

Museum of Broken Relationships

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Lasting love relationships - more or less happy or unhappy, superficial or fateful - engage our time, our thoughts and afterthoughts: by their very existence in the present, we enjoy them, they occupy us, they are the talk of the town, and not infrequently they are the subject of newspaper columns or at least gossip over a cup of coffee. The present gives legitimacy to the existence of the relationship binding enamoured or at least apparently enamoured couples. Even secret relationships which are rumoured (but not openly discussed) exist in sweet SMS messages, in meetings hidden from the eyes of the public, in the beaming faces of those who enjoyed the 'forbidden fruit' the night before.

However, what about expired relationships? Relationships brutally severed by an accurate surgeon's cut or those that died of a long and incurable disease? Relationships that lived still recently in carefully picked presents, in smiles recorded on photographs? What happens with 'broken relationships' which also used to boost SMS traffic for cellular phone operators and generated an emotional charge in the neurons?

If you enter broken relationship in any search engine and any world language, you will get a series of instant self-help instructions telling you how to get rid of the emotional burden the fastest and the most efficient way, how to get rid of everything that mercilessly reminds you of the just broken relationship. In a nutshell, libraries and virtual space are flooded with prescriptions for efficient oblivion (How to cope with a broken relationship?; How to forget?; and so on). The material and nonmaterial residues of a broken relationship should be destroyed/eradicated as soon as possible in order to cure one's consciousness and heart and make room for something new and exciting: for a new relationship that will again produce a condition of spiritual fulfilment, the cracking of neurons and hormones, an emotion which will again give meaning to the ephemerality of life.

Severed relationships barely seem to exist, like archaeological remains buried deeply in the memory of the former protagonists. They can be discerned on old photographs if they did not end up torn in the waste or expired by the merciless delete permanently. In the best of cases 'compromised' material remains stored with a reliable friend, driven into the deepest drawers or packed in (Pandora's) boxes that gather dust under the bed or in the closet. Even trivial objects like a coffee cup with a silly message (which once had a meaning) are a sure 'trigger' of emotional memories. This is why the cup is no longer used lest even the simplest act of coffee drinking should jeopardize the relative and fragile calm of present living or - God forbid - the current relationship.

Haven't we all experienced at least once this destroyed, depressive state of mind and wished, like characters in the movie *The Eternal Splendour of the Invincible Mind*, for a radical and durable medical process which would erase all memories of washed-out love, of another defeat, of another personal failure? Yet, apart from the fact that a clinical erasure of memories still exists only in the imagination of skilled scriptwriters, memories and the 'emotional heritage' stored in the most varied objects, messages, songs or photographs, are truly an invaluable part of individual emotional history. Moreover, these objects store the memory of unique, infinitely beautiful and pleasant moments and memories; it is only the new context of a broken relationship that makes them unwanted and turns them into victims of 'affective vandalism'.

The Museum of Broken Relationships is an art concept which proceeds from the (scientific) assumption that objects (in the broadest sense, i.e., matter as a whole) possess integrated fields - 'holograms' of memories and emotions - and intends with its layout to create a space of 'secure memory' or 'protected remembrance' in order to preserve the material and nonmaterial heritage of broken relationships.

Unlike the 'destructive' self-help instructions for recovery from broken relationships, the Museum offers every individual the chance to overcome the emotional collapse through creation, i.e., by contributing to the holdings of the Museum. The individual gets rid of 'controversial objects', triggers of momentarily 'undesirable' emotions, by turning them into museum exhibits, i.e., artefacts and thereby participating in the creation of a preserved collective emotional history.

In this process objects full of nice emotions finally emerge from their dark and hidden hide-outs and are placed within a new, display framework which automatically changes the perception of the object and establishes a new context for the emotions generated by them.

Theoretically, the layout of the Museum of Broken Relationships is renewed every day because it is a project undergoing continuous generation, conditioned by the relentless process of disappearing relationships. The project is conditionally divided into several segments:

I. Virtual Web Museum - www.brokenships.com

By registering on the web pages of the Museum every potential user (shipwreck victim) becomes its user and donor. He is e-mailed a user password and a certificate regarding the 'lease' of part the collective emotional memory in which he can store his exhibits/create his own data base. Over time the base is developed from a number of directories stored under the name of the person involved in a broken relationship and the date of the breakdown. The user can 'store' in every directory whatever may still function of a trigger of a painful memory:

a) photographs,

b) existing e-mail messages (which can be sent directly from the user's inbox to his own web directory,

c) SMS messages (which can also be sent directly from the user's phone to the Museum web).

Additionally, the user may 'lock', that is, forbid access to specific 'exhibits' (photographs, messages) or to the directory related to the broken relationship as a whole for a specified period (3 months, 6 months, a year or 4 years). This does not permanently destroy undesirable memory triggers: they are simply 'removed' during convalescence. In this way every user creates over time a treasury of his own emotional history and, thereby, of 'collective emotional history'. Every user can also decide whether 'to open for the public' part of his own collection so that it can be viewed by other users of the Museum, too.

II. Material Remains Layout

This part of the Museum assumes the existence of a real exhibition space, and includes the following exhibits:

a) objects that only provoke an immediate reaction of a specific couple but gain, in the museum context, new emotional connotations in the mind of an impartial viewer/visitor;

b) photographs, letters, messages - with which even impartial viewers/visitors can identify more easily.

c) Since the Museum is physically limited by space, older exhibits from the 'physical' part are stored, catalogued and transferred to the virtual (web) part of the Museum.

III. Confessional

This is the interactive part of the Museum in which every visitor can immediately store his object(s) or send (store) an SMS message, record his own confession, etc., in the restricted and intimate space of the confessional.

The Museum of Broken Relationships opens up a number of other opportunities for development in the process of its generation involving all the potential visitors/users. And their number is vast indeed...