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# Healing a Divided Nation: Transforming Spaces Through Sustained Dialogue

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**Abstract:** In the wake of the U.S. 2016 election, national media has highlighted the divided nature of our country. Considering this division, dialogue is often pushed as the tool for reconciliation, healing, and bridge building. This paper takes up this call through considering the spatial practices of the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network. This turn to space makes possible a consideration of division beyond geography that takes seriously how local and global spaces are produced and reproduced, and suggests opportunities for different spatial becomings.

## HEALING A DIVIDED NATION: TRANSFORMING SPACES THROUGH SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

The 2016 election season brought with it increasing division, conflict, and anger. In the aftermath of the election, the national rhetoric has continued to

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emphasize the embittered divide that the election of Donald Trump thrust to the fore (Friedersdorf, 2016; Hellman, 2016; Itkowitz, 2016; Wallace, 2016). In the months after the election, it has become increasingly apparent that our division is geographically spatial (as illustrated through Tim Wallace's [2016] mapping of Clinton and Trump voters into imaginary nations), at the same time as our divisions and misunderstandings lie deeper than geography. Massey (2005) describes spaces as particular moments of relations, a coming together of intensities and forces that are constantly producing and constructing space. This kind of space, a layered and complicated space of relations, produces the possibility that a Harvard Business school student who voted for Clinton had never met a Trump voter (Itkowitz, 2016). Not because of geography but due to other spatial practices, the ways that spaces are produced and reproduced through relations and connections. This kind of spatial divide is what calls to bridge and mend and repair relationships speak to (Friedersdorf, 2016; Itkowitz, 2016). This paper takes up the charge to consider the role of spatial practices in producing (and bridging) divisions through unfolding the processes of dialogue modeled by The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN). I will argue that not only does dialogue, as a series of layered spatial practices, offer an opportunity to interrupt the reproduction of divided spatial practices, but that dialogue offers a set of practices to apply in order to move forward into new possibilities and make our spaces differently. As we look to the future in this uncertain time, the site of higher education as a threshold of learning and development is an integral space in which to consider the possibilities that dialogue offers, pointing to healing, peace, and reconciliation (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2011).

A spatial turn asks how we take up, create, and produce space, not only at the local and bounded level of individual institutions and campuses but space as enfolded and layered nationally and globally, including national politics and legislation (Massey, 2005). The language spatial "turn" is not to suggest a turning away or even towards, but instead as an ontological *return* a "commitment to consider different orders of things, different distributions, that have been and might be" (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 14). Through this return, this paper asks, how is space constructed through the processes of Sustained Dialogue? How do human and nonhuman bodies *intra* act to create this space?<sup>1</sup> How is the space of the dialogue enfolded within the space of the institution as a whole, and the current climate of higher education? These questions put space first, "affording a more layered, dynamic, and nuanced investigation into processes of learning as well as representations of meaning-making" (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2011, p. 15). Through considering these questions,

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<sup>1</sup>I use the term *intra* action (as opposed to *interaction*) here intentionally and will revisit this definition later in the paper.

this paper unfolds the practices of dialogue with the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network as a series of relations, intensities, and flows that produce and are productive of space. Mapping these relations moves analysis beyond the divide and duality of Right and Left, human and nonhuman, towards a perspective that considers relations and connections as points of potential and change.

I begin with an overview of dialogue research in higher education and a description of the processes of the Sustained Dialogue Institute. This is followed by a mapping of the conceptual framework that guides this paper. This conceptual framework weaves together materialist theories of space and place, affect, and intra action with discursive philosophies of rhizomes, and multiplicity. This section is followed by a discussion of application, exploring how considering these spatial practices can open possibilities for change in higher education. I will conclude by exploring how this ontological return to space opens up the possibility for transforming relationships, opportunities for change on the local level of individual campuses, as well as on a global scale as we look to the climate of the nation.

### SITUATING DIALOGUE RESEARCH

Before unfolding the processes of the Sustained Dialogue Institute, I will first map how dialogue has been understood broadly in higher education research and literature. Research involving the term dialogue splits broadly into two categories: formal dialogues and dialogue as an interaction between two individuals. The definition used moving forward looks to formal dialogues, sustained relations with a constant group of individuals with a goal of social justice action (Wayne, 2008). The history of dialogue finds its roots with Freire in critical pedagogy, as well as in the field of international relations and reconciliation (Androff, 2012). These studies suggest that dialogue has the potential to create spaces where individuals and materialities relate in different ways “using the factors and processes which encourage positive contact effects . . . that lead to increased understanding, changed attitudes, and sometimes to ongoing action” (Wayne, 2008, p. 454). This premise builds from Allport’s (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, which suggests that contact between groups under certain conditions can reduce intergroup prejudice. As Harvey (2001) noted, “To construct knowledge requires an active involvement in the process of social change. We discover ourselves by striving to change the world, and in the course of the struggle we change both the world and ourselves” (p. 89). This speaks to the core of Allport’s (1954) theory: in general, the more people connect across lines of difference, the more likely they are to build mutual trust, work through conflict towards reconciliation, and build bridges to greater understanding.

