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El Cid: Can an Aesthetics Lens Save Transformational Leadership from Itself?

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Abstract: Countless articles and books have been written about transformational leadership theory since the late 1970s when it first appeared in the literature. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to illustrate that transformational leadership contains both logical and psychological problems when explaining the nature of leadership and as an empirically supportable and verifiable construct. It aims to show that its failure to garner evidence from a scientific methodological analysis may not invalidate its efficacy if it is viewed from an alternative lens, such as aesthetics. An aesthetic frame is one that recognizes sensuous ways of knowing since feelings and emotions are just as important as reason and logic. An aesthetic approach to leadership would see leadership as more of an art than a science. This paper is not arguing for the abandonment of transformational leadership theory; rather it is saying that an aesthetic lens is likely to yield a richer, more artistic, and more nuanced account of what is understood and enacted as transformational leadership. This way, the manifestations of transformational leadership may live on in the arts and continue to inspire and motivate us.

Keywords: archetype; transformational leadership; scientific management; charisma; line of demarcation; point of scientificity; scientific empiricism; aesthetics; El Cid



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1. Introduction

Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar (1043–1099), known in Spain as El Cid or El Campeador (the Champion), is an example of historical and literary transformations that propelled him to be feted as an unparalleled battlefield and political leader and the national hero of Spain portrayed in the medieval Spanish epic poem *El Cantar de mio Cid* [1]. For purposes of this paper, El Cid is the symbol for confronting the realities and mythology of the concept of the transformational leader, even in death. It is said that after he died, his wife had his corpse set into his armor and set aside his horse to lead a charge into the enemy lines [2]. Thus, El Cid is a transformational leader who refuses to die.

One of the most enduring archetypes in the stories of human struggle across the ages is that of the hero archetype. In his classic work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell [3] chronicled the mythologies, battles, trials, and triumphs of the heroes of ancient, medieval, and modern times. They all bear a striking resemblance to current portraits of the transformational leader.

It is the purpose of this paper to illustrate that transformational leadership contains both logical and psychological problems in explaining the nature of leadership and as an empirically supportable and verifiable construct. It aims to show that the failure of transformational leadership to garner evidence from a scientific methodological analysis may not invalidate its efficacy if it is viewed from an alternative lens such as aesthetics. Indeed, the manifestations of transformational leadership live on in the Spain of El Cid, and in the arts, and continue to inspire and motivate followers to this day. The paper begins with a discussion of the conceptual approach used and then discusses how the field of

educational administration embraced scientific thinking in school leadership in the first part of the twentieth century. It then considers “charisma”, a key construct in the history of leadership understandings and one that remains an important dimension within transformational leadership theory. Following this is a critique of transformational leadership that underscores some of the conceptual and methodological problems associated with it. The final part of the paper makes the argument that transformational leadership may be better understood if it is explored within an aesthetic framework.

2. Methods

This paper is a critique of some of the conceptual and methodological issues within transformational leadership theory and makes an argument for an alternative lens through which to examine transformational leadership. As such, it is a conceptual paper as opposed to an empirical study where researchers make decisions concerning the data they collect to answer the research questions they pose [4]. Good conceptual papers are said to “bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking” [5] (p. 128). According to Jaakkola [4], there are common types of research design for conceptual papers. One of these is called “theory adaptation” which is a process that involves revisiting current understandings about a topic or theme and then introducing a new theoretical lens in which to understand the topic/theme [4]. Theory adaptation also involves “problematizing an existing theory or concept and resolving identified dilemmas by introducing a new theoretical lens” [4] (p. 22). In this paper, we follow theory adaptation by exploring some of the extant literature on transformational leadership, critiquing it, and then providing an alternative lens, aesthetics, in which to expand its conceptual scope. To achieve this, we drew upon a wide selection of the literature in order to “provide multi-level insights” [5] (p. 128).

3. Discussion

3.1. From Charisma to the Point of Scientificity (POS)

For an area of study to be elevated to a position where it is recognized conceptually and academically, and in today’s university and larger global contexts, it must make some claim that it is scientific. This claim is one that does not involve so much an historical argument, but one regarding an epistemological field, or an *episteme* in Foucault’s [6] view.

