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Vincent Miller
Space and Culture 2006; 9; 453
DOI: 10.1177/1206331206292548

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The Unmappable

Vagueness and Spatial Experience

Vincent Miller
University of Kent

This article contributes to current discussions of the spatial inspired by complexity theories that emphasize the multiple and relational qualities of space. It introduces the concept of vagueness and “vague objects” and relates these to spatial theory through the intersubjective theory of Alfred Schutz. The author argues that a consideration of vagueness, especially as constructed in Schutz’s version of intersubjectivity, can provide insights (outside complexity theorizations) into the continuous and multivalent nature of social space and the relationships between spatial experience, practice, representation, and power.

Keywords: vagueness; space; Schutz; power; Lefebvre

Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles and everything can be constantly shuffled in every way conceivable.

—Italo Calvino (1988, p. 124)

Jewish law is very complicated, we were aware of trying to explain it to people who hadn’t a clue. . . . It’s hard to find ways of expressing the idea of the eruv. . . . Eventually we said we can’t explain it or you’ll never believe it . . . We just want you to respect the fact that we understand it.

—North West London Eruv proponent, as quoted in Cooper (1996, p. 540)

Author’s Note: I would like to thank Majid Yar, Ryan Conlon, John Urry, Tiago Moreira, Bulent Diken, and Rob Shields for helpful comments and inspiration on previous drafts of this article.
The relationship between identities, spaces, categorizations, and boundaries has been under much academic scrutiny in the social sciences during the past three decades. This ranges from the critique of essential notions of identity (Foucault, 1970; Hall, 1991, 1996; Said, 1978); to current work on space that deals with the construction, permeability, and fluidity of boundaries and networks (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Law, 2002; Natter & Jones, 1997; Thrift, 1996; Urry, 2003); to work more specifically situated in the urban (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Latham & McCormack, 2004).

In *For Space*, Doreen Massey (2005) has provided a valuable attempt not only to summarize and chart the current terrain of debate in the social sciences that centers on the “spatial turn” but also to build on these debates to assert a particular view of how space should be reconceptualized given these recent theoretical advances.

Massey’s (2005) work centers on three propositions that currently inform spatial theory. The first emerges from a politics of antiessentialism (heavily influenced by the work of Laclau and Mouffe, as well as Stuart Hall) and sees space (and identity) as a product of interrelations. The second emphasizes the multiple histories, stories, and trajectories of which space and place are born, and which exist in multiplicity and contemporaneous plurality. Third, that space should not be reified or seen as fixed but as continuous and always “in production.”

Massey’s (2005) latter two propositions in particular draw on current “relational” theories of space that rely heavily on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who built on the work of Henri Bergson. In particular, there is an emphasis on the Bergsonian notion of time as a continuity, a “temporal becoming,” as well as qualitative multiplicity. This is illustrated by Zeno’s paradox, which illustrates that time cannot be broken up into discrete units (Massey, 2005, p. 22). Massey put forward a case to merge time with space, to view space as “an event” that is open to multiple experiences and modalities and always in the process of “becoming.”

Although sympathetic to a relational, nonessentialist, continuous, and multivalent view of space, this article elucidates a view, also based on Bergsonian lines of thought, that can also achieve these aims. Instead of following the Deleuzian approach to space, which has increasingly been used alongside theories of complexity, the objective of this article is to put forward a multivalent and relational view of space influenced primarily by phenomenological sociology.

In meeting this objective, the first aim of the article is to introduce the burgeoning literature on *vagueness* into contemporary debates on space. This literature has branched out from its philosophical origins in recent years into the disciplines of geography, sociology, and communication studies where it has been applied to discussions as varied as social scientific method, public policy, geographical location, and semiotics. Thus, my aim is to insert the vagueness debate into contemporary spatial debates as a productive approach to the examination of power, representation, and spatial experience.

The second aim of this article is to demonstrate how, through a consideration of the vagueness debate, the marginalized yet well-known intersubjective theory of Alfred Schutz has much to contribute to the study of space in terms of both the multivalent character of space (that is, as a space of multiple, coexistent, and even contested meanings) and the relationships of power that emerge where the vague meanings, understandings, and perceptions enacted in everyday life contrast a world of precifications, representations, and abstractions associated with spatial hegemony under contemporary capitalism.

