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Commercializing the Visual through Photography. The Bettmann Archive and Corbis

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- 1 Acting as both filters and catalysts, photographic agencies and commercial photo archives have widely influenced photographic production and reproduction in their attempt to satisfy and to continuously stimulate the ever-increasing demand for visual imagery. The acceptance of the substitution of the referent by a photograph underpins the creation and growth of the picture market<sup>1</sup> and the development of a 'picture economy.'<sup>2</sup> This acceptance, plus the reproducibility of the image allow for the establishment of the market value for photography. In 1859, Oliver Wendell Holmes, in reference to the sales potential of stereoscopic photographs, stated 'Form is henceforth divorced from matter.'<sup>3</sup> Ever since, photographic agencies and commercial archives have focused on how to sell photographic pictures as surrogates of the objects and the ideas they represent. The accumulation, management, and archiving of photographs are fundamental conditions in the context of the picture market, as they guarantee the sustained exploitation of the imagery and constitute the economic basis of their distribution. These private agencies and archives have become repositories for a facet of photographic history, one in which the product is shaped by its particular setting and economic parameters. This article examines the construction of value for both analogue and digital photography by tracing the development of two different economic models – the picture archive and the image bank – using the examples of the Bettmann Archive and Corbis respectively. It also considers the consequences of economic efficiency on the management and use of photographs.

## Producing a 'Circulating Library of Authentic Photo-prints'

- 2 Otto Bettmann, born in Leipzig, Germany, in 1903, studied history, art history, and sociology and was awarded a doctorate for his dissertation on the rise of professionalism in the book trade in eighteenth century Germany.<sup>4</sup> From 1928 to 1932, he was employed as librarian and rare books curator by the Staatliche Kunstbibliothek, the state art library in Berlin, where he began photographing illustrations from art books and other printed matter with a 35 mm camera.<sup>5</sup> This became the foundation for a photographic collection, with a series of medical illustrations from historic prints constituting the first systematic group. Dismissed from his position at the library in April 1933, the result of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service implemented by the National Socialist regime, Bettmann established the commercial photo archive Bildarchiv Dr. Otto Bettmann/Berlin.
- 3 Though this endeavor was destined to fail under the worsening political situation, Bettmann used the time, until his emigration to New York in November 1935, to develop a more comprehensive business model and to systematically expand his collection. By the time he left for the United States, his collection comprised ten thousand photographic reproductions, notably of illustrations and paintings housed in European museums and libraries.
- 4 Parallel to collecting images, Bettmann developed a particular indexing system, applying his training in classification systems, reference work, and cataloguing to the needs of a picture archive.<sup>6</sup> This system relied on a card index combining two types of data: the visual in the form of a 'thumbnail' photograph, and the textual information. The decisive factor for selecting pictures was their iconographic content, their potential as 'subject pictures.'<sup>7</sup> Bettmann, 'the picture-librarian,'<sup>8</sup> applied this method of viewing pictures according to their depicted themes in the 1931 exhibition on *Reading and Books in Graphic Art and Painting* which he had organized for the annual book day at the state art library. By analyzing an image with 'subject eyes,'<sup>9</sup> Bettmann identified a number of descriptive and associative keywords, which, in combination with the caption and date, would form the metadata of the picture.
- 5 Aware of the inherent value of his collection, Bettmann took the negatives and the corresponding card index with him to New York. This was the initial capital of the Bettmann Archive, established in 1936. Soon, the classification system was augmented by new categories, including that of 'Americana,' illustrations of American history, politics, and society, which came to represent the majority of the archive. As he had done in Germany, Bettmann obtained pictures by leafing through and photographing the material in public libraries, such as the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and the New York Public Library, in particular its prints and photographs division. Owing to their liberal policies (libraries were considered the guardians of the books, but not of their visual contents), Bettmann was able to amass a considerable quantity of reproductions, paying little or no fees. His business idea entailed transforming publicly accessible image resources, whether inherently valuable or not, into commercially viable products by reproducing, evaluating, and indexing them. Issues of ownership or copyright were ignored completely.

