National Narration and Organisational Crisis: A Discourse-Mythological Analysis of the Imperial War Museum During the Second World War

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Abstract

The Imperial War Museum (IWM) first opened in London, United Kingdom, on 9 July 1920. Until the Second World War (1939-1945), this museum conducted itself as an institution that commemorated heroism and sacrifice in the First World War (1914-1918). But when the United Kingdom declared war against Germany on 3 September 1939, that framing lost its relevance; major developments in British wartime mythology were occurring and a change to national narration was required. Thus, the IWM anticipated the prospect of cultural irrelevance. An organisational crisis ensued. This study captures two key factors in this case of the IWM. Firstly, we consider the cultural mythology which the museum knew it was embedded within and needed to represent accordingly to remain relevant after the Second World War. Secondly, we consider the ensuing legal contradictions that it perceived and unnecessarily feared for itself – both internally and through its dialogue with relevant authorities. The museum's mythological entanglement with wider cultural and political factors made its sense of crisis simultaneously justified and unjustified. Our discourse-mythological analysis shows how such a paradoxical phenomenon played out and what lessons can be learnt from it.

Key words: *Crisis; Discourse-Mythological Approach; Imperial War Museum; National Narration; Storytelling*

1. Introduction

The Imperial War Museum (IWM) first opened in London, United Kingdom, on 9 July 1920 (Kavanagh 1994, p. 146).[1] Until the Second World War (1939-1945), it commemorated the heroism and sacrifice of people in Britain, its empire and commonwealth during the First World War (1914-1918). Over the inter-war years, the First World War became known as the 'war to end all war' – a framing adopted by the IWM (Malvern, 2000). But, when Britain declared war against Germany on 3 September 1939, this framing lost relevance; developments in Britain s wartime mythology occurred and changes to national narration was required. Thus, the IWM confronted the prospect of cultural irrelevance. An organisational crisis ensued.

In essence, crises are disruptive situations – potentially rendering something inoperable and irreparably damaged – requiring extraordinary intervention to be overcome (Deans, 2022a, pp. 70-74; Garayev, 2013). Why did this situation become crisis-conducive? And what is a crisis when a museum contemplates its identity and agency in the national psyche? As Deans (2022a, pp. 91-100) shows, the IWM successfully navigated previous adaptation and repurposing. So, what made this situation different? And how can such a sense of crisis be understood *vis-à-vis* broader prevailing contemporaneous social structures? Our study addresses these questions. It involves an analysis of documentation on the IWM s organisational crisis during the Second World War, performed using Kelsey s (2015; 2017; 2022) discourse-mythological approach.

Our study captures two key factors in this historical case. Firstly, we consider the cultural mythology that the IWM *knew* it was embedded within and needed to represent to maintain societal relevance after the new conflict. Secondly, we consider the ensuing legal contradictions that it *perceived* and unnecessarily feared and expressed internally and externally. The museum's mythological entanglement with wider cultural and political factors made its sense of crisis simultaneously justified and unjustified. Our discourse-mythological analysis therefore shows *how* this paradoxical phenomenon transpired and the lessons we can learn from it. The primary data on which the study is founded derives from archival documents. As a result, this paper explores closely the specifics surrounding the chosen case while featuring historical voices alongside our own. These documents were researched at the IWM itself and The National Archives and processed using the historical method.

The discourse-mythological approach (DMA) is adopted herein for three reasons. Firstly, as a framework to analyse discursive constructions and perceptions of cultural mythology. Secondly, to understand how transitional narrations operate through evolving mythologies in organisational context. And thirdly, to provide conceptual toolkits which show how theories of crisis can be applied through psycho-discursive analyses of apparently crisis-ridden organisations. A key theory synergised with DMA herein is Milstein's (2015) 'pragmatic' framework for understanding crisis. Our introduction of this to DMA represents an innovation beyond Kelsey's current work. Hitherto, he has not incorporated crisis theory, nor historically analysed psycho-discursive practices in organisations. Moreover, DMA's attention to archetypal storytelling and collective psychology (Kelsey, 2017; 2022) enriches our application of Milstein's ideas by attending to those narrative conventions of crisis perception.

This paper is important in three key ways. Firstly, its foreground sections offer a dissection and interpretation of the ontology and epistemology underpinning conceived and legitimised crises. Secondly, its case study presents and analyses the implications of accurate and inaccurate sensing of organisational crises on organisational operationality. And thirdly, its discussion section shows how Milstein's crisis theory can be synthesised with DMA – entwining the literature surrounding these two strands, and further expanding the applicability of the latter emerging cultural/psycho-analytical toolkit – and proposes a framework to help researchers and practitioners understand and critique crises in future academic and practical contexts. Before proceeding onto the case study, we provide a rigorous breakdown of analytical tools developed over previous DMA studies, which we draw on throughout our

analysis. But first, let us establish what we mean by crisis and what Milstein's work offers this study.

2. Understanding Crisis

The concept of crisis originated in antiquity, accruing meaning from legal, theological and medical origins (Koselleck, 2006, pp. 358-361). Crises are 'unpredictable, unstable and potentially dangerous situation[s]' (Deans, 2022a, p. 74). They arise when something appears 'disrupted, perhaps inoperably and irreparably, requiring extraordinary intervention to be overcome' (Deans, 2022a, p. 74). Crises form from what Whitehead et al. (2019, p. 2) call 'a set of interlinked structural and discursive phenomena', the latter which Milstein (2015, p. 147) describes as 'a range of claims, comments, and attitudes regarding our relation as a collective "us" to a "not-us around us" upon which our everyday life depends'. Declaring a crisis represents more than declaring something to be amiss in the environment. It involves critiquing something prompted by troubled perceptions about its existence. Hence, 'crisis' is not just an expression. It is also 'a conceptual tool for making judgments about one's relationship to one's social environment' (Milstein, 2015, p. 147) – thus, a fundamentally constructivist notion.