While the arts and humanities have long dealt with topics of leadership and the moral dilemmas of leaders throughout the ages, they do not enjoy the prestige and status of a field defined by and supported by science and scientific studies. Educational administration was founded on just such an event when departments of educational administration were established in American universities at the turn of the last century [7–9]. The specific intellectual event was the publication of Frederick Taylor’s 1911 book *The Principles of Scientific Management* [10]. Its impact was huge and no less monumental than in education and the founding of graduate course work in school administration [11]. The near immediate infatuation of former educational administrators with scientific management was as profound as in the latter half of the century with Edward Deming’s total quality management (TQM) [12].

Early professors of educational administration were emboldened by claims of establishing a science of school leadership [13]. For example, in his multi-year best-selling textbook, early founder of educational leadership, Elwood P. Cubberley (1929) wrote, “Wholly within the past two decades one of the most significant movements in all our educational history has arisen . . . We refer to the test and measurement and efficiency movement, the aim of which has been to give scientific accuracy to the educative process” [7] (p. 497).

Cubberley, former Dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, went on to observe, “The scientific purpose of the movement has been to create standards of measurement and units or norms of accomplishment which may be applied to school systems, to individual schools or classes, or to pupils, to determine the efficiency of the work being done . . .” [7] (p. 499). Presciently, Cubberley concluded, “In another decade or

two we shall probably need to rewrite our books on school administration in terms of this new scientific development" [7] (p. 501).

The elevation of course work cloaked in science helped create the autonomy early professors needed to be free of competing areas of interference and control, because while there might be other departments, disciplines, or studies that claimed to be involved with preparing leaders (i.e., the arts and humanities, business), this program prepared *scientific leaders*. Science provided the legitimacy for the power of preeminence. To use a poker game of legitimacy, it was the "ace" in the deck.

While the creation of a separate department of educational administration was in reality an extremely humble beginning and the early "research" was, by today's standards, trivial [14], what had been established is a line of intellectual and conceptual demarcation or LOD (line of demarcation). According to Lakatos [15], the line of demarcation is "the central problem in [the] philosophy of science" (p. 168). The LOD creates the conceptual border between a science and a non-science. Upon the LOD rests the establishment of a *field*, or in this case the episteme of a *scientific field*.

The event itself that created the LOD is known as the *point of scientificity* or POS. Created by Foucault [6], the *point of scientificity* represents the event or time period where an area of knowledge was transformed into a science [16]. Foucault's [17] example occurred in the field of psychiatry. Once the *line of demarcation* is established, then Foucault [18] marks out three distinctive fields. First there is the *field of memory*. This comprises topics, theories, ideas, concepts, and knowledge that "... are no longer accepted or discussed and which consequently no longer define either a body of truth or a domain of validity" [18] (p. 58). In this they are not relevant because they are not scientific.

Then there is the *field of presence*, "... by which is understood all statements formulated elsewhere and taken up in a discourse, acknowledged to be truthful, involving exact description, well-founded reasoning, or necessary presupposition" [18] (p. 57). Foucault [18] adds, "in this *field of presence*, the relations established may be of the order of experimental verification, logical validation, mere repetition acceptance justified by tradition and authority, commentary, a search for hidden meanings, the analysis of error; these relations may be explicit (and sometimes formulated in types of specialized statements: references, critical discussions), or implicit and present in ordinary statements" (p. 57).

Finally, there is the *field of concomitance*. This comprises concepts, ideas, and theories that belong to "quite different domains of objects, and belong to quite different types of discourse ... either because they serve as analogical confirmation, or because they serve as a general principle and as premises accepted by a reasoning, or because they serve as models that can be transferred to other contents, or because they function as a higher authority than that to which at least certain propositions are presented and subjected" [18] (p. 58).

The field can also be understood as comprising social/cultural relations where the players compete for positions of influence and dominance [19]. "Players" can be individuals and groups. Whatever they advocate usually advances their own sphere of influence and power because knowledge is rarely neutral [20]. What is selected as the knowledge base of a field represents a series of choices regarding both epistemological and ontological assumptions because, as Maxcy has observed, "leading does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is rooted in our deepest beliefs about humankind, nature, and the real world around us" [21] (p. 65). Human morals and morality hinge on these assumptions. Nowhere is that more important than in educational administration and schooling.

In this paper, we review the work of scholars and other researchers pursuing transformational leadership who are struggling hard to function within an episteme of scientific empiricism, a derivative of logical positivism [22]. In this, the results are inconclusive at best, a flat-out failure at worse. Part of the problem is that transformational leadership involves dimensions that defy the rubric of scientific empiricism. This paper begins by dealing with the legacy of charisma, which once underpinned the concept of transformational leadership but ended up "swallowed whole by the model it underpinned" [23] (p. 369).