- 6 Fascinated by the wealth of American libraries and their general accessibility, Bettmann appropriated what, in his view, was public property – the picture – by means of photography. This appropriation expressed itself unmistakably in the form of the release agreement printed on the back of the photograph, insisting on the mention of the Bettmann Archive in the credit line whenever the image was used. Yet, in an article published in the *Wilson Bulletin for Librarians* in April 1939, Bettmann pleaded: the ‘thousands of pictures in art books, periodicals, manuscripts, etc. ... these picture sources have to be freed and made available in a systematic form.’<sup>10</sup> The Bettmann Archive sought to be understood as a ‘circulating library of authentic photo-prints,’<sup>11</sup> as a library of pictures.
- 7 Besides the appropriation or ‘liberation’ of library stock, the Bettmann Archive acquired various private and commercial picture collections, as well as books and magazines, which, after being photographed, were resold or put up at auction, if a profit could be expected. The criteria for selection consisted of three vital preconditions: good reproducibility of the source image, instant readability, and thematic expressivity.<sup>12</sup> Under the guiding notion of reviving historical representations, the depicted scenes of human experience and achievement had to prove relevant for the present day in order to be marketed and, as Bettmann put it, ‘to make history a useful and slightly profitable thing.’<sup>13</sup>
- 8 The material was, above all, directed towards publishers, advertisers, and designers. Whether understood as a resource for individual pictures, portfolios, illustrated texts, or as a ‘complete historic museum of your trade or industry,’<sup>14</sup> the Bettmann Archive was to be a catalyst of ideas and also a picture finding machine – a service, culminating in the person of Otto Bettmann, the ultimate picture editor, who ‘finds pictures and eliminates them’<sup>15</sup> to save the client work and time.

## One Word Is Worth a Million Pictures

- 9 The efficiency of picture research, as eagerly promoted by the Bettmann Archive, relied on its particular classification and research method, based on its card index. Subsequent to a thorough and rigorous selection process, an individual record was created for each picture accepted into the archive. The index of keywords pointed to a register of categories and sub-categories in which a photographic print of the picture was to be found. Hence, one picture could appear in several categories and, depending on the client’s request, could be used in a variety of contexts. This is why the extensive list of categories, the company’s index, played such a crucial role in promoting the Bettmann Archive and attracting new clients. ‘One word is worth a million pictures’<sup>16</sup>: in contrast to the practice of most photographic agencies and commercial picture archives, the Bettmann Archive did not advertise its most prominent images, but rather presented extracts of its index. While the archive comprised two hundred thematic categories with ten thousand reproductions in 1936, the number of categories had increased to ten thousand with more than one million pictures by 1961.<sup>17</sup> The aim was not to have as many pictures as possible in any single category, but to have as many categories as possible in order to further the vision of an encyclopedic picture collection, a ‘vast collection of photographic reproductions recording man’s progress in every art, profession and trade – in all countries – in all ages.’<sup>18</sup>