Research around formal dialogue in higher education has often focused on the experiences of the participants within the workshop. For example, DeTurk (2006) observed and participated in a six-week community dialogue program and found that her co-researchers developed a more complex understanding of diversity and a greater awareness of structural power relations and others' realities. Another study by Nagda (2006) examined the process of communication in a dialogue, finding four factors which mediated differences between participants, (1) appreciating difference; (2) engaging self; (3) critical self-reflection; and (4) alliance-building. Returning to these articles with a spatial orientation, these studies suggest how the space of dialogue is disciplined, how space is productive and produced, and how bodies and materialities intra act in the space. These studies found that deepened engagement with dialogue requires critical reflection on how positions of privilege and oppression shift, join, and impact relations through the space of the dialogue group.

Although several studies remark upon the importance of facilitators in the dialogue process (DeTurk, 2006; Khuri, 2004; Zuniga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007) or suggest competencies for dialogue facilitators (Khuri, 2004), few focus specifically on the role of the facilitator in creating the dialogue space. For example, DeTurk (2006) discusses the role of the authority of the facilitator, noting that the clarity and structure of established group norms, trained facilitators, and an agreed-upon process played a large role in the outcomes her co-researchers described. Other research has examined the importance of the relations between the facilitator and participants in constructing space (Zuniga et al., 2007). More broadly, these articles present a binary and hierarchical relationship between the facilitator and the participants, as the human body of the facilitator acts with bounded agency to stimulate the dialogue experience. These studies center the agency of the facilitator to influence the dialogue, smoothing over the affect of other materialities in the dialogue space.

A critical spatial perspective flattens the hierarchy and agency of the individual subject, moving instead to explore how bodies and materialities intra act in space. This flattening occurs as agency is dislocated from a linear and causal relationship between subject and object (or facilitator and dialogue group/dialogue participant and dialogue group/dialogue participant and facilitator) to become a flow of relations and intensities (Barad, 2003). For example, instead of understanding the dialogue space as produced through what is said by human participants, a critical spatial perspective moves beyond bounded human bodies to consider how materials, encounters, symbols, identities, and contexts produce and are productive of the dialogue space. Moving beyond human bodies flattens agency to make possible questions of global and local proportions, such as how pending legislation on immigra-

tion affects students' experiences on campus, or how the removal of political campus chalkings has implications for free speech in a national context (Deruy, 2017; Garrison, 2016). Through this flattening, space is produced through the intra action of unbounded intensities, "dislodging agency from its exclusive mooring in the individual, rational subject" and allowing the consideration of other components and agents in the production of space (Bennett, 2010, p. 30).

As the following sections unfold the specific set of dialogue practices and activate a spatial turn to explore what dialogues does, dislodging agency from subjects and objects moves us beyond Allport (1954) and contact with difference to how materialities intersect, affect, and intra act to create space, and in turn produce openings for social change and action (Massey, 2005). This entanglement suggests that contact with difference is a starting place for relations to be produced and constructed and that through contact we create layered and multiplicitious space, where many experiences, perspectives, and identities exist simultaneously in relation to one another.

### SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

Through this paper, I apply a spatial turn to the processes and practices of dialogue to look to entry points for social change. The emphasis on space suggests a different way of relating to issues of injustice and equity in higher education. For the purposes of this paper, dialogue refers specifically to the process of dialogue modeled by the Campus Network branch of the Sustained Dialogue Institute (SDCN). SDCN teaches dialogue through the work and theories of the organization's founder, Hal Saunders, who described dialogue as "a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn" (Saunders, 1999, p. 82). The distinctiveness of dialogue is emphasized in Sustained Dialogue workshops where participants discuss and reflect on the differences between debate, discussion, and dialogue. With dialogue, differences are held in tension, "where no participant gives up his or her identity, but each recognizes enough of the others valid human claims so that they will act differently toward the other" (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2016, p. 1). Importantly, dialogue is not considered as 'better than' debate or discussion, rather that through dialogue, different things become possible. Dialogue makes possible a process to move towards change through relationships, something that is not possible through debate (where relationships are ignored or dismissed) or discussion (where relationships are retained or remain in stasis) (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2016).

I serve as an associate with the Sustained Dialogue Institute, leading workshops on dialogue and moderating skills on my own campus and campuses

and conferences across the country for groups of thirty to fifty students and staff. These workshops introduce participants to concepts of identity, power, and privilege; teach skills to encourage and moderate dialogue; and situate dialogue in a framework towards community action. The dialogue process focuses on first, “transforming relationships that cause problems, create conflict, and block change” through the concept of relationships and second, “emphasizes the importance of effective change over time” through a five-stage process of identifying participants, naming challenges, probing problems and relationships, building scenarios to change, and moving towards individual and collective action (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The concept of relationships describes five components, which are detailed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.**  
**FIVE ELEMENTS OF RELATIONSHIPS**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Description</i>
Identity	How individuals define themselves; the sum total of their experiences
Interests	What motivates individuals: goals, aspirations, and desires
Power	The ability to influence the course of events, as well as systemic systems of power and privilege
Perceptions	The assumptions, misconceptions, and stereotypes about a group or individual
Interaction	Patterns of how groups and individuals interact, including the frequency, tone, and rules (written and unwritten) of their interaction

(Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2017)

The five elements of relationship frame the process of dialogue towards relations and connections, looking to these elements as moments to stutter or interrupt conflict or misunderstanding. A typical Sustained Dialogue workshop takes participants through this process during a simulation of the five stages of dialogue. In this activity, participants begin by identifying a conflict.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout this paper, I ground theories of space and place in practical examples pulled from my experience as a Sustained Dialogue Associate, facilitating moderator workshops and dialogue groups with students on campuses across the country. It is important to note that these examples are a necessarily incomplete example, and do not fully capture or represent all that space is or can be.

