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## From mistaking fakeness to mistake in fakeness.

### Artificial ruins between aesthetics and deception

#### Abstract

*Aesthetic attraction and artful execution of the object, careful design and seemingly blatant falsification by the creator, voluntarily accepted counterfeit imitation and celebration of a melancholy-filled illusion – these, and many other, often contradictory, particularities can describe one of the most complex aesthetic phenomena, that of fake ruins. Questions of perfection and mistake, accurate planning and permissive randomness, genuineness and authenticity – or the convincing justification of aesthetic experience despite the complete lack of them – profound references to the nature of decay, the transience of all human creation and nostalgia can all be found around this object of art. In this article I analyse the fakeness of fake ruins with regard to the multiple consequences that this type of fake can contribute to the better understanding of both their aesthetics and the concept of mistake.*

#### Keywords

*Ruins, Fake ruins, Aesthetics and deception*

Received: 24/01/2021

Approved: 15/02/2021

Editing by Danilo Manca

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### 1. *Ambiguous appreciation*

At first it seems that nothing is further from the idea of fake ruins than the concept of mistake. Consider for example the following quote from a popular garden design handbook by Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell, titled *Beiträge zur bildenden Gartenkunst für angehende Gartenkünstler und Liebhaber*, published in 1819:

The sites for the ruins should normally be chosen in distant areas of the park, especially on hills, and in such places where Nature shows itself in its solemn and festive character; where solitude and frightening stillness rests; where the undivided masses of dark brushwood make almost all access impossible; where among the moss-grown walls the old maple and the aged oak proudly grow up and certify the walls' antique age: here can these sad remnants of long disappeared centuries decorously rise, approaching a *complete illusion* (emphasis mine, quoted in my translation from the German original, from Hartmann 1981: 148).

These artificially ruined edifices thus need to be well-planned and created with great care, in order to achieve a “complete illusion”. However, their appearance, just like the reasons for their construction, were not so convincing for all. It is worth comparing the above considerations with another one, from just fifteen years apart. In 1834 Hermann von Pückler-Muskau wrote in his *Hints on Landscape Gardening*:

*Buildings, then, should have a meaningful relationship to their surroundings, and should always have a distinct purpose.* Thus we should be cautious in the use of temples that had a completely different religious and ethnological significance in ancient times, as well as in the use of meaningless monument that might make an impression not of deep emotion but foolishness. [...] Gothic *gimcracks* should be avoided: the effect they have is more or less that of senile dementia (italics in the original, Pückler-Muskau 2014: 40 and 42).

It is thus really curious to see that the same aesthetic phenomenon, still popular around the time of writing of both texts, inspired such completely diverse opinions. In a way, these opposing ideas already indicate the ambiguous aesthetics of fake ruins.

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one of the most complex aesthetic phenomena, that of fake ruins. Questions of perfection and mistake, accurate planning and permissive randomness, genuineness and authenticity – or the convincing justification of aesthetic experience despite the complete lack of them – profound references to the nature of decay, the transience of all human creation and nostalgia can all be found around this object of art. Therefore, in the following I analyse the fakeness of fake ruins with regard to the multiple consequences that this type of fake can contribute to the better understanding of both their aesthetics and the concept of mistake.

## *2. What is a fake ruin?*

A fake ruin – or, in other names: an artificial ruin, scam ruin or even sham ruin – is an object of art that at first seems quite easy to define: a construction that looks like a “normal” ruin, though is not several centuries or millennia old, just recently created, intentionally made to look unfinished and crumbling. It is thus a building that seems to be abandoned, let to be exposed to Nature’s eroding forces and therefore is in a state of decay. Its style could bear Antique elements, or – especially after the start of the revaluation of the national historical past, including that of the Middle Ages – Gothic forms. These fake ruins were then arranged in a picturesque way and setting, with a carefully calibrated proportion of still-standing and “ruined” parts, and often allowed visitors to not only see the decaying edifice from a distance but to partly enter it.