This article consists of three main sections. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the literature on vagueness in philosophy and the social sciences and its
relevance for contemporary urban studies. In the second section, I demonstrate how the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz, and more specifically Schutz’s emphasis on intersubjective vagueness and multiplicity in social life, furnishes a useful concept for exploring space as relational and multivalent. The final section emphasizes how the concept of vagueness (and Schutz’s view of intersubjectivity in general) can be applied to wider literature on the production of space to demonstrate the links between power, representation, spatial practices, and understandings.

The Problem of Vagueness

Vagueness has been a part of the philosophical landscape since the time of the ancient Greeks, where the Sorites paradox queried the notion of precise identity (Schofield, 2003). The Sorites paradox posed the question that if we agree that one, or two, or three proximate grains of sand cannot be rightly called a “pile” or “heap” of sand, at what point will one additional grain of sand create a pile? Thus, a pile or heap of sand can be seen as possessing vague or indefinite properties. This “problem of the many” extends to a wide manner of objects and categorizations we take for granted. If, as Massey (2005) suggested above, Zeno’s paradox illustrates that time and movement cannot be broken up into discrete instances, then in a similar manner, the Sorites paradox illustrates that spaces and objects cannot be broken up into discrete units. Current thinking about vagueness includes a wide range of literature from many disciplines; what follows is a very brief sketch of these debates and their recent application in a wide range of subject areas.

From the philosophical perspective, Tye (1990) and Keefe and Smith (1996) gave three examples of how objects can be vague:

- **Objects with vague properties**: These properties are susceptible to the Sorites paradox as defined above.
- **Natural objects with fuzzy boundaries** (e.g., a cloud, or Mount Everest): In these cases, there is no obvious line that determines where a particular object ends and other objects begin.
- **Abstract objects and sets** (which involve borderline cases): A classic example here is “tall men,” where borderline members to the tall man set become problematic.

In a more general sense, the problem of vagueness boils down to epistemological and ontological questions of identity. Epistemological vagueness has to do with logic and our use of language. Here, vagueness is a problem with language and our inexact use of terms. In the epistemic view (e.g., Williamson, 1996), vagueness extends solely from our lack of knowledge of the world, inability to determine truth and falsity, and in general, our conceptual limitations in a complex environment (Grant, 2003; Williamson, 1996).² In this sense, one is drawn back to Hume’s (1978) view of the role of perception and imagination in categorizing the world, where the world as perceived is seen as a “defect” of the mind.

Vagueness as an epistemological problem engaged philosophers such as Bertram Russell and Gottlob Frege, who believed that vagueness not only stood in the way of logical expression and the advancement of knowledge but also should be eliminated (or at least reduced as much as possible) from language.³ In addition, some philosophers, such as Tye (1990), have argued that vagueness is ontological—not only is language vague but also there are actual vague objects in the
world. In the early 20th century, several notable scholars entered the vagueness debate sympathetic toward ontological vagueness. These included A. N. Whitehead, Owen Barfield, C. S. Pierce, and William James. These figures in particular went against the prevailing cultural and philosophical climate that valorized precision, clarity, and objectivity and where vagueness was seen pejoratively as a condition of chaos, uncertainty, and uselessness (Schofield, 2003). Instead, James, Pierce, Whitehead, and Barfield argued not only that vagueness is an inevitable part of the use of language and experience of the world but also that recognition of its condition (as opposed to imposing a false precision on it) was of fundamental importance to depictions of truth and “the real.”

In this respect, the American philosopher William James (1909) stands out as perhaps the thinker who has most strongly argued for an appreciation of ontological vagueness in philosophical discourse (Schofield, 2003). Writing at a time when most philosophers (such as Russell) lionized certainty, objectivity, and universal truth in language (both that it was possible and that it was desirable), James took a devout anti-absolutist stance. Heavily influenced by Bergson’s work, he lashed out against what he called “vicious intellectualism”: the violent attempt to impose precision and clarity on experiences that are too rich or complex to be represented fully:

Each passing moment is more complex than we have realised, more vague and multidimensional than our concepts can pick up. Not only the absolute but every pulse of experience possesses this common complexity, this vagueness. (Gavin, 1992, p. 50)

In other words, our experience of reality is so “thick” and “rich” that any attempt to represent this linguistically is doomed to fail:

Thought thus deals solely with surfaces. It can name the richness of reality, but it cannot fathom it. . . . To understand life by concepts is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits with scissors, and immobilizing it there in our logical herbarium where, comparing them as dried specimens, we can ascertain which of them statically includes or excludes which other. (James, 1909, p. 244)

Attempts to capture the richness of perception in many cases results in what James (1909) called the act of “bumbling,” a situation where one “seeks certainty, seeks the apodictive, the fundamental Archimedean point as a necessary desideratum in life, but fails to find it” (Gavin, 1992, p. 2).

