



Ines Schaber // **Notes on Archives 3** Picture Mining

In digital data banks, images travel more frequently from one archive to another than they did in analog archives. Sometimes images that are in the public domain are taken by commercial stock-image agencies and offered for sale. This is the case for a series of images of breaker boys in Pennsylvania that Lewis Hine made in the 1910s as part of his series on child labor. The images are both digitally available for free from the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and for a fee from Corbis, Bill Gates's stock-image company, which offered them for sale until it ceased operations in 2016.

Hine's work was made in the tradition of social documentary photography and with the belief that visual facts can both engender empathy and shape public opinion. Our contemporary understanding of how images are able to produce knowledge is far more ambivalent. The images of the breaker boys offered for sale on the Corbis website manifests an uncanny relationship—not only between the images of a labor struggle and the site of their recent commercialization but also between two distinct moments in the history of the medium of photography.

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Notes on Archives is a series of publications by artist Ines Schaber about archives and the practices we conduct in relation to them. Produced over the course of more than ten years, the publications feature a series of case studies, research, concrete projects, and reflections on the questions and problems that image archives pose today. The aim of the work is not to find or create another institutional archive per se, but to develop a practice in which the set of problems that archives produce is in fact part of the process one engages in.

The artist understands the archive as a place of negotiation and writing. "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation," writes Jacques Derrida.

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