- 10 The promotional index presented clients with an initial orientation to the collection and marked the quality that distinguished the Bettmann Archive from its competitors and from the public libraries and other institutions whose non-exclusive visual holdings Bettman was offering for sale. Through its research, screening, and re-evaluation of the images and the creation of a complex classification system, the Bettmann Archive claimed superiority over similar picture agencies. Despite the 'uniqueness'<sup>19</sup> of the available pictures, the prices, ranging from \$5 to \$500, were not higher than the usual rates for news or contemporary stock photography.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the distinctive characteristic of the Bettmann Archive and the key to its success depended upon both the stringent selection of relevant historical illustrations and the instant retrieval of the photographs.
- 11 The classification system, and in particular the card index, was simplified over the years to increase economic efficiency. While the first series of German card templates, mostly handwritten, indicated the keywords under the field of 'prospective buyers,' the English templates listed them, in typewritten form, under the field 'index,' replacing the space for the provenance of the picture resources. Also the reverse side of the cards changed: anticipating the idea of a holistic 'commodity tracking,' the early templates were designed to indicate the clients' names and addresses, as well as the pictures' use and commercial success. However, these fields were later removed, as filling them in proved to be too time consuming and therefore not practical. In addition to the changes and adjustments that were made between the German and the English card templates, the translation of the metadata also implied the revision of keywords, whether in terms of addition, removal, or reinterpretation.
- 12 The card index as it survives today suggests that this visual indexing system, which, through its meticulousness reflected the academic approach promoted by the Bettmann Archive, applied only to those negatives and picture sources that were relocated from Europe to New York. It seems, in fact, that the indexing system was maintained only in the early years of the archive's commercial activity and was abandoned with the development and increased professionalization of the firm. However, the thematic classification and the continuous expansion of categories remained integral to the structure of the archive. The picture research was now conducted with the help of a 'category book,' a system which could also be found at other photo agencies.
- 13 The simplification of the visual indexing system seems to reflect the paradox of the idea of the archive – with the theory of its classification systems on the one hand and their practical maintenance on the other hand, between the desire to accumulate and control masses of objects and the inevitable impossibility of doing so. Thus the idealistic aspirations of the librarian and academic were in opposition to the demands on the 'picture man,' who needed to uphold his competitiveness within the picture market. The fact that 'commerce and culture are standing in a dialectic relation to one another'<sup>21</sup> and that the one does not necessarily exclude the other has been pointed out by Cheryce Kramer in her remarks on Otto Bettmann's doctoral dissertation.<sup>22</sup> It is this dichotomy that characterized the Bettmann Archive throughout its existence and that was its driving force.
- 14 This becomes particularly apparent with respect to the books and booklets published by the Bettmann Archive and later by its publishing company Picture House Press. Starting in 1939 with a visual history of libraries and a series of *Educational Forum Portfolios*,<sup>23</sup> Bettmann compiled several illustrated books using pictures from the archive, such as the *Pictorial History of Medicine*,<sup>24</sup> the *Pictorial History of Music*,<sup>25</sup> *The Good Old Days; They Were*

*Terrible!*<sup>26</sup> and *The Bettmann Archive Picture History of the World*,<sup>27</sup> and indicated clearly that the pictures could be acquired via the Bettmann Archive. The fine line between visual historiography and sales promotion, between an educational or epistemological tool and a catalogue of goods, is particularly blurred in the case of the *Bettmann Portable Archive*, first published in 1966. As a 'graphic history of almost everything,' it presented 3,669 pictures, thematically arranged and cross-referenced. This portable version of the Bettmann Archive was meant to inspire, to convey knowledge, and to be 'a window in the house of pictures,'<sup>28</sup> for both the general public and for potential clients internationally.<sup>29</sup> The self-representation of Otto Bettmann as a restless, if somewhat peculiar academic, in combination with the institutional aura of the company's name, contributed to the archive's credibility and played a decisive role in establishing it as an authoritative source for historical pictures.