Gavin (1992) argued that what really exists for James are not things but “things in the making.” Thus, James had a view of reality that was dynamic, in flux, and ultimately overwhelming for precise language and representation. In fact, James described concepts as “cuts” made into ongoing experience for the (scientific) purposes of predicting possible outcomes. Concepts cannot contain the “many-in-oneness” of the world that perception offers (conception by its very nature is “exclusive”) and, therefore, the perceptual world is richer, more intense, and more “real” than our conceptions of it.

Later on in the 20th century and into the millennium, the vagueness debate has become a small cottage industry within the discipline of logical philosophy, with a series of texts by Beall (2003); Code (1995); Keefe and Smith (1996); Tye (1990, 2002); and Williamson (1996), to name a few, emerging in the 1990s in particular.

This debate has since entered the discipline of geography through texts by Achille Varsi (2001); Barry Smith (2001); and Smith and Mark (2003). These debates center on the concepts of spatial location and the marking of boundaries, both “natural” and man-made. Both point out how the discipline of geography is riddled with ontological
vagueness in terms of the objects it studies. Concepts such as mountains, seas, sand dunes, or regions are sketchy at best to delimit physically, as are indefinite categories such as rivers and cities (i.e., When is a creek a river, or a town a city?). Such questions are particularly relevant in the study of Geographic Information System (GIS) processing, for example, in the problem of how an area of individual mountains should be represented in a database (Smith & Mark, 2003).

Sociology has a strong tradition in the study of ambivalence via Zigmunt Bauman (1989, 1991), who defined *ambivalence* as “the possibility of assigning an object or event to more than one category” (Bauman, 1991, p. 1). He argued that ambivalence was the result of the modernist tendency to order the world into classifiable homogeneous entities and that the objects and people who did not fit into strict classifications were seen as problematic within modernist cultural milieu. Of course, vagueness and ambivalence are fundamentally different concepts. Ambivalence is a state either in between closed categories or identities or belonging to both of them. Vagueness, by contrast, suggests not undecidability but openness in general, with no fixedness or “choice between.” Thus, vagueness is a condition in itself, not a choice between alternate conditions.

It was only in 2003 when the vagueness debate entered sociology through the courtesy of Barry Schofield (2003), who discussed the productive relationship between vagueness and precision. Using Laclau, Schofield argued that vagueness and precision have identities that have become dis-located, that vagueness and precision are mutually dependent, simultaneously embracing each other in mutual antagonism. He argued that both in the world of public policy and in discourses of “community,” a “culture of vagueness” is being employed, for example, with the malleability of work roles and in the blurring of identity boundaries. For Schofield, retaining a sense of the vague retains “generative possibility” and provides an insight into how knowledge is shaped and used.

Within communication theory, there has been an emphasis on how understanding is pragmatically achieved despite pervasive plurality and uncertainty in the use of language. Grant (2003) pointed out that despite pervasive vagueness (ignorant or not) in language, understanding between subjects is still achieved and that this is done through pragmatic terms and not in relation to our conceptualizations of an “objective” world. Grant went on to develop a semiotic approach to vagueness through the use of “fuzzy signs” where he argued that the multivalency and vagueness of semiotics are overcome by “collective fictions” that are a part of the social reality of an intersubjective lifeworld. Code (1995) followed a similar line of thought that ends in the primacy of the intersubjective over the “objective” world. Using Whitehead and Barfield, Code argued that metaphor is the strategy we use to describe a real world (a world filled with change, transition, and motion) that evades all rigid classification. The “ill-fittedness” of precise terms are overcome through metaphorical appeals to the imagination. Code pointed out that the fact that metaphor even works is significant, alluding to the primacy of intersubjectivity and the use of the imagination in describing the world. In Code’s opinion, “not everything that can be said can be expressed literally” (p. 99). Thus, metaphors are not merely decorative elements of language but provide “the very warp and weft of understanding” (Code, 1995, p. 195).

