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Walter, Nigel and Lamarque, Peter Vaudreuil orcid.org/0000-0002-2406-8750 (2020) Narrative and Conservation::A Response. *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics*. pp. 104-115.

<https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.32>

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CRITICAL NOTE

Narrative and Conservation: A Response

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A response to Saul Fisher's critical note on Peter Lamarque and Nigel Walter's 'The Application of Narrative to the Conservation of Historic Buildings' (*Estetika* 1/2019).

Keywords: Architecture; narrativity; conservation; restoration

I. Comments by Nigel Walter

The argument based on narrative is a tentative attempt by a non-philosopher to address a specific problem (change in historic buildings, particularly elective change) in a field of action (architectural conservation). That this specific problem is of interest to some philosophers concerned with issues of persistence makes this a fruitful engagement, and we are grateful to Saul Fisher for his considered response which expands the scope of the discussion.¹ Since our original article debates my assertion of the benefits of a narrative approach to conservation, we commence with my response to some of Fisher's objections to the position taken in our article; this response divides into four parts, first restating some key aspects of the argument before discussing persistence and Fisher's engagement with Noël Carroll and finally returning to some of Fisher's specific challenges. Since our positions remain distinct, this is then followed by Peter Lamarque's response both to Fisher and to my comments.

The first general point to make is the distinction between a narrative *about* a building on the one hand, and the use of the metaphor of the building *as* a narrative on the other, for which Fisher uses the shorthand of 'weak' and 'strong' forms of the narrative approach respectively. This is perhaps the principal point on which Lamarque and I disagree. As previously rehearsed, the strong form originates as an attempt to account for the coherence of those historic buildings that have experienced a series of episodes of change, whether creative or destructive, and to help guide elective change to such buildings in future. While the weak form is important – community narratives *about* a building are essential to, but typically

¹ See Peter Lamarque and Nigel Walter, 'The Application of Narrative to the Conservation of Historic Buildings,' *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 5–27; Saul Fisher, 'Lifespans of Built Structures, Narrativity, and Conservation: A Critical Note', *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* 57 (2020): 93–103. In-text references are to the latter text.

neglected by, conservation processes – it is the strong form where, for me, the meat of the argument lies. Being the more ambitious claim, this is also the more interesting to defend and is, therefore, my focus. I acknowledge that, in the form argued here, this relies on taking a high view of the explanatory efficacy of metaphor; nevertheless, this seems to me an important distinction, not least since in Fisher's contribution the distinction is at times blurred.

Second, the context of the enquiry is the ethical question of what a practitioner should do at the point of decision-making; if the building is characterized *as* a narrative that is still living, then the viewpoint is from *within* the narrative, not from outside it. Having established the context *within* the narrative, it follows that that narrative is necessarily incomplete. The core of the discussion is how/whether the metaphor of building as narrative helps guide the practitioner in differentiating changes to the building that will be constructive from those that may compromise or destroy its character. Fisher's introduction of Carroll's paper focusing on the requirements for narrative connection is very helpful in this regard.

One of Fisher's principal objections is that 'Not being grounded in a complete identity, such accounts cannot deliver on Walter's hope that narrative give voice to a holistic identity and so guide conservation efforts' (p. 98). The proposition here seems to be that only the completed narrative can deliver a complete identity. But this is a misunderstanding of the holism criterion, which refers to narrative's ability to characterize the whole (in this case the whole building) as more than a collection of parts, perhaps reflecting a refusal to enter the narrative and adopt the view from inside. The argument makes no claim that the identity offered will be complete; on the contrary, identity is always provisional and contingent. Indeed a novel such as *Weir of Hermiston*, unfinished at the time of Robert Louis Stevenson's sudden death in 1894, provides an example of an incomplete narrative that nevertheless possesses a distinct identity.² In any case, incompleteness does not prevent meaningful debate over the relative merits of competing narratives.

