

major publishing industry efforts. Lost in between pdf, ePub and proprietary formats, which produce quite different reading experiences, maybe it can still be considered as an unborn medium. If you agree, do you think that it's due a historical design (temporary) failure, an inadequate technological approach, or there's simply a cultural gap still to be filled?

We find the way reading experiences finally diversify and de-normalize away from the Gutenberg Galaxy actually quite interesting. Through the inadequacies of the medium, and the way the stability of books is cut across many standards, formats and devices, the economical and technical construction of the publishing process starts to reveal itself, but also becomes available for intervention and rethinking. One of the troubles we have with the ePub format, is that the standard is largely being defined by industrial/commercial stakeholders, which might be one of the reasons why readers, writers and designers have had a hard time getting excited about it. Still, ePub is a lot more interesting than the awkward pseudo stability of the Portable Document Format (pdf), thanks to its closeness to HTML. If you consider an ePub as a portable website, you can imagine how it is a much better startingpoint for hybrid forms of publishing, between continuous and discontinuous bookforms.

Another seminal project you developed, has been to create an experimental platform inspired by Paul Otlet's *Mondotheque*, an ancestor of the "universal library" concept, realised in 1934 on paper. What kind of relationship have you developed with the digitalization process of printed media? And do you think it'd just be enhanced by powerful search tools while interconnecting as many digital libraries as possible, or it'd be important to establish a standard shareable digitising (technical and cultural) "paradigm"?

*Mondotheque*[5] grew out of a shared concern with the mesh of institutional narratives, local politics and corporate interests that coagulate around the heritage of Paul Otlet. It is both an

artistic and strategic project, resisting the popular myth that one visionary (Otlet) has foreseen the other (Google). The shortcut conveniently suggests the omnipresence of The Alphabet companies as an irreversible consequence of history. How do we break that spell and invent other futures and narrations of the past? We decided to appropriate Otlet's 'intellectual machine' *La Mondotheque* as a way to imagine the consequences of digitisation differently. Imagined in the 30s, it was to be an archive, link generator, desk, catalog and broadcast station at the same time. Proposing a cosmology rather than a prototype for a multi-media library, Otlet insists on actively connecting the multiple facets and scales that make up knowledge production. So, we started exploring Otlet's proto-digital concepts for practices of reading, writing and publishing. For example in one of our experiments with *Le traité de documentation: Le livre sur le livre*[6], we are trying to make co-exist a 19th century universalist index system with contemporary technologies such as text-mining and full-text search. We are algorithmically treating the scanned facsimile, experimenting with the book as an image collection, and exploring how to insert live elements into the Book on the Book. We also spend long days in the Mundaneum archives, tracing the material history of *Le Traité* all the way from unpaid printing bill to its transformation into a digital artefact on Wikisource. So yes, we think it is time for a paradigm shift. If we want Radiated Libraries to thrive, we need to redefine 'fair use' in a way that is radically in favor of cultural production, rather than merely tolerating it.

In this context, "universal access", or "free culture" goal should have as primary task that major collections of text would be freely accessible on-line, or would we need more "librarians," "editors", filters that would let us get oriented in the mare magnum of available knowledge?

We would like all kinds of users to have access to as much knowledge as possible, and to publish major collections as open content on-

line seems a good start. We understand that digitisation can only happen through the combined effort of people, softwares and technological infrastructures. To trust commercial enterprises to take care of putting digital collections on-line, is a dangerous bet. It is a way to wish the material consequences of digital culture away and it will be hard to reclaim attention, time and money for it once The Alphabet Companies are done with 'giving' 'free' access to our shared cultural heritage. It is also important to understand 'access' beyond 'the right to view'. It means materials should be available in a useable format, under appropriate legal conditions, and if possible without predefining their use through APIs or apps. We do need more librarians and editors, not because pre-filtering is required, or that users need to be protected from what they want. We need to keep asking what could happen if we consider each viewer also as a potential reader, writer or librarian? What skills would they need, what tools could we think of together, but most importantly, what types of orientation could we imagine, that actually make sense?

References:

- [1] *Fons* <http://osp.kitchen/tools/fons/>
- [2] *Belgica-Belgica* <http://ospublish.constantvzw.org/foundry/belgica-belgica/>
- [3] *Html2print* <http://osp.kitchen/tools/html2print/>
- [4] "I think that conversations are the best, biggest thing that Free Software has to offer its user" <http://conversations.tools/>
- [5] *Mondotheque* <http://mondotheque.be>
- [6] *Le livre sur le livre* [http://www.mondotheque.be/wiki/index.php/Le\\_livre\\_sur\\_le\\_livre](http://www.mondotheque.be/wiki/index.php/Le_livre_sur_le_livre)

A German version of this interview will be published in *KUNSTFORUM international*, Band 241, 2016, ed. by Franz Thalmair

Constant is a non-profit, artist-run organisation based in Brussels since 1997 and active in the fields of art, media and technology. <http://www.constantvzw.org>