Such artificial ruins were very popular especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, most typically in the so-called English or landscape gardens in aristocratic estates, and later in public parks of larger cities and new(ly) modernised metropolises. Although they had some forerunners in the 16th and 17th century garden decorations and Mannerist architectural follies – for example in the complex of Palazzo del Té in Mantua or the Parco dei Mostri in Bomarzo – their first phase of spread in the 18th century is also connected to the changing taste in garden design and landscape architecture. The fashion of formalist French gardens, with their emphasised geometry, controlled shape of the plants and their overtly regulated arrangements highlighting the ambition of dominating Nature, got gradually replaced with a preference for English gardens or informal landscape gardens. This latter underlined the idea of

“naturalness”, or – at least seemingly – letting Nature grow more freely than in the extremely controlled French garden. Needless to say, even in the informal gardens the natural elements were curated – otherwise Nature would have quickly overgrown the whole site – but the estate’s entire appearance was planned to look like being closer to a “natural” state.

The insertion of fake ruins in the park is very much in line with the above approach of the English-style landscape garden tradition too: highlighting the power of Nature on all human creation and construction, what’s more, making it manifest and reminding the viewer of it in an aesthetically pleasing way. As Jonathan Hill described it: “A found or fabricated ruin acknowledged the effects of time and place, emphasising symbiotic relations with its ever-changing immediate and wider contexts and celebrating the creative influence of natural as well cultural forces. In a significant design innovation, the picturesque instigated a more intense, profound and temporal dialogue with nature” (Hill 2019: 62). Hence just like the French garden was meant to symbolise the attempt of dominating Nature, the English one was to visualise the failure of this attempt. The realisation of this overwhelming power of Nature and the growing interest in Antique heritage in the wake of the early Neo-Classicism could beautifully merge in the fashionable art form of the fake ruin. It was also motivated and nurtured by diverse and concurrently effective cultural phenomena – including various aesthetic ideas, philosophical movements and artistic styles, among others the strong Antiquomanie of Neo-Classicism, the early Romantic philosophy of Nature that was influencing artists too, the much-discussed categories of e.g. sublime or picturesque etc. The commissioners and artists making fake ruins could have multiple references through them, and the work could serve various purposes. Among these references and purposes we can mention some more cultural and philosophical, and some more social or even political. For the former we can again remember the aforementioned function of being a reminder of the power of Nature from which nothing, even art cannot be truly saved, or the melancholic feelings towards an imagined “Arcadia”, that for many of the era presumably existed but had been lost, of which nostalgic reconstruction motivated the idyllic pastoral plays – very often pursued in such gardens and around similar constructions – celebrated, though often not uncritically, in the paintings of Watteau and Hubert Robert. Regarding the more social and political references that a fake ruin can incorporate we can think of the ideas that a ruin can refer to the

transience of not only an art (or architectural) work in itself, but of the former civilisation and political power that built it. This way, the fake ruin – and, in this, despite many other significant differences (see below) it may come quite close to a “regular” ruin – may remind the visitor of all human and political power decaying and vanishing. Another socio-cultural aspect of the desire to have a fake ruin is its power through the formal – though often superficial – references to the long temporal perspectives in general and to the noble, classical Antique heritage in particular. As Kai Vöckler summarised it precisely, fake ruin could “integrate temporality in the architecture” (Vöckler 2009: 28). These references to the temporal perspective may have also resulted in instances when the fake ruins were serving as a sort of “status-symbol” in an estate to highlight the owner’s appreciation of the early peaks of human civilisation.