The third general point is that absent from conventional conservation – also it seems from most philosophical discussion of identity – is a recognition of creativity in the formation, whether original or ongoing, of the subject, whether building or person etc. This is one reason Fisher's suggested alternative of the lifecycle as a model for change to living buildings is no substitute for narrative. Even in the case of persons, who might be seen generally to follow a broadly predictable progress through the 'seven ages of man', the lifecycle approach is more suited to the demographer or the actuary, than it is to exploring questions of character and vocation that are pertinent to conservation. This is compounded in the case of buildings which, having once been formed, can in principle persist in productive mid-life almost indefinitely, given adequate maintenance and sufficient scope to remain in beneficial use. Part of the problem the narrative approach is seeking to address is orthodox conservation's assertion – explicit or implied – that once a building becomes statutorily protected as a monument, its identity becomes fixed. This is the challenge that living buildings pose to conservation, for which this argument from narrative is attempting to furnish a theoretical foundation: just as my identity is not fixed until my life is over, so we can say that the identity of a building is only fixed when it 'dies', whether by demolition or preservation. As a genre, the funeral eulogy addresses the contrasting situation of completed identity: by narrating the subject's completed life, the eulogist attempts to provide an account of that life, which, if successful, allows those present to recognize and identify the deceased person.

But this is not the situation that applies to a living building; its identity is still in formation, and remains open to creative intervention. The lifecycle model provides a poor match for

² Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* (1896; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

this. The purpose of a narrative account of a historic building is not to deliver a definitive account of a complete(d) identity. The argument from mid-narrative allows the flexibility for further development (the projective criterion), while providing some constraint on that further development because of the 'debt' each chapter owes to the preceding narrative, holistically grasped, of which it forms an extension. Narrative coherence might seem a minimal constraint, until one attempts to add a successful new chapter to an existing narrative, whether literary or architectural.

1.1. Persistence

The debate between three- and four-dimensionalist views of persistence is primarily concerned with criteria of identity; while this is certainly of relevance to the narrative argument, it is not its primary focus. Orthodox models of conservation typical of the mid-twentieth century tend to deal in purities of stylistic and historical identity, with a particular focus – fetishization even – on the authenticity of the material; with its assumption of relatively fixed identities, this is suggestive of endurantism. The 'Ship of Theseus' is a powerful challenge to this approach and was explicitly used as such; the endurantist riposte, I would anticipate, would be to say that the ship's identity does not rest in being materially identical. This is in any case an impossible position to sustain, since molecules are continually being added (dirt) and removed (eroded) from any ship/building and so on; the same observation is routinely made of personal identity, that at a molecular level our bodies are almost entirely different from their state even a few years ago. And yet to say that materiality is not relevant to identity also seems wrong (though there are heritage theorists who come close to such a position). This would seem to count in favour of a non-endurantist account.

Four-dimensional approaches are better able to account for temporal change, and therefore seem more sympathetic to the narrative approach. The architectural historian Nicola Camerlenghi, arguing for the benefits of reading historic buildings through the transformations they have undergone, enthusiastically advocates four-dimensionalism. She suggests that 'What emerges from a narrative comprising transformative episodes is an account of how and why buildings endure and remain relevant in a cultural context far removed from that in which they were first built'.³ This she contrasts to more conventional modes of study which emphasize the moment of inception of the building and the roles of the architect and, perhaps, patron. The implication of this approach is that any stage of the building's life, including its initial, pristine condition, is only ever a partial display of its enduring self.

Since under four-dimensionalism a building's identity is the aggregate of all its temporal parts, at any point before the end of its life its identity is necessarily incomplete; the form of identity offered under this view is thus the same as that of a developing character in a story. Camerlenghi uses the example of Hagia Sophia, adding that at its points of transformation it 'mattered enough to warrant serious changes and that its value remained intimately connected to the people around it'.⁴ Moving from architectural history to conservation, under four-dimensionalism the concern is as much with the emergence and development of the identity of the building as with its preservation. The model of the medieval quest is helpful: it is only in starting out that the protagonist discovers the object of their quest, and in the process their identity is at least in part formed.