In subsequent work, Grant (2004) has incorporated the complexity theory of Luhmann (1995) within a theory of complex communication. Luhmann, of course, countered the whole notion of intersubjectivity by arguing that autopoietic systems (such as the psychic system of individual minds) are incommensurable. As a result, relevant communication can be established only through the emergence of other systems (the social system; Knodt, 1995; Luhmann, 1995). Grant went on to argue that “transcendental”
intersubjectivity leaves no room for gaps or slippages in meanings between actors. As I demonstrate in the next section, this criticism is based on reciprocal versions of intersubjectivity that do not allow for gaps of vagueness in meaning between actors. Schutz’s version of intersubjectivity, by contrast, is more pragmatic than transcendental and is predicated on the inexactness of knowledge between actors.

The breadth of this more recent literature indicates how the vagueness debate has great relevance to a wide range of investigations concerning identity, space, and our experience and understanding of the world. In this sense, the vagueness debate has a direct relevance to the study of space and experience, particularly in works concerned with “everyday life.” Furthermore, the application of vagueness in communication theory points to how vagueness is not only “dealt with” through intersubjectivity but also actually aids in the understanding of the world. This is further explored in the next section.

Schutz and the Unmappable

One disciple of James (and Bergson) who places vagueness in a central position within the intersubjectivity of social life is Alfred Schutz. The neglect of Schutz in more contemporary sociology and studies of space in general is tragic, for one thing that Schutz did in his philosophy is demonstrate how language, object, space, and communication are intertwined in everyday life. The following demonstrates his relevance to urban studies and more specific, to the study of urban social space, and in the process suggests how to operationalize the notion of vagueness into a pluralistic urban theory. I argue that the experience of space can be seen to have two important themes that follow from Schutz’s view of intersubjectivity: the vagueness of its experience by an individual and the varieties in modes of experience or meaning (multivalence) that are possible for an individual.

LIFEWORLDS AND VAGUE TYPES

Within Schutz’s approach of phenomenological sociology, which has as its concern the descriptive experience of the individual, there is a focus on the lifeworld:

The total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living. (Schutz, 1970, p. 320)

Thus, Schutz’s emphasis is on the pragmatic as a constituting factor of social life. The lifeworld is the sphere in which we “do” things, the space, time, and context in which the mundane aspects of our daily life occur.

Therefore, in everyday life, there is continuity between self and world, and our practical goals are implicated in and help define the sociostructure of the lifeworld. Thus, lifeworld exists as a “state of affairs” that we accept as unproblematic until proved otherwise. This acceptance of the way things are is known as the natural attitude, the “mental stance” a person assumes when involved in the spontaneous and routine pursuits of daily affairs (Schutz, 1970):

I always find myself in a world which is for me taken for granted as self-evidently “real”. I was born into it and I assume that it existed before me. It is the unexamined ground of everything given in my experiences. . . . The taken for granted frame in which all the problems which I must overcome are placed. (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 15)
For Schutz, this state of being in which doubt is suspended is the primary way in which reality is experienced. This becomes constituted through the act of “getting things done,” and the extent to which our “paramount reality” applies to others is through its intersubjectivity. Paramount reality is shared between individuals in the sense that one’s basic assumptions about life and others (that he or she is similar to me) are taken for granted.

Through our life experiences, we are able to understand each other to the degree that we are able to deal successfully with one another and accomplish our goals (Schutz, 1970). We have an approximation of what reality is that seems to “work” well enough for what we have to accomplish; therefore, we do not question it unless some sort of conflict occurs. Thus, social life and interacting with others continually reinforces our notion of what is real, without any particular or objective knowledge about reality or others.

Typification “is the medium through which man [sic] in his daily life finds his way through the anonymous structure of the everyday world” (Natanson, 1986, p. 45). The crucial point about typification is to demonstrate how paramount reality is “constructed” through means of categorizations that are certain in that they “work” as categorizations for predicting goals and outcomes. Yet these are uncertain in that we have no exact understanding, just as series of generalities that seem to work fine for specific purposes. In that sense, types are essentially vague. “The ‘standard’ is standard in commonsense terms because what is standard tolerates a considerable range of what is vague” (Natanson, 1986, p. 46).

