective approach

International Symposium

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The concept of documentation appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at a time when writing and communication practices were going through major changes, accelerated by the Industrial Revolution, World War I, and amplified by technical progress. With new means of production—industrial papermaking, the rotary printing press, greater publishing houses, wider distribution—the form and function of books had already started transforming, a second revolution after the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. Now, new audiences were being reached by diversified media—photography, cinematography, telephone, phonograph, soon television—and documentary forms—flyers, cards, manuals, pictures, films, microfilms, disks, etc. While the origin of this dynamic dates back to the late eighteenth century, the exponential increase in volume observed in the early twentieth century was unprecedented. For instance, World War I further increased the proliferation of documents that could disseminate ideology and propaganda: such quantities of leaflets, newspapers, posters and photographs were then produced that they were later described as “paper storms” (Christophe Didier).

This documentary deluge represented a crisis for libraries, archives and museums. Processing and managing all this information far exceeded the capacity of their traditional systems, and so initiatives were taken to try and tackle these issues, in particular through new techniques of classification, circulation and conservation. Belgian jurist and bibliographer Paul Otlet (1868–1944) devoted his life to the problem of structuring and shaping what he termed documentation. His multiple proposals were summarized in the 1934 book *Traité de Documentation*, which constitutes a founding manifesto of documentation and information as sciences and disciplines in their own right. It marked the beginning of a “documentary regime” (Bertrand Müller), taking over from the printed book, before the advent of the current digital or “computational” era (Bruno Bachimont).

The *Traité de documentation* is a key object of the ANR research program HyperOtlet (<https://hyperotlet.hypotheses.org/>), whose goal is to study the articulation between documentation technologies and modes of knowledge organization, presentation and visualization. Studied in context, the *Traité* represents an analytical tool, a lens through which an entire era can be questioned in relation to documentation. Simultaneously, applying more recent methods—particularly inspired by digital humanities—to the work of Paul Otlet informs us on current issues related to documents, encyclopedias, archives,

indexing systems, interfaces, communication devices, networks and knowledge environments.

The ambition of this symposium is to extend this twofold approach and assess the scope of the documentary regime as well as its resurgence in the current period—a “return of the document”. By paying attention to the materialization and visualization of knowledge, not only in the first part of the twentieth century but also up to the present days, the goal is to shift the focus from Paul Otlet as a visionary and World Wide Web anticipator to a global “retro-prospective” research movement.

Three axes of research are proposed.

### **Axis 1. Forms and materialities**

This axis concerns the technical and industrial innovations that lead us to consider a ‘return of the document’ transversally. What were the material aspects of the production, circulation and conservation of knowledge?

How did the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the documentary paradigm take shape? What were their physical manifestations at the institutional level—museums, libraries, archives, documentation centres—in the humanities and social sciences—ethnography, history, sociology, information-communication—and in cultural fields—literature, international exhibitions, photography, cinema?

Materiality also beckons the question of processes: which design, formats and standards appeared with the development of documentation, influenced by new materials—paper, film, phonograph records—new media—photography, telephony, radio, television—and new displays—boards, posters, furniture, architecture, etc.

What have been the consequences of the mechanization and industrialization of printing? How did the Industrial Revolution contribute to the documentary boom of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How was it influenced in return? Which machines were invented to help with filing, counting, preserving and thinking? Which practices appeared based on index cards and folders? Which epistemology informs us on card-based record management?

This forms and materialities dialectics welcomes the exploration of various view points, from document producer to document recipient.

### **Axis 2. Visualization as a new language**

This axis concerns the link between technical innovation and knowledge visualization, as part of a longer history of the “instrumented gaze” (Delphine Gleizes and Denis Reynaud). Media diversification stems from the ambition to transmit information and knowledge to as many people as possible; by moving beyond the book format, documentation contributed to renewing the ways in which knowledge is visualized.

In what ways can documentation be considered a language? How does it result in the development of new formats or in the transformation of traditional forms of knowledge transmission—book, map, atlas, encyclopedia? What is the transformation or translation process from ideas to visual instruments—isotypes (Neurath), logotypes, graphics, statistical graphs, schematics?

