

This is a Pre-Print article not for citation. This article was published in *Composing Media Composing Embodiment*, edited by Arola and Wysocki, Utah University Press.

How Billie Jean King Became the Center of the Universe

While I do not want to paint too broad a picture, I think it is safe to say that the early reception of Wikipedia by the academy was characterized by glib dismissal, followed by open disdain. A few exceptions notwithstanding, many academics and institutions ignored the early stages of its developments, maintaining a healthy skepticism of an encyclopedia that “anyone could edit.” But as Wikipedia continued to develop, becoming one of the web’s most trafficked sites, so grew the attacks on the value of an internet encyclopedia edited and composed by millions. As it became clear that Wikipedia was developing into a central—and in many places primary—place students would turn to gather information, academics and institutions responded with increasingly alarmed rhetoric, leading at times to the outright banning of Wikipedia by professors and institutions.¹ But, as Wikipedia has matured and developed into one of the “backbone” sites which organize the internet, the academic climate surrounding it has moved from heavy resistance to a perhaps begrudging acceptance, where Wikipedia itself has become an object of serious academic inquiry.

Much of the early research and commentary on Wikipedia has attempted to compare it to print encyclopedias by measuring traditional criteria, for example article length, number of entries, and method of composition (multiple authors versus a single accredited expert). But, these conventional analytic methods have failed to capture the unique nature of this digital formatted and networked encyclopedia.² Accordingly, analysis has begun to switch

1. This response has always struck me as particularly ridiculous. The propriety of students using Wikipedia as a source and citing it in papers should have nothing to do with its status as an internet encyclopedia, but rather its status as a secondary source. Students should no more cite Wikipedia than they should Britannica. Rather, the issue here is the appropriate use of an encyclopedia as a source rather than the particular instance of Wikipedia.

2. The now somewhat famous study in *Nature* serves here as the pre-eminent example. In December of 2005 researchers found in 42 tested entries relatively little difference between

from measuring the size or content of any individual article towards measuring its connectivity; from measuring the size of any one node to measuring its relation to other nodes in the network.

Last year Stephen Dolan, a student at Trinity College in Dublin authored a computer program to measure the network size of Wikipedia. Unlike prior network analytic tools, Dolan's program did not measure the distance between the two furthest Wikipedia articles (in order to find the articles which constitute the endpoints and thus determine the project scope). Instead, Dolan's program looked for which articles are most "central" to Wikipedia. It sought articles from which is it easiest to reach the others. In other words, Dolan was looking to determine which articles served as the most robust hubs, rather than looking to measure the scope of the entire network of articles.³ One can think of Dolan's approach as the "six degrees of Wikipedia," if you will, modeled after the "six degrees of Kevin Bacon" game in which players attempt in six links to connect Kevin Bacon to any other actor or actress. In other words the program tracked the fewest number of clicks required to get to any other article. For example, it takes an average of 3.98 clicks to get from Kevin Bacon to any other article on Wikipedia (not just any other Hollywood personality).⁴

Wikipedia and Britannica in terms of accuracy. This article gained so much attention that it promoted a response by Britannica, which, in a letter to the journal, contested the legitimacy of the study.

3. Dolan's research can be accessed online via a site he maintains: <<http://www.netsoc.tcd.ie/~mu/wiki/>>. This site contains not only an explanation of his work (the code he used) but also allows one to download the entire list, as well as input two entries to find the shortest path between the two.

4. Or at least this number was accurate as of the time Dolan's program ran. One of the difficulties in writing about Wikipedia is distinguishing which Wikipedia one is speaking about. Should all attributions of Wikipedia contain the past tense as opposed to the present (e.g. Wikipedia "said" vs. Wikipedia "says")? The convention is to refer to the content within an article as currently articulating such a position, as in Britannica "says." It is assumed that the encyclopedia to which one is referring is a relatively stable object, yet in the case of Wikipedia the continuance of utterance presumably provided by the stability of print and authentication is absent.