³ Nicola Camerlenghi, 'The Longue Durée and the Life of Buildings', in *New Approaches to Medieval Architecture*, ed. Robert Odell Bork, William W. Clark, and Abby McGehee (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 11; it is noted that, for Camerlenghi, it is their formation into a narrative that gives these transformative episodes explanatory force.

⁴ Ibid., 17.

There are, of course, variants within four-dimensionalism. Where perdurantism conceives of a spacetime worm, stage theory seems to require a metaphor more like a string of discrete beads; the additional challenge is then how to account for the string, for what enables the collection of temporally-indexed counterparts to constitute a coherent whole. The narrativist might respond that it is narrative that best performs that connective role, like the golden thread of an argument. In both forms of four-dimensionalism, the focus is on the aggregate identity of all slices/beads, with both therefore requiring what we could term the 'parenthetical identity' of the whole as more than the sum of its changing parts. Either seems to offer a better match for the narrative approach than does endurantism.

1.2. Carroll, Causation, and Cultural Practices

The second focus of my response is Fisher's use of Noël Carroll's essay on narrative connection; for Fisher this is decisive in rejecting the idea that buildings can be classed as narratives. This I judge to be less successful, on three counts: first, in that the constraints of Carroll's argument do not match well with those of change to existing buildings; second, that Fisher's appropriation of Carroll is partial and selective; and third, a broader consideration of Carroll's work suggests that he can be better read as supportive of the narrative position.

Carroll develops his argument from Morton White's distinction between annals, chronicles and narratives in his book *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*.⁵ Given that White's concern is the writing of history, it is no surprise that Carroll's competing forms of story are principally backward facing, therefore lacking the projective aspect necessary for any model of living historic buildings that remain in use. It could well be argued that White's alternatives to narrative are perfectly serviceable for 'completed buildings', in much the same way as (completed) biography already provides a recognized model used in buildings archaeology. Indeed, this distinction is central to the debate, since existing models within conservation do indeed characterize buildings as to all intents and purposes complete. This concern with modes of historical writing implies that (in this essay) Carroll engages with narrative *from the outside*, while the application of narrative to historic buildings is intended to address the point of decision *within* the story. Thus, in none of the examples Carroll uses to establish his criteria does he enter the story; this is simply not relevant to Carroll's argument, but it very much is to ours.

Turning, secondly, to the adequacy of Fisher's appropriation, Carroll discusses various forms of causation, and repeatedly stresses that the steps in a narrative are often underdetermined. He explicitly states that the form of causally necessary condition he has in mind are those narrative connections that are causally relevant while remaining insufficient. His minimum requirement for causation is J. L. Mackie's INUS condition – 'an *insufficient* but *necessary* part of a condition that itself is *unnecessary* but *sufficient*'.⁶ Carroll illustrates this weaker form of causation with the example of a character born in a humble area of Arkansas who later becomes US President; his humble birthplace is not of itself causally necessary to his becoming President, but since he had to be American-born it nevertheless plays a contributory role. Fisher dismisses the use of narrative for buildings partly on the basis that (my own example of) the medieval church of St Nicholas could not have *caused* the Victorian modifications, concluding that 'we don't find here the sort of causal or explanatory character of narrative that Carroll requires' (p. 100). And yet the examples of the President and the church do indeed display the same form of what Carroll terms 'causation', in that that particular

⁵ Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁶ Noël Carroll, 'On the Narrative Connection', in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124, 409n7.

Victorian restoration would not have been possible without there having been a medieval church, yet that earlier church did not determine the later restoration.

