REPATRIATION TO RESTITUTION: HOW ELITE MUSEUMS GRAPPLE WITH DISCURSIVE CONTROVERSIES

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PROLOGUE

At the beginning of this research study in 2018, the term *repatriation* was, in my experience as a former Deputy Minister with responsibility for provincial museums in Alberta, the primary word used to describe the phenomenon of the return of contested cultural objects. Over the years of researching and writing this thesis, the dominance of the word repatriation has changed. In 2024, in my current role as the President and CEO of a large community college in Alberta, I received a note from a colleague suggesting I think more critically about the word repatriation. She knew that this word was in the title of my thesis, and indeed it was heavily referenced in the narrative. She suggested that I think about the change occurring internationally regarding the importance of the words we use to describe the phenomena considered in this study, and that the word *rematriation* might be a more fitting descriptor for the action of return. Her astute comments mirrored some references that were arising in the literature and public discourse.

This quiet suggestion, and what to do, profoundly mattered to the lens through which this story is told. To stick with repatriation, however arguably appropriate, would be to stay in the past, to not hear the engagement, and to not accept a change. Moving to rematriation was untested and replaced one gendered approach with another, whilst still not fully defining the scope of the international situation. To wit, the words repatriation and rematriation both conjure an action, with a focus on the recipient for whom that action involves. This examination of gender dynamics in the restitution debates is outside of the scope of this thesis. Using an alternative word like *return* would be straightforward and descriptive but would miss the point of emotional entanglement with the objects. The word *restitution* had been regularly referenced for years in debating the issue and was the term of choice used in the Sarr Savoy report, and the Hicks book,

both referenced heavily in this thesis, and thus was decided upon as the reference word for this body of work. Restitution, to me, implies a happening, something that suggests “making it right” and hints at the moral and legal tone that permeates the arguments herein. Thus, this thesis has been retitled and edited to reflect this perspective, with full knowledge that the story of restitution, and the language we use to describe it, is not complete, nor solved and certainly not settled.

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ABSTRACT

Museum leaders and board governors are facing external pressure to restitute cultural objects and must respond to a situational context wherein these forces, whether from government, academia or civil society, form a call to action influencing institutional legacy towards change. The British Museum, as a critical site of restitution tension and debate, frustrates homogenous progress across the museum field, despite a new legal tool pointing to restitutional breakthroughs.

This thesis asks how the future, responsive museum addresses material strategic and reputational risk, and how the decisions of collective voices within a set of museums triggers an acceleration of era change. To answer these questions, methods comprised a hybrid constructivist grounded theory approach blended with positivist case study. The resulting temporal process study used theoretical sampling of non-random case studies via semi-structured interviews and museum board minutes resulting in narrative description and a cross-case search for patterns leading to a theory of system-influencing "temporal acceleration" of breakthrough governance in a proposed "Restitutional Era".

In this theory, the governance decision platform for examined institutions aligns to a "legal form" or a "moral form". "Moral form" decisions operate across four schematics concerning institutional reputation, engagement, framing and visioning, while imprinting influential vocabulary onto the debates. The theory shows that first, we see directional responses such as moving with, extending through, and systematically holding through crisis. Second, we see a levered response comprising infrastructural, emotional and intellectual solutions. Third, we see

the use of power and voice to scale legitimacy of direction. Finally, actors intentionally calibrate their assets, risk, and markets. The study finds that first, there is heterogeneity across museums, but homogeneity within museums as actors address reputational issues arising from civil action and social justice pressures. Second, “moral form institutions show a “temporal acceleration” of the proposed new era. Third, restitution is not being treated evenly as urgent or a crisis by elite museums. Fourth, a useful vocabulary germane to breakthrough decision-making is advancing visualizing of the next era of museums. This work advances existing scholarship by analysing governing decisions about restitution to offer a new package of information and insights so that the debates can move forward, and the practice of boards can be improved.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The same elusive qualities which make the arts so difficult to analyze sociologically or to use for propaganda purposes may ultimately contribute most to their survival".

(Judith Huggins Balfe, 1987: 25)

1.1 Introduction

The board governance of museums is increasingly informed and influenced by the intersection of civil society, community engagement and public policy in response to calls for the restitution of cultural objects. The international scale and level of risk involved in the governance of cultural objects draws museum leaders and boards into distinct challenges that are informing the mission and fundamental work of museums now and looking ahead. One of the greatest of these tests is the issue of restitution.

Reimagining museums as an outcome of the restitution of cultural objects is progressing as civil society and diverse communities demonstrate increasing power and voice in shaping the direction of institutions. Restitution is a visible and much discussed issue internationally, and a solid example of the influence of changing mores on institutional identity. Over a decade ago, in essays about legalities and ethics encompassing the exhibition of monuments and cultural heritage (Rhodes, 2007), Lykoudis focused on the famous Parthenon Sculptures[1] (aka Elgin

[1] Note that there are multiple terms for the Parthenon Sculptures, including Elgin Marbles and Parthenon Marbles, and the decision to use Parthenon Sculptures in this study aligns to current common practice and restitution efforts from Greece.

Marbles) arguing for their return to Greece. Framing the marbles as a canary in a coalmine, he reasoned that '(t)he manner in which we return the Parthenon Marbles and display them will reflect how we see our collective and individual histories and indeed our futures' (Lykoudis, 2007: 94). Said "manner" is at the core of this thesis.

Pressure to decolonialize has been highly motivated by the Savoy/Sarr report (Savoy & Sarr, 2018), calls to action in research (Cameron & McCarthy, 2015; Hicks, 2020; Hicks and Ladewig, 2026; Janes, 2009; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Krishtalka & Humphrey, 2000; Robbins, 2014; Savoy, 2022; Tythacott & Arvanitis, 2014), the media (Bowley, 2018; Herman, 2018: Hopper, 2018), and growing momentum and direction from civil society (Banks, 2017; Levitt, 2015; Powell & Clemens, 1998; Silverman, 2010). Regarding French President Emmanuel Macron's 2018 Sarr/Savoy report, commissioned as a response to his plan to address colonialism and restitution in French museums, recommendations were unequivocal about returning artifacts to home countries. The report has been a lightning rod for debate and discussion on meaningful changes in museums.

The question about what to do with colonial practices passed from an 'inside baseball' deliberation to a high-profile debate among civil society with a significant action occurring in 2018. The Humboldt Forum, an $825 million (US) museum originally scheduled to open in September 2019 in Berlin, within the renovated Berlin Palace on Museum Island, had earlier received a damning public announcement from recently departed advisory board member Benedicte Savoy, in which she stated, 'the baby is dead on arrival' (Bowley, 2018:16). (Eventually, because of COVID19, the Humboldt Forum opened digitally in December 2020 and

is now open to the public.) Savoy voiced that the museum failed to reflect a diverse, modern Germany sensitive to the issues of colonialism and restitution. For such a high profile, high stakes project, it is provocative that strategic intention and execution for this new museum did not line up at that moment in time, especially considering the volume of international public policy interventions regarding the issue of restitution.

For decades, governments and international regulations like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN General Assembly, 2007), the National American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (Congress.gov, 1989-1990), the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1970), and the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act in Alberta, Canada (FNSCORA, 2016) have influenced the collection and de-accessioning of cultural artifacts and artworks. The momentum of these public policy documents, and the stimulus of the decolonizing narrative on museums (Lena, 2019), is impacting audience perception of museums (Geurds & Van Broekhoven, 2013), and deepening consequences for philanthropic support of museums (Pellew, 2018; Yates, 2016). As such, public engagement and reputational matters germane to restitution are entering the museum governance domain.

The public good is a central argument on each side of the restitution debates, and collects steam from engaged communities, members of which have increasing power of voice and political position through traditional and social media. We have seen over the past few years that this momentum, whether through the Me-Too movement within the entertainment industry, or the

climate change movement in the oil and gas industry, has power to influence the strategic direction of institutions.

1.2 Aims and approach

This study addresses how the governing, and hence reimagining, of museums is being reshaped as a response to restitution. It shows how the boards and leaders of museums prepare for profound change to their materials, resources, administration, and structure in response to civic action and social justice pressures. The work involves how boards and leaders of museums are visualizing the next era of their institutions in response to material, ongoing, crisis-like pressure, and how breakthrough occurs. The study concerns the distance between museum leaders' strategic and fiduciary obligations and their duties to the collections and the law, as guided by policymakers, and the reputational responsibilities profoundly changing in the museum field in response to significant pressure from civil society.

This thesis primarily undertakes a qualitative analysis ascertained through interviews with leaders of several of the world's leading museums. The study draws on twenty interviews including anonymized senior museum governors, directors and senior staff, and a renowned legal scholar. Archival materials and board documents, such as museum board meeting minutes, further inform the findings. Landmark reports and discussion pieces from UNESCO, analysis of responses to Dan Hicks' watershed book on the issue, "The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, colonial violence and cultural restitution", and a tracking of newspaper articles from The Guardian newspaper on the issue are included in the empirical set.

1.3 New era challenges

In this study, I make four arguments in response to the finding that the museum field is in a nascent stage of being restructured by the restitution debates, ushering in a new era, and demonstrating how a breakthrough in an era occurs via responsiveness to international social pressure. The four arguments are as follows:

1. There is heterogeneity across museums, but homogeneity within museums along moral or legal lines that affects institutional preparation for risk and vulnerability to reputational issues from civil action and social justice pressures.
2. With museum board alignment to a moral or legal form in addressing restitution, moral form adopters are embracing a "temporal acceleration" of a proposed "Restitutional Era", demonstrating new actions, processes and curatorial opportunities.
3. The international restitution situation has been described episodically as urgent, or a crisis but is not being treated evenly as a crisis by elite museums, despite "moral form" museums showing early-stage homogeneity in institutional framing and visualization of actions in response to the pressure.
4. The discourse enveloping the debates is informing a useful vocabulary germane to decision-making as museum leaders and governors visualize the next era of museums and modulate internal and external engagement.

Embedded in the four arguments above is an overarching story of a burgeoning new era. This narrative shows how museums are entering a new era driven by the unexpected voices reckoning

with restitution heightened by powerfully orchestrated vocabularies that are sensitive to reputation, engagement, framing and visioning at a governance level. The change-agent museums in this burgeoning new era can show documentable preparation achieved by leaders who are ready to address reputational risk and opportunities. The work of these leaders shifts their "market position", by which is meant the profile that they hold within the body of international museums as active respondents to societal pressure. This profile is leading to positive news stories and increasing public awareness of their cultural contributions. A future project could involve a longitudinal study tracking whether this awareness translates into a more corporate definition of increased market position, such as increasing audience share, grants and/or philanthropic support.

The material work that has been building little by little over decades has reached a tipping point and shows first steps toward fluid movement into era change that is stress-tested by society and has significant opportunity to achieve a breakthrough in the stalemate of the restitution debates. The findings in this study will help build a vocabulary of the debates, topics and issues overarching the strategy of museums, and track how leadership and boards are reimagining and restructuring the future of their museums through variable responses to restitution pressure.

Herein, I look at the shifting scenarios, new traditions unfolding in real time, and responses to requests by countries whose objects have been taken, that face museum leaders. Museums are morphing from keeper of cultural memory to "bridges between cultures, instruments of societal transformation, forgers of new futures and strong community anchors" (Geurds and van Broekhoven, 2013: 158) supported by technology and the drive for connection. Since the highly

influential analysis of the professionalization of museums from the 1920s through 1940s in a classic study by DiMaggio (1991), we have had one hundred years of management knowledge, organizational theory and restitution arguments tabled, with new claims and new debates, and solid perspectives regarding the accountability and expectations of board governors. This thesis aims to show how this knowledge informs breakthrough decision-making that can crack a centuries-old debate and bring forth genuine progress and era change.

1.4 Research questions

This doctoral research project concerns how the board governance of museums will be informed by the mix of civic society, community engagement and public policy in response to the restitution of cultural objects. Given the international scale and level of risk involved in the governance of museums, my research questions are as follows:

1. As museum governors and leaders grapple with the discursive claims and controversy surrounding the restitution debates, how is the future, responsive museum addressing internationally material strategic and reputational risk?
2. How does the response of collective elite voices within a set of museums signal or trigger era change in the field?

A subset of questions consider:

1. What does strategic success look like in the future, responsive museum?

2. To what extent are the current debates shaping the status and identity of museum governance?

1.5 Research perspective

Restitution is arguably the largest existential pressure to hit museums in decades and has been an issue for a century if not longer. **Table One** charts a timeline of restitution. This case of the shared reimagining of museums is valuable to the governing of collective institutions across our global investment sphere, as boards and leaders take on new duties of care in our increasingly complex geopolitical state.

The findings herein will help build an overview of the issues and topics supporting the strategic direction of museum governing decisions and explore the continuum of how boards of museums are responding to external pressures. Over the past hundred years, we have seen shifts in forms of governance, new stakeholders, post-colonialism and a series of contested issues, and I am interested in how these scenarios map a model of the new museum, and how leaders and governors' narratives contribute to the visualization of the reimagined museum field. The case of the reimagining and restructuring of museums in response to changing societal priorities can be seen as a subset of larger concerns shaping newly mobilized debates in governance and new political economies.

As a nascent proposed 'Restitutional Era" is envisaged, the societal story of which is not completely written, and the situation of which is not settled, we cannot prematurely call the

situation finalized. But for now, this is a story of temporality and diffusion, wherein a burgeoning moral imperative has infused governing discussions, over time, to affect breakthrough decisions, leading to high profile returns and new institutional thought leaders setting the direction for the field.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sets up the research context, approach, and scholarly aims put forward in this thesis. These contributions support my claim that we are seeing a system-influencing temporal acceleration of a proposed nascent "Restitutional Era" driven by "moral form" decisions characterized as a breakthrough in museum governance. In the public realm, external pressures to solve the restitution debates placed on museums by, for example, French President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 speech at the University of Ouagadougou, and the subsequent Sarr Savoy report (2018), plus societal pressure to return the Parthenon Sculptures (table one) have added urgency to the debates. Recent scholarly calls for restitution (Hicks, 2020; Savoy, 2022), and international reports such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), comprise a situational context ripe for meaningful action. This readiness for change across the museum field is bolstered by precedents in organizational scholarship defined in this chapter as a "Professionalization Era" in the 1920s (DiMaggio, 1991), a "Super-Professionalization Era" in the 1960s to 80s (Alexander, 1996), and a current "Discursive Collision Era" leading up to, and during, the 2020s (Charities Act, 2022; Hicks, 2020; Hicks and Ladewig, 2026; Macron, 2017; Van Broekhoven, 2018). The arrival at, and definitions of, these eras are described in section 2.1.2.

2.1 Research approach

My researcher identity is established herein as multi-disciplinary, using qualitative research methods. Denzin et al describe qualitative research as “a field of inquiry” that “crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters” (Denzin et al, 2024: 12). The authors assert that as interpretivist perspectives in theory making gained prominence over time, researchers were “learning how to borrow from many different disciplines” and “cut across disciplinary divides” (ibid: 13). They contend that we have reached a point of evolution in qualitative research that “calls for a critical, performative, social justice inquiry directed at the multiple crises of our historical present. We need a rethinking of where we have been and, crucially, where we are going – and how we will get there” to “meet the demands of our hopeful – but evolving – future” (ibid: 14). This statement has highly informed my disciplinary identity and approach to discovering answers to my research questions, and inquiry into the decision making of museum leaders and governors as they address the challenges of our present and prepare for the future.

Thus, with my researcher positionality described above as inclusive of artistic professional practice, the “bricolage” concept, as defined by Denzin et al, was attractive in constructing reality, given its comparability and relatability to the artistic process I had refined for a master’s degree in painting, and used in ongoing studio practice. A “bricoleur”, as drawn by the authors, “reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism, queer theory, posthumanism) that can be brought to any particular problem” (ibid: 16). The authors describe the concept as “a complex, quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations” (ibid: 16). I adapted this concept closely in my narrative representation of the cases presented in chapter four. Thus, I define my approach to this “bricolage” concept as multi-

disciplinary, wherein I gather input and perspectives from multiple sources to add to our understanding of how museum boards grapple with the restitution debates. In this literature review I gathered input from legal, ethical/moral, material culture and governance/organizational perspectives to support this act of drawing on multiple perspectives.

My researcher positionality (Charmaz, 2014) described in the methods chapter as one of artist, executive and board governor, afforded me an appreciable level of trust by, and access to, elite interviewees in museums across four nations. This positional identity established empirical conditions to explore with multidisciplinary (Denzin et al, 2024) rigour the complexity of board governance in this far-reaching debate. Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) allowed for an interpretive approach in analyzing multiple perspectives to learn how governors construct meaning to make internationally relevant decisions in a time of urgency.

2.2. Key terms and definitions

Several key terms are referenced in this work and defined as follows. First, the term "**field**" is described as a set of autonomous institutions, globally situated, for which the patterns and decisions made by governors and leaders over time affect the whole. The term is used in bodies of literature instrumental to this chapter when referring to the understanding of museums as a set (Hicks and Ladewig, 2026: 59; Savoy, 2022: 78).

The second term, "**crisis**", is pulled from Renfrew's early framing of the restitution issues as such. He states "(c)risis is not too strong a word to use when we speak of the predicament which

today faces the historic heritage in nearly every country on earth" (Renfrew, 2000: 9). I use the word "crisis" to mean a situation that requires an urgency response by institutional leaders and governors. The word is used liberally in executive suites to signal a level of importance in affording a situation affecting the institution, especially insofar as it requires addressing by the board. When thinking of governance responsibilities that concern the financial health of a museum, the act of returning cultural objects should provoke thinking regarding not just the moral, but the financial issues associated with the debates. Writing on the complexity of valuation in museums today, in the context of these and other issues, Hahn writes "this task has plunged those responsible for collections into deep uncertainty" (Hahn, 2026 :471). Unpredictability and uncertainty are highly concerning for boards and executive leaders, and if deemed threatening to the ongoing operations of the institution, prompts crisis, or crisis-like thinking, and is thus considered herein from both the Renfrew-esque academic, and practical terms.

Finally, two terms are central to the arguments in this thesis that are dependent on a finding that museum board governors and leaders examined in this study align to either "**legal form**" decisions or "**moral form**" decisions. This polarity is causing tension, especially concerning the British Museum as a critical site of pressure and debate. The definition of legal and moral form institutions is derived herein from Bénédicte Savoy's sweeping text "Africa's Struggle for its Art" (2022) wherein she acutely articulates the early days of the restitution debates between 1960 and 1985. Savoy quotes the first draft of a letter written by Hans-Georg Wormit, a German government official, to Carl Gussone, at the Ministry of the Interior overseeing Matters of Cultural Conservation, penned on August 7, 1972 (Savoy, 2022: 21). This quote shows that early

framing of the restitution domain along polarized positions was described as moral versus legal. The quoted section reads as follows: "Any yielding to the, initially *"moral"*, demands of the developing countries would however in my opinion also weaken the *legal* position (italics mine) of all those museums that possess and legitimately own artworks from other countries of origin" (ibid: 23). Savoy further shares details of an exchange occurring on television on December 18, 1984, during a panel hosted by Wilfried Hoffer, a German television personality with twelve guests, on the subject of "colonialism, museums and restitution" (ibid: 131), wherein the host asked social psychologist Dr. Klaus Horn a question that reads:

> *"I have just been handed a note, a call from a viewer, that the moral side received too little attention so far. And maybe we should go into it for another moment now. The moral side means, of course, that many people even here with us have a sense of guilt vis-à-vis the Third World, for historical but also other reasons, and I would be interested to hear what a social psychologist says about it" (ibid: 133).*

Dr. Klaus answers: "Well, if you want to discuss the issue now as a moral problem as well, then I fear that the Europeans will completely withdraw to a legal position... I would therefore rather prefer to leave the moral question out of it" (ibid: 133). Consequently, I use the term "moral form" for museums that are addressing the debates with demonstrable action to address the subject of colonialism and restitution, and "legal form" for museums that are addressing the restitution tensions with laws that favour retaining cultural objects in the holding museum.

The narrative thus follows a set of institutions throughout the field as leaders and board governors of identifiable "moral form" institutions make breakthrough decisions and take actions derived from identified practical forces, framed as "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117) and built from Charmaz's CGT method (ibid). Said concepts are described as both entry points to

abductive reasoning in this literature review, and as process in the methods chapter. These concepts are drawn from a systematic examination of the texts described below and shown extensively in Savoy's text (2020). Using a process of iterating back and forth with the emerging data and foundational literature brought forward in this chapter, the "sensitizing concepts" (ibid:117) provided rich material from which my reasoning emerged and is discussed in section 2.2.2. With the legal and moral forms established to build theory (ibid, 2014), I have structured this literature review using a multidisciplinary research identity (Denzin, Lincoln, Giardina and Cannella, 2024) and theoretical perspectives described in section 2.2 to understand and move forward from the governing deadlock of the restitution debates.

2.3.1 Research context: Watermarks of the debate over time

The response of museum governors and directors to restitution tensions is internationally significant. The challenges are of such significance that a powerful new tool is available to help board trustees answer the question "how can museums define the moral standard of this age when constrained by historic rules of stewardship and the absence of a modern ethical framework" (Returning Heritage, 2026). This instrument, DARCA (The Decision Aid for the Restitution of Cultural Artefacts), is a "free online tool designed to help museum trustees resolve these moral decision-making dilemmas...launched by practical ethicists at Oxford's Uehiro Institute, working closely with the UK's Institute of Art and Law" (ibid). DARCA is a practical response to changes to the Charities Act 2022 (Returning Heritage, 2022), that will "make it harder" for trustees to *avoid* making restitution decisions when they could argue a moral case for return (ibid). This is great progress for practitioners, and my study aims to contribute to the

scholarly and practical evolution of thinking about governing responses to this intractable problem over time. Looking back over the watermarks of the debate shows how we arrived here.

Two centuries ago, Lord Byron's "Curse of the Minerva" (Byron, 1820), offered poetry as protest that the Parthenon Sculptures were being held at the British Museum. Mary Beard eloquently penned: "And there is, of course, a whole tradition, flamboyantly launched by Lord Byron, that makes tears obligatory on the Acropolis, not for the overwhelming beauty of the Parthenon, but for its tragic ruin and for what he saw as its horrible dismemberment" (Beard, 2010: 11). Much academic discourse ensued over decades leading up to the 2018 Sarr/Savoy report debating the issue both for restitution (Fouseki, 2014; Renfrew, 2000), and against (Cuno, 2009; Jenkins, 2016).

Since the Sarr/Savoy report was published, Bénédicte Savoy's own book covering the history of the debates during a formative period between 1965 and 1985 claimed that "(o)ver thirty years ago, European museums and cultural administrations succeeded in thwarting Africa's struggle for its art, but also in suppressing public debate and the collective memory of it through such statements. Yet, after decades *the repressed subject has now returned* (italics mine)" (Savoy, 2022: 138). Furthermore, with the current era being defined in this thesis as one of "Discursive Collision", (explained in section 2.3.3) not only has the subject returned, but I claim that external pressures and institutional legacy form a situational context that is pushing on the governance decision platform strongly enough to cause a collision between "moral and legal forms" leading to actions that generate a "Restitutional Era".

Of course, cases have been made for decades both for and against restitution. A flurry of debate occurred around 2000 leading up to the Macron speech. With Colin Renfrew, a frequently cited scholar supporting restitution in early framing of the debate characterizing the issue as a "crisis", (Renfrew, 2000: 9), strong positions were becoming established. As the argument to restitute gained power over the next few years, theories regarding the moral imperative of peoples' attachment to sacred history and desire to perform active ceremony took hold (Fouseki, 2014; Peers, Reinius & Shannon, 2017; Van Broekhoven, 2018), alongside the critique of reasoning that cultural objects' safety and security was more comprised in their home countries (Atkinson, 2010; Conaty, 2015; Cubillo, 2010; Simpson, 2016) in an ever fraught and fragile geopolitical environment worldwide. Concurrently, Tiffany Jenkins, arguing against restitution in an oft-cited book on the subject entitled "Keeping their marbles: How the treasures of the past ended up in museums…and why they should stay there" (Jenkins, 2016) stated that her "central observation is that our great museums as institutions are struggling to find their place in the new millennium, and that this is an important contributing factor in why they have become the object of scrutiny, and defensive in response" (Jenkins, 2016: 9).

Then, in 2017 Macron's Ouagadougou speech achieved international acclaim, with his statement that "I cannot accept that a large share of several African countries' cultural heritage be kept in France…there is no valid, lasting and unconditional justification…Within five years I want the conditions to exist for temporary or permanent returns of African heritage to Africa" (Élysée, 2017). Already, the #RhodesMustFall protests had "picked up steam at Oxford University by 2016, with a student-led campaign for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College" (Abraham, 2021: 4). And then, in 2020, after the killing of George Floyd, the Black

Lives Matters movement became a powerful agent of change for human rights and decolonialization, including the push to remove monuments associated with colonialism (Abraham, 2021; Hicks, 2025). Taken together, the sands shifted to wider, more urgent public demands for change regarding civil rights more broadly, and restitution as an exemplar of tangible change.

Thus, a critical assumption in this thesis holds that wide-scale restitution, including the return of the Parthenon Sculptures, will eventually be inevitable within burgeoning frameworks and international guidance like DARCA. The persuasive voices for restitution have cascaded attention to the magnitude of the problem for two hundred years, and now, as Savoy suggests, the response by civil society, and the buildup of institutional legacy, has reached a catalytic level of influence thus populating a compelling research context.

2.3.2. Research context: Increasing pressure through calls to action

Emmanuel Macron's Ouagadougou speech and subsequent commissioning of the Sarr Savoy report, which states that "acquisitions of cultural heritage should be considered within a different category: that of transgressive acts, which no juridical, administrative, cultural, or economic apparatus would be capable of legitimizing" (Sarr and Savoy, 2018: 8), upped the ante of political urgency. Sarr and Savoy were unequivocal in their perspectives. They asked if the idea of restitution could be framed into something less political, less economic, and more germane to the idea of culture itself, and if consideration could be given to how restitution could be reimagined as inhabiting, cultivating and honouring cultural material, and peoples (ibid). They

state that with this new paradigm of restitution, objects could circulate around the world, and they describe the objects themselves as achieving freedom (ibid), whilst opening the discourse about them. The report is a clarion call for the consideration of objects as holding a kind of life and meaning (ibid) that has not been of paramount concern in the debates about restitution.

University of Oxford professor and Pitt Rivers Museum curator Dan Hicks' book *The Brutish Museums* (Hicks, 2020) is as persuasive as the Sarr/Savoy report, and described as a watershed moment in the debates, as discussed in the methods chapter, see table ten. Hicks argues that museums should be reconfigured as spaces that acknowledge the violence of colonialism, particularly in relation to Africa. He suggests that museums ought to take practical steps towards restitution (ibid) because they have been operating as a weapon, and as such, the "colonial museum has failed" (ibid:10). This failure is due to presentations that display political victories in a way that goes on in perpetuity, with the taking of photographs and the taking of cultural material being equally problematic, both actions of violence in a colonialist era. Museums, thus, are due for a colonial reckoning, and interestingly, he identifies a particular time, around 2015, as the impetus for change, and that this time "will appear, in retrospect, to have been a distinctly African moment" (ibid: 209). Curatorial work is the opportunity, and he states that "(m)useums must put an end to this through developing and investing in a new approach to restitution, where the duty of understanding and action begins with the curator" (ibid: 218).

Two UNESCO reports, the first from 2016, entitled *The UNESCO recommendation on the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society*, and the follow-up from 2019 entitled the *Report on the implementation of the UNESCO 2015*

Recommendation on Museums and Collections: Recommendation concerning the protection of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society also offered a way forward, with a focus on "education, inspiration and dialogue" (UNESCO, 2015: 5). The 2015 report further references engagement with the public given museums "play an essential role in social cohesion and sharing collective references (ibid" 5). The 2019 report reinforces the societal context affecting museum operations, including "globalization… economic quality of life…social cohesion, citizenship education and collective identities…and information and communication technologies" (Mairesse, 2019). Thus, UNESCO has clearly laid out for museums the importance of social change, and elements upon which to track progress.

Museums have experienced impactful disruption through the media, with particular attention paid to the Parthenon Sculptures at the British Museum. For example, Helena Smith wrote in the Guardian on December 3, 2022, that "(i)n August, the British Museum's deputy director, Jonathan Williams, announced that the institution was eager to 'change the temperature of the debate' after UNESCO ruled it imperative that the affair was discussed at an inter-government level" (Smith, 2022, The Guardian). And Graham Bowley wrote in the New York Times on December 16, 2022 "U.S. Homeland Security Investigations reports returning more than 20,000 items since 2007, largely seized from dealers and collectors, but also found in many of America's more prestigious museums" (Bowley, 2022, The New York Times). These are two among countless examples that document the perception of museum resources as geopolitical fodder and the items themselves as controversially contested material. This thesis addresses reporting in one paper, The Guardian, covered in the Methods chapter, and shown in table nine.

Regulatory material is another powerful external pressure on the case for restitution: A primary case for return, played out over two centuries, centres on the Parthenon Sculptures, also known as the Parthenon Marbles, or the Elgin Marbles. In Appendix 34, submitted by the Committee on the Parthenon for the Minutes of Evidence, printed on July 18, 2000, for the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee Publications (www.parliament.uk, July 18, 2000), a succinct summary of the history of the marbles is dispassionately described, covering legal and political milestones, with international and United Kingdom standpoints, and corresponding legal perspective. A highlight of the minutes is shown as follows:

> *"2.6. Global interest in the matter of the Parthenon Marbles has been widely known for many decades but has intensified in recent years. Over the years, UNESCO has worked to open a dialogue among the parties to work toward return of the Marbles.*
>
> *2.7. The United Kingdom*
>
> *2.7. In the 184 years since the vote (hereinafter "Vote")15 for the purchase of the Marbles in 1816, British public opinion has mounted steadily toward the current support for reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.*
>
> *2.8. The first was a 1996 BBC phone-in poll, after a documentary on the Marbles, and the result was 92.5 per cent of the 99,340 people who called in said they supported return of the Marbles to Greece.*
>
> *6.2. Now that Parliament "vested" the Collection in the Trustees that the Collection be cared for and retained together, the necessary reading is that Parliament did not fully alienate the Marbles but retained legal authority over the Collection.*
>
> *6.3. Any doubt about the legislative intent of the 1816 Parliament to retain control is allayed by the British Museum Act, 196367 which clearly prohibits the Museum from alienating any part of its holdings"* (www.parliament.uk, July 18, 2000).

The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, formed in 1983, submitted a memorandum via Appendix 12 for the same July 18, 2000, House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee Publications, (www.parliament.uk, July 18, 2000), that includes the following passages:

> *"3. THE CASE FOR THE RETURN*
>
> *When a Committee of the House of Commons recommended the acquisition of the "Elgin" Marbles in 1816, it accepted Lord Elgin's claim that he had been authorised by a "firman" issued in 1801…*
>
> *No firmans were produced in evidence…*
>
> *3.1 ...If the Parthenon itself and the British Museum's collection of Parthenon Sculptures lay within the same state boundaries, but 2,000 miles apart, there is no question but that they would not be brought together.*
>
> *3.2 The British Museum's position in this matter is based on ownership. We urge that it is of greater international importance to consider the unity of the monument itself"* (www.parliament.uk, July 18, 2000).

The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles was founded in 1983 in response to pleas for their return by Melina Mercouri, a Greek celebrity and politician, during the UNESCO International Conference of Ministers of Culture in Mexico, Aug 1982 (www.atom.aim25.com). Robert Browning, former chair of the Committee, writes in his essay for Christopher Hitchens' book The Parthenon Marbles: The Case for Reunification, "The Parthenon has been and is for almost all Greeks the symbol *par excellence* of their national identity, of their links with the past, and of the contribution that they and their forefathers have made to the civilisation in which we all share" (Browning, 2025: 13).

The African Foundation for Development published a report in June 2020 covering comprehensive survey research undertaken by the organization to "map communities of practice in the UK in relation to the restitution of stolen African artefacts and human remains in UK museums and cultural institutions" (AFFORD, 2020: 3). The researchers found that the "respondents were overwhelmingly (approximately 80% of all respondents) in favour of the

return of stolen African artefacts and human remains to their countries and communities of origin" (AFFORD, 2020: 3). They write: "The agitation for the return of African artefacts has continued to grow in more recent years… As the release of Nelson Mandela and expected collapse of the apartheid regime unfolded in the early 1990s" (AFFORD, 2020: 7).

Finally, we have seen civil society calls to action, such as The Guardian Poll, "Time to Return the Marbles" (The Guardian, 2009), and interesting celebrity calls to action. Table one identifies several of these, including work done by Melina Mercouri, Greek celebrity and politician, to shed light on the situation in 1982, the Parthenon 2004 campaign of 90 actors and MPs who made significant strides forward, and George and Amal Clooney, who made another attempt in 2014.

These examples show a mix of political, governmental and regulatory calls to action, in tandem with recommendations regarding engagement, education, and curatorial concerns layered over the foundational purpose of the institution. Thus, macro disruption has pressurized the systemic context within which the museum field operates, and I theorize that the "Restitutional Era" coming into 2020 was set to begin.

2.3.3. Research context: Institutional legacy, eras and breakthroughs

A principal contribution of this thesis is the examination of defining eras of museums as considered through the lens of museum governance. I argue that "moral form" museums are moving ahead of "legal form" museums as viewed through several critical actions such as

framing, visioning, engaging, and attending to reputation and vocabulary as discussed in chapters five and six. A key text in providing theoretical foundational thinking to support this claim comes from Fligstein, an economic, organizational and political sociologist, thus enriching the multi-disciplinary identity of this thesis.

Fligstein, in the Transformation of Corporate Control, (Fligstein, 1990), studied "1000 of the largest industrial enterprises in the United States since 1880 (and) how they transformed in terms of conception, identity, strategy and structure" (ibid: 11). His considerable contribution to the discourse regarding how organizations transform included the conceptualization of organizational fields as gaining stability when more powerful organizations help less powerful organizations coalesce around a sophisticated form (ibid: 1990).

Fligstein addresses the social pressures that push an institution to destabilization, and eventual transformation, whether political or economic, rattling the field's "power structure" (Fligstein, 1990: 7), leading to actors responding by "altering the rules" (ibid: 7). He describes this activity as rare, risky, and impactful to organizational control. Fligstein argues that "(w)hen executives in a leading firm alter their conception of control, the rules shift as the power base shifts, and executives in other firms will follow the new example" (ibid: 259). Furthermore, Fligstein and McAdam state that scholarship concerning change across a field addresses the phenomenon of actors working together through crisis and challenge. They write "(a)ll have discovered that in times of dramatic change, new ways of organizing 'cultural frames' or 'logics of action' come into existence. These are wielded by skilled social actors…who come to innovate, propagate, and organize strategic action fields" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012: 4).

This is exactly what is happening in the case of museum leadership and governance in the making of a new era. Restitution holds considerable adjacency to institutional reputation, which is increasingly valuable and fragile in our social media-driven world. Fligstein and McAdam's argument that field shifts "are focused on the emergence, stabilization/institutionalization, and transformation of social constructed arenas in which embedded actors compete for material and status rewards" (ibid: 5), is particularly poignant in the face of reputational competitive position.

This study does not find, as described in chapters four and five, that the most well-known leaders of museums, as one might expect, are responsible for the temporal acceleration in the field. Rather, this is a case of diffusion across time, as somewhat lesser-known museums like the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, Canada, and the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London, England (than, say the British Museum), seize power through strong, well-publicized, reputation-oriented decisions. I argue that this directionality of restitution-forward museums is made along a plane of moral form, surpassing in public opinion the governing decisions of the British Museum, in the case of the Parthenon Sculptures, as tracked closely in The Guardian newspaper, over decades.

Alongside these pressures is a history of what I am calling the "Professionalization Era" of the 1920s to 1940s, the "Super-Professionalization Era" of the 1960s to 1980s, the "Discursive Collision Era" up to and into the 2020s, and the proposed "Restitutional Era" of the nascent and near future.

Other authors have examined museums through the lens of time, and change, for instance, Bennett wrote that the museum "acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Bennett, 1995: 19). He thinks critically about how museums can be understood as sites of policy and politics, and how they have evolved (ibid: 4 -5) drawing on Foucault's conception of space. Or Hooper-Greenhill's tome "Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992), covers several epistemological eras, spanning centuries, stating that the years leading up to her arguments have shown a "major shifting and reorganization" of the field (ibid: 1). She states: "Museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them" (ibid: 1). Alexander explicitly describes three, and potentially a fourth era, defining these as "the philanthropy period (1960 – 1966), the transition period (1968 – 1972), and the funding period (1974 – 1986)" (Alexander, 1996: 130) and suggests a burgeoning "retrenchment period…characterized by a dearth of funds" (ibid: 130). Powerful voices like McCarthy write about an "Indigenization" era, as museums bring Indigenous ways of knowing and being into the institution (McCarthy, 2011), and Savoy, who crucially describes important and sometimes devastating periods of dramatic action punctuating the restitution debates between 1960 and 1985. Her work explicitly lays out detailed material describing when decisive action was taken on both sides of the debate, and when opportunities were lost (Savoy, 2022).

In thinking of eras more broadly, Kuhn notably offered the zeitgeist a powerful tool in his conceptualization of paradigms. He writes: "These I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of

practitioners" (Kuhn, 1970: viii). Kuhn examined the progress of science, with periods of "normal" and "revolutionary" phases (ibid), described by critics as corresponding "to great conceptual breakthroughs" (Naughton, 2012) ahead of further periods of statis. The idea of breakthroughs regarding a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn, 1970) *appears* to be theoretically close to how I conceptualize "breakthroughs" in this thesis, but it is different.

Kuhn's idea of breakthrough ties to his statement that "scientific revolutions are here taken to be those non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one" (ibid: 92). I am arguing against this. I claim that governors and leaders in the museum field have been learning from, as much as responding to, external pressure, both practical and academic, and absorbing the urgency of restitutional controversies, to methodically take decisive action that is nevertheless of such an important scale that it can be considered a breakthrough of organizational form. I define this breakthrough as "temporal acceleration", exposed and addressed through the pressures and academic discourse. This "temporal acceleration" is the purposeful action taken by "moral form" museum leaders and governors in the making of decisions of such magnitude that they reflect the work of the past and present and shape it into a material, measurable assemblage of something new(ish). It is not a clean break from the past, or a revolution. It has much more in common with Hicks and Ladewig's idea of "slow inheritance" (2026). The decisions undertaken by museum leaders and governors to achieve "temporal acceleration" is described in chapter six as infrastructural, intellectual, and emotional, and is coherent enough to create new ideas and free-up past tensions, thus making room for an era in museum activity that is free of the bounds of colonial debris.

Thus, my theoretical background for the discussion of eras, is inspired by Hicks and Ladewig, (2026) whose theory of "slow inheritance" is critical to this thesis. The authors critique the Kuhnian account of change and offer a way of thinking about museums in a manner that expands on what it means to be a person of directional responsibility and governance in the decisions driving the institution forward, and through the dynamics of professionalism as well as social pressure. It all comes together in what I call the "Discursive Collision Era" that peaked with Hicks (2020) and Hicks and Ladewig (2025), ergo, I build on the theoretical background supporting this thesis in the "Discursive Collision Era", after looking back at earlier eras, in the section below.

DiMaggio on museums: The Professionalization Era 1920s to 1940s

Professionalization, and the implied power of the employee in setting strategic direction of the institution, is central to the defining of a prominent modern era of the museum within the boundaries of the last century. Paul DiMaggio, in his often-cited work "Constructing an organizational field as a professional project: U.S. art museums, 1920 – 1940" (DiMaggio, 1991), laid out the characteristics of this definable era in the last century.

DiMaggio examined museums from this period (ibid: 273) leveraging them as an empirical exemplar to explain his theory of how an organizational field is structured using a model defined by diffusion, tensions and professionals (ibid). Central to his argument was the Carnegie Corporation, a granting body to museums and the arts, which became an ally of museum professionals through professional responsibilities expected of them in the granting process.

This, along with the rise of "city patronage" (ibid: 273), whose leaders were looking for more educational direction from museum professionals "offered pivotal support to the structuration of the field" (ibid: 268).

In DiMaggio's model, the organization of actions of workers in the museum field legitimized the professionalization of their roles. He contended that the dotting of museum infrastructure across the nation was enhanced by philanthropy, wherein founding elites who had a high degree of governing control over the institutions led to a hastened diffusion of the structured field. Concurrently, museum professionals came together with a set of scholarly and credentialed interests specific to their institutional mandates and mission, that sometimes differed from the founding elites. As a result, tension created a deepening clarity of institutional structure as conflict was realized less within each institution, and more across the field, forming professionals into a unit that was clearly articulated and understood (ibid). All this is to say that with this nexus of diffusion, tensions and professionalization, DiMaggio finds evidence of a rise in increasing paid staff, including educational staff, departments, and city patronage resulting in the levelling up of staff power over trustee power, more connections between communities and museums, more interest in art overall, manifesting in more art schools, art theses, expertise, art consumers, and art departments in academia (ibid).

DiMaggio's "Professionalization Era" describes a field that manifested its own policies wherein museum professionals organized activities in response to collective administrative pressure, and not just those of the elite, founding trustees (ibid) who prioritized "art collections, family

philanthropy, (and) connoisseurship" (ibid: 282). Thus, an activism of professionalization emerged over organizational authority (ibid). In short, professionals had power.

Alexander on Museums: The Super-professionalization Era 1960s to 1980s

Prominent museum scholar Victoria D. Alexander, influenced by DiMaggio, argues in her important paper "Pictures at an exhibition: Conflicting pressures in museums and the display of art" (Alexander, 1996) and the book published the same year, "Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship, and Management" (Alexander, 1996), that museum managers have been working to maintain their autonomy within, and withstand environmental pressures on, their organizations. She suggests that resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) and institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Meyer and Scott, 1992) explain how this outcome is manifested. She rationalizes that museums are dependent on money and resources to create exhibitions for the public, and that "to maintain such funding, resource dependency predicts, museums conform to the demands of those who supply resources – for example, they mount shows that conform to funder preferences" (Alexander, 1996: 799). Institutional theory (Meyer and Scott, 1992; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1995), on the other hand, considers how organizations are shaped by their environment (Alexander, 1996: 14), and that the legitimacy of the organization will be of paramount importance to the professionals working within. Alexander claims that institutional theory predicts that the museum workforce will seek to ensure credibility is retained through legitimating supporting institutions like associations and granting bodies. She writes that "a

museum must maintain a good reputation to proved that it is an organization worthy of donations (ibid; 15). This creates a tension and set up for a defined era.

Alexander states that since we know that influential sponsorship of exhibitions occurs by funders, resource dependency and institutional theories support the hypothesis that funders will have power over exhibitions. However, curators can influence this exhibition output by "channeling, deflecting, or mediating the external effect" (ibid: 798) to manifest more scholarly work. In "Museums and Money" she elegantly states the crux of the matter that I argue sets up the "Super-Professionalization Era". She writes: "Funders pressure museums in a variety of ways, both direct and indirect, and museum personnel do their best to avoid pressures…But in forging such arrangements, museums become crucibles of conflicting factions where tempers flare and ideals clash" (Alexander, 1996: xiii). She talks of changes during this period of museum history wherein a clash of two logic models occurred: that which concerns the curatorial, art historical, and mandate, versus that of the business, and economic, supported by "administrators, board members, and, to a large degree, by museum directors" (ibid: 82).

Alexander is building on DiMaggio's work to situate museums as institutions with increasing professional stakes within the field. She references Judith Huggins Balfe, who writes that museums are locations of political symbolism, holding power regarding international relations and agendas (Balfe, 1987). Balfe describes artworks themselves as "cultural ambassadors" with propagandistic qualities (Balfe, 1987: 25) and argues that blockbuster shows are emblems of this power. Alexander furthers this thinking with emphasis on blockbusters as sites of agency and power as influenced by the curatorial members of the structured field (Alexander, 1996). She

argues that as the influence of philanthropic interjections increases, blockbusters and travelling shows help curators maintain control because these shows attract audience share and maintain integrity regarding scholarly analysis.

The “Super-Professionalization Era”, and the blockbuster effect, shows the resolve of professionals in the face of external pressure, and illustrates museums as convincing symbols of institutional political power and social change. This era refines the dynamic between funder and curator, with higher financial rewards and risks, and greater public pressure as the idea of political and organizational agency is entrenched. If one is of an age to remember the rise of the blockbusters, they were fun, exciting, and brought art to broader social demographics, and both cost, and made, serious money. Blockbusters put museums on a big tourism stage and were (and are) a talking point in civil society. They set a strong precedent for museums to both benefit and experience new risks as a spotlight was shone on the institution, and political agency was starting to be more directly tested. Just as Alexander defined a set of three, and potentially four eras in her “Museums and Money” book, from the benefit of further distance from that time period, I look at her temporal framing as a strong contribution, building on DiMaggio’s early writing about professionalization, and a thread to follow in understanding the next era, that I have titled the “Discursive Collision Era” of the 2020s.

The Discursive Collision Era 2020s

The museum field has seen a shift through the “Professionalization Era” and the “Super-Professionalization Era” involving the rise of the professional, diffused across the sector, leading

to curatorial power and credibility (DiMaggio, 1991) and reaching an apex in the blockbuster era and ultra-organization of curatorial authority in the context of increasing resource demands (Alexander, 1996). Leading up to 2020, after the seismic shift of the Macron speech in 2017 and the Sarr/Savoy report in 2018, this path was significantly disrupted. I am called this disruption the "**Discursive Collision Era**", which is not a paradigm shift, or a break from the past, but a temporal acceleration of building pressure both inside and external to museums. I define the "Discursive Collision Era" as the tension point wherein the legal element of professionalized practice collides with the "moral form" that is responding to both external pressures of restitution, and new thinking about the objects themselves, informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing.

I have coined the term "**object durationality**" to describe what is happening to the objects as the Discursive Era takes hold. "Object durationality" is derived from Hicks' thinking that "archaeology is not the study of the remnants of the past: it's the science of human duration" (Hicks, 2020:36). The term is used to describe the inherent "life" as Indigenous people describe it, in the object, that is a factor pushing museums forward in making bolder decisions about restitution. It is important to state up front here that I am not an Indigenous person, and in no way represent or speak for Indigenous ontology. Rather, I seek to communicate a modest piece of what I have learned from Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing.

Thus, it is hard to express, and words in a thesis fail to describe the depth of feeling that the loss of cultural objects, considered, often, as having "livingness", sacredness and ancestry, inhabits for Indigenous peoples. Turnbull and Pickering say it well:

> *"There is one thing that can never be stolen from our people and that is their spirit. They can box us up, stick us on shelves, experiment to no end, trade us and even swap us but our spirit will never be broken; while I am alive I will do all in my power to right the wrongs of history and face the keepers and collectors and the like to return my people home so their spirits can rest at last"* (Turnbull and Pickering, 2010: 18).

They describe the hurt that is felt by Indigenous peoples when faced with the display of their peoples. For example, they describe the spiritual meaning, and sacredness of the cultural material set out for all to see, sharing that some is meant only for women, some meant only for men. (ibid, 2010).

At the root of "object durationality" is the recognition of the Indigenous ontology that life is inherent in the cultural object. (I acknowledge that the term "cultural objects" used throughout this thesis is difficult, and rooted in colonialism, but to appropriate an Indigenous word would feel, at this time, an overstep into Indigenous ontology, for which I have profound respect.) An impeccable description of the life force in cultural objects was stated by Nesrin Yavaş in her discussion about "Indigenous materialisms" sharing that "these knowledge systems do not frame materiality and spirituality as separate realms. Instead, they perceive all human and non-human beings as enmeshed in dynamic relationships of reciprocity, respect, and co-responsibility" (Yavaş, 2025: 357).

