

ANTINOMIES OF VAGUENESS

Exploring obscurity, vacancy and ambiguity
as cultural resource

Keynote speakers

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University of Copenhagen, April 20-21, 2017

The Saxo Institute

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Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies



Conference outline

The conference explores the ways in which vagueness, ambiguity, voids and vacancy feature in human social life. Much research in the humanities – and in science in general – is devoted to examining factual and quantifiable observations with the aim of testing hypotheses and establishing evidence for interpretations. This research design has many merits, but also tends to regard that which falls beside or outside of concrete data sceptically as a methodical or empirical problem, error or deficiency. As a consequence, vagueness and vacancy are ignored both as empirical facts and conditions, and as cultural resources.

The aim of the conference is to bring such potential into play across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, such as anthropology, archaeology, architecture, art history, history, human geography, linguistics, urban studies, media theory, philosophy, and rhetoric. A multi-disciplinary approach has the potential for offering novel perspectives on the impact of vagueness and vacancy in social life, the condition under which they come into being, or work, as well as the epistemological consequences of recognising vagueness and vacancy as empirical phenomena. But it is equally important to the conference to shed light on how vagueness and vacancy can work as cultural resources, sometimes in the form of objects or experiences being cherished in or for their lack of clarity, and at other times by vagueness or emptiness being manufactured or orchestrated deliberately.

Regardless if vagueness, ambiguities or invisibilities are real ('objective' in a conventional terminology) or imagined ('subjective' in the same conventional terminology), they have concrete effects upon people's cultural lives and social relations. In this sense vagueness and absence become empirical parameters in the examination of human life.

While these issues have been discussed in many different ways within a series of different disciplines, we are still in need of two common platforms: Firstly, vagueness and absence or vacancy are often considered to be separate phenomena, while an aim with this conference is to shed light on their continuity and the ways in which they might have to be understood as mutual, overlapping or interactive. And secondly, vagueness and absence are often examined under very disparate conditions within different disciplines, and this conference aims at bringing these notions together in an interdisciplinary discussion.

The conference thus invites questions such as:

- Are there phenomena that in their very nature are vague or unclear, or is our ability to see such a phenomenon merely blurred or flawed?
- Are our methods incomplete, is there a lack of data, or is the object at stake ontologically speaking vague?
- Are cultural voids the product of actual disappearances or is absence a socially constructed form of invisibility or ignorance?
- What may be gained by looking at vagueness and vacancy as cultural resources?

Should you be interested in presenting a paper at the conference, please forward a title and an abstract of no more than 200 words for your proposed paper, along with a short bio, to both of the organizers no later than March 7th 2017: Tim Flohr Sørensen (klq302@hum.ku.dk) and Martin Demant Frederiksen (mdemant@hum.ku.dk).

Antinomies of Vagueness is hosted by The Saxo Institute and the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, and it is sponsored by a generous grant from The Carlsberg Foundation.