## 'Either You Grow or You Go'

- 15 While the Bettmann Archive<sup>30</sup> had specialized in making historical imagery available through its service, it had to adapt to the fact that photography had become the leading picture medium; no longer merely a tool for reproduction, photography was now also a means of producing 'autonomous' pictures. In response to this situation, the Bettmann Archive acquired, in the early 1970s, large photographic collections and former agency stock, 'entire photo-morgues'<sup>31</sup> such as the Gendreau Collection and the Underwood & Underwood Collection of stereographs, which the Bettmann Archive distributed on a commission basis. The archive's stock grew sharply, as a result, adding historic photography to its vast stock of photographic reproductions of illustrations in various media. In the case of the Gendreau Collection, however, Bettmann objected that it scarcely added a more modern facet to the existing stock, as it was static, 'neither old enough to fall within my own collection nor current enough to qualify as truly contemporary.'<sup>32</sup>
- 16 Moreover, every acquisition necessitated the integration of a foreign, often less developed, classification system into the existing one, leading to an undermining of the complexity of Bettmann's original system. This dilution of complexity can be regarded as a direct consequence of the shift of the picture market towards the need to always supply more pictures and to continuously stimulate demand.
- 17 While Bettmann had anticipated the growing need to incorporate photographs into his collection of reproductions, his interest in the medium was clearly business oriented. He valued its unrivaled efficiency for reproducing and its reproducibility, as well as its standardizing format. Through photography, picture sources and materials of all kinds could be transferred into a single format, allowing not only for the amassing of images, but also the creation of an operational classification system. In the context of a commercial picture archive, the question of the photographic original – in any case a highly disputed concept in terms of photography – was irrelevant or handled pragmatically, since the original was defined as the available picture source, the master.
- 18 Upon demand, prints were made and mailed out to customers as 13 x 18 cm 'authentic photo-prints.' The Bettmann Archive requested the return of the prints after their one-time use. If a master was damaged or lost, a new negative was produced. Thus, the negative became the vehicle for preserving a damaged Bettmann 'original' and thus ensuring its continued exploitation. And the negative was easily manageable in terms of

archival storage. With the abandonment of the visual card index and the growing number of transactions, the registers were increasingly filled with 'authentic photo-prints,' often with several copies of the same image.

- 19 Regardless of the changing copyright laws for photography, the Bettmann Archive rarely credited the photographer. The reproductions were deemed to have become the property of the archive once a collection was purchased or reproduced. This is apparent in the 'photography chapter' of the *Bettmann Portable Archive* of 1966<sup>33</sup>: for example, the reproduction of Walker Evans's photograph 'Penny Picture Display, Savannah, Georgia, 1932' is presented with the caption 'Advertising in Window of Midwestern Small Town Portrait Studio, 1932.' There is no mention of the photographer's name. Photographs, whether art, news, or object photography, were not considered any different from other picture sources. Photographs were 'subject pictures,' endlessly reproducible, authorless, and, therefore, quasi-public property. The self-designation of Otto Bettmann as 'photo-historian'<sup>34</sup> or 'backward photographer'<sup>35</sup> and the advertising slogan 'Call on us for anything in photo-history'<sup>36</sup> articulates a different historiography of photography – not the history of photography as a medium, but photography as a medium of history.
- 20 In 1981, Otto Bettmann retired and sold his company, with its collection of approximately three million pictures, to the publishing firm Kraus-Thomson Organization, which later merged the Bettmann stock with the photo collections of United Press International (UPI) and Reuters, bringing its holdings to a total of over sixteen million objects, including duplicates. Tellingly, Kraus-Thomson did not change the archive's name, despite the takeover and relocation into new offices and even though the Bettmann Archive was fused with the significantly larger UPI collection.<sup>37</sup> From this time forward, the stock, including numerous 'iconic images from the 20<sup>th</sup> century,'<sup>38</sup> as well as photographs dating back to the 1860s, was marketed under the name The Bettmann Archive and also its photo-journalistic branch, Bettmann News Photos<sup>39</sup>.

## A Formidable Digitized Oak: Juxtaposition vs. Hierarchy

- 21 In 1995, the Bettmann Archive changed hands once again, but in contrast to the Kraus-Thomson Organization, Corbis, the new owner, was *a priori* unfamiliar with the traditional picture market. A 'visual content provider'<sup>40</sup> specializing in the commercialization of digitized reproductions, Corbis was created in 1989 by Microsoft founder and owner William H. Gates under the name Interactive Home Systems. The initial business concept consisted of reproducing art works and famous photographs in order to display these digital images on wall monitors in private homes or to sell them as thematic compilations on CD-ROMs. Corbis negotiated non-exclusive licensing rights with a number of museums to market their collections by means of digital images, also referred to as 'media-files.' The museums were to benefit not only financially from this arrangement, since part of the generated profit was to be shared with Corbis, but also through the indirect promotion of their collections.
- 22 But Corbis claimed a separate copyright protection, arguing that the digital reproduction of an artwork or photograph could be considered as fundamentally distinct from its 'original.' Through the potential adjustment of colour, brightness, and contrast, the digital reproduction could be interpreted as a unique work of art.<sup>41</sup> The museums balked,