Not surprisingly, high on Dolan's list were dates and category lists—entries such as the year 2007 which has links to all the major events that occurred during that calendar year. These list-style entries, lists of dates, or even focused organizational lists such as “Presidents of the United States,” dominate the top of the list of entries with the lowest average click count.⁵ But for the sake of intellectual exploration and the analysis of networked encyclopedias, let us remove these articles which catalog and index and instead look at what “real articles” are actually at the center.⁶

Highest on this focused list is the United Kingdom. Given the western cultural bias of Wikipedia, and that this main “United Kingdom” article links to extensive historical entries throughout different periods, its position as a hub in the network is not particularly surprising; indeed, it is predictable. In the third position on the list was the United States, for the similar reasons: the United States article is, not surprisingly, well developed and links to a number of other equally developed articles about the U.S. Furthermore, given the particular American cultural bias of Wikipedia, the only thing that is surprising is that it is not higher (although considering the relative short history of the United States, the article's subordinate position to the United Kingdom entry is predictable). The difference between the first and third positions is ultimately not that large, as the average click number for the main United Kingdom entry is 3.67 and that of the U.S. is only slightly higher at 3.69. What was surprising

5. Notably, not all of these high ranking list articles are years, dates or ones we might think of as being central hubs. The list is populated by entries such as “Deaths in 2004” “1990s” “List of Treaties” “List of the first female holders of political offices” but also other seemingly more trivial lists such as “List of QI episodes (B series),” “List of C-130 Hercules crashes,” “List of IMAC Venues,” and “Skyteam Destinations.”

6. In some regard the dominance of lists is telling, indicating that catalogs and indexes serve central roles in network connectivity, and while indexes in the codex encyclopedia are crucial for locating desired information, in the case of the networked work the locational function is served by the search bar. These indexing articles serve a different organizational role, helping to manage the signal-to-noise ratio in a markedly different way than in the codex encyclopedia.

however, and noticeably different from the other top entries, was the second entry in the list, one with a click count of 3.68. Given the title of this article, the astute reader undoubtedly would have guessed that this privileged second position is held by Billie Jean King. Billie Jean King outranks major historical figures such as Ghandi, or Franklin Delano Roosevelt, manifesting a lower link count even than other, perhaps more prominent, popular culture figures such as Kevin Bacon or Madonna.

Upon close examination of the Wikipedia article on Billie Jean King one discovers a thoroughly written entry, covering her personal life, tennis career with full statistics, information about the famous “battle of the sexes,” her sexual orientation and indeed even a reference to the fact that “King appeared as a judge on Law & Order, one of her favorite television shows, on April 27, 2007.” In many respects this article fulfills the Wikipedia vision of an ideal entry: “well-written, balanced, neutral, and encyclopedic, containing comprehensive, notable, verifiable knowledge.”⁷ But, at 17,000 words, the article surpasses mere encyclopedic quality and borders on a mini-biography. Jesus only gets 11,000 words and Shakespeare less than 7,000.

In this respect we might say that Wikipedia, as illustrated here by the case of Billie Jean King, reproduces the impulses laid out by the Enlightenment Encyclopedia. The Wikipedia article is an attempt to capture all of the relevant and important information about one subject, to record and present it for others to consult—the “complete” picture of Billie Jean King in a transparent readable format. And, further, despite Wikipedia’s presentation in the digital medium, it is to a large extent conservative archival form, at least on the level of

7.The “About_Wikipedia” page lays out its governing philosophy, explaining the ideal articles should strive towards, the criteria for inclusion and deletion, as well as a section on the advantages and disadvantages of Wikipedia when compared to traditional encyclopedias.

presentation and governing ideology (if not on the level of composition), one we might easily recognize as informed by an enlightenment tradition of archivization.

Wikipedia in this respect is a *librocentric* archive. It embodies ideologies present within the codex print form—think libraries and encyclopedias—but not necessarily intrinsic to analog formats. Librocentricism, however, is not coterminous or even necessarily correlated to print material structures; rather it is an outgrowth of a specific metaphysical perspective towards the ability to capture, fix, and fully present knowledge. What librocentricism culturally accomplishes, or at least tries to stand in as a metaphor for, is a certain stability of knowledge. One sees this most prominently in the physical form of the book: a beginning, middle, and end, a linear arrangement, that when traversed, promises to deliver on a specific subject. Whether that knowledge is of a specified subject matter, i.e. a non-fiction encyclopedia entry on Victorian England, or a fictional narrative, *Pride and Prejudice*, is immaterial. In both cases, the idea is that by consuming all of the pages in linear order, one acquires the complete picture of the information contained within the specified pages. Movement from page to page produces a sense of progress wherein the reader is presented with causal links leading to the final eschatological page that delivers the complete picture, wherein the book is made complete, knowledge transmission guaranteed. Both the encyclopedia and the library re-enforce this librocentric thinking: gathering together in one place everything of relevance to saturate the context and provide an end, ensuring stability.