While it may stretch our normal use of language, the weak form of 'causality' in the case of St Nicholas does indeed meet Carroll's requirements for narrative coherence. As Carroll himself suggests, 'A great many of the details we encounter in narratives are of this sort; they do not constitute causally necessary conditions for later events, but are contributions to the characterization of such conditions'.⁷ While deterministic causation may be characteristic of some steps within a given narrative, where it becomes the rule it typically makes for dull storytelling. We could go further and suggest that successful narratives – those that command our attention – are precisely defined by indeterminacy between branching futures. The INUS condition can be seen as opening up a creative space within the framework of causality. Into this space we could place a 'responsive' form of causation, a creative response shaped but not determined by the story to date, thus satisfying Carroll's requirements for narrative connection while also allowing the creation of branching futures within a coherent but extensible narrative identity. Compelling narratives usually incorporate a good degree of this 'responsive causation', that the story to date presents a situation to which the protagonist responds but is not wholly determined by.

Third, there is the question of setting Carroll's argument about narrative causation in its broader context. Elsewhere in the same volume of essays, in a paper first published in 1988, Carroll uses narrative history as a means of exploring the nature of art. Carroll advances 'narrative as a primary means of identifying artworks and of characterizing the coherence of the artworld, in contrast to the inclination to deal with these matters by proposing defining sets of necessary and sufficient conditions'.⁸ Having reviewed and dismissed three standard views of what art is, Carroll proceeds on the basis of art as a cultural practice or set of practices.⁹ While the particular challenges faced when altering or adding to the specific artwork that is a historic building are not the same as the artworld as a whole, nevertheless both Carroll's concern (coherence) and his solution (narrative) parallel ours.

The parallel is illustrated in the following passage where, in each instance, what is said of cultural practices is equally applicable to historic buildings:

Custom, tradition, and precedent are integral components of a cultural practice. Nevertheless, cultural practices need not be static. They require flexibility over time in order to persist through changing circumstances. They tolerate and indeed afford rational means to facilitate modification, development into new areas of interest, abandonment of previous interests, innovation, and discovery. Practices sustain and abet change while remaining the same practice. Practices do this by a creative use of tradition[...]¹⁰

Of particular note is Carroll's use of narrative as an explanatory form that relies on the creative use of tradition to 'sustain and abet change'. As if explicitly addressing Fisher's concern that a living building on the narrative model cannot offer a unified subject, Carroll goes on to state that 'Narrative provides us with a means for tracing the unity of the practice of art

⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁸ Noël Carroll, 'Art, Practice, and Narrative', in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75.

⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

without prejudging what art of the future will be'.¹¹ Taken together with his later paper on narrative connection, I suggest that a closer and wider reading of Carroll is not unsympathetic to the narrative approach argued for here.

1.3. Spatial Relations

Before leaving our discussion of Carroll it is worth noting that in his later essay he entertains the idea that spatial relations might also be a form of narrative connection, observing that most narratives do indeed involve spatial relations, but concluding they are non-essential to his concept of narrative.¹² Buildings, on the other hand, are necessarily extended in space, and their parts clearly have spatial relations with each other; indeed the lyricism of excellent architectural design is all about the manipulation of these spatial relations. Having determined that historic buildings do indeed satisfy Carroll's criteria for temporal narrative connection, the adoption of this putative spatial criterion neatly mirrors the addition of the temporal dimension in the move from a three- to a four-dimensional account of persistence. By combining temporal and spatial narrative connectivity, historic buildings not only present a particularly rich example for the discussion of the metaphysics of persistence, but deliver on the promise of four-dimensionalism's engagement with spacetime in what we could perhaps term a metaphysics not just of persistence but of 'presence-persistence'.

Another aspect of spatial relations that deserves comment is the siting of a building and its relationship to its context. This form of spatial relationship is now usually regarded as an important aspect of historic buildings, and a function of the building's identity as a unified subject. The stately home that has been shorn of its setting by the progressive disposal of its estate is one example, where the character and identity of the building are markedly affected without it itself undergoing any physical change; and in such cases, the impact on the narrative can be devastating, removing some or all of the branching futures the building might otherwise have had. This, for example, was the case with the grade I listed Jacobean Apethorpe Hall in Northamptonshire.