The simulation takes participants through how the process of dialogue can intervene and change the way the groups in conflict relate. During stage three, participants map the elements of the relationships in conflict asking: What are the interests of the groups in conflict? What are the perceptions about these groups? How do they relate? Through this mapping, moments of similarity or disconnect become apparent that can point to interventions or change. This focus on relationships “differs significantly from focusing primarily on one group’s decision about how to behave toward the other group” and situates the action in the experiences and contexts of the participants (Saunders, 2005, p. 81). In addition, this focus on relationships resists a single “right” answer to conflict on campuses and between groups. Instead, it encourages an iterative and reflective process that focuses on tangible change to develop positive relationships.

Intertwined with the concept of relationships are the five stages of dialogue, which serve as guideposts for dialogue to move towards change (rather than a linear process). Table two details the stages of dialogue, the activities or components that take place at each stage, and the questions to consider before moving into another stage. These five stages focus on relationships and emphasize the gradual, iterative, and on-going nature of change (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2017).

Through these workshops, participants practice skills that are foundational to dialogue, embodying active listening, learning to ask and form questions that encourage dialogue, sharing experiences related to their identities, and participating in dialogue with members of the workshop or group. Sustained Dialogue’s commitment and stated purpose to create social change and community action provide a structure, mission, and specific set of practices to pull apart. These practices provide the framework for the following section, which introduces the spatial theories that ground this paper.

### A SPATIAL TURN TO DIALOGUE

Exploring the spatiality of dialogue, I understand space as “fundamentally, from the start, a complex social product, a collectively created and purposeful configuration and socialization . . . that defines our contextual habitat, the human and humanized geography in which we all live our lives” (Soja, 2010, pp. 17–18). As a critical exploration of space, this paper concerns itself with “identities and difference, borders and borderlands, reproduction and resistance, the global and the local” (Helfenbein, 2010, p. 305). Critical spatial theory pushes against the idea that experiences take place within bounded, delimited systems, and instead moves to understand the tangled web of practices at many scales that make up spaces (Helfenbein, 2010). These concepts overlap, intersect, and layer with each other, and as such, my discussion

**TABLE 2.**  
**FIVE STAGES OF DIALOGUE**

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Questions to Consider</i>
One	The Who: Deciding to Engage	Community members recognize systemic challenges, and bring individuals with different opinions and perspectives to the table	Are there different opinions and perspectives in the group? Is the group invested in making change?
Two	The What: Mapping and Naming	Building relationships and trust among the group, talking about and sharing experiences about the challenges in the community	Does the group trust each other? Does the group agree on what to focus on?
Three	The Why: Probing Problems and Relationships	Pull apart and uncover dynamics of the relationships at the root of conflict to define the problem, identify ways to change it, develop direction towards change, and weigh the consequences of moving towards change	What are the most pressing problems? How can we change them? What are the consequences of moving in that direction versus doing nothing?
Four	The How: Scenario Building	Developing scenarios that could address the change they want to see in troublesome relationships	What resources do we have? What are the obstacles? What steps could overcome those obstacles? Who could take those steps? How can we sequence those steps?
Five	The Now: Individual and Collective Action	Puts the plan into action as an individual or collective effort	What did our action do? Does this action lead to further action, or do we need to return to another stage to identify a different problem?

(Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2017)

of these concepts in relation to dialogue is woven into a discussion of the assumptions inherent in critical spatial theory, including (1) space as created through relations; (2) space as iterative and produced; and (3) space as simultaneous (Massey, 2005). The *rhizome* of these critical spatial theories suggests an ever-moving understanding of the world, with lines trajecting in a multiplicity of directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Throughout this paper, I take up theories of materialist spatial thinkers (i.e., Massey & Soja), and discursive scholars (i.e., Bakhtin & Foucault). Broadly, materialist theories advocate for a return to an awareness of the nonhuman/more than human world, and an attentiveness to matter and material as productive agents in shaping ontology and epistemology, while discursive scholars explore the production of power and knowledge through language. These theories entangle and intersect through this paper as I consider language as matter, and discourse as a material entanglement through the production of space and spatial practices (deFreitas & Curinga, 2015). A spatial perspective, then, entangles and folds the discursive production of power and knowledge with an awareness of matter and forces beyond the human body.

The following sections look to practices in Sustained Dialogue workshops and map these lines as they connect, enfold, and intertwine with the spatiality of dialogue spaces. Each section creates *lines of flight*, suggesting new ideas, concepts, and ways of thinking, simultaneously overlapping and enfolding with sections previous, possible, and to come (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As space is simultaneous, constantly under construction, and created through relations, so this paper is, in a sense, a space. Ideally, this paper would be read with each section in simultaneity, or as a Dadaist creation cut up and constantly rearranged with no intention towards making hierarchy or order. Instead what follows is my own mapping, connecting to and from and out to new ideas and thoughts, intentionally nonhierarchical and intertwined. This is a conceptual weaving together of practices of dialogue and theories of space and place, each section unfolding practices for social justice. As such, concepts are introduced and italicized along the way. As a roadmap, each section's header marks broad concepts, (1) becoming rhizome; (2) thing power; (3) affect; and (4) making place.