fearing a loss of control over the use of their holdings especially given that copyright legislation had yet to be adjusted to reflect the rapidly changing technology. Corbis countered allegations of taking possession and commercializing common property through digitization by stating that the copyright protection applied only to the digital image produced by Corbis. The company argued that it was not preventing anyone from reproducing and subsequently disseminating the same original work of art.

- 23 Unlike Bettmann's earlier approach, Corbis's initial idea was barely successful and led to the development of a modified business model. In 1995, with the aid of major financial investments, Corbis began taking over numerous photo agencies and picture archives, and establishing several commission contracts. By purchasing inventory outright, the company avoided lengthy negotiations with museums and libraries, while seeking to gain a leading position in the picture market by eliminating potential competitors.
- 24 Similar to the sales rhetoric used by the Bettmann Archive (and many other photo agencies), Corbis's mandate was 'to build a comprehensive visual encyclopedia, a Britannica without the body text,'<sup>42</sup> a 'digital Alexandria'<sup>43</sup> with a stock that now amounts to more than one hundred million creative, entertainment, and archival images.<sup>44</sup> As with the invention of photography, digital reproduction technology reanimated the vision of eventually being able to capture 'the world' – the fantasy of the archive, an idea that was deliberately propagated by Corbis.
- 25 The Bettmann Archive, Hulton-Deutsch, Sygma, Condé Nast, the Ansel Adams Collection, the Andy Warhol Foundation are but a few of the 'iconic and historical collections' whose images Corbis features. Corbis has defined its value primarily through the quantity of available pictures, in both analogue and digital form. With these acquisitions and their successive digitization, the company assumed a key position in the distribution chain of this new product. Parallel to its major competitor Getty Images, Corbis anticipated the radical transformation in the field of communications with its new way of consuming and distributing pictures.
- 26 Otto Bettmann himself approved of the purchase of his former company, claiming to be pleased 'to have seen my original acorn nourished and cultivated into a formidable digitized oak,'<sup>45</sup> and that 'picture seekers no longer have to consult a multiplicity of sources to fill their graphic needs, all can be satisfied in one well-organized picture emporium,'<sup>46</sup> thereby reaffirming his pragmatism and view on photographic materiality.
- 27 In turn, Corbis – the IT-company and newly created 'super-agency'<sup>47</sup> – stated: 'When we acquired the Bettmann Archive in 1995, both Bill and I immediately recognized not only its commercial potential, but even more important, our stewardship obligation.'<sup>48</sup> With the mention of the company's stewardship obligation, Steve Davis, former chief executive of Corbis, points to an episode in the company's history that generated much criticism in the media and in the writings and works of artists.<sup>49</sup> Corbis solicited a group of photography conservators to develop a preservation plan to stop the deterioration process of large numbers of negatives. In keeping with this plan, in 2002 Corbis transferred the Bettmann Archive and UPI files to Iron Mountain, an underground storage facility located in a former limestone mine north of Pittsburgh.
- 28 The information protection and storage company, also called Iron Mountain, holds the documents and data of approximately 2,300 clients, including government departments, private companies, as well as libraries, museums, and media corporations.<sup>50</sup> Temperature and humidity controls ensure the long-term preservation of the analogue materials. For a



selection of approximately 28,000 'icons of photography' – a set of vintage negatives of best-selling and best-known pictures – the preservation plan foresees storage at -20 degrees Celsius, thereby freezing the negatives.

