

Placed. Displaced.

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May 2020

Children's Geographies (ISSN 1473-3277)

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Abstract. Given that the working title of the collection of essays gathered in this issue of the journal was ‘children displaced across borders,’ the paper considers the implications of this strange and arresting word, ‘displaced,’ which can be read in conflicting ways, depending on the weight, stress, and strain that one applies to the rift that traverses it: *displaced*, *dis-placed*, and *di-splaced*. Drawing upon structuralist and poststructuralist influences, such as Alain Badiou, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan, the paper stresses the place of displacement and the displacement of place, and deconstructs the ‘taking place’ of each, as well as of emplacement, misplacement, and mal-placement. The comeuppance of this contortion in the fabric of space–time is an unfathomable commotion or ‘loco-commotion’ in the structure of placement, where ‘displaced children,’ like any split subject, come to be ‘splaced’ out and ‘splayed’ out.

Keywords: place; displace; displaced person; displaced child; borders; deconstruction.

Placed. Displaced.

the self as though emplaced
set in its depths,
braced
waiting (Michaux 1992, 181)

Behold our hollows. (Beckett 2009, 60)

By way of introduction: reading displaced

Everything that exists is thus at the same time itself and itself-according-to-its-place. ...
All that is relates to itself at a distance from itself owing to the place where it is.
(Badiou 2009a, 8)

‘Children displaced across borders,’ he writes or she writes from afar. Receding into the distance from the off, I ponder this weird titular sentence, and especially the peculiar and perhaps superfluous word that is inserted or suspended like a vanishing mediator between the children and the borders, as if from hooks, barbs, scare quotes or some other tear-jerking device: ‘displaced.’ I wonder from afar what such an oddly braced and strangely emplaced ‘displacement’ adds to the figure of border-crossing or border-straddling children, other than a vague sense of misdirection, hollowing out, and self effacement, and an evocative sense of enforced, involuntary, and compulsory volition, either blindly, mindlessly or thoughtlessly executed by the forces of nature, so called, or else wilfully, consciously or knowingly prosecuted by some nefarious agency, such as military, paramilitary or police forces: ‘dis-placed’ in deed. I ponder the intrinsic and inherent *violence* of displacement as things are shoved carelessly hither and thither by a multitude of displacers, but also the *gentleness* of displacement, when it aims to conserve and preserve what would otherwise be lost, exhausted or spent: for example, a delicate, precise, and careful displacement of forces and assets for tactical or strategic reasons. I mull over the prefix ‘dis-,’ which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, may express aversion, negation, the reversal or absence of an action or state, the removal, separation or expulsion of something, and the completion or intensification of an unpleasant or unattractive action; in twain, in different directions, apart, asunder, and hence abroad, away. (In what follows I will read all of these senses into the word ‘displaced’ rather than limit myself to the usual association of child displacement with

mere detachment, separation, and removal. In fact, I wager that everything will remain suspended in twain: *placed*, *displaced*, which hinges as much on the ‘di-’ as the ‘dis-,’ and which invites a series of uncanny doubles into our midst, beginning with the giving and taking of place.) I also mull over the French etymons of displace, *déplacer* and *desplacer*, which in turn makes me ponder the notion of ‘*splace*’ that confounds the clear-cut separation of ‘place’ and ‘space’ by splaying them out (Doel, 1999, 2014), all of which leads me to toy with the idea of splicing ‘space’ and ‘place’ with ‘splay’ and ‘play,’ but the resulting neologism, ‘splayce,’ suddenly makes me yearn for our quotidian ‘places’ to be dubbed ‘playces.’ I would love the fallout from this childish homonym to settle on the surrounding landscape like snow, revolutionizing everyday life in its wake: “When snow falls on cities, the child, taking over for a while, is all at once Lord of the city” (Aldo van Eyck, quoted in Strauven 1998, 169). Consequently, the word ‘displaced’ no longer seems to be exhausted by the sense of taking over the place, position, or role of something else, or of moving something from its proper or usual position, or else of removing someone from a position of authority, or even of forcing someone to leave their home or homeland, *and hence* abroad, away, asunder. There is so much more that needs to be played out and splayed out, and this will be my focus in what follows. Eriksson (2019), for example, went some way in this direction by ‘converging one place into another in order to identify three coexisting *preschool displacements* – locations, dimensions and positions,’ as did Cresswell (2013), via a trilogy of poetic displacements, yet the dissemination of displacement always seems to fall short, falling back on placement and re-placement. Grasp the ‘dis-’ of displacement, and hold on to the ‘place’ of displacement, if you can. These are not only ontological but also ethical imperatives: ‘Not grasping that which flees, not at all. But grasping fleeing *qua* vanishing point’ (Badiou 2009b, 133).