### ***Becoming Rhizome***

Through intra actions and relations, space is constantly being produced. Materialities are both the product of and producers of space and place, and this process of producing/production is fundamentally connected. As Massey (2005) argues, "Precisely because space is the product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices . . . it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished, never closed" (p. 9). Bakhtin (1984) suggests another way of thinking about this through the unfinalizable self—that we as humans are forever on the threshold *becoming* (instead of

merely being) and are therefore never fully known. With a spatial perspective, the space of dialogue is constantly on the threshold of intra action, affecting and being affected through and by trajectories of materiality.

The concept of space as constantly produced and iterative enfoldes notions of the rhizome from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Deleuze and Guattari describe the *rhizome* as a multiplicity, connecting points to other points, reducible to neither one nor the multiple. The rhizome suggests an ever constructing, varying, expanding, and moving understanding of the world as made up of lines and a multiplicity of directions. Dialogue is a process of becoming rhizome where participants create new lines and variations through sharing stories and experiences that are held in relation with one another to complicate participant's understandings of the world. The space of dialogue is an ever-rotating and rhizomatic prism where through relations new possibilities emerge for different becomings. For example, during a Sustained Dialogue activity called "The Big 8 Monologues," participants in small groups share without interruption or input for four minutes how they came to understand each of the big eight identities (age, socio-economic status, race and color, sex and gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and ability and mental health)<sup>3</sup> for themselves. Through these relations, *lines of flight* are produced, cracking assumptions, creating new connections and building relationships among participants (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Through sharing experiences, new relations and openings for change become possible. More specifically, the sharing of experiences in the space of dialogue makes possible what could be labeled as empathy, understanding, or awareness through an awareness of how other materialities intra act differently in space. This produces a new rhizome. Just as the experiences that are shared produce the dialogue, the dialogue makes the sharing of the experiences possible. Thinking of the production of relations in the dialogue space in terms of how they intersect and relate in the space makes possible an awareness of the interconnectedness and contemporaneity of others that purely temporal thinking misses (Massey, 2005). The production and awareness of these connections in the dialogue space produces an outwardlookingness, an empathy for the entangled and complicated becomings of other materialities within the space (Massey, 2005).

The concept of a constantly constructed space pushes against fixing and making space static. This is a radical concept to apply to the space of higher education, where it is held in tension with a shift in educational ideology to one of panoptic and predictive analytics and technical rationality (Foucault,

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<sup>3</sup>These categories are the eight primary identities SDCN uses in U.S. campus based workshops, as they are the identities around which power and privilege in the U.S. are most often experienced. Experiences of power and privilege are not limited to these eight.

1975). The process of collecting information on students to assess and track begins before they arrive on campus to fix reasons to attrition, retention, and matriculation as well as to measures of success: graduation, career attainment, GPA, and critical thinking. In relation to dialogue, research on these spaces is often couched in predictive terms of “outcomes” of cognitive gains and critical thinking (e.g., Bowman, 2010; Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Nagda, 2006; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017).

The methodology of mapping the rhizome gives way to new understandings of dialogue, spaces of higher education, and students’ experiences and outcomes in college. Current research in student development and student experiences in college have “organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities . . . It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13). A rhizomatic mapping of space moves beyond the grooves and gouges of post-positivist outcomes research to flatten, fold, and complicate the research paradigm. This makes possible different lines of flight and different resistances to injustice in higher education. A spatial perspective expands this to include the space of dialogue itself as in constant construction, in addition to the participants within the space, and the global or macro space of the workshop. This leads to questions regarding the entanglement of the material and discursive for higher education researchers such as, how do students and spaces author one another in dialogue settings? How can we map the construction of space in dialogue? What does this mapping do to the production of space and what the intra actions of dialogue make possible?

### ***Thing Power***

Massey (2005) proposed that space is created through relations, from the local to the global, advocating for the interrelatedness between the everyday and immediate and macro global practices. Within Sustained Dialogue workshops, the intra action of bodies and materials in the space brings local relations to the fore. For example, during an activity to practice active listening, we arrange chairs and bodies in a circle to enact the acronym SOLER, as bodies squarely and openly face each other, leaning in slightly, making eye contact with a relaxed posture (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2016). These movements produce a local and imminent space between bodies communicated through the slight lean of a torso or the shift of a chair. During the dialogue workshop, the local level of relations happens between the materialities in the space; torsos, chairs, eyes, walls, knees, doorways. Simultaneously, these bodies are intra acting with and shaped by larger spaces. Jumping beyond the dialogue space, consider the relations of broken tail light, Black and White, blue uniforms, license and registration. These materialities in a local, immediate space are imminently in relation to global spaces that produce Black bodies as objects of fear, making possible both violence and an acquittal produced

by that fear (Smith, 2017). These intra actions, in turn, connect and relate to other spaces and contexts, becoming imminent in the space of a dialogue, even when the bodies in the dialogue are geographically removed from the intra action of tail light, uniforms, license and registration. This example illustrates how intra actions of the local (shifting chairs, eye contact) produce and are products of the global (Blackness, Whiteness) in the dialogue space (Thrift, 2006). Space is created through relations at the global and local level, and between the global and local, in simultaneity (Thrift, 2006).

