

The aesthetic experience of ruins*

LINDA E. PATRIK

Union College, Schenectady

1. Introduction

In this paper I analyze the aesthetic experience of ruins phenomenologically for the purpose of discovering how ruined works of art can be experienced with aesthetic pleasure. The analysis makes use of Husserl's discussion in *Ideas I* of the founded noetic strata (*fundierte Noesen*) that modify acts of consciousness and contribute noematic meaning to objects of consciousness.¹ These noetic strata build upon one another in hierarchical formations, such that higher level noetic strata overlay the lower level noeses upon which the higher are founded. The need for phenomenology to elucidate the hierarchies amongst founded noetic strata is emphasized by Husserl, but Husserl himself concentrates primarily on the founded noetic strata of doxic modalities in *Ideas I* and only briefly discusses affective, evaluative, and volitional noeses as other kinds of founded noetic strata.

Because founded noetic strata all have the basic structure of intentionality, they are correlative to noematic characteristics, which group around and qualify the noematic core, thereby articulating the intentional object with additional meanings. According to Husserl, specific noematic characteristics are "posited" even by the non-doxic affective, evaluative, and volitional noetic strata.² Just as doxic modalities constitute the intentional object with a certain reality status, or being-characteristic, so, too, affective noetic strata constitute it as touching one's emotions in certain ways, evaluative noetic strata constitute it as bearing certain values, and volitional noetic strata constitute it as desired or otherwise ranked within one's range of desires or repulsions.

* I would like to thank David Michael Levin for his earlier guidance on this topic.

Such founded noetic strata generally characterize aesthetic experience, enriching basic noeses of perception, memory, or imagination, and transforming these basic noeses into more complex acts of consciousness. Correlatively, because of its founded noematic characteristics, the intentional object is constituted not merely as a mundane object, but as an aesthetic object – as an object that seems valuable or emotionally charged.

In the following paper, I unpack and elucidate the founded noetic strata within the aesthetic experience of ruins, including ruined works of art. On the basis of this analysis I argue that the ruins of artworks are not necessarily non-art, because in many cases these ruins not only retain aesthetic value but also present the being of artworks in a way that makes their historicity clear. My argument in this paper is directed against the standard aesthetic position on ruins, which treats the ruination of art as negative in aesthetic value. This standard position is represented by Roman Ingarden's claim that when we view ruined works of art, we must ignore their ruination in order to appreciate them aesthetically.³ Instead, a careful analysis of the aesthetic experience of ruins shows that this experience actually includes awareness of their ruination, but because ruination is transvalued in the experience, it does not need to be ignored in order to have an aesthetically positive experience. Further analysis of the historicity of artworks provides a basis for the claim that the ruination of an artwork does not necessarily destroy it as art; a ruin is not merely a gravemarker for a work of art that is past and gone – it is the very same artwork that the artist created, in its authentically historical nature.

2. Phenomenological analysis of the pleasure of ruins

2.1 The puzzling pleasure of ruins

Many art lovers seek out the ruins of ancient sculpture, architecture, and other artworks. Preferring a crumbling ruin to a modern skyscraper, a fading fresco to a spanking new painting, they experience such ruins as aesthetic objects despite the incompleteness, fragmentation, disorder, roughness and other features that commonly characterize ruins. Even though the ruins of artworks often bear little resemblance to the original forms of these artworks, people still take pleasure in the ruins

for a number of different reasons, many of them aesthetic. Some observers study the change of artistic styles down through the ages, some imagine the original forms of the artworks, some contemplate the ravages of time, some speculate on the future ruined condition of present-day cities and artworks, and some watch nature reclaim its materials. Still other reasons for the pleasure of ruins can be found in ruin poetry and painting from the last few centuries. Although the reasons for it vary widely, the pleasure itself seems to be a common enough phenomenon. In cases where the pleasure arises in an experience that is closely attentive to a ruin's perceptual features, we can speak of the aesthetic pleasure taken in ruins.

Further evidence for the aesthetic significance of ruined artworks is that some of the world's best art museums contain ruins in their collections. For example, the Metropolitan Museum in New York built an expensive new wing to house the ruined Egyptian temple of Dendur. In its grand setting this rather small temple appears every bit a work of art. Art museums such as the Met give no indication that ruined, ancient artworks are not really art. Instead the ruins are catalogued, guarded, photographed, and bought and sold as equal members in the museum collection. Whether located at an archaeological site or in an art museum, ruined works of art receive the same protection and care as that given to new works of art. All of this suggests that the artworld recognizes ruins as aesthetic objects and maintains them in the conditions appropriate for aesthetic experience.

The aesthetic fascination for ruins seems odd, however, since we usually criticize any unauthorized alteration of an artist's original creation. And to be sure, ruination (whether due to natural or human forces) radically alters the original forms and properties of artworks. Ruination destroys many of the artwork's parts, thereby damaging the work's original unity and the harmony of its parts. Ruination often reduces to fragments what remains of the original form and perhaps even scatters these fragments, near and far, thereby disintegrating the work's coherence. Ruination also introduces new properties into the work — for example, vegetation, encrustation, staining, roughness — which alter the visual properties of the work's surface and the visual relationship between the work and its surroundings. Finally, ruination often incapacitates an artwork for performing its intended cultural function: fallen temples no longer protect sacred rites or relics, eroded stone inscriptions no longer communicate their original messages,

statues with broken features no longer portray clearly the deities, people, or scenes they once captured.

Were it not for the pleasure of ruins, the ruination of works of art would pose no distinctive problems for aesthetic theory. For in the absence of such pleasure, ruination could be analyzed as just another instance of change which is experienced, purely and simply, as negative in value. If ruins did not please, they would be nothing more than reminders of value past and gone. But because there is a certain pleasure taken in ruins, especially in the ruins of works of art, aesthetic theory is faced with the problem of accounting for the positive response of pleasure arising in an experience which, offhand, should be one of displeasure – namely, the experience of an object so altered by ruination that it no longer looks like the artist's original creation.