Peers, as well, in writing about ceremonial objects as thought of in terms of ancestry, writes about a set of Blackfoot shirts, saying these "are potentially animate, associated with the spirits of those who made and wore them, and whose bodies were used to make them…spirits associate

with them might leave if treated disrespectfully, in which case they would become inanimate" (Peers, 2013: 138).

Thus, the term "object durationality" came from seeking a way to describe both the Indigenous ontological view of life and ancestry experienced in the material world, and a theory springing from Hicks concerns with the weaponization of the museum, through the idea of "necrography" and work "to resist the position of entanglement and biography" (Hicks, 2020: 35)

"Object durationality" is defined as a phenomenon wherein we are seeing museum leaders and governors of the "moral form" advance relations with material in the institution in a new way that is highly considerate of the life and ancestry of the cultural object. It describes both the life-force and the action to advance Hicks' ideas on finding a way forward through the violence of the museum. The idea of "object durationality" builds on Hicks' discussion of "necrography" wherein he states "(t)he focus of the necrographer must therefore be unashamedly on the white men who took these things and inflicted such loss, so that we can understand and locate what was taken, and can inform and catalyse the task of restitution" (ibid: 154).

In so doing, I see "object durationality" as the action-oriented (Charmaz, 2014) breakthrough that connects scholarly research and practice concerning, within, and across museums. In the act of recognizing, respecting, and taking actions of change in relationship with Indigenous and sacred material, museum leaders and governors make a "temporal acceleration" past the current "Discursive Collision Era" towards a "Restitutional Era" argued in this thesis. Just as Yavaş writes of the importance of "embracing Indigenous materialisms" to accelerate past the ideas of

inclusion and "otherness" onward "towards a pluralistic intellectual practice that can genuinely address the complex crises of our time" (ibid: 367), the multi-disciplinary position I have taken in this work relies on the Indigenous idea of walking together, to hear the balance of Indigenous and museum critical theory in tandem.

Hence, I coined the term "**temporal acceleration**", defined as the ignition of a set of governing decisions that triggers documentable and publicly evident actions affecting the field. The term builds on Hicks' concept of "chronopolitics" (Hicks, 2020: 180) wherein museums like the Pitt Rivers in Oxford, England, "normalize" and "dehumanize" the "displayed" cultural objects, frozen in time as an act of "weaponry" thus "memorialized" in time "through the technology of the anthropology museum" (ibid: 180-182). Hicks makes a major point in "Brutish Museums" that "(a) time of taking is giving way to a time of returns, like the gun that shoots twice, a second moment is coming" (ibid: 17) and I claim that moment is now. I thus argue herein that a "temporal acceleration" has occurred through governing decisions across key institutions within the field, only held back by the heterogeneity of the "legal form" decision-making of the British Museum concerning the Parthenon Sculptures.

Thus, the current "Discursive Collision Era" emphasizes Hicks and Ladewig's calls for urgency (Hicks and Ladewig, 2026: 59), framing the current era as one where that urgency is colliding with the stale legal positions holding, say, the British Museum back from breakthrough decisions. In the previous two eras, professional rigour and policy/practice were valued and foregrounded to afford power to professional practice. This is a good thing, but when it is used to slow action and segue power to the institution as a site of weaponry (Hicks, 2020) the collision

occurs, and we are seeing, now, as shown in my data, a prominent shift. Hicks and Ladewig describe a tension now in museums, that there is an "inheritance" embedded in "the time-warped, tacit colonialism in the discipline of archaeology" (Hicks and Ladewig, 2026: 67). The authors examine how there is a phenomenon of implicit knowledge that is baked into the institution, making it difficult to move forward, which is especially problematic when dealing with the colonial past, and restitution tensions (ibid: 69). But they bring the chapter to a close on a significant note of promise: They build on Sarah Amhed's idea of "slow inheritance" in her book "Complaint!" wherein she states that "(w)hen structures begin to collapse, the impact of past efforts becomes tangible" (Ahmed, 2021: 310). Hicks and Ladewig write: "But as the temporal regimes of archaeology continue to fail, and with them the enduring colonialism, dehumanisations, and supremacies hard-wired into the discipline and its institutions, orthodoxies, inheritances to be refused not retained, above all there is hope" (Hicks and Ladewig, 2026: 69).

When the "Discursive Collision Era' meets the proposed, nascent "Restitutional Era", system-influencing temporal acceleration of breakthrough governance will flourish, but not until, I submit, the British Museum adopts a moral form.

The proposed Restitutional Era

The reshaping of museums into a new symbol of political power and social change was foretold by museums scholar Eleonora Belfiore who theorized that the field imparted to society empowerment, education, identity of place, responsibilities to other people and one's role in future transformation (Belfiore, 2002). Belfiore recognized that museums affect change by

giving voice to people who have been silenced. This is the essence of what Laura Van Broekhoven is theoretically driving towards: The notion of true voice, and linkage between the institution and society, and the visible demonstration of the institution as one restructured by the welcoming of diverse perspectives, built by the collaboration of curation through power sharing between internal and external parties (Van Broekhoven, 2013). This gain of the intellectual, soulful, and cultural essence afforded by inviting into the museum diverse, transformational perspectives and an open-ness to the construct of object durationality, while letting go of our colonial past, is core to the idea herein of the temporal acceleration of the "Restitutional Era" of the museum field. The discussion in chapter six pulls apart the data and theories that support this claim.

2.4.1 Context setting: Looking at museums through an organizational lens

To get there, looking at organizational and governance literature offers useful frameworks for analysis. Elite museums are complex social, public institutions that operate with a bureaucratic organisational structure. Museums professionals have internal and external responsibilities. They think critically about their mandate concerning the public and their audiences and must take care to further the organization as an enduring, fiscally sound, establishment. Moreover, decisions made on behalf of a museum are exquisitely visibly apparent to civil society, and thus are measurable over time, as we have seen is the review of "eras". Thus, as an empirical site, museums provide a constructive bounded unit of analysis to analyse governance decision-making and breakthrough thinking under pressure. The board itself is the platform on which the

tensions from extreme pressures collide. Looking at literature addressing organisations, and organisational vocabulary is helpful to understand the arena in which these governors work.

March and Simon assert in their classic work *Organization*s first published in 1958, that organizations are significant, and the decisions that govern the institution matter to society. They matter because so many of us spend our entire lives in them and see them as "social institutions" (March and Simon, 1993: 21) that affect the lives of populations. Furthermore, March and Simon frame organizations as systems, in which those who operate bring their outside beliefs, decisions, ideologies and differences to the table. As members of the organization work to move "conflict into cooperation" (ibid: 2), they harness resources to ensure its survival. They write that survival is "accomplished primarily through control over information, identities, stories and incentives" (ibid: 2), which is a concept that is foundational to the decision-making findings of this thesis. They argue that the choices we make within institutions are dependent on how we evaluate risk and consequences, and that we enter organizations with a construct of our thinking, bounded by all we have learned and bring to a scenario, affecting our decision making, which ultimately influences the organization. They describe the synthesis of individual with organizational decisions, leading to the observation that "we must recognize ways in which any particular organization is tied into a history and a collection of organizations from which it draws aspirations, beliefs, technologies and personnel" (ibid: 16 – 17). Museums today are publicly playing out this melee of an individual/organizational synthesis of risk, consequences, and decisions, certainly within the backdrop of aspirations and beliefs. In chapter six we see distinct examples of how individual positions on restitution affect organizational decisions, leading to

real consequences in the media, as institutions become representations of the act of social change (or not).

Twenty-five years on from March and Simon, Hinings and Meyer discussed how organizational theory blossomed into an institutionalized academic pursuit, tracing the origin of study through European and North American organizations (Hinings and Meyer, 2018). Their starting points were the sociology of organizations and classical management, and they found that society was rationalizing and creating systems of authority, including legal authority and organizational bureaucracy. They write that managing organizations required an emphasis on planning, strategy, control and coordination of activities. Even the rise of business schools was presented as evidence of the influence of organizational theory (ibid). Museums neatly fit within this paradigm and offer material for analysis on each of the dimensions they list, and certainly the legal, bureaucratic, strategic and control elements are central to this study.

In addition to Hinings and Meyer's dimensions above, museums are an ideal representation of the properties of power and voice, especially through leadership and trusteeship. In 2007, Scott and Davis influentially theorized that actors within organizations have power, and as instruments of power within organizations, could lead the organization through problematic situations for society (Scott and Davis, 2007), both inside and outside the institution. They contend that networks in the public sector influence policy and once a definitive proposal upon which an organize can act is made manifest, events see considerable movement. (ibid).

Moreover, Barley and Kunda reasoned that within organizations experiencing pressure and challenge, the blurring of best interests between employees and that of their organizations leads to higher performance for the organization (Barley and Kunda, 1992). Lounsbury and Ventresca, in 2003, wrote that new structuralists "view organizational action as fundamentally shaped by broader social and cultural processes" (Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003: 458). Taken together, in thinking of the power of individuals within organizations to both adversely affect the welfare of the organization, and the welfare of society, the restitution issue is a prime example of these ideas in action.

Furthermore, disruptive periods in an organizational field are useful points of analysis on phenomenological change and breakthrough. Organizational theory scholar Michael Lounsbury posited that useful analysis is gleaned from transformational periods when uncertainty leads to new ways of working, thus "actors can make new kinds of claims, organizational forms can emerge and die, status orders can be restructured, and rules of engagement can be redefined" (Lounsbury, 2002: 263).

The vocabulary literature is useful in understanding how actors shape a movement through breakthrough eras (Carley, 1986, 1988; Nigam and Ocasio, 2010; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) and as a legitimate source of generating meaning (Weick, 1995). To achieve "profound institutional change" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 35), institutional actors use language to link the "proposed form to broader cultural understandings in an effort to support or challenge the comprehensibility of an innovation. Persuasive language, or rhetorical strategy, is a significant tool" (ibid: 41). The interviewee stories, thinking and decisions, both shown in

chapter four and parsed in chapter five, demonstrates how, in this way, museum actors "attach or deny legitimacy" (ibid: 35) in response to restitution debates. This results in nascent change in the museum field. As Powell argued,

> *"when the structure of a field changes in such a profound fashion, established organizations scurry to protect their interests and to re-establish rules and practices that favor the status quo. But boundary changes also bring upstarts to the fore and create the possibility for redefinition of rules and assumptions that favor newcomers or challengers at the expense of incumbents"* (Powell, 1991: 200).

Museums with leaders who are driving prominent restitution cases, like the former CEO of the Horniman Museum and Gardens, achieve this shift in power through deliberate shaping of the field by using the persuasive language, engagement and framing techniques described more fully in chapters four and five. Thus, the vocabulary literature is helpful in conceptualizing what is happening in practice. Lounsbury argued that it is valuable to look at transformational eras because this is a time when we see breakthroughs, innovative claims and new structures and processes (Lounsbury, 2002). Thus, the "boundary changes" (Powell, 1991: 200) that come out of intentional work to reshape an organizational field through vocabulary are particularly interesting in the case of museums, because their form is visibly transparent, thus making decision-making inside comparatively evident.

2.4.2 Context setting: The board governance platform

Looking critically at governance literature further situates the arena in which elite museum leaders and governors work. In her classic 1990 piece, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Elinor Ostrom profoundly shaped scholarship by

ascertaining that resources are well managed given closer proximity between said resources, people and their communities, with the commons being that which we all own. She wrote that local actors have access to information and intelligence that centrally organized planning entities lack (Ostrom, 1990), and Ostrom's perspective is prophetic from the lens of communities who seek the restitution and governing control of their cultural objects, which is oft described as relations or ancestors.

The research addressing board governance in museums shows that organizational reputation is solidified by "elite" (Ostrower, 2002) membership. Elite trustees have strong reputations, and even power, that can be identified as "collateral" (Handy, 1995). This power projects internal and external organizational trust and works as a proxy for organizational reputation (ibid). The elites have an agency that can be "civic-minded" (DiMaggio, 1982: 42), institutionally prestigious (ibid), media-forward (Ostrower, 2002), and visible on, for example, a Forbes list or "society bluebooks" (ibid, 2002:3). DiMaggio described how elites build arts organizations through board service in the early 1900s in America (DiMaggio, 1982), and indeed, they have arguably been running arts organizations ever since. Author Patricia Banks goes so far as to report that there is a "group of eight white billionaires who together comprise 21.62% of Met trustees" (Banks, 2017: 105). Banks builds on the work of Ostrower, whom she says, "emphasizes that cultural capital grows out of the social organization of elite participation in the arts" (ibid: 98). Regardless of elite status, board governors must exercise "duty of care" (Stone and Ostrower, 2007) and strategically guide the direction of the institution.

Concurrently, tensions have been growing over the exclusivity of the governance of elite institutions, and the transparency of their work in the public eye (Ostrower, 2002). Moreover, pressure has been found among museum workers regarding their societal, organizational, and governmental responsibilities (Alexander, 1998). The authority that museum leaders have tacitly held in leading powerful institutions, and in representing the norms and values of society as described by Durkheim over a century ago (Durkheim, 1972/1982) is being challenged.

Furthermore, in thinking of the early field of museums, a prophetic characterization of the risks inherent in their board governance and structure was offered by Laurence Vail Coleman in 1939. Coleman placed museums as a set, by stating that they started in isolation, then came together through activity, experience and their museum association (Coleman, 1939). Moreover, he shared that their "(b)oards are more or less alike" (ibid: 389). His thesis recognized that the early board trustees understood their role was clearly oversight, not management, and that trustees were responsible for policy, philanthropy hiring, supporting and evaluating the head of the institution (ibid), which holds today. However, Coleman identified that forward-thinking museums paid attention to social problems, and heeded external, civic pressures, just as he was concerned that board governors would fall into an echo chamber of mutual agreement and passivity as a detriment to this progress (ibid).

Coleman's prescience anticipates the directional work occurring through scholars and leaders today with respect to the changing field. University of Oxford professor and head of the Pitt Rivers Museum Laura Van Broekhoeven argues that museums link cultures, but not through straightforward, previously conceived static methods of collection, display and didactic panels.

Now, museums have a re-shaped mandate to adopt the progressive standing predicted by Coleman, which is that of the transformation of society and focus on the future. Van Broekhoven writes that for the diversity aims of museums to grow, museums must connect more effectively to partners and interested external parties, and one productive way of moving forward involves embracing new technologies to reach more people (Geurds and Van Broekhoven, 2013). Further, she contends that the field will realize progress towards its new era by the demonstration of embracing new values like sharing curatorial creation with communities, and engaging with people who have traditionally not held space in the institution (Van Broekhoven, 2018).

2.4.3 Context setting: Consequential legal and regulatory direction

Finally, reviewing consequential legal and regulatory direction is helpful in building the operating structure within the elite museum board governance milieu. As stated above, I arrived at the polarities of legal and moral forms shown in data described by Savoy (2022) in her sweeping book about the early years of significant debate on the restitution issue. In practical terms, there are two pieces of legislation that serve as exemplars of each form.

First, in terms of **"legal form legislation"** we have The British Museums Act, 1963, which strictly controls that which is allowed to be disposed stating in section 3.4: "Objects vested in the Trustees as part of the collections of the Museum shall not be disposed of by them otherwise than under section 5 or 9 of this Act" (British Museum Act 1963, s 3.4). Relatively recently, Godwin wrote a paper defending the British Museum's legal position that trustees are

"prohibited from repatriation" (Godwin, 2020: 144) for the Washington International Law Journal. She states "fiduciary law governs the roles and obligations a trustee must follow in preserving property for a beneficiary" (ibid: 157), and that regarding the British Museum, "the Board of Trustees are appointed to manage the collection, which is held in trust for the benefit of the general public, whoa are beneficiaries" (ibid: 158). She concludes that the board's duty to the public is protected based on this legal premise of fiduciary duty as well as "the statutory incorporation of Sir Sloane's Last Will and Testament in the Museum Act of 1963: (ibid: 169).

Going back 25 years, an important annual meeting in 2002 of the International Group of Organisers of Large-scale Exhibitions, informally known as the Bizot Group, MacGregor, then Director of the British Museum, shared in The Art Newspaper that the "Declaration on the Value and Importance of Universal Museums" (Merriman, 2024:3) had been initially signed by twenty museums (Martin, 2002) in favour of the universal museum. Said MacGregor: "At our Munich meeting there was grave alarm at the way Greece was applying political pressure over the Marbles and the idea that one Western country could build a museum to house objects belonging to another" (Bailey, 2002). Central to the declaration's ethos is that "objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values reflective of that earlier era" and that "we should acknowledge that museums serve not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation" (Bailey, 2002).

Foundationally, the "legal form" argument rests with prominent scholar John Merryman who states that within policy there is the question of how much legal control one nation should have over another regarding cultural material, positing that cultural objects should take precedence in

cultural policy over nationhood (Merryman, 2009). Merryman's argument depended on the ideas of preservation, safety and security of the cultural objects; the value of scientific and cultural knowledge gleaned from the object; and the importance of public access to objects for both scholars and the public (ibid). Of note, in his oft-cited 1985 paper on the subject, he uses the term "cultural property" (Merryman, 1985: 1888), and in discussing the "Elgin Marbles" asks whether their removal from Greece was "illegal or immoral" determining that "if the removal of the Marbles was proper under the then applicable international law, as it seems to have ben, then the British are legal entitled to keep them" (ibid: 1900).

In terms of **"moral form" legislation**, important to the progress of the debates is the introduction of the Charities Act 2022 into the House of the Lords in England on February 24, 2022. Section 106 of the Charities Act 2011, amended by the Charities Act 2022, reads:

> *"the Commission, the Attorney General or the court may authorise the charity trustees of a charity to take any action falling within subsection (2)(a) or (b) in a case where the charity trustees…(a)(apart from by virtue of this section or section 331A) have no power to take the action, but…(b)in all the circumstances could reasonably be regarded as being under a moral obligation to take it"* (Legislation.gov.uk).

Certainly, the British Museum Act of 1963 is the key argument on which the British Museum's spokespersons rely regarding decision-making to keep the Parthenon Sculptures in place at the institution. However, the Charities Act could provide enough of a measure of legal substance to dampen the authority of the act of 1963. To date, though, this has not been the case. An official letter sent by Lord Parkinson of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the Charity Commission, care of Orlando Fraser, states:

> *"The policy of HM Governments is that national museums and galleries should continue to be bound by their governing legislation, precluding them from resolving to restitute objects from their collections other than in the limited and specific circumstances expressly provided for in legislation. To that end, we will specifically exclude those national museums and galleries from the commencement of sections 15 and 16 of the Act"* (DCMS, 2024).

That said the Charities Act of 2022 is a breakthrough tool. With the new act, museum boards can identify morality as a lever by which to return cultural objects. Alexander Herman, a prominent arts and law academic, has recently been discussing the Charities Act as having considerable potential to identify a path forward. In his book "The Parthenon Marbles Dispute", Herman writes that the act would give board governors a new tool for restitution "if there is a 'moral obligation' to do so, upon receiving approval from the Charity Commission, Attorney General or the Courts... But how such morality would be defined is a matter of some discussion" (Herman, 2023: 85).

How governing voices will define 'moral obligation' is a story yet to be told. Fiduciary responsibility and reputational position for museums in exercising moral authority is a fuzzy concept. But the change in tone is impactful. The progress of the Charities Act offers governing bodies of museums significant material for positioning field change.

2.5 Governing platform actions

Existing scholarship shows how boards operate in existing environments. To better understand the governance decision platform tensions, iterating between the literature and the data as

arguments emerged showed ten “sensitizing concepts” (Charmaz, 2014: 117), leading to four “schematics” (figure six), as entry points for abductive reasoning and theory building.

To begin, “sensitizing concepts” were pulled from the existing literature, then each was tested for inclusion in Savoy’s comprehensive, foundational book setting the stage for the restitutional debates. These concepts (political, legal, business/governance, moral/reputational, safety/security, education, purpose/mandate/policy, engagement, curatorial, and routine) are woven through the paragraphs throughout this literature review and all but “routine” are explicitly mentioned many times in Savoy (Savoy, 2022). Then, the sensitizing concepts were plotted across the interviewee data, compared, and conceptualized as four action concepts, or “schematics”

The four schematics were used to compare sensitizing concepts through actions described below. The vocabulary literature provided a sensitizing platform through which to further induce theory. Out of these sensitizing concepts, four schematics emerge from the existing debates as important sites of action. **“Schematics”** are defined as relational words, and given my study is constructivist and inductive, the schematics work to map the interpreted ways that museum leaders and boards make decisions that lead to breakthrough actions. The schematics identified in this study serve to organize a cognitive framework on which the sensitizing concepts, tested through the case study interviews, are methodologically compared to create meaning and theories.

The British Museum Act versus the Charities Act shows that reputational concerns and visioning skills to describe alternatives in challenging board environments, as well as engaging with the public to frame the debates as a way forward requires empirical analysis. Thus, four schematics, **reputation, engagement, framing and visioning**, emerged, and have been incorporated into arguments that show a critique of what is missing in the current literature, and how a multi-disciplinary approach undertaken in this study creates findings that offer new insights into the restitution stalemate. These concepts were identified through "abductive reasoning" (Charmaz, 2014: 200) in working with the data to make sense of how, in learning of exciting and bold governing actions, we are seeing, as predicted by Hicks, "a time of returns" (Hicks, 2020: 17). To demonstrate the actions of the museums within the social environment in which they exist, these terms operate as tools to understand how governing decisions anchor this breakthrough period. These linking words are used to describe connections between decision makers and the public to inform a bounded period and identify eras and are defined below.

The term "**reputation**" is considered through the lens of Fombrun's essay discussing definitions of corporate reputation in the "Oxford Handbook of Corporate Reputation" (Barnett and Pollock, 2012). He examines reputation in terms of "visibility" and "memorability" in the media, and by the public, and notes a relationship between favorable stories and positive consumer reactions (Fombrun, 2012: 96). Fombrun defines reputation vis-à-vis organizations as "a collective assessment of a company's attractiveness to a specific group of stakeholders relative to a reference group of companies with which the company competes for resources" (ibid: 100). A key element of this thesis is the comparison of museums as cases, therefore, Fombrun's inclusion of comparability is especially helpful. Furthermore, in thinking of reputation as a schematic in

this work, the perspective that reputation concerns how one is perceived and is influenced by "narratives" (Waller and Younger, 2017:16), especially germane to the discussion of vocabulary further in this chapter and chapter five.

The term **"engagement"** considers both the structure of the board, and the management of the social system that comprises that board (Sonnenfeld, 2002: 106). It is the bridge between power and people, decisions and action, and feedback against said action. Engagement is a "collaboration" between governors and the community and public bodies with whom they interface (Ansell, 2012: 498).

"**Framing"** is the power and influence of the transference of information to human consciousness (Entman, 1993). Entman writes that framing requires "selection" and providing clarity on the scope of a problem, how that problem can be interpreted and evaluated, and offering a set of recommendations in the exchange. Entman includes the making of "moral judgements" as part of the and justifications in the definition (ibid: 52). Engagement is a term used by organizations liberally, yet frameworks and measurement are inconsistent. Herein, engagement is defined as a deliberate, sincere effort by professionals and governors to work with audiences and the public in the best interest of the institution and the people whom it serves.

The term "**visioning"** is a process that leads organizational leaders to imagine the future of the institution. (Finlay, 1994). Visioning stretches leaders' thinking, especially vis-à-vis the "most desirable or ideal state" they would like to achieve (ibid: 64). In thinking critically about new

eras, analysis of comparative vision is helpful to pinpoint steps, actions, narratives and work done on behalf of an institution to afford change, and ergo, to inspire.

Thus, if reputation, engagement, framing and visioning are the action on which the governing platform manifests decision-making, **"vocabulary"** is the conduit through which a future breakthrough is bridged. All four of the schematics are impossible to elevate without critically considered and applied vocabulary. Vocabulary is given an entire chapter in the thesis because while it supports and aligns abstractly to the four schematics, it is the mechanism that reveals and shapes the manifestation of an actual era change. The four schematics are conceptual arenas on which to apply abductive reasoning more abstractly; vocabulary is a primary tool for temporal acceleration, and for explaining and nuancing object durationality. Moreover, the amplification of intentional vocabulary to drive momentum in restitutional progress informs that which is developing out of a powerful growing literature that inspires hope. (Hicks and Ladewig, 2026).

2.6 Steering towards a Restitutional Era

As we have looked at the systemic context of discursive disruption and institutional legacy within the governance decision platform (which covered legal and moral forms and the empirical setting), four arguments emerge that show how this study will contribute to advancing the literature regarding how boards propel towards the Restitutional Era. These have been developed using an agile approach in that I do not look at hypotheses to be tested, proven or disproven, but instead look at analytical premises on which the sensitizing concepts have been built. Below, I state each argument. These four arguments are as follows. First, there is heterogeneity *across*

museums, but homogeneity *within* museums along moral or legal forms as museum directors and governors advance preparation for reputational issues arising from civil action and social justice pressures. Second, we see board alignment to a moral or legal form in addressing restitution, wherein moral form coalitions show a temporal acceleration of a nascent proposed "Restitutional Era" demonstrating new actions, processes and curatorial opportunities. Third, restitution is not being treated evenly as urgent, or a crisis, by elite museums despite moral form museums showing early-stage homogeneity in institutional framing and visualization of actions in response to the pressure. Fourth, the discourse enveloping the debates is informing a useful vocabulary germane to breakthrough decision-making as museum leaders and governors visualize the next era of museums through the modulation and description of internal and external engagement.

2.7 Aims for next chapters

In chapter three, I provide the methods and data that build on disciplinary identity and researcher positionality, the research method comprising a hybrid Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) data collection, analysis and theory-building, blended with positivist case study approach and replication logic (Eisenhardt, 1989. I carry this through with a discussion of epistemological grounding and research design, followed by the steps taken to process data and construct higher order themes and theory building from abductive reasoning.

In chapter four, I analyse case studies in the museum sector, and specific requests for restitution, through semi-structured interviews comprising descriptive narrative concerning thinking and decisions by leaders and governors in the museum field. The British Museum is considered as a

critical site of tension and debate through analysis of board meeting minutes against two comparative institutions, followed by a juxtaposition of the British Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum as poles in the legal and moral form. The chapter concludes with a cross-case comparison of the eleven elite museums foregrounded in this thesis, setting up the arguments presented herein.

In chapter five, I discuss the emerging vocabulary and the new narrative emerging in the field. I look at coded dimensions along each of the sensitizing concepts and how temporal acceleration towards the moral form museum is showing a trackable vocabulary manifested by museum leaders and governors in shaping the Restitutional Era.

Chapter six covers a summary of key findings, including deepening attention to reputation, risk and communications, increasing expansion of digital solutions, sensitive responses to object durationality and alternative voices, engagement with unexpected sources of power, and framing institutional vocabulary alongside global priorities. I discuss the research significance and aims, the summary of major results as drafted onto the four schematics, and a description of findings in relation to the literature review.

I conclude with the research significance and contributions, limitations of the study, alternative explanations and arguments for position, new insights into theory and practice, future lines of inquiry and a final summary.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

This chapter explains the methodological framework (figure one) that I have used to structure my research. I adopted a multi-disciplinary research identity (Denzin, Lincoln, Giardina and Cannella, 2024) and set up a research method using a hybrid strategy blending constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014) to inform data collection, analysis and theory-building, with a positivist case study approach and replication logic (Eisenhardt, 1989). My epistemological grounding adopts a constructivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2014) answering how/what questions, with the assumption that museum governance decisions are partial to subjectivity and research positionality wherein both are "inseparable from social existence" (ibid: 14). Throughout, my researched positionality is recognized as central to the "construction" of "analytic categories though an iterative process" (ibid: 15) occurring throughout the research design. This design undertakes a theoretical sampling of non-random case studies via semi-structured interviews, and archival materials via bounded museum board minutes (Eisenhardt, 1989). Analysis includes "narrative description" and a "cross-case search for patterns" (ibid: 540).

Coding and theory building follows the application of Charmaz's CGT coding process to data collected within Eisenhardt's case study design approach. These steps comprise:

1. **Phase one**: Coding using "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117) such as political, legal, business/governance, moral/reputational, safety/security, education, purpose/mandate/policy, engagement, curatorial and routine.

2. **Phase two**: “Focused coding” (ibid: 138) and emerging analysis using “action words” like deepening, increasing, responding, engaging and framing.
3. **Phase three**: “Abductive reasoning” (ibid: 200) using narrative cases, vocabulary framework and archival materials.
4. **Phase four**: Constructing higher order themes and theory building. These include:

   A) Directional responses to real or perceived crisis.

   B) Levered responses to reputational risk.

   C) Scaling legitimacy through vocabulary and adoption of three new principles: asset reorientation, risk reorientation and market reorientation.

   D) A to C above leads to breakthrough governance and a proposed restitutional era.

In this thesis, I examine the decisions and actions of museum leaders and governors that address pressure at their institutions caused by the restitution debates. My research involves (1) twenty qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with museum leaders and governors, (2) a study of archival materials composed of board meeting minutes dating between 2017 and 2023 for three institutions, including the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Horniman Museum and Gardens, (3) a study of articles in The Guardian newspaper from 1999 to 2024 regarding the Parthenon Sculptures, and (4) a collection of reviews assessing feedback and critique for scholar and practitioner Dan Hicks’ prominent, impactful book *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, considered herein as a watershed moment in the momentum of the debates. One of the tools (table one) used in this research is a chronology of key restitution references either directly quoted in the body of the

thesis or indirectly sourced as informative material. The timeline situates the debates in a societal context, and data was pulled from several sources to create this synthetic tool.

3.1. Disciplinary identity, epistemological position and research methods

As stated in section 2.1, my epistemological position and research methods adopt Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. Early on, I followed Charmaz's primary step to situate both "the literature review and theoretical framework" as "ideological sites in which you claim, locate, evaluate, and defend your position" (Charmaz, 2014: 305). Charmaz's framework recalls Glaser and Strauss (1967) in which grounded theory is utilized for the "systematization of the collection, coding and analysis of qualitative data for the generation of theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 18), and how this architecture informs my methods and concepts developed in this thesis is explained in this chapter.

Charmaz notes that "constructivist study *how* – and sometimes *why* - participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations" (Charmaz, 2014: 239). I ask "how" questions in this thesis, such as: How is the future responsive museum addressing internationally material strategic and reputational risk? How does the response of collective elite voices trigger an era change in the field? What does strategic success look like in a future, responsive museum, and how are the debates shaping the status and identity of museum governance?

Within a multi-disciplinary research identity seeking perspectives across different frames of reference described in the literature review, I acknowledge, as per Charmaz, that "the resulting

theory is an interpretation" (ibid: 239) of both literature and data. My researcher positionality is informed by ongoing work as a practicing studio artist, chief executive, and board governor, with considerable past senior government official experience, including oversight of all provincial museums and the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act when serving as a Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism. As an artist, I work to make the abstract tangible and put form to vision, creating a body of paintings over decades that are distinct but function as defined but related series. My graduate work in painting dealt with anachronisms in artistic eras, thus I see this research project as an extension of my academic interests.

I wrote a paper to develop ideas for this thesis examining a proposed metaphor between artists' ways of speaking about their work that defines stylistic eras, or series, and organizational actors' ways of speaking and making decisions about their work that shapes the era of an institution. Anecdotally, artists often speak of the need to have a "breakthrough", or a moment that pushes the work into an exciting new direction, often following a particularly difficult block in progress. I have worked through this in the studio on several concrete occasions and have experienced comparable manifestations in organizations of institutional movement into an entity that looks and behaves in a new way, which could be described as a new "era". Eras are described in section 2.3. To examine this phenomenon, I looked at text fragments in six cases from interviewees who had experienced crises in their organizations (thus blocking progress) and found sensitivity, patterns, triggers, scripts and distinctive serial thinking in place, time and form. That paper significantly reinforced my thinking about looking at institutions as social and cultural entities that could take on a new form in a manner not dissimilar to the artistic oeuvre. As such, it opened an ontological direction of discovery towards thinking about how institutional

breakthroughs could be marked by signals that would indicate a nascent era of patterns and decisions. I sought to apply this perspective and positionality to the research questions of this thesis. Therefore, the theory developed and explained in this chapter "depends on the researcher's view: it does not and cannot stand outside of it" (Charmaz, 2014: 239).

Thus, three values and axiological assumptions inform this research. First, museums are important to societies and communities beyond the realm of "audience", and because they show their purpose with clarity, museums are a strong institution to study as a field responding to sustained international pressure. Second, a breakthrough in imagining, visualizing and changing how restituted objects are handled could change the very form of museums. Given management creates strategy, and governors shape strategy and are responsible for institutional oversight, this direction will only achieve momentum if embraced by the board.

Third, restitution is an issue of extreme pressure and even crisis, with the potential to affect the identity, role and purpose of museums. Layering researcher positionality onto the definition of crisis shared in the literature review with personal, practical experience in dealing with crises and crisis-like situations in executive leadership roles for public institutions, a crisis response requires an urgent or sustained response to an external pressure that exists outside of regular operational or strategic matters as must be addressed by the institution as an ongoing concern. In public institutions, such situations can require 1) enacting the Emergency Operations Centre, 2) engaging the Board of Governors methodically, yet urgently, 3) standing up a special committee of the board of governors to address, especially, ongoing reputational or financial issues, and/or 4) needing an immediate, unscheduled response to public pressure outside of regular operations.

With these assumptions in place, this work opens new inquiry into how governors and leaders of cultural institutions will use the tension of this issue to affect strategy and achieve a breakthrough that will reinvent institutional form.

3.2 Research design

This thesis has been designed as process-oriented research (Langley et al, 2013), with a narrative of temporality, wherein an empirical set of museums is showing a homogenous trend of breakthrough change, but the body of museums across the world remains heterogenous because of the prominence and lack of action from the British Museum regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. "(P)rocess studies address questions about how and why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time" (ibid: 1). That said, this research has not been designed as a longitudinal study, despite having longitudinal elements in that interviews occurred over a four-year period, and the set of examined museum minutes spanned a four-year period as well.

Langley discusses how process studies work with a constructivist perspective, adopted herein and described below, in her classic 1999 paper (Langley, 1999: 695). She writes that "(f)or the proponents of this approach, it is the contextual detail in the narrative ('thick description') that will allow the reader to judge the transferability of the ideas to other situations" (ibid: 695). She adds that a researcher using this research design will make efforts to "avoid excessive data reduction and to present as completely as possible the different viewpoints on the process studied" (ibid: 695). I used this perspective in crafting chapter four, described methodologically below. I followed this perspective in analysing the interviewee cases using Langley's strategy

which foregrounds “contextual detail”, and over the body of cases studied “should convey a high degree of authenticity” (ibid: 695).

Langley describes “temporal bracketing” (ibid: 703) as a method to make sense of “eclectic data” (ibid: 693). This strategy was exciting to me in that it paralleled my early thinking that breakthrough change would lead to a new era of museum governance and decision-making. Her “temporal bracketing” strategy is a “way of structuring the description of events”, that have “a certain continuity in the activities within each period” (ibid: 703) which is core to this thesis design. Key to this design is that “temporal bracketing” is a mechanism that “permits the constitution of comparative units of analysis for the exploration and replication of theoretical ideas” (ibid: 703). My method involved “bracketing” two defined periods concerning the interviews (2021 to 2025) and the meeting minutes (2019 to 2023) to allow “examination of how actions of one period lead to changes in the context that will affect action in subsequent periods” (ibid: 703). I use the idea of a “bracket” to locate the boundaries of the examined period for the museum interviews and minutes defined as occurring after the publishing of the Sarr-Savoy report, up to current day at time of analysis.

My method begins with Langley’s design strategy wherein “a shapeless mass of process data is transformed into a series of more discrete but connected blocks. Within phases, the data are used to describe the processes as fairly stable or linearly evolving patterns” (ibid: 703). Langley states that “one or a few cases may be sufficient to produce useful insights” and that resulting theory will have the advantage of having a high degree of “accuracy”, and if “derived inductively, they will also have moderate generality, until tested on more data” (ibid” 704).

Therefore, this study focuses on an evolving situation and draws on "temporal progressions of activities as elements of explanation and understanding" (Langley et al, 2013:1). I examine, over a defined period, how museum leaders and governors shape the strategic direction of the institution, and gain agency by taking an identifiable approach to the issues of restitution, establishing their institutions as influencers of both public policy and institutional form. I am interested in how institutions, like artworks, take physical form and content, story, script and narrative, from temporal changes, and seek, in this study, to determine the breakthrough moment when that change is visible in museums. The restitution debates have loomed large over museums across the world, and this study seeks to provide an empirical explanation for how the issue has definitively changed the institutions.

With this method in place, I used the Charmaz (2014) method for data analysis, interpretation and theory building, supplemented with the Eisenhardt method (1989) of selecting multiple case studies. This resulted in four phases of data collection and coding pulled from CGT methods. To build the data set, I blended research techniques to establish rigour to the interpretation arising from the CGT epistemological position taken herein. Precedent for blending compatible research techniques is drawn from Kalpokaite and Radivojecic (2019). The authors draft a model of combining approaches that "can be applied within an array of qualitative methodologies (Kalpokaite and Radivojecic, 2019: 44). Their model "synthesizes commonly used analytic strategies and methods (ibid: 44). Further rationale was explored in Andrade (2009) describing the compatibility of Charmaz and case study researchers, including Eisenhardt (Andrade, 2009), which increased my confidence in this approach. Andrade writes of the "real life" value of case study inquiry that "allows the researcher to grasp a holistic understanding of the phenomenon

under investigation (ibid:44). This was an important element in my design, in that the profile of the issue is high, and can be heated, and it was crucial to preserve the authenticity of tone of voice, especially in the interview narratives, even as the raw text from these narratives was examined in smaller text bites. Andrade states that “Eisenhardt (1989) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), from a positivistic perspective, affirm the usefulness of the case study approach for building theory, which is expected to be strongly attached to empirical reality” (ibid: 45). He adds that grounded theory, via Glaser and Strauss (1967) then “provides the opportunity for the researcher to theorise from evidence existing…in the data” (ibid: 45). He concludes that "the major advantage of grounded theory is its inductive, contextual, and process-based nature", referencing Charmaz and others (ibid: 46). Definitively, he states that grounded theory "is a neutral analytical process that fits well within either the positivist or interpretive approach" (ibid: 46). Thus, I proceeded to systematically explore the benefits of blending the Eisenhardt and Charmaz methodological strategies.

In their article "Finding theory-method fit: A comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building", Gehman, Glaser, Eisenhardt, Gioia, Langley & Corley discuss a path forward. They write "qualitative research cannot be described as a singular approach: Rather, it encompasses a heterogeneous set of approaches" (Gehman et al, 2018: 284). The authors think about qualitative methods as "tools in our toolbox" (ibid: 285), and that "some tools are good for certain purposes, whereas other tools are good for other purposes" (ibid: 285). States Eisenhardt within the article, "(w)e're trying to figure out different ways to look at our data to see fresh insights. For example, I might mix and match: Let's compare Cases A and B or let's compare Periods 1 and 2." (ibid: 296). This statement provided a solid exemplar for mixing Eisenhardt

and Charmaz methods, especially alongside a temporal process in thinking about comparisons within a defined period.

Therefore, given my theoretical goal of adding to the understanding of museum decisions with the objective of advancing how governors and leaders direct their institutions into a restitutional era, I use Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory supplemented with the positivist case study design championed by Eisenhardt to address complexity and maintain rigour. Replication is critical in the Eisenhardt approach. In the semi-structured interviews undertaken in this thesis, replicability of findings is important. Eisenhardt states, on replication: "I think if you had asked my research questions in my cases, you would get pretty much the same answer that I got" (ibid: 296). Thus, while Eisenhardt and Charmaz differ in that Eisenhardt is a positivist, I have followed her method of presenting each museum's story as a unique case, including positivist work to analyse each case shown in **tables eleven to fifteen**.

Charmaz's CGT aligns to my epistemological approach to theory building as one of adopting a co-participant point of view for the purpose of constructing, not uncovering, data. I am building a narrative (Charmaz, 2014: xv) from a concrete period gleaned from interviews between February 2021 to May 2025; museum minutes from 2019 to 2023; and The Guardian news stories from 1999 to 2023. The 2018 and 2019 UNESCO reports provide triangulated data to support the larger studies. These four archival sources, taken together with archival material reviewed for the examination of responses to Hicks' "The Brutish Museums" book, comprise the temporal evidence in the narrative of this thesis.

Charmaz's discussion of "extant documents" (ibid: 48) has informed my use of supplementary archival materials used to support analysis and theory building in this research. She describes these "extant documents" as those that are not constructed by the researcher, and include "public records, government reports, organizational documents" and so on used to "support their observational or interview findings" (ibid: 48). Charmaz adds that "(t)hese texts may also spark your ideas and provide evidence for your hunches" (ibid: 51), and the documents and reports listed below served as useful triangulating materials to confirm data gleaned from the interviews and meeting minutes in the coding and theory building steps described below and in **figure two**.

These "extant documents" used to support this research method and analysis of data, listed in full in the bibliography, include:

1. AFFORD Institute, "Return of the icons" report, (2020),
2. Archives in the M25 area, King's College London archive project (date unknown),
3. Arts Council of England guide for museums (2023),
4. British Museum governance website,
5. Canadian Museum Association, "Moved to action" report (2022),
6. The Charity Commission, Decision-making for charity trustees (2013),
7. Congress.gov, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1989-1990),
8. First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, 2016,
9. Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust Corporate Governance Code, date unknown,
10. Horniman Museum and Gardens governance website,
11. House of Commons publications, 2020,

12. International Council of Museums: Resources, standards and guidelines: Museum definition,
13. Mairesse report on the UNESCO recommendation on the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society, 2016,
14. Mairesse report on the implementation of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation on Museums and Collections, 2019,
15. Truth and Reconciliation Canada, final report, 2015,
16. UNESCO, 1970, Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property,
17. UNESCO, 2015, Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society,
18. UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007,
19. Victoria and Albert Museum governance website.

I considered embedding quantitative enquiries in the research, including questioning whether the restitution of artifacts would lead to higher or lower museum visits, and whether citizen/audience reactions to restitution decisions would drive museum attendance and influence market share, or volume of visitors to the museum compared to like-sized institutions in overall operating dollars. The proposed study would pull data from annual reports, changes to strategic plans, and/or mandates, and/or purpose statements to explain the popularity of museums. Ultimately, it was decided that adding a quantitative element to this qualitative study would excessively increase

the scope of work beyond the boundaries of this thesis project. Meanwhile, this option remains a viable path for future research.

3.3 Step one: Data collection

Data collection has followed Eisenhardt by combining sources such as interviews, archival materials (board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, and book reviews) using "multiple data collection methods" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 533) to build rich data (Charmaz, 2014), and iteratively interact with the data (Charmaz, 2014: 115). The latter allows for a research "space that pulls you deeper into the data and keeps you involved with them far more than a casual reading fosters. In grounded theory coding, you act on your data and these actions sustain your involvement with them" (ibid: 115). First, this necessitated "gaining access" (Charmaz: 39) to interviews and meeting minutes. This section describes the data collection process for gaining access, and collecting data for the semi-structured interviews, as well as supplementary data collection comprising the museum minutes, The Guardian News articles, and the Hicks' book reviews.

3.3.1 Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

The first study, and primary research, is a set of twenty qualitative interviews with board members, Directors or CEOs, and senior leaders of museums. These interviews occurred between February 22, 2021, and May 2, 2025. The categorization of the interviews covers eleven categories. These are: 1) the anonymized museum number, interviewee number and role, 2) the museum's location, fiscal operating category, and governance structure, 3) the date of the

interview, 4) the number of board members, 5) the length of service of Director/CEO, 6) the number of annual board meetings, not including special meetings, 7) whether the museum is making restitution efforts yes/no, 8) whether the museum garners media attention for its restitution efforts yes/no, 9) whether board engagement in the restitution debates or practice occurs as discussed by the interviewee yes/no, 10) a key statement regarding the board mechanism for restitution as expressed by the interviewee, and 11) a key statement by the interviewee regarding board governance at their institution (see sample collection in **tables five and six**).

Of the twenty interviews, twenty people participated from eleven museums. Two people were interviewed twice, from the museums identified as museum two and museum three. Two interviewees participated at once in a single interview at museums six and seven. Interviewees comprised four museum board members, seven museum directors, seven senior leaders, one internationally renowned board member of several museums and one prominent arts law scholar and practitioner.

Most of the institutions in this study have a typical board governance structure, others have government or academic governance structures. A typical board structure is defined herein as a mix of board appointed and government appointed members. A governmental governance structure is defined herein as one wherein government ministers are responsible for the oversight of the institution. An academic governance structure is defined herein as one wherein board members are appointed from within the academic institution.

In categorizing the length of service of the leadership of the museum, I chose longevity of the incumbent Director/CEO at the time of the interview. I chose not to categorize the longevity of the interviewee, if that person was not the Director/CEO, given that the latter is responsible for executing upon the strategic direction of the institution and is the sole employee of the Board.

Museums included in this thesis operate within the following boundaries: 1) they belong to western countries that are addressing the restitution issue from the return perspective, in this case the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America and New Zealand, 2) they have a public profile, including media attention, for addressing restitution or colonial concerns, 3) they have material fiscal responsibility, ranging between $5 million and $2 billion in annual operating revenues, 4) they have a formal governance structure with external credibility and rigor, 5) they share public documents and records in the public domain, 6) they have expected reputational responsibilities wherein risk mitigations and opportunities are governing concerns, and 7) they have legal and compliance responsibilities that are reportable to the public.

This is not a broad, retrospective study documenting a typology of how museums in the colonized regions of the world are handling restitution. Rather, the interview sample size comprises a smaller set of elite museums that covers a viable quantity of data to achieve my aim of delivering value by taking the rich views and insights from notable institutional leaders and governors as they respond to the restitution situation, thus making a new package of information and insights so the debates can move forward, and the practice of boards can be enhanced.

As the interviews and research design progressed, it was determined that inclusion of receiving museums and tangential entities would substantially increase the scope of the project and weaken the boundaries of the research. That said, these entities remain as potential subjects of future research. Therefore, as stated, the final set of anonymized museums includes: 1) One museum categorized as “immense”, with between $501 million and $2 billion in annual operating dollars, from the United States of America, 2) one museum categorized as “mega”, with between $100 million and $500 million in annual operating dollars, from the United Kingdom, 3) four museums categorized as “substantial” with between $26 million and $ 99 million in annual operating dollars, from Canada and New Zealand, and 5) five museums categorized as “modest” with between $5 million and $25 million in annual operating dollars, from Canada and the United Kingdom **(tables five and six).**

Interview length was approximately an hour. Interviews opened with an introduction of the project and interviewer biographical background to establish credibility, such as executive level leadership in post-secondary education and government, and familiarity with cultural policy development. Specific questions asked in the early interviews, as approved through the CUREC process June 30, 2020, were as follows:

1. There is complexity today due to the COVID19. How does your board deal with the risks and challenges arising from the pandemic?
2. How does your board view risk generally? What are your critical risks, and how are you organized to oversee and guide the organization through risk?

3. More specifically, do you have experience with repatriation (working term at the time of interviews), and what is your view of repatriation? How has your board grappled with repatriation?
4. As boards deal with this issue, and the purpose of museums more broadly, how do you see the purpose of museums adapting now and in the future?
5. To meet your purpose, what kind of expertise does your board need to access, or add to in your skills matrix in the future?

Interviews followed an open-ended format, but within the boundaries of restitution, risk, change and planning. As interviews progressed, nearing December 2022, the open-ended conversations drifted away from discussions about COVID19. With the high profile of the Charities Act, 2022 in the UK, discussion of this matter became a common topic addressed by interviewees, thus I also asked interviewees:

1. How are you, in your official role, be it museum leadership, policy advice, or media reporting, perceiving and addressing new relevant legal acts and challenges to repatriation, as well as political/policy changes and direction?
2. What information can you publicly share regarding board decisions during board meetings that compare repatriation, broader controversial agenda items and routine agenda items?
3. Which jurisdictions or cases are making a difference in the work of repatriating cultural property?