The nature of this structural and discursive phenomena is set out by Milstein (2015, pp. 147-152), who theorises it into four components. Together, they formulate a framework which profiles the psycho-discursivity underpinning crisis. These four components are the crisis' context, object, resolution and community. The first component is the *context* wherein crisis arises. It stems from perceptions of something falling into contradiction with expected/desired norms. The second component is the *object*: the thing inhabiting crisis. It could be physical or nonphysical but must uphold some aspect of the social system. The third component is the *resolution* which the crisis conscious believe an object must reach to escape crisis. If no resolution is perceivable, no crisis exists. And the fourth component is the *community*: people who collectively conceive and spread perceptions of crisis. Communities fuel crises. They identify and strive to rectify whatever discontinuity has alarmed them. Membership can be defined by or outwith geography. It may also cut across established groupings political and social and vary in size depending on the situation. Crisis communities come into existence when somebody – let us say, 'Crisis Conscious Zero'[2] – makes a declaration of crisis which is replicated by others. Those others licence themselves and each other to speak authoritatively about the crisis on the community's behalf: what it signifies and the requisite resolution. This gives the crisis bearing. Accordingly, a crisis' impact depends on the vitality of its community.

These components demonstrate that crisis not only comprises a definition for disruption to systemic entities, but a concept for making sense about the world and articulating discomfort arising from disruption. Hence, crisis represents symptoms of unpredictability, instability and/or danger and indicates an alarm or rallying cry warning against those symptoms, thereby preventing them from causing harm. In short, the concept is a means of simultaneously analysing and negotiating the social system (Milstein, 2015, p. 152).

We selected the IWM during the Second World War to explore the concept of crisis because this case was previously used by Deans (2022a) to demonstrate different organisational crises. Most relevantly, Deans identified two narrative driven crisis-conducive situations there. This occurred when conceptions about the IWM's pre-Second World War *raison d'être* and rationale collided with perceptions of a new, incompatible post-Second World War reality – producing concerns over impending institutional demise. The case was chosen for this study because of its potential to illustrate the effects of the mind on people's conceptualisation of legitimate and not-so-legitimate threats. What follows is an account characterising these crisis-conducive situations and their resolutions presented within a psycho-discursive framework. Through doing so, our article addresses two interrelated yet contrasting scenarios. One is a crisis of cultural irrelevancy, stemming from shifts in cultural mythology. The other is the IWM's internal perception of a legal crisis between itself and relevant governmental authorities. When reading our case study, it is important to be mindful that, as a museum, the IWM embodies a particular organisational paradigm and possesses features and idiosyncrasies, and arises out of circumstances, unique to itself – as do all organisations. Readers interested in this context can consult, for example, Kavanagh (1994, pp. 117-151), Cundy (2015) and Deans' (2022a) historical institutional studies on the IWM, alongside work on museum theory and practice such as that presented in Anderson's (2012; 2023) edited collections *Reinventing the Museum*, Macdonald and Leahy's (2015) four-volume edited collection *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, and Mason's (2020) three-volume edited collection *Museum Studies* – of course, amongst many others. Our concern here is with teasing out and critiquing the psycho-discursive qualities of the contrasting crisis-conducive situations arising from the case study and incorporating the issues and ideas generated through that process to the DMA.

The account herein was produced using multiple methods and approaches requiring explanation. Before proceeding to explore its underlying analytical framework, we must first explore the data collection and analysis which established the building blocks of our case study.

3. Archival Data Collection and Analysis

Our case study was produced from documentation researched by Deans at IWM's museum archive and The National Archives during concentrated research trips over 2016-2018, typically between British university terms. More than 1500 individual documents were consulted and recorded during these trips, the most salient of those pertaining to this study being referenced herein. Documentary sources encompass heterogeneous types conveying thought and expression on daily occurrences. Accordingly, different documents were encountered during the research trips towards this paper, with those eventually being used comprising correspondence (predominantly letters), memoranda and meeting minutes (see Morris, 2006, p. 3). The first two types convey personal perspectives and insights into the issues that their author-senders wanted the intended audience/s to be aware about. And the third type represents what is discussed amongst attendees at meetings. It follows that each document drawn on herein will have been produced and preserved through a unique mesh of stimuli, systematic processes and personal or

institutional agendas. Thus, every document consulted possessed different meanings and informativeness, requiring careful analysis to be understood.

Documentary analysis occurred alongside the collection and during 2019-2020. As with all historical research, the aim of the analysis was to understand the information obtained and to critically evaluate it. Hence, the critical approach deployed comprised a three-stage process of evaluation. Stage one involved inspecting the sources to confirm their authenticity. Stage two involved reviewing the extracted information to determine validity. And stage three involved assessing what the data implied, how the different units correlated, and their significance. The process can be best described as an interrogation of assumptions. It involves anatomising the data, then reassembling it in ways that make the data more knowable and meaningful. The result is an ability to make critical observations which inform the understanding of the case (Stake, 1995, pp. 71-76). The data collected through this process is analysed below via DMA.

Most of the documents referenced below originate from just one actor, the Director-General of the IWM during the Second World War, Leslie Bradley. Besides exclusionary archiving practices (Assmann, 2011, p. 337), this feature is the result of Bradley's dominance at the institution and his omnipresence in its preserved documentation. The IWM was a relatively small museum during the Second World War, employing around 15 back-of-house staff. Indeed, by 1939, as well as occupying the role of Director-General, Bradley was also the museum's curator, secretary and accounting officer. This meant he enjoyed 'considerable discretionary decision-making capabilities and broad, direct responsibility' (Deans, 2022a, p. 104). By necessity, our study reflects, in more ways than one, Bradley's hegemony.

4. *Analytical Framework: The Discourse-Mythological Approach*

4.1 Conceptual Context

While DMA has typically explored cultural mythologies as narrative vehicles for ideology, this study explores how cultural myths and organisational narratives function as perceptive vehicles for crises. There are relevant ideological contexts operating through those myths that are drawn in national identity and how institutions identify their position regarding cultural identities. The latter has cogency and warrants consideration herein, but the primary concern is how those perceptions cause justified and unjustified senses of crises for organisations.