This pleasure of ruins is a perplexing one. It seems far removed from the simpler and more immediate pleasures which arise through the satisfaction of basic human needs or from those rarer pleasures found on the bright side of life. To take pleasure in ruins *as* ruins, one must be aware of the deterioration or damage they have suffered. This requires a sensitivity on our part, by which we can recognize their deterioration or damage without being, or remaining, pained by it. Any experience which derives pleasure from pain or from sources that usually cause pain involves complicated noetic modalities that are not found in most pleasurable experiences.

Even those pleasures which seem closest to the pleasure of ruins – namely the pleasures taken in outright destruction and in natural decay – differ from it in their moods and occasions. The pleasure of ruins is not a pleasure felt while in the midst of destruction or in the wear and tear of everyday life, but is a response of quieter moments, undisturbed by alarm or practical concerns. In this sense, it differs from the more exuberant pleasure taken in outright destruction (for example, a child's joy in smashing sand castles or the thrill of demolishing a condemned building). Yet even though ruin pleasure has a certain meditative stillness, this stillness is more like a hush that is charged with tension than like an undisturbed calm. For ruination is a disconcerting phenomenon, which does not inspire the same tempered reflection that natural decay often does. Ancient Greek tomb-reliefs, Chinese poems on autumn, Dutch still-life paintings of the remnants of meals – all express a pathos of decay that is subdued by a reverence for nature's recurring cycles; these artistic reflections on nature in decay have a cool tranquillity,

which seems characteristic of even our own non-artistic contemplation of natural decay. But the experience of ruins does not lull us into a repose of cosmic harmony, for it includes the upsetting recognition of damage inflicted or of deterioration that cannot be stopped, and of an existence sustained only at the price of its downfall and disfigurement. Thus the pleasure of ruins seems to arise out of an odd mixture of horror at the devastation undergone and of respect for the endurance upheld. This mixture of horror and respect in the pleasure of ruins differs from both the impetuous pleasure of outright destruction and the more serene pleasure of natural decay. Ruin pleasure is in a class all its own; it is, as Henry James once remarked, slightly perverse.⁴

2.2 *Founded noetic strata and correlative noematic characteristics in the experience of ruins*

This section focuses on how we constitute an object as a ruin, rather than as an unruined object. First, the hierarchically structured, founded noetic strata in the experience of ruins are analyzed, then the correlative noematic characteristics, and finally some of the constitutive characteristics of a ruin's historical nature. The subsequent section provides an analysis of the aesthetic experience of ruined works of art.

Generally speaking, some changes in an object are experienced as improvements (e.g., the cultivation of land, the creation of a piece of pottery out of a lump of clay, the simplification of a mathematical proof), and some changes are, most often, experienced as neutral with respect to value (e.g., the movement of the tides, the chemical reactions occurring in a laboratory test tube). Ruination, however, is not experienced as change that is positive or neutral in value for the object undergoing the change; instead ruination is essentially experienced as a process of change that is, in some way, negative for the object undergoing it. No process of change is experienced as ruination without the evaluation that the state of the object after undergoing the change is inferior in some way to the object's state prior to the change. Examples abound in everyday life: we speak of ruined parties, neckties ruined by gravy spills, ruined careers, and even ruined people. In all of these examples, the object is constituted with a complex noematic meaning that is correlated to at least two essential noetic moments: a presumption that the object has undergone change and an evaluation that the object is worse for the change.

In terms of Husserl's theory, the experience of ruins is a complex noesis that includes both of these noetic moments (the presumption of change and the negative evaluation of the change). These are not temporally distinct noeses, but are founded noetic strata contained in the same intensive mental process. Such founded noetic strata build upon one another in hierarchical formations (*Schichtungen*),⁵ and they are all ultimately founded upon the basic underlying noesis that gives the object — that is, upon the objectivating noesis — usually perception, memory, or imagination.⁶ Also underlying higher level founded noetic strata is the doxic stratum that posits the object with a certain reality status, or being-characteristic.⁷

The presumption that the object has undergone change is a secondary doxic stratum that is founded upon the doxic primal positing of the object. The secondary doxic stratum will be conditioned by the primal doxic stratum in the sense that if the latter constitutes the object as a real physical thing, then the secondary doxic stratum will constitute the object as an altered, real physical thing. If the primal positing is of the object as a fictional thing (e.g., a ruin in a science fiction story), the secondary doxic positing will constitute the object as if it has been altered by fictional forces (e.g., intergalactic radiation). The secondary doxic stratum is essentially a belief in the past alteration of the object, however that object is posited through the primal doxic stratum. This secondary doxic stratum is correlated to its own, additional being-characteristic in the full noema, namely, the noematic meaning of being an *altered* thing.

The experience of fake ruins, or follies — when these are actually recognized as fake — is an exception to this analysis of doxic strata. In such cases, the primal doxic stratum posits the object as a real physical thing, but there is no belief that the thing's apparent features are due to its past alteration. When one recognizes a folly for what it is, one does not believe in its past alteration in the same way that one believes that a ruin has been altered. If there are higher level doxic strata in the experience of follies, they would not be beliefs in the past alteration of the object, but beliefs that the object was created to give the illusion of ruination.

In the experience of an object as a real ruin, the evaluation by which the change undergone by the object is constituted as negative (rather than positive or neutral) change, is a noetic stratum founded upon both the primal and secondary doxic strata, since the evaluation is of the ob-

ject as altered. According to Husserl, the negative evaluation is also a “positing” (albeit a non-doxic positing) of a specific value-quality in the full noema.⁸ The value-quality posited is the negative one of damage or deterioration. Damage usually implies sudden alteration caused by external forces. Deterioration suggests more gradual change, not only due to external forces but also due to internal weakening. The difference between these two noematic meanings turns on the specific nature of the underlying doxic strata that constitute the object as altered: a presumption of sudden alteration founds the evaluation of the object as damaged, whereas a presumption of more gradual alteration founds an evaluation of the object as deteriorated.

Of course both presumptions, and thus both evaluations, are possible in the same intensive mental process, in those cases where the ruins are actually experienced as both damaged and deteriorated. For example, if one knows something of the Parthenon’s history, one experiences it as damaged due to the 1687 explosion of ammunition stored in it during a battle; yet one also experiences the Parthenon as deteriorated due to the centuries of weathering and, more recently, to the high levels of air pollution in Athens.

