

UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHS: Example #2

VISUAL

Three figures stand in the **foreground** against an **out of focus** landscape. The **repetition** of each figure's stance, their walking sticks, dark suits and hats creates a lateral **rhythm** across the **picture plane**. Each figure looks directly at the camera. The **shapes** of their heads and hats are delineated against the blank sky. Their expressions are serious. Their shared **pose** is a mixture of **formal** (stiff posture, 3/4 profile) and **informal** (cigarette of man on left). They appear to be on their way to an event and have dressed up. They are not in their usual work clothes. The **Rule of Thirds** is used to locate each figure from left to right and top to bottom - their heads, hands and feet. There is an implied **movement** from left to right - their feet point towards their destination.

CONTEXTUAL

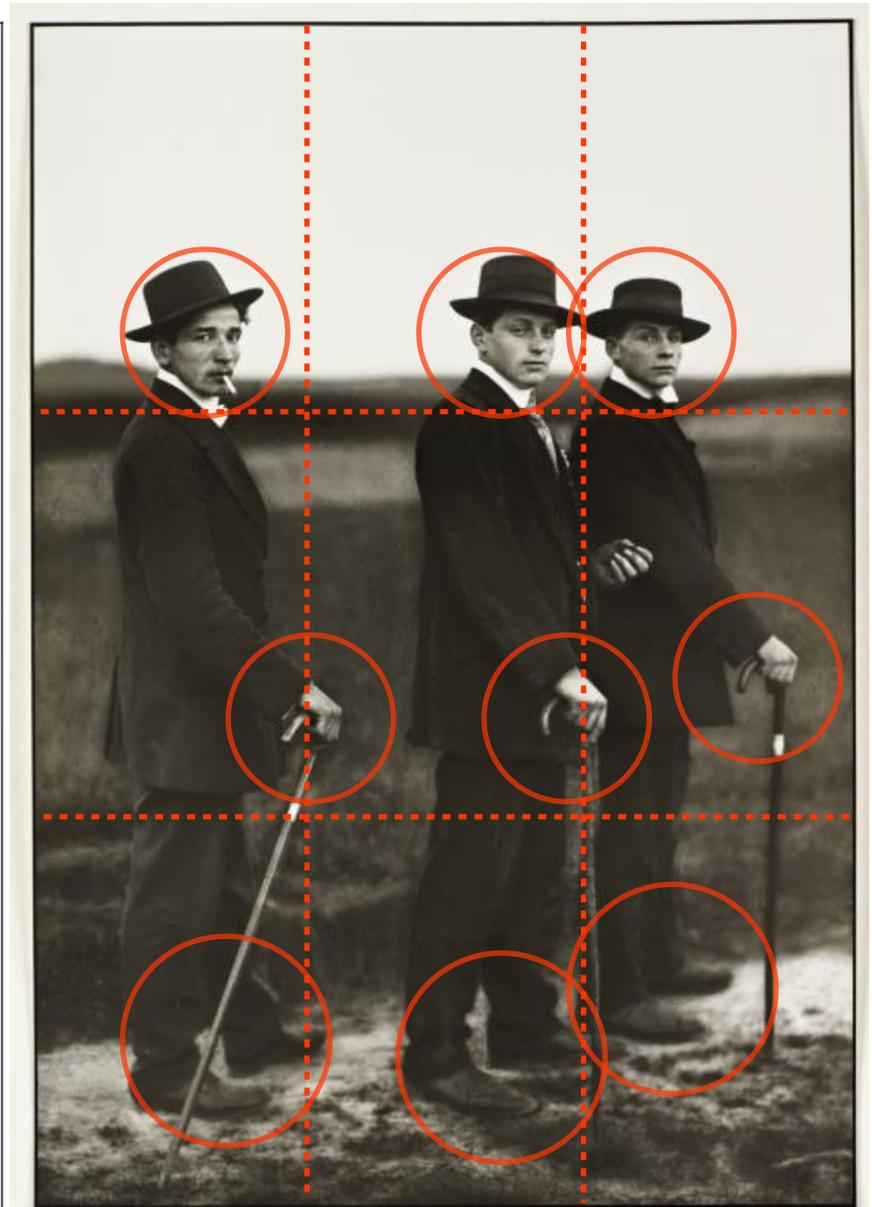
Sander was a German **portrait** and **documentary** photographer. During the Nazi period he struggled to maintain his practice. This image was the sixth plate in Sander's portrait **photobook** 'Face of Our Time', published in 1929, and also appears in the first volume of Sander's life-long but incomplete project 'People of the Twentieth Century', which was planned as a **comprehensive photographic index** of the German population, **classified** into seven groups by social 'type'. The Marxist critic John Berger famously wrote about the image, arguing that the peasant's suits are ill-fitting copies of a more bourgeois attire. These farmers, influenced by popular culture and advertising, may represent a trend that saw workers move away from the land towards the city.

TECHNICAL

Image taken with a **large format glass plate camera mounted on a tripod** with a **long shutter speed** (more commonly found in portrait studios). The photographer uses available early evening light. **Shallow depth of field** caused by relatively **wide aperture** and **focal length** of the lens. Many of Sander's negatives were destroyed either by the Nazi authorities or damaged during the war. This image was re-printed in 1996.

CONCEPTUAL

- Portraiture as a form of historical document - what does this picture tell us about a particular class of people in Germany on the eve of the First World War?
- The photographic series - Sanders intended this photograph to be part of a sequence of images.
- Typologies - 'Face of Our Time' is a photographic typology (classification) of German society intended to be seen as a group of connected images in book form.
- Theoretical interpretations of photography - John Berger's essay is an example of Marxist analysis (concerned with class relations and power).



August Sander, *Young Farmers*, 1914