



Collective Research Center “Cultures of Vigilance”

[SFB 1369 Cultures of vigilance - LMU Munich \(uni-muenchen.de\)](https://www.uni-muenchen.de/sfb1369)

Annual Conference 2022 „Politics of Vigilance“

27./28.10.2022: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, München

Concept: Klaus Benesch and Martin Schulze Wessel

Abstract

The degree to which political systems engender vigilant behavior in both individual citizens and in their political leaders or those in power at large differs significantly. In an authoritarian political environment a heightened sensibility vis-à-vis critics and dissidents or, conversely, for the critical individual to be on alert with respect to the state apparatus and its various forces of control and oppression seems almost a given. At a closer look, however, democratic societies may equally find it expedient for their citizens to be vigilant: not only has democracy itself proved to be volatile and in constant danger of being eroded from both without and within (just note the foreign attempts to influence the 2016 elections in the US as well as the Republican’s concerted attempt to reverse Trump’s demise in 2020). What is more, in radically egalitarian, democratic societies with considerable social mobility such as the United States the status and political clout of each of its members is itself volatile, that is, subject to being altered, demoted, or denied altogether. As early as 1790 Jon Adams, the founding father and second president of the US, has claimed that the poor are now mostly miserable not because they are deficient in material wealth, but because they lack in social recognition and attention, that is, they are simply “not seen.” The need for individuals to constantly observe others and, simultaneously, to draw attention to oneself—either by sociable means or, as Adams feared, by pretense and deceit—has since become a trademark not only of American society but of many modern liberal societies in the West.

To identify forms of vigilance indigenous to the two major political formations of the modern era, East European centralist socialism and US free market capitalism, this year’s conference will focus on the geopolitical spheres of North America (including Canada) and Eastern Europe. To put calls for vigilance or contemporary manifestations of vigilant behavior in both societies in historical perspective, contributions will range from the early eighteenth century to the post 9/11 present. In line with the research institute’s research agenda we define vigilance as any commitment to either called-for or self-appointed wariness on behalf of a higher, collective, social, or political objective. Speakers may address issues as wide-ranging as 18th century political discourses on self-observation, racial vigilance from slavery to the present, the role of vigilance in the creation of a new socialist man, mutual observation of bystanders and collaborators in mass crimes of the 20th century, the paranoid style in politics of the cold war era (Hofstadter), the regime of vigilance in neo-nationalism in Eastern Europe since 1989/91, or Texas’ new anti-abortion laws that call upon individual citizens to enforce by way of private lawsuits the State’s restrictive reproduction rights.

Jonathan Alderman (LMU)

The politics of watching in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands

Borders are widely theorized as social processes, rather than simply being material objects. Physical borders are constructed to erase territorial ambiguity, but also to reject the “other”, placing them outside national territory. At the same time borders constructed to divide who does and does not belong highlight and make more visible the other within the borders of the nation-state. Our research looks at politics of othering in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. We show that in the U.S. city of San Diego, practices of vigilance are developed by racialized people, including Chicanx and Latinx, in response to othering by the media, politicians, and some citizens, who have portrayed Latin Americans outside the borders - and by extension, also those within the borders - as a threat. Political discourse that portrays people of Mexican American and of Latinx descent in this way means that those living in the borderlands deal with surveillance and suspicion, since some citizens are categorized as *potential* migrants. Being observed makes individuals living in the borderlands watchful over their own actions, but also of people around them. We discuss how personal watchfulness is expressed on an everyday basis both individually and collectively, and how it informs the subjectivity of people living in a particular working-class, Mexican-American neighbourhood of Barrio Logan in San Diego.

Winfried Fluck (FU Berlin)

Unsichtbare Herrschaftsausübung oder Selbstermächtigung? Die Rolle der Aufmerksamkeit in Theorien populärer Kultur und Medien.

In der Analyse amerikanischer Populärkultur und Massenmedien dominieren zwei Narrative: In einem wird die populäre Kultur zum Modell unsichtbarer Herrschaftsausübung erklärt, im anderen zum Paradebeispiel eines breiten, fast anarchischen Spektrums aktiver Rezeptionen von großer Unvorhersehbarkeit. In beiden Fällen ist die Aufmerksamkeit der Rezipienten das Nadelöhr, das passiert werden muss, entweder von Seiten der Ideologie oder der subjektiven Selbstermächtigung der Rezipienten. Die Aufmerksamkeit nimmt daher in den entsprechenden Wirkungstheorien eine zentrale Rolle ein, wird allerdings, wie mein Vortrag zeigen soll, jeweils sehr unterschiedlich konzipiert.

Patrick Geiger (LMU)

“A jealous, watchful spirit”: John Adams, hyper-vigilance and paranoia in the 18th Century.

John Adams’ writings before, during and after the American Revolution represent a specific strain of the history of ideas which can be used to illuminate a hyper-vigilant, almost paranoid, outlook on virtually all aspects of life (state, society, self) during a formative period of time for the Western world. In this talk, the genealogy of what Adams calls “a jealous, watchful spirit” will be traced and its significance for the way vigilance and attention are understood will be argued.