Husserl takes pains to distinguish value-qualities, such as damage and deterioration (positive examples would be improvement and strengthening), from the intended objects and the properties of the objects that are characterized by these value-qualities.⁹ Damage itself differs from the object that is damaged; the former is a value-quality, constituted through a founded evaluative stratum, and the latter is an object, given in the objectivating substratum, that bears that value-quality. (The same is true of deterioration.) The object comprises the noematic core; damage or deterioration is a noematic characteristic that is founded upon this core and the other underlying, noematic strata of being-characteristics.

What, then, is the ruin noema? Because of the noematic characteristics correlative to the founded doxic and evaluative strata in the experience of ruins, the full ruin noema is not a simple one. It, too, is a stratified whole (*Fundierungsganze*), comprising a noematic core and founded strata of various noematic characteristics.¹⁰ It is not merely a perceptual noema, for it is possible that an object could first be perceived without any awareness that it is a ruin, but then be perceived as a ruin in a later perception without any additional perceptual properties coming into view. For example, one might initially perceive a head

made out of marble as simply a sculpted head, complete in itself. Later, however, one recognizes it as a fragment broken off from a full-bodied statue. Only the latter experience is an experience of the marble head as a ruin, even though the intended object in both perceptions is the same – it is the head – and even though its modes of givenness are basically the same – the objectivating noeses in both intensive mental processes are perceptions. Yet still the marble head would be perceived differently in the two experiences.

In the second experience of the marble head, the being-characteristic of alteration and the value-quality of damage would qualify the edge of the neck and the head's overall proportions (even in cases where the full body of the statue is not presented or even known). The neck edge and the head's proportions would be seen as the same features in the two experiences, but yet they would have different meanings in the second experience: the neck edge is not merely an edge, but a break; the head's perceived proportions are not those it had originally when it was sculpted as part of a body. Even though the perceived features of the head are the same (and are seen to be the same) in both experiences, they are modified in the second experience by virtue of the effect that the negative evaluation of damage and the doxic belief of alteration have within the constitution of the full noema.

This is because when higher level strata overlay the lower level strata, not only are these higher strata added to the full noesis, but the lower strata are modified through the addition of these higher strata.¹¹ Correlatively, not only does the noema gain new noematic characteristics, which form higher strata within it, but the lower noematic strata are also modified through the higher level noematic characteristics. In his discussion of the relation between strata, Husserl argues that higher noetic strata can be added or removed without affecting the identity of the lower strata as a complete intensive mental process, but he notes that such additions and removals effect modifications in the lower strata.

Dabei sind die Schichtungen, allgemein gesprochen, so, dass oberste Schichten des Gesamtphänomens "fortfallen" können, ohne dass das Übrige aufhörte, ein konkret vollständiges intentionales Erlebnis zu sein (Hua III/1, 220).

In an important remark in one of his personal copies of *Ideen I*, Husserl

qualifies this statement by adding: “freilich bringt das zugleich eine Modifikation, trotz der Identität” (Hua III/2, 508). The text as printed by Husserl continues:

... und dass auch umgekehrt ein konkretes Erlebnis eine neue noetische Gesamtschicht annehmen kann; wie wenn z.B. sich auf eine konkrete Vorstellung ein unselbständiges Moment “Werten” aufschichtet, bzw. umgekehrt wieder fortfällt (Hua III/1, 220).

This again is worked out in greater detail in another personal copy where Husserl adds: “Doch gehen mit dem Wegfallen auch gewisse phänomenologische Modifikationen der Unterschicht vonstatten” (Hua III/2, 508).

In the two experiences of the marble head, the noema of the second experience basically includes the noematic content of the first experience, but overlays it with the noematic characteristics of alteration and damage in such a way that this content is modified. The noematic core and noematic characteristics constituted in the lower noematic strata – e.g., the head’s perceptual features – are taken up into the higher level noematic strata, where they are modified according to the noematic characteristics contributed by these higher level strata.

Wenn in dieser Art ein Wahrnehmen, Phantasieren, Urteilen u.dgl. eine es ganz überdeckende Schicht des Wertens fundiert, so haben wir in dem *Fundierungsganzen*, nach der höchsten Stufe bezeichnet als konkretes Wertungserlebnis, *verschiedene Noemata*, bzw. *Sinne*. Das Wahrgenommene als solches gehört, als Sinn, speziell zum Wahrnehmen, es geht aber in den Sinn des konkreten Wertens mit ein, *dessen* Sinn fundierend (Hua III/1, 220).

Thus the hierarchy of strata is cumulative in the sense that the higher strata are not merely added externally to the lower strata, but they absorb the lower strata. Thus the full noemata of the two experiences of the marble head differ from one another. The second experience of the head, which takes it as a ruin, includes the noema of the head as perceived, just as the first experience does; but this noema is filled out with additional noematic characteristics in the second experience so that a new, fuller noema is built upon the first noema while also still including it. Perhaps the most appropriate analogy for the ruin noema of

the second experience, in its relation to the head noema of the first experience, is not that of a body covered with many layers of clothing (i.e., externally added noematic strata), but a body grown larger from inside out.

In general, an object constituted as a ruin usually has certain distinctive noematic characteristics of its own: decomposition of form, corrosion of surfaces, actual or threatening collapse of structural features, as well as an overall time-worn appearance. All of these noematic characteristics are more specific instantiations of damage or deterioration that are founded on perceptual properties of the object. The perceptual properties – without changing as perceptual properties – are overlaid with the value-quality of damage or deterioration, so that these properties appear to be damage or deterioration of the object's form, surface, structural support, or overall appearance.

