

Book Review - Sandlin, J. and Wallin, J. (eds.), 2017. *Paranoid Pedagogies: Education, Culture, and Paranoia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 212 Pages.

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Paranoid Pedagogies attempts to revive an interest in paranoid subjectivity, especially as it relates to sociocultural mechanisms that, in many ways, bind educational thought and practice. For all of the conversation surrounding cultures of surveillance, escalating standardization, conspiratorial politics, and neoliberal univocality within this context, there is limited discussion about how paranoiac fixity preserves and reproduces these psychosocial realities. To this end, Editors Jennifer Sandlin and Jason Wallin argue that we can analyze the “reasons and functions” of paranoia in terms of a “broader calculus of social conformity” as well as a “potential for social resistance” (vii). In this sense, paranoia is multifunctional: it can cut *and* it can mend. They note that “the mechanisms of paranoia do not simply repeat in the same symptoms” as an explanation for any lack of cohesion within the collection (23). It is precisely this lack of cohesion that reveals the power of divergent conformity; specifically, that one’s paranoiac-schizoid fantasies shape reality in ways that can open one up to counter-hegemonic possibilities.

In chapter one, Sandlin and Wallin begin with a genealogy of paranoia. They briefly conduct an etymological inspection of ‘*para-noos-ia*’ before turning to a survey that glosses Hellenistic, Cartesian, Kantian, psychoanalytic, and post-psychoanalytic approaches to paranoid atypicality. The authors notably linger on Freud, Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari, whose work establishes a foundation for the most theoretically rich contributions highlighted here. Although the editors have divided *Paranoid Pedagogies* into three sections: paranoid aesthetics, paranoid society, and paranoid pedagogies; the texts do not fully obey this attempt to categorize them. By the end of the text, the aesthetic, the social, and the pedagogical begin to blur, and—much like the paranoid representations contained within these sections—any suggested pattern remains untrustworthy and vulnerable to critique. Still, the most relevant contributions for Žižek scholarship are Chapters 3, 8, and 9: jan jagodzinski’s “Penetrating Images,” Stearns and Blake’s “It’s Been Getting Under My Skin,” and Jake Burdick’s “The Paranoid and Psychotic Pedagogies of Conspiracy Theory.”

jagodzinski explores Lacan’s three psychic registers which bind the subject’s relation to images (42-3). He goes on to develop the Deleuzoguattarian notion of “unavoidable violence” (46) and the image as “simulacrum” (47) as a means to understand educational media and its affective implications. This exploration centers around an insightful psychoanalytic analysis of student reluctance to watch films he assigns. For example, an anti-queer student’s aversion to Gus Van Sant’s biographical film *Milk* (2008) constitutes a refusal to “‘face’ the Real” and understand “the unknown element that is ‘framing’ vision to begin with” (43). For jagodzinski, this “phenomenon of self-censorship” occurs when students deny themselves access to these films, meanwhile “the Imaginary has [already] been ‘framed’ by the horror of what ‘could’ or might be seen,” where its “intrusion would mess up the student’s tidy scheme of things” (44). Students express this aspect of ‘self-censorship’ through a Žižekian paradox: “the *objet a* of desire [is] both a threat and a necessity for fantasy so that life is bearable” (44). jagodzinski concludes with an addendum that reignites these claims within a Trumpian “post-truth” society, specifically that educators should begin to evaluate “unconscious affects” through new media in a time of ever-increasing precarity (52).

While jagodzinski’s essay emphasizes more “regressive” formulations of paranoia, in the final section of *Paranoid Pedagogies*, Jennie Stearns and Charlie Blake underline their concept of a ‘pedagogy of the possessed’. For them, this is a “new way of mapping knowledge and its acquisition as mediated by paranoid patterning” (146). To that end, they build upon Michel Serres’s notion of ‘parasitosis’ as a “cancer of being” (149) and the delusional parasitic condition ‘Morgellons’ (151) in order to emphasize the potential for resistance within paranoid

reproduction. Stearns and Blake claim that “new invaders” make a “pedagogy of parasitosis” that “oscillates between the poles of paranoia and schizophrenia” possible (161). For Jake Burdick, this lack of fixity enables an “alternate conspiratorial pedagogy...that interrupts the psychosocial reproduction of paranoia...[and] attempts to address the Real of the conspiratorial symptom” (172). Drawing on Žižek’s notion of ‘the Other of the Other’, Burdick claims that this conspiratorial mode is “concerned only with the *search* for the truth—not its discovery” and therefore provides “a respite from the Real of postmodernity” (183). He concludes by calling for “a pedagogy that denudes our desire for unity” and “to engage in acts of critical dreaming” in order to produce “new formulations of and language for engaged citizenship” (186).

Sandlin and Wallin’s collection ushers in a new way of looking at our paranoiac metamodern condition from the aesthetics of surveillance to social confinement to pedagogical possibilities. The explications of the ‘irregular mind’ contained in *Paranoid Pedagogies* provide robust entry points for educators, researchers, social activists, and critical artists alike. A diversity of approach is one of this book’s many strengths. While most readers will find a few contributions that are of interest, not everyone will find everything contained here entirely productive. Still, there is great potential within the broad field of educational ecology to extend this work, especially for those who are partial to Lacanian- and Žižek-flavored analysis.