4.2 Origins

DMA was designed to analyse discursive constructions of cultural mythology using tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Here, Kelsey analysed the myth of the Blitz spirit in British newspaper responses to the 2005 London bombings. By defining myth, discourse and ideology as distinct, distinguishable components via DMA, Kelsey showed how discursive practices construct mythological stories and how those myths function as narrative vehicles for ideology. Myths are not lies or falsities. Rather, they are simplified stories

serving cultural and political purposes (Barthes, 1972; Kelsey, 2015). For DMA, wartime mythologies operated as popular and commonly unquestioned stories denying the complexities and contradictions of past events to reflect specific values and ideals of their society. Myths provide modes of collective storytelling to create a sense of identity and shared values between communities across manifold societal demographics. Wartime mythologies often form national narrations that institutions, politicians and communities look to for a sense of common values, a definitive past and sense of common purpose in the present (Calder, 1991; 1999).

Kelsey's analysis of the Blitz spirit showed that to understand the politics of remembering we must be aware of prevailing apocryphal stories and their impact on subjective perceptions of the present. Here, Kelsey analysed the diachronic and synchronic contexts in which cultural mythologies operate historically and contemporaneously. The significance of our current case study is the way synchronic mechanisms of cultural mythology and national narration during the Second World War affected the IWM's sense of responsibility and crisis at the time.

In developing DMA, Kelsey conceptualised a flexible framework, synergising tools of CDA (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak et al., 1999; Wodak, 2001) with theories of myth and semiotics (Barthes, 1972; Bottici, 2007; Flood, 2002). DMA was never conceived as a fixed or reductive approach, but an adaptable and expandable one to analyse cultural phenomena across manifold spaces. Thus, DMA's toolkits (Kelsey, 2015; 2017) contain various concepts that can be applied to understand how constructions of mythology operate in society. DMA has since been used in several studies on mythological storytelling in political, cultural and geographical contexts (Lähdesmäki, 2019; MacMillan, 2020; Nartey, 2021; Panay, 2017).

This article draws on various tools featuring in DMA over its decade-long development. They have been selected to show how DMA's earliest and most recent developments offered conceptual insights that supported our case. These tools are outlined below.

4.3 Narrating the Myth of the Blitz

Research by Ricoeur (1986), Somers (1994) and Wodak et al. (1999) show that narrative enables national identities to be imagined, remembered, and communicated. Through common and recurring stories about a nation's past, present and future circumstances, political leaders, cultural narrators, journalists, institutions, communities and groups are entangled with those narrative landscapes and ideological practices involved in shaping national identities.

As Calder (1991), Ponting (1990) and Manthorpe (2006) argue, positive stories from the myth of the Blitz are not untrue. Communities did unite and support each other; humour, solidarity and resilience did exist amongst British people. But there were also communities wherein morale was low, where crime was rampant, and where people died from panicked crowds piling into underground shelters for safety: examples of uncomfortable stories in an otherwise popular narrative. 'London Can Take It', 'Keep Calm. Carry On' and 'Business as usual' remain popular slogans of Blitz mythology since the war. Indeed, this narrative survives and continues to be reconfigured in

contemporary contexts serving various ideological purposes in stories about events such as Brexit (Berry, 2019) and COVID-19 (Reicher and Stott, 2020).

Instead of looking at recent invocations of Blitz mythology, this paper considers the wartime past of Britain when national narration was transitioning. As the IWM knew at the time, national narration is not a static practice in collective storytelling. Despite its simplifications and denial of awkward contradictions, the adaptations and recontextualisations occurring in national narration and its associated mythologies are nuanced and evolve over time (Kelsey, 2015). Therefore, the transitional narrations of wartime mythology we consider herein were salient in the public psyche, causing a public institution to realise its requirement to evolve and create for itself a sense of crisis in the process. Hence, this study addresses what happens when a public museum responds to 'value shifts' in Britain's wartime story (Van Wart, 1995, p. 429).

To conduct this analysis of transitional practices in national narration at a museum in crisis, we adopt DMA's multi-layered discursive toolkits to understand the IWM's contemporaneous position and the socio-political structures it worked within. This scope accounts for the textual, discursive, and social practices involved in storytelling and communication.

4.4 Multi-Layered Scope

DMA draws on Fairclough's (1995) three layered model to analyse texts in their communicative and social contexts. Firstly, *textual analysis* examines language, images and other semiotic elements of texts, accounting for their key messages and meanings. Alongside recognising the significance of these textual aspects, it addresses the active role they play in communication and the contexts wherein they appear. Our case study analyses texts collected from the IWM archive – the dataset evidencing a crisis-conducive situation and how it formed. But we can only fully understand these texts in their professional and political contexts, the ways they are produced and consumed in their cultural and institutional environments.

Here, the second layer addresses *discursive practices*. Discursive practices account for the way 'authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text and [...] how receivers of texts also apply available discourses and genres in the consumption and interpretation of [...] texts' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 69). These operate through the IWM's reception and interpretation of cultural mythology and where it perceived itself to be in terms of existing and required practices in national narration at that time. These elements reflect what Blommaert (1999, pp. 5-6) writes about as systems of reproduction, reception and remembering, which affect the way that texts are produced and consumed since socio-historical and cultural mechanisms form discourses and produce meaning.

The third layer addresses *social practice*. This accounts for those broader societal, governmental, and ideological structures wherein the museum understood itself to function. The latter particularly is where the museum identified legitimate reasons to evolve its subject remit while forming illegitimate perceptions of intrinsic legislative structures. These multi-layered dynamics feed back into the textual layer of discourse, informing how the IWM created meaning. Hence, as with previous DMA studies, we do not separate

textual/discursive/social stages of analysis. Rather, they are entwined and operate simultaneously.

Recently, Kelsey (2021) developed this multi-layered approach to account for deeper psychological mechanisms of storytelling and how these conventions entangled with ideology. Those discursive and social practices influence the production and interpretation of texts, but also our sense of Self and Other between people and communities. When entangled with the ideology, archetypal manifestations form perceptions of agency and participants in personal and cultural relations. Accordingly, archetypal storytelling is an influential psychological factor that impacts on (and is impacted by) those above-mentioned multi-layered practices.