Another example of how local and global relations intersect and traverse the space of the dialogue takes place during an activity called “Take a Stand.” During this activity, students position themselves along a continuum from strongly disagree to strongly agree to practice asking questions in response to statements such as “I feel safe on campus” or “I believe that chivalry is oppressive.” During this activity, bodies take on other meanings, as they become a proxy for a response along a continuum. The students are prompted to ask ‘strong questions’ of those on the other end of the continuum asking, “tell me more about an experience you had that led you to disagree with the statement I feel safe on campus,” or “can you clarify what you mean by oppressive?” These questions create trajectories that enact larger spaces of global politics and national conversations while bodies simultaneously illustrate the local divide that dialogue seeks to build relations across, creating a new and productive space. How these layered and simultaneous trajectories and relata intersect, connect, and diffract to create space are concepts of *thing power*, or the vitality of materials (Bennett, 2010); *affect*, the power for a body to affect other bodies; and *intra action*, or the moment of marking agency among relations (Barad, 2003).

Building from the notion that the relations of bodies and materials, materials and bodies create space, a further assumption of the premise that space is constructed through relations is that these relata are not limited to the interactions of human bodies, but extends to nonhuman bodies, systems, structures, and materials (Bennett, 2010). Bennett described this notion as “thing power,” the active role of nonhuman materials in the world. Methodologically, thing power, or thingliness, has examined discursive practices through the way things (human and nonhuman bodies) matter in spaces (e.g., Jones, 2013; Larson & Phillips, 2013; Mulcahy, 2012; Taylor, 2013).

Within educational settings, “how material things act on and with us reveals educational practices to be a constellation of human-nonhuman agencies, forces, and events” (Taylor, 2013, p. 689). Jones (2013) suggests a surrealist notion of the chair in the classroom, conceptualizing the chair of the teacher as more than a chair, infused with qualities of the possible while simultaneously existing as a symptom of the past. Although the chair holds similar meanings in each classroom Jones studies, this reproducibility does

not mean that the meaning of the chair is fixed. Instead, the slight differences and interpretations in meaning imply infinite possibility of the meaning of the chair in the classroom (Jones, 2013). Applying this conceptualization to dialogue, the chair becomes a space of possibility of intent and impact in the dialogue group. Arranged in a circle, the chairs signify simultaneously the boundaries and possibilities for the dialogue. How do bodies move in a chair, and how do chairs shape bodies and what does that communicate? This intra action between materialities (bodies-chairs-dialogue) vibrates with signification, possibilities for redefinitions and multiple meanings. These redefinitions and multiple meanings create boundaries while opening spaces of possibility, spaces of re-imaginings, and points of perspective taking, beginning to see not only how materialities are, but what they do in spaces.

This 'more than' quality of thingliness refers not only to the materialities in the space, the chairs, and bodies, but the ideas, notions, and structures that shape the space. For example, during an activity called 'Walk a Mile,' participants check a list of boxes that relate to social identities including, "I grew up in a home owned by my family; I can walk across campus at night at not worry about my safety; When I go to a class, the professor teaching it will likely be of my race" (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2016, p. 85–86). Participants stand in a circle as one participant collects up the papers, and then redistributes them to the group. As one person reads from the list, participants are instructed to take a step into the circle, then step out, if the box on the sheet they are holding is checked. This activity begins to recognize how identities (race, class, religion, dis/ability) are entangled, multiplicitous, and constantly under construction and in relation. The simultaneity of being and doing of identity are embodied through this activity, a dynamic embodiment of intersectionality and multiple identities under construction (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991). Participants are holding a sheet of paper that is identical just as it is different than their own. They embody the slippage of signification as they step in and out of the circle for what is checked on the paper they hold, momentarily embodying, taking up space for an identity or experience that they may (or may not) identify with.

During 'Walk a Mile,' the intra actions between bodies-paper-floor reference layers of spatiality. There is the local spatiality, the motion of stepping in and out, momentary boundaries created by an inner ring and an outer ring. Then there is the spatiality of disparate experiences, the disparity in the boxes checked, the impact of unjust geographies (Soja, 2010). One additional way of facilitating this activity involves a component that emphasizes this geography. After everyone has gone through the list and checked the boxes that apply to them, a participant places a bucket on the floor closer to one side of the circle than another. Participants are told that the bucket represents 'The American Dream' and making your checklist in the bucket

represents achieving said dream. There is simultaneity of local and global spaces, as there is the local action of bodies-bucket-paper with the global space encompassing social identities-justice-privilege, that are enacted again in the local. In these moments, these activities and dialogue groups act in a meta-space, where the intra actions in the space of the dialogue map the intra actions happening at a global and institutional scale.

Soja (2010) reflects that “all who are oppressed, subjugated, or economically exploited are to some degree suffering from the effects of unjust geographies, and this struggle over geography can be used to build greater crosscutting unity and solidarity” (p. 24). This move to social change is the stated objective of the Sustained Dialogue program, and the activity referenced above concludes with a discussion question which asks, “From the statements or your observations during the activity, which issues on campus do you think should be addressed?” (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2016, p. 88). What this question asks is for students to reflect upon the thing power and spatial nature of the relationship between oppression and privilege from the activity, and then to use that experience to build unity among the group, looking to how they can apply their experience to affect change in their space.