Quickly retracing my steps, I return whence I came, to the spot where displacement takes place, in the double sense of *occurrence* (i.e. the taking *place*, there where *it* happens) and *thievery* (i.e. the *taken* place, as it *steals away*): *emplaced* (...) *displaced*. For rather than displacement *from* place *to* place, I am interested in the displacement *of* place and the place *of* displacement. Where does displacement ‘take’ place? Perhaps it takes it on a ‘stationary voyage’ or a ‘stationary process,’ as Deleuze and Guattari (1998, 151 and 381) famously put it, which is *intensive* rather than *extensive*. For here as elsewhere, if you follow these displaced children on their

‘stationary trips,’ or allow them to follow you, they are forever ‘approaching without getting nearer’ (Derrida 2008, 21). They are ostensibly lost (i.e. found) betwixt and between an implacable and unforgiving structure of placements, for which the word ‘borders’ serves as a synecdoche. (Displaced across borders means displaced within a structure of placements, which begs the question of establishing the difference between placing and displacing, and between placement and displacement, and of locating where each takes place, where each is taken, and where each is given [Deleuze 2004].) Such a structure takes care of place, both in the positive sense of *curation* (as if it were a caretaker or a caregiver) and in the negative sense of *assassination* (as if it were a terminator or an exterminator). We will come back to this ambivalence again and again in what follows, not least because some agency or other will undoubtedly be called upon to ‘take care’ of these ‘displaced children,’ perhaps with a shower of gifts and a wall of smiles or else with a cloud of tear gas and a curl of razor wire, as well as with an avalanche of red tape and a barrage of legalese. So, we will need to tread very carefully around the place where displacement takes place, not least because of the commotion that it invariably stirs up. Accordingly, the rest of the paper proceeds by way of five tentative steps. The first steps into the space of displacement, while the second slips into a broader space of placement, emplacement, displacement, misplacement, and malplacement. Skipping ahead, the third step enables the figure of the ‘displaced child’ to enter the scene from a borderland that will remain screened off. This then paves the way for the penultimate step, wherein the figure of the ‘displaced child’ becomes indiscernible and undecidable. By way of conclusion, the final step ends on a customary high, with an improbable up rising; specifically, a rising up of what has been discounted and repressed within the extant space of placements. This glorious step will, however, almost certainly get lost within the general commotion that this uprising stirs up.

Loco-commotion in the structure of placement

Space hesitates about its identity. (Lyotard 1990a, 131)

Where other readers may take a sentence such as ‘children displaced across borders’ in their stride, I am snagged by that queer word, ‘displaced,’ which can be read in at least three ways: *displaced*, or else *dis-placed*, or even *di-splaced*, with more or less weight brought to bear on its cracked, cavernous, and abyssal interior: *dis-placed*, *dis-placed*, *dis-placed*, *dis—(...)—placed*, etc. Plumb the unfathomable depths of a ‘displaced

child’ or a ‘child displaced’ (split up to your own liking) as it traverses the crazy paving of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, if you can. These split subjects, like all subjects, are *emplaced* (...) *displaced*. Behold his or her hollows.

What has been said so far? Little more than this: displacement does not come after placement, least of all as a negative disturbance, since every place is always already spaced out and splayed out. Place is turned inside out and turns itself inside out. Perhaps the prefix ‘dis-’ serves only to counter-sign, reaffirm, and redouble this irreducible contortion of place: ‘di-splace’ rather than ‘dis-place,’ so to speak. Yes, yes: placed, displaced. And this is where the border comes back in, from the inside out no less than from the outside in. For while a border ostensibly marks the threshold, more or less permeable, between an inside and an outside, it is itself neither one nor the other; it is neutral (*ne uter*), hollow (...), and inclined to swallow up whatever steps into its breach (De León 2015). I am reminded of Robert Coover’s convoluted short story, ‘Playing House,’ in *A Child Again*:

Once there was a house, the storyteller continues, which was struck by a hurricane and turned inside out, the outside closed within it, its own dimensions infinite and unknowable at what was once the core, more like the edge. Those within moved out, which of course was further in, and there they built a new house looking out in all directions upon the inverted old. (Coover 2005, 65)

Now, what strikes me most forcefully about the occurrence of the word ‘displaced’ in the expression ‘children displaced across borders’ is not so much the *force* of this word (its positional shifting, ousting, supplanting, removing, replacing, etc. within a given spatial order), least of all in the sense of a pleonastic *forced* displacement or *forced* migration that can be either *involuntary* (i.e. imposed on the unwilling) or *non-voluntary* (i.e. imposed on those who lack the capacity or are deprived of the opportunity to consent or dissent), which would seem (for some at least) to characterize the mobility of children as such, since they are invariably placed at the mercy and disposal of their family and other caretakers and caregivers. While I appreciate that this characterization has been thoroughly contested, not least in the pages of this journal, since it ostensibly neglects the agency and ‘response-ability’ of children, I invoke it here because it accords with displacement conceived in terms of force. And yet, while

children no doubt enjoy travelling ‘a great deal at the bottom of [their] bed[s],’ as Georges Perec (1999, 17) so wonderfully put it, I wager that few of them enjoy travelling very far from them.