3.3.2 Data collection: Museum minutes study

The second study comprises data collection of museum minutes dated from 2018 to 2023 that were publicly available at the time of collection for three museums in London, England, analyzed from February 2023 to February 2024. The study was designed to establish how much time board governors in one global destination city at the heart of the issues spent talking about restitution, and to find valuable documented statements that could show an impact on the trajectory of the debates. To establish a benchmark on the quantity of discussion pertaining to restitution, discussions about finance/audit matters and strategy were also counted. The study was further employed to compare how the British Museum, pivotal to the restitution debates given the authority of the British Museum Act, compared in governing statements about restitution against proximate institutions.

The study draws on minutes from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Horniman Museum and Gardens and the British Museum. Data collection was intermittent between February 2023 and February 2024, as it was time consuming, detailed, and difficult to sustain over long periods. Minutes available for the Victoria and Albert Museum during the collection period span January 2019 to September 2023. Minutes available for the Horniman Museum and Gardens span February 2018 to December 2022. For the British Museum, minutes were available from March 2015 to November 2023, but for the purpose of comparison with the other two museums, I narrowed my search to begin at the first meeting of 2018. Starting with minutes that were publicly available in 2018 was established because the “Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage” by Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr was delivered to French President Emmanuel Macron that year and became a defining high-profile public happening in the restitution debates. Minutes were scanned for conversations and records of decision. Useful

statements to inform future arguments were documented, including evidence of change, consequential decisions, and narrative arcs.

As stated, the set of minutes includes the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Horniman Museum and Gardens, chosen for two reasons. First, these museums are in the same geographical tourist destination location, with access to similar target markets, similar mandates and operating and reporting structures, relatively equal access to board members from a location matrix and ability to attend in-person meetings, and an equal vested-interest in the topic of restitution. London is home to the heart of this issue, which inarguably centres on the British Museum and the Parthenon Sculptures debates, and any consideration of the restitution issue would be incomplete without consideration of the British Museum. Institutions in London England have considerable access to talent and people with the resumes to populate a sophisticated and diverse board matrix. Thus, analysing these three boards and their decisions is contained within a relatively comparable geographical and ideological boundary.

Second, all three of these museums have been in the press regarding restitution decisions, which levels their playing field in institutional platform. The British Museum has the ongoing Parthenon Sculptures narrative; the Horniman has received considerable media for its groundbreaking decision to return several Benin Bronzes in 2022; and the Victoria and Albert Museum's Director Tristram Hunt speaks regularly about the subject in the public realm. Discussion and analysis of the meeting minutes are restricted to the minutes themselves, and do not include further analysis of the papers tabled during the meeting. This decision was made to

address the concept of voice and decision that was evidenced in the official transcripts of the meeting, without confusing the narrative arc and clarity of voice.

The raw data was organized into date and content columns for restitution discussion and decisions, as shown in **table seven**, which is a snapshot of the body of data collected. Next, coded terms, established by "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2014: 111), include 1) repatriation, restitution or return, 2) finance and audit, and 3) strategy. Each time that an occurrence of one of these three coded terms appeared in the minutes they were recorded to compare the number of instances that board members referenced restitution, finance or strategy topics.

I had at first planned to compare restitution decisions against other controversial decisions, but this resulted in too many inconclusive variables, and an overly nondescript coded term. For example, Covid conversations at the board level significantly affected meeting agenda items for a finite period within the sampling boundaries.

The minutes did tell a story, most explicitly in those of the Horniman Museum. As described more fully in chapters five and six, these minutes revealed the thought processes of board directors who had a strong point of view, working alongside a CEO who had a clear path of action, and a board team that was in full support of making breakthrough change along moral lines. A record of how often the topics of repatriation, restitution or return, juxtaposed with

finance/audit and strategy, appeared in the meeting minutes for three museums, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, or the Horniman Museum is shown in **table eight**.

3.3.3 Data collection: The Guardian stories study

The third study involves the data collection of the number of media stories from January 1999 to December 2023 in The Guardian newspaper using the search heading "Parthenon Marbles and Elgin Marbles". Data was collected in February 2024. Articles were accessed using theguardian.com through https://www.theguardian.com/info/2017/jun/26/how-to-access-guardian-and-observer-digital-archive published 07:43 Wednesday, 15 November 2017, titled "How to access past articles from the Guardian and Observer archive". This short study sought to quantify and establish data regarding the volume of Parthenon Sculptures/Elgin Marbles stories in The Guardian during the established period. Letters were included in the set. The only search words included were "Parthenon Marbles and Elgin Marbles", given commonality and relative reach back over decades. I did not repeat the search with different search terms given the potential for overlap of articles, and I did not use artificial intelligence to help sort articles.

I used the term Parthenon *Marbles* rather than Parthenon *Sculptures* because the term sculptures is a more recent term used to describe the objects. I used the marbles as a search term after trying "repatriation" (operating word at the time of study) and finding data with non-comparable variables, including many stories about the repatriation of material that is not cultural. If clarity regarding the content of the article was obscured, a close reading was required to determine if the article was germane to the Parthenon sculptures. If articles about the sculptures pointed to

articles about repatriation, these were included in the set. The point of this short study was to determine if an increase in public profile regarding the Parthenon Sculptures debates could be quantified between 1999 and 2023. **Table nine** shows a snapshot of the data collection method used for this study.

I had intended to begin data collection from the year 2017, given that this is one year prior to French President Emmanuel Macron's Sarr/Savoy report, which as stated, is a defining moment in the debates. However, the search process was straightforward, and I opted to gather information back to the end of open available files. If it was not clear whether content was relevant to the search, I read the article closely. Articles about restitution more broadly are included in the data set. This material will comprise raw data to establish whether discernable patterns in public profile afforded to the Parthenon Sculptures debates, in an internationally circulated newspaper, from 1999 to 2023 could be established.

The choice of The Guardian was made for several reasons. First, The Guardian has an established archival history of reporting on the restitution issue largely through the Parthenon Sculptures debates going back to 1999, and second, has an easily accessible database of stories, that are well and consistently presented (see **table nine** for a sample of recorded data). Third, The Guardian has credibility and reach as an internationally read newspaper with numerous awards to its credit, as listed on its website (www.theguardian.com). Fourth, The Guardian published poll results on July 8, 2009 in response to a June 24, 2009 poll asking "(I)s it time to return the Parthenon marbles" (www.theguardian.com) thus setting up the paper to be widely

quoted and referenced in subsequent years regarding the debates, for which 95% of respondents stated “yes”.

Graph one shows key inflection points found in The Guardian between 1999 and 2023 and identifies a definitive increase in story volume in 2022. A big jump occurred beginning in November 2023, when the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Rishi Sunak, and the Greek Prime Minister had a diplomatic row over the Parthenon Sculptures. Thus, The Guardian’s writers maintain an interest in restitution, and certainly the repatriation of the Parthenon Sculptures. This, despite Neil MacGregor, The British Museum’s director from 2002 – 2015, stating to The Guardian in 2006 that “(r)epatriation is yesterday’s question” (Higgins, 2025).

3.3.4 Data Collection: Reviews of “The Brutish Museums” study

The fourth study completed for this thesis is data collection of reviews of Dan Hicks’ book “The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution” (2020). Data was collected March 3, 2024, see **table ten**. This book has been widely reviewed, with multiple book tours and considerable anecdotal mention on the issue of restitution. Top google hits were searched for reviews of this book, to establish a measure of international response to the issue, and the author’s point of view that museums are in a moral dilemma should they not restitute cultural objects. My interest in this book lies in how respondents would perceive of his arguments that the Benin Bronzes should be returned to Nigeria and show that the wide reviews of the book position it as a watershed moment for the restitution debates, and a material step

forward towards a new restitutional era. The study comprises thirteen unique source publications and unique responders, dated between 2020 and 2022, and ranked as favorable, unfavorable or balanced. The study was conducted as background material to the thesis overall, as preparation to build arguments and ensure balance in the discussion chapter.

3.3.5 Data collection: Supplementary data and summary of process

To supplement data for this thesis, key UNESCO reports were reviewed concerning current issues pertaining to museums internationally, and groundbreaking new material from the Charities Act within the context of the legal environment affecting cultural artifacts (Tasdalen, 2016).

In conclusion, to collect data I assembled multiple cases and archival materials, utilizing replication and cross case comparison (Eisenhardt, 1989), and positioned myself in the research as a co-participant (Charmaz, 2014). This constructivist grounded theory method, which "fosters researchers' reflexivity about their own interpretations and the implications of them as well as those of their research participants" (ibid: 240) led to a triangulated approach towards coding, interpretation and theory-building. That approach referenced the multi-disciplinary research identity discussed in the literature review and allowed for creative exploration of understanding how museum leaders and governors made breakthrough decisions in the face of discursive controversy.

3.4 Step two: Data coding, interpretation, analysis and theory building

As shown in **figure two**, I followed four phases of data coding, interpretation, analysis and theory building.

3.4.1 Phase one: Data coding

The first phase of data coding involved using “sensitizing concepts” (ibid: 117). As per Charmaz’s first step that "(i)nitial coding should stick closely to the data (Charmaz, 2014: 116)." I used "sensitizing concepts" (ibid: 117) to begin making sense of each text bullet, shown in **figure three**. Charmaz writes that "(s)ensitizing concepts from symbolic interactionism include action, meaning, process, agency, situation, identity, and self" (ibid: 117). She writes that she likes to "keep codes simple, direct, analytic, and emergent" (ibid: 19). I derived ten codes to assign to lines of data that were short non-phrases representing concepts discussed in the literature chapter and familiar to my researcher positionality. I recognize that a limitation of coding using "sensitizing concepts" is vulnerability to researcher positionality and subjectivity of the proposed codes. Charmaz (ibid: 5) identifies that unique researchers could attribute different codes to the same set of data. I addressed this limitation by pulling the sensitizing concepts from a method of iteratively moving back and forth between the data and the literature, reflecting on concepts that were specific, understood without explanation, and consistent across the body of cases and interviews, as described in the literature review.

The data from the semi-structured interviews was broken into 657 bullets. Each bullet was transcribed from shorthand notes written word-for-word during the interviews. A "sensitizing

concept" was attached to each bullet, as per **figure three**. The codes were "simple and direct" (ibid: 19) but not "active" (ibid: 120). These sensitizing concepts kept me close to the data, and kept the data organized and manageable for categorization of this, and future, research. The 657 bullets follow Charmaz's "line-by-line" (ibid: 124) approach to coding, to "illuminate the situations in which these events occur" and "ask what larger story they indicate" (ibid: 124). Additionally, this method helped to establish a "strong analytic direction" (ibid: 138) early in the work. Wherein my approach mirrored, but not strictly followed Charmaz, was the decision to use concept words rather than action words in the first stage of coding. To have used action words at this early stage of coding would have been difficult to reconcile, as interviewees were speaking sometimes on behalf of themselves, sometimes on behalf of the board, and sometimes as a reflection about an abstract idea or issue. This is a limitation in my methods, as it deviates from Charmaz. That said, I saw it as an advantage in keeping the coded "sensitizing concepts" as less open to interpretation in the first round of coding.

3.4.2 Phase two: Deeper data coding

The second phase of data coding involved "focused coding" (ibid:138) and emerging analysis using "action words" (ibid: 120). This step involved linking the sensitizing concepts (political, legal, etc., shown in **table four**), to Charmaz's call to consider "what larger analytic story" (ibid: 127) the codes inform. While using "focused coding" to take this step (table four), I first considered Charmaz's call to use action words. Her process of identifying "action words", called "gerunds" (ibid: 120-124) became a valuable tool to transition from the "sensitizing concept" labels to understanding how museum governors and leaders make decisions towards addressing

the restitution debates. Although not strictly layering action words onto the data, I used the action concept to categorize the data into themes (Charmaz, 1989: 341), or “focused codes” (ibid: 138). In analyzing the line-by-line text independently of narrative flow, to "gain a strong sense of action" (ibid: 120), I read and re-read the data several times over many months to separate the interviewee tone and statements, and structure comparative incidences of "sensitizing concepts" across cases. To stratify this work, I reorganized the data into sections defined by "sensitizing concept" codes and numbered 1-10 see **figure four**.

Throughout this process, I established five discrete "focused codes" (ibid: 138) rooted in action (ibid: 120-124) to "sift, sort, synthesize and analyze large amounts of data" (ibid: 138). To ensure I did not lose the relationship between the focused codes and then "sensitizing concepts", I assigned a code to each emerging "theme" (see **table four**). An advantage of this method is the creativity in linking the data to the multi-disciplinary literature review, wherein each of the "themes" aligns to a wide array of perspectives as shown in chapter two.

A disadvantage of this method is in the recognition that researcher positionality in word choices, and identified actions, affects a risk of leading the “focused codes” toward “sensitizing concepts” that might reinforce early assumptions about what the data was telling me. To resist and test this limitation, I went over each “focused code” to analyze which "sensitizing concept" could be applied to each emerging “focused code”. A balance of “sensitizing concepts” provided comfort that this limitation was acknowledged and stayed close to the surface, with emerging patterns.

Thus, the "focused codes" provided an effective mechanism to “categorize” the large volume of lines of text, ergo sharpening up and highlighting that which was emerging as important in the early stages of analysis (ibid: 138). These action statements, or codes served to direct the research towards theory-building. Of note, Charmaz suggest that “focused coding” can utilize a second layer of coding the original codes. I did not do this step in coding the semi-structured interviews, at the risk of overly abstracting the decisions and statements made by the interviewees. Therefore, a limitation of my method is the potential to have missed out on further discovery.

In conclusion, the data coding strongly relied on lines of text extracted from the semi-structured interviews parsed into two concrete phases of methodological research derived from cognitive grounded theory. With the CGT simple, active, focused codes in place, I moved to analysis (ibid: 147) and beginning phase three.

3.4.3 Phase three: Data interpretation and analysis

Phase three of data interpretation and analysis comprised adopting the "abductive reasoning" strategy described by Charmaz as "a mode of imaginative reasoning" affording space to "make an inferential leap to consider all possible theoretical explanations for the observed data and then form and test hypotheses for each explanation until arriving at the most plausible theoretical interpretation" (ibid: 200). This method is meant to "illuminate data" (ibid: 201) through the process of examination and gathering of more data to improve rigorous theoretical analysis. From this vantage point, I undertook three abductive reasoning steps.

In the first abductive reasoning step, I wrote up each case study as a distinct narrative in chapter four, and analyzed it via Eisenhardt (Eisenhardt, 1989). This was important as a key contribution of this thesis is in the documentation and categorization of leading voices on an important issue during a critical period in history.

The narratives presented in section 4.2 offer the reader a straightforward account of comparable interviewees' thinking on replicable questions in a bounded empirical interview setting. This advantage affords other researchers an opportunity to use the data as an intact story, useful also for my further research. A limitation of this approach meant deliberately less analysis was layered into the telling of the story described in section 4.2 in the following chapter. I addressed this limitation by creating **table sixteen**, which offers a snapshot of which sensitizing concepts received stronger or weaker mentions, and whether each case favoured internal or external sensitizing concepts.

A second limitation concerns who did not, or perhaps felt that they could not, speak to me. I reached out to many institutions that did not respond. Thus, the final set of interviewees who felt they could speak to me are arguably more likely to be moving more boldly towards restitutional change. This locating of both the interviewees and my researcher positionality on a spectrum privileging the "moral form" is a limitation on the direction that theory building could take in this study. I resolved this limitation by focusing the study on the comparative steps that "moral form" museums took in affecting change, in juxtaposition to the British Museum as a critical site of tension and debate. Regarding the latter, I sought out further data through the museum

minutes study and archival materials, as recommended by Charmaz in the process of analysis and building theory (Charmaz, 2014: 201).

The second abductive reasoning step involved re-organizing the text data spoken by interviewees by sensitizing concept words and writing up each concept word as a section in chapter five. To facilitate analysis, I created a new pages-long table, a snapshot of which is shown in **figure four**. Charmaz recommends "interacting with your data and emerging analysis" (ibid:201), thus this was my method to affect "imaginative ways of reasoning" (ibid: 201) and make new analytical connections. Words, of course, generate meaning (Weick, 1995) and considerable vocabulary literature (Loewenstein, Ocasio and Jones 2012; Carley, 1986, 1988; Nigum and Ocasio 2010; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) offers a way to decipher that meaning. I iterated back and forth with the vocabulary literature and the raw data text (organized by sensitizing concept) to re-animate each concept. This served to tie each concept to the potential for larger theoretical discovery and generate new thinking for this thesis.

A limitation in this approach is that several theoretical lenses identified in the multi-disciplinary body of literature included in chapter two could have been applied to each sensitizing concept, taking the theorizing in a different direction. I addressed this limitation by thinking critically about what was deeply important in the content, leading back to researcher positionality that the voice of each interviewee was of prime value, and the vocabulary literature was thus most appropriate for this theorizing activity. Furthermore, there is potential to re-animate the theoretical options in future work by reconsidering the sensitizing concepts through a difference disciplinary lens.

The third abductive reasoning step involved gathering more data to support heightened "rigorous empirical scrutiny" (ibid: 201). This additional data comprised small studies to support burgeoning arguments and theories. The additional three studies include an analysis of the meeting minutes of three comparative museums described in section 3.3.2; a short examination of The Guardian articles as described in section 3.3.3; and a look at several reviews of Dan Hicks' prominent book "The Brutish Museums" described in 3.3.4. The limitation of these studies is that they are small of scope, especially the newspaper and book review studies. I imposed a tight boundary around the minutes study in that analysis would only include the "voices" at the boardroom table, and not, for example, papers and other archival materials tabled during these meetings. I addressed these limitations by ensuring each study supplemented the analysis rather than comprising the dominant empirical work.

3.4.4 Phase four: Building arguments and theories

Charmaz describes grounded theory as "both a way of analyzing situated action and moving beyond it" (ibid: 228). She suggests researchers in grounded theory may move along a continuum of positivist or interpretivist perspectives. "Positivists try to keep their values out of their research to avoid contaminating the results" which can "leave out emotional and cultural contexts" (ibid: 229). Interpretivists assign "*abstract understanding* greater priority than explanation" and "aim to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them" (ibid: 231).

Thus, while noting that Eisenhardt's positivist approach has informed the research design as described above to provide additional rigour to the data process, I have adopted Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory that builds on interpretivism. CGT "places priority on the studied phenomenon and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (ibid: 239). CGT answers "how" questions and looks at the construction of "meaning and actions in specific situations" and acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation (ibid: 239). Charmaz calls for theory-building that considers the data in terms of "higher-level categories" (ibid: 247) and I did so herein through the aforementioned focused codes.

Thus, I deduced **four arguments**, discussed more thoroughly in section 4.4.3. Three of the arguments are derived from the abductive reasoning activity through the case narratives, and a fourth from the abductive reasoning activity through the vocabulary exercise. Through this process, I established a method to generate a set of theories to answer the research questions I set out to investigate in this research. My method of establishing the CGT was done in a manner like Charmaz's recommended memo-writing (ibid: 162) but with my artistic background and related researcher positionality described above, found a combination of repetitively writing long form notes and drawing mind maps more conducive to breakthrough thinking. These notes and drawings were produced in notebooks that have been saved, key parts of which were reproduced in **table four.** I consistently checked for closeness to the data while pushing creatively towards greater abstraction that aligned across the body of multi-disciplinary literature described in chapter two.

Once the "focused codes" were established, I worked through abductive reasoning to further raise the abstraction, "forge links between their actions and larger social processes" (ibid: 133) and push the boundaries of emerging theory. I did this by testing whether multiple conceptual themes could be reduced into higher-level theories to explain governing decisions, answer the research questions, and tell the story of museums working towards a post-restitutional era, shown also in **table four**. As Charmaz states "(w)hat you see in your data relies in part upon your prior perspectives. Rather than seeing your perspectives as truth, try to see them as representing one view among many" (ibid: 132). The resulting four theories are discussed in section 6**.**2.

3.5 Situational perspective

As stated, interviews were the primary study and started in 2021. Between 2022 and 2023 several restitution stories became national and international news. Three were of strong interest to this study. First, in Canada, was the announcement by former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, who in his last week on the job in 2022 shared that the Manitou Stone would return to its original location, within a newly built structure, new governance body and ongoing governmental funding. This was an unusual and exciting solution. Second was the news of the return of Benin bronzes from the Horniman Museum and Gardens to Nigeria, a story that highlighted the power of the incoming Charities Act in the United Kingdom. Third was the intense publicity over theft of archival materials in the British Museum, and the subsequent reinvigoration of the diplomatic debates regarding where items are considered safe and secure. The juxtaposition of these stories influenced my decision to showcase these museums as models of the restitution issue, and handling of cultural objects. The case of the Manitou Stone was especially important for me to

capture because during my tenure as a deputy minister of culture and tourism, the stone launched my interest in restitution as potential doctoral research material. It is discussed in relation to the interview cases in chapter four.

3.6 Conclusion

These methods have blended the comparative rigour of Eisenhardt's case study approach with Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory building to establish a disciplined and creative path towards understanding breakthrough decisions made by museum leaders and board governors in handling the restitution debates. I have followed the phases of coding, interpretation and abductive reasoning resulting in a set of arguments and theories that are grounded in the empirical data. The data and resulting analyses are set up to inform further research on the issue of restitution or broader museum governing issues, as well as the handling of external pressures across a set of institutions as addressed through board governance. The next two chapters show the findings of this process by telling the stories in each case, first analysing and comparing these cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) in chapter four and reimagining these cases vis-a-vis the vocabulary mechanism to push for creative idea generation in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: CASE STUDIES IN THE MUSEUM SECTOR AND REQUESTS FOR RESTITUTION

This chapter looks closely at the research case study findings in three parts. Part one addresses the approach, selection and development of case studies for developing theory and sharing findings. Part two covers the empirical environment beginning with descriptive narrative from the interviewees of eleven elite museums, rounded out with two key interviews, the first which positions the United Kingdom Charities Act as a tool for change, and the second which contextualizes restitution issues across the museum field. Part two then focuses on the governance minutes of three exemplar museums as critical sites of tension and resolution of the debates: the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Horniman Museum and Gardens. Finally, part two examines the polarity between the British Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum as a juxtaposition of exemplar "legal form" and "moral form" museums, showing the latter as key to institutional "temporal acceleration" towards a "Restitutional Era". Part three returns to the eleven narratives through the lens of cross case comparisons across four schematics: reputation, engagement, framing and visioning to set up the arguments put forward in this thesis.

4.1 Case studies part one: Approach, selection and development

4.1.1 Case studies approach

The thesis first tracks the narratives and decisions shared by directors and governors of museums across four countries between 2021 and 2025, then presents the decisions and actions of the museums in terms of cross case schematics and shared meaning and vocabulary. The findings are interpreted conceptually based on four schematics: reputation, engagement, framing, and visioning. The first stage of the case study analysis comprises the sharing of key narrative points for each of the eleven museums, laid out close to verbatim for purpose of replicability and extension (Eisenhardt, 1989). For narrative flow, *only direct statements about restitution, how decisions concerning restitution impact the museum, and key findings* are included in the narrative description in this chapter, but statements regarding each of the sensitizing concepts for all statements made by interviewees were identified, measured and compared as per **figures three and four**.

4.1.2 Case study selection

The cases selected for this research project include eleven anonymized museums shown in **table five**. These tables categorize eighteen of the twenty interviews in this study. The interviewees in table five comprise chief executives, senior leaders, board chairs and board members, and work across the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and New Zealand. The museum interviews took place between February 22, 2021, to May 2, 2025. For line of sight to varying governance structures across institutions, this research clarifies whether the board of the museums studied are typical, with external and internal appointees; academic, with affiliations to a university; or government, wherein governance of the institution is overseen by government.

The type of museum is established based on institutional operating expenses from consolidated financial statements pulled from annual reports in 2022/2023, as follows:

- immense = $501 million to $2 billion in annual operating dollars
- mega = $100 million to $500 million in annual operating dollars
- substantial = $26 million to $99 million in annual operating dollars
- modest = $5 million to $25 million in annual operating dollars

Thus, as shown in table five, the data set includes 1) a UK mega museum with a typical board structure, 2) a UK modest museum with an academic governance structure, 3) a UK modest museum with a hybrid of a typical and academic governance structure, 4) a Canadian substantial museum with a typical board structure, 5) a UK modest museum with a typical board structure, 6) a Canadian modest museum with a government governing structure, 7) an American immense museum with a typical board structure over several institutions, 8) a New Zealand mid-sized substantial museum with a typical board structure, 9) a UK modest museum with an academic board structure, 10) a Canadian modest museum with a typical board structure, and 11) a Canadian substantial museum with a typical board structure.

These cases have been selected because they have been in the news for addressing restitution efforts. The cases span Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Each case has public information available regarding restitution efforts, whether through media stories, board meeting minutes, public director talks, periodical mentions, or scholarly writing. Cases have been selected to enrich the angles of the restitution debates, whether through

narrative of artifact or narrative of decisions. Several cases bring a unique angle to follow. A few of these include Museum One's high-profile director; Museum Two's leading proximity to academic thinking on the issue; Museum Five's strong directional governance decisions; Museum Six's unique cultural object; Museum Seven's bold policy decisions; and Museum Eight's novel structure.

4.1.3 Case study development

The first step in data collection was the introductory email to potential interviewees, followed by sending them the Oxford ethics form, setting up the meeting, then introducing the meeting in person or virtually with a standard opening monologue following the scripted, semi-structured set of questions. Close to verbatim notes were collected during the interview process. Each interview was considered a unique experiment. The purpose of each experiment was to systematically record every remnant of perception, visualization, framing, reaction and response that the interviewee held regarding the restitution debates vis-à-vis their museum. In working through the interviews established for each case, it is acknowledged that reality is "constructed" (Charmaz, 2014: 15) and that both researcher and interviewees bring their worldview to their perspectives of the restitution issue and how it affects their organizations.

Multiple cases have been selected to "create more robust theory", leading to analysis that is "more accurate than the individual instantiations" (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007: 27), therefore "theory building from multiple cases typically yields more robust, generalizable, and testable theory than single-case research" (ibid: 27). Interview material has been triangulated with

archival materials comprising board meeting minutes, media stories, and published reactions to a watershed book on restitution (Hicks, 2020).

Even though interviews concluded in May 2025, and interesting progress occurred at several of the case museums during and after the interview period, it was not practical to request additional interviews from such busy directors and board governors. Given the volume of interview material per interviewee, and given that the first interviews were often a challenge to secure, I closed each museum narrative within the bracketed dates.

To contain the interview content for each case study, focus on the restitution work at each museum was accomplished by employing a consistent interview methodology, as described in chapter three. Introductory emails and interview welcome comments included uniform description of the purpose of the study, research questions, and researcher biography to establish credibility, bridge trust and cultivate a robust conversation. Each case is presented in anonymized narrative form. The names of each case study institution and key informants, as well as identifying cultural objects have been anonymized. Access was attempted at a preeminent institution facing the debates but was not accomplished. One interviewee hoped that the data would not be anonymized, but for consistency, it has been anonymized in this research.

Data is analysed first using “within case analysis”, using “detailed case study write-ups” of “pure descriptions” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 540), followed by “cross-case comparison…by looking at the data in many divergent ways” (ibid: 540). Theory-building started with no firm hypotheses or

pre-established theories, but with research questions formulated (ibid: 536), and early "sensitizing concepts" in place (Charmaz, 2014: 117).

4.2 Part one: The empirical environment and museum case narratives

The cases presented herein are not exhaustive examinations of the museums' collections and policies, and furthermore, doing so would be revealing of identity. The cases consider what a given museum leader, at a defined point in time, dealing with a protracted international issue, does and says to move the institution forward. The process led to considerable data to mine. As stated by Eisenhardt in handling large volumes of date, "the overall idea is to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity. This process allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before investigators push to generalize patterns across cases" (ibid: 540). Thus, the analysis looks at these statements, called "mentions" through the lens of schematics. Analysis along each case to determine wherein there existed stronger, or weaker, mentions, as well as whether interviewees favoured internal dimensions (defined as curation, collection, education and safety/security concerns) or external dimensions (defined as moral, legal, political and engagement concerns) is shown in **table sixteen**.

Interview headings are organized according to museum number, museum location, operating dollar category, governance structure, interviewee number, interviewee title, and date of interview.

4.2.1 Museum One: United Kingdom, mega museum with typical board structure, Interviewee One A, Director, February 22, 2021.

Key statements by Interviewee One A regarding restitution reference the UK's legal position and the value of long-term loans and arrangements that allow for cultural objects to move back and forth across nations. Their board addresses the intellectual and reputational risks of restitution as an annual matter on the agenda. Interviewee One A responded to the question of reputational decisions affecting audience as being a "powerful question". He ponders how museums can balance visitor desire for an optimal museum experience with the serious issues facing, and addressed by, a global institution, asking "does your patron body want to come for a nice experience and not be hit over the head with climate change etc., and yet, (for museums leaders) to be shapers of conversation, you have to be involved in those issues". He adds that museum leaders must care with the tone they affect with audiences, balancing issues with the need to sell tickets, and growing revenues beyond government contributions. To do this, "you want to have a creative response to those social justice issues while not losing track of purpose". He concludes that "the political heat" for donors is charged with increased public risk, and "that just taking on a role of trustee of board is opening yourself up politically".

4.2.1. Museum One, part two: Interviewee One B, Board member, February 20, 2025

Interviewee One B is a board member of a mega museum in the UK, and former senior leader of a well-known museum in the United States, both of which have been involved in high profile restitution issues. In describing the restitution profile of Museum One, he references the

constraints of the National Heritage Act of the 1980s, and the British Museum Act of the 1960s. He describes these constraints as a "sort of moral cowardice". That said, at Museum One, with legality preventing some deaccessioning, the board is addressing restitution through the organization of long-term loans. As they prepare for future shifts within legal parameters, the board and management are responding in novel and interesting ways. He references their "rapid response department that's about acquiring objects for collection that reflect changes in society". This is a key finding, in that the museum has initiated a systemic practice that reflects engagement with society and social change. Given that their board talks about restitution and considers hypothetical situations, this tool provides a unique opportunity for quick adoption of a "moral form". For now, Interviewee One B states that there are "some objects still in the museum that shouldn't be there morally", acknowledging that sometimes "where you return objects to is a huge problem" and it "can be unclear as to whether you are sending back (cultural objects back) to the right place, so the moral imperative gets complicated".

4.2.2. Museum Two: United Kingdom university-affiliated modest museum with academic governance structure, Interviewee Two A, Director March 3, 2021, and November 25, 2022.

Interviewee Two A led by sharing that she educates the board about abstract concepts concerning restitution. One such concept is that of loss, prominently explored in Hicks' *Brutish Museums* (2020) released at the time of this interview and referenced in our conversation. Interviewee Two A's perspective, shared with the board, frames restitution claims and educational exchanges with countries requesting their cultural property back as a type of gain. Her perspective is that the Hicks book pushes the envelope of ideological perspectives on restitution, and that it is necessary

research. She states that research concerning restitution in museums can be reconfigured as deep, rich academic exchange with communities that enhances collections and understanding of our global cultures. In turn, this work extends communication with communities, builds trust, and enhances museum care for cultural objects. This perspective opens new conversations about alternative "fields of study, methods of co-curation" and interacting with cultural objects in a new way.

For Interviewee Two A, restitution releases an exciting new era for the museum field. Some cultural objects coming out for discussion have not been considered in a century. Part of what is exciting is the exchange of epistemologies between cultures and learning about spiritual and sacred knowledge. She stresses that it takes "time and money to bring delegates over, and they're bringing new objects (and thinking of) how they want to be represented". This work means that whether a cultural object is retained or returned, there is a healing process underway, and bringing the objects into view is also healing, because the "absence" of these objects caused harm.

Interviewee Two A's "board does not see (restitution) as a huge risk". A Museum Two restitution decision "reached 6.8 billion people through mostly associated press, CNN, Fox News, and most places picked up (the story) positively", nevertheless, they have academic students looking into social media responses to restitution concerns. She says that "social media is mostly positive, looking at emojis, some is violently racist and awful. So, they are listening and seeing which words trigger. There is weaponized terminology now, like wokeness". Museum Two wants to ensure they are "trustworthy partners of communities", and Interviewee

Two A recognizes that this comes with an important duty of care and is riddled with complications.

Interviewee Two A described in detail identifying restitution efforts that are being undertaken by her institution and shared her deep academic attachment to this work. She shared that "when directors are not political appointments, then this is the work they're doing in museums". Interestingly, she compares restitution work within museums to the work of other sciences, wherein science continually questions the past. She said, "museums are places where for a long time it was about accumulating, decided by colonial officers, and questioning what would have value (which brings up) deep systemic issues".

In our second conversation, on November 25, 2022, the UK Charities Act, discussed in chapter five, was a considerable news story in the restitution debates. Interviewee Two A mentioned that the "Charities Act was going to change and then when Liz Truss was (in power), she dropped it, but Rishi will likely bring it back". She was interested in the British Museum Board Chair's public comments about the Parthenon Sculptures and thought that as a result "movement is possible, but the British Museum has a different governance structure", and "they're waiting on Charities Commission deliberations (which) was agreed to in June 2022. Now the Horniman is based on the moral case". This lead Interviewee Two A to consider the work of international committees in offering advice to governments regarding overall direction on process, as well as individual cases for which government ministers might seek advice, and she noted an opinion on how particular governments are faring regarding restitution process.

Considering the Charities Act was figuring largely in the debates at the time of our second interview, Interviewee Two A reflected on a question as to whether diplomatic complexity was the reason why the Act had stalled. At the time of the interview, she felt that the Charities Act was hopeful, but the government was not yet in a settled enough place to achieve clarity on the legislation. That said, she sees "huge change" in the museum field, and significantly more engagement. She was aware as well that "meetings have been organized in the White House", and work like the "Digital Benin gives hope - they have connected to the databases of 130 institutions and make one data base of worldwide objects of Benin". She adds that "Digital Benin wasn't a humongous task so if we can find funders, big foundations in the US, that's what can (bring together) nation states, communities and individuals, to make it more manageable for keepers". Additionally, there is a scalability to this progress, and she adds that digitizing and categorizing collections has further value, because "there is a commercial interest, (and) an interest for the tourism industry".

4.2.2. Museum Two, part two: Interviewee Two B, Museum Project Researcher, April 28, 2023

Interviewee Two B is a museum Project Researcher and joined Museum Two to look at their legal/policy frameworks and community connections. He thinks that relying on legal solutions in the restitution debates "legitimizes the Regal framework" and hopes museums can "invite people to re-tell stories". He believes that to restitute is to rebuild and expand, and restitution is a mechanism to help people find a way into the history of their culture. A step forward involves constructs of legality and policy moving towards a "moral imperative" in a restitution framework. He sees a shift from the technicalities of legal arguments towards moral arguments,

progressing to a focus on “governance and story”. His perspective is that future thinking is recognizing demand for change as a way of saving, rather than emptying, museums”. He asks museum professionals and governors to “think more imaginatively, what else could museums transport? Not just material violently extracted. Can Indigenous people donate new materials, and (if we) encourage craft and future and the making, we can have more.”

He thinks that because museums are ideological institutions, boards have responsibilities for ideology as well as policy. As such, institutions that create safe conversational spaces result in boards members embracing openness to exercise imagination, leading to more ideological decisions, ergo, change occurs, and systems shift. Thus, on the question of breakthrough, he adds that it is helpful to think of “era and error” together, and of “temporality, fear of getting it wrong, but (knowing we) can’t get it all right”. Provocatively, he muses on an idea that if lesser-known museums move ahead with a moral case, and make significant gains in restitution frameworks towards a breakthrough era, will “the British Museum mimic others, can they get there, re-create when the coast is clear? If museums move in that direction, others will be able to catch up”. But he cautions: “Traditions and regulatory frameworks are invented. There’s an understanding that when we talk about object returns, and talk about title, ownership and usage...then what do we say about the attendant things. Repatriation is a trojan horse, and then what’s next”.

4.2.3 Museum Three: United Kingdom University-affiliated modest museum with mix of academic and typical governance structure, Interviewee Three, Director, April 23, 2021, and December 2, 2022.

At the time of our conversation, Interviewee Three was writing a restitution statement which indicates “we should be telling new stories, but if you use certain language that’s a problem, so the statement will be less bold and more temperate”. His position is that “looting of Benin needs reparation, and objects should be given back”, but “where things get difficult is not Benin but other areas”, and the legal picture is complicated, despite the presumed clarity of the Savoy Sarr report. He thinks it is wrong to perpetuate “the idea that if we give Benin bronzes back there will be nothing in museums “and suggests “rethinking ownership and lending”. He adds that “the act of collecting and colonial expansion went hand in hand”, as such, “museums are so popular, but we have never questioned ourselves more”. Indeed, when he speaks with students, “the assumption now is it’s all colonial loot and when are you going to give it back”? To move the needle, he adds that “the whole board recognizes the need to diversify”.

Regarding a specific restitution matter of prominent cultural objects at Museum Three, “they are going back, the board is unanimous”. He expected challenges at the board but received none, because the case was clearly one of looting. Complicated cases move through varying levels of governance before reaching the Charity Commission, with an application “under the moral argument”. For long term clarity, he thinks that a nationally approved and independent decision-making body would assist the museum sector in moving forward with restitution.

4.2.4 Museum Four: Canada, substantial museum with typical governance structure, Interviewee Four A, Senior Staff member, October 22, 2021.

Interviewee Four, in thinking about risk and restitution, focused on racism within museums, pointing to an article “Are art museums still racist” (Miranda, 2020, www.latimes.com) as a prime example. Restitution is a responsibility of the chief curator, and is a “standing topic on board agenda, so when they are ready, they deal with it, the board must approve, and they are unlikely to say no”. The board of Museum Four is highly focused on applying knowledge from their work and other governing tables to their work on this board. This allows them to think about engagement and change comprehensively. Interviewee Four stated that “museums are struggling with relevance, and community engagement, who is their audience, who should it be, and how to engage”, and with that, this museum has addressed challenges with strategic planning, civic engagement and consideration to the infrastructure of the institution, with an eye to the museum becoming a “locus of civic engagement and civic partnership”. As such, the physical form of the institution is shaped by engagement with audiences and civil society.

4.2.4. Museum Four, part two: Interviewee Four B, former board Chair, May 2, 2025.

Interviewee Four B shared an important story about restitution practice at Museum Four. “At the choice of Indigenous peoples, some (cultural objects) were held in a locked room that only Indigenous peoples could go in, even staff could not go in. (There were) cases where objects were made available to Indigenous youth and people but kept at (Museum Four)”. The concern of the board was “how to do the right thing and make sure their reputation was maintained”. Furthermore, she spoke of the museum taking a position that was “not traditional that we own them, and you can see them, but we don’t necessarily exhibit it. (We were) proactively seeing

something coming up for sale, going to Indigenous peoples, and saying you need to have this, for example, this was an important object".

The former board chair described the case of a particular object as an exemplar of principles-based decision making at the institution. Giving details here would reveal the identity of the institution, but the board agreed to a direction that comprised "pretty sophisticated solutions and a range of solutions". At the management level, she referenced that there is still "some pushback from curators, the older ones", even as they experience progress overall. Regarding individuated restitution decisions, she said that these matters would "come to the board, staff would present (to) the board, and the board would approve. (We) never didn't approve but asked questions about how it worked, and process". With cultural objects, it is important that the process includes the board, they "want to be asked, (even though) nothing came to board where no one wanted to repatriate" and they were "pretty open about negotiation" being careful to ensure the "nation could manage it" and that the cultural objects were going back to "not just a family, which is why keeping objects and giving access is important".

4.2.5 Museum Five: United Kingdom, modest museum with typical governance structure, Interviewee Five, Director, April 20, 2023.

When interviewing for the Director role, Interviewee Five asked of the board, "what's next"? The board was privy to data about that museum that "some visitors saw it as colonial". Thus, "they were rethinking relationships and building trust around African collections". The director mentioned three museums that he thought were doing this well: "the World Museum Liverpool,

the Pitt Rivers Museum and Cambridge Museums". Moving ahead to address restitution at his own museum to rethink relationships and build trust, the director employed a unique research method of engaging student voices regarding the future of African collections. He learned that students value collaboration and see "the objects as vehicles for relationships rather than focusing on ownership disputes". Thus, the Director noted that "if you can understand more about relationships, then ownership questions are easier to resolve".

Concurrently, museum staff consulted communities, with representation from countries asking for the return of cultural objects, holding a "focus group on what the future of the (objects) should be, as in, is it good to have the pieces to show? They said you should give them back and then ask to borrow them, and show (through subsequent exhibitions) what they learned through restitution claims".

Meanwhile, all restitution "claims are reported to the board", and with the convergence of several world events that drew shone a light on colonialism in society, including the pandemic, the George Floyd murder in the United States, and toppling statues, the director "recommended to the board that they get a repatriation procedure, done in 2020-2021, and post it on the website". He also consulted with the Pitt Rivers Museum regarding policy work. Thus, "the board was primed on colonialism and unlocking diversity, plus pragmatically they needed to respond to future claims". The board knew that with public attention on the namesake of the institution in reference to colonialism, that the issue was a critical reputational matter to address. Thus, they mounted an exhibition that dealt head on with the issue and prepared to address colonialism by forming a working group of the board.

Shortly thereafter, the museum began work on the restitution of high-profile cultural objects. What follows is an account of the objects' return. The board "anticipated" external reaction to the case. Given the profile of the case, and the intensity of the politics, coupled with a concern to keep media profile at bay whilst the work was occurring. They did not want the "trustee decision to be media driven. Journalists did try." Unlike the British Museum Act that indicates museums cannot divest of pieces in the collection, the Charities Act governed this regional museum. Interviewee Five confirmed that "they had a curator on top of this". They were careful about which objects were "in and out of scope and established the credibility of the items". The restitution involved ensuring "clarity of the narrative of the raid" that resulted in the work arriving at the museum.

Policy was cemented. Interviewee Five stated that the policy involved ensuring that the restitution committee of the board, comprising three members, would hear the case, and the recommendations provided by staff. In this case, the policy involved the restitution subcommittee hearing and assessing the case, and management recommendations for the board. Regarding this case, the restitution subcommittee asked for further management work on the matter, including a focus group. Stated Interviewee Five, "one person said you can't change history so keep them. Everyone else said morally you should give them back, but it is nice if you can borrow them back". One strategy employed by the museum staff included hosting a session for children looking at why the cultural objects were in the museum. Interviewee Five said that "the kids are moral creatures, and I got hundreds of letters from kids saying to give them back".

The museum board and professionals considered both the legal and curatorial path ahead of them. The team planned alternative opportunities to exhibit these cultural objects such through digital representation. They secured legal representation in anticipation of their Charities Commission application, and were attentive to terms of legal endowment, and importantly, "legally the objects were not part of permanent endowment. Had they been, the Charities Commission could have still agreed" to the restitution.

The governance process moved methodically, and the team was mindful of security concerns and experienced "lots of unintended consequences that are pioneering for other museums", including "who pays for the transport, you'd have to charter a whole plane for it all". They used "six carrying cases and went with a diplomatic channel, no customs, and had two people and two big metal cases…with three objects each". Through it all, the "Chair was supportive, and she wanted to get it done". She had legal and media skills, emphasized process and was clear that the principle of whether an object had been "taken by force" would foreground decision-making. The director added that "the professionals' work was complicated by Chair stepping down (on given date) and she did not want the new Chair entangled, so the staff asked bureaucracies to expedite. They did". The Chair had a clear value set, and "is all about truth and justice", but the board was "probably not aware of the scale of their decision. However, the museum had done training on issues well in advance of policy, so they were aware that the museum was pioneering, but not aware of the ripples this decision would have more widely".

He was careful to add that this is "not end of a process but the start". The museum is still "rethinking relationships and building trust". Additional storage needs constructing in the

returning country to house the objects, therefore, the spokesperson in that country says this is a "symbolic return to start and then work over several years" will progress to ensure facilities are in shape for further restitutions. He added that "they can't take all back because they couldn't show all… they're like ambassadorial objects". He explains that these objects are like Indigenous cultural objects, wherein there is a sacredness and a soul that has "emotions, stories, and relationships. Objects had a life before the museum, then a life in the museum and a new chapter in their life after the museum, so be more relaxed about a new chapter in their biography".

In thinking about the future, the director shared that it "could be more difficult, and people could say anything collected in the colonial period from unequal power relations should be returned". Thus, the board must ensure processes are thorough, and "academically credible", and have a keen awareness of the unpredictability of governments. He is not worried that the future museum will be "emptied", reinforcing that they have hundreds of thousands of objects, and fewer than one hundred have reversed ownership back to the home country, with fewer than ten leaving the museum, thus they are "not emptying the museum".

4.2.6. Museum Six: Canada, modest museum with government governing structure, Interviewee Six A, Director, April 21, 2023.

Museum Six's primary contribution to the restitution conversation concerns a significant cultural object that they were given "twenty years ago with the caveat that they consult with Indigenous people for the next space" in which that object would reside, said the director, Interviewee Six A.

She shared that “people always come to hold ceremony with the it, one group brings different people every time, then I went to meet them, and they came frequently”. They call themselves “The Companions of the (name of cultural object). The people were Indigenous and non-Indigenous and wanted the cultural object returned to the location (where it was found)”. The director slowly got to know them and did not insert herself in the process, adding that “some members said they had experienced some difficult interactions with the museum and were worried they had hit a brick wall”, but for her, “building bridges was important to her principles of work”.

The director shared that Museum Six had progressed its engagement efforts significantly. The aforementioned “group was doing community building, and it was important that it was not done by one community, not by one nation, not by one person, but by building bridges because the (the object) is important to so many people”. She mentioned that “twenty years ago, the consultation resulted in non-agreement about (where the object) should go, so it should not live here forever, but there is no consensus on where it should go, that said, there is consensus to keep consulting”.

Two treaties regions in the province became involved in the case. Interviewee Six A shared that “the companions of the (cultural object) have incorporated, and they are governors of this situation. They created a co-stewardship agreement, which says (the governors) and government will work together to relocate the cultural object, as we find a physical location for the move”. This agreement functions like a memorandum of understanding, and it says, “the cultural object will be returned to Indigenous care, and the long-term goal is to keep a strong relationship

between Museum Six and The Centre, and to tell the story of the cultural object while it is in Indigenous care". Furthermore, specifications were given regarding certain restitution language to avoid as found in government acts.

The director stated that "legally, currently it still belongs to the government of the province", and she shares that for the object to be moved to The Centre, clarity over ownership is yet to be determined. That said, a novel plan is being discussed, wherein the object would move back to the original site, described in further detail with a government relations firm working with Museum Six, named Interviewees 6.2 and 6.3, below. Meanwhile, Interviewee Six A states that "they are in the early days of land acquisition and building, the press release said it was going back to where it came from, but that was nine months ago".

Interviewee Six A shared that the companies "incorporated as a non-profit are now called The Centre with a volunteer board. The new board hired staff, project management, and support from the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre", with funding sourced from both government and the private sector. The Centre can fundraise, and they have received "some government money, and will be making capital asks. They have drawings and engagement". As work progressed to relocate the object, "community and consensus building by the Centre, and consulting by Museum Six, and an Indigenous Advisory panel" with government leaders was effective. "Things really accelerated." Eventually there was a co-stewardship agreement signed with provincial leadership and a representative of The Centre. This was a high-profile news event in Canada.

As “The Confederacy of the Treaty groups were involved, and the government side all did due diligence, the hardest parts were (framing) the agreement, addendum to (the Act), deaccessioning in the Historic Resources Act, creating the memorandum of understanding and co-stewardship”. In this co-stewardship mode,l “the timeline was difficult, things accelerated quickly”, and the political leadership “must have been supportive because it accelerated” once the provincial leader was engaged.