3.2. *The Historicity of Charisma: Two Illustrations*

Long before the idea of the “transformational leader” came of age, charisma and leadership were linked together. Images from antiquity are replete with sketches of the extraordinary charisma of legendary leaders. For example, from Plutarch [24] we piece together a portrait of Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.) displaying charismatic qualities. “He [Alexander] made the longest address that day to the Thessalians and other Greeks, who answered him with loud shouts, desiring him to lead them on against the barbarians, upon which he shifted his javelin into his left hand, and with his right lifted up towards heaven, besought the gods, as Callisthenes tells us, that if he was of a truth the son of Jupiter, they would be pleased to assist and strengthen the Grecians” [24] (p. 166).

In another story, Plutarch referred to the eleven days during which Alexander and his soldiers marched 3300 furlongs to seek Darius and his army. The long journey was a very difficult one and Alexander’s soldiers were tired and ready to give up mainly due to a lack of drinking water. Plutarch [24] says: “While they [his soldiers] were in distress it happened that some Macedonians who had fetched water in skins upon their mules from a river they had found came about noon to the place where Alexander was, and seeing him almost choked with thirst, presently filled a helmet and offered it to him. He asked them to whom they were carrying the water; they told him to their children, adding, that if his life were but saved, it was no matter for them, they should be able well enough to repair that loss, though they all perished. Then he took the helmet into his hands, and looking round about, when he saw all those who were near him stretching their heads out and looking earnestly after the drink, he returned it again with thanks without tasting a drop of it. ‘For’, said he, ‘if I alone drink, the rest will be out of heart’. The soldiers took notice of his temperance and magnanimity upon this occasion, but they one and all cried out to him to lead them forward boldly, and began whipping on their horses. For whilst they had such a king they said they defied both weariness and thirst, and looked upon themselves to be little less than immortal” [24] (p. 174).

Another example of a more modern version of charisma, influence, and malevolency is in the life of the Siberian-born mystic, peasant, and semi-literate monk Grigory Rasputin (1872–1916). At the age of 28, he was said to have transformed his life and moved toward Christ [25]. He became a wanderer visiting temples and churches, where he came across Khlyst communities, “sects in which fanaticism, lechery, and faith in God were blasphemously joined together as one” [25] (pp. 47–48). Key ideas of the Khlysty can be found in his writings [25]. In his travels, he became famous for his exceptional gifts in healing and prophecy. He was called upon by Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) and Tsarina Alexandra (1872–1918) to help their son who suffered from hemophilia. He alleviated the child’s symptoms and from that time on was very close to both Nicholas and Alexandra, especially Alexandra. In letters written by Alexandra, Radzinsky noted how Rasputin “was able to relieve her nervous anxiety. With his soothing words of forgiveness and love and of the future divine reward for all her sufferings. And with his remarkable hands that dispelled the constant migraines that drove her mad with pain. The tormented Alex [Tsarina Alexandra] needed him just as much as her doomed son did” [25] (p. 127).

He also was able to charm religious leaders and members of society. For example, when Bishop Feofan first met Rasputin he said, “he amazed us all with his psychological perspicacity. His face was pale and his eyes unusually piercing—the look of someone who observed the fasts. And he made a strong impression” [25] (p. 62).

There was a group of devoted society women who both defended and supported Rasputin. E. Kazokova said these women “looked after him and considered him a man of great righteousness, and who cut his nails and sewed them up to attach to their bodices as mementoes.” [25] (p. 91). He earned the respect and admiration of those persons he was able to heal. For example, Olga Lokhtina, a society woman, reflected on her experience at meeting Rasputin: “I saw Rasputin for the first time on 3 November, 1905. By then I had grown disenchanted with society life, having undergone a spiritual change, and I was, besides very sick with an intestinal neurasthenia, which tied me to my bed . . . The

priest Father Medved [at the time one of Rasputin's loyal admirers] took pity on my and brought Rasputin . . . From the moment of Father Grigory's appearance in my home, I felt completely restored, and from then on was free of my illness" [25] (p. 92).

Rasputin was a charismatic person because of his extraordinary gifts. Those people whom he cured or advised developed a strong emotional attachment to him. He was also a divisive figure who created many enemies because of the unnatural influence and control he had over the royal family, and he was assassinated because of it. We would argue that both of these illustrations of leaders from history are helpful in illuminating an understanding of the nature of charisma and transformational leadership. This is because these illustrations or stories bring to life the leaders within their historical context and times and help to reveal how and why followers were attracted to them.