- 29 In contrast to the initial plan to digitize the entire stock, the preservation of the Bettmann Archive resulted in a reduction of the 'visible' and instantly retrievable photographs. First, the sixteen million analogue objects were viewed and evaluated; the reproduction sources were repackaged, low-quality pictures or duplicates were sorted out – they were archived but did not qualify for digitization. Then, after the re-verification of copyrights and research on captions, Corbis digitized the negatives and prints, starting with the best-selling pictures and with those pictures for which the company expected future demand, namely pictures that could be relevant for the present day. However, the initial objective of reproducing more than five thousand photographs per month was soon reversed. Not only were the costs of digitization and digital storage soaring, but the company had underestimated the difficulties in bringing together the diverse collections and in migrating the existing metadata into the new visual database. Today, the number of scanned pictures of the Bettmann and UPI masters adds up to about 250,000 items, of which only a fraction can be displayed on the Corbis website. New scans are predominantly carried out upon the clients' request. Thus, as with many other digitization projects, it is the client who will determine which pictures will be made 'visible.'
- 30 Yet, one has to acknowledge that the electronic display has led to an unprecedented virtual availability of a selection of the stock in the form of standard, medium-sized and watermarked screen pictures. The screen picture is the alias of the digital picture as well as a surrogate of the analogue photograph archived at Iron Mountain. With its search mechanism employing both keywords and cross-referencing, the electronic database realizes what Otto Bettmann had envisioned with his card index, as mentioned in the *Bettmann Portable Archive* of 1966: a 'mobile catalogue.'
- 31 'Ideally, picture retrieval should work in the following manner (and perhaps one day it will): The picture user in search of "Melba eating Melba toast" will teletype his coded request to an electronic picture research pool. After a few minutes' wait, a Western Union messenger will arrive with a fat envelope containing pictures of Melba eating Melba toast, dry, buttered or with marmalade! Only a digit here and there has to be changed should the request happen to be for "Thomas Jefferson eating spaghetti" or a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" ... This Pictorial Futurama is not offered facetiously. We are getting there ... To help in such pursuits and to speed up the retrieval of pictures – the right pictures – The Bettmann Archive has developed a visual index.'<sup>51</sup>
- 32 But as the example of the 'ideal visual index' conceived of by Otto Bettmann has shown, the 'ideal' research scenario becomes deficient when offering too many images, and yet offering as many pictures as possible is the underlying condition of the picture market. In practice, the question of how to find an individual picture or a 'fat envelope' of pictures has become ever more urgent: it is, and will continue to be, the key concern of all picture providers.
- 33 One way of facilitating the research is by presenting pictures in portfolios such as 'Bettmann Premium' or 'Great Historical Moments' and by the rating of pictures, since the creation of a hierarchy serves to structure the body of the available stock. It may be this hierarchy that is the most distinctive feature between the image bank and the picture archive, as it replaces the principle of juxtaposition of equal elements – the basic

principle of the library – and the principle that characterized the structure of the Bettmann Archive.