But the risks did not disappear as “they have momentum, but funding is not secured. They worry about private or government money falling through”. Added complexity is layered into the plans, given lack of clarity of land acquisition or gifting, architectural costs and “not everyone in Indigenous communities is pleased…some need more information, some just express disagreement. Some concerns about the composition of the board, they’ll never satisfy everyone, but The Centre has baked in inclusiveness”.

4.2.6. Museum Six, part two: Government Relations Firm supporting Canadian mid-sized museum with government governing structure, Interviewees Six B and Six C, government relations consultants, two interviewees, September 11, 2023.

Interviewee Six B and Interviewee Six C became engaged in the restitution of Museum Six’s cultural object out of the blue. They were driving to the mountains when the phone rang, and a prominent client reached out to them about a project. They were suitably intrigued and turned the car around to meet with a group of people assembled to share with Interviewee Six B and Interviewee Six C the story of the object.

Their story begins with an accepted understanding of the location wherein the object was first discovered by Indigenous Peoples, an account which aligns with published data and oral history about the provenance of the object. They were brought in to "talk to the farm families" on the original site in small town Canada, and Interviewee Six B would be the intermediary. He said:

> *"They want to move the (the object) there… a gathering place by (a town) where all the tribes would gather and trade, and it landed about 200 km SW of that location. They described the area as a "free zone in tag" and if you were fleeing that was a safe space. This ties to repatriation. (Anonymous person) took the object because he thought they were worshipping it as an idol. (A woman at the meeting) is a shaman, and she had done a lot of work with the blood tribe and (another member of the meeting) claims some Cree heritage and claimed a powerful force around it that was undeniable. The object (arrived) thousands of years ago, plus it is a scientific artifact as the largest (object of its kind) ever to hit Canada. They wanted to acquire the spot and do a raft of ceremonial things and then they would have ceremony on the mound."*

Interviewees Six B and Six C went to see the farm family, because the ideal relocation site suggested by the people in the meeting was in their front yard. Said Interviewee Six B, "this fellow's grandfather had farmed the place". In fact, "they had had Indigenous people show up and do ceremony as long as they could remember. Elders and anyone would come to be healed and pass away there. Back then burial was not a thing". As the meeting progressed, Interviewee Six B offered additional information about purchase offers, and options for purchasing nearby land were explored. Interviewee Six B stated that he "told the family it would be hard to stop. They were open to it, but not super happy, and someone told them 100,000 people a year could be coming. The family thought they'd lose the farm".

Meanwhile, a well-known Indigenous architect was hired to design the facility, government was engaged, and funds were identified for design and legal work. Interviewee Six B reached out to a high-ranking public official who was familiar with the case. "He was well-versed and was a big fan of doing this, so we got $500,000 from the province for the project to move forward". But there was something else to think about, in that there is an inherent, and very high intrinsic value, of the material that comprises the cultural object. Interviewee Six B said it "is more valuable than gold per ounce. So, what's sitting there is …worth a ton of money. Therefore, they have a fiduciary duty to protect the object".

Ongoing questions of ownership of the object persisted. Several Indigenous peoples made claims, but two Indigenous men "trusted by all as an elder statesman and chief, said that none of us should own it, and all should have a say and joint stewardship of (the entities governing the object)". With that, the interviewees reckoned that a change of Chief or governance would affect the project and Museum Six would "default to ultimate stewardship".

Interviewee Six B described the denouement at the time of interview as follows:

> *"It got to the point where government had money in it, (and planned to) send it back to its resting place and the farm family received agreement that they could continue to farm and (the governing body) had planned a multi-million dollar building on multi millions of dollars of land, and then (the governing body) wanted more land from government…so then the Indigenous elders around (the governing body) started to think the object could go anywhere. Two members of the (governing body) identified something called "lay-lines" and there are ten to twenty of these spots on the globe, like Stonehenge and the Pyramids, where there's strong spirituality and the (preferred spot for the cultural object) is one of them. When they realized that the farm groups wouldn't move out, they decided to find a new spot. So, we got a call from (the governing body) to say abandon the site early this year. They could look for a more suitable site to reverse the curse (on*

> *humanity predicted by the stealing of the object) but now they want a larger facility and lots of land, so they told the farm families it was off."*

The interviewees engaged a land broker, and explored issues with water, trees, elevation, farming complications, lay line proximity, spiritual plateaus, and adjacency to private residences. Some land was purchased, and as of the time of interview, "the idea is it's easier to get land and a whole new design for an interpretive centre", given the money invested by government and donors in the work so far is considerable.

This work filled the interviewees with purpose as a significant act of reconciliation, and a genuine opportunity to fix something that caused harm. They remain committed to the project and will spend time with elders walking the land. They spoke of the complexity of restitution when there is no longer clarity about to whom the objects should return, especially in an environment of changing leadership. They wonder if something new is cropping up, whether the objects, if held by a museum, especially if the intrinsic value is substantive, and ownership is uncertain, are edging into a liability for the institution to hold, because of the inherent reputational and financial risk now in keeping disputed cultural objects. They ask how board members respond if an object moves from the asset column to the liability column on the balance sheet. Furthermore, what then would be the ultimate risk of being on that board?

4.2.7 Museum Seven: American, immense museum with typical board structure overarching several institutions, Interviewees Seven A and Seven B, two senior staff members in one interview, June 8, 2023.

Interviewee A and Interviewee B are senior staff members of the museum. The institution has a governing board with individual advisory boards for entities within the institution. In discussing the museum's ethical returns policy, Interviewees shared that direction was set through the strategic plan, community engagement and inclusiveness policies. Their leader was emphatic that the primary principle in the policy development would be ethics, and the secondary principle would be legal. Despite the legal entitlement to retain cultural objects, this would be "contrary to values", and Interviewee Seven B added that "they had a values statement as companion to policy".

Interviewee Seven B's work involved consultation, drafting policies and holding a working group. She "determined that which was unique, and not comparable to other conversations, which is that boards are not part of the direction". She shared that once the direction was adopted by the institution, "then the museums had to change their policies to be in compliance, and to be part of the greater policy. Compliance was an (institutional) directive, except for the two museums", for which compliance moved through museum collections staff, legal staff, management staff, and then the boards. When the policy came to the board, it was "put forward as an expectation". At one of the two museums "there was not much discussion".

Interviewee Seven A added that they "reached consensus right away, and there was a feeling of the right thing to do, and policy had to mandate that". Interviewee Seven B emphasized that work was also done on the side of people(s) who would receive the cultural objects, and engagement comprised "external consultants including people working on getting returns. None of this is public, and all were deemed internal documents" with a focus on "shared stewardship".

A rich policy creation process moved quickly between 2021 and 2022, but the challenge was implementation, “submitting a request”, recognizing “diversity of practice” and “monitoring”. They had to “ensure (each) ethical return is treated similarly”. Additionally, they would have to deal with generalities and manage broad questions like “do you have anything from such and such a place”. Overall, Interviewee Seven A shared that this has been the “most rewarding work of his career, and now asks, what does possession and ownership really mean? Shared stewardship, not ownership, or return?” They are seeing “a real cultural shift. How we were trained in museum studies was as custodians of cultural and scientific heritage” but now they “have to remind themselves that this is instead a shared responsibility around the globe. Some folks might still feel it’s going too far. Altering museums from a traditional western perspective to something new. But that’s the exciting part”.

Interviewee Seven B built on this point, stating that she “hates the term ‘decolonizing the museum” preferring to frame restitution as “for the public good”. She referred to the British Museum, and the British Museum Act as being part of a perspective that “I am the scholar, and I am the expert, and I know best, rather than learning about how to display and how to relate to objects”, adding, “these people are still in leadership roles”. Interviewee Seven A added that “curators had the perspective that ‘this is my collection, I will set the criteria’, but this is now antiquated based on the last three years (here). Now how do (museums) support a cultural shift in audience, whether social or climate change”.

4.2.8 Museum Eight: New Zealand, substantial museum with typical governance structure, Interviewee Eight, Co-Director, July 19, 2023.

Governance is foregrounded in Museum Eight's restitution work. Like Museum Six in Canada, Interviewee Eight mentioned that his institution "is a crown entity and reports directly to the Minister, and Culture Ministry". The ministry has expectations regarding "priorities". The board has "been involved (in restitution) since 1998, and a lot depends on the makeup of the board and their interests and philosophies. Since 1998, (there have been) two occasions with no Maori members (on the board), so then they make a statement that they don't have a mandate to make decisions on Maori interests". Restitution is managed through their collections policy, and the board has recognized the importance of this work, emphasizing that "part of (their) new strategy is to own our past". This work is part of their bigger mandate to "transform museum practice by centering Maori communities". Thus, with a "vision for a treaty-based national museum", they put relationships at the heart of their work while "ramping up learning history and key concepts across all staff".

The co-director believes that the "ICOM (International Council of Museums) definition hasn't served museums well". The ICOM definition reads as follows:

> *"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing"* (www.icom.museum).

Vis-à-vis the definition, he says that service to society could be pursued more, as museums hold power in maintaining and revitalizing culture. He favours the director of the restitution conversation internationally, referencing UNESCO's efforts, adding that he "made recommendations to UNESCO on repatriation" suggesting "absolute support (to) reconcile colonial practice". However, he challenged UNESCO to "take an active role, don't wait for Indigenous people to knock on your door, and the room went quiet". When asked if this dialogue ever showed up in a UNESCO report, Interviewee Eight said no, which he "found alarming and reflective." Interviewee Eight is "not saying UNESCO is as entrenched as ICOM, but that "it's natural, why wouldn't Indigenous people be involved in what's happening with their treasures". When pressed about the role of UNESCO and ICOM in the governance of museums writ-large, he said "you've got the ingredients in what museums haven't done, but we have the ingredients of what they could be doing". Interestingly, he thinks that "it's almost frightening how similar the museums are that are all doing repatriation". He questions "if they are asking themselves: 1) Is this really making a difference, 2) why are we doing this, 3) is this meeting our purpose, 4) who are we doing this for, and 5) are we really examining our repatriation process"?

4.2.9. Museum Nine: United Kingdom, University-affiliated modest museum with academic governance structure, Interviewee Nine, Director, September 5, 2023.

Leading off with a discussion about board responses and decisions regarding restitution, Interview Nine stated that Museum Nine has had a long-standing restitution policy that looks "at these questions case-by-case". That policy, however, was not firmly stated, or strongly tested.

“For decades people outside the museum, including students and activists assumed there were lots of claims but in fact (there were) only four claims in twenty years”. One specific case handled by the museum led to a review of the framework in 2019, and a refresh of the policy for clarity and thoroughness, ensuring it was “not off-putting for grassroots members and representatives”. Thus, as the debates grew after this date, it “didn’t catch them by surprise”.

Nevertheless, the director noted that increased scrutiny on boards has “prompted culture change in those bodies” given “adverse media content when they make stronger statements”. He added that cultural institutions cannot avoid controversy, and museums can “be committed to the narrative of retention and then not committed to colonialism but also criticized for lurching to decolonial agendas in an academically unsatisfactory way that doesn’t take care of collections. There are contexts, for boards, when you can’t get it right, but it’s important to make the right decision based on legal and other considerations.” Harkening back to a comment made by a “curatorial colleague in the nineties” that “we must justify ourselves every day” concerning contested collections and different points of view, he says that as “those perspectives get picked up by academics, curators and leaders, the sea change is more about preparedness and openness for claims”.

Reflecting on the UK Charities Act in terms of a moral authority, he stated that the framework is not “designed to respond” to the moral angle. He explains that hypothetically, “the university doesn’t have the legal power to return artifacts but argues it has a moral obligation to do so. So, if a lawyer is arguing for, say, the Horniman to the Charities Commission, they will say it doesn’t have legal, but rather moral obligation” to restitute the cultural object. Thus, “there is a

consideration that material going home is of greater public consideration than staying in a museum in Britain".

4.2.10. Museum Ten: Canada, substantial museum with typical governance structure, Interviewee Ten A, Board Member, January 15, 2025.

Interviewee Ten A stated up front that "you would think repatriation policy would be old hat, but you (researcher) will be breaking new ground". Their gallery is developing a restitution policy, and "has embraced reconciliation and decolonization, which came at a cost with the media". For over five years, Museum Ten has moved across a pendulum from embracing a strategic plan, to worrying about a "hollowing out, and ways of celebrating the collection now". To move ahead, the board governor states that building relationships, and following guidelines of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are working. "The commissioners of the TRC recognize just one side of the story can't be told, whether one or the other, we have to move forward together to get out of this. The right thing to do is to ask what resources you need."

Within the museum, the policy is advancing through the efforts of the Indigenous lead who "has been working with the Vatican. When the Pope asked if we wanted our stuff back, people got really excited about that and interested in moving forward". That said, there are practical questions about restitution, like "how do you insure the thing now, which is 150 – 200 years more fragile, and needs special care…and reduce risks on the thing that would do damage, like if the thing dissolves when it hits air". As an example, he cites work happening in Whitehorse, Canada, wherein they have facilities, controls, infrastructure and systems to deal with

restitutions. Overall, though, Interviewee Ten A maintains that “real resource consideration and money need to be discussed in addition to underlying ownership questions”.

The board governor admires work such as that taking place at the Fogg Museum in Boston, “right on Harvard campus, their curator is doing amazing things, like a sculpture head of an OBA King from Nigeria, and a placard says ‘culture carries history, magnificent and brutal and more recent controversies’ (thus) they don’t shy away from the colonialist way” as an invitation to think about the situation in the round, and new ways for audiences to learn. This curatorial methodology “creates different types of relationships with the public who could be allies, or not, but they are part of an important conversation that advances reconciliation”. This is a way, he suggests, for museums to form allyship, and an example of how museums are adapting.

As an Indigenous lawyer, the board governor brings knowledge about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Canada. He believes that “the thing Museum Ten has going for it is the TRC having finished its work, and the TRC did an amazing job with its mandate”. He adds that “there are calls to action in the TRC that impact the work of museums, and the association of museums did a document called “Moved to Action” in 2019 that museums (reference to) ask themselves how to respond to reconciliation, and repatriation figures prominently in it”. Later, on the same day of the interview, Interviewee Nine wrote in an introductory email to the Indigenous lead of Museum Nine that “I shared my thoughts on reconciliation as relationship, agency, and governance and how the TRC is a watershed between two eras (IMO)”.

As the “sole Indigenous person on the board, there is an expectation to speak up when issues and opportunities impacting Indigenous people, and agency, come up”. He wonders “what happens with 150 years of colonialist repatriation and what does that mean for the narrative of collection”. The “Moved to Action” document “asks important questions and asks museums to act”. Several times in the interview, he references the importance of relationships as a guiding principle, and for him, it helps with decision-making. When deliberating on board matters, he “asks himself does this advance the relationship, is it respect, or does it fall back to decisions *about*, rather than *with*”. Since we are ten years past the publication of the TRC, there may be a concern now that we’re entering a stage wherein that work could be considered “ancient history and if we haven’t solved a problem they identified then, maybe it’s not a problem anymore, so fatigue sets in, but it doesn’t take away that we have this valuable thing and valuable framework that received universal acknowledgement and support”.

Expanding on his thinking about boards and restitution, he harkens back to a provincial premier who “gave an apology for silence, so we have to keep talking”, and he says that he is “lucky that at the gallery there are good, smart human beings who understand the opportunity and the years of discord, and you can take an approach like ‘walking together’ that is more sustainable at the end of the day”. By this he means an approach wherein Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and leaders of an organization work side by side on a set of principles and actions to advance the work of decolonizing the institution. He adds the following: “So, the board views the work ahead, and has conversations with staff, maybe we can appreciate a bit of pragmatism and a pivot that keeps you moving in the same direction. The journey is not a straight line, occasionally we make a detour”.

Expanding into the question of the fiduciary responsibility of the board, Interviewee Ten states that this is “interesting for the board and as a concept”, asking “are we moving from fiduciary to an ‘honour of the crown’ type of dialogue”. The definition of which could be described as “less about taking care of, and more about being true to promises, treaty, and relationship. This is where the law is going. Leadership at a provincial level, and courts coming around to shifting the premise of the discussion”. He adds that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples “is also occupying more of an ‘Honour of the Crown’ approach. It’s all a pendulum, so (we will) see what happens with a new federal government”. Essentially, “Honour of the Crown goes away from fiduciary towards nation to nation, community to community, and decision maker to decision maker”.

4.2.10. Museum Ten, part two: Interviewee Ten B, Vice President, Indigenous portfolio, January 23, 2025. Note: No direct quotes permitted as per signed ethics form.

Interview Ten B stated right at the start of the interview that a global movement responding to restitution issues is occurring, with some museums placing more emphasis on change than others. He referenced the British Museum, and its reliance on colonial systems, as a notable resistor to the movement. He described this colonialist point of view as one wherein a right to loot was exerted, followed by claims of both ownership and interpretation rights. For Interviewee Ten B, there is hope and potential in the opportunity to change that which is determined to be important, and the narratives that follow from new concepts of meaning. Internationally renowned policies have helped shape these narratives, and the abstractions of meaning,

especially UNDRIP, and the assertions therein that support the rights of Indigenous peoples, including cultural forms. The TRC is a national policy that guides systemic change that accommodates shifts in meaning and story. He believes, as does the board member interviewed for this case, that the Canadian Museum Association has made respectful shifts in this policy direction as demonstrated in their Move to Action Framework, dated 2022.

Regarding whether there is a change in era occurring within the museum field, the vice president was unequivocal, believing that a new era is in play, organized into phases. The first phase of museums is one wherein the colonialist perspectives described above are prevalent, and he thinks that it seemed as though this narrative would perpetuate indefinitely. The second phase saw the increase in civil and Indigenous rights. With activist movements growing, the museum field began to respond in a way that involved increased representation of Indigenous peoples within the institution or through the art exhibitions and curatorial practice. Interviewee Ten B saw a correlation in academia, in that a sole Indigenous person could be called on to represent Indigenous people more broadly, with heavy responsibilities to educate staff. As the second phase progressed, curators, especially non-Indigenous curators, began to support Indigenous exhibitions in an exciting way, and exhibitions that had once been excluded found their way into museums like Museum Ten. He confirmed he was speaking of the 1970s and that Indigenous artists were finally getting public profile, manifested concurrently with change at the Canada Council for the Arts, occurring in the 1970s through the 1990s. As this occurred, academia saw slight shifts in how artists were trained, but this aligned with much burnout and regret when change did not occur.

This era was ongoing for 25 to 30 years, and it was surely impactful as Indigenous artists had their first solo exhibitions, and Indigenous art was increasingly purchased through professional galleries. Museum Ten made its first purchase of Indigenous art in the mid-1980s. The impact, Interviewee Ten B believes, was mostly directed toward the public. Museum Ten made a powerful administrative decision at this time to better engage with the public by clearly renaming a gallery with Indigenous language.

The third phase of this new era was, and is, as Interviewee Ten B describes, getting to the heart of what this thesis question asks, which is whether and how we are entering a new era for museums. Interviewee Ten B calls this era transformational, a fundamental shift, and a new way of thinking about art in our land. He describes the era as one in which we question how and why museums acquire art, and why people in general acquire art, evocating a new responsibility on the holders of cultural material, inclusive of preservation practices in museums. This is an important point: Preservation is key to conservation, and it is object focused. The new era brings in expanded thinking of what museology practice is meant to do. Now, bigger responsibilities are folded into conservation. Ideas such as honoring history, relationships and the meaning layered therein dovetail with who gets to tell the story, who is told the story, and how the narrative is presented. The goal now is not just to underscore a western view of art history, but to demonstrate a responsibility to wider society, and art history in a new way.

Thus, to deepen and add meaning to this direction, museum professionals need to engage in new ways with society and have notably different conversations. Policies and processes ought to combine curatorial responsibilities that move along from transactional relationships, into

groundbreaking conversations, that bring people into new settings with their knowledge. This can change dogma. That said, in practical terms, he was careful to add that the Museum Act does allow for more leeway than is sometimes understood. Furthermore, policies are simply a point in time construct and can change as people's beliefs adapt. In summary, Interviewee Ten expressed caution in defining the third phase definitively as an era, because we are not far enough in. He hopes that in ten years we will be able to do so, and that there will be a body of empirical work to back up this hypothesis. He suggested measurable data regarding whether a new era takes hold could include shifts in grant money, staffing, and questions that are brought to the board for discussion and decisions.

Bringing these phases back to board governance more directly, Interviewee Ten considered the question of risk through the lens of his operational area, and how the novelty of the department is embraced by the board. Museum ten governors address systemic risk by increasing understanding, especially vis-à-vis the impact of articles 11 and 31 of UNDRIP and the TRC. Interviewee Ten B praised management's work with the board and described their conversations in positive terms. His point of view is that risk was well mitigated at the board, but will never be, nor ought to be eliminated entirely. However, ethically and legally, the Museum Act legislation and UNDRIP give organizations more room to take new positions such that moving forward is a less risky enterprise. Restitution, which he refers to as rematriation policy, is part of that forward direction. Overall, he states that the board is in a better risk position by thinking of understanding as a moral and legal obligation, and with increased understanding comes the knowledge that to move ahead can be less risk than sticking with the status quo. Even still, boards come and go, so it will be important to have policies move along with understanding at a relatively parallel pace. Nevertheless, he believes that board governors are asking the right questions, and the direct

communication he has with them to increase understanding allows for better decision-making, sometimes outside of their comfort zone.

4.2.11 Museum Eleven: Canada, substantial museum with typical governance structure, Interviewee Eleven, Former Board Chair, and former CEO of a comparably sized Canadian museum, February 24, 2025.

In thinking about whether enough momentum and political will for a breakthrough era exists in the museum field, Interviewee Eleven, a former board chair of the institution, identified risk oversight and fiduciary responsibility as primary influences of directional change. As such, decisions must be principled, and "we have to be consistent". For example, the "Canada Revenue Agency said museums need to identify the dollar value of collections, and should the collection be, or not be, on the financial statement, which leads to (new thinking about) how risk is identified". For "boards, the risk area for collections is in the ongoing care and storage. Money to accommodate is not necessarily on financial statements but does need to be on a risk register in perpetuity". This ties to the restitution debates, and how contested cultural objects will be recognized in a new risk environment.

On restitution claims, the former board chair said there is an "evolution now that more material should return. It's been there, but the discussions now are reaching a velocity". Museums have been "collecting for generations and records can be inaccurate or nonexistent…so the origin story is getting grappled with, and even if good documentation is in place, that doesn't deal with the background" of the cultural object. Museums must "think through the uses of everyone's

story, and … the rigors around usage". Interestingly, while digital solutions are posited as a way forward in recognizing collections to resolve debates, cyber security could be highly problematic in relation to sensitive material, and "how that could be compromised, and the tech needs to be constantly upgraded".

Interviewee Eleven described a solution to restitution at the museum. "They care for it, but it is not in their collection, and it is not their object. The agreement was they don't own but they do care for it (which is) a different way of thinking for museums". She offered that artists and curators ought to work together in considering the care and exhibition of contested cultural objects, playing more strategically into each profession's expertise and the development of "concepts, creation and ideas jointly". Curators are focused on "the forever of collecting and showing", and we "don't hear a lot from artists on this", except with Indigenous artists. Moreover, she provocatively asked that when an institution deaccessions a piece, "should some money go back to artists" as a principle, which could have repercussions in cases of return, "and if "you're buying that art to enjoy it, is there a finite time you get to enjoy it"?

Finally, she considered how restitution policies could 'infiltrate all areas of the institution". For example, "sometimes we look at cultural objects but forget about environmental material collected in Indigenous territory, like the voices of Indigenous languages. What about that material? How is it used or shared? Were permissions at point of collection as strong it should have been"?

4.2.12 The United Kingdom Charities Act interview: UK director, arts lawyer and educator, Interviewee Twelve, May 3, 2023.

The UK Charities Act, as discussed in the literature review, is a tool for change in the restitution debates, with progress frustrated by the legal rigidity of the British Museum, discussed in the next section. Interviewee Twelve offered an internationally respected voice on the situation. Concerning the question of adequacy of policy and legal frameworks, primarily in the United Kingdom, in addressing restitution issues, the arts law scholar considered whether the Charities Act will provide a tipping point in the debate, and just what the "moral" imperative with the act implies. He said: "Up to one and a half years ago, no one thought it would have much of a role, it was not on anyone's radar". He explained that "the role of the Charities Commission for national museums is to first potentially approve decisions" and that "the law that applies to charities and trustees (allows) that on rare occasions trustees can make moral decisions, even if (those decisions) are not in the best decision of the charity, and they must have approval of the Attorney General. Power flows from the Attorney General".

Practically, assessing the moral will be tricky, because "if you're a board, you could say you have moral obligation, if it goes against our interest…but we think we have moral decision and we need authorization from Charities Commission, the Attorney General, and the courts". So, proposed changes to the Charities Act lead to questions for board trustees about "whether the trustees could reasonably be held to have a moral obligation. Thus, the Charities Commission is fraught, what's moral"? This is a "big change" and changes to the Charities Act would leave boards with "what is now a subjective assessment".

When asked whether boards could delegate their moral authority to management, Interviewee Twelve noted that the relevant legal article in the act "would have to be like who would write that cheque" which is an important point for bureaucratic bloat. In this scenario, increased documentable process on the part of management in representing a board moral authority would be, according to Interviewee Twelve, "interesting, because it allows decisions to be reviewable", and at the same time, "could further politicize" process given that ultimately "the board could make a decision, but the Attorney General has residual oversight of the sector and the Attorney General could step in and say this wasn't a reasonable decision so we won't allow it to happen".

Interview Twelve concluded that "probably this can't be used for big things like the Parthenon Marbles, centerpieces of a collection, but used more like Pitt Rivers and Jesus College and the Horniman, (wherein) the pieces were not central to the collection". With that, the Charities Act has had success, for instance "section 106 is the moral obligation (section) which is what the Horniman did" to manifest their noteworthy return discussed throughout this thesis. Further discussion of the Charities Act is examined in Chapter five, section 5.3.2.1.

4.2.13 The reoccurring themes and directional validation interview: Museum board governor across several institutions, currently based in Poland. Interviewee Thirteen, March 3, 2025

In one of the last interviews for this study, an internationally renowned museum governor with expertise in restitution offered perspectives that reinforced reoccurring themes building during analysis and provided rich insight into future research opportunities. He requested that no direct quotes be included in the study.

Interviewee Thirteen approached the restitution issue from a broad perspective germane to his current role as a board member of three museums in Poland, including one as chair, and in the context of an international career in museum direction. He stated that restitution is an international issue that both boards and governments must address. Governments could provide valuable assistance to restitution efforts by creating inventories and internationally available tools to address restitution in practical terms. In his experience, bringing in high profile leaders and even celebrities into board discussions on specific restitution cases helped unlock resistance to change and grow educational acumen.

Education is of course helpful, and lacking, especially considering the variance of laws in different countries, and with that, teaching the board to deeply consider their role, and how best to protect and serve the assets, is key. Board members are constantly revolving, and some can enter discussions from a naïve perspective. Adding to the complexity, legal, policy and government definitions vary, and language in general is sensitive. For example, Indigenous peoples refer to cultural objects as ancestors, so definitions remain complicated. Thus, he wonders if boards genuinely understand the complexity. The British Museum Act is more widely understood, given the profile of the Parthenon Sculptures case, but there is room to grow education across boards, and across nations. To do so, governments could, for example, include restitution work in their mandates.

Regarding the question of how museums are adapting, Interviewee Thirteen says that this is a big question. The intricacies of running museums, and the big agenda that comprises the board and administration work could lead to exciting directional solutions and ideas. For example,

technology and artificial intelligence may help with restitution momentum. He believes that the restitution debates will become even more significant in the future, and that understanding object biography and history is important. He stated that artistic perspectives will be paramount in achieving a breakthrough in the debates, and through artists we can get to the heart of the issues, affect change, and reach the next level of adaptation.

4.3 Part two: The British Museum as a critical site of tension and debate

4.3.1 The British Museum context, governance and regulatory environment

The British Museum adds to the case-study section of this thesis to round out the methodological gap in the semi-structured interviews. My concern in this study is a lack of "voice" from directors and governors who would not or could not speak as requested for interviews. Board meeting minutes were selected as a method for garnering board voices that had been recorded, moved and approved. The meeting minutes study sought to gain deeper insight into the tensions occurring through the restitution debates, using The British Museum as an exemplar case of the "legal form" vis-à-vis two regional comparators, also mentioned frequently in the media regarding the issue. The British Museum, arguably the site of one of the most famous examples of restitution tensions globally because of the Parthenon Marbles, did not respond to requests for inclusion in this study. Requests were made through emails and on X, the site formerly known as Twitter. The empirical material for this cross-comparison study is the British Museum's handling of the Parthenon Marbles.

The British Museum is situated within a governance framework as follows. Most members are appointed by government or crown corporations. The British Museum was established by an Act of Parliament in 1753 and is currently governed by the British Museum Act 1963. The British Museum is an exempt charity under Schedule 3 to the Charities Act 2011. Its principal regulator is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The British Museum is a non-departmental public body (NDPB), operating at arm's length from government, but accountable to parliament. It is sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with whom it has a Management Agreement (British Museum, 2024), and "The Secretary of State and other members of the DCMS ministerial team will account for the British Museum's business in Parliament" (British Museum, 2024), and, of the board trustees, "15 are appointed by the Prime Minister, 5 by the Trustees, 1 by HM the Queen, and 4 by the Secretary of State on the nominations of the Royal Academy, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the British Academy and the Royal Society respectively" (ibid).

4.3.2 Comparison through analysis of board governance minutes

This study concerns the board meeting minutes for three exemplar museums concerning the restitution debates. These museums are the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Horniman Museum and Gardens. The study methodology is described in section 3.3.2. In short, minutes were collected between 2018 and 2023 as available at the time of research. The Sarr Savoy report in 2018, as discussed in chapter two, was a lightening rod for the issue, and a driver for looking back to that date within the available minutes. Minutes were analyzed for restitution conversations and records of decision. Undercurrents of narrative interest comprised

evidence of change, notable decisions, influences and stories regarding restitution cases. The data was organized to show whether and how often the topic of repatriation/restitution/return was discussed in each meeting. To provide a comparison for analysis, instances of discussion regarding finance and audit, as a discrete point, and strategy were collected. **Table eight** shows the results of the data collection.

Restitution topics appear in 34% to 54% of all three of the studied museum minutes' agendas, leading to an assumption that restitution issues were tabled as important to both managers and boards. However, the amount of documented discussion varies. This, or course, is dependent on minute-taking methodology, but the content is interesting and tells a story.

Victoria and Albert Museum: Thin narrative data of 29 lines within the table was available in the V&A minutes about restitution. Key statements were captured as exemplars from the minutes showing efforts to engage the public on these issues, and work on anti-racism in the institution. For example, as written in the V&A museum minutes, on March 3, 2021, the Director's report shows a reiteration of V & A policy to "communicate with audiences and engage in debate around the collections and its colonial histories remains unchanged... (and is) setting up an Anti-Racism taskforce (V&A minutes, March 23, 2021:2). On September 24, 2020, the minutes show a director's update regarding restitution and repatriation, wherein it was stated:

> *"The Director shared an update with Trustees setting out the museum's position around restitution and repatriation. At the same time the interpretation narrative of the collection is being evaluated through the lens of multi-cultural histories, to ensure that it is more explicit around provenance and takes account of new approaches to the past for the museum's contemporary audience. The Board welcomed the updates"* (V&A, September 24, 2020: 4)

Horniman Museum and Gardens: Thick narrative data of 280 lines within the table was available in the Horniman Museum and Gardens minutes about restitution. These minutes tell a compelling story about the ground-breaking decision to return Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. As stated above, the director at the time, Nick Merriman, has since written a book about the case. Two lengthy quotes from the museum minutes are shared herein, as they provide a compelling data point regarding the framing, visualizing and engagement between director and board on the issue of restitution. First, the launch of the decision, and the path forward, is evidenced in the minutes of December 7, 2018, wherein the minutes show:

> *"The CEO provided background and an update on the current situation around restitution of objects from Sub-Saharan Africa arising from the report commissioned by President Macron. Although the report and recommendations relate specifically to French museums and artefacts it is obviously an issue that will have an impact for UK museums given our colonial past…The Horniman is proposing further research on the possible impact on our collections, led by our Anthropology curator Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp, who has expertise in Africa… A report will be brought back to trustees for discussion. Trustees approved this approach. It was agreed that it is important to move towards an ethical collections policy and that local communities should be consulted. The policy would need to be wide enough to cover all parts of the world. The Chair reminded management that the Charity Commission should be included in the consultation as their permission would be required if we considered giving away valuable assets.* (Horniman minutes, December 7: 3).

Next, a move was made towards increased framing and contextualization for the board. The meeting of December 6, 2019, shows minuted information from a repatriation paper progress report:

> *"Benin bronzes. – this area is moving quickly with Jesus College, Cambridge recently deciding to return their cockerel. The Guardian has started a campaign asking for information on Benin artifacts. The Horniman is proposing to submit a list of objects held. It was agreed that this should be kept short and factual and that it should be made*

> *clear that we are working through a process which includes holding discussions with representative local communities before deciding any further response. The process and governance issues need to be stressed. It was suggested that a statement also be put on our website. Management were asked to notify trustees once the list had been sent to the Guardian. It was agreed that it would be useful for the Board to have a training session on repatriation and decolonization so that they had a better understanding of the breadth of principles and issues involved. The Chair and CEO will discuss how this can be incorporated into the March meeting. It was suggested that after the initial training it might be useful to have some external input to stimulate thinking. This would help the Board be clear about the criteria it would apply when considering individual requests for repatriation, above and beyond the general policy"* (Horniman minutes, December 6, 2019:3).

The minutes of December 15, 2020, showed that reputation concerns were increased on the Horniman's risk register, and upon questioning by the board, the CEO responded that it was on account of "strong public reaction to such issues this year. Raising our head above the parapet will further increase the risk. The Chair commented that the risk could be mitigated by getting advice from our lawyers and that she would get involved in this" (Horniman minutes, December 15, 2020:3). Policies would then be drafted, and the board agreed that the work "should not be rushed and that all the necessary evidence should be obtained before going public" (ibid: 5). On March 18, 2021, it was reported that a working party was established to set guidelines, the Restitution policy was finalized, and interestingly, "(i)t was agreed that Mayowa, Sarah and Clare would form the (Restitution) subcommittee and it would be up to them to decide the basis on which they will make their decisions. It was important to have good evidence on the process" (Horniman minutes, March 18, 2021: 4).

Although lengthy, the following statement from the minutes is evidence of the thinking by a board and CEO in parsing through the process in response to a global tension and forms a critical

data point of this thesis. On March 17, 2022, a sample from the minutes of the board concerning the restitution subcommittee shows:

> *"The subcommittee is clear on the evidence presented, that the items listed (with provisos relating to further research on some items) were acquired inappropriately and through force. In the light of this it would be appropriate to return them to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria as the designated body…Although it is known that the Horniman has received the request to return these objects it has so far remained low profile, which has been useful as it has enabled the review to be carried out sensibly and without the glare or pressure of publicity. The Board will keep any reputation risks to the Charity (related to the return of, or failure to return, the assets) under review as this matter progresses in accordance with their trustee duties. The CEO reported that the Minister, Lord Parkinson had recently visited the Horniman and there had been a conversation about the request. His main concern was that there was proper due process, academic rigour and that the decision wasn't rushed. Another issue raised was consultation… the sub-committee proposed that consultation with small focus groups from amongst members would be appropriate and strike a balance with the previous consultation amongst the Nigerian diaspora community… It is thought that the Nigerians are currently more concerned about transferring legal title and won't want them physically returned for some time. If such a time came then the cost of transport to return them and possibly getting replicas would need to be discussed. After consideration of the above matters, and taking into account the further work required to enable the return of these assets, the Board approved the recommendation of the sub-committee"* (Horniman minutes, March 17, 2022: 4-5)

The October 13, 2022 minutes show that "(t)he Chair congratulated the team…on the way the Benin Bronzes had been dealt with…The handover ceremony for the Benin objects has been fixed for 28 November 2022 and we are in correspondence with all relevant parties" (Horniman minutes, October 13, 2022: 1).

British Museum: Thin narrative data of 33 lines within the table was available in the British Museum minutes about restitution. Key statements were captured from the minutes, beginning in this sample set with a note from December 6, 2018, under International Relations, that "(t)he Director provided an update on cultural property matters and some of the Museum's current and proposed international projects. The Board gave its strong support to the Museum's approach"

(British Museum minutes, December 6, 2018:2), which is probably linked to the restitution issue. Several months later, at the July 4, 2019 meeting, the minutes show a record that, regarding cultural property, "(t)he Director provided an update on the steps the Museum had been taking to strengthen and develop global relationships. The Board noted the position of other countries in Europe in relation to the current debate about the restitution of cultural objects" (British Museum minutes, July 4, 2019:3). The next noteworthy mention in the minutes arrives on March 23, 2023, when the Chair's report is recorded as sharing "recent media stories and discussions regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. He noted that he would keep the Board updated of any developments" (British Museum minutes, March 23, 2023: 4). Then on June 29, 2023: The chair noted the potential, following an election in Greece, that its government would seek to resume discussions regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. He noted that he would keep the Board updated of any developments" (British Museum minutes, June 29, 2023:4). The last record in this set comes again from the Chair's report on December 3, 2023: "The Chair provided an update on his engagement with the Greek government on the potential for a Parthenon partnership. He informed the Trustees that the principles of a partnership, which would see reciprocal loans of objects, remained the focus of discussion" (British Museum minutes, December 23, 2023: 3).

Thus, all three museum boards record conversations about restitution, but the nature and tone of the discussions, even when allowing for methodological differences in capturing board discussion on record, show a marked difference in engagement, framing and visioning on the debates, and how best to respond. The Victoria and Albert Museum was taking moderate steps forward, with a key action comprising the launch of anti-racism work, and their register of discussion instances showed 34%. The Horniman Museum was taking ground-breaking

measures to restitute cultural objects, transparently sharing breakthrough decisions, and registering 54% discussion instances of restitution topics. The British Museum appeared to be caught in a discussion and monitoring loop, with discussion instances totalling 31%.

4.3.3 Juxtaposing the Royal Alberta Museum and the British Museum

The Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) opened a new $375 million building to record breaking attendance in 2018 after operating successfully for decades on a different site in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I argue herein that the RAM is an exemplar case of a "moral form" museum. A prominent local critic pronounced that the 'new RAM is a triumph - an institution that will make you proud of your province' (Griwkowsky, 2018: D1).

A significant restitution issue has faced the RAM for many years involving the Manitou Stone. A *"Report documenting the Iron Creek Meteorite/Manitou Stone First Nations Consultations"* (Parry, 2004), was written by Alison Parry, an Aboriginal Liaison Officer for the Royal Alberta Museum. The report chronicles the history of Manitou Stone, which is a 150-kilogram piece of meteorite, sacred to the Blackfoot people, first discovered in land now called Hardisty, Alberta. The Manitou Stone, also known as Manitou Asinîy, holds "spiritual significance" for the peoples in the region, was removed from its landing place by Methodist missionaries in 1866, and taken to their mission home, at which time "First Nations spiritual leaders prophesied that war, plague, and famine would soon devastate their people" (ibid: 2).

After stops at Victoria University College in Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum, the stone was returned on loan to the (then named) Provincial Museum of Alberta in 1972. Title was

transferred to the Provincial Museum in December 2001 with the understanding that the museum would enter consultations with Blackfoot, Blood, Saulteaux, Nakota, Tsuu T'ina and several Cree communities (ibid: 3). Consultation was largely completed from 2002 to 2004, and dealt with ideas involving how to best handle, display, and perform ceremony with, and near, the stone. Further consultation continued from 2004 to present day by a guest curator in preparation for the move. The Manitou Stone is now presented in a sacred and profound space and is a focal point of the ideologies and strategic planning for RAM. The report content states that the "staff met with thirty-three Alberta and Saskatchewan First Nations and seven First Nations organizations to seek Elders' views and advice regarding the Stone and its appropriate care" (ibid: 2). Consultation followed four themes, "including knowledge about the traditional use of the meteorite; appropriate location for the meteorite; appropriate care for the meteorite; and suggestions for the consultation process" (ibid: 4).

> *'Elders strongly believe that no one should make money from a sacred object. No matter where it ends up, people should be able to see if for free. Elders specifically mentioned that if the Manitou Stone were to remain at the Museum, admission should be waived for those individuals who come to the Museum expressly to view and pray with the Manitou Stone. Many Elders expressed concern about it falling into the hands of one community or individual who might try to gain from it*' (ibid:13).

The Manitou Stone has been the subject of public discourse and debate in Canada on restitution. Newspaper letters and think pieces had been shared in the media that called for the RAM team to return the Manitou Stone back to Indigenous peoples in Alberta. A quintessential example was reported by the National Post when a First Nations college clearly asked for the return of the object to its home soil in 2012 (Gerson, The National Post, August 8, 2012).

Unlike more typical institutional board structures, wherein a project of this scale would often have a building committee governing the project, or most certainly risk and opportunity oversight provided by the Finance and Audit Committee, and reporting to the board overall, the RAM Executive Director reported ultimately to the Minister. Additionally, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Heritage and the Deputy Minister provide advice to the Minister addressing financial and reputational responsibilities related to the institution.

Thus, the handling of the Manitou Stone was and remains a challenging governance issue regarding care and attention to reputational, cultural and administrative decisions. After eighteen years of consultation with Indigenous peoples, the current space for the stone in the new museum, which opened in 2018, was designed with cultural significance. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples all influenced the process and display.

Individual voices have spoken up in favour of return of the Manitou Stone, and both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples led to a change at the museum that drafted into broader societal evolution. UNDRIP articles 11.1, 12. 1, 12.2, 13.1, and 31 (UN General Assembly, 2007) lay out Indigenous rights to ceremony, practice and access. TRC actions 10.iii, 10.iv, and 14.i (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015) include additional recommendations regarding education, protection of rights and urgency to protect Indigenous languages. The architects and designers of the room holding the stone at the RAM created a stand-alone new space, ensuring it could accommodate spontaneous ceremonies, was filled with natural light, and used incandescent lighting in a star formation.

Floor to ceiling imagery of the original location wherein the stone was found envelope the walls of the space, and natural earth from the ground whereupon the stone was found has been placed underneath it, evoking connectivity to land. Notably, Indigenous peoples do not pay admission to the gallery.

In a rare move to solve restitution dilemmas regarding where, exactly, an object should be returned if the original peoples have dispersed, the RAM, supported by their years of engagement, came up with a novel approach, announced by then Premier of Alberta, Jason Kenney, in September 2022 for a project cost of "between 7.5 to $10 million" (Bellefontaine, 2022: www.cbc.ca). Kenney made an announcement on Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, September 30, 2022 (Junker, 2022) that the Manitou Stone "will be returned as close as possible to the place where it lay for millions of years, to the place where it attracted generations and generations of indigenous people to sacred ceremonies" (ibid, 2022). This was a significant milestone in the debates.

As of today, the final space has yet to be determined for the Manitou Stone, and the story continues. But metaphorically, it has broken free of the walls of the museum and has become an embodiment of the power of engaged communities, government relations support, innovative architectural/infrastructural solutions and breakthrough administrative decisions. The highest level of political leadership and new rules and ways of being are imprinted in the museum space, all hallmarks of the moral form. Vocabulary, whether through engaging with governments, the public, and most importantly, Indigenous peoples, has been a significant force in the shift. Thus,

the Manitou Stone is a symbol of the new era of a museum, and the freedom of object from space, history, and conventions.

The Manitou Stone is a strong example of the "Discursive Collision Era" discussion in section 2.3.3, wherein new ways of engaging with, and thinking about cultural objects in our current time, is primed to lead to a breakthrough. The "Discursive Collision Era" is identified by "object durationality", both terms inspired by Hicks' oeuvre, and discussed in the literature review, in which this new thinking considers the "knowledge systems" of the relationship between "human and non-human beings" (Yavaş, 2025: 357). In this way, the Royal Alberta Museum, through the case of the Manitou Stone, embodies "temporal acceleration" and shows progress towards a "Restitutional Era". By contrast, in relying on the legal decision of the British Museum Act of 1963, and hedging on real change, as evidenced in the museum minutes, the British Museum remains stuck, a holdout to homogeneity in the gelling of a new era, and a clear example of the "legal form".

4.4 Part three: Cross case comparisons

4.4.1 Cross case comparisons analysis

This chapter concludes with a return to analysis of the eleven narratives in a new way, now through the lens of cross case comparisons in terms of four schematics (section 2.5), based on "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117). Decision-making and thinking by interviewees across the eleven narratives has been plotted on two-by-two tables for each schematic, these being reputation, engagement, framing and visioning, and shown on **tables eleven to fifteen**.

Each word of these "sensitizing concepts" (table four) was used to populate numbered "mentions" and mapped to frequency instances by interviewees (**figure three**), then used for "cross case comparisons" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 540). The methodology of analysis was described in sections 3.3.1, 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3. Each cross-case comparison involved establishing the diametric properties of each schematic represented per table. All measures were set from low to high, representing statements by leaders and governors on interview questions designed to answer the research questions articulated in section 1.3. This analysis builds on the narrative story in part two, thus showing statements leading to decisions that result in a proposed "Restitutional Era".

An important decision regarding the cross-case comparisons involved defining which interviews to include in the two-by-two tables. Including all interviews would lead to an imbalanced set of data per museum, and accordingly, inaccurate representations of the volume of themes. For instance, two interviewees in this study were interviewed twice, and several museums had multiple interviews. Thus, for consistency, and to impose a control on the volume of data per interviewee, only the first interview by a representative for each museum was considered in the schematic tables. Accepting these limitations was part of getting to the crux of what leading practitioners and thinkers on this subject of considerable international tension believed and acted upon. Doing so required a balance between structure and flexibility in approach, to capture meaning.

4.4.2 Part three: Cross case comparisons through schematic lenses

The first schematic, **reputation**, was seen through the lens of moral versus legal responses, herein called codes. As such, two columns were drawn alongside each museum, and a tally was created regarding how many bullets of text referenced each code. Measurements were set from low to high. The selection of the moral code and legal code align to a priori perspective regarding how leaders manage reputational risk. **Table eleven** graphs the results. A threshold of fifteen was defined as the top number of bullets within each set of codes, and graphed. Seven museums showed in the low to mid range of moral mentions, and four museums showed in the mid to high range of moral mentions. All eleven museums show a low to mid range in legal mentions.

The second schematic, **engagement,** was seen through the lens of engagement and political mentions, and measurements set from low to high. The engagement and political codes were measured and graphed in the 2 x 2. The selection of the engagement code is self-evident, and the selection of the political code was chosen given the relationship between public good and politics/government. **Table twelve** graphs the results. A threshold of ten was chosen as the top number of mentions. Nine museums showed in the low to mid engagement mentions and two museums showed in the mid to high engagement mentions. Along the X axis, eight museums showed low to mid political mentions, and three museums showed mid to high political mentions.

The third schematic, **framing,** was looked at in two ways. First, as shown in **table thirteen,** framing was tracked along a plane of curatorial mentions versus a plane of

purpose/mandate/policy mentions, and measurements were set from low to high. The selection of these codes was assigned to balance artistic versus bureaucratic concerns in talking about the restitution issue. A threshold of ten was established as the highest number of mentions across both planes. All eleven museums showed in the low to mid curatorial mentions, with a surprising finding that none were in the mid to high curatorial mentions. Across the X axis, eight museums showed in the low to mid purpose/mandate/policy mentions, and three museums showed in the mid to high purpose/mandate/policy mentions.

The framing schematic was also tracked along a plane of political mentions versus a plane of purpose/mandate/policy mentions, and measurements were set from low to high. The selection of the political code was assigned to balance political versus bureaucratic concerns in talking about the restitution issue. **Table fourteen** graphs the results. A threshold of ten was established as the highest number of mentions across both planes. Eight museums showed in the low to mid political mentions, and three showed in the mid to high political mentions. As above, eight museums showed in the low to mid purpose/mandate/policy mentions, and three museums showed in the mid to high purpose/mandate/policy mentions.