4.5 Archetypes and Collective Psychology

This development enabled DMA to explore psycho-discursive mechanisms of narrative construction and how they affect our personal and collective lives. In *Media and Affective Mythologies*, Kelsey (2017) introduced Carl Jung's work to analyse archetypal patterns and characteristics of storytelling and the role of the collective unconscious in cultural storytelling. DMA showed how our stories reflect recurring archetypal forms in behavioural patterns and characteristics that play out in stories and mythology (Kelsey, 2017, p. 1).

DMA has shown how archetypes and ideology become embroiled in political and celebrity personas that take on mythological roles such as heroes, tricksters, villains, saviours and magicians. Other behavioural symbols, happenings and patterns in personal and collective stories also assume archetypal forms beyond mythological character roles. For example, Bassil-Morozow and Kelsey (c. 2024) show how surveillance practice can be analysed as an archetypal phenomenon: from moral patterns of meaning and behaviour in ancient Greek mythology to behavioural tendencies and practices of surveillance cultures in modern life. Collective 'shadows' can also be identified in cases where cultural taboos, awkward conversations and unpleasant truths about current or historical flaws and follies are obscured by darkness and denied from collective integration in the psyche of a community (Kelsey 2017; 2022).

Jungian analysts Joseph Lee, Lisa Marchiano, and Deborah Stewart (2022) discussed this phenomenon *apropos* the archetype of war. As Jung (1959) pointed out, humans carry an innate tendency for destruction, change and transformation, which requires recognition and integration in the psyche to avoid chaotic projections to occur via war and atrocity. Despite its horrors, and because of the binding impact war often has on communities, Jung discussed the way war, as an archetype, provides a constellated field of human experience in the psyche. Hence, organisations like the IWM also feel a sense of moral and patriotic duty to remain relevant in the national psyche when wartime mythologies evolve and reform over time.

Likewise, crises and crisis responses comprise archetypal phenomena through their associated patterns of narrative, behaviour and symbolism. Jung described personal crises – mental illness, anxiety, depression, *etcetera* – as symbolic manifestations of a need/opportunity for transformation that is not fully and consciously integrated psychologically. This suffering applies to groups as much as individuals and intensifies if the crisis is not confronted with the required change or transformation. However, in the context of

organisations, there are archetypal behaviours that play out in responses to crises.

Organisational crises are often identified as opportunities for transformation by organisational leaders. Miller (1987) and Lalonde (2004) identify distinct archetypal management responses to crises: the 'collectivists', 'integrators', and 'reactive' types. These archetypal patterns concern different cases of crisis management to those we analyse in our case study. But what is noteworthy is that patterns of behaviour recur because they are symbolic of personalities, organisational environments and the social structures wherein they work.

In Lalonde's (2004) analysis, for example, 'collectivists' (typically) reflected a desire to account for differing needs of various communities in their crisis response. The 'integrators' sought to implement distinctive organisational skills through the actions of other strategic members – often becoming preoccupied with a rigorous rationale for optimising the team's best skillsets and most appropriate use of resources. The 'reactives' were spontaneous in nature and confident in implementing strategies. But they were also anxious in their need to react quickly, which often put other members of the organisation under pressure.

Our study does not recontextualise these specific archetypes to the case of the IWM. Such a task is beyond its scope. However, we note that behavioural traits in crisis situations do take on recurring archetypal forms. So too do stories people and organisations tell themselves. This is a problem humans have understood for millennia. It is often our stories, personalities and personas which make us anxious as individuals and groups. Kelsey (2022) tackled this issue in his recent expansion of DMA, which introduced collective psychology and certain philosophical foundations behind Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to understand how patterns of behaviour and storytelling impact upon our personal and collective wellbeing.

4.6 Stoicism and Storytelling

While developing its focus on collective psychology, DMA incorporated ancient Stoicism to analyse personal and collective storytelling *vis-à-vis* mental health. Kelsey showed that by synthesising modern psychology with this philosophy, we can manage our personal and collective narratives in ways conducive to our wellbeing as people and societies.[3]

It should be noted that the foundations of CBT derive from Stoicism. When Albert Ellis developed CBT in the 1950s, he drew on Stoicism in designing the ABC model of emotions. This model encourages us not to ignore our emotions but control them by managing our perceptions of life events. Ellis would reveal he had been influenced by a saying from the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus (2004, p. 3): 'Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by the[ir] opinions about the things' (see Evans 2013, p. 4). Ellis believed that we can manage our emotions if we understand how our unconscious beliefs affect our responses to events in life.

Aaron Beck, another pioneer of CBT, was also influenced by Stoicism and particularly this idea that people are affected by the meaning of events rather than events themselves. As Evans (2013, p. 4) discovered from conversations with Ellis and Beck: '[They] took the ideas and techniques of ancient Greek philosophy, and put them right at the heart of Western psychotherapy'.

Through this method, we can transform how we understand ourselves and everything around us to reduce the emotional disturbances created through our perceptions. Rather than investing our emotions in those external factors beyond control, CBT encourages us to focus on what is controllable and to make pragmatic sense of how we should respond.

CBT has typically been applied against internal narratives of individuals who could benefit from realigning perceptions of their inner-self *apropos* the outer world. However, the Stoic ethos and toolkits offered by CBT has equal potential when shared and practised among professional teams, community leaders, organisations, peer-to-peer dialogue and coaching (Hultgren et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2010).

It is worth considering the principles of Stoicism and CBT – with those organisational applications – to understand how perceptions shape our collective stories and communities and institutions relate to the surrounding world. Given that stories help interpret life around us, they become the connective components in perceptions that form our inner-dialogues.

Our perceptions often instigate a self-perpetuating cycle of anxiety and frustration reinforced by stories about ourselves and the world. Yet we need not banish this ethos from our inner-dialogue, since it can foster healthier shared dialogues and pragmatic organisational narratives. As Kelsey (2022, p. 7) highlights, 'it is our collective responsibility to foster social and institutional environments that are conducive to human flourishing and less reliant on therapy'. Hence, the Stoics resonate in the ethos of healthy team/community/organisational dialogue.