So, what strikes me most forcefully about the occurrence of the word ‘displaced’ in the expression ‘children displaced across borders’ is not so much the *force* of this word and how it might be countered or resisted (force against force), but rather the *disappearance* of the parentheses that featured in the original call for papers: ‘(Dis)placed children and their rights.’ In the passage from ‘(dis)placed children’ to ‘children displaced’—which is to say, from the ‘(dis)placed’ to the ‘displaced,’ from the ‘(dis)’ to the ‘dis,’ from the ‘(...)’ to the ‘...’—a few critical steps have slipped away or stolen away, including a *displaced place* and a *place displaced*. Ponder, then, these transpositional slips that destabilize the meaning, reference, and sense of the word ‘displaced’ as we steal our way with those children forced to step [*pas*] (or not [*pas*]) across borders: *(dis)place*, *(dis)placed*, and *(dis)placement*; *dis-place*, *dis-placed*, and *dis-placement*; *dis—place*, *dis—placed*, and *dis—placement*; *dis—(...)—place*, *dis—(...)—placed*, and *dis—(...)—placement*; etc.; including the vexed problem of how to parenthesize ‘*displace*,’ ‘*displaced*,’ and ‘*displacement*,’ and, since I have already mentioned the neologism ‘*splace*’ several times over, the even more wicked problem of how to cut ‘space’ and ‘place,’ splice them with ‘time’ and ‘motion,’ and interlace them with ‘presence’ and ‘absence,’ which the quasi-concept of *différance* coined by Derrida (1982) offers a resolution of sorts, if only as a device to relay and amplify the commotion or loco-commotion in the structure of placement.

Unthinking displacement

Let us space. (Derrida 1986, 75)

Having cut a dash through the space of displacement, let the expression ‘*children displaced across borders*’ swill around your mind’s eye whilst allowing the conjunction and disjunction of these children and those borders to be spread out, stretched out, and splayed out among five incommensurable dimensions and impossible states: *placement*, *emplacement*, *displacement*, *misplacement*, and *mal-placement*. These dimensions herald a perilous board game of allotment, arrogation, and disgregation played out on a criss-crossed, chequered or bordured surface. Indeed, I wager that the

expression ‘*children displaced across borders*’ will have aroused your natalitious geopolitical unconscious and solicited the phantom presence of myriad ‘inter-national’ and ‘inter-natal’ relations, if only as vanishing mediators: ‘*children displaced across national borders.*’ Edging crosswise, hatch an image, if you can, of children flickering between these five dimensions and circulating amongst these five states: *placement*, *emplacement*, *displacement*, *misplacement*, and *mal-placement*. Take note of the axes, axles, and pivots around which they revolve and rotate, and the spit-wheel or suchlike that keeps the whole jerry-built contraption in motion, commotion, and ‘locommotion’ (Malabou and Derrida 2004).

Of the five dimensions that I have briefly mentioned (*placed*, *emplaced*, *displaced*, *misplaced*, and *mal-placed*), the last two are arguably the most pernicious, since what matters is perhaps not so much whether children are here or there, (*em*)placed or (*dis*)placed, but whether they are *in place* (fitting, settled, suited, reposed, etc.) or *out of place* (unfitting, unsettled, ill-suited, disturbed, etc.), whether they are *well placed* (accordable, comfortable, conformable, etc.) or *badly placed* (discordable, uncomfortable, disconformable, etc.), and whether they are accounted for as integral and wholesome or as remainders and exceptions (which begs the question of how they will be ‘rounded up’ in the national accounts, at the border, and on the streets). Displaced children would then not simply be in the wrong and improper place, like square pegs in round holes, they would also be wronged by place, damaged by place, and disfigured by place: mal-placed with mal-volition and mal-direction (alienated, estranged, outcast, etc.). Accordingly, I wager that few if any readers of this journal will be able to swallow the expression ‘*children displaced across borders*’ without some disrelish, discomfiture, and distaste, without some sense of crossing out and cancelling out, of effacement and erasure, and of maladjustment and malaise in the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary registers. Echenwiler (2018), for example, builds on Casey’s (2009, 321) claim that human beings are ‘placelings’ (i.e. always already placed, constitutively emplaced, and never without placebound experiences) to suggest that the ‘displaced’ are akin to the ‘precariously placed’ or ‘insecurely placed,’ and that those with secure embedment should ‘forge relations of solidarity and promote justice through ethical place-making with those who are vulnerable through their insecure relationship to place’ (Echenwiler 2018, 568). Such a loose conception would, however, barely scratch the surface of all of the ways in which children may become lost *in place*,

lost *from* place, and lost *to* place, or else lost *in-from-to* space, or even lost *in-from-to* splace.