A final illustration of the narrative relevance of spatial relations is the building or structure that is relocated, as famously happened when the 1830s London Bridge was purchased and moved to the Arizona desert in the 1960s, where it now graces Lake Havasu City. On one reading there is a very real sense in which the transplanted structure is no longer *London* Bridge. In narrative terms, the disassembly, transport, and reassembly of the bridge constitutes a sufficient caesura to form two separate narratives, even if it were not also the case that the older stonework conceals a new concrete structure, and that it crosses a canal dredged in order to give the bridge a purpose. That at least might be a typical view from the old country, though it should be acknowledged that this might look very different from the new world, where the reconstructed bridge served its economic purpose in drawing visitors to an area where some then purchased property. On that basis, perhaps it was the continuity of the structure's narrative – that it *is* still London Bridge, at least for the developer Robert P. McCulloch's target market – that made the transaction worthwhile.

1.4. Response and Application

This final section considers a handful of points raised by Fisher, starting with the example of *façadism*, which is presented to defeat the relevance of narrative (p. 99). For the purposes of this argument we can say that *façadism* is a different enterprise from that of conservation; that is the case at least as far as the individual building is concerned – a different argument

¹¹ Ibid., 73.

¹² Carroll, 'On the Narrative Connection', 128.

might perhaps be made if townscape (the space between buildings) were the overriding concern. The narrative view would account for façadism as falling outside of the family of conservation approaches on the basis that it involves the closure of the narrative through the dismemberment of the building. On the narrative view it is akin to taking a character out of one story and writing a wholly different and contradictory story around that character. Contra Fisher, the narrative approach provides a strong argument to resist façadism, on the grounds that it entails the abandonment of the building's narrative, and thus represents poor conservation. This provides one example of how, through its insistence on coherence through time, the narrative approach helps the practitioner discern a desirable next stage in the developing life of the building.

Similarly, the idea that 'we might not need historical accounts of built structures' (p. 99) describes something other than conservation. The point of the proposed narrative approach is that it enters a field in which the current models rejoice in the analysis of historical development but have eviscerated the possibility of the future development of historic structures. Fisher suggests that narrative could be dispensed with by simply bolting a future orientation onto existing conservation principles. This is to misunderstand both the professional landscape against which this philosophical excursus is set, and also, I think, the nature of narrative whose particular characteristic is to create a unity out of a relatively well known past and present and an as yet unknown future; the non-determinative form of identity delivered by narrative we have already termed 'parenthetical'. Paul Ricoeur has provided the most detailed account to date for how narrative might achieve this.¹³

Finally, Fisher uses the factory converted to dwellings as an example of growth that does not require a narrative approach, suggesting that 'we don't need narrative histories of built structures to account for series of instances in which structures changed and grew' (p. 101–102). That much is true, but hardly compelling. The narrative approach has been developed to address more complex cases, and the question is then its capacity to extend to simpler cases. The case of the factory does, nevertheless, follow Carroll's five criteria for narrative: we have more than one state (before and after), an account that is forward-looking, a unified subject (the building), a temporal relation linking those two states, and adequate causation (of the INUS condition form).¹⁴ It is true that, given the simplicity of the case as presented, narrative does not add a great deal to the explanatory picture. But if the example were embellished a little, with the additional information that the factory was noteworthy (and thus of concern to conservation) because of its innovative structure and large internal spaces, then the narrative approach becomes more relevant. The eighteenth-century former Whitbread brewery in Moorgate, London, or the 1930s D6 and D10 buildings at the Boots Factory Site in Beeston, Nottinghamshire – all statutorily protected – are examples.¹⁵ Because of that protection, in each case the character of the building (large spans, and so on) would typically prevent a proposed change to residential use (which involves multiple subdivision). Here narrative does indeed have traction, both because it is the proposed breaking of a narrative link that should be preserved that accounts for the problematic nature of the proposal, and because it is the developer's failure to understand that the proposed conversion would have that result that would lead to the likely failure of the project.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative Time', *Critical Inquiry* (1980): 169–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1343181>; *Time and Narrative*, vols 1–3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88).