The point is that practical understanding is not a precise meaning established between two people but something that can refer to, agree with, and be understood in a general sense. Realizing that typification is a vague process is fundamental to the understanding of intersubjectivity because it suggests that one can have a unique experience, yet still be understood by others (more or less). In a similar manner, Stoltzfus (2003) showed how Schutz’s theory of the symbol is predicated on the idea that they are “ambiguous but unifying,” dependent on

the essential ambiguity of the symbol, the vagueness of the transcendent experiences represented by it, and the difficulty of translating their meanings into discursive terms of more or less precise denotations. (Schutz, as quoted in Stoltzfus, 2003, p. 189)

In the same way, categorizations of space are often vague: understood and yet imprecise. As stated above, geography itself is riddled with vagueness both in terms of what it studies and in how it defines objects. As with a discussion of “vague objects,” much of this can be put down to an inexact use of language. However, there are what Varsi (2001) called “weaker forms of cognitive projection” and Smith (2001) called “denizens of common-sense reality”: these have no boundaries, perceptual, fiat, bona fide, or otherwise. Their existence is a purely relational one present in the here and now. One knows where, for example, “our picnic spot” is not by crossing a perceptual border but by the alignment one remembers (and reexperiences) of the trees, buildings, open spaces, and perhaps most important, the agreement of others. It is, as Varsi described in a paraphrase of Wittgenstien, how “we know what sound a Clarinet makes, though we are unable to say it” (p. 51).

PLURALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF “ENCLAVES”

Within a single day, even within a single hour our consciousness may run through most different tensions and adopt most different attentional attitudes to life. There is, furthermore, the problem of “enclaves”, that is, regions of belonging to one province of meaning
enclosed by another, a problem which as it is, cannot be handled within the frame of the present paper. (Schutz, 1962, p. 233)

In Schutz’s commonsense world, interests organize our constructs. Therefore, “reality” or “meaning” for an actor (or what Schutz would call the “here and now” or “the definition of the situation”) is defined through relevant typifications, signs, and symbols. Relevance in turn is defined through biographical situation, stock of knowledge, and current goals (Heeren, 1971). This, and Schutz's line that it is the intersubjectively vague meaning of experiences that constitute reality, suggest that there is no reason for other “realities” not to exist within which different experiences and meanings occur outside the paramount reality of the natural attitude. Schutz himself suggested that more than one “reality” is possible, characterizing them as provinces of meaning, different planes of meaning on the ontological level of the mind and thought in which certain assumptions, relevances, and modes of operating apply. Chief among these is the paramount reality associated with the mental stance of the natural attitude. However, each province of meaning possesses its own epoch—prevailing forms of spontaneity, self-experience, sociality, and time (Lengkeek, 1996, p. 232):

Nevertheless, the life-world embraces still more than everyday reality. Man [sic] sinks into sleep, day after day. He relinquishes the everyday natural attitude in order to lapse into fictive worlds, into fantasies. He is able to transcend everydayness by means of symbols. Finally, as a special case, he may consciously modify the natural attitude. (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 21)

These changes in cognitive style imply different ways of brackets everyday reality. It is argued that we often transcend paramount reality in the experience or practice of religion, science, play, fantasy, daydream, and theater. These essentially amount to different “modifications” of mundane life. Schutz used the term tensions of consciousness to underline the fact that other provinces of meaning are not separated states of mental life but part of different “layers” of the same consciousness.

Although Schutz’s notion of multiple realities is fairly well known and discussed, Maurice Natanson (1986) has focused on what Schutz called the problem of enclaves, which he argued is an enormously significant part of the theory of multiple realities, as well as issues of familiarity and anonymity. For Schutz and Natanson, enclaves are the overlapping aspects of provinces of meaning: interruptions or “othernesses” that impinge one world on another. Thus, the mundane world (paramount reality) becomes inflicted with meanings that derive from nonparamount realities (say Schutz’s example of religion or theater, but one can come up with many more contemporary urban examples, such as “gay space” or “ethnic space” or even skateboarders’ use of public space).

Although still “operating” within one province of meaning (such as the paramount reality), what is attended to under such conditions are the aspects of experience relevant to the enclave, whereas the rest is set at a distance. To put it simply, what Schutz and Natanson (1986) referred to are those moments in time when the pragmatic meanings of the paramount reality have been overlapped.