### 3. *A fake ruin compared to a “normal” ruin*

In order to understand more of the aesthetic particularities of fake ruins, it is worth comparing them to “classical” or “regular” or “normal” ruins. Traditionally, a ruin is considered as the physical remains of a former architectural construction, either of a singular building or even of an entire city, the integrity of which is harmed. Since it is left abandoned, its maintenance and regular upkeep missing, Nature starts to take it over. In a previous book on the aesthetics of ruins, I listed three criteria of ruins: functionlessness, absence and time (Somhegyi 2020: 3–21). By *functionlessness* I mean that the ruin is characterised by the fact that the construction’s original function is gone, hence until the edifice is able to fulfil its original (or modified) purpose, it is not a “real” ruin yet. In other words, the formerly active (and actively used) building, if it is considered as a ruin, cannot have a proper practical function or actual purpose anymore, neither its original, nor a new one. Hence, if an abandoned and decaying Gothic church is converted into a bookshop or concert hall (which of course implies the regular maintenance such a location requires), it is not a ruin yet – and not a ruin anymore. *Absence* is the second criteria defining a classical ruin. It refers to the fact that decaying edifices have a significant amount of missing elements: holes in the ceiling, broken columns, zig-zag contours of walls etc., hence a continuously growing lacuna on the “body” of the former building. The third criteria, *time*, is strongly connected to the first two: there needs to

be a notable temporal distance between the present viewer and not only the era of the original building and its functioning, but also the start of its ruination. This is how the actual view of the ruined edifice will incorporate an impressive amount of time, the encounter of which will lead the viewer to nostalgic thoughts, melancholic feelings and reflections on the flow of history or even experiences of sublime. The significant temporal perspective is needed for the continuous growth of the absence – as Nature needs time to “work” on the edifice through erosion – however it will also limit the “lifespan” of the ruin between not-yet-ruin (when the building is still standing, but perhaps needs some restoration) and not-anymore-ruin (when there is so little left of it that one cannot possibly imagine its former grandeur). What’s more, exactly this importance of the significant temporal perspective is what explains the aesthetic appeal of ruins – as a relatively “temporary” result and state of decay – and the lack of aesthetic attraction of rubble or debris – being a result of a sudden destruction, caused by whether natural catastrophe or human aggression, without the long process of slow ruination.

Compared to all this, fake ruins have a different working and thus effect too. When applying the above three criteria, we can see that some are matching, and some not: in the case of artificial ruins we see functionlessness partly matching (about this “partly” see more towards the end of this paper): in its present form, a fake ruin does not have an actual, proper function, e.g. it is not built to be(come) a functioning temple for worships or a working theatre for performances. The category of absence is definitely matching; in fact, its most important formal connection point to proper ruins would be the (intentionally and carefully made, thus imitated) lacunae that trigger, what’s more: highlight, the perception of ruinousness. And, as it can already be easily guessed from the above, the most problematic criterion of the classical ruin to “apply” to a fake ruin is that of time: scam ruins are (were) recently built, not incorporating that amount of time that they pretend to manifest through their otherwise aesthetically often attractive appearance. We will come back to some further consequences and considerations of this later.

#### 4. *What is fake in a fake ruin?*

Exactly this latter feature, i.e. the mismatching temporality will then help us to get closer to describe what is fake in a fake ruin? We should welcome this aid, since just like the mere definition and description of fake ruins seemed quite straightforward and then turned to lead to much more complex issues, similarly the proper description of the fakeness of a fake ruin may bring the analyses to convoluted problems and intricate cross-references between art, architecture and aesthetics.

All the aforementioned three criteria – with their various grades of matching between a “classical” and a fake ruin – somehow merge and get ambiguously manifested in a curious feature that will then further complicate our issue and lead to the understanding of their fakeness: fake ruins are *always in a “perfect” shape*. As we saw above, a traditional ruin has a certain lifespan between not being a ruin yet, just a building in need of maintenance, but then, not lastly due to the loss of function, it starts its ruin-phase, till the point when so little is left that it is not a ruin anymore. Only between these points can we have aesthetically attractive ruins, before that it is a building in a bad shape, after that it is an amorphous pile of building material on the edge of disappearing (or being reduced to a level “below” perception, and especially of aesthetic appreciation, even if it still can be relevant for example for archaeologists or architecture historians). This was also analysed by Alois Riegl in his seminal 1903 text titled *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin* (Riegl 1982), as well as a few years later (1907) by Georg Simmel, in a bit more outspoken and unreserved way: “[...] the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains of it to let us feel the upward-leading tendency. The stumps of the pillars of the Forum Romanum are simply ugly and nothing else, while a pillar crumbled – say, halfway down – can generate a maximum of charm” (Simmel 1959: 265). Also from this we can thus see that although this phase of being a ruin, i.e. its lifespan can last several centuries or even millennia, there is a state in its decay when it is the most pleasant “as a ruin”, e.g. when the proportion between the still-standing and the already-disappeared seems “ideal”. Not surprisingly this what becomes the most often associated with the most commonly diffused idea of ruins, mainly deriving from and strongly influenced by the 18th and 19th century Romantic imaginary and pictorial world, and what is most typically represented even when depicting imaginary ruins

whether in “high art” works or popular pieces, fantasy novels, fairy tales, children films or even horror movies.