What I want to emphasize here is that to understand the “book” as an archival format (and by extension the encyclopedia and library associated with this format), we need to separate the ideological imports of this structure from the simply material ones. What has been called the Gutenberg Galaxy is more correctly, as Tom Pettitt points out, the Gutenberg Parenthesis. Within this parenthesis, certain ideologies and prejudices were associated with the idea of archivization, ones which transferred to the book, but which are not dependent on

its material structure. We can see how this is the case from the way in which the word “book” circulates separate from the actual physical existence of a particular volume or set of printed pages bound together by cardboard: the Book of Love, the Book of Nature, to throw the “book” at someone. In each of these phrases “book” represents the idea of a completeness of knowledge—a metaphor for a type of communication and knowledge presentation rather than its material form—in other words, the entirety of a certain matter codified into physical form for the sake of knowledge transmission. And, in this sense, the Wikipedia article on Billie Jean King is the “book” on Billie Jean King.

Despite the fact that most writing takes place first in the digital, that the first material support is so often the screen and pixel, this “new” digital age is still haunted by, determined by the librocentric trappings of the book. Our writing machines and archival formats still respect this figure of the book. Despite claims of the liberating potential of hypertext or the internet, there is little to suggest that these structures of archivization have escaped this infatuation with the book as the ideal format for knowledge transmission. (The Billie Jean King article is just one such example, where a digital archive serves as a resource to collect “all of the essential information” about a specific subject matter.) So much of what is written on digital archivization, as Derrida notes,

“re-creates the temptation that is figured by the World Wide Web as the ubiquitous Book finally reconstituted, the book of God, the great book of nature, or the World Book, finally achieved in its onto-theological dream, even though what it does is to repeat the end of that book as to-come” (Derrida, Paper 15).

Despite the idea that digital support structures supposedly free the archival formats from the restrictions of the analog codex forms, a digital networked structure such as Wikipedia is valued precisely because it fulfills a librocentric criteria. That is, rather than constitute new possibilities for archivization and knowledge transmission, these new forms adopt the criteria

of the prior, staking their worth not on their supposed newness or revolutionary form, but rather as the logical evolution of their predecessor.

The digital seems to overcome the limiting paradox of physical archives: the librocentric mandate to simultaneously gather and disperse.⁸ And, along these lines, it becomes easy to see how the internet is seen as the logical progression of the librocentric archive; the digital is even more book than the book. In other words, the digital networked archive is not something radically new which threatens to overturn our prior knowledge formats, but something which, at least up until now, very much fits within the criterion and values of knowledge formation and dissemination laid out by the librocentric archive. In this respect the digital archive is not that which brings about the end of the book. It is just the logical extension of librocentricism.

Digital archivization, especially with respect to Wikipedia, has yet to escape these librocentric criteria. It attempts to fulfill this Enlightenment vision, saturating context, gathering all of human knowledge in one location to preserve meaning without the threat of dispersal. This reproduction of librocentric values in the digital archive would not be limited to Wikipedia; one could also include other projects such as the Hurricane Katrina Digital Memory Bank, or the William Blake Archive, both of which attempt to preserve “all” of the content surrounding specific historical events or individuals, to serve as the definitive account and repository for these matters. In this regard, those who critique Wikipedia, seeing it either as the utopic fulfillment of the Enlightenment project of universal knowledge or the dystopic declination of the pursuit of truth, are not arguing about the value or role of a digital archive,

8. As Derrida explains, it is this paradox which structures the codex archive, and even the book itself. A library for example on the one hand must operate by collecting books in one location, gathering them together to preserve them. But it has value only in so much as individuals can consult the archive by ungathering what the library has preserved: removing the book from the shelf, checking it out. And thus the library is always gathers to prevent the threat of dispersal, the very thing it was designed to enhance.