Amid the wreckage of the phrase ‘*children displaced across borders*’ we may discern the precarious trace of what remains of the out of place, of the out-place, of (not) belonging there. I am tempted to emphasize the extent of this prolonged displacement through an anamorphic distortion, such that they are condemned to *be—long* there and experience the anguish of *be—longing* there. (*Belong*, based on Old English *gelang*, ‘at hand, together with.’) But I will resist this temptation since the displacement that has been put to work in the expression ‘*children displaced across borders*’ is neither a matter of length, nor breadth, nor depth, nor duration, but of slippage. (I will, however, return to a slippage of hands by way of conclusion.) Here, displaced, the traction of place slips away and steals away, like a step (*pas*) that simultaneously ‘takes’ place and fails to take place. Everything that follows is, as Blanchot (1992) famously expressed it, a step (*not*) beyond [*Le Pas au-delà*]: placed, displaced.

Hereinafter, whenever displacement ‘takes’ place, wherever it ‘slips’ into place, something very queer has ‘gone’ on. ‘Something is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it,’ as Derrida (1988, 184) once put it. Accordingly, Derrida gave Jacques Lacan’s expression, ‘*manque à sa place*’ [lack in its place; missing from its place], a subtle twist: ‘*manque a sa place*’ [lack has its place] (Derrida 1988, 177). From the moment that someone wrote ‘children displaced across borders’ it should have been obvious that we had strayed via the imaginary from the real into the symbolic. For ‘what is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place*, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in a library. ... For it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it’ (Lacan 1988, 40, italics in the original). Unlike a child wedded to the real, assuming that there ever was such a Thing, a child displaced is the *symbol* only of an absence, a flickering *signifier*, and one cannot say that ‘it must be *or* not be in a particular place but ... it will be *and* not be where it is, wherever it goes’ (Lacan 1988, 39, italics in the original). *Placed, displaced* in deed.

Displaced in relation to itself, differed and deferred in relation to itself, criss-crossed by a labyrinthine estrangement from itself, a displaced child steps not (*pas*) in the place where he or she is. Such a child maintains a spectral, flickering presence in the ‘here and now’ of the real, so called, due to the fault (*faux pas*) of the symbolic. At this very moment in the text, when one says ‘children displaced across borders,’ such a child ‘can have and lose its place only in the symbolic register’ (Muller and Richardson 1988, 59). Like Lacan’s inspired psychoanalytic reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s (1988 [1844]) famous tale of ratiocination, *The Purloined Letter*, in which ‘the fateful letter is not stolen so much as dis-placed, that is, ‘purloined’ in the sense of ‘pro-longed’ or ‘diverted from its path’ along the circuit of the symbolic order,’ so too with a purloined child, whose errant place and path of errancy, so to speak, ‘is determined by the symbolic system within which it is constantly dis-placed’ (Muller and Richardson 1988, 58–59). Such a purloined child ‘has the property of nowhere-ness. ... As symbol of an absence, it is and is not wherever it may be. The truly hidden is what is missing from its place, and such placing is a function of the symbolic order’ (Muller and Richardson 1988, 79). Here, then, a displaced child is hidden and trafficked in plain sight, even if he or she also disappears into one of those grim places that are often employed by more or less roguish states to ‘take care’ of all sorts of displaced persons (Bryson and Poucki 2019, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014, Netz 2009, Piotrowicz 2019, Stone 2017).