Prior to our case study, it is important to remember that neither Stoicism nor CBT are about denying life's threats, challenges, emotions, anxieties or disturbances. Rather, they encourage us to manage our perceptions and actions to minimise unhelpful disturbances that we endure personally and collectively. On detecting a genuine threat that stirs emotions and disturbance for legitimate reasons, we can manage our inner-dialogue to respond in ways more conducive to our wellbeing and social participation. As the Stoics explain, if we focus on thoughts and actions that are within control, then we maximise our ability to impact upon a preferred outcome, rather than investing negative emotions in anticipated outcomes beyond our control.

We shall return to these principles later in a final discussion section after next presenting the data from our case study on the IWM during the Second World War.

5. Case Study: The Imperial War Museum during the Second World War

5.1 Historical Context

After H. G. Wells (1914) published *The War that will End War*, this wartime mythology received multiple adaptations over subsequent years (Deans, 2022a, p. 100; Malvern, 2000, p. 181). During the First World War, such words may have offered messages intended to galvanise the population into defeating the Central Powers. Immediately afterwards, they may have presented messages that helped alleviate the nation's shock at what had transpired. Next, as the country healed over the 1920s, they may have communicated messages to

reassure the bereaved. And finally, with another war looming throughout the 1930s, it may have conveyed messages warning against history repeating itself. Hence, the IWM's role in national narration before the Second World War was not to tell a static story for fixed purposes. Rather, it had adapted to cultural developments, remaining relevant and resonant to those it spoke to.

The onset of the Second World War prompted further, extensive cultural development. A major transition in national narration was required when Britain entered the conflict on 3 September 1939. With the First World War no longer representing the 'war to end all war', the IWM faced the prospect of cultural irrelevancy. This position brought the museum's legitimacy into doubt. The IWM knew it had to take action to survive, catalysing its sense of organisational crisis.

5.2 Detecting Crisis Signals

There are many frameworks for understanding crisis and organisational crisis management. Our choice is one developed by Pearson and Mitroff (1993). In its entirety, this framework breaks down crisis management into five stages: signal detection, preparation, prevention/mitigation, recovery and learning. During the following case study, we focus on the first two stages. This is because those discourses and ideologies under analysis derive from the institution's initial transactions from the crisis – the opening phases when the museum was establishing its predicament and laying the foundations to resolve the problem.

As discussed, declaring a crisis involves critiquing the conditions of something prompted by troubled perceptions about its existence. This commences with signal detection (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993, pp. 52-53). It involves a risk assessment (Pursiainen, 2018, pp. 9-16) to distinguish red flags from background noise (Al Luhaidan and Alrazeeni, 2019; Paraskevas, 2013, p. 629). Signals emanating from the legitimate crisis-conducive situation at the IWM considered here were first detected by museum staff no later than 1939. The earliest document found in this regard comprises a letter dated 7 June 1939 from Leslie Bradley (1939a), Director-General of the IWM, to the Private Secretary of the Deputy Under-Secretary of State for War:

> I have […] urged upon the Chairman of the Board […] the desirability of establishing relations with the Service, and other Departments, with a view to the preservation of the records and relics of any future war, but his attitude is, first, that such Departments have far too many other things to consider, and that in any case the handing over of such relics and records to this Museum will be automatic in the event of another war.

This source reveals that the chief staffer had received the signals, legitimised them, and sensed a genuine danger facing the IWM: encroaching cultural irrelevancy. It also shows he had sensed the necessary resolution for the problem at hand: a contemporary collecting programme, enabling the IWM to maintain relevancy. Indeed, sense making is an important skill in perceiving and resolving crisis. The earlier an emerging threat can be identified, the sooner it can be addressed. Moreover, if the sources, traits and ramifications of crisis are quickly understood, the more likely it will be mitigated (Boin et al., 2017, p. 23).

Despite its importance to effective crisis management, sense making is not always easily accomplished. An organisation's structure or culture may mask or

allude misleadingly to a crisis' onset. Moreover, the subjectiveness of crisis may mean some people do not perceive any threat where one exists, or vice versa. Indeed, organisational attributes such as hierarchy, bureaucracy and communication can be a hindrance to clear, rational thought processes. While no specific qualities suffice sense making, research shows that experience and intensive training (Roe and Schulman, 2008), intuition (Kahneman and Klein, 2009; Kahneman, 2011; Klein, 2017) and organisational structures or cultures that proactively scan for environmental problems (Hopkins, 2009; Rochlin, 1996; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2015) can all help in this regard.

Bradley's sensing over the sources, characteristics and consequences of the crisis-conducive situation confronting the IWM in 1939 is demonstrated through his desire for the museum not to suffer from the same handicap which hampered its collecting activities during the previous world war. When the War Cabinet initially authorised the museum project in 1917, the First World War had already exceeded two years. Over this time, numerous pieces of war material, particularly ephemera, entered and exited circulation without any specimens being collected. Accordingly, manifold pre-1917 items big and small were still unrepresented in the IWM's collection by 1939. A similar delay threatened much the same outcome to any new collecting initiative. This potentially limited the effectiveness of the crisis management strategy. After all, the more fulsome the contemporary collection, the more relevant and resonant the IWM would be to future audiences and researchers (Rhys and Baveystock, 2014).