The fourth schematic, **visioning** was looked at through the lens of internal vs external positioning. Internal positioning is defined here by the curatorial, educational and safety/security codes which dovetail with the ICOM definition of the purpose of museums. External positioning is defined here by the moral, legal, political and engagement codes as per perspectives that address market concerns. **Table fifteen** graphs the results. A threshold of 25 was established as the highest number of mentions across both planes. Nine museums showed low to mid

engagement mentions, and two museums showed mid to high engagement mentions. Eight museums showed low to mid political mentions, and three museums showed mid to high political mentions.

4.4.3 Arguments induced through cross case comparisons

Several arguments arose from the cross-case comparisons, discussed as well in section 2.5, in terms of surfacing direction towards a "Restitutional Era".

4.4.3.1 Argument one: Breakthrough within versus across the field

As stated above, the **first argument** is that there is heterogeneity *across* museums, but homogeneity *within* museums along moral or legal forms that affects preparation for risk and vulnerability to reputational issues from civil action and social justice pressures. This argument answers the research question regarding the preparation of museum boards for projected increased risk in response to pressure from civil society on restitution issues. The schematic used to examine this hypothesis is engagement of the board vis-à-vis restitution. Of note here, "smaller" institutions is an abbreviated method to describe museums that are not foregrounded in the debates. These museums have a lower profile in the media (at least prior to the Horniman and RAM making solid restitutional gains and thus achieving breakthroughs).

This schematic compared engagement mentions and political mentions for similarities and differences among the eleven primary museums in the narrative study. On a scale of one to ten,

all but two museums scored below five on engagement mentions, and all but three museums scored below five on political mentions. The low quadrant comprising both dimensions showed a cluster of eight museums. Museums five and six scored high engagement, with museum six scoring high engagement and high political mentions. Of course, the museums in this study are anonymized, but the narratives do tell a story about the way primary cultural objects are being returned to receiving regions. These stories are groundbreaking and exciting. Museums five and six are making breakthrough decisions, as described in the detailed case studies and discussion in chapter six. Of note, the operating dollars of museums five and six are in the lowest category in the set, thus considered "smaller" institutions. Both museums, as established in the overarching narrative of the story, whether that comprised engagement with audiences and students, as per museum five, or engagement with Indigenous consultants and government, as per museum six, were heavily influenced by the perspectives of external interested parties who were trusted with complex decisions.

This also tracks with the overall narrative of the respective director and board member of these institutions. For instance, both museums are in the median operating dollars of the set, and have sophisticated Indigenous Relations structures within the museum, which affords a different tone of voice, one of assurance, and "next level" of manifestation of identity. Museums eight and ten have moved to a level of embedding Indigenous Relations in the staffing and policy work of the museum. Therefore, museums five and six, as noted, are making breakthrough, newsworthy, exciting restitution decisions that are decidedly moving the field forward, and inspiring media, discourse, and scholarly writings on the subject. But museums eight and ten are past that stage and have moved into a political sophistication that inextricably entwines the Indigenous political

worldview with the old colonialist worldview to fashion a fresh, although fragile new institutional foundation. What's most interesting is that, unexpectedly, every interviewee spoke of a coherence of position and perspective shared by director and board that, in the opinion of the researcher, had no tone of falseness, and can be backed up with the staging of decisions toward a mutually (director and board) agreed upon decision regarding restitution decisions. A definitive tone of solidarity between director and board was clear in each narrative experiment. This was unexpected, there was no discussion of questions or recommendations raised that were debated at length among any of the museums in the study. They are heterogeneous across the field of cases in how they handle restitution, but they are homogenous within each institution about how the issue is to be resolved within their organization. The director of museum two, stated that "they knew what they were getting when they hired me", and museum five experienced a similar situation. It is noteworthy to see the level of trust that exists in these institutions that allows for strength in addressing risk, and vulnerability to social pressures.

4.4.3.2 Argument two: "Temporal acceleration"

The **second argument** is that with museum board alignment to a moral or legal form in addressing restitution, moral form coalitions are adopting a "temporal acceleration" of governing identity, leading to new actions, processes and curatorial opportunities. "Temporal acceleration" is stated in section 2.3.3 as the ignition of a set of governing decisions that triggers documentable and publicly evident actions affecting the field. This term was inspired by Hicks' concept of "chronopolitics" (Hicks, 2020: 180), wherein museums work to counter the "weaponry" (ibid: 180-182) of the institution illuminating a "time of returns" (ibid: 17). This argument corresponds

to the research question that asks how boards will visualize the next era of the institution in response to crisis and pressure, and how society will critique and stress-test that response. The schematic used to examine this hypothesis is the reputation governing concerns.

This schematic compared legal and moral responses of interviewees from the museums within the narrative study. Within the quadrant, no museums scored above the mid range in the legal response. This, of course, is a weakness in the study, in that those museums who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis appeared to naturally lean to a potentially biased moral perspective. The uniformity across the narrative set of museums is notable regarding low legal mentions. The level of moral responses was varied, with a relatively even spread from low to high. In contrast, we saw in the study of the minutes of the British Museum in section 4 5.6 and through evidence such as that described by Alexander Herman in "The Parthenon Marbles Dispute', that the legal form dominates. Herman writes:

> *"The House of Commons then divided for the final vote. The tally was 82 in favour of purchasing the Marbles, with 30 against. And so it was concluded: a bill providing further detail was passed and soon had force of law as 'An Act to vest the Elgin Collection of ancient Marbles and Sculptures in the Trustees of the British Museum for the Use of the Public'" (Herman, 2023:59).*

Additionally, in analysing the minutes of the British Museum, reputation concerns are not a materially noticeable factor in considering alternative structural decisions in managing the restitution issues. Looking at five years of minutes from the British Museum, the closest statement regarding reputational concerns occurs on July 4, 2019, concerning cultural objects with the statement "(t)he Director provided an update on the steps the Museum had been taking to strengthen and develop global relationships" (British Museum minutes, July 4, 2019:3).

The top scoring museums on the moral line of the two-by-two in the schematic show a different perspective. Museum eight's moral alignment to cultural object concerns has been prioritized to the degree that top level leadership is structured to ensure voice and agency are embedded in the operating principles of the institution. For museum two, the director is a well-known academic brought into multiple geopolitical regions and political situations to speak about the morality of the restitution debates, and has foregrounded the principles of these debates, and the difficulties of reconciling old colonial tensions on didactic panels in the entrance of the museum. Both the hiring practices and public displays of value systems are forward-facing actions that alleviate civil society pressure.

A curious example of this phenomenon is museum six. Arguably, the solution museum six is working to achieve for a prominent sacred object, including long-standing Indigenous consultation, government relations advocates for Indigenous reconciliation and the highest level of government support for a unique solution that addresses concerns of Indigenous peoples (note that this museum is governed by government, not governors), is an aberration. Museum six scored zero on the moral scale of mentions. That said, museum six scores very high on engagement. The supposition here is that a moral tone has been so deeply embedded in the actions and processes of the institutional leadership that it doesn't come out in conversation but rather has moved into a stage of action. As such, the restructuration of the museum is advanced, to the extent that a wholly new space is planned for construction on the land that Indigenous peoples choose for the new site of the cultural object.

4.4.3.3 Argument three: Homogeneity and a new era in flux

The **third argument** is that restitution has been described episodically as urgent, or a crisis but is not being treated evenly as such by governors across museums internationally, thus leading to heterogeneity of museum boards, despite moral form museums showing early-stage homogeneity in institutional framing and visualization of the pressure. Given its global positional power and voice on the topic, homogeneity of field restructuration and a truly new restitutional era cannot occur until the British Museum resolves the Parthenon Sculptures tension. When it does, I predict we will see what DiMaggio and Powell would describe as a restructured, homogenous field, fully reformed into a definitive era (1983). Thus, it is exciting to watch this phenomenon play out internationally in such a public form.

This argument corresponds to the research question that asks how the future, responsive museum addresses internationally material strategic and reputational risk. The schematic used to examine this hypothesis involves the framing and visioning activities of the directors and boards of museums regarding the restitution debates.

Considering Renfrew's characterization of the restitution debates as a "(c)risis (Renfrew, 2000: 9), the British Museum's lack of urgency or a crisis response, as shown in the meeting minutes, is notable. This, despite experiencing an increased reputational crisis developing in the public domain. A piece for The Guardian newspaper refers to controversy surrounding the British Museum, and identifies the institution as definitively being in a crisis (Higgins, 2025) in the face of colonialism, stressing that restitution is still a tension for them today. The minutes do, however, show that another controversial issue involving thefts from the collection, and changes

in leadership, required several special meetings. Whereas in the same archival materials, the restitution issue is represented as routinized.

In contrast, the Horniman Museum shows a high degree of crisis response in the meeting minutes, with over 54% of meetings addressing the issue. A special committee was formed to move the situation forward in the museum, and references to President Macron's report, strategies to manage a major restitution publicly through the media, and time sensitivity coming through clearly in the documentation.

No museums in the narrative studies spoke of the restitution debates explicitly as a crisis, but museums two, five, six, eight and ten all addressed the issue with a gravitas implying time-sensitive action bordering on urgency. For Museum Five, urgency was certainly upheld. An interesting finding was that all interviewees in the study showed an alignment between director and board in the handling of the debates within their institutions, thus strengthening the overall argument of growing homogeneity. Additionally, all museums in the board meeting minutes study showed a comparable alignment between director and board. Of course, this is to be expected in recorded meeting minutes and conversations with a third-party researcher, nevertheless, no evidence of tension or cracks in the unity of decision making within each museum appeared in the interviews, or in the meeting minutes.

4.4.3.4 Argument four: Vocabulary leading to a "Restitutional Era"

The **fourth argument** is that the discourse enveloping the debates is informing a useful vocabulary germane to decision-making as museum leaders and governors visualize the next era of museums and modulate internal and external engagement. This argument derives from an alternative method of looking at the data described next, in chapter five.

This chapter has shown that the situational context comprising external pressures due to the restitution debates are being addressed on the governance decision platform for museums across the field. As juxtaposed to the British Museum, a critical site of tension and discourse, considered herein a "legal form" museum, the eleven narratives and two examples in the Horniman Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum, show how "moral form" institutions are achieving breakthrough results. These museums grapple with the controversy through schematic mechanisms such as reputation, framing, visioning and engagement, leading to novel approaches argued as propelling the field into a "Restitutional Era" through "temporal acceleration". Thus, we see important decisions recorded and manifested, answering calls to action tabled by key academic theories stated by Hicks (2020), and Hicks and Ladewig (2026), to seize this opportunistic moment of change (Savoy, 2022).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: EMERGING VOCABULARY AND THE NEW NARRATIVE

This chapter explains how the disruptive period of global restitution tensions foretells a changing era in the museum field, as demonstrated through a vocabulary of dimensions conveyed by museum leaders and board members in grappling with associated complexity. The chapter establishes the value of identifying vocabulary into "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117), around which to coalesce directional decision-making, following on Loewenstein, Ocasio and Jones' theory "that vocabularies are a central tool of persuasion and a means for talking about frames" (2012:50).

5.1 Vocabulary in context

Museum actors are, as in social movement theory (Clemens and Cook, 1999: Galvin, 2002; Lounsbury, 2002), reframing the restitution debates by shifting away from dominant logics of colonial collection. The shift establishes distance from the legal argument, as exemplified by the British Museum, to the moral argument as exemplified by the Horniman Museum, and echoed in many narratives of museum leaders who participated in this research. Suddaby and Greenwood theorize that when an organization drafts to broader societal values "considerable attention is paid in value-base rhetorical statements to the 'public good' or 'social accountability' in an effort to link the values of the new organizational form with values held in the broader social context within which the organization exists" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 57). This builds on Carley's argument that through learning, one's "frame evolves" (Carley, 1986: 144) and that

which is newly understood as fact is widely accepted as "it becomes a piece of social knowledge" (ibid: 144). Dacin, Ventresca and Beal, in 1999, contended that in the future, "firms could potentially leverage the partnerships of their prior or current relationships to form alliance networks" (1999: 336), and to an extent, this phenomenon is happening within the museums studied here, as lower profile institutions (than, say the British Museum) reference one another's work and begin to affect social change. This chapter examines how a *body* of institutions can utilize the "public good" and "social accountability" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 57) statements as strategy to restructure a field.

5.2 Brief method review

The methodology for identifying and using "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117) to build arguments and theory, is described in the methodology chapter in section 3.4.1. The development of Constructivist Grounded Theory (ibid: 239), and shown in table four, started with the process of assigning each sensitizing concept to an interviewee statement as shown in Figure three. The semi-structured interview data is looked at in two ways in this thesis: First, as shown in chapter four through the treatment of eleven museum case studies as unique experiments in documentation of governing response to external pressure, and second in this chapter foregrounding the sensitizing concepts themselves as organizing vocabulary for the narration of museum actors' dilemmas and debates.

5.3 Sensitizing concepts as dimensions

5.3.1 The political and government dimension

Interviewee One A, a high-profile UK museum director, stated that in thinking about field reaction to societal critique, museums will "be held to account by their diversity of staff, audiences, programming and collections, and held to account internally and externally". Although for now, regarding the political climate, he added "in the UK, they also have a conservative government that doesn't like them being too far out of mainstream government". He noted that activists, and largely American politics, were turning up the heat on board governors and donors, thus putting increased risk onto individuals taking on these roles and responsibilities. Interviewee Twelve referenced a private letter from the Secretary of State in the UK to museums, that they ought not politicize the institutions, advocating for "retain and explain" for which there "was pushback, because boards should be arm's length".

Thus, we see a bridging of accountability from inside the institution to political governing, and further to the abstraction of civil society's pressure on institutional trustees over the governance of ideas. Interviewee One says a "key point in the modern world is (people) are not inside and outside the tent (these being) creators, curators and activists". He thinks about "how you maintain cutting edge in a conservative milieu" and adds that organizations that classified as government agencies do important public work, but the independence of these agencies is vital to assure the strength of society more broadly. Interviewee Ten A described the progress that has been in governments with manifestation of UNDRIP, especially regarding culture, but worries about how changes in government could affect the trajectory of change.

The balance between creativity and conservatism as a political concept is playing out across the world in the field. Interviewee Nine, a New Zealand museum director, says "it didn't help when

Boris Johnson said, ‘hold your ground’ about the Parthenon”. But he adds that overall, “yes, right, there is a genuine desire for change. ICOM can do more. It would be helpful to bring thought leadership to the fore”. He comments that specifically, “Germany, France, and Austria are having vibrant, healthy discussions to shape policy and practice, and reckon with their colonial past”, and “the time is right” for change. However, Interviewee Five, a UK museum director, offers a reminder that government changes equal vulnerability and unpredictability, and the press is unpredictable. As such, a change agenda is a moving target.

5.3.1.1 Political environments and emotional responses

Interviewee Two A, a museum director in the UK, shared that “there is political pressure and people feel strong emotions on the conservative side which is projected onto the left side”. She adds that “the way government is talking about activism insinuates the research comes from emotion or passion”. She concludes, regarding politics, that “there is a real pressure on government that has to do with national pride. Historical research is being burdened by national pride. There is an idea that history doesn’t care about your feelings”.

Museum directors are following political decisions about societal tensions and emotions closely. Interviewee Three, a museum director in the UK, shared that he was watching a published report, commissioned by government, around racism in the UK, noting that this report concluded that the concept of structural racism was not “a thing”. On a separate note, he shared that the “War Graves position has finally apologized for the white soldiers having their individual graves and

the black soldiers having one mass grave". For this director, the tragedy of the George Floyd murder gave Americans a direction through societal pressure.

5.3.1.2 Political action and inaction

It would seem, though, that the mix of societal pressure and international acclaim would have resulted in more action from the French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron's Sarr/Savoy report. Interview Two A stressed that "Macron threw it out there without discussion, grand gesture, and everyone scrambled, buying a way into Africa. Nothing has changed and almost nothing returned". The Sarr/Savoy report promised a political breakthrough in the restitution debates, but the situation seemed, during the interview period between 2021 and 2023, to have stalled. Political stability is a foundational museum concern and a necessary condition for progress on the museum agenda, especially in the context of a discussion on restitution and the shaping of the field. Drawing a finer point on the matter, Interviewee Thirteen has been advocating to politicians in a European country that they should go as far as including restitution in the mandate and work of government.

5.3.2 The legal dimension

5.3.2.1 Legal leverage and the United Kingdom Charities Act

Meanwhile, during the interview period, the UK Charities Act of 2022 was receiving more media attention and scholarly writing. Interviewee Twelve, an arts lawyer, holds a uniquely international perspective on restitution, and was particularly informative about the nascent

Charities Act. This was helpful to the theoretical direction of this thesis. Interviewee Twelve was asked a set of open-ended questions after working through the defined set of study questions. These questions are as follows: If policy and legal frameworks are currently inadequate, then what decision-making paradigm do boards follow? What kind of tipping point does the Charities Act afford the debates? What kind of moral imperative does the Charities Act imply? If restitution is described as "not loss", then what comprises "gain" in future eras? Who are the people behind the boards and what happens to all the systems if they decide to decolonize museums? These questions were treated as a jumping off point to describe the context and impact of the Charities Act at the time of interview in 2023, and the emergence of distinct moral and legal forms.

The Charities Act is a central to the argument in this thesis that there is a clarity of form developing between moral and legal dimensions on museum boards. Interviewee Eleven explained that the Charities Commission is first and foremost a body set to approve decisions, for instance, trustees are responsible for decisions including the de-accessioning of cultural objects. However, with the changes proposed in the Charities Act 2022, trustees could, rarely, make "moral decisions", according to Interviewee Twelve, who suggested that even if an action is contrary to museum mandate, authority from the Charities Commission and the courts could allow that action to proceed. The responsibility associated with transferring moral decisions onto a board holds significant potential for consequential change in museum governance. Interviewee Twelve, on considering how boards would make a moral decision, responded that legally the Act has sections of legislation that could be manifested to allow for this change, but this is the work that is not yet resolved and why the Act is stalled. He thinks that "the Charities Commission is

fraught. What is moral?". Interviewee Three mirrored this wavering of legal ambiguity stating the Sarr/Savoy report had suggested legal acquisition is an impossibility, which he recognizes as a complicated position.

With what we know about governance from scholarly literature as discussed in chapter three, legally tethering decisions to moral persuasion and a moral point of view is a material shift in governing methodology. For example, in museums, an established decision regarding whether to deaccession a cultural object, or exercise matters of fiduciary responsibility, correlates to board policy, bylaws, regulations, procedures and terms of reference. We now have, according to Interviewee Twelve, a "subjective assessment" introduced into the decision-making paradigm.

Interviewee Twelve was asked whether there is an assumption baked into the language used in the Charities Act that implies that a moral decision is inherently understood as occurring through the action of restitution. Is it assumed in the language of the Act that a moral decision is equivalent to restitution? And if that is the case, then is the action of the British Museum's "keeping" of the Parthenon Sculptures, as considered vis-a-vis this proposed legal language, explicitly immoral?

If thought to be so, this constitutes a breakthrough. Through this mechanism, legality can catch up with morality, thereby affording museum board governors additional leverage to restitute cultural materials. Cultural material could be considered morally misplaced and thus recognized as returnable. Recognition requires a decision, and a decision must be documented in institutional minutes, thus formalized and often made public. Transparent methodologies must be

developed to navigate ambiguity. It is foreseeable that with other nuanced decision-making held by board governors of public institutions wherein delegation powers are manifested, the idea that moral delegation could be established will need to be addressed by the Charities Act 2022 before it is brought into law. It should be noted that there is the potential for responsibility to shift to an operational member of the institution.

5.3.2.2 Legal power and independent governing bodies

How or whether Lord Vaizey's new work with respect to the Parthenon Project, which has been established to consider the return of the marbles to Greece, will make use of the moral form created in the Charities Act 2022, is a prime example of the potential for independent, or quasi-independent governing bodies to intervene in the stalemate of the debates, especially vis-à-vis the British Museum. Given that the British Museum Act of 1963, and the National Heritage Act of 1983 have been strong legal levers to resist restitution, at the very least, the new Charities Act could provide a potential foil for legal argument, and a significant step towards legal return down the road. For now, Interviewee Twelve, though, stated that the Charities Act will probably not apply to the situation with the Parthenon Marbles, and any material that would not be considered central to a museum's oeuvre.

Interviewee Three suggested that an independent, nationally approved government body would be an effective lever to assist the sector in managing new legal/moral ambiguity, noting that some help is available through the UK Art Council Guidance, which, while not a legal document, certainly provides practical advice.

5.3.2.3 Legal policy considerations of the board

Boards are engaging in the legal considerations of restitution, for instance, Interviewee One A states that Museum One makes use of partnerships and long-term loans, even though they cannot make legal restitutions. This though, does not prevent the board from engaging in the ongoing intellectual work around the issue, and they are mindful of reputation. Interviewee Two B is looking at ideas that stretch past our current conceptualizations of legality. He is looking at policy frameworks and the law, and if found to be inadequate, then he questions the directionality that boards will follow, and the cascading of policy over multiple spheres. He is thinking about how breakthrough changes like that of the Charities Act can lead to governance changes, which impact an institution but also the tables of influence that governors affect in their broader network of influence. Interviewee Ten A thinks of legal concerns entwined with fiduciary responsibility, and a concept that museums are moving towards less emphasis on the collecting side of the mandate, and more concern about relationships, treaties and promises to Indigenous peoples. He believes that the law is moving in this direction in Canada, with "the courts coming around" to this shift. But Interviewee Thirteen reflects on the complexity of the law, and the complexity of restitution and related definitions. He asks if boards truly understand the law and governmental policies.

5.3.3 The moral and reputational dimension

Civil society is pressuring institutions to address evolving emergent issues and geopolitical disasters and crises. In 2024 we saw in the post-secondary sector a full-scale international

situation regarding the questioning of institutional statements, or lack thereof, regarding the Israel/Gaza war, resulting in encampment protests, and high-profile leadership changes in response to issues management. The museum field has been hovering below this threshold in international engagement but nevertheless is at the centre of an international situation regarding restitution.

5.3.3.1 Navigating reputational responsibilities

Interviewee Ten A states plainly that they have been working publicly on reconciliation and decolonization work, which has "come at a cost with the media", and impacted institutional reputation. Interviewee Eleven stated that pressure from media to rush decisions is resulting in difficulties for museums in handling the restitution discourse. Interviewee Four A in this study discussed how leadership at Museum Four is navigating challenges to reputation. Their board brings what they have learned regarding reputation management to the board table by way of other boards and networks in which they are involved. This, she says, is leading to strong civic partnerships and engagement, leading to more diversity and inclusion at all levels, and fresh strategic planning, including changes to the physical plant. She believes that museums today are concerned with relevance, engagement, and changing audiences. Interviewee Two B says Museum Two is also working to address these issues. He sees restitution as a process of rebuilding, and not just returning, and that attending to reputational concerns foreshadows era change. He asserts that museums are not just regulatory entities, they contain ideology, and the board has a responsibility for this ideology.

Interviewee Seven A, as described in section 4.2.7, shared that in their organization, reputation management has been recognized through a formalized process, wherein ethical return and values would be prioritized ahead of legalities. Interviewee Two A formalizes reputational concerns through conversations with boards and donors through both an ideological and informal process. She encourages boards and donors to see restitution as institutional work towards reconciliation and redress. Comparable to Interviewee Four, Interviewee Two A states that much of this institutional work is about having difficult conversations with communities, establishing trust and being good stewards of the objects. She sees this restitution as a rebuilding effort and states that this work will crack open academic study and curatorial practice, opening intellectual access to collections that have been quietly tucked away for decades. She offers that there is value in the combining of epistemologies and academic discourses across nations through this act of "opening" so that people can begin the process of healing. This extends to formalized processes, such as mission statements for the organization. Thus, she builds on a moral imperative to return cultural objects in the service of opening new academic and curatorial opportunities for museums, growing into the next era of the museum.

5.3.3.2 The relationship of reputation and audience

Despite all the reputational work that museums leaders are addressing, Interviewee Three noted that not all audiences would pick up on the direction. Others are learning through social media deeper insights into institutions. Interviewee Five states that in the UK, one response to Black Lives Matters was a crowd-sourced website called Topplethetheracists.org, and they learned through this site that their founder was named for having made money through channels that

were considered by members of the site to be problematic. In answer to this, the museum re-did their displays to share a narrative about the situation more broadly, and how the founder may not have been aware of the issues at the time. With respect to the board, however, more action was required regarding strategic planning and an issue that was not going to disappear. Therefore, they put together an anti-colonialism working group and prepared for a major return of cultural objects. The Chair was motivated through her own career networks to steer and complete a process, and she was firm about her perspectives on “truth and justice”.

Interviewee Eight, interviewed in July 2023, stated they are indeed in the service of society, but traditional collecting practice is not serving museums anymore, noting that the field can powerfully shape and revitalize culture. Museums that are leading in restitution are moving along a common path and he questions if museum actors are asking themselves how much difference they are making, why they are doing this work, and how it meets their organizational purpose. He asks if museums are clear for whom they do this work, and if measurements are in place to assess if museum leaders are examining their restitution efforts.

5.3.4 The business and governance dimension

5.3.4.1. The value of the museum

Thinking about museums vis-à-vis market position infused the data through varying lenses and was shown in interesting ways. For instance, Interviewee Two A frames the business and governance dimension of her work in terms of organizational design and asking how museums can be good partners of communities. She sees her role as bringing the team along with this

mission and looking critically at why the institution needs to change and move past just accumulating objects. She acknowledges that it is complicated, but the museum has a responsibility of care, and this is the primary work of the board, when members are “not political appointments”. Interviewee four, speaking at the height of the COVID pandemic, still thinks these are “tough times for museums” and references the decisions of the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum making difficult decisions for the long-term sustainability of the institution. She was keenly aware of the risk agenda concerning the board, both short-term and long-term risk, with the board focused on the latter. Governments, too, are invested in the value of the museum, and Interviewee Eight stressed government expectations on a museum’s priorities and efforts.

Market position was addressed up front in the job interview of Interviewee Five wherein the restitution issue figured prominently in the strategic direction for the museum. Decreasing audience diversity alongside heavy public funding necessitated a more inclusive strategy. Interviewee Five’s subsequently recommended that the Board formalize a restitution procedure in 2022-2021 and post the procedure on their website. They created a business and governing approach to policy that established a concrete path for addressing change. Thinking through the perceived risk of the “emptying of the museum”, he says that practically speaking, from a business perspective, they given the overall quantity of cultural objects, and the minute number being restituted, there was no concern of the emptying of Museum Five, or risk to resources.

5.3.4.2 The strategic direction of the museum

So where does the museum field go? From Interviewee Eight's macro concern that the ICOM definition needs to be updated to better serve museums, and Interviewee Six's organizational concern that museums address practical ways to serve audiences, like free admission for Indigenous peoples, Interviewee Two B's statement that it is time to "break the mold and not hide behind conventions" rings loud in the field. Interviewee Nine echoed that in university museums, academics, curators and leaders are prepared and willing to look at new perspectives. Provocatively, Interviewee Six B noted that risks may increase over time for boards if restitution is not embraced, and cultural objects become a liability financially and reputationally. Thus, board members need to be prepared to address this plausible scenario strategically. Interviewee Ten B stated that we will know that a new era has taken root when we can begin to financially measure, say, grant money, and the priorities that take shape in institutional budgets.

5.3.5 The safety and security dimension

Much is made in the restitution debates about whether cultural objects are safer at the contested or contesting regions, and interestingly, very little was said about safety and security of said objects in this research project. Interviewee Five shared an example of indemnity regarding the return of specific cultural objects, especially as this was leading work in the field, and described in section 4.2.5. Interviewee Ten B emphasized the importance of working to ensure the best care is taken for cultural materials to maintain their safety and security, and ensure the mandate moves forward. Interviewee Eleven referenced an interesting case wherein Museum Eleven offered to take care of Indigenous material, with collaboration in place with Indigenous peoples to participate in the material's safety and security. Therefore, although the findings in this

dimension are limited, it does show that the safety and security argument is waning, even as a point upon which to debate. It cannot have helped the "keep" side of the debate that the British Museum struggled with the stolen objects crisis, as reported beginning in 2023.

5.3.6 The educational dimension

Like safety and security, fewer mentions were tabled by interviewees regarding education. Interviewee Two B addressed the value of the educational dimension, and the impact of museums as a vehicle of cumulative knowledge. Interviewee Eight approached education from the perspective of training the board, as did Interviewee Ten B. Interviewee Thirteen had several insights on education, which is interesting as his point of view in this study is one of having served on many boards, policy bodies and as CEO of several museums. He stated that education is lacking regarding restitution overall and explicitly said that boards of museums "need education, and it is all about education". He emphasized that education is key to boards understanding their role and fiduciary responsibilities in protecting the assets of museums.

5.3.7 The purpose, mandate, and policy dimension

As interviewees described their work in response to restitution pressures, text samples were inferred to fall into a purpose, mandate and policy dimension. This dimension was demonstrated across three principles: adaptation, decolonialization and vision.

5.3.7.1. Purpose, mandate and policy through adaptation

On adaptation, Interviewee One spoke of this principle as a function of framing the museum of the future against the founding mission of the field through a 21st century lens, such as education and the prominence of civic mindedness. This lens could crack open the usefulness of the collection and reposition the museum as a "storehouse of creativity and innovation". Ultimately, the work could be imagined as the remaking of meaning within a contemporary milieu, thus prioritizing the relevance of the institutional mission. Interviewee Two B talked about this imagined new state embodied by the words "moral, art, governance and story, instead of legal and technical".

5.3.7.2. Purpose, mandate and policy through decolonization

On decolonialization, interviewees' language fell along the lines of idea generation and practice, with the most precise point on the matter coming from Interviewee Ten A, who stated that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada demonstrates a "a watershed between two eras". Interviewee Two A discussed how interested she is in decolonizing the holistic process of museum work, including procedures. Interviewee Three was concerned that the Art Council guidance lacked strength and direction. Others had ideated early-stage restitution projects, not yet realized. For instance, Interviewee Six A spoke of the restitution solution for a prominent cultural object as having a plan, awaiting execution, or, as in Interviewee Three, processes had been drawn, and the restitution work was moving through a prescribed and orderly workplan. Decolonialization in practice was occurring for several interviewees. Interviewee Three's museum and board were finalizing a restitution statement and had finalized a policy, and the board unanimously approved a high-profile case. Interviewee Four shared that restitution was a

standard board topic, and fell under the chief curator, and the board would be unlikely to decline a restitution request. Interviewee Five was well into the restitution process, getting into the details of paperwork, export licences, transfer payments, and insurance. Interviewee Six A echoed that rhetoric, with statements about restitution involving government due diligence, working with First Nations Treaties, government acts, memorandums of understanding and stewardship models. Interviewee Seven B, given Museum Seven's significant progress in restitution, described museum directives to proceed, and subsequent effects on collections and legal, alongside practical concerns with paperwork and consistency of approach to claims. Interviewee Seven A stressed that the museum felt that this was the morally right call for the institution to make. He added that this was the highlight of his career and has led him to think critically about the concepts of "possession" and "ownership". For him, these words embody the idea of shared stewardship, which leads to vision.

5.3.7.3 Purpose, mandate and policy through vision

Several interviewees spoke of policy matters in terms of vision. Interviewee Eleven stated that there is an entire policy discussion to be had that frames how restitution concerns permeate the work of the museum overall, which will necessitate adaptation in the future. Interviewee Three directly stated that he is regularly asked to state a vision regarding the restitution situation, but this is terribly complex. Furthermore, the museum must stay clear on its overarching vision and satisfaction of museum audiences, who vacillate between a kind of expert, and a guest looking for a lovely afternoon. Interviewee Two B thinks about how smaller institutions (such as the Horniman Museum which at the time of the interview, had made a prominent restitution), are

leading the way in establishing a path to manifesting a decolonial vision, and thinks about how larger, more well-known museums can catch up. Interviewee Eight pushed ahead with a perspective that he is seeing the museums doing restitution beginning to demonstrate a sameness and wonders if this movement past the tension is leading to less testing of why the work is occurring, and if it is "really making a difference". This, he shares, is an ideal job for ICOM to lead. Interviewee Thirteen concluded that because museums operate within such complexity and are inherently multifaceted, depending on the makeup of the board, developing vision for the future could take many directions.

5.3.8 The engagement dimension

Looking at the data through the engagement dimension illuminates the balance that museums are seeking to achieve in reaching audiences, driving relevance across civil society, ensuring reputational matters are managed, and curatorial mandates are achieved. Interviewee One, in speaking about audience and patrons, questions the nature of the experience that the market desires, ranging from a "nice experience" to thought leadership about material societal issues. He emphasized that museums should not lose their voice in this engagement with issues, ensuring a "creative response" that aligns to institutional purpose.

Interviewee Two B shared that Museum Two monitors social media to ascertain which words "trigger" because there is "weaponized terminology now", and this research is important to document. Interviewee Six A shared that the complexity of engagement required slow, purposeful and sensitive relationship building, and Interviewee Ten A spoke at length about the

importance of creating allies through engagement and cultivating multiplicities of relationships with the public. Interviewee Five noted the importance of engaging with unexpected audiences, as social justice agendas are exercised against restitution as well, leading to more complex engagement with expanding communities. As described by Interviewee Five, lawyers became involved in their prominent restitution case, requesting compensation for a group of people adjacent to the situation who objected to the objects being returned to their claiming country, citing significant social issues.

It became clear in the analysis of engagement text fragments how necessary this work is, and will continue to be, for museums. Interviewee Three said that no one argues with the importance of pulling in more voices and opinions into the museum discourse to understand the history of cultural objects, and Interviewee Ten B said that in fact, a global movement is burgeoning with museum engagement. Interviewee Four is concerned that museums today are consistently struggling with relevance, audience, and engaging with communities, while Interviewee Eleven emphasized that if museums are deeply rooted in community, these links will lift the organization when it is under attack. In particular, for Interviewee Six A, it is an absolute necessity for museums to engage with Indigenous, in perpetuity.

Novel approaches were tabled in the engagement text. Interviewee Five talked to students about imagining the future and believes that if museums know more about the relationships in which they engage, then questions of restitution will be resolved more readily. Adds Interviewee Three, museums should be identifying and sharing new narratives and reminds that the colonialism conversation is still relatively new in a “startling way”. Museum Four is demonstrating evidence

of new plans for the plant arising from increased engagement, drawing the public into the museum as centre of public engagement and partnership. Interviewee Five says his museum is also rethinking relationships and sees this as a strong practice to build trust within contested collections. While CEO of a museum, Interviewee Thirteen had employed arguably the most glamorous novel method of engaging the board in restitution issues by inviting well known religious leaders, thinkers and a famous actress to meetings.

5.3.9 The curatorial dimension

The curatorial dimension was mentioned less frequently in the text samples than many other dimensions, which became apparent when cross analyzing the data, and on reflection, was a surprise. When mentioned, interviewees spoke of specific curatorial projects that address restitution within their institutions, such as Interviewee Two A discussing a label project to educate about the debates in situ, or Interviewee Ten B sharing perspective on increasing Indigenous exhibitions at Museum Ten. Interviewee Two A also referenced a movement to bring delegates to the museum to share how they would like to be represented. Interviewee Three spoke of planning a show about their ongoing restitution work in partnership with other academic museums. Interviewee Five also covered the curatorial work occurring in the museum to show the darker side of Victorian museums.

Interviewees also referred to fresh curatorial practices in thinking about the future of the institution. Interviewee Two A said that curatorial progress is forthcoming with digital advancements in recording collections, such as the Digital Benin project, which demonstrates an

exciting directional shift. Interviewee Five spoke of object life before, during and after the museum, and suggested that the field could relax its hold on the future of an object, thinking about it in terms of biography. Interviewee Two B similarly spoke of the "multiplicities" of museum spaces, thinking about them as an artist thinks of series of paintings: We can re-make them. He thinks museums are much more than we think of now. This saves the museum rather than emptying the museum. The museum can be a place of transport. He implores society to think more imaginatively about museums. They can be about more than that which was extracted from other cultures only to be displayed and explained. If, he posited, Indigenous peoples could for instance use textiles and materials to encourage craft and the future, the museum could become about abundance, ergo, it becomes about gain and not loss. Interviewee Seven A echoed this point. He pointed to training for museum careers as an opportunity to shift culture. Training, traditionally in museums, is about being "custodians" of culture and science and our collective heritage, but what if we could recognize that this responsibility is one that is global? This would reshape the museum from a western perspective to something new, and to Interviewee Seven A, this is what excites him, this letting go of curatorial and professional expertise in favour of cascading learning of other cultures as it imprints on the museum space.

5.3.10 The routine dimension

A routine dimension was coded into the text and included examples such as Interviewee One sharing mentioning the risk register and audit committed, and Interviewee Two A covering a description of the governance structure of Museum Two. Sample statements include Interviewee Four discussing a matter that is "showing practices and decisions", or Interviewee One talking

about the need for a Chief Information Officer, but overall, interviewees in this study stayed away from routine matters in the text.

5.4 UNESCO and vocabulary

To round out the analysis of this method, and consider a broader international perspective towards building theory, I looked at two key UNESCO reports wherein a shift in language can be ascertained over four years in two of their recent landmark documents that are relevant to my research. The first is the 2015 "Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collection, their diversity and their role in society adopted by the General Conference in its 38th session", and the second is the 2019 "Report on the implementation of the recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collection, their diversity and their role in society". The chart demonstrates a shift in vocabulary from words like creativity, imagination, visitors, education and inspiration, to that of globalisation, citizenship, accessibility, restitution, sustainability, equality and rights. This brief examination shows that the context of framing the next era of museums is shifting for boards and represented in **table sixteen**. This snapshot suggests that a richer study of UNESCO's role in shaping the narrative and strategic direction of individual institutions and the collective body of museums, has strong potential for future.

5. 5 Temporal Acceleration" towards a moral form

In this chapter I have shown that key leaders and governors of museums are exemplifying what has been earlier described as “temporal acceleration” through another lever: the redirection of codified language to reinforce bold directional decisions. This redirection sees prominent museum leaders move away from the legal argument for keeping contested cultural property intact in the established system, toward the moral arguments for return. This argument stands on the theorization of Suddaby and Greenwood that a strong rationale for change is embedded within the identity of the “core actors” through “institutional vocabularies” if a “compelling scenario of change” is present (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 60). Lead actors thus link the new form to a value set that aligns to those burgeoning in civil society. We see this happening in museums, predictive of the reshaping of the field. I argue that the discourse surrounding the debates is generating a trackable vocabulary that describes decision-making by leaders and governors in drafting institutional change to broader societal change, thus framing and visualizing the next era of the museum field.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This chapter explains the outcomes of this research study, putting the research questions in context, and addressing the questions through actions demonstrated in the context of the four schematics: Reputation, visioning, framing and visioning, as well as attention to vocabulary. The chapter covers the study's significance and aims, three major theories arising from the research, a summary of major results, and a discussion of the findings vis-à-vis the literature review.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The outcome of this research project concerns how elite museums grapple with discursive claims and controversy. The value that this research adds to scholarship is in the documentation and analysis of the views of leading institutional actors' reactions to the restitution situation and producing a new package of information and insights so that the debates can move forward, and the practice of boards can be improved.

6.1.1 Research questions in context

This doctoral research project follows leaders and governors of museums across several western countries as these leaders address the restitution debates in a heightened period of cultural sensitivity in society. This period is largely experienced and tacitly known as transformational largely in response to the Sarr Savoy report and Black Lives Matters. Museum actors responsible

for handling the tension and potential global reputational risk caused by the restitution debates make this situation an issue of governance requiring a response that I aim to show has these actors visualizing and framing a nascent next era of museums. This era is informed by several dimensions as described in chapter five, driven by engagement with civic society and politics.

This work is significant for reasons articulated in, respectively, academic, professional and artistic contexts. First, the academic debates about restitution have been carrying on for decades. The academic discourse has been rigorous in demonstrating the value of both sides of the issue, as evidenced in chapter two above. Academic discourse has expanded to include deepening legal insight, especially within the work of Alexander Herman (Herman, 2021, 2022, 2023). The situation, however, remains stuck. Progress in advancing the debates is caught in a stalemate because the Parthenon Sculptures loom large in the academic writing, have become the a priori public emblem of restitution, and are not seeming to go back to Greece anytime soon, despite occasional pulsing signs to the contrary. Restitution literature no longer has much room to move conceptually, beyond articulating opportunities for museum thinkers to put forward methodologies to work around the situation, like digital collections and display, enhancing educational trade of ideas and intellectual contributions, and progress made by individuated institutions, as captured in chapter four.

Within this thesis, I show how leading figures have taken the problem, and drafted dimensions of the problem - consciously or subconsciously - onto broader public domains, to push forward their agenda, and in so doing, are representative of a critical mass of figures acting in the same manner, serving to materially affect the overall direction of the field. As such, the restitution

literature can move from one of "to restitute or not to restitute" towards one of leaders and outliers, by layering organizational theory and literature onto the discourse within the museum field. This movement in academic literature can lead to future thinking and ideas that further develop this parallelism of approach that could help solve this, and other, internationally difficult issues that affect fields, and breathe new life into the theories about how fields can adapt to slow and sweeping changes to civic society.

Second, this research will make a difference in practical terms. C-suite executives and board governors are facing challenges today that surge through the public at a pace wherein the distance between learning of an issue and readiness to respond to said issue is dematerializing, and the ramifications for failure to respond appropriately are material. Board meetings are scheduled with months between meetings, and limited time for challenging subjects. Responsible governors concerned with fiduciary, strategic and ambassadorial responsibilities must exercise a duty of care in handling sensitive issues with reputational risk, thus the board milieu is fraught with the potential for sub-optimum decision making. This thesis aims to help board members and directors set the agenda for board meetings in terms that prepare the institution along the dimensions and schematics laid out in the previous chapters. Museum actors wrestling with restitution, and other situations driven by civil society, may use these dimensions and schematics as a toolkit to organize thinking, communications and decision points. Further, the closely told stories by interviewees in the empirical set of museums offer insight and examples to board members and directors writ-large in dealing with their own sets of issues.

The central aim of this study is to answer the research questions in a manner that would advance the practical challenges that policy makers, and especially directors and board governors of museums, face when dealing with serious matters germane to the public and for which leaders have a responsibility to the public purse. Leaders continually seem to reinvent the wheel in dealing with matters wherein civil society and reputational concerns intersect. As such, I aimed to provide the aforementioned toolkit that would serve a purpose in helping practitioners methodically work through complex issues that have been elevated to a field level. I hoped to do so with the sensitivity and credibility of being an artist and having the utmost respect for cultural objects. Secondarily, I aim to forge a path as an academic that brings together the three key areas of my career and provide a unique and focused arena for future research that remains tied to both administrative and academic pursuits. Excitingly, the research has also had an impact on my studio practice by way of expanding my concept of definitive eras.

The research showed that no one institution has drafted a methodology or technique for managing this long-term crisis that is not vulnerable to policy or political position changes, and no single institution claims to have resolved the restitution tension permanently and for every contested object in the collection. There is still a case-by-case tone to the discussions, even within museums that have established rigorous policies and practices, such as the Horniman museum (Merriman, 2024). As shown in the case studies in chapter four, museums that have moved forward in the debates through prominent restitution projects or solutions recognize further challenges and complexities across their own institution, and reference complications in parallel institutions. There was a recognition across the interviews for this study that solutions were achieved with rigour and a modest perspective, and that circumstances had lined up

effectively in individuated cases for optimal solutions, for instance, there has been a place to which objects could return, and an appropriate mechanism of delivery. That said, it is in the aggregate of the advancing solutions that a common thread can be established, and a pattern emerges that consistent vocabulary and dimensions are levelled up and herein tabled as a toolkit for practitioners to examine and consider within their organizations and for academics to pull apart and advance as future theory to address the restitution situation and broader complex problems that affect a field across western nations.

There is a parallelism, in that just as the economic, technological and social factors that led to a potential deepening of challenges for museums was rising, the same factors came into play as highly networked board members, alongside prominently reviewed books like Hicks', and a plethora of newspaper articles slowly but surely demonstrated a command of the subject and an increasing voice of resistance to the legal form. Museum leaders such as Interviewee Two A, joined committees across the world to deal with the issue and spread knowledge of effective practices that reached both museum leaders and policy makers. As stated by Interviewee Ten A, the sweeping public policy documents such as UNDRIP and the TRC in Canada, as well as regional policies such as FNSCORA, mandated institutions to work on meaningful solutions to societal issues, and these policies were not lost on governors across western nations. Whether politically aligned or not aligned with social will to action, the subject of restitution was certainly on the agenda of every institution discussed in this thesis, through varying degrees of formal recognition at board meetings.

Museums have been reshaping institutional identity through common strategic actions, using infrastructural leverage, emotional leverage and intellectual leverage. Museum leaders and governors have been working to ameliorate pressures on the institution from the restitution debates that affect reputation, and have been finding ways through this international, protracted risk. Leaders and governors shape the identity of museums through actions that were evidenced in the interviews and board meeting minutes as an attention to stories, narratives, scripts and vocabulary. Thus, I argue in this thesis that renowned international museum director and board member Jack Lohman's call to museums over a decade ago to think big, accept the moment of change, and "affiliate themselves with the political, the economic and the global" (Lohman, 2013: 239) has been achieved.

The museums considered in this study are exemplars of a change in market position in response to this call for positioning according to political, economic and global concerns. The change in market position has been made manifest first through the utilization of four schematics that align to reputation, engagement, framing and visioning. Second, the change in market position has been achieved through key figures' use of drafting to the vocabulary of broader concerns and establishing new protocols as shared by the interviewees. These protocols include the following actions and policies, which have been developed as a response to the restitution debates and have had the effect of leveling up the market position of museums across western nations bringing the field governance to a new era more closely tied to current political, economic and global concerns.

6.1.2 Research questions addressed

Elinor Ostrom in her classic literature "Governing the Commons" describes her strategic approach to institutional research of organizations across a field. She writes that her strategy comprises the identification of the "physical, cultural, and institutional setting" (Ostrom, 1990: 55) that affects the participating actors, their actions, and the ramifications or opportunities resulting from these actions, as well as concerns of information flow and control. She states that "(o)nce one has all the needed information, one can then abstract from the richness of the empirical situation to devise a playable game that will capture the essence of the problems individuals are facing" (Ostrom, 1990:55). In this thesis, I theorize that indeed museum actors with control of the restitution situation do make decisions across the physical and cultural settings comprising a field commons. They do so, as described below, through infrastructural, emotional, and intellectual levers. I argue that they have created a "playable game" by addressing risk either directly, as in the case of the Horniman Museum, or indirectly, as in the case of the Victoria and Albert Museum, described in section 4.5.6. With that, the boards of institutions deal with current or project risk by setting up structures to move with or adapt through crisis. To do so, actors are using the vocabulary of broader societal concerns, amplified by media, and in turn influencing actions in the institution. These actions take various forms, and it is through these new protocols, actions and policies, which I am conceptualizing here as the "temporal acceleration" by leaders in the field of a "playable game".

This playable game comprises a set of actions that have been extracted from the case studies, dimensions and vocabulary expressed by interviewees in this study, and demonstrate how board governors and directors of museums are preparing for institutional and reputational risks and

visualizing the next era of the field. The playable game involves five leading actions: 1) Framing: paying attention to reputation, risk and communications: 2) Visioning: Expanding digital solutions: 3) Engagement: Responding with sensitivity to "object durationality"; 4) Reputation: Engaging with unexpected sources of power; and 5) Vocabulary: Imprinting vocabulary onto scalable concerns (**figure six**).

It is through these actions defining the "playable game" that the two primary research questions (section 1.3) in this study have been answered.