but merely disagreeing about the extent to which something like Wikipedia fulfills this role. Andrew Keen and Andrew Lih are ideologically closer than either would like to admit.⁹

Wikipedia is little more than a fulfillment of the logic of librocentric thinking, Wikipedia as the final eschatological promise of the book of the world. Whereas books are limited by space, digital archives are not; whereas books are costly to produce and transmit, digital archives are relatively cheap; whereas a book can be read by only one person at a time, the digital archive provides access to multiple readers; whereas a book is threatened by its material form (it can be lost, damaged, burnt), the digital archive resists any localized environmental threat. Whereas in a library the text is limited to a singular dispersal (in the sense that only one person can check out a work at any given time), digital works seem to transcend this physical limitation, allowing for dispersal to an infinite number of viewers without undermining their being gathered at a particular locale. Not limited by space, and seemingly free from physical danger, however, Wikipedia fulfills the vision of the library of Alexandria, sans threat of fire. As Jeromme McGan observes in *Radiant Textualities*, “the library as a model underlying the invention of the internet—resists the way of distinguishing digital and paper based textualities” (25). Indeed Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, is fond of saying that he is “very much an Enlightenment kind of guy,” and he consistently articulates his vision of Wikipedia is as an instrument for fulfilling the Enlightenment project of universal knowledge. One of the goals of Wikipedia seems to be to fulfill the librocentric goal of the encyclopedia in a way that Britannica or any other codex work could never do: to collect in one location all of human knowledge for universal dissemination.

9. Andrew Keen made a name for himself as a “digital curmedgon” when he wrote *The Cult of the Amateur*, a book which claims that the internet destroys culture. Throughout the book Wikipedia figures as a prominent example. Andrew Lih, the author of *The Wikipedia Revolution*, defends Wikipedia as an example of the positive changes the web can bring to knowledge archivization and dissemination.

Billie Jean's inclusion then seems entirely normal, even if her entry is longer than average. For what use would an encyclopedia be if it did not contain information on her tennis career, political, public, and private life? Furthermore, this is where critics of Wikipedia fall short in their critique when referring to the "List of 500 Pokemon Characters." It might seem odd that an encyclopedia would contain extensive lists of characters from a fictional universe. Yet, clearly pokemon represents part of human knowledge, and if the goal of the encyclopedia is to collect "all of human knowledge," then it must necessarily contain reference not only to the "Knights of the Round Table" but "Pokemon Fire Red" and "Professor Oak" as well.¹⁰ While any source which contains an article on Chess Boxing—three clicks away from Billie Jean King and an article which although only 750 words in length, still longer than the entry for Amos Tutola which is 500 words and three clicks away from Billie Jean King—is an encyclopedia which is clearly an ideological reference, it is hard to discount Wikipedia because it includes articles or places certain ones at positions of power relative to others, as hubs in the network (as is the case with Billie Jean King). What Wikipedia is actually chronicling is which places are sites of human knowledge, what articles are of interest to the public which uses them.

Wikipedia's impetus is still informed by that very enlightenment ideal of producing the "Book of the World" which explains the entirety of human knowledge and which would be used by a fully engaged literate public. Wikipedia claims to "acquire knowledge," and "share knowledge," in a "fair and balanced" manner. But perhaps the clearest instance of how Wikipedia sees itself as the fulfillment of Enlightenment ideals is in what Wikipedians call the

10. The ongoing debate between the deletionists, those who want to establish a conservative criteria for an article's inclusion, and the inclusionists, those who have much more liberal criteria, characterizes one of the, if not the, essential current debate by Wikipedians, and how this question is settled, as Mark Pesce notes, will to a large degree determine the future of Wikipedia.

