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Abstract: Paul Otlet’s exploration of the idea to record information in separate chunks or units according to the “monographic principle” has provoked considerable interest in information history for the way in which it resonates with the present tendency to conceive of information as detachable and manipulable units, whose retrievability has become more important than the information itself. This paper aims to dissect within Otlet’s historical and intellectual context the make-up of the positivist epistemology underpinning his concept of the “Universal Book.” The “Universal Book” was of central importance in his theory of documentation as it proposed how documentalists—the new experts trained in documentary procedures—were to operate. These professionals were asked to gather facts or objects to make them ready for public use. Through an inquiry into the wide-ranging epistemological views prevalent in the French intellectual milieu in the belle époque—notably monism, energeticism, materialism, idealism and spiritualism—this paper questions the positivist label that has been attributed to his concept of documentation.


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Abstract: This article outlines the history of library and information science (LIS), from its roots in library science, information science and documentation. It considers various conceptions or “paradigms” in the field and discusses the topical content of LIS as well as the relationships between LIS and other disciplines. The main argument of the article is that answers to all such questions concerning LIS are related to conceptions of LIS. It is argued that an updated version of social epistemology (SE), which was founded by Egan and Shera in 1952, may in hindsight provide the most fruitful theoretical frame for LIS. SE is related to the domain-analytic approach, which was suggested by Hjørland and Albrechtsen in 1995.