For example, by simply looking at the Parthenon one seems to see the incompleteness of its form, the roughness and discoloration of its surfaces, and the fragility of its structure without conscious awareness of having made any evaluations about its perceptual properties. These value-qualities of incompleteness, roughness, discoloration, and fragility are higher level noematic characteristics, founded upon the Parthenon's perceptual properties and upon its being (taken as) a real, altered object. As higher level noematic strata, these value-qualities contain the more primordial, dator characteristics in such way that the founded noematic strata seem inseparable from the underlying strata. In the case of the Parthenon, it is difficult to see it as anything but a ruin; it is difficult to see its columns and walls without immediately seeing these as broken, cracked, fallen, and so on. The case is similar to our usual, non-phenomenological positing of the real world: this doxic modality is not consciously performed but is part of almost every noesis in waking life. Similarly in the experience of the Parthenon and other ruins, the founded evaluative noeses constitutive of their incompleteness, fragmentation, roughness, etc. often occur without conscious performance.

The constitution of a ruin as an historical object involves yet higher level noetic strata. It, too, often occurs without conscious performance, although to pinpoint the exact historical period from which a ruin originated is a more conscious and more complex intensive mental process. (The latter has the structure of scientific archaeological knowledge.) The doxic stratum that constitutes the object as altered founds the minimal sense of historicity; an altered object has existed at least long

enough to have undergone change. A fuller sense of the object's historicity usually arises out of a global awareness of the object's time-worn appearance, out of a belief that the object is old, and out of more specific historical knowledge about past cultures and the kinds of objects produced in these cultures.

Time, of course, is not visible, nor is the duration of an object's existence. A time-worn appearance is a complex noematic sense, comprising perceptual properties qualified by the higher level noematic characteristic of antiquity. Even though perceptual properties and the noematic characteristic of antiquity are constituted at different noematic levels, they seem to merge together in the actual experience, because the higher level strata absorb the noematic content of the lower levels. Thus when a ruin is constituted as an ancient historical object, its perceptual properties will appear to be marks of its antiquity and thus be "historicized". For example, a statue with nicked surfaces, uneven coloring, and fading features seems to make its antiquity incarnate, in the same way that wrinkles in a face make age seem incarnate.

The noetic stratum constitutive of antiquity is a form of belief (which means that like all beliefs, it can be mistaken). It basically builds upon the doxic stratum positing the object as real, because it gives temporal span to the object's being-characteristic: the object is old, it has been real for a long time. The noematic characteristic of antiquity adds a fairly general reference to the past, so that its correlative noetic moment need not be a belief that pins down the object to a specific historical period. Instead, the belief in the object's antiquity is set within the subject's historical frame of reference; it places the object towards the earliest end of the subject's scale.

Also among the higher strata in the experience of the ruin's historicity are founded beliefs about past causes of the ruin's properties, both the original causes of the object and the subsequent causes of the damage or deterioration suffered by the object. The former posit the ruin as the remains of an original historical object, and the latter posit the ruin as altered by forces occurring during a certain stretch of history. These founded beliefs are related to the belief in the ruin's antiquity (analyzed above), but they fill in the bare temporal span of the ruin's endurance by positing causal relations between the ruin and the original object, and between the ruin and external forces. These founded strata are important because they constitute the ruin, not merely as old, but as historical — that is, as created, enduring and

changing within the course of events comprising human history. (The sun is old, but not historical in this sense.)

Recognizing a ruin as the remains of a certain kind of historical object (e.g., a Doric temple, a Stone Age tool) brings into play yet higher level noetic strata that presuppose historical knowledge of past cultures and the kinds of objects produced in these cultures. These strata may still be part of a complex, stratified experience of perception – the recognition occurs in seeing the ruin – but what they contribute to that perceptual experience is not immediate or perceptual, because it has been thought before, in the process of accumulating historical knowledge. In short, such recognition involves re-cognition, or memory grafted onto perception. These higher level strata, then, are founded upon the perception substratum in the experience, but they are related to remembering; they make the whole experience memory-laden with historical knowledge gained in the past.

Correlative to these higher level strata are, of course, noematic meanings that characterize the ruin as an historical object, articulating its features with temporal weight. Such general noematic meanings as antiquity, and such particular noematic meanings as Doric, may give rise to higher level value-qualities. For example, in Japan the items used in tea ceremony are prized if they are very old; their antiquity founds a positive value-quality. Or some people prefer the Doric style of ancient Greek statuary and architecture to the Ionian style; in their experience of a Doric temple, they would be likely to evaluate a Doric temple positively. These are all examples of higher level evaluations that may be based upon experiences of a ruin as a historical object. But because these examples show culturally relative evaluations (i.e., Japanese) or personal evaluations (i.e., preferring Doric to Ionian), they do not yet establish a general reason why ruins might be evaluated positively, nor do they show the essential structure of the aesthetic pleasure of ruins. This will be the task of the next section.

2.3 *Transvaluation in the aesthetic experience of ruins*

The preceding section analyzed the founded noetic strata and correlative noematic characteristics ingredient in any experience of an object as a ruin, and it sketched the strata in the experience of ruins as his-

torical. The problems in this section are, first, to analyze the aesthetic experience of ruins phenomenologically, and then, to account for the aesthetic pleasure taken in ruined artworks.

One might think the aesthetic experience of ruins impossible because any experience of ruins includes a negative evaluation and correlative value-quality of damage or deterioration. How can a damaged or deteriorated object be aesthetically valuable? But even more problematic is the case of ruined works of art. Aesthetic pleasure would seem out of the question in their case because of the high aesthetic value placed on the artist's original creation. Ruination clearly alters the artwork's original form, and relative to this highly valued original form, ruination is change for the worse. Whatever the ruined artwork's own present form is, it is experienced as a damaged or deteriorated version of the original, in any experience of the object as a ruin.

Yet there are many cases in which observers actually do take pleasure in ruins, even the ruins of works of art. This is not to say that all ruins are experienced aesthetically. (Remember the necktie ruined by gravy spills?) And not everyone experiences all ruined works of art with aesthetic pleasure. (Who took pleasure in the vandalism against Michelangelo's *Pietà*?) Further, there are cases in which one takes aesthetic pleasure in a radically altered object without ever, for a moment, recognizing it as a ruin. (Do we really notice that restored paintings are ruins?) But for those cases in which the object is recognized as a ruin and is still experienced with aesthetic pleasure, phenomenology needs to show how this pleasure is possible, by unpacking and describing the noetic and noematic strata within the experience.

