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New Publication Reveals Story Behind Wikipedia Article

According to Bridle, Wikipedia is a perfect test case for his study as it provides, unlike many web encyclopedias, a chronicle of all the edits made to its entries, of which there are currently over 3,000,000 in English.

In a blog piece published in the *New York Times*, Bridle points out that while the black letter of a Wikipedia article may tell an interesting story, the more interesting, and historically more valuable, arc of the storyline can only be discovered by pulling back the curtain and looking at whose hands are on the keyboard altering the articles and why.

To prove his hypothesis, Bridle has collected, collated, and published a 12-volume set of books documenting the evolution of the Iraq War Wikipedia entry. "This particular book — or rather, set of books — is every edit made to a single Wikipedia article, The Iraq War, during the five years between the article's inception in December 2004 and November 2009, a total of 12,000 changes and almost 7,000 pages," he informed the *New York Times*.

The shelf of books offered by Bridle instructs readers in the debates and discrepancies that editors consider when updating the entry. Every line in the entry is but the visible percolation of an underlying discourse about the "truth" of the data to be provided by the article. Sometimes, Bridle claims, the comments made by amateur editors and reviewers can get downright "colorful."

Bridle is joyful and almost evangelical about the glimpse his multi-volume record gives into one of history's most debated events. He insists that the unique process of editing and reviewing of Wikipedia entries that he has captured and published represents a new day in historiography. He sees a transition from the passive reading of history to the participation in the recording of that history, and on to the examination of the curious thrusts and parries of that participation.

"And for the first time in history, we're building a system that, perhaps only for a brief time but certainly for the moment, is capable of recording every single one of those infinitely valuable pieces of information. Everything should have a history button. We need to talk about historiography, to surface this process, to challenge absolutist narratives of the past, and thus, those of the present and our future," he exulted to the *New York Times*.

Albeit a bit self-aggrandizing, Bridle's zeal for reliable historiography is praiseworthy. As readers of *The New American* know as well or better than anyone, there is greater influence exerted on the tide of history by those seemingly inferior lights hanging about in the shadows of the throne than by those occupying the so-called seats of power. Were all the intrigue of the world accessible by merely clicking a "History" button, there might not have been an "Iraq War" Wikipedia entry in the first place.

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