### 5. *Keeping the ideal form*

It is exactly regarding this point where we arrive to the first form and manifestation of “fakeness” of a fake ruin: not only that they are created in such a form that is the closest possible to this ideal phase and ideal appearance of the ruin, but, more importantly, that they *stay* in this form. They are thus deep-frozen in an aesthetically pleasant though impossible temporal structure and condition, because – as long as fake ruins are properly maintained, just like any other construction needs to be – they are “ruins” taken out of time. They are extra-temporal, time is not passing by them, or, better to say, its passing them by seems to be leaving no marks on the “body” of the work of art. Needless to say then that this “lack of lack”, the *not-increasing* of the lacuna, i.e. the fact that it is not continuously growing, but the proportion of still standing and missing parts is constant will be what completely contradicts the key essence of a classical ruin, of which mass of matter is incessantly shaped or sculpted by Nature over time, i.e. taking away pieces as long as there is any material left to be taken away.

Naturally, one could object to the above claim that this “deep-freezing” of a certain state of a ruin can easily happen not only to fake ruins, but also to traditional ones, for example as a result of conservation, when an important, partly survived monument is decided to be kept in the form as it had survived to us, i.e. neither to be erased, nor to be rebuilt, just maintained in the state as it is – or perhaps with minimal intervention to make it safe for tourists to visit etc. True, but in that case the original ruin (before the conservation) nevertheless did and still does have the huge amount of time incorporated in it, that resulted in its decayed (though for the moment conserved) form. But a fake ruin skips these centuries or millennia, arrives directly to the ruined phase and form in the moment of its creation, and then it is kept in this “ideal” appearance. In this sense it could be considered as a clear example of forgery, like a fraudulent painting, where the forger did everything possible to make the picture look like an old one, often with the application of special chemical treatments and physical techniques to obtain the signs of the time passed, including for example the fading colours or craquelure on the surface of the painting – thus attempting



to speed up the (passing of) time in an artificial way to arrive to the visual effect and the possible added quality of looking (like) old. Comparing with ruins, an analogy to this forging technique, known from the world of fine art works, could be when actual, genuinely old architectural fragments are built into a fake ruin to make it look more “authentic”, almost like “fermenting” the new building materials with the older ones. A typical and well-known example of this process could be Virginia Water in Surrey, where real pieces from the Ancient city of Leptis Magna in Libya were transported and then re-used to create a picturesque ensemble (Thomas 2003).

## 6. *Aesthetics and deception*

Despite this – or, perhaps exactly because of this, among of course some other reasons – fake ruins continue to attract, even if there are multiple further “twists” that can explain the otherwise confusing valuation and confused appreciation of them. One of these is what may also remind us of Alfred Lessing’s analyses on the aesthetic concerns related forgeries. In his 1965 article titled *What is Wrong with a Forgery?* he was focusing on classical cases of forgeries, i.e. of modern paintings made to look like older ones – his case study was Han van Meegeren’s forged Vermeers – nevertheless, fake ruins can also be an illustration of his affirmation that aesthetic value is not necessarily connected to authenticity: if an object arouses aesthetic pleasure, then even if later it turns to be a forgery, the object itself remains the same regarding those very aspects and features based on which it was highly appreciated aesthetically. Hence it might be at first hard to explain what and why should it lose from its aesthetic values when the fact of fakeness is confirmed. In Lessing’s words: “The plain fact is that aesthetically it makes no difference whether a work of art is authentic or a forgery [...]. The fact of forgery is important historically, biographically, perhaps legally, or, as the van Meegeren case proved, financially; but not, strictly speaking, aesthetically” (Lessing 2002: 90 and 98). Naturally Lessing does not claim that forgeries are acceptable, only that it is not the aesthetic value of the object that is harmed: the fake’s flaw will be more definable with the lack of originality.