Properly displaced: go figure, figure out

The Governments accepting this Constitution, RECOGNIZING: that genuine refugees and displaced persons constitute an urgent problem ... (*Constitution of the International Refugee Organization*, United Nations, 15 December 1946, Preamble)

In the context of borders and rights—but also of boards and edges, boundaries and frontiers, and lines and limits, as well as claims and entitlements, demands and dues, and inscriptions and titles, etc.—one may be forgiven for thinking of so-called ‘displaced children’ as a variant of the well-worn theme of ‘displaced persons,’ and a belated recognition that reference to the latter has tended to presume men as its unremarked norm despite all of the evidence to the contrary, such that *the* figure of displacement would hereinafter be ramified, serialized, and serrated: displaced men, displaced women, displaced children, displaced orphans, etc. (and let’s not forget the vast array of displaced nonhumans, from insects to climates). The task posed by the

General Assembly of the United Nations on the 12th February 1946, amid the ruins of yet another world war, was, in the words of Resolution 8(1), under the heading ‘Question of Refugees,’ that of ‘clearly distinguishing between genuine refugees and displaced persons, on the one hand, and the war criminals, quislings and traitors ... on the other.’ All of these words should continue to give us pause for thought, beginning with the question of the question and its dismemberment, not least because the question is invariably posed as a problem, a sleight of hand that transforms ‘refugees’ or ‘displaced persons’ into a problem, and the solution to the problem amounts to sorting the wheat from the chaff. Who, precisely, should be gathered up and ‘rounded up’ as a ‘displaced person’ – both figuratively (in the accounts) and literally (in the camps, in the streets, in the borderlands, etc.)? Who, precisely, should be hailed as a ‘displaced person’ and forced to respond to the call of his or her name? ‘*Hey, you there!*’ as Louis Althusser (1971) succinctly expressed it in his famous essay on ideological state apparatuses and the interpellation of the subject. And who, precisely, should be claimed and reclaimed by place, or detained and interned in place, or even swallowed up and consumed by place? Hereinafter, whenever you stumble upon words such ‘accommodate,’ ‘assimilate,’ and ‘integrate,’ and similar words lumbered with ‘integrity’ that are tossed around ‘displaced persons’ and other social misfits in a more or less careleswise fashion, attune yourself to the violence of rounding up, which wounds and scars not only those who are discounted, those who come to count for nothing in the ‘fabric of society,’ so called, or else marked down and tallied up as dangerous ‘remainders’ that need to be tracked down, hunted down, and taken care of, but also those who are counted upon for being ‘integral’ to society, for just being there, where they purportedly belong (Lyotard 1990b, Fleischman et al. 2013). We will circle back to this rounding up in what follows.

Having posed the ‘question of refugees,’ the UN considered that ‘the main task concerning displaced persons [was] to encourage and assist in every way possible their early return to their countries of origin,’ with the caveat that none ‘shall be compelled to return.’ Meanwhile, an exception to this desire for repatriation was made for war criminals, quislings, and traitors—and also for Germans, with a *non-refoulement* obligation subsequently appended via the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Much later, as late as the 1990s, it would finally dawn on the UN that the so-called question of refugees and displaced persons primarily concerned ‘women and

children' (to wit, UN Economic and Social Council Resolution 1991/23, on Refugee and Displaced Women and Children). This belated yoking of 'women and children' to the question/problem of 'refugees and displaced persons' has continued unabated ever since, often under the cover of all that is familial and communal, and invariably drawing upon the threefold assertion that children require 'special care and assistance' because they are 'vulnerable,' 'dependent,' and 'developing' (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, UNHCR Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care 1994).

The question of refugees and displaced persons, so forcefully formulated in the wake of the Second World War, has itself been dis-placed in the subsequent half century or so. It has been dis-placed in two directions, at least. First and foremost, it has been dis-placed from being exclusively a question that concerned discerning the *genuinely* displaced, the internationally 'dehomed' or 'dehoused,' so that they may be encouraged, supported, and assisted in their venture or adventure to return 'home,' to return to their 'country of origin,' a return that was driven not so much by the desire of individuals for the right abode or the right to abode than by the desire of states to recoup their citizens. States wanted to take their subjects back into custody, to reclaim their unlost and refound souls. They wanted to reappropriate those who had been ex-appropriated and expropriated (the dislodged and the taken, such as refugees and prisoners of war), the most voracious of which was the Soviet Union. Needless to say, states did not necessarily want to recoup all of their misplaced citizens, nor did they necessarily wish to retrieve them for humanitarian reasons. Many who were returned to their 'homeland' lived under a cloud of suspicion (as de facto renegades, defectors, deserters, traitors, cowards, fraternizers, etc.), facing stigmatization, marginalization, and maltreatment at 'home,' but also punishment, imprisonment, internal exile, and even death. Moving away from this original concern with the *restitution* of the *genuinely* displaced, the question of refugees and displaced persons was dis-placed from sifting the genuine from the bogus onto a question that concerned 'women and children' in particular, partly because they were in the 'majority,' for when it comes to the subject of the question, the subjects that will be put to the question, women and children are evidently more numerous amongst the displaced than men. More importantly, however, the dis-placement of the subject of the question from discerning the bogus amid the genuine and the treacherous amid the faithful to a notable concern for women and

children was primarily because women and children—and particularly ‘unaccompanied children’ or ‘separated children’—were widely regarded as especially vulnerable.

