

## Dislocation and Desire

Cuahtémoc Medina

A few years back, in 1999, when I had recently returned to Mexico from abroad, I was interrupted in mid-sentence by a colleague, the historian Renato González Mello. “Dislocated?” he sputtered. “You mean, like an elbow?” I was perplexed. I had used an Anglicism, and the interrupted sentence was one more example of how I had allowed my language to be corrupted. Indeed, while sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish did admit the concept of *dislocation*,<sup>1</sup> it was mainly limited to the domain of orthopedists. Something that was *dislocated* would thus appear to be the opposite of the exalted *articulation* of a prodigy or a monster. Therefore, that which was dislocated would be weak and painful.

However, in English it is common to use *dislocate* to mean “to put out of place, put out of proper relative position; displace,” and even to refer to any kind of commotion: “to throw out of order; upset; disorder.” Clearly, for reasons I don’t fully understand, the notion of disarticulation or being out of joint took on a much more catastrophic meaning in English. As proof of that, suffice it to cite the crucial passage from *Hamlet* where the main character tells Horatio that he has seen his father’s ghost and found out that the king’s murderer is none other than his own uncle, Claudius. He believes this infraction to be so heinous that it provoked a cosmic *dislocation*. Time—as in *today, now*—was dislocated: “The time is out of joint; O cursed spite! / That ever I was born to set it right!” [I.V.211–212]. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida made a comment that is very much to the point on this first day of this *sprain* in our general politics:

The time is out of joint. The world is going badly. It is worn but its wear no longer counts. [...] What is coming, in which the untimely appears, is happening to time but it does not happen in time. *Contretemps. The time is out of joint.*<sup>2</sup>

So how do we interpret the significance of this round table? It would seem that the dislocated space has detached itself from any articulation with the rest; as such, it has ceased to be coherent and teleological, to respond to the mechanism—in a word, to have a systemic behavior. And yet, this is (still) not an autonomous, isolated or liberated space: the limb continues to dangle from the body, though it is out of place, unable to connect, and responding only to an informal order. It still belongs to the cultural and social body, perhaps even to the institutional body, but does not sustain a relationship of synchronization with the movements of the whole.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Corominas, *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, 3rd edition (Madrid: Gredos, 1990): 366.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York / London: Routledge, 1994).

Is there no remedy other than to replace the detached member, bandage it and immobilize it? Anyone who has dislocated an elbow, a shoulder or a finger knows that *dislocated* also means *free* and submitting only to its own oscillation, however painful that may be. We need to understand, then, that dislocated spaces are not spaces of autonomy and absolute rejection: we refer not so much to a secession or a separation as to the resistance to or sabotage of any functional articulation. However, the fact that these spaces, these limbs, have not been completely amputated does not mean that their displacement was a delicate process: it is possible that the reason they are out of place involves a memory of incredible violence. But despite the torture that has been inflicted, a *dislocated space* still remains close to its original position, though no longer linked to the rest of the political body. It has been separated from the general context of its culture, and has ceased to have any connection to general cultural politics. But is there anything to be gained from dislocation?

The most recent Spanish dictionary has fully incorporated the Anglicism *dislocado*. In other words, the definition has been expanded to include the following meanings: “To twist an argument or reasoning, to manipulate it by taking it out of context,” or “To make someone lose their strength or composure.”<sup>3</sup> However, it seems to me that with this solution, we have incurred a *terrible loss*. In 1999, when I ran indignantly to my *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* in its still current nineteenth edition, published in 1970, to discover that *dislocado* was in fact a foreign use of the language, I discovered the following pearl of wisdom:

**Dislocar:** (from the Latin *dis*, negative, and *locare*, to place). Tr. To remove a thing from its place, usually referring to bones and joints. // 2. fig. To provoke vehement enthusiasm or desire.

All that remains now is to dislocate ourselves *at once*.

Translated by Michelle Suderman.

---

<sup>3</sup> Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 22nd ed., vol. 4 (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2001): 564.

## The Museum as a Work in Progress

Bárbara Perea

I find it highly appropriate to discuss MUCA Roma at a round table on dislocated spaces, if we take that to mean a cross between cultural management and art practices designed to move away from the notion of the Museum as a *repository of objects* and also to oblige cultural institutions to constantly reinvent themselves insofar as those very art practices, public practices and current theories demand more dynamic positions and strategies.

MUCA Roma itself emerged as a dislocated member of its parent institution, the University Museum of Sciences and Art (Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte, or MUCA) on the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM) campus. Its proposed function was to give the UNAM a presence in a culturally significant part of Mexico City, with the idea not only of staying in touch with the local art scene and influencing it, but also of enabling it to respond more quickly to the demands of art practice and the cultural medium.

Thus, it is possible to speak of dislocation on a number of levels here: not only that of MUCA Roma’s condition as a cell of its parent institution, but also in the sense of it being oriented toward a more permeable and fluid museum space, like a temporarily autonomous zone that questions traditional ways of making and interpreting art. As a laboratory, battlefield and *tabula rasa* that attempts to erase discursive lines based on generational, stylistic or historic criteria, MUCA Roma seeks to define itself based on a destabilizing, playful and subversive action focused on the constant questioning of what is understood by the terms *contemporary*, *public*, *artist* and *museum*. It may be a not-for-profit public space, but it is immersed in a world with close ties to the market.

Its openly anticuratorial nature puts artists with dissimilar positions and from different places on equal terms, making this space a redoubt, a safe haven in the Roma district, intended as a response to Mexico City’s more officializing spaces of national and international Art History, and thus providing a counterpointed interpretation of art practice—a kind of discursive and creative *emergency room*, based on trial and error.

And with sirens wailing because, let’s face it, the art practices and strategies outlined in this round table’s synthetic description—collaboration, interdisciplinarity, site-specificity, works in progress, interventions—turn cultural management into an extreme sport only suitable for adrenaline addicts. Indeed, as art strategies are expanded to make room for something besides the traditional finished product that can be exhibited in a gallery, there comes a need to revise current practices among management, curators—I guess among critics, too—as well as in museum models... Only then may we speak of intervention and site-specific art—not only as strategies of artistic production, but at an interpretive level where discourses are generated: for example,