



# Picture the Past

The use of documentary  
photographic images in  
historical research

Douwe Zeldenrust



Cor van der Heijden en Gerard  
Rooijakkers, *Kempische boeren  
en Vlaamse vissers, kunstenaars  
en volkscultuur omstreeks 1885:  
Victor de Buck en Joseph Gindra*  
(Den Bosch 1993)



# Fishermen and...



# ...Farmers



# Method

- Visual Anthropology
  - Title
  - Creator
  - Date
  - Location
  - Size
  - Type
  - Purpose
  - User
  - Position
  - History
  - Collection



# Visual Anthropology

- Interested in the perception of the maker of the image
- Interested in the way the images is used
- Interested in the subject of the images
- Uses other sources as archives or material remains
  
- John Collier, Jr. and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology, Photography as a Research Method* (Albuquerque 1999)



**M.G. Thijsen, *Humanistische  
fotografie en het geluk van het  
alledaagheid, Het Nederlandse  
bedrijfsfotoboek 1945-1965*  
(Utrecht 2000)**



# The Commemorative Company Photo Book



# Method

- Visual language
- Title
- Creator
- Date
- Location
- Size
- Type
- Purpose
- User
- Position
- Researcher
- Collection



# Visual Language

- Art Historian
- Typology of the genre
- Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing, The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (New York 2001)



**Ellen Tops, *Foto's met gezag,*  
*Een semiotisch perspectief op*  
*priesterbeelden 1930-1990*  
(Nijmegen 2001)**



# Images with Authority



# Method

- Semiotics
  - Title
  - Creator
  - Date
  - Location
  - Size
  - Type
  - Purpose
  - User
  - Position
  - History



# Semiotics

- Learning of signs
- Each sign has its own meaning
- Gives the possibility to analyse the image as an relatively independent source
- Liz Wells (ed.), *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York 2002)



# Conclusion

- There are various ways to use photographic images as a historical source
- But there is common ground:
- Title
- Creator
- Date
- Type
- Size
- Location
- Purpose
- User
- Position



# Practical Suggestions

- More research into methodology
- Description and background information of a (digital) collection is necessary
- The more well-structured metadata, the happier the historian will be



# Address

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