3.3. The Re-Birth of Charisma in Transformational Leadership

According to Bass and Bass [26], transformational leadership as a phenomenon was first described in 1973 by sociologist J.V. Downton in his book *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process* [27]. His on-going research areas were activism, new religious movements, and charismatic leadership. He also wrote in the area of creativity [27]. Downton's text was followed by a book chapter by Robert House [28], in which he identified the dependent variables of a possible theory of charisma. First, he acknowledged that the charisma of a leader is defined by the leader's followers and not the leader per se. These were followers who

- Demonstrated trust in the veracity of the leader's beliefs;
- Are isomorphic to the leader's beliefs;
- Showed great affection towards the leader and emotional attachment to him/her;
- Showed unquestioning loyalty and obedience to the leader;
- Held the belief that their goals will be accomplished if they are linked to the leader's mission [28].

House [28] called these variables the "charismatic effects" of one person on another. His empirical approach was to identify a number of persons who could be called "informed observers" such as superiors or peers who are in agreement with the effects on them of a charismatic leader and then on a leader who was not as charismatic, or failed to produce the same effects. The responses could then be categorized and eventually scaled. Over time with a period of repetition and refinement, a clearer picture of a charismatic leader could be produced. The other is the methodology involved, which would say nothing about the behaviors or actions that produce such effects. House [28] admitted that this was the scientific challenge that had to be addressed.

So what does a charismatic leader do? House [28] created a kind of behavioral codex of plausible hypotheses. These revolved around such assertions that charismatic leaders

- Have a high need for influence and a dominant belief in the righteousness of their beliefs;
- Understand they are role models for their followers to emulate;
- Engage in actions that are likely to be seen as complimentary and attractive to their followers [29];
- Portray their competence, confidence, and past successes in their appearances;
- Create common or shared visions often based on the accomplishment of ideological goals that appeal to followers [28].

House's [28] chapter presciently anticipates some of the later works' notions of transformational leaders who have incorporated charisma into their indices, which have remained a conceptual issue with the concept [30,31]. In fact, Bryman [32] conceptualized transformational leadership as involving charisma, vision, inspiration, vision, and change-centered leadership, which House and Aditya [33] termed *neocharismatic*.

We see such traces in the earliest and most cited work of transformational leadership, that of James McGregor Burns [34]. Burns' work masterfully combines charisma and transformational leadership. He noted that, "The concept of charisma has fertilized the

study of leadership. Its very ambiguity has enabled it to be captured by scholars in different disciplines and applied to a variety of situations" [34] (p. 243). However, Burns lamented that the term *charisma* had become so overused that it had lost its zest and announced that he would substitute the words "heroic leadership" for the idea. He defined it as "belief in leaders because of their personage alone, aside from their tested capacities, experiences, or stand on issues; faith in the leaders' capacity to overcome obstacles and crises; readiness to grant to leaders the powers to handle crises; mass support for such leaders expressed directly—through votes, applause, letters, shaking hands—rather than through intermediaries or institutions. Heroic leadership is not simply a quality or entity possessed by someone: it is a *type of relationship* between leader and led" [34] (p. 244).

Burns [34] then goes on to describe such a leader in the Madhi of the Sudan (also known as Muhammad Ahmad, 1844–1885), who rose from poverty and with unusual intellectual prowess (he had memorized the entire Koran by the age of nine) and courage, went on to confront the established social order, build an army, and capture the city of Khartoum. The Madhi's "main strength seemed to lie in the force of his message, his ability to adapt it to the needs of different classes and groups, his promise of salvation to believers who fell in battle, and his ability to win sophisticated theological debates with the opposition" [34] (p. 245). Like the Madhi, El Cid was a soldier of great military prowess who was able to attract soldiers from Portugal and other parts of Spain to serve him. He achieved much fame and fortune from his exploits as a mercenary where he fought against Muslims and Christians alike. Yet it was his "virtues and heroic conduct [that were said to have] encapsulated the essential spirit of the Hispanic nation" [35] (p. 520).

Burns [34] exposed the "ideological leader," as one who is motivated by explicit goals linked to change. Burns described ideological leaders as leaders who "embody and personify collective goals so intensely that other human wants and needs and aspirations—those of both the leaders and the led—may be swallowed in the *purposes of the movement*. The leaders, at least, have 'thrown themselves' into a transcending cause and quest" [34] (p. 248). Such leaders are judged "... not by peoples' delight in a performance or personality but by actual social change measured by the ideologists' purposes, programs, and values" [34] (p. 249). The modern mantra of transformational leadership, especially in business, is strongly echoed in this passage [36].

