



Paper Type: Original Article

Psychoanalytic Analysis of Anderes Portraits by Thomas Ruff based on Jacques Lacan's Theories

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Citation:

Received: 13 November 2024

Revised: 17 January 2025

Accepted: 20 February 2025

Zinalabedini, P., & Majdjahanbani, N. (2025). Psychoanalytic analysis of Anderes portraits by Thomas Ruff based on Jacques Lacan's theories. *Perspectives on Art and Beyond*, 2(1), 51-54.

Abstract

In this research, the series of Anders portraits by Thomas Ruff, a German photographer, is analyzed based on Lacan's ideas. In this context, theories such as look, otherness, repetition, and desire are applied in the works of photographer and artist Thomas Ruff. In fact, this research seeks to answer the question of how the philosophical concepts of Jacques Lacan's thought are reflected in the work of Thomas Ruff. The research method in this study is descriptive and analytical, and the data analysis was conducted in an inductive way using written and library sources. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that this collection of photographs evokes feelings of emptiness, doubt, division, loss, and a gap in the contemporary subject and audience.

Keywords: Jacques Lacan, Thomas ruff, Portrait, Anderes' portraits.

1 | Introduction

Lacan is one of the psychologists who first reviewed Freud's theories and analyzed topics such as the unconscious mind. Then by focusing on human childhood and using the theories of linguists such as Saussure and Roman Jacobsen, he made the connection between the unconscious mind and the realm of language.

Thomas Ruff is one of the contemporary German photographers who started reconstructing the faces in the manner of passport images, by using the Minolta montage, an image-making machine that used a combination of mirrors to turn four portraits into a composite image. He often combined male and female features and

presented an image that did not exist in reality. This creativity led to the creation of Andres's portrait series¹ (1994-1995). This contemporary photographer has been chosen for the research because the discussion of imagination and reality has appeared in his works in terms of content and can also relate to psychoanalytical theories. The general purpose of this research is to investigate the creative and made-up portraits of Thomas Ruff based on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan.

2 | Research Literature

2.1 | Imaginary Order, Imaginary Matter, Imaginary Space

It is a word that Lacan uses to describe the psychological quality of the baby and his awareness of his position and his relationship with himself and the world around him. In the imaginary order, the child has not yet learned the rules of language; his perceptions are based on discrete and imaginary images. And he has a fragmented and discrete perception of his existence [1].

2.2 | Mirror Stage

According to Lacan's belief, the split ends when the child sees an image of himself in the mirror and achieves a unified perception of his body and its independence from the mother and the surrounding world [2]. This stage creates the first feeling of unfamiliarity, incompatibility and duality in him; He also explains that "at this stage, an assimilation is formed in which the child, in a constant illusion, identifies himself with the mirror image and deceived that there is an ideal self" [3].

2.3 | Loss

After entering adulthood, the child is still in search of unity and tries to overcome the dissociation that brought him into being for the first time. That is why he always tries to achieve a unity by making others and himself "one".

2.4 | Symbolic Order

The domain of symbolic order includes everything from language to law and all social structures. Because of this, it is a significant part of what we call "reality". In this system, the symbol replaces something that we do not have direct access to. [4]. Also, the psychological meaning of the father is the authoritative presence of a character that determines the subject's position in the social framework.

2.5 | Real Order

Lacan believes that "real order is unsignifiable and does not enter into the system of language and the relationship between the signifier and the signified. As a result, it cannot be accessed at any time. In the real order, nothing can be changed, because this order does not fit in coding and language games" [5].

2.6 | Gender

In Lacan's view, the sexual difference, instead of being related to anatomical difference, expresses the limitations of the symbolic order. According to him, the concepts of femininity and masculinity are not anatomical data, but rather the positions of subjects that are defined through the relationship between men and women and the phallus, which is the signifier [6].

¹ Anderes means other in German. it is also known as other portraits in English.

2.7 | Gaze

Lacan defines the gaze as follows: "Beyond the gaze, there is no self-image; There is only the look" [6]. Looking in the Lacanian concept includes both the act of seeing and being seen, the act of receiving, and the act of interpretation".