For reasons that are not entirely arbitrary, the UN settled upon a certain calendrical age to mark the outer limits of childhood, whereafter one would yield to adulthood: ‘the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier,’ as Article 1 of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defined it. Whence the agony of rounding up children in the absence of credible documentation, especially in the borderlands and rim-lands of childhood and adulthood, in the age-disputed no man’s land of ‘adolescence’ and ‘youth,’ not to mention in the vicinity of retardation, decrepitude, and infantilization, but also the agony of rounding them up in the streets and elsewhere, in the real, imaginary, and symbolic registers. And so, I ask again: who, precisely, should be rounded up as a child or an infant, as childish or infantile? And who, precisely, should be rounded up in the world and rounded up in the accounts? Indeed, who, precisely, has the wherewithal to be rounded up in this way? And who, precisely, has the wherewithal to round them up? We will return to this rounding up in due course.

In addition to the dis-placement of the question of refugees and displaced persons onto a question of more or less crude demographics (i.e. women and children), a second dis-placement has transposed the question from one of international displacement *across* state borders to one of so-called ‘internal displacement’ *within* a state’s borders. While both international and internal displacement can arise from the same wide array of forces, including so-called ‘natural disasters’ as well as warfare, genocide, ethnic cleansing, contrived famine, and suchlike, their emplacements and displacements once again beg the question of place, and specifically the *place* of displacement and the *taking place* of displacement, to which I finally return. For while the notion of ‘internal displacement’ is obviously oxymoronic, it is not entirely without merit, since the schismatic ‘fault’ that cuts through and unhinges the notion concerns place *itself* and *as such*, and not simply the distance *between* places. So, rather than displacement *from* place *to* place, I am interested in the displacement *of* place and the place *of* displacement. Where, in deed, does displacement ‘take’ place? And what becomes of a place that is so taken?

At this very moment in the text here I am

I'm not from here either! (Handwritten cardboard placard, held aloft by a child during the so-called 'European Migration Crisis,' September 2015)

Placed. Displaced. Each takes place. (I am tempted to insert a parenthetical remark between the '*takes*' and the '*place*' in order to gesture towards the hollowing out and sweeping away of some more or less snug space for what will have come to pass, an '*(its)*' or an '*(a)*' perhaps.) Children placed, displaced. What happens, I wonder, when this double take is crossed or double-crossed by a border or when a border is crossed or double-crossed by this double take? Is a child, *placed, displaced*, marked and remarked or raised and erased by this repetition of placements and emplacements, of incisions and divisions, of scars and cuts, of lacerations and seriations, etc.? 'We know less than ever where to cut—either at birth or at death. And this also means that we never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject. Today less than ever' (Derrida 1991, 117, italics in original). Here as elsewhere, the subject takes (*its*) place (or *a* place) as 'a stringed series of enlaced erasures' (Derrida 2007, 175), of serial erasures, for which Derrida coined the beautiful neologism '*seriasure*.' Every child is a child of *seriasure*. Even a totally crass understanding of childhood, such as one that fixates on the plodding of calendrical age, disaccumulates as it tallies up, and erases as it notches up. Every child becomes younger with respect to adulthood and older with respect to childhood; older than they were and younger than they will become. Child A, let's call her Alice, can neither advance without retreating nor retreat without advancing. Becoming is the perpendicular stationary trip, or 'loco-commotion,' that takes flight between these two, reversible directions, hollowing out a child from the middle.

When I say 'Alice becomes larger,' I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa. Good sense affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction (*sens*); but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time. (Deleuze 1990, 1)

Spaced, Displaced, says Michaux (1992). ‘In the beginning is REPETITION’ (Michaux 1992, 101, capitalization in original). Is there a difference there? Between the placed and the displaced. Between a child placed here or there and a child displaced here or there. Each takes (*its*) place, finding itself lost where it is found. ‘A thing that isn’t there is there,’ as Auster (1994, 167) put in *Mr Vertigo*. The placed always already displaced and the displaced always already placed. Place takes place. Re-read the ambiguity and ambivalence of this phrase. It is no longer certain—is never certain, in fact and in deed—what is ‘in’ place and what is ‘out’ of place. Run out. Behold the hollows of our ‘*ex-sistence* (or: eccentric place),’ as Lacan (1988, 28, italics in the original) wryly put it. *Placed, displaced*. In the round, this errant twain forms a Möbius strip, with a single surface and a single border, which causes not so much the ‘*dis-*’ but the ‘*di-*’ to reverberate the length and breadth of *its* space. Dis-placed or di-spaced, so to speak.