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## NOTES

1. For further reading, see Paul FROSH, *The Image Factory. Consumer Culture and the Visual Content Industry* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).
2. See also Matthias BRUHN, *Bildwirtschaft. Verwaltung und Verwertung von Sichtbarkeit* (Weimar: VDG Verlag, 2003).
3. Oliver WENDELL HOLMES, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, no. 3 (June 1859): 738–49.
4. See Otto BETTMANN, *Die Entstehung buchhändlerischer Berufsideale im Deutschland des XVIII. Jahrhunderts* (Ph.D diss., Leipzig, 1927).
5. Otto BETTMANN, *The Picture Man* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 26.
6. *Ibid.*, 23.
7. Otto BETTMANN, 'A Picture Index,' *Wilson Bulletin for Librarians*, April 1939: 536.
8. Otto BETTMANN, *The Picture Man* (note 5), 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 26.
10. Otto BETTMANN, 'A Picture Index' (note 7), 537.
11. See Advertising for the Bettmann Archive, *The Bettmann Archive Newsletter*, no. 4 (March 1942). 'Regard the Archive as a circulating library of authentic photo-prints.'
12. O. BETTMANN, ed., *The Bettmann Portable Archive* (New York City, 1966), 81.
13. Leslie HANSCOM, 'A "Little Bettmann Archive" for Everyone,' *Newsday*, New York City (November 19, 1978).
14. See Advertising, *The Bettmann Archive Newsletter*, (note 11), no. 3 (May 1941).
15. Leslie HANSCOM, 'A "Little Bettmann Archive" for Everyone' (note 13). 'Essentially what the Bettmann Archive has to sell is a service that saves a client infinite, perhaps prohibitive labor. "People pay me for finding pictures, and for eliminating them" says Dr. Bettmann – that is for screening thousands of pictures so that only a good choice remains.'
16. See slogan on *figure 4*.
17. 'Dr. Bettmann and his Picture Archive,' *Publishers Weekly*, December 1961 [no author credited].
18. See Advertising, *The Bettmann Archive Newsletter* (note 11), no. 3 (May 1941).
19. *Ibid.*, no. 4 (March 1942).
20. *Ibid.*, nos. 1–4 (1941–2).
21. Cheryce KRAMER, "'©Bettmann/CORBIS" – Techniken der Sichtbarmachung von historischem Bildmaterial.' In *Konstruieren, kommunizieren, präsentieren. Bilder von Wissenschaft und Technik*, ed. Alexander GALL, 259–91 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008), 259.
22. Original title, 'Die Entstehung buchhändlerischer Berufsideale im Deutschland des XVIII. Jahrhunderts' (dissertation, university of Leipzig, 1927).
23. The Bettmann Archive, ed., *The Educational Forum Portfolio*, 1–4: 'The Story of the Wheel' (November 1940); 'The Story of Roads' (January 1941); 'The Story of Vehicles' (March 1941); 'Street Life and Inns Through the Ages' (May 1941).
24. Otto L. Bettmann, *Pictorial History of Medicine* (Springfield: Thomas, 1956).