Concern over losing opportunity to collect material from the new conflict is clearly evidenced through three letters which Bradley sent to various members of the government during September 1939. In each, he earnestly requested their assistance in undertaking a contemporary collecting initiative through organising or influencing formal or informal activities towards earmarking and storing material across their departments until custody could be assumed by the IWM. The first such letter was sent on 11 September 1939 to the Secretary of State for Air:

> I consider it my duty to bring this matter to your notice now because the utility of the Museum and the completeness of its record have always been hampered by the fact that the systematic collection of material did not begin until 1917, and unless immediate steps are taken in this matter another unrecoverable gap will be formed. (Bradley, 1939b)

The Lord Privy Seal was sent the second letter a day later:

> [The IWM] has never been able to attain completeness owing to the impossibility of tracing all that was lost during the first half of the [last] war when no systematic effort was made to collect a record of activities on what is commonly called the 'Home Front'. [...] Our experience [...] is that the very beginning of a war is the only time for such collection to be begun [...]. (Bradley, 1939c)

And the Home Secretary was sent the third letter two days later:

> Both we and they [those who used its collections for war research during the interwar years] have [...] suffered from comparative paucity of records and material for the earlier half of the [last] war when no systematic collection was made [...]. [...] [T]he last few years have amply proved the convenience of keeping a complete record of war measures accessible for reference in a future emergency. (Bradley, 1939d)

The ramifications of not extending its subject remit were also raised in a candid letter which Bradley (1939e) sent to the Deputy Secretary of the Air Ministry on 24 October: 'I could see no future for the Museum if it was to remain merely a Museum of the last war but one'.

Bradley cannot be confirmed as Crisis Conscious Zero of this crisis-conducive situation at the IWM. Yet he was convinced by the danger and sensed that an appropriate resolution to cultural irrelevancy involved updating its content in line with the country's shifting collective narrative.

5.3 Preparing for Crisis

A crisis must be prevented or mitigated following its detection. Both outcomes occur after a preparation process (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993, p. 53) where the requisite strategy for resolving it is formulated (Paraskevas, 2013, pp. 629-630). The danger posed by post-war cultural irrelevancy against the IWM clearly warranted a preventative strategy. Hence, the Director-General, Bradley, was convinced about the necessity of extending the institution's subject remit to avert its demise. Yet conviction alone did not suffice instigating this. Bradley also needed authority from those who held ultimate responsibility for the institution on behalf of the nation – the Board of Trustees. The immediate task therefore was to prepare to resolve the situation by ensuring the necessary permission was secured before enacting his scheme.

Bradley raised the extension of the IWM's subject remit with the institution's Trustees on 20 June 1939 (Board of Trustees, 1939a). Although apparently the first minuted discussion with any Trustee meeting under his leadership, it would unlikely have been the Trustees' first conversation with him about the idea. As per his abovementioned letter dated 7 June 1939, Bradley shows he was a vocal proponent of the extension. Moreover, the meeting minutes infer it had previously been discussed off the record (Board of Trustees, 1939a, p. 2).

Had Bradley hoped for a quick approval, he would have been disappointed. The Trustees 'laid it down that it was for the Government to decide whether and where such relics and records were to be kept' (Board of Trustees, 1939a, p. 2). This decision requires some interpretation.

When proposing his scheme to the IWM's Trustees on 20 June, Bradley acknowledged that following preliminary enquiries into it at the War Office, certain officials had 'enquired [about] the exact terms of the *Imperial War Museum Act*' (our italics; Board of Trustees, 1939a, p. 2). This was the legislation passed in 1920 which incorporated the IWM. The above admission is significant for sparking an additional yet wholly unnecessary perception of threat. Indeed, it seemingly raised concerns amongst the Trustees about the socio-political regulative legitimacy surrounding the scheme. After all, such action needed to remain in regulatory alignment with the frameworks that governed the IWM. Otherwise, it risked attracting sanctions and disrepute and catalysing a reduction of legitimacy (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002, p. 418).

The *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920 was quite a straightforward piece of legislation. There existed six sections to it in 1939. The first three were the most significant: section one defined the Board of Trustees and established terms for its governance; section two established the scope of the influence and power of the Board; and section three established core policies through which collection material could be gifted, acquired, or transferred to the IWM. Sections four, five and six detailed staffing and expenses arrangements, the museum's non-

charitable status, and guidance on the legislation's citation and interpretation respectively.

While fairly uninhibiting, there existed one clause which may have prevented the IWM from buying exhibits with government funds. This was clause 2d, stating that 'subject to the consent of the Treasury, [the Trustees may] apply any money received by them [...] in the purchase of any object which in the opinion of the Board it is desirable to acquire for the Museum' (*Imperial War Museum Act* 1920). Thus, the Treasury had a veto on certain museum activities.

At many non-profit organisations, boards are not just responsible for their institution's conduct. They are also liable when that conduct causes negative repercussions. Accordingly, charges against boards can arise from manifold contexts of perceived negligence. As Johnston (1988, p. 77) explains: 'Normally, board members are liable personally when they fail to fulfil [...]: (1) the duty of diligence; (2) the duty of obedience; and (3) the duty of loyalty'. This means boards are subject to multiple dimensions of accountability, with ramifications befalling if anything avoidable occurs which harms the organisation or contravenes established governing frameworks (Burcaw, 1997, p. 205). Johnston (1988, p. 78) therefore recommends that to avoid liability for actions which fall beyond the scope of their responsibility, 'board members should conduct their duties strictly within their governing rules'. The inference of this recommendation is that boards may (indeed should) adopt, in the broadest understanding, a conservative philosophy when dispensing their duties (see Hamilton, 2020).

Considering the provisions of the *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920, we posit that this context catalysed caution by the Trustees over Bradley's proposal for the IWM. Through vesting them with 'general management and control' (*Imperial War Museum Act* 1920, clause 2), the act made them legal guardians of the museum. Consequently, had the proposed scheme been met with governmental disapproval, been undertaken unlawfully or against existing policies, it was they, not Bradley, who would be found responsible. With the War Office querying the purview of the *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920, it is thus unsurprising the Trustees wanted reassurance over the plan.

Ideally, the next step for Bradley should have comprised raising the extension of the IWM's subject remit with the Treasury. Such was the Trustees' cautiousness over his scheme however, the Chair of the Board, Sir Bertram Cubitt, instructed its legality to be established by a government lawyer. Cubitt had formally been the Assistant Secretary of the War Office (see 'Sir Bertram Cubitt', 1942). Yet despite retiring in 1926, he seemingly maintained contacts with senior personnel there, such as the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War (Cubitt, 1939). This may have further exposed him to concerns emanating from the War Office about the *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920 and its restrictions on the museum's subject remit.