3.4. The Establishment of the Great Binary and Other Methodological Problems

Burns contrasted transformational leadership with that of transactional leadership. He referred to transactional leadership as "opinion leadership" [34] (p. 257). By this he meant exchanges of gratifications in a political marketplace. "They are bargainers seeking to maximize their political and psychic profits" [34] (p. 258) he observed. "In this marketplace bargaining is restricted in scope because the process works only in easily identifiable, calculable, tangible, measurable properties ... because sellers and buyers cannot repeat the identical exchange, both must move on to new types and levels of gratifications. Most important, the transactional gratification itself may be a superficial and trivial one" [34] (p. 258).

Later research showed that leaders engage in both transformational and transactional relationships [37] and that there was not a hard and fast categorical line of demarcation between them as they were multidimensional. Part of the reason is that as in all binaries, the oppositional term is silently suspended in the other. So when one thinks of something being "true", the oppositional term of "false" is present but unspoken in order to grasp the full meaning of something being "true" [38]. Given this linguistic phenomenon, categorical distinctions resting on binaries often can be deconstructed, consolidated, collapsed, and even dissolved because one term is always suspended but present in the other. This is also perhaps the reason that Yukl [31] has criticized the behaviors identified with transformational leadership as ambiguous, with overlapping content resulting in high inter-correlations that "raise doubts about their construct validity" [31] (p. 288).

Still another issue which is similarly present is the circularity of the construction of the theory of transactional leadership. As sketched out methodologically by House [28] and later used in the construction of the two popular surveys (the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the Transformational Leadership Inventory) to assess transactional and charismatic properties in a leader, the researcher begins with the descriptions of the nature of charisma from a variety of accounts. Then those same characteristics are isolated and reified via factor analysis in a survey and employed in another construction of a survey of those highly loaded factors. This procedure results in a descriptive synopsis (a score) rendered as to whether a leader is charismatic and/or transformational.

Lakatos points out that “the idea implicit in the methodology of scientific research programmes is that a fact may not be used twice, first in the construction of a theory and subsequently in support of it” [39] (p. 111). This circularity, so common in the social sciences using survey methods, produces high intercorrelations but little else, leading Lakatos to comment, “empirical content has nothing to do with truth or falsity” [15] (p. 36).

Criticisms of the circulatory nature of transformational survey data highlight the lack of distinction “between the definition of transformational leadership and its effectiveness to be problematic because transformational leadership theory borders on the tautological and as such it cannot be refuted” [40] (p. 611). Furthermore, it has been observed by Van Knippenberg and Sitkin that the inclusion of the notion of charisma transformational theory contains “a logical deductive loop [whereby] if it is not effective, by definition it is not charismatic-transformational” [40] (p. 611).

Transformational leadership theory has been criticized for its lack of conceptual clarity as well as its bias towards the concept of the hero leader [41]. In the context of educational leadership, Gronn sees transformational leadership as “a resurrected version of a long since discredited and virtually defunct leader type . . . the hero” [42] (p. 14). Dugan [43] lists, as weaknesses of transformational theory, that it does not account for all leadership behaviors and it has produced scant evidence of how followers or organizations are “transformed” as a result of being directed by a transformational leader. Lastly, transformational theory, while dependent upon followers to identify a transformational leader, is relatively minimalist when identifying follower agency, which is allegedly stimulated by the theory.

The bias of transformational leadership theory to a single leader struggling against enormous odds (El Cid personified) has not only established in the popular mind an individualist image of leadership, but one in business that has produced a “savior” mentality as corporations that have fallen on hard times in the search for new leadership. The “cult of individualism” distorts the role of a CEO and raises impossible expectations and a warning by Khurana who said, “the widespread, firmly held belief in the overriding importance of the CEO is all the more noteworthy considering that there is no conclusive evidence linking leadership to organizational performance. In fact, most academic research that has sought to measure the impact of the CEO on firm performance confirms Warren Buffett’s observation that when good management is brought into a bad business, it is the reputation of the business that remains intact” [44] (p. 21).