How are these new languages structured? Which codes and standards—of classification, indexing, cataloguing, typography—condition them?

What is the relationship between universal languages—esperanto, international auxiliary language—and documentation?

This axis particularly welcomes proposals describing the transformation or translation of idea to visualization, as well as the implementation of a new graphic order.

### Axis 3. Knowledge and power

By putting forward new ways to organize knowledge, documentation must be considered as an instrument of intellectual, social, economic and political power. It plays an important role in the organization of power and social control, in the production and dissemination of ideologies, and in economic productivity. Based on documentation, administrations identify and register individuals, record mobility, index criminals, rebels and marginals.

In what ways have thinkers and inventors contributed to the development of political movements and the dissemination of ideologies? What are the criteria, norms and values that condition documentation-related practices—from collection to classification—and preside over their display and mediation to the public, particularly through speeches and media?

These questions can be considered from a spatial and even architectural point of view, by questioning places of knowledge as well as places of power—such as libraries, museums, international organizations, world fairs, administrations, industries and businesses.

This axis particularly welcomes proposals on the extension of indexing and management practices from knowledge to existence, and in general the permeation of documentation-related practices from knowledge circles to power circles.

### Selected Bibliography

BOTTICELLI, Peter, MAHARD, Martha R., CLOONAN, Michèle (dir.), *Librairies, Archives, and Museums Today, Insights from the field*, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

DIDIER, Christophe (ed.), *Paper Storms: 1914–1918. Les collections de guerre des bibliothèques*, Exhibition organized by the Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg and the Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte in der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek; in cooperation with the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine. Paris, Somogy editions of art; Strasbourg, BNU, 2008.

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GARDEY, Delphine, *Ecrire, calculer, classer : comment une révolution de papier a transformé les sociétés contemporaines (1800-1940)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008.

KITTLER, Friedrich, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, illustrated edition, Stanford University Press, 1999.

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LE DEUFF, Olivier, *La documentation dans le numérique*, Lyon, Presses de l'Enssib, 2014.

MÜLLER, Bertrand, 'Pour une histoire des régimes documentaires', paper at the Marc Bloch Centre, Berlin 2015.

RAYWARD, W. Boyd, *The Universe of Information: the Work of Paul Otlet for Documentation and International Organization*, Moscou, International Federation for Documentation, 1975.

SKARE, Roswitha, LUND, Niels Windfeld, VARHEIM, Andreas (eds.), *A document (re) turn: contributions from a research field in transition*

VAN ACKER, Wouter, *Universalism as Utopia. A Historical Study of the Schemes and Schemas of Paul Otlet (1868–1944)*, Zelzate, University Press, 2011.

## Terms and conditions of submission

We are expecting proposals in different formats: twenty-minute papers, poster presentations or creative visualizations.

Proposals (in English or French) must include:

- A title
- A summary of 500 maximum words
- An indicative bibliography (not included in the abstract)
- A bio-bibliography of the author and his institutional affiliation

For poster-type proposals, an abstract of 250 words is expected.

They must be sent, no later than 15 May 2020 on the <https://hyperotlet.sciencesconf.org/> platform

The selected speakers will be required to submit a detailed plan or the text of their paper, the length of which will be specified, prior to the conference.

Under conditions yet to be defined, the most relevant communications may be published.

## Calendar

Return of proposals: 15 May 2020

Response to candidates: 29 June 2020

Return of final papers: 2 October 2020

Symposium: 19 and 20 November 2020

## Steering Committee

- Bertrand Müller, Research Director, Maurice Halbwachs Centre (CNRS)
- Olivier Le Deuff, Senior Lecturer HDR in Information and Communication Sciences, Media, Information, Communication, Arts (MICA, Bordeaux Montaigne University)
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- Benoît Epron, Associate Professor, Haute Ecole de Gestion (HEG, Geneva)
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- Marianne Hérard, Anthropologist, Head of scientific programs and valorisation (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord).
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- Henri Sergent, Centre Maurice Halbwachs (CNRS)

## Scientific Committee

Bruno Bachimont, Director of Research and Development of the Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Sorbonne University

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Johann Holland, Director of the digital team of the Condorcet Campus

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