### *Affect*

A spatialization of dialogue suggests a pushing back against fixing and tracing, against dualistic and categorical ways of knowing to one that is unfixed and unbounded, potential and virtual (Massumi, 1995). This line of flight leads to the concept of affect, or the relations between levels of intensity and qualification, that of resonance, interference, amplification, or dampening (Massumi, 1995). Importantly, affect is distinct from emotion, which Massumi describes as the fixing of the quality of an experience, qualifying intensity, while affect is “two-sidedness . . . the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the action and the action in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other” (p. 96). In other words, affect provides a language for understanding how bodies relate to one another to create space within a dialogue and in turn, be affected by dialogue, how matter comes to matter (Barad, 2003).

Folding in a materialist understanding, affect connects materialities, policies, politics, histories, and other nonhuman entities in space through intra action and the agential cut (Mulcahy, 2012). Barad (2003) describes the agency as the moment of affect, the process of marking cause and effect, of diffracting agency between bodies. Agential intra action is the process of mattering, how the relations and phenomena between human and nonhuman bodies become meaningful and significant. Intra action is distinct from interaction in that interaction assumes entities are independent of one another prior to the moment of meaning (Barad, 2003). Intra action shifts causality beyond contained objects with quantifiable and buildable forces

and effects towards a back and forth of mattering and meaning, where phenomena shape one another.

Looking to the previous example of the “Walk a Mile” activity, this shift moves our analysis to consider the entangled relations between materialities. When filling out the checklist, how does a pen checking a box to respond to an experience produce mattering? A simple reading might suggest that through the act of checking a box a bounded human body is responding to the statement on the paper. Yet this bounded conception of agency skips over the affect and force of this intra action. By checking (or not checking) a box, materialities (including the paper, chairs, pen) take on meaning, they matter differently through the intra action. These intra actions reverberate through the activity. For example, how does the crumple-toss-miss of paper into a bucket embodying the American Dream matter differently from the process of filling out the same paper? With the concept of intra action, meaning is produced through relations, and this moment of meaning marks an agential cut: a moment where boundaries or properties become meaningful (Barad, 2003). Intra action represents a conceptual shift away from linear cause and effect towards an entangled knowing, “where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility” (Barad, 2009). This suggests how the crumple-toss-miss/make of the paper might produce different matterings for different bodies, and how a materiality, such as the bucket/American Dream, makes possible different responses from different bodies.

Affect, intra action, and the agential cut suggests a language for describing how materialities within a space of dialogue intra act with one another, the process of mattering, and of cause and effect. A spatial perspective of dialogue looks to affect as beyond humans to spaces, materials, and ideas, as Bennett (2010) suggests, “encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages” (p. 107). A consistent concern from higher education research is that students from minority groups experience the space of higher education differently, specifically as more hostile and unwelcoming than their peers who hold dominant identities (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Through a spatial perspective, we look beyond human bodies to consider also the affect of institutional policies and forms, access to resources, marketing materials, and buildings as a swarm of materialities which are co-constitutive, affecting (and being affected by) students experience, making mattering.

Looking to dialogue, affect, materialities, and intra activity broaden the focus to “the whole of the learning event, including the environment and the agentic qualities of matter that intra-act with the learner” (Larson & Phillips, 2013, p. 28). Considering the spaces of dialogue workshops with Sustained Dialogue, the affect of the workshop itself goes beyond hierarchical pedagogical patterns to diffractive moments that understand materialities in

motion, the way things matter, and the production of space. The concept of space as produced through the process of relations complicates the way we understand how students intra act and are affected through dialogue, and by the spaces of higher education. Furthermore, this suggests how, in turn, the spaces of higher education and the dialogue workshop intra act and are affected by students. Student development theories of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999), identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) have traced how students interact with their environment and others to develop and grow, and have guided and informed more recent studies (e.g., Merrill, Braskamp, & Braskamp, 2012; Rockenbach, Riggers-Piehl, Garvey, Lo, & Mayhew, 2016; Woodford & Kulick, 2015). This has largely been a one-way and positivist conversation, looking to generalize how specific experiences impact student growth and development, tracing a “typical” path of development. A spatial turn suggests an iterative, complicated understanding of the back and forth between the human and nonhuman experiences in the spaces of higher education, as embodied through dialogue.

### *Place*

Through the negotiation and construction of space and time, we produce place. Massey (2005) calls this placemaking, or the event of place, and describes arriving in a new place as “joining up with, somehow linking into, the collection of interwoven stories of which that place is made” (Massey, 2005, p. 119). Place in this sense is a ‘constellation,’ connecting trajectories of space and time, and weaving them together. Looking to the space of dialogue, placemaking is another way of understanding how students experience higher education, as well as how the place of higher education is constructed.

Placemaking enfolds with the notion of the heterotopic space (Foucault, 1986). Foucault describes heterotopias as spaces that are “in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (p. 24). Dialogues, whether they be formal and structured or an open-ended topic based program, create a space that is a space and not a space, “society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). During Sustained Dialogue workshops, the group sets ground rules and expectations, such as ‘lean into discomfort’ or ‘challenge by choice.’ These practices, which are guided by a prompt such as, ‘what rules or norms can we agree on now to create a learning space in which we can ask each other anything?’ (Fitzgerald, Pettit, & Wuerz, 2017) counter the experiences students may have in other campus spaces, where they are situated into tiers and rows and “sent forth to receive instruction” (Sousanis, 2015, p. 8). Furthermore, as SDCN emphasizes, dialogues can function in many fashions and hold many places in them that are incompatible. On some campuses, dialogues take the

form of weekly meetings or a series of programs; they can be guided by a topic or recent event, begin open-ended, or can include a mixture of faculty, staff, and students, just students, or only faculty and/or staff.<sup>4</sup> They can be a space where those on the margins feel alternatively validated or silenced, as a symbol for an institution to tout as a signifier of status quo or prove their action on a topic.