The efforts of the leadership industry to cast the heroic leader into the realm of science has been called out by Wilson who wrote, “I propose that what is revealed in the archive is the skillful deployment of the discursive norms of science, all the while relying on largely unquestioned yet problematic assumptions and aims which are profoundly political rather than scientific in nature” [45] (p.101). Wilson’s troubling concern is that dominant form of leadership, now regnant in academic studies, “insidiously seeks to control leader subjectivity so as to bring about its complete conformity with organizational interests” [45] (p. 101).

It is interesting and ironic that Thomas Carlyle [46], a writer on heroes, hero worship, and leadership, largely dismissed in Foucault’s *field of memory* [18] as an anachronism to be scorned, should have remarked in his text that “science has done much for us; but it is a poor science that would hide from us the great deep sacred infinitude of Nescience [the unknown, no science], whither we can never penetrate, on which all science swims

as a mere superficial film. The world, after all our science and sciences, is still a miracle; wonderful, inscrutable, *magical* [italics in original] and more, to whosoever will *think* [italics original] of it" [46] (p.10).

We turn now to an alternative perspective that we believe offers a more promising understanding of transformational leadership, that of aesthetics.

3.5. Towards an Alternative Perspective to Understand Leadership

When examining the so-called "scientific" studies of transformational leadership Gronn opined, "... the claims made for TF leaders far outrun the data's capacity to sustain them ... the very idea of transformed individuals and organisations, carries with it all the hallmarks of a religious crusade and being born again ... any argument about the uniqueness, superiority and effectiveness of the TF leader has to remain substantially unproven" [42] (p. 25).

Empirical science is unlikely to penetrate very much more deeply into the act of leadership, especially with the use of seeking information through tautologically flawed surveys. Breaking out of the circulatory logic of that research approach, we proffer that a different frame may offer an expanded understanding of leadership. Ladkin [47] explored a similar approach with the concept of charisma when she also turned to aesthetics.

Henry Kissinger [48], a long-time experienced diplomat, negotiator, statesman, and historian, commented about an artistic approach to leadership when he said, "leaders need also the qualities of the artist who senses how to sculpt the future using the materials available in the present. As Charles de Gaulle observed in his meditation on leadership ... the artist 'does not renounce the use of his intelligence which is, after all, the source of 'lessons, methods, and knowledge'. Instead the artist adds to these foundations 'a certain instinctive faculty which we call inspiration', which alone can provide the 'direct contact with nature from which the vital spark must leap'" [48] (p. xxiii).

The call for aesthetics as a frame for viewing leadership is not a recent newcomer in the educational leadership field [49]. Among these alternative perspectives have been insights from the arts, humanities, and aesthetics. For example, over 30 years ago, Drucker argued that leaders would do well to consider music, such as improvisation in jazz, as a way of thinking about how they interact with teams [50]. In an earlier paper, the authors of this article [51] explored the metaphor of dance as an entry point to understand leadership anew. In the article, a whole new vocabulary—emotion, bodily knowledge, energy, rhythm, grace, improvisation—was introduced that opened up a different way of thinking about leadership, providing a clear departure from the dominant metaphors of the machine and accounting, often associated with leadership within a bureaucracy [51].

While an aesthetic frame has gained interest in leadership studies in recent times [52], its intellectual history is over a half-century old. For example, Chester Barnard wrote in his classic work *The Functions of the Executive* [53] that, while managerial actions were logically derived, "the essential aspect of the process is the sensing of the organization as a whole and the total situation relevant to it. It transcends the capacity of merely intellectual methods, and the techniques of discriminating the factors of the situation. The terms pertinent to it are 'feeling', 'judgment', 'sense', 'proportion', 'balance', 'appropriateness'. It is a matter of art rather than science, and is aesthetic rather than logical" [53] (p.235). A person is said to use their aesthetic sensibilities when they make a judgement as to whether something is considered beautiful or ugly, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on [54].

Aesthetics provides an alternative to traditional and instrumental views of leadership that see it in terms of technical competence and behavioral roles. Aesthetics is concerned with "sensory experience and sensemaking, and the felt meanings that are both produced by and guide our interactions and decisions" [50] (p. 255). It recognizes that feelings and emotions are just as important sources of knowledge as reason and logic; all guide our thoughts and actions [52].

Shusterman posits that within the last century, "Anglo-American aesthetics has displayed two characteristic forms deriving from two distinctive philosophical sources: ana-

lytic philosophy and pragmatism" [55] (p. 1). Analytical philosophy, and hence analytical aesthetics, became the dominant perspective inasmuch as this branch of philosophy was more heavily influenced by science, and "the idea that there are at least some logically independent facts or things in the world (even if these be only sense-data) which constitute an immutable foundation for reality, truth, and reference, and which are somehow represented to us in experience through our conceptual scheme" [55] (p. 5).