Research Question One: As museum governors and leaders grapple with discursive claims and controversy surrounding the restitution debates, how is the future, responsive museum addressing internally material strategic and reputational risk?

Despite no interviewee from museums across Canada, the United Kingdon, the United States and New Zealand included in this set describing a potential loss of patron desire to visit the assets decreasing. A partial exception to this finding is the Horniman Museum, in that the former CEO of the museum, Nick Merriman, wrote in his book about the return of Benin Bronzes from the museum that concerns were expressed by both board and CEO that "its audience did not reflect the diversity of the place in which it is located" (Merriman, 2024: 14). Museums interviewed for this study are working on addressing risk in three primary ways concerning risk awareness, digital solutions, and sensitivity to "object durationality".

6.1.2.1 Deepening attention to reputation, risk and communications

In the introduction to “A Social History of Museums”, Kenneth Hudson refers to a sentiment at the time of authorship of museum leaders retreat from the public good. He described a situation wherein a public relations staff member of the Victoria and Albert Museum wrote of a worry of tone setting in amongst curators, that the public were not especially welcome in museums (Hudson, 1975). Granted, there is an acknowledgement by Hudson that it is difficult to assess the level of uptake of this sentiment, but he writes that a Director of a renowned museum in Vienna stated in 1972 that “it would be no bad thing if the doors of the museum were kept permanently closed, so that prospective visitors would have to produce satisfactory evidence of their fitness to be admitted” (Hudson, 1975:2), and continues that the director said he “had no intention of wasting museum funds on such frivolous activities as surveys aimed at discovering the reactions of the visitors to his museum, or of the audiences at his lectures” (ibid: 3). Of course, this is a highly isolated and provocative position and statement for use in this discussion, but it makes the point that today, we have an a priori understanding of museums as a place that operates for the public good. Museums, as described by Alexander, have become sites of heavy action to bring people inside, as best exemplified by the retrospective era (Alexander, 1996).

Contrast this with case studies described in chapter four above, wherein all four schematics that demonstrate the themes that emerged from the case study interviews involve relationships with people, and for people. The reputation schematic centred along axes of legal and moral responses to that which is presented as a public debate. The engagement schematic measured the number of instances wherein interviewees spoke of politics or engagement. The framing schematic measured responses along purpose, mandate and policy, or curatorial/political axes with all

mentions relevant to finding a way to solve a problem in society, and thus, for people. The visioning schematic followed axes of external and internal concerns, with the former involving moral, legal and political engagement, and the latter concerning curatorial, educational and safety/security matters within the institution and for the public.

The case of the Horniman Museum, argued here as a smaller institution that practiced a leading approach to resolving a restitution concern, is a prime example of engagement in public interest. Their deep attention to reputation, risk and communications developed through a concrete approach to testing hypothesis and potential ways forward with the public. Nick Merriman, the former Director of the Horniman Museum, in his book "Returning the Benin Bronzes: A Case Study of the Horniman's restitution", describes the process of building support for their approach as follows. Importantly, Merriman regularly refers to that which is moral, and "moral grounds" (Merriman, 2024: 47) for decision making, which situates the focus groups within that milieu. The process began in 2022 and comprised the board restitution subcommittee preparing a recommendation, but before the board vote, they felt that "it was important to hear from more voices, not just those of the Nigerian community" (ibid: 49), and thus they put together a focus group of eight diverse people, who had a mostly favorable response to the return of the Benin collection at the Horniman Museum.

The day seems to have been won, however, by the involvement of schoolchildren, who whilst visiting the museum, were asked a question with respect to whether the museum should retain the collection. The schoolchildren responded with a letter writing campaign that overwhelmingly supported the return of the Benin cultural objects to Nigeria. Then, having followed their internal

policy and engagement with their audiences, the Restitution subcommittee wrote a recommendation to the board that was passed as described in section 4.5.6. The Horniman is a strong example across all schematics, with clear vision, framing of the problem, engagement and resulting reputation management.

With this, there is a clear path forward for museums to mirror this approach, and in the case studies included in this thesis, there is a clear will to find a path forward and actively work on reputation, risk and communications, thereby showing a wholesale move away from the "original rules and regulations of the British Museum" (Hudson, 1975: 9) which opened in 1759 with a list of rules published by the Trustees by which visitors must abide in order to see the collection, including writing for permission, and offering credentials". Furthermore, "(t)his procedure was likely to take at least two weeks, and the investigations into credentials could last as long as several months" (Hudson, 1975: 9). Now, almost 300 years later, a leading decision that significantly affects the mandate of the museum has been influenced by schoolchildren, and a board that was concerned with making a moral decision.

6.1.2.2 Increasing expansion of digital solutions

The restitution debates have forced museums to look at new ways of exhibiting work in the collection that has been determined as subject to restitution. The Arts Council of England published "Restitution and repatriation: A practical guide for museums in England" in September 2023 to help museums with this work. They write that "(d)igitisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to broaden access to the collection as widely as possible." (Arts Council England, 2023:

6). A prime example of digitization in action is the Digital Benin project that began in November 2022, mentioned as an opportunity by Interviewee Two A for outcomes of the debates to take a significant leap forward in resolving access to museum visitors to contested objects. The MIT Technology Review describes the Digital Benin project as a catalogue comprising 5000 bronzes aiming to reconnect people to looted objects in a sensitive way, and cost a bit over a million pounds (Sharma, 2024):

As field sharing develops across like-minded governing institutions, replication of the Digital Benin project offers considerable opportunities for further academic and practical research that could lead to significant curatorial breakthroughs. Such theoretical and curatorial advancements could be amplified through sharing digital collections with artists, who could make new work, and inspire rich insights and technical applications in situ.

Overall, apart from Interviewee Two A, and Interviewee Eleven, very few mentions were made of the digital opportunities (or risks) by subjects in this study. Interviewee Eleven, who has been in board and leadership roles across Canada, addressed a new issue that could arise as further digitization of collections is made manifest, wherein breaches to cybersecurity could open new avenues of risk to collections. Interviewees in this study were in the early stages of determining technical and visual solutions to the problem of contested objects in the collection and concentrated on governing concerns that comprise fiduciary and reputational responsibility, including broad directional principles applicable to both their home institution and the field.

The leadership of Interviewee Two A in the field globally, and her influence on both strategic and curatorial direction, renders the digital solution as one of gravitas and thoughtful potential. At the time of interviews, she was conversant about the restitution project at the Horniman Museum. Nick Merriman, the Director of the Horniman at the time of said interviews, addressed the thinking and processes involved in the return of Benin Bronzes in the Horniman Collection in his book on the subject. An angle discussed in the book includes the relevance of digital fluency to the restitution project and Merriman offers several material points in the book (Merriman, 2024).

First, Merriman offers a perspective that extant digital documents that accompany the Benin collection should be returned with the cultural objects to Nigeria (ibid) and he shares that "records for all 72 objects in our collections management database" (ibid: 73) were indeed returned. Second, Merriman shared the trustees' concern that if the cultural objects were being returned on moral grounds, it would follow those digital representations of the objects (which also had been created for Digital Benin) made while in the Horniman's care should be returned on moral grounds as well, including copyright. The final resolution read that the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) "grants the Horniman licence to use the media listed as it has previously, including in the delivery of paid for school education session, upon condition that the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria's copyright be clearly stated" (ibid: 73-74). Third, the museum is creating a new digital record comprising responses from schoolchildren to the work the staff is undertaking to document the restitution project. The educational project, entitled "The Kingdom of Benin" was offered "79 times over the 2022/2023 academic year" (ibid: 80). Fourth, Horniman staff were trained "by University of

the Arts London in August 2023 on how to deliver virtual store tours successfully, which will enable greater virtual access to the objects in storage on load from NCMM" (ibid: 81). Taken together, these actions comprise a well-rounded response to digital opportunities presented by the resolution of restitution cases, positioning the Horniman as a leader in transforming the field, ushering in new curatorial and technical paths by embracing the moral form, and ushering in a tangible element of a new era of the institution.

6.1.2.3 Sensitive response to "object durationality" and alternative voices

Interviewee Six B spoke of the risks that are growing as museums hold onto the paradigm of keeping cultural objects that are contested, and/or are considered living ancestors of Indigenous peoples. He reflected on the challenges of insuring said cultural objects in the future, and whether the risk of keeping the objects, even fiscally, rounded out the argument for return. Interviewee Eight spoke of the intentionality of their work, and "at the centre of it they are acknowledging Indigenous knowledge". As a non-Indigenous person, I have not taken this thesis in a direction that would speak for cultures or peoples. This thesis focuses on the board decisions, and how those decisions have been heavily impacted by the directionality of museum directors, and it is through the lens of the interviewees that the positions and arguments in this thesis are framed. The point made here is that Indigenous peoples' knowledge and beliefs and voices are growing in colonialized institutions, with Interviews Ten A and Ten B sharing that Museum Ten (in Canada) has grown to have a senior staff person in Indigenous Relations. "Object durationality", as discussed in section 2.3.3, is an important part of this worldview and an exciting path forward in a nascent new era of museums.

In the case of the Manitou Stone at the Royal Alberta Museum, “object durationality” is foregrounded as a significant reason for the sensitive, highly engaged and ongoing handling of the stone and its resting place. The environment has been created to mirror its landing place, and Indigenous peoples who visit the stone do so often in ceremony and the sacredness of the time Indigenous people spend with the stone is highly respected and considered. The case of the Manitou Stone shows sensitive engagement and consultation by museum leaders in several countries. It has moved across Canada as the subject of its story and the people who tell it, and the object of colonialized points of view regarding representations of culture, religion and history. The stone has sharpened the framing of the Royal Alberta Museum’s emotional and intellectual narrative regarding collecting, storing, moving and exhibiting cultural objects, and has influenced its infrastructural decisions and fiduciary plans. Thus, the Manitou Stone is a strong example of “object durationality” and new thinking by museum leaders and governors that is representative of a burgeoning “Restitutional Era” in museum governance.

Research Question Two: How does the response of collective elite voices within a set of museums signal or trigger an era change in the field?

Surprisingly, the restitution issue is not convincingly treated as an urgent call to action, even when described as a crisis by media regarding the British Museum’s handling of the Parthenon Sculptures. The issue is not consistently treated as reputational crisis by leaders or boards, despite situations like the return of the Benin Bronzes at the Horniman Museum being described as “immensely significant” (Halliday, 2022, www.theguardian.com) by The Guardian on August 7, 2022. That said, museums are concerned with how the visualization of the next era will be

critiqued and stress-tested by society, and museum actors are visualizing the next era through two interesting mechanisms, these being their engagement with unexpected sources of power and framing institutional vocabulary alongside global priorities.

6.1.2.4 Engagement with unexpected sources of power

Francie Ostrower, in her 2002 book that examined the machinery of elite boards, wrote that the "elite" were drawn to boards that promised 'prestige and exclusivity" (Ostrower, 2002: 85). Ostrower argued that board members of cultural institutions are expected "to function at the highest level of excellence and to be recognized as representing the best in their fields. This is a factor in their motivations for association with the organization, for their fundraising efforts and for their decisions concerning organizational policy" (ibid: 87). Interviewee Four B made a similar point: In thinking of a commonly held supposition that board members of elite institutions are usually wealthy and powerful through societal status, she stated that museum board members "used to be the wealthy, and they're looking now for expertise rather than status".

Thus, the decision by the Horniman Museum's former CEO Nick Merriman to harness the opinions of schoolchildren in a manner that held documented agency with the Board of Governors, subsequently pushing novel decision-making regarding the return of several Benin Bronzes, is exciting. Merriman conveys the children's voices as having a moral directness, gravitas and credibility, materially impacting an important board recommendation to move ahead with the restitution of the bronzes (Merriman, 2024).

Furthermore, in cross-referencing data from the meeting minutes of the Horniman from March 18, 2021, that align to the above restitution board recommendation, a key sentence demonstrates the power that three voices, on a first-name basis, would go on to have in making a fresh restitution policy that resulted in a "watershed moment" (Kelly, 2022). The minutes state that "(i)t was agreed that Mayowa, Sarah and Clare would form the subcommittee, and it would be up to them to decide the basis on which they will make their decisions. It was important to have good evidence on the process" (Horniman Museum, 2021: 4). Therefore, the combined voices of the schoolchildren and Mayowa, Sarah and Clare, led to new practices that influenced a breakthrough decision, by a relatively small, government-funded institution. This meaningful change was recognized as progress by key museum relationships, such as the CEO of the Nubian Jak Community Trust, and within the museum by Security Assistant Pius Osemwegie both of whom wrote testimonials to express their gratitude (Merriman, 2024: 67).

6.1.2.5 Framing institutional vocabulary alongside global priorities

As described in chapter five, vocabulary literature is a valuable scaffolding on which to apply the argument that museum leaders and board governors are using language that has effectively broken ground in solving big global priorities to push forward on the restitution debates towards solutions for institutions. Every museum in this study was represented by an interviewee who made a statement that aligns to this argument. Interviewee One A said that there are "non-negotiables" in the running of the institution, and that is to "be transparent, accountable, globally engaged, and have a digital footprint". Interviewee Two A stated that "we have to be responsible for undoing violence and understanding other ways of being". Interviewee Three shared that

"some visitors would be surprised we were trying to improve society", and "the catalyst of the George Floyd murder gives Americans a way". Interviewee Four A described their new and future state as one of being the "locus of civic engagement and civic partnership". Interviewee Five stated that "they are rethinking relationships and building trust around African collections" and that a "big thing" was the impact of "COVID and George Floyd and the toppling of the statue and accelerating impact of colonialism". Interviewee Six A said that a group working on a particular case of restitution for the museum "was doing community building and it was important that it was not done by one community, not by one nation, not by one person, but build a bridge". Interviewee Seven A shared that they worked to "develop more policies in inclusiveness, and societal, social justice and equality". He also said that they acknowledged "a real cultural shift" and spoke of "a shared responsibility around the globe…altering museums from traditional western perspective to something new", reinforced by Interviewee Seven B as "for public good". Interviewee Seven B spoke of "being intentional people" and the "ideal of belonging and identity" and their "relationship to the environment". He added that "Germany, France and Austria are having vibrant, healthy discussions to shape policy and practice, and reckon with their colonial past". Interviewee Eight stated that "part of a new strategy is to own our past". Interviewee Nine said that "public considerations underpin the criteria" in restitution policy. Interviewee Ten A stated that he is "interested in creating different types of relationships with the public who could be allies, or not, but part of an important conversation that advances reconciliation", and the museums is "looking for opportunities to create allies". Interviewee Eleven, a former board chair of a museum, wanted to cover "the evolution of society in general and the speed of social media Museums are working hard to be current and the work they do is thoughtful, but sometimes the policy outcome would be better if we could think longer".

Interviewee Twelve does not represent a museum. Interviewee Thirteen, board chair and CEO of several museums, and requesting no direct quotes, spoke of the importance for museums, in the context of restitution claims and questions of museum decision-making, to think about their future. Considerations include technology, AI, and sustainability.

6.1.3 Supplementary questions

6.1.3.1 Strategic success in the future, responsive, museum

As museums grapple with the strategic success of the institution, and the field, in the future, a responsive museum or set of museums could follow the model set forth in **figure five**. Shifts in issues will emerge over time, and notwithstanding the groundbreaking change afforded by the 2018 Sarr/Savoy report and the social change that has occurred world-wide since, drafting new issues to this model grounds decision-making onto tested contexts, giving board governors and leaders fiduciary and governance assurance. The model is built on the case-study documentation of leaders' thinking during this current "Discursive Collision Era" when, as described by Merriman "to thrive fully following the tipping point of 2020-2022, museums must embrace the implications of their colonial histories" (Merriman, 2024: 93).

Institutional actors across broader fields could establish a position across a set of scatter plots, as identified in **tables eleven to fifteen**. Analysis of the museum cases described in chapter four offers material to imagine playing out new issues in parallel to the thinking of these leaders at a given point in time. Looking at the schematic tables, plotting decisions using dimensions regarding the four schematics works as follows. First, in considering organizational and board

reputation, governors can plot meticulously the preferred balance between the moral and legal dimensions of their thinking given the significance by which this matters to the public good. Second, as governors and leaders set out to engage in issues concerning the public good, a scatter plot offers options for imagining how the tension between societal engagement and political engagement is agreed upon. Third, governors and leaders can frame decisions along axes that identify how deep first, curatorial or academic, and second, political concerns work alongside purpose, mandate or policy dimensions. Fourth, as governors and leaders participate in visioning work for the institution, they can intentionally conceptualize the balance between internal concerns, such as curation, education and safety/security, with external concerns comprising moral, legal, political and engagement dimensions.

As Merriman described, the "tipping point" of 2020-2022 changed the era through their own "watershed" (Kelly, 2022) event. Jenkins, who argues against restitution, wrote that "(d)ecolonization, which took place in the second half of the twentieth century, was driven by the great social movements that swept through Africa and Asia and forcefully challenged the might of European rule" (Jenkins, 2016: x). She adds that "(t)he 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign formed a long time after decolonization, and – not insignificantly – in a time of political *in*action, where removing statues appears to stand in for social change" (ibid: x – xi). I argue that the major action of restitution is the breakthrough moment of the Horniman Museum returning the Benin Bronzes in their collection in 2022, and that this is a significant political action affording museums and institutions more broadly a playbook by which to undertook complex social change within organizational constructs.

6.1.3.2 Influence of restitution on museum governance and identity

Given the plethora of academic, media and policy conversations regarding the restitution debates over the past several decades, with the "tipping point" having been reached by an influential leader in the field (Merriman, 2024:93), a breakthrough has been achieved in reshaping the status and identity of museum governance. Museum governors move from conceptualization of elites, defined as wealthy, powerful people with high societal status (Ostrower, 2002) to highly networked individuals wherein depth and breadth of resume, as per the network study described in chapter five shows in table eight, *or* less networked but specifically skilled against a board matrix board members, each skilled in reputation management, whether aligning to a moral or legal form. I argue that in today's world, wherein reputation risk, and "cancel culture" are persuasive external controls on board and individual behavior, concerns about the ability of board members to navigate through social change and make difficult decisions in public are paramount. The restitution debates are a mighty test by which to exemplify how skilled board members are navigating the matter, and to date, no board has been signaled out in a material way that has significantly affected the reputation of individual members or led to the dismissal of a board as a whole.

Furthermore, board members and leaders of museums are demonstrating how their field is now positioned to lead academic discourse regarding both actions and decisions that shape a next generation of institutions. Museum actors can now embark on a sweeping international path to compete with universities for research dollars. The high profile of the current debates has re-positioned museums on a global agenda as contending academic players with new forums,

platforms, materials, assets and institutional thinking that demonstrates abundant research and scholarly opportunities. Given the perspective of "gain" as described by Interviewee Two A, Interviewee Two B, Interviewee Four B, Interviewee Eight, Interviewee Ten A and Interviewee Ten B regarding how much museums have benefited by opening collections and sharing ideas, materials and curatorial content with new audiences, we can anticipate that research opportunities will abound. This is good progress on a challenge posed by Lohman in his book "Great Expectations: Reflections on Museums in Canada", wherein he writes

> *"I watch museums trumped time and again by universities and other institutions, not because the others are better, but because they are much better at attracting significant funding for research and projects. That should change, because museums have so much that is unique to offer, from the richness of their archives and collections to their potential as advisory bodies on science policy or environmental protocols. At present we are underusing museum expertise".* (Lohman, 2019: 54-55).

The restitution debates have pulled the curators, educators, objects and the practices and purpose of museums out from the display case, vaults, and the four walls of the institution, and into the public discourse, alive now with joyous rediscovery and the potential for new connections and opportunities for rich analytical consideration. With that, the status and identity of museum governance will rely every more on matrix and strategic visioning towards an exciting new era of the field.

6.2 Research significance and theory

This research adds to the literature on museums and governance in addressing a stalemate debate that has carried on for decades in the public realm, through institutions that belong to the public

good, and are responsible for sharing and showing cultural output. The research catalogues the thinking of prominent figures in the restitution debates, who hold, or have held significant responsibility for cultural material, at a key point in time when society is pushing for solutions to inequities. A handful include matters such as the Me-Too movement, climate change activism, anti-racism, and EDI projects in organizations. As the rise in the political and societal discourse swelled, the opportunity for resolution to the restitution debates increased. The emblem of achieving resolution is arguably a solution to the Parthenon Sculptures situation. Failing that (and to-date there is no solution), should the rise of equity discourse recede because of political swings, this research will catalogue a record of how leading thinkers were conceptualizing the issue and progress at a point in time.

Given the persistence of the restitution issue, including associated reputational and fiscal risks, the timing now is useful to capture the thinking of leaders in the field. Further, should swings occur politically or in civic society against restitution, it will be valuable to have a categorization of leaders' thinking should narratives be revisited in future years.

This thesis first aims to understand if, given the potential for high reputational risk involved in the restitution debates, the issue is being treated as a call to action or a crisis by leaders and governors in the museum field. I seek to understand, in short, how boards and leaders prepare, through framing and visualizing, institutional next steps. And if they are preparing, what actions fall out of that preparation.

The second aim of this research concerns the overarching direction that these actions imprint on the field globally. If reputational concerns can be considered material (and newspaper articles and academic discourse would suggest that the problem is material), then how do decisions that address the research questions above inform the reshaping of museums, thus launching enough change to usher in a new era in the field. Are boards preparing for potential risk to assets, audience and overall position in the museum milieu. Are leaders and boards seeing a new era and is the "visualness" of museums as an entity the ideal way to demonstrate social change. Can governors on any board with public facing responsibilities look to the narrative, rhetoric and actions of museum leaders and governors as an example of how to plan around broader social justice issues such as globalization, citizenship, accessibility, sustainability, and equity within society (Mairesse, 2019).

The third aim of this research is to show that museum boards and leaders who see the reputational risk of the restitution debates are shaping the identity of museums through stories, narratives, scripts and vocabulary. My research shows that boards and leaders are using these mechanisms through a clarity of moral or legal form to shape the future of the institution and manage reputational risk, but not necessarily as a crisis response. I aim to show that this language is rooted in theories of vocabulary to "attach or deny legitimacy" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 35) to persuasion and decision-making.

6.2.1 Theory one: A directional response to real or perceived crisis

Several museums are using urgency and crisis-like methods to publicly respond with directional change to the restitution debates. Museum Five is treating the restitution issue as having triggered a crisis response by both leaders and governors. The British Museum does not treat the issue as a crisis, and Museum One, while not also treating the issue as a crisis, is structuring the institution to react should legal constraints be removed from the institution.

A theory can be induced that if legal constraints are removed from governing decisions, directional actions that mirror a crisis response may be activated, as both institutional and individual board member reputation management becomes more vulnerable to personal decision-making. I argue that boards address the current or projected risk by 1) moving with the crisis, 2) adaptively extending through the crisis, or 3) systemically holding through the crisis.

6.2.1.1 Moving with the crisis

Take, for example, Museum Five. I posit that Museum Five is ***moving with the crisis***. This museum is categorized herein as a "moral form" institution, having expressed that they are "rethinking relationships and building trust". They were aware that "because of Black Lives Matters, the (museum founder) was racist, and the board was primed that there is an issue not going away" and "morally you should give them (contested cultural objects) back". In short, Museum Five was ready to move on the restitution issue. They acted by appointing a restitution subcommittee, conducting time-sensitive engagement, moving quickly on safety, security and transport issues, and managing the media effectively.

6.2.1.2 Adaptively extending through the crisis

Museum One, technically a legal form museum, as it is subject to the National Heritage Act, is characterized herein as a legal form museum with a moral form signifier. I posit that Museum One is ***adaptively extending through the crisis***. Interviewee One A, the director of the museum stated that "legally they can't repatriate, but they can do substantial partnerships and long-term loans. The board is interested intellectually and reputationally and must be engaged in the conversation actively". Interviewee One B, a board governor of Museum One stated that "they have a Rapid Response Department' that's about acquiring objects for collection that reflect changes in society", to deal with issues of social justice, and he knows that "some objects are still in the museum that shouldn't be there morally", albeit this is on account of legal constraints. He adds that "the moral imperative gets complicated".

I suggest that they are flexibly and adaptively holding through the crisis because Interviewee One B says that "they're constrained, but the debate is always happening, it's at a stalemate at the moment, and not a priority of government, but if they are allowed to do it the board would debate". The "Rapid Response Department", only five to eight years old, is a routinized new solution to a long-term social pressure that reaches into the mandate of the institution and gets to the heart of moral form. Arguably this solution offers a larger long-term capacity to address social challenges than an issue-by-issue response as per restitution in particular, thereby allowing Museum One a newly structured mechanism to adapt quickly to any changes in legal constraint.

6.2.1.3 Systemically holding through the crisis

The British Museum, technically a legal form institution as subject to the National Heritage Act and the British Museum Act, also embodies the legal form through narrative and action. I posit that the British Museum is ***systemically holding through the crisis***. Despite the drama unfolding politically between the Greek and UK governments at the time, the Chair's report of the minutes of the British Museum, on December 3, 2023, showed that: "The Chair provided an update on his engagement with the Greek government on the potential for a Parthenon partnership. He informed the Trustees that the principles of a partnership, which would see reciprocal loans of objects, remained the focus of discussion" (British Museum minutes: 2023: 3). Therefore, as recently as this the British Museum is decidedly categorizing action on the Parthenon Sculptures as one of principles and process. Many news articles were occurring at the same time, as referenced in table seven, but did not factor in any new action on the part of the museum. That said, the museum held several extra meetings during the same period to address a different social issue, thus demonstrating a call to action on the part of the board of governors, documented in table five,

6.2.2 Theory two: A levered response to reputational risk

Regarding the second research aim, analysis supports the hypothesis that if reputational concerns surrounding museum responses to the restitution debates are significant enough, board and leadership decisions will reflect the reshaping of the museum, with models of change that provide direction for the field.

The data suggests a theory that museums are reshaping institutional identity through three mechanisms or solutions, shown herein as 1) an infrastructural lever, 2) an emotional lever, and 3) an intellectual lever. Three of the museums anonymously covered in this study are exemplars of each lever, these being, respectively, Museum Six, Museum Five and Museum One. Each example is described below in terms of the type of lever, narrative and vocabulary that supports the designation as a particular lever, and the type of action that organizes the lever, followed by how that action provides a pathway for followers along the vocabulary dimensions described in chapter five.

6.2.2.1 The infrastructural lever

Museum Six, the exemplar of the Infrastructural lever, has been expecting a considerable change to the exhibition of a high-profile cultural object for a significant period, and is reshaping the field through a **new facility** concept. This planning and shift in mindset afforded the museum, through successive leaders and a unique governing structure comprising government oversight, to make methodical decisions based on years of engagement. As described in chapters four and five, Interviewee Six A was clear about the directional change of the museum and shared that "Museum Six was given (the cultural object) twenty years ago with the caveat that they consult with Indigenous people for the next space". The government relations team supporting the museum, Interviewees Six B and C, asked those with whom they were engaging to make the new space, on the land at which the object was originally found, work. Said Interviewee Six B "what would it take? Fences, signs, roads"? A prominent Canadian architect was hired, they "bought

some pretty land" near the sight so that it would eventually be "easier to get land and a whole new design of an interpretive centre".

I argue that this is a frame breaking move, rarely do we see a solution across the international museum milieu, wherein a museum seeks to buy land, build a new structure, staff the structure, raise funds and employ government relations contractors to manifest a vision that will cost considerable money for capital and operating expenses. **The frame breaking action** exemplified by Museum Six's utilization of the infrastructural lever provides a pathway for government, policy-makers and funders across the political, engagement and curatorial dimensions to envisage possible new paths forward in the design and implementation of museum facilities in the future, towards the resolution of the restitution debates.

6.2.2.2 The emotional lever

Museum Five, the exemplar of the emotional lever, also demonstrated breakthrough decision making regarding the restitution of high-profile cultural objects and is reshaping the field through a **new process**. I argue that Museum Five made a breakthrough in the restitution process by leaning on strong and powerful statements at the board and CEO level, thus affecting change in the field. As stated above, Interviewee Five began his tenure at the museum with a moral imperative to act and change given the recognition that audience diversity was decreasing, and the museum was working to in parallel improve diversity on the board. Further, they were cognizant that they "pragmatically needed to respond to future claims". Interviewee Five stated that the board was "primed" and actively worked on the restitution case by moving quickly, as

there was “a moral case to be made and reputational damage if not returned”. Less constrained by legal acts, the board of Museum Five was sure to receive education on the issues, had hired a director clear about his point of view on the issue, and admittedly, were “not aware of the ripples this decision would have more widely”. Arguably, this was a brave decision, led by a Chair who wanted to move quickly on the issue as she was “stepping down in August and didn’t want a new Chair entangled”, and “didn’t want the trustee decision to be media driven”, and indeed they announced in August. A key engagement factor was the director’s decision to work with children through focus groups discussing the restitution case, about which Interviewee Five said, “these kids are moral creatures, and I got hundreds of letters from kids saying to give them back”. Thus, without legal constraints, decision-making could be localized to the director and board, with strong visioning, framing, education and engagement in place to support the newly formed governance structure of a restitution subcommittee wherein three members of the committee would make a recommendation to the board. The **dramatic action** exemplified by Museum Five’s utilization of the emotional lever provides a pathway for followers seeking to resolve the restitution dilemma along the purpose/mandate/policy, business/governance and reputational dimensions.

6.2.2.3 The intellectual lever

Museum One, the exemplar of the intellectual lever, has found a way to broadly address social justice issues. As mentioned above, Museum One hovers between the legal and moral form. As of now, they are governed under the National Heritage Act and are thus constrained from restituting cultural objects, therefore objectively placing them in a legal form category. However,

the vocabulary and positioning of Museum One shows a direction for moral form thinking, hence identified as a moral signifier. For instance, Interviewee One A is keen to ensure the museum is revisiting meaning vis-à-vis contemporary society, and that museum purpose should adapt with relevancy of mission to contemporaneity. He stresses that museums today need to be in the conversational mix of social issues while maintaining purpose and recognizes that a latent risk occurs as board members open themselves to political scrutiny.

To counteract this balance, and as considered in the theory that museums, when loosened from a legal form will need to be prepared for such risks, Museum One has demonstrated a breakthrough solution to overarching social justice concerns. This solution is identified herein as the "Rapid Response Team" highlighted by Interviewee One B. Interviewee One B stated that the creation of a "Rapid Response Team" five to eight years ago, was established to add to the collection of the museum cultural objects that "reflect changes in society", thus ensuring that collection practices are in place to reflect societal change. This mechanism could be used down the line if a legal change occurs to allow the museum to look at the restitution debates through this lens in collecting and exhibiting practice. Ergo, Museum One is reshaping the field through a **new routine**.

I suggest that Museum One has made a breakthrough change by introducing a new routine that gives room for staff to implement action and provides a method for museums to methodically address social issues as they arise. The museum can then collect and exhibit materials that represent phenomena through the core mandate of the museum, such as curation, education and collection. Arguably, this lever would provide a valuable new routine that, should Museum One

become freed from the constraints of the National Heritage Act, offers an outlet for educating the museum's audience on the era change that more routinized restitution would spark. The **systemic action** exemplified by Museum One provides a pathway for followers on political, business/governance, educational, purpose/mandate/policy, engagement, curatorial, and routine "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117).

6.2.3 Theory three: Scaling legitimacy through using power and voice

Regarding the third research aim, analysis supports the theory that boards and leaders who identify the reputational risk of the restitution debates shape the identity of the museum through stories, narratives, scripts and vocabulary. I theorize herein that leaders and boards attach legitimacy to decision making by drafting into broader social change vocabularies, as argued by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), and that this mechanism can be scaled up across institutions, amplified by media and reinforced by correlated academics to legitimate the introduction of era-shifting global change through "temporal acceleration".

As described in chapter five, Lounsbury posited that a period of transformation occurs in institutions when increased uncertainty occurs within its organizational milieu, allowing for the emergence of new practices, the restructuration of "status orders" and the redefinition of the "rules of engagement" (2002: 263). Loewenstein, Ocasio and Jones claimed that vocabularies are core to persuasive action (2005) in such circumstances. Suddaby and Greenwood argued that "profound institutional change" (2005:35) occurs as actors connect the new ideated form to more

largely understood phenomena in societal culture writ-large, and use “rhetorical devices” to make such connections (2005: 41).

Rhetorical devices either afford or prevent the legitimization of profound change. Such ideas build on Powell’s groundbreaking work about field changes, and how profound change can occur across a field. Powell posited that organizations entrenched in a field will protect institutional concerns and work to reinforce established actions to ensure past patterns can continue (Powell, 1991). In this study, the breaking of entrenchment was predicated partially from powerful language in the public realm on account of 1) The Guardian’s persistently increasing articles on the subject, and 2) the influential and well-read “Brutish Museums” (Hicks, 2020). Efforts relayed by interviewees for this study and through archival board meeting minutes underscore the momentum building for bold decisions. This momentum is aligned to three principles, leading to theory four.

6.2.4. Theory four: Scaling legitimacy through key principles

Theory four is underpinned by three principles that concern directional thinking and outcomes realized by museum directors and governors in response to the restitution debates. If we envisage the moral form as decisions undertaken by actors that change boundaries and allow new ways of thinking about institutional form, then the three principles theorized herein “create the possibility for redefinition of rules and assumptions” (Powell, 1991: 200), leading to positional advantages. These three principles are conceptualized herein as scaled legitimacy towards a new “Restitutional Era” through asset re-orientation, risk re-orientation, and market reorientation.

6.2.4.1 Scaled legitimacy through asset re-orientation

There are two key factors found in this study that describe how museum leaders and governors are scaling legitimacy to field restructuration through asset re-orientation. These involve display and collection. First, museums are rethinking the power of display by looking at new ways of showing cultural objects that respect the sacredness and object livingness that is growing as an area of understanding in the field. For instance, the Manitou Stone at the Royal Alberta Museum currently has a viewing space that was informed through consultation with Indigenous peoples and has a permanent new home in the planning stages that will exist on Indigenous determined land, in an Indigenous governed environment. Another example was shared by Interviewee Four B, who spoke of spaces at Museum Four that had been created only for Indigenous peoples. She spoke of cultural objects "held in a locked room that only Indigenous peoples could go in, even staff could not go in". "Object durationality" described in section 2.3.3 goes a long way to explain why there is an imperative and sensitivity growing among museum leaders and governors to make this shift away from a mentality of "curators owning the objects" as described by Interviewee Four B.

"Object durationality" is a primary indicator of why the second asset re-orientation principle of collection has changed. We see that objects are now released for ceremony, or restituted, and the old argument that objects are safer when held in a western museum begin to fail. First, the argument lost wind after the thefts reported in 2023 at the British Museum, and second, the argument is weakening as museums like the Acropolis in Greece and the new Grant Egyptian Museum have opened. In fact, when safety and security was mentioned by interviewees for this

study, (which was only nine times across 20 interviews, with three being from interviewee five), the point was how to ensure safety and security when transferring ownership or storing what the museum no longer owns. Said Interviewee Five “so they created a new rule to allow indemnity. No money changes hands but if anything happens to it, say it’s destroyed in a fire, then the (home country) government is simply compensated for value. But to get indemnity you need standards of fire mitigation”. Only Interviewee Five brought up the argument that objects are safer when stored in western museums, and as we can see, it was not in the context of agreeing with this position.

6.2.4.2 Scaled legitimacy through risk re-orientation

Museum leaders and governors are looking at new ways to scale legitimacy to field restructuration through re-orientation of risk. This involves the loss or gain mindset and the supposition that restitution affords a museum new academic and curatorial opportunities but also aligns the governance of the institution to a risk model wherein the removal of the objects leads to gain in reputation and potentially a gain in insurance or liability concerns. The best example of this is the frame-breaking perspective of Interviewees Six B and Six C, who are government relations advisors for Museum Six. Interviewee Six B held a strong perspective that restitution is a moral imperative, so it is important to keep this in mind given his later comments. As a reminder, he stated that “this (restitution) is something that settlers can really say, we did a wrong thing, and we can change that. This is an actual act of reconciliation”. He went on to say that “the objects can be a liability now”, and when the object transitions from asset to liability,

the board has a new fiduciary problem with which to contend, and ultimately, if a board does not make the restitution, is it too much of a risk to continue to sit on that board.

6.2.4.3 Scaled legitimacy through market re-orientation

Finally, the boards of museums are scaling legitimacy to field restructuration through market re-orientation. We see a shift in how museum directors position the institution with their boards to handle restitution tensions by using borrowed vocabulary from bigger societal directions. The outcome is a museum with increased potential for growth in market share. A prime example is the Horniman Museum's methodical steps in addressing a potential market problem vis-à-vis lack of proportional diverse representation in the institution compared to the region leading to purposeful growth in diversity on the board, then education regarding diversity as relates to restitution, followed by a breakthrough outcome. This outcome was shaped by a concerted effort to engage schoolchildren not simply as passive bystanders and visitor statistics, but as engaged shapers of institutional policy and board recommendations.

Museum Four, as told by Interviewee Four B, is actively researching cultural objects that the curatorial team believes to be contested material and assisting the probable owners in the return of said material. Furthermore, they are keeping cultural objects in locked rooms for viewing by Indigenous peoples only. Both actions steer the institution away from simple dynamics of measuring audience and people who walk through the door, which is assuredly a metric used by boards and government regulators to measure institutional success and potential granting opportunities. That said, by flexibly opening up new thinking both inside and external to the

space, and whom they engage with to animate those real and abstract spaces, museum actors are widening the intellectual opportunities to grow and gain form new academic and artistic pursuits that will be attracted to the institution.

6.3 Summary of major results

Results of this study are organized vis-à-vis the four key schematics defined in chapter two and discussed in chapter four, these being reputation, engagement, framing and visioning. Further, each result addresses the four arguments presented in chapter four. These are identified as follows:

6.3.1 Reputation schematic

Argument: We see heterogeneity *across* museums but homogeneity *within* museums as differentiated by the moral form (exemplified by the Horniman Museum) and the legal form (exemplified by the British Museum) responses to restitution tensions. The moral form acts as a proxy of broader societal shifts that leaders and governors use to buffer the institution from risk and vulnerability to reputational issues. As the moral form grows internationally, as evidenced in chapter four, homogeneity increases, leading to a proposed restitutional era, but will not be achieved unless the British Museum restitutes the Parthenon Sculptures and adopts the moral form, given the outsize role the British Museum inhabits in the debates. Should this happen, we would move a long way toward the manifestation of a homogenous field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and a more comprehensive opportunity for reputational analysis.

Result: Directors and board governors are observationally aligned in manifesting a "playable game" through actions and vocabulary that is helping museums move past the tensions inherent in restitution debates. All five scatter plots in tables eleven to fifteen in this study show interviewee areas of concern across all four schematics, but the breakthrough change is shown in the narrative to be that of institutional singularity. These unique reputational responses, taken together with the narrative story arc in the case studies, describe decisions that in aggregate form a toolkit of measures to deal with discursive controversy.

A key finding in this study is that no director or board member *interviewed* for this study shared a perspective that did not show alignment between management and board. Homogeneity within institutions was strongly reinforced by both Interviewee Two A and Interviewee Five, who expressed deliberate awareness of their persuasive principles regarding restitution by their board governors prior to their accepting their roles. Interviewee Two A shared that the board knew what they were getting, and Interviewee Five's job interview was sure to address cohesiveness on the debates. Furthermore, the board meeting minutes included in this study show a flow of information and decision-making from meeting to meeting that has a linear logic and no apparent signs of dissent, or need for special board meetings, or protracted conversations, for any of the three museums studied. Board members and staff regularly spoke of the work that had been mutually achieved and that was on future agendas, especially as demonstrated by Interviewees Ten A and Ten B. Regardless of institutional position on restitution, reputation is protected by consistent application of decision-making rationale, buffering individuals on the board from public critique. Both Horniman Museum leadership and governors treated the Benin Bronzes restitution project at the museum in a crisis-like manner, reacting to the Sarr/Savoy study in 2018

explicitly. They affected a rigorous methodology sensitive to a looming deadline of the departure of the board chair at the time, who was highly attuned to the issues, and keen to steer the institution through a dramatic reputational moment (Merriman, 2024).

Interestingly, the British Museum, the heterogeneous example as described above, also shows a strong example of heterogeneity regarding reputational positioning within the institution. One board member, Ahdaf Soueif, exited the board in 2019 given the museum's stance on restitution among other issues. As reported in Museums Journal, Soueif stated that "(t)he British Museum, born and bred in empire and colonial practice, is coming under scrutiny. And yet it hardly speaks" (Kendall Adams, 2019, www.museumsassociation.org).

6.3.2 Visioning schematic

Argument: As museums align to a moral or legal form in addressing restitution, the moral form adopters are affecting a new governing identity associated with breakthrough change in the conceptualization of institutional purpose, leading to new actions, processes, and curatorial opportunities.

Result: Moral form decisions taken by governors and leaders of museums are leading to a breakthrough. Moral form decisions are executed by directors and governors who personalize the reputational risk associated with not acting on opportunity. Ongoing engagement with Indigenous peoples in cases such as Museum Six and Museum Eight show a developing embrace of new vision for how museums collect, show, interact with, and let go of, cultural objects.

"Object durationality" and sensitivities to infrastructural decisions are becoming active levers in re-establishing how leading museum figures picture the purpose and identity of the institution. New vision makes room for alternative ideas regarding mandate, as in Museum Seven, or staffing and priorities, as in Museum Ten.

There are examples of large institutions taking considerable risk, such as Museum Seven in the United States, but with respect to the two most pressing restitution cases in the world, the cases of the Parthenon Marbles and the Benin Bronzes, advances have been made by a small, nimble institution. Both the British Museum, as the primary international restitution narrative example by way of their handling of the Parthenon Sculptures, and the Horniman Museum, in its handling of the Benin Bronzes, have experienced material public critique and stress-testing of decision-making. The Horniman Museum's treatment of the Benin Bronzes, and the Royal Alberta Museum's treatment of the Manitou Stone have achieved breakthrough actions, hat offer a template set of behaviours, actions, protocols and policies that now lead the field.

6.3.3 Framing schematic

Argument: The global restitution tensions could be thought of as urgent, or even a crisis both academically and increasingly in media rhetoric. However, museum boards are not evenly treating the situation as a crisis of reputation or threat to assets and market share, as in the case of the routinization of the issue by the British Museum. Even across the moral form, there is heterogeneity across institutions regarding whether a crisis or routine response is manifest, thus showing a comparative difference in institutional framing.

Result: No board members or directors interviewed in this study described the restitution tensions within their museum, or across the field, explicitly as a crisis. No interviewees in this study referred to the restitution tensions as routine. That said, the actions taken by Museums Five and Six to push for unique and timely restitutions certainly demonstrated urgency. Analysis of the board meeting minutes shows that reporting did not frame the restitution debates or organizational decisions as a crisis, but the actions of directors and board members certainly showed urgency and crisis-like action, primarily through the restitution efforts undertaken by the Horniman Museum. The Horniman Museum comes closer to a crisis reaction, and the board was fully aware of the reputational issues involved in the case, and that the issue had reached a "tipping point" (Merriman, 2024: 1) and they should embrace leading in a "watershed moment" (ibid: 65). So, they acted quickly, methodically and with precision, in a crisis-like manner, with due attention, special committees, and consistent address during board meetings, using effective engagement techniques.

Moreover, the British Museum has organized the discussions of the debates as routine. This, even though the British Museum, oft described as being in crisis over the issue, does not react in a crisis manner during board meetings, despite having done so regarding other, more fleeting issues.

6.3.4 Engagement schematic

Argument: The discourse enveloping the debates is showing several consistent dimensions that appear in the narrative museum cases, thus informing a documentable vocabulary categorizing

decision-making by museum leaders and governors as they visualize and strategize towards a restitution response and frame the next era of museums. Vocabulary is a primary tool for engaging with internal and external audiences of the institution.

Result: Individuals are making a difference. Museum five's work to amplify the voices of schoolchildren, Museum ten's foregrounding of the voices of Indigenous peoples, Museum One and Two's directors' strong thought leadership across the field, and Museum Eight's director having arrested the room at a UNESCO meeting, all show powerful directional momentum in establishing a next era in addressing restitution.

6.4 Overall contribution of findings to research

The findings in this study will help build a vocabulary of the debates, topics and issues overarching the strategy of museums, and track how leadership and boards are demonstrating "temporal acceleration" towards the future through breakthrough decisions and actions. We see distributed power and voice, and increased academic and curatorial outputs that configure new exhibitions, narratives and partners, as well as increased collaboration and story-telling that enriches the scholarship and educational capacity of museums. This story is about how culture can sweep across continents through networks and actions (Godart and Galunic, 2019; Scott and Davis, 2007). We now know how to structure institutions (Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003; McDonnell, King and Soule, 2015; Swartz, 1996) and we know that pressure causes institutions to succeed or fail (McDonnell, King and Soule, 2015). In this examination of museums,

distributed power and voice, and imprinting vocabulary to broader social agency, leads to a breakthrough in how we think of museums in terms of academic and curatorial gain.

There is significant potential for cultural material to swing from an asset to a liability, as reputational harm from holding on to contested objects increases, and potential risk of harm to the objects themselves increases given the current heightened and charged media environment. The latter also creates an increased climate of risk for board members regarding the perpetuation or challenge to their elite status gleaned from sitting on cultural boards. Status could change from positive to negative if the public and the media turn on individual members as representatives of the aforementioned reputational risks.

A shift in the foregrounding of fiduciary duty to moral duty in the restitution debates as evidenced in proposed changes to the Charity Act of 2022 has significant implications on the decision of board members to accept, or not, board positions at institutions with cultural objects that pose reputational challenges to the institution and individual members. If board members are to make a moral decision, on behalf of an institution, their personal beliefs will be a matter of public record, and the board could be perceived as having acted on personal moral values, rather than fiduciary duty.

We can identify a distinct period when a breakthrough occurred in the changing of an era for the museum field. From 2000 forward, with the rallying cry from Colin Renfrew to both academics and practitioners, through to the statement from Dan Hicks that 2015 is a definitive, visible period in the shift of public perception regarding Benin Bronzes, culminating in the Sarr/Savoy

report commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron, we have a crescendo of activity, and a cacophony of news media that has tipped the scales toward the manifestation of behaviours and decisions predicted by organizational theory.

6.5 Five brief insights

First, political pressure and oversight are influencing board and leadership decisions on either side of the debates. Second, legal leverage has taken a big step forward with the February 2022 Charities Act and the introduction of the moral decision for board governors. Third, pressure from civil society is working to drive the engagement agenda of institutions, and individual board members are cross-referencing their other boards to address reputation issues facing the institution. Fourth, security arguments regarding whether cultural material was or will be safe it its home region have quietened. Fifth, Cultural material is conceptualized as having agency, power, a biographical life – including ancestry – and a future of its own, around which ceremony and space is to be academically and practically renewed. Taken together, these insights show the shaping of the governance of a field, reminiscent of DiMaggio's work, wherein actions internal and external to the institution multiplied and scaled to create new norms and actions that are on the verge of defining a nascent new era in the museum field.

6.6 Unexpected results

An unexpected result concerns how relatively rarely interviewees spoke about the opportunities to address restitution through innovative curatorial dimensions. I had expected considerable

conversation on this topic. There were few references to addressing risk or reputation through the primary vehicle through which museums communicate, that being art. On reflection, it seems surprising that there was no ideating in the conversations about innovations in art, or the commissioning, say, of artists to experiment with the issue, except notably with Museum Ten. That said, we know that there are many exhibitions around the world that are experimenting with artistic methods of addressing restitutional tensions. One hauntingly beautiful example was shown at the British Museum in 2023, effectively juxtaposing work by African artist El Anatsui with the Benin Bronzes, telling an effective story of place, position and curatorial directionality.