Through this lens, gay space, for example, can be seen as a place/event in which subjects move from the paramount reality of everyday life in heterosexual society and enter the nonparamount reality of the enclave, thereby experiencing different modes of spontaneity, sociality, and self-experience. In short, a nonparamount reality within the intersubjective geography of the city.
Thus, an application of Schutz’s theory of intersubjectivity captures the multivalence of space and provides a framework for understanding how within multivalence and unique experience, understanding, commensurability, and unification are possible through the use of “vagueness” in everyday practice. Such a realization would suggest that looking at space, and one’s experience of it as a series of discrete units (such as city, neighborhood, ethnic enclave, or gay space), is fundamentally misleading. People do not, for the most part, experience borders; they experience transitions. In the same way that the “border” of Mount Everest is contingent on one’s relationship to it (once you start climbing it, it begins), to say where social spaces or ethnic spaces (especially within urban contexts) begin and end is problematic, although one may be conscious of when one is “in” or “out” of them. Even the fiat boundaries that may define them for planning purposes are not likely to reveal themselves in daily life or have any particular correlation to anyone’s lived understanding of those places.

Thus, through an emphasis on the pragmatic, one is able to imagine the city as interwoven and overlapping provinces of meaning, coexisting, and competing dynamic and multiple conceptions of place. In this way, it is possible to conceive of a social geography that does not rely on borders and exactness but on inexactness and layers of experience:

The terms “zones” or “regions” of various relevance might suggest that there are closed realms of various relevance in our lifeworld and, correspondingly, of various provinces of our knowledge of it, each separated from the other by clear-cut border lines. The opposite is true. These various realms of relevances and precision are intermingled, showing the most manifold interpenetrations and enclaves, sending their fringes into neighbor provinces and thus creating twilight zones of sliding transitions. If we had to draw a map depicting such a distribution figuratively it would not resemble a political map showing the various countries with their well-established frontiers, but rather a topographical map representing the shape of a mountain range in the customary way by contour lines connecting points of equal altitude. Peaks and valleys, foothills and slopes, are spread over the map in infinitely diversified configurations. (Schutz, 1970, p. 113)

Everyday Life: Between Vagueness and Precision

We were being held captive by a picture, by something already imagined, and prevented from making our own meanings as we saw fit, in relation to a particular, practical context. (Shotter, 1993, p. 90).

One of the perceived weaknesses of Schutz’s theory of the lifeworld and intersubjectivity is that he devotes little time to the question of “society” and instead relies on face-to-face relations as the primary mediation of the social world (Rasmussen, 1984). In a related manner, Lengermann and Neibrugge (1995) commented that Schutz’s sociology is striking in its lack of consideration of power and domination. The social world certainly does not end at immediate experience, vague or otherwise.

This section demonstrates that the phenomenological theories of Schutz have a place within broader sociospatial theory alongside de Certeau, Habermas, and most notable, Lefebvre. I argue below that a consideration of Schutz serves to inform the concept of spaces of representation and clarify the relationship between spaces of representation and representations of space through an emphasis on the vagueness of pragmatic lived experience, and the relationship to representation, embodied through the notion of precision.
In many ways, it is issues of power that open up the relationship between vagueness and precision, and Schofield's (2003) overall point is that by “reinstating the vague,” we can follow the process from vagueness to inevitable precision, thereby demonstrating how knowledge is shaped and put to use. Here I briefly introduce the relationship between vagueness and precision as a question of power. In doing so, I demonstrate how vagueness (and the vagueness embedded within Schutz’s theory of intersubjectivity, in particular) and precision are useful concepts in demonstrating power relationships within the city, thus relating these concepts to contemporary spatial theory.

Perhaps one of the most obvious and useful spatial examples of this relationship can be seen in recent critical work on mapping (Del Casino & Hanna, 2000; Harley, 1989; Hutnyk, 1996; Turnbull, 1989; Wood, 1993), which demonstrates that although maps pose as “objective” and accurate reflections of spatial reality, they are in fact reductive representations produced with intent. Therefore, maps reduce reality to represent it and in doing so, are subject to critical inquiry in terms of “who” is doing the representing.