The pleasure of ruins, like every aesthetic experience, includes multiple noetic strata. Insofar as an aesthetic experience includes recognition of the object as a ruin, the negative evaluative stratum analyzed in the preceding section is part of the full noesis. Yet, on the other hand, insofar as the experience is an aesthetic experience, the object is constituted with positive aesthetic value. This means that the negative evaluative stratum constitutive of the object as damaged or deteriorated would not be the *only* evaluative stratum in the noesis. Instead, there would be two (or more) evaluative strata, at different hierarchical levels in the full noesis: the first would be the negative evaluative stratum that constitutes the object as damaged or deteriorated; the second would be a higher level, aesthetic, evaluative stratum that supervenes upon the first in such a way that the object as damaged or deteriorated is transvalued

through the second. In other words, the positive aesthetic evaluation of the object evaluates the object *with* its damage or deterioration, constituting the object as an aesthetically valuable ruin.

Transvaluation occurs when an object's damage or deterioration is recognized, yet the object is evaluated positively. The clearest case is when an object's damage or deterioration is actually desired. In such a case, there is a positive evaluation of the damage done to the object, that presupposes the more primordial negative evaluation by which the changes produced in the object are actually constituted as damage, rather than as changes that enhance the object. The positive evaluation of the damage done to the object is a higher level evaluation, which in no way alters or cancels the lower level negative evaluation of the change undergone by the object. Examples of transvaluation include experiences in which one delights at the downfall of something or someone (e.g., a repressive moral code or a tyrant); experiences in which one believes creation can only occur out of the ashes of destruction (e.g., new growth out of the decaying leaves on forest floors, avant garde art's attacks against its predecessors, political revolution); and experiences in which one respects the inevitability of change (e.g., acceptance of ageing, awareness of the fleeting nature of things).

Such transvaluation does not occur in a temporally subsequent noesis, but is a higher level stratum within the same noesis as the negative evaluative stratum. It is not a re-evaluation in a temporal sense, as though there were two different experiences, each with its own evaluation, directed to the same object. Instead it is a transvaluation by which the lower level negative evaluation is comprehended by the higher level evaluation and subsists within it.

The positive aesthetic evaluation of ruins is a species of transvaluation; it overlays the negative evaluation constitutive of damage or deterioration, which is essential to constituting the object as a ruin, but it does not thereby cancel this negative evaluation. According to Husserl, in experiences with complex hierarchies of noetic strata, the entire intensive mental process is "designated according to the highest level within it."¹² Thus an experience with two different evaluative strata, the lower constitutive of the object as a ruin and the higher constitutive of the ruin as aesthetically valuable, would be designated aesthetic experience, according to its highest evaluative stratum.

What makes a higher level evaluation aesthetic is its close attention to the object, rather than to self-interest. (Kant called it disinterested

judgement.) Desire plays no role in the aesthetic experience of ruins, for aesthetic experience is an appreciative, rather than acquisitive, experience that spends its energy upon simply observing the object. (Desire to possess a ruin would be a separate, non-aesthetic experience – perhaps following upon aesthetic experience of the ruin, but distinct from it by virtue of desire's drive to have rather than to observe.) The higher level, aesthetic evaluation of ruins can, of course, be positive or negative; one could appreciate a ruin and linger over its ruined features, or one could find it aesthetically repellent. Positive aesthetic evaluation implies willingness to observe the object closely and at length – not because one seeks a practical use for the object (as an engineer would), and not because one examines the object as an example of some natural law (as a scientist would) – but simply because pure observation is an invigorating and pleasurable mode of consciousness. Ruins often draw out this mode of pure observation, so that observers become engrossed with all features of the ruins, including the very features that are, at a lower level, constituted as damage or deterioration.

The pleasure occurring in the ruin experience comprises positive affective noetic strata, that is, positive feelings about the ruin. These affective strata contribute to an overall positive, aesthetic evaluation of the object, because they motivate continuation of focus on the object (rather than a switch to a new object), so that there can be the close and lengthy observation characteristic of aesthetic experience. The affective strata in ruin experience come in a wide variety – for example, from light-hearted delight over the blossoming of flowers amongst the ruins, to deeper fascination for the vastness of human history. In all likelihood, which particular affective strata actually occur in an aesthetic experience of ruins would depend more upon the personality of the observer and upon the circumstances (e.g., sunny or cloudy day) than upon the ruin's own features. Nonetheless, whatever affective strata are part of the experience of ruins, if they are generally positive, evoking continued focus on the object, they are modalities of pleasure conducive to the positive aesthetic evaluation of ruins.

Analyzed from the side of the noema, the aesthetic experience of ruins includes a highly complex structure of noematic characteristics, which build upon one another in the same hierarchical fashion as the noetic strata do. The value-qualities constituted by the two evaluative noetic strata belong to different hierarchical levels in the full noema, but they are related to one another as founding and founded meanings.

The higher level, positive aesthetic value-quality builds upon the underlying, negative value-quality of damage or deterioration, in such a way that the latter determines the noematic content of the intentional object as it is meant and evaluated in the higher level evaluation. What the positive aesthetic value-quality applies to is the object as ruined – not the object stripped bare of the noematic characteristics contributed by the lower strata. As long as the object is constituted as a ruin, the value-quality of damage or deterioration remains in play in the full noema, without ever being cancelled by higher level value-qualities.

Because the positive aesthetic value-quality does not reverse the negative value-quality of damage or deterioration, but transvalues it, the perceptual features constituted as instances of damage or deterioration (e.g., roughness, fragmentation) are neither ignored nor re-constituted as non-damage. Instead they bear aesthetic value precisely in their noematic characterization as roughness, fragmentation, incompleteness, encrustation, etc. So, for example, the very features of the Parthenon that show its ruination most – broken columns, weather-worn surfaces and sculptural detail – become aesthetically relevant within an overall aesthetic experience of the Parthenon as sublime or picturesque. These two aesthetic values, analyzed closely in Eighteenth century aesthetic theory, are examples of higher level, positive aesthetic values that pertain to ruins.²³ They apply specifically to objects experienced in their roughness, incompleteness, wildness, etc., rather than to the kind of objects that would, in other experiences, be characterized as beautiful because of a different set of features (e.g., unity, harmony, gracefulness, elegance, etc.).