6.7 Relation of findings to literature review

Looking at the findings in this study through the lens of the literature review in chapter two layers additional perspective into just how far the restitution debates have come in the last half decade and shows that worries of worst-case scenarios for museums in affecting a "return" stance are not playing out. The findings are considered below in five contexts, these being 1) the case for and against restitution, 2) eras of the museum, 3) vis-à-vis organizations and governance knowledge, 4) vis-à-vis vocabulary, and 5) in accordance with the objects themselves.

6.7.1 On the case for and against restitution

Tiffany Jenkins book effectively summarizes the restitution debates into the issues put forward by Cuno establishing the priority of affording the public an encyclopedic venue in which to view, compare and learn about cultures and art. She emphasizes the arguments regarding the reputational problem for museums in holding looted objects, and the value that return would

afford receiving communities. Her claim that the debates were repositioning museums unfavorably into a defensive position, criticized for social ills, and in her argument unfairly, was a strong one, especially at the time. This thesis, as stated previously, does not attempt to argue for or against restitution, but rather looks at restitution as a debate that is shaping institutions, in much the same way as demonstrated by Jenkins, but with the benefit of another decade of activity, and finds a different conclusion. Jenkins argues that act of restitution comprises a "strategy aimed at trying to 'big up' these kinds of museums – improve their reputations – which could backfire in the long run as too much will be expected of them, whilst at the same time the core roles they do perform (research and dissemination) will be undervalued" (Jenkins, 2016: 232-233). She adds that society "will not find the solution to present-day conflicts in museums" (ibid: 233).

In this thesis, I argue that quite the opposite has happened. In fact, the restitution debates have situated museums as leaders in sorting out a defined process that can be extracted from individual cases within a defined period, showing the steps and narrative that shored up institutional reputation, exemplifying new value of research and dissemination in representing the cultural materials and perspectives through a living history. The debates have shown that museums are critical and successful institutions in addressing issues that matter to civil society. Recent restitutions have resulted in optimistic, and even joyful responses, especially in schoolchildren, who are the future audience of the field. Jenkins writes that the restitution debates "demand a great deal from museums and old objects in instrumental terms: they have great expectations of these institutions and treasures. But these expectations cannot possibly be fulfilled" (ibid: 233). I argue that nearly ten years on, the objects have taken on a strong "object

durationality"; they are subjects in the story of civil society and decision-making. Indeed, the expectations have been fulfilled with a rich potential for future innovation, experimentation, and artistic imagination and research.

6.7.2 On the Professionalization, and Super-Professionalization eras

In chapter two, the Paul DiMaggio "professionalization" era of the museum is described in terms of the rising importance of the employee in establishing strategic direction for the institution, and museums as a field through burgeoning professionalism. DiMaggio, writing in the early 1990s, was looking at the era of the 1920s to 1940s. His work defined the importance of the organization undertaken by professionals in refining common roles, while noting that the philanthropic power of elites in the governance of the institutions broadly enhanced the infrastructure of museums and the diffusion of their form across the field. He described a growing tension between the governors and the professionals that resulted in a richer clarity of institutional structure of museums resulting in better pay for staff, new educational staff, and better relationships with cities thus lifting the power of the employees, a growing interest in art in society, and an uptick in art education, expertise, consumption and research.

Chapter two then describes a Super-professionalization era described by Victoria Alexander in her research on museums as they operated during the 1960s to 1980s. Alexander described the scenario of museums in this period as one wherein professionals worked to maintain their autonomy and withstand the external pressures against the institution. Alexander describes a burgeoning era of power exercised by wealthy and influential funders that caused professionals

to creatively gain control over curatorial content by staging blockbuster exhibitions. These blockbusters and travelling shows attract strong market share and held integrity in scholarly analysis and proved that resources in a museum could be controlled by professionals through creative work (Alexander, 1996).

The story of eras can be thought of in terms of voice and power. From the 1920s to 1940s, DiMaggio argued that professionalization was becoming established, and professionals were identifying the broad characteristics of their work that gave it legitimacy, and the agency to regain control of the resourcing of museums (DiMaggio, 1991). Now, we see that the strong professional linkages between institutions have resulted in a coherent set of voices on a major institutional risk resulting in clarity within each institution on which lane to draft into to enforce institutional position. We see that the successes by professionals to harness resources to reinforce professional position by creating blockbusters through which curatorial creativity could be exercised is now scaled further to achieve societal position. This societal positioning looks like an adherence to a moral or legal form that both opens the institution to breakthrough decision-making or closes the institution to legal harm, either way affording the institutional governors and leaders a powerful voice with which to collectively engage with society and respond to risk and reputational pressures.

6.7.3 On organizations, governance and vocabulary

A primary point relating the findings of this study to the academic discourse that has richly grown over the past few decades is as follows. Jenkins argued that museums could not win

should they become boxed into a zero-sum game of restitution, thus placing the institutions writ-large in a worrying position of excessive social responsibility (Jenkins, 2016). This study shows that the opposite has occurred since her hypothesis was published. I argue that the museums that are affecting internationally recognized change in the restitution matter are led by boards and directors who respond to social challenges in a visible and transparent manner using "persuasive language, or rhetorical strategy" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005:41). Furthermore, using innovative solutions regarding asset re-orientation, risk re-orientation and market re-orientation to legitimately create meaning (Weick, 1995), these leading museums achieve breakthroughs in structure and process (Lounsbury, 2002), seen here as infrastructural, intellectual and emotional, and demonstrate capacity to model the framing and visioning required to manifest social change.

6.7.4 On the objects themselves

When Tasdelen wrote of the human capacity to have a "bond with objects" (2016:4), the museum field was just beginning to comprehend the vast scotoma experienced in art museums concerning the display of cultural objects that are so much more than an object to the peoples who hold them dear. In this study, we see how "object durationality" is being realized in meaningful new ways by breakthrough institutions, leading to a defining characteristic of a nascent new era of the field. "Object durationality" is a hallmark of the current "Discursive Collision Era", the link that connects the past to the future, embracing Indigenous scholarship, and ways of knowing and being. The term springs from Hicks' thinking about "duration" (Hicks, 2020:36) and how museums have been used as weapons, but we can move past this, and make bold, definitive decisions that re-position the museum away from its colonial past.

A quintessential example of this change and growth concerns an important cultural object, the Manitou Stone described at length in this thesis. The Manitou Stone display area has been reimagined to ease ceremonial relations, and further, it is being moved to a new space that will honour its past, present and future. This act of restitution fully considers the history of the stone as an ancestor and ceremonial relative and is demonstrative of genuine reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. As Interviewee Six B stated, “this is an actual act of reconciliation”.

In this chapter I have shown how the “Discursive Collision Era”, largely through “object durationality” and “temporal acceleration”, is giving way to a “Restitutional Era”, through five key actions that address framing, visioning, engagement, reputation and vocabulary considerations by directors and board governors of museums. I build on these actions to submit four theories that through directional responses, levered responses, using power and voice, and exercising three new principles we are seeing a system-influencing acceleration of breakthrough museum governance in the nascent era.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the narrative of this thesis follows museum directors and board governors as they grapple with the restitution debates and manage the discursive claims and controversies that materially impact museum governance and strategy.

7.1 Research significance and contributions

I argue that museum governance is moving through discursive controversy towards a proposed "Restitutional Era". The argument follows a path wherein a situational context pressured externally by the Sarr Savoy report (2018), calls to return the Parthenon Sculptures (table one), and the Benin Bronzes (Hicks, 2020) are magnified by international calls to action such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). This context is shaped by institutional legacy as the "Professionalization Era" (DiMaggio, 1991), gives rise to the "Super-professionalization Era" (Alexander, 1996), leading up to the current "Discursive Collision Era" (Hicks, 2020, Hicks and Ladewig, 2026) bringing the tensions to a boil.

Meanwhile, the governance decision platform, informed by organizational, governance and vocabulary scholarship over decades is coalescing around a "legal form" and a "moral form" wherein the British Museum Act (1963) and the Charities Act (2022) square off in key museums

such as the British Museum and the Horniman Museum and Gardens, respectively, leaving the former definitively as a critical site of tension and debate.

The moral form museums are taken specific action. These museums frame the future by paying attention to reputation, risk and communications. They vision new solutions, like expanding digital collections. They engage differently with the civil society, their audience and the cultural objects themselves, by thinking through an "object durationality" lens. They work on reputation by engaging with unexpected sources of power, and finally, imprint vocabulary on scalable concerns.

These actions lead to theories that directional responses undertaken by museum actors, such as moving with the crisis, extending through the crisis, and systematically holding through the crisis, will steady the organization. Three critical levers inform momentum to decisions, centering on infrastructural, emotional and intellectual solutions. Museum directors and governors are using power and voice to scale legitimacy by layering coded vocabulary onto institutional tensions. They further scale legitimacy through asset, risk and market reorientation.

It must be acknowledged that we do not have the full picture of how the restitution debates including the impacts of public policy documents, and bold actions by museums are going to play out in the long term. The data is challenging in that it is a point in time study and limited to a bound set of leaders and governors, and there is much yet to be discovered, especially as geopolitical landscapes continue to shift. But with the current state of understanding and having done the work herein to analyze triangulated data, a breakthrough across continents has been

identified and provides an exciting path for future inquiry. Moreover, this research has relevance to broader complex societal debates for which governors of institutions experiencing field-level tensions are subjected.

7.2 Limitations of the study

Limitations of this study are described herein in terms of methodological and theoretical claims. As stated in chapter three, the limitations in research design concern the coding of dimensions, and the thesis relies on the strength of these dimensions to support arguments and claims. The dimensions were established intuitively based on repetitive themes and ideas that resonated through the literature review, and they are subject to personal values and biases that emerged in the analysis of the text fragments. These dimensions are abstractions and vulnerable to interpretational shifts in definition of the vocabulary as understood by readers over time.

Practical limitations in the study concern the quantity of responses of interviewees, and the resulting higher number of museum directors versus board members in the set of interviews, wherein a greater number overall, and a stronger balance would have been preferred, but was not granted by institutions, or agreed to by individuals. Given language barriers, more rigorous pursuit of museums in Germany and France that are germane to restitution concerns prevented the inclusion of interesting museums, such as the Humboldt Forum, in the empirical set. That said, the final set comprised a satisfying volume of institutions to study without over-saturating the data pool and exhausting the narrative arc.

The assignment of moral and legal framing that supports the claims and arguments in this thesis is susceptible to challenge regarding stricter, or more philosophical meaning given there are no absolutes in either realm. Furthermore, the schematic levers that structurally support the data, including reputation, engagement, framing and visioning, were established through reading and re-reading the data, and drawing these themes from that which is experienced in my own governance and executive work.

7.3 Alternative explanations and arguments for position

Alternative explanations and arguments could be made from the findings in this study. For instance, if the reputational and risk dimensions were not foregrounded as key topics shared in the interview questions, the data might not have supported a delineation forming between moral or legal forms. Thus, it follows that an entirely different rationale could be established to explain why some museums are moving faster and more boldly into resolving the restitution debates. Moreover, the research could have taken a direction that did not privilege the conversational interviews as discrete experiments, as it does in this thesis, thus highly valuing the persuasiveness of the interviewees. In a scenario that does not emphasize narrative, the vocabulary argument would have been less material, and a different direction, say, looking at quantitative data, such as audience numbers or museum reviews could be used to show how museums are feeling the impact of the debates, and thus if any outputs have changed that could show a directional change into a new era.

7.4 New insights for theory and practice

There are three insights for theory and practice ascertained through the arc of this research project. These include 1) that museum directors and governors can rethink how they mandate activities and resources in the institution, primarily concerning gain and loss, and flip how the act of "holding on" can become a liability; 2) the protracted efforts to resolve the debates over decades has resulted in an unexpected positive consequence of expanding the collective worldview to effectually give more voice, and power, to objects, and 3) as the restitution debates have continued, innovations to digitally capture collections and imagine collections in new ways has arguably increased the breadth of value in the body of cultural objects held by a museum, as academic and curatorial resources.

7.5 Future lines of inquiry and final summary

Further lines of inquiry are exciting to consider in artistic, organizational and board governance terms as follow up scholarship to this research. The first line of inquiry involves potential artistic contributions based on themes presented in this research. For instance, what if there was an international call to artists in Africa to make something for all the spaces from where cultural material had been looted. A worldwide cultural project spanning all countries concerned could be imagined with artistic and research value. The stand-alone museum would become less static, and the concept of collecting could be relaxed while showcasing a new era solution that speaks visually to society. That which remained in the collections could be opened for active research, much like Marina Abramovic did with her 2023 show in two parts, at the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Oxford Contemporary Art Gallery.

Further artistry could be built on the picture presented by Hicks in “The Brutish Museums”. Hicks talks about how “(t)his global shift is unstoppable: from the museum as end-point to the museum as process” (Hicks, 2020: 234), what if the global shift became a show, an exhibition worldwide that communicated the changes in curatorial practice, in thinking about how cultural objects have a sacred-ness, a history, a family, a place in the future. Berlin’s project of the brass nameplates in front of homes from where Jewish people were brutally taken from their homes during the Holocaust could serve as an artistic example.

In organizational and governance terms, possible future topics of exploration include looking at changes in job descriptions, and whether boards see museums as an open system or a closed system, as relates to stakeholders, and broader public policy. Moreover, a project might look at how boards across a field are homogenizing in response to new social controversies. Another project could comprise interviews of the heads of education programs, and the new generation of museum professionals to understand if or how these practicing professionals see a new era developing in museums. Research questions could include inquiry regarding what they see as new issues, and what they say about acquisitions. In twenty years, these professionals will be shaping museums, thus important questions arise regarding how their work affects the ongoing machinery of each institution, how that is reported to the board, and how the gestalt of their work impacts the direction of the field.

In summary, the act of grappling with restitution controversies, over decades, is a responsibility and institutional calling that signals field level breakthrough demonstrated in actions, histories and plans carried out by elite museums internationally. The future, responsive museum is

manifesting a new identity for individuated institutions, and the field more broadly, ushering in a nascent, and proposed “Restitutional Era”. Inherent in this era are tools and narratives that are useful to boards across civil society in addressing sweeping social issues that affect decision-making germane to the ongoing governance of institutions responsible for the public good.

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TABLE ONE

Restitution Timeline

Note: This table is not a comprehensive timeline of all material restitution decisions, documents and policies, rather, it serves as an accompaniment to the thesis, highlighting references and cultural moments addressed herein. These references are either directly quoted in the body of the thesis, or indirectly sourced as informative materials.

YEAR	ITEM
1812	"Curse of the Minerva" poem, Lord Byron waxes poetic on the restitution of the "Elgin Marbles" back to Greece
1954	The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
1963	British Museum Act
1970	UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
1978	UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Return of Cultural Property to its Country of Origin and for its Restitution in Case of Illegal Acquisition
1982	Melina Mercouri, Greek celebrity and politician pleas for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece at the UNESCO International Conference of Ministers of Culture in Mexico
1983	British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles
1983	UK National Heritage Act concerning deaccessioning collections
1990	US Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
1995	UNIDROIT (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects
1999	Parthenon Sculptures cleaning controversy
2000	UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation: Secretariat Report
2000	UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport Spoliation Advisory Panel
2002	Declaration on the Value and Importance of Universal Museums
2004	Human Tissue Act
2004	Parthenon 2004 campaign (90 actors and MPs in favour of restitution)
2007	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2009	Holocaust Return of Cultural Objects Act
2009	The Guardian Poll "Time to Return the Marbles"
2009	Acropolis Museum opens
2014	The George and Amal Clooney effect

2014	Loan of Parthenon Marbles to Russia
2015	Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2016	Alberta, Canada, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Repatriation Act
2017	Emmanuel Macron's 2017 Ouagadougou speech
2018	Report on the Restitution of Cultural Heritage by Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron
2020	African Foundation for Development "Return of the Icons: The restitution of African artefacts & human remains project mapping report
2022	The Horniman Museums and Gardens in the UK returns six objects in the Benin Bronze collection to Nigeria
2022	Canadian Museums Association "Moved to action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums" report
2023	Then UK PM Rishi Sunak and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis diplomatic row involving the Parthenon Sculptures

TABLE TWO

Sample image of empirical interview notes, with name and organization redacted.

Empirical Interview Notes
Name and organization redacted, Interviewee 1A, February 22, 2021

- I said that I am noticing that executives are making governance decisions, not boards, and he says that is right.
- Risk is captured in risk register, through director of finance and board spends one day on risk annually, reported through audit committee
- "the board itself is more theatrical"
- Legally they can't repatriate, but they can do substantial partnerships and long-term loans, board interested intellectually and reputationally, and must be engaged in the conversation actively, once a year it's on the agenda.
- On museum purpose – museums are adapting, go back to the founding mission and think about it in 21st century focus on education, democratic civic ethos of opening the collection and focus on being storehouse of creativity and innovation, unlike National Gallery (sublime art) or British Museum (enlightenment).
- Meaning revisited in contemporary society – make mission relevant today, still an important role for (Museum One).
- Non-negotiables = be transparent, accountable, globally engaged, and have a digital footprint.
- Board does need updating on expertise of board (matrix) – very bureaucratic and political need to be continually reviewing.
- Talked about need for CIO – same place as colleges in Alberta, can't afford, but need, can raise money for core business but not a CIO.
- On my first research question "powerful question" – does your patron body want to come for a nice experience and not be hit over the head with climate change etc., and yet to be shaper of conversation you have to be involved in those issues. Don't talk down to membership body, challenge your staff and activist base, have to have a consumer and mixed economy, not just sponsored by state, you want to have a creative response to those social justice issues while not losing track of purpose, etc., as not a museum of social justice. Don't lose space in conversation.
- On my second research question – (museums will) be held to account by diversity of staff, audiences, programming and collections and held to account internally and externally. Key point with modern world not inside and outside the tent = creators, curators and activists. But in UK they also have a conservative government that doesn't like them being too far out of mainstream of government. How do you maintain cutting edge in conservative milieu. Agency of government situation, like colleges, important function of government but strength of civil society comes from independence of colleges, museums, and civil service.
- The political heat (especially US) and accountability by activist groups to museum trustees like Whitney and Met, that even though they're not in charge and just donors, that just taking on a role of trustee of board is opening yourself up politically.

TABLE THREE

"Sensitizing concepts" written as phrases during coding process (Charmaz, 2014: 117).

"Sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117)
1. Political and government influence, responsibility and direction. 2. Legal orientation and boundaries. 3. Business, governance, strategy and the running of the institution. 4. Moral, reputational, and ESG, with a tone of "the right thing to do". 5. Safety and security of objects past, present, future and in transport. 6. Education of staff and audience. 7. Purpose, mandate and policy of the institution. 8. Engagement, including media and mentions of civil society. 9. Curatorial, including oversight and direction of the cultural resources, and collections. 10. Routine.

TABLE FOUR

Linkage between "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117), "focused codes (ibid: 138), and development of constructivist grounded theories (ibid: 239).

"Sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014: 117)	"Focused codes" (ibid: 138)	Constructivist grounded theories (ibid: 239)
A. Political B. Legal C. Business/governance D. Moral/reputational/ESG E. Safety and Security F. Education G. Purpose/mandate/policy H. Engagement I. Curatorial J. Routine	Deepening attention to reputation, risk and communications. (**B,C,D,H**) Increasing expansion of digital solutions and vision. **(C,D,F,G,H,I)** Responding with sensitivity to object durationality and alternative voices. **(D,F,G,H,I)** Engaging with unexpected sources of power. **(A,C,D,F,H)** Framing through drafting institutional language to bigger global priorities**.** **(A,C,D,F,G,H,I)**	1. Directionally responding to real or perceived crisis by moving with the crisis, adaptively extending through crisis, or systemically holding through crisis. 2. Leveraging responses to institutional risk using infrastructural, emotional or intellectual levers. 3. Scaling legitimacy vocabulary to shape and restructure the field through perpetuation of the legal form or adoption of the moral form.

TABLES FIVE and SIX

List of case studies and interview categorization of museum CEOs and board members.

These tables categorize twenty interviews and case narratives in the case studies. The interviewees in table five comprise chief executives, senior leaders, board chairs and board members from eleven museums. The interviewees in table six comprise field experts. The interviewees in table five work across the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and New Zealand, and the interviewees in table six work in the United Kingdom and Poland. All interviews occurred from February 22, 2021, to May 2, 2025.

The interviewee numbering in this table has been ordered as per date of interview, except when a second person has been interviewed for one museum. In these cases, the second interviewee's data appear underneath that of the first interviewee's data to keep each museum in a cluster.

For line of sight to varying governance structures across institutions, this research clarifies whether the board of the museums studied are typical, with external and internal appointees; academic, with affiliations to a university; or government, wherein governance of the institution is overseen by government.

The type of museum is established based on institutional operating expenses from consolidated financial statements pulled from annual reports in 2022/2023, as follows:

- immense = $501 million to $2 billion in annual operating dollars
- mega = $100 million to $500 million in annual operating dollars
- substantial = $26 million to $99 million in annual operating dollars
- modest = $5 million to $25 million in annual operating dollars

TABLE FIVE

Museum number, and Interviewee number/ type	Location and type of museum and researcher - designated governance structure	Date of interview	Number of board members	CEO length of service at time of interview	Number of annual regular board meetings	Key statements about policy and practice of restitution	Key statements about board governance of restitution
Museum One Interviewee One A, CEO	UK mega museum with typical board structure	Feb 22, 2021	14	Four years	6	"Board interested intellectually and reputationally, and must be engaged in the conversation actively, once a year it's on the agenda.	"The board itself is more theatrical." "The political heat (especially in US) and accountability by activist groups to museum trustees like Whitney and Met, that even though they're not in charge and just donors, that just taking on a role of trustee of a board is opening yourself up politically."
Museum One Interviewee One B, board member	As above	Feb 20, 2025	As above	Eight years	As above	"They're constrained but the debate is always happening, but it's at a stalemate at the moment and not a priority of government, but we're allowed to do it."	"Boards would debate and decolonization is a tricky word that means different things to different people…shouldn't use it."
Museum Two Interviewee Two A, CEO	UK modest museum with academic governance structure	Mar 3, 2021 and Nov 25, 2022	19	Five and six years respectively	Not publicly available	"Description of governance structure of (Museum Two), procedures for claims, etc., is on website, and policy/process approved by governors."	"When directors are not political appointments, this (decolonialization) is the work they're doing in museums." "University collections don't have the same kind of boards, so if China comes for collections, what happens to that? What do you do to avoid a big diplomatic problem?"
Museum Two Interviewee	As above	April 28, 2023	As above	Seven years	As above	"Repatriation or restitution is a process of rebuilding not just returning, enabling people to access their cultural history. We should not privilege legal and policy over moral imperatives, gestures of return,	"Museums are subject to ideology, not just regulation. So the board's responsibility is not just to regulation but ideologies, so when people are safe to make ideological decisions, they'll push for change, and more imaginative

Two B, staff member						what do we want these repatriations to look like in the future. Decisions today are the making of history and what we want for the future." "Traditions and regulatory frameworks are invented. There's an understanding that when we talk about object returns, and talk about title, ownership and usage, then we say that other platforms with regulatory frameworks…and the people behind the boards, and behind them, for instance repatriation is a trojan horse, and then what's next?"	choices. This is about leadership, where people are supported for positive shifts…institutional change equals shifting systems, so use language that doesn't alienate but invites."
Museum Three Interviewee Three, CEO	UK modest museum with hybrid of typical and academic governance structure	Apr 23, 2021 and Dec 2, 2022	19	Seven and eight years respectively at time of interview	Not publicly available	"They have established a policy for restitution of cultural objects on the website." Director "has been writing a repatriation statement."	"The process is that the University has laid out on the return of cultural objects (considers) each claim on a case-by-case basis and that goes as a case to the board of visitors (for museum) and then the board recommends."
Museum Four Interviewee Four A, senior staff	Canadian substantial museum with typical board structure	Oct 22, 2021	17	Five years	4	"Repatriation is in chief curator area – standing topic on board agenda, so when they are ready, they deal with it and board has to approve, unlikely to say no."	"We have a wonderful board and have kept them informed on short-term and long-term decisions. They have not pushed us to do more. Have endorsed sacrifices." Management includes on agenda "what are you doing and what can we learn from you. They've applauded and supported decisions and asked how to help…Board very focused on long term, and now, employee morale and what they can do."
Museum Four Interviewee Four B, board member	As above	May 2, 2025	As above	Nine years	4	"They'd come to the board, staff would present, here's object with board, and board would approve. Never didn't approve but asked questions about how it worked, process."	"How to do the right thing and make sure reputation of (Museum Four) was maintained."
Museum Five	UK modest museum with typical board structure	Apr 20, 2023	12	Five years	6	"All claims reported to the board." CEO "recommended to the board they get a repatriation procedure, 2020-2021, post on website. "…needed time to be clear about (Benin) raid. Had to list objects in and out of scope, establish credibility of terms, clarity of narrative of the raid and as part of policy tell a restitution subcommittee of three trustees to assess the case and make recommendations for board. They wanted them to do more consultation with members of (museum), so did focus group. One person said you can't change history so keep them. Everyone else said morally you should give them back, but it is nice if you can borrow them back. They did a session for kids about why objects were there, the kids are moral creatures, and I got hundreds of letters from kids saying to give them back." "They got lawyers and knew they had to make application to Charities Commission because museum can't give away collections. The lawyers said the collections could be deemed to be part of a permanent endowment. If they were they could break the legal endowment. So, they went to archives in London to track a document that might somehow establish them as endowed and transferred to the public realm by (museum)…then meetings of subcommittee, interim report to trustee board…then draft recommendation…then final recommendation…and board said (the objects were) clearly looted and therefore under their policy that looks at duress and force, (the objects) should be returned." "..there's never been a case like this before so worked with Arts Council England on indemnity." "Not end of process but the start."	"Board was primed on colonialism and unlocking diversity plus pragmatically needed to respond to future claims." "Because of BLM, (museum) seen as racist, so board primed that there is an issue not going away, so we actively prepared and have an anti-colonialism working group." "Politics were fevered so we wanted to keep journalists out of it, and were successful, we didn't want the trustee decision to be media driven. Journalists did try." "Chair supportive and she wanted to get it done. Chair had legal background…and wanted to steer a process. Ultimately it came down to one principle that yes, (the objects were) taken by force." "Important decision by trustees, probably not aware of the scale of their decision. However, the museum had done training on the issue well in advance of policy so they were aware that the museum was pioneering but not aware of the ripples this decision would have more widely."
Museum Six Interviewee Six A	Canadian modest museum with government governing structure	Apr 21, 2023	N/A govern-ment	Two years	None	"Museum given object twenty years ago with caveat that they consult with Indigenous peoples for next space. People always come to hold ceremonies with the object, one group brings different people every time, then I went to meet them and they came frequently. Called themselves *The Companions of the (object)*. This group was doing community building, and it was important that it was not done by one community, not by one nation, not by one person, but by building a bridge because the (object) is important to so many people. (The treaties) and the government side all did due diligence. The hardest parts were determining what kind of agreement, addendum to (the government act), MOU or co-stewardship.	"The companions of (the object) have incorporated, and they are governors of this. They created a co-stewardship agreement, which says the centre and government will work together to relocate the (object) as we find a physical location for the move. It is like an MOU. It says the (object) will be returned to Indigenous care and the long-term goal is a relationship keeping strong between the museum and the new centre, to tell the story of the (object) while it is in Indigenous care."
Museum Six Interviewees Six B and Six C	As above	Sept 11, 2023	As above	Two plus years	As above	"This is something that settlers can really say. We did a wrong thing and we can change that. This is an actual act of reconciliation."	"So now, if Charities Act asks board members to make a moral decision, and if moral decision is impossible, i.e., return but no clear target, no return and media and civil backlash, or return with clear target, and then material is stolen, there is a higher profile now, and reputation and

						"Who has ownership to begin with, if it's an identifiable group and they can steward it great, but when you have a situation where the returning peoples have changing leadership you have an issue. Macron could be running into this – Africa's governance model. The objects can be a liability now. Does it go from asset to liability, and what do you do as a board member? How do you manage the moral dilemma of your ancestors? Who is responsible now?"	fiduciary risk and liability increases, then do you want to be on these boards anymore?"
Museum Seven Interviewees Seven A and Seven B	American immense museum with typical board structure over several institutions	Jun 8, 2023	17	Two years and four years respectively, interview occurred with two senior staff	4-5	"The (Director) put together a working group, that should an ethical return policy be put in place, past practice may have caused harm, was really acknowledged so we should engage those communities and descendants, should we have shared stewardship or return. Legal is secondary at this point in time, ethics comes first. They may have legal title but to continue to retain would be contrary to values." "Idea for working group April 2021, first meeting June 2021, findings December 2021, adopted April 2022, resulting in a policy, which was then integrated in the museum policy. In one year, they went from concept to policy." "…went through this process: collections, general counsel, undersecretary, secretary, boards." "…now challenge is how to implement it. Policies and procedures but what is process for submitting a request, how to monitor, how to deal with diversity of practice, ensure ethical return is treated similarly." "Repatriation committee is supported by staff and then goes to board. Very solid process, very engaged repatriation committee, lengthy reports and hours of conversation. They are really busy. A true indication that as a society we are making progress. Sent a board member to study a live case. "	"Initiated by senior leadership, held working group, studies, consultation and draft policies. Determined what's unique and not comparable to other conversations, which is that boards are not part of the direction." "Two and a half years ago they started the process. We reached consensus right away. Feeling of right thing to do and policy had to mandate that." "A real cultural shift. How we were trained in museum studies was as custodians of cultural and scientific heritage and now they have to remind themselves that this is instead a shared responsibility around the globe. Some folks might still feel it's going too far. Altering museums from traditional western perspective so something new. But that's the exciting part."
Museum Eight Interviewee Eight	New Zealand substantial museum with typical board structure	Jul 19, 2023	8	Four years	Seven to twelve	"We have been doing repatriation under collections policy. Board have been, from Chair down, (noting) that this is an important part of what they should do."	"Board on repatriation: they have been involved since 1998; a lot depends on the makeup of the board and their interests and philosophies." "It's about the governance, they need training and to be educated on museums, cultural identity and where they've come from." "It's almost frightening how similar the museums are that are all doing repatriation. Are they asking themselves: Is this really making a difference, why are we doing this, is this meeting our purpose, who are we doing this for, and are we really examining our repatriation process?"
Museum Nine Interviewee Nine	UK modest museum with academic board structure	Sept 5, 2023	16	Seventeen years	Three	"Regarding boards and change, they have had a repatriation policy in place for many years before he joined the museum, since the nineties, there was a policy which said almost the same things as recent framework, we look at these questions on a case by case and how material was received and so on. That policy was loosely expressed, and one issue is that it had not been particularly tested. They became aware of the issue that for decades people outside the museum, including students and activists, assumed there were lots of claims but in fact only four claims in twenty years."	"Boards, there's an intensified level of scrutiny, prompted culture change in those bodies. In (institution there is) concern to be extremely careful."
Museum Ten Interviewee Ten A	Canadian modest museum with typical board structure	January 15, 2025	11	Eighteen months	Four	"VP of Indigenous galleries and decolonization…is developing a repatriation policy for the gallery." "With Truth and Reconciliation Commission, reconciliation as relationship is the banner under which they then worked."	"I shared my thoughts on reconciliation as relationship, agency, and governance and how the TRC is a watershed between two eras."
Museum Ten Interviewee Ten B	As above	January 23, 2025	As above	As above	As above	No direct quotes requested.	No direct quotes requested.
Museum Eleven Interviewee Eleven	Canadian substantial museum with typical governance	February 24, 2025	13	Five years	Four	"Also want to cover the evolution of society in general and the speed of social media, museums are working hard to be current and the work they do is thoughtful but sometimes the policy outcome would be better if we could think longer." "Adapt in future, whole policy discussion, how does policy of return infiltrate all areas of the institution."	"The risk area for collections is in the ongoing care and story. Money to accommodate not necessarily on financial statements but does need to be on risk register in perpetuity."

TABLE SIX

List of case studies and interview categorization of field experts.

Interviewee	Professional sector/discipline	Date of interview	Key statement about repatriation debates	Key statement about sector/disciplinary debates, or boards
Interviewee Twelve	UK director, lawyer and educator	May 3, 2023	Regarding Charities Act, "probably this can't be used for big things like the Parthenon Marbles, centerpieces of a collection, but used more like Pitt Rivers and Jesus College and Horniman, the pieces were not central to the collection." "Section 106 (of the Charities Act) is moral obligation which is what Horniman did. This is the one that is not in your interest but moral."	"Now these decisions are politicized, a lot of political control that's manifested in last couple years, especially over museums." Regarding the charities act, "change is whether the trustees feel there would be a moral obligation. Whether the trustees could reasonably be held to have a moral obligation. Thus, the Charities Commission is fraught, what's moral?" "Big change, what is now a subjective assessment, decide – either pay someone money or move object out. When this comes forth it won't be whether they agree or whether it's reasonable." Regarding the delegation of moral authority. "Interesting because it allows decisions to be reviewable…could further politicize because the board could make a decision, but Attorney General has residual oversight of the sector and the AG could step in and say this wasn't a reasonable decision, so we won't allow it to happen."
Interviewee Thirteen	Museum board governor currently based in Poland	March 3, 2025	No direct quotes requested.	No direct quotes requested.

TABLE SEVEN

Sample images of meeting minutes from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Horniman Museum and Gardens and the British Museum, collected between 2018 and 2023, capturing discussion of restitution issues and matters.

Museum	Meeting date	Restitution discussions and decisions
Victoria and Albert Museum	September, 28, 2023	None
	July 6, 2023	None
	May 10, 2023	None
	March 23, 2023	None
	January 26, 2023	None
	December 1, 2022	None
	September 29, 2022	None
	July 7, 2022	Director's report: Head of Eros returning to Turkey via Renewable Cultural Partnership. Not a board decision.
	May 12, 2022	None
	March 23, 2022	Board listens to Dr Jacques Schuhmacher, a curator, provide an overview of an updated paper with confidential legal advice dealing with claims and context of "museum's legal framework and trustee obligations" p. 3
	January 19, 2022	None
	November 24, 2021	Director's report: Return of Anatolian Gold Ewer to Turkey. Not a board decision.
	September 20, 2021	None
	June 29, 2021	None
	May 11, 2021	None
	March 23, 2021	Director's report: Reiteration of V and A policy to "communicate with audiences and engage in debate around the collections and its colonial histories remains unchanged..(and is) setting up an Anti-Racism taskforce. p. 2
	January 28, 2021	None
	November 27, 2020	"The trustees received an update on the ongoing work around decolonization" p. 2
	September 24, 2020	Director update on board agenda item 10.2 V & A Update on Restitution and Repatriation (not Director's Report) "The Director shared an update with Trustees setting out the museum's position around restitution and repatriation. At the same time the interpretation narrative of the collection is being evaluated through the lens of multi-cultural histories, to ensure that it is more explicit around provenance and takes account of new approaches to the past for the museum's contemporary audience. The Board welcomed the updates." p. 4
	July 2, 2020	Director's Report: Discussion of BLM, Anti-Racism taskforce getting established, focusing on workforce collections and programs.

Museum	Meeting date	Restitution discussions and decisions
Horniman Museums and Gardens	December 9, 2021	None
	October 14, 2021	None
	July 9, 2021	Item 3: "The Chair noted that there was an action on her to ensure that the restitution subcommittee should hold an initial meeting. However, as she is not on the subcommittee, its own members need to do this." p.1 Item 11, Restitution sub-group terms of reference: "The terms of reference were approved by the Board for the Restitution subgroup, subject to review and amendment of some of the wording of the policy by the sub-group". P. 5
	March 18, 2021	Chair and CEO reported on Contested Heritage meeting with Secretary of State. CEO had been asked to speak. Horniman asked if "explain or retain" policy applied to museums in a different category, i.e. changing exhibitions that need to keep relevant to change. DCMS are forming a working party to consider further and produce guidelines. NMDC have sent follow up letter offering to do their own guidelines. Chair had reviewed the revised Restitution policy and "was now happy with it" p. 4 Draft changes to policy are: "To correct the impression that any claim would be granted, To include more on the role of charity trustees, To include the process for making a claim, To allow for an appeal by providing that all claims will go to a sub-group of trustees so that any appeal could be heard by the board". P.4 "It was agreed that Mayowa, Sarah and Clare would form the subcommittee and it would be up to them to decide the basis on which they will make their decisions. It was important to have good evidence on the process" p.4 "The Chair confirmed that considering the amendments that had been make in the policy in relation to trustees' responsibilities she was happy that there was no need for it to be reviewed by our lawyers". P. 4. The policy was agreed by the Board subject to some tweaks to align it with the Herman Remains Policy". P.4

Museum	Meeting date	Restitution discussions and decisions
British Museum	December 3, 2023	Chair's report "The Chair provided an update on his engagement with the Greek government on the potential for a Parthenon partnership. He informed the Trustees that the principles of a partnership, which would see reciprocal loans of objects, remained the focus of discussion." p.3
	November 27, 2023	None (Note: special meeting pertaining to corporate sponsorship)
	October 6, 2023	None
	September 7, 2023	None (Note: special meeting regarding lost, missing or stolen items)
	August 28, 2023	None (Note: special meeting regarding appointment of Interim Director)
	August 25, 2023	None (Note: special meeting regarding appointment of Interim Director)
	August 24, 2023	None (Note: special meeting regarding resignation of Dr. Hartwig Fischer)
	June 29, 2023	Chair's Report: "The Chair noted the potential, following an election in Greece, that its government would seek to resume discussions regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. He noted that he would keep the Board updated of any developments" p. 4
	June 1, 2023	None (Note: special meeting pertaining to corporate sponsorship)
	March 23, 2023	Chair's report: "The Chair noted recent media stories and discussions regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. He noted that he would keep the Board updated of any developments" p. 4
	December 8, 2022	None. A discussion is recorded about "principles and proposals that could guide decisions relating to the Collection" p. 2
	October 8, 2022	None
	July 7, 2022	None
	March 24, 2022	None
	December 2, 2021	None
	October 2, 2021	Discussion of a "Benin Dialogue Group meeting" p. 2
	July 1, 2021	None
	June 23, 2021	None (Note: special meeting regarding the Recommendation of the Chair Search Committee)
	March 18, 2021	None
	December 3, 2020	None
	October 2, 2020	Chairman's Report: "The Chairman noted the Secretary of State's recent letter about contested heritage" p. 2
	July 2, 2020	None
	May 11, 2020	None (Note: special meeting regarding COVID-19 update)
	March 19, 2020	Minutes; "restitution request: The Director gave an update on discussion in relation to a restitution request" p. 3
	December 5, 2019	Management report: "Jonathan Williams briefed the Trustees on a recent restitution request. The Board endorsed the proposed response" p. 3

TABLE EIGHT

Tally of museum minutes comparing board coverage of restitution issues versus finance and audit or strategy discussions.

Record of how often the topics of repatriation/restitution/return, juxtaposed with finance/audit and strategy, appeared in the meeting minutes for three exemplar museums in the United Kingdom.

CODE WORDS	YEAR	VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM	BRITISH MUSEUM	HORNIMAN MUSEUM
Repatriation, restitution or return	2018	N/A	1/4	1/4
	2019	3/6	3/4	3/4
	2020	3/6	2/5	3/8
	2021	2/6	1/5	2/4
	2022	2/6	0/4	4/4
	2023	0/5	3/10	N/A
Total/percentage 2018 - 2023		**10/29 = 34%**	**10/32 = 31%**	**13/24 = 54%**
Finance and audit	2018	N/A	3/4	3/4
	2019	2/6	3/4	3/4
	2020	5/6	4/5	7/8
	2021	5/6	3/5	4/4
	2022	5/6	3/4	3/4
	2023	5/5	3/10	N/A
Total/percentage 2018 - 2023		**22/29 = 76%**	**19/32 = 59%**	**20/24 = 83%**
Strategy	2018	N/A	2/4	2/4
	2019	3/6	1/4	2/4
	2020	5/6	1/5	1/8
	2021	5/6	1/5	2/4
	2022	4/6	0/4	0/4
	2023	5/5	1/10	N/A
Total/percentage 2018 - 2023		**22/29 = 76%**	**6/32 = 19%**	**7/24 = 29%**

TABLE NINE

Sample image of data establishing pattern of newspaper articles regarding the Parthenon Sculptures debates, in The Guardian newspaper, from 1999 to 2023.

THE GUARDIAN/YEAR	MONTH	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	PERCENT OF TOTAL	NOTES
2023	December November October September August July June May April March February January	16 23 2 5 12 3 0 1 0 3 0 7		Rishi Sunak/Greek PM diplomatic row Nov '23
	TOTAL	72	28%	
2022	December November October September August July June May April March February January	4 2 2 2 4 2 2 2 0 1 4 4		
	TOTAL	29	11%	
2021	December November October September August July June May April March February January	1 6 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 2 1 0		
	TOTAL	12	5%	
2020	December November October September August July June May April March February January	0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1 0 1 3 0		
	TOTAL	6	2%	

TABLE TEN

Data collection of review of the Dan Hicks book "The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution" (2020).

Source publication	Author	Date	Tone favorable, unfavorable or balanced vis-à-vis Hicks' thesis	Key statements
The Guardian	Charlotte Lydia Riley	November 6, 2020	Favorable	"..museums house unending violence, ceaseless trauma, colonial crimes committed again every morning as the strip lights click on. Museums are battlegrounds." "The book is a vital call to action: part historical investigation, part manifesto, demanding the reader do away with the existing 'brutish museums' of the title and find a new way for them to exist, not as sites of violence or trauma but as 'site of conscience'."
Counterfire	Dominic Alexander	March 31, 2022	Favorable	"*The Brutish Museums* presents a powerful case for restitution of looted objects, and hostile responses to it highlight enduring attachments to imperialism." "As well as providing a critical look at the events of 1897 in the context of Britain's racism and imperialism, the book also critically examines anthropological theory and the museum worlds self-understanding, coming to the conclusion that restitution is the only way forward." "The attempted rebuttals of *The Brutish Museums* over the attack on Benin are therefore in obvious bad faith. Even so, they fail on their own account because they ignore the pattern of British aggression against all indigenous authorities, even those they had previously encouraged, in their stage-by-stage reduction of the region to colonial control." "Yet in Britain, a chorus or opinion from liberals to reactionaries find ways to reject this feasible project. In their objections, they reveal in fact their own attachment to the existence of general structures of racism and imperialism, and the ideological role museums have in teaching people in this country to remain loyal to the present order."
International Journal of Cultural Property	Elizabeth Marlowe	January 21, 2022	Balanced	"In its passionately argued call for the restitution of cultural artifacts looted in one of the most notoriously brutal episodes of colonial violence, *The Brutish Museums* encapsulates the zeitgeist." "Hicks is here to disrupt this tacit pact between museums and the public." "He offers little detail about what any of this looks like from the Nigerian perspective."
Apollo Magazine	Daniel Trilling	July 6, 2021	Balanced	"There were one or two points where I wished Hicks had foregone a literary flourish or an invocation of a postcolonial theorist in favour of spelling out his own argument more directly. A dismissal of 'the ideology of universality as a peculiarly western concern' , for instance, cause me to raise an eyebrow: is the problem that the West's interpretation of universal values is incomplete and insincere, or that the idea of mutual understanding between human cultures is itself a sham? Where, then does that leave the museums readying themselves for the return of stolen items?" "Yet the argument remains optimistic, and inspiring."
The Critic	Nigel Biggar	March 18, 2021	Unfavorable	"But its greatest importance lies elsewhere, for Brutish Museums is an object lesson in how political zeal can abuse data in the cause of manufacturing an expedient narrative. In that respect, it is also typical of the 'decolonising' movement. And since the author occupies a professorial position at the University of Oxford, I may also be a symptom of something rotten in the heart of academe." "Whatever museum directors decide to do with objects acquired during the colonial period, they should not base it on the history told in this book. It cannot be trusted. The British were not so brutish in Benin."
African Identities	Olajide Salawu	August 17, 2021	Favorable	"When the descriptors are stripped away, museums are read as a moving space where objects can be evaluated for their histories of ultraviolence, racist

				ideology, and cultural erasure. For Hicks, this means that each artefact in the glass box is an unfinished event."
Law and Liberty	Michael Mosbacher	July 8, 2021	Unfavorable	"More importantly, Hicks' fellow curators must strongly resist the wider argument of *The Brutish Museums* if ethnographic museums are to survive. And surely their survival is an unequivocally good thing. If artefacts in Western museums have to be returned en masse to their countries of origin, Western understanding of and interest in other cultures will inevitably diminish. We will be living in a more monocultural world; this is surely not Hicks' intention, but it will be the consequence of what he proposes."
W86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture, Book Reviews – a publication of the Bard Graduate Center and the University of Chicago Press	Ivan Gaskell	2020	Unfavorable	"Clearly, in considering the responsibilities of what Hicks somewhat jejunely calls 'brutish museums', relations between the past and the present are at issue. This is the concern of history. Yet Hicks's account, as a moral vision promoting what he considers to be a moral imperative, is not so much ahistorical as anti-historical. This is the most serious flaw in Hicks's book.
Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture	Adrian Locke	June 28, 2021	Favorable	"Through a focused and compelling examination of the sacking of Benin City in 1897, *The Brutish Museums* questions the role of anthropological or ethnographic museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford as devices for extending, repeating and intensifying violence, in effect promulgating the concept of Western superiority, acting as weapons in the bristling arsenal of Victorian colonialism. Can they ever, he asks, through conventional methods of display and interpretation be neutral containers of a universal heritage?" "As Hicks makes clear in *The Brutish Museums*, the dialogue going forward, both internally and externally, whether as a museum or as a nation, needs to change." "Hicks says 'let us reimagine and reinstate the anthropological, archaeological and world culture museum as a site of conscience, of transitional and restorative justice, and of cultural memory'. Who could argue with that?"
Arab Studies Quarterly, Vol. 44, No.2	Melissa Eppihimer	Spring 2022	Balanced	"*The Brutish Museums* is not an instruction manual for the process of restitution, but a moral argument for the premise of restitution." "However, the book misses an opportunity to highlight the voices and actions of Edo and Nigerian people who share his view that museums perpetuate colonial violence."
Race and Class, Vol. 62. Issue 4	Colin Prescod	April 7, 2021	Favorable	"This book is an educational tour de force. It deserves to be versioned as a primer for the history curriculum in schools."
Art Monthly	George Vasay	February, 2021	Favorable	"Hicks's frank tone counters the prevalence of euphemism and abstraction that has pervaded restitution debates for many years and the book lays out the terms clearly. These aren't 'problematic' histories, they are wrong and the display of looted artefacts is an open wound that needs correcting as a prerequisite to healing."
Public Archaeology	Johanna T Zetterstrom-Sharp	2021	Favorable	"*The Brutish Museums* by Dan Hicks is both an intellectual and theoretical engagement with an academic discipline, and a work of public activism and consequential intent." "Hicks' *The Brutish Museum*s is anchored on the idea that academic activism has a role to play in not only driving this change, but leading it. The author self-declares this book as part of a wave of public activism in 2020, catalysing the return of looted property from Africa held in Europe's World Cultures museums."

TABLE ELEVEN

Reputation schematic – first museum interviewee mentions along moral and legal dimensions.