Johannes Gleixner (Collegium Carolinum)

Anticipating the true Leninist past – Ideological self-alignment of Bolshevik intellectuals in the 1920s

Few modern polities lend itself to a study of vigilance as much as the Soviet Union during Stalinism. In my talk, however, I would mainly like to focus on the public ideological discourse of the Bolsheviks in the timeframe of 1923–1928 in order to show, how during the late NEP era and early Stalinism a public was conditioned for a state of ideological vigilance that depended on Stalin as an (arbitrary) arbiter for even the smallest of discussions. As borders of the policed discursive space could change over time, many participants in ideological discussions tried to square the circle by retroactively align themselves with an unknown party line.

Maren Hachmeister (TU Dresden)

Vigilanzpraktiken beim Aufbau einer Rentnerkartei in der DDR

Eine zentrale Betreuungskartei für Menschen im Rentenalter (kurz Rentnerkartei) war ein Vorhaben des Gesundheitsministeriums der DDR. Ziel war es, Rentnerinnen und Rentner mit ihren individuellen Pflegebedürfnissen zentral zu erfassen und ihnen konkrete Versorgungsleistungen zuzuteilen. Am

Beispiel dieses Vorhabens können Vigilanzpraktiken von den 1960er-Jahren bis zur Deutschen Einheit nachverfolgt werden. Das Gesundheitsministerium (als primär zuständiger Akteur) erstellte einen Fragebogen, mit dem Pflegebedürfnisse direkt bei den Rentnerinnen und Rentnern abgefragt werden sollten. Mit der Durchführung dieser Befragung beauftragte es die Räte der Städte, die entweder ihre eigenen Mitglieder oder Freiwillige aus Massenorganisationen (z.B. Volkssolidarität, DFD) mit den Fragebögen in die Wohnungen vor Ort schickten. Welche Unterstützung in welcher Lebenssituation notwendig bzw. verfügbar war, entschied sich jedoch weiterhin vor Ort. Welche übergeordneten Interessen verfolgte also das Ministerium mit der Rentnerkartei? Welche erweiterte Aufmerksamkeitserwartung wurde mit der Rentnerkartei an die (vermeintlich sekundär zuständigen) lokalen Akteurinnen und Akteure adressiert und waren mit ihr Anschlusshandlungen verbunden? Der Beitrag beleuchtet, wie sich Vigilanzpraktiken beim Aufbau der Rentnerkartei mit der Zeit veränderten und zeigt, wie staatliche und nicht-staatliche Beobachtungsregime in der DDR zusammenwirkten.

Ekaterina Makhotina (Universität Bonn)

Das Versprechen der „guten Ordnung“: Pietistische Ideen im Strafwesen des frühneuzeitlichen Russlands

Im Zeitalter des Absolutismus entwickelte sich in Russland - ebenso wie in Westeuropa - ein System von Institutionen, die Delinquenten mit Freiheitsentzug strafte und zugleich auch polizeiliche und karitative Aufgaben übernahmen. Das Konzept der neuen multifunktionalen Institutionen der Verwahrung war nicht nur von der Philosophie der Aufklärung inspiriert, sondern im gleichen Maße vom deutschen Pietismus, der wiederum von russisch-orthodoxer Geistlichkeit aufgenommen und vermittelt wurde.

Dietmar Neutatz (Uni Freiburg)

The Hard Core and the "Backward". Everyday practices of vigilance in the Soviet Union of the 1930s

Using the example of a large construction site, this article shows how everyday practices of vigilance functioned at the lower levels under Stalinism and what role they played in the system of exercising power and educating people. The focus is on the behaviour of a hard core of activists of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) towards workers freshly arrived from the village, whom they regarded as "backward" and in need of education.

Angela Naomi Paik (University of Illinois, Chicago)

Sanctuary for All: Abolition for Migrant and Environmental Justice

In this talk, I extend analyses in my previous work arguing for radical, abolitionist approaches to sanctuary movements. I trace the deep genealogies of sanctuary and abolitionist movements and examine how these modes of organizing can address demands to create "sanctuary everywhere" and "sanctuary for all," as clamored for by migrant justice movements. The talk reaches for the broadest possible meaning of sanctuary—one rooted in a genealogy that encompasses not just humans under the threat of imminent harm, like migrants excluded and expelled from wealthy nations, but also nonhuman species and the planet. It asks what possibilities emerge if we approach sanctuary as a placeless practice that creates sanctuary for all living beings and the habitats on which we depend to live at all.

Claudia Verhoeven (Cornell University)

Vigilant Terror: Hyperconsciousness in the History of Revolutionary Terrorism (Russia & US)

The presentation will examine the ties that bind terror and vigilance in two historical periods that produced comparable revolutionary cultures: the 1860s/70s in Russia and the 1960s/70s in the United States. In these contexts, terrorism must be vigilant, and vigilance is ultimately terroristic, because of a deeply entrenched and very compelling, but also highly slippery understanding of the role that consciousness plays in history's unfolding.