Title
The Age of Vigilance, Abstract

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8qf0k66v

Author
Berson, Josh

Publication Date
2018-01-08

Peer reviewed
The Age of Vigilance
Josh Berson

This is the age of vigilance—of coordinated attacks and drone warfare but equally of attention disorders and modafinil. At every scale of our lives, from the long-distance movements of weather patterns, disease vectors, and human beings to the regulation of wakefulness in our bodies, vigilance has become a modal theme of self-care. For Bodies of Knowledge, I propose a panel exploring what this means for us as individuals and collectives.

Vigilance has two senses. There is vigilance in the sense of preparedness or threat readiness, an attunement to signs of incipient violence—or simply demands for social synchronization—in our perisomatic space. But vigilance has a second sense. In this second sense, vigilance is a dimension of nervous physiology that characterizes the relationship we enact in our bodies between motoricity and attention. The challenge here is to unpack the politics of this second kind of vigilance. More precisely:

1. How do vigilance outliers, individuals and communities whose attentional-motoric styles diverge from social norms, suffer or benefit? How do the enforcing and troping of vigilance norms function in the enactment of social power?

2. How do the types of vigilance operative at different scales of social life flow into one another? How do the rate and rhythmic character of demands on our attention, be it for threat assessment or simply social synchronization, shape our attentional-motoric style over time?

3. What role does the acoustic environment play in shaping our habits of vigilance? As a lifelong monaural hearer with continuous tinnitus and recurring hyperacusis linked to episodes of hypomania, this is a question of personal significance.