Museum	Moral dimension	Legal dimension
Museum One	1	1
Museum Two	15	4
Museum Three	7	1
Museum Four	5	0
Museum Five	10	2
Museum Six	0	1
Museum Seven	3	0
Museum Eight	14	0
Museum Nine	10	5
Museum Ten	5	2
Museum Eleven	4	1

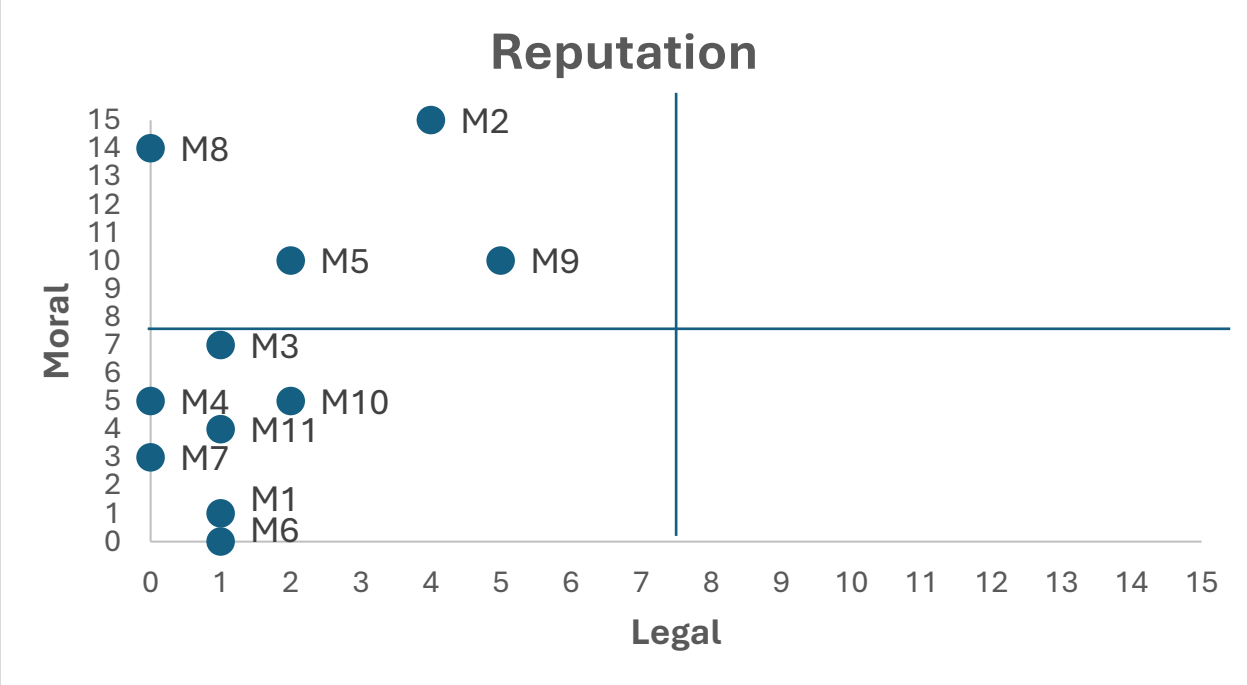


TABLE TWELVE

Engagement schematic – first museum interviewee mentions along engagement and political dimensions.

Museum	Engagement Dimension	Political Dimension
Museum One	1	2
Museum Two	1	4
Museum Three	3	3
Museum Four	2	0
Museum Five	8	4
Museum Six	8	6
Museum Seven	4	0
Museum Eight	1	5
Museum Nine	3	1
Museum Ten	2	8
Museum Eleven	1	0

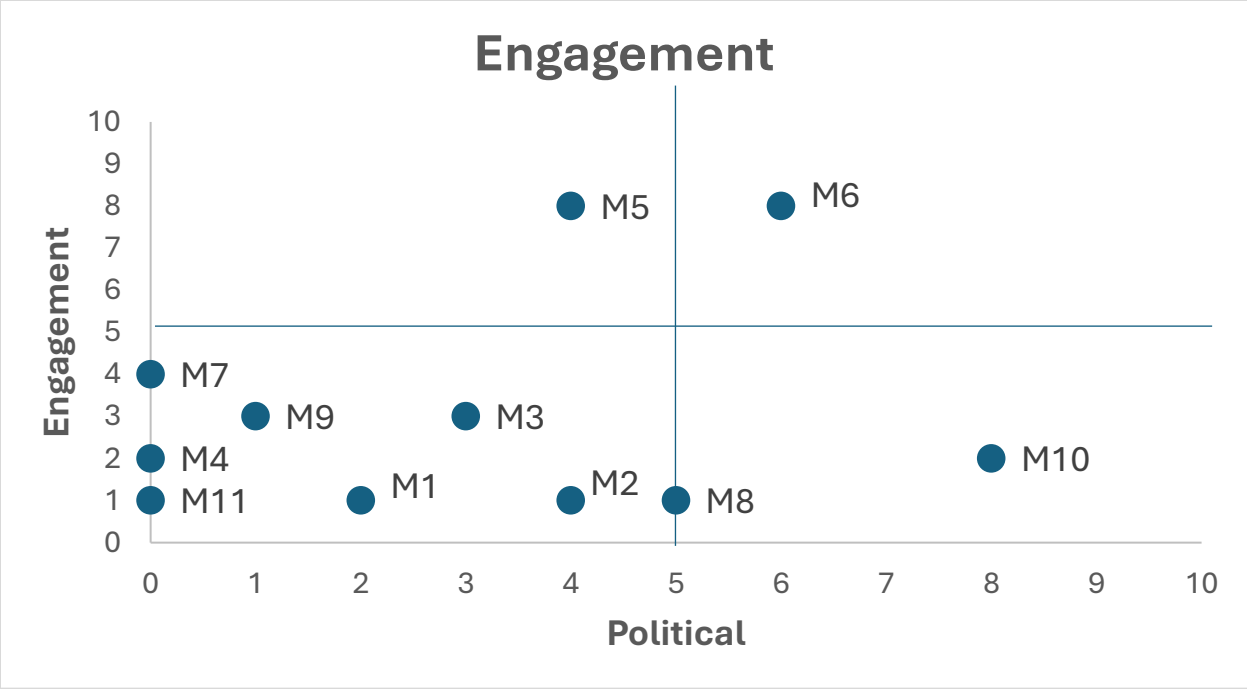


TABLE THIRTEEN

Framing schematic – first museum interviewee mentions along curatorial and purpose/mandate/policy dimensions.

Museum	Curatorial Dimension	Purpose/Mandate/Policy Dimensions
Museum One	0	2
Museum Two	2	0
Museum Three	1	4
Museum Four	0	3
Museum Five	2	4
Museum Six	0	2
Museum Seven	3	7
Museum Eight	0	8
Museum Nine	0	7
Museum Ten	0	2
Museum Eleven	1	3

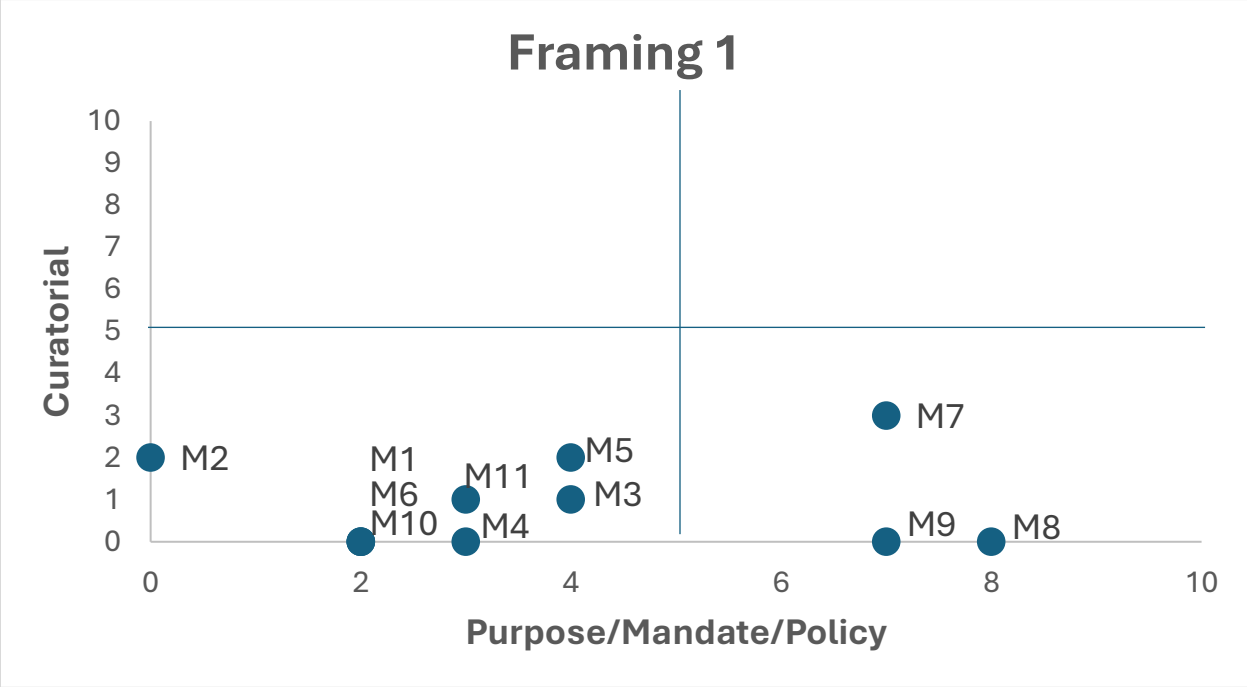


TABLE FOURTEEN

Framing schematic – first museum interviewee mentions along political and purpose/mandate/policy dimensions.

Museum	Political Dimension	Purpose/Mandate/Policy Dimensions
Museum One	2	2
Museum Two	4	0
Museum Three	3	4
Museum Four	0	3
Museum Five	4	4
Museum Six	6	2
Museum Seven	0	7
Museum Eight	5	8
Museum Nine	1	7
Museum Ten	8	2
Museum Eleven	0	3

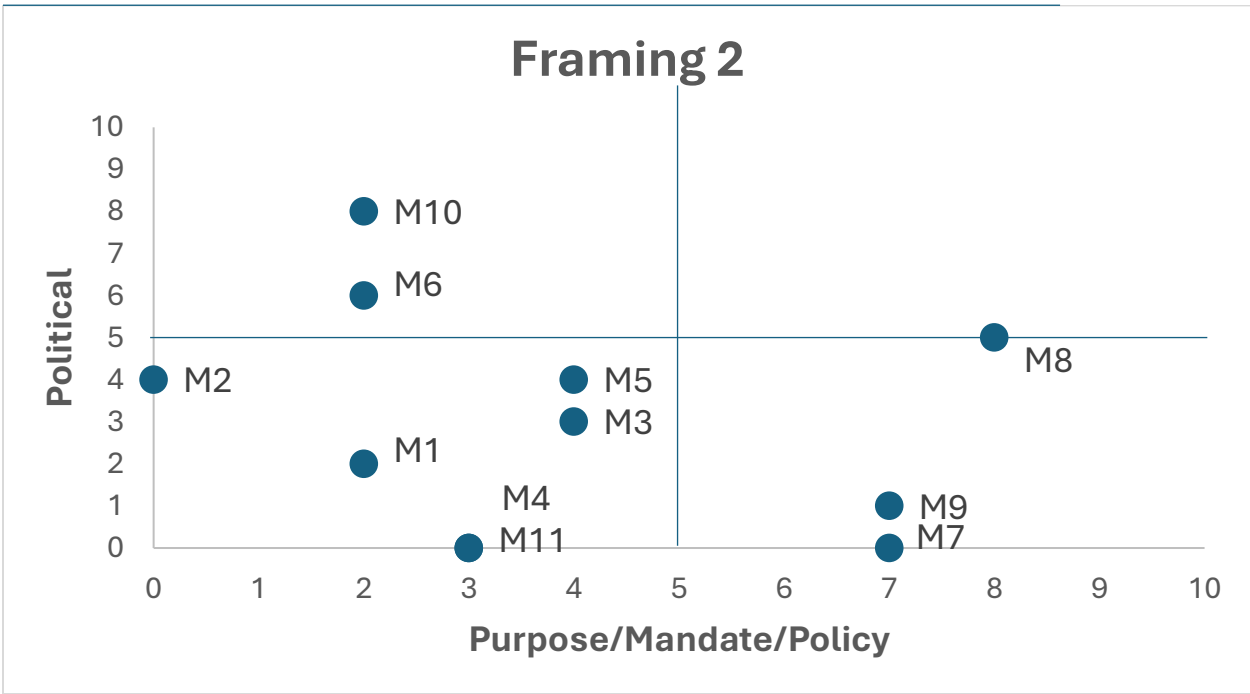


TABLE FIFTEEN

Visioning schematic – first museum interviewee mentions along internal (curatorial, educational and safety/security) dimensions and external (moral, legal, political and engagement) dimensions.

Museum	Internal	External
Museum One	0	5
Museum Two	4	24
Museum Three	3	14
Museum Four	0	7
Museum Five	6	24
Museum Six	0	15
Museum Seven	3	7
Museum Eight	3	20
Museum Nine	1	19
Museum Ten	3	17
Museum Eleven	3	6

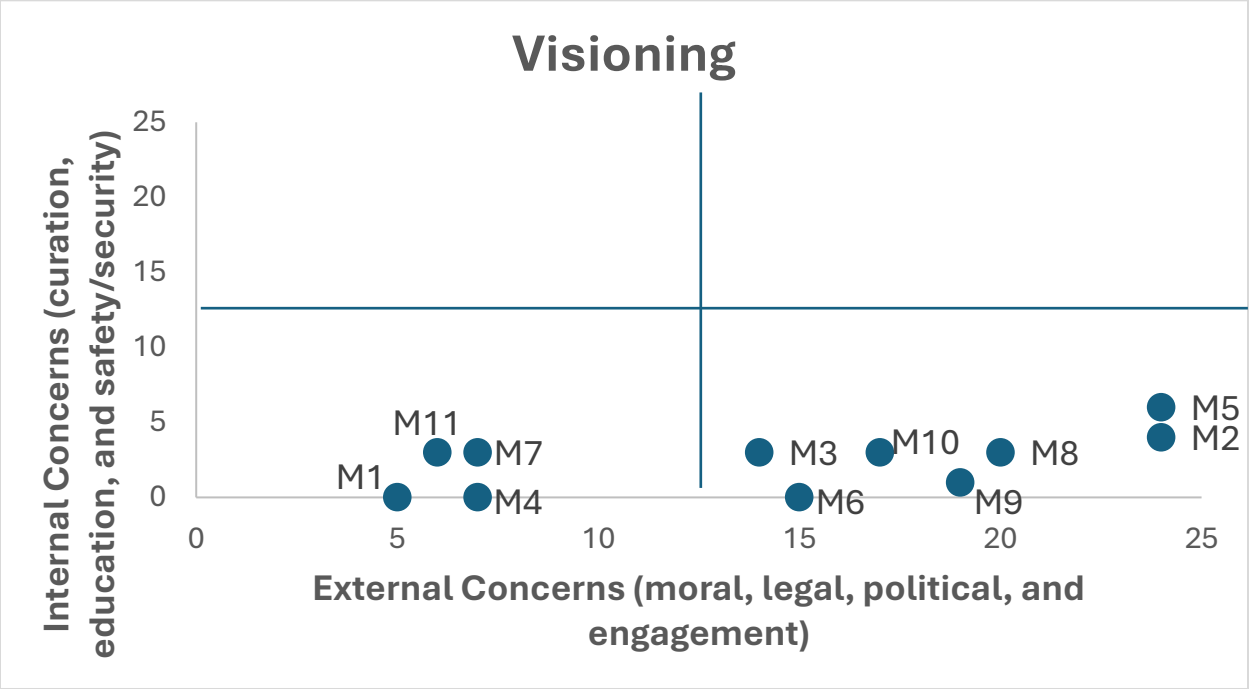


TABLE SIXTEEN

Relative stronger or weaker mentions of sensitizing concepts as stated in museum interviewee narratives.

The sensitizing concepts defined as having an **internal dimension** include curation, collection, education and safety/security concerns.

The sensitizing concepts defined as having an **external dimension** include moral, legal, political and engagement concerns.

The weighting of these mentions is factored relative to each museum interviewees' total mentions, rather than comparatively across museum cases.

Museum	Strong mentions	Weaker mentions	Favour internal or external dimension
Museum One	Political Purpose/mandate/policy	Curatorial	External
Museum Two	Legal Moral Political	Engagement Purpose/mandate/policy	External (strong)
Museum Three	Moral Purpose/mandate/policy	Curatorial Legal	External
Museum Four	Moral Purpose/mandate/policy	Curatorial Legal Political	External
Museum Five	Engagement Moral	Curatorial Legal	External (strong)
Museum Six	Engagement Political	Curatorial Legal Moral	External
Museum Seven	Engagement Purpose/mandate/policy	Legal Political	External
Museum Eight	Moral Political Purpose/mandate/policy	Curatorial Engagement Legal	External (strong)
Museum Nine	Moral Purpose/mandate/policy	Curatorial Political	External
Museum Ten	Moral Political	Curatorial	External
Museum Eleven	Moral Purpose/mandate/policy	Political	External

TABLE SEVENTEEN

UNESCO reports – vocabulary examples between 2015 and 2019.

UNESCO 2015 report	UNESCO 2019 report
Essentialness	Globalization
Mirror	Social
Alternate visions	Citizenship
Creativity	Education
Imagination	Identities
Challenge	Accessibility
Represent	Restitution
Visitors	Origin
Link	Audience
Education	Sustainable
Inspiration	Equality
Dialogue	Rights

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure One: Literature review sampling of calls to action, approach and arguments.
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3. Figure Three: Sample photo of redacted data sheet demonstrating initial coding.
4. Figure Four: Sample photo of redacted data sheet demonstrating organization of "line-by-line" text (Charmaz, 2014: 124) ordered by "sensitivizing concepts" (ibid:117).
5. Figure Five: Strategic success path in the future, responsive museum.
6. Figure Six: Conceptual framework: How museum board governors move through discursive controversy towards a proposed "restitutional era".

FIGURE ONE

Literature review sampling of calls to action, approach, reasoning and arguments.

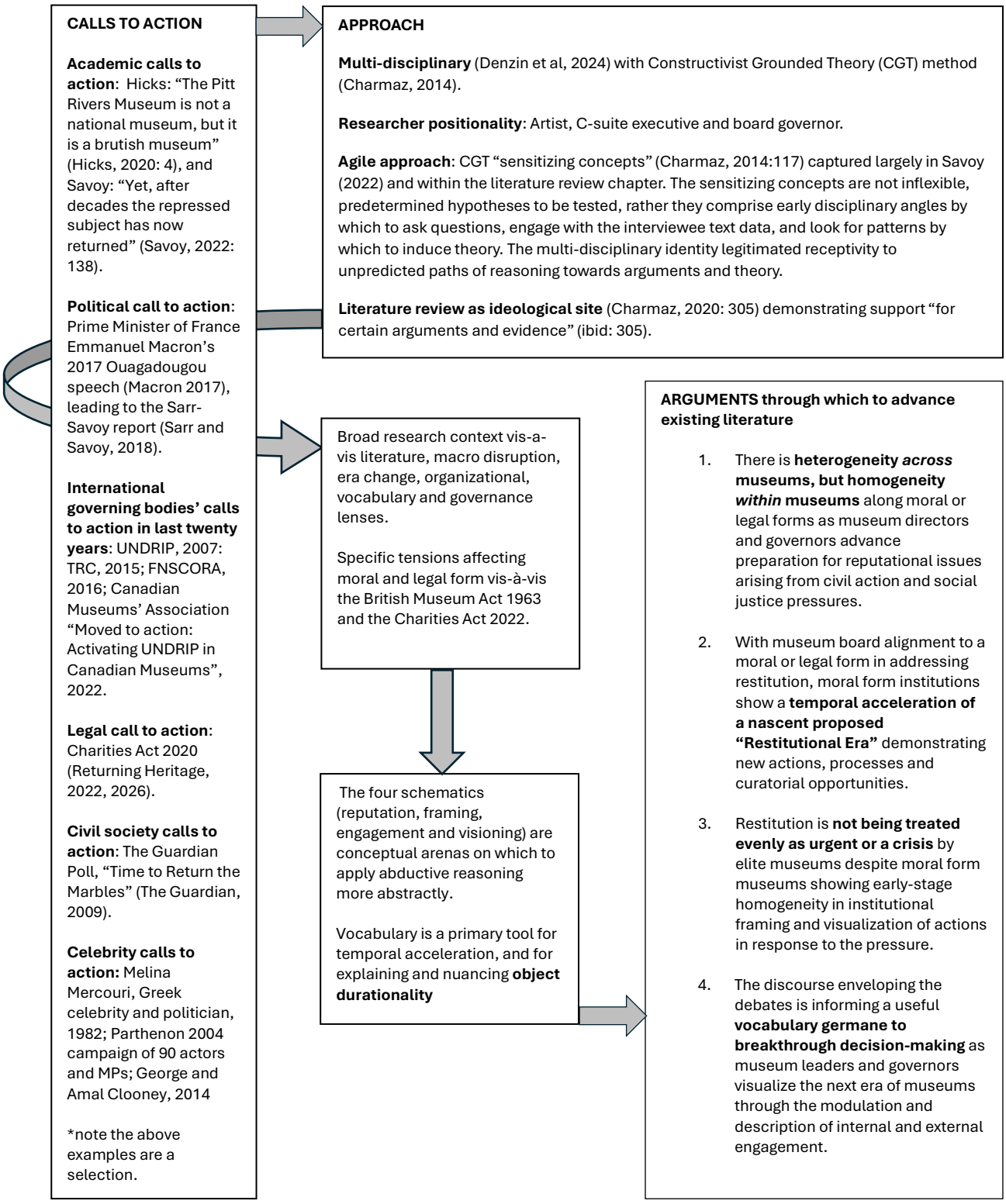


FIGURE TWO

Methodological framework.

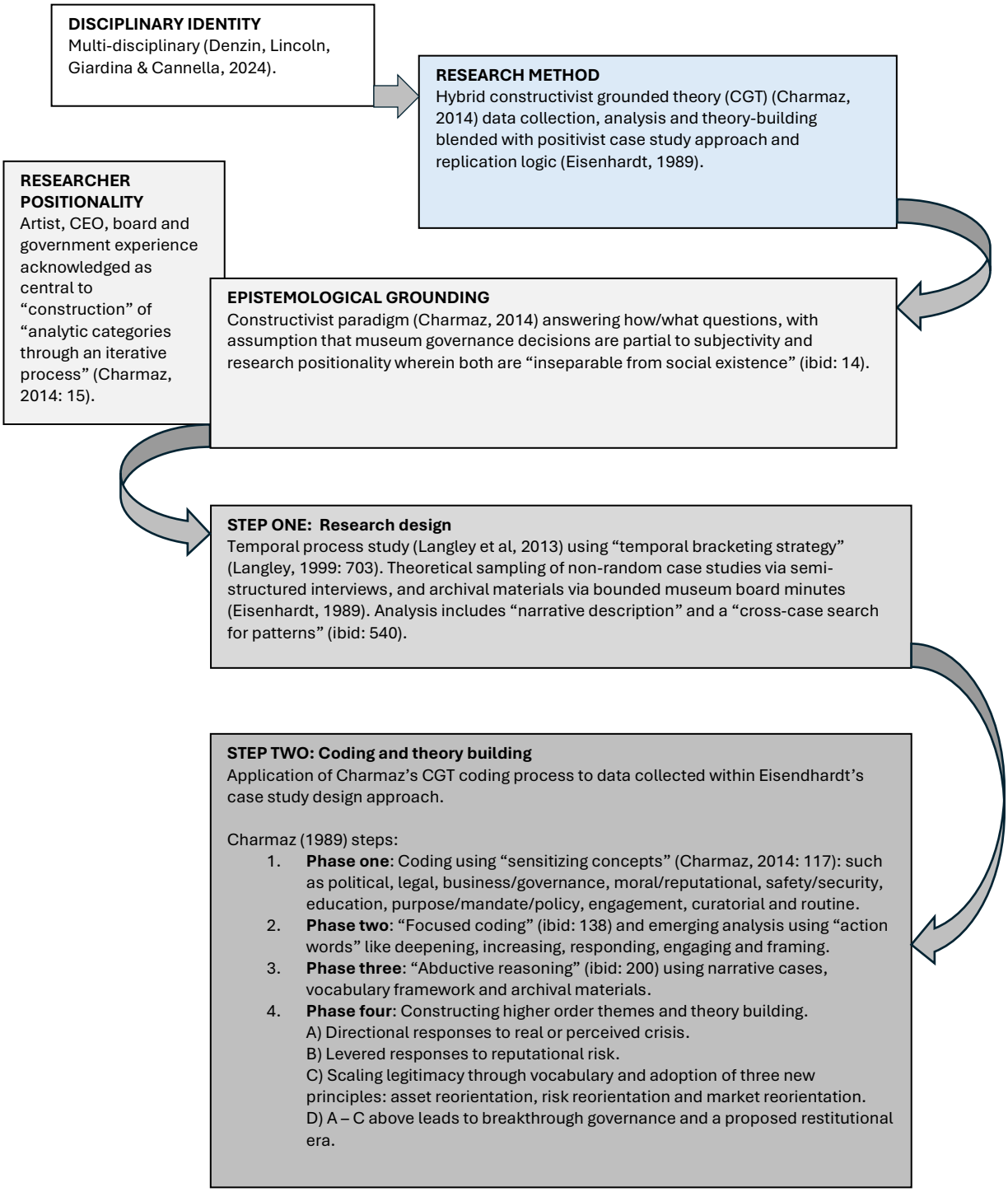
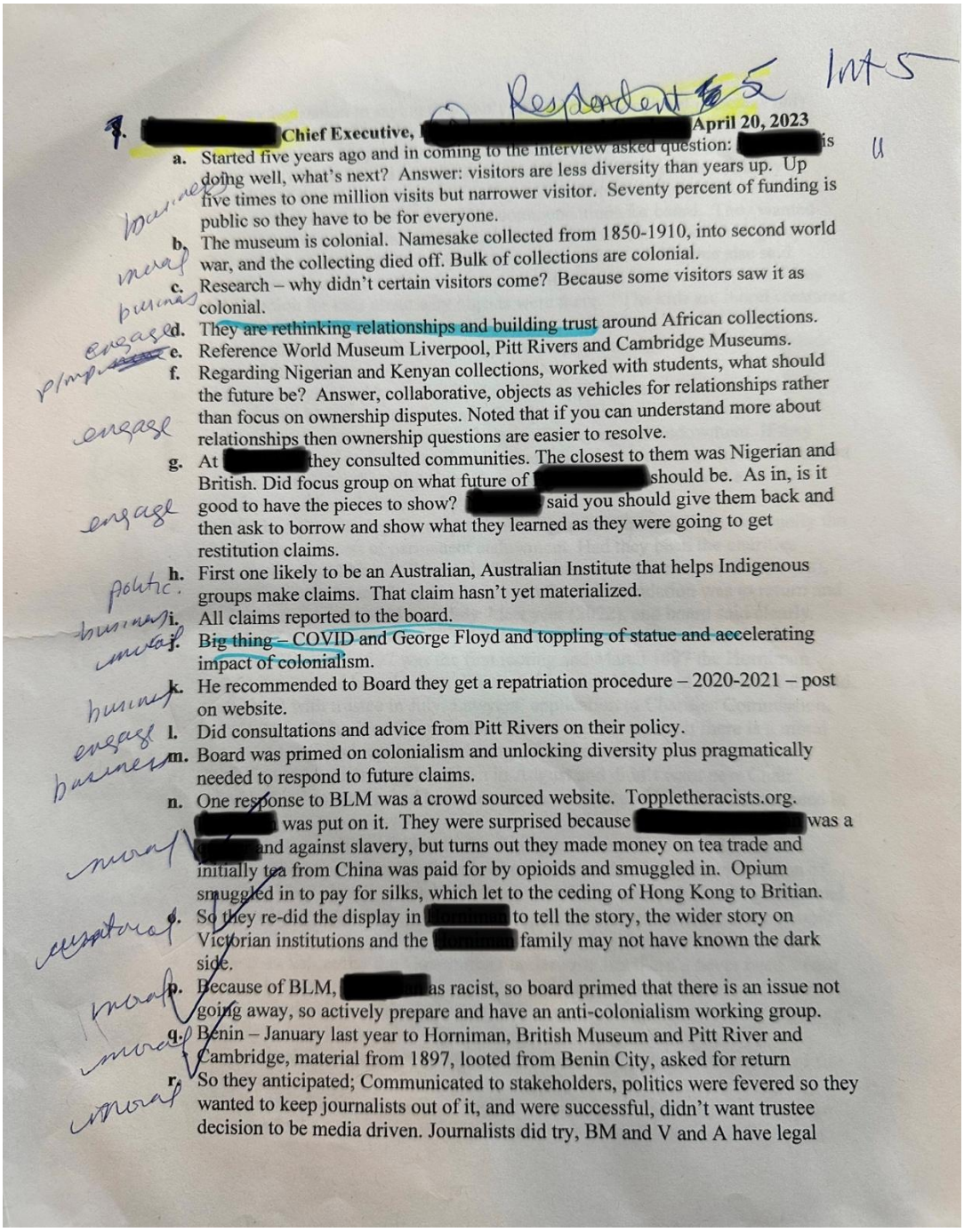


FIGURE THREE

Sample photo of redacted data sheet demonstrating initial coding of sensitizing concepts written on the left-hand margin of lines of text. This sample page is part of a set of 36 total pages.



Respondent 5 Int 5

9. [redacted] Chief Executive, [redacted] April 20, 2023

a. Started five years ago and in coming to the interview asked question: [redacted] is doing well, what's next? Answer: visitors are less diversity than years up. Up five times to one million visits but narrower visitor. Seventy percent of funding is public so they have to be for everyone.

b. The museum is colonial. Namesake collected from 1850-1910, into second world war, and the collecting died off. Bulk of collections are colonial.

c. Research – why didn't certain visitors come? Because some visitors saw it as colonial.

d. They are rethinking relationships and building trust around African collections.

e. Reference World Museum Liverpool, Pitt Rivers and Cambridge Museums.

f. Regarding Nigerian and Kenyan collections, worked with students, what should the future be? Answer, collaborative, objects as vehicles for relationships rather than focus on ownership disputes. Noted that if you can understand more about relationships then ownership questions are easier to resolve.

g. At [redacted] they consulted communities. The closest to them was Nigerian and British. Did focus group on what future of [redacted] should be. As in, is it good to have the pieces to show? [redacted] said you should give them back and then ask to borrow and show what they learned as they were going to get restitution claims.

h. First one likely to be an Australian, Australian Institute that helps Indigenous groups make claims. That claim hasn't yet materialized.

i. All claims reported to the board.

j. Big thing – COVID and George Floyd and toppling of statue and accelerating impact of colonialism.

k. He recommended to Board they get a repatriation procedure – 2020-2021 – post on website.

l. Did consultations and advice from Pitt Rivers on their policy.

m. Board was primed on colonialism and unlocking diversity plus pragmatically needed to respond to future claims.

n. One response to BLM was a crowd sourced website. Topplethetracists.org. [redacted] was put on it. They were surprised because [redacted] was a [redacted] and against slavery, but turns out they made money on tea trade and initially tea from China was paid for by opioids and smuggled in. Opium smuggled in to pay for silks, which let to the ceding of Hong Kong to Britian.

o. So they re-did the display in [redacted] to tell the story, the wider story on Victorian institutions and the [redacted] family may not have known the dark side.

p. Because of BLM, [redacted] as racist, so board primed that there is an issue not going away, so actively prepare and have an anti-colonialism working group.

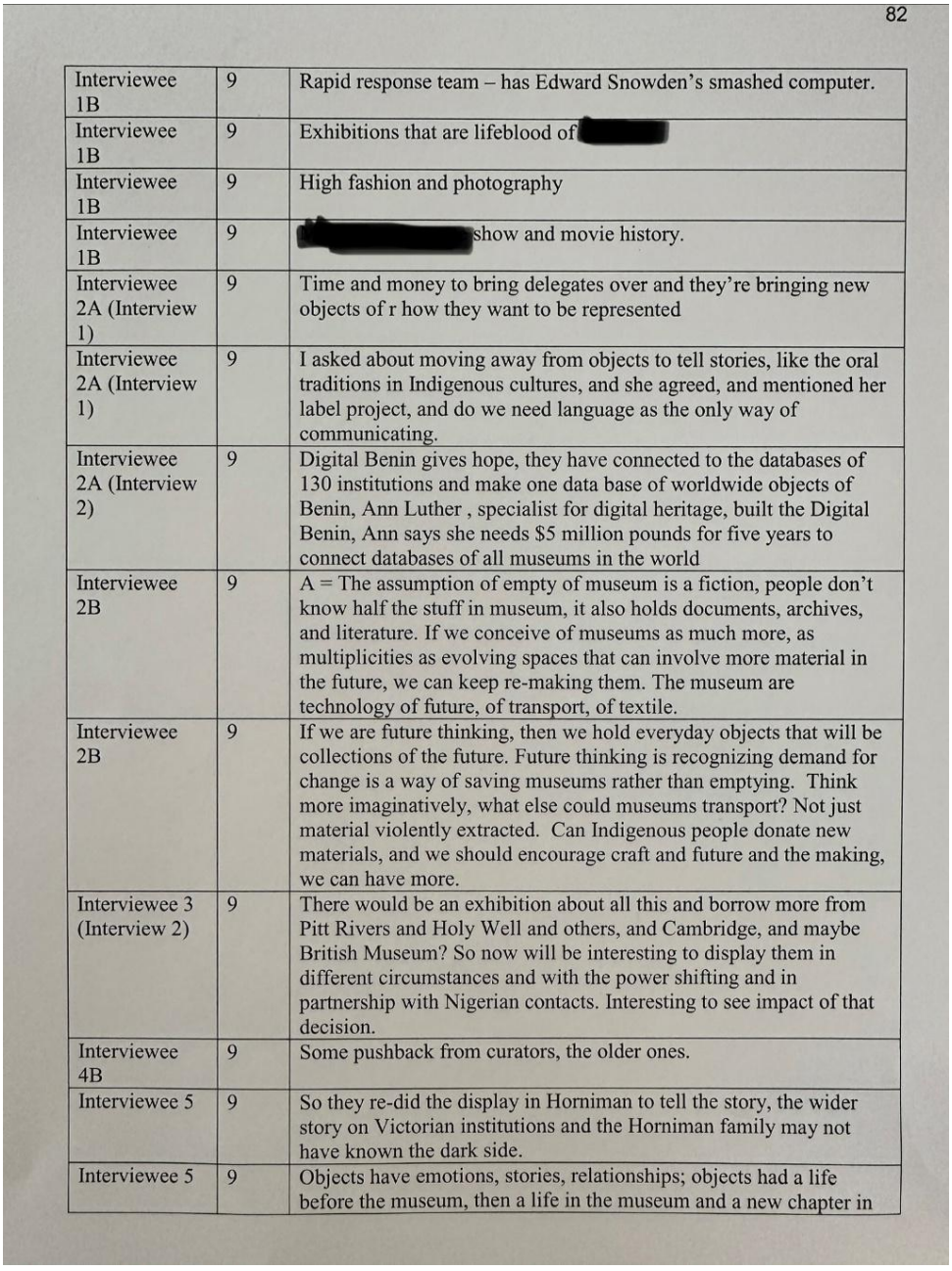
q. Benin – January last year to Horniman, British Museum and Pitt River and Cambridge, material from 1897, looted from Benin City, asked for return

r. So they anticipated; Communicated to stakeholders, politics were fevered so they wanted to keep journalists out of it, and were successful, didn't want trustee decision to be media driven. Journalists did try, BM and V and A have legal

FIGURE FOUR

Sample photo of redacted data sheet demonstrating organization of "line-by-line" text (Charmaz, 2014: 124) ordered by "sensitizing concepts" (ibid:117).)

The ten "sensitizing concepts", called codes, comprise the words, political, legal, business/governance, moral/reputational, safety/security, education, purpose/mandate/policy, engagement, curatorial, and routine, and were numbered in the full re-ordered table.



82

Interviewee 1B	9	Rapid response team – has Edward Snowden's smashed computer.
Interviewee 1B	9	Exhibitions that are lifeblood of [redacted]
Interviewee 1B	9	High fashion and photography
Interviewee 1B	9	[redacted] show and movie history.
Interviewee 2A (Interview 1)	9	Time and money to bring delegates over and they're bringing new objects of r how they want to be represented
Interviewee 2A (Interview 1)	9	I asked about moving away from objects to tell stories, like the oral traditions in Indigenous cultures, and she agreed, and mentioned her label project, and do we need language as the only way of communicating.
Interviewee 2A (Interview 2)	9	Digital Benin gives hope, they have connected to the databases of 130 institutions and make one data base of worldwide objects of Benin, Ann Luther , specialist for digital heritage, built the Digital Benin, Ann says she needs $5 million pounds for five years to connect databases of all museums in the world
Interviewee 2B	9	A = The assumption of empty of museum is a fiction, people don't know half the stuff in museum, it also holds documents, archives, and literature. If we conceive of museums as much more, as multiplicities as evolving spaces that can involve more material in the future, we can keep re-making them. The museum are technology of future, of transport, of textile.
Interviewee 2B	9	If we are future thinking, then we hold everyday objects that will be collections of the future. Future thinking is recognizing demand for change is a way of saving museums rather than emptying. Think more imaginatively, what else could museums transport? Not just material violently extracted. Can Indigenous people donate new materials, and we should encourage craft and future and the making, we can have more.
Interviewee 3 (Interview 2)	9	There would be an exhibition about all this and borrow more from Pitt Rivers and Holy Well and others, and Cambridge, and maybe British Museum? So now will be interesting to display them in different circumstances and with the power shifting and in partnership with Nigerian contacts. Interesting to see impact of that decision.
Interviewee 4B	9	Some pushback from curators, the older ones.
Interviewee 5	9	So they re-did the display in Horniman to tell the story, the wider story on Victorian institutions and the Horniman family may not have known the dark side.
Interviewee 5	9	Objects have emotions, stories, relationships; objects had a life before the museum, then a life in the museum and a new chapter in

FIGURE FIVE

Strategic success path in the future, responsive museum.

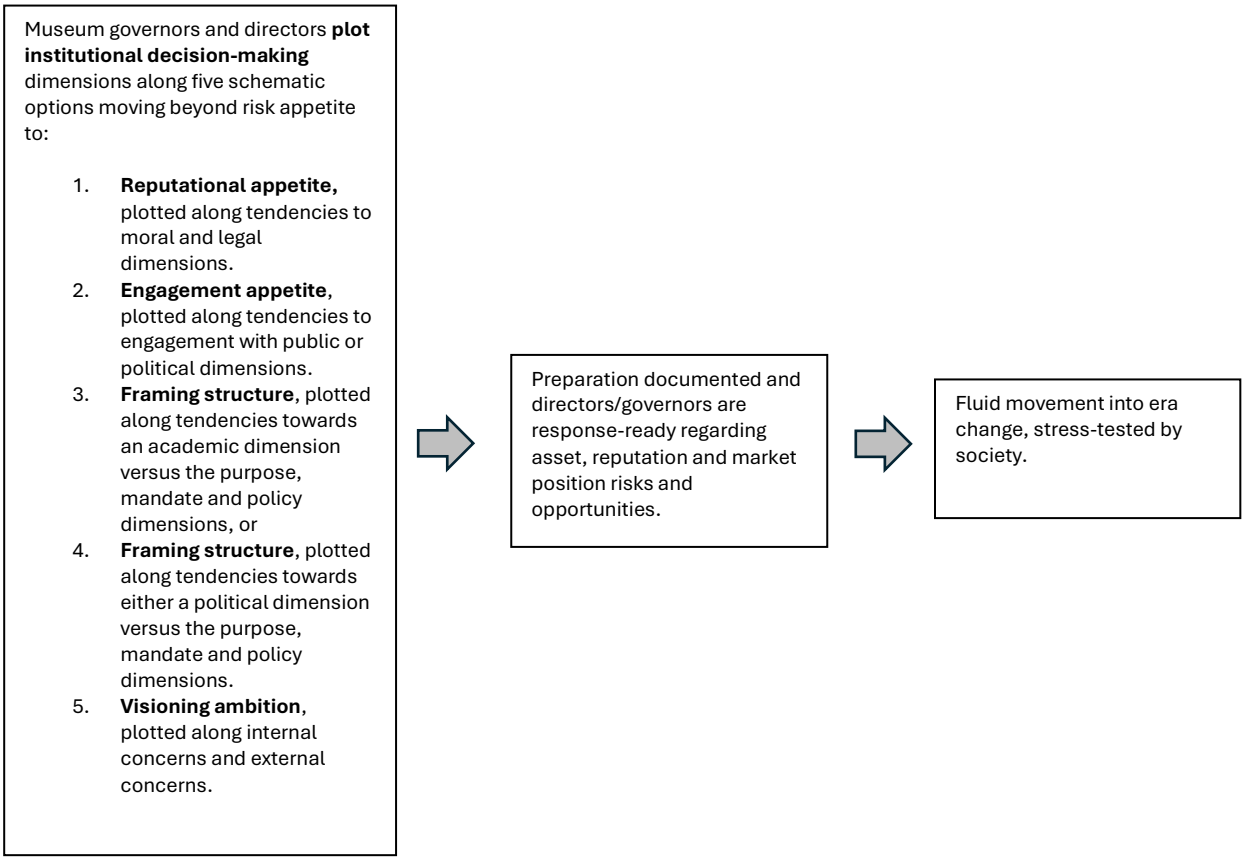
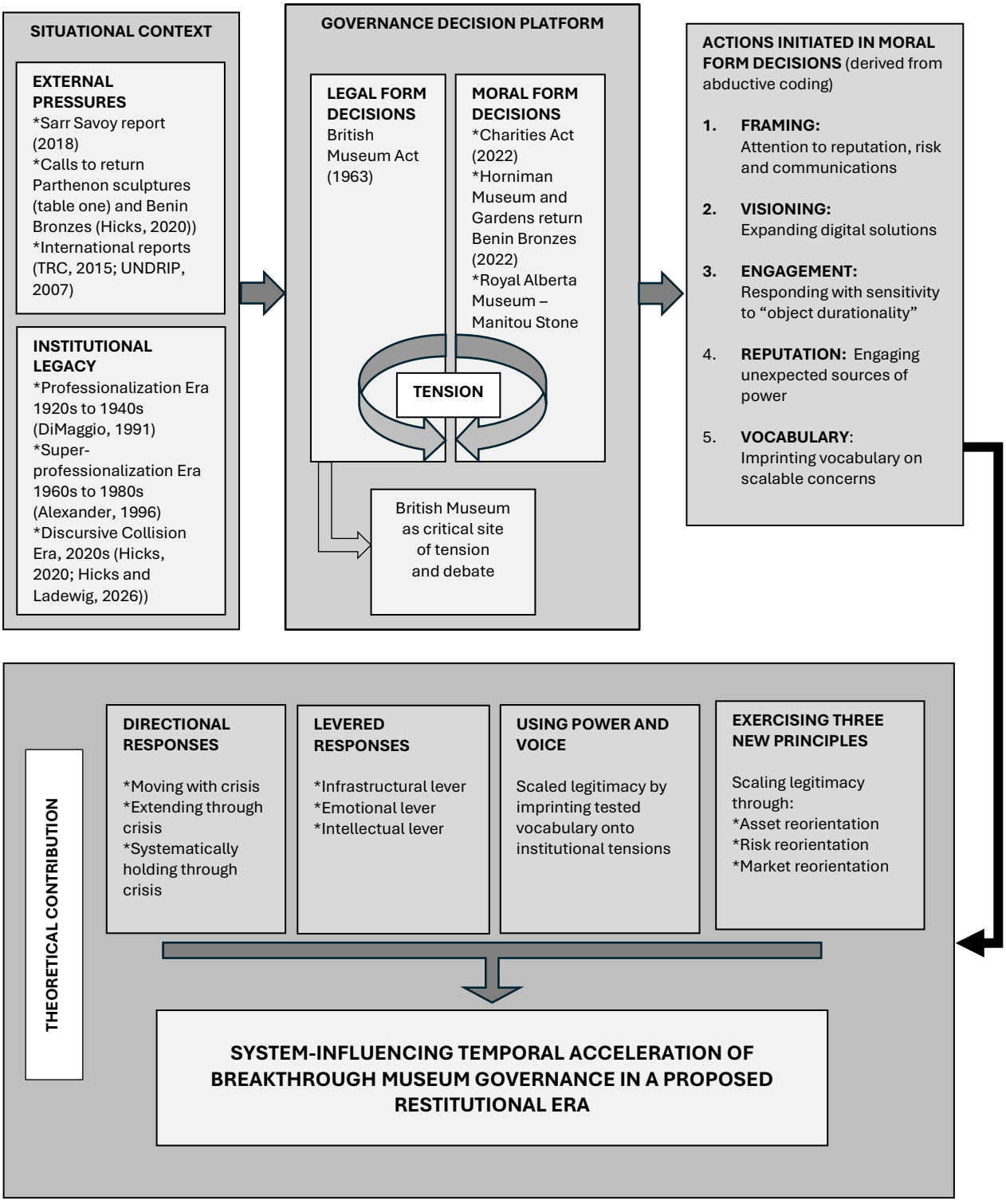


FIGURE SIX

Conceptual framework: How museum board directors and governors move through discursive controversy towards a proposed "Restitutional Era". References are cited in the thesis text.

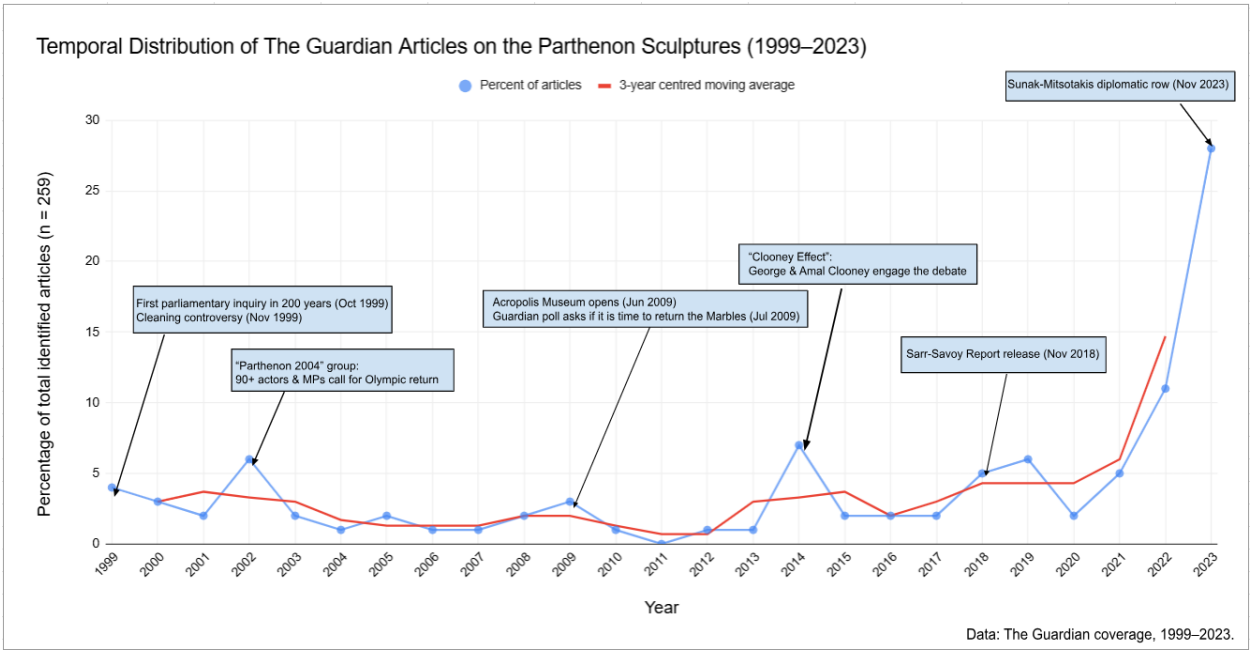


LIST OF GRAPHS

1. Graph one: Temporal distribution of The Guardian articles on the Parthenon Sculptures and related restitution stories (1999-2023).

GRAPH ONE

Photo of a google sheet graph depicting the temporal distribution of The Guardian articles about the Parthenon Sculptures, and related restitution stories (1999-2023).



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