Bradley (1939f) followed Cubitt's instructions by sending a copy of the *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920 and covering letter to the Treasury Solicitor's Office on 27 July 1939. The government lawyer who looked at it, J. C. P. Kinsman, found '[nothing] in the act to prevent the Trustees from accepting the custody of future relics of a future war' (Kinsman, 1939a). Highlighting, perhaps, the Trustees' overcautiousness, he appended his written judgement with the following pithy remark directed at Cubitt: 'I can see nothing in the Act to prevent you from doing this, and I am at a loss to understand how the question ever arose' (Kinsman, 1939b).

This verdict debunked key assumptions at and about the IWM about the institution's *raison d'être* and rationale. Kinsman shows that despite contrary beliefs, no formal institutional documentation prescribed what the museum should or should not have collected and displayed or addressed in exhibitions. A search of Hansard, previous legislation and museum documentation indicates that until 1955, the *Imperial War Museum Act* 1920 was its sole constitutional document. Further underlining this, separate records reveal that in 1927, Charles ffoulkes (n.d.), the then Curator and Secretary of the IWM, had similarly enquired at the Treasury Solicitor's Office whether the museum could also collect and display medieval weapons. The response received from the Treasury Solicitor's Office at that time informed him how: 'The Act is in very general terms. It gives wide discretion to the Trustees as to the objects to be acquired and exhibited' (King, 1927, p. 1). All this indicates that during 1939 the IWM had a large degree of autonomy and that any limitations which the institution observed were entirely self-imposed.

On 22 September 1939, 19 days after Britain declared war against Germany, the Board finally authorised Bradley (1939g) to approach the Treasury and formally request an extension of the IWM's subject remit. Memorandums between Treasury officials during its deliberations over the extension suggest no great exciting disagreement took place. For all the concern about process, there seemingly was consensus over the benefit an extended subject remit would have for the public and museum, further highlighting the unwarrantedness of any concern. One Treasury official reflected that 'I think it must be admitted from all points of view that having set up the record of the Great War [...] it would be most desirable to continue with a similar record of the present war' (Unidentifiable, 1939a, p. 2). Another mused how 'it is probably right to assume that future generations will be at least as interested in records of the present war as of the last war' (Unidentifiable, 1939b). And a third even predicted that 'Future generations will probably be as interested in this war as in the last war and would not attend in large numbers a Museum whose exhibits were limited to the last war' (Unidentifiable, 1939c).

On 19 October 1939, the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury issued a document conveying the requisite permission (Douglas, 1939). Bradley presented this document at the Meeting of the Board of Trustees on 7 December 1939, where the Trustees reviewed it. With questions over its legitimacy now addressed, the Board authorised Bradley to begin organising the collection (Board of Trustees, 1939b, pp. 1-2). The imagined legal crisis had been resolved.

5.4 Round-Up

In 1939, the IWM was a museum on the 'war to end all war', as the First World War had been mythologised. The onset of the Second World War fractured this mythology, so the IWM adopted a new identity consistent with the narrative which society now recognised. In 1945, at the close of the Second World War, the IWM emerged as a museum on two world wars, representing the new world reality. In hindsight, this transition may seem obvious and logical. But at the time, it was the resolution to an unprecedented organisational crisis, the contemplation of which catalysed another crisis through concern over the former's resolution.

How can we make further sense of these instances of crisis perception and reaction? Before concluding, let us finally revisit certain tools introduced above

to show how DMA augments Milstein's ideas to create a synergistic framework for future research on organisational crisis.

6. Discussion: Milstein-Mythological Crisis

6.1 A New Framework

This case study shows how adopting Milstein's crisis theory in DMA enriches our understanding of crisis in organisations, cultural mythology and collective psychology. DMA's attention to those broader discursive practices and social contexts which organisations are caught up amid provided rigorous insights on the complexities of crisis. For future scholarship, we now propose a Milstein-Mythological framework to help researchers critique theoretical, practical and psychological complexities of crisis-ridden organisations. Drawing on Milstein's ideas, let us return to those other conceptual areas evident in the archival data of our case study.

6.2 National Narration

We have shown that an institution's awareness of prevailing cultural mythology and its position and responsibility at transition points in national narration poses multifaceted implications. At the IWM, this stimulated a sense of urgency in response to potential crisis that was justifiably and successfully avoided. But it also created an inner-dialogue which catalysed overly risk-averse practices. For example, the museum's Director-General, mindful about the impact time has on the efficacy of contemporary collecting initiatives, wanted the Trustees to authorise the establishment of a collection of the new world war without delay. The Trustees however, mindful of the museum's founding mission and constitution – and, we conjecture, their responsibilities and liabilities as its custodians – wanted confirmation from higher authorities that this shift in national narration had governmental approval and socio-political regulative legitimacy before granting the Director-General with the permission he needed.

6.3 Multi-Layered Practices

This study brings various observations to DMA. It shows how national narration is practised within a national museum that considers itself a part of the mnemonic infrastructure of its society and cultural mythology. And DMA too shows how the three-layered approach is necessary to understanding those discursive dynamics of the organisation: the museum critiques its own textual material and gathering of prospective wartime artefacts (textual analysis), it understands how these assets are shared and interacted with through public engagement and wider societal stories that its assets are part of (discursive practice), and it engages with broader institutional and governmental practices to oversee its political and legislative protocols (social practice). Likewise, our analysis applied those layers to the archival data gathered for this case study. Archetypal dynamics are evident in those behavioural and narrative patterns appearing throughout the case concerned.

6.4 Archetypes and Collective Psychology

There are many archetypal conventions and narrative layers that can be analysed regarding wartime mythology, national identity and national narration. While we did not conduct an archetypal analysis, the relevance of the storytelling, cognitive and behavioural patterns are evident *apropos* the macro and micro contexts of collective psychology in national and localised/organisational contexts. As discussed, war itself is an archetype that variously recurs in the psyche. Likewise, the idea of 'the nation' and its associated narrations accommodated by museums evolve over time. During the Second World War, staff at the IWM actively participated in the prevailing collective psychology and societal concerns.