Thus the Parthenon's ruined features actually add to its sublimity. In phenomenological terms, these ruined features found the aesthetic value-quality of sublimity, which is a higher level noematic characteristic that needs to be based upon certain kinds of perceptual features, rarely found in new works of art. At a lower noetic level, these perceptual features are negatively evaluated as damage, but at a higher level (where they still retain their meaning of damage), they are transvalued positively as sublime.

2.4 *What are the reasons for the aesthetic pleasure of ruins?*

Without giving a causal explanation of ruin pleasure (which would, in any case, fall outside phenomenology), one could still identify a couple

basic reasons for the positive transvaluation of ruins. In the aesthetic experience of ruins, the transvaluation is usually not motivated by a desire that the object be ruined. Instead many observers wish that the object were somehow still in its original state, with created aesthetic form and cultural meaning intact. But this wish for permanence of material things founders on nostalgia, disappointed whenever it becomes more than mere wishful thinking. For most observers, the wish recedes in favor of the consolation that whatever remains from the original is better than nothing. Lacking the whole, one appreciates the surviving parts. This respect for the remains does not, however, exhaust the motivation for the positive aesthetic evaluation of ruins, primarily because such respect concerns a specific object, or at most, a specific ancient culture. If one appreciates ruins only as the remains of some specific object or historical culture, one will care for the remains only if one cares about the original object or culture.

In a deeper and more comprehensive way, the appreciation of ruins issues from one's feelings about mortality, nature, and transitory human accomplishments — these are matters of concern for almost anyone. Ruins inspire contemplation of the bigger issues of life. They often represent some of the greatest artistic, political, scientific, or philosophical achievements of past peoples, who attempted to make something meaningful and lasting before they died. A sense of similar drive, but different direction, often lurks in comparisons drawn between what they did and what we moderns have done and planned. And I think we wonder more about the variety of cultural paths actually taken by people when we see the ruins that mark these paths, than we would if we should see sparkling new objects and monuments — markers of paths barely started.

Ruins also indicate the forces that oppose the endurance of anything human: nature, time, even unfriendly others who make the wheels of history turn so violently. And ruins do so in a way that shows the difference between human accomplishments and natural things. When natural things decay, nature recoups their loss by a new cycle of generation following upon the decay: new plants grow out of rotting logs in the forest, young animals grow from the nourishment they draw from other dead animals and plants. The different species endure by virtue of the natural cycles that make generation dependent upon the death and decay of each member of these species. But the endurance of human accomplishments is of a different order, far more fragile than

the endurance of natural species, because nature does not recoup the loss of what people create in their cultures. There is no natural cycle that raises a new building from a ruined one. Lacking reproduction, the Parthenon is truly going out of existence, so that its present state of ruination foreshadows a more decisive ending, both for the Parthenon itself and for the Greek culture it represents, than does the decay of any natural thing.

This difference between the ruination of human products and the decay of natural things seems sharper the more unique the human products are. Among the things we find most unique in the world are works of art. This is not surprising, since artworks fall outside the constraints of natural species and the strict utility of tools. Artworks are freely constructed according to the artists' purposes and inspiration, rather than propagated and grown in conformity with species distinctions and gene patterns, or manufactured according to design specifications for the most efficient tools to serve specific functions. Ruination intensifies our sense of artworks' uniqueness by removing them slowly from the earth, giving us time to think about what they have meant over the centuries, about our ignorance of much of their meaning, and about the impossibility of creating them again, exactly as they once were, with the meaning they once had.

In this way, ruination discloses the historicity of artworks as well as their uniqueness, because ruination prompts us to consider the centuries through which the artwork has endured, as well as the epoch in which it was originally created. On this basis, we recognize that not only were artworks unique when created, but each was uniquely affected by (and effective in) subsequent history. If an artwork is unique, it is not only dissimilar to all other objects that existed before it, but its meaning at one time, in one culture, is dissimilar to its meaning at other times, in other cultures; thus it becomes, in a very complex sense, dissimilar to itself. This is because a unique object has no pattern or standard to which it must conform; consequently, it may lose some of its original meaning or take on new meaning without occasioning the imposition of some corrective to bring its meaning back in line with a standard or pattern. Thus it is a fact that all works of art lose some of their original cultural meanings, yet gain new cultural meanings, as they endure through time. For example, an ancient statue that once meant the presence of a deity now means Greek humanism; the statue was once concealed within the inner recesses of a temple, accessible only to

ministrants, whereas now it stands in a public museum, accessible to any child or adult who pays the price of admission.

Ruination primarily means the physical changes in an artwork's material form, but in a very broad sense, ruination includes the alterations in an artwork's meaning as well. All visual arts are subject to ruination in both the narrower and broader sense. Music and the literary arts may also be subject to ruination in the strict sense, for example when the scores or texts are preserved only in fragments, or when we do not know exactly which musical notes are meant by the original notation, which musical instruments were intended to perform a piece, or how to translate the writings or hieroglyphs of lost languages. In any case, even these non-visual arts are always still subject to ruination in the broader sense of the alteration of their meanings through history. Thus the only artworks that escape ruination would be those that disappear completely from earth in the very act of their creation or in a relatively short time afterwards (that is, short compared to human history). This means that ruination is inevitable for all enduring works of art.

If no lasting artwork escapes ruination, it would be very restrictive to claim that only non-ruined artworks are art. We would be forced to expurgate some of our best art museums, casting out the Rembrandts with darkened colors, the Michelangelos with worn surfaces — not to mention the ancient Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese works. Instead, it makes more sense to recognize that an artwork is not an unchangeable object, but a protean, historical one, which alters in physical form or meaning over time. Static objects are neither affected by, nor dynamic in, history; they persist, frozen, in physical form and meaning. Artworks do not seem static at all: they course through history, taking on new significance in the interpretations given them by different cultures, and they change slowly or suddenly in their physical forms without necessarily losing the attention given them by people of different epochs.