The concept of the heterotopia and placemaking deepens concepts of transition and theories of belonging and community, often a purpose of dialogue workshops. For example, Schlossberg's (2005) research looked to the experience of transition to understand the ways in which students negotiate and make meaning of their transition to higher education. Exploring these experiences as happening within a heterotopic place considers the ways in which many materialities overlap and intersect and interweave to create place, places which are specific and recognizable, while constantly being produced. Massey (2005) describes, "each [place] is unique and constantly productive of the new. The negotiation will always be an invention; there will be need for judgment, learning, improvisation; there will be no simply portable rules" (p. 162). Dialogue workshops have a quality of the carnivalesque, where there is a temporal familiar and free interaction between groups, and a sacrilegious quality where, 'what's said here stays here, what's learned here leaves here' (Bakhtin, 1964). SDCN workshops begin and end with formal openings (an icebreaker or ground rules) and closing (takeaways or a debrief). In this way, Sustained Dialogue workshops have a "system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). They are bounded, just as they leak and create openings. This heterotopic quality of dialogues emphasizes their specificity, even as dialogue groups take on different forms and manifestations, what is important is the production of the space of dialogue. Sustained Dialogue offers a method, a set of practices, a way of thinking about dialogue that interacts with the individuals in the group, the place of the campus, and through this intra action, produces entry points for change that are specific to place.

### ***Space and Time***

As space is iterative, constructed, and produced, space is inherently temporal. Massey (2005) describes the entangled nature of space in time building from Zeno's Paradoxes, which argue that motion is an illusion, and our human attempt to segment and fix time into discrete slices is "the impossibility of reducing real movement/becoming to stasis multiplied by infinity; the impossibility of deriving history from a succession of slices

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<sup>4</sup>See .pdf at <http://sustaineddialogue.org/our-work/sd-programs/> for examples of different iterations of Sustained Dialogue.

through time” (p. 22). Space in this way is interwoven with time, simultaneous, un-representative, and existing in simultaneity. Bakhtin (1984) describes this interweaving of space and time in the writings of Dostoyevsky as a polyphony, a plurality of independent voices and consciousness’s existing in contradiction and juxtaposition at the same time.

The relationship between space and time is within and of the process of dialogue, as the process is a polyphony of voices, layered with the consciousness and affect of bodies shot through with space and time (Bakhtin, 1984). As an illustration, consider a dialogue about race on a college campus in a building (re)built from the bricks of Confederate barracks destroyed by Union soldiers during the Civil War, where student protests against segregation on campus happened on the same steps three years and fifty years ago, where twice in three years the student body has elected a student of color to the presidency of the student government, under very different circumstances (Crain & Ford, 2013; Dorn, 2016; Hunter, 2017). Space and time overlap and relate in ways that are meaningful and important to understanding dialogue, and also to how we find entry points that are specific to the places we hope to make change. Higher education research on campus climate (e.g., Garvey & Inkelas, 2012; Museus et al., 2017; Rockenbach et al., 2016; Saenz, 2010) has looked to how students experience the space of campus but has sought to fix space in time, or, alternatively flatten space along a historical continuum. An understanding of space as simultaneous allows a folding and rhizomatic understanding of space, as layered, historical, current, and considering the possible. This simultaneity also folds in the global to the local, the local to the global in simultaneity. As future sections look to the application of these theories, understanding space as simultaneous presents not only a way of understanding space but a tool for mapping how space is created on campus, a rupturing and an entry point for dialogue groups created for social change to take action. Through this, higher education becomes dimensional, not just a site of learning, but a symbol of the historical struggle of identity politics, of collegiate marketing, of the industrialization of education, as well as a site of intimacy and laughter, of individual and group struggle and of possibility.

### **INTERRUPTION: ENTRY POINTS**

I have argued that dialogue makes different spaces possible, that dialogue has the potential to open opportunities for change and entry points for new lines of flight, a new rhizome. This paper has mapped dialogue as a space of affect and intensity, as one where space and time are layered and multiplicitous, where the local and global are entwined, and where new relations become possible. This layering, complicating, becoming rhizome is an interruption which produces new lines of flight and new relations making possible

an interconnectedness that emphasizes contemporaneity and entanglement with others (Massey, 2005). More specifically, it is an interruption of a cycle of propositions that produces a dangerous series of sense-making (Deleuze, 1969). In *Sustained Dialogue*, we map this series of propositions through this example: (1) I'm a student. Everyone else here is a faculty member, I don't know what faculty do; (2) students are great!; (3) students are better and more important than faculty; (4) faculty don't have our interests in mind and are not to be trusted (Fitzgerald et al., 2017, p. 69). This process, the cycle of dehumanization, moves from identification to ingroup positivity to intergroup comparison and outgroup hostility (*Sustained Dialogue Institute*, 2016). Dehumanization, the process of depriving people or a group of human qualities, is endemic in our current national climate, as well as within relationships among individuals and local groups. This is a natural process, and identification and ingroup positivity can be productive and positive, and even necessary. In higher education literature, we have traced repeatedly the necessity and importance of connecting with others who share your identity and experiences as productive to spaces of belonging on campus (e.g., Hurtado et al., 2015; Museus et al., 2017). Dialogue offers an avenue for resisting in-group comparison and out-group negativity. This resistance to dehumanization is what we must grapple with as a field if we want to move forward towards change. Through relationships and an awareness of our entanglement with materialities beyond human bodies, dialogue can interrupt this cycle in productive and positive ways (Saunders, 2005).