In this regard, and, *mutatis mutandis*, shifting from fake artworks to fake ruins, we can find a similar argumentation – and thus an argumentation with similar results – by Saul Fisher: “I propose that the

premium on authenticity traditionally attributed to our *aesthetic* appreciation and judgement of ruins is overlaid an unnecessary, even if frequently of value to engagement with ruins relative to their *historical* status and role. [...] There is no principled reason to take sham ruins as offering different or fewer sorts of aesthetic value than do actual ruins; the authenticity premium is thereby eliminated” (italics in the original, Fisher 2020: 109).

Even if the above considerations can help us in analysing some very important aspects of fake ruins – especially in understanding that aesthetic effect and “efficiency” are not necessarily connected to the genuineness of the construction – there are two further aspects that arise here, when fake ruins are compared to fake artworks. These will, on the one hand, seemingly “weaken” the above comparison, while on the other hand help us further in understanding the speciality of fake ruins and speciality of their fakeness too.

### *7. The known fake and the status of the artwork*

One of these aspects that we need to be aware of is that fake ruins are not “real” fakes or “true” fakes – we could perhaps even say: not “genuine” fakes – just to use these inspiring oxymorons, since they are *known to be fakes*, and most probably nobody would seriously think even for a moment that they were real, despite the aforementioned instances of trying to “ferment” their authenticity by embedding original parts. It is thus a conscious acceptance of being deceived, hence not only a work created with the deliberate intention of deceiving, but the observer who enjoys it during her encounter and aesthetic experience knows, what’s more, deliberately chooses and accepts of being deceived. Hence the case is a bit similar to what Carolyn Korsmeyer stated about replications: “Straightforward replications, however, are invitations to imagine rather than attempts to cheat. They raise their own puzzles, about encounters with the past” (Korsmeyer 2019: 70). What’s more, this also explains why we can call them fake ruins – following Nan Stalnaker’s usage of terms, according to which distinction a “fake” is a non-deceptive copy, while a “forgery” is one intended to deceive (Stalnaker 2013: 462). In this sense fake ruins are non-deceptive – of course, they are deceptive in the sense that they want to make the observer arrive to the same considerations and feelings as a classical ruin, but only through the superficial and formal elements of imitation,

and it would surely be an unfruitful attempt to try to seriously deceive the visitor and assume that she can consider the fake ruins authentic.

The other aspect to be mentioned with regard to both the above comparison with forged artworks and to the fakeness of a fake ruin that makes the question even more convoluted is the confusing status of the fake ruin as an artwork. Here I am again referring to various questions, one of which is the difficulties in its categorisation, i.e. whether it is a piece of architecture, or rather a kind of monumental sculptural work, or a “garden sculpture” or “decorative element” (McCormick 1999: 23) or – if it did not sound anachronistic – an installation? Naturally most of us would consider them pieces of architecture, not only because of their material, form, size, and not even because many of these were designed by trained architects, but naturally because they refer to the derelict states of *actual* pieces of architecture, i.e. to real ruins and natural decay, a common and commonly shared experience of us all. The fakeness here is however naturally again in the way of the creation: unlike a classical ruin that is continuously degrading, fake ruins were built. Hence a physical and artistic “countertendency” is what dominates their very essence and appearance: the act of construction will result in a view of deconstruction, and in this way, knowing the mode of their being created interferes with, contradicts to or even impedes the image they pretend to emanate.

Besides there is another curious fact with an important impact – and that will bring us back again to the above discussions – that although naturally it is considered an artwork, but it lacks one of the famous, and aforementioned particularities of an artwork: a fake ruin cannot be faked and forged. It cannot be made a fake, since it is already a fake. Just imagine what would be the case of forgery of a fake ruin? A fake-fake-ruin? If a fake ruin is a fake, would that mean that it is “real”? Or would it signify an “unsuccessful” or “not-working” fake ruin? I do not think these would make too much sense.