Further, ruins bring out the essential historicity of art in a way that new artworks probably cannot. Ruination not only makes concrete and visible some of the effects of historical events upon artworks, but it also discloses certain essential facts about all art's relation to human history. For example, if an artwork has been damaged during wars or revolutions, its ruination not only provides evidence of the historical events in those times, but it comes to symbolize the violent extremes that occur

all too often in human history. Considered aesthetically (that is, in deep and lengthy observation), the ruined artwork discloses all art's susceptibility to human destruction and all art's dependence upon peace for survival. If an artwork has been transported from its original site (consider the Egyptian obelisks shipped by Napoleon to Paris or the Elgin marbles now in London) then that, too, is an historical event, which dislocates the artwork culturally as well as physically. In its new context the artwork has a radically altered cultural meaning – one not even known or planned for by the original artist. Considered aesthetically, a ruined artwork of this kind exemplifies all art's ability to transcend the limits of its original culture (an ability that has also been called the universal appeal of art) so as to address other people in very different historical situations.

In sum, ruination does not merely alter artworks; nor does it necessarily destroy them as art. When experienced aesthetically it reveals historicity as essential to all art. By revealing something essential about art, ruination actually contributes to the artwork's aesthetic nature by bringing out a deep universal meaning – the historicity of all art – from the artwork's own particular case. Ruination makes clear what is less obvious in most new works of art – art's historicity – and makes an individual artwork into a reflection upon all art. Because art strives for universality, depth, and a kind of reflexivity, insofar as a ruined artwork continues to deliver these goals, a ruined artwork continues to be art.

3. Critique of Ingarden's position on the aesthetic experience of ruined works of art

Ingarden is one of the few aestheticians who have addressed the problems of art's ruination and of how we experience ruined works of art, but he denies any pleasure of ruins. In essence, Ingarden sees ruination as detracting from the aesthetic value of works of art; he argues that one must disregard the damage or deterioration suffered by a ruined work of art in order to have an aesthetic experience of the work. In this section I refute Ingarden with the argument that the aesthetic experience of ruins includes the recognition of damage or deterioration – it does not remain blind to it. For example, when viewing the Parthenon aesthetically, one does not simply ignore the damage suffered by the

building and pretend to see this work as it was originally. Instead, one sees its damage and still appreciates it aesthetically.

Taking the Venus de Milo as his example, Ingarden insists that certain features of the statue which are due to its ruination (e.g., the dark stain on the nose, the rough spots and cavities on the breast) hinder the aesthetic experience of the statue and, consequently, should be overlooked. He maintains that these ruined features “shock” us and “... introduce a disharmonious factor into the field of what is in perception given to us ... [thereby bringing] discordance into the totality of the aesthetic object.”¹⁴ According to Ingarden, since aesthetic experience seeks the maximum aesthetic value possible in an object, the neglect of such features would further the aim of aesthetic experience. Ingarden even goes so far as to say that we must not only overlook the features of ruination in works of art, but we should also correct these features, that is, imaginatively restore them to their original condition. He describes the resulting aesthetic experience of the Venus de Milo as follows:

In an aesthetic experience, we overlook these particular qualities [e.g., stains, cavities] of the stone and behave as if we didn't see them; on the contrary, we behave as if we saw the shape of the nose uniformly colored, as if the surface of the breast were smooth, with the cavities filled up, with a regularly formed nipple (without the damage actually to be found in the stone), etc. We supplement “in thought,” or even in a peculiar perceptive representation, such details of the object as play a positive role in the attainment of the optimum of aesthetic “impression” possible in the given case.¹⁵

In general, Ingarden considers ruined works and their features to be aesthetically valuable *despite* their ruination, but never *with* their ruination. Ingarden's justification for overlooking, and for even improving, the ruined features of artworks lies in his belief that these ruined features lack positive aesthetic relevance. He allows that there might be certain features of works of art which can be ruined without affecting the aesthetic value of the works adversely. For example, Ingarden claims that the Venus' lack of arms does not hinder the aesthetic experience of the work or diminish its aesthetic value.¹⁶ Instead he feels that the Venus actually profits from the loss of her arms, for without

them, other aesthetically relevant features of the work become more prominent, e.g., the slenderness of the figure and the uniformity of the chest's silhouette. The Venus' loss of arms is "posterior damage" occurring after the completion of the work by the artist, but this loss does not detract from the aesthetic value of the statue, because it allows an unobstructed view of what remains of the original torso.

But notice that the Venus' lack of arms is not, in itself, aesthetically positive for Ingarden; it is only because the remaining torso has high aesthetic value that Ingarden extends positive aesthetic relevance to the absence of her arms. In short, Ingarden takes what remains of the original work of art as the standard by which its ruined features are to be judged. For Ingarden, the damage suffered by the work through ruination does not contribute to the work's aesthetic value; at most it can only expose the value which was there all along. Thus, to summarize Ingarden's position, he argues that in the aesthetic experience of a ruined artwork, one attends to what remains of the original; one does not attend to the damage or deterioration it has suffered through ruination; indeed one tries to ignore that it has been ruined.

Ingarden's position may make sense for the Venus de Milo and a few other, partially ruined works, but it is inadequate as a complete phenomenological description of the aesthetic experience of ruins, because it fails to account for the following points.

First, many aesthetic observers believe that they prefer viewing certain works of art in ruin than in their original condition. For example, they have a sense of aesthetic repulsion towards the gawdiness of color and profusion of sculptural ornamentation that adorned ancient Greek temples. In its heyday, the Parthenon was not the crisp, white monument that it is today, but instead it was ablaze with colors and cluttered with objects dedicated to the deity. Most aesthetic observers do not attempt to reconstruct such original features of the Parthenon in imagination, but rather they appreciate the bare marble, the view of sky through broken columns, and the simple elegance of the Parthenon in ruin. These ruin lovers do not ignore the Parthenon's ruined features, as Ingarden suggests – instead they transvalue these features in their aesthetic experience.