In *Sustained Dialogue* workshops, we conclude the discussion of dehumanization by asking participants to reflect silently and list ten times when they have reached at least the first two stages of dehumanization: identification and ingroup positivity (*Sustained Dialogue Institute*, 2016). The purpose of this exercise is to acknowledge that we all participate in this series of propositions. This moment has been productive for me as a practitioner to reflect on the judgments and assumptions, conscious and unconscious, that influence my decision-making and practice. This reflection serves as an interruption, a pause in the cycle of sense-making to problematize how I compare and categorize groups, to ask: 'When have I made assumptions or decisions based on this type of comparison between groups?' 'What practices are a result of this cycle?' A spatial perspective of dialogue brings to the forefront additional interrupting practices, considering how we make space to build relationships and empathy across difference. The space of a dialogue creates new lines of flight through complicating narratives and experiences. These practices are not limited to formal dialogue groups and can be applied to the classroom, pedagogical practices, or developing co-curricular programs for students (LePeau, 2007). As practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers, this spatial perspective highlights practices that can produce space differently.

For example, campus leaders can apply the concept of relationships to building community and creating a sense of belonging among their stakeholders. The concept of relationships furthers Kezar and Wheaton's (2017) discussion of the promise of connective leadership to navigate complicated campus environments in a way that is responsive and situated in local contexts and relationships. Furthermore, as Kezar, Gehrke, and Elrod (2015) discuss, "changes are more successfully executed when there is alignment between the strategy or intervention and the type of change" (p. 490). In addition, dialogue offers an opportunity to develop programs and services that are localized and specific to place. This furthers work by Xu (2017) on localized retention efforts that are responsive to student experiences. With Sustained Dialogue, the process of dialogue to action encompasses and acknowledges the multiplicitious intra actions of place, time, and materialities, in other words: aligning change and place. In research, applying practices of dialogue to inquiry can provide a reflexive interrogation of how research practices play a part in reproducing and/or offer opportunities for resisting the unconscious reproduction of unjust spaces (e.g., Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010; Gonzales & Satterfield, 2013). Dialogue is a process of developing empathy and awareness, and practices of dialogue discussed in this essay can be applied pedagogically towards transformative learning, research, and the development of critical consciousness (e.g., Snipes & LePeau, 2017). The space of dialogue develops possibility for critical consciousness and opens up the possibility for actions, research, and pedagogy that is responsive and reflective to local contexts (Freire, 1970). This perspective also challenges us to ask how our spaces are including or excluding, and how we play a part in reproducing and/or resisting the reproduction of unjust spaces through our research, policy, and practice.

### PAUSE AND FORWARD

Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take other's concerns into their own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up their identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims so that they will act differently toward the other. (Saunders, 1999, p. 85)

The practices that produce the space of dialogue: genuine interaction, listening deeply, taking other's concerns into their own, recognizing others valid human claims, are not everyday practices. These are difficult, they are muscles and movements that we don't exercise in a context where social media and a 24-hour news cycle encourages reaction and binary, siloed perspectives. As one anonymous reviewer of this article mused, "given the ontological

reality of a world in constant process, can we really have any sort of social justice? . . . [I]s the current assemblage just tilted in this funny way; are we simply on an unanticipated line of flight?" Throughout this paper, I have argued that the practices of dialogue produce space differently and that this space offers the possibility for new becomings, opportunities to consider our connection and entanglement with materialities beyond human bodies as we seek social justice in the future. Taking up the spatial practices of dialogue enacts an embodied awareness of the affects, relations, and intra actions between materialities that extends beyond physical geography while also acknowledging the specificity of these relations in particular locations. This awareness enacts an ethical shift, the possibility to practice a reflexive and responsive empathy to the ripples and trajectories of affect across an unpredictable rhizome of relations (Massey, 2005).

I am not suggesting that dialogue will be a remedy to all that divides us; it does not offer a panacea or a quick fix to the vitriol and hatred that has permeated our communities and our country. What the practices and processes of dialogue do offer is an opportunity to pause, to interrupt cycles of dehumanization, and recognize the vibrancy and vitality between human and nonhuman bodies, our ethical entanglement that extends beyond individual subjects. A spatial perspective of dialogue offers possibilities for how dialogue can interrupt or make differently the (re)production of inequity and injustice as one perspective of possibilities for social justice in the future. Following this, future papers may further consider what an ontology of process makes possible for social justice in higher education in the future, and how we might move beyond linear and bounded conceptions of agency and responsibility when responding to inequity and injustice in higher education and beyond. This paper, then, marks a pause, a moment to move and act differently, guiding us to possibilities to transform our relationships with one another, a re-envisioning of space that extends beyond geography and contact. This transformation offers possibilities for our national need to come together and our local need for change.

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