Neutral Point of View or NPOV: “The ideal Wiki article is balanced, neutral, and encyclopedic.” As Roy Rosenzweig has aptly articulated, Wikipedia attempts to mimic the neutral rhetorical tone of the codex encyclopedia. In fact, the “achilles heel” of Wikipedia, its drab writing, is as much an effect of being composed by several authors as an effect of a composition which favors neutrality—privileging the presentation of facts over interpretation. Indeed in some sense Wikipedia is simply the logic of data collection—encyclopedic universal knowledge—carried to the extreme: an attempt to present just the facts, and all of them. Not surprisingly one sees this reflected within the articles which often read rhetorically as lists of fact, which is why Wikipedia seems to excel in the scientific entries over those in the humanities. Because of the dominance of the NPOV and the goal of presenting facts, Wikipedia articles often tend towards annulling narrative logic, and they often slide towards presenting information with simple sentence structures and in an outline format. But this is simply the logical outcome of the Enlightenment quest to create the world book, an absolutely transparent collection of facts. In this sense I would suggest that Wikipedia is not a radical archival structure, some alien force, but is rather the monstrous progeny of the librocentric archive.

Perhaps one could object here and argue that poststructuralism has done much to call into question the Enlightenment ideologies pursued in the librocentric archive by demonstrating how these governing ideologies have always been a fiction. I would agree that these theories have done much to expose the inadequacy of the idea of the book as complete, whole, guaranteed communication. Yet to a large extent these governing fictions of librocentricism still inform the pursuit, collection, and archivization of knowledge in the digital networked era, and in this respect we have done little to escape the Gutenberg parenthesis. We have expanded on its principles not overthrown them all together. And so for many of those who critique Wikipedia (both those who see its utopian possibilities and

those who see its dystopic qualities), its value comes precisely from the way in which it fulfills the hope of the Enlightenment codex encyclopedia by capturing and preserving all of human knowledge, making it freely available to all those who have access to the internet.

But Wikipedia is not entirely a librocentric archive. Indeed, there are significant ways in which it breaks with prior archival formats. And it is by paying attention to the ways in which Wikipedia differs that we gain insight not only into how it is that Billie Jean King came to be at the center of the universe, but also how digital networked archives manifest a new archival format. Crucial in this analysis is tracking how relations develop not along the traditional criteria of an article's worth (inclusion in the work, final presentation, number of words), but around links and network influence. Now in one respect, this is nothing particularly new, for encyclopedias have always contained internal links as a way to organize and signify relations between articles—the “see also” within an entry, or even the indexes which serve as giant lists of relevant material. But the link in the digital networked space has become the central organizing principle, not the supplemental feature added to aid in navigation.

In *Targets of Opportunity* Samuel Weber makes the rather provocative, and I think useful, claim that when we turn to analyzing networks, it is not the net that matters but rather the work, as a great deal of “work” goes into the process of turning a net into a network. While we could choose to focus on the nodes in the net, the sites where content is held or made manifest, the more important question seems to be how one adds work into those nodes, turning a net into a *network*. In modernity, work is more closely associated with *oeuvre*, the notion of a deliberately created unit; work is thus used as a noun, as in a piece of art work, or a specific article entry in an encyclopedia, the product of the aim and intent of one individual. In the digital era the noun sense of the word “work” recedes as the verb sense takes on greater significance:

nodes (net) + work = netWork

There is indeed a great deal of effort that must go into maintaining the structures that produce a distributed network of information. Where a network gains purchase is in the elaborate set of connections, via the narratives that form across the nodes. The nodes have meaning, if you will, only in so much as they are worked into the net. And thus the ability and power to narrate and focus these connections to disseminate, transmit, rework these narratives is ever more important. Unlike prior archival formats, the work that goes into this work must be constantly maintained, updated, and cared for. Wikipedia becomes a substantially different and diminished object without its bandwidth, incoming links, or Google ranking.

As Albert-László Barabási explains in *Linked*, we often treat networks as flat spaces, distributed collections of nodes wherein it is possible to travel from any node to any other single node, with links randomly distributed in an egalitarian space. However, networks are anything but spaces of equanimity. Links between nodes develop over time, with some nodes developing more links and a higher rate of connectivity. Thus these hubs become powerful places in the network distribution as they play the important role of connecting otherwise unconnected nodes. As Barabási explains: “[Hubs] dominate the structure of all networks in which they are present, making them look like small worlds. Indeed, with links to an unusually large number of nodes, hubs create short paths between any two nodes in a system” (64).