Analytical aesthetics have striven to delineate the various forms of art and formulate the attendant definitions. One project has been a focus on "projects of distinction" [55] (p. 17). Some analytical theorists have differentiated within categories of art by dividing them into two compartments, the descriptive and the evaluative. The former is believed to be more uncontested in definitional status.

3.5.1. The Aesthetic Concept of "Beau Geste"

One example in examining leadership using an aesthetic frame is via the concept of "beau geste" [56]. This descriptive metaphor helps explain the aesthetic dimensions of a leader's actions or behavior; these dimensions lie in stark contrast to a set of general behaviors that transformational leaders are set to exhibit. Beau geste is "not a physical gesture in itself; it is the metaphor used to describe a beautiful behaviour naming an action symbolically perceived as an aesthetic gesture" [56] (p. 1099). It is a behavior whose essence is "virtuous" yet triggers controversy since it challenges established rules and acceptable behaviors [56]. Bouilloud and Deslandes claim that beau geste is not a self-interested act; it is intended for a group or a community, and it is not deliberate in any way; it is a "surprising emergence" [56] (p. 1107). It is an example of analytical aesthetics, a way of differentiating certain leadership actions.

An historical illustration of beau geste [56] is evident in the actions of Eleanor Roosevelt. In the late 1930s, Eleanor Roosevelt and her black female friend, Mary McLeod Bethune, attended a conference hosted by a racially integrated organization in Alabama. Not everyone approved of the integrated conference and officials used police to enforce the law so that white participants sat on one side of the hall, and black participants sat on the other. Rather than comply with segregation, Eleanor moved her chair into the center aisle so that it sat between the two sections [57]. This spontaneous, beautiful, controversial, and aesthetic gesture [56] was an act of defiance. An example of beau geste within an educational context was relayed to the authors of this article by a superintendent who shared with us a decision he made that led to schools in his district being closed due to poor weather. He told us that on a particularly volatile day in winter, he delayed the school opening rather than closing it altogether. After a short while, he then decided to close the school and the children were sent home. When questioned by his critics why he opened the school in the first place, he told us that "... for some of his children, school was the only warm place they would have that day and the only place where they could have a meal." [58] (p. 150). The rationale underpinning his decision was one of compassion and care for the children in his district.

Not only does aesthetics have much potential in providing a nuanced, context-rich description of leadership, as it is enacted as revealed in the previous illustration of the decision made by the superintendent, but it also holds much promise in understanding the dynamics of the relational aspects of leadership [59] "through the lens of 'sensitivity and 'sensuous' interactions'" [60] (p. 65). The next section considers this.

3.5.2. Aesthetics and the Relational Experiences of Leadership

To explore the notion of the relational in leadership, Beau [60] carried out empirical research on a conductor-less orchestra in Paris. Based on interviews with regular audience attendees and musicians from within the orchestra (some of whom were professional and others who were amateurs), and participant observations of sessions led by conductors and without conductors, Beau found that leadership within the conductor-less orchestra was co-constructed and negotiated between the players to a greater extent than in an

orchestra with a conductor. This negotiation was evident during rehearsals and as well as the performance. Musicians in the study indicated that compared to an orchestra led by a conductor, being in a conductor-less orchestra provided them with a greater emotional intimacy and that they were “more receptive to the expressions of others. Not only the sound is important but also the attention to breaths, to gestures, to people stamping their feet, to the general enthusiasm, to visual expressions” [60] (p. 70).

In Beau’s study, an aesthetic lens was used to understand subtle aspects of leadership, including the exploration and meaning of facial expressions, body gestures, and other interactions as indicators of changes in the relationships among players [60]. The study’s findings reinforced the point that an aesthetic lens is one that “open[s] up possibilities and widen[s] the understanding of leadership by becoming knowledgeable about the hidden and unrecognized sensuous ways of knowing” [52] (p. 553). Thus, an aesthetic perspective provides an alternative entrance point into understanding the nature of leadership.

3.5.3. The Strengths of an Aesthetic Lens

The lens of scientific empiricism enables some aspects of leadership to be examined, but historically blocks out emotion, intuition, hunches, and, most importantly, context. The purpose of a quantitative method is to engage in context-free generalizations. It is supremely reductionistic. In the case of transformational leadership, the empirical approach seeks to identify dimensions of charisma and to verify them as transportable to a wide variety of organizational situations and contexts, such as business, the military, and the public sector.

