

The psychosis of race: racialization, racial anxiety, and the objet a of Race [abstract only]

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Published version

BLACK, Jack (2022). The psychosis of race: racialization, racial anxiety, and the objet a of Race [abstract only]. In: Lacan: clinic & culture conference, Pittsburgh, PA, U.S.A., 14-16 Oct 2022.

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The Psychosis of Race: Racialization, Racial Anxiety, and the *Objet a* of Race

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Presented at:

‘Lacan: Clinic & Culture Conference’, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, U.S.A.,
October 2022.

Conference website:

<https://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/liberal-arts/academics/departments-and-centers/psychology/news-and-events/lacan-clinic-and-culture>

Citation:

Black, Jack. “The Psychosis of Race: Racialization, Racial Anxiety, and the *Objet a* of Race.” Paper presented at the *Lacan: Clinic & Culture Conference*, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, U.S.A., October 14—16 2022.

Abstract

The psychotic subject “has the object a in his pocket”
(Lacan, “Petit discours aux psychiatres de Sainte-Anne”)

“The work of theorizing the role of race in the constitution of the subject has only just
begun”
(Seshadri, “Afterword”, 303)

It is widely asserted that race bears no epistemological significance, especially when seeking to delineate “racial” differences in the human population. Indeed, while such assertions serve to dismiss race as a false distinction, nothing more than a “social construction”, they nonetheless uphold an ontologization of race that just as easily reifies racial differences as much as it seeks their critique. In fact, despite the untenability of race, it is in its very resilience that its significance to Lacanian psychoanalysis can be found. By way of exploring this significance, this paper will draw from a Lacanian conception of psychosis in order to introduce what it will define as “the psychosis of race”. Specifically, Lacan’s account of psychosis will lend a new

perspective to the central importance of lack and alienation in processes of racialization, perceived as an ‘illusion of being’ (George, “From alienation to cynicism” 361), while also exploring the effects of race in both masking and accentuating examples of racial visibility. It will be discussed how Lacan’s structure of psychosis, and the difficulties in articulating one’s subjective position, can become reproduced as part of a racial logic that pursues its very certainty in the racialization of both the subject and the other. This paper will make sense of such racialization by locating race as structurally grounded in the foreclosure of the Name of the Father, the jouissance of the Other and in the subject’s relation to the *objet a*. It is in accordance with the Lacanian *objet a*—the *objet a* of race—that its presence in psychosis exhibits the advertence of a racial anxiety, which works to fix the subject to a delusional ‘racial essence’. Here, assumed racial differences can be conceived as returns in the Real, expressed in examples of racial paranoia and fantasy.

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