In The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas (1984, 1987) provided another way in which to approach the relationship between vagueness and precision through his characterizations of lifeworld and social system, which he saw in oppositional stance to the social system related to the instrumental rationality that he tied to modern capitalism and its administration.

Habermas (1984, 1987) argued that in modernity, the social system has an intrusive relationship with the lifeworld through its colonization. Here, the systemic processes associated with the increasing complexity of the democratic welfare state lead to an “excessive judicIALIZATION of the lifeworld as even more areas of life become subject to economic and state administrative imperatives” (Fleming, 1997, p. 145). Habermas referred to this “interference” by the social system in the reproduction of the lifeworld as “structural violence.” Thus, the lifeworld has its intersubjectivity prejudiced by bureaucratic and rational systems that penetrate our structure of consciousness.

Although Habermas (1984, 1987) provided a colonization thesis that ties the phenomenological to the structural based on the rationalization of communication, Lefebvre (1991a, 1991b, 1996) produced a similarly Weberian colonization thesis that relies on the rationalization of space in everyday life through his “trilectics” of representations of space, spatial practice, and spaces of representation. This “dialectics of tripliCITY” (Shields, 1998) basically sketches out an antagonistic relationship between meaning-filled experience in space (spaces of representation) and the bureaucratic and technical forces that produce goal-oriented abstractions in the interests of state capitalism (representations of space).

Intertwined with these “lived” and “conceived” qualities of space is what is called “spatial practice”: the terrain of everyday life. This “moment” is often referred to as the perceived, meaning that spatial practices are perceived in the commonsensical mode and, therefore, involve daily life and routines under the logically rationalized urban (Shields, 1998).

The nuances Lefebvre’s trilectics of spatiality (spaces of representation, representations of space, and spatial practice) have been discussed at length by a number of prominent authors (such as Elden, 2004; Gottdiener, 1985; Harvey, 1990; Shields, 1998; Soja, 1996), so I do not intend to repeat this discussion here. However, it is worthwhile to focus briefly on Elden (2004), who has recently emphasized the influence of Heidegger on Lefebvre’s work. Elden interpreted spaces of representation as connaissanCe: less formal or more local forms of knowledge more akin to Heidegger’s notion.
of poetic dwelling than to more popular interpretations as either “fully lived” or “other” spaces (e.g., Shields, 1998; Soja, 1996). Elden, by contrast, focused more on the concept of spaces of representation as “authentic” space, that is, space lived through “doing,” “dwelling,” and practical engagement, which stands in direct opposition to the Cartesian or technological understanding of space dominant in the capitalist state.

Lefebvre argued that in the modern era, spaces are now conceived before they are lived (Stewart, 1995); thus, spaces of representation have been overthrown by representations of space. “Colonization” occurs when conceptions or representations precede space that is “fully lived” in our understanding; thus, the “system,” in the form of spatial science (and its conceptions and abstractions), interferes with everyday life through the use of space. Lefebvre described this situation as abstract space.

Similarly, de Certeau (1984) set up a dichotomy between the “solar eye” view of abstracted space and strategic imperatives of planners and the like as compared to the meaning-filled experiences enunciated by those “down below.” However, de Certeau managed to employ a more sophisticated notion of power through his notion of “pedestrian speech acts,” where the act of practicing or enunciating space is a subversive production that gives space its meaning and identity.

Although Lefebvre never used the term lifeworld, there is much that is phenomenological about his approach to space: His “body centredness” (Shields, 1998), his recognition of commonsense perception in everyday life, suggests that he has more in common with lifeworld approaches than one might think. Both Lefebvre and Schutz concerned themselves with everyday pragmatic interpretations or perceptions within the dominant “frame of mind” of society. For Schutz, this is simply “getting things done”; for Lefebvre, this is operating in the everyday within the given sociospatial modes in capitalism.

When Lefebvre spoke of the historical meaning, the myths, the “lived,” the struggles against oppressive orders, the enchanted aspect of the spatial involved in spaces of representation, he was referring to how spaces of representation relate to “different” or “alternate” ways of understanding outside the logic of capitalism. This chimes with the nonparamount realities of Schutz, those meanings and intersubjectivities outside the pragmatic modes of the natural attitude (daily life in the working world) that are potentially outside alienation. Both denote a relationship to space that is yet to be “colonized” by processes whose origin is beyond the here and now. It is these understandings that become “acted upon” by forms of representation and abstraction or structural violence. Instead of being “tested against the world,” these categorizations and definitions impose themselves on the world, working against the “vagueness” of intersubjective experience, meaning, and typification.