Placed, displaced. I hesitate, then, between what *takes* place and what takes *place*, or, if you prefer, between taking place and the taking place, or even between the taken place and the taking (of) place. Rather than a bare repetition of the same, of the different or of the same difference (on and on, again and again), there is an eternal return or double movement of a *différance* that endlessly differs and defers what ostensibly takes place. Hereinafter, (dis)placement takes (*its*) place. I hesitate, then, before reading too much or too little into the difference between children *placed* and children *displaced*, or between *displaced* children and *placed* children. And yet, like ‘younger’ and ‘older,’ ‘placed’ and ‘displaced’ are ostensibly two words that pull in opposite directions. Affirmation on the one hand and negation on the other hand, which is not necessarily to say that to be *placed* is to be well placed, properly placed or rightfully placed nor that to be *displaced* is to be badly placed, improperly placed or wrongly placed, nor that to be either placed or displaced is to be *misplaced*. Here as elsewhere, nothing is lost in reality or to reality, only in the symbolic and the imaginary.

A child displaced is not simply ‘misplaced’ or ‘mal-placed’ in the real, or left ‘without place’ or left ‘out of place’ in the imaginary. Such a child does not lack place, least of all a ‘proper place’ or a ‘resting place,’ that some may be tempted to call a ‘home’ or a ‘homeland’ or some such. The word *displaced* keeps bringing me back to a purloined and prolonged *place* that remains impossible to pin or pen down, rather than

to a set or series of *places* that may be occupied or vacated with more or less propriety, legitimacy, embedment, etc. Displacement leaves a trace that takes place, a trace that effaces itself at every step along the way. Accordingly, the phrase ‘displaced children across borders’ reminds me of Blanchot’s (1992) *The Step Not Beyond*, which plays on the polysemy of the French word ‘*pas*,’ in so far as it makes sense in the registers of both transgression (*pas*, step) and prohibition (*pas*, not), of both mobility and immobility (*pas*, step/not). ‘Because of the double meaning of *pas*, every step is a false step’ (Nelson, in Blanchot 1992, xvi). A displaced child leaves a step/not (*pas*) in every place, a false step/do not (*faux pas/faut pas*) in the very structure of place—and, as we have seen, also in the structure of time: the paradoxical pace (*pas*) of ageing qua becoming, for instance. What the displaced child demonstrates is not that *some* unfortunate souls are misplaced or mal-placed, that *some* people are out of place and do not belong here or there, and that we should try to put this maladjustment right either by returning them whence they came (homeward bound) or else by making them belong here (through more or less forcible integration), but that we all step/not in each and every place. The fault belongs to place itself. The fault is place itself. The fault is what takes place. Here as elsewhere, ‘the *pas* both creates and erases the limit in its crossing’ (Nelson, in Blanchot 1992, xvi).

At the outset of this paper I floated a quotation from Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject*: ‘Everything that exists is thus at the same time itself and itself-according-to-its-place. ... All that is relates to itself at a distance from itself owing to the place where it is’ (Badiou 2009a, 8). This queer formulation derives from his Hegelian appreciation of ‘the dialectical correlation between being and being-there, between essence and existence’ (Badiou 2009c, 100). Such a correlation is the step/not (*pas*) of displacement. Take a child, for example, whose destiny is to be split into three, at least: as a *being* (essence, pure identity), a *being-there* (existence, placed identity), and a *being there* (ex-sistence, displaced identity). The latter is the unity of being and being-there, the unity of ‘being-there-in-a-world, whose principle is to consist’ (Badiou 2009c, 39), the tally or count-as-one of a unary trait that begins with difference and repetition, a tally that may range from a minimal (nil) to a maximal (full) degree of appearance within a particular world (Badiou 2009c). Changes of degree often occur gradually and imperceptibly, but they can also shift abruptly and dramatically. One may age slowly, for example, but also catastrophically, in a flash (Malabou 2012). Age is not simply a

tallying that goes on and on through serial repetition; it is also a transformation and transmutation, a difference in kind rather than a difference of degree, a ‘*becoming*’ and a ‘*stationary trip*,’ as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988) once put it. Placed, displaced, one steps/not into every age.