Further evidence of this aesthetic appreciation of ruins in their present, ruined state can be found in ruin poetry and painting (genres particularly popular in the 18th and 19th centuries). When artists paint or write about ruins, they do not ignore features of ruination or portray

these structures in their original condition. On the contrary, these artists relish the details of ruination and evoke a powerful aesthetic response from their audience by emphasizing the effects of ruination on artworks. Ingarden's theory does not account for the aesthetic experience of ruins in which one attends to features that were never features of the original artwork, specifically, the features caused by ruination.

Second, certain ruins (e.g., fortresses, dungeons, and other structures originally built for utility) are now appreciated aesthetically, even though they were not works of art in their original state. Because of their ruination, they have lost their utility, but they have gained new qualities that can be experienced as aesthetically relevant. Even the perceived effects of ruination that damage the original form of the structure most — e.g., fragmentation, incompleteness, encrustation, overgrowth, and fallenness — can be aesthetically relevant when viewed in terms of the aesthetic concepts of the sublime or the picturesque. A ruin appears sublime when the vast expanse of time or the vast power of nature's processes of decay are called to mind by its very ruination. When a ruin appears to be in the process of returning to nature, merging more and more with the natural landscape, it appears picturesque. No matter that the ruin was not originally a work of art; its original function and aesthetic value are less relevant than the sublimity or picturesqueness gained through its ruination.

Because ruination can transform functional, non-aesthetic objects into aesthetically relevant objects, ruination seems to contribute positive aesthetic value to these objects. This aesthetically positive contribution by ruination cannot be accounted for by Ingarden's theory; he lacks an answer as to why non-works of art can become more aesthetically valuable when they become ruins.

Third, the whole historical phenomenon of fake ruins, or follies, is incomprehensible on Ingarden's view. Many monumental follies were built in gardens and on estates during the 18th and 19th centuries,¹⁷ and even today artists create new works of art that imitate the simplicity and time-worn appearance of ancient ruins (Brancusi springs to mind). Since follies are not the remains of anything — certainly not the remains of works of art — whatever aesthetic value they possess must be due to the features they actually possess. And of course, the features prominent in fake ruins are those that simulate ruination.

If ruination, or the illusion of ruination, were not aesthetically rele-

vant in its own right, there would be no good reason for constructing follies. Because Ingarden's theory locates aesthetic value only in the original artwork and in what remains of it in a ruin, his theory cannot account for the aesthetic value of something that looks like a ruin, but for which there was no original work of art at all.

These three counterexamples to Ingarden's position are cases in which the aesthetic experience of ruins does not disregard the damage or deterioration ruins have suffered, in an attempt to envisage the original states of the objects. Instead these cases essentially include recognition of ruins' damage or deterioration as part of the aesthetic pleasure taken in the ruins.

4. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the aesthetic experience of ruins, particularly on the noetic strata that make possible a positive aesthetic evaluation of ruins. In the analysis, four noetic strata have been found essential to the aesthetic experience of ruins: an underlying objectivating noesis, a belief that the object is changed, a negative evaluation of that change, and a higher level, positive, transvaluation of the object. Other noetic strata constitute the object with noematic characteristics often included in the aesthetic experience of ruins, for example, antiquity, historicity, and sublimity, and some of these noetic strata have also been discussed.

Because many aesthetic observers appreciate ruined artworks, the paper has also addressed the problem of how a ruin can be experienced today as an artwork, when it is recognized as damaged or deteriorated in comparison to the original. In contrast to Ingarden, who argues that an artwork's ruination is (and must be) ignored by aesthetic observers when they appreciate the object as art, I have argued that a ruined artwork is usually appreciated with full awareness of its ruination. Most aesthetic observers constitute such an artwork as both ruined and aesthetically significant; going further, some constitute it as both ruined and as art.

It is possible to constitute a ruined artwork as full-fledged art by attending to the historicity of all art, including the art that seems to escape physical ruination. In the past, aesthetic theory has ignored the changes undergone by artworks and, instead, has treated art as though it is eternal and unaffected by history. By dropping the prejudice that

artworks retain forever their original forms and meanings, one begins to acknowledge the brute facticity of artworks' physical change over time as well as the flexibility of their appeal to members of different cultures and epochs. Instead of being eternal objects, which stand outside of time and any changes that occur over time, works of art are historical objects that do change over time. As dynamic, historical objects, artworks not only are affected by historical events, but they themselves can also influence history. Ruination in form or meaning is an inevitable part of an artwork's historicity, and thus it need not disqualify an artwork as art if all art is understood as essentially historical.

NOTES

1. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, Collected Works, Vol. 2, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982). The following sections are especially relevant: 93-95; 116-117; 121-122; 127-133.
2. Hua III/1, 268ff.; *Ideas*, pp. 279ff.
3. Roman Ingarden, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Object," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 21 (1961), pp. 289-313.
4. Henry James, *Italian Hours* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), p. 229.
5. Hua III/1, 215f., 220; *Ideas*, pp. 226f., 231.
6. Hua III/1, 216, 266; *Ideas*, pp. 227, 276.
7. In the most common cases of ruin experience, where the objectivating noesis is perception or memory, the object is posited as a real, physical thing. There are exceptions, however, e.g., a ruined career or person. But in fantasy experiences of ruins (for example, in science fiction set amongst futuristic ruins), the object is given in the objectivating noesis of imagination and is posited through a doxic modality only as if it were a real, physical thing, subject to "as if" forces of ruination occurring in the fantasized world.
8. Hua III/1, 268f.; *Ideas*, p. 279.
9. Hua III/1, 220ff.; *Ideas*, pp. 231ff.
10. Hua III/1, 220, 298; *Ideas*, pp. 231, 310.
11. Hua III/1, 220.
12. Hua III/1, 220; *Ideas*, p. 231.
13. General works on Eighteenth Century aesthetic theories of the sublime and picturesque include B. Sprague Allen, *Tides in English Taste (1619-1800)*, 2 vols. (New York: Pageant Books, 1958); Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in 18th Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1967); Rose Macauley, *Pleasure of Ruins* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967); Samuel Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York: George Banta, 1935).
14. Ingarden, "Aesthetic Experience", p. 293.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 293ff.
17. Barbara Jones, *Follies and Grottoes* (London: Constable, 1974).