¹⁴ Carroll, 'On the Narrative Connection', 126.

¹⁵ See also *Industrial Buildings: Listing Selection Guide* (London: Historic England, 2017), <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-industrial/heag134-industrial-buildings-lsg/>.

But the factory example is also useful in the simpler form in which it is presented. To strengthen it in this form, let's stipulate that there is nothing whatsoever of interest about the original factory building, and further that the developer is considering a number of uses alongside residential, including as a car park, an office, or a nightclub, such that the second use offers no constraint. In this case we would expect the link between before and after to revolve around questions of real estate, physical dimensions, structural robustness etc. This expansion of the example achieves two things. First, in purely buildings terms, confirmation that it is unlikely that anyone really cares; certainly the conservation system would not, because there is nothing under threat that is of value to conservation. And that is because the factory is lacking features of interest that would give it any definable character, at least in conventional art historical terms. In that sense it could be argued that it fails a sixth test for narrative connection because the building so lacks character that its identity is vanishingly weak. Nevertheless, the building stands in a unique location, and it will have impacted in at least some way on the lives of some people; so *someone* might care enough for the factory for it to take on both character and identity for them. There might, for example, be a band of faithful former employees for whom the factory represented a significant part of their working lives for whom it would have a strong character and a well-defined identity; so much so that they might organize opposition to the proposed redevelopment. In that case, with a discernible character under threat, then the narrative approach becomes relevant in guiding the developer in effecting change that does not destroy the identified character – preserving narrative coherence – thus avoiding conflict with a group that has by now become an important stakeholder in a conservation argument.

Finally, Fisher's factory serves to highlight a key difference, between adaptive reuse and elective change in living buildings. The factory is an example of the former, while it is to the latter, where conservation theory is far less developed, that this narrative approach is addressed. I hope, however, that these elaborations of the factory example go some way to demonstrating how a narrative approach might be helpfully deployed even in an example as unprepossessing and disjunctive as this. All of which, it will be noted, has involved storytelling.

II. Comments by Peter Lamarque

Like Nigel Walter, I am grateful to Saul Fisher for his substantial and illuminating comments on our jointly authored paper. As the point of that original paper was to introduce, develop, and reflect on Walter's own theory about the role of narrative in the conservation of historic buildings, it is quite right that he should have the major say in responding to Fisher's discussion. My contribution to the dialogue in the first place was simply to help test Walter's theory in the light of my own more broadly sceptical stance on the explanatory efficacy of appeals to narrative in other contexts. My aim was certainly not to reject or even to weaken Walter's account but if anything to help give it a firmer foundation. As Fisher notes, Walter and I arrive at a position where we are in substantial agreement on many key points.

In this context I have just one or two comments to make arising from Fisher's paper and Walter's response above. The first concerns narrative and criteria of identity. Fisher reads our paper as essentially involving questions of the identity-preservation of buildings through renovation work, and he raises various problems for the narrative account on that score, not least those rooted in the metaphysics of identity. The discussion raises some complex and intriguing questions and shows the reach of philosophical theories of identity. But, as Walter makes clear in his response, it is not quite right to see this as the primary focus of the narrative account. If identity-preservation and criteria of identity were the key issues, then the question at the heart of the discussion of cases would be:

(A) *Is it the same building before and after the conservation/development/renovation work?*

But that question, as I understand it, is simply not at the forefront of the kind of work that Walter engages as a conservation architect. The example he gives in our original article – the internal alterations undertaken in the Church of St Nicholas, Great Wilbraham – suggests that the question whether it is the same building before and after is not of central relevance or interest. The much more pertinent question, which is at the heart of the debate, and is relevant to the example, is something like this:

(B) *Does the conservation/development/renovation work on a building preserve the character, integrity, and coherence of the building?*

Walter's claim, I take it, is that an appeal to narrative can make a substantial contribution to weighing up and pointing towards an answer to question (B). Whether narrative can cast light on question (A) seems both doubtful and of only marginal relevance.