Aesthetics as a frame includes dance, theatre, music, sculpture, architecture, and the visual arts. These media are rich in symbolic and expressive stimuli that bypass the brain and human systems based on logic, and deal with reality that may be irrational to them. Yet, it is the emotional aspect of leadership that often moves people to act, to dare, to dream, and to lead. Analytical aesthetics is the bridge to understanding how one moves and connects to others. Although, to date, aesthetics has not been embraced by researchers of educational leadership, it could be employed to illuminate the humanity underpinning the connections, negotiations, and relationships between and among leaders (both assigned and emergent) and others within schooling contexts. Aesthetics enables leadership to be envisioned as a type of performance. That performance can be described as beautiful rather than effective or functional [58] when it involves “the courage to envision possibility, even at the risk of being labelled naïve . . . [61] (p. 213) [and when it enables us] “to out our own humanity and that of the people we have the privilege to work with” [61] [p. 217]. And as Derrida observed, “There is no science of the beautiful, only a critique of the beautiful” [62] (p. 89).

4. Conclusions

Transformational leadership theory came on the scene in the 1970s, and since that time, countless articles and books have been written about it and research studies have endeavored to measure followers’/subordinates’ perceptions of managers/leaders regarding their behavior. It was the work of Leithwood [63,64] and Leithwood and Jantzi [65,66] that did much to promote transformational leadership theory as a useful way of understanding leadership practices within schools. The multi-factor leadership questionnaire, alluded to earlier, continues to be a commonly used survey used in both education and business contexts to measure transformational leadership [67]. A recent trend in transformational leadership educational research has seen it compared to “instructional leadership” (i.e., leadership concerned with teaching and instruction) in respect to its effect on enhancing student outcomes (see Robinson et al., 2008) [68]. Kwan’s [67] more recent study investigated the integrative effect of instructional leadership and transformational leadership on student outcomes and concluded that there has been a blurring of leadership practices within both perspectives. Given the ongoing interest in transformational leadership and the new

angle tying it to instructional leadership, it appears that it is not going to disappear in the immediate future.

In this article, our main intention was to critique transformational leadership regarding its validity, usefulness as a theory, and claims to scientific status. As we have argued, not only does transformational leadership lack conceptual clarity, including the ambiguous notion of “charisma” that is a dimension within it, but it also has methodological difficulties arising from overlapping behaviors within surveys (such as the MLQ) that purport to measure it. One of our strongest reservations about transformational leadership, as a universal theory, is that it provides only a superficial glimpse into the nature of leadership. In the final part of this paper, we argued that leadership studies would profit by using an aesthetic lens that would extend our understandings of transformational leadership by highlighting it as a type of artistic performance concerned with human feelings, emotions, and sensory perceptions. Promoting an aesthetic rather than a scientific approach to transformational leadership opens up new ways of thinking about educational leadership. Using the construct of “beau geste”, as well as revealing the relational aspects of leadership within a specific context that aesthetics is able to do, provides an intimate and novel way of understanding it.

Over the generations, stories told about El Cid, national hero and defender of the Spanish people, and other heroes, continue to capture our imaginations and inspire us. These stories keep legends alive and there will always be a place for a good story. Yet, stories are rarely “factual descriptions, they manifest and convey implicit knowledge and are thus inescapably . . . experienced in aesthetic terms” [69] (p. 44). Hansen et al. [52] point to leadership narratives, including those from charismatic and transformational leadership, for their potential to reveal emotions and provide aesthetic descriptions, especially if they are constructed within an experiential context.

We believe that exploring transformational leadership through an aesthetic lens, including through stories of leaders such as the legendary El Cid, and their followers, holds great potential for capturing subjective knowledge about leadership in a range of contexts, including educational leadership. Moreover, such explorations are likely to reveal a more nuanced and novel understanding of leadership away from roles, functions, and context-free generalities. While the scientific studies of transformational leadership are profoundly leader-centric, the artistic perspective creates in followers more active connections and dynamic relationships because artistry by nature is relational between artist and audience. Both require the other to be realized. A painting, a play, or a ballet only come alive when they live in the minds and hearts of the viewer as a co-participant. In that, there is reciprocity between the artist and the viewer that is non-hierarchical. This is the leader relational perspective that scientific empiricism has erased under the false guise of objectivity. The co-relational exchange between leaders and followers is the true bridge of the process of transformation itself.

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