At the same time – and this again a particularity that connects our interpretation of fake ruins to the analyses of them being artworks and fakes – it is also curious to observe how the concept of completion and completeness can be applied to them. We saw that in the case of a traditional ruin it is never completed, because – if it is left for Nature’s gradual interaction – the decay never stops, unless it is conserved in a chosen state and moment. On the other hand, traditionally an artwork is completed or finished at a certain point by its creator: a sculptor finishes chiselling or adding clay, a painter makes the last brushstroke

etc. Compared to these two classical cases, that of traditional ruins and artworks, fake ruins are again somewhere in-between regarding their completeness. Naturally they are completed – in the sense of, for example, being finished at a definite time, the builders having followed the design of the architect, who planned them to look incomplete. In other words, they arrive to completion when they look the most incomplete. But can there be any mistakes in this very incompleteness, i.e. can their primary visual effect and the source of their aesthetic functioning be somehow incomplete?

### *8. Mistakes and fake ruins*

Naturally, this will also influence the possibilities of mistakes, what's more, the possible interpretation of the very concept of mistakes in relationship with fake ruins. Of course we cannot claim that there could not be any mistakes or errors in a fake ruin at all. What is possible however is that at the end not all of them are proper or "real" mistakes and some may even turn out to be in a way beneficial for the fake ruin's otherwise dubious purposes. For example let's consider a simple case of mistake: some pieces of the "building material" of the fake ruin is carelessly attached to the ensemble and as a consequence some elements of the construction fall to the ground. In the case of a building it would definitely be considered as a mistake and an error of the constructors or builders that harm the final aesthetic effect – and perhaps even the actual function – of the edifice. In the case of an artwork, for example a sculpture, again, such a technical mistake would influence the aesthetic appearance (and completeness too) of the work. However, in the case of a fake ruin, it would not necessarily be a proper mistake – what's more, it could even be justified with interpreting it as a manifestation and illustration of Nature's interaction in the construction, and some would definitely see it as a sign that contributes to the otherwise fake authenticity of the fake ruin. Having the fallen pieces of the fake ruin next to its walls, some may not even notice they were fallen due to bad construction, but would perceive it as part of the deception. In this way, the mistake would, paradoxically, convert to an (aesthetic) value, and the visitor would perhaps praise the designer and builder for their careful techniques of creating and augmenting the illusion.

On the other hand – continuing our example from above – of course, if the entire construction of the fake ruin suddenly crumbles due to

improper design, low-quality materials and careless execution, then it can be a more classical example of proper mistake. It will be a mistake, since in case all (or practically all) of the fake ruin falls, it loses its effect, better to say, it loses its possibility to create an aesthetic effect. Hence the mistake will then be manifested in the fact that the fake ruin will – in such state – not be able to fulfil its effect. This is why Inger Sigrun Brodey is right when reminding us of the fragile equilibrium of these constructions: “The fake ruin inherently and precariously balances in avoidance of two anathematic extremes: on the one hand, it seeks the more natural appearance, avoiding order, balance, and harmony, whether neoclassical, Palladian, or baroque in style; on the other hand, it must also rely upon traditional balance and order to avoid complete ruination” (Brodey 2008: 79).

Curiously however, this form of mistake will help us come back to a more major mistake connected to the phenomenon of fake ruins. In the last example, the suddenly falling fake ruin fails to achieve its effect, since as a form of crumbled and amorphous building material it cannot even pretend to evoke classical ruination. Therefore, the pile of crushed matter is useless, as it cannot fulfil not only its effect, but even its *purpose*. And exactly here, with this word “purpose” we can point to a major mistake in the very idea behind creating fake ruins in general: the intention of providing them with an actual purpose, a function, an (ideological or aesthetic) scope. As we saw in the beginning of this paper, among the motivations of building a fake ruin we found various (aesthetics, social, cultural and even political) reasons, including references to Antiquity, to the transience of all human efforts, to nostalgia or melancholy. The problem is, of course, not that such ideas and emotions arise – any or many artworks trigger thoughts and feelings. The problem is in the very intentionality of arousing such sentiments. Since this calculated arousal of sentiments is what lies behind the construction of fake ruins, it contains the most important difference compared to a classical ruin: the latter may trigger similar (or even the same) sort of feelings, but they do it “on their own”, and not with a pre-meditated intention that makes the efforts of the commissioners and designers of fake ruins almost “propagandistic”.