Thus it is difficult to judge a Wikipedia entry based on the criteria of accuracy, or the authority and credibility of a particular author, for even if we suppose that a particular entry was written by an expert and is flawless, the article must link to other articles within Wikipedia, and other nodes across the internet, in order to have meaning. (This is entirely different from the prior archival model where an “expert” on Billie Jean King would present

the definitive interpretation of her biography.) This would hold in a temporal sense as well for the article must be open to edits to go on working into the future (rather than establishing itself as a definitive singular work). Hence one cannot analyze Wikipedia separate from its use, from its workings in the network of information. While this is to some extent true of any book—its contextual uses inform meaning—in the case of Wikipedia, the speed at which it works and its open relation to an unpredictable future makes this hyperbolically true. And in this respect it is very much not a traditional archive, for its edges and borders can never be neatly and artificially contained by the work of a book binder.

Thus I would suggest that we need to understand Wikipedia as a technical organism, rather than a static archive. Consider, for instance, that every second Wikipedia is updated between two and three times. This means that while particular articles might be relatively stable, the whole of Wikipedia is in a constant state of flux. This feature of Wikipedia is aptly demonstrated by “time lapse” screen captures of specific Wikipedia articles that chronicle the evolution of a particular entry; for example the Heavy Metal Umlaut video, which shows how this seeming piece of minutiae developed into a well developed article, or the video of the Wikipedia entry of the London Bombings, which demonstrates how that particular article became a repository of information of this event, updated both with true and false information faster than any individual journalism source.

More importantly, consider how Wikipedia is now monitored by hundreds of volunteers who spend hundreds of hours maintaining it against the onslaught of new information, attempts to spam, graffiti or otherwise maliciously alter its contents, a process further complicated by the fact that there are now “bots,” computer programs, which run throughout Wikipedia, auto correcting, formatting and deleting information added to particular entries in conjunction and negotiation with human users. This analysis increases in complexity and importance as we realize how prevalent Wikipedia is, how much it serves as one of the

organizational backbones of the internet, and how increasingly other institutions and organizations are using wikis to archive material.

Ultimately, I think we miss the point of digital networked archival structures like Wikipedia if we analyze the object alone, treating it as a text to be read which would be subject to the same hermetic analysis we as scholars leverage against other static works. Wikipedia is not a static object that is written, a closed object which one consults. It is instead more analogous to a living organism which is maintained and kept healthy. Indeed, those who contribute to Wikipedia often speak of their role in such “caretaker” terms. The author function of a particular article or bit of text is replaced by a curatorial function where an encyclopedia serves as a place where knowledge is communally stored, produced, and accessed, requiring constant observation and maintenance. For Wikipedia is nothing without the community of users who work on it, keep on working on it. One can copy the entire data structure which comprises the text—it is relatively small (133 GB give or take)—and port it to anywhere you wish (the license allows this). Yet, you would not be porting Wikipedia, not only because there is a great deal of network capital tied to the particular internet address associated with Wikipedia, but also and more importantly because you would not be porting the community of users. Here is where Wikipedia substantially differs from prior archival models which have both a longer and a shorter life span than it does. These spans are shorter in the sense that the information in a codex volume quickly becomes outdated, whereas Wikipedia is constantly kept up to date. But this “up to dateness” also means the lifespan of Wikipedia is shorter, connected to the community, which if it disappears and ceases to maintain the archive, renders the archive’s value null. Wikipedia’s archival format does not fix the knowledge it presents; while print encyclopedias strive to produce a finished work, Wikipedia is not only “open” in the sense of allowing outsiders to edit, but “open” in the sense that its material is always open to future discursive productions, to a future which is

not controlled, an openness which is a threat to its very existence. We should probably think of Wikipedia and its archival cousins as continually maintained processes rather than final products. This is a substantial shift from the librocentric prejudice which governs the Gutenberg Galaxy and still to a large part informs current thinking in the humanities.