2.8 | Identification Portraits

Thomas Ruff never fell under the false assumption that photography is objective. He has always accepted that lying is the nature of the camera. For Ruff, narrative content is the least essential element of a photo, and abstract qualities such as composition, subtext, process, artist's point of view, and purpose are more important. Throughout his work, he challenges the definition of authenticity and objectivity in photography. Anderes' portraits by Thomas Ruff were a continuation of his previous collection of portraits, which was a research about the identification portraits of people. In order to create this collection, he used a device called the Minolta assembly unit. This device combined four passport photos into one composition with the help of an optical mirror system. Instead of using four photos, Ruff combined two faces from his portrait series. In the production of these composites, Ruff combined and experimented with the gender binary, the faces of men and women. Instead of showing the identity of a person like an artistic portrait, the series of portraits of Anderes Ruff clearly demonstrated the ability of photography to show the surface appearance of the subject. In this way, the background, personality, and identity of the person were left out. According to Ruff, photography "can only reproduce the surface of objects".

In these images, Ruff uses the visual language of archive images to create a new person. Ruff's collection of portraits, which can be placed in the purely visual realm of art, problematizes the authority of the archive in relation to the subject of the portrait. In this series of portraits, Ruff combines the faces of men and women.

3 | Research Findings

Andres's portraits are considered to be a part of the formation of multiple portraits. This is a different representation of an image compared to a traditional single portrait, and therefore requires a theory that does not assume singularity and linearity in subjectivity. Otherwise, the ways of examining photographic portraits will be limited by this description. Lacan's perspective is based on the concept of "dividing the subject" and "splitting the subject" [7], so there is less limitation in explaining multiplication, repetition, and splitting in the process of creation and observation. Also, it works more productively. When viewing a portrait, the audience identifies with it in the same way as it does with other ideal images, but in front of a composite portrait, the audience's unconscious memory of a fragmented self and the desire to remember themselves as a unified person in the process of watching emerges.

Subjectivity in a composed portrait is made of two faces, broken and inaccessible, which reminds the audience of a wound or a gap in his being, but he still tries to identify with the work. This awakens his unconscious existence. The "other" referred to in the title of the series – andere - means "other" in German - could refer to the primary use of the apparatus of security offices: "other" with a capital "O", to those who stand outside the society, criminals or terrorists, those who are outside the familiar territory and are considered dangerous. It can also refer to a face that is created when two portraits are used to make a composite. "Other" can also refer to the intersection of a culturally constructed gender binary. The subject's goal is to reach a primary injury, but he cannot find words to express it". In other words, the process of making composite portraits is a process of searching for what constitutes the subject and getting closer to reality.

When the audience tries to guess the identity of the portrait, the image leads the audience to another identity; in this way, the mentality of the female figure, the male figure, and the audience is interwoven as if both of them lack a self-sufficient identity. They are looking for an image that is reflected by another. It seems that this relationship involves "me". It is also consistent with Lacan's concept of the object of desire that the subject tries to be the object of another's desire. He claims that "human desire is the desire of another". These

works once again confirm the contemporary mentality of emptiness. The look of the portraits in Andres Ruff's series is a gaze without any emotion, a direct look at the audience. But even though they are staring at us, we cannot get to know the people in the photo, and this is Ruff's goal: turning the subject into an object. The question of which of the two characters is used in these portraits makes identification difficult, and the audience does not know which character is being seen. In fact, he loses the other.

4 | Conclusion

In this research, we examined the series of Andres Thomas Ruff under the Lacanian psychology's light. Andres Ruff's portraits are a perceptual study of the structure of portrait photography. Uncoordinated areas appear between the faces and stimulate perceptual movement. In these photos, inconsistent areas between the faces appear and stimulate perceptual movement. It should also be said that in these portraits, discontinuity, combination of faces, repetition in expression, and technique can be observed in the process of creation in his works. In fact, it seems that the elements such as emptiness, gap, and the subject's inherent lack and the other's desire that exist in the contemporary mentality can be seen in these portraits as well. Composition in "other portraits" is used by the artist to address these elements in the mentality, which in a way reveals the "self".

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