### 9. *Function vs. functionlessness*

Fake ruins are thus fake because – just like any other forms of faked and forged art – they miss something essential from the original, something they cannot imitate convincingly. The original in this sense would be naturally the classical, traditional ruin that (and the effect of which) the fake one tries to imitate. Of course, what is mistaken in the fake ruin's imitation is not something formal or superficial – these can be copied quite convincingly – but is exactly regarding the functionlessness and purposelessness of a classical ruin. In other words, we saw in the beginning of the paper, classical ruins are functionless, and as long as they can be used for any practical purpose, they cannot be considered a proper ruin. When comparing this criterion of the classical ruins to the fake ones, I anticipated that this aspect is only “partly matching”, and here is finally the reason why: fake ruins are, in this way explicitly purposeful: their function *is* to trigger and strengthen melancholic feelings through superficial references to a classical ruin that does truly incorporate the centuries that made it look like that. In this way, fake ruins are attempts of “shortcuts to nostalgia”, as I described the phenomenon in an earlier text, i.e. ambiguous ventures of shortening or even cutting out the required time of the dereliction, in order to arrive to a form that can artificially evoke nostalgia in the visitor (Somhegyi 2018).

With all this we have arrived to a better understanding of the fakeness and also the mistake of a fake ruin: it fails to efficiently refer back to classical ruination and its aesthetic effect, not because there are formal differences (these can be minimised, it is only subject to the designer's skills), and not even only because it actually lacks the time it pretends to incorporate (that would be required to really arrive to this ruination), but because the evident intentionality manifested in their existence, that contradicts the functionlessness and purposelessness of classical ruins.

### 10. *The ultimate failure*

Towards the end of our considerations, however, we can find another, final twist regarding fake ruins, that on the one hand provides us with a further evidence how convoluted the phenomenon of fake ruins are and on the other hand explains my title (“From mistaking fakeness to

mistake in fakeness”): the ultimate failure of fake ruins consists in the fact that fake ruins can have the ability to turn into real ones. In this regard they are perhaps unique in the world of art, where fakes and forgeries are usually unable to acquire the status of genuineness. Many of the artificial ruins date back to two or three centuries and often this time can (or at least starts to) be sufficient to make them not only look like real ruins – provided that they are not taken care of – but to convincingly and justly evoke similar aesthetic effects. In case this happens, they not only refer to the passing of time through their intentionally ruinous forms, but they really start to be (further) shaped by the elements of Nature, hence parallel to this natural tendency and as a consequence of it, they start to gradually change their aesthetic status and category. As an actual example of this we can remember Désert de Retz in France, built between 1774 and 1789 by François Nicolas Henri Racine de Monville. As Susan Stewart described its ambiguous state: “Between the 1700s and the 1980s, the Désert survived in an increasingly neglected state: an artificial ruin became an actual ruin. Its restoration still incomplete, today it stands somewhere between the states of authentic and artificial ruin, remaining in quandariness as a challenge to ‘authentic’ restoration” (Stewart 2020: 224-5).

Based on all the above, we can say that the ultimate failure of fake ruins thus consist in the fact that – beyond the original intention of their builders – fake ruins fail to remain fakes, and start to be real ones. Over this last mistake of not being able to remain what they were (supposed to be), they may really begin to become what they were (originally) only pretending. This will then also alter the way we can describe them: from a *mistaking fakeness* – i.e. when they attempt to deceive the visitor with and through their fakeness – to a *mistake in fakeness* – hence when their fakeness contains a mistake, and so they fail in their fakeness. This time however, the mistake may be a positive one, leading to a pleasant deception that will open the way for the exciting fate of the fake to slowly become not only (seemingly) authentic, but even genuine.

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