So, let’s begin to count and recount the children, rounding them up along the way: *one one*, which is to say: *placed displaced*. Follow the torsion, contortion, and distortion of this notching up of a duplicitous ‘unary trait,’ as Lacan famously dubbed it in his seminar of 1961–1962 (*Seminar IX: Identification*), if you can. And whilst tallying them up, notching them up, making them count, count-for-one and count-as-one, which may be a *one one* or a *one zero*, bear in mind that duplicates and counterparts were once called tallies. Take any old child, whether they count or not. Child A, for example. A child (A) is always placed (A_P), with more or less visibility (inclusion, appearance, recognition, etc.) within a world, and insofar as it is re-marked by place, it is also other than itself, estranged from itself, and a stranger to itself: ($A = A, A_P$), where ‘P’ denotes the set of possible places in the space of placement. I repeat: ‘Everything that exists is thus at the same time itself and itself-according-to-its-place. ... All that is relates to itself at a distance from itself owing to the place where it is’ (Badiou 2009a, 8). Consequently, the true initial contrary of A is therefore neither something else (Not-A) nor A placed (A_P), but the space of placement (P) as such. Just as the contrary of the working class is not the capitalist class, but the class structure as such, so the contrary of displaced children is not placed children, but the space of places as such. As its name implies, a *re*-placement, like a *re*-volution, has no purchase whatsoever on the space of placement. No child should be subjected to the structure of places, least of all one in a chequered state. ‘Scission is that by which the term [A] is included in the place [P] as out-of-place [A_P],’ (Badiou 2009a, 15, parentheses added). The important point, however, is that the scission of A/P is asymmetrical: ‘one term is dominant, another subjugated. One term fixes the game of assigned places; the other must subject itself to it’ (Badiou 2009a, 25). The space of placement (P), for which Badiou coined the neologism ‘*splace*,’ is the *including* (dominant) term that indexes, re-marks, and stamps (with existence, with being-there). The term (A), for which Badiou coined the neologism ‘*outplace*’ with respect to the *splace*, is the *included* (subjugated) term that is indexed, re-marked, and stamped. The phrase ‘children displaced’ is sufficient to foreground the subject’s subjugation not to any *particular place* but to the

space of placement as a faulty whole. The gratuitous addition of ‘across borders’ is sufficient to foreground the derangement or ‘locommotion’ of any such space. Here as elsewhere, the *splace* is demented, yet works very well (q.v. Deleuze, in Guattari 2009, 36). And since *splace* is deranged, every *place* is de-ranged. Whether moving *between* places or moving *within* places, we are forever ‘approaching without getting nearer’ (Derrida 2008, 21).

By way of conclusion: re-enforced displacement

There where the old coherence prescribed a mere sliding displacement, an interruption arises through a purification that exceeds the place. ... From this point of view, ... there is ... only one force, whose existence always surfaces as an event. (Badiou 2009a, 142)

When all is said and done, the key struggle is not between children and any *particular* placement, least of all a misplacement, mal-placement or displacement, but between children and the space of placement *as such*. Rather than falling back onto place (re-structure, re-arrange, re-place) we should strive to overthrow the space of placement itself (de-structure, dis-arrange, dis-place). ‘The essence of the relapse is the space of placement, the place,’ while the real struggle ‘is the outplace against the splace’ (Badiou 2009a, 10–11). This is why I would prefer to follow in the step/not (*pas*) of so many displaced children. ‘We must keep steadily out of place. This is not feasible without the redoubling of the place by that which is no longer of its order and which is no longer spatially figurable. That is to say, force after place’ (Badiou 2009a, 21). Hereinafter, I will simply place force after place, and so re-place place with force. For while it is true that there are only children and places, there are also exceptions (aside from, but for). All is *dis/placed*, then. ‘What we believe to be in front of us, as Lacan puts it brilliantly, is being-to-the-side, para-being, par-appearing. ... “Let us para-be,” that is our war cry. And better yet: “We are nothing, let us para-be the Whole”’ (Badiou 2009a, 124). For here and there, now and then, approaching without getting any nearer or further away, is another world that is taking (*its*) place as we speak. It is barely a step away, bordering on oblivion. By way of a parting shot at all manner of border-enforcement agencies, suffice to say that at this very moment in the text here I am, with two children, one displaced, the other not, a switcheroo of placements that reinforces the work of the border as a *transformer*. Obviously, a border marks the passage from one state to another, from one sovereign power to another. Before this power a child is *neither*

placed *nor* displaced. To purloin the phraseology of Foucault (2004, 240), one might say that from the point of view of placement and displacement the child is neutral, and it is thanks to the sovereign space of placement that the child has the right to be placed or, possibly, the right to be displaced. Imagine, then, children placed, displaced across borders. Imagine that they have come here, that each is present to hand, that each is on hand: 'Hand in hand with equal plod they go. ... Joined by held holding hands. Plod on as one' (Beckett 2009, 84). Placed, displaced, with equal plod we all go on. Disjoined together. Held together. This is how we all belong.

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