Having said that, there will, of course, be cases where identity-preservation is at issue and question (A) becomes relevant. These tend to be extreme. One such would be instances of 'façadism', as discussed by both Fisher and Walter. These are cases where the façade of a historic building is preserved while the bulk of the building itself is removed and replaced with a modern design, new and unrelated to the original. Fisher's point is that no appeal to narrative will be sufficient to condone or condemn such a practice. However, Walter seems right to respond that these cases fall 'outside the family of conservation approaches' and involve the 'closure of the narrative through the dismemberment of the building'. A negative answer to question (A) here is largely unproblematic.

It is, however, worth pondering a moment longer why question (B) lends itself to the invocation of narrative. The answer is simple: because it appeals to core aspects of narrative, namely, *character, integrity, and coherence*. All narratives – think of literary narratives as a paradigm – exhibit a certain character, revealed in tone, style, or mood; they are also judged, in standard cases, by the extent to which the elements in the narrative cohere and are integrated into some kind of meaningful, unified whole. In another sense of 'character', we can test these aspects of narrative by postulating a fictional character in a novel whose actions, attitudes and personality at the end of the novel are radically at odds with those at the beginning. We *might* ask whether it is the same character at the end as at the beginning (rather in the manner in which we might ask whether a real person who has undergone a radical personality change remains 'the same person'). But in a literary context – where we are evaluating a narrative – it seems more fruitful to ask if the character is coherent and intelligible, whether the characterization 'works' (perhaps this is a post-modern novel, where disjointedness has its own aesthetic function) or whether the seeming incoherence is a serious flaw. These are judgments about a narrative and the criteria are precisely such things as the preservation of integrity and coherence.

We can similarly ask, as in question (B), whether some conservation/development/renovation work on a building coheres with what has gone before. This is by no means always clear-cut and can be a matter of (contested) judgment. But in this context, narrative constraints seem especially pertinent. Interestingly, pursuing the literary parallel, the criteria in the building case also invite aesthetic considerations. Is there a perspective on the changes wrought that 'make sense' of them, that reveal their 'fit' and coherence? Or have the changes produced merely muddle and inconsistency? Here, I suggest, lies some of the power of the narrative approach, which, as Fisher points out, is far less evident if we focus on question (A).

What is the role of narrative in Walter's account? In his response to Fisher, Walter now wants to emphasize (following Fisher's own terminology) a 'strong' and a 'weak' version of the narrative approach: the 'weak' one focuses on narratives *about* buildings, the 'strong' one speaks of buildings *as* narratives. In the original article my own focus was more on the 'weak' kind, asking how actual narratives of communities and stakeholders might constrain conservation or other renovative works. But let me concentrate here on the idea of buildings *as* narratives.

Walter thinks that this is a principal point on which we disagree. But I disagree only with the idea that buildings are *literally* narratives, not, as Walter claims, that they can profitably be conceived *metaphorically* as narratives. If it is a metaphor that is at issue then the question becomes how effective the metaphor is, how far it clarifies our thinking about buildings and conservation, how it might connect with other metaphors, and so on. It would be wrong to suppose that basing a theory on a metaphor somehow trivializes it. The philosopher Richard Boyd has introduced the idea of 'theory-constitutive metaphors' in science, such as the idea, in cognitive psychology, that the mind is a computer and thought is information-processing, saying that 'part of the function of this metaphor as a theoretical statement is to suggest strategies for future research by asserting that, as investigations of men and machines progress, additional, or, perhaps, entirely different important respects of similarity and analogy will be discovered'.¹⁶ This might well be a benefit too of Walter's metaphor of buildings as narratives.