25. Paul Henry LANG and Otto BETTMANN, *Pictorial History of Music* (New York City: W. W. Norton, 1960).
26. Otto L. BETTMANN, *The Good Old Days; They Were Terrible!* (New York City: Random house, 1974).
27. The Bettmann Archive, ed., *The Bettmann Archive Picture History of the World. The Story of Western Civilization Retold in 4460 Pictures* (New York City: Random house, 1978).
28. Interview with Otto BETTMANN recorded for the William E. Wiener Oral History Library of the American Jewish Committee (New York City, June 12 and June 24, 1971).
29. Otto BETTMANN, *The Picture Man* (note 5), 135.
30. *Ibid.*, 93.
31. *Ibid.*, 101.
32. *Ibid.*, 101–2.
33. O. BETTMANN, ed., *The Bettmann Portable Archive* (note 12), 160–4. The ‘chapters’ of the Portable Archive are defined by the selection of thematic keywords.
34. Otto BETTMANN, *The Picture Man* (note 5), 84.
35. *Ibid.*, 85.
36. See Advertising, *The Bettmann Archive Newsletter* (note 11), no.1 (October 1940).
37. UPI is in itself a conglomerate of several photo agencies such as ACME (1923–60) and INP (1912–58).
38. See Corbis Film Preservation and the Bettmann Archive factsheet, updated 2007, <http://www.corbis.com/corporate/PressRoom/PressFactSheet.asp>. Similar notions appear in several articles, such as Mary BATTIATA, ‘Buried Treasure,’ *Washington Post Magazine*, May 2003: ‘millions of the greatest images of the 20th century’; Dirck HALSTEAD, ‘A Visit to the Corbis Picture Mine,’ *The Digital Journalist*, June 2003, <http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0306/cpmine.html>: ‘a vast proportion of the world’s visual legacy’; Scott WILLIAMS, ‘Freezing Time,’ *Washington CEO Magazine* 15, no. 5 (May 2004): 69–70: ‘most famous pictures in history.’
39. Information sheet for the merged company The Bettmann Archive and Bettmann News Photos, ca. 1989.
40. Richard RAPAPORT, ‘In His Image,’ *Wired* 4, no.11 (November 1996). [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.11/corbis\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.11/corbis_pr.html).
41. Jane LUSAKA, Susannah CASSEDY O’DONNELL, and John STRAND, ‘Whose 800-lb Gorilla Is It? Corbis Corporation Pursues Museums,’ *Museum News* (May/June 1996).
42. Richard RAPAPORT, ‘In His Image’ (note 39): quote by Charles Mauzy, director of media development at Corbis.
43. *Ibid.*
44. See Corbis corporate fact sheet, August 2009, [www.corbis.com](http://www.corbis.com).
45. Jesse BIRNBAUM, David BJERKLIE, and Patrick E. COLE, ‘Gates Snaps Top Pix,’ *Time* (October 23, 1995): 107.
46. Otto BETTMANN, *The Picture Man* (note 5), 144.
47. Paul FROSH, *The Image Factory* (note 1), 27.
48. Henry WILHELM, ‘High-Security, Sub-Zero Cold Storage for the Permanent Preservation of the Corbis-Bettmann Archive Photography Collection,’ in *Final Program and Proceedings: IS&T Archiving Conference* (Springfield: IS&T, 2004), 122–7.
49. See the most prominent works addressing the issue: Hal FOSTER, ‘The Archive without Museums,’ *OCTOBER* 77 (Summer 1996): 97–119; Geoffrey BATCHEN, ‘Photogenics/Fotogenik,’ *Camera Austria* 62–3 (1998): 5–16; Allan SEKULA, ‘Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic of Photographs),’ *OCTOBER* 102 (Fall 2002): 3–34. See also artworks by Alfredo JAAR, ‘Lament of the Images (2002),’ installation work *Documenta XI* (Kassel, 2002); and Ines SCHABER, ‘Culture Is Our Business (2004),’ photographs and dia-projection presented in the

framework of the group exhibition *No Matter How Bright the Light, the Crossing Occurs at Night* (Berlin: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2006).

50. [www.ironmountain.com/company](http://www.ironmountain.com/company).

51. O. BETTMANN, ed., *The Bettmann Portable Archive* (note 12), S. 81.

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## ABSTRACTS

Contrary to the art market of photography, the picture market is based on the reproducibility and indexability of the medium. As the protagonists of this market, photographic agencies and commercial photo archives are seeking for ways to maximize revenues from picture licensing and to continuously exploit their collections. But how exactly is monetary value attributed to these pictures produced and reproduced through photography? How does the information associated to a picture as well as the specific forms of visual archiving and picture retrieval contribute to its value? How does the dictate of economic efficiency shape and influence the materiality and status of photography? Using the example of the Bettmann Archive and Corbis, this article analyses the construction of value through analogue and digital photography and investigates the differences and continuities between a former commercial picture archive evolving in response to the changing market needs (Bettmann Archive) and a visual content provider (Corbis) that emerged from the transformation in the fields of communication and stimulated new ways of consuming and distributing pictures.

## AUTHOR

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Estelle Blaschke is an art historian as well as a research associate and teacher of the history and theory of photography at the University of Duisburg-Essen. From 2003 to 2007, she worked as a consultant in UNESCO's Culture Sector, before going on to write her doctoral dissertation, 'La production du patrimoine dans les agences photographiques' under the direction of André Gunthert, Michel Poivert, and Herta Wolf. Together with Herta Wolf, she co-organized the conference *Dépôt et Plateforme. L'Archive Visuelle dans l'Ère Post-Photographique*, which was held in Cologne in June 2009; she also writes the blog *Post-Photographic Archive*.