**Conclusion**

Spatial ordering questions temporal becoming. It is, though, the most dismal of pyrrhic victories. For in the very moment of its conquering triumph “space” is reduced to stasis. The very life, and certainly the politics, are taken out of it. (Massey, 2005, p. 30)

The passage above illustrates Massey’s (2005) attempts to put forward a nonrepresentational conception of space, one that illustrates its dynamic and plural nature. Although I agree with her assertion that representations take the life out of space, it is much easier to disagree with the point that representation takes the politics out of space.
Representation is really the point at which politics is put into space. The ideological closure that results from the act of representing remains in contrast to other (alternative) forms of representation (for two examples, see Miller, 2005; Rose, 1994). What spatial representations work against are lived understandings. Representations by their nature are precise, and it is this act of precision that works against the vagueness and ambiguity of the world and, therefore, the openness of social life. It is in that movement from vagueness to precision where power relations are enacted.

It is in these power relationships between abstraction, rationality, and efficiency—verses lived understandings as highlighted by Lefebvre and Habermas—that one can see the applicability of both vagueness and Schutz’s theory of intersubjectivity to wider current spatial theory. The struggle between the conceived and the lived is, for Lefebvre, a struggle against abstraction and alienation in everyday life. This can also be seen, I argue, as a struggle between pragmatic, intersubjective (and ultimately vague) understandings and reified, static (and ultimately precise) concepts achieved through abstraction. Thus, the intersubjective and the structural come together to do battle on the terrain of everyday life, both vague and precise, uniform yet multiple. To resist is to put forward the notion that urban experience is made up of shades of gray, as opposed to lines of black and white.

Notes

1. These relationships are discussed specifically with regard to the relationship between spaces of representation and representations of space as outlined by Lefebvre in The Production of Space (1991a) and Critique of Everyday Life (1991b).

2. Supervaluationism aims to eliminate vagueness by arguing that some things are both true and false (they lack a truth value) and that these can be assigned borderline qualities (still, this is a problem of language). Degree theories and “fuzzy logic” work on the premise that there are “degrees of trueness” in any given statement.


4. A distinction is made between “knowledge by” (direct, immediate, unanalyzed) and “knowledge about” (indirect, mediate, the result of classification). Much like the sign/signifier distinction, the distinction between sensation, perception, and conception is analytic. In the “real world,” no clear distinction can be made between these.

5. Here, one of the key questions as Varsi (2001) and Smith (2001) saw it is the difference between fiat boundaries, the results of acts of human decision (e.g., political boundaries), and bona fide boundaries, such as the shores of an island.


7. Jucher, Smith, and Ludge (2003) followed a similar line in linguistics, promoting an interactive approach that sees vagueness as not only an inherent part of language but also an intellectual strategy to help the addressee to draw intended implications from an utterance. Vague terms convey beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (additional effects) and in that sense are often more effective than precise terms in conveying intended meaning.

8. One could note here this concern for “relevance” is similar to Luhmann, who argued that autopoietic systems are “blind” to their environment and exist through “operational closure,” where only relevant (self-referential) information is gleaned from the environment (Knodt, 1995).

9. Although, de Certeau (1984) provided for much more possibility for resistance than Lefebvre’s essentially modernist, “top down” conception of power. For de Certeau, the act of using (or enunciating) a given structure or system entails an exercise of power.
10. There is perhaps an aside to be made here following Foucault’s (1979) argument in *The History of Sexuality* that power is not only oppressive, exclusive, and punishing but also can be “productive” in terms of the creation of order or even be experienced as pleasurable. In a similar manner, one could argue that representations of space can indeed enhance life and space. Just like power, effects of representation can be complicated; however, I believe the point still remains that representation itself is a colonization in which power becomes enacted.

References

Vincent Miller is a lecturer in sociology at the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent. His research interests focus on intimacy, intersubjectivity, and the social life of urban space. Currently, this interest is being articulated in a study of the North West London Eruv in the United Kingdom. He also has an interest in the influence of information and communication technologies on human communication and intimacy within contemporary society.