The 'war to end all war' had become redundant. Heartbreakingly, the notion that 'heroic sacrifices' (a key archetypal form in mnemonic storytelling) had ensured indefinite peace was void. An evolving national story in response to returning outside threats – now on home soil – was required if the IWM would remain relevant. This story began being told in the Second World War itself with an exhibition framing Germany as a country requiring subduing (Deans, 2022b, pp. 93-96). The story then evolved following the war, focussing on war's spectacle and the awesomeness with which war was now being waged, including the effect weapons had on the lived-environment (Cundy, 2017, pp. 268-269; Deans, 2022a, pp. 240-246).

The notion of 'crisis' also provides another archetypal factor worth considering. As discussed, all crises can be considered archetypes for the recurring behavioural and cognitive patterns they reflect in personal/collective stories (Jung, 1959; Lee et al., 2022). And organisational crisis responses have been extensively analysed because of their recurring behavioural tendencies (Lang et al., 2020; Lalonde, 2004; Olejarski and Garnett, 2010). As Miller (1987) establishes, organisations reflect distinct archetypal patterns of crisis response in the behavioural roles they assume. They reflect strategic and psychological states of their teams: perceptions, objectives and leadership dynamics, *etcetera*.

Indeed, Miller identified those 'collectivists', 'integrators' and 'reactives' as distinct archetypal forms. But rather than defining such characteristics of the IWM following a study that did not observe these psycho-discursive factors, we call for further research to be conducted to establish how these archetypes can be applied to the operations of museums in crisis.

We apply caution here. As Kelsey et al. (2023) have shown, archetypal blending is a phenomenon that requires further attention in psycho-discursive research to demonstrate the complexities and negotiations between social ideals, narrative conventions and ideological contexts. It is likely multiple archetypes, characteristics and personalities influenced internal relations and dialogue at the IWM beyond what our archival data reveals. It is conceivable that the IWM's behaviours and responses varied depending on the different crisis-types it faced. One response required the necessary actions that it provided. The other required an internal adjustment of feelings and perceptions towards the challenges faced.

6.5 Managing Perceptions and Actions

Finally, we revisit the philosophical grounding discussed in the relationship between Stoicism and CBT and the oscillation between individual and collective dialogues. The principles and toolkits typically applied through personal uses of philosophy for life (Stoicism, for example) or therapy (CBT, for example) can be applied via collective dialogue, leadership and coaching.

Regarding the crisis in national narration which the IWM faced, it provided a sound assessment of the collective psyche and requirements for transformation. It identified that challenge and used this as an opportunity to evolve. Indeed, the obstacle faced in remaining culturally relevant became a way forward to develop. Here, we apply Marcus Aurelius (2006, para. 20) for some Stoic reflection: 'The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way'.

But on the legal crisis that the IWM perceived, it required adjustments to its collective group dialogue, its communicative relations with government, and a recalibration of its cross-institutional sense of place and purpose. These are not abstract factors in modern organisational collective psychology and reflective work. They reflect the lived reality and commonly adopted approaches to dealing with internal crises that are developed via the emotions, perceptions, fears and anticipations of professional teams, communities and organisations.

We end by revisiting Epictetus (2004, p. 3) for a reminder of the wisdom that those pioneers of CBT found so compelling: 'Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by the[ir] opinions about the things.' People, groups or organisations can keep their perceptions in check by focussing on actions rather than letting the former paralyse their sense of agency and control.

7. Conclusion

This paper could have concentrated on any of the DMA toolkits used herein, given the dataset the study focused on. But our aim was to show how multiple toolkits helped to understand the discursive, political and psychological complexities defining the IWM's wartime crisis and how this relates to collective storytelling. In terms of our findings and their relevance to institutions and organisations, it is important to note the more specific context of IWM as a *museum*. Museums are spaces in which the (re)production of identities takes place through curation and memorialisation. Hence, the practical, cultural and psychological dimensions to this study should be of interest to museum sectors, practitioners, policy makers, and the public.

Future studies exploring crisis as an *archetypal* form could pay closer attention to the psycho-discursive mechanisms of crises and how these relate to Milstein's thinking on the concept. This could further illuminate details regarding collective storytelling of institutions that perceive crises in their practice and identity. It could also distinguish between i) cases where organisations face legitimate crises imposed by external, superordinate factors which require resolution, and ii) cases where the sense of crisis is internally generated by stories that organisations tell themselves which would more appropriately benefit from critical reflection on the threat being confronted. By

deploying a range of tools from DMA, this study has evidenced both phenomena, occurring at the same time, in the same museum.

8. Acknowledgments

Notes

1. 'IWM' was formally adopted as the museum's name in 2011 following a rebranding exercise (IWM, 2011).
2. We developed this term from the medical term Patient Zero, meaning 'the first person known to have contracted a transmittable disease' (Eisenhower, 2022, s.v. 'Index Case vs. Patient Zero').
3. It should be noted that in developing the approach offered here in DMA, Kelsey (2022, p. 153) has previously tackled some of the stipulations and ethical considerations that should be respected when advocating these psychological and philosophical tools in personal or collective contexts: 'CBT is only one contributory component available to support our wellbeing, and it s not always the answer. There are environmental, social and professional factors that impact hugely on our mental health and we need to keep those elements in check. We must avoid lazy occupational cultures of CBT provision in which institutions overlook their own working conditions and responsibilities; sending an employee for some introspective therapy that provides no acknowledgement of the legitimate causes of stress in the workplace. There is little point in workplaces providing access to counselling and wellbeing services if institutions themselves are systematically causing employees to be unnecessarily stressed, disillusioned or disempowered at work. Institutions require collective introspection and transformative leadership that supports their employees in order to reduce the necessity for counselling and undue pressure on wellbeing services. That said, these collective and institutional responsibilities do not warrant us to completely dismiss the validity of CBT. Individuals can and should help themselves too.'

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