A standard account of metaphor has it that the tenor and vehicle of a metaphor are in some kind of cross-category tension which can yield an original conception not already contained in the ideas of either tenor or vehicle. Take Shakespeare's metaphor of Time as a tyrant. Being a tyrant entails being an agent, mercilessly wielding power, cruel, unfeeling, apt to behave arbitrarily, and demanding total subjection. In contrast, time is an abstract notion, without consciousness, agency or intent, merely one dimension in which all existents exist. The juxtaposition of the concepts is, taken literally, a category mismatch of an extreme kind. Yet personifying Time is something we understand perfectly well and the fear we can feel at the relentless passing of time is familiar and powerful. The metaphor is effective.

In the metaphor of buildings as narratives we also see an initial category mismatch. Taken literally narratives are stories narrated; there must be a narrator. They report, describe or represent events, they have structure, they involve selection, they give salience to certain events over others, they embody perspectives, values and meanings. Buildings, on the other hand, while they do have histories (sequences of causal interactions), embody values and meanings only to the extent they are given these by people. They cannot literally be narratives but can have narratives woven about them. Nor literally can they be narrators. However, unlike the remote conceptual connection between time and tyrants, the relation between a narrative and a building is much closer. Some descriptions can be applied literally to both: incomplete, uninspiring, even incoherent. To speak of a building metaphorically as a narrative is to draw out certain commonalities, notably the story-like aspects of buildings. One such, on Walter's account, is the idea of a building being in 'mid-narrative'. This is a harmless enough epithet implying that the building is still subject to further change, just as the middle of a narrative is a point where further events (real or fictional) are still to be recounted, whether or not we know what they are.

I suspect, though, that the metaphor that attracts Walter more than that concerning narrative is the metaphor of 'living' buildings. It is the metaphorical personification of buildings that interests him: the idea of buildings (metaphorically) having a personality, or character, or agency, or indeed living a life. However, this, I believe, is a different metaphorical system

¹⁶ Richard Boyd, 'Metaphor and Theory Change: What Is "Metaphor" a Metaphor For?', in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 360.

from that related to narratives, even if there are connections. Narratives, after all, are not persons. In particular, as I stressed in the original paper, a life is not a narrative. We might speak metaphorically of a living building, or a building having a life or even of it being alive but that is not the same as saying that a building is a narrative. For what it is worth, I am inclined to think that the personification metaphor is more explanatorily powerful than the narrative metaphor. To think of a building as a living organism, growing, developing, decaying, dying, and also adapting, surviving, struggling, persevering against the odds, even showing courage, resolve, bravery, or faint-heartedness, captures metaphorically aspects of buildings that inspire and move us or invite our sympathy, even a kind of fellow feeling, that can well serve to motivate efforts at conservation and preservation. Narrative can be involved with this but is not reducible to it. There are stories to be told about how buildings survive and adapt, live and die, and maybe metaphorically they can tell these stories themselves. Also, it might be that we need the narratives, with the structure, character and significance that they impose, to guide our decisions about what changes are desirable and coherent in conservation. But that returns us to the 'weak' appeal to narrative, the literal stories we tell about buildings. I wonder if the real work (if only driving the constraints emotionally) is being done, not by the metaphor of buildings as narratives but by the metaphor of buildings as persons with lives and characters to be nurtured and protected. Maybe this is just my scepticism about appeals to narrative resurfacing! But it is not a deep scepticism in this context and I remain foursquare committed to the common ground Walter and I established in the original paper.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Walter, Nigel, and Peter Lamarque. 'Narrative and Conservation: A Response.' *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* LVII/XIII, no. 1 (2020): pp. 104–115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.32>

Submitted: 18 October 2019 **Accepted:** 02 November 2019 **Published:** 15 April 2020

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