Rather than the case of the codex encyclopedia presenting information as “truth” Wikipedia preserves the discursive formation of the article, where as I indicated the standard for inclusion is not “truth” but verifiability, that is can the particular claims be linked to, connected to other places where those claims are made.¹¹ And although the previously stated goals of Wikipedia seem to mimic the librocentric—that is, collecting in one place the transparent truth about subjects—this network approach shows how this goal is already from the beginning impossible, for “truth” is subject to particular structures of power, some democratic—voting on what changes should take place—and others not—the intervention of an administrator. Regardless, the formation of the archived information in Wikipedia is made part of the archive, and it is in this sense too, that Wikipedia is more “open” than the prior codex model. The discursive practices that produce the analog archives often took place within the closed walls of the university, publishers, or libraries; what counted enough to appear as part of the archive, what was saved, if you will, was decided in a closed manner. In the case of Wikipedia such decisions are folded into the archive itself.

Each article page is the result of a discursive process which is preserved within the pages of the archive itself. Indeed, we are perhaps reading “Wikipedia” backwards, for unlike Britannica or other codex form encyclopedias, Wikipedia preserves not only its current iteration but all prior iterations. In this respect, if we only look at the current article the

11. This as Axel Bruns notes in *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life & Beyond*, is in part what distinguished Wikipedia from a codex encyclopedia like Britannica. Wikipedia does not claim to be presenting facts about the world, but rather its claim to present representations about facts which are claimed and explained in other places (115).

Billie Jean King page, despite its rather thorough and lengthy nature, it is difficult to understand how it became the center, or at least number two, on the link ranking. The key to uncovering the peculiar network value of the Billie Jean King article is in looking at the discussions pages, the places where the discourse about the discursive production is recorded.

The more intriguing aspects of Wikipedia are stored on the discussion pages, where contributors argue, negotiate, and ponder about not only the content of any given article, but the particular wording used in it. Thus any particular entry is only a small, narrowly framed text representing the current formation of a much longer, more elaborate process. As Clay Shirky observes, a Wikipedia article “is the product not of collectivism but of unending argumentation. The articles grow not from harmonious thought but constant scrutiny and emendation” (139). This is precisely the case with the Billie Jean King article, where several editors heavily invested in having certain information about Billie Jean King displayed persistently argue about the scope of the article. Proposed cuts to text on either her tennis career, or her personal life are meant with resistance by editors determined to have those pieces of information included in the article. And although several suggestions have been made to resolve this conflict— for example, splitting the article into a main Billie Jean King article and a second Billie Jean King tennis career article—as of the writing of this article no such agreement about dividing the entry has been met. (Such an action would, of course, lower the average click rating.)

Indeed, by reading the discussion page carefully, we can see how the Billie Jean King article become a locus of debate among different groups and editors. At the bottom of each Wikipedia article is a list of categories to which each entry belongs; one can think of these as the folksonomies that users have created to help organize Wikipedia. For example, Abraham Lincoln contains links to 1809 births, Presidents of the United States, Illinois Lawyers, and even Small Pox survivors. In the case of Abraham Lincoln his groups are relatively consistent,

containing what we could describe as a high rate of “bonding capital” that ties together groups we might intuitively associate with each other. But in the case of Billie Jean King, her categories cut across groups displaying a higher rate of what we could describe as “bridging capital”: American Feminists, 1943 births, Living People, LGBT people from the United States, American vegetarians, American tennis players. Thus, while many would argue that Abraham Lincoln is a more important “historical” figure, Billie Jean King is more important (or at least the article is) in establishing connections between different knowledge clusters.

As long as we continue to evaluate Wikipedia by librocentric criteria we will miss recognizing what is unique about this archival format. If we were only talking about Wikipedia here than the danger from ignoring these archival changes might be minimal, but, Wikipedia is merely one node in the entire network—granted it is a large node, but it is still only one node. What Wikipedia offers us though is a particularly instructive place of critique from which to understand how this digital networked archive affords new possibilities for knowledge formation and archivization. This is not to suggest that the future here is by any means guaranteed. Wikipedia, and its archival cousins, might grow increasingly bureaucratic and hierarchical, indeed the recent history of Wikipedia suggests precisely this trend: an effort to pursue librocentric goals at the expense of leaving the structure more open and organic. What is however clear though is that as these digital networked archival formats grow in both size and influence we will need to